



Make it work

The future of collaboration
and productivity



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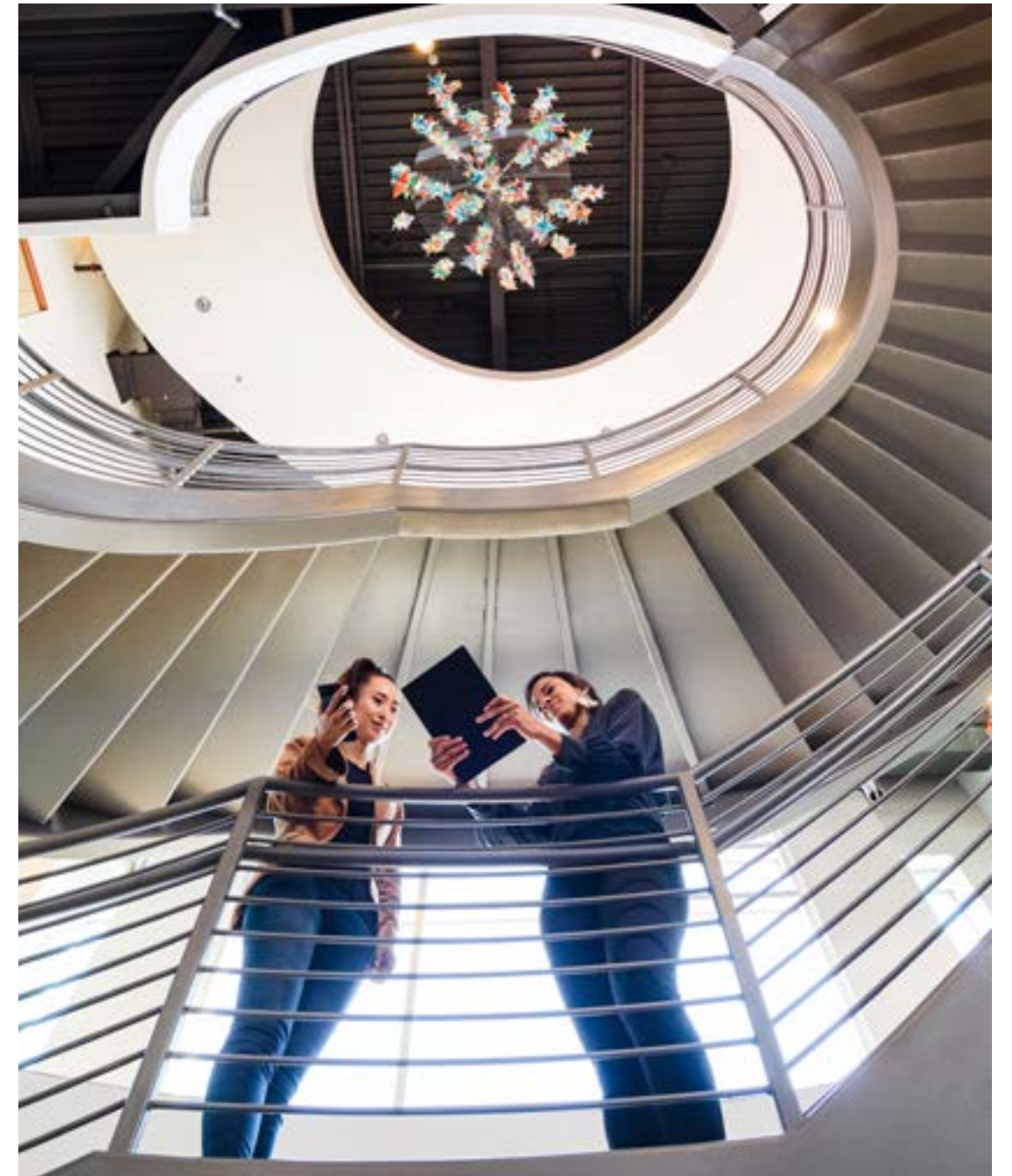
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The future of work is here

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.

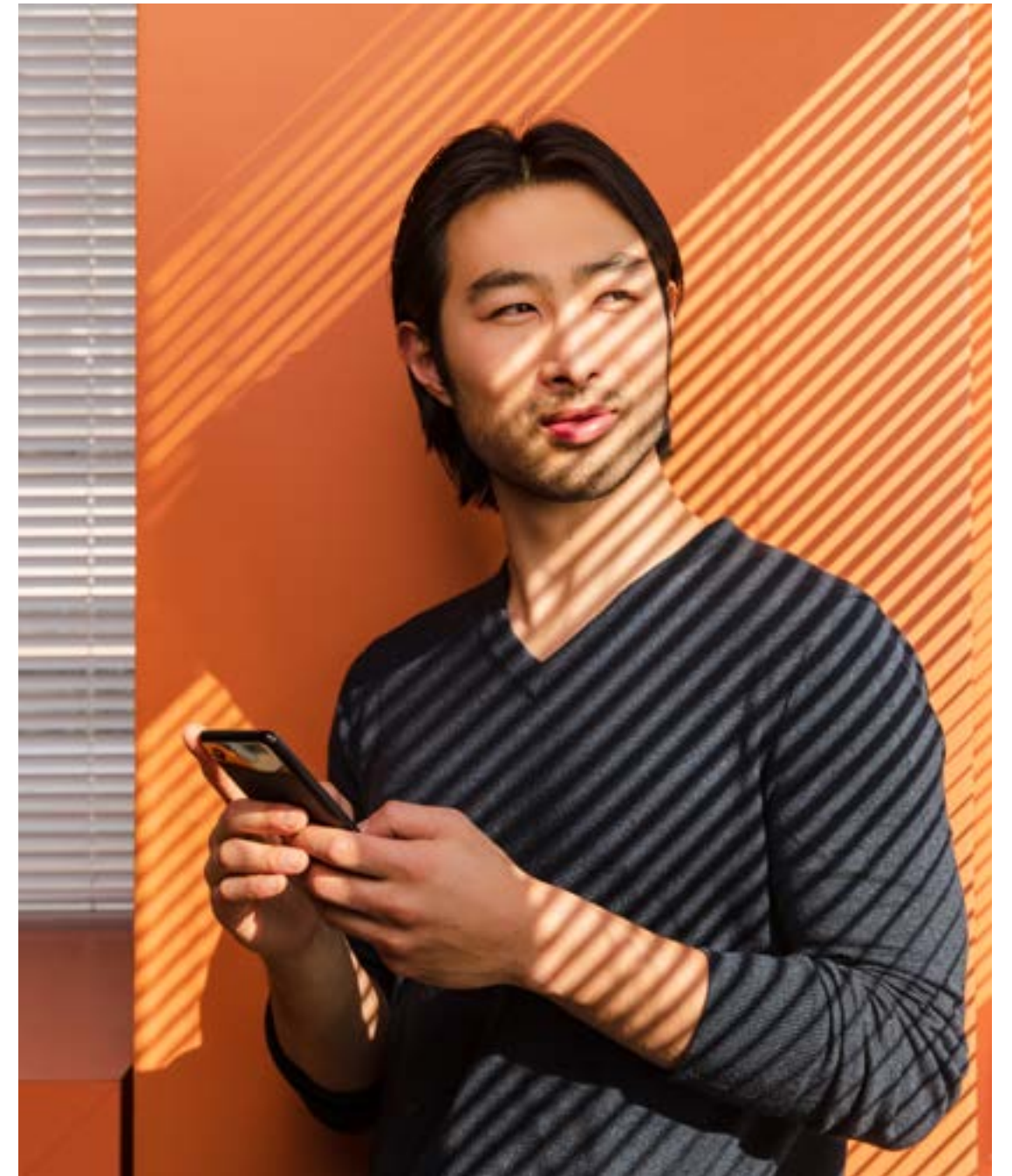
But look a little closer, and many of the technologies, trends, and cultural norms that will shape tomorrow's workplaces are already transforming forward-thinking organizations around the world. In other words, the future of work is here—it's just not evenly distributed.



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

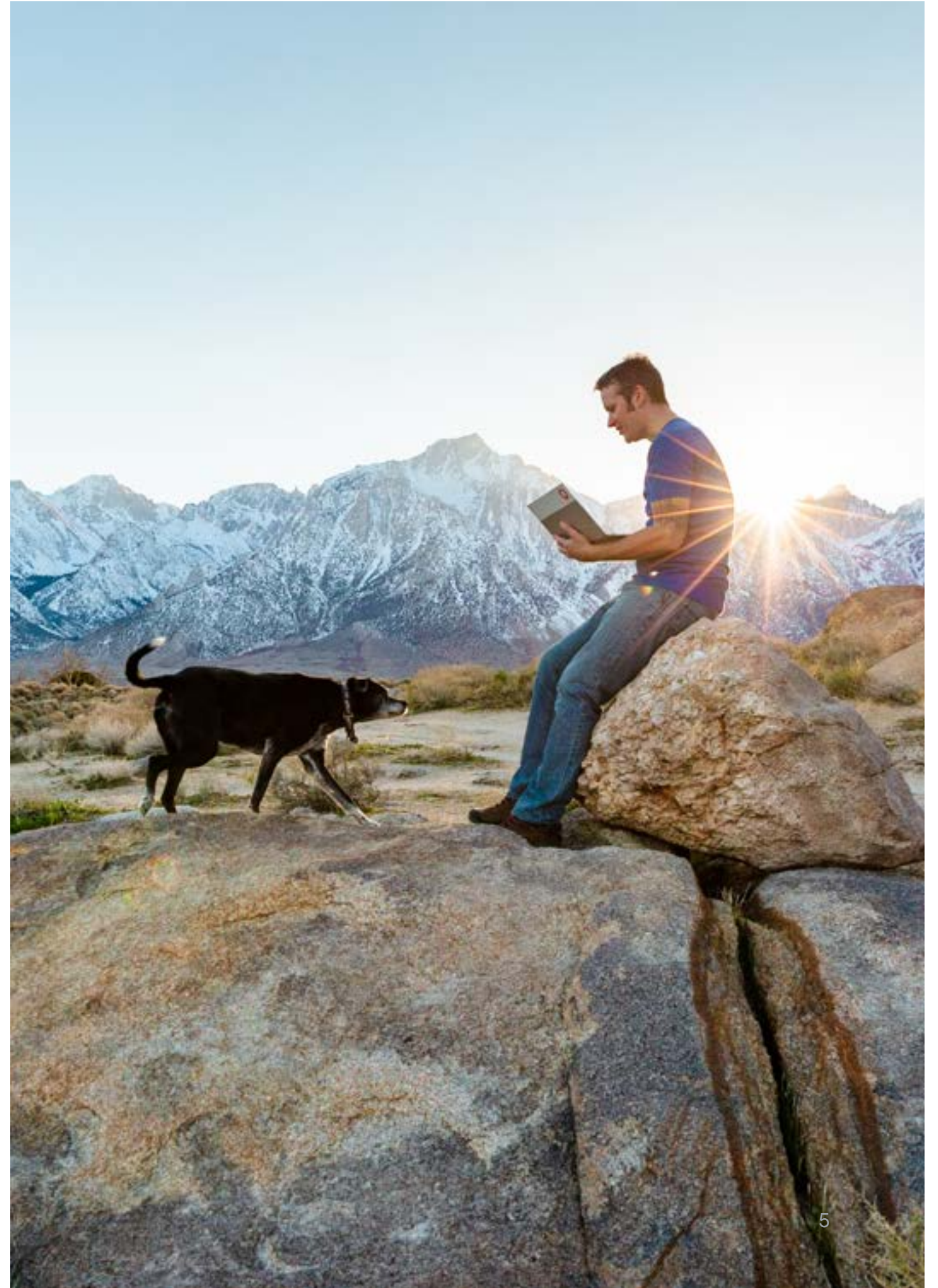
- 1 Give people the tools to save time and work faster
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Armed with these three strategies, businesses can improve productivity and encourage innovation while better meeting the needs of their customers and their employees—now and in the decade (or more)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



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

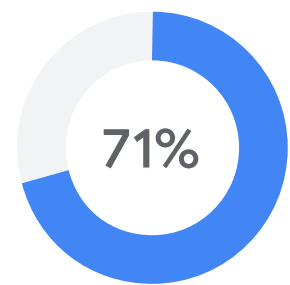
So where are all those hours going? Research shows that employees around the world spend significant chunks of their day on low-value tasks that require little human ingenuity and get in the way of productivity. These include attending fruitless meetings, managing high volumes of email, tracking down 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.”

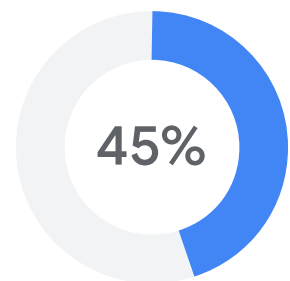
Massimiliano Santeramo, IT Director at
GrandVision Italy

How people lose out on productive time at work

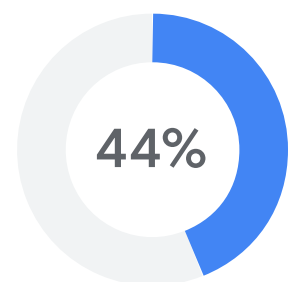
Unproductive meetings



of professionals lose time every week due to unnecessary or cancelled meetings²

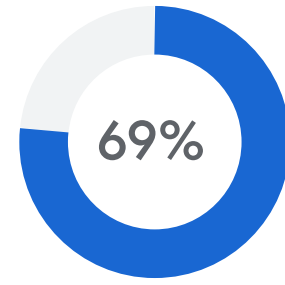


of workers say more efficient meetings would have the most positive impact on their ability to innovate and problem-solve³



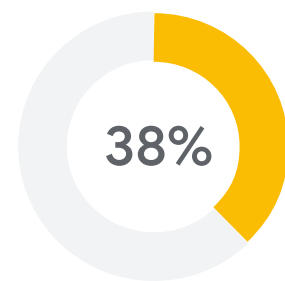
of employees say poorly organized meetings prevent them from doing their work⁴

Toggling



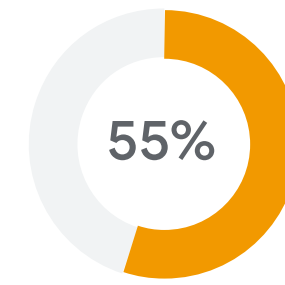
of workers waste up to an hour each day switching applications⁵

Technology trouble



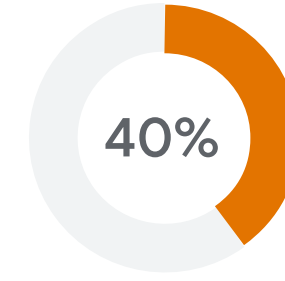
of U.S. business leaders say IT issues get in the way of productivity⁶

Communication



of U.S. employees say that excessive emails get in the way of work⁷

Busywork



of U.S. information workers say they spend at least a quarter of their workweek on manual, repetitive tasks⁸

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.”

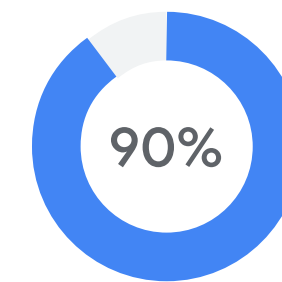
Bashir Agboola, VP and CTO for a U.S. healthcare company

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.

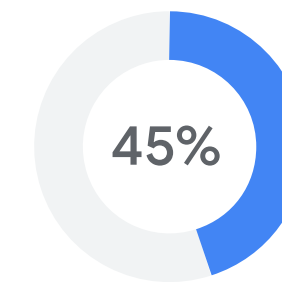
“Instead of hiring people to manage a bunch of servers and to support them and to patch them, we can focus our talents on building things and doing things that excite us.”

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

By 2023, global spending on cloud technology will reach nearly \$1 trillion, more than double the amount spent in 2018¹⁴



By 2024, more than 90% of enterprises will have intensively multi-cloud environments, with on-prem, off-prem, public, and private cloud¹⁵



of U.S. business and IT leaders plan to migrate from legacy collaboration and productivity tools to cloud-based apps in the next two years¹⁶

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 first 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.

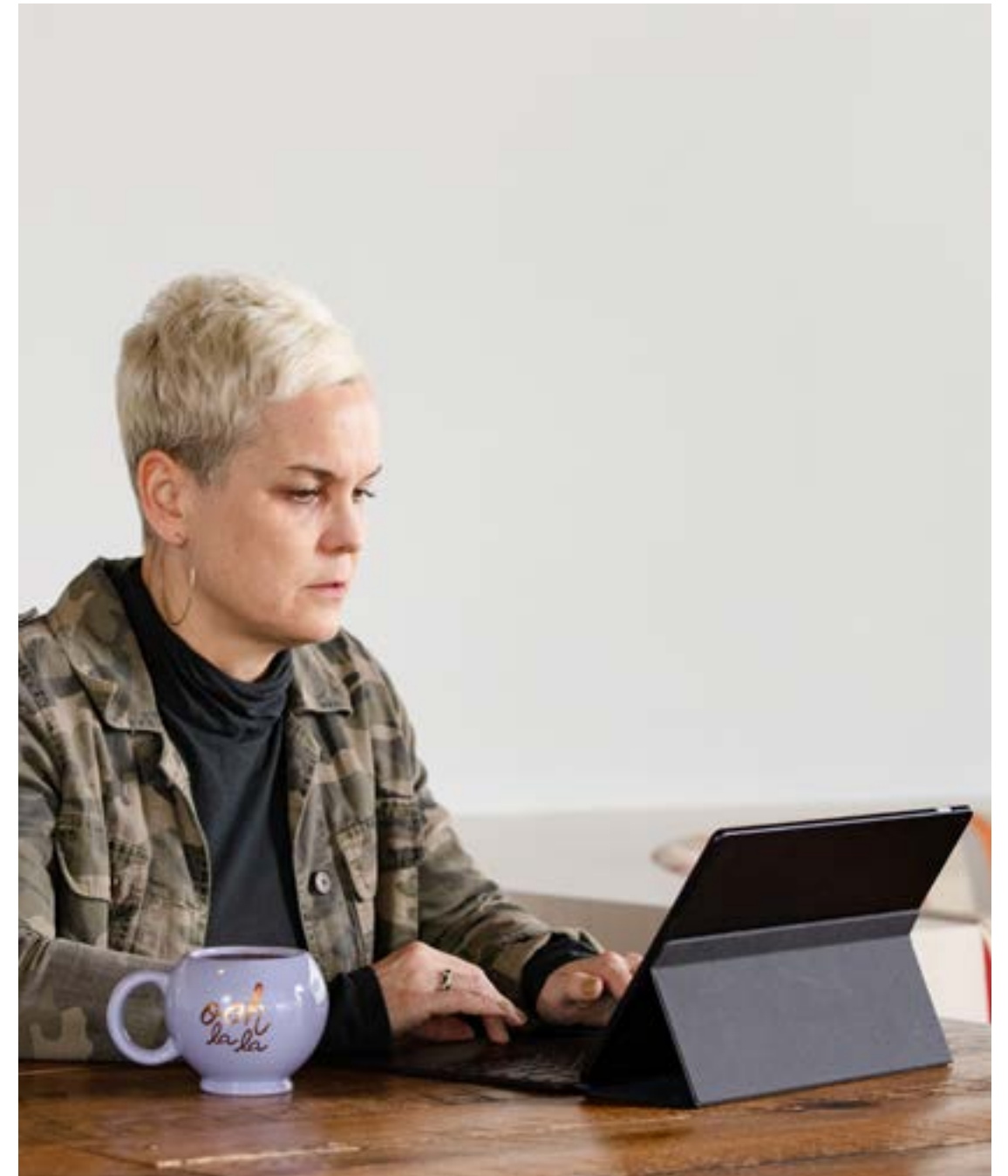


Cloud software stays up to date automatically, so you always have the latest features and safeguards.

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 workflows 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.

“Today we need to open Office to edit a document, then go to File Explorer to change its name, then open email to send it, then go to WhatsApp to send an audio message, and then schedule a videoconference in Skype. This is not a seamless experience.”

Luciano Nascimento, CTO at one of the largest banks in Brazil



Easing the burden of busywork

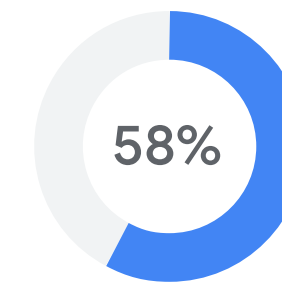
Many modern business apps rely on the power of automation to speed up processes and take mundane activities off employees' plates. Imagine, for example, intelligent software that learns your work patterns and preferences over time. Then, when you're preparing for a meeting or drafting a status update 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.

“Automating away some of the mundane tasks means people will be focusing more on the strategic nature of challenges and problems, and the creative aspects of them as well.

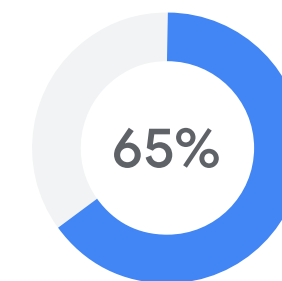
Work is going to focus more and more on the abstract, the creative, and the unique things that people are good at and can't be outsourced to machines.”

Paul, CTO at a U.S. media and gaming company

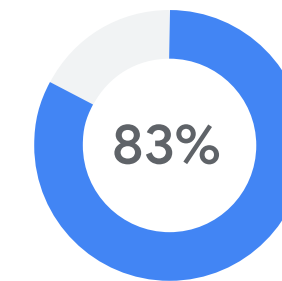
Research reveals a widespread expectation that automation can lighten the load of routine tasks:



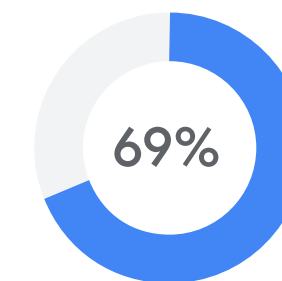
of global workers believe automation will free them up for more interesting work¹⁷



welcome automation to eliminate manual, repetitive tasks¹⁸



of U.S. workers say automation will let people think of work in new and innovative ways¹⁹



say automation will give them more time to do their primary job responsibilities²⁰

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

“Automation isn’t about replacing your job. It’s about empowering you to do more with your time.”

Maribel Lopez, Founder and Principal Analyst,
Lopez Research LLC

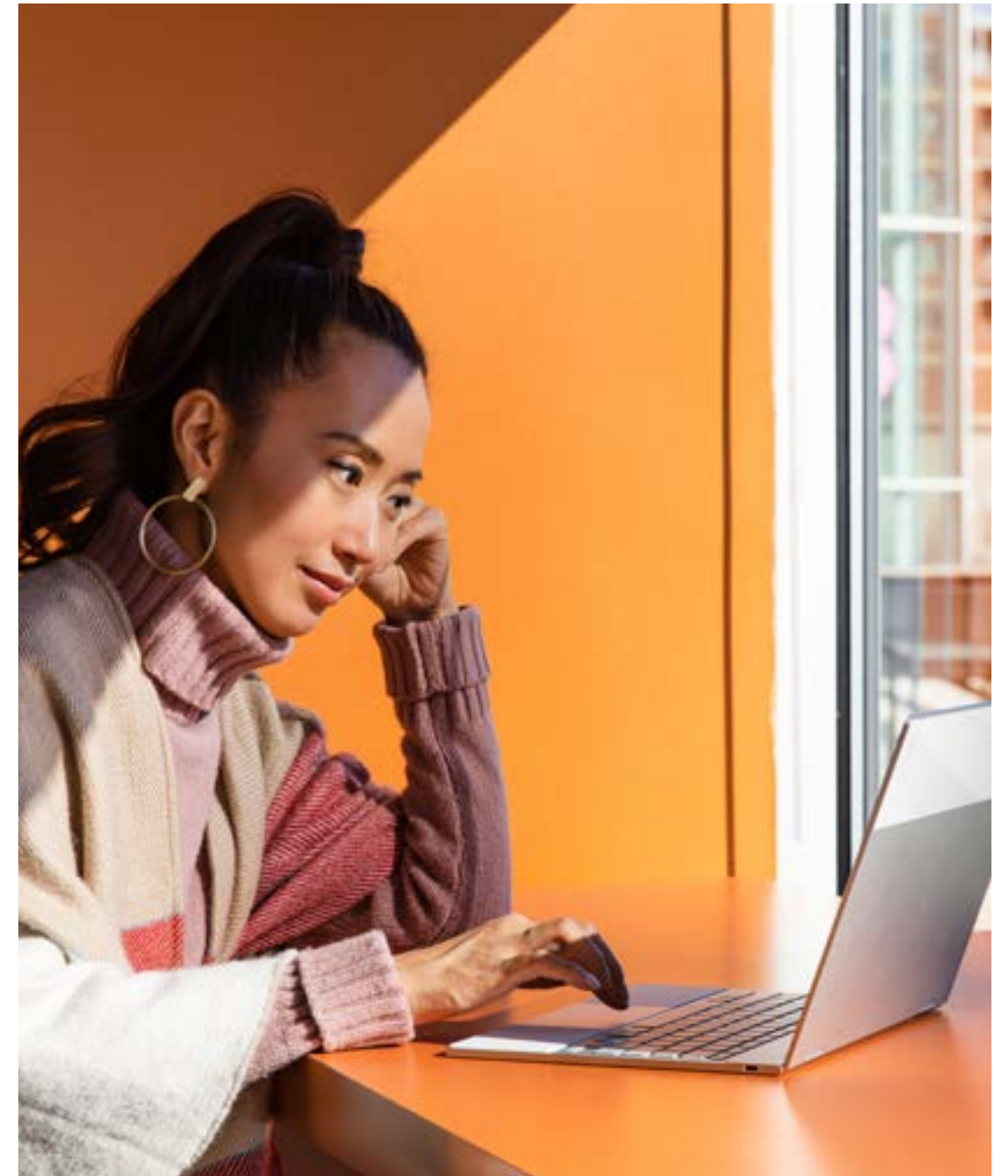
Fringe benefits of faster tools

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.



Case study

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](#)

“To serve our 750,000 customers better, [we knew we needed to reimagine how we work together.](#) And to do that, we knew we needed a new kind of toolset to enable collaboration like never before.”

Wellington Holbrook, Chief Transformation Officer, ATB Financial

Case study



[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 remote teams to work together](#) using online spreadsheets and documents
- [Implemented digital calendars](#) for booking vehicles and checking availability
- 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 from email disruptions every 10 days to [zero downtime in three years](#)
- [Improved cash flow](#) due to ease of searching across records
- [Sped up tour coordination](#) by upgrading from a paper-based system to a digital one

“All of our document handling is electronic. That's allowed our company to move forward, bring in investors, and grow its portfolio.”

Dominic Grammaticas, Managing Director,
Governors' Camp

Making meetings less terrible: tips from Google's productivity experts

For many employees, meetings are the most wasteful part of the day. Even the best meetings can exhaust your team's time, resources, and patience. To help you combat aimless brainstorming sessions and twice-as-long-as-necessary status updates, we reached out to Googlers who train fellow employees on how to run productive, efficient meetings and asked them to share their secrets.

1 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.

2 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.

3 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.

4 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.

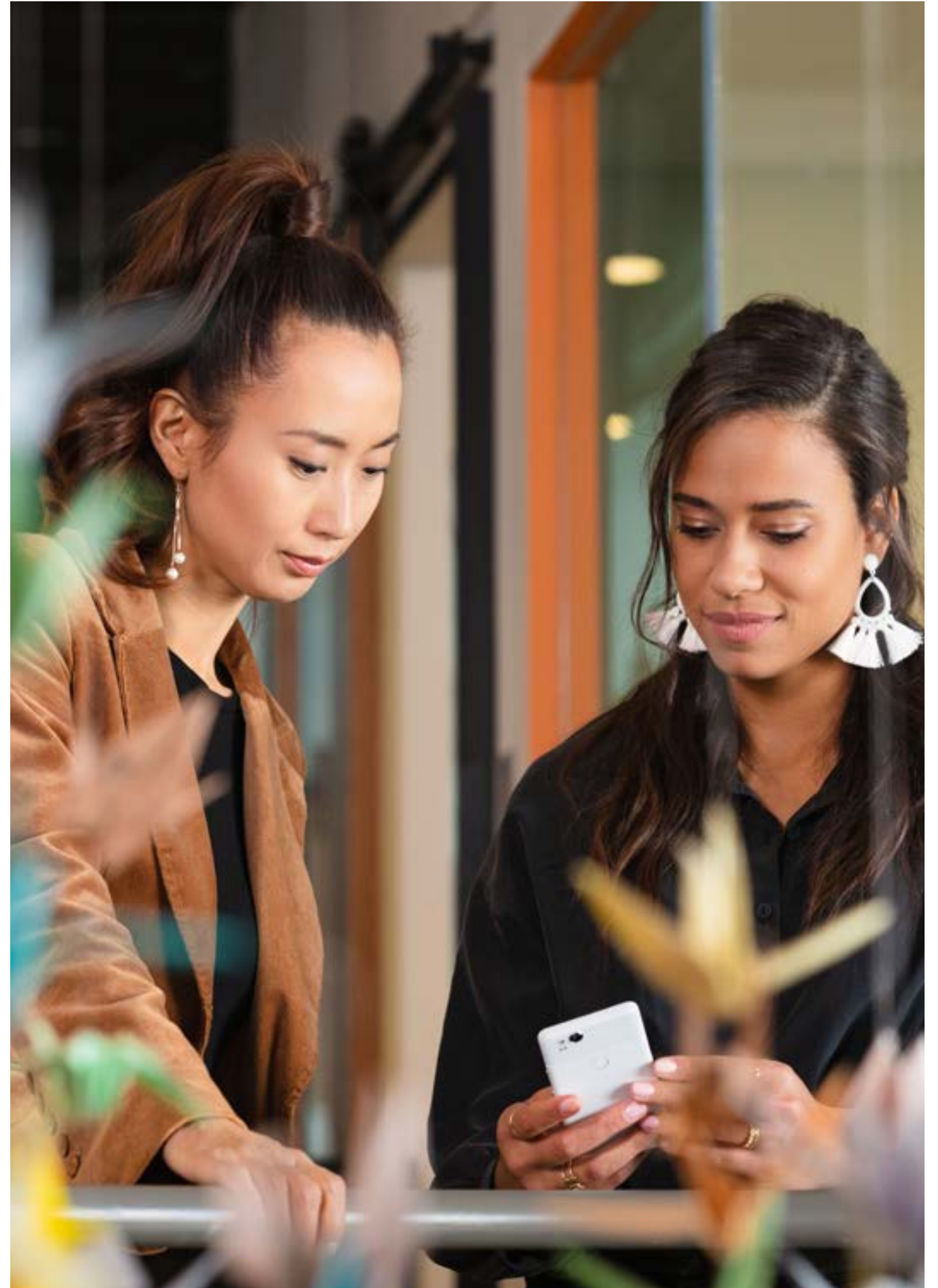
5 Hold meetings as a last resort

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



02

**Empower
people**
to access
knowledge and
share ideas



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.

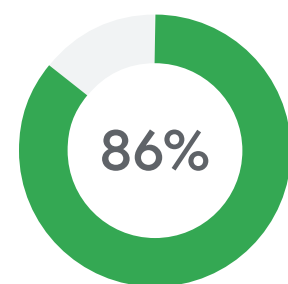
But, while 79% of business leaders believe seamless, digital access to knowledge is very important to overall performance, only 18% report that knowledge is shared extremely well across the entire company.²⁸

More data, more problems

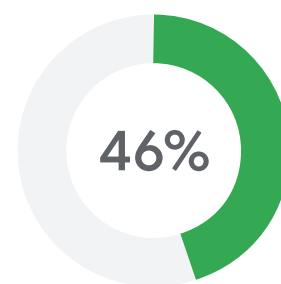
With the world's data growing at an annual rate of 61%, businesses are generating more information than ever before.²⁹

But employees are still in the dark and out of the loop.

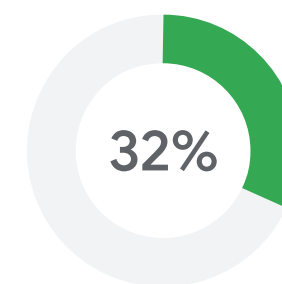
🔍 People can't find what they need



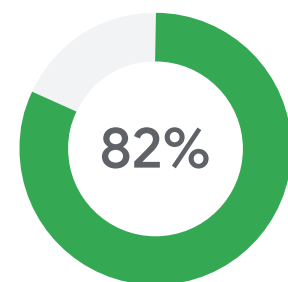
of global workers experience challenges when searching for information they need to do their jobs³⁰



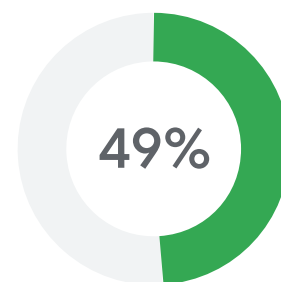
of global workers say it's challenging and time-consuming to find needed information³²



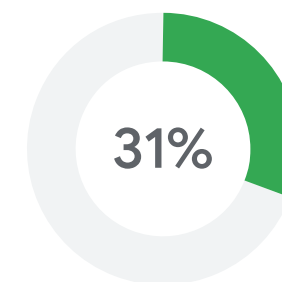
have avoided sharing a document with a colleague because it would take too long to find³⁴



of employees spend at least half an hour a day searching for information³¹

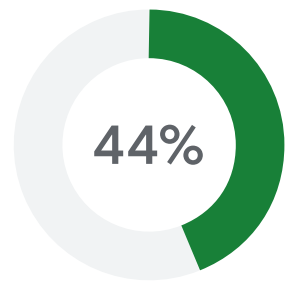


of U.S. employees have trouble locating documents³³

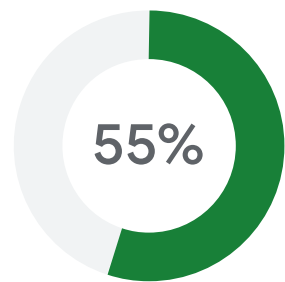


would use Google Search to obtain their own company's logo³⁵

🔍 Information is restricted or siloed

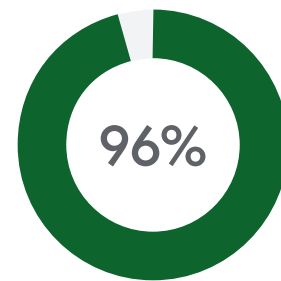


44% of U.S. business leaders say that disparate information systems across the organization make it hard to connect and collaborate³⁶

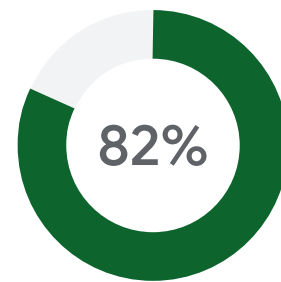


55% of U.S. employees have trouble gaining access to tools and documents that enable effective job performance during onboarding³⁷

📊 Multiple versions are a problem

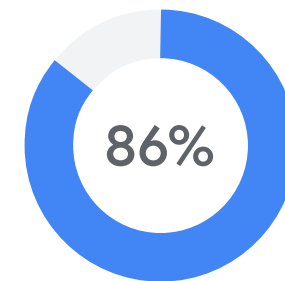


96% of global workers have trouble finding the most recent version of a file³⁸

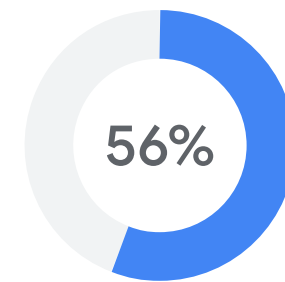


82% say navigating through different systems and locations to verify the most current versions of documents negatively affects productivity³⁹

👥 Knowledge isn't shared across the organization

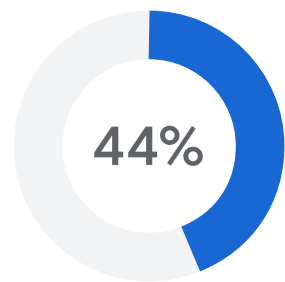


86% of U.S. employees don't have a clear idea of what their colleagues are working on⁴⁰

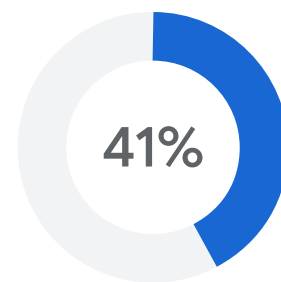


56% say lack of communication is the most common source of conflict with other departments or teams⁴¹

☰ 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 it⁴²



41% say they struggle to pull and find data on sales⁴³

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, understand the context and consequences of their work, and build experiences that delight customers: creating a culture of transparency and knowledge-sharing.

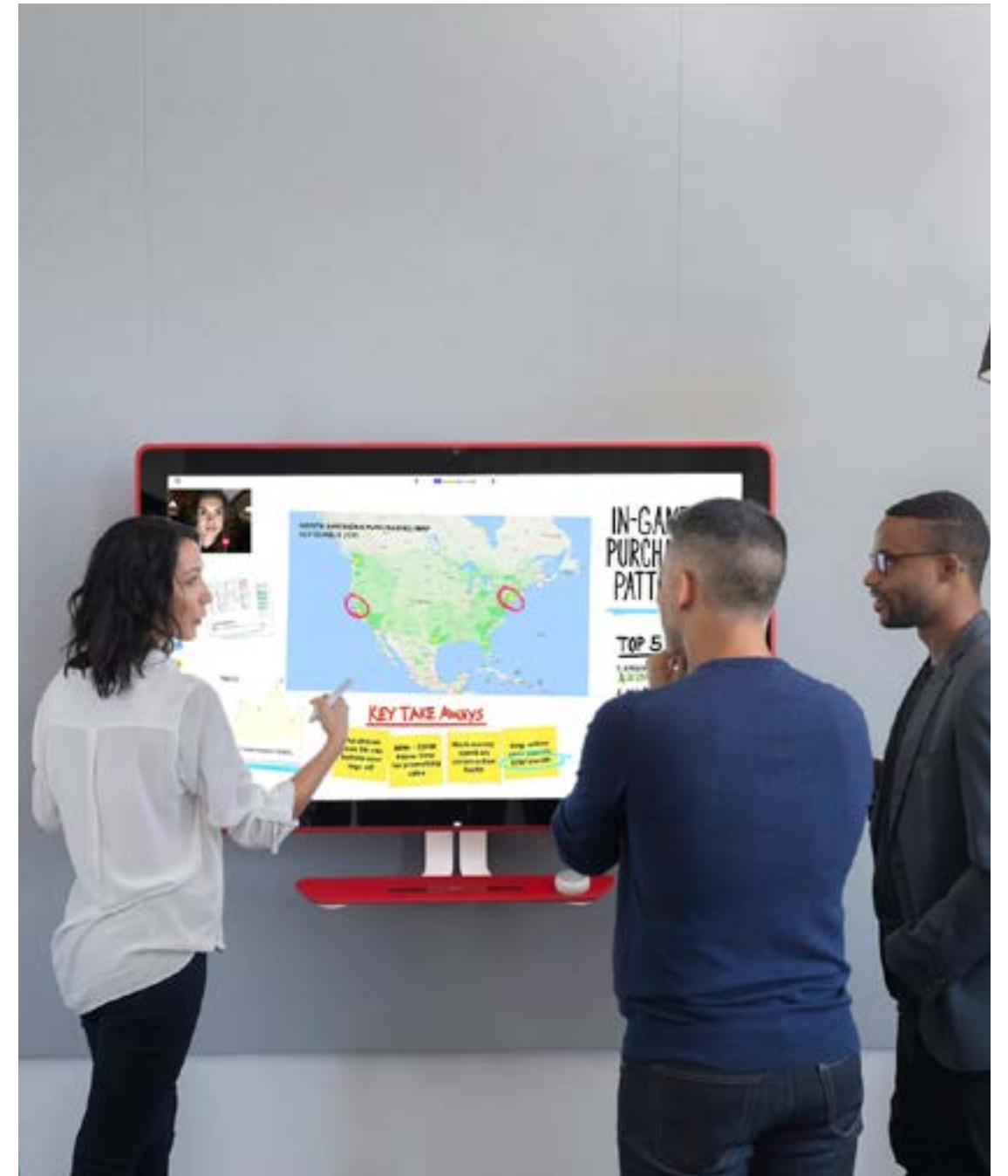
Safe tools for accessing, sharing, and finding information

The first step is to provide employees with centrally managed technology that fully meets their need to access and share knowledge, curbing reliance on unsanctioned apps that may endanger sensitive data. For example, many future-minded businesses are adopting cloud-based file storage and synchronization services, social platforms designed for corporate



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 transforming 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.

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.

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 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.

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.

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



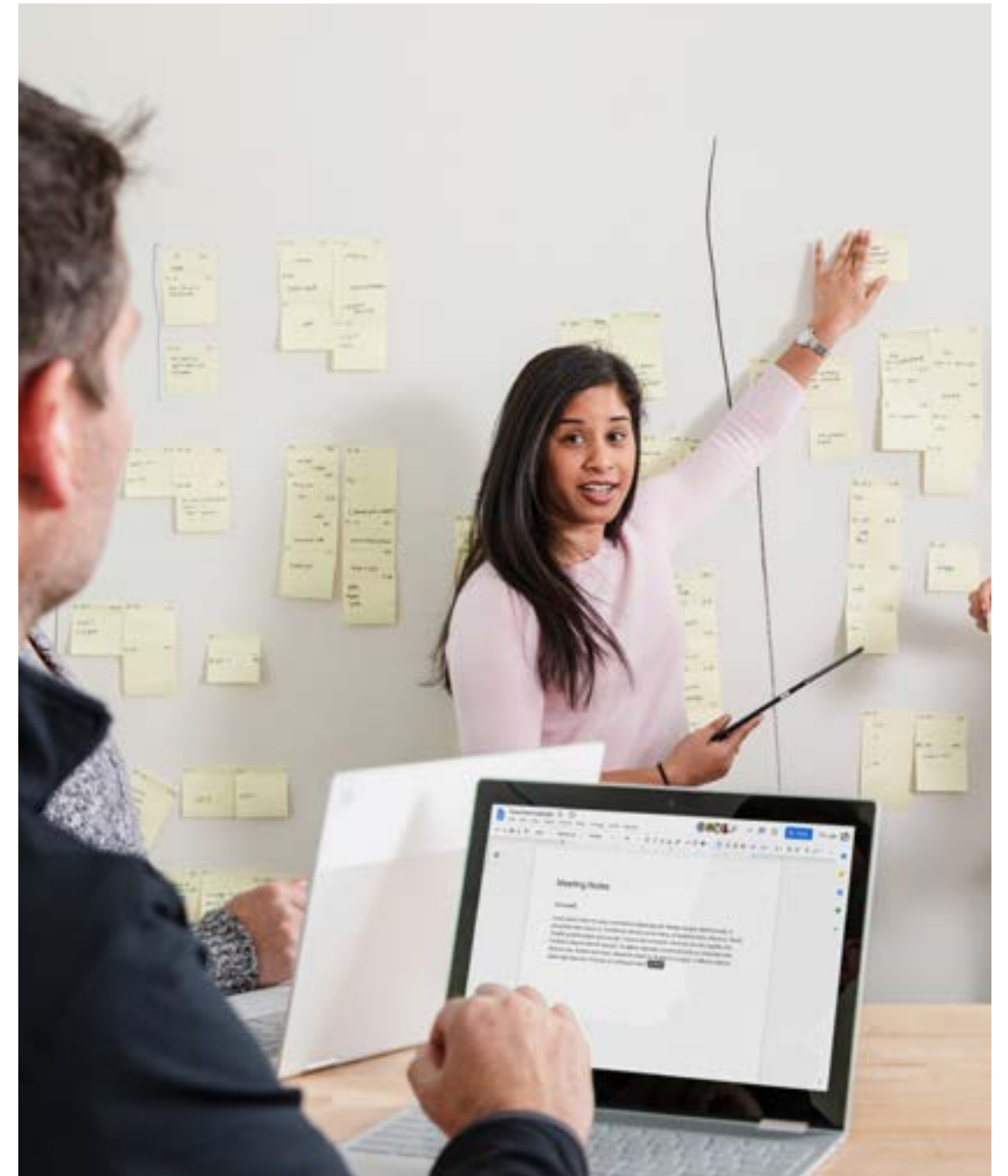
Metrics are captured in real time at mobile kiosks, allowing stakeholders to identify and address problems immediately.

More voices, better ideas

Today's employees care about and benefit 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 perform their best work.⁴⁵

“We have found that companies with focused diversity and inclusion initiatives have proven to be more successful. When employees feel their voice is heard there is better employee engagement and job satisfaction.”

Michelle Bailey, Group Vice President, General Manager, and Research Fellow, IDC



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 time⁴⁸
- ✓ Happy employees are 30% more likely to say their office diversity is “above average” than unhappy employees⁴⁹



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.

“Incoming generations want to get work done efficiently. As a result, they will also demand more from organizations as customers, employees, and partners, because they grew up with the expectation that sharing, services, and information will be readily available.”

Jim Lundy, Founder, CEO, and Lead Analyst,
Aragon Research

Case study

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 face to face](#) with teammates and partners from anywhere
- [Gave new hires immediate access](#) to online training, documents, and other 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 the need to email files back and forth, [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

“Our employees have everything they need accessible at all times, from any device. As a result, [we’re reclaiming approximately 150,000 hours a year for global innovation.](#)”

Rickard Söderberg, Global Digital Workplace Manager, GANT

Case study



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

“We empower as many as 500 volunteers and employees to collaborate. This has allowed venues to improve consistency by eliminating redundancy and to reduce the planning time from two years to one year.”

Aaron Bruce, Vice President, Sport,
Canada Games Council

5 tips for protecting your company's data

Not long ago, your best bet for exchanging information quickly and securely between physical locations was to send a fax. Fast forward a couple decades, and we can edit work files on our personal phones, instantly share documents and spreadsheets with people outside our organizations, and tap into collective knowledge to make smarter decisions. 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:

1 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.

2 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.

3 Stop relying on passwords alone

Is a beloved pet's name the only barrier between you and a data breach? 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, voice call, or mobile app notification). Make the process even more convenient and secure by arming users with security keys, which are physical authentication tokens that connect to computers and devices.

4 Change the locks when employees leave

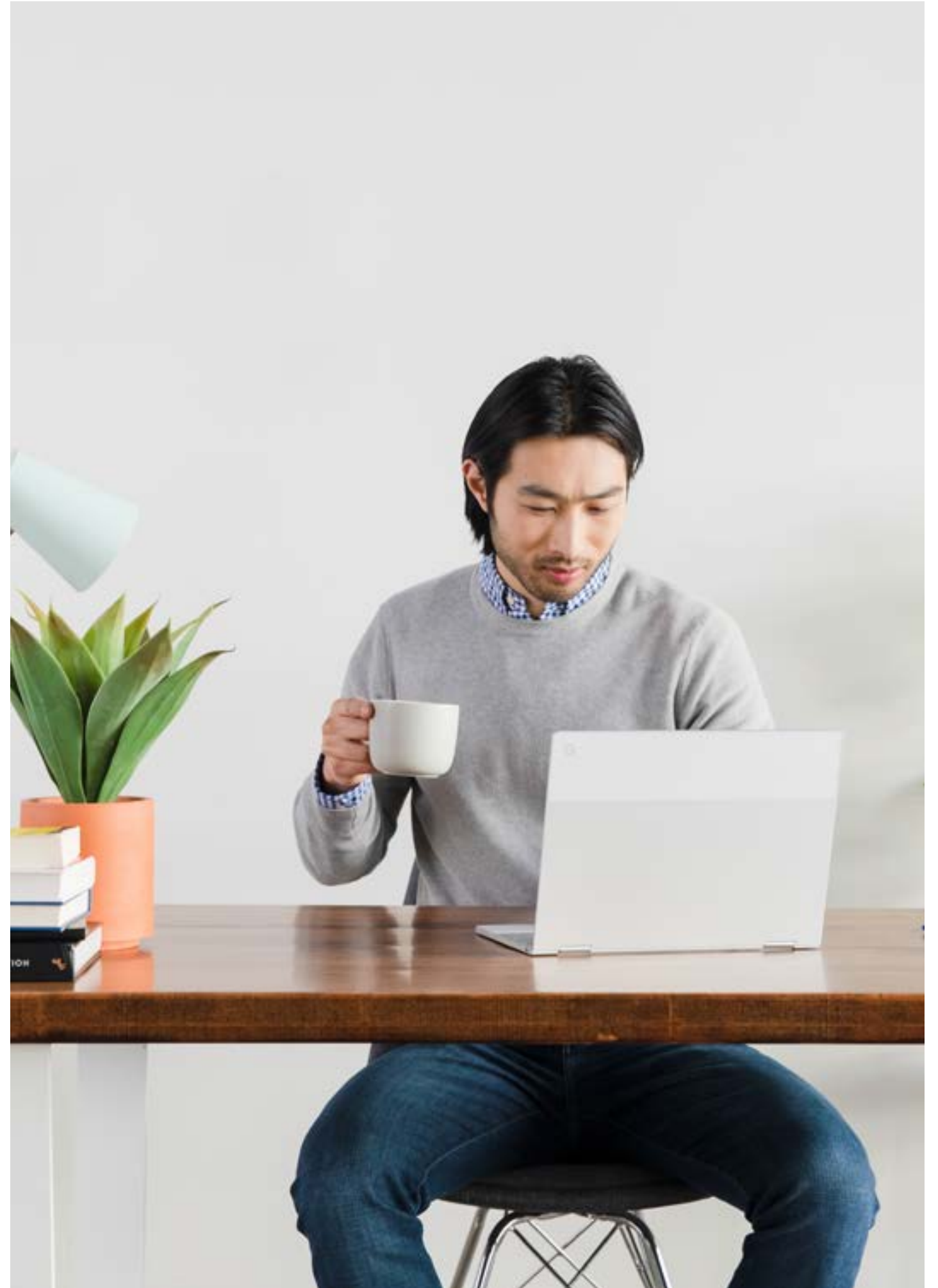
With 36% of U.S. employees participating in the gig economy⁵² and a rising turnover rate for full-time workers,⁵³ the risk of ex-employees walking away with corporate secrets is significant. Keep your organization safe and secure by taking advantage of cloud services and discouraging the use of local storage, such as USB drives. When an employee leaves, be sure to disable their access and remotely remove your data from phones and other personal devices.

5 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 email traffic 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.

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.

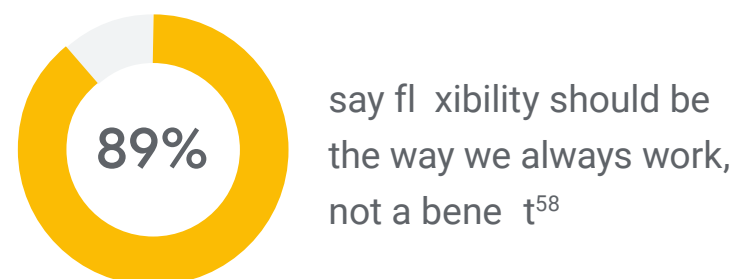
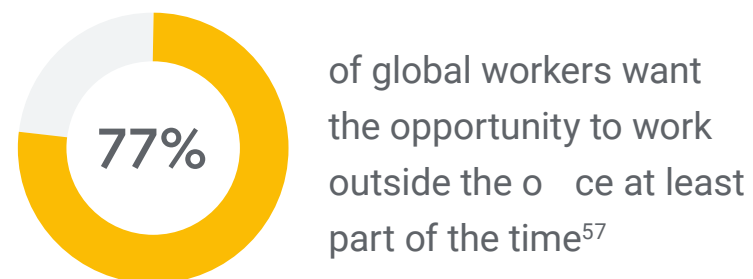
Tellingly, today's employees would go to great lengths to achieve more flexibility: 54% would switch jobs, 40% would take on bigger workloads, 31% would pay for their own technology, and 24% would give up company benefits.⁵⁵ Younger generations are more likely to prioritize flexibility, signaling that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

“As companies look for increased productivity, employees are looking for more flexibility. Technology must empower employees, giving them more control over their work, which allows them to better focus on their business impact. To compete for talent, companies have been accommodating more flexible work styles, schedules, and locations, and this trend will continue.”

Chris Marsh, Research Director, Workforce Productivity and Compliance, 451 Research

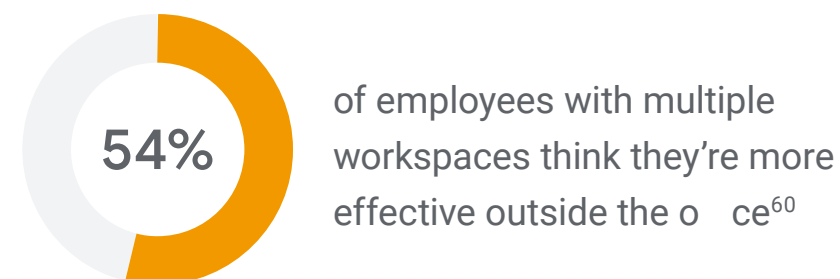
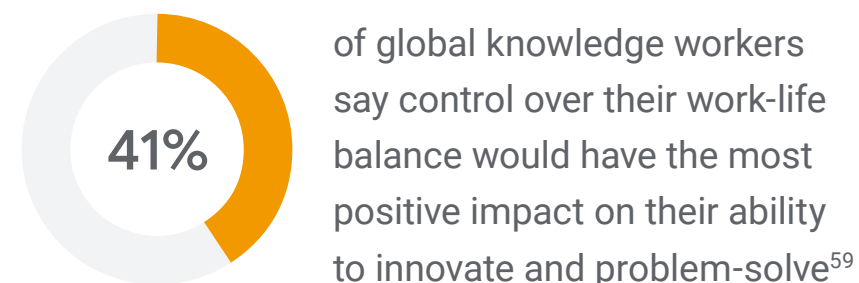
Flexibility: good for workers, good for business

 People want to choose where and when they work

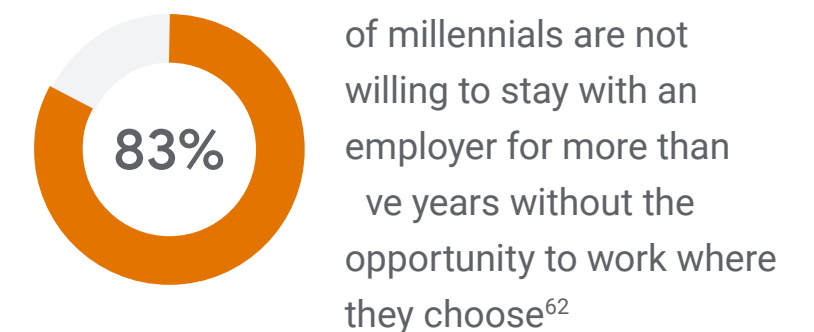
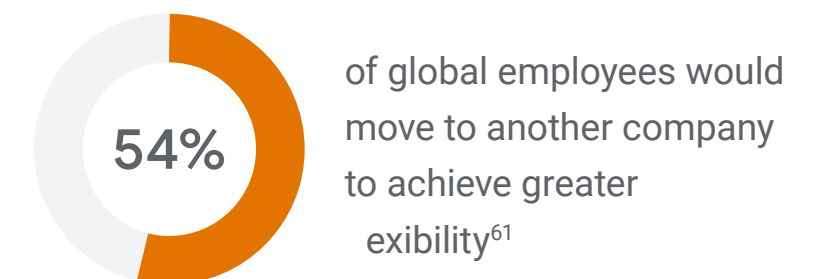


Research shows that flexibility improves:

 Performance

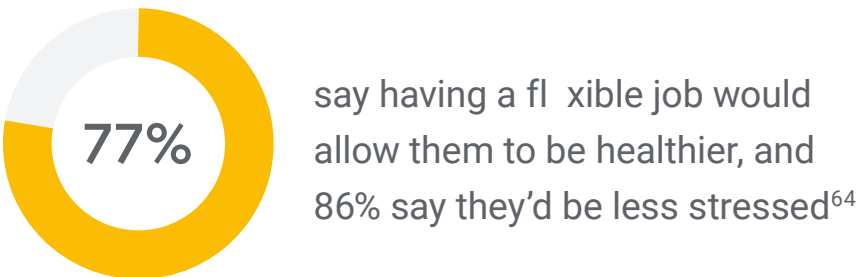
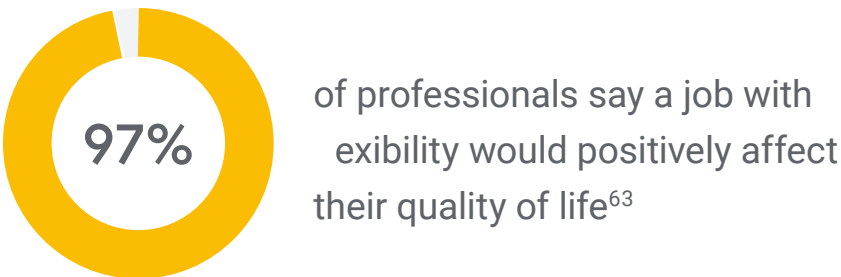


 Loyalty

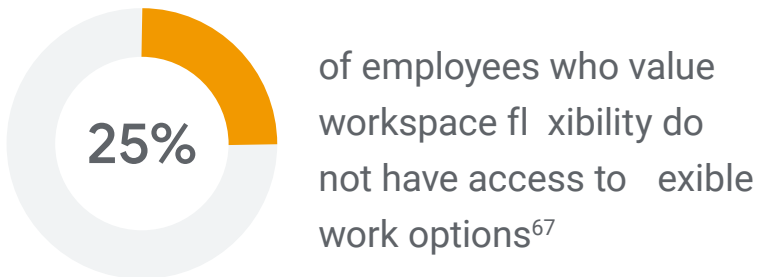
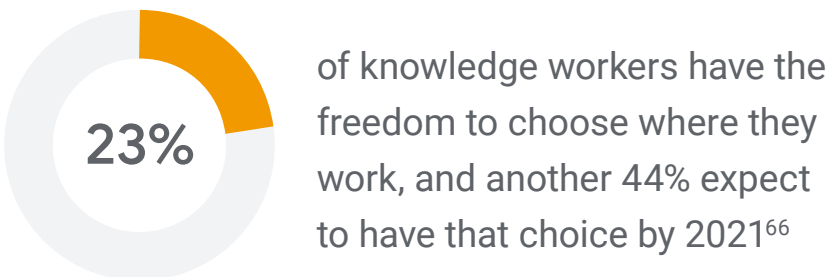


Research shows that flexibility improves:

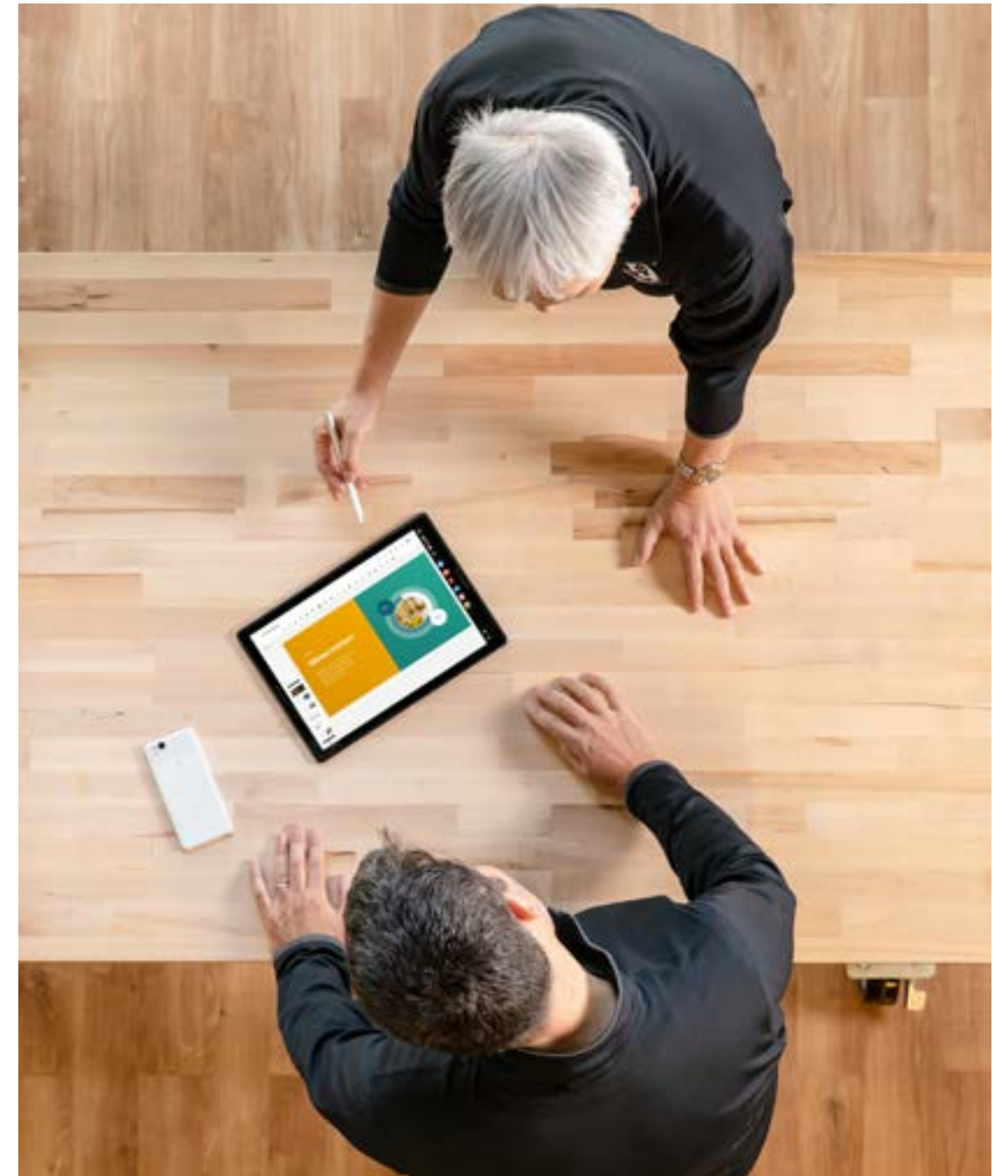
♥ Well-being



↗ Work is becoming more flexible, but not for everyone



For many businesses, 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 a physical office. Traditional remote access solutions, such as VPNs, often fall short in this department: They take time to set up, involve an extra sign-in step, only work on certain devices, and often 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

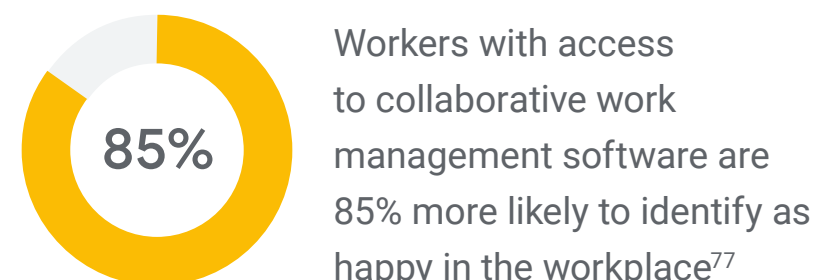
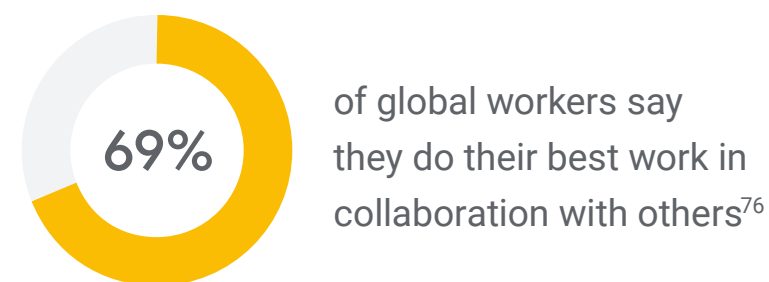
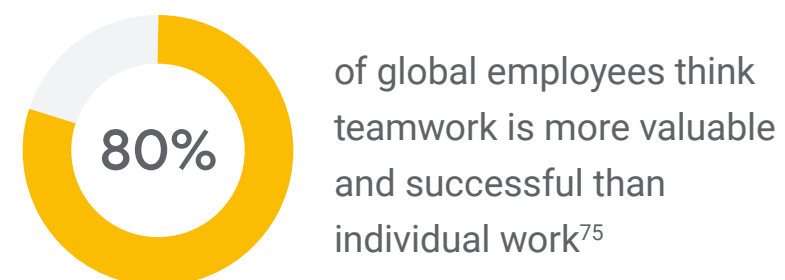
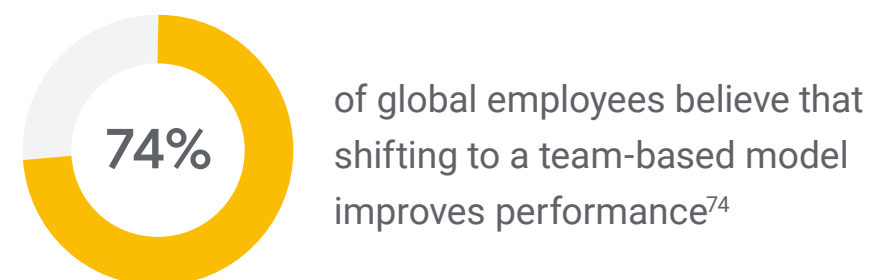
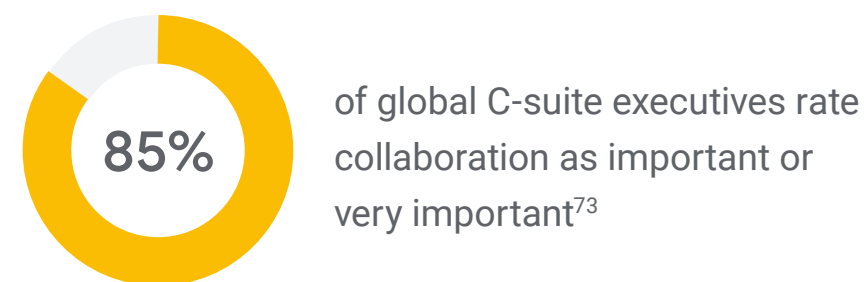
Recognizing the growing importance of collaboration, leading organizations are taking steps to reward group efforts, encourage communication and coordination across departments, and transition away from hierarchical models of management toward networks of teams. But research suggests there's room for 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 happens at many different levels. It happens in meetings, in person. It happens within roles and reporting relationships. I think the blending of titles is also a change in the culture. So a vice president and a first-level analyst can be working together, but it doesn't matter what their titles are. They're focused on the task, not who each other are.”

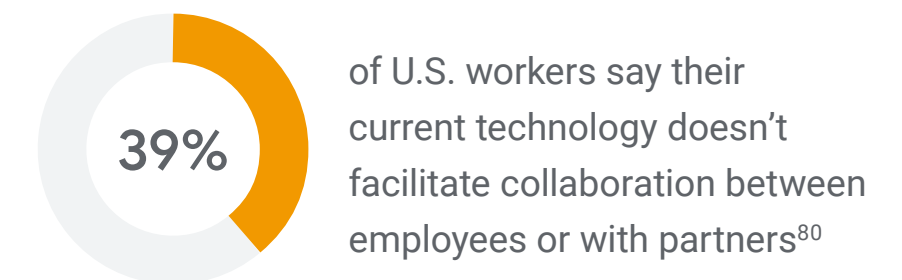
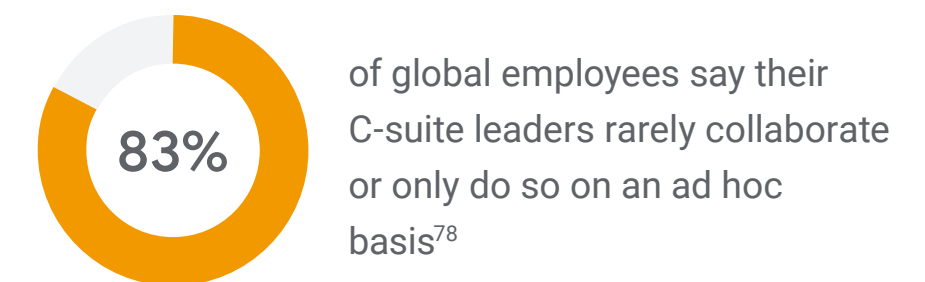
David Sondergeld, CIO for a U.S. retail company

Collaboration: how we (sometimes) work together

 People believe collaboration helps them work better...

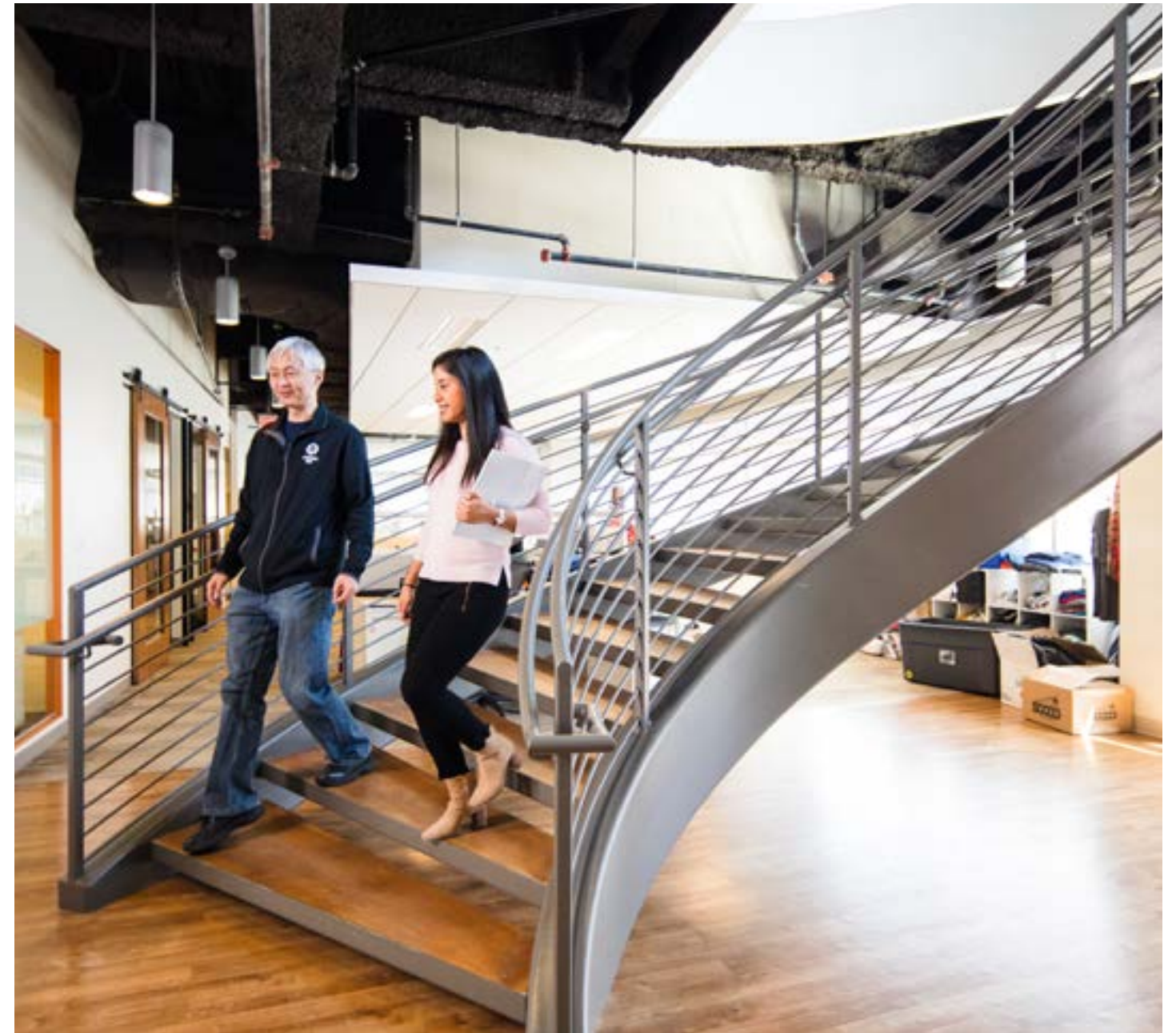


 ...but not all organizations are teamwork-friendly.



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.

Case study



[Salesforce](#), a leading provider of cloud-based customer relationship management software, gets everyone on the same page.

Strategy

- Replaced legacy tools with [cloud-based apps](#) for email, video meetings, documents, and more
- [Adopted shared documents](#), ending the practice of sharing drafts via email
- [Automatically gathered metrics](#) on room and resource use
- Empowered employees to compose emails faster with [AI-powered suggestions](#)

Results

- Shortened the review process for marketing materials from weeks to [24 hours](#)
- [Freed up 200–300 hours](#) of conference rooms each day by monitoring underutilization
- [Resolved recurring version control issues](#), simplifying the long-range planning process
- Enabled employees to spend [less time on email](#) and more time creating value for customers

“We can collaborate and communicate with all of our stakeholders—both in real time and in a highly secure environment—to create meaningful impact at scale.”

Jo-ann Olsovsky, Executive Vice President and Chief Information Officer, Salesforce

Case study



Cloud tools enabled [Twinkl](#), an online platform for teaching resources, to quickly grow its staff by 535%.

Strategy

- [Adopted cloud apps](#) for content production, file storage, meetings, and communication
- Moved data from on-premises storage into [shared, searchable repositories in the cloud](#)
- [Used shared calendars](#) to automatically schedule job interviews at convenient times
- [Enabled secure sign-in](#) from any location or device without the use of a VPN

Results

- [Grew staff by 535%](#) without having to worry about setting up new infrastructure
- [Saved 1,500 hours](#) of IT administration per year
- [Processed an unprecedented number of job applicants](#) quickly and easily
- [Improved onboarding, management, and security](#) for remote and globally disparate employees

“We spend time delivering solutions for our customers, not maintaining infrastructure and services. These tools have supported our exponential growth.”

Jez Seaton, Chief Technology and Security Officer

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—think smartphones and online document storage—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

But it doesn’t have to be this way. Business leaders can create a culture of respect for each individual’s personal time, helping employees feel comfortable disconnecting and potentially preventing burnout. Keep reading for some recommendations from Google Wellness Manager Lauren Whitt. Get more tips [here](#).

“Detachment is a choice, so be intentional about giving your mind a break to recharge and refocus on the next moonshot.”

Lauren Whitt, PhD, Wellness Manager at Google

- 1 Avoid sending non-urgent messages after a certain time of day or over the weekend, and encourage your team to follow suit. To make it easier, use an email service that lets you schedule delivery in advance.
- 2 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. Also remember to keep your work inbox closed while on vacation. (Avoid temptation by turning off mail syncing on your phone.) As long as you've designated an alternate contact in your out-of-office responder, everything will be OK—really.
- 3 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.
- 4 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.
- 5 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

04

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's 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. [Find out how Google's cloud productivity suite can help.](#)

“This is a call to action to all organizations. You really have to move into creating these adaptable, flexible workplaces and leveraging technology to do that—because if you don't, your competitors will, and they will be ahead of you. Think about what you're doing today that you could do differently—how technology can help you unlock ideas and creativity.”

Maribel Lopez, Founder and Principal Analyst,
Lopez Research LLC

What will the workplace of the future look like?

Business leaders share their predictions

“In 30 years, knowing what AR/VR can do now, **I’ll be transported to my team’s office from wherever I’m sitting**. I may not even put on a headset; it may just be a projection into my eyes—bionic—while I’m working.”

Head of Digital for Australian Community Media

“I can easily imagine a future where no one needs to really worry about what they’re wearing because you put on a VR headset and you go into a virtual kind of office space. If you want to speak to a colleague, you can walk over to them or tap them on the shoulder and just **instantly meet in a virtual room where you have some kind of avatar, but it seems like you’re meeting face to face**.”

Paul, CTO at a U.S. media and gaming company

“I envision **working remotely coupled with advances in technologies such as holograms** with high resolution, so it feels real and you’re standing next to that person having that conversation while you’re miles apart.”

Chief Digital Officer for an Australian retail company

“We’ve got some pretty good tools in place for people to be remote and to use a VPN connection back to the company to run their tools, but I still envision that will change to be much more of a **video-based collaboration, with teams using tools that probably haven’t even been invented yet**.”

Senior Director of Global Technology & Operations for a U.S. manufacturing company

“In the future, I envision people truly connected to their peers when they are at work, but not physically present in the same place. **I envision some sort of immersive home office that emulates a work floor, full of people.** You are seeing your colleagues most of the time; you can click on his or her avatar for a one-to-one conversation. I think this will improve collaboration and communication greatly.”

João, IT Director for a Brazilian retail chain

“The physical environment probably will be broken down even more in the future. You might not have big corporate sites. You'll have smaller locations to cut down on commuting for people and it'll probably slip the other way where a lot of **people will work 75% to 80% from home and only go into the office a bit each week.**”

Director at a U.S. healthcare company

“We will continue to leverage a global workforce, and tasks that are currently performed in the U.S. might be performed in another location. Tasks that are performed at another location might end up back in the U.S. **We will see more of a fluid workforce as we get more global and the technology enables people to work from anywhere.** We will see the jobs and the roles move to where those skillsets are, value-wise.”

CIO in the U.S. healthcare industry

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