GLOBAL
REPORT

asana
Work Innovation
Lab

2024
EDITION

The State of Work Innovation

The four taxes that bankrupt your workday—and how smart organizations reduce them

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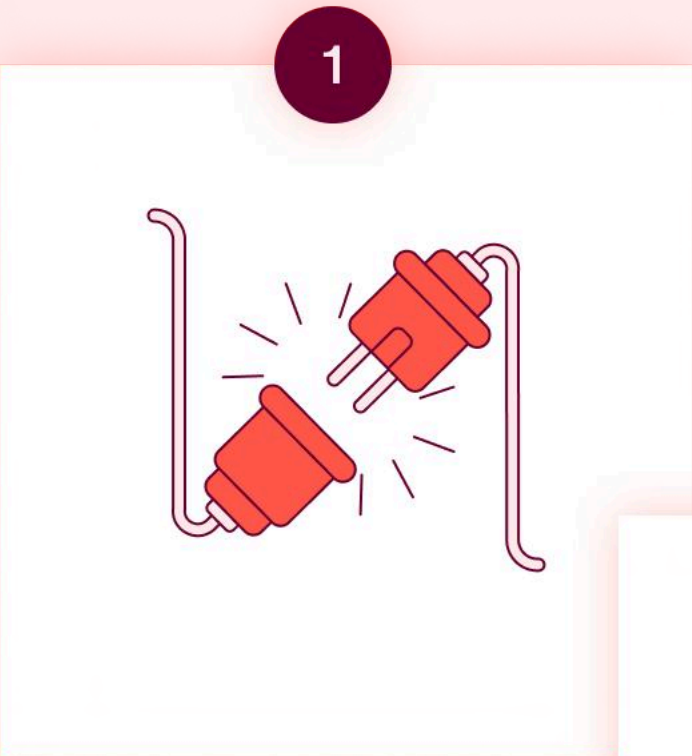

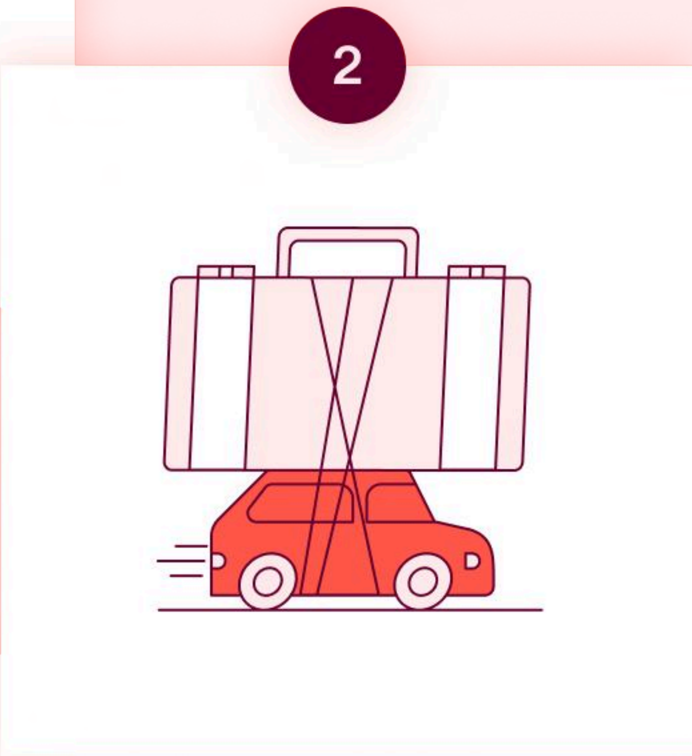

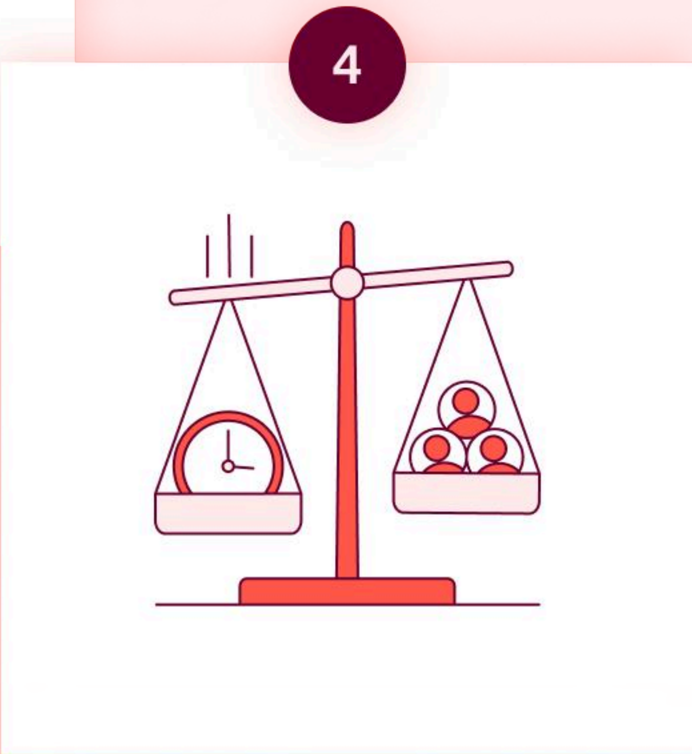

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Introduction

The shift we can't ignore

The workplace has experienced a tidal wave of change. Our State of Work Innovation report from Asana's Work Innovation Lab draws on insights from over 13,000 knowledge workers—5,000 knowledge workers in the U.S. and U.K. and more than 8,000 knowledge workers in Germany, Japan, Australia, and France—along with five years of trended data. With expert analysis from leading voices in the future of work, it unpacks the radical shifts reshaping how we work.

Unfortunately, too many organizations—perhaps yours, too—are stuck with outdated practices that no longer serve them. It's time to break free.

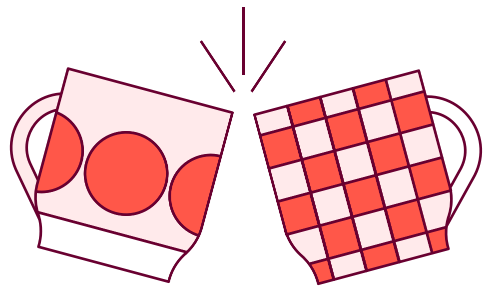
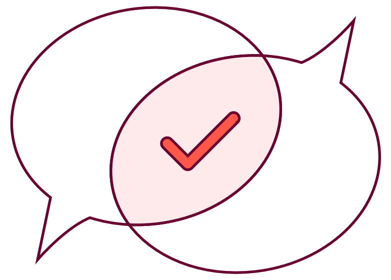
This report is your blueprint for how the smartest companies are staying ahead.

The changing workplace

Our research shows that only 13% of knowledge workers now stick to the traditional 9-to-5 workday, with many opting for unconventional hours or nonlinear workdays broken up into blocks.

Hybrid work is the new norm, with 59% of workers either working in a hybrid format or having the option to do so.

Meanwhile, asynchronous communication—where messages are exchanged and work happens without requiring immediate responses—has surged, with 81% relying on it to get their work done.

	FROM	TO
	9-5 workday	Non-linear workday
	In-office work	Hybrid work
	Synchronous work	Asynchronous work

HOW WORK HAPPENS TODAY

Just
13%
of workers work a traditional 9-to-5 workday.

59%
work in a hybrid setup.

81%
depend on asynchronous communication.

Stuck in a time warp

Outdated tactics are draining productivity

More face-time

In March 2023, after the pandemic, 31% of workers said they primarily worked remotely, while just 11% were office-bound full-time according to our trended data. However, as growth in some industries slowed, many organizations backpedaled. By August 2024, only 12% of workers remained fully remote, while 27% found themselves back in the office full-time.

More technology

In the rush to adapt to new ways of working, organizations have flooded employees with technology. But instead of simplifying work, many have made it more overwhelming. Many tools, especially AI-powered ones, don't integrate well with existing systems, forcing employees into constant context switching. The result? 75% of workers now report digital exhaustion—up from 64% just a year ago, before the rise of large language models and other AI tools.

More meetings

Despite all these changes, meetings have only multiplied—often as a reflex reaction to the loss of in-person interaction. Nearly half of workers—44%—say they dread meetings. And yet, these broken meetings stubbornly remain the default mode of communication.

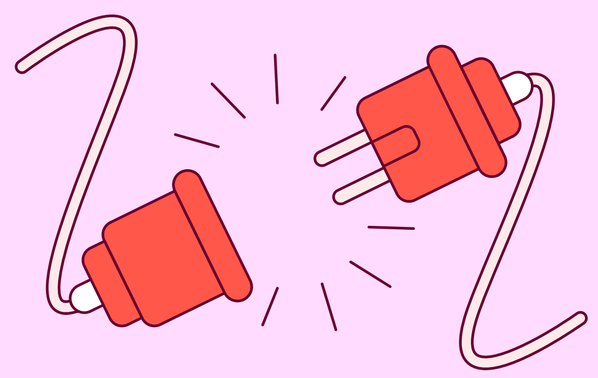
The time workers spend in unproductive meetings has doubled since 2019, to **5 hours per week.**

Productivity taxes that bleed us dry

Clinging to outdated ways of working has come with a steep price—in the form of four hidden taxes that are quietly draining our organizations: the Connectivity Tax, the Velocity Tax, the Resilience Tax, and the Capacity Tax.

Just like government taxes take a chunk of your paycheck, these organizational taxes chip away at your organization's productivity and potential. Together, they gobble up 53% of knowledge workers' time, leaving only 47% for skilled and strategic work.

And while your tax dollars at least fund things like roads and schools, these organizational taxes just serve up wasted time and poor results—leaving employees feeling ground down by despair and helplessness. And there's no refund check coming in the mail.



Connectivity Tax

The cost that organizations incur when people and work are disconnected.

Velocity Tax

The cost of technology and process bottlenecks that slow down work.

Resilience Tax

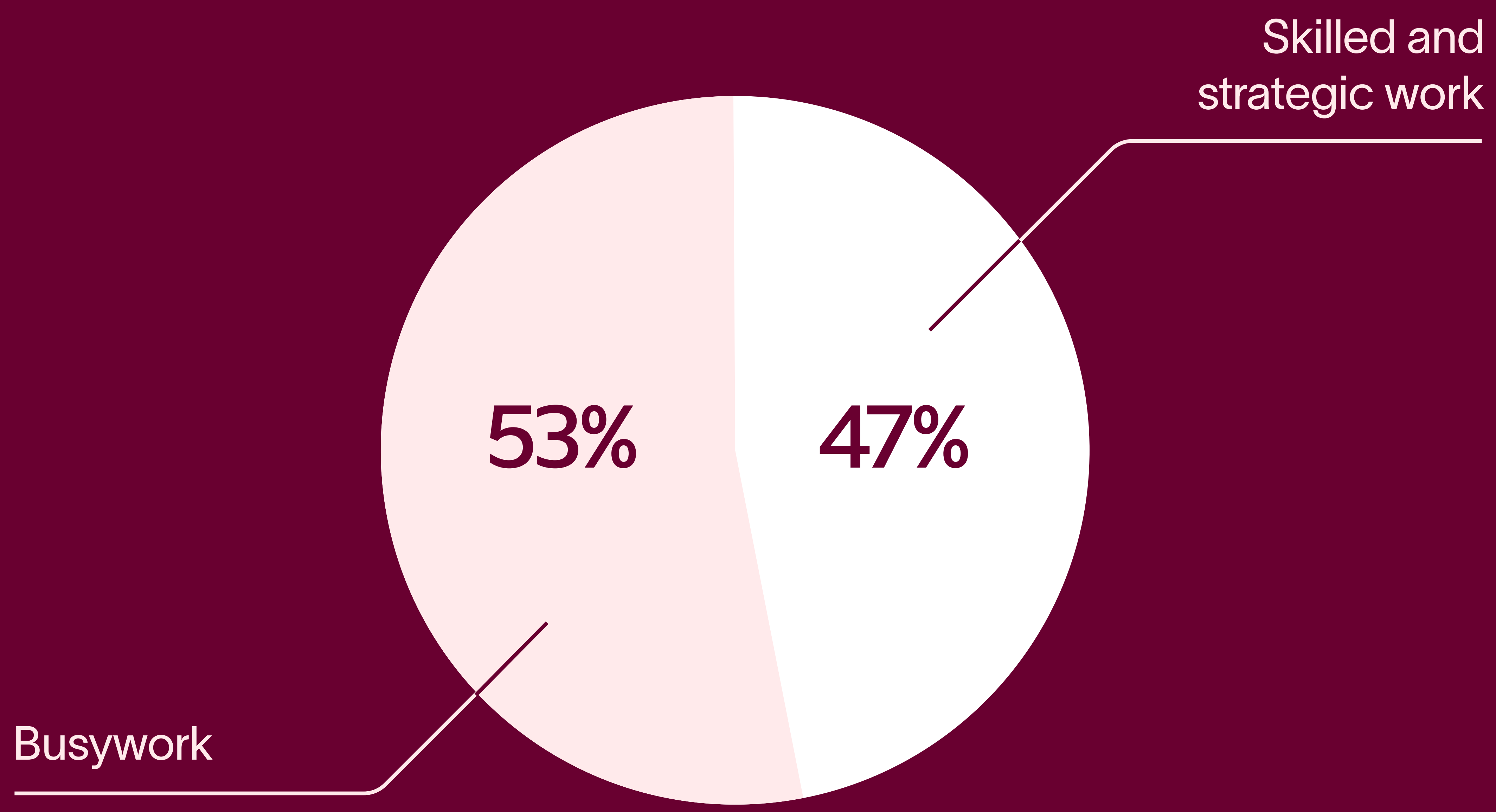
The cost of toxic colleagues, bosses, and change management approaches that hurt our ability to adapt to change.

Capacity Tax

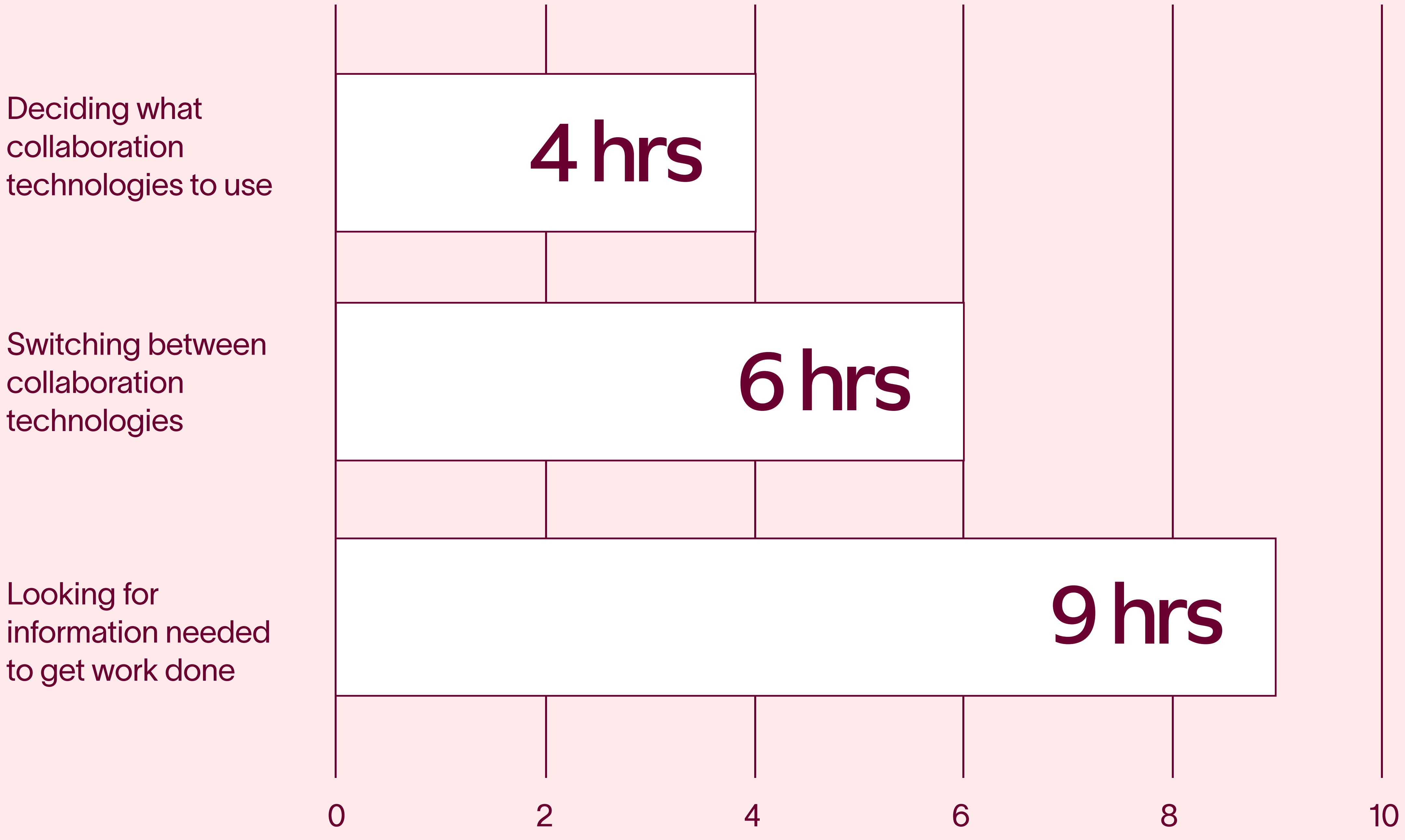
The cost of overload—meeting overload, technology overload, and collaboration overload—that drains employees' capacity and bandwidth.

Workers spend more than half their time on busywork

Outdated ways of working mean that more than half (53%) of workers' time is swallowed up by busywork—chasing the status of work, searching for information, communicating about work, and other work that takes away from time available for skilled and strategic work. Ultimately, workers are left with less than half (47%) of their time available for the important skilled and strategic work they were hired to do.



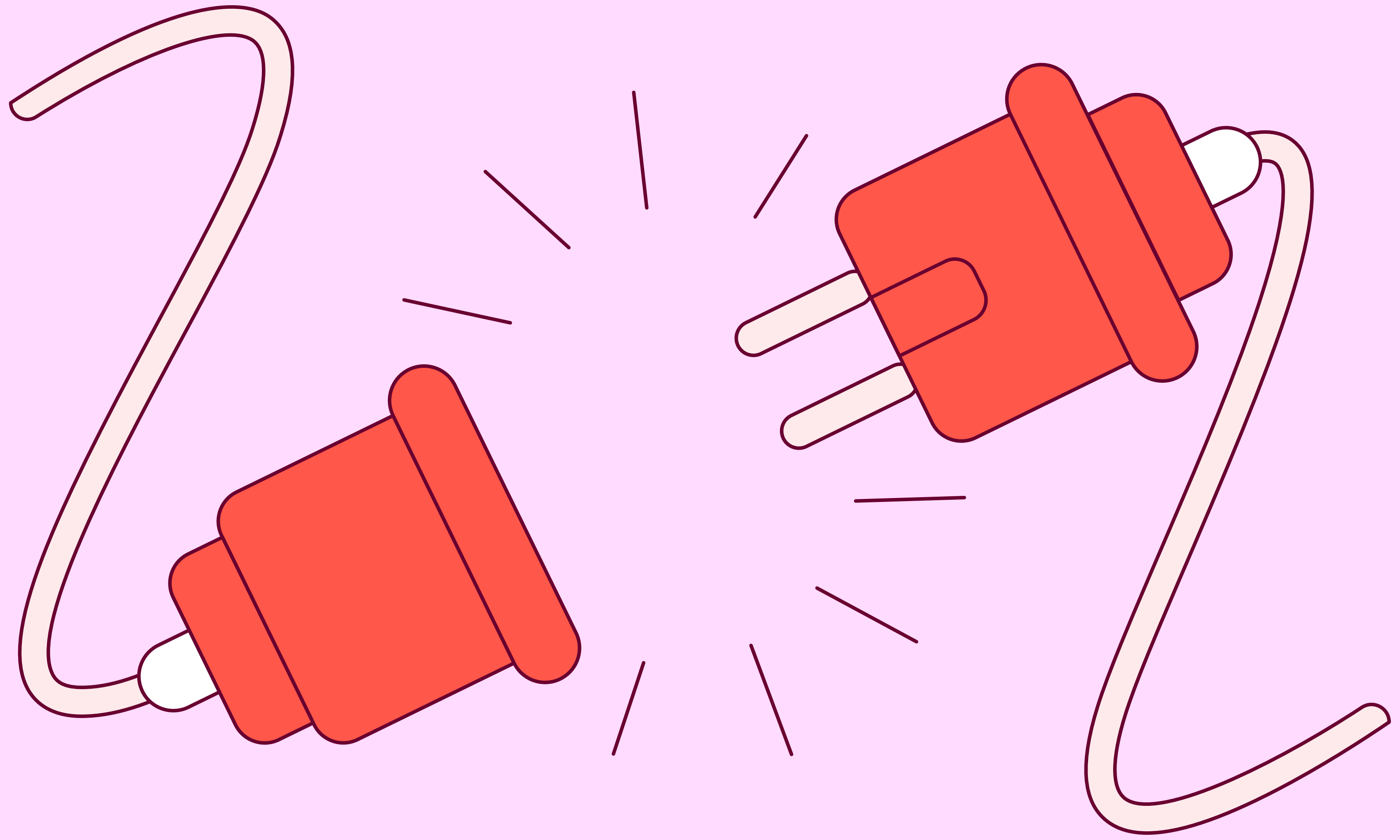
TIME WASTED BY EACH WORKER PER WEEK



The solution?

To reduce these taxes, we need to innovate how we work.

1



Teams

Work

Location

The Connectivity Tax

The hidden toll of disconnection

Solving a work problem used to be as simple as popping your head over a cubicle wall or tapping your coworker on the shoulder. But as teams spread across time zones and locations, that's become a relic of the past for many. This shift has piled on a hefty Connectivity Tax, as people struggle to stay connected.

The Connectivity Tax impacts us in three key areas: **teams**, **work**, and **location.** You won't see it on your paycheck, but you're definitely paying it.

Connectivity across teams

81% of workers now spend some of their time collaborating with others, a rise from pre-pandemic levels. Additionally, 38% of workers' collaboration time is spent with other teams, and on the Asana platform, this number is even higher at 41%[1].

The result? Only 21% of employees say teams collaborate very effectively across their organizations, and 63% report that at least one cross-functional project they were part of failed to meet its goals last year.

81% of workers now spend some of their time collaborating with other teams.

38% of workers' collaboration time is spent with other teams.

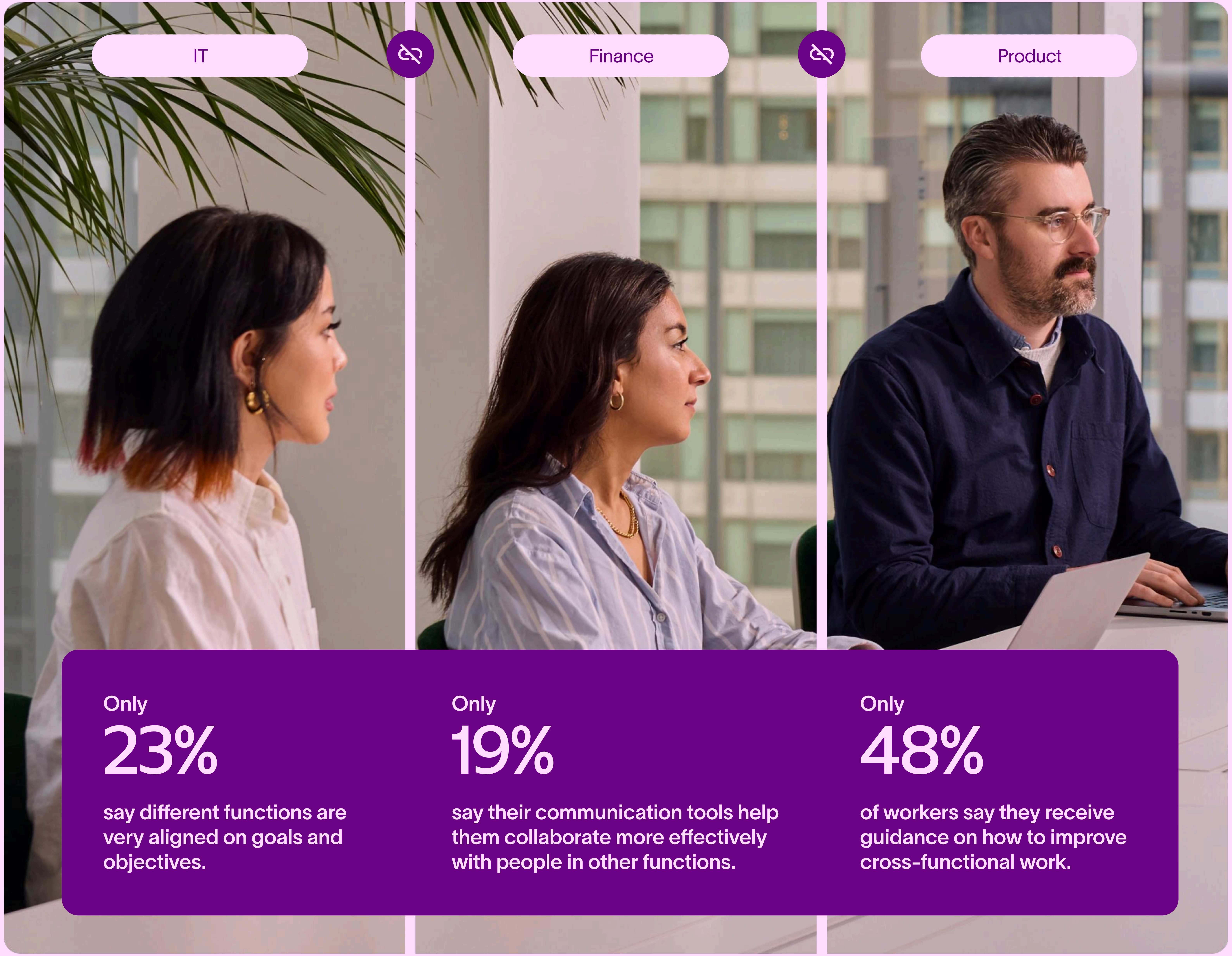
> "In the past, teams were specialized and often worked in silos, which suited simpler tasks. Today's work is more complex, requiring input and collaboration from multiple teams. We can't rely on outdated ways of working."
>
> **Anna James**
> Work Innovation Analytics Lead, Work Innovation Lab

The cost of disconnection

In a disconnected workplace, employees are often left to fend for themselves—going rogue because the systems meant to support them are failing. A whopping 90% of workers rely on informal networks, friends, and unspoken understandings to get things done.

This creates an uneven playing field, giving some an advantage while others struggle to keep up. Worse, these informal remedies aren't cutting it in most companies.

Only 12% of workers are confident that new ideas and information flow quickly between departments.



Only 23% say different functions are very aligned on goals and objectives.

Only 19% say their communication tools help them collaborate more effectively with people in other functions.

Only 48% of workers say they receive guidance on how to improve cross-functional work.

Connectivity across work

Connection in the workplace isn't just about who you're connected to—it's about how the work itself is connected, or isn't. In too many organizations, work is disconnected. Only 47% of employees understand how their work fits into the organization's overarching objectives. Individual contributors feel this disconnect the most—only 42% see how their work fits into the bigger picture.

Only **42%** of individual contributors say they're clear on how their work fits into their organization's overarching objectives.

> "Our research consistently shows that when employees can't see how their work aligns with company goals, their efforts lose meaning. Teams pull in different directions, leading to misalignment and poor results."

Dr. Rebecca Hinds
Head of the Work Innovation Lab

Connectivity across location

During and after the pandemic, many organizations tried to break free from the traditional office. But many have since hit the brakes and reversed back to managing face-to-face. Over the past 18 months, we've seen a 145% spike in workers reporting they are required to work from a physical office.

This shift back to fully in-person work is costly. Our research shows that employees who work in the office full-time are 32% more likely to consistently feel micromanaged by their managers compared to those with more flexible arrangements. And all that micromanagement seems to be a one-way street: 60% of onsite employees say their feedback on organizational issues is ignored.

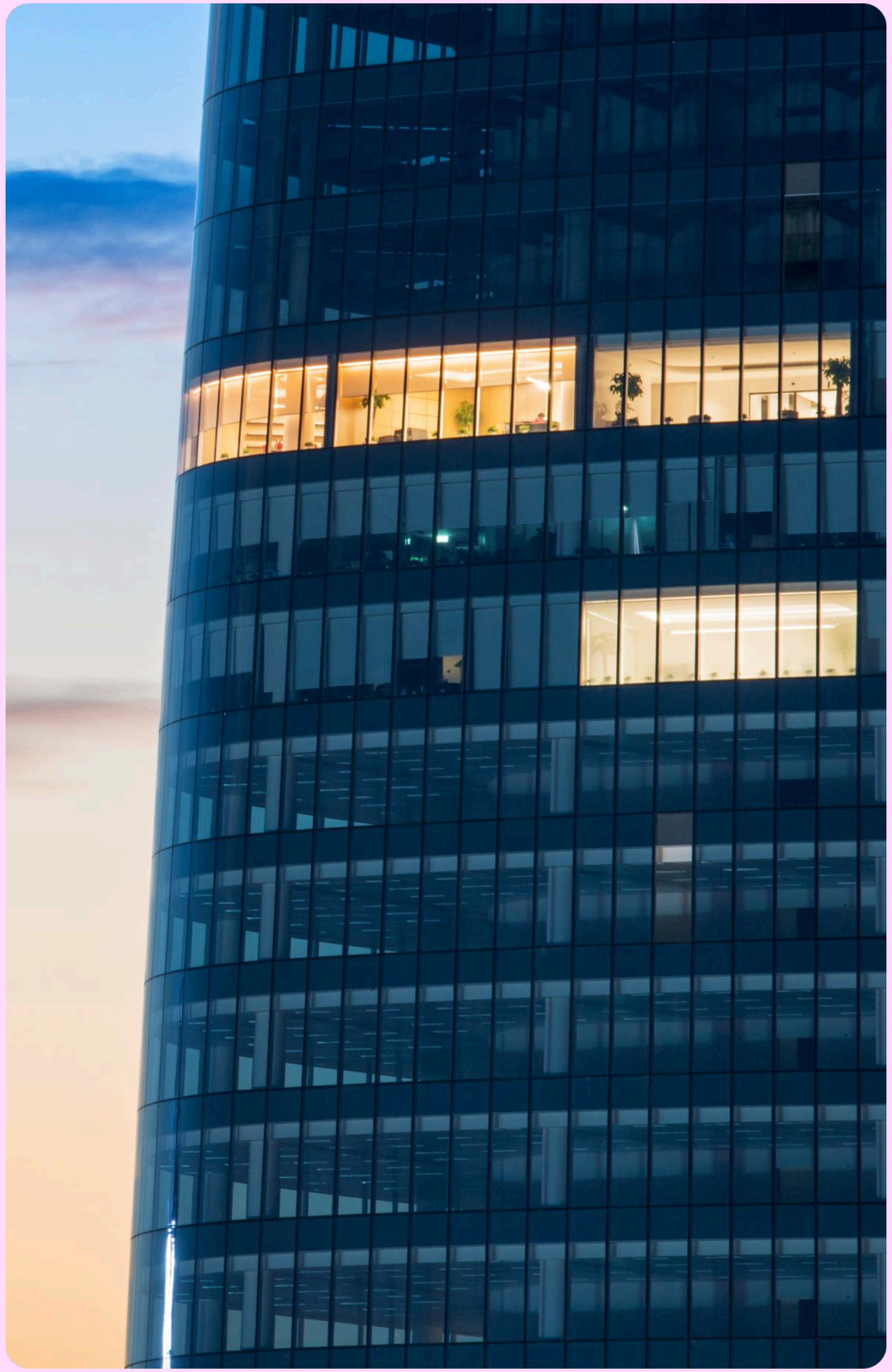
During the pandemic, companies pushed for asynchronous work—communication without real-time responses. But most were unprepared, lacking tools like work management platforms, strong writing cultures, and a culture that doesn't expect hyper-availability from employees.

And so, companies continued to cling to pre-pandemic norms, and real-time communication surged, taking up 36% of the workday—16% higher than before the pandemic[1]. This overreliance on synchronous communication in too many companies has turned "always available" into a damaging gold standard that many workers are pressured to meet.

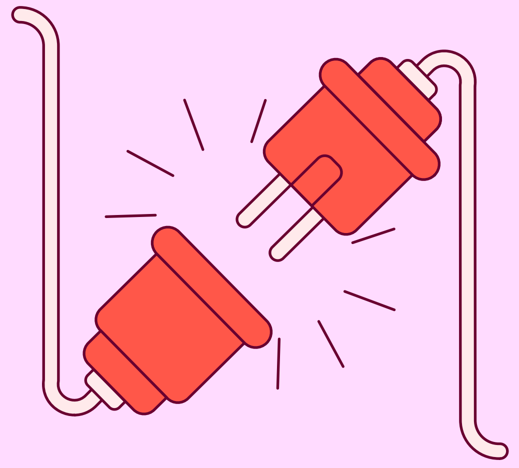
Because companies cling to outdated in-person norms, remote workers often suffer most. They're 32% less likely to feel connected to their in-office teammates.

Full-time office workers are

32% **more likely to say they consistently feel micromanaged by their managers versus those with more flexible work arrangements.**



[1]Based on analytics conducted by Asana in 2024 as part of State of Work Innovation research.



Hallmarks of high-connectivity organizations

Some companies have successfully minimized the Connectivity Tax for their people. At organizations where employees report effective collaboration across teams:

They give more guidance

Employees are 2.4x more likely to say their organization provides training and guidance specifically focused on improving cross-functional collaboration.

They have clearer lines of sight

Employees are 90% more likely to understand how their work adds value and helps achieve company objectives.

They have more goal alignment

Employees are 2x as likely to say different functions are aligned on their organization's goals and objectives.

2

Process bottlenecks

Technology bottlenecks

The Velocity Tax

The bottlenecks that slow us down

While the Connectivity Tax creates gaps in our work, the Velocity Tax introduces bottlenecks that choke the flow of work. Think of it as organizational arteries clogging up, slowing the lifeblood of productivity to a trickle.

There are two main culprits behind this corporate cholesterol: process bottlenecks and technology bottlenecks.

Process bottlenecks

Inefficient processes create a cascade of issues—from information hide-and-go-seek to decision-making dead zones. The result? A mess of process bottlenecks.

6 types of process bottlenecks

1

Information hide-and-go-seek

Workers waste 9 hours a week hunting for the information they need, often lost in a wilderness of spreadsheets and information silos.

2

Responsibility roulette

77% of workers say tasks are delegated poorly, leading to confusion, miscommunication, and delays.

3

Decision-making dead zones

Only 14% of workers rate their team's decision-making as highly effective, and just 6% use a consistent decision-making framework.

4

Protective fudge

48% of workers say they exaggerate their workload to avoid new projects.

5

Approval molasses

83% of workers say that slow approval processes sometimes delay their work.

6

Accountability shadowland

78% of workers say there is limited accountability for others to deliver their work. This rolls out the red carpet for mediocrity.

48% of workers say they exaggerate their workload to avoid new projects.

78% of workers say there is limited accountability for others to deliver their work.

Tech bottlenecks

Technology is another major driver of the Velocity Tax. Many workers are still stuck in the digital Stone Age. The result? Tech bottlenecks that slow you down.

3 types of tech bottlenecks

1

Technology debt

Too many companies cling to outdated tools that should've been retired long ago. We found that 94% of workers still depend on spreadsheets to manage their work, and 98% depend on email. It's no wonder 93% of employees say that the technology they use at work needs innovation.

94% of workers still depend on spreadsheets to manage their work.

2

Software sprawl

Companies often invest in technologies without considering how it fits together. Workers are left juggling a mismatched set of tools.

64% of workers say their organization's choice of collaboration tools makes their job harder, not easier.

One of our research collaborators, Professor Paul Leonardi, calls this the "credit card problem"—where managers can freely purchase software on their corporate cards as long as it's under a certain threshold. This leads to a chaotic patchwork of tools that adds more confusion than clarity.

3

Buyer's remorse

Despite big spending on tools, the payoff often falls flat because too many leaders are out of sync with what teams actually need—specifically, better tools to support cross-functional work. Only 19% of workers feel that their communication tools support cross-functional collaboration.

AI bottlenecks

Our research reveals that many companies are rushing to adopt AI without the proper groundwork, leading to bottlenecks. While more than half (54%) of workers now use AI at least monthly, many organizations aren't planning beyond the initial rollout. Just 12% of employees report their organizations have mature AI implementations, up modestly from 7% three months ago.

Still, far too many companies are moving beyond surface-level adoption. The result? AI bottlenecks that slow organizations down.

6 types of AI bottlenecks

1

Data quality issues

Companies are also rushing into AI without tackling data quality problems, and it's coming back to bite them.

Johann, a 36-year-old at an enterprise tech company, shared:

> **"We tried to roll out multiple internal AI tools but it had harmful outcomes... because they used biased training data."**

It's no surprise that nearly half of workers (47%) are worried about people making decisions using unreliable information from AI, according to our 2024 research with AI safety and research company Anthropic. To avoid these pitfalls, companies must make sure AI is built on accurate, complete datasets.

2

Budget gaps

72% of employees say their organization either hasn't set a budget for AI investments or they're unsure if one even exists. This lack of financial commitment leaves many teams without the resources they need to effectively implement and benefit from AI .

3

Unauthorized use

When companies don't provide reliable AI tools, employees often take matters into their own hands. Nearly one-third (32%) confess to using "shadow AI"—unauthorized tools that introduce significant security risks.

6 types of AI bottlenecks

4

Lack of guidance

This rogue behavior isn't entirely their fault—it's driven by a lack of clear guidance. Only 30% of employees say their organization has an AI policy, leaving them left to navigate the AI wild west on their own. But policies alone aren't enough—they need to be enforced.

Brianna, a 35-year-old media and entertainment company owner, told us that her company banned AI for image processing and design, but within a few months:

> **"...Some people kept secretly using it anyway, often in ways that interfered with other people's projects....we had a period of 'don't ask don't tell.'"**

5

Peanut butter coating

Many organizations are stretching their resources too thin across too many AI projects—like peanut butter—rather than concentrating on what will make the biggest impact.

Benson, a 33-year-old at a mid-sized tech company, shared how his company poured time and money into assistants that "no one asked for." He expressed his frustration:

> **"We went through stupid, pointless training and an annoying implementation process, all for an 'assistant' that can't assist with anything...People with...no knowledge of the technology are trying to force it into everything."**

6

Training deficits

Just 24% of employees say their organization has a dedicated budget for AI training, leaving teams ill-prepared to use AI effectively. It's also fueling concern—nearly two-thirds (64%) are worried about the impact of not learning how to use AI effectively.

Alex, a 44-year-old at a mid-sized professional services firm, told us how his company introduced an AI transcription service for meetings:

> **"No one was trained on it but it was expected to be used. There were several meetings where time was wasted getting the service to work."**

AI bottlenecks in action

Show me the biggest AI bottlenecks from the 2024 State of Work Innovation report.

Here are some examples of AI bottlenecks:

- Only 30% of knowledge workers say their organization has an AI policy.
- 32% of workers admit to using unauthorized AI tools.
- Only 28% say their organization has a specific budget for AI investments.
- Only 24% say their organization has a dedicated budget for AI training.

Typing...

Great! How can

Send

Hallmarks of high-velocity organizations

Smart companies have cracked the code on cutting the Velocity Tax. In organizations where information flows quickly between teams, leaders strike the right balance—adding enough structure to keep things running smoothly.

They centralize work

These organizations are 47% more likely to use work management platforms that centralize tasks, streamline approvals, manage complex workflows, and give leaders better visibility to make smarter decisions.

They make better decisions

Employees at these organizations are 3.2x more likely to say their leaders make decisions that align with the organization's best interests.

Tools are standardized

These organizations are 14% more likely to have a core set of standardized collaboration tools, which aligns with what employees want—67% prefer everyone in the organization to use the same tools.

How do high-velocity organizations use AI to accelerate workflows?

When it comes to AI, high-velocity companies also fight the Velocity Tax with smart AI investments.

1

They have an AI policy in place

High-velocity companies are 54% more likely than slower companies to have an AI policy in place. Why? Without clear AI guidelines, teams waste time figuring out how to use tools and how to use it responsibly.

2

They invest in digital literacy

High-velocity companies know that technology is only as powerful as the people using it. So, they double down on upskilling, particularly in AI. Workers in these organizations are 75% more likely to feel confident in their ability to learn how to use generative AI tools effectively. When workers know how to use technology, they can solve problems faster.

3

They budget where it counts

We found that high-velocity organizations are nearly 2x as likely as low-velocity organizations to put their money where it matters—allocating budget for AI-specific investments (37% vs 19%). They're also more than 2x as likely to set aside funds for AI-specific professional development (34% vs 14%).

4

They slow down to speed up

High-velocity companies know that rushing AI can backfire. Workers at high-velocity organizations are 45% less likely to say their organization rushes changes without proper planning. These organizations take the time to get it right, even if it means slowing down—whether it's setting up policies, allocating budgets, or training their teams. It's a "measure twice, cut once" approach that sets them up for long-term results.

5

They invest in enterprise-grade AI tools

High-velocity organizations know that investing in enterprise-grade, secure AI is essential.

8

They invest in AI for all

High-velocity companies recognize that AI needs to be accessible to everyone, not just the engineers. They invest in solutions that require minimal or no coding, so your entire team can tap into its potential. We found that 40% of workers want to choose the AI models they use (e.g., ChatGPT 4o versus Claude 3.5 Sonnet), while 31% don't want the option (28% are indifferent). Workers want for AI that's both easy to use and customizable for those who want more control.

6

They prioritize AI with relevant context

For AI to actually work, it needs to understand the context of your work. But most AI falls short.

Arthur, a 37-year-old manager in an education organization, described his organization's AI chatbot as:

> **"Terrible at recognizing input and usually spits out irrelevant or overly generic responses. When I type a question into our AI chatbot, it doesn't offer a specific or targeted solution. Instead, it throws out a blanket answer filled with multiple points, none of which address the actual problem I described."**

When AI lacks context, it delivers shallow and inaccurate results, while frustrating workers.

7

They view AI as a teammate

Employees at high-velocity organizations are more likely to view AI as a teammate than a tool. They don't just ask what AI can do for them for specific tasks but what they can co-create with AI as part of more complex workflows. They don't just use AI as a tool but as a collaborative partner that learns and evolves and this unlocks new productivity benefits. According to our prior research with AI safety and research company Anthropic, employees who see AI as a teammate are 33% more likely to experience significant productivity boosts.

Employees who see AI as a teammate are

33% **more likely to experience significant productivity boosts.**

“

As we advance into an AI-driven future, it's essential that everyone—not just software engineers—has access to digital literacy and AI training. Upskilling programs, especially in AI, have the potential to be great equalizers, empowering individuals across all industries to adapt, collaborate, and thrive in an evolving workplace.

By democratizing access to these skills, it’s good for people and good for business. We not only future-proof our workforce but also unlock the full potential of our workers and our problem-solving abilities in the age of AI.

Lauren Pasquarella Daley

Associate Vice President, Jobs for the Future

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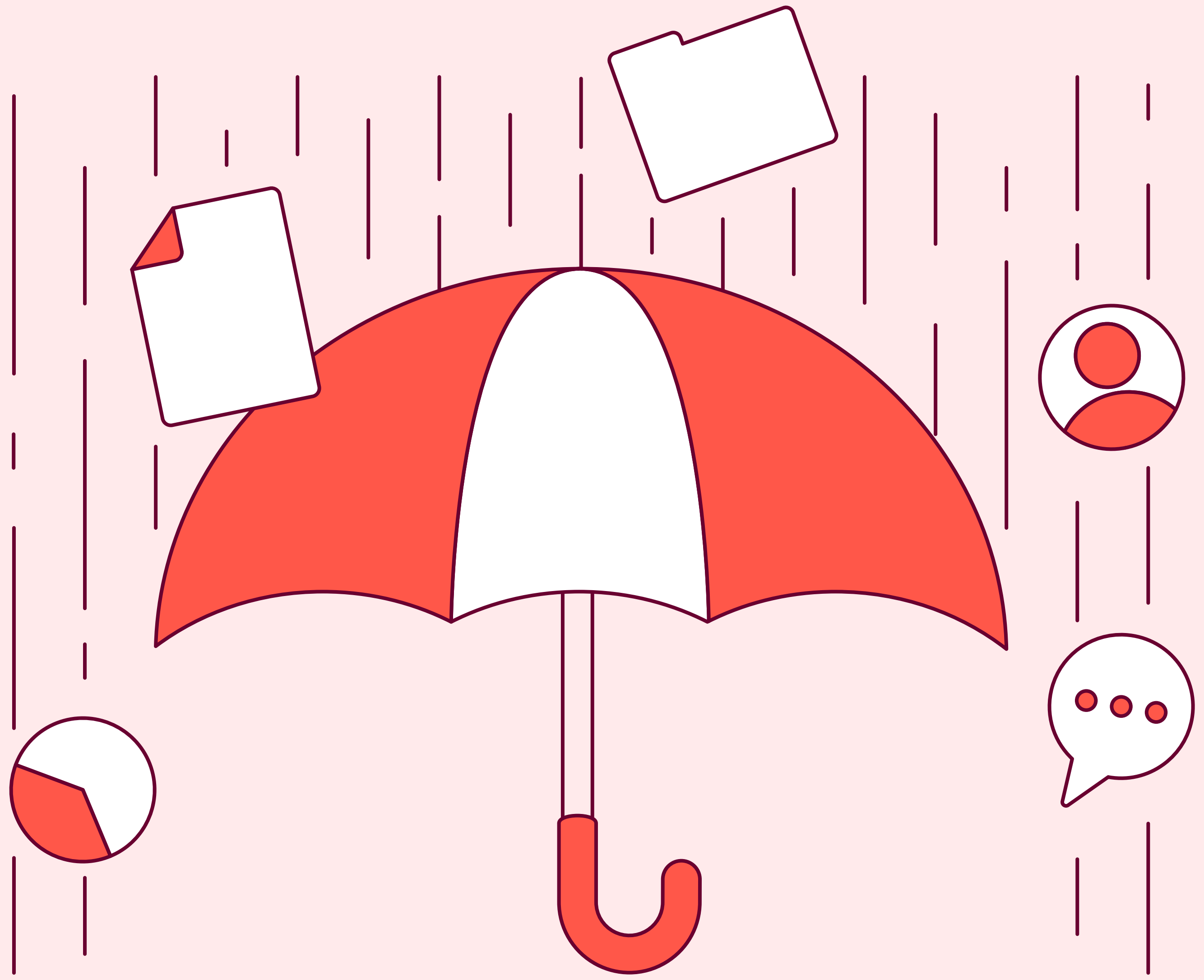
3



Toxic colleagues

Toxic managers

Toxic change management

The Resilience Tax

The processes that crumble under pressure and change

In today's fast-paced business environment, many organizations are building on shaky ground. This is the Resilience Tax—a hidden cost that weakens your organization's ability.

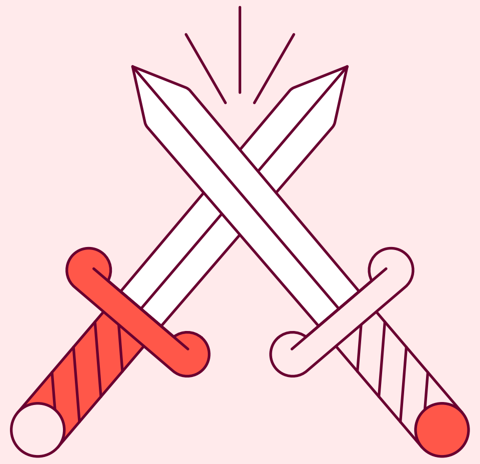
Three main culprits drive this tax: toxic colleagues, toxic managers, and poor change management. Each one quietly undermines your organization's resilience, leaving it exposed and vulnerable in the face of change.

Toxic colleagues

These are the people on your team who slowly gnaw away at trust and collaboration.

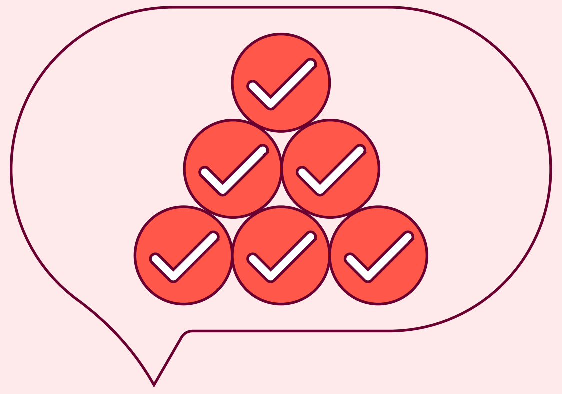
Our research identified five types of toxic colleagues currently lurking in organizations, each one chipping away at your team's success in their own way.

93% **of workers say they experience one or more toxic colleague behaviors at work.**



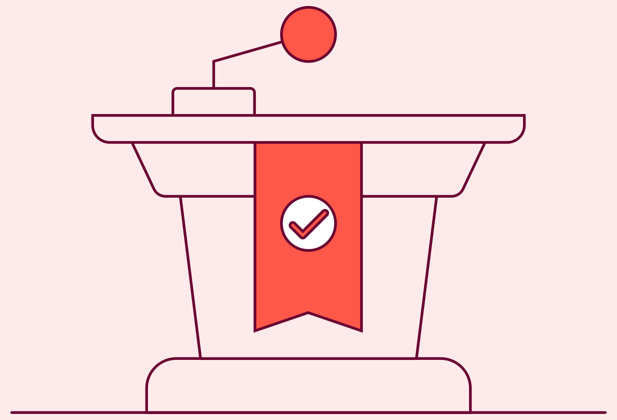
The turf warriors

80% of workers say their colleagues are sometimes overly protective of their area of responsibility.



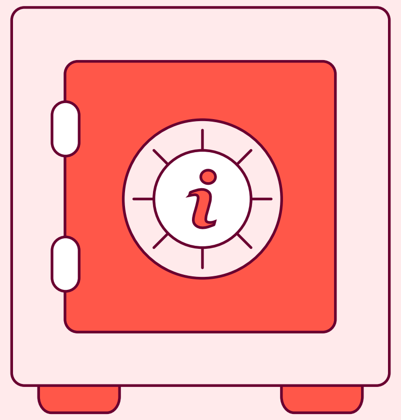
The deluded martyrs

70% say their colleagues sometimes exaggerate their workload to avoid taking on projects.



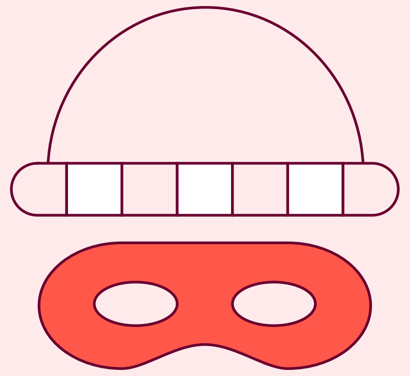
The office politicians

77% say that they are surrounded by office politics that sometimes skew decision-making



The information hoarders

69% say their colleagues sometimes withhold important information.



The glory thieves

52% say their colleagues take credit for other people's work.

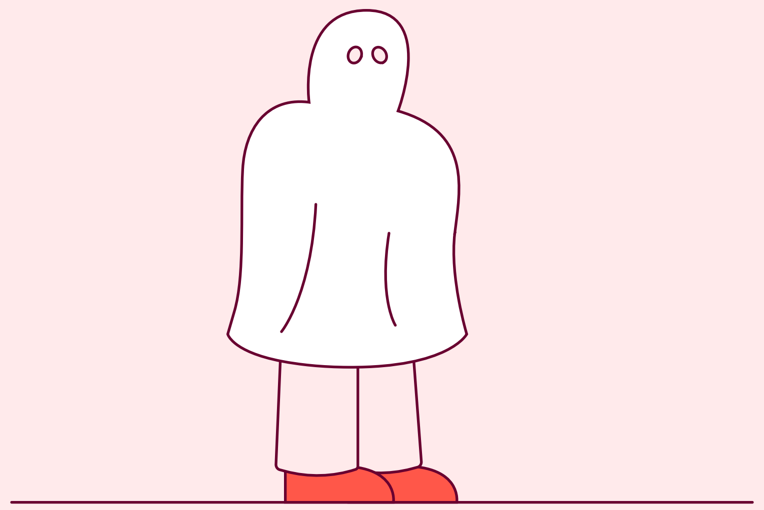
Toxic managers

Many organizations have great managers. If you're reading this, you're probably one of them, eager to help your organization improve.

Unfortunately, some leaders still engage in toxic behaviors. 88% of workers say their leadership needs innovation.

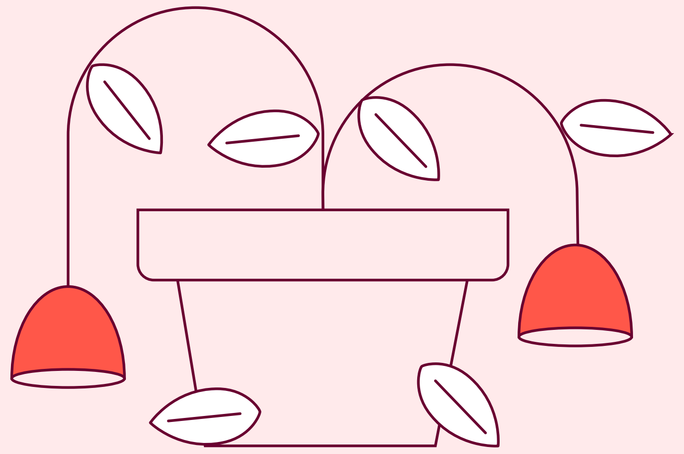
Our research identified four types of toxic managers.

81% of workers say they've witnessed toxic manager behaviors at work.



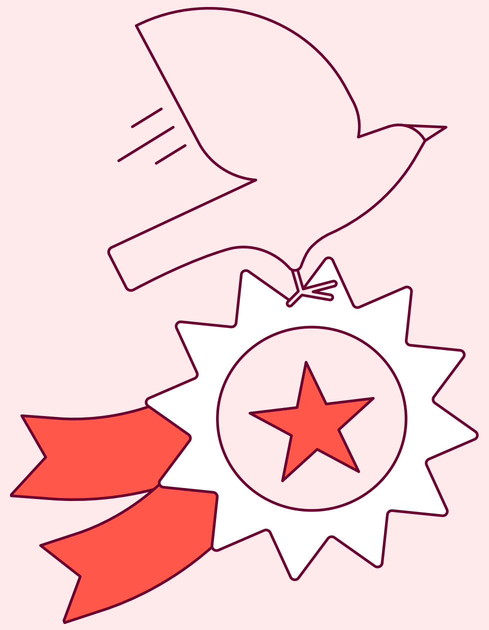
The vanishing acts

68% say their manager is sometimes unavailable or unresponsive when they need guidance.



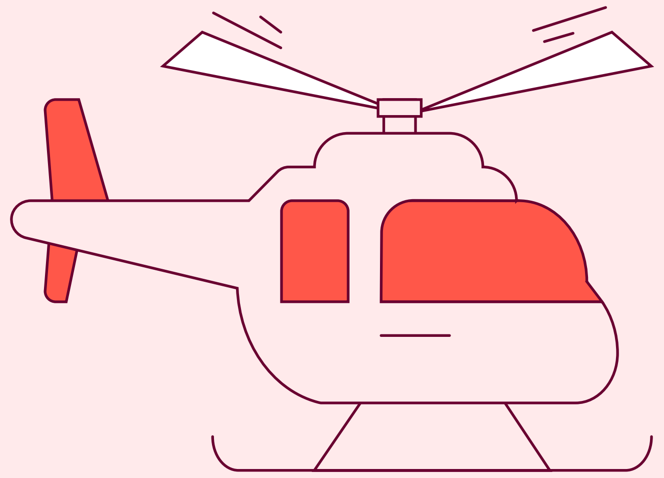
The appreciation misers

52% say their manager goes longer than a week without acknowledging their contribution to team success, or never acknowledges them at all.



The credit snatchers

36% say their managers sometimes take credit for their work.



The helicopter bosses

26% of employees say their managers micromanage their work on a weekly basis.

“

This compelling evidence from the Work Innovation Lab’s report explains why bad managers can undermine even the best employees, and all too often, drive them to quit.

The good news is that bosses who are available, express appreciation, give others credit, and give their people the freedom to use their judgment generate loyalty, extra effort, and creativity.

Dr. Bob Sutton

Professor Emeritus at Stanford University

”

Toxic change management

Companies are also clinging to short-sighted change management approaches, further piling on the Resilience Tax.

82% of workers say they've encountered toxic change management practices in their organization.

7 types of toxic change management

1

Hasty overhauls

41% of workers report seeing rushed changes without proper planning.

Carlos, a 20-year-old at a mid-sized consumer goods firm, shared how his company hastily introduced a new resin (a thick substance used to manufacture plastics) into production, which hurt product quality and left employees scrambling for solutions. He explained:

> **"We didn't properly research the right resin for our products."**

2

Sham participants

45% of workers say their organization ignores employee feedback during change initiatives.

Marco, a 63-year-old at a small retail company, shared a recent experience:

> **"Everybody got to put ideas into a box... all the ideas were read but the management ignored them all and went ahead with their own strategy. This caused resentment...we all felt we wasted our time and effort."**

7 types of toxic change management

3

Change overload

43% of workers struggle with too many changes happening at once.

Jenny, who works at a human resources agency, described how her organization took on new clients they weren't ready for, while overhauling its entire service approach.

> **"We ran into deadlines that could not be met and made too many changes."**

43% of workers struggle with too many changes happening at once.

4

False starts

30% of workers have seen their organization announce changes without follow-through.

Sam, a 39-year-old at an enterprise financial services firm, shared:

> **"On nearly every occasion an update is promised to be delivered...it is pulled at the last minute due to lack of testing and issues. We shouldn't announce a 'go live' date until the necessary testing has been done and signed off."**

30% of workers have seen their organization announce changes without follow-through.

5

Criticism crackdowns

26% of workers say their organization downplays change initiative failures, while 10% report critics being punished for these.

Molly, a 51-year-old senior manager in the Hospitality sector, described how her company hired new general managers in half of the business units without providing any training, and when things went wrong, the blame landed on them:

> **"It has failed miserably, yet somehow it's my fault?"**

26% of workers say their organization downplays change initiative failures.

7 types of toxic change management

6

Empty training

23% of workers say their organizations invest in broad training with no practical value.

Joachim, a 35-year-old at an enterprise healthcare company, described a change in the machine used to dispense prescription medications.

> **"There was not enough training or troubleshooting explored prior to implementation."**

When the system crashed or bugs appeared, employees struggled to fix the issues, halting operations for days.

7

Stakeholder sidestep

16% of workers say there's too little stakeholder involvement in decisions.

Rosco, a 28-year-old at a large engineering firm, described a poorly communicated change to vacation days and rollover policies:

> **"It was poorly communicated and did not give employees much time to adjust before penalties started. He added that it felt like "HR [didn't] want to give much time for negative feedback and wanted to keep the project hidden until the announcement."**

The toxic toll of the Resilience Tax

When toxic people, toxic managers, and toxic change management practices infest an organization, they impose hefty Resilience Taxes.

While 42% of employees feel confident in their own abilities to handle change, only 27% are confident in their organization's ability to navigate future challenges. It's like being a capable sailor on a ship with a questionable captain and a leaky hull—soon enough, you start looking for a lifeboat. It’s no surprise, then, that only 45% of employees are certain they will still be working at their current organization in six months.

Only
45%
of workers are certain they'll stick be working at their current organization in 6 months.

45%
of workers say their organization ignores feedback during change initiatives.

Only
27%
of workers are confident in their organization's ability to navigate future challenges.

Hallmarks of high-resilience organizations

Some organizations have developed strong defenses against the Resilience Tax. According to our research, places where employees are confident in their organization's ability to adapt to unexpected changes or challenges have:

They have fewer toxic teammates

Employees in high-resilience organizations are 37% less likely to report toxic teammate behavior, creating a more positive and productive work environment.

In high-resilience organizations, workers are

37% less likely to report toxic teammate behavior.

More leaders stay in the loop

Leaders in high-resilience organizations are more in tune with what's happening on the ground. Employees are 72% less likely to feel that upper management is out of touch with the organization's needs.

More bosses have employees' backs

In high-resilience organizations, workers are 116% more likely to say they can depend on their managers, especially when it comes to showing them their role in the bigger picture. Employees in these organizations are 2.7x more likely to say, "I know how I fit into my organization's future plans." When change hits, they don't waste time figuring out their role—they can keep moving forward.

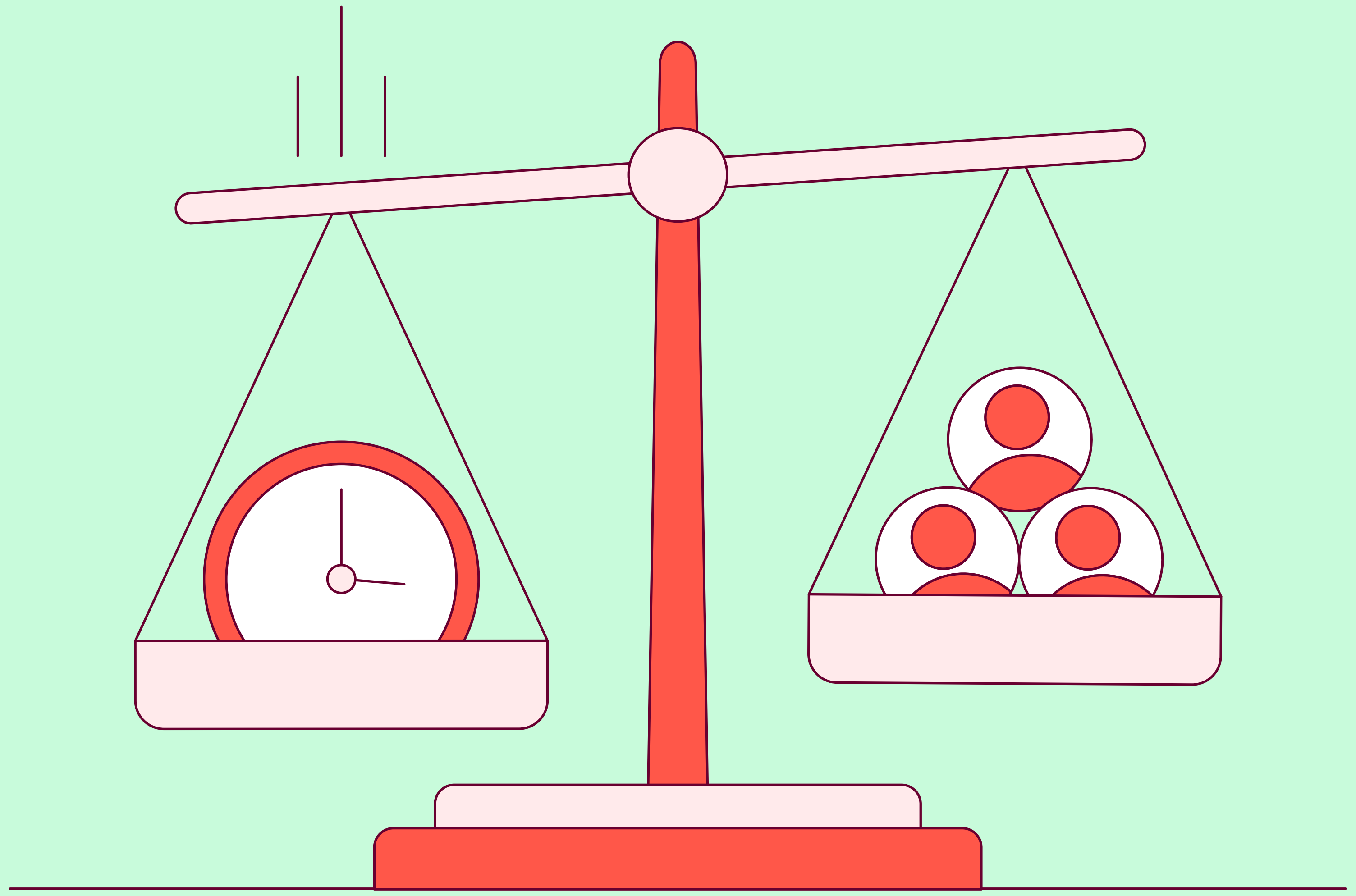
In high-resilience organizations, workers are

116% more likely to say they can depend on their managers.

Change management is less toxic

High-resilience organizations are 19% less likely to suffer from toxic change management practices like hasty overhauls or poorly managed change initiatives. They take a thoughtful approach to change, avoiding the knee-jerk reactions that often lead to chaos and failure.

4



Meeting overload | Technology overload | Collaboration overload

The Capacity Tax

The overwhelm that depletes employees' bandwidth

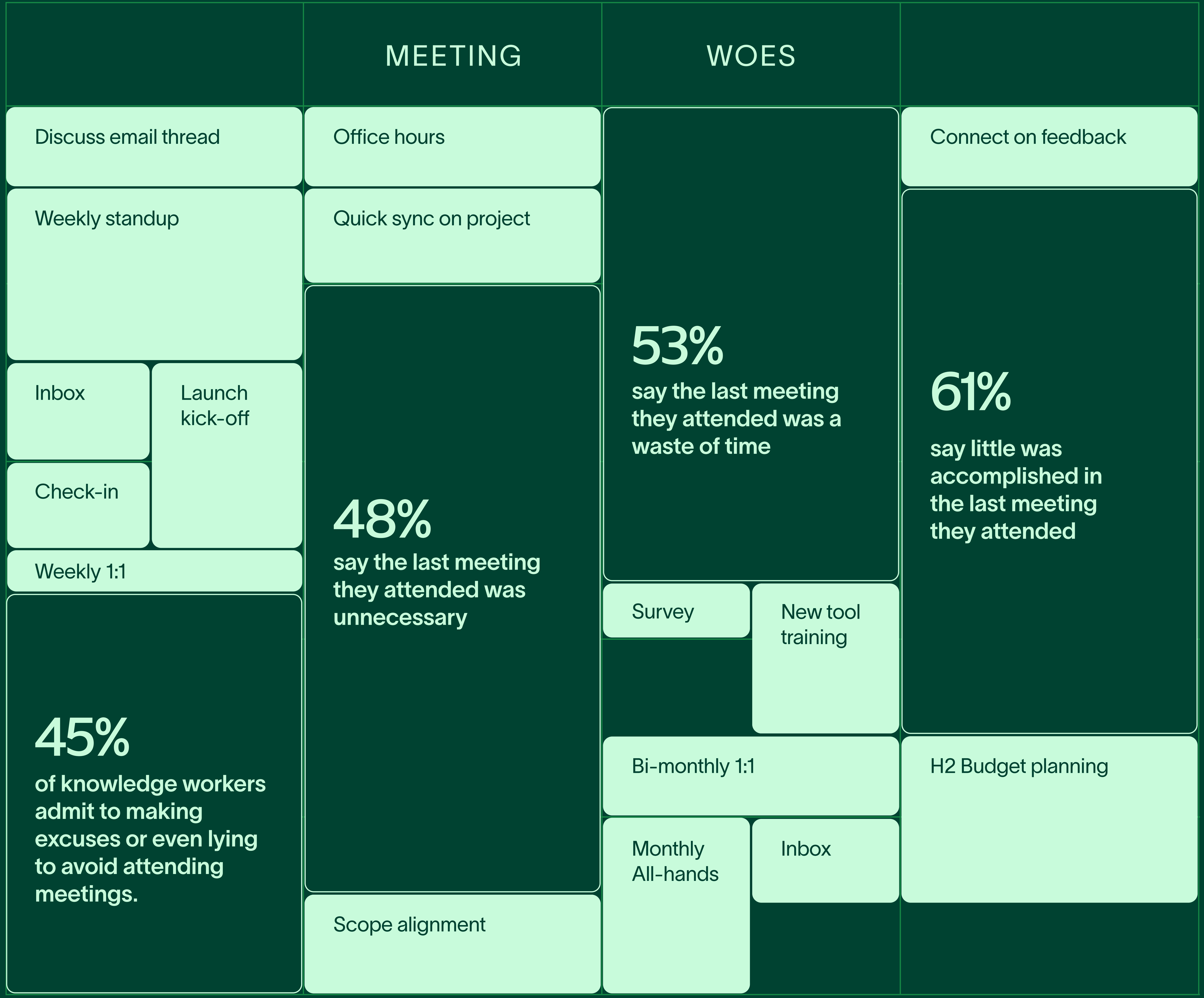
The Capacity Tax is the invisible leech sucking your team dry of energy, creativity, and sanity. It's the reason why a whopping 75% of workers admit their workload has been so unmanageable that they've felt the need to take a day off at least once in the past six months.

The Capacity Tax is driven by three key culprits: **meeting overload, technology overload,** and **collaboration overload.**

Meeting overload

Meetings are supposed to drive decisions and track progress, but too often, they become a black hole for time and energy. According to our research, 44% of workers say they dread meetings. We found that the number of hours workers waste in unproductive meetings has doubled to 5 hours per week since August 2019. Workers are feeling the bloat.

With meeting bloat out of control, workers have started to push back with toxic tactics. Our research found that 45% of knowledge workers admit to making excuses or even lying to avoid attending them.



Meeting recovery syndrome

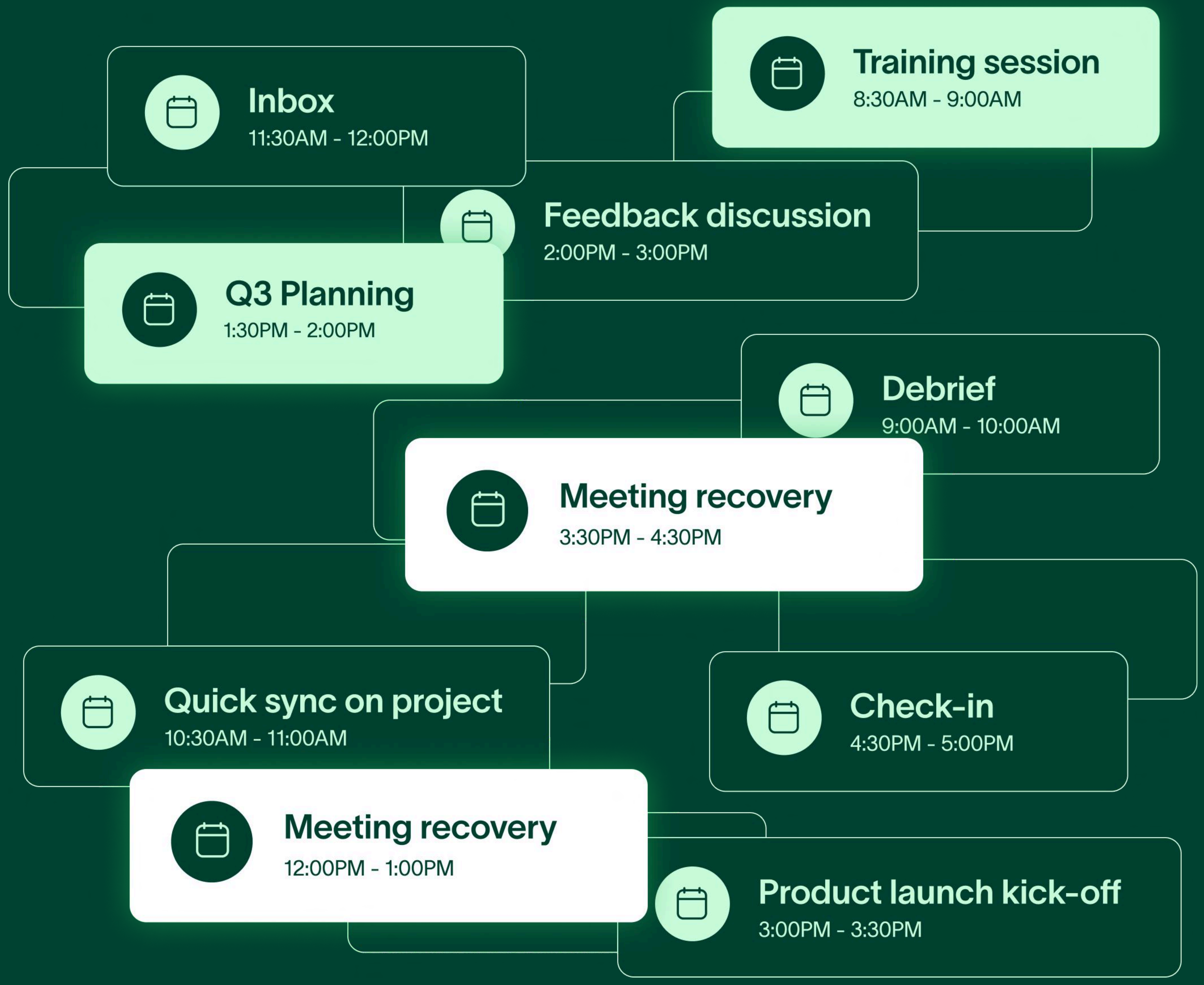
And it's not just the meetings themselves that drain capacity. We collaborated with Professor Steven Rogelberg from the University of North Carolina at Charlotte to explore "meeting recovery syndrome".

> **Meeting recovery syndrome (MRS)**
> The lingering effects of frustrating meetings on employee productivity, attitudes, and well-being.

Our research found that employees experience MRS after 28% of their meetings. Not only does MRS disrupt workflow and decrease productivity, but 89% of employees say they've vented to colleagues to recover from it—spreading negativity across the organization.

Employees suffer from meeting recovery syndrome after 28% of their meetings.

This cycle of unproductive meetings and their aftermath saps capacity, leaving people running on fumes.



“

The findings around MRS are just so important as they speak to lingering effects of a bad meeting. Namely, a bad meeting lingers on the minds of attendees. It negatively affects their productivity, leads to rumination, and when we have a bad meeting we typically can't keep it to ourselves, we need to tell others and co-ruminate. This in turn, can negatively impact others' productivity.

Dr. Steven Rogelberg

Chancellor's Professor
University of North Carolina at Charlotte

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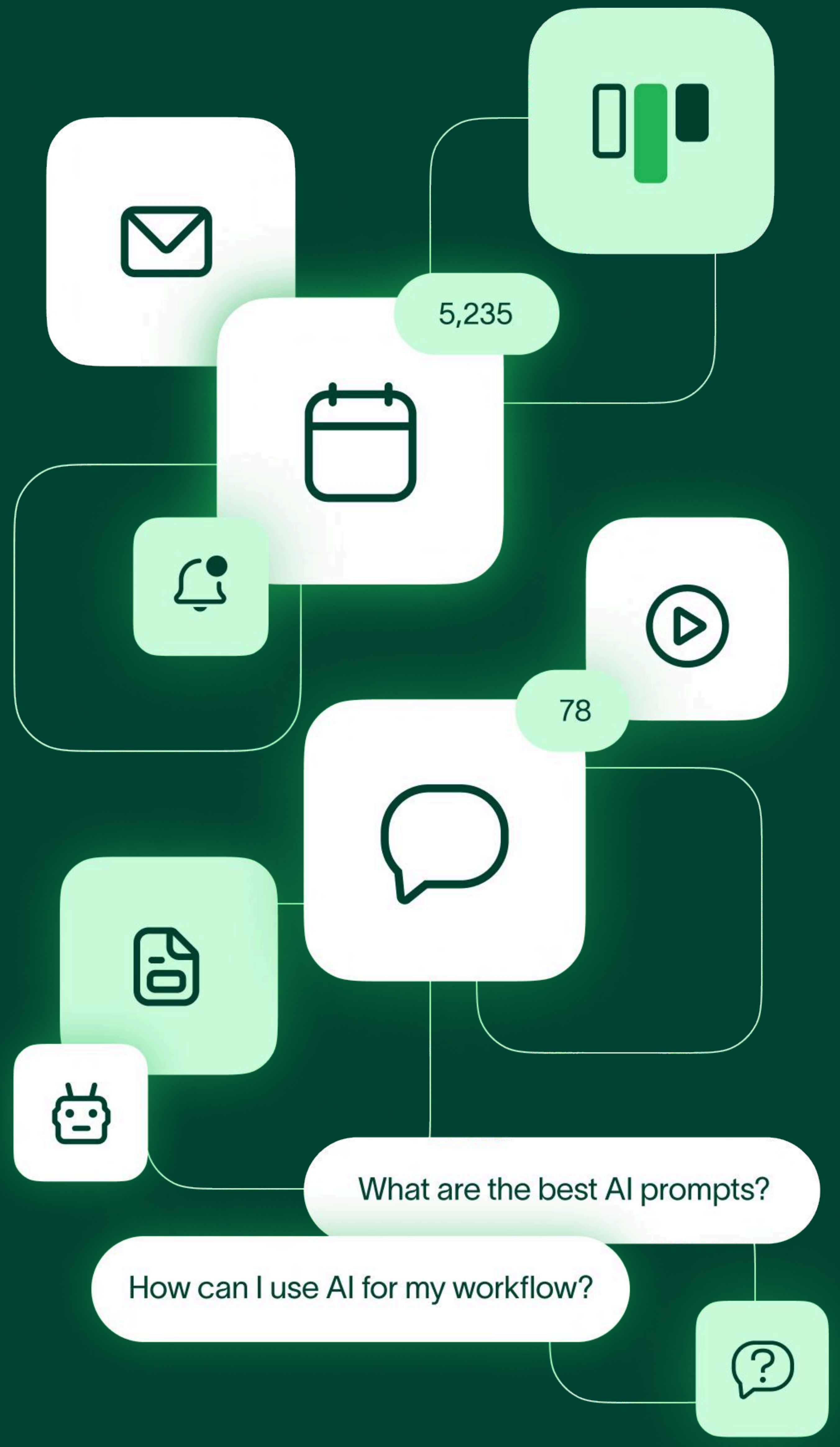
Technology overload

Meetings aren't the only drain on capacity—technology can be just as exhausting. Nearly two-thirds (63%) of employees say their work is disrupted by too many tools.



Digital exhaustion:

We found that 75% of workers report digital exhaustion—feeling drained by the very technologies they use at work—up from 64% just a year ago. It's so bad that 76% of workers report needing a "digital detox"—a period of intentional disconnect from technology. They're worn down by the relentless onslaught of notifications, constant connectivity, and the pressure to always be "on."

AI overwhelm

The rush to integrate AI into daily tasks is adding to the stress for many workers. One 32-year-old manager in a mid-sized tech company shared, "Once teams realized how challenging it was to use AI...people began to freak out...they just wanted an easy way to get work done." AI solutions need to be user-friendly and shouldn't have a steep learning curve.

But it's not just the overwhelming use of technology—it's the pressure to keep up with it. Our research shows that 24% of workers don't know where to learn how to use generative AI tools, and 64% fear the negative consequences of falling behind in AI advancements.

“

Feelings of digital exhaustion are pervasive. From the C-Suite to individual contributors, our companies are filled with people who are worn out from learning how to use new technologies, battling the onslaught of data, and feeling fearful that the next technological change will leave them behind.

Digital exhaustion saps productivity and reduces engagement. Senior leaders can't let technologies run amok in their companies; they need to develop a strategy for handling digital exhaustion.

Dr. Paul Leonardi

Duca Family Professor of Technology Management
University of California Santa Barbara

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Top 8 most common fears about falling behind in AI

Percentage of workers who report the following concerns

Leaders often tell me they have a hard time uncovering AI use cases. If they can't integrate AI into their work, their teams won't be able to, either. Any modern worker needs access to personalized AI training that considers where and how the technology can be most useful to them. Only when we make it obvious to anyone when AI can help for what, will we see AI adoption that doesn't take exhausting and expensive change management programs. AI is a teammate when you understand where it fits your workflows.

Daan van Rossum

Founder, Lead with AI

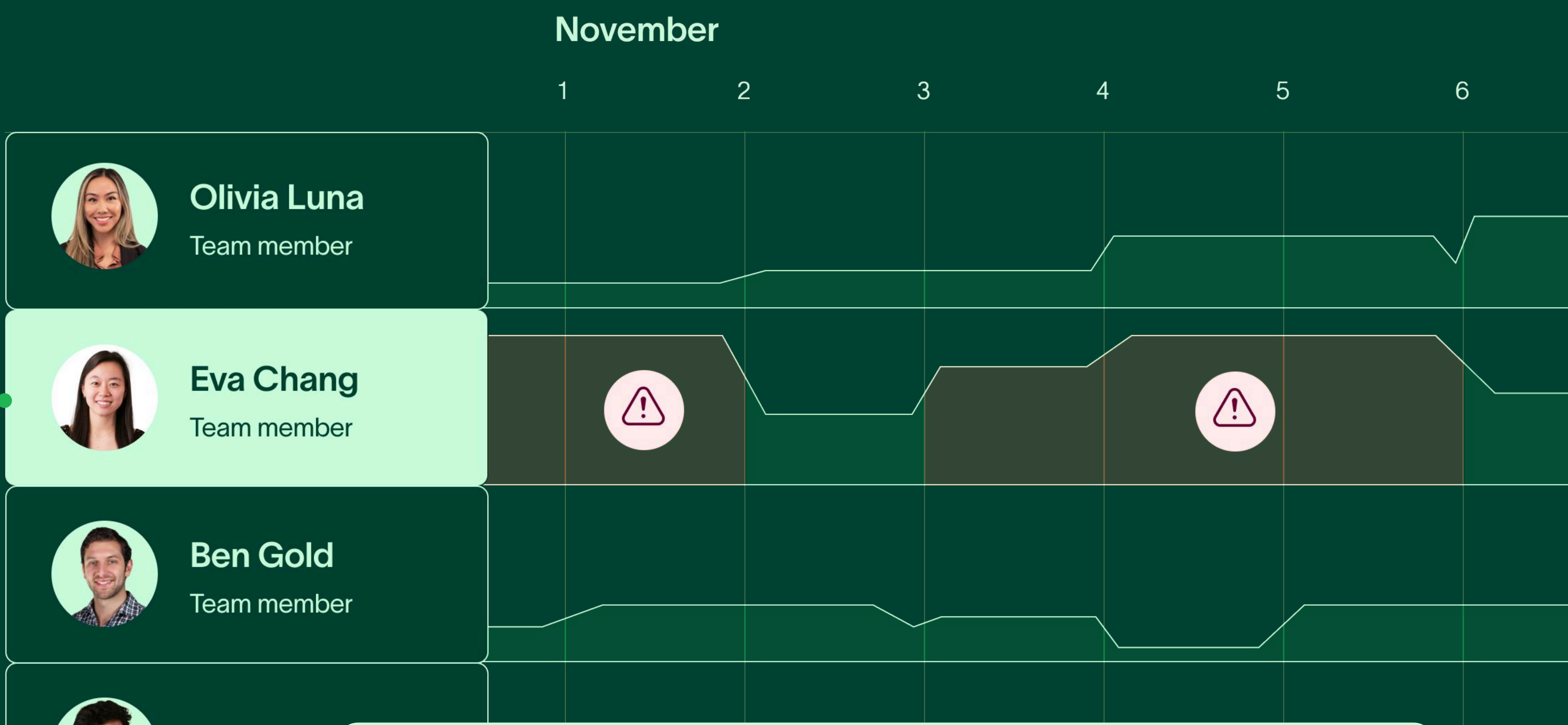
Collaboration overload

Collaboration overload—where too many meetings, emails, and check-ins leave workers scrambling—is another major drain on capacity.

When workloads aren't evenly spread, collaboration overload takes over. Over half (53%) of employees say their team relies on a few high-performers, leading to burnout, while 38% don't feel responsible for high-quality work. This imbalance overwhelms some and wastes others' potential.

53% of employees say their team relies on a few high-performers (like Eva) to get work done.

38% of employees admit they don't feel responsible for delivering high-quality work.



> "Our research shows that collaboration has a 'sweet spot.' High-capacity organizations hit this balance, with employees 41% more likely to engage in just enough collaboration to stay connected without feeling overwhelmed."

Dr. Mark Hoffman
Collaborative Intelligence Lead, Work Innovation Lab

Productivity theater

Another contributor to collaboration overload is "productivity theater."

> **Productivity theater**
>
> When employees perform tasks to appear busy without actually doing meaningful work.

This includes scheduling unnecessary meetings and sending emails just to appear busy or important. A whopping 65% of workers admit to performing some form of productivity theater.

Productivity theater drains time and energy for both the performer and the victim—time that could be better spent on real, productive work. It's not just inefficient; it's exhausting. We found that workers caught up in this charade are 13% more likely to experience burnout, wasting energy on appearances instead of meaningful work.

The cost of productivity theater

Meeting for the sake of meeting

22%

say they sometimes prioritize looking busy over actually completing work.

Draft business plan, typing extra loudly to show I'm busy

15%

admit they schedule meetings because it makes them look or feel more productive.

Send meaningless update to all teammates

65%

of workers admit they perform productivity theater at work.

Create another PowerPoint presentation nobody asked for or needs

41%

say they send messages just to appear busy.

Workers who report participating in productivity theater are

13%

more likely to experience burnout.

Workplace jargon

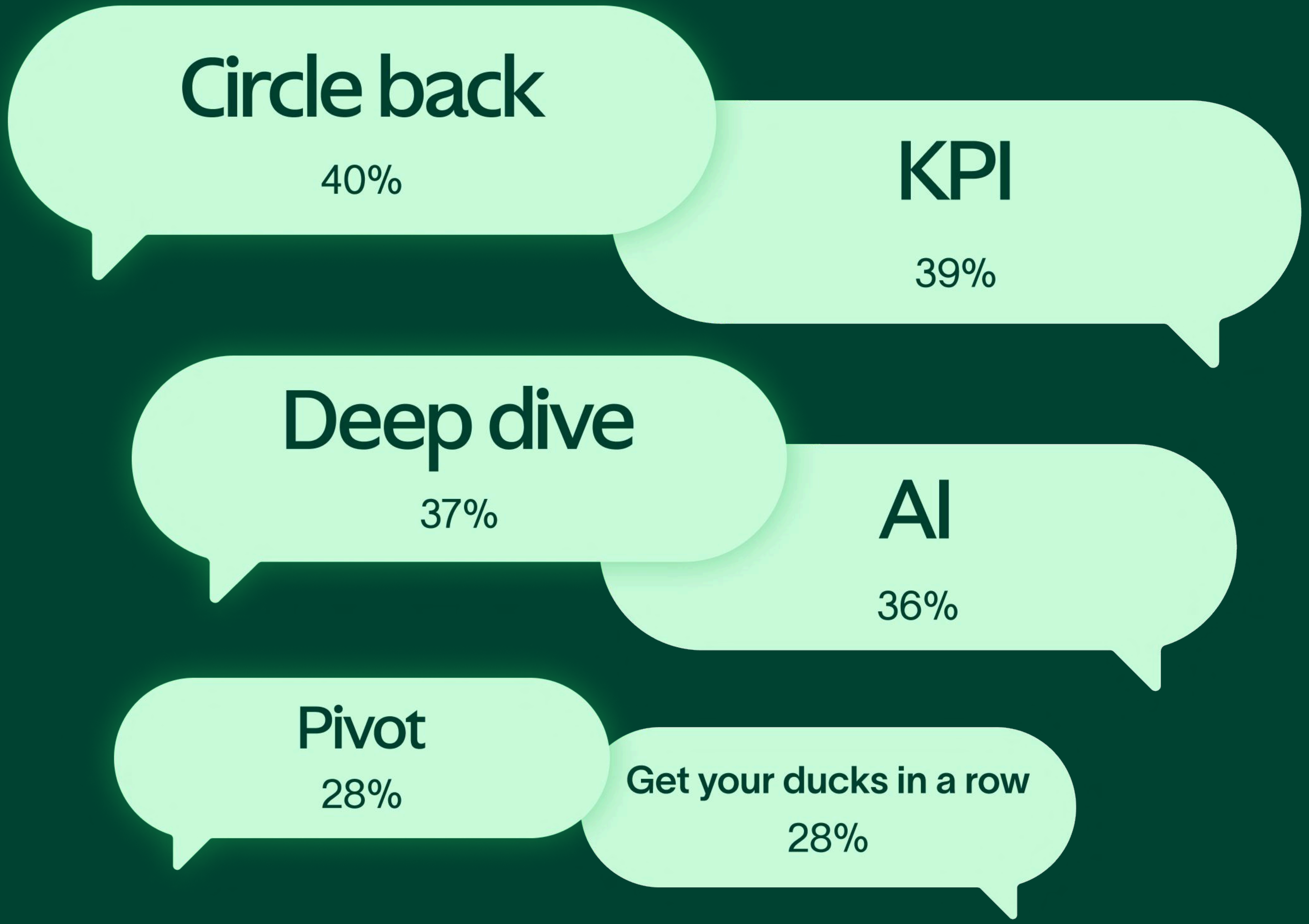
It gets worse. Jargon also drains workers' capacity. When workers start spewing jargon, they muddy their message—leading to misunderstandings, constant clarification, and ultimately a drain on everyone's capacity. This drags down everyone's productivity. Jargon is productivity quicksand—it sucks the life out of communication. The top offender? "Circle back."

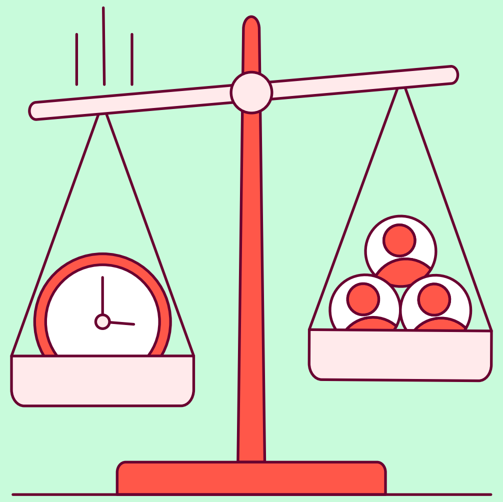
All this productivity theater makes it tough to gauge real workloads. In fact, 68% of employees aren't confident their manager has an accurate understanding of how much they have on their plate.

70% **of workers say they hear jargon at work that they don't understand.**

Top jargon heard in the workplace

Percentage of workers who report hearing the following terms





Hallmarks of high-capacity organizations

Some organizations are taking on the Capacity Tax head-on. Our research shows that at organizations where employees report feeling lower levels of emotional, physical and mental exhaustion caused by workplace stress:

Workers at high-capacity organizations are

24% **less likely to perform productivity theater.**

They tame tool bloat

Employees in high-capacity organizations are 69% less likely to say their work is disrupted by an overload of tools. With less context switching, there's more capacity for meaningful work.

They minimize collaboration thrash

High-capacity organizations invest in technologies and processes that bring predictability to work. Employees are 183% more likely to avoid being interrupted by non-urgent requests and 138% more likely to avoid unexpected delays.

They cut down on meeting recovery syndrome

These organizations cut down on draining meetings, with employees 40% less likely to report frequently experiencing "meeting recovery syndrome." Less recovery time means more focus on moving work forward.

They clarify ownership of work

High-capacity organizations make sure there's clear ownership of work. Employees there are 133% more likely to report strong accountability. With this clarity, there's less room for "pretending to be busy" and more focus on real productivity—employees are 24% less likely to perform productivity theater.

Conclusion

Slashing your tax bill

The modern workplace has undergone significant changes, but outdated practices are draining productivity and stifling innovation. The Connectivity, Velocity, Resilience, and Capacity Taxes are bleeding organizations dry, leaving teams exhausted and disengaged.

The four taxes hit all organizations but their impact isn't the same everywhere. Our research found that each region wrestles with the taxes in different ways. We've created a supplemental report at the end of this report to show how these taxes play out different across the world.

But, regardless of where or how you work, these taxes aren't inevitable. Smart companies are showing that it's possible to break free. By tackling these hidden costs head-on, you're not just saving time and money—you're unlocking your team's full potential.

Discover where you stand by taking the Work Innovation Assessment now. →

Methodology

This research is based on a survey of 13,066 knowledge workers across six countries in 2024: United States (2,500), United Kingdom (2,504), Germany (2,002), France (2,001), Japan (2,044), and Australia (2,015). The surveys were administered via Qualtrics between February and August 2024, with data collection conducted in partnership with panel providers Prolific and RepData. Respondents were employed knowledge workers using computers or mobile devices for at least 50% of their work, with Executives defined as Director level and above. Surveys were conducted in local languages where applicable. The study did not target Asana customers or employees. Findings from Asana product usage data were estimated from a random sample of 100,000 paid users in the U.S.

Read more Work Innovation Lab research

Work Innovation Lab

- 2024 State of AI at Work →
- 2024 State of Collaboration Technology →

Harvard Business Review

- Meeting Overload Is a Fixable Problem →
- How to Fix Collaboration Overload →
- Are Collaboration Tools Overwhelming Your Team? →

Inc.

- Collaboration Is Broken. Here's How to Fix It. →

Reworked

- Change Management in the AI Age: How to Sidestep Common Mistakes →

SUPPLEMENTAL REPORT

asana Work Innovation Lab

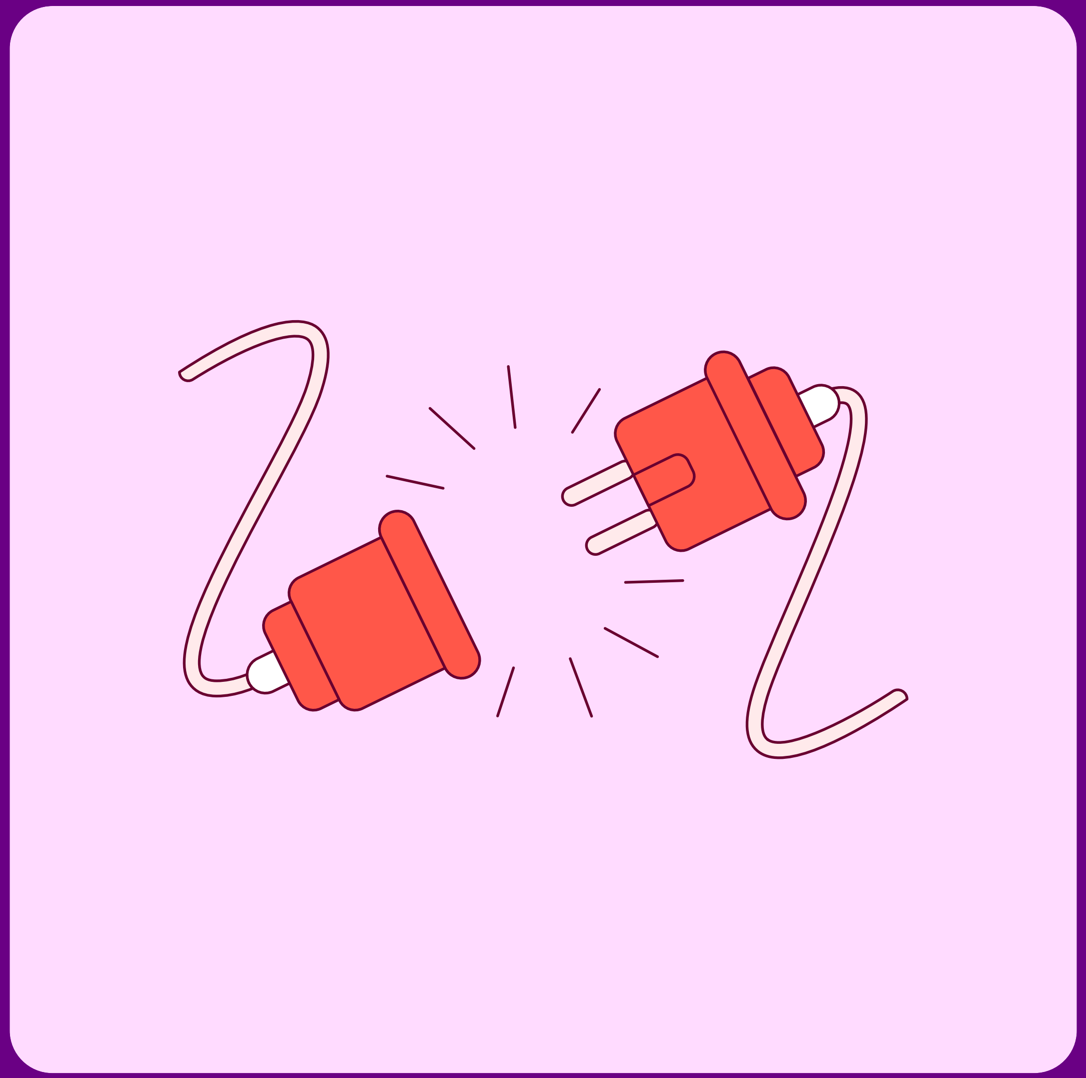
2024 EDITION

The four taxes across the world

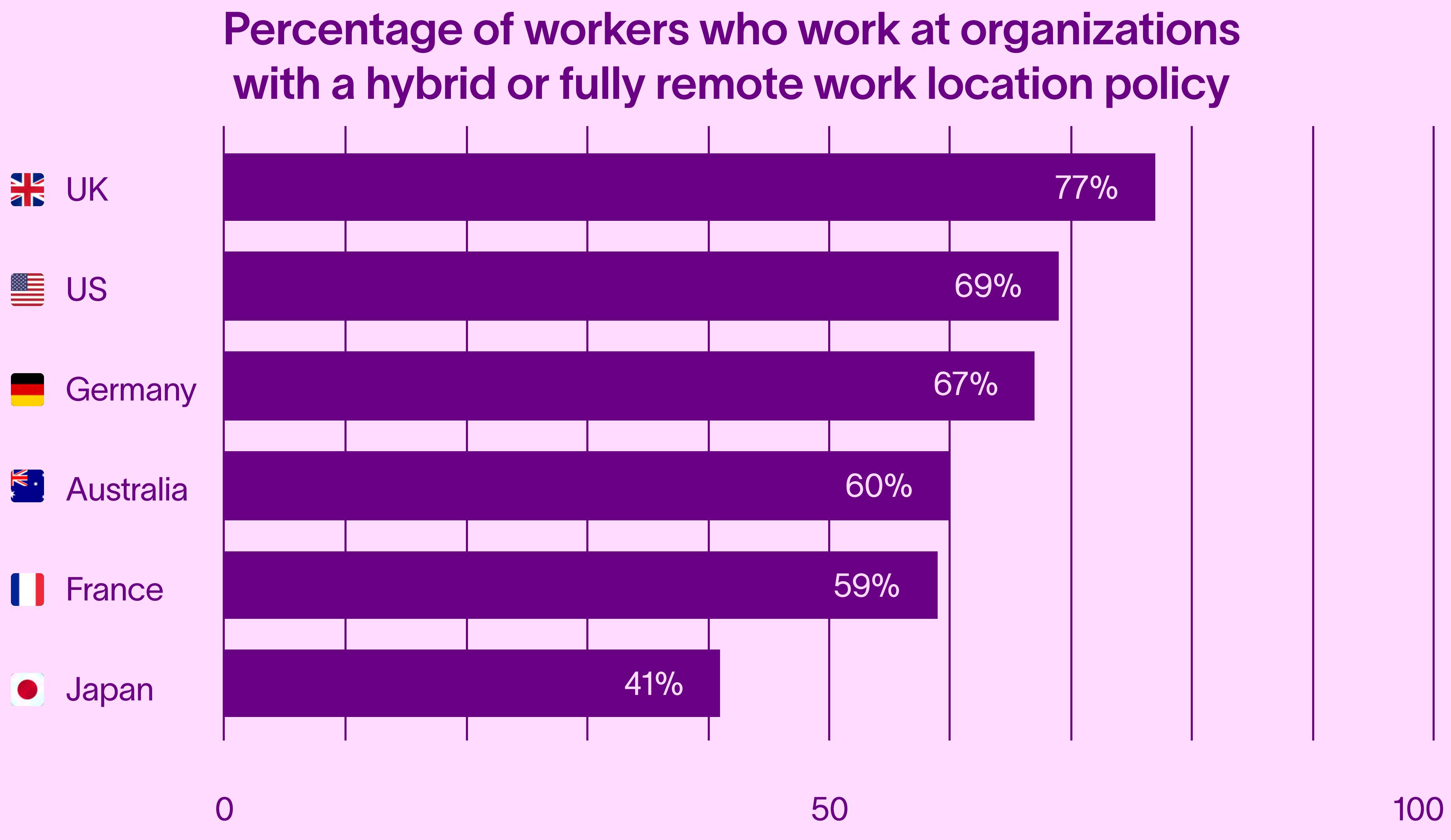
The four taxes hit all organizations but their impact isn't the same everywhere. Our research found that each region wrestles with the Connectivity, Velocity, Resilience, and Capacity Taxes in different ways. Here's a snapshot of how they play out across the world.

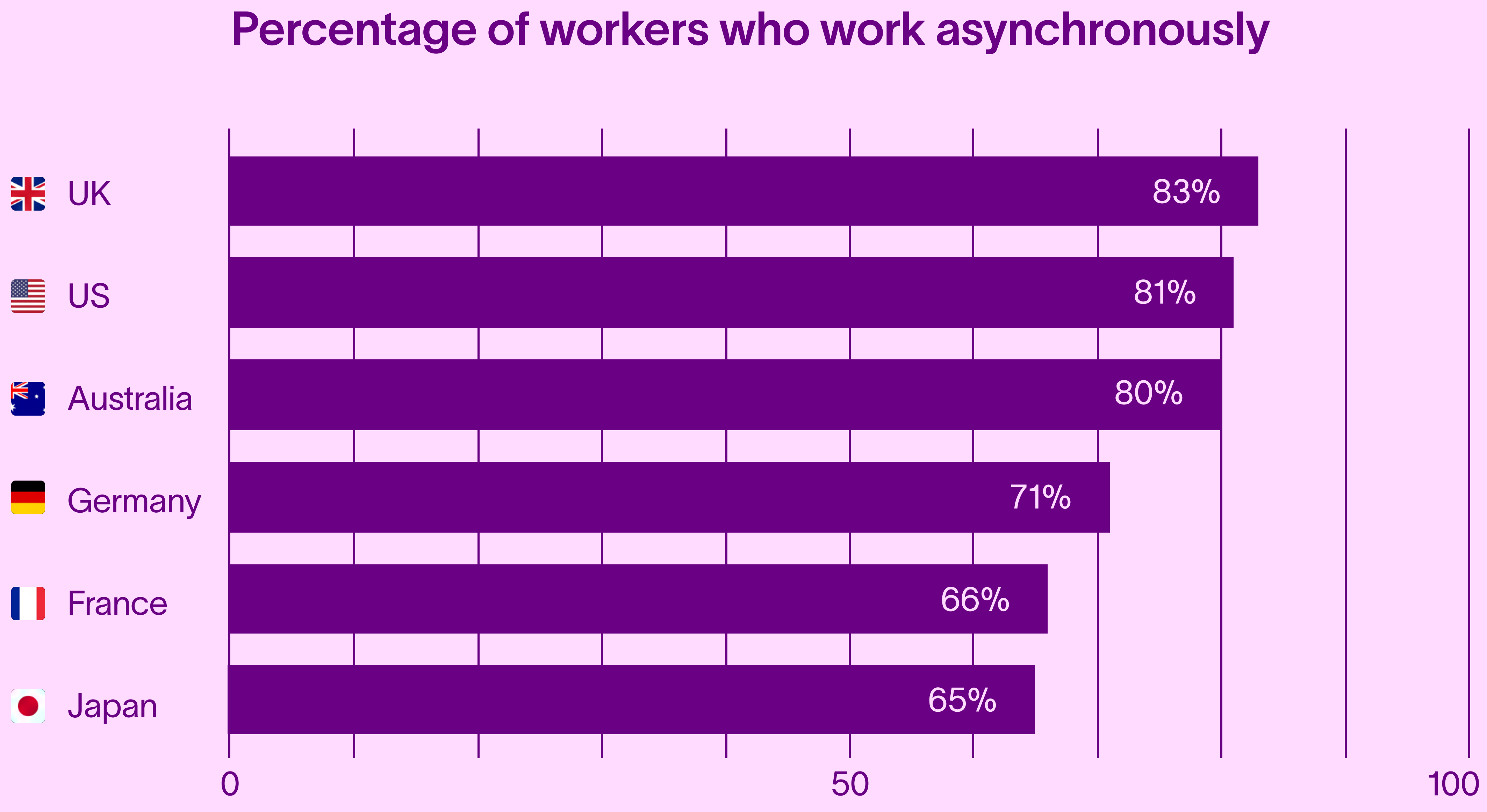
The Connectivity Tax

Across the world



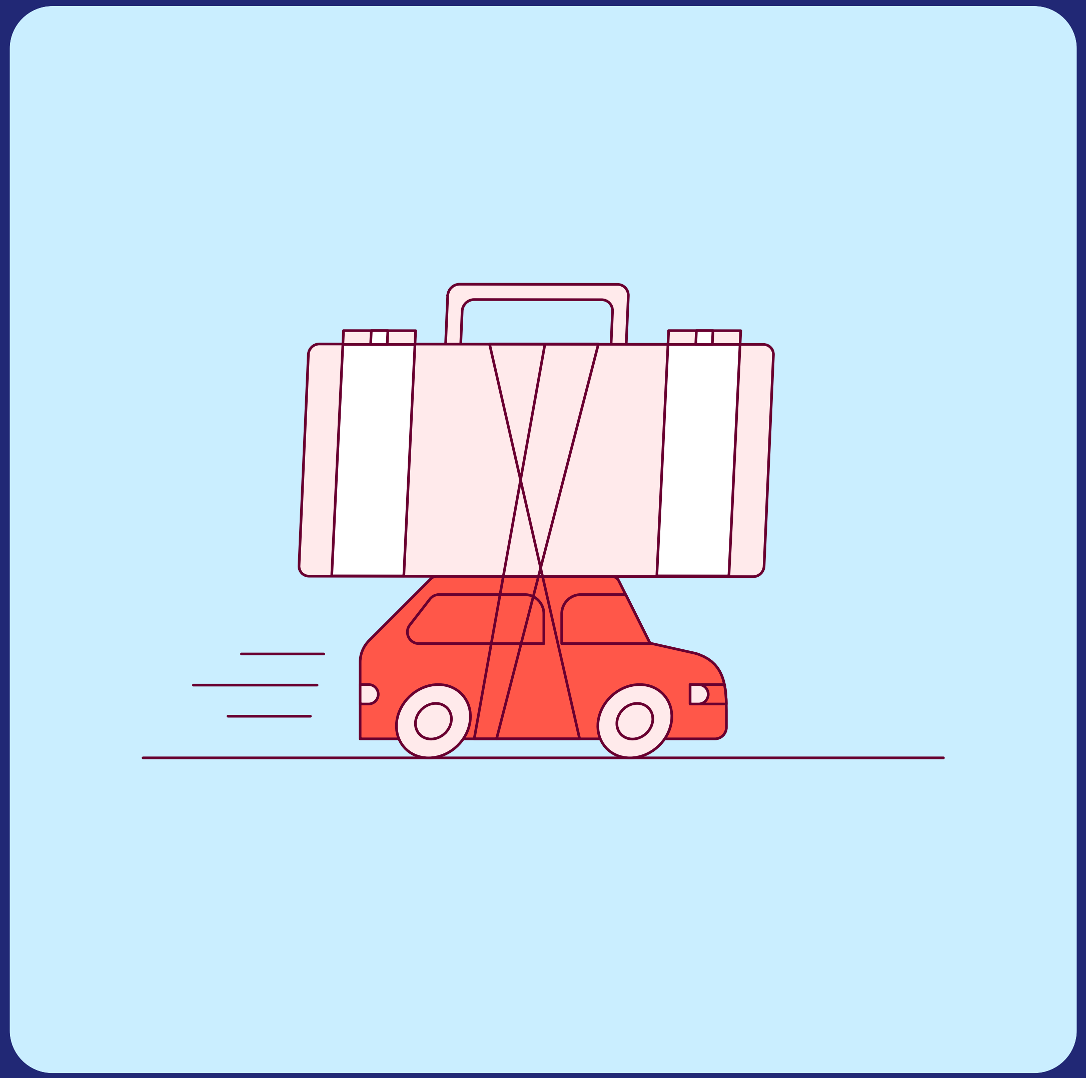
In the UK, workers are most likely to be in hybrid or remote setups. While this flexibility boosts engagement, it risks a Connectivity Tax if systems aren't in place—especially for asynchronous work. With the right strategies, organizations can cut this tax and avoid the back-and-forth chaos of misaligned schedules, even when teams are physically apart.





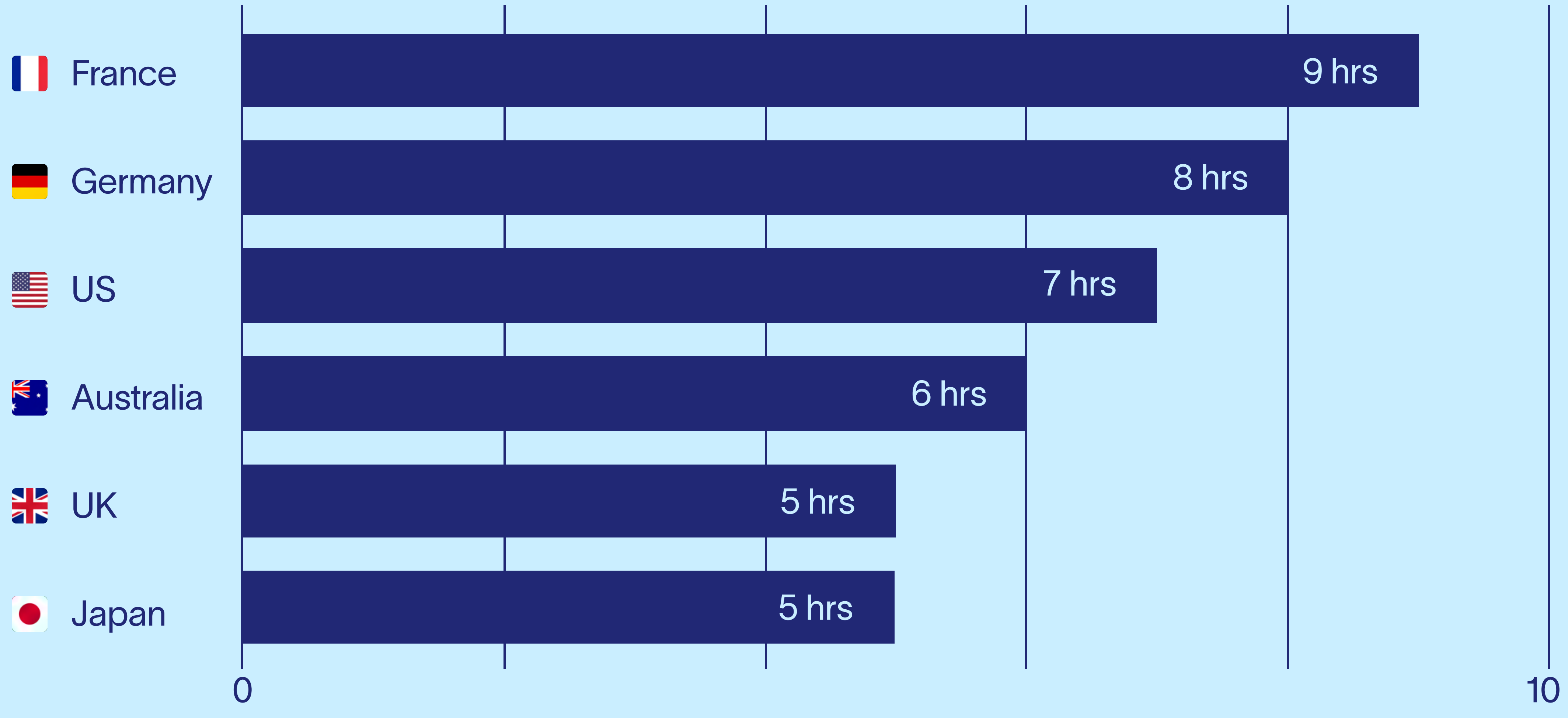
The Velocity Tax

Across the world

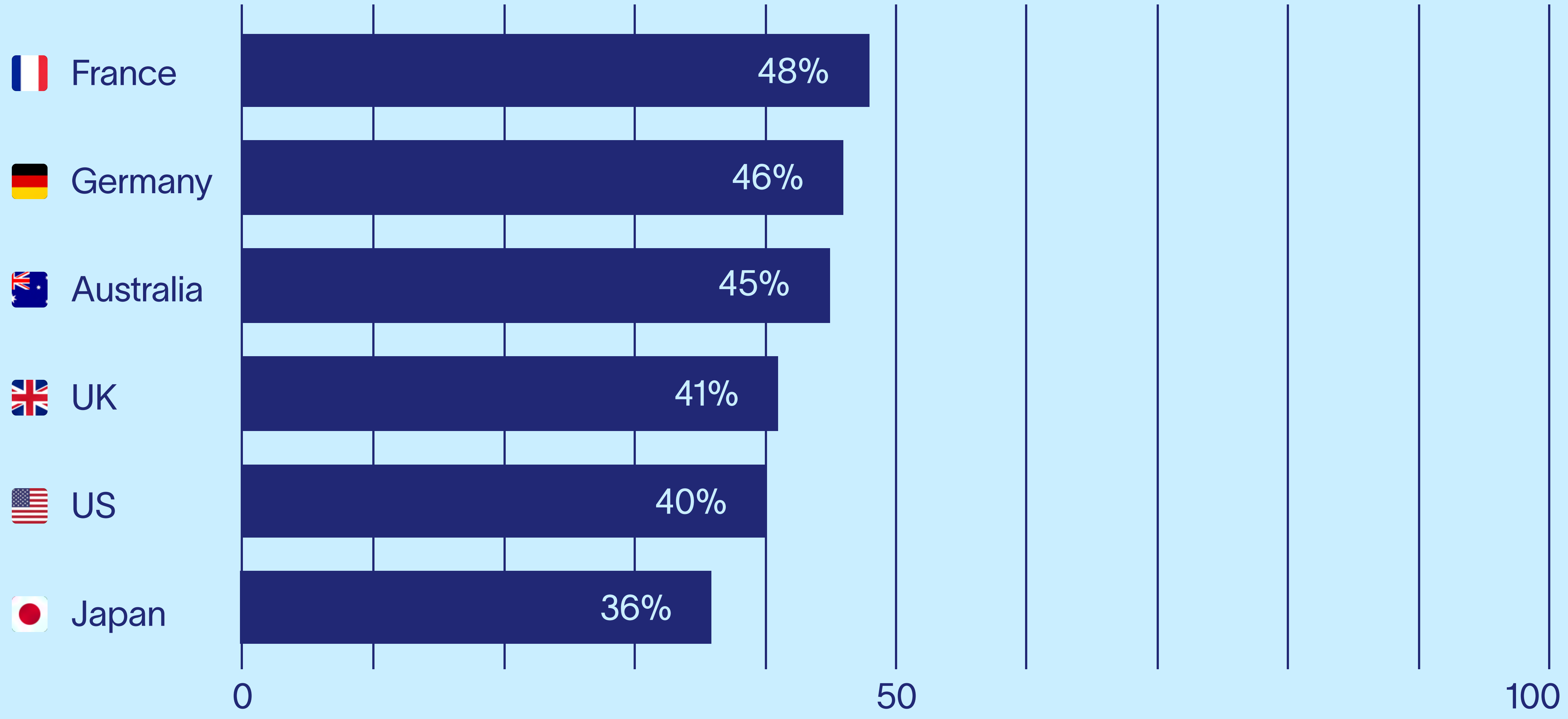


Technology can be a double-edged sword when it comes to the velocity tax—it can speed things up or slow them down. In France and Germany, workers are experiencing high levels of technology overload, spending 122% more switching between collaboration platforms.

Average number of hours each worker spends per week switching between collaboration tools



Percentage of workers who say their organization's technology and tools are in need of innovation

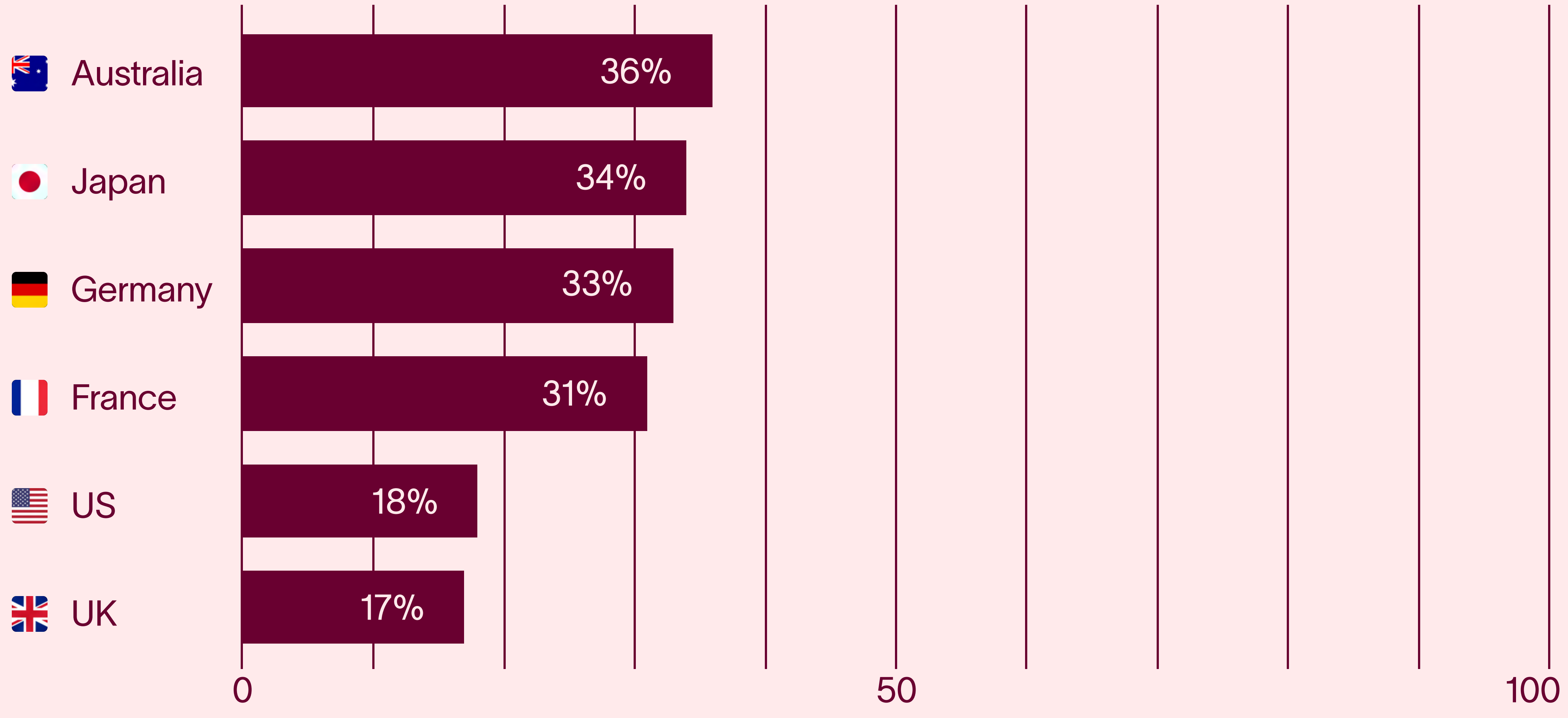


The Resilience Tax

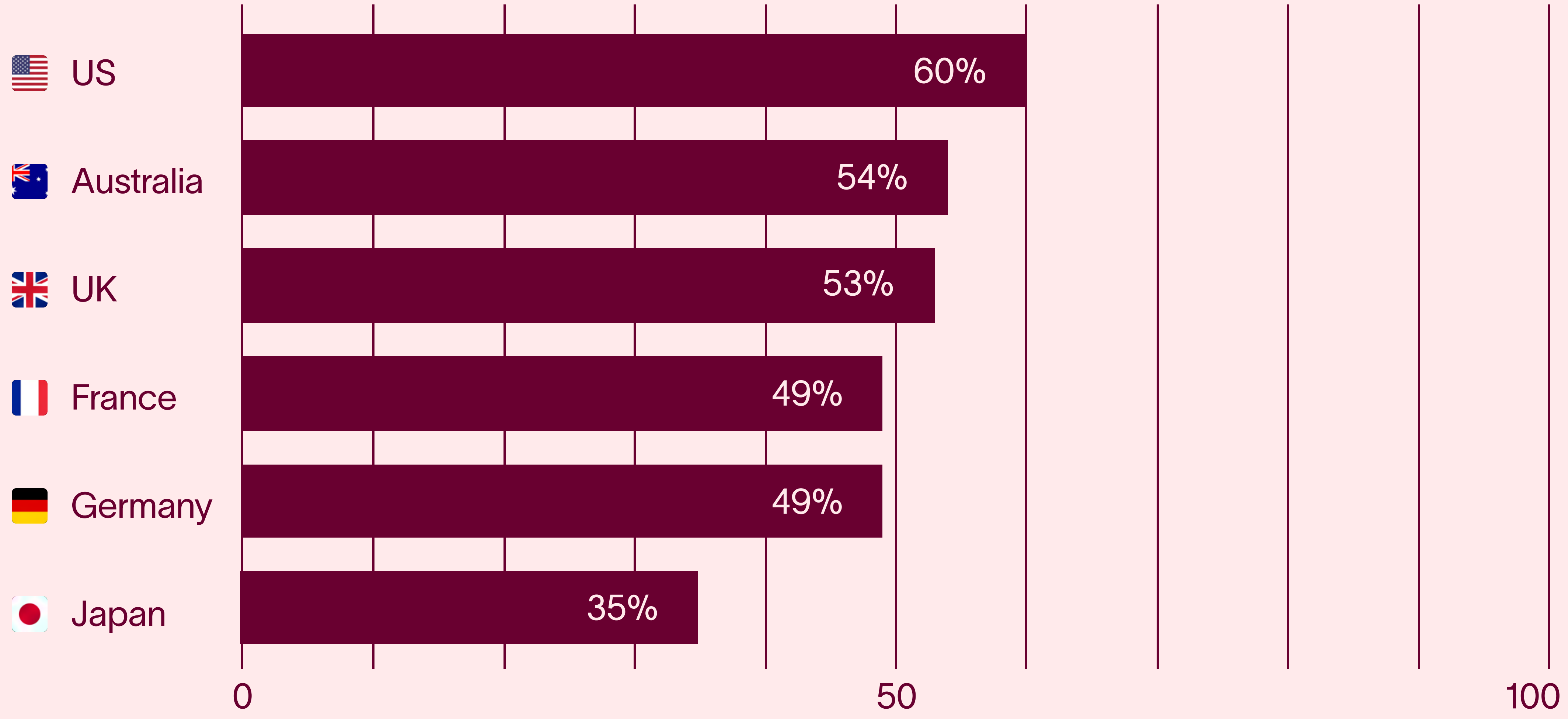
Across the world

Resilience depends on psychological safety. When people feel safe asking questions, asking for help, or admitting mistakes, they stay engaged and handle challenges better. In places like the UK and US, fewer workers worry about the fallout from asking for help. Innovation is also crucial for resilience. Companies that encourage bold ideas and creative problem-solving are better able to identify and plan for changes.

Percentage of workers who worry about repercussions when asking their team for help

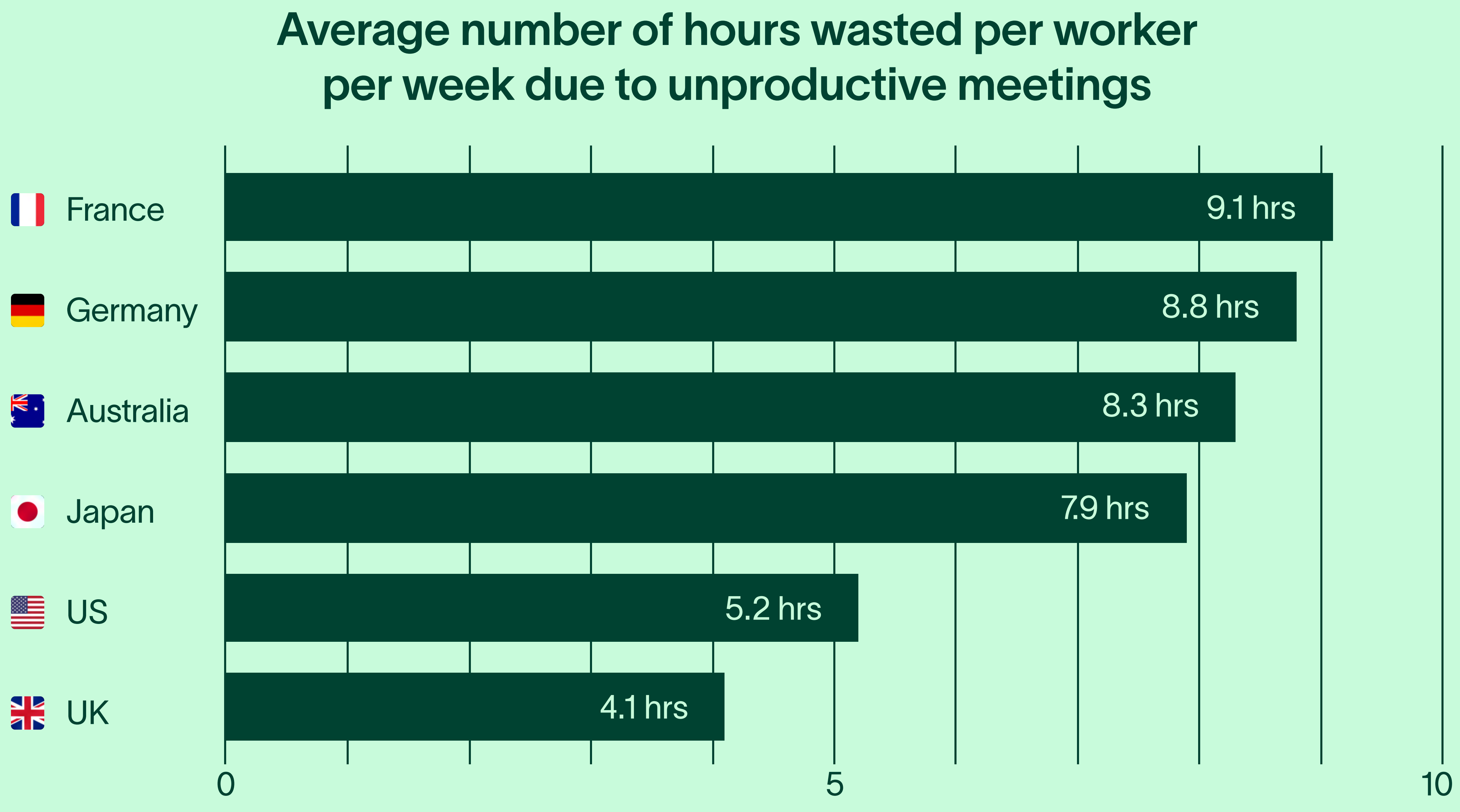


Percentage of workers who say their leaders promote a culture of innovation



The Capacity Tax

Across the world



French and German workers waste a staggering 9 hours a week in unproductive meetings, while those in Australia and Japan lose 8 hours. In France and Germany, where high-context cultures value detailed discussions and consensus-building, meetings drag on longer and happen more frequently —especially without the right asynchronous tools in place. This global meeting overload is a serious drain on workers' capacity, robbing them of the time and energy needed for meaningful work.

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