Make it
work

The future of collaboration
and productivity

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The future of work is here

Employees, business leaders, and analysts spend a lot of time wondering what the future of work will look like and what it will take for organizations to succeed a few years down the line. And those are fair questions, because today's businesses face more pressure than ever to innovate quickly and fulfill rising customer expectations—expectations that are driving what workers desire and demand from their employers, too.

But look a little closer, and many of the technologies, trends, and cultural norms that will shape tomorrow's workplaces are already transforming forward-thinking organizations around the world. In other words, the future of work is here—it's just not evenly distributed.

This report identifies three important and impactful changes businesses can make to catch up with competitors that are already working in the future:

❶ Give people the tools to save time and work faster

❷ Empower people to access knowledge and share ideas

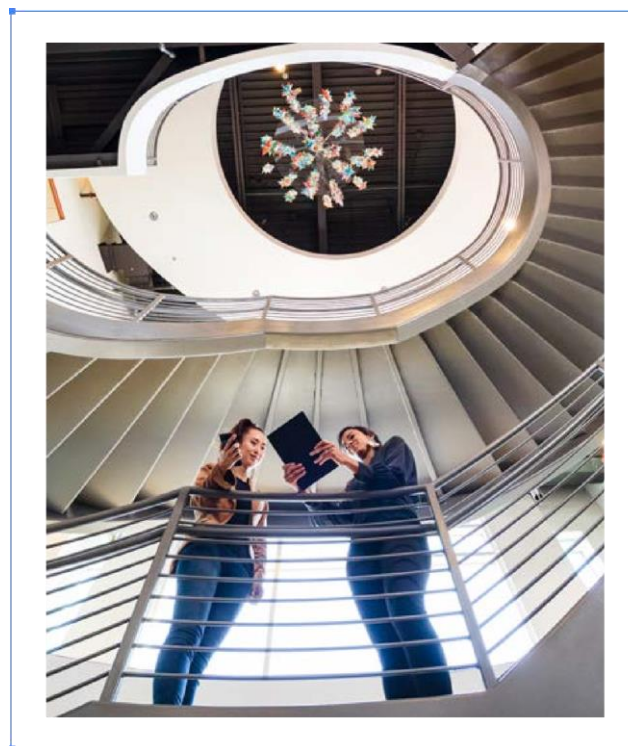❸ Let people work how they want: flexibly and collaboratively

Armed with these three strategies, businesses can improve productivity and encourage innovation while better meeting the needs of their customers and their employees—now and in the decade (or more) ahead. Let's take a look at each one.

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01

Give people tools that help them save time and work faster
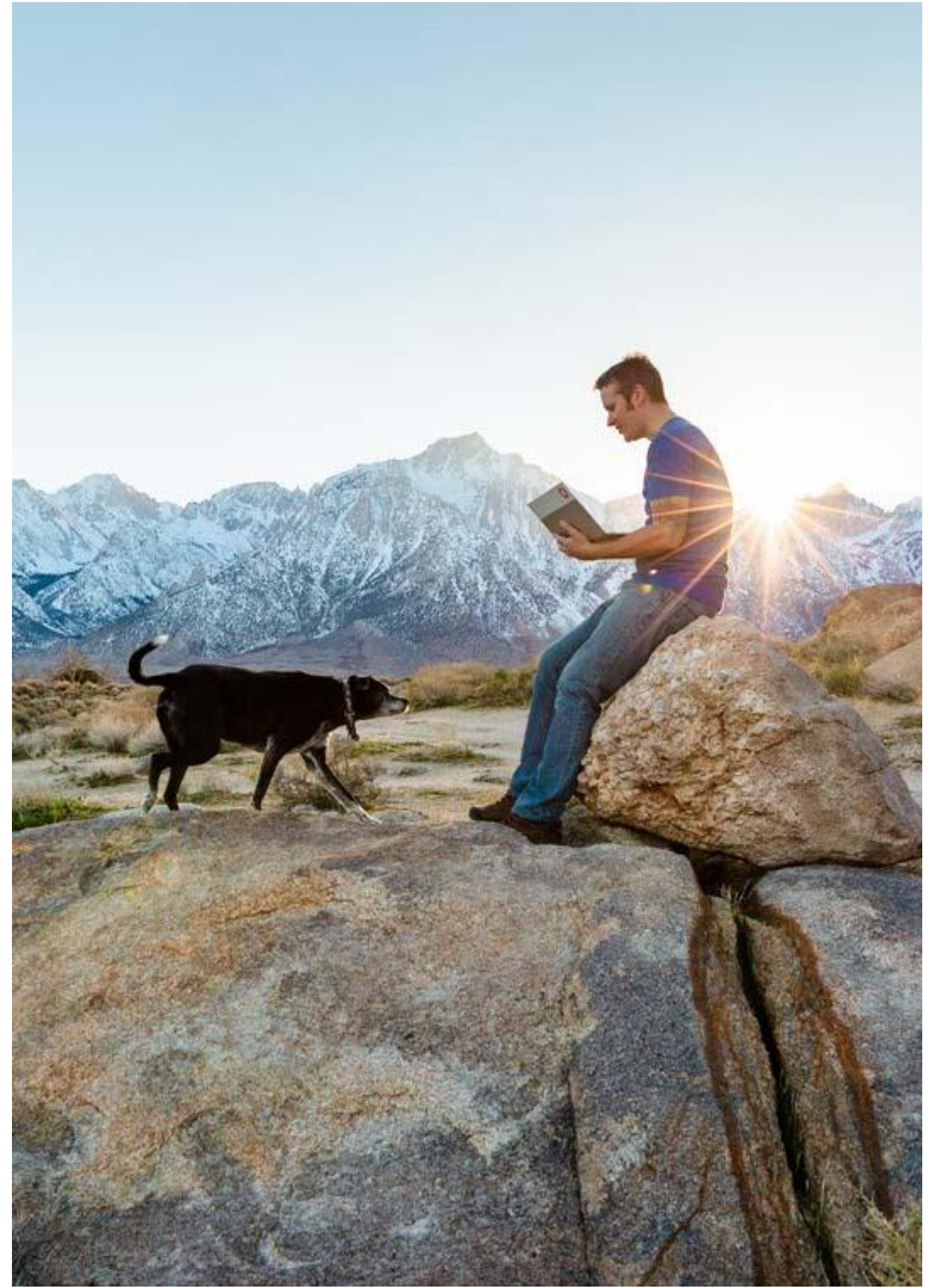
From new services to product updates to more personalized experiences, companies face growing pressure to deliver the latest and greatest—faster—into the waiting hands of increasingly demanding consumers. Speed has become imperative in today's world, not only because the pace of business has increased but also because it frees up time for employees to innovate, problem-solve, and have meaningful engagements with customers.

But for many organizations, routine tasks and inefficient processes are slowing people down. Fifty-eight percent of U.S. workers say they're too swamped to think beyond their daily to-do lists. They also report losing 60% of the workweek to activities other than their primary job duties.[1]
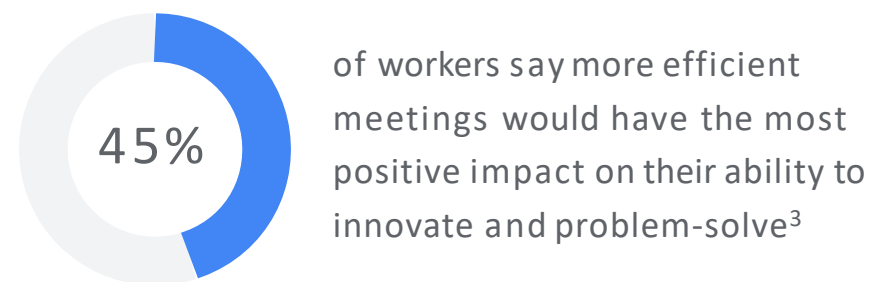
So where are all those hours going?

Research shows that employees around the world spend significant chunks of their day on low-value tasks that require little human ingenuity and get in the way of productivity. These include attending fruitless meetings, managing high volumes of email, tracking down the latest versions of documents, switching between applications, and dealing with IT problems.

"What everybody wants is a way to connect quickly and get an answer quickly. You almost need to set aside some time each day to check different communication channels because, if not, then your only activity during the day becomes answering somebody."

Massimiliano Santeramo, IT Director at GrandVision Italy

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How people lose out on productive time at work

📅 Unproductive meetings

71% of professionals lose time every week due to unnecessary or cancelled meetings[2]

45% of workers say more efficient meetings would have the most positive impact on their ability to innovate and problem-solve[3]

44% of employees say poorly organized meetings prevent them from doing their work[4]

⇄ Toggling

69% of workers waste up to an hour each day switching applications[5]

😐 Technology trouble

38% of U.S. business leaders say IT issues get in the way of productivity[6]

📭 Communication

55% of U.S. employees say that excessive emails get in the way of work[7]

🏃 Busywork

40% of U.S. information workers say they spend at least a quarter of their workweek on manual, repetitive tasks[8]

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With so many routine chores consuming their working hours, it's no wonder that employees rarely have time to go above and beyond the daily grind. This may help explain why no less than 85% of global workers are not engaged or are actively disengaged at work, while only 26% strongly agree that they learn or do something interesting each day, according to Gallup.[9] Not only are people unhappy, but business is suffering as a result: Lack of engagement cost companies an estimated $7 trillion in lost productivity in 2017.[10]

Finding speed in the cloud

Many employees already know what they need in order to pick up the pace and make time for innovation: the same kind of seamless, cloud-based tools they use in their personal lives. Some are taking matters into their own hands, with 41% of global workers using unsanctioned apps to do their jobs—a win for productivity, perhaps, but a potential threat to the security and privacy of corporate and client data. (Indeed, 62% of global IT professionals are concerned about the impact of this "shadow IT" on their organizations' cloud security.[12]) Others simply recognize the burden of legacy technology in the workplace: Nearly four in 10 U.S.-based business and IT leaders say their systems make it harder, not easier, for their employees to work quickly.[13]

> "The generations that are coming into the workplace are digital natives. Their expectations of technology in the workplace are driven by consumer technology. They come to the corporate enterprise and they want the same stuff. They want it the same way and quickly, so that's forcing companies to change how we do enterprise IT.
>
> Consumer IT is forcing us to change how we do enterprise IT."
>
> Bashir Agboola, VP and CTO
> for a U.S. healthcare company

Slow, outdated tools can turn everyday tasks like attaching files and joining conference calls into protracted undertakings. Future-minded organizations understand this, so they're trading in their legacy productivity software for modern business apps that accelerate the pace of work by getting out of people's way. These new solutions are typically based on cloud technology, which has become a core component of the enterprise technology landscape. Research shows that companies of all sizes increasingly rely on the cloud for their IT needs in general, from collaboration and communication to software development and data analytics, and that the rate of adoption will continue to grow in the future.

By 2023, global spending on cloud technology will reach nearly $1 trillion, more than double the amount spent in 2018[14]
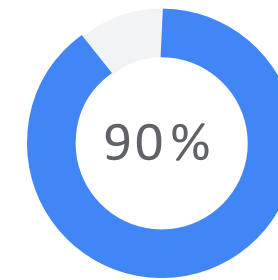
90% By 2024, more than 90% of enterprises will have intensively multi-cloud environments, with on-prem, off-prem, public, and private cloud[15]
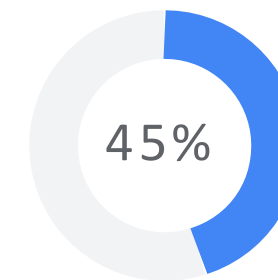
45% of U.S. business and IT leaders plan to migrate from legacy collaboration and productivity tools to cloud-based apps in the next two years[16]

"Instead of hiring people to manage a bunch of servers and to support them and to patch them, we can focus our talents on building things and doing things that excite us."

Naya Resnick, VP of Technology in the media and gaming industry

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Cloud-based tools are designed to fade into the background so people can do what they do best, without thinking about the technology—or even the device—they happen to be using. Working behind the scenes, these solutions handle routine and repetitive tasks or eliminate the need to perform them in the fir t place, letting employees get to the meat of their jobs faster. Writers can focus on crafting sentences, not hitting save. Analysts can focus on gleaning insights, not formatting reports. Customer support specialists can focus on answering questions, not pulling up records in multiple systems. And retail workers can focus on giving shoppers a frictionless experience, not tracking down inventory.

"It's a really extraordinary time in the world. We don't have to focus on how to get things done; we can focus on what to do."

Maribel Lopez, Founder and Principal Analyst, Lopez Research LLC

The old way vs. the new way

Each contributor edits a separate document, requiring someone to consolidate many versions into one.

Everyone works together in a single document and sees changes as they happen.

Planning a meeting takes a lot of manual work.

Your calendar automatically finds convenient times, pre-books rooms, creates and sends reminders, and generates dial-in numbers.

New hires get access to email, applications, and resources in a slow and piecemeal fashion.

IT admins use cloud-based management tools to quickly set up new users and deploy apps to their devices.

You spend more time on the layout of your presentation than you do on the content.

Automated design suggestions can be applied with one click, instantly giving your slides a polished and consistent look.

You write "Have a great weekend!" 50 times every Friday.

Personalized suggestions appear as you type, reducing the time it takes to compose an email.

IT teams must manually upgrade software and install security patches on individual machines, creating downtime for users.

Cloud software stays up to date automatically, so you always have the latest features and safeguards.

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Cloud-based business solutions have the greatest impact on speed and productivity when they work together as an integrated suite and interoperate seamlessly with common third-party software. This allows you to complete entire work ows without toggling back and forth between apps or entering your credentials again and again (and again). For example, a salesperson can find customer info from their CRM tool while drafting a strategy document, an engineer can add tasks to their project management app directly from their email, and a recruiter can consult their hiring pipeline while scheduling interviews in their calendar.

Easing the burden of busywork

Many modern business apps rely on the power of automation to speed up processes and take mundane activities off employees' plates. Imagine, for example, intelligent software that learns your work patterns and preferences over time. Then, when you're preparing for a meeting or drafting a status update for your team, it automatically surfaces relevant presentations, documents, and spreadsheets so you don't have to track them down. Add up the few minutes it saves you each time, and that's a significant chunk of the day you've reclaimed.
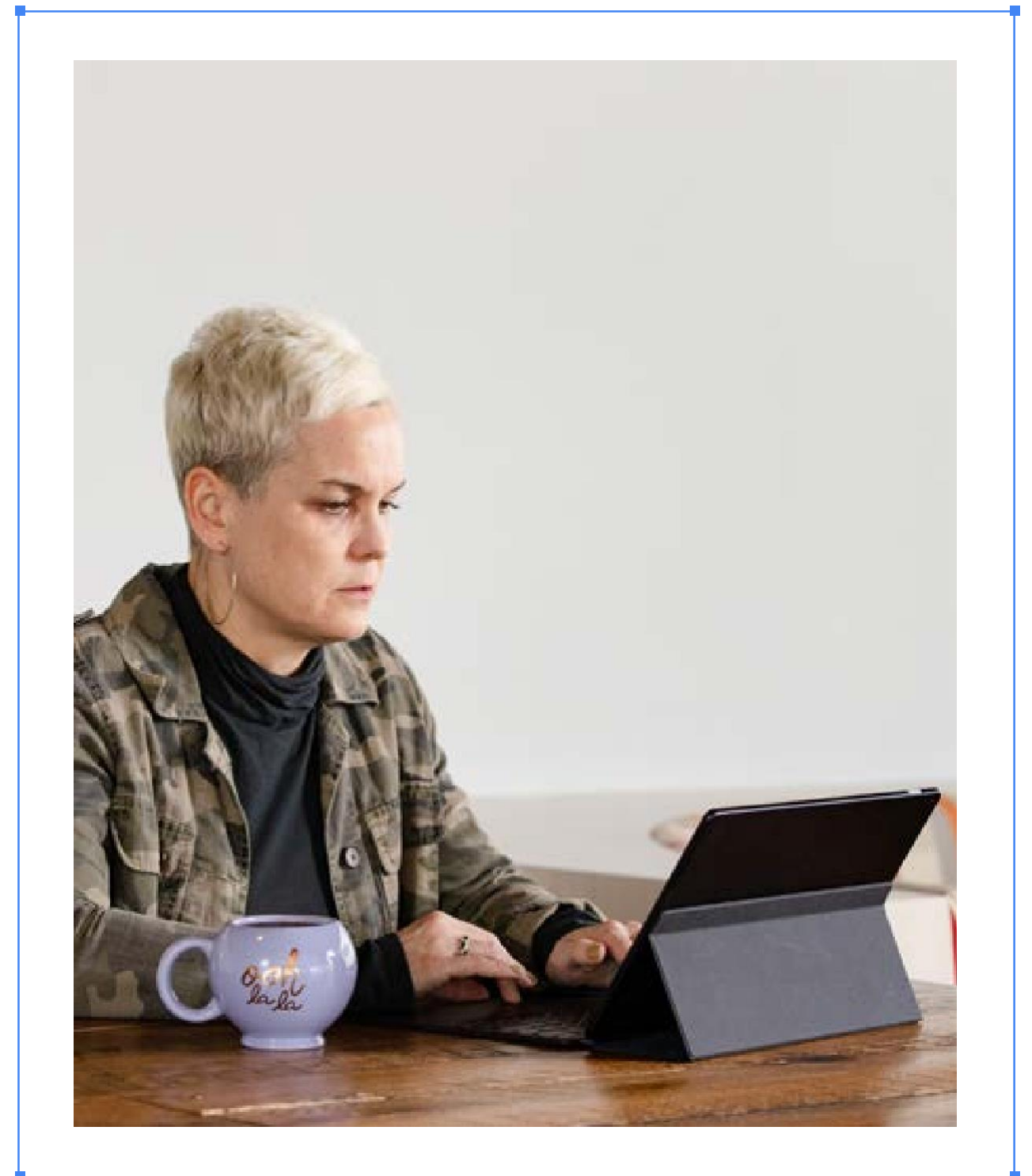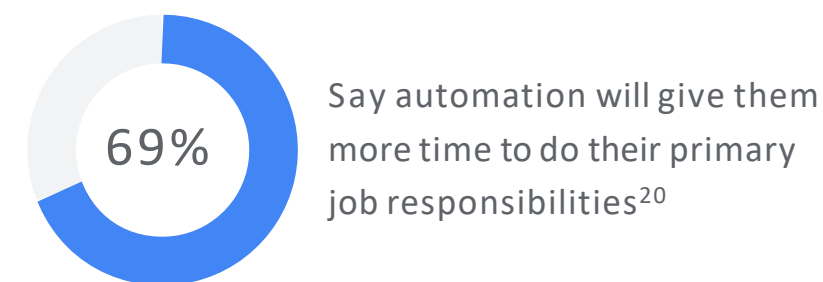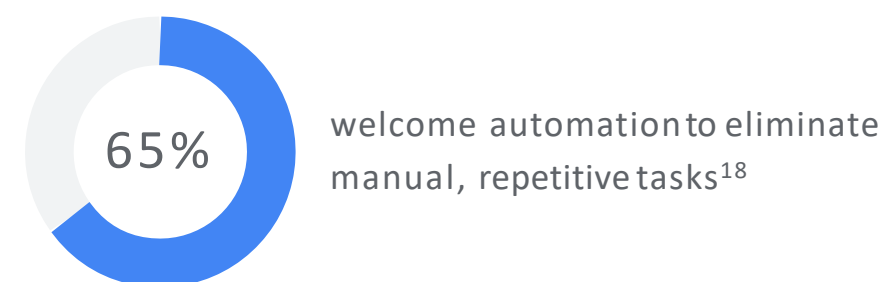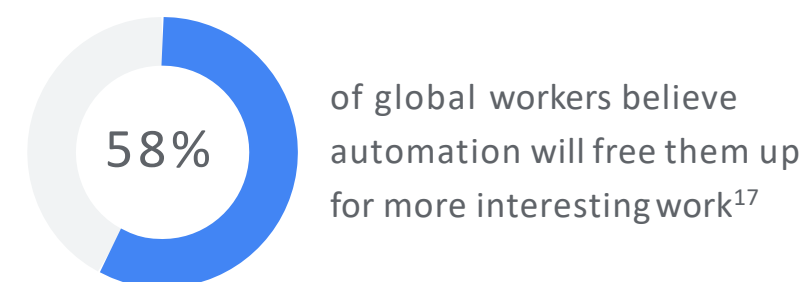
Technology experts and business leaders emphasize that automation enhances human productivity by helping people spend more time doing what machines can't.

Already, many businesses are well on their way to harnessing the power of automation: 63% of global knowledge workers say their companies are using or are in the process of adopting some kind of automation tool.[21]

And it's not just about knowledge workers: The rise of mobile devices has opened up new opportunities for automation and productivity for millions of front-line workers as well, from nurses and construction workers to field technicians and retail managers.

According to Forrester, automation will transform 85% of U.S. jobs—and create 14.9 million new ones—by 2027.[22]

Research reveals a widespread expectation that automation can lighten the load of routine tasks:

58% of global workers believe automation will free them up for more interesting work[17]

65% welcome automation to eliminate manual, repetitive tasks[18]

83% of U.S. workers say automation will let people think of work in new and innovative ways[19]

69% Say automation will give them more time to do their primary job responsibilities[20]

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Fringe benefits of faster tools

Today's workers place so much value on modern, easy-to-use tools that a business's choice of technology can affect recruiting. Eighty percent of U.S. workers say that a company's use of the latest digital tools greatly influences their desire to join that company.[23] Fifty-one percent of U.S. business leaders and consultants say that outdated or inadequate office IT impedes their organization's ability to compete for talent, and 58% say that technology factors into job candidates' decisions.[24]

Giving employees tools that make their lives easier can also improve retention: 72% of active U.S. job seekers say their companies' IT processes are broken, compared to 58% of other employees.[25]

It's not only internal users who benefit when companies adopt faster, smarter technology. As employees spend more time on high-value work and less time on routine tasks, there's a powerful trickle-down effect on the speed and quality of customer interactions and experiences. In an era of soaring consumer expectations, this is essential to business success.

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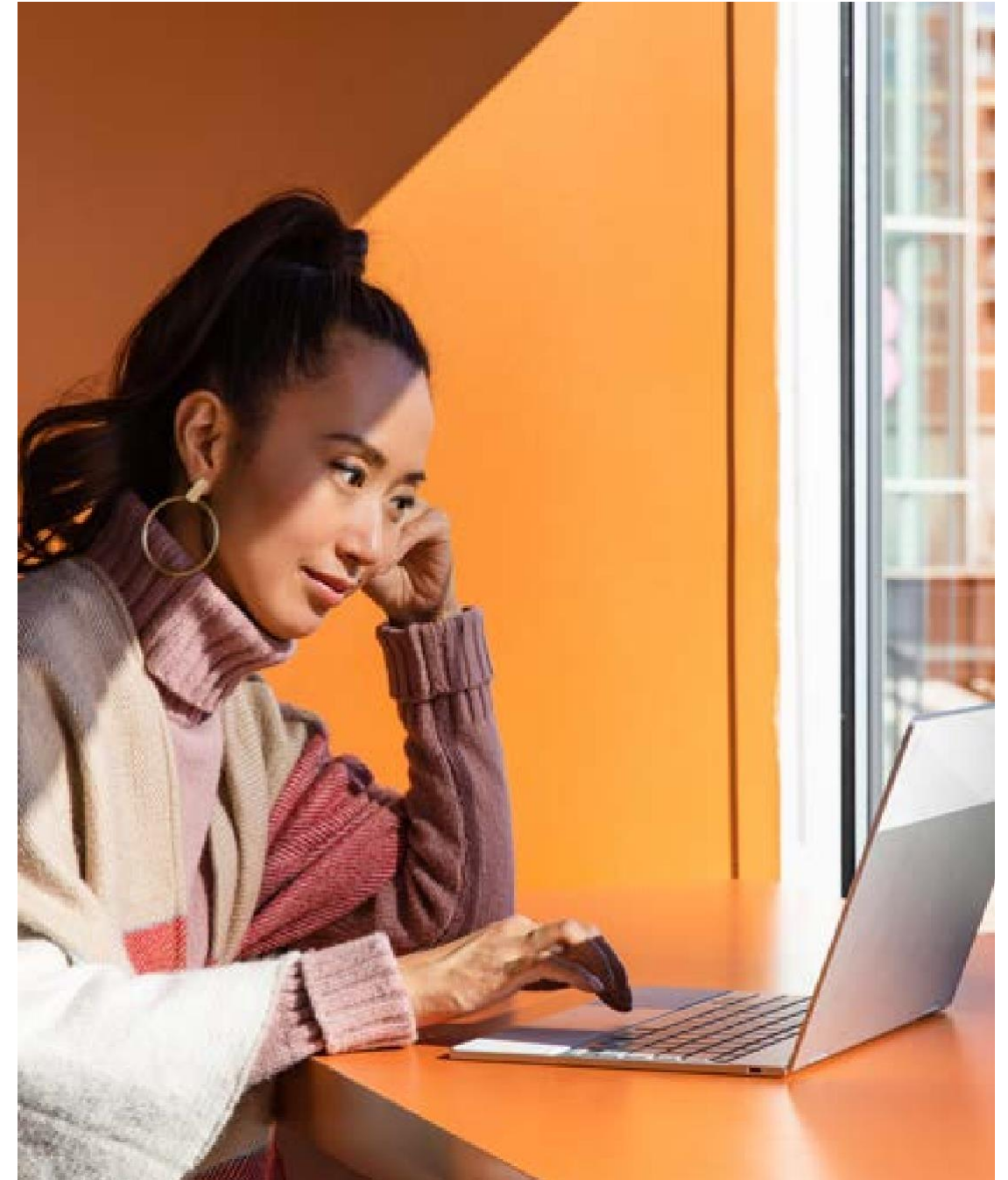
Case Studies

ATB Financial

Alberta-based financial institution ATB Financial speeds up mundane tasks to spend more time improving the banking experience for customers.

Strategy

- Replaced legacy office tools with a cloud productivity toolset
- Empowered deskless workers to be productive from anywhere, without needing a VPN
- Redesigned their workflow to end file loss while improving security and compliance
- Sped up business processes with collaboration tools that prevent versioning issues

Results

- Reduced quarterly board reporting time by nearly 60%
- Cut consolidation time in half for its semiannual talent review
- Reined in unnecessary meetings by enabling teams to connect over video

Governors' Camp Collection
KENYA | RWANDA

Governors' Camp, a travel company that offers luxury safaris in Kenya and Rwanda, shortens the invoice approval process from weeks to hours.

Strategy

- Traded in on-premises email for a cloud-based communication and collaboration platform
- Encouraged using online spreadsheets and documents
- Implemented digital calendars for booking vehicles
- Created a digital approval workflow based on shared folders and files in the cloud

Results

- Cut the invoice approval process from six weeks or more to just hours
- Went to zero email downtime in three years
- Improved cash flow due to ease of records access
- Sped up tour coordination by upgrading from a paper-based system to a digital one

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Making meetings less terrible

❶ Pare down your guest list

Productivity advisor Laura Mae Martin typically limits her meetings to attendees who can contribute meaningfully to the conversation, help the group reach a conclusion, or come away with new insights that will help them do their jobs. If you're on the receiving end of a meeting invitation and don't believe your presence will add value, she advises following up with the host to share your thoughts and ask for a detailed agenda.

❷ Send an agenda, every time

Create an agenda for your meeting and share it several days in advance, along with any supporting documents, suggests training specialist Jose Gomez. An agenda helps ensure that key people who have a stake in the matter at hand will actually show up. It also empowers participants to adequately prepare and keeps you on track once the meeting kicks off.

❸ Take running notes

Writing an ongoing account of the meeting as it unfolds can help keep people engaged and aligned while ensuring that everyone leaves with tangible action items, says Kevin Bleicher, a technical program manager. He recommends taking notes in a shared document so participants can follow along and contribute in real time.

❹ Draw out the silent types

For some people, meetings offer a time to shine. But your team may also include some quieter, more strategic thinkers who have dazzling ideas yet don't thrive in a conference room. To avoid missing out on their input, Laura recommends inviting attendees to weigh in via email or shared document before the meeting.
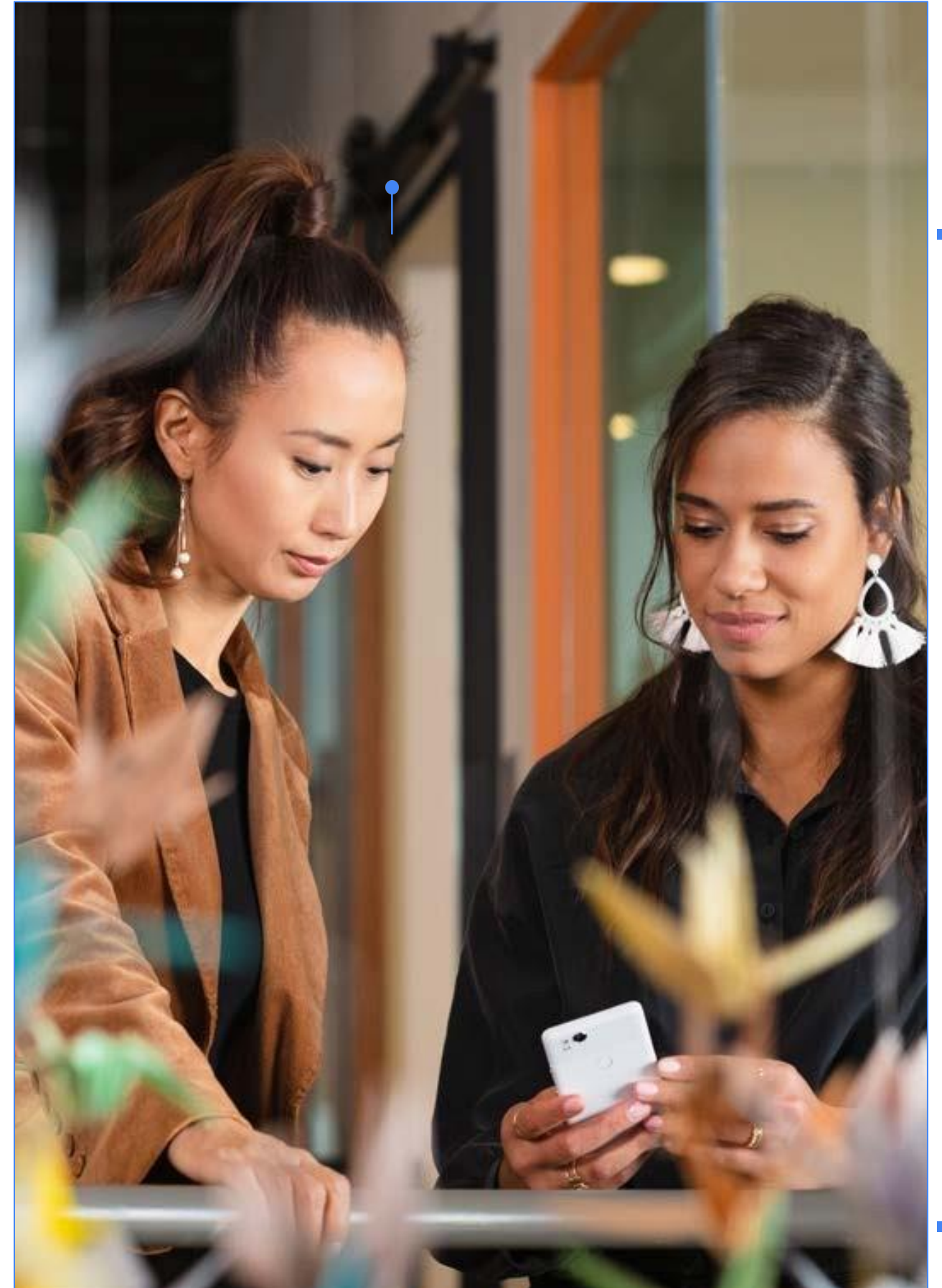
❺ Hold meetings as a last resort

Can you easily achieve the same objectives with a group message, email thread, shared document, phone call, or casual chat?

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02

Empower people
to access knowledge and share ideas

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Research continues to show that people do their best work when they have fast, easy access to collective knowledge and the information they need to do their jobs. Half of global employees say that secure, reliable access to tools and information would have the most positive impact on their productivity, according to one study.[26]

Another survey revealed that global employees think real-time knowledge sharing leads to:

- Improved responsiveness/agility (69%)
- Faster or better decision-making (63%)
- Increased employee engagement/satisfaction (59%)
- Increased time savings/efficiency (58%)
- Improved customer experience/satisfaction (48%)[26]

It makes sense that access to knowledge can help unlock employees' full potential. Sales teams can produce higher-quality presentations when they have the right data, proof points, and creative assets at their fingertips.

Marketers can build better campaigns when they know how previous initiatives performed. And IT workers can respond more quickly to security risks when they receive proactive alerts about suspicious activity.

But, while 79% of business leaders believe seam- less, digital access to knowledge is very important to overall performance, only 18% report that knowledge is shared extremely well across the entire company.[28]
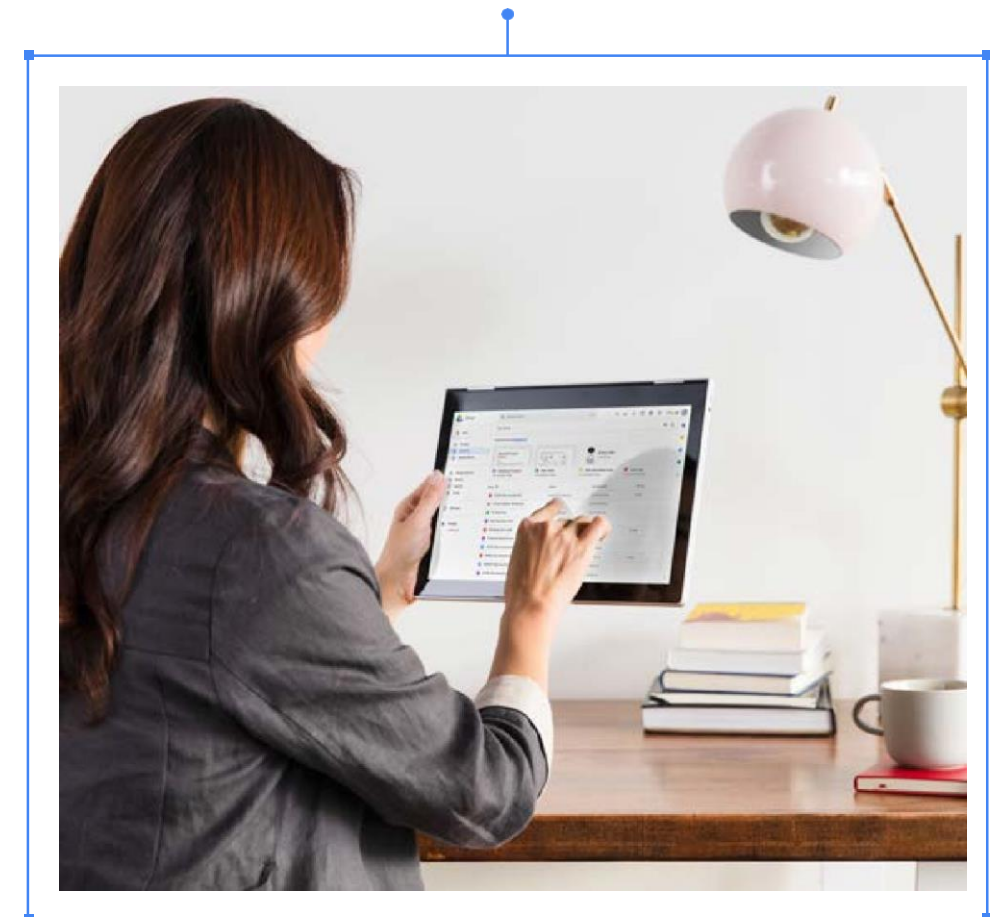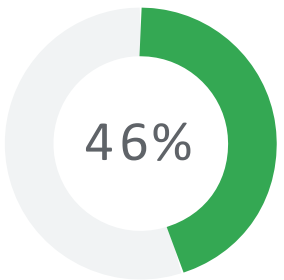
More data, more problems

With the world's data growing at an annual rate of 61%, businesses are generating more information than ever before.[29] But employees are still in the dark and out of the loop.
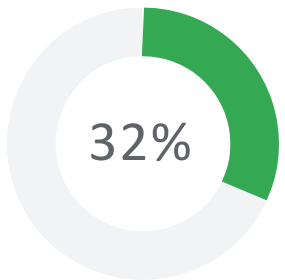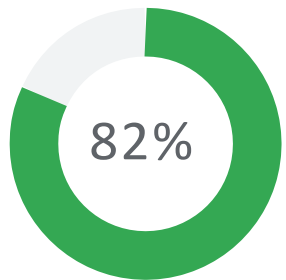
🔍 People can't find what they need
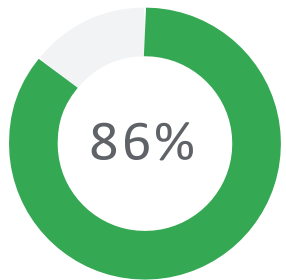
86% of global workers experience challenges when searching for information they need to do their jobs[30]
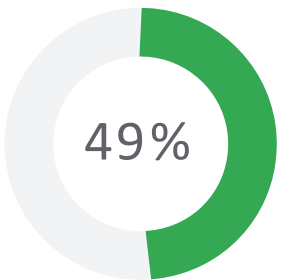
82% of employees spend at least half an hour a day searching for information[31]

46% of global workers say it's challenging and time-consuming to find needed information[32]

49% of U.S. employees have trouble locating documents[33]

32% have avoided sharing a document with a colleague because it would take too long to find[34]
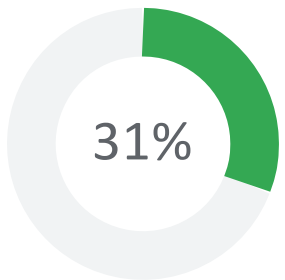
31% would use Google Search to obtain their own company's logo[35]

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🔍 Information is restricted or siloed
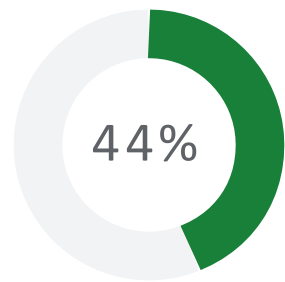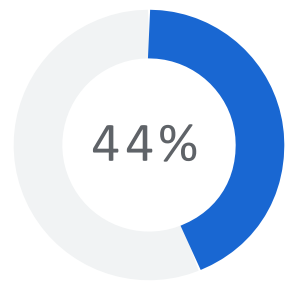
44% of U.S. business leaders say that disparate information systems across the organization make it hard to connect and collaborate[36]
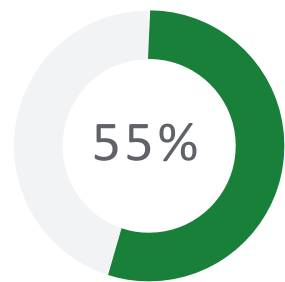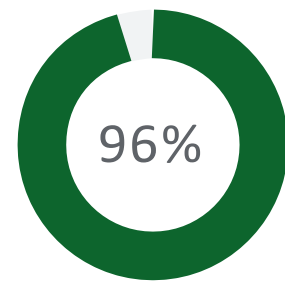
55% of U.S. employees have trouble gaining access to tools and documents that enable effective job performance during onboarding[37]

⊞ Multiple versions are a problem
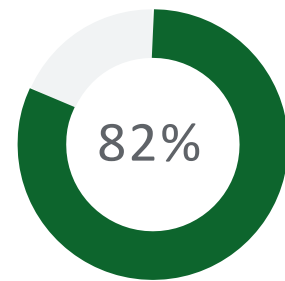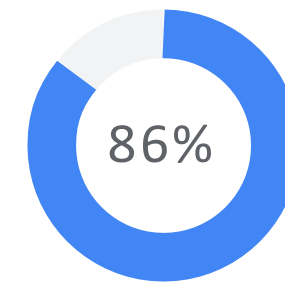
96% of global workers have trouble blending the most recent version of a file[38]

82% say navigating through different systems and locations to verify the most current versions of documents negatively affects productivity[39]

👥 Knowledge isn't shared across the organization

86% of U.S. employees don't have a clear idea of what their colleagues are working on[40]
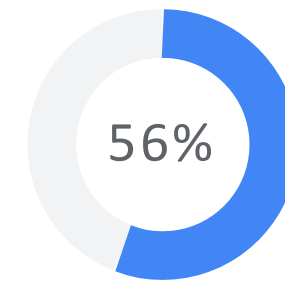
56% say lack of communication is the most common source of conflict with other departments or teams[41]

☰ It's hard to turn data into value

44% of U.S. employees say they have good data but still struggle to make the right decisions with it[42]

41% say they struggle to pull and understand data on sales[43]

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To overcome these hurdles, 61% of global employees resort to using personal file-sharing solutions or personal devices for work, putting critical data at risk.[44] Future-thinking businesses know there's a better way to empower employees to excel at their jobs, under- stand the context and consequences of their work, and build experiences that delight customers: creating a culture of transparency and knowledge-sharing.

Safe tools for accessing, sharing, and finding information

The first step: provide employees with centrally managed technology that fully meets their need to access and share knowledge. Curb reliance on unsanctioned apps that may endanger sensitive data. Many future-minded businesses are adopting cloud-based file storage and synchronization services, social platforms designed for communications, and tools for searching across internal data repositories. People can help themselves to information quickly and easily, without having to worry about versioning issues or going through the extra step of connecting via VPN. Ideally, employees don't even have to enter a keyword or open a folder; instead, an app will use artificial intelligence to automatically surface the right content at the right time.

But access is only part of the puzzle. Employees also need help trans- forming all this knowledge into value. How can they use data to make smarter business decisions and design better customer experiences? Leading businesses take advantage of AI-powered solutions that let anyone uncover valuable insights from data, even if they don't have specialized training. For example, a spreadsheet program might offer the option to write queries using natural language instead of SQL.

The old way vs. the new way

To locate last year's sales deck or a high-res company logo, you have to navigate complex file structures or scroll through old emails.

Smart tools automatically surface relevant information and enable fast, easy searching across your organization's assets.

To draw meaningful conclusions from the Q4 budget report, you need help from a data analyst.

It's easy to surface insights from a spreadsheet by typing questions in natural language—no formulas or SQL required.

Employees rarely interact with business leaders and people in other teams, so they have little insight into what colleagues are doing and thinking.

Online platforms facilitate meaningful discussions and knowledge-sharing, breaking down organizational barriers and increasing engagement.

People miss out on training opportunities because they're not in the right place at the right time.

Attendees join and participate in video training sessions from any location or device.

Inventory reports are submitted at the end of each day, preventing real-time visibility into product demand.

Shared spreadsheets provide teams with up-to-the-minute data, helping them track and reallocate items more intelligently.

To track the manufacturing process, line supervisors record metrics on paper and enter the data at a later time.

Metrics are captured in real time at mobile kiosks, allowing stakeholders to identify and address problems immediately.

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More voices, better ideas

Today's employees care about and bene t from expanded access to shared information, but that's not all: They also want opportunities to contribute to their organizations' collective knowledge, whether it's by suggesting a new product or service, providing feedback on internal processes or business initiatives, or exchanging insights with colleagues across the company.

Employees who feel that their voices are heard are 4.6 times more likely to feel empowered to per- form their best work.[45]

Organizations also stand to gain from a range of voices: 89% of executives say that for a business to be successful, new ideas must come from everyone across the organization, regardless of their role or seniority.[50]

Forward-thinking companies understand this, and many have taken concrete steps to flatten hierarchies, promote diversity, and encourage creative thinking at every level. Sixty-four percent of U.S. workers say they're regularly asked to propose completely new ways of doing things, and more than half report that innovation is factored into their performance.

And that brings our story full circle, because what do employees need in order to innovate and problem-solve? Enough free time to look beyond their daily to-do lists, along with access to information that enables smarter decisions.

The value of diversity and inclusivity

☑ Companies in the top quartile for gender diversity outperform those in the fourth quartile by 21%[46]

☑ Companies in the top quartile for ethnic diversity outperform those in the fourth quartile by 33%[47]

☑ Inclusive decision-making leads to better business decisions up to 87% of the time[48]

☑ Happy employees are 30% more likely to say their office diversity is "above average" than unhappy employees[49]
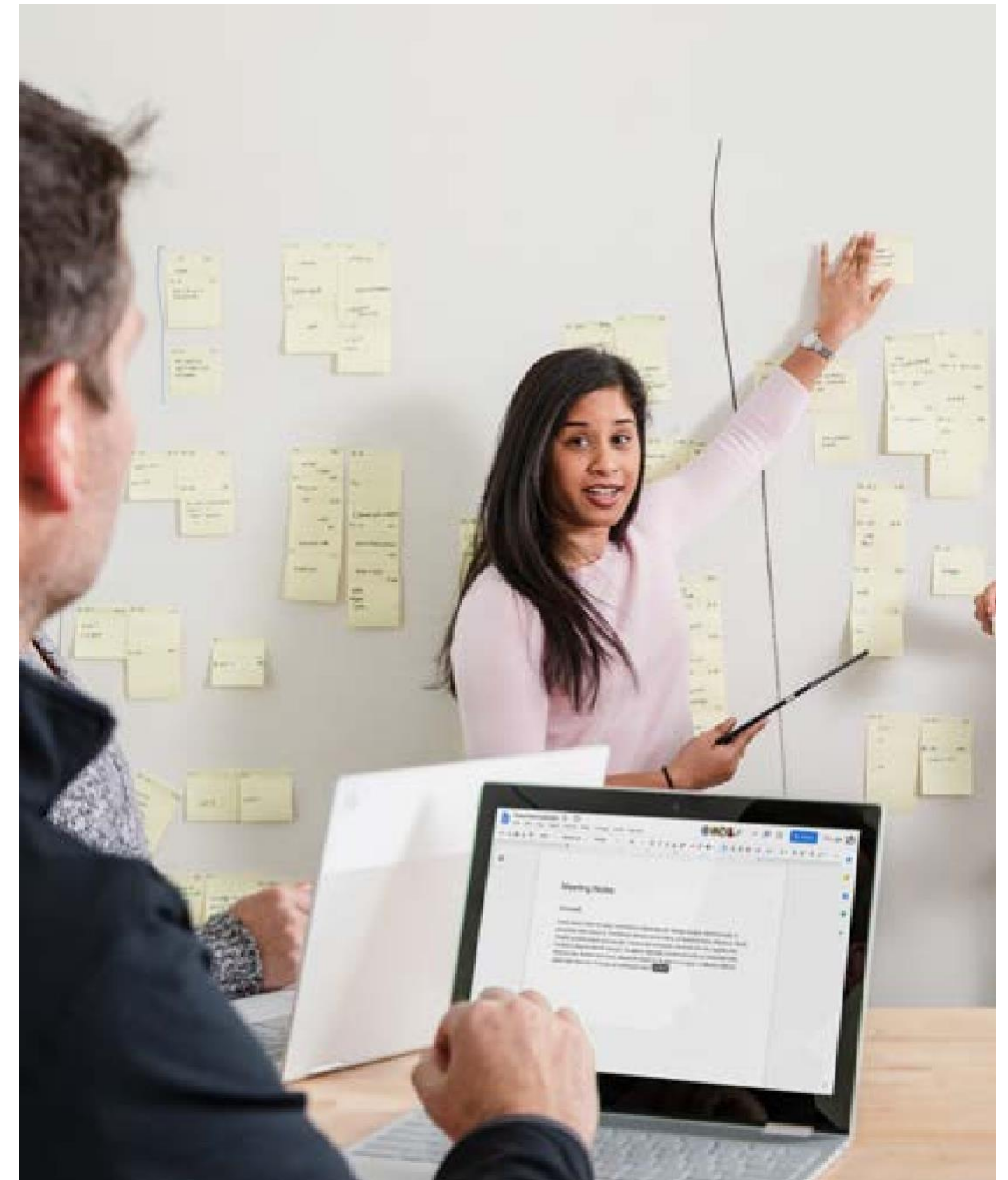
Case Studies

GANT

International lifestyle brand GANT streamlines the knowledge-sharing process, reclaiming 150, 000 hours a year for global innovation.

Strategy

- Replaced expensive legacy tools with cloud-based collaboration and productivity apps

- Enabled video meetings for connecting teammates and partners

- Gave new hires immediate access to online resources

- Assigned ownership of key files at the team level for better availability and control

Results

- Reclaimed 30–60 minutes every day for their 800 users, freeing up time to focus on creating

- Eliminated emailing files, decreasing email usage by 40%

- Reduced travel costs by 20% by conducting meetings and training sessions via video

- Improved the productivity of new hires by streamlining the onboarding process

JEUX DU CANADA GAMES

Cloud tools cut planning time in half for Canada Games Council, a nonprofit organization that organizes a biennial multisport event.

Strategy

- Provided employees and volunteers with cloud-based tools for meeting, working, and communicating

- Replaced a paper-based knowledge transfer process with an online file-sharing system

- Streamlined travel planning with a shared spreadsheet containing real-time updates

- Moved decades of information into online storage for fast, easy sharing

Results

- Enabled staff to reclaim 40% of their day by eliminating the task of keeping volunteers in the loop

- Saved host cities up to $2.5 million in infrastructure, licensing, and support costs

- Cut operational planning time in half by improving productivity

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5 tips for protecting your company's data

As access to information becomes faster and easier in the coming years, forward-looking businesses are rethinking their approach to protecting customer data and intellectual property—often with the help of cloud-based technologies. Google security expert Heather Adkins shares some key best practices:

❶ Take advantage of security automation

With cyberthreats on the rise and attackers using more sophisticated techniques, security is a business necessity that must scale. Move toward automatic security processes with next-generation analysis tools that alert admins to suspicious activities, respond immediately to attacker activity, and methodically apply the same rules to similar threats going forward.

❷ Get a bird's-eye view of your security posture

Many employees now regularly work across multiple devices and apps, making it difficult to know where the boundaries of the enterprise begin and end. A unified dashboard can act as a sophisticated watchtower, providing admins with insight into their assets, updates on their security system's effectiveness, warnings about potential threats, and recommendations on how to improve security health.

❸ Stop relying on passwords alone

Add an extra layer of protection with multifactor authentication, which requires employees to sign in using something they know (their password) and something they have (such as a phone prompt or mobile app notification). Make the process even more convenient and secure by arming users with physical authentication tokens that connect to networks.

❹ Change the locks when employees leave

With 36% of U.S. employees participating in the gig economy[52] and a rising turnover rate for full-time workers[53], the risk of ex-employees walking away with corporate secrets is significant. Keep your organization safe and secure by taking advantage of cloud services and discouraging the use of local storage. When an employee leaves, disable their access and remotely remove your data from phones and other personal devices.

❺ Safeguard private information

The sum of the world's data is growing at an annual rate of 61%,[54] so companies have more information than ever before at their disposal—and much of it is confidential or protected. Data loss prevention systems reduce the risk of human error by scanning emails and shared files for sensitive content, such as credit card and bank account numbers. You can create rules to trigger automatic actions when detection occurs.

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03

Let people work how they want: flexibly and collaboratively
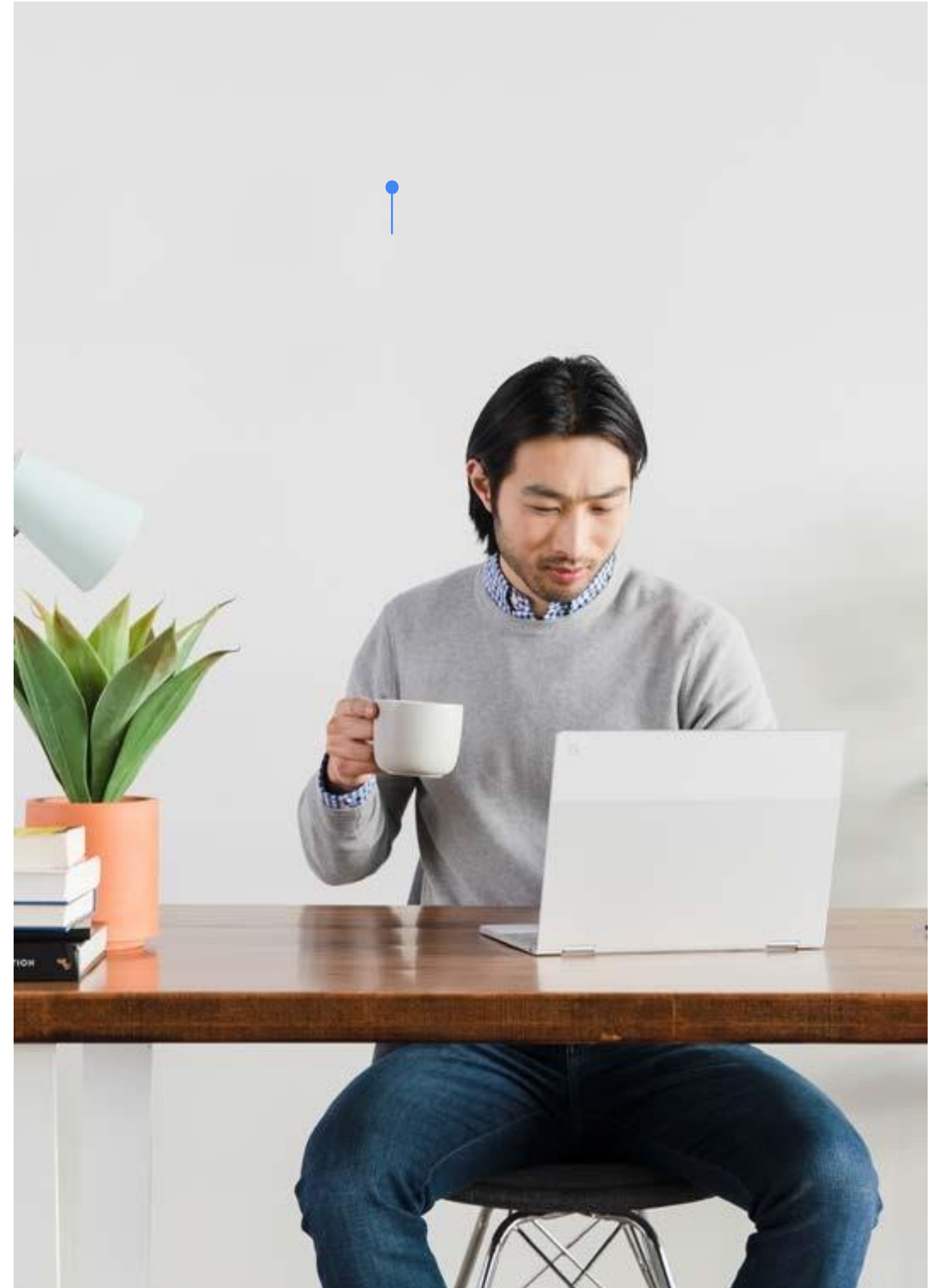
Along with time-saving tools and expanded access to information, two core values are reshaping work for forward-thinking organizations and will help determine the future success of every business. The first is flexibility, which research has shown to enhance employee productivity and happiness while helping companies attract and retain the best talent from across the globe. When businesses offer flexible work options, people gain more control over where and when to be productive, as well as how to balance their job responsibilities with their personal lives. And increasingly, it's more than just an item on a wish list—it's a freedom that many workers expect.

Tellingly, today's employees would go to great lengths to achieve more flexibility: 54% would switch jobs, 40% would take on bigger workloads, 31% would pay for their own technology, and 24% would give up company benefits.[55] Younger generations are more likely to prioritize flexibility, signaling that demand will continue to increase for remote work, alternative schedules, and new kinds of facilities such as coworking spaces.[56]
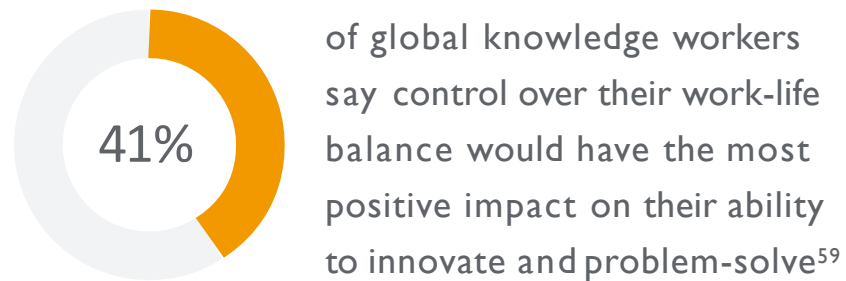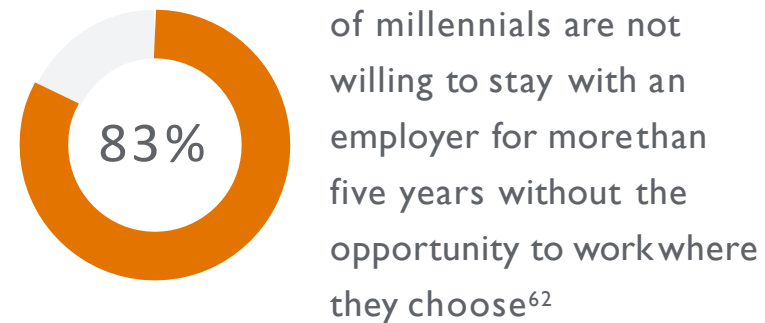
People want to choose where and when they work

77% of global workers want the opportunity to work outside the office at least part of the time[57]

89% say flexibility should be the way we always work, not a benefit[58]
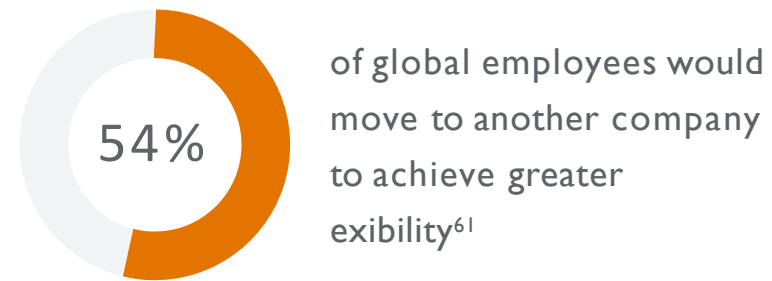
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Flexibility: good for workers, good for business
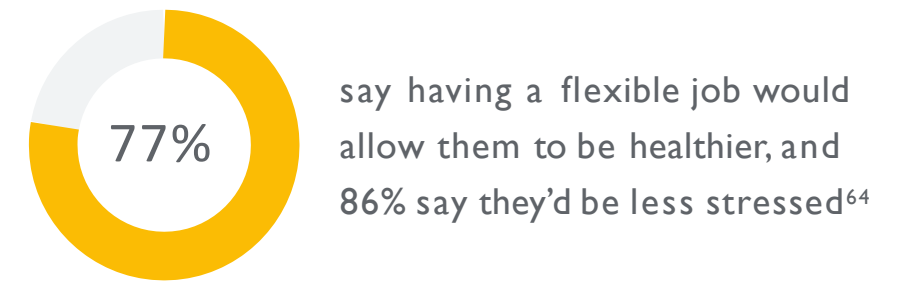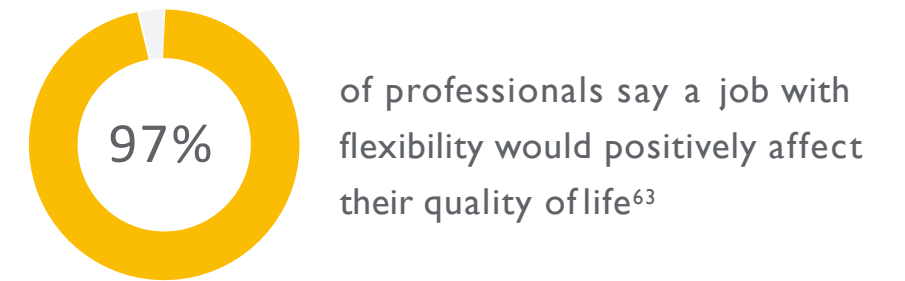
Research shows that flexibility improves:

Performance

41% of global knowledge workers say control over their work-life balance would have the most positive impact on their ability to innovate and problem-solve[59]

54% of employees with multiple workspaces think they're more office[60]

Loyalty

54% of global employees would move to another company to achieve greater exibility[61]

83% of millennials are not willing to stay with an employer for more than five years without the opportunity to work where they choose[62]

Well-being

97% of professionals say a job with flexibility would positively affect their quality of life[63]

77% say having a flexible job would allow them to be healthier, and 86% say they'd be less stressed[64]

Work is becoming more flexible, but not for everyone

73% of departments at U.S. companies will have remote workers by 2028[65]

25% of employees who value workspace flexibility do not have access to flexible work options[67]

23% of knowledge workers have the freedom to choose where they work, and another 44% expect to have that choice by 2021[66]

38% of workers say their technology doesn't work effectively when they're working remotely[68]

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Flexibility requires leaders to rethink old assumptions about designing effective workspaces, building strong teams, and assessing job performance. It also requires an IT environment that ensures the same degree of security, reliability, and functionality across locations and devices, both inside and outside physical offices. Traditional remote access solutions, such as VPNs, fall short in this department: They take time to set up, involve an extra sign-in step, only work on certain devices, and slow the performance of applications and websites. ==With cloud-based services, employees get an identical experience from their business apps and communication tools whether they're sitting at their desks, serving customers in the field, camping out in a coworking space, or working from a remote office.==

Wherever, but also together

People want the freedom to work on their own terms, but that doesn't mean they want to work on their own. Increasingly, employees value collaboration just as much as flexibility, and they believe that teamwork leads to higher productivity and stronger results— and research backs them up. This is especially true for millennials, the post-1980 generation that will make up three-quarters of the global workforce in just six years. Research has shown that millennials thrive in collaborative environments, preferring cross-functional working groups that prioritize unity over competition.[70]

Recognizing the growing importance of collaboration, leading organizations are taking steps to reward group efforts, encourage communication and coordination across departments, and transition away from hierarchical models of management toward networks of teams. But research suggests there's room for improvement.

Only 17% of global employees report that their C-suite leaders regularly collaborate on long-term interdependent work.[71] Workers also cite technological obstacles to collaboration, such as outdated IT systems.[72]
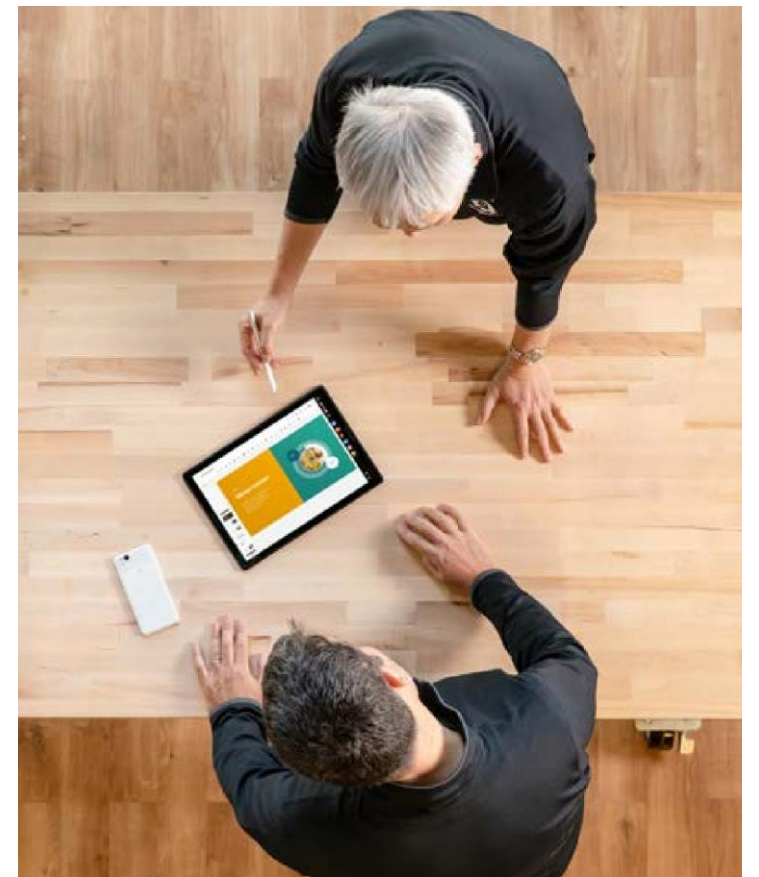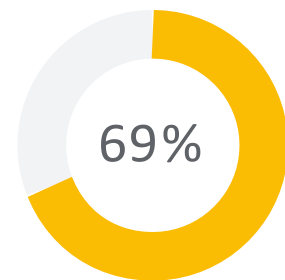
Collaboration: how we (may) work together

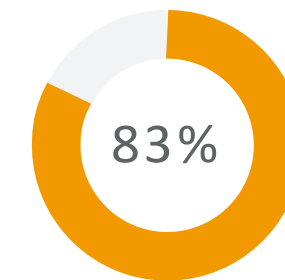**People believe collaboration helps them work better...**
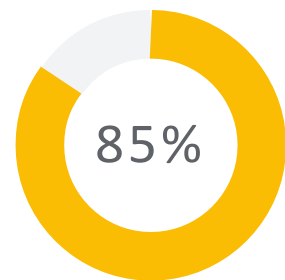
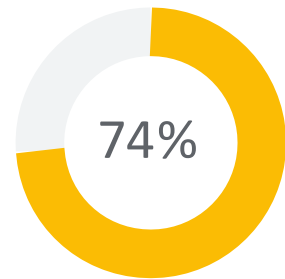**85%** of global C-suite executives rate collaboration as important or very important[73]

74% of global employees believe that shifting to a team-based model improves performance[74]

80% of global employees think teamwork is more valuable and successful than individual work[75]

69% of global workers say they do their best work in collaboration with others[76]

85% Workers with access to collaborative work management software are 85% more likely to identify as happy in the workplace[77]
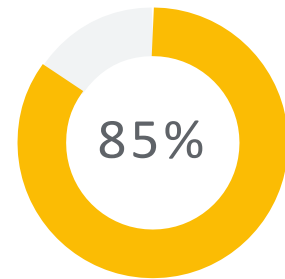
...but not all organizations are teamwork-friendly.

83% of global employees say their C-suite leaders rarely collaborate or only do so on an ad hoc basis[78]
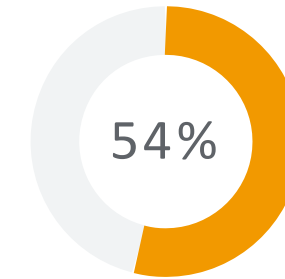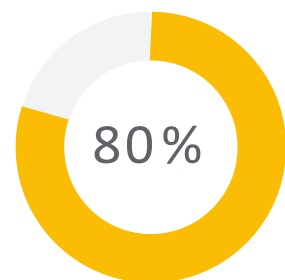
54% of U.S. employees say they would like to have more opportunities to collaborate with their companies[79]

39% of U.S. workers say their current technology doesn't facilitate collaboration between employees or with partners[80]

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Making flexible collaboration work

As individuals and businesses gravitate toward flexible collaboration, technology is evolving to support—and sometimes even anticipate—their needs.

We now have tools that let people on opposite sides of the globe work together as a team, from video meetings for face-to-face interaction to digital whiteboards for collective brainstorming.

These solutions are quickly becoming available to more employees, with 27% of global executives adopting integrated software suites for collaborative content creation and idea sharing in the last two years and an additional 24% planning to do so by 2021.[81]
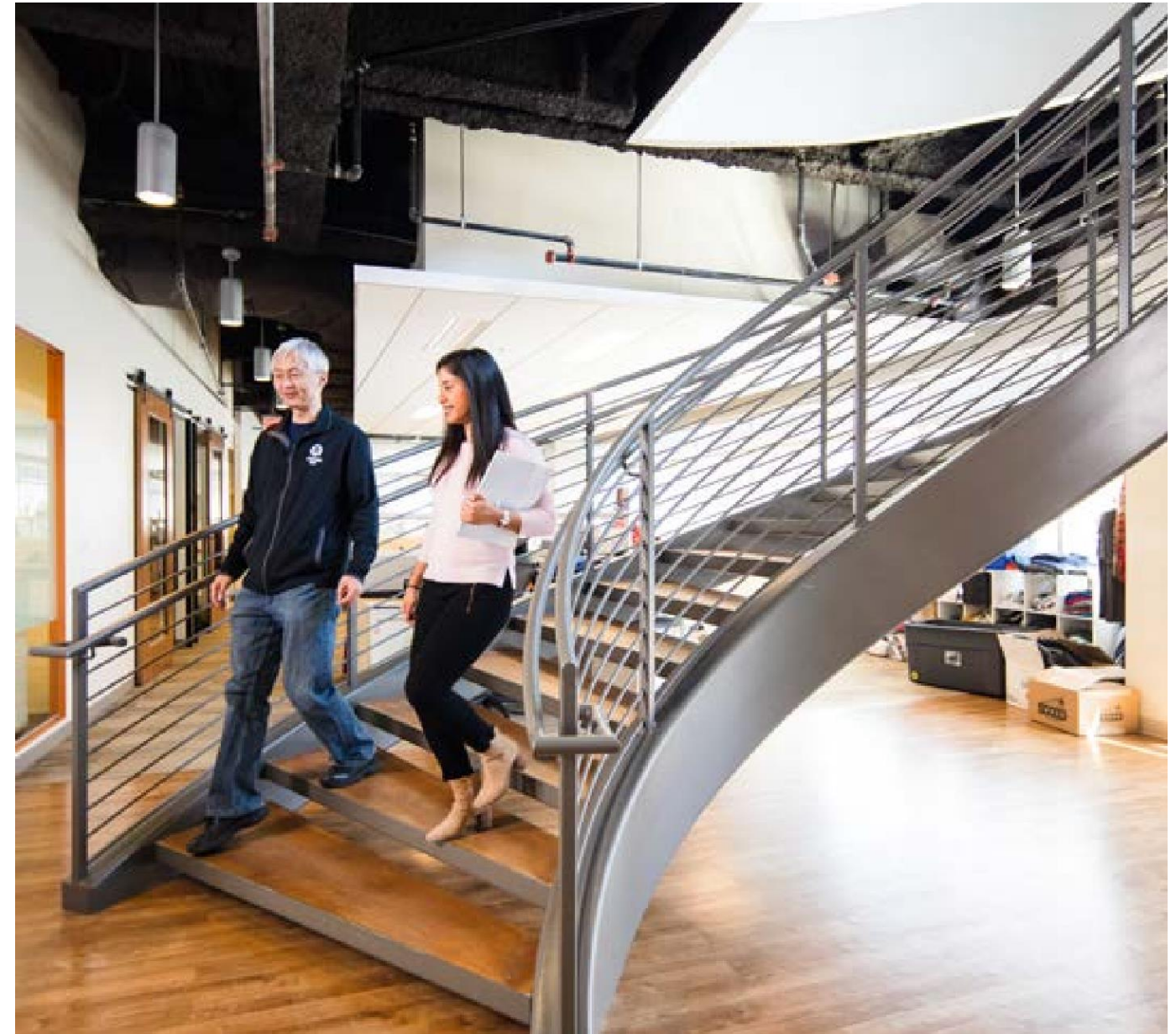
The old way vs. the new way

You miss a whole day of work when your kid stays home sick from school.

You join critical meetings via video chat while the little one takes a nap.

You email many versions of the same document back and forth, from v1 to v1_final to v1_final_for_real.

Multiple people edit one shared version and changes are tracked automatically—no email required.

Employees rarely interact with business leaders and people in other teams or offices.

Video meetings and online discussion platforms make it easy to connect with anyone, breaking down organizational barriers.

To train a team in another city, you lose several workdays to travel and jet lag.

You can present to hundreds of people right from your desk, watch their reactions, and answer questions in real time.

Sometimes talking is more effective than typing, but you struggle to get everyone on a call or in a room.

You can instantly transform direct messages and group chats into video calls to have a spontaneous quick sync.

You'd like your team's input on which graphic to use, but it's so hard tracking everyone down that you just ask your neighbor.

You post the options in your team's group chat and start getting votes within seconds.

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Well-being in an always-on world: how to disconnect

There are numerous benefits to tools that let people work anytime and anywhere – but there's a downside, too. Thanks to new cloud-powered tech that allows us to be constantly connected, many people feel pressure to stay responsive during their time off. On average, U.S. workers spend eight hours of non-work time per week reading and answering work-related emails. Research shows that the belief that companies expect 24/7 availability prevents employees from detaching from work, causing exhaustion and susceptibility to burnout.[82]

Help employees feel comfortable disconnecting and potentially preventing burnout.

❶ Avoid sending non-urgent messages after a certain time of day or over the weekend, and encourage your team to follow suit. Use an email service that lets you schedule delivery in advance.

❷ Model healthy detachment by leaving the office at a reasonable hour, incorporating more movement into your day, taking micro-breaks every 90 minutes, and logging out of work-related communication platforms when you're off the clock. Keep your work inbox closed while on vacation.

❸ Check in regularly with each of your reports to discuss work-life balance. If your employees are regularly struggling to detach from work, help them pinpoint the challenges they face and develop strategies for setting boundaries. They may need clarity on which projects to prioritize, permission to push back against unreasonable requests, or reassurance that your company rewards people for doing great work—not for always being on call.

❹ Use a shared calendar solution that lets you and your team set daily working hours and block off time for personal commitments. It's an easy way to manage expectations about when you can join meetings, answer emails, and chime in on group messages.

❺ Be open to your employees' requests for flexible work arrangements, like a gradual transition from full-time leave or the option to telecommute once a week. Research suggests that burnout rates decline when people have control over their schedules and organizations focus on results, not long hours.[83]

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Conclusion
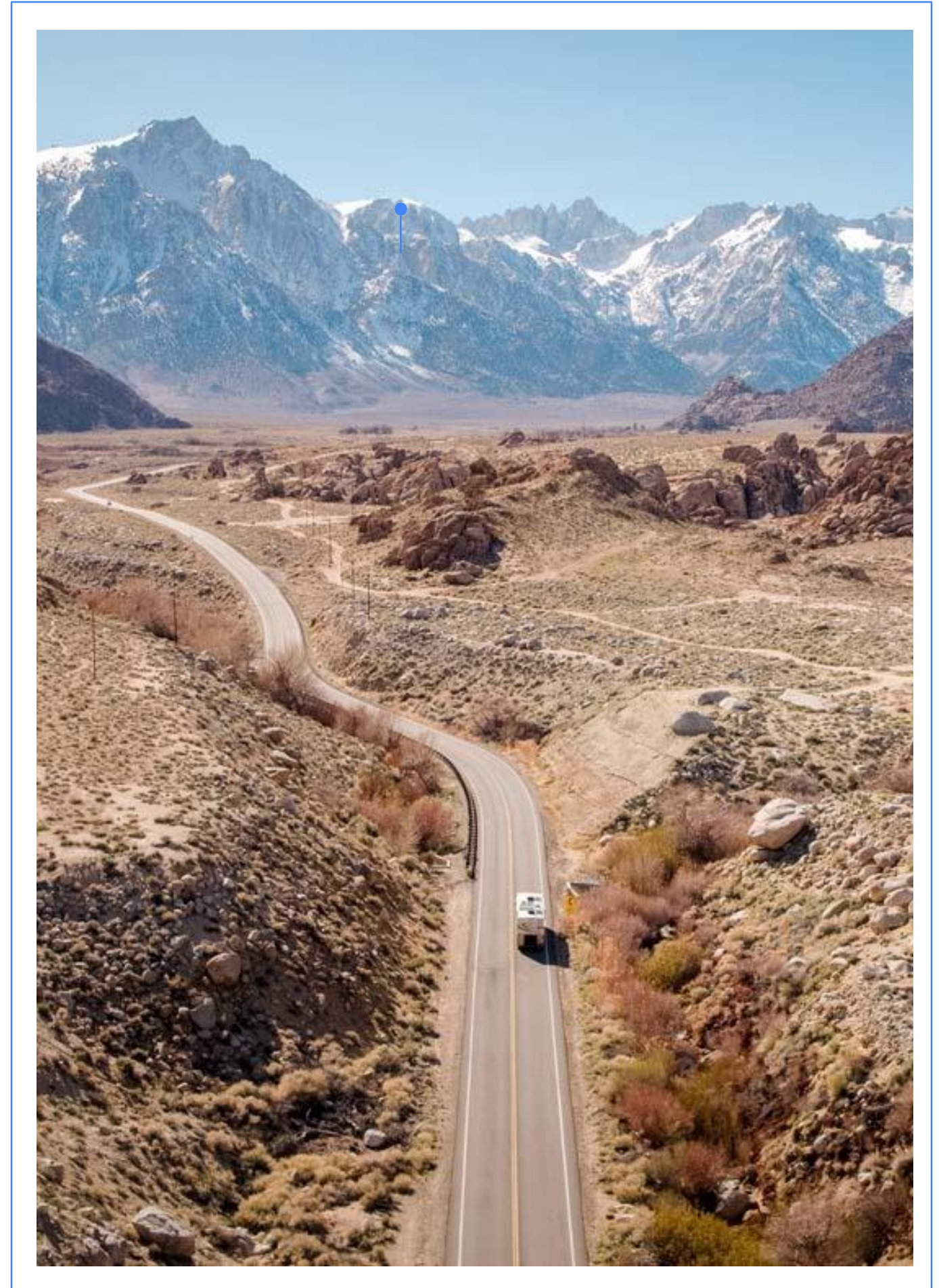
The future of work is already here.

It's in a shared document where three founders in three different countries hash out their mission statement together (and exchange a few GIFs). It's at a baby shower attended via video meeting by coworkers around the world. It is the online survey that inspired a local bakery's most popular cupcake yet. It's every extra second that people can spend delighting customers, thinking creatively, or bringing ideas to life—all the exciting and amazing things that humans alone can do—while technology takes care of the boring stuff.

Bring the future of work to your business, today, with the strategies described in this report.

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