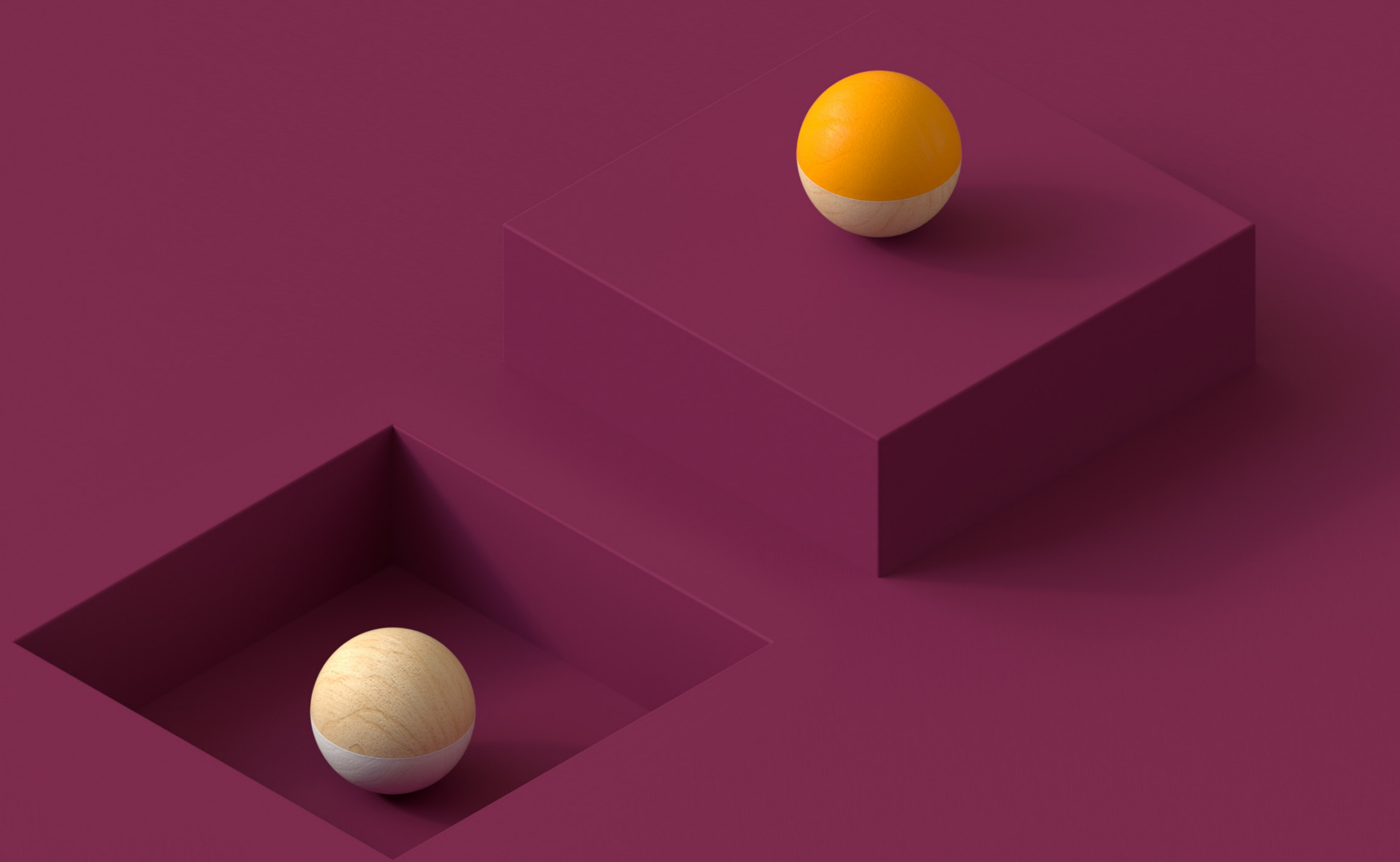




# The State of Work

[slack.com/state-of-work](https://slack.com/state-of-work)



**Modern work is more complex and interdependent than ever before. A new study by Slack and market research firm GlobalWebIndex explores what it takes to thrive in this new era of business.**

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The State of Work, by Slack

# Executive Summary

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# If going by headlines alone, the state of work today is defined by transformative technology.

This is certainly true in many ways. The pace of change is faster than at any other time in history, and no industry has yet escaped the forces of what is often called the “Fourth Industrial Revolution.” But it’s a surprisingly incomplete picture.

If anything, the true state of work is more people-powered than ever before.

Simply put, as automation rises, the work that is left requires a decidedly human touch, such as complex problem-solving and collaboration.

We see it every day at Slack, even as we build this very technology. We believe that any analysis of trends and technology is secondary to the human experience of those trends and technology. (Yes, this from a software company.)

So when we set out to better understand the state of work today, we were eager to explore first-person attitudes and experiences. How do these core beliefs about work affect worker engagement and organizational success? What we learned is revealed in this analysis.

Slack’s State of Work report draws from 17,000 knowledge workers, up and down the organizational chart, from CEOs to frontline employees, ages 16 to 64. They live in 10 countries, span more than 40 industries, and work for companies of all stages and sizes, from “micro-emerging” businesses to large, well-established enterprises. There are startups less than a year old and companies in business for more than 50 years. To contextualize the data, we conducted in-depth interviews with economists, workplace psychologists and frontline workers themselves.

## HERE'S WHAT WE FOUND:

# People crave connection to their organization's strategic vision.

Understanding the big picture is no longer solely the domain of the C-suite. We found a direct correlation between monthly communication of company strategy (the most frequent option available on the survey) and people rating their companies as “excellent” against a long list of attributes: career progression; collaboration; communication; effective use of technology; productivity; morale; training; work-life balance; culture; and openness to feedback.

# Without insight into that organizational vision, people struggle in the workplace.

While most people want to feel more engaged, there is a subset who feel disconnected from their company's strategy, vision and set of operating principles. These “unaligned” workers are likelier than their more “aligned” counterparts to have never heard their company discuss strategic goals. They focus less on innovation and are less likely to collaborate outside of their immediate teams. They are also significantly more likely to report low morale.

Given that connection and communication can shape each knowledge worker's experience, we were interested to view the data through the lens of aligned vs. unaligned. So first, our definitions:

- An **aligned worker** is one who agreed with this statement: "I feel aligned with my company's vision, values and operating principles."
- An **unaligned worker** is one who disagreed with the statement "I feel aligned with my company's vision, values and operating principles."
- A **knowledge worker** is anyone who holds an office position and/or works with data, analyzes information or thinks creatively in a typical workweek.

Throughout the data, aligned workers show a stronger sense of optimistic purpose, while unaligned workers seem adrift. When thinking about their company's future revenue and workforce, unaligned workers are far likelier to predict significant decline, while aligned workers are more likely to forecast growth. There are clear benefits, then, to developing and retaining an aligned workforce.

The good news is that alignment is not a finite, or even scarce, resource. It's available to all people and organizations. By focusing on things like effective, frequent and context-rich communication, organizations can facilitate alignment. When asked what would make them feel more aligned, no one shot for the moon. They ranked, in order, surprisingly basic needs:

greater transparency, clearer documentation of responsibilities, more cross-team collaboration, and open access to leadership.

There are many other actionable insights from the data, which we discuss in depth throughout this analysis and summarize in Chapter 6: "Looking ahead: The 8 Rules of Engagement."

So while roles and responsibilities will continue to shift in this new era of work, our data shows that many people are ready to confront these challenges. But they need organizational support, clear communication, effective tools, and a strategic vision to follow. In other words, in a world of increasing automation and complexity, a human-first approach can still be the most strategic of all.



CHAPTER 1

# The future of work is now

**W**hat is transformative technology, and how is it changing the way we work?

Saadia Zahidi, the managing director and head of the Centre for the New Economy and Society at the World Economic Forum, describes the current era of work as “a coming-together of digital, physical and biological systems leading to the rise of machine learning; the applicability of technology across many different fields; and the creation of wholly new fields, markets and sectors.”

Zahidi has studied these forces within large multinational companies across developed and developing economies. She contends that the current era has unfolded exponentially faster than the previous three industrial revolutions, which were defined by mechanization (First

Industrial Revolution), mass production (Second Industrial Revolution) and digitization (Third Industrial Revolution).

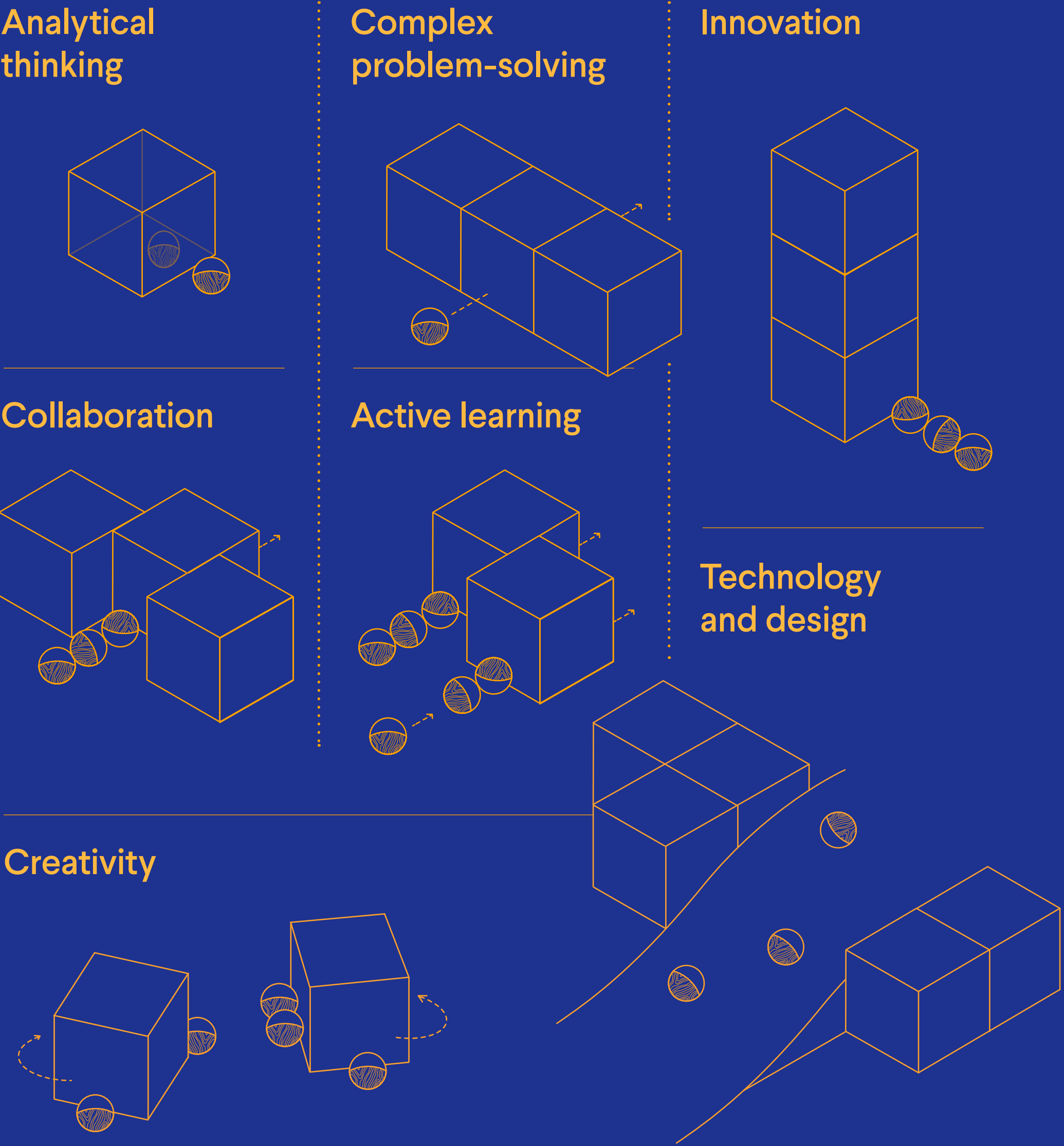
**The skills of the future**

For knowledge workers, the skills required to succeed have already shifted dramatically and will continue to change. According to Zahidi, the core tasks needed to perform the average job will change by 42% over the next three years. By 2022, that is, nearly half of the average worker’s day-to-day duties will look profoundly different.

Demand will grow for skills such as analytical thinking, innovation, active learning, creativity, analytical thinking, collaboration and complex problem-solving, while rote skills and easily repeatable tasks will be shunted off to automation.

**SAADIA ZAHIDI, AN ECONOMIST AT THE WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM, SAYS THESE SEVEN SKILLS WILL BE IN DEMAND**

**The skills of the future**



**Alignment is “table stakes” in today’s complex world**

Knowledge workers realize that they can’t accomplish these new tasks in a vacuum or simply by adding hours to their workday. To be effective, they need more visibility into the strategic objectives of the business. They need a line of sight to the company’s North Star.

When knowledge workers understand their company’s overall strategy, they’re much more likely to know how their work fits into the broader picture and to feel aligned with their company’s direction. Which is why it becomes so important for organizations to understand why workers find themselves disconnected from the wider corporate vision.

The data underscores the need for organizations to help workers complete the

**WHEN WORKERS UNDERSTAND THEIR COMPANY’S STRATEGY:**

**84%**

Feel aligned with their company’s vision, values and operating principles

**88%**

Know how their day-to-day work contributes to their company’s strategy

transition to alignment. That is, the onus isn’t all on the worker. Much of it is on the organization to understand and invest in its people and to help them develop the skills to thrive in this new era of work, according to Zahidi.

**WHEN WORKERS DON’T UNDERSTAND THEIR COMPANY’S STRATEGY:**

**22%**

Feel aligned with their company’s vision, values and operating principles

**33%**

Know how their day-to-day work contributes to their company’s strategy

The modern era of work, she says, “is about being able to work and relate with your teams in a different way. It is about building an inclusive workplace culture. It is about active listening and more flat team structures.”

“It is about being able to work and relate with your teams in a different way. It is about building an inclusive workplace culture. It is about active listening and more flat team structures.”



**Saadia Zahidi,**  
Managing Director  
and Head of the  
Centre for the  
New Economy and  
Society at the World  
Economic Forum



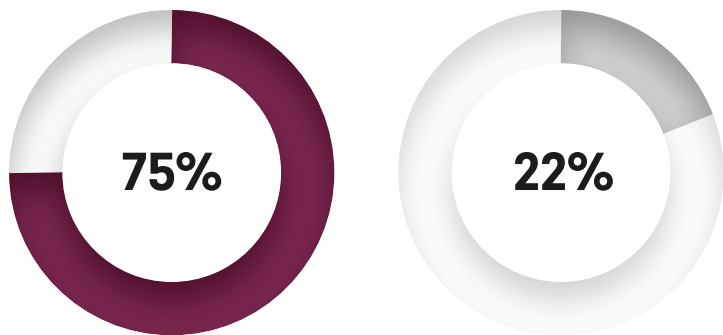
Are you aligned? Divergent workplace experiences

Building the inclusive culture Zahidi describes can be a daunting task. It’s hard to know where to start. Alignment offers a useful lens for determining which strategies and tools will serve an organization and which will undercut its efforts.

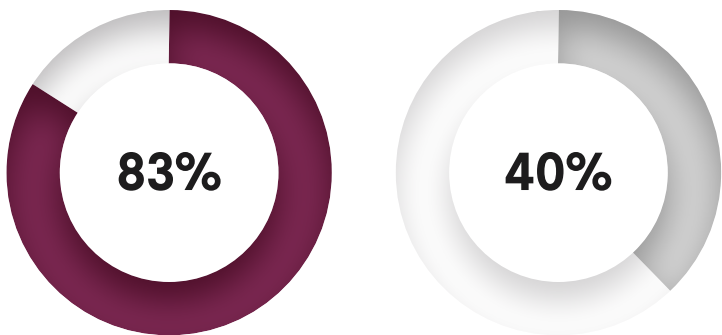
Unaligned and aligned workers experience the workplace in profoundly different ways—and their experiences impact their organizations. By opting for strategies that promote alignment, companies benefit from a cascade of other effects, including more engaged and empowered workers. The opposite is also true. Strategies that derail alignment tend to correlate with demotivated, disengaged workers.

- Aligned workers who agree
- Unaligned workers who agree

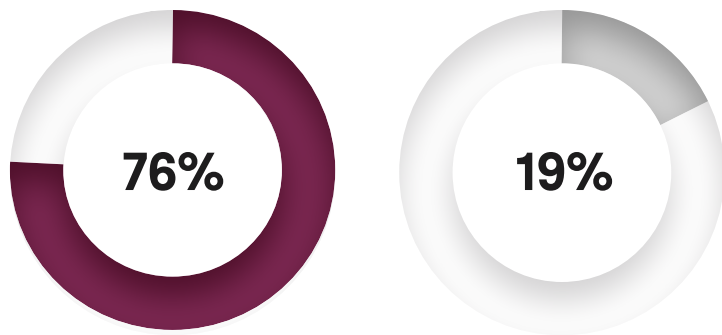
*I feel empowered to make strategic decisions or to pursue new business opportunities*



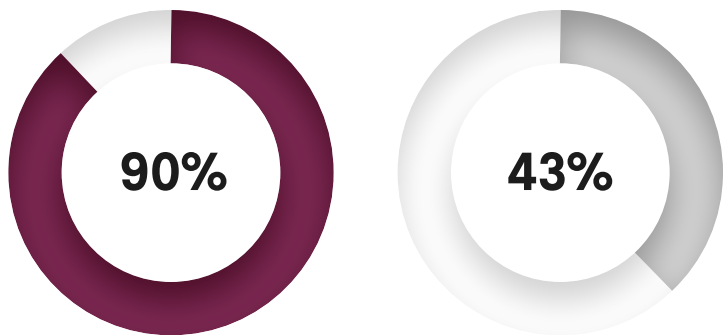
*Being able to adapt quickly is critical to my company’s long-term success*



*At my company, we have the tools and systems in place to adapt quickly to industry changes*



*I understand what I need to do in my role to be successful*



Management and culture challenges in the workplace

So what are organizations up against in the drive to align, upskill and empower their people? For starters, workplace culture is a chief concern for knowledge workers worldwide; it was the most frequently cited “management and culture” challenge globally and topped the country-specific list for France and India.

Company morale is another key challenge, particularly in Australia, Singapore, Spain, the U.K. and the U.S. Japanese workers were most concerned about building alignment between teams, whereas those in Germany cited bureaucracy as the No. 1 challenge.

While each country has its own set of nuanced challenges, it’s clear that

TOP MANAGEMENT AND CULTURE CHALLENGES GLOBALLY

1 Building a good culture/working environment

2 Morale/retaining staff

3 Vision/leadership within the company

4 Alignment between teams at the company

developing a positive culture, boosting morale, and retaining and aligning people is a global concern.

The state of collaboration

Overall, knowledge workers feel positive about the state of collaboration at their workplaces, with two-thirds of respondents reporting that collaboration is “good” or “excellent.” Only 7% rated their companies as “poor” or “very poor.” But that 7% when extrapolated across all knowledge workers in the 10 surveyed countries amounts to an estimated 25.6 million people.

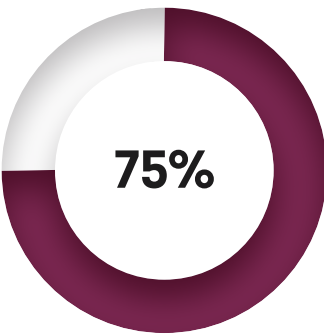
Again, the divide between aligned and unaligned workers stood out. Unaligned workers were nearly nine times as likely to rate collaboration at their companies as “poor” or “very poor.”

What can be done to improve collaboration? For starters, a clear understanding of the company strategy correlates closely with positive scores for collaboration. Workers who understand their company’s strategy are twice as likely to indicate that collaboration at their companies is “good” or “excellent.”

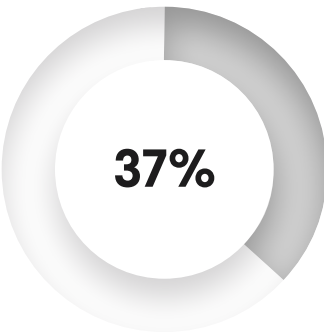
Zahidi says setting objectives and communicating them frequently is critical for collaboration. “It’s very hard to set these medium- to long-term objectives around which people can coalesce in a constantly shifting business environment,” she says. “But it’s through the creation of those very, very clear objectives that you get the right kind of collaboration incentives.”

Workers who understand the company strategy are more likely to rate their companies highly for collaboration.

RATES COLLABORATION “GOOD” OR “EXCELLENT”



Understands company strategy



Doesn't understand company strategy



CHAPTER 2

# Understanding aligned and unaligned workers



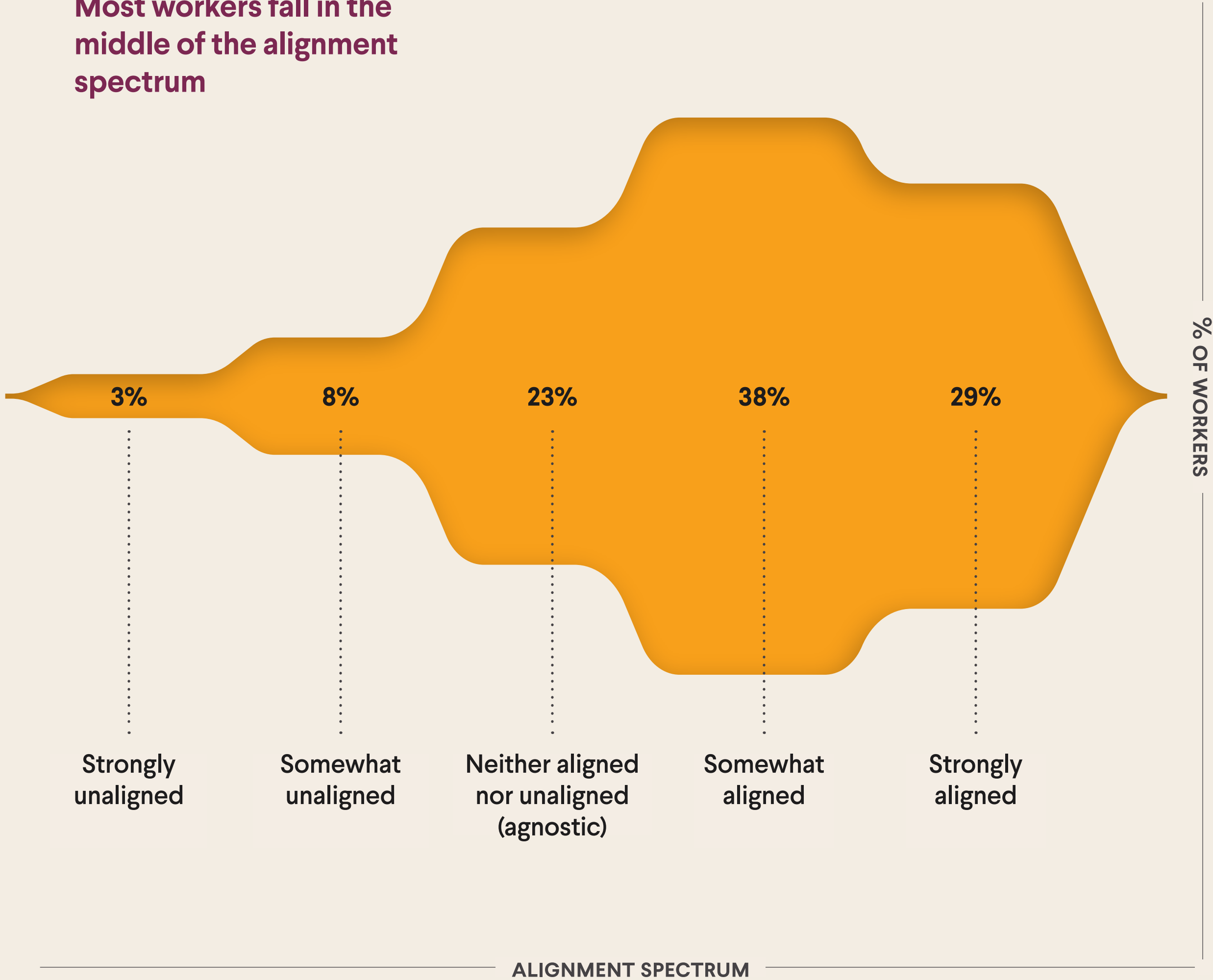
Aligned and unaligned workers exist in companies large and small, in every industry, all over the world. They span generations and workplace hierarchies.

Understanding how the aligned/unaligned chips fall across different categories—be it industry, age or geography—merits a deeper look.

Understanding the alignment spectrum

Alignment exists along a continuum, and most knowledge workers (69%) fall somewhere in the middle. Those in this swing group (“somewhat aligned,” “somewhat unaligned” and “agnostic”) don’t feel strongly aligned or unaligned. Companies stand to gain clear benefits by converting them to fully aligned employees.

Most workers fall in the middle of the alignment spectrum



While only 11% feel some level of unalignment, it’s worth noting that across all 10 surveyed markets they amount to an estimated 38.5 million workers. Moreover, given the importance of connectivity and collaboration in the modern workplace, moving these unaligned workers into alignment can have a positive ripple effect throughout an organization.

For the purposes of this study, we looked more broadly at aligned and unaligned workers and included the “somewhats” in their respective categories. Their insights hint at what employers can do to tip them more fully into the “strongly aligned” category.

Industry

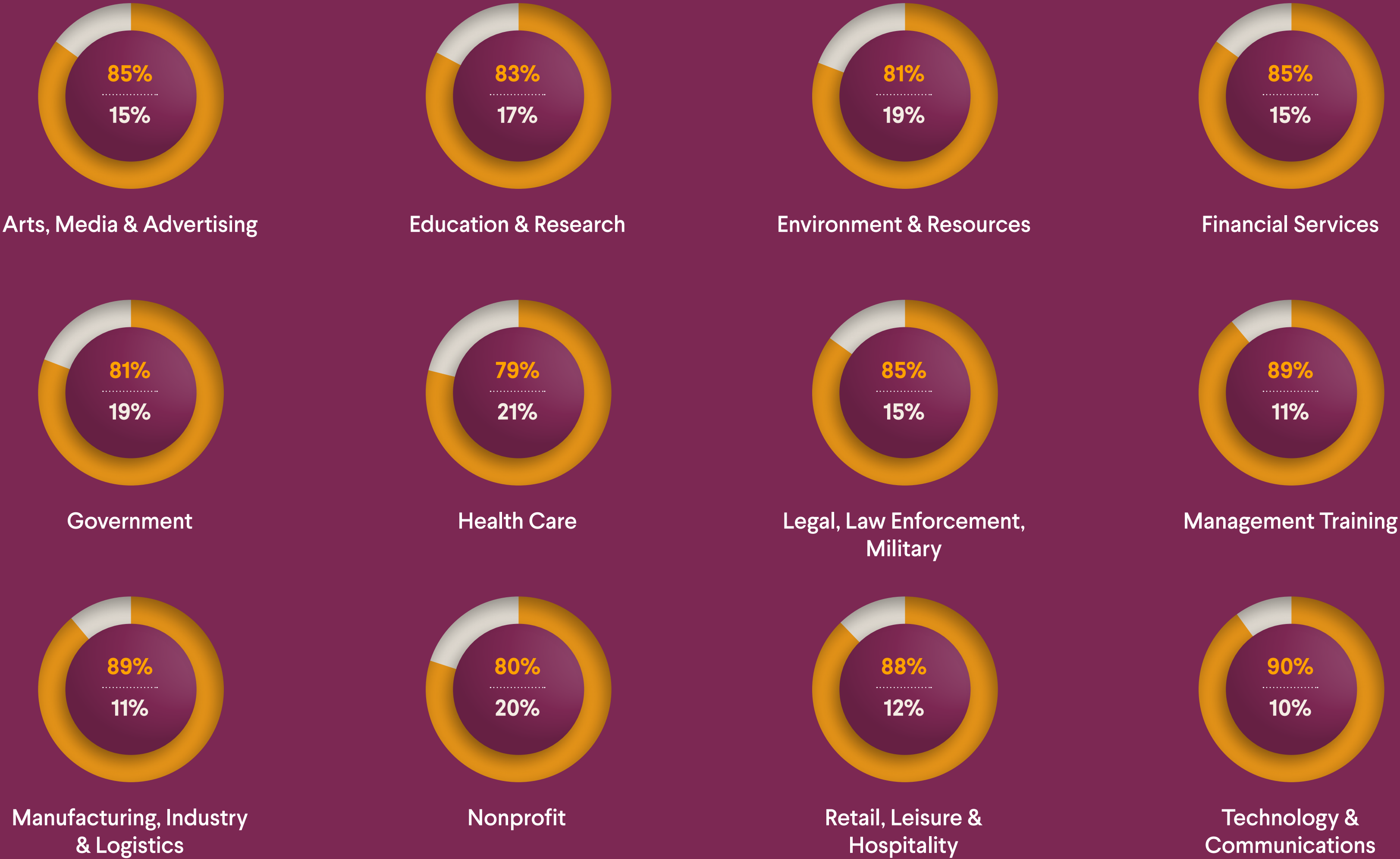
Aligned and unaligned workers are not confined to any one industry. The divide cuts across all sectors, though some trends emerge. The most aligned sectors are technology and communication; manufacturing, industry and logistics; and management training. The sectors with the highest percentage of unaligned workers include health care; nonprofit; government; and environment and resources.

Age

Alignment varies little across generations, though the data suggests that it increases slightly with age. The youngest cohort (16 to 24 years old) has the lowest percentage of aligned workers and the highest percentage of unaligned workers. Older workers, those

The unaligned/aligned divide cuts across all industries

● Aligned workers ● Unaligned workers



ages 55 to 64, were the most likely to feel aligned and the least likely to feel unaligned.

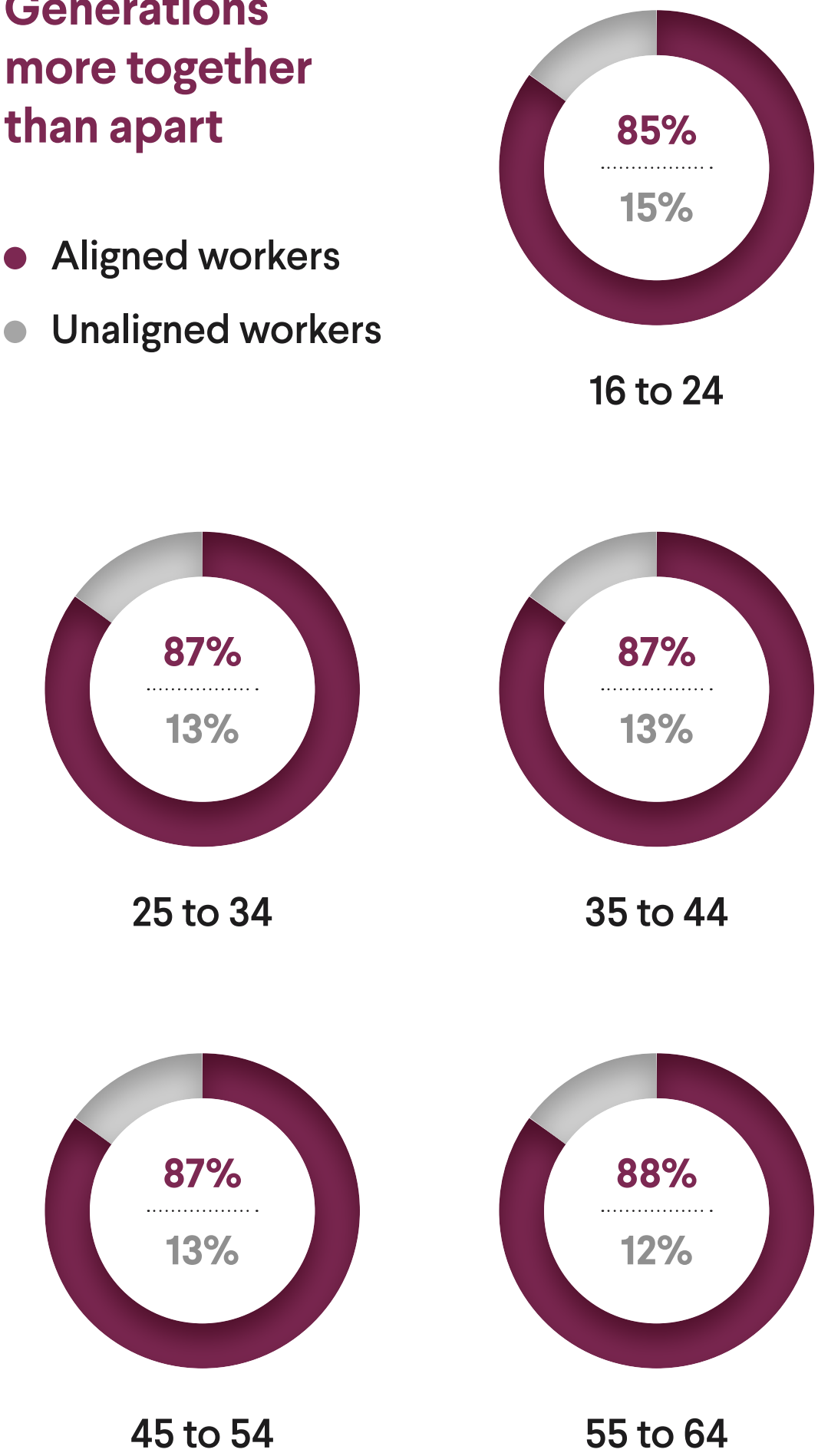
Company size

Aligned and unaligned workers span all company sizes, but there is a clear sweet spot for alignment in mid-market (251–1,000 employees) and enterprise organizations (1,001–7,500 employees), where aligned workers outnumber unaligned workers.

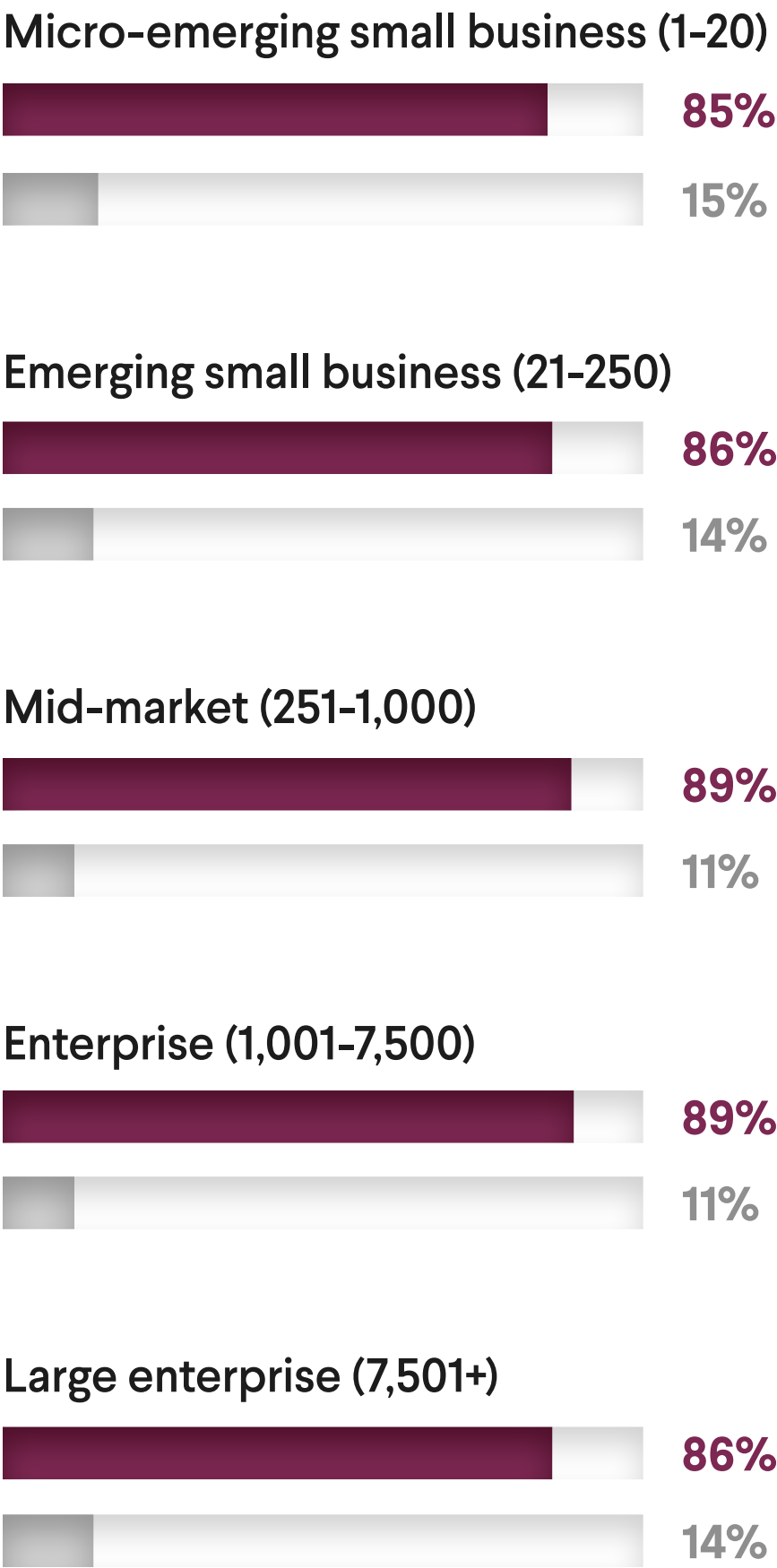
At the extreme ends of the company-size spectrum, unalignment is at its highest. Micro-emerging small businesses (1–20 employees) over-index on unaligned workers, as do large enterprises with more than 7,500 employees.

Generations more together than apart

- Aligned workers
- Unaligned workers



BUSINESS SIZE (NO. OF EMPLOYEES)



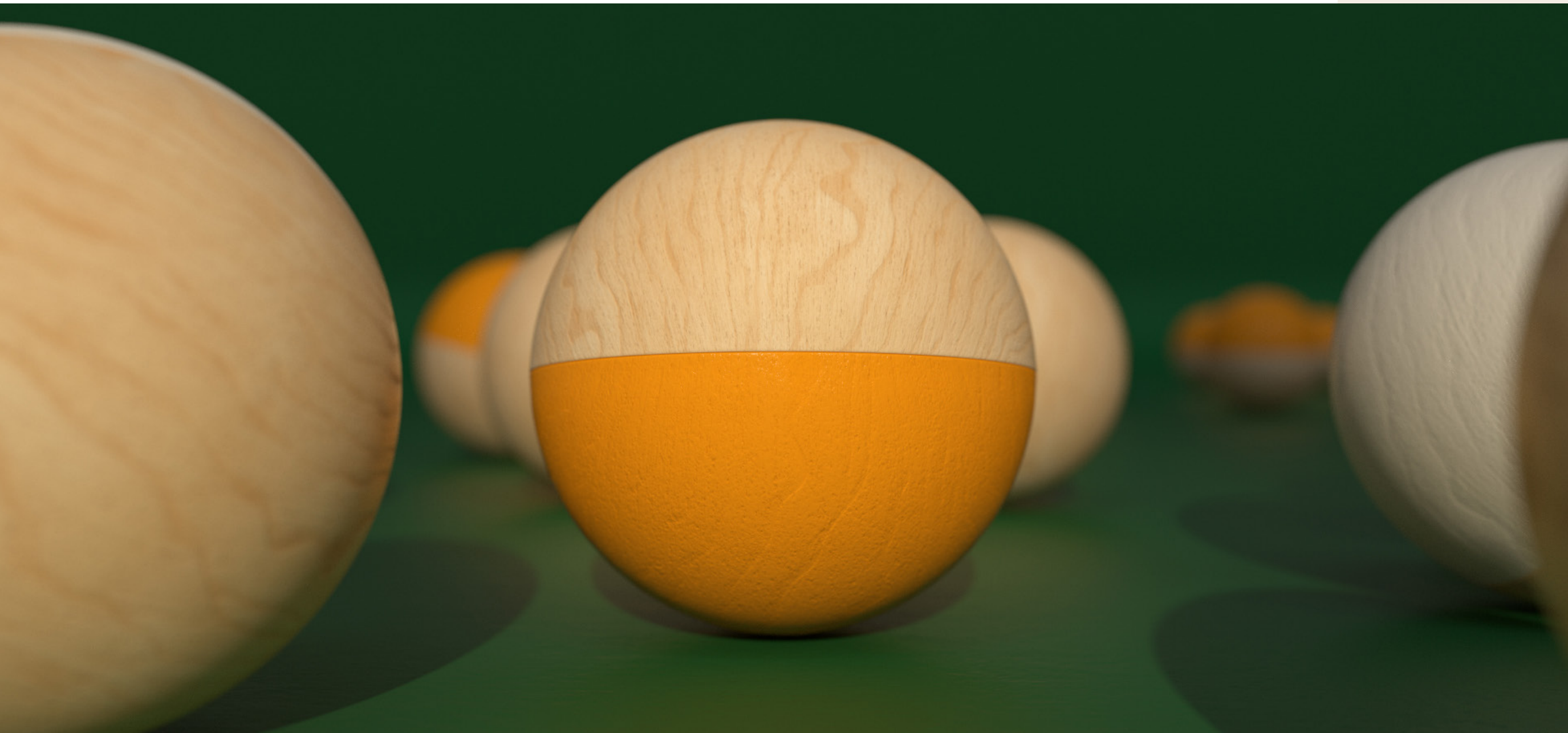
KEY DEFINITIONS

**KNOWLEDGE WORKERS:** Employed individuals who hold an office position and/or work with data, analyze information or think creatively in a typical workweek

**ALIGNED WORKERS:** Survey respondents who agreed with the statement “I feel aligned with my company’s vision, values and operating principles”

**UNALIGNED WORKERS:** Survey respondents who disagreed with the statement “I feel aligned with my company’s vision, values and operating principles”





**Who are the aligned workers?**

As their designation suggests, aligned workers have a clear understanding of their company’s strategy, their own personal goals and how those two things connect. Ninety percent of them know what they need to do in their roles to be successful.

Aligned workers also rate their companies highly on key drivers of success. They are twice as likely as unaligned workers to rate communication, workplace culture, collaboration and productivity as “good” or “excellent.”

Aligned workers are highly engaged: They attend more meetings, receive more

**Aligned workers understand how their work connects with the company’s strategy**

**90%**

- Have a clear understanding of their personal goals and objectives
- Understand what they need to do in their roles to be successful

**88%**

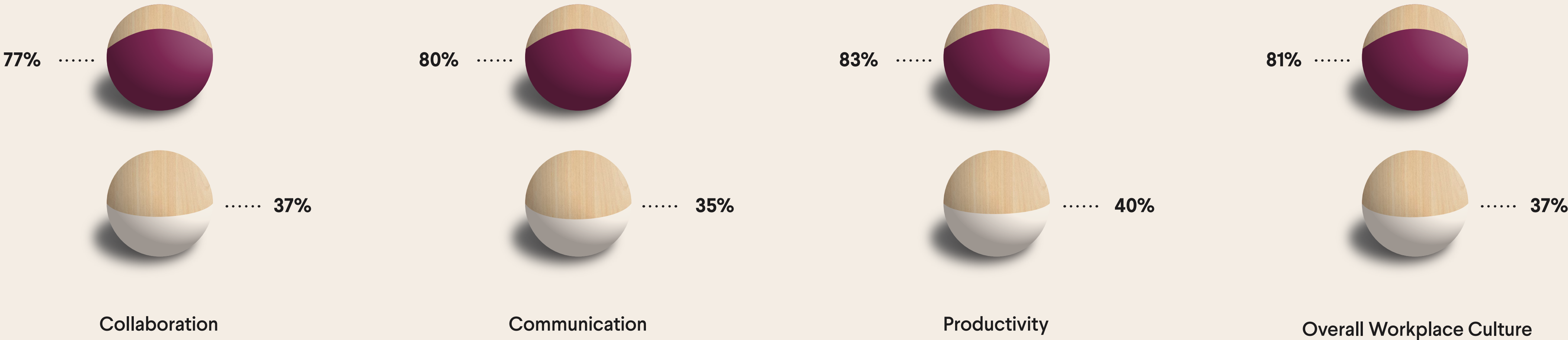
Have a clear understanding of how their day-to-day work contributes to their company’s strategy

**86%**

Have a clear understanding of their company’s strategy

Aligned workers are more likely to rate their companies highly across a wide range of factors

● Aligned workers ● Unaligned workers



communications and use more software tools than their unaligned counterparts. They are hyperconnected to their colleagues and want more information, rather than less, when making decisions.

**Who are the unaligned workers?**  
Unaligned workers have lost sight of their company’s vision and struggle with poor morale. They are 12 times as likely

as aligned workers to rate “employee morale/satisfaction” as “very poor.”  
The majority of unaligned workers say that their company has a hierarchical

structure. More than half feel that their company does not have the tools, systems or structures in place to adapt to industry changes. In fact, they are half as likely as aligned workers to believe that quick

adaptation is critical to their company’s long-term success. For unaligned workers, routine seems to rule the day. They are much less likely than aligned workers to feel that their

company is open to new ideas. And they are slightly more likely to have a consistent day-to-day routine and work with the same colleagues.



## CHAPTER 3

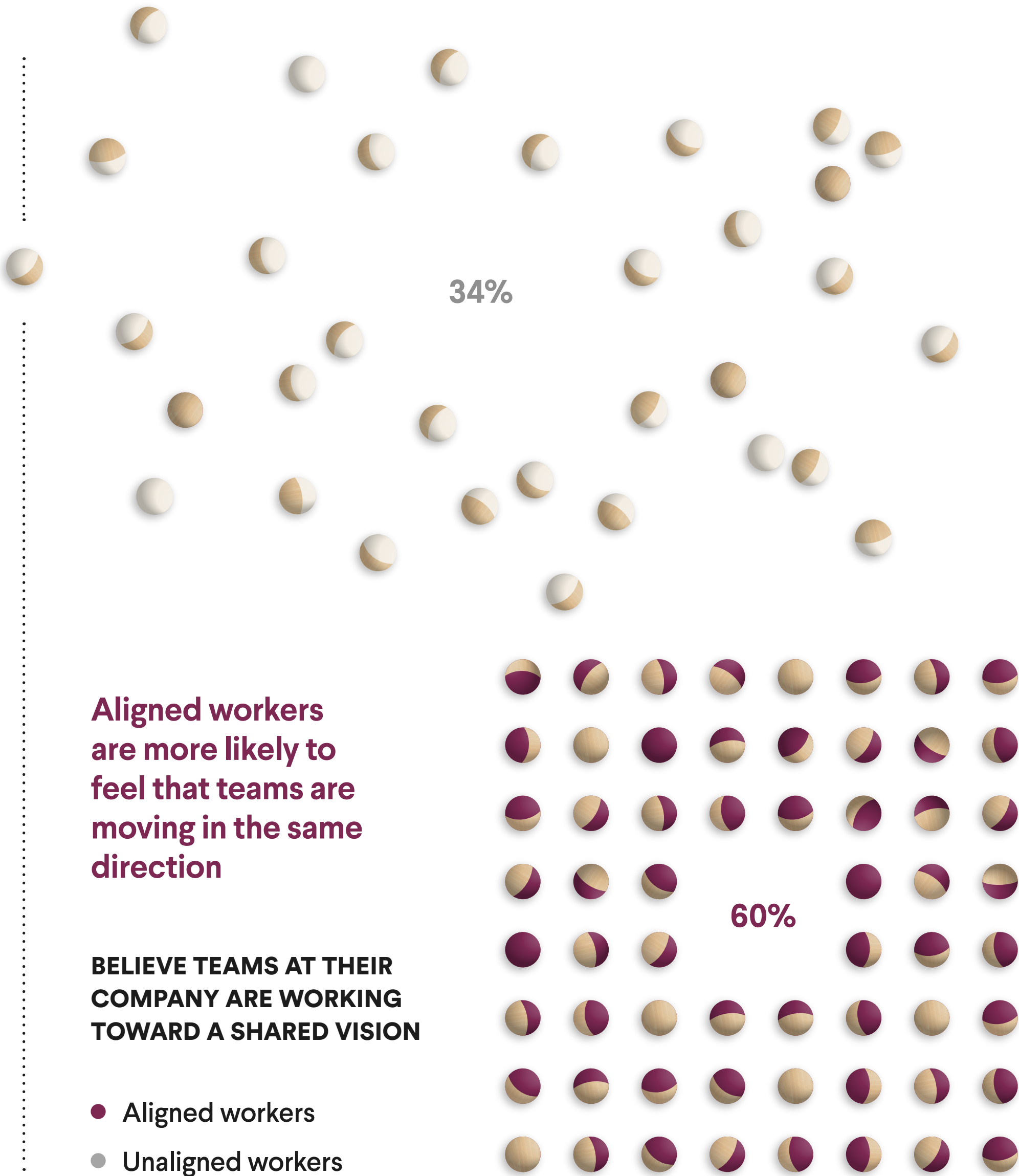
# Alignment affects the bottom line: here's why



There are clear benefits to investing time, effort and resources into building an aligned workforce—namely, aligned workers drive business forward.

They approach their company’s future with optimistic purpose and are nearly twice as likely as unaligned workers to believe that teams at their company are working toward a shared vision. They are also nearly twice as likely as unaligned workers to expect “significant growth” in their company’s revenue and workforce.

What’s more, they’re willing to act on that optimism. Three-quarters of aligned workers feel empowered to make strategic business decisions or pursue new business opportunities. That mindset enables them to propose new product features



to wow customers or pilot new marketing strategies that help sales teams close deals faster.

In contrast, unaligned workers are far likelier than aligned workers to forecast “significant decline” in their company’s financial future. Moreover, unaligned workers are seven times as likely to report that they do not feel empowered to make strategic business decisions or pursue new business opportunities.

**UNALIGNED WORKERS:  
WHAT’S AT STAKE**

**12x**

Unaligned workers are 12 times as likely as aligned workers to rate “employee morale/satisfaction” as “very poor.”



Critically, aligned workers are focused on high-impact, strategic work, such as competitive intelligence, effective use of technology, and innovation. Unaligned workers are bogged down by staffing and personnel challenges. They are twice as likely as aligned workers to cite poor management decisions as a challenge.



# 75%

of aligned workers feel empowered to make strategic business decisions or pursue new business opportunities.

# 22%

of unaligned workers feel the same way.

## ALIGNMENT IN ACTION

# Aligning around a “North Star” to transform health care in underserved communities

Cityblock Health, a Brooklyn, New York-based, technology-driven health-care company, is reimagining an industry long known for resistance to change. The company is committed to offering member-first, technology-enabled care to improve health outcomes in underserved communities.

At Cityblock, integrated, multidisciplinary care teams work collaboratively to address the medical, behav-

ioral and social determinants of health. Care Teams use Cityblock’s care delivery platform, Commons—which was co-designed by clinicians, engineers and data scientists—to align around each member. Co-founder and CEO Iyah Romm says alignment is essential in uniting cross-functional teams to deliver the best possible care. “Without aligned priorities and ways of working, we’ll never get anything done in a complex ecosystem,” he says.

For Theresa Soriano, Cityblock’s northeast regional chief health officer, setting a North Star to guide all decisions and actions was key. It empowers everyone from Community Health Partners in the field to software developers in the office to recommend improvements

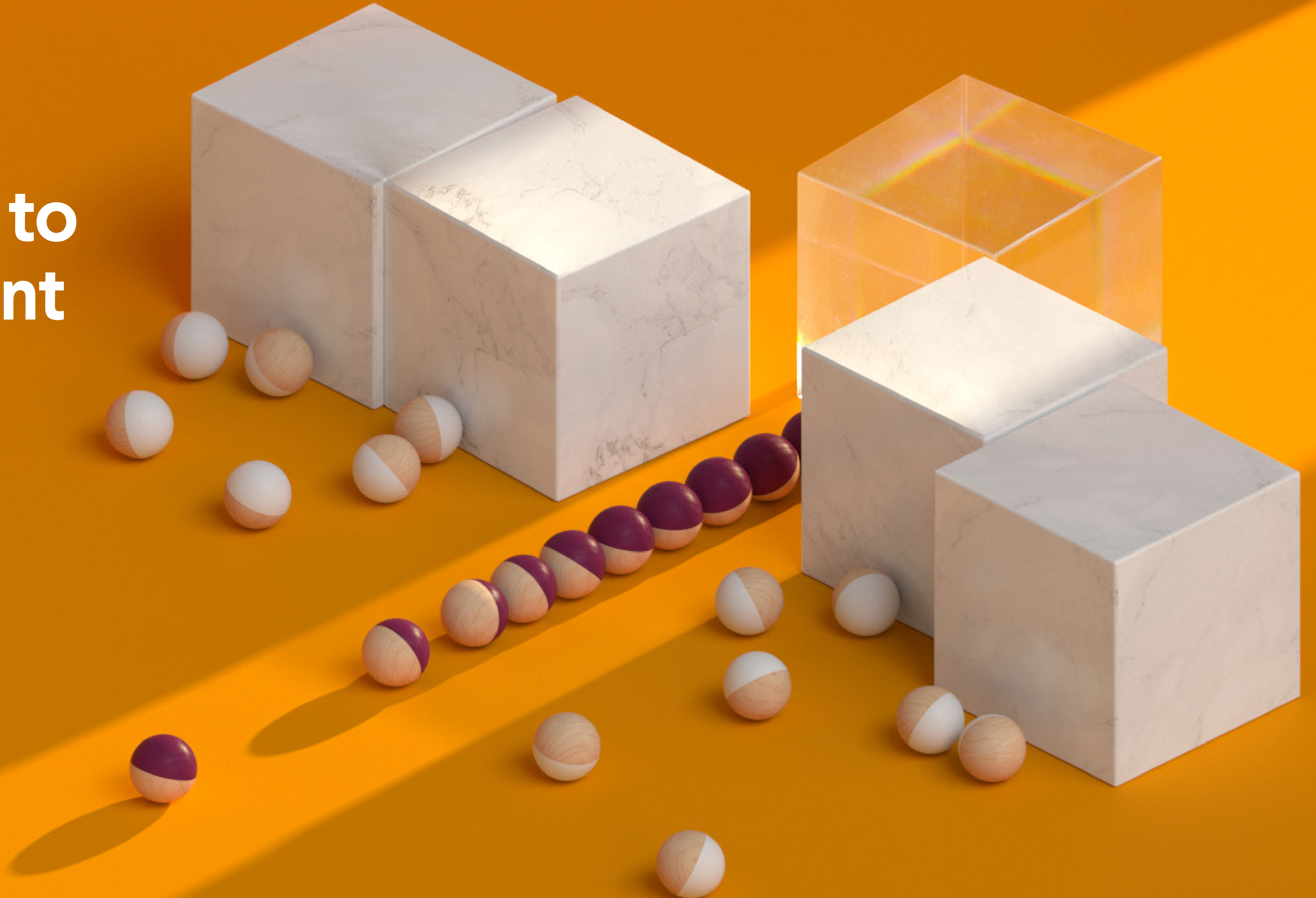
and make real-time decisions. “If we don’t have that same mindset—of the members being at the center of everything we do—and if all of our activities don’t have that same purpose and why,” she says, “then all of the work that we’re doing runs the risk of being disjointed or fragmented.”

Clarity of mission has enabled Cityblock to redefine health care for thousands of members across the communities it serves. And for Romm, this is just the beginning of bringing better care to neighborhoods where it’s needed most. “You ultimately end up building for your goals ... and so setting goals that force you to think in different ways than the status quo is, I think, a requirement for driving meaningful change.”



CHAPTER 4

# Getting to alignment





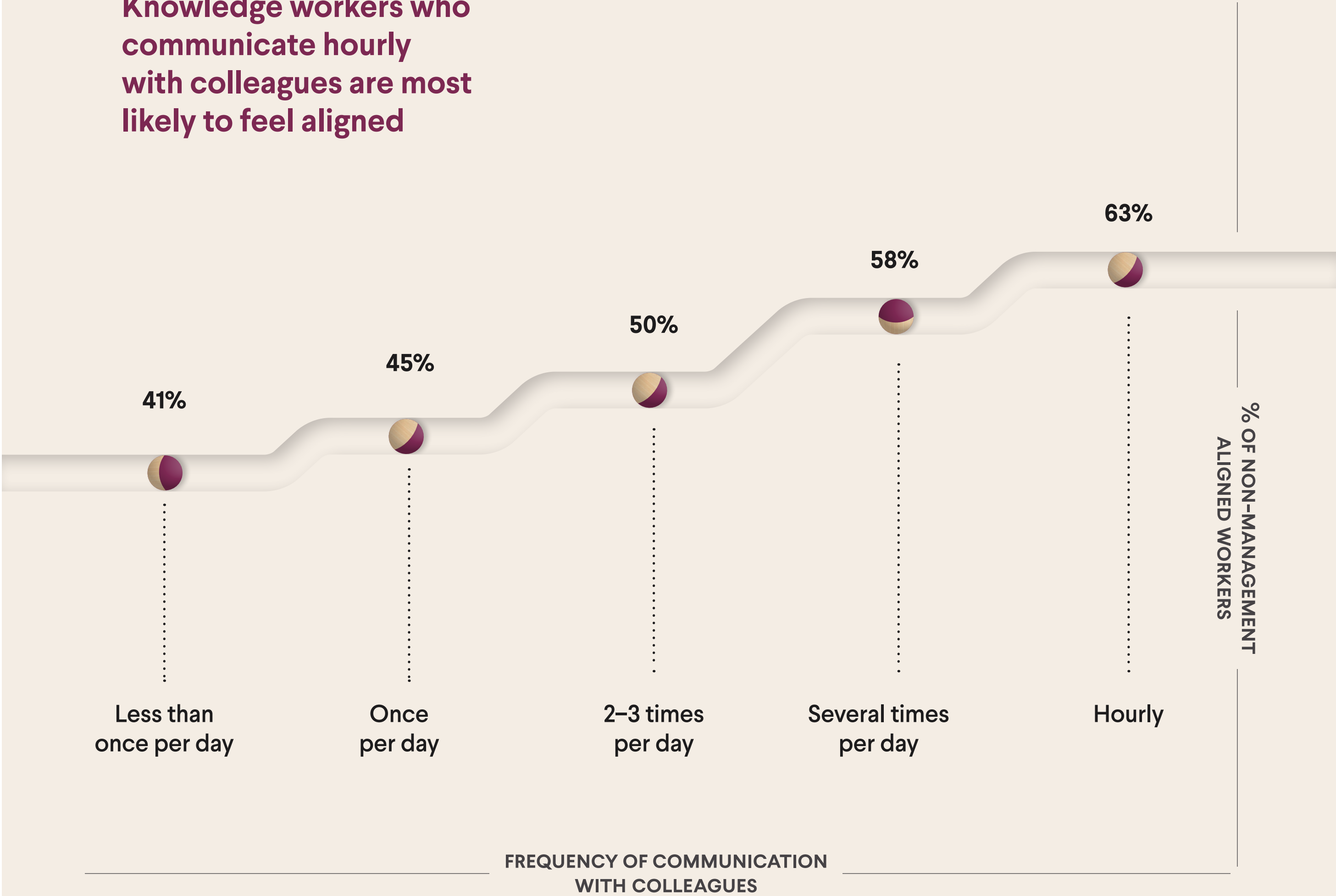
How to achieve alignment

There is no simple solution, but there are strategies that can enable an aligned workforce. Top among them: communication.

Aligned workers crave communication—around strategic goals, with their colleagues and from leadership.

Although they are the most likely to have their company’s strategic goals communicated on a monthly basis (the most frequent option available on the survey), aligned workers clearly indicated that they wanted more communication, not less. But the quality of that communication matters as much as, if not more than, the frequency.

Knowledge workers who communicate hourly with colleagues are most likely to feel aligned



Aligned workers want connection and communication with colleagues

There is a direct correlation between alignment and how frequently knowledge workers communicate with their colleagues. The more often they connect with coworkers, the likelier they are to feel aligned, whether that communication happens through collaboration tools, emails, phone calls or other means. The inverse also applies: Alignment drops as the frequency of communication decreases.

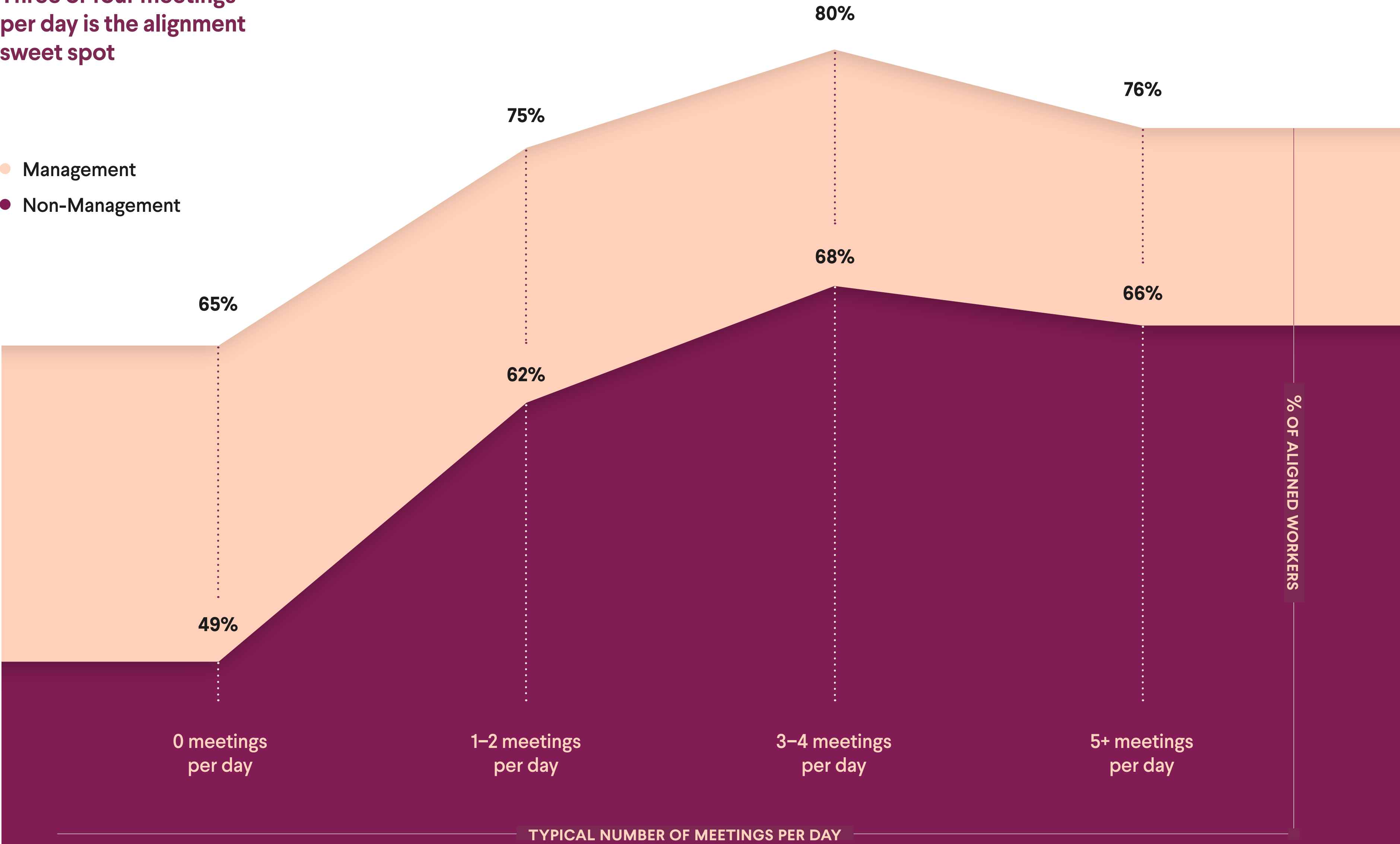
This is especially true for non-management workers. Those who communicate with other employees at least hourly are the most likely to feel aligned (63%), while those who communicate with colleagues less than once per day are the least likely to feel aligned (41%).

More meetings improve alignment—to a point

Meetings have weathered a reputational blow in recent years, but the value of in-person (or on-camera) syncs prevails. Aligned workers have more meetings than unaligned workers across the board—in comparison, unaligned workers are twice as likely as aligned workers to have no daily meetings.

Logic would suggest that more meetings lead to more alignment. But filling workers’ calendars isn’t necessarily the answer. The sweet spot seems to fall at three or four meetings per day. After four meetings, alignment dips for non-managers and managers alike.

Three or four meetings per day is the alignment sweet spot



Share strategy goals quarterly at minimum

Communicating with colleagues may be a key element of alignment, but ensuring that knowledge workers understand the company’s strategic goals is equally, if not more, important. To understand the strategy, knowledge workers need to know what it is. That knowledge comes through frequent communication.

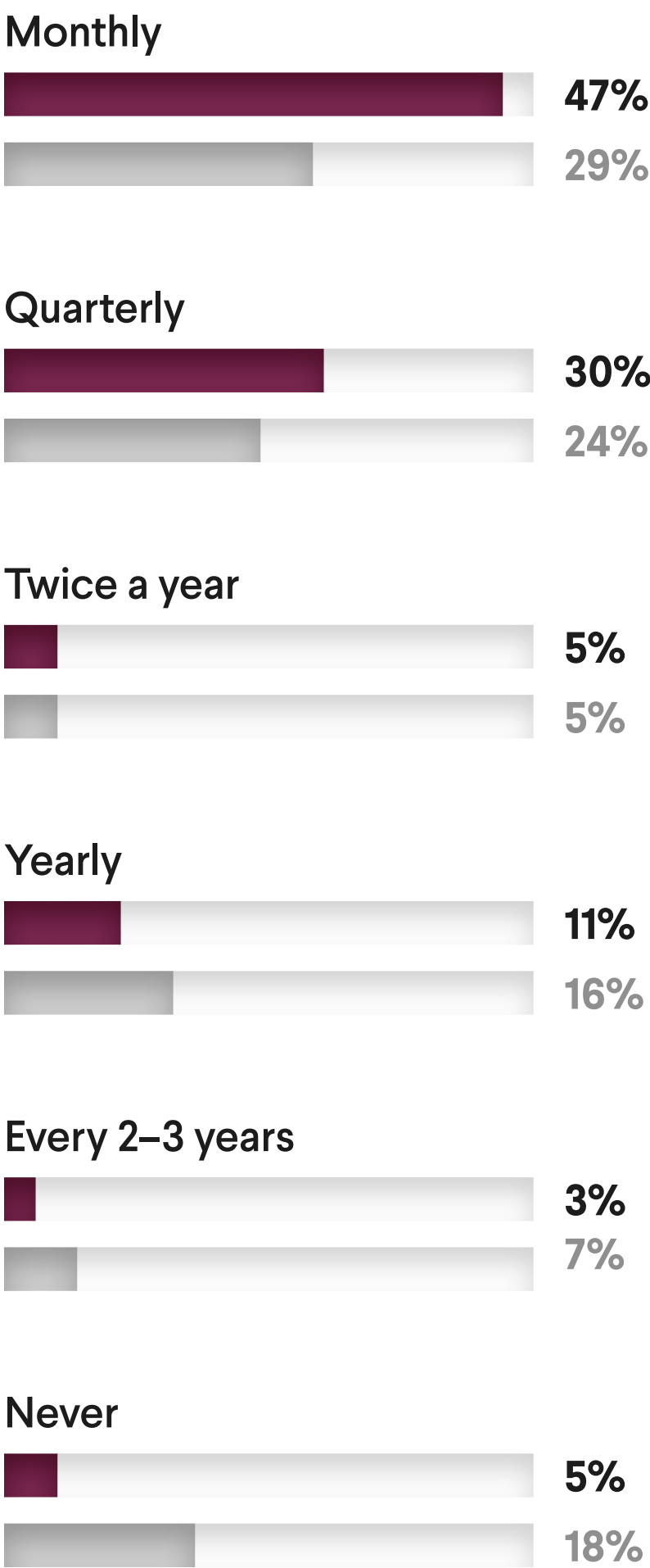
More than three-quarters of aligned workers (77%) report that their company communicates its strategic goals at least quarterly. Nearly half (47%) say their company’s goals are shared at least monthly. Unaligned workers, on the other hand, are the most likely to report that their company never shares its strategic goals.

The good news is that a company doesn’t need to jump

Aligned workers are the most likely to receive monthly communication about their company’s goals

HOW FREQUENTLY A COMPANY COMMUNICATES ITS STRATEGIC GOALS

- Aligned workers
- Unaligned workers



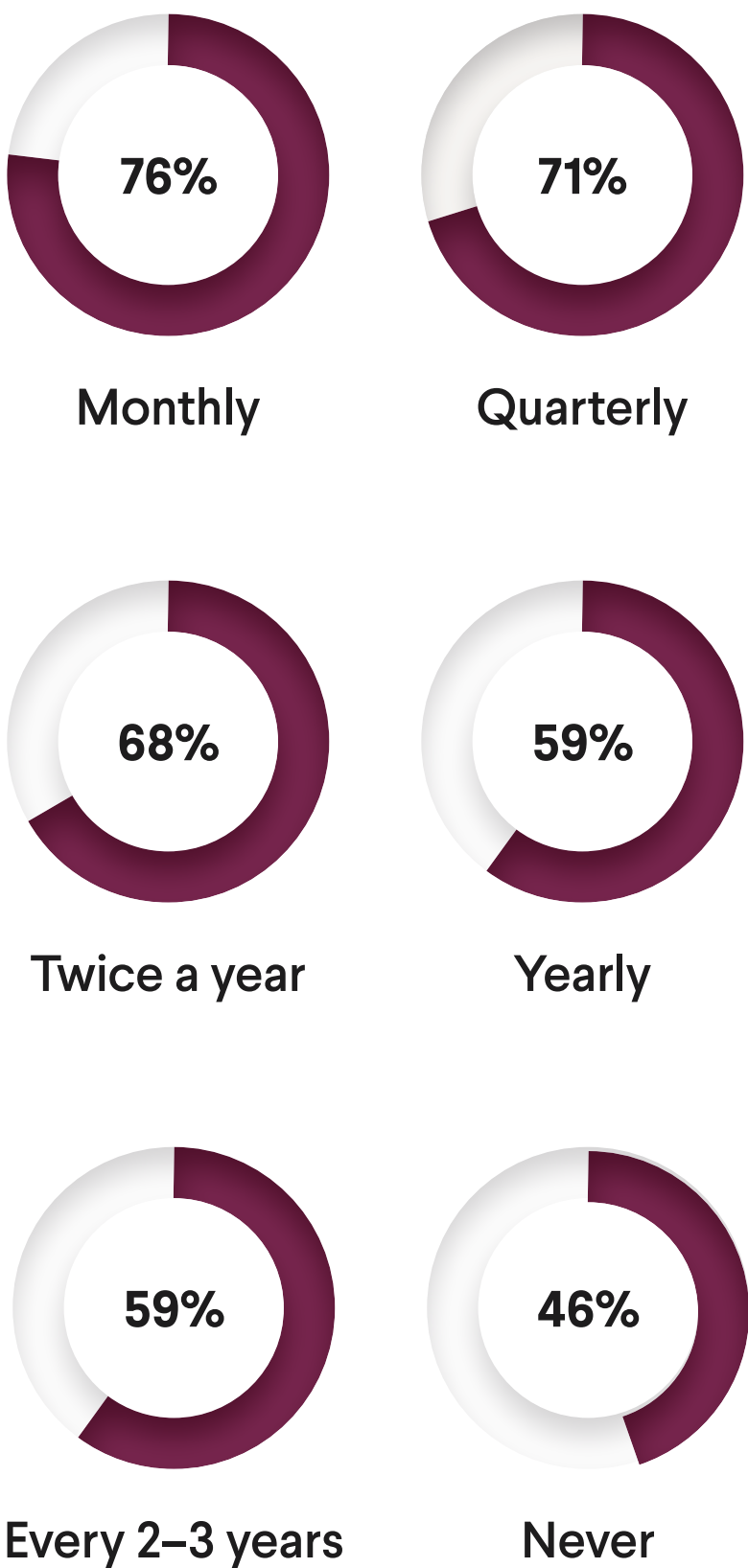
from sharing its strategy annually to monthly to reap the benefits. Even incremental increases in communication frequency can improve knowledge workers’ understanding of company strategy.

For instance, a subtle shift from communicating strategic goals annually to twice a year boosts understanding of the company strategy by 9 percentage points.

And there are other benefits to communicating strategy monthly: Workers who receive monthly strategy updates are the most likely to say that their company is open to new ideas. The same can be said about employees who feel that teams at their organization are working toward a shared vision.

There’s also a direct correlation between monthly communication of strategy

UNDERSTANDING OF STRATEGIC GOALS IN RELATION TO FREQUENCY OF COMMUNICATION





and workers rating a company as “excellent” for career progression, collaboration, communication, effective use of technology, productivity, morale, training, work-life balance, culture and openness to feedback.

**The leaky bucket of executive communications**

Companies must also decide who will communicate strategic goals. The obvious choice is the CEO or executive team. When aiming to ensure that knowledge workers understand company strategy, these are indeed good spokespeople.

Three-quarters of knowledge workers who receive strategy communications from the CEO feel they understand the company strategy. This drops slightly to 74% for the executive team and to 68% when

direct managers are the ones sharing strategic objectives.

But while tapping the CEO to communicate corporate goals can be a smart choice, there is a caveat: the leaky bucket of executive communications, when messaging gets diluted as it moves down the organizational ladder. Even aligned workers aren’t immune to this effect.

Unsurprisingly, most aligned executives feel that they have a clear understanding of their company strategy. But that understanding drops 13 percentage points as one moves down the organizational chart to general staff.

This dilution of strategy communications applies across the board, to both aligned and unaligned workers, although aligned workers start at a higher level of understanding. To combat information loss,

leaders have to think carefully about both their messaging and the mediums used to convey it.

**Meetings and collaborative channels are most effective**

Teamwide meetings win out as the most popular form for strategic communications, followed by email announcements and companywide meetings. This ranking applied across all knowledge workers surveyed.

But when it comes to strategy, hearing doesn’t always equate with understanding. For that, collaborative channels are key. To gain deeper insight into their company’s strategy, knowledge workers seek a “two-way street” that facilitates an inclusive, organic dialogue between and among executives, managers and office personnel.

**PERCENTAGE OF ALIGNED WORKERS WHO UNDERSTAND THE COMPANY STRATEGY**

90% Executive Management

90% Senior Management

89% Management

86% Supervisor/Administrator

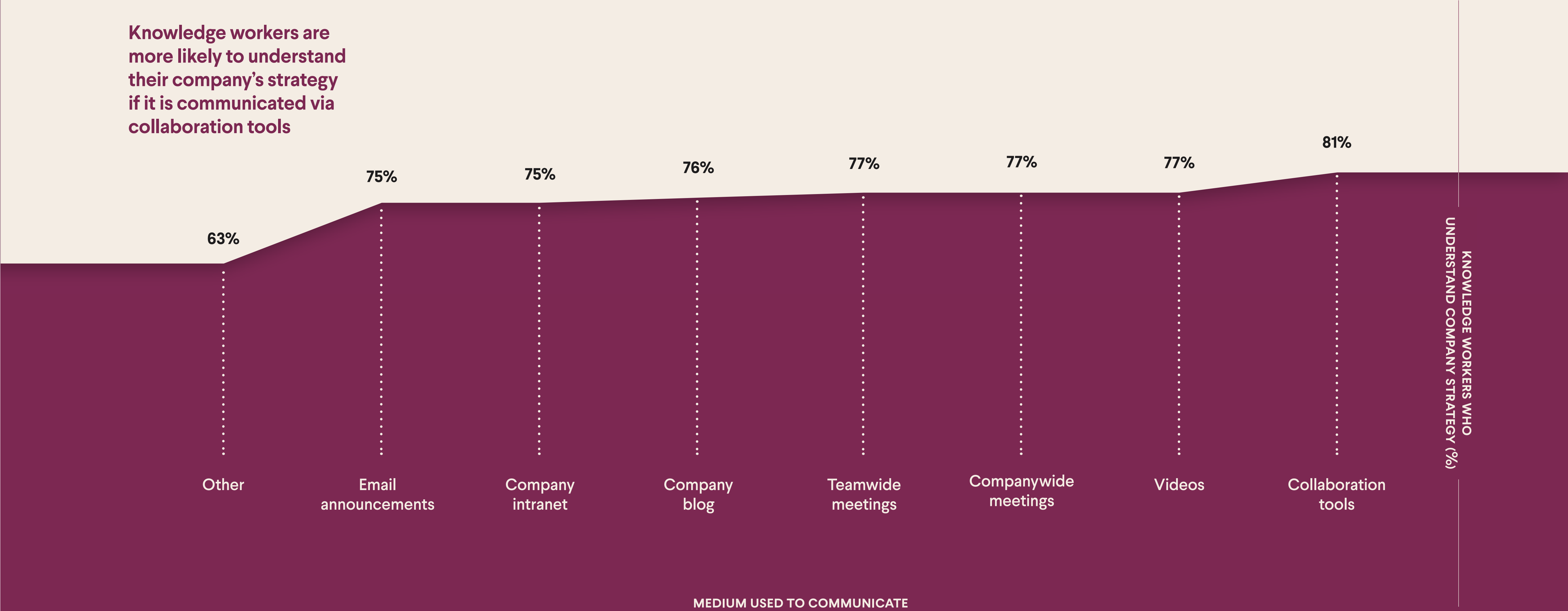
77% General Staff

Team meetings offer this to a degree, and, accordingly, knowledge workers rank them as the most effective forum for communicating strategic goals. But for deepening understanding and encouraging discussion of strategic goals, collaboration tools are key.

Eighty-one percent of knowledge workers at companies using collaboration tools to communicate their strategic goals indicate that they understand their company’s strategy. In fact, for understanding company strategy, collaboration tools emerge as the best medium, followed by videos and companywide and teamwide meetings.

The upshot? Encourage leadership to share strategic goals on a monthly basis and to do so through meetings and collaboration tools.

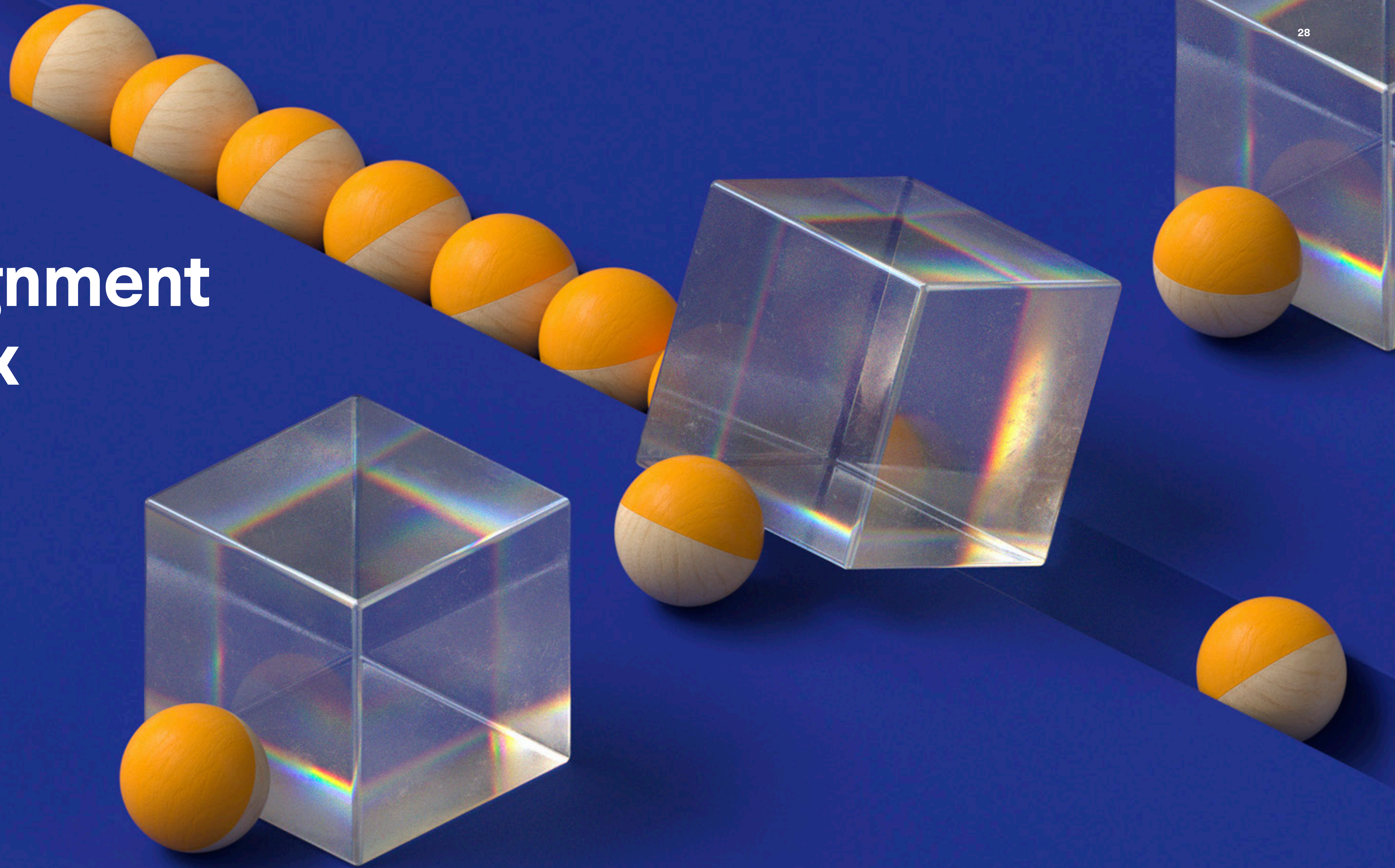
Knowledge workers are more likely to understand their company’s strategy if it is communicated via collaboration tools





CHAPTER 5

# The alignment paradox





**T**he benefits of an aligned workforce are readily apparent. Companies want and need workers who are connected, collaborative and optimistic about their company's future. But in today's fast-paced, high-pressure world of work, the immediate impulse is often to double down on alignment by scheduling more meetings, introducing more tools and encouraging more communication.

The catch is that aligned workers are already inundated. Aligned employees are the most likely to have 10 or more meetings a day and the most likely to send or receive hourly emails, messages and phone calls. Additionally, 64% of aligned workers report spending 30 minutes or more switching between apps each day.

## Aligned workers are using more apps than ever before

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## Most aligned workers lose 130 hours each year switching between apps

**81%**

of aligned workers report using more apps than they did five years ago

**73%**

expect the number of apps they need to use to increase further

**30 min.**

64% report spending 30 minutes or more switching between apps each day

**130 hrs.**

Over the course of an average working year (260 days), this amounts to 130 hours of lost productive time

**51%**

report that switching between apps "makes it harder for me to get essential work done"

That half hour of lost productivity takes on staggering proportions when looked at across an entire company. An enterprise with 2,500 employees working 260 days a year could lose 325,000 hours of productivity annually.

And things aren't slowing down. Eighty-one percent of aligned employees report using more apps than they did five years ago, and 73% expect the number of apps they need to use to increase further. There's an urgent need for management to provide clear direction and limits so aligned workers can use their time more effectively.

### Knowledge workers worldwide are under pressure

This paradox isn't limited to aligned workers. Knowledge workers across all regions, age

### App usage is on the rise globally

**76%**

of all knowledge workers surveyed report using more apps than they did five years ago

**68%**

expect that number to rise

groups and industries report using more apps than ever before. Seventy-six percent of all respondents reported using more apps than they did five years ago, and 68% expect that number to rise.

This makes sense in light of current workplace trends, in which automation is increasingly displacing rote work and pushing more complex,

interdependent tasks to the forefront of knowledge workers' daily routines. This shift requires knowledge workers to engage more with technology as they connect with colleagues to tackle complex projects across teams and time zones.

### Communication can become all-consuming

As the complexity of work increases, so does the need for cross-functional teamwork. And communication between teams is hard—and even harder for those working on teams distributed across multiple offices, time zones and countries.

More than half (52%) of knowledge workers who communicate with colleagues in several time zones find cross-functional

“The cost of choice and information overload is that people get distracted, people are making more errors because they're multitasking, and if you're not giving yourself the time to focus, you are less good at engaging in creative problem-solving.”

**Sheena Iyengar,**  
S.T. Lee Professor of  
Business, Columbia  
Business School



communication challenging. The same can be said of those who work with different people and teams every day—63% of them feel the strain.

**Knowledge workers need better (not more) software**

Adding more software and communication tools isn't the answer—workers need better solutions. Knowledge workers often find their attention divided across multiple avenues, and the proliferation of workplace software that (mostly) enhances productivity can also contribute to fragmentation of attention.

More than half of knowledge workers who use more than six apps on a daily basis find cross-functional communication challenging. The same applies to those who receive more than 25 daily emails.

**TOP MANAGEMENT AND CULTURE CHALLENGES GLOBALLY**

**1** Collaborating with people across several time zones

**2** Using more than six apps per day

**3** Receiving more than 25 emails daily

**4** Working with different people and teams every day\*

\*For each condition, more than half of respondents found it challenging to “communicate with coworkers in different teams, departments or offices.”

**ALIGNMENT IN ACTION**

# Canada's largest bank leverages new tech tools to reinvent itself

**When used well, technology is a key driver of innovation**

Reinvention is not just the domain of startups. Disruption in this new era of work is something even the largest and most successful enterprises are tackling head-on. And leaning into new technologies is a major part of that transformation.

The Royal Bank of Canada, a 150-year-old bank and the largest in Canada, is

transforming itself into a digital-first institution, according to the company's executive vice president of innovation and technology, Martin Wildberger.

“One of the most exciting things on the innovation front is we're approaching an age where we have access to tremendous compute capacity alongside an abundance of

data, which we are able to connect and analyze through new techniques like AI,” Wildberger says. “As a result, we will soon only be limited by our own imaginations. These advancements are allowing us to not only derive better solutions to problems we've been wrestling with for ages, but more importantly to do things that we've never done before.”



**Martin Wildberger,**  
Executive Vice  
President, Innovation  
and Technology, RBC



Beyond communication, the very technology that should boost productivity can undermine it. Nearly half of all knowledge workers surveyed (49%) reported that switching between apps prevents them from getting essential work done.

**The innovator’s dilemma**

The app overload effect is particularly profound at “innovator” companies—those that adopt new products and services first. Almost all workers at innovator companies report using more apps than they did five years ago.

And as with aligned workers overall, app switching can get in the way of actual work. Eighty-one percent of workers at innovator companies report spending at least 30 minutes each day switching between apps.

But these innovators seem to have landed on a solution. They are the most likely to feel that collaboration tools are an effective form of communication, at almost three times the rate of employees at laggard companies (those that are among the last to adopt new products and services). From the innovator standpoint, it’s clear that apps aren’t going anywhere. So the best, most effective approach is to consolidate them in a collaboration platform to stem the fragmentation of attention. True to form, the innovators may have found and adopted a solution that will inform the future of work.

# Leveraging the power of choice in the workplace

The average working person in a developed country deals with an extraordinary amount of information each day—the equivalent of reading 174 newspapers, according to Columbia Business School professor Sheena Iyengar. Here, she shares strategies for dealing with too many decisions.

**1 Be choosy about choosing**  
Determine which decisions you can delegate to others or technology.

**2 Identify your priorities**  
Select three to five significant problems or ideas to focus on.

**3 Keep your end goal in mind**  
Rather than reacting to incoming information, define what you need to know to move forward.

**4 Set limits**  
Put a time cap on information-gathering and set an endpoint for making a decision.

CHAPTER 6

# Looking ahead: the 8 rules of engagement

**F**ortunately, alignment is not a finite resource. It's a competitive advantage available to every worker and every company, everywhere.

What people want—and need—is to feel part of the bigger plan. To be kept in the loop. To have the support and understanding they need to achieve their best work. Even aligned workers agree that they want more alignment. And workers everywhere want more transparency, frequent communication and a clear understanding of who's doing what.

Companies acting now, with people in mind, can reshape their trajectories toward more innovation, happier and more engaged workers, and ultimately more growth and revenue.

# The Engagement Eight

Data is wonderful, but how can you translate that into action within your team or your company? Here are the Engagement Eight, or eight principles we feel all leaders, from executives to managers, can leverage to provide their teams with the support needed to achieve the best possible outcomes.

## 1 Invest in alignment now

The majority of knowledge workers want to feel more aligned. And leaders who prioritize that stand to gain clear benefits: Aligned workers are more collaborative, innovative, empowered and filled with optimistic purpose about their company's future. An aligned workforce nets out positively for both workers and the companies that support them.

## 2 Lead with strategy and vision

Without insight into their company's strategic vision, people struggle. Unaligned workers are the most likely to have never heard their company discuss strategic goals. Conversely, workers who understand their company's

strategy are more likely to rate their company positively across a wide range of metrics, including collaboration, employee morale and workplace culture. By setting a North Star for workers to follow, leaders empower their teams to make decisions, and act and innovate in the best interest of the business.

## 3 Communicate your strategy monthly

A bold vision and detailed strategic plan aren't effective if they're not known. When it comes to communicating strategy, monthly is the ideal cadence, but even incremental increases in frequency can improve workers' understanding. Beyond alignment, there are other benefits to communicating strategy monthly: Workers are more likely to see their

company as open to new ideas and believe that teams are working toward a shared vision.

## 4 Allow people to be more human at work

While organizational alignment can help workers connect with their colleagues and company, Susan David, a Harvard Medical School psychologist and the author of *Emotional Agility*, emphasizes the importance of individual alignment. That is, when employees feel a sense of clarity and connection between their values and day-to-day work. That clarity of purpose can ladder up to organization-wide benefits. "When people are allowed to bring their emotional truth to work," David says, "that is when innovation, creativity, engagement and culture thrive in the organization."



“When people are allowed to bring their emotional truth to work, that is when innovation, creativity, engagement and culture thrive in the organization.”

**Susan David,**  
Harvard Medical  
School psychologist  
and author of  
*Emotional Agility*



## 5 Empower all leaders to share the strategic vision, but start at the top

Knowledge workers want to hear from the source. When plans are passed down, information gets lost along the way. Workers are most likely to understand the company strategy when they hear it from leaders, whether CEOs or other executives. Three-quarters of knowledge workers who receive strategy communications from the CEO feel they understand the company strategy. This drops slightly, to 74%, for the executive team and to 68% when direct managers are the ones sharing strategic objectives.

## 6 Opt for meetings and collaborative channels when sharing strategy

Knowledge workers seek a “two-way street” that facilitates an inclusive, organic dialogue between and among executives, managers and office personnel. Team meetings offer this to a degree, and, accordingly, knowledge workers rank them as the most effective forum for communicating strategic goals. But for deepening understanding and encouraging discussion around strategic goals, collaboration tools emerge as the most effective medium.

## 7 Aggregate tools and information

The software proliferation trend is here to stay. Globally, knowledge workers are using more apps than ever before. And while apps can (and do) help people become more productive and collaborative, all of this “context switching” can have the opposite effect and

fragment attention. Nearly half of knowledge workers today report that switching between apps prevents them from getting essential work done. So select apps carefully and source solutions that consolidate, rather than divide, attention.

## 8 Distraction isn't just a productivity killer

Distraction also means you leave behind your best possible problem-solving brain. “If you're not giving yourself the time to focus, you are less good at engaging in creative problem-solving,” says Columbia Business School professor Sheena Iyengar. And perhaps even more seriously, it's long been proven that distraction leads to errors, which, depending on your industry, could have steep costs.



## CHAPTER 7

# Methodology





**SAMPLE SIZES IN EACH MARKET**

|                 |       |
|-----------------|-------|
| Australia ..... | 1,250 |
| Brazil .....    | 1,000 |
| France .....    | 1,250 |
| Germany .....   | 1,250 |
| India .....     | 2,000 |
| Japan .....     | 1,000 |
| Singapore ..... | 1,000 |
| Spain .....     | 1,250 |
| U.K. ....       | 3,000 |
| U.S. ....       | 4,000 |

In the first quarter of 2019, Slack partnered with market research firm GlobalWebIndex to undertake multimarket, quantitative research designed to understand the views of knowledge workers as well as the trends affecting the future of the workplace.

Slack and GlobalWebIndex co-designed the questionnaire, which GlobalWebIndex then fielded as an online survey to 17,000 knowledge workers across 10 markets. The 20-minute survey included Likert scale, dichotomous and multiple-choice questions.

All respondents were identified as internet users

(someone who uses the internet from any device and any location) and knowledge workers (employed individuals who hold an office position and/or “work with data, analyze information or think creatively” in a typical work week). The surveyed population spanned an age range of 16 to 64, more than 40 industries, all company sizes, and all career levels (from skilled/semi-skilled workers and office staff to senior executives).

Participants completed the survey in their local language, and questions were localized to each country to ensure relevancy. To produce

the highest-quality and most representative data, the survey was broken into several themed “blocks,” which were then randomized to remove any bias around the question order. Routing methods, which direct respondents to relevant survey questions, were applied to ensure that all respondents were presented with questions pertaining to their workplace experience.

After fieldwork was completed, GlobalWebIndex vetted all responses across a series of metrics. These included analysis of survey completion time; checks for patterned answers; and the use of logic traps, which

screen for contradictory answers. Between 5% and 10% of the surveys in each market were removed during these checks.

Within the final sample, respondents were assigned a weight based on their representativeness of surveyed markets. Weights took into account age, gender and education profile and were used to estimate how many real-world people a data point represents. The report specifies when these projections were used.



The State of Work, by Slack

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