

# THE Future of Time

A global study fielded by  
Adobe Document Cloud



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**2020 and 2021 have brought significant business changes to our relationship with work, the pace of business, and the very fabric of time.**

Companies of all sizes have dramatically altered how they work—from going fully remote during the pandemic to implementing a new hybrid approach. Small and medium businesses (SMBs) had to quickly digitize operations.

**63%**

Percent of high-growth companies that have already adopted a “productivity anywhere” workforce model

→ [April 2021 Accenture Future of Work study](#)

**\$656B**

Estimated spending on Future of Work technologies

→ [June 2021 IDC Worldwide Future of Work Spending Guide](#)

**60%**

Percent of global SMBs that have made at least one change to the way they do business since the start of the pandemic

→ [April 2021 FB Global State of Small-Business study](#)

# THE Future of Time

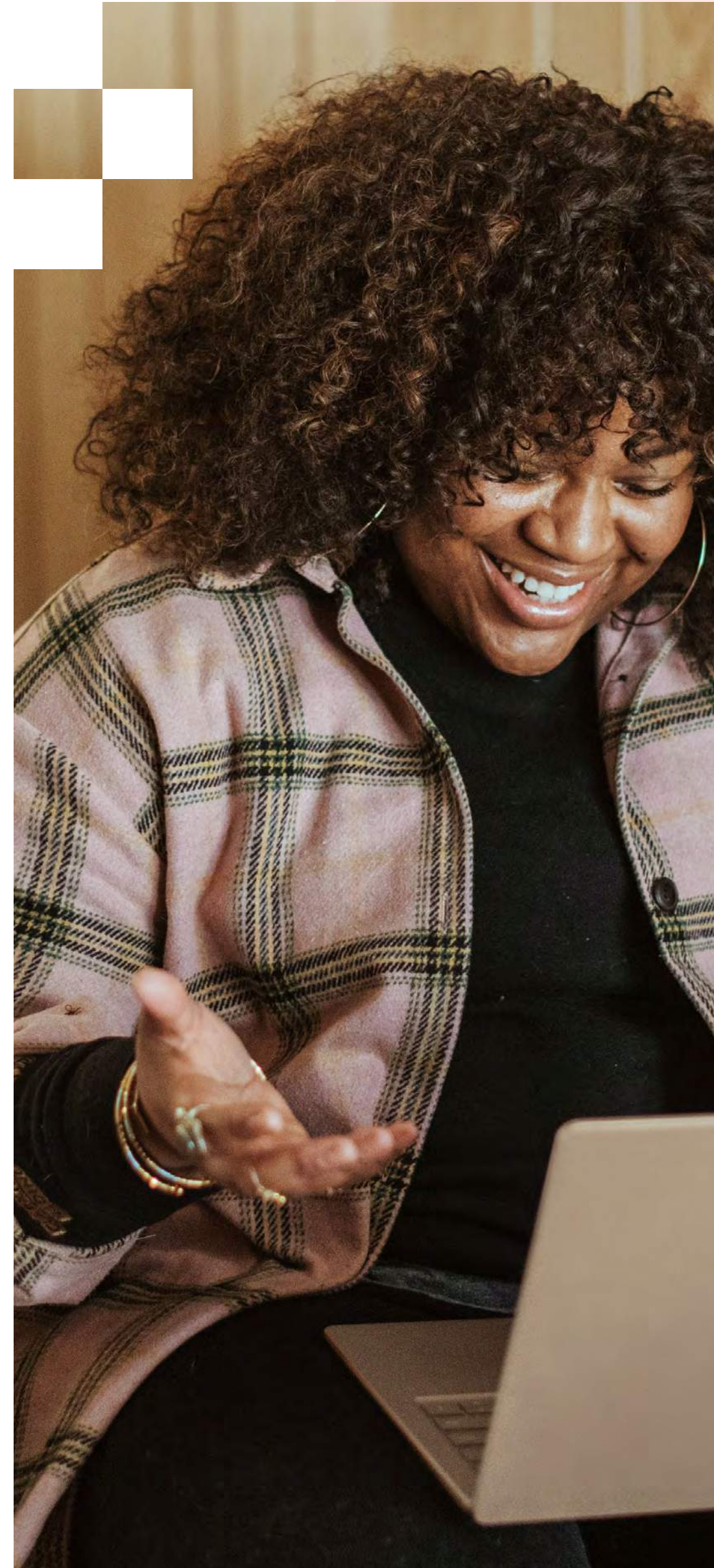
Adobe Document Cloud conducted a study to understand the **choices people make when managing their time**—speaking directly with those at the forefront of how work is changing.



**Enterprise workers**  
(at companies with 1,000+ employees)



**Small and medium business  
(SMB) leaders**



## Key areas of exploration

- Is feeling “stretched for time,” or that there’s not enough time to get work done, an increasing global phenomenon?
- How will the changing valuation of time impact society and business?
- What is causing these time pressures, and what can be done to achieve a more enjoyable, human-centric **future of time**?

# Survey methodology

Adobe Document Cloud conducted a 20-minute survey among enterprise workers and small and medium business leaders in seven global markets, fielded April 30–May 28, 2021.

## Audiences

**Enterprise workers**  
(n=400–500 per market)

**SMB leaders**  
(n=300 per market)

## Audience definitions

Those employed at enterprise-size companies (1,000+ employees).

Those employed at SMBs.

- **Micro businesses**  
(1–9 employees)
- **Small businesses**  
(10–99 employees)
- **Medium businesses**  
(100–999 employees)

## Markets

**US, UK, France, Germany, Australia, New Zealand, and Japan**

## Sample size

**N=5,500**  
(n=800 in the US, UK, FR, DE, JP and AU; n=700 in NZ)

## Method

**20-minute online survey**

**Fielded May 2021**  
(4/30–5/28)

# Executive summary



# Pandemic puts personal time at a premium.

Across small, medium, and enterprise-sized businesses, COVID-19 changed how we think about time—from putting in longer hours to feeling pressure to be “always on”—as work and home life blend together. Today, time is at a greater premium than ever.

- One in two enterprise workers and SMB leaders work longer hours than they would like—and among them, nearly half say they work more now than they did before COVID-19.
- Instead of the traditional 9-to-5, the average workweek has crept up to 45 hours.
- Nearly half of enterprise workers and 3 in 5 SMB leaders feel pressured to be reachable around the clock—even more so among Gen Z workers.
- SMB leaders are dealing with the additional pressure of trying to keep their businesses afloat, and those at minority-owned, women-owned, or essential SMBs feel this most acutely.
- Two out of three SMB leaders say that now more than ever, every minute counts for their business, and the majority of both audiences admit that they feel constantly stretched for time at work.

# Time pressures exacerbate employee burnout.

Employees hold their company responsible for these pressures, and they are willing to switch jobs for better work-life balance and control over their schedules. Employers need to address these challenges or risk losing top talent.

- Three in five enterprise workers who work longer hours than they would like blame their company—its work culture, administrative processes or tasks, and growth strategy.
- Employees crave more flexibility in their schedule, and younger generations feel especially pressured to be working during “office hours,” even when it’s not when they feel the most productive.
- More than a third of the workforce—and half of Gen Z workers—plan to switch jobs in the next year, especially employees struggling with time and productivity pressures.
- At least half of enterprise workers would switch jobs for more work-life balance, to be more in control of their schedules, or to be able to work remotely—especially Gen Z and millennial workers.
- SMB leaders are also feeling the impact—1 out of 3 have struggled with employee burnout or attrition this past year, and 2 in 3 have made changes to better retain and recruit employees.



# Calling for technology to get their personal lives back.

Most enterprise workers and SMB leaders spend too much time on tasks that get in the way of doing their jobs effectively, and they are hungry for technology to unlock new choices for how they use their time to work, learn, and play.

- A third of the workweek is currently being spent on unimportant tasks.
- Nine out of 10 employees and SMBs are interested in tools to help them tackle the tasks that get in the way of doing their jobs more efficiently—including managing files, forms, contracts, payments, and invoices.
- One in two enterprise workers would switch jobs if it gave them access to better tools that made them more effective at work.
- If they had more time for work, enterprise workers would pursue passions and personal growth (53%), while SMB leaders would focus on business growth (57%).
- Outside of work, 2 out of 3 employees and 1 out of 2 SMB leaders would spend extra time on themselves—their hobbies and health—followed by family and social time.

# Detailed findings





**Pandemic  
puts  
personal  
time at a  
premium.**

# Since the start of the pandemic, long work weeks have become even more embedded in business culture.

“I work longer hours than I would like.”

% agree (T2B)



**49%**

Enterprise workers

**56%**

SMB leaders

Of those who work longer hours than they would like,

**56%** of Enterprise workers **65%** of SMB leaders

say they now work more than before COVID-19

So much for “9–5.”

Today, people average

**44.9** Enterprise workers **45.1** SMB leaders

hour workweeks

Especially in Japan and Germany...

JP | **48.6 Enterprise workers**  
46.2 SMB leaders  
DE | **45.5 Enterprise workers**  
46.5 SMB leaders



	US	UK	AU	NZ	FR	DE	JP
Enterprise workers	45%	51%	56%	51%	47%	51%	44%
SMB leaders	52%	63%	62%	58%	60%	58%	41%

Q8: This next question is about your own personal experience working. How much do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?

Q1. On an average weekday, approximately how many hours do you spend doing each of the following activities?

Q2. On an average weekend day, approximately how many hours do you spend doing each of the following activities?

N=3,404 Global ENT, N=2,102 Global SMB, N=1,676 ENT working longer hours, N=1,183 SMB working longer hours

\*Sample sizes vary by country

# Pressure to be “always on” as work and home life blend together has significantly eroded mental health.

“I feel pressure to be reachable at all times of the day, even early morning or evening.”

% agree (T2B)



**48%**

Enterprise workers

**61%**

SMB leaders



	US	UK	AU	NZ	FR	DE	JP
Enterprise workers	44%	47%	52%	48%	45%	42%	56%
SMB leaders	58%	67%	65%	60%	75%	54%	49%

“It is difficult to set work and personal life boundaries.”

% agree (T2B)



**45%**

Enterprise workers

**58%**

SMB leaders



	US	UK	AU	NZ	FR	DE	JP
Enterprise workers	41%	49%	53%	48%	44%	34%	44%
SMB leaders	46%	64%	60%	61%	65%	51%	55%

Q8: This next question is about your own personal experience working. How much do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?  
N=3,404 Global ENT, N=2,102 Global SMB

\*Sample sizes vary by country

# Many SMBs have experienced decreasing revenues this past year, adding another layer of pressure to leaders trying to keep their business afloat.



**41%**

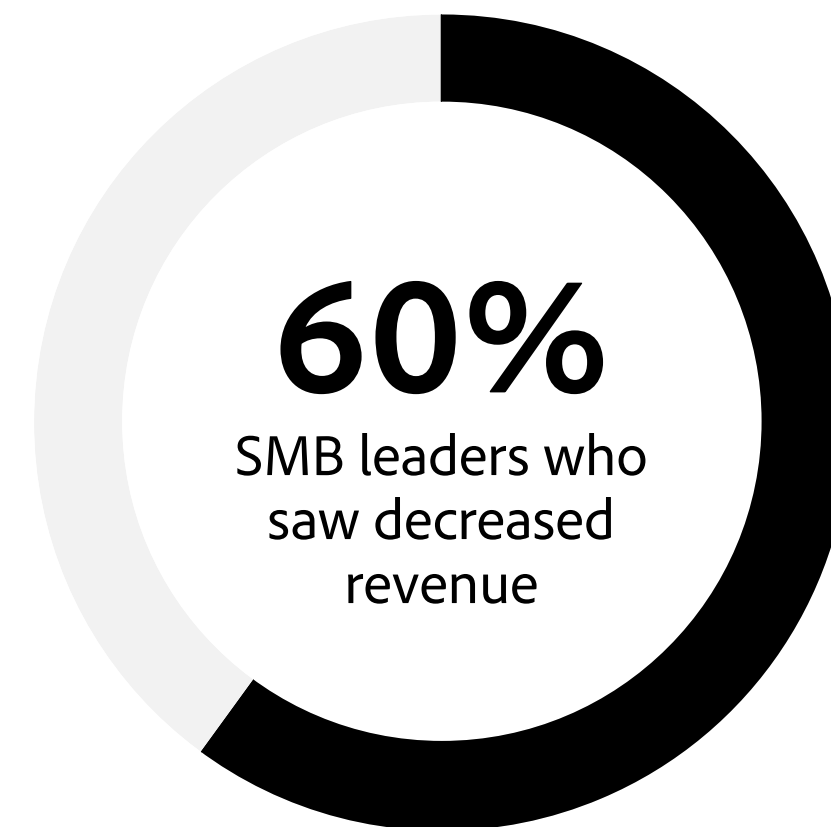
of SMB leaders report seeing **decreased revenues** in the past year

**Especially**

- SMBs in the food & beverage, hospitality, or retail industries **(52%)**
- Microbusinesses **(50%)**
- SMBs who provide goods, not services **(46%)**
- SMBs with brick-and-mortar locations **(40%)**

**“Trying to keep my business afloat has brought a lot of stress into my personal life.”**

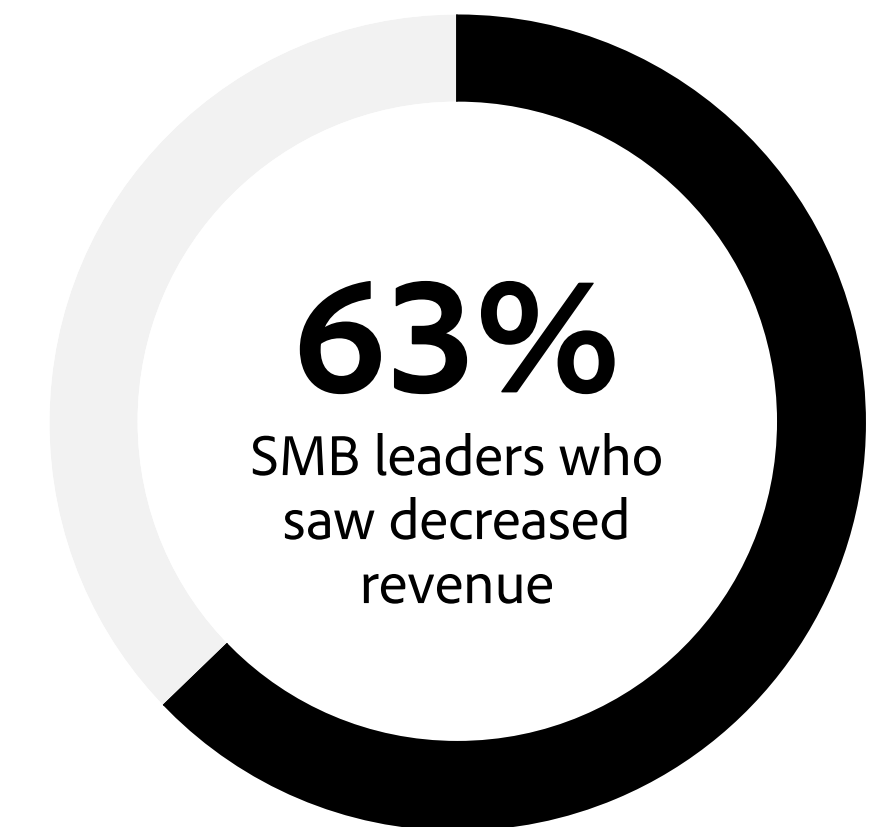
% agree (T2B)



Among SMB leaders seeing decreased revenue

**“I am willing to work around the clock if it means keeping my business afloat.”**

% agree (T2B)



Among SMB leaders seeing decreased revenue

**D5:** Thinking about your business's performance over the past year, how would you describe your company's revenue flow?  
**Q8.** This next question is about your own personal experience working. How much do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?  
**Q10.** Which of the following best describe the workplace trends that you've seen in your own company in the last year?  
 N=2,102 Global SMB, N=859 SMB with decreased revenue

\*Sample sizes vary by country



**SMB leader,  
New Zealand**



**Working from home is 'flexible' but it means no blocked hours for work.**

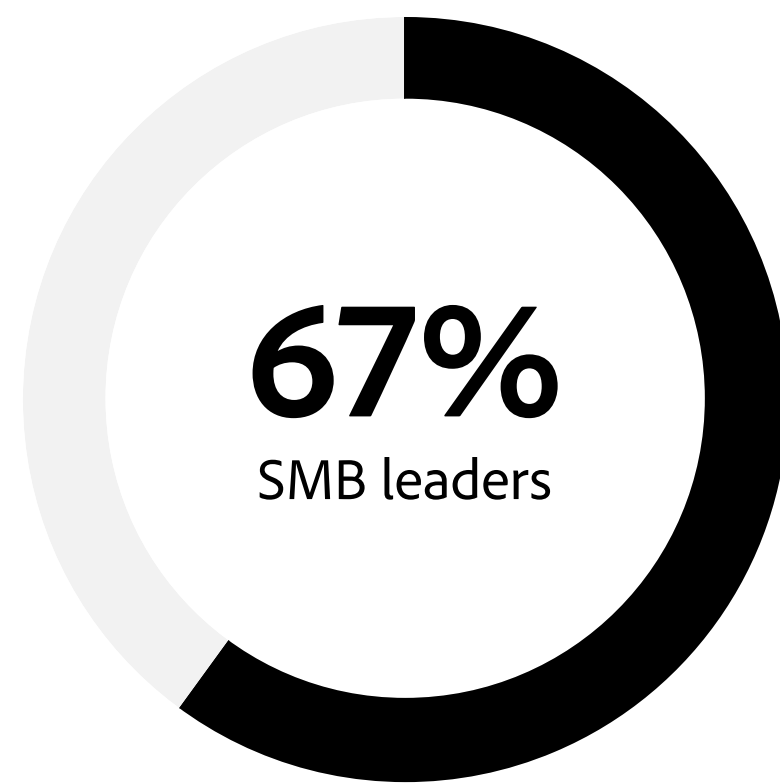
**As a mum, I do hundreds of small blocks of work instead of protected regular office hours. This goes into evenings and weekends, too.**

**I feel like my work hour never ends, but customers really appreciate quick responses, even on weekends."**

# These stresses have put time at a greater premium than ever before—making people feel constantly stretched for time at work.

“Now, more than ever, every minute counts for my business.”

% agree (T2B)



	US	UK	AU	NZ	FR	DE	JP
	67%	68%	72%	74%	68%	53%	66%

“I constantly feel stretched for time at work.”

% agree (T2B)



53%

Enterprise workers

57%

SMB leaders



	US	UK	AU	NZ	FR	DE	JP
Enterprise workers	45%	57%	61%	61%	52%	47%	46%
SMB leaders	53%	60%	63%	63%	68%	52%	40%

Q8: This next question is about your own personal experience working. How much do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?

Q13: How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements? Q10. Which of the following best describe the workplace trends that you've seen in your own company in the last year?

N=3,404 Global ENT, N=2,102 Global SMB

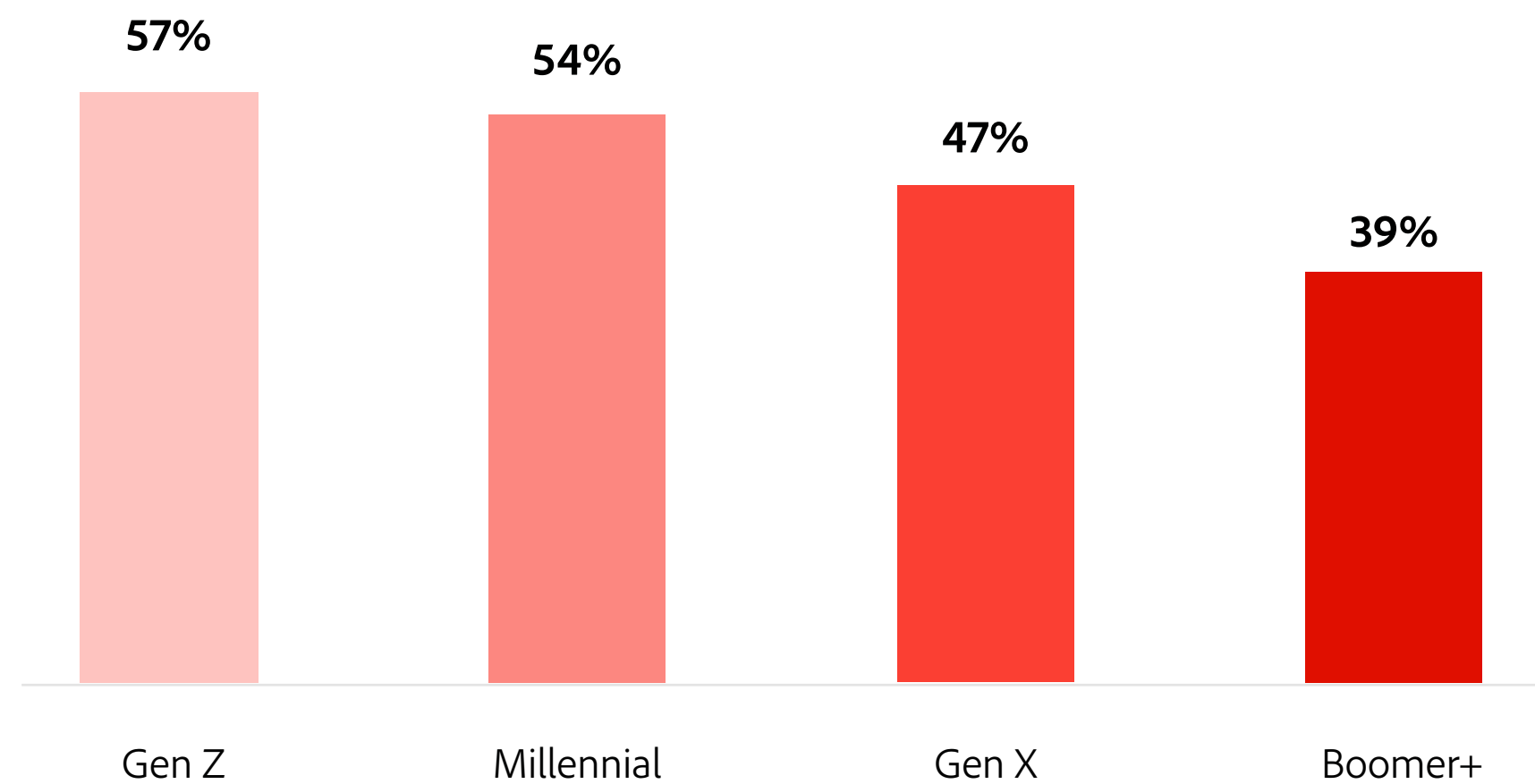
\*Sample sizes vary by country



# Younger generations of enterprise workers and minority-owned, women-owned, and essential SMB leaders struggle most with these pressures.

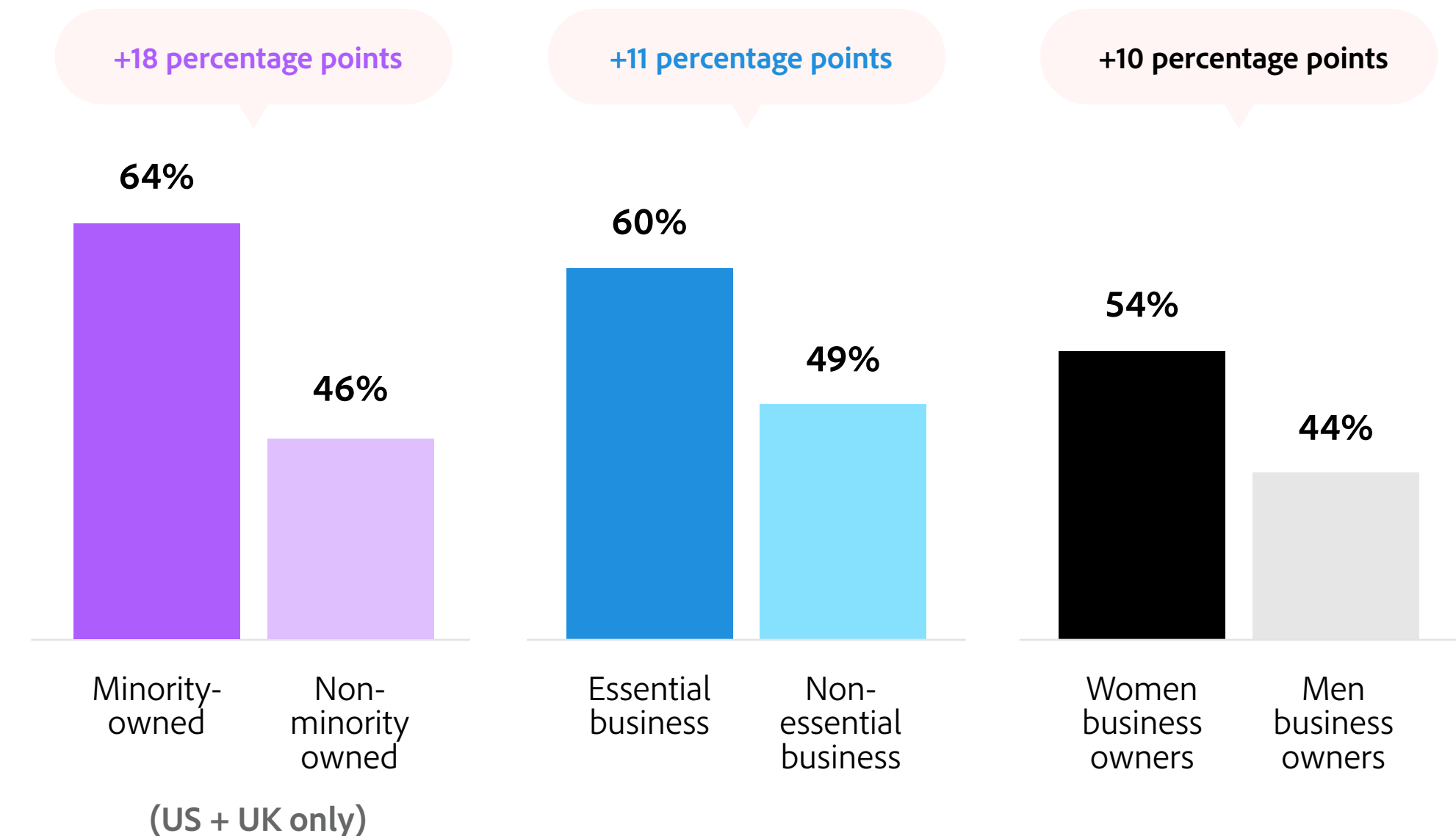
**“I feel pressure to be reachable at all times of the day, even early morning or evening.”**

% agree (T2B) among enterprise workers



**“Trying to keep my business afloat has brought a lot of stress into my personal life.”**

% agree (T2B) among SMB leaders



Q8: This next question is about your own personal experience working. How much do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?

N=3,404 Global ENT; N=143 Gen Z ENT, N=1,058 Millennial ENT, N=1,425 Gen X ENT, N=779 Boomer+ ENT, N=181 Minority-owned SMB; N=419 Non-minority-owned SMB; N=956 Essential Businesses; N=1146 Nonessential Businesses, Women SMB owner N=171 Men SMB owner N=308

\*Sample sizes vary by country



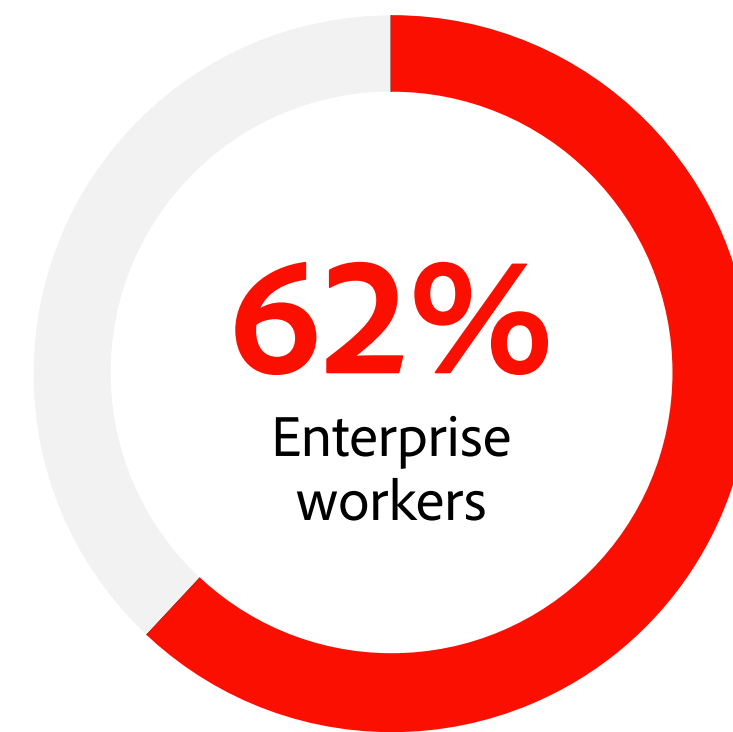
**Time  
pressures  
exacerbate  
employee  
burnout.**


**Employees working longer hours than they would like blame their company—its work culture, administrative processes or tasks and growth plan.**

### Feel Their Company is Responsible for Their Long Workdays

% selected any response related to company

Among those who work longer hours than they would like



	US	UK	AU	NZ	FR	DE	JP
	59%	66%	68%	67%	63%	55%	59%

**39%**

blame work culture at their company

**36%**

blame administrative processes or tasks

**17%**

blame their company's growth plan or strategic vision

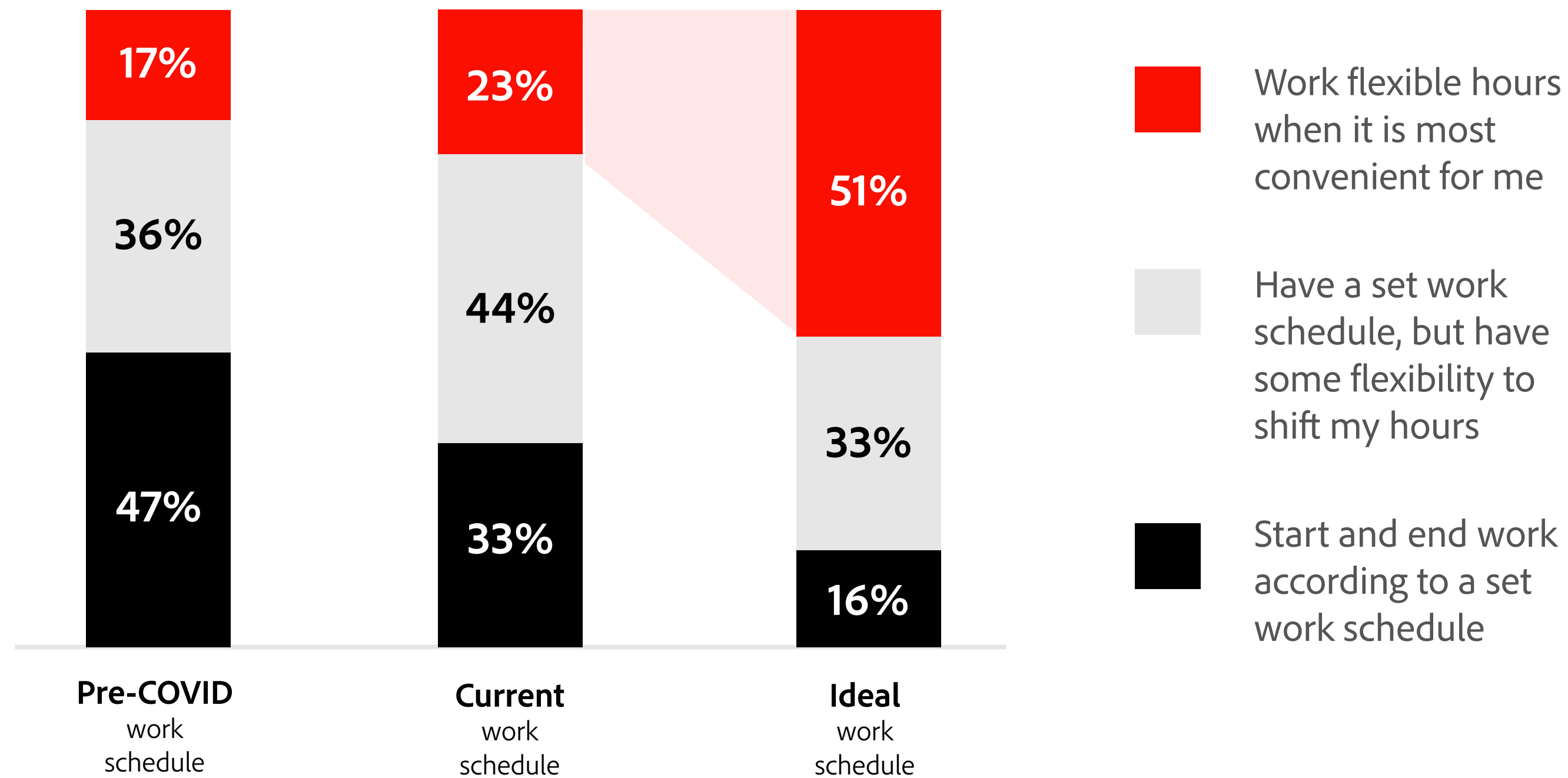
Q9: Thinking about your current working hours, who or what do you feel is responsible for your long workdays? Asked among those working longer hours than they would like (Q8)  
N=3,404 Global ENT, N=1,676 ENT working longer hours than they would like

\*Sample sizes vary by country

# They feel work schedules are also part of the problem—by not providing the flexibility to get work done when it is most convenient.

## Desire for More Flexible Work Hours

% selected describes my [pre-COVID/current/ideal] work schedule



	Currently work flexible hours	Ideally work flexible hours
US	19%	47%
UK	22%	53%
AU	23%	53%
NZ	17%	53%
FR	25%	49%
DE	39%	56%
JP	12%	48%

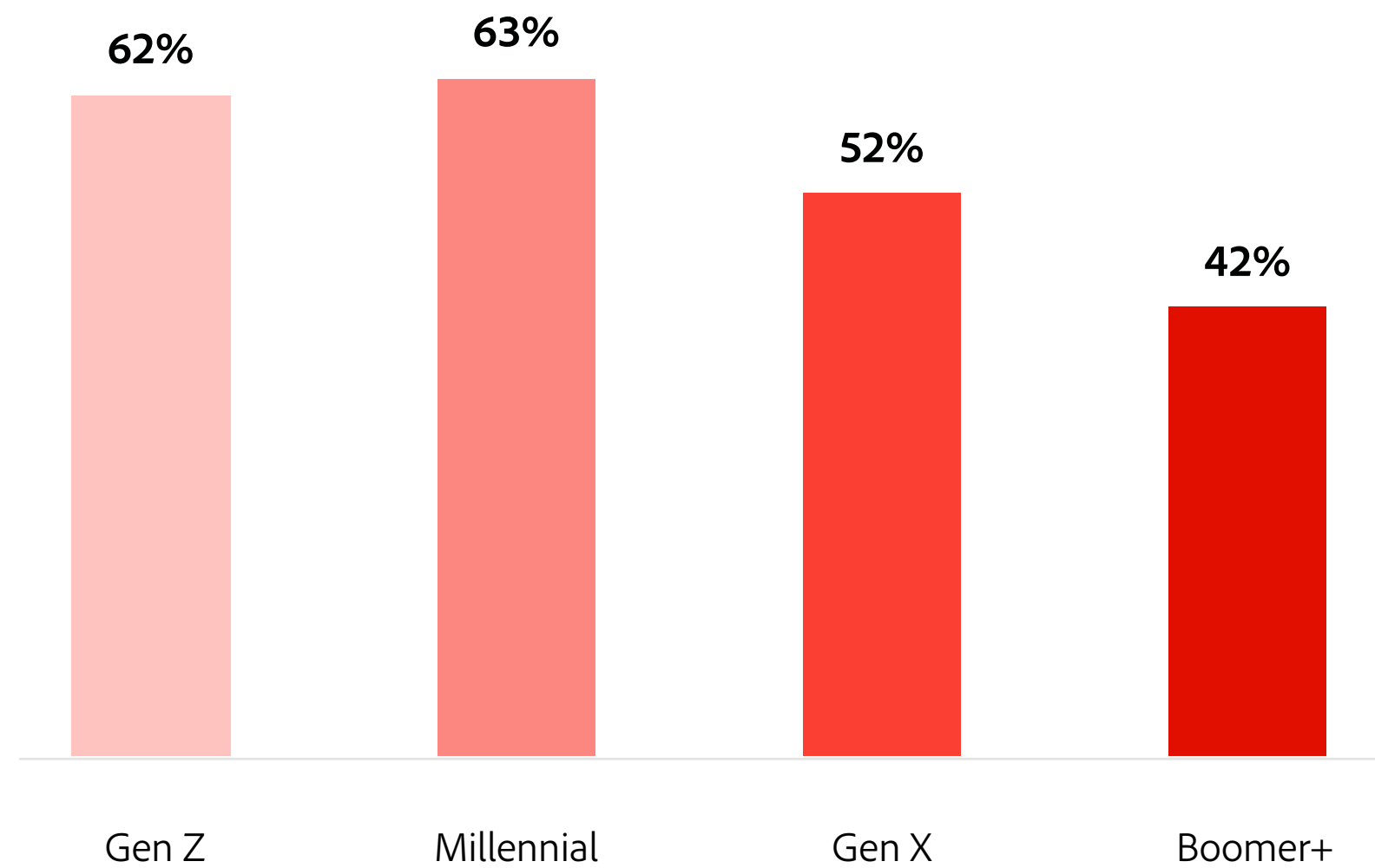
Q9: Which of the following best describes your work schedule? Please specify your work schedule before COVID-19, currently, and your ideal work schedule. N=3,404 Global ENT

\*Sample sizes vary by country

# Younger generations feel especially pressured to be working during “office hours”—but that’s not always when they feel most productive.

“I feel pressure to appear working during office hours, even when I know I won’t be productive.”

% agree (T2B)



## Most Productive Working Hours

% selected

	Gen Z	Millennial	Gen X	Boomer
<b>Early hours</b> (3am–9am)	27%	32%	36%	39%
<b>Office hours</b> (9am–6pm)	62%	74%	76%	74%
<b>Late hours</b> (6pm–3am)	26%	18%	13%	6%

Q8: This next question is about your own personal experience working. How much do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?

Q7: Thinking about a typical workday before COVID-19 and currently, what hours do you work and when are you most productive? If you have an irregular work schedule, simply select “My schedule varies”

N=3,404 Global ENT; N=143 Gen Z ENT, N=1,058 Millennial ENT, N=1,425 Gen X ENT, N=779 Boomer+ ENT

\*Sample sizes vary by country



# Enterprise worker, Australia



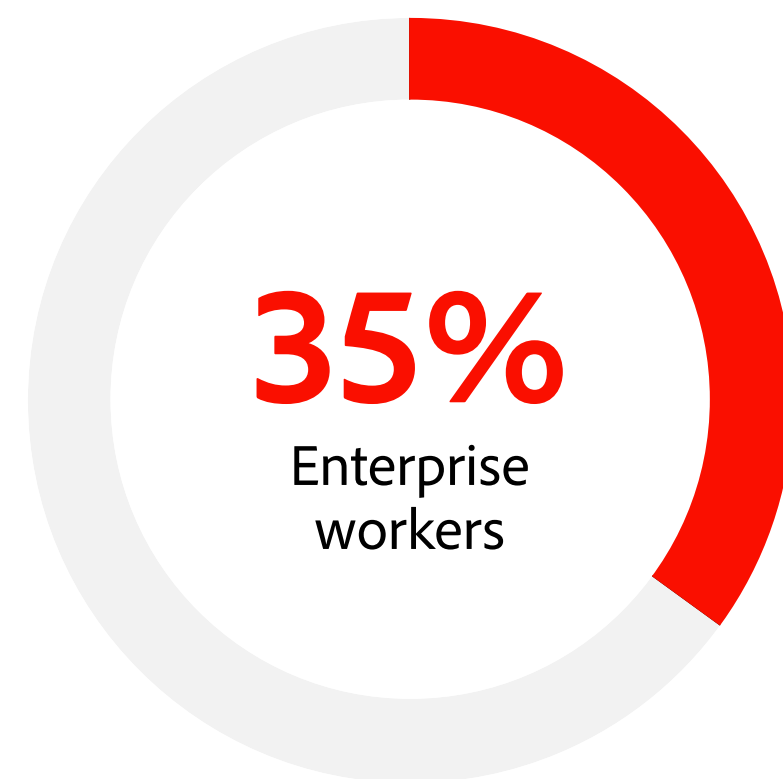
**[Flexibility means] a culture that supports employees to complete their work while still having the freedom and flexibility to meet other family/ life priorities or commitments.**

**Recognition that work doesn't have to be completed in typical office hours, but without the expectation that an employee is contactable 24/7."**

# Employee dissatisfaction presents a serious risk to business—more than a third of the workforce plans to switch jobs in the next year.

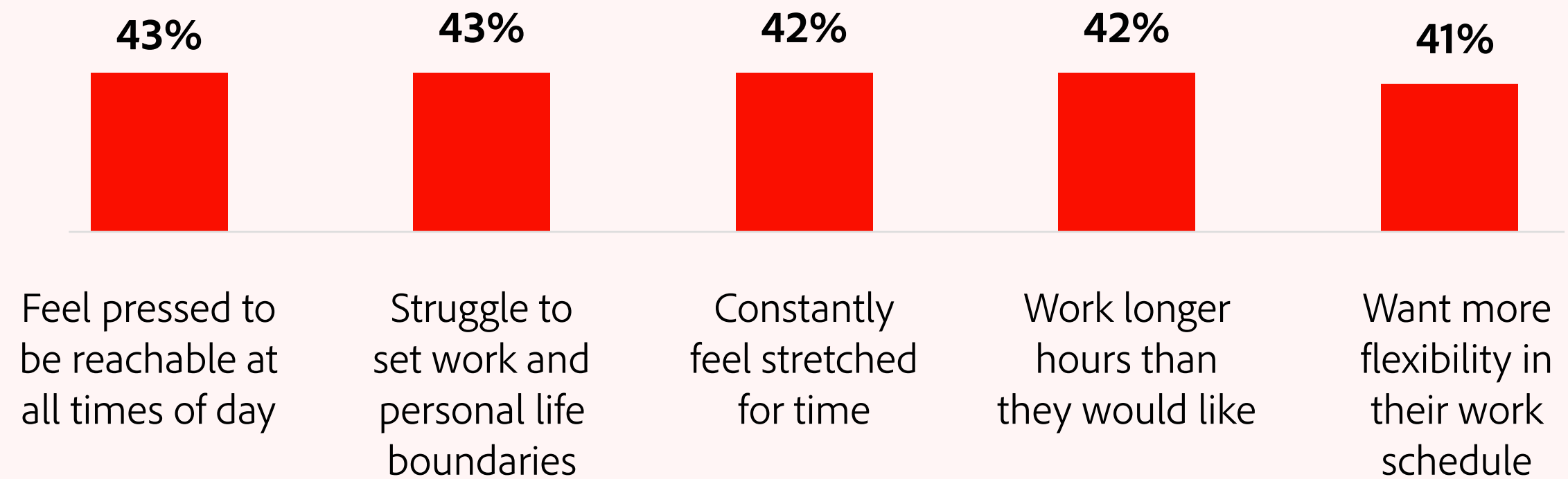
## Likelihood to Switch Jobs

% likely in the next year (T4B)



US	UK	AU	NZ	FR	DE	JP
29%	34%	44%	46%	28%	25%	39%

## The likelihood to switch jobs is even higher among employees struggling with time and productivity.



D18: How likely are you to pursue a new job in the next year?

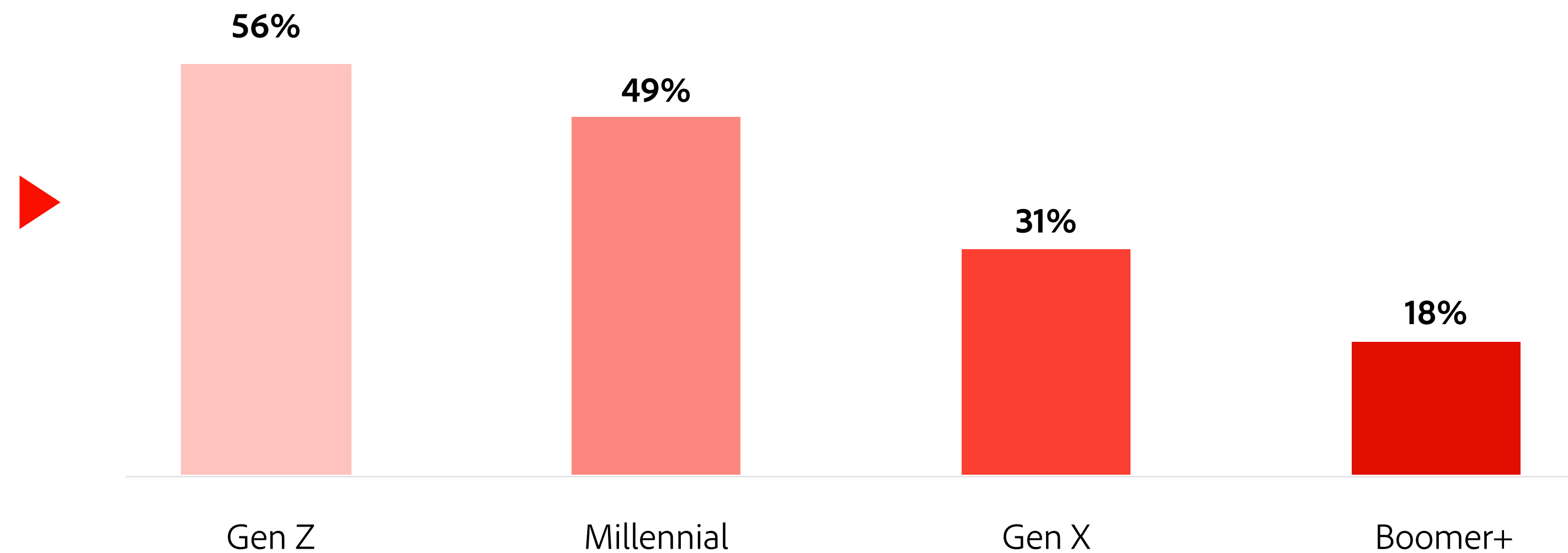
N=3,404 Global ENT; N=1,617 Feel pressured to be reachable ENT; N=1,525 Struggle to set boundaries ENT; N=1,796 Stretched for time ENT; N=1,676 Work longer hours ENT; N=1,305 Want more flexibility ENT

\*Sample sizes vary by country

# In fact, more than half of Gen Z workers plan to pursue a new job in the next year, driving “The Great Resignation.”

## Likelihood to Switch Jobs

% likely in the next year (T4B)



By 2025, Gen Z will make up about

**27%**

of the global workforce\*.

\*According to the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) Employment Outlook 2021

D18: How likely are you to pursue a new job in the next year?  
 N=3,404 Global ENT; N=143 Gen Z ENT, N=1,058 Millennial ENT, N=1,425 Gen X ENT, N=779 Boomer+ ENT

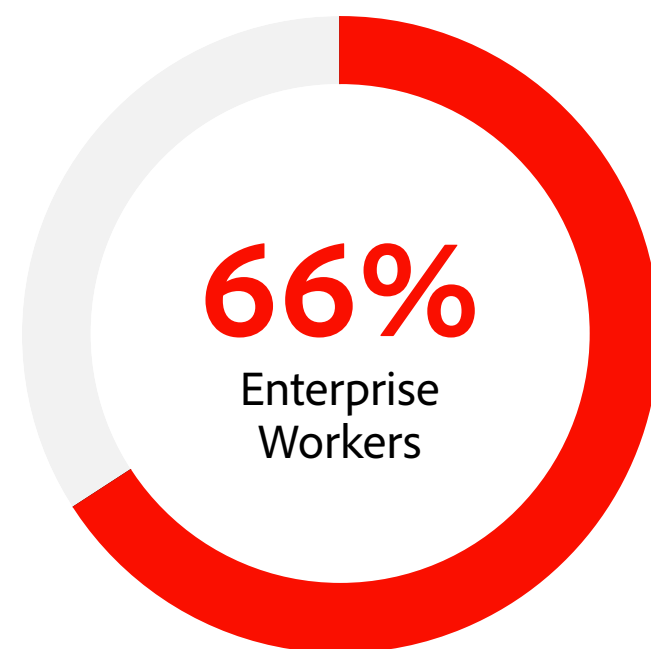
\*Sample sizes vary by country



# Employee dissatisfaction presents a serious risk to business—more than a third of the workforce plans to switch jobs in the next year.

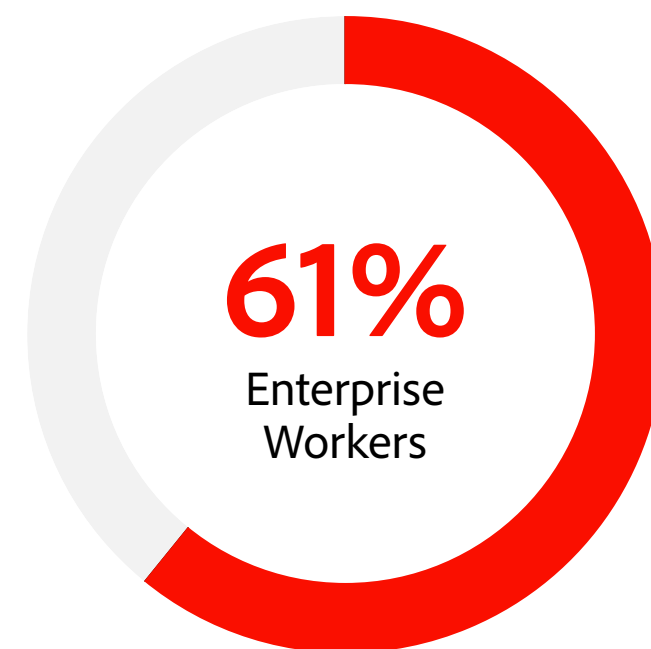
Assuming Salary and Job Description Remain the Same, I Would Switch Jobs for...  
% likely (T2B)

## Better work-life balance



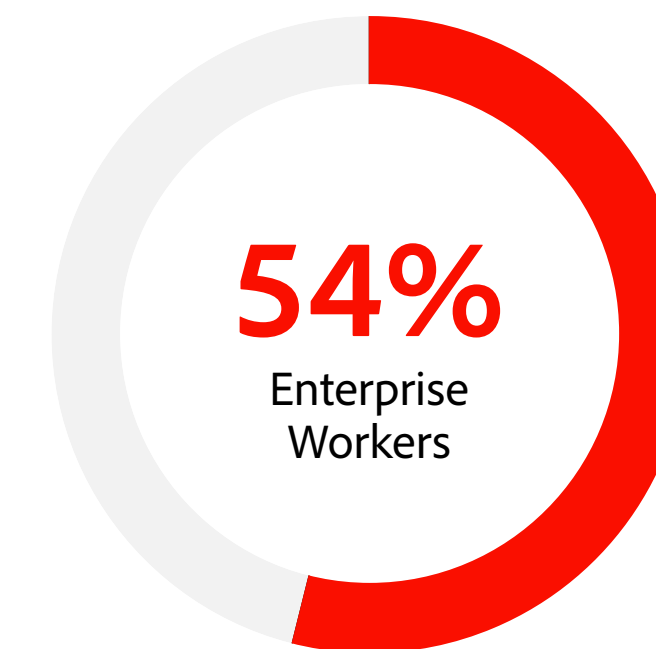
	US	UK	AU	NZ	FR	DE	JP
	64%	74%	74%	72%	51%	66%	65%

## More control over my work schedule



	US	UK	AU	NZ	FR	DE	JP
	60%	67%	69%	63%	49%	56%	60%

## The option to work remotely



	US	UK	AU	NZ	FR	DE	JP
	58%	57%	59%	57%	43%	51%	52%

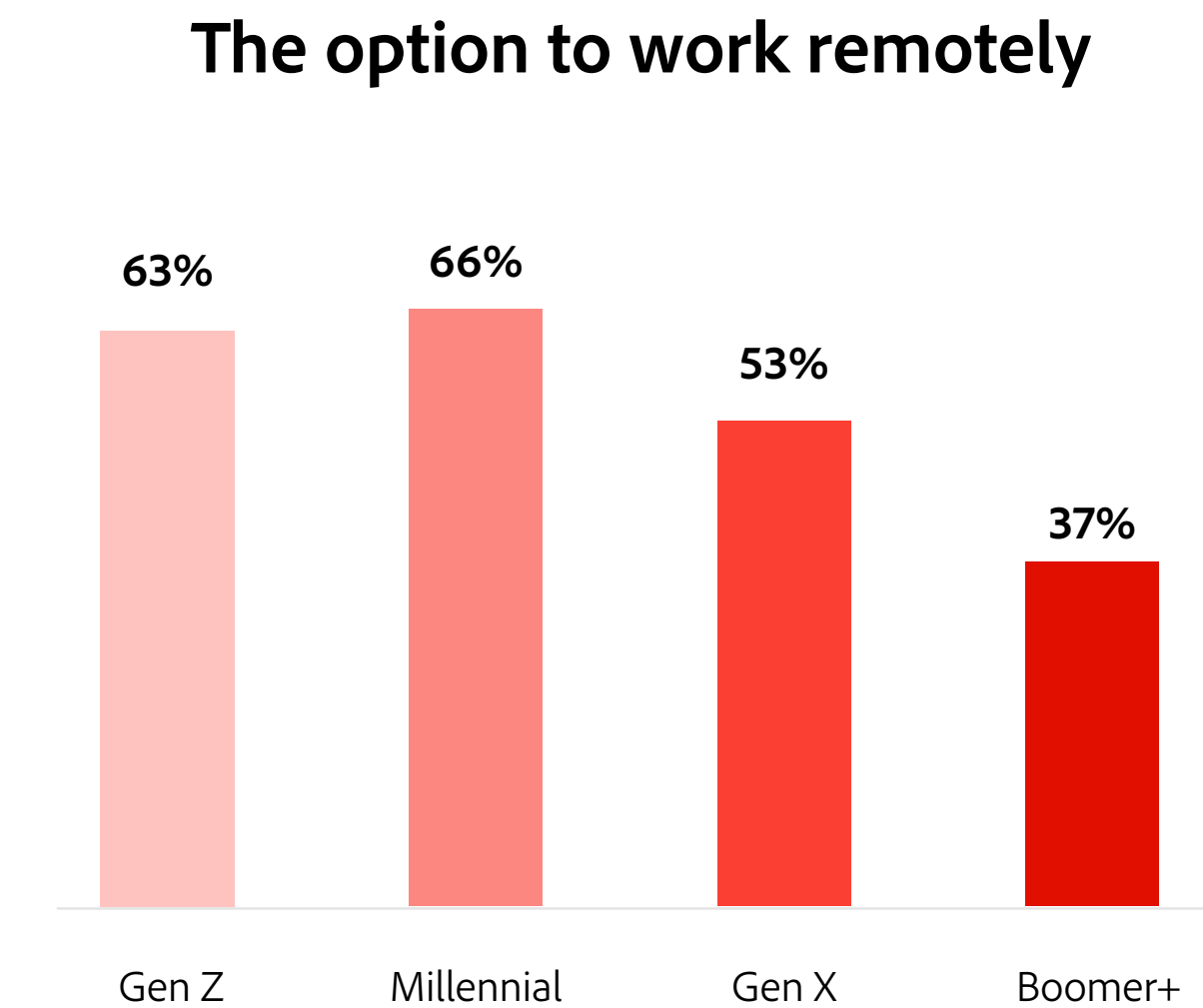
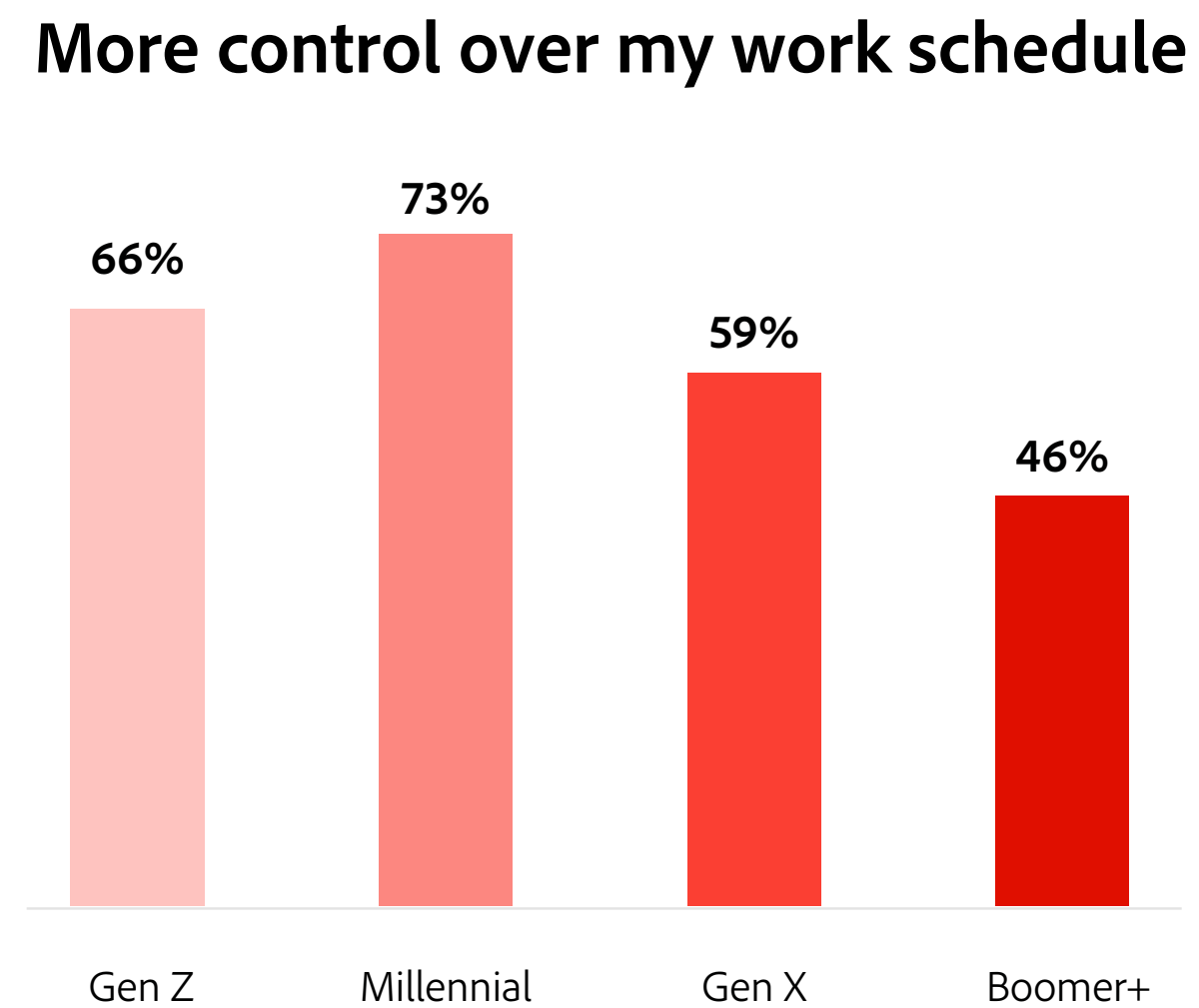
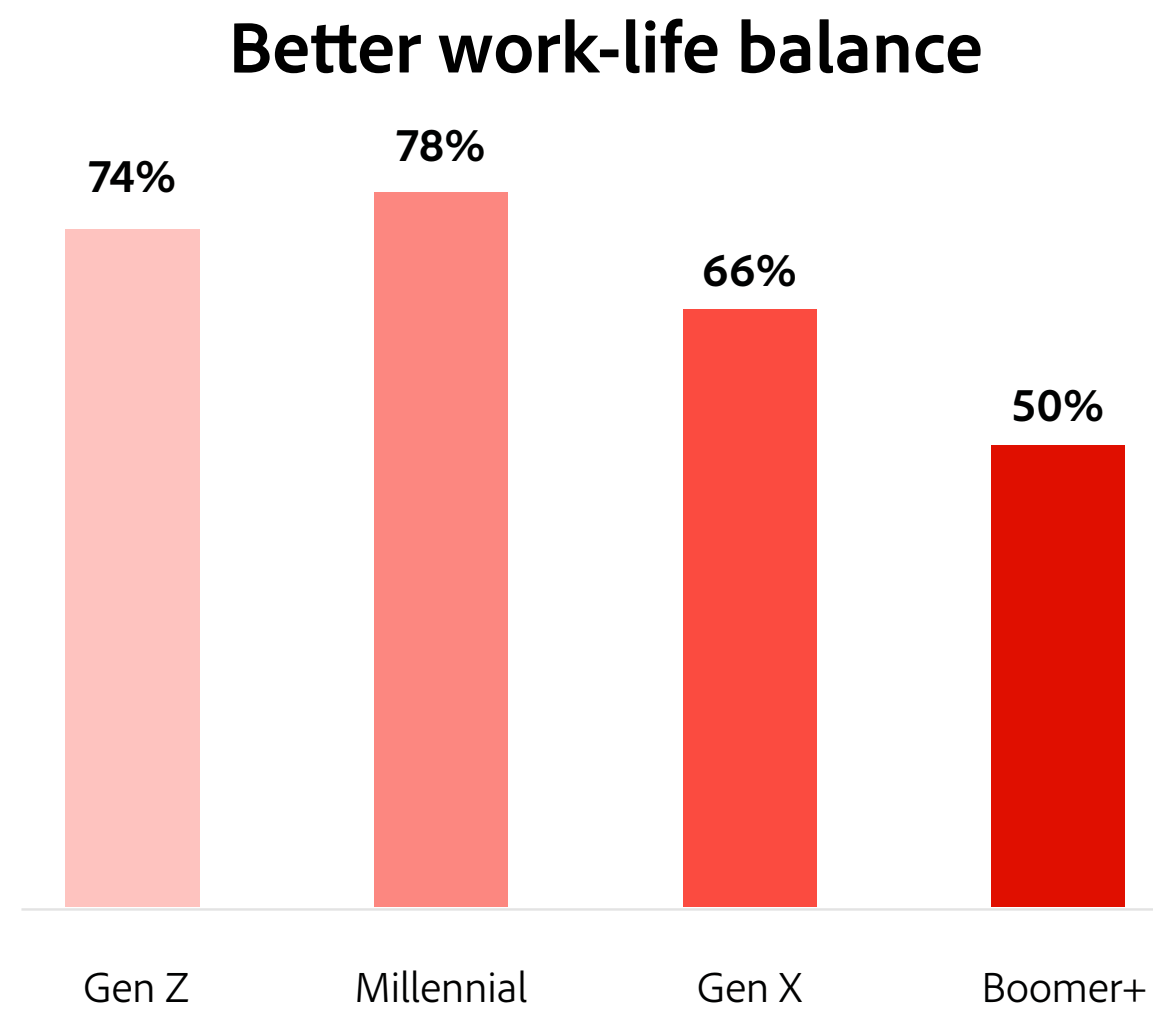
Q34: Assuming other factors like salary and job description remain the same, how likely would you be to switch jobs for...  
N=3,404 Global ENT

\*Sample sizes vary by country

# And this is especially true among Gen Z and millennial workers.

## Assuming Salary and Job Description Remain the Same, I Would Switch Jobs for...

% Likely (T2B)



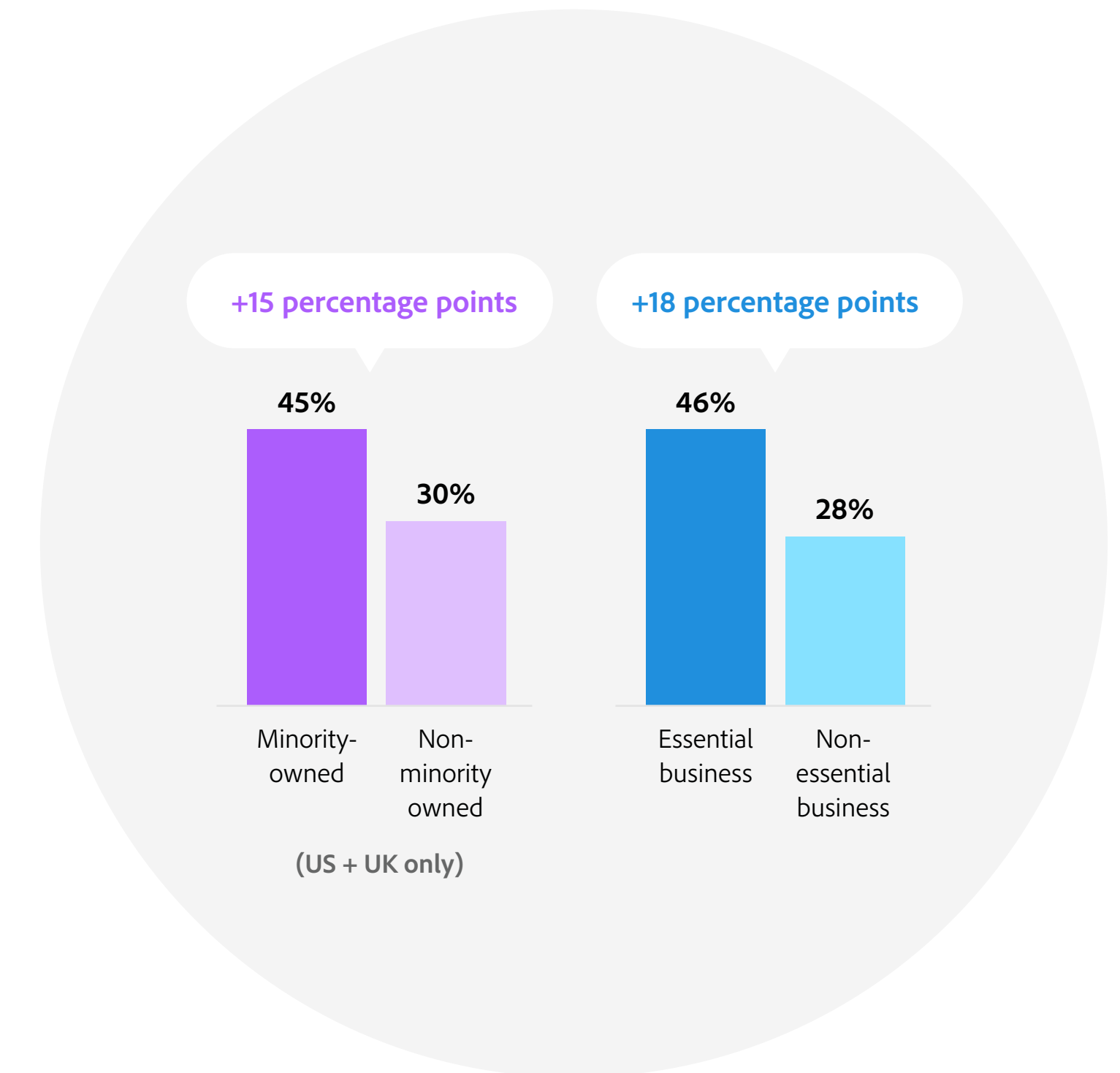
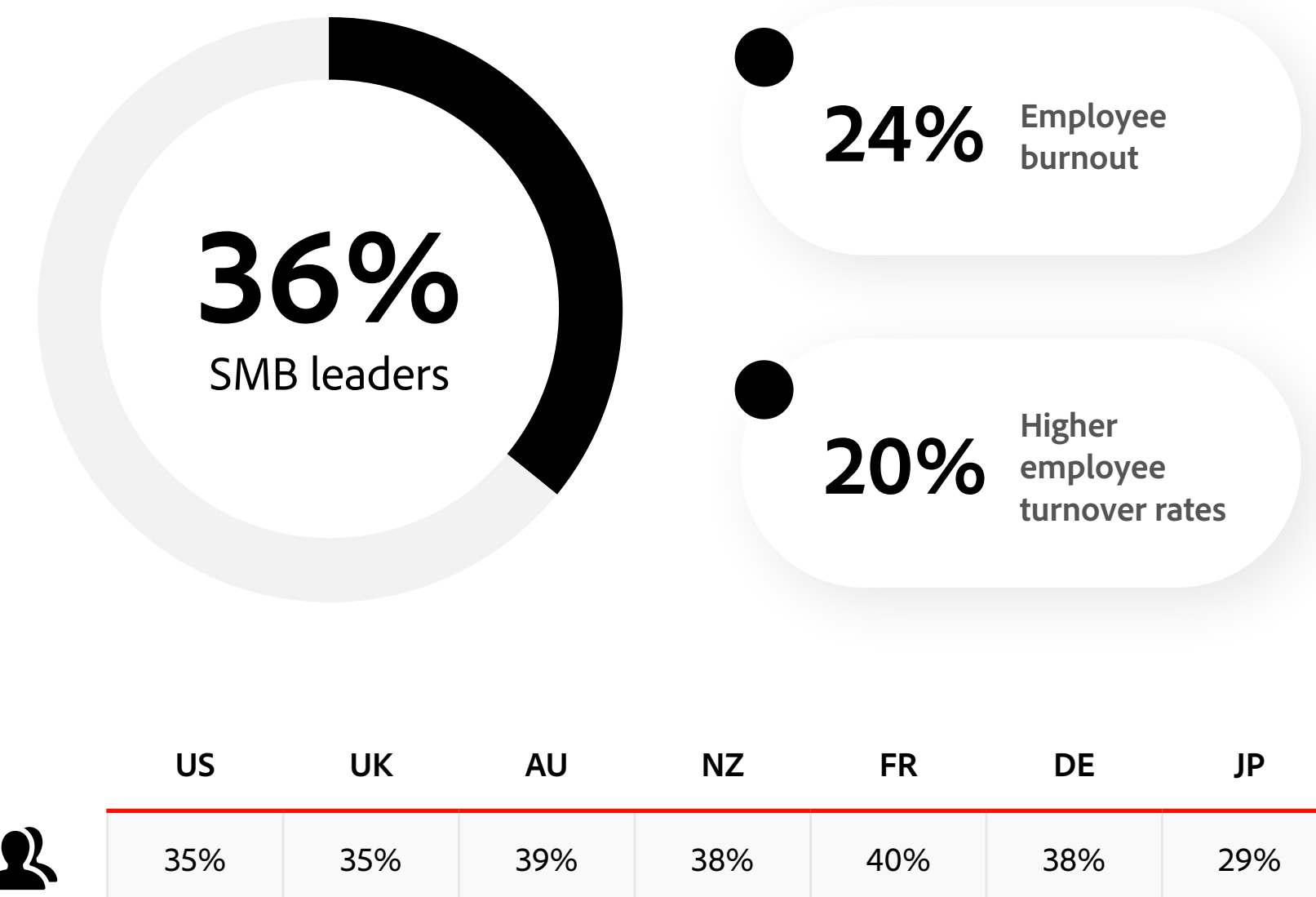
Q34: Assuming other factors like salary and job description remain the same, how likely would you be to switch jobs for...  
 N=3,404 Global ENT; N=143 Gen Z ENT, N=1,058 Millennial ENT, N=1,425 Gen X ENT, N=779 Boomer+ ENT

\*Sample sizes vary by country

**More than 1 in 3 SMB leaders have already noticed employee burnout or attrition in the past year—especially those at minority-owned or essential SMBs.**

## Have Struggled with Employee Burnout or Attrition in the Last Year

% selected employee burnout or high turnover



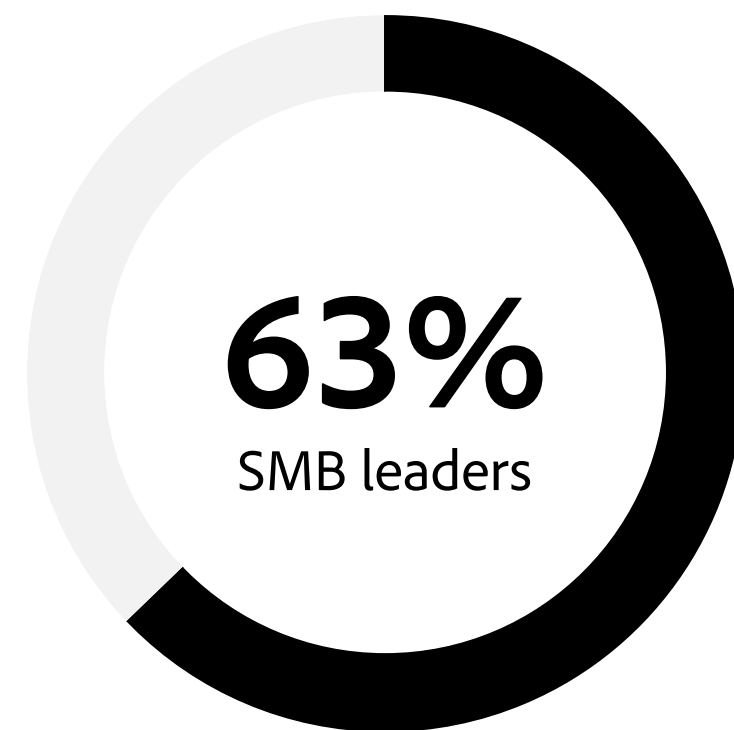
Q10: Which of the following best describe the workplace trends that you've seen in your own company in the last year?  
 N=2,102 Global SMB; N=181 Minority-owned SMBs; N=419 Non-minority-owned SMBs; N=956 Essential Businesses; N=1146 Non-essential Businesses


\*Sample sizes vary by country

**Most SMB leaders have already had to make changes to recruit and retain employees—like adopting flexible working hours.**

### Made Changes to Recruit and Retain Employees in the Pandemic

% selected any response



	US	UK	AU	NZ	FR	DE	JP
	58%	61%	64%	65%	73%	57%	65%

**40%** Adopt flexible working hours

**25%** Provide additional benefits

**16%** Hire nationwide for remote work

**15%** Provide remote work equipment

**13%** Launch initiatives for mental health

**12%** Adopt new tech to aid HR processes

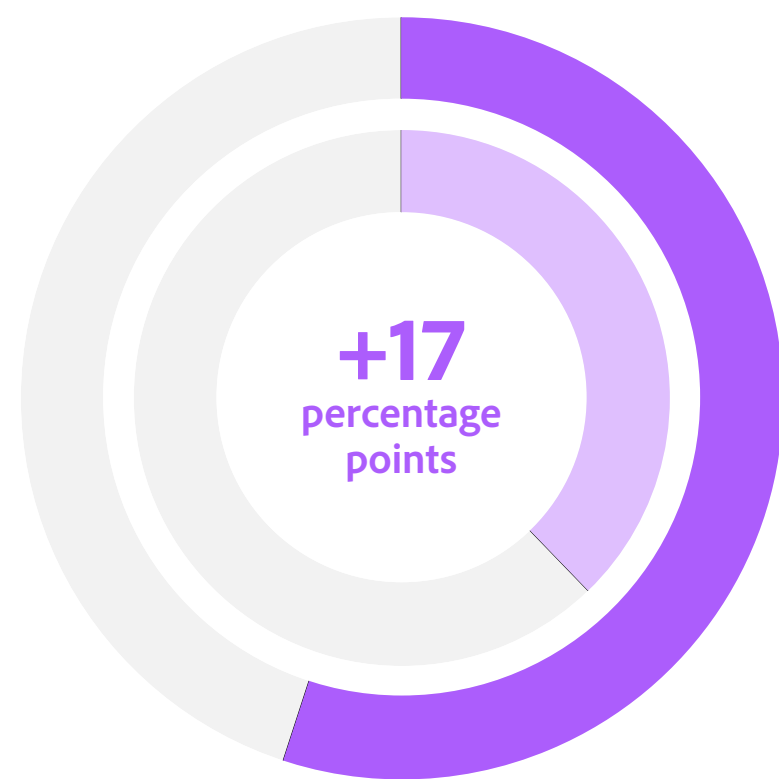
Q11: What changes, if any, have you had to make to your business to recruit and retain employees in the pandemic?  
N=2,102 Global SMB

\*Sample sizes vary by country

# And SMB leaders themselves are also feeling the impacts on their own morale—especially those at minority-owned and essential SMBs.

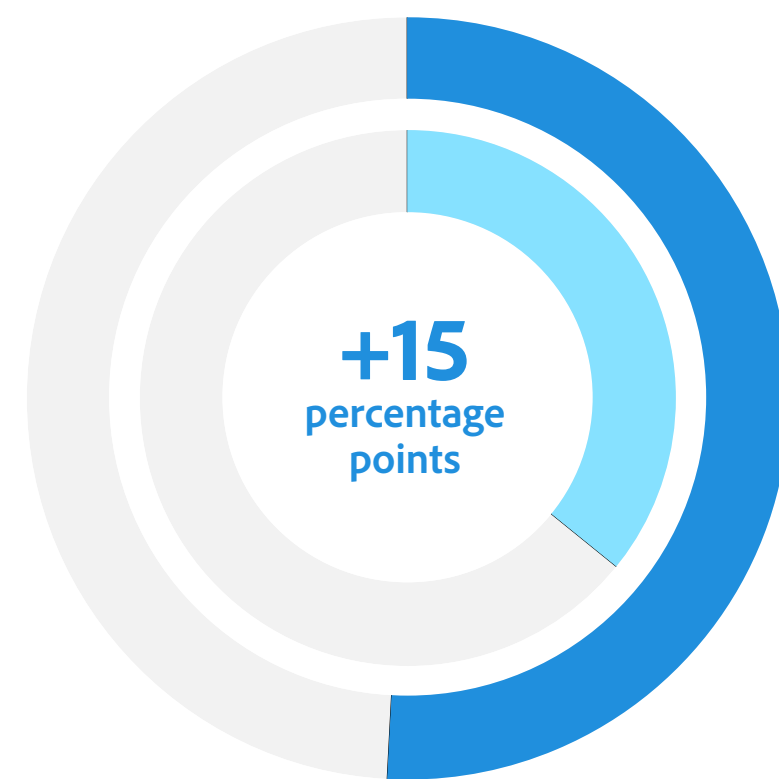
“I no longer feel connected to the passions that led me to start my business or job in the first place.”

% agree (T2B)



**55%**  
Minority-owned

**38%**  
Non-minority-owned

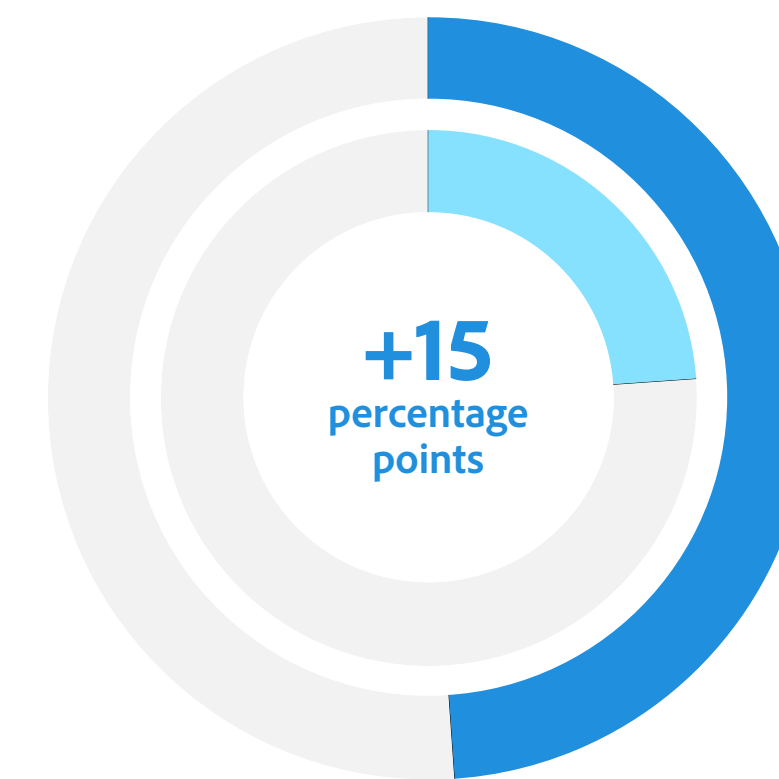


**51%**  
Essential business

**36%**  
Non-essential business

“I would sell my business tomorrow if I could because it no longer brings me joy.”

% agree (T2B)



**49%**  
Essential business

**24%**  
Non-essential business

Q37: How much do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?  
N=181 Minority-owned SMB; N=419 Non-minority-owned SMB; N=956 Essential Businesses; N=1146 Non-essential Businesses, Essential business owner N=166, Non-essential business owner N=414

\*Sample sizes vary by country



**Calling for  
technology  
to get their  
personal  
lives back.**

# Enterprise workers and SMB leaders spend too much time on tasks that get in the way of doing their job effectively.

## Percent of Their Work Week Spent on Unimportant Tasks

% agree (T2B)



**32%**  
Enterprise workers

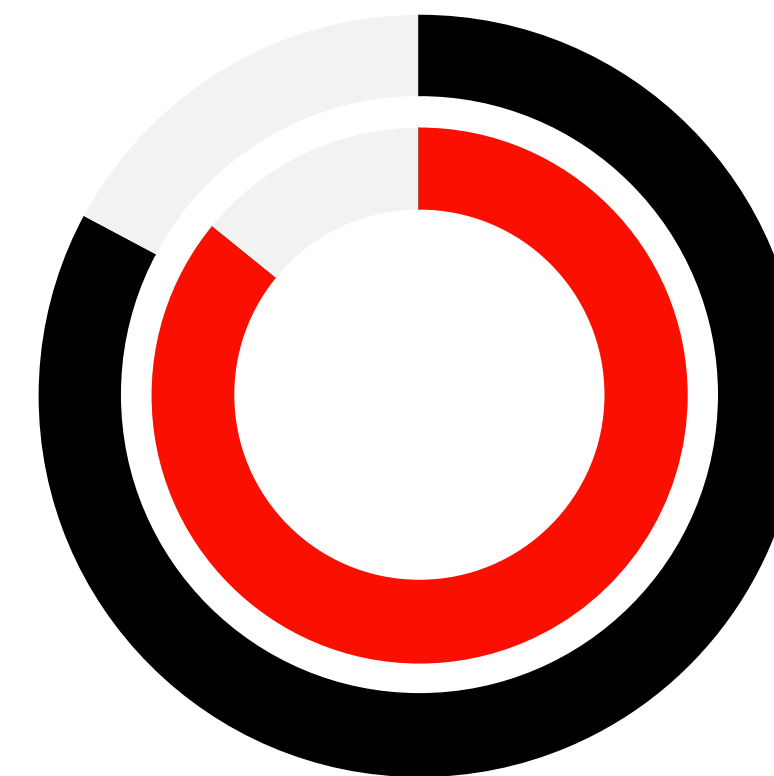
**35%**  
SMB leaders



	US	UK	AU	NZ	FR	DE	JP
Enterprise workers	32%	32%	32%	30%	31%	34%	36%
SMB leaders	35%	38%	32%	34%	36%	35%	37%

## Tasks Get in the Way of Doing Their Job Effectively

% agree (T2B)



**86%**  
Enterprise workers

**83%**  
SMB leaders



	US	UK	AU	NZ	FR	DE	JP
Enterprise workers	82%	88%	88%	88%	92%	85%	75%
SMB leaders	80%	84%	88%	91%	88%	81%	67%

Q18: During a typical workweek, approximately what percent of your time do you spend on tasks that are less critical, provide no significant value, or involve busywork or distractions?

Q20: How much does each of the following get in the way of you doing your job effectively? [Managing files, forms, contracts, payments and invoices, and document collaboration]

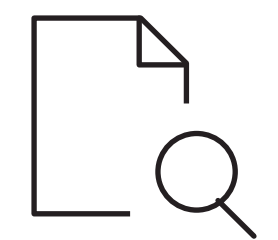
N=3,404 Global ENT, N=2,102 Global SMB

\*Sample sizes vary by country

# Managing files, forms, contracts, payments, and invoices get in the way of doing their jobs effectively.

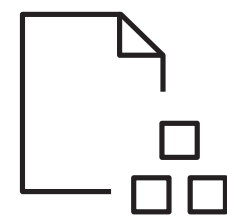
## Tasks that Get in the Way of Doing Job Effectively

% affected (T2B)



Searching for, sharing, and accessing files

**72%** of Enterprise workers  
**70%** of SMB leaders



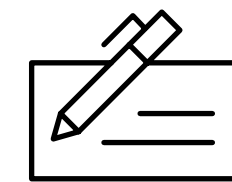
Filling out forms, timesheets, and expense reports

**56%** of Enterprise workers  
**65%** of SMB leaders



Awaiting signatures

**44%** of Enterprise workers  
**48%** of SMB leaders



Making payments and invoicing

**32%** of Enterprise workers  
**63%** of SMB leaders



Collaborating on documents

**43%** of Enterprise workers  
**53%** of SMB leaders

Q20: How much does each of the following get in the way of you doing your job effectively? If any of these do not apply to you personally, simply select "N/A".  
N=3,404 Global ENT, N=2,102 Global SMB

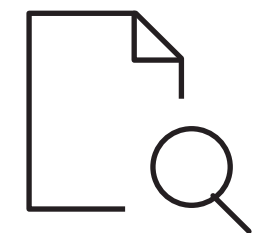
\*Sample sizes vary by country



# Workers and SMB leaders are hungry for tools and tech that make processes more efficient, unlocking choices for how they use their time.

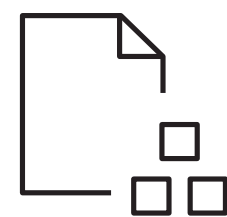
## Interested in Tools to Make Tasks or Processes More Efficient

% affected (T2B)



Searching for, sharing, and accessing files

**80%** of Enterprise workers  
**81%** of SMB leaders



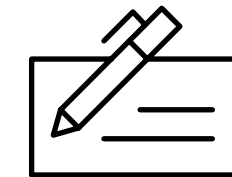
Filling out forms

**60%** of Enterprise workers  
**64%** of SMB leaders



Signing contracts and awaiting signatures

**65%** of Enterprise workers  
**74%** of SMB leaders



Making payments and invoicing

**46%** of Enterprise workers  
**81%** of SMB leaders



Collaborating on documents and managing workflows

**79%** of Enterprise workers  
**80%** of SMB leaders

Any of these

**91%**  
Enterprise workers

**91%**  
SMB leaders

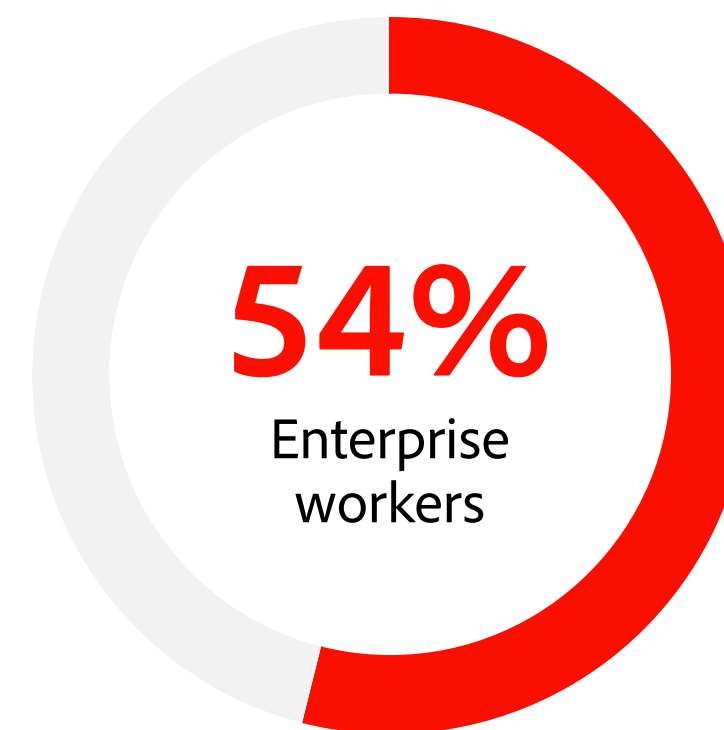
Q29: How interested would you be in tools to make the following tasks or processes more efficient? See appendix for full category breakout  
N=3,404 Global ENT, N=2,102 Global SMB

\*Sample sizes vary by country

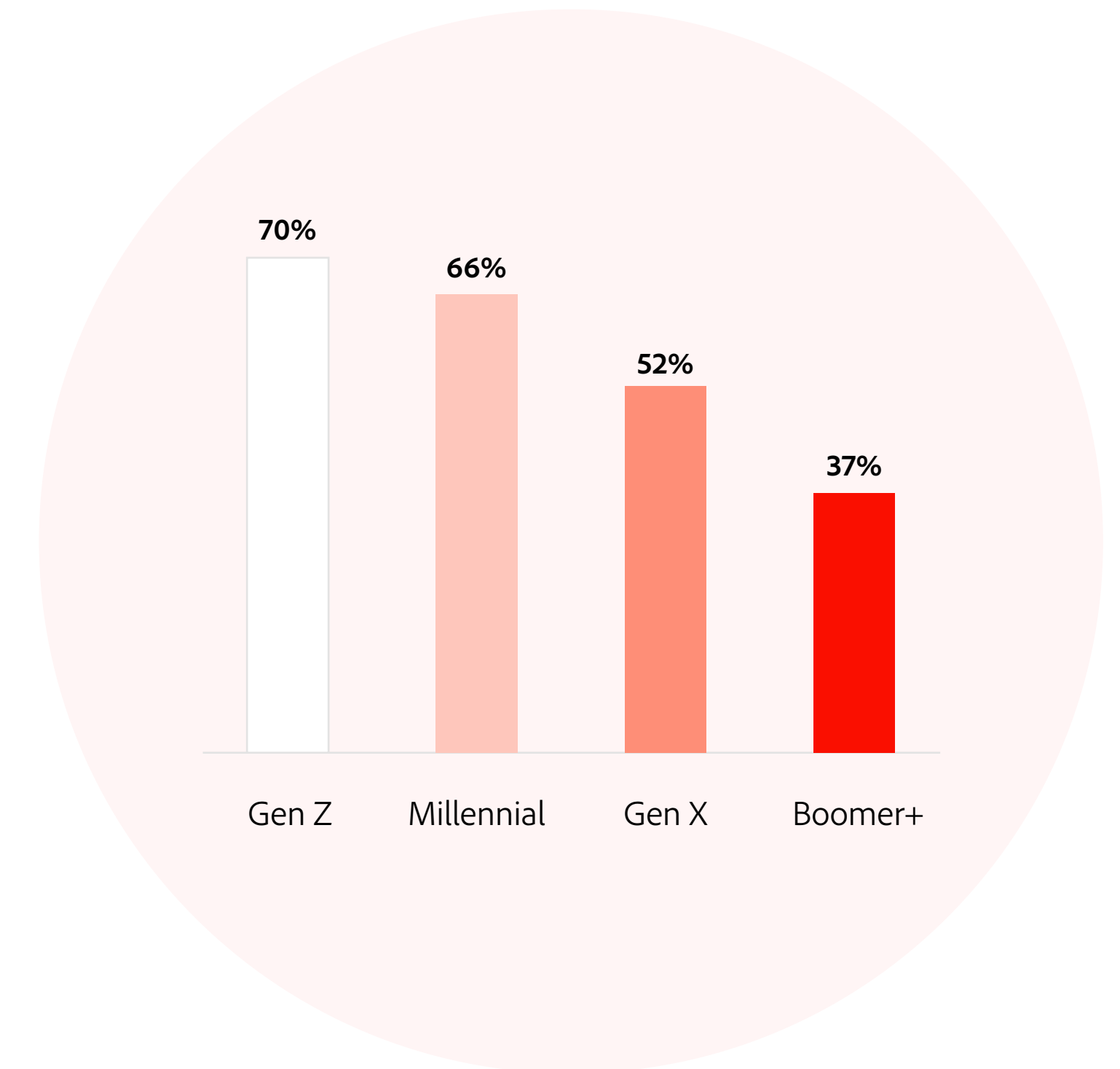
**In fact, enterprise workers would switch jobs for access to better tools that make them more efficient—especially Gen Z.**

**Assuming Salary and Job Description Remain the Same, I Would Switch Jobs for...**  
 % Likely (T2B)

**Better tools to be more effective at my job**



US	UK	AU	NZ	FR	DE	JP
51%	59%	62%	60%	42%	50%	52%



Q34: Assuming other factors like salary and job description remain the same, how likely would you be to switch jobs for...  
 N=3,404 Global ENT; N=143 Gen Z ENT, N=1,058 Millennial ENT, N=1,425 Gen X ENT, N=779 Boomer+ ENT

\*Sample sizes vary by country



# Enterprise worker, United States



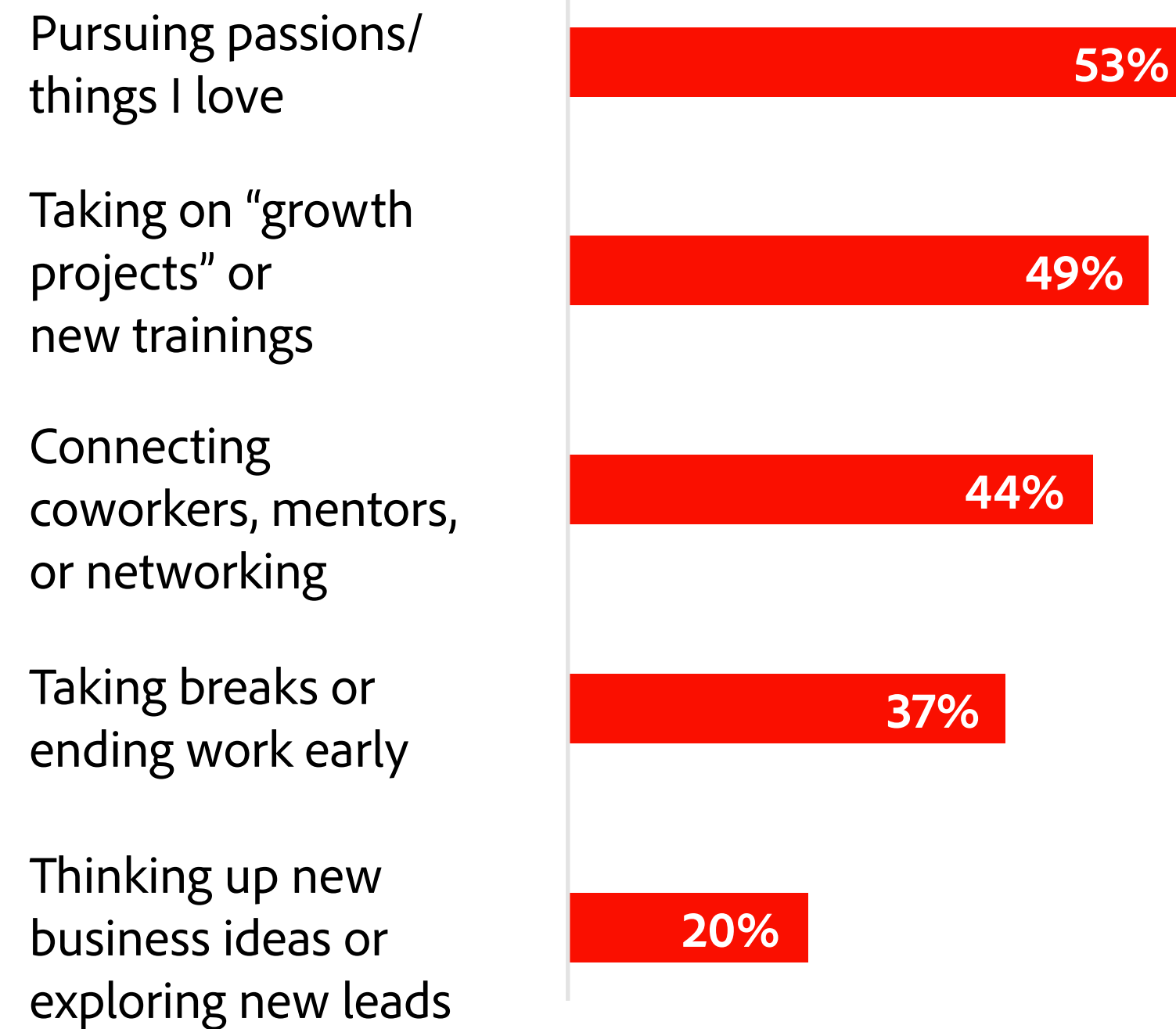
Often times people who have been on the job for several years get complacent and continue doing things 'the way it's always been done,' even when it may no longer be the most efficient way. New technology forces that mindset to be changed."

**If they had more time for work, enterprise workers would pursue passions and personal growth, while SMB leaders would focus on business growth.**

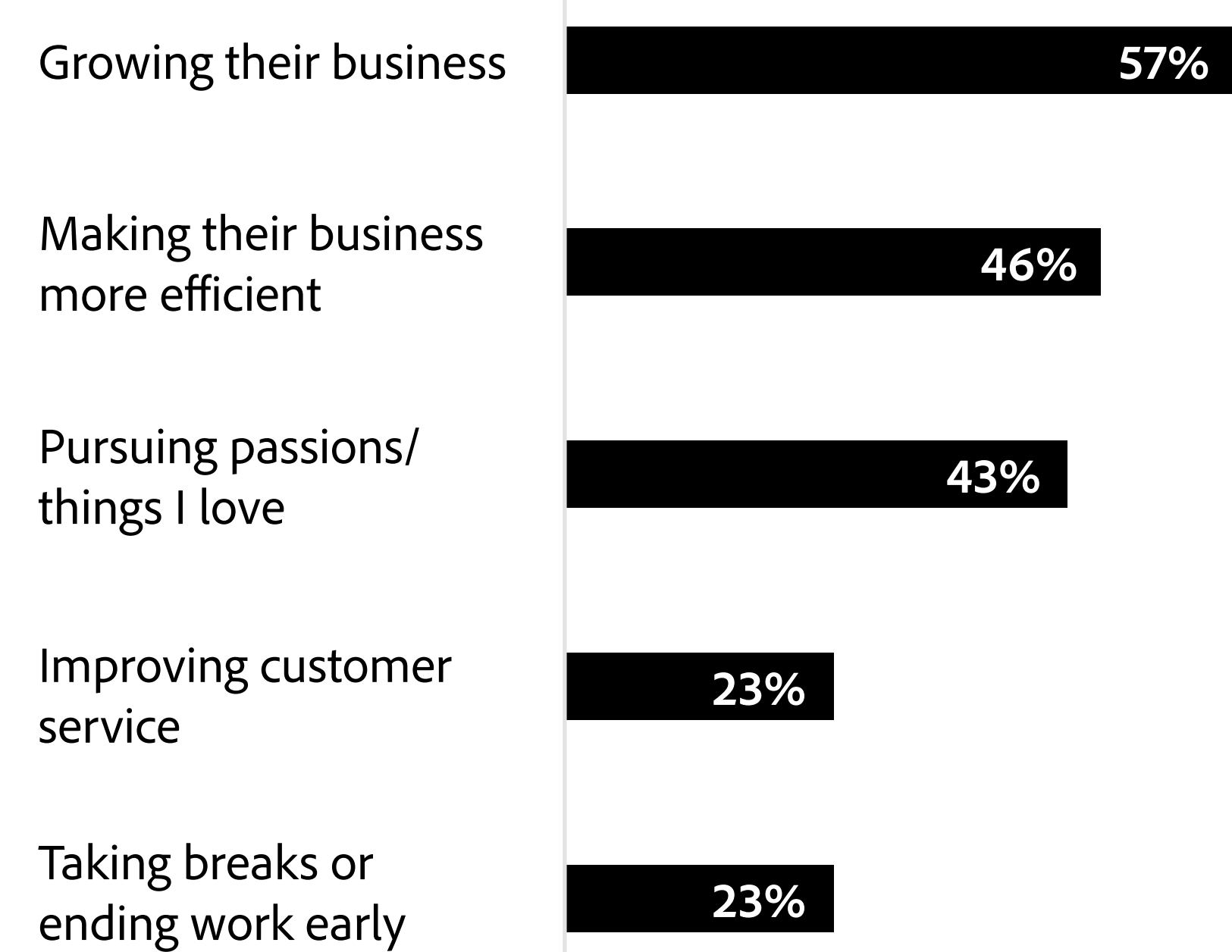
### Desired Ways to Spend More Time at Work

% selected

#### Enterprise workers



#### SMB leaders



Q36: If you had more time to focus on work-specific tasks, how would you spend it?  
N=3,404 Global ENT

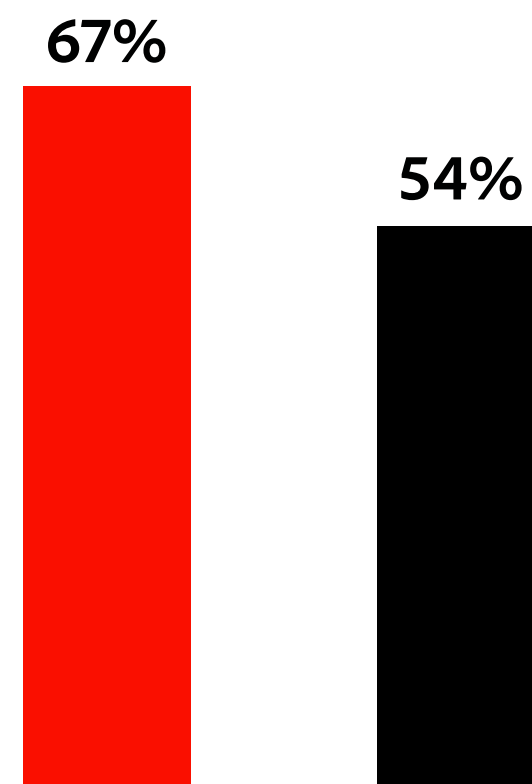
\*Sample sizes vary by country

# Outside of work, employees and SMB leaders would spend extra time on themselves—their hobbies and health—followed by family and social time.

## Desired Ways to Spend More Time Beyond Work

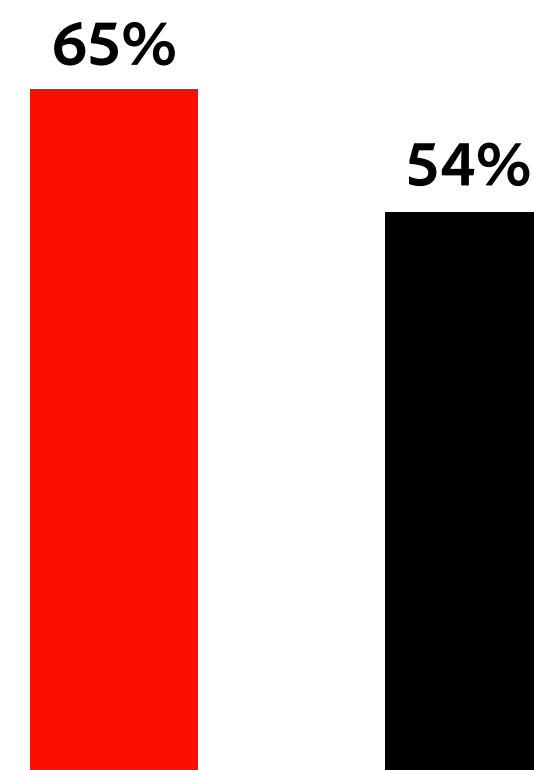
% selected

### Hobbies or relaxation



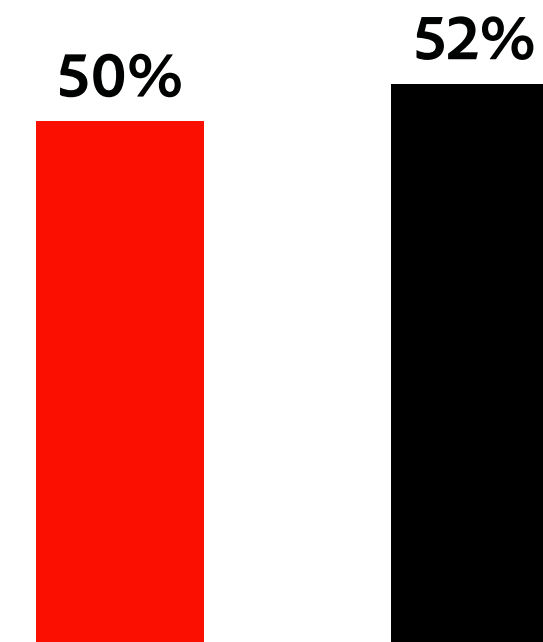
Enterprise workers    SMB leaders

### Health, wellness, and sleep



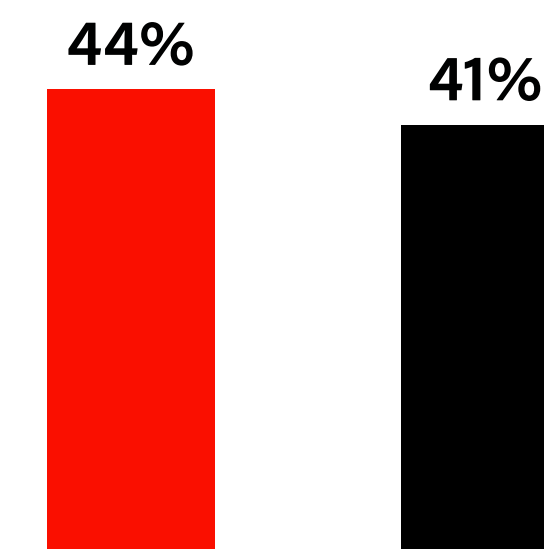
Enterprise workers    SMB leaders

### Family time or caretaking



Enterprise workers    SMB leaders

### Social activities and dating



Enterprise workers    SMB leaders

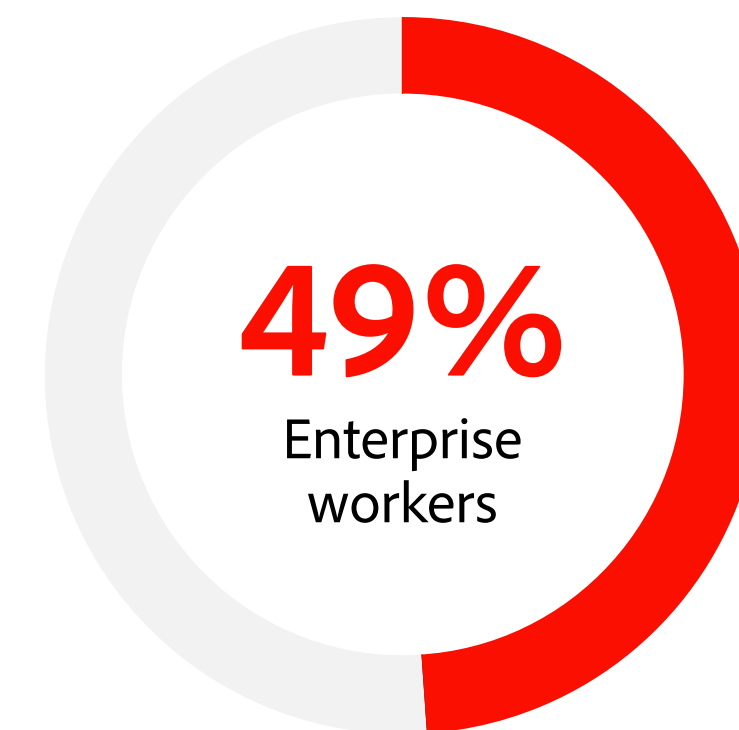
Q35: If you had extra time in your week, how would you spend it? [Select the top 3]  
N=3,404 Global ENT


\*Sample sizes vary by country

**Digital tools can save workers time and ultimately let them enjoy life more fully.**

**Assuming Salary and Job Description Remain the Same, I Would Switch Jobs for...**  
 % likely (T2B)

An extra week of vacation or holiday time



	US	UK	AU	NZ	FR	DE	JP
	50%	51%	57%	60%	33%	46%	47%

A recent Forrester report found that employees who use Adobe Document Cloud tools saved an average of

**43 hours**

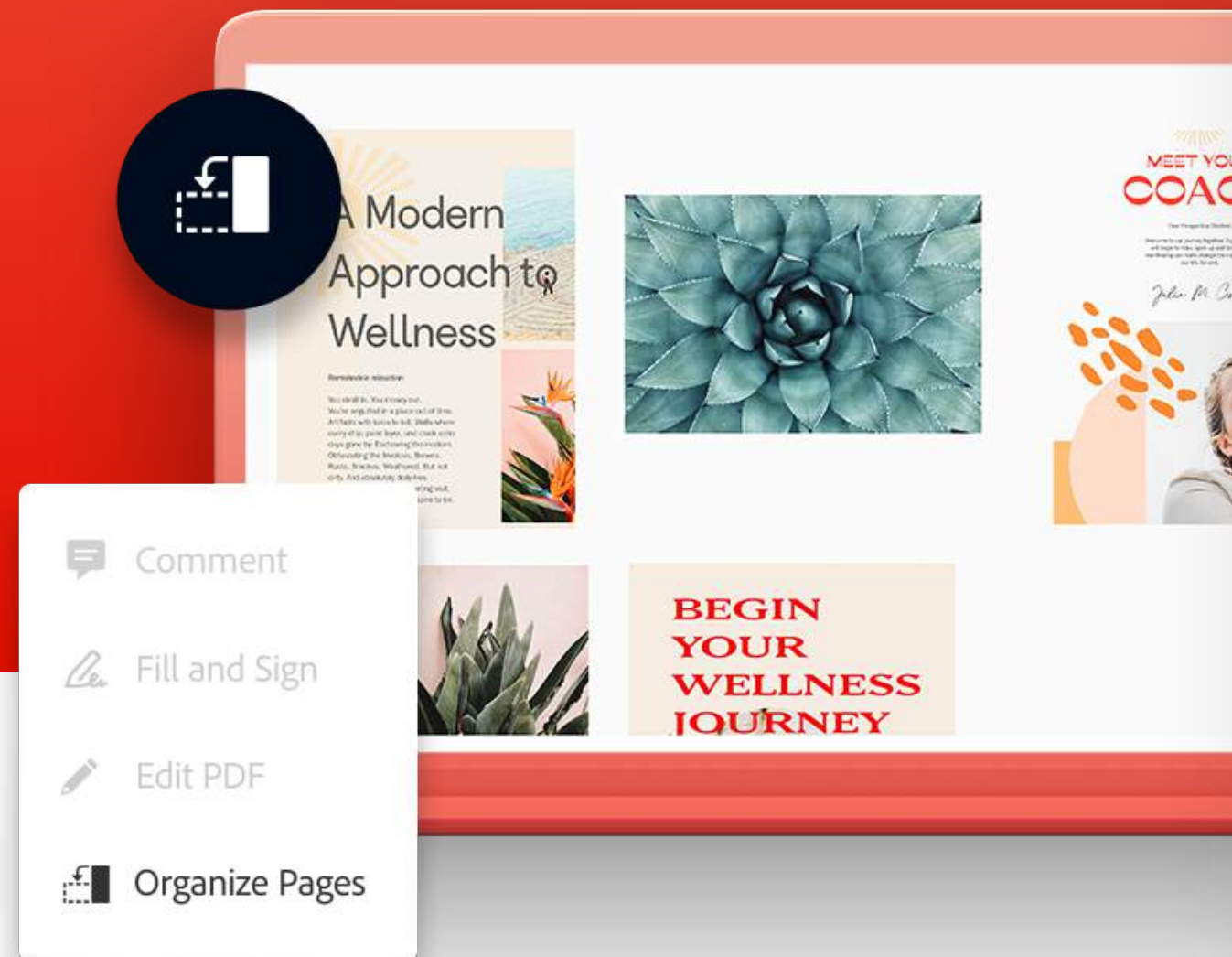
per year due to improved productivity.

Q39: How likely would you be to switch jobs to get an extra week of vacation or holiday time? Assuming other factors like hours worked and job description remain the same  
 N=3,404 Global ENT

\*Sample sizes vary by country



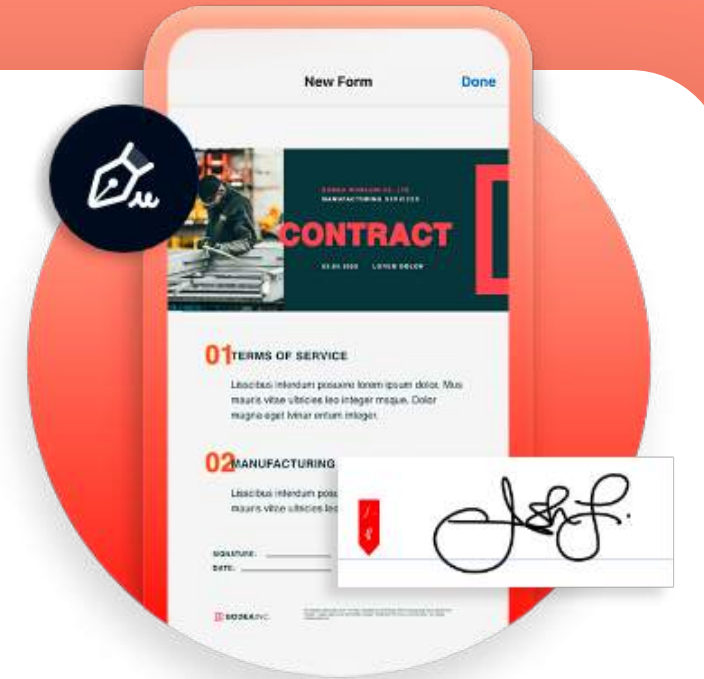
# Save time and boost productivity with Adobe Document Cloud.



## Adobe Acrobat puts the power of PDF productivity to work for your business with 100% digital workflows.

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# Sources

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*"Organizations Are Forecast to Spend Nearly \$656 Billion on Future of Work Technologies in 2021, According to New IDC Spending Guide,"* IDC, 2021.



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