THE
Future of Time

A global study fielded by
Adobe Document Cloud
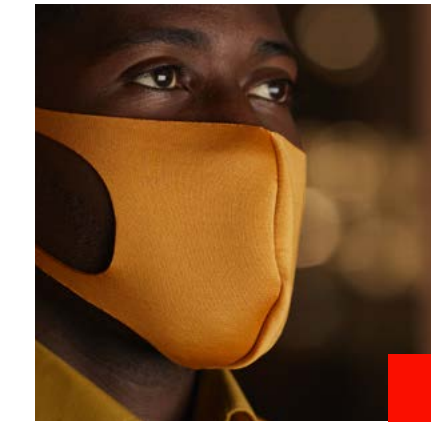
Adobe

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2020 and 2021 have brought significant 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 digitise operations.

63%

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

→ **April 2021 Accenture Future of Work study**

£494bn

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**
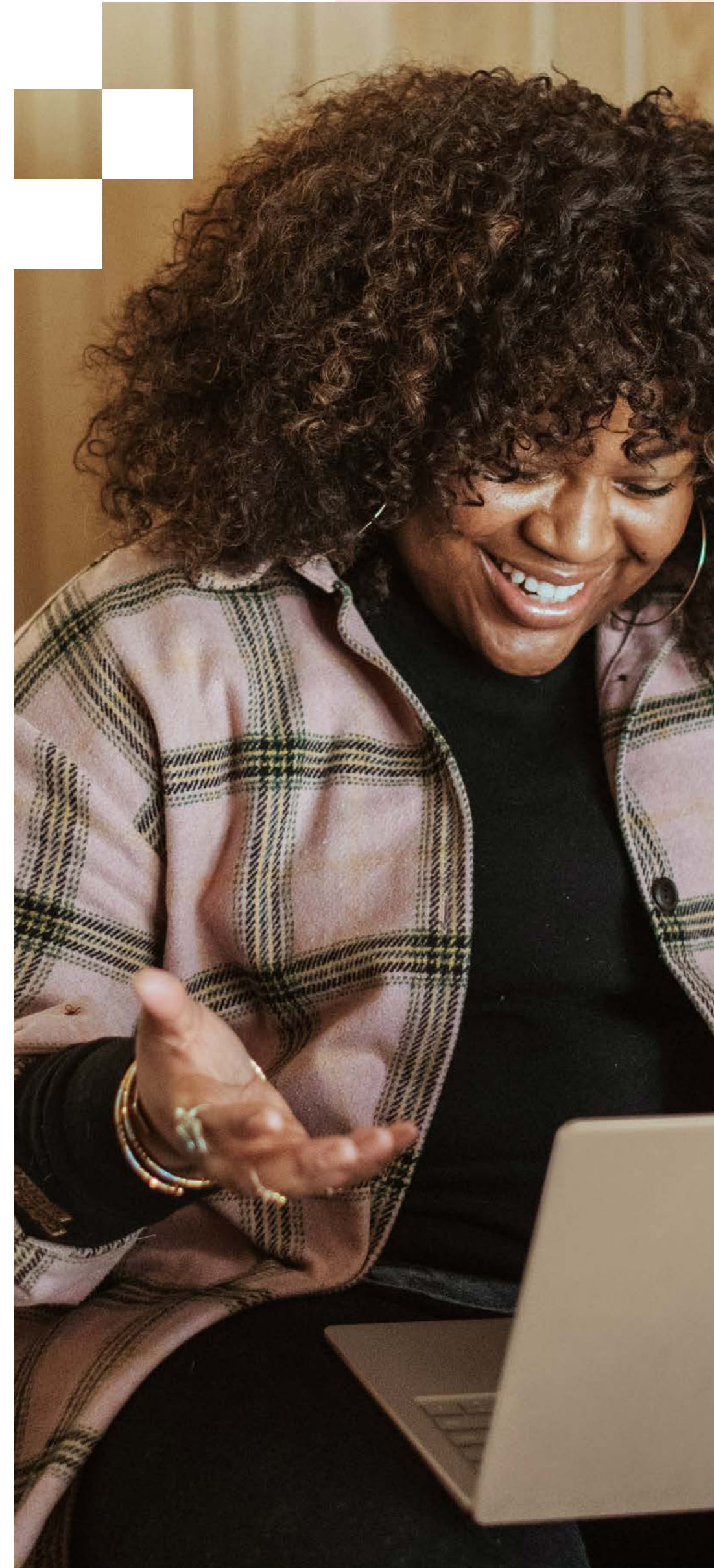
THE
Future of Time

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 30 April–28 May 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
(30/4–28/5)

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

	US	UK	AU	NZ	FR	DE	JP
🏢	45%	51%	56%	51%	47%	51%	44%
👥	52%	63%	62%	58%	60%	58%	41%

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

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
🏢	44%	47%	52%	48%	45%	42%	56%
👥	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
🏢	41%	49%	53%	48%	44%	34%	44%
👥	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."
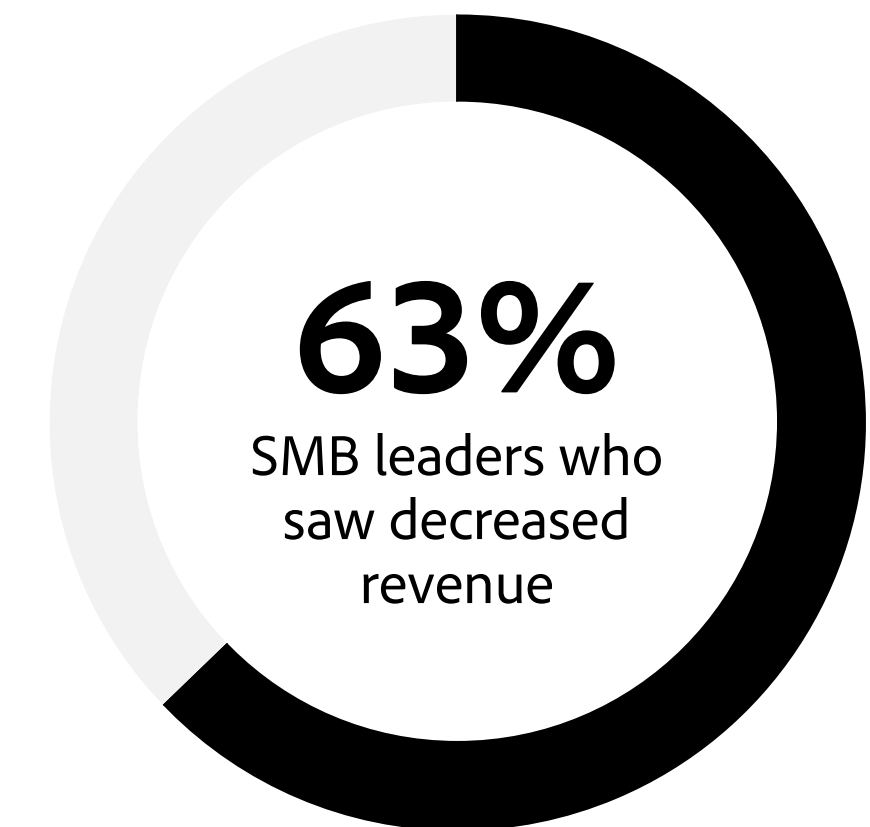% agree (T2B)

60%
SMB leaders who saw decreased revenue
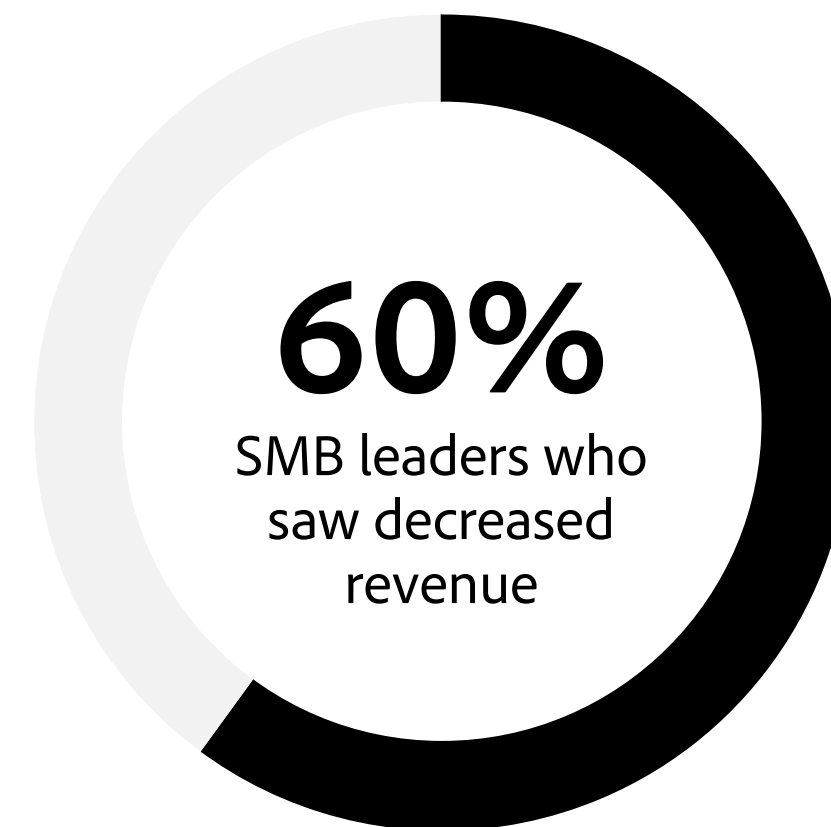
Among SMB leaders seeing decreased revenue

"I am willing to work around the clock if it means keeping my business afloat."
% agree (T2B)

63%
SMB leaders who saw decreased revenue

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)

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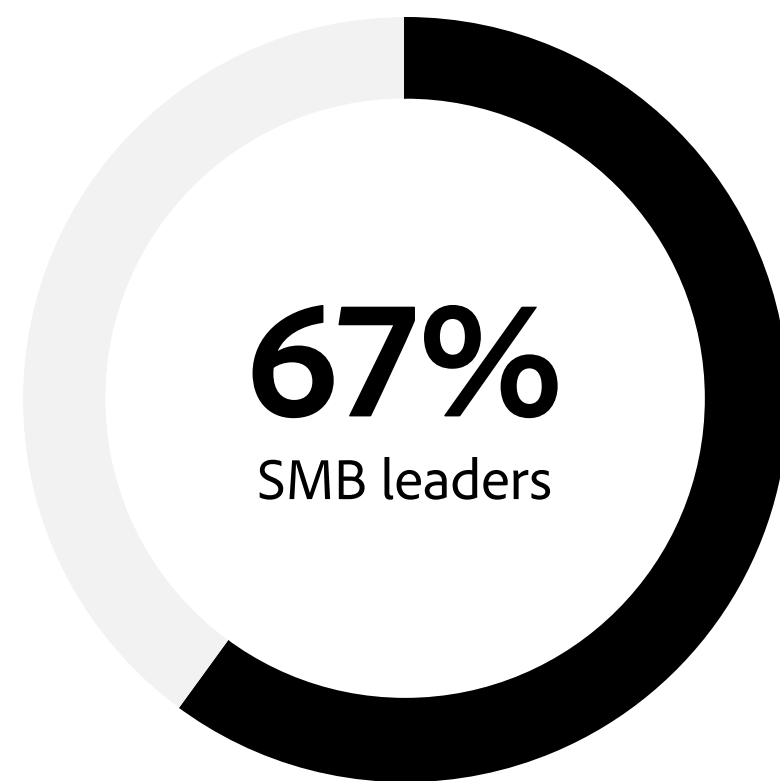
	US	UK	AU	NZ	FR	DE	JP
	67%	68%	72%	74%	68%	53%	66%

"I constantly feel stretched for time at work."
% agree (T2B)

53%
Enterprise workers

57%
SMB leaders

	US	UK	AU	NZ	FR	DE	JP
	45%	57%	61%	61%	52%	47%	46%
	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?
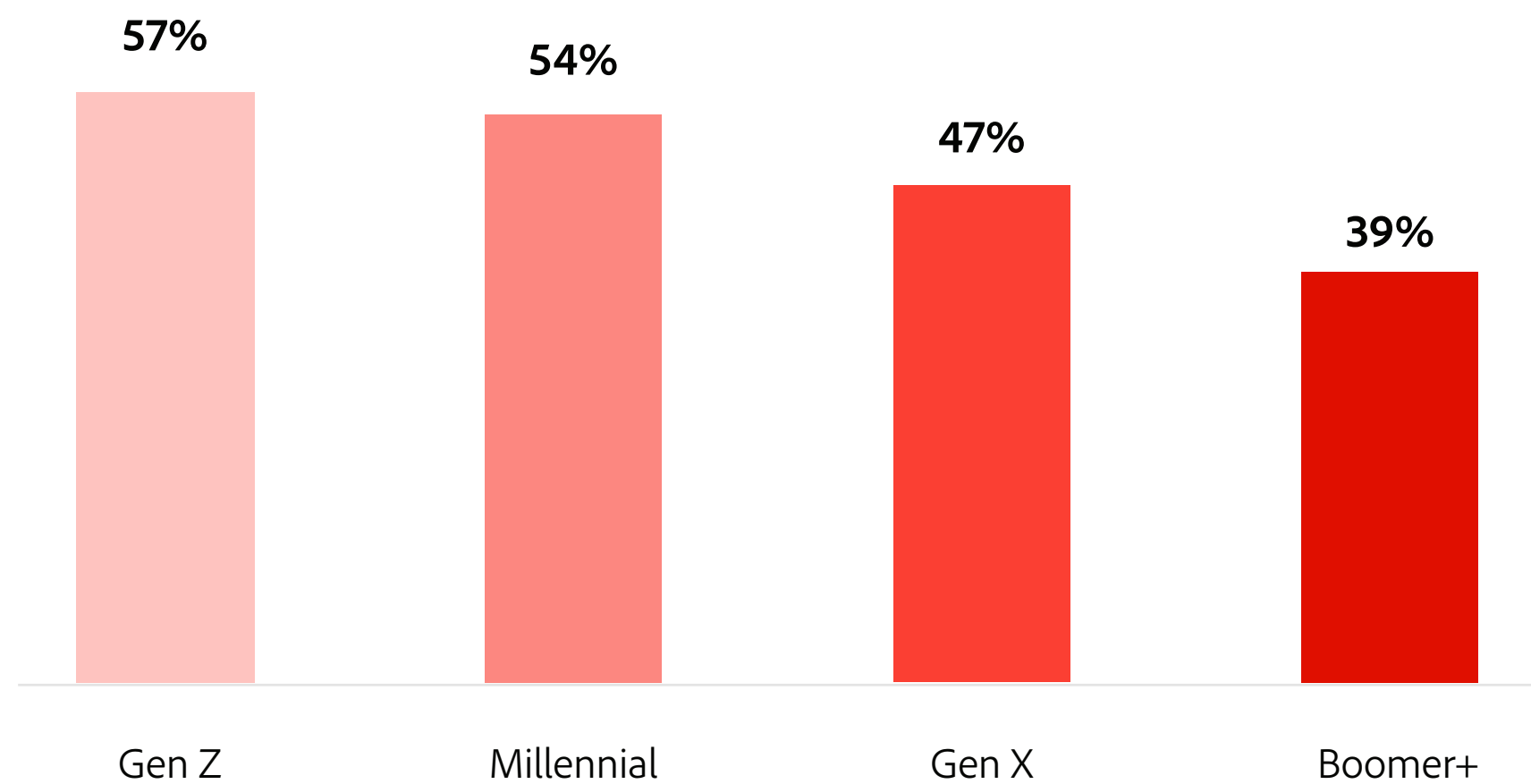N=3,404 Global ENT, N=2,102 Global SMB

*Sample sizes vary by country

Younger generations of enterprise workers and minority-owned, women-owned and essential SMB leaders struggle most with these pressures.
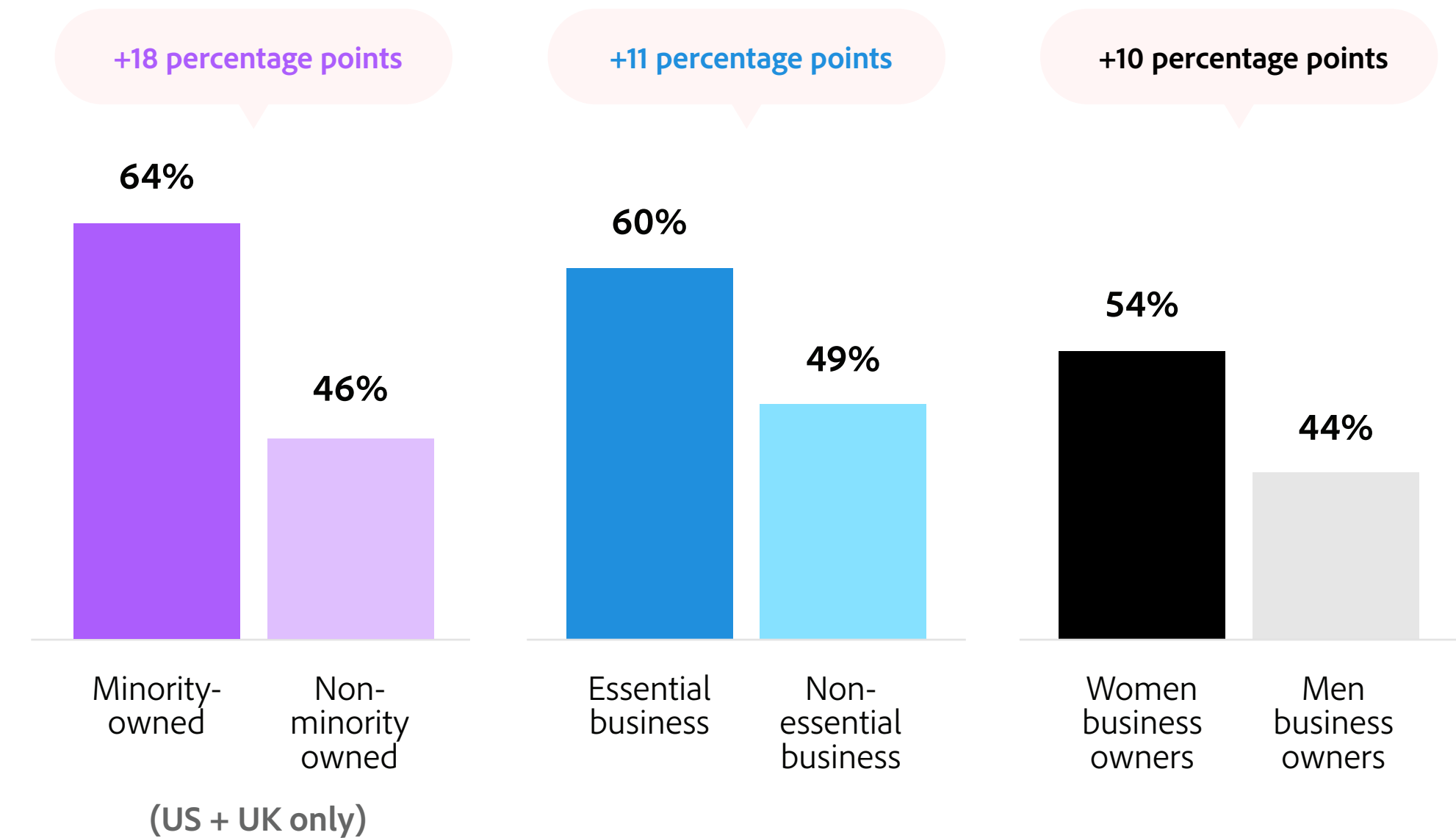
"I feel pressure to be reachable at all times of the day, even early morning or evening."
% agree (T2B) among enterprise workers

Gen Z	Millennial	Gen X	Boomer+
57%	54%	47%	39%

"Trying to keep my business afloat has brought a lot of stress into my personal life."
% agree (T2B) among SMB leaders

+18 percentage points		+11 percentage points		+10 percentage points	
Minority-owned	Non-minority owned	Essential business	Non-essential business	Women business owners	Men business owners
64%	46%	60%	49%	54%	44%

(US + UK only)

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

62%
Enterprise workers
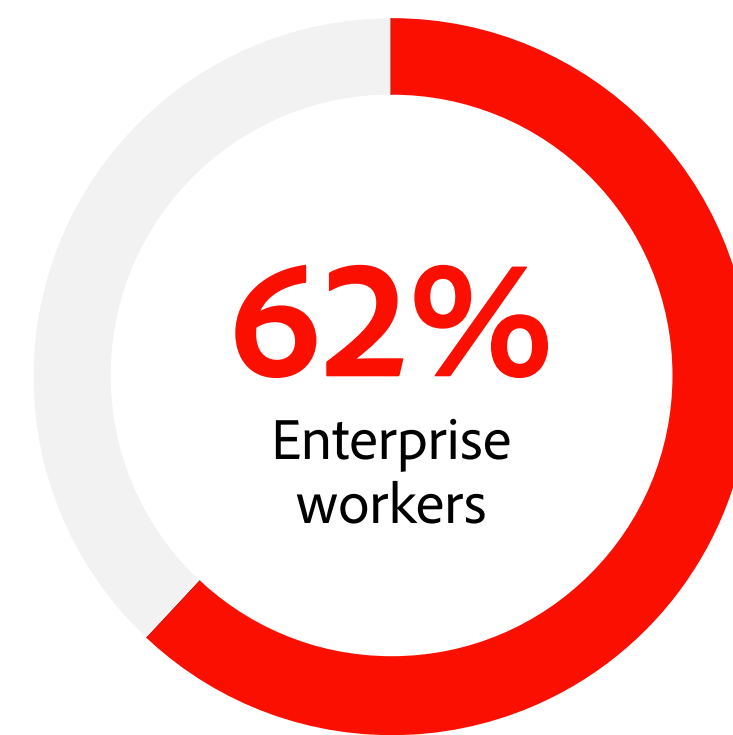
US	UK	AU	NZ	FR	DE	JP
59%	66%	68%	67%	63%	55%	59%

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

Pre-COVID work schedule: 17% / 36% / 47%

Current work schedule: 23% / 44% / 33%

Ideal work schedule: 51% / 33% / 16%

Legend:
- **Work flexible hours when it is most convenient for me**
- **Have a set work schedule, but have some flexibility to shift my hours**
- **Start and end work according to a set work schedule**
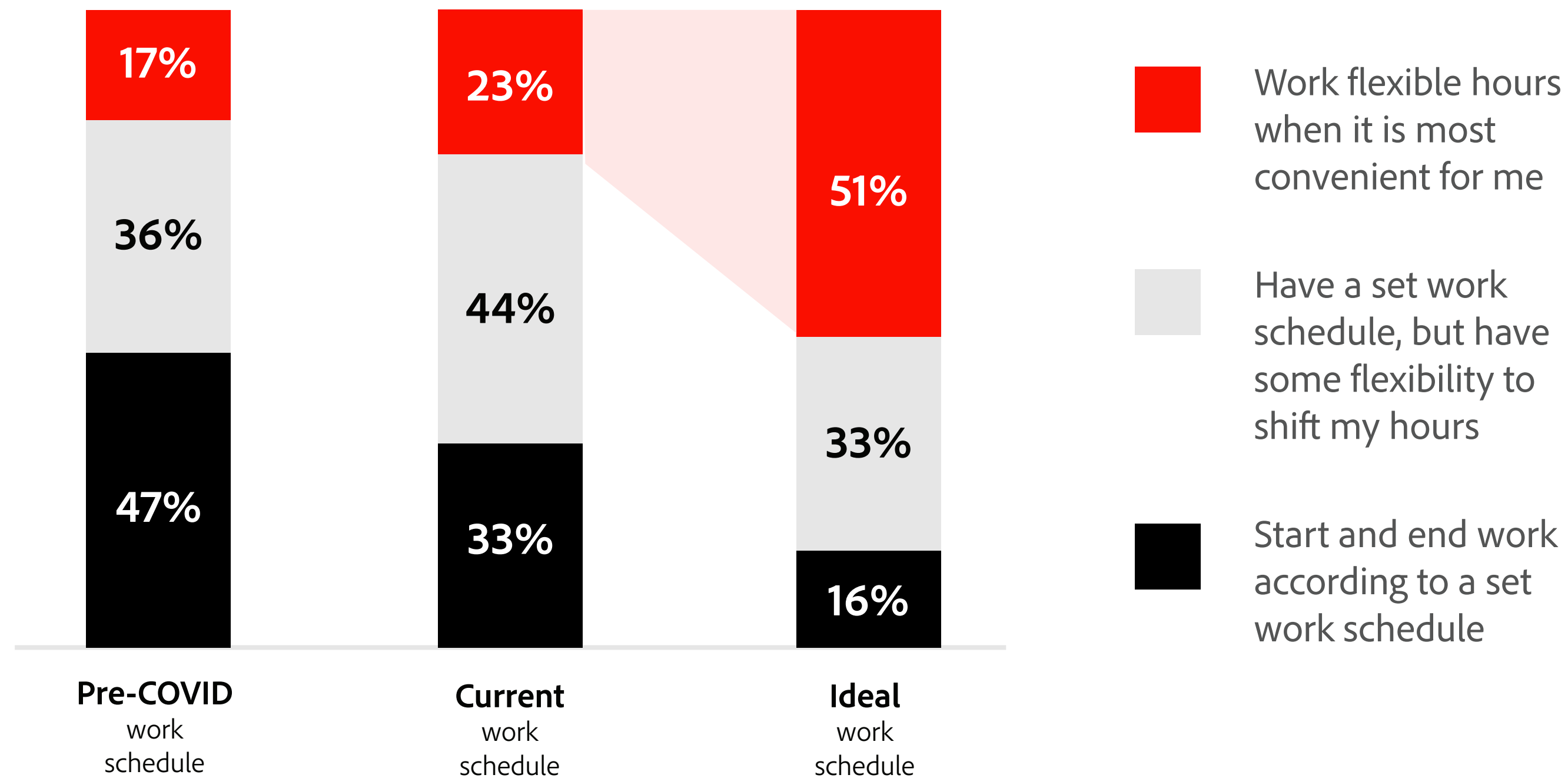
	Currently work flexible hours	Ideally work flexible hours
US	19%	47%
UK	22%	53%
AU	23%	53%
NZ	17%	53%
FR	25%	49%
DE	39%	56%
JP	12%	48%

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)

62% Gen Z
63% Millennial
52% Gen X
42% Boomer+
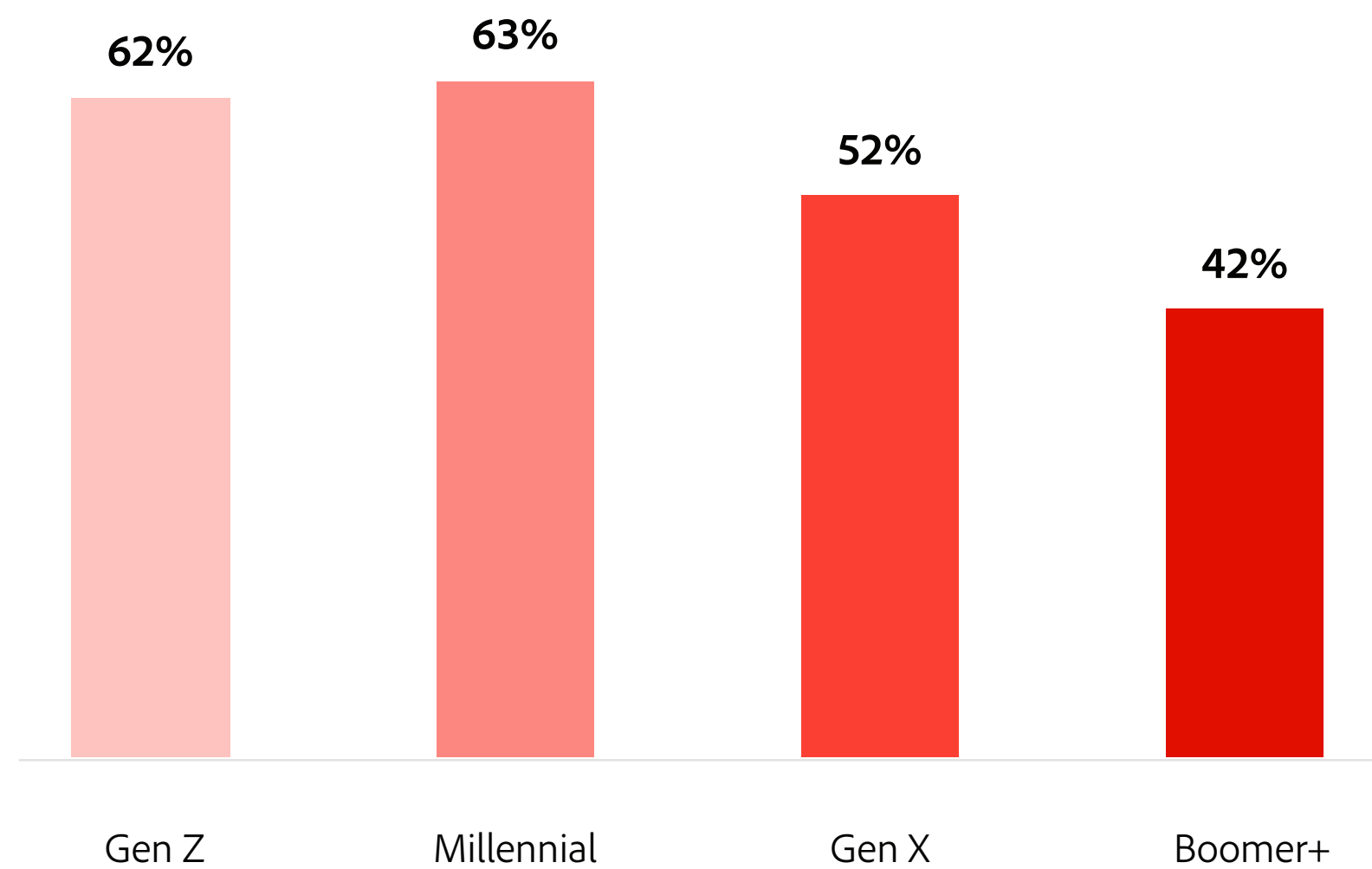
Most Productive Working Hours
% selected

	Gen Z	Millennial	Gen X	Boomer
Early hours (3am–9am)	27%	32%	36%	39%
Office hours (9am–6pm)	62%	74%	76%	74%
Late hours (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.
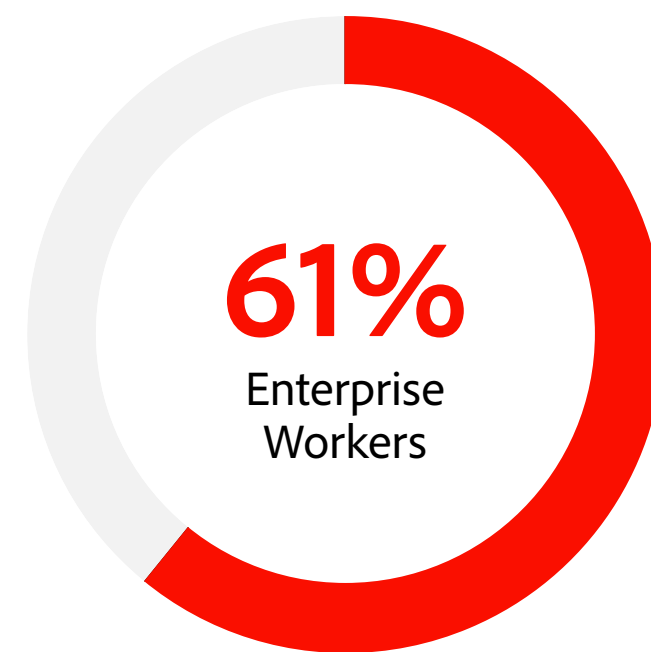
Likelihood to Switch Jobs
% likely in the next year (T4B)

35%
Enterprise workers
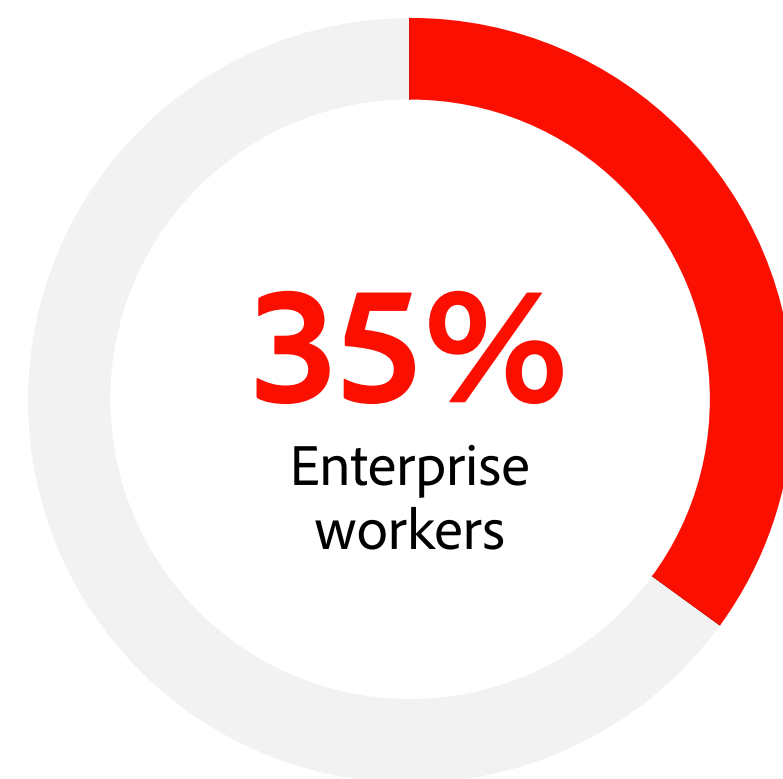
	US	UK	AU	NZ	FR	DE	JP
	29%	34%	44%	46%	28%	25%	39%

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

43%	43%	42%	42%	41%
Feel pressed to be reachable at all times of day	Struggle to set work and personal life boundaries	Constantly feel stretched for time	Work longer hours than they would like	Want more flexibility in their work schedule
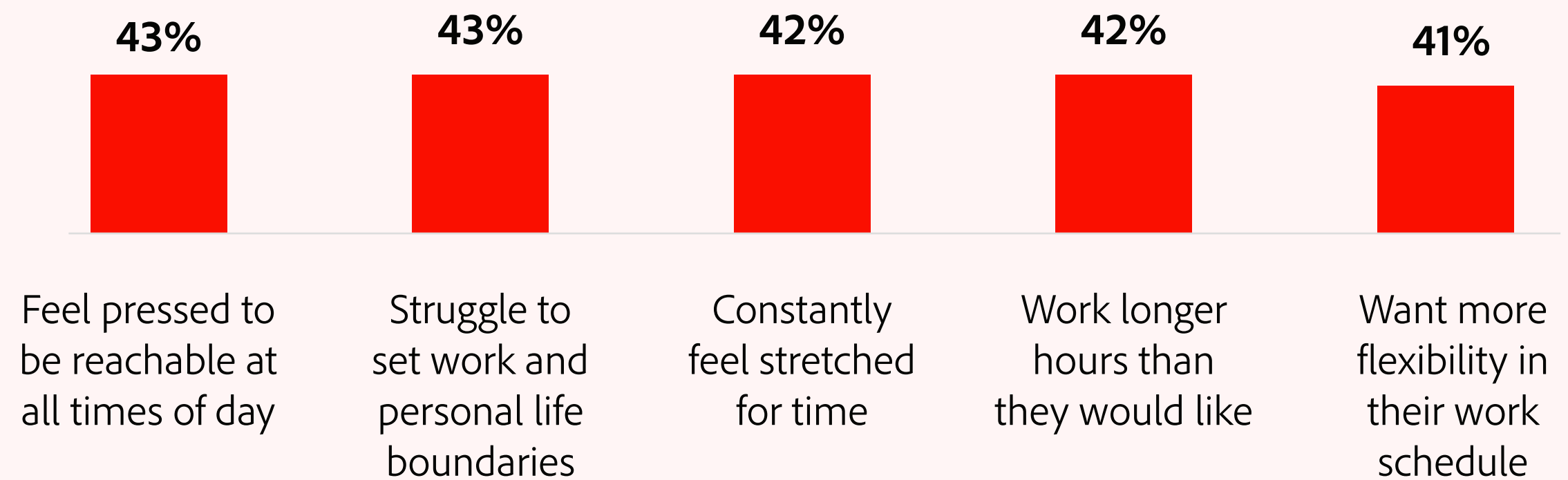
D18: How likely are you to pursue a new job in the next year?
N=3,404 Global ENT; N=1,617 Feel pressured to be reachable ENT, N=1,525 Struggle to set boundaries ENT; N=1,796 Stretched for time ENT, N=1,676 Work longer hours ENT; N=1,305 Want more flexibility ENT

*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."

By 2025, Gen Z will make up about

27%

of the global workforce*.

Likelihood to Switch Jobs
% likely in the next year (T4B)

56%	49%	31%	18%
Gen Z	Millennial	Gen X	Boomer+
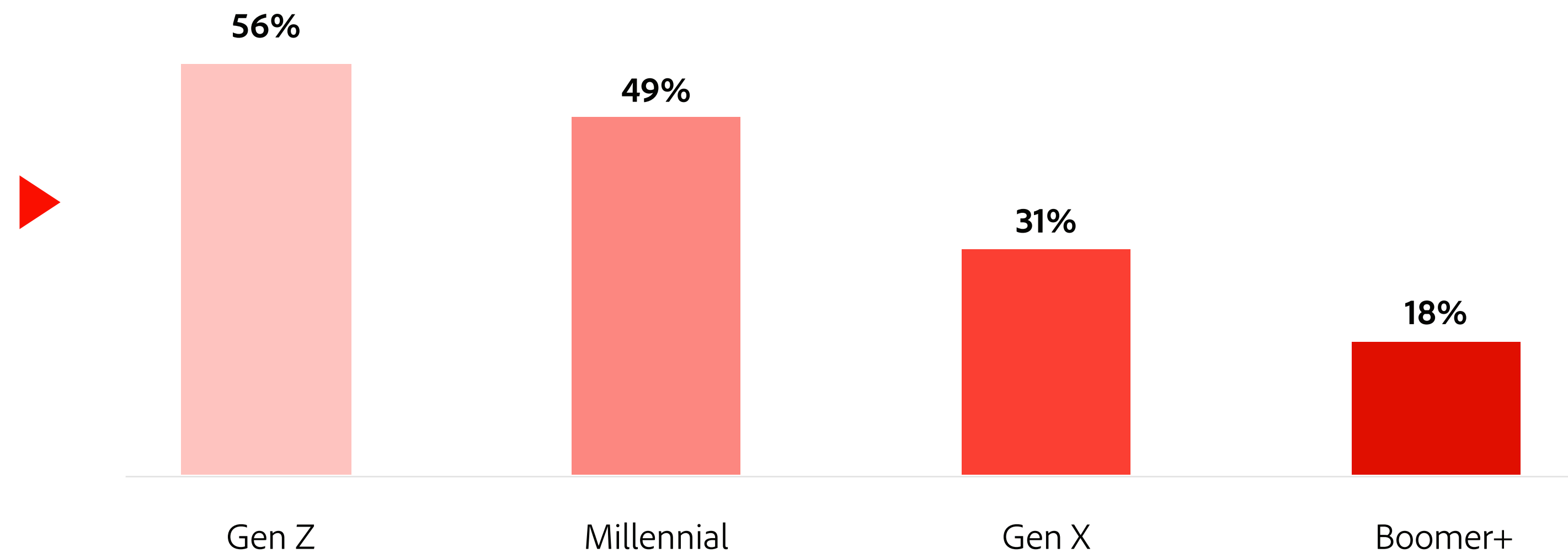
*According to the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) Employment Outlook 2021

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	More control over my work schedule	The option to work remotely
66% Enterprise Workers	**61%** Enterprise Workers	**54%** Enterprise Workers

	US	UK	AU	NZ	FR	DE	JP
Better work-life balance	64%	74%	74%	72%	51%	66%	65%

	US	UK	AU	NZ	FR	DE	JP
More control over my work schedule	60%	67%	69%	63%	49%	56%	60%

	US	UK	AU	NZ	FR	DE	JP
The option to work remotely	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...
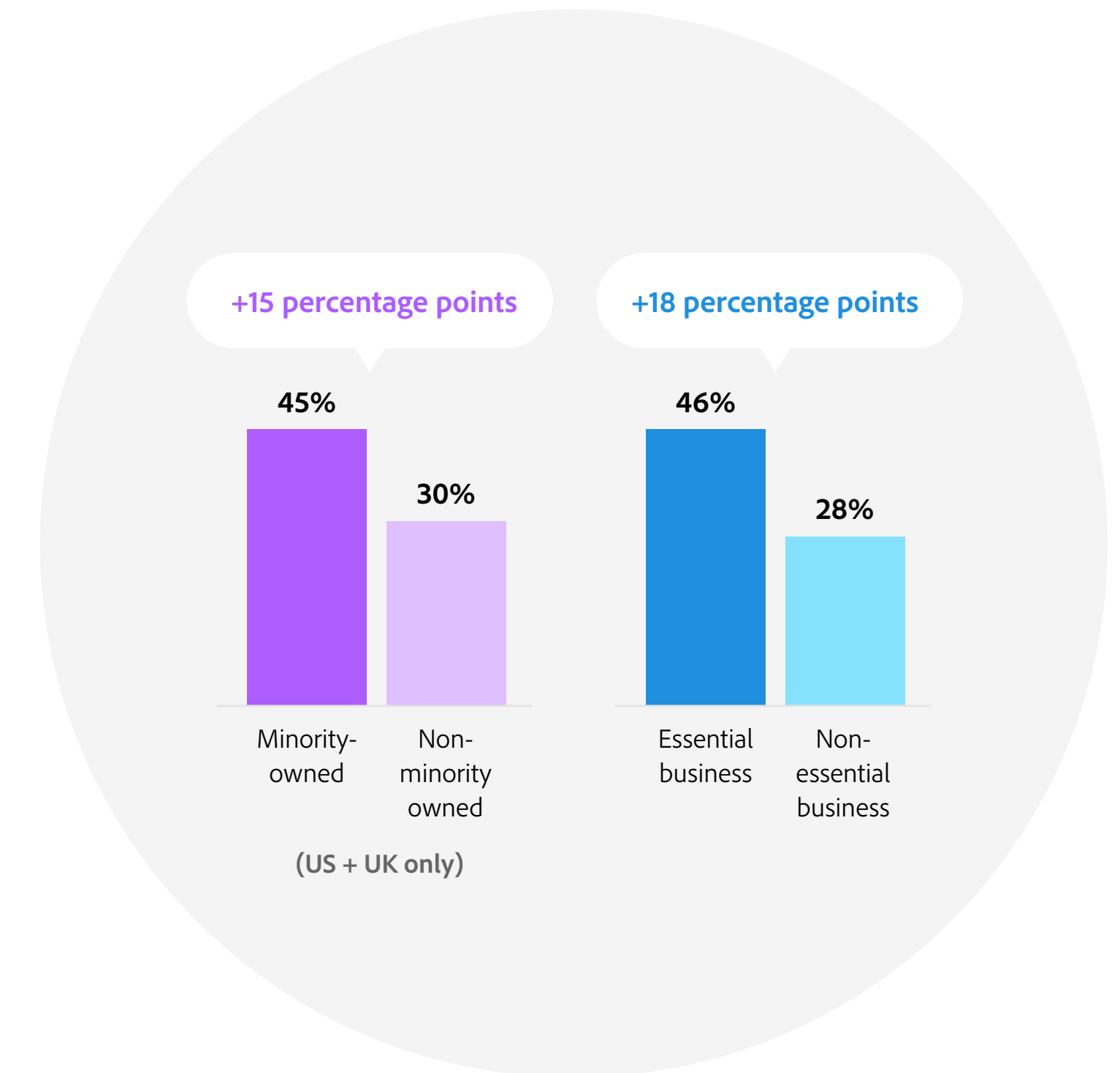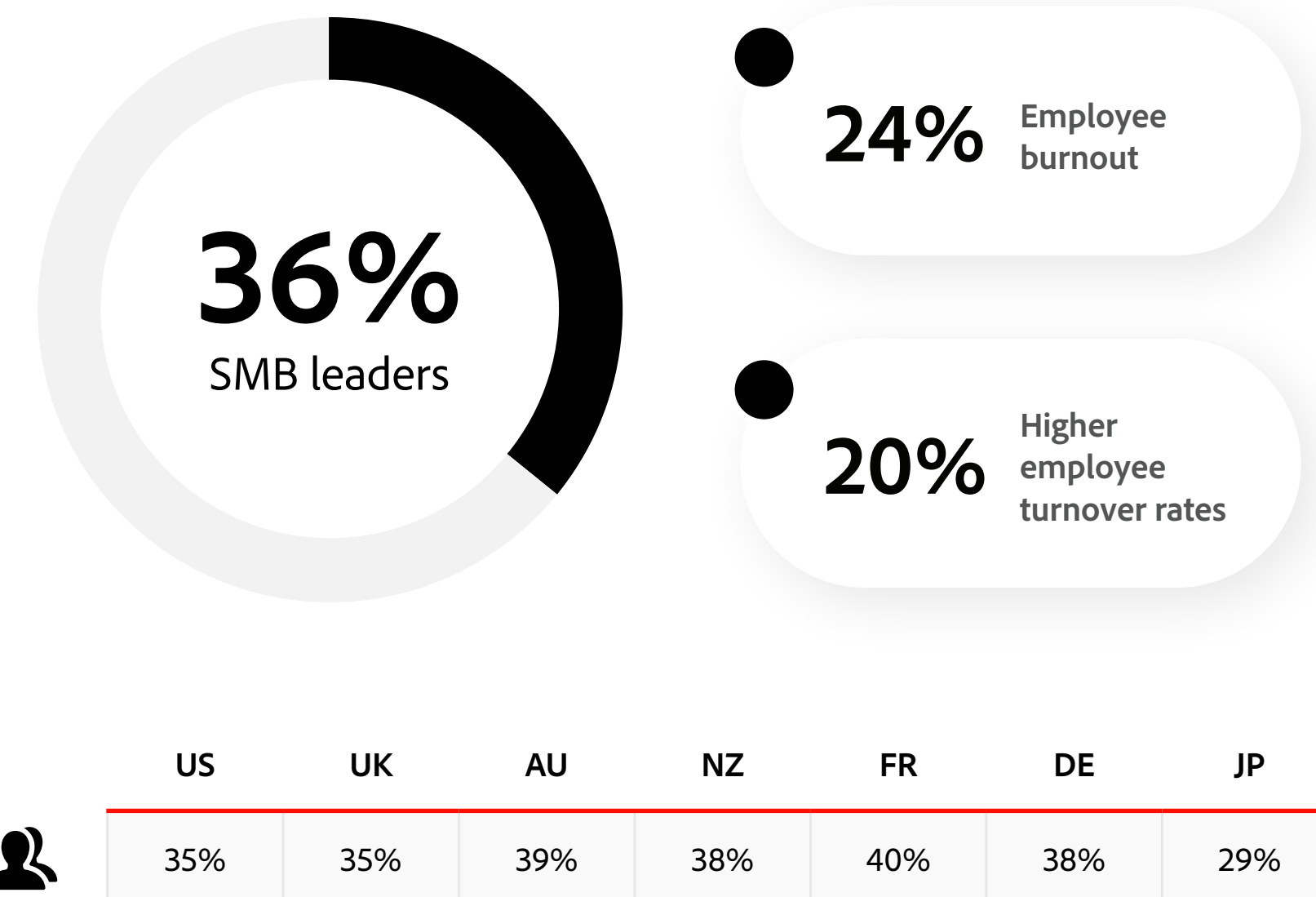% Likely (T2B)
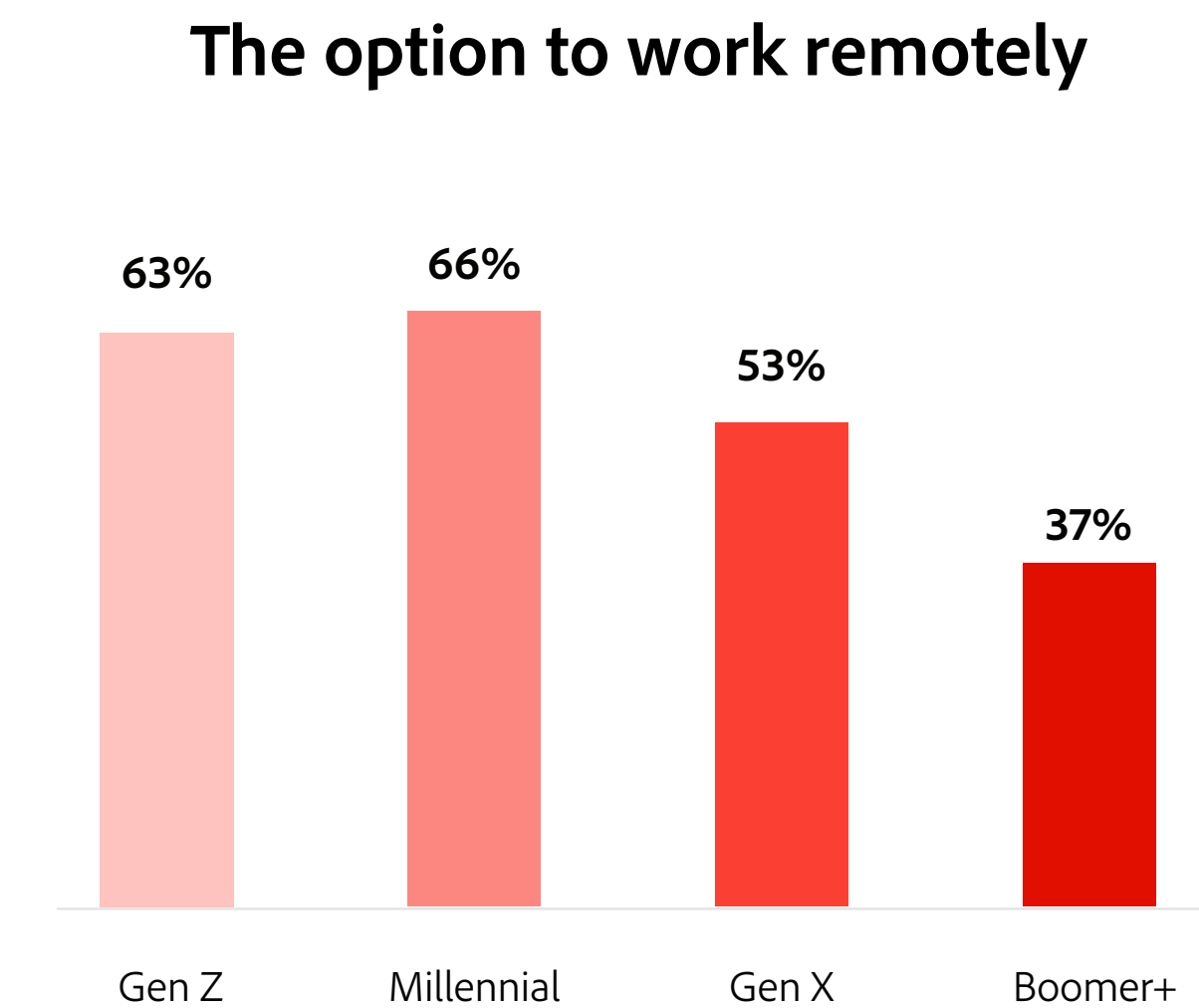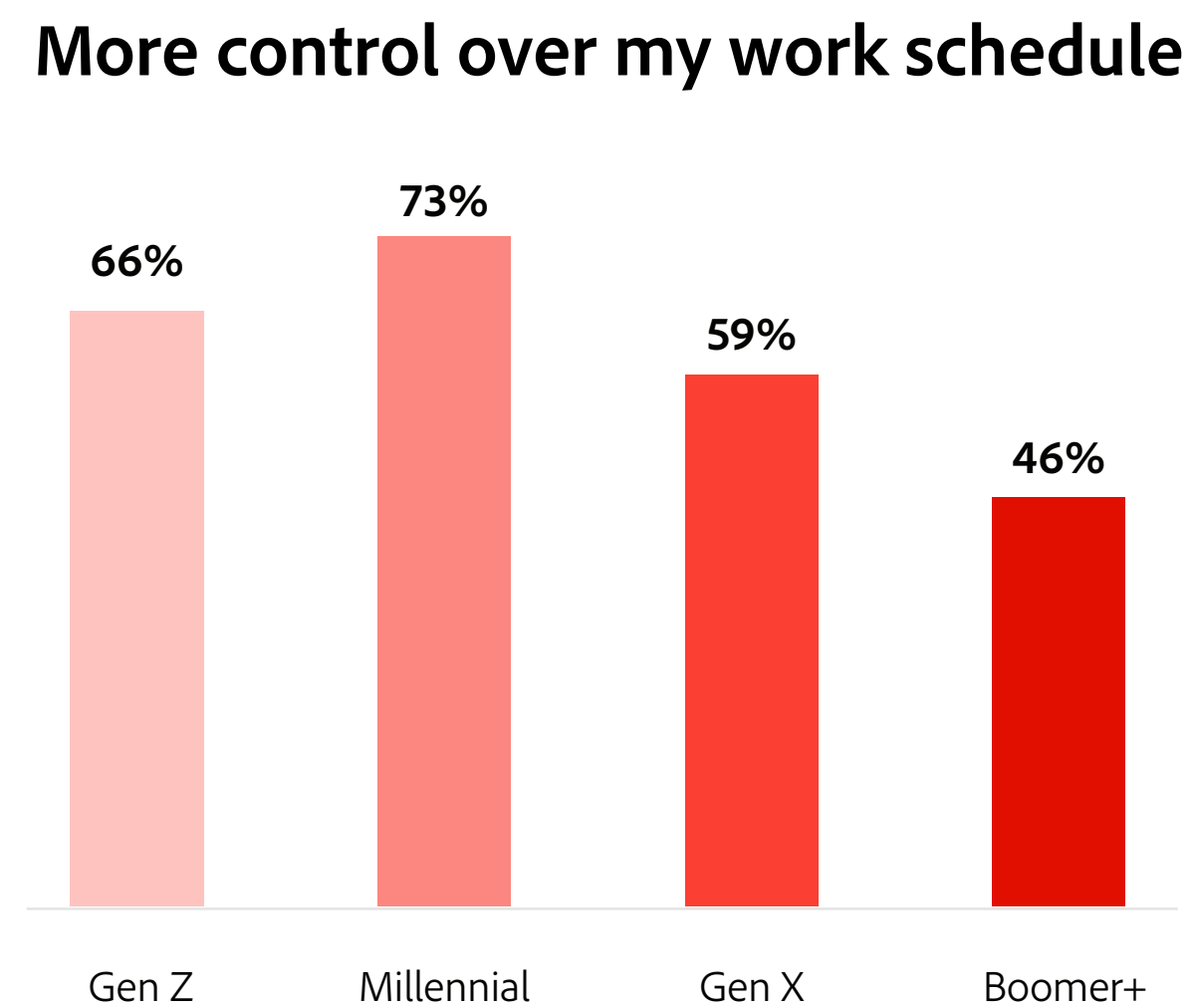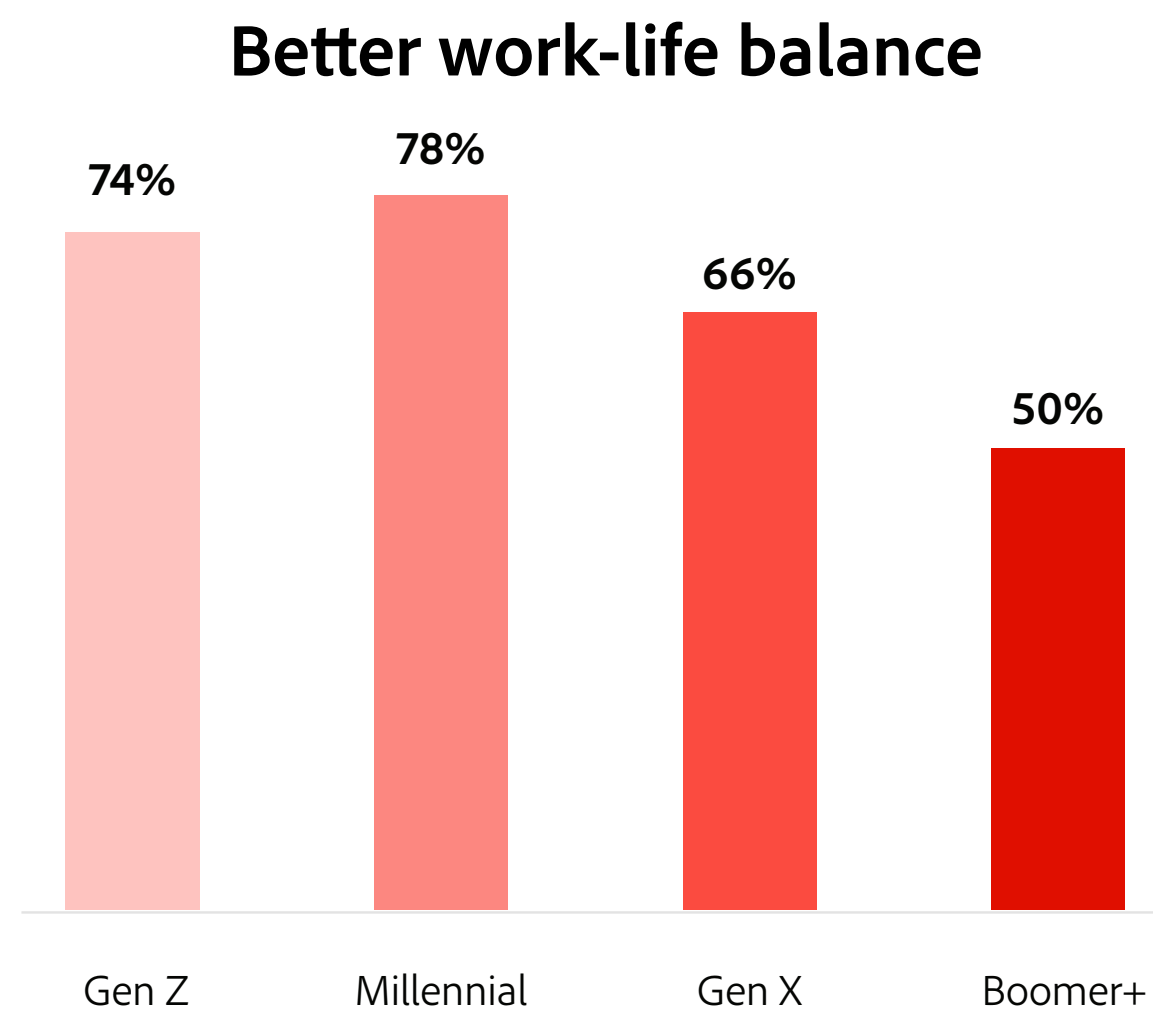
Better work-life balance

74%	78%	66%	50%
Gen Z	Millennial	Gen X	Boomer+

More control over my work schedule

66%	73%	59%	46%
Gen Z	Millennial	Gen X	Boomer+

The option to work remotely

63%	66%	53%	37%
Gen Z	Millennial	Gen X	Boomer+

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

36%
SMB leaders

24% Employee burnout

20% Higher employee turnover rates

	US	UK	AU	NZ	FR	DE	JP
	35%	35%	39%	38%	40%	38%	29%

+15 percentage points

45% Minority-owned
30% Non-minority owned

+18 percentage points

46% Essential business
28% Non-essential business

(US + UK only)

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

63%
SMB leaders
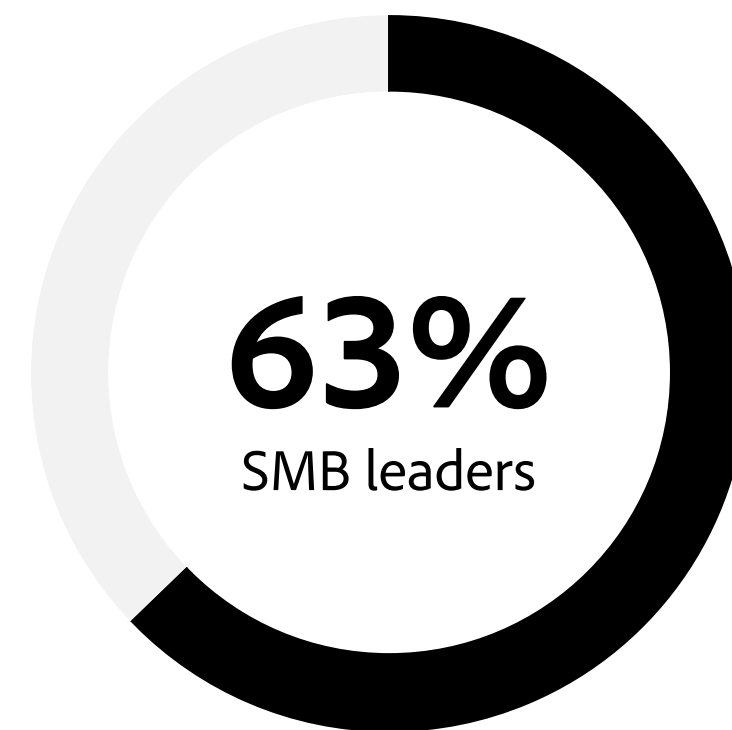
	US	UK	AU	NZ	FR	DE	JP
	58%	61%	64%	65%	73%	57%	65%

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)

+17 percentage points

+15 percentage points
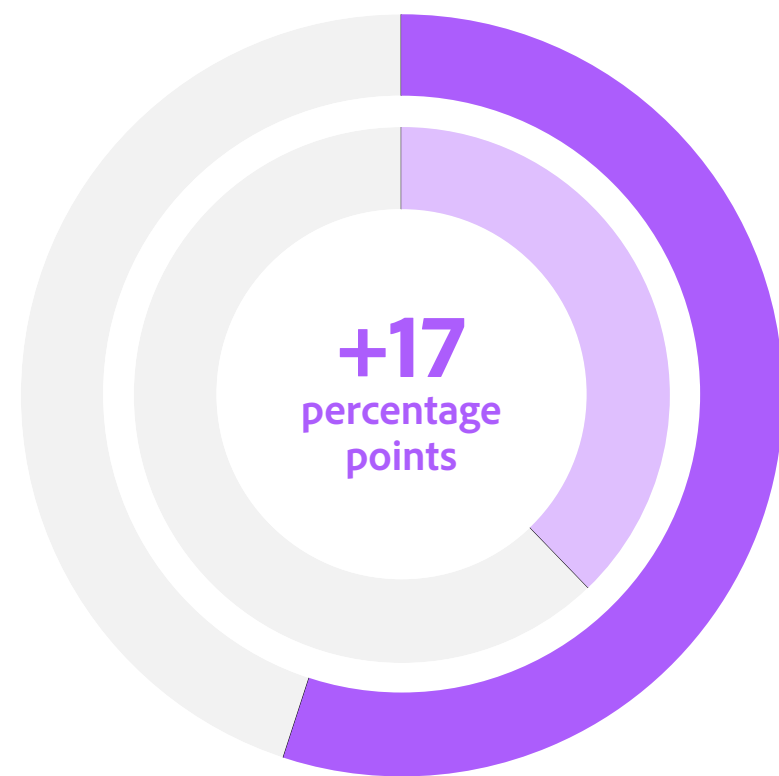
55%
Minority-owned

38%
Non-minority-owned
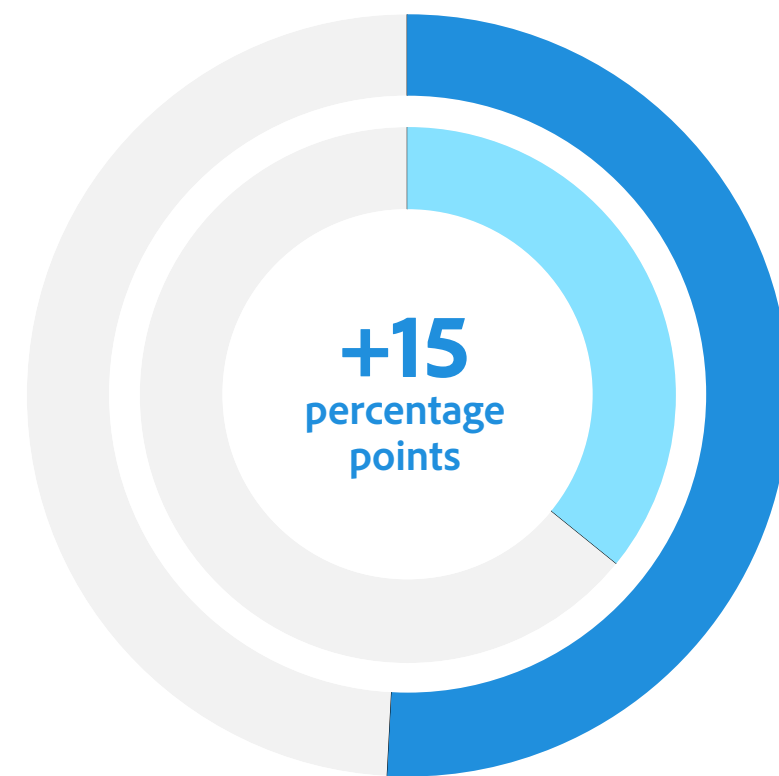
51%
Essential business

36%
Non-essential business

"I would sell my business tomorrow if I could because it no longer brings me joy."
% agree (T2B)

+15 percentage points
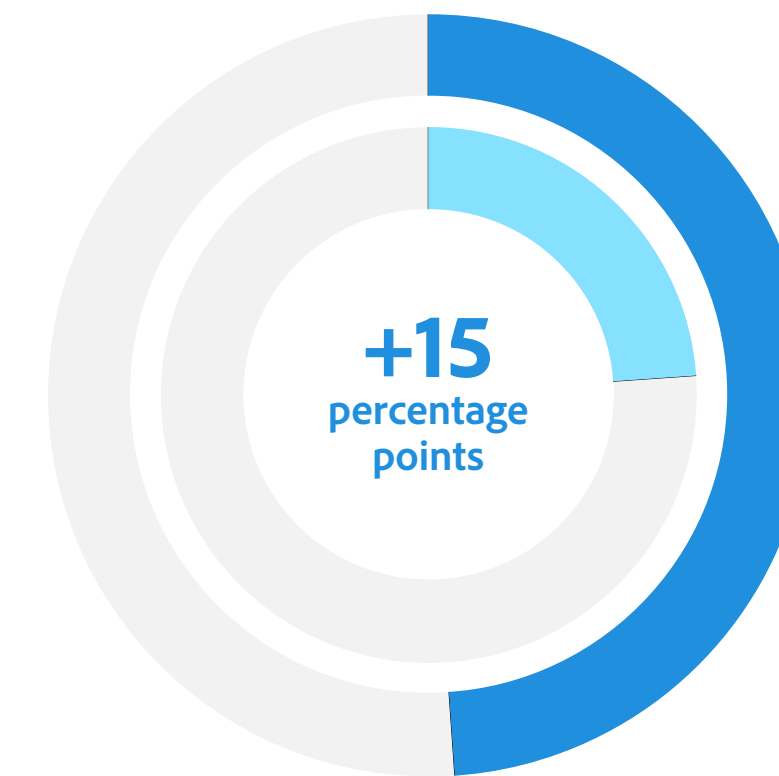
49%
Essential business

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
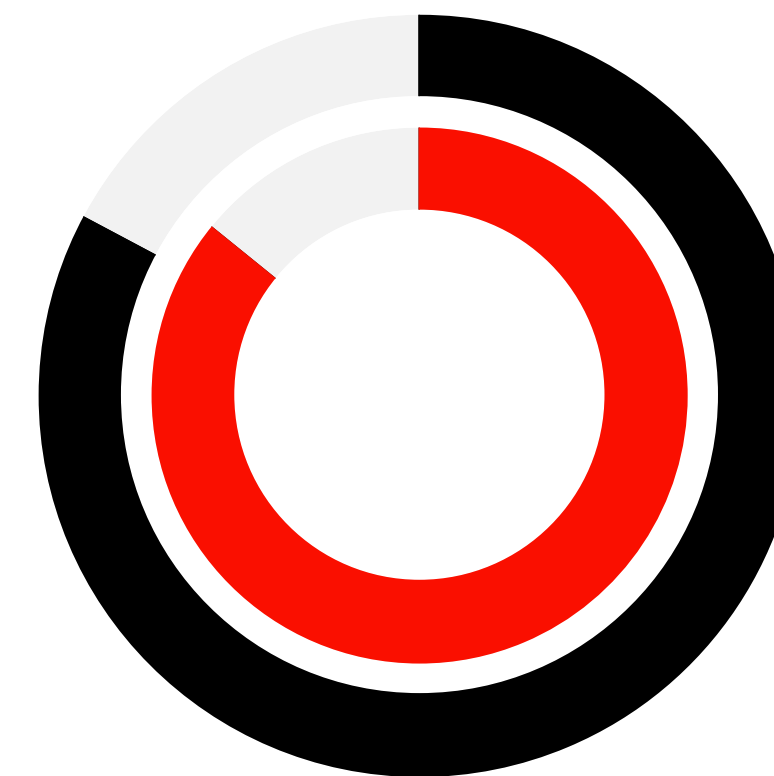% agree (T2B)

32%
Enterprise workers

35%
SMB leaders

	US	UK	AU	NZ	FR	DE	JP
🏢	32%	32%	32%	30%	31%	34%	36%
👥	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
🏢	82%	88%	88%	88%	92%	85%	75%
👥	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]
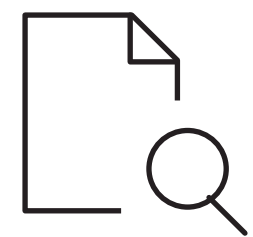N=3,404 Global ENT, N=2,102 Global SMB

*Sample sizes vary by country

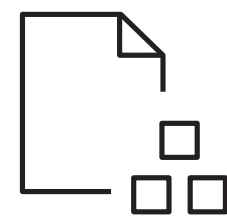# Managing files, forms, contracts, payments and invoices get in the way of doing their jobs effectively**.**

Tasks that Get in the Way of Doing Job Effectively
% affected (T2B)

Searching for, sharing and accessing files	Filling in forms, timesheets and expense reports	Awaiting signatures	Making payments and invoicing	Collaborating on documents
72% of Enterprise workers **70%** of SMB leaders	**56%** of Enterprise workers **65%** of SMB leaders	**44%** of Enterprise workers **48%** of SMB leaders	**32%** of Enterprise workers **63%** of SMB leaders	**43%** of Enterprise workers **53%** of SMB leaders
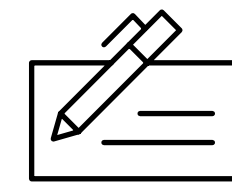
Q20: How much does each of the following get in the way of you doing your job effectively? If any of these do not apply to you personally, simply select "N/A".
N=3,404 Global ENT, N=2,102 Global SMB

*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.
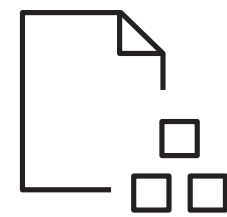
Interested in Tools to Make Tasks or Processes More Efficient
% affected (T2B)

Searching for, sharing and accessing files

Filling in forms

Signing contracts and awaiting signatures

Making payments and invoicing

Collaborating on documents and managing workflows

Any of these

91%
Enterprise workers
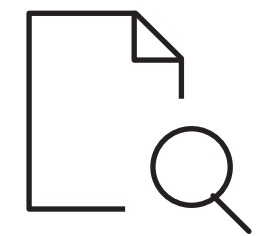
91%
SMB leaders

| **80%** of Enterprise workers | **81%** of SMB leaders | **60%** of Enterprise workers | **64%** of SMB leaders | **65%** of Enterprise workers | **74%** of SMB leaders | **46%** of Enterprise workers | **81%** of SMB leaders | **79%** of Enterprise workers | **80%** of 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
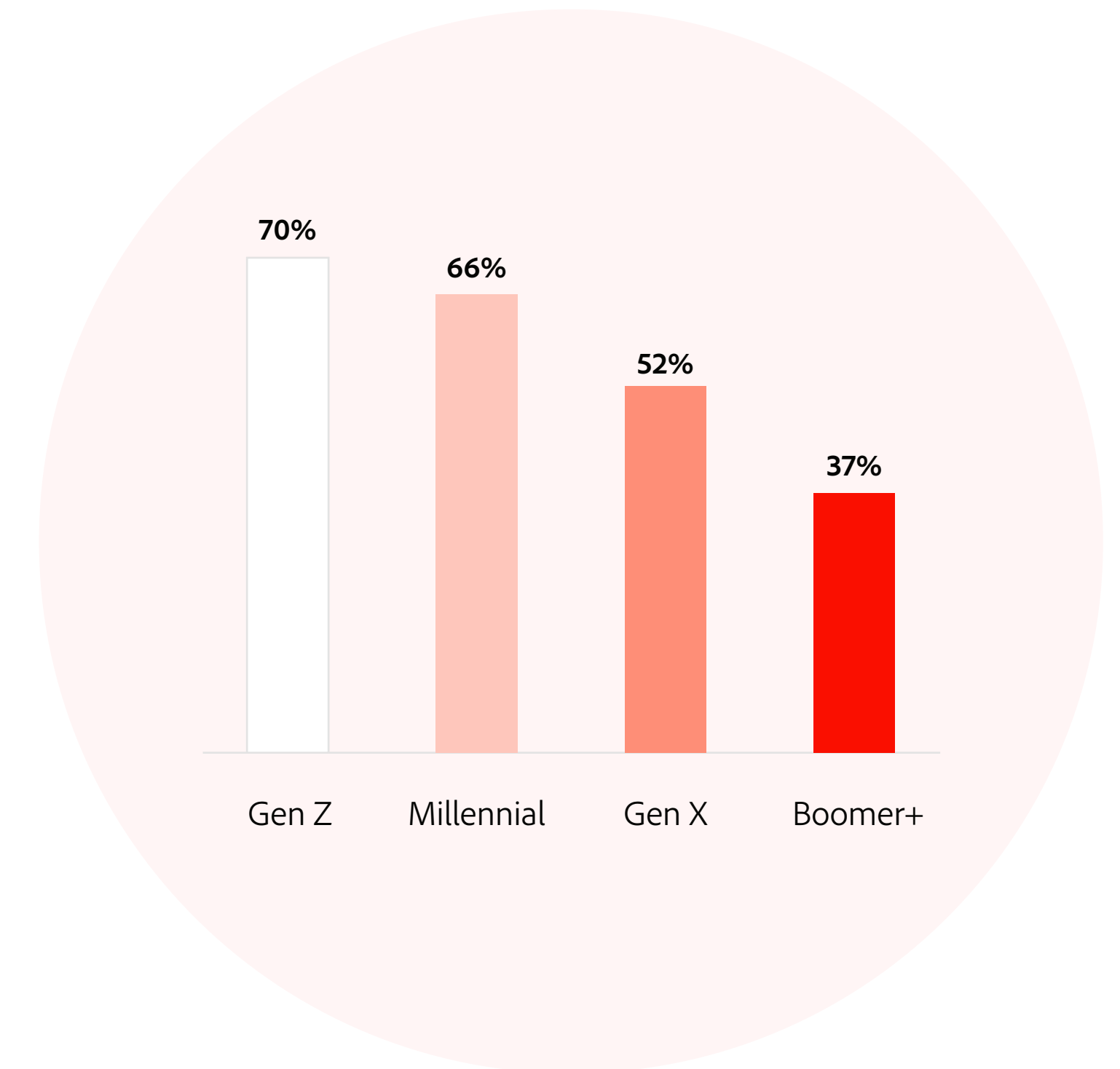
*Sample sizes vary by country

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

54%
Enterprise workers
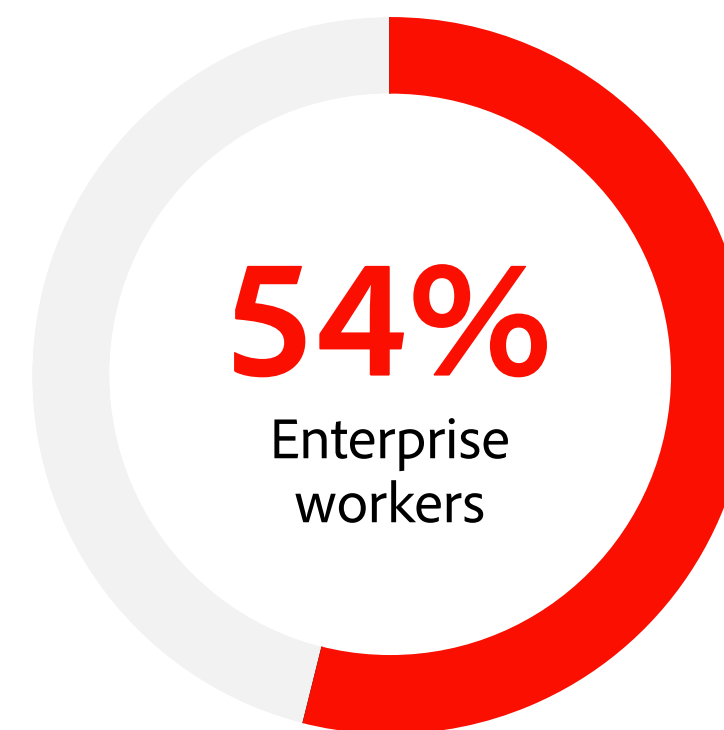
	US	UK	AU	NZ	FR	DE	JP
	51%	59%	62%	60%	42%	50%	52%

70% Gen Z
66% Millennial
52% Gen X
37% Boomer+

*Sample sizes vary by country

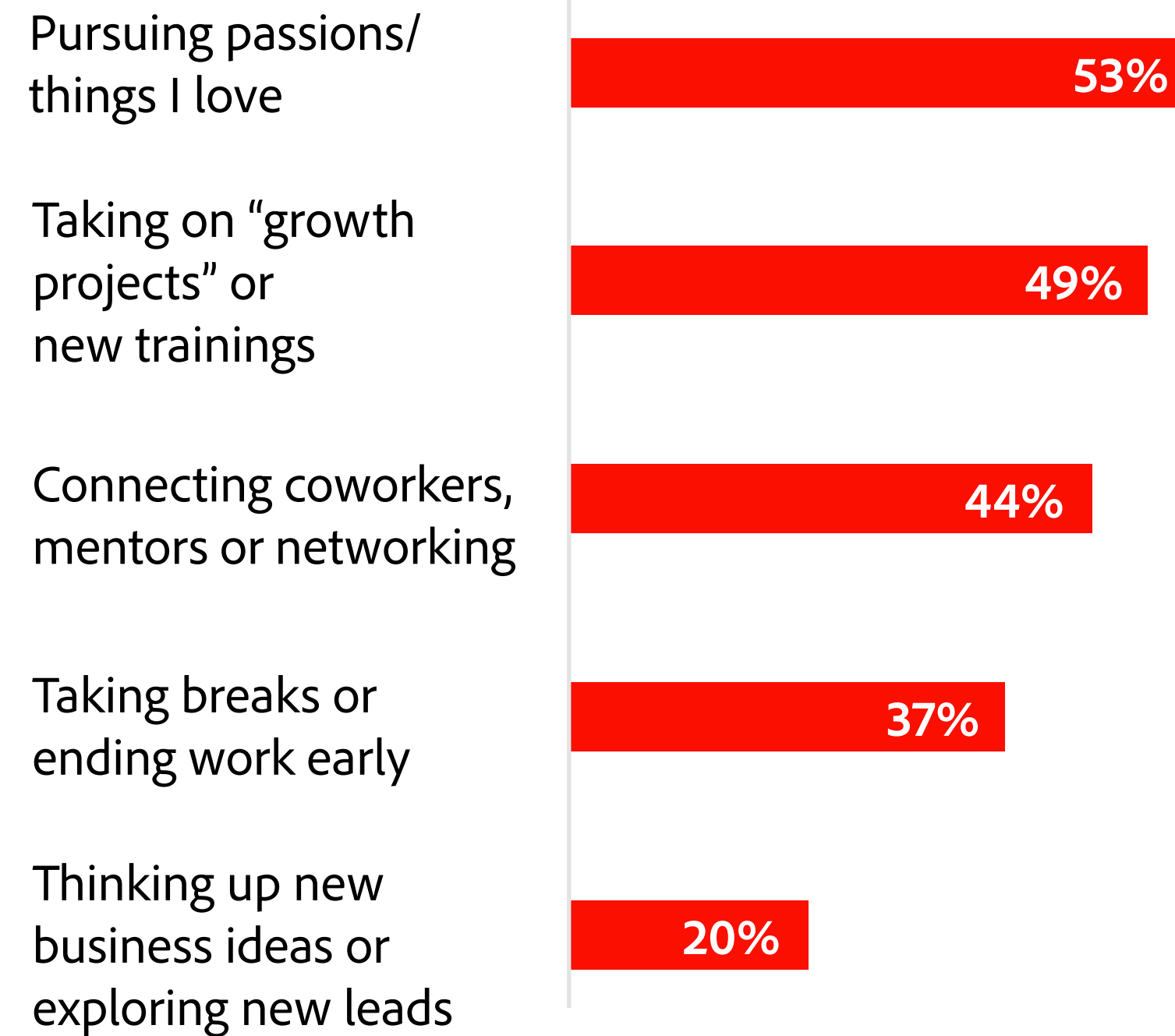# Enterprise worker,
United States

" **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.
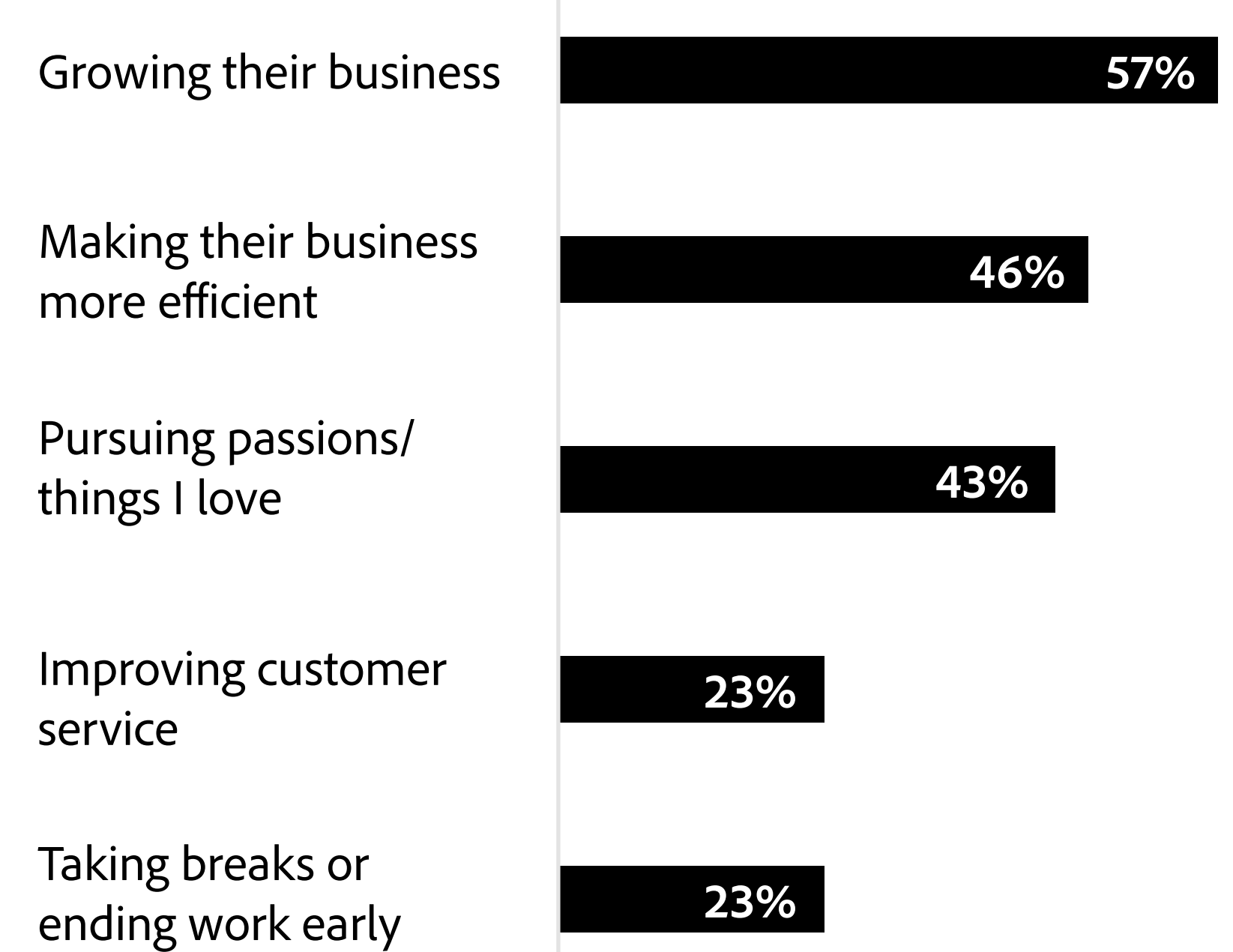
Desired Ways to Spend More Time at Work
% selected

Enterprise workers

Pursuing passions/things I love	53%
Taking on "growth projects" or new trainings	49%
Connecting coworkers, mentors or networking	44%
Taking breaks or ending work early	37%
Thinking up new business ideas or exploring new leads	20%

SMB leaders

Growing their business	57%
Making their business more efficient	46%
Pursuing passions/things I love	43%
Improving customer service	23%
Taking breaks or ending work early	23%

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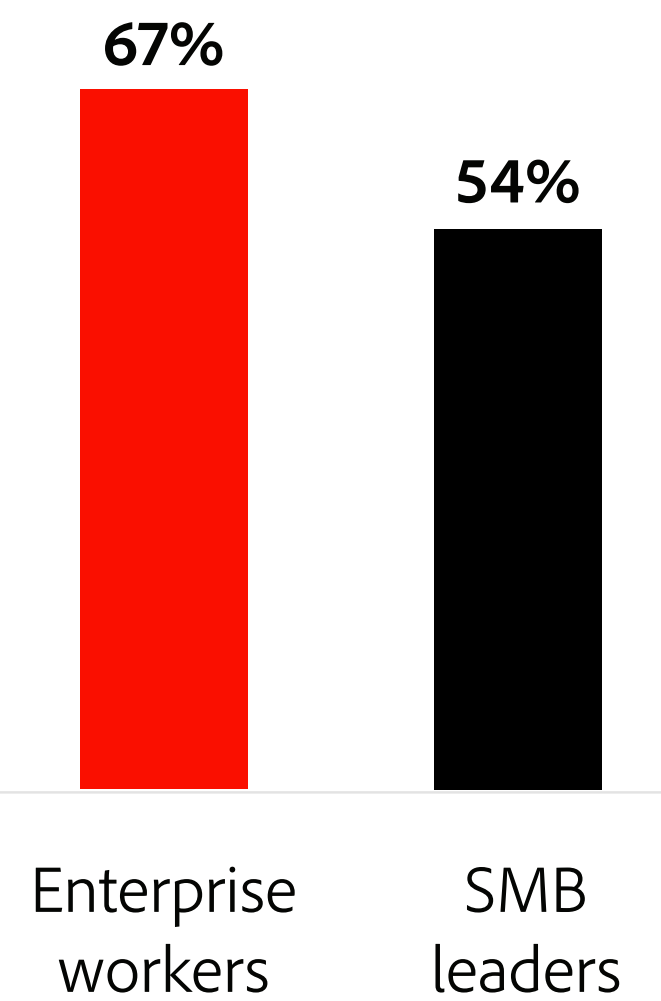N=3,404 Global ENT

*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.
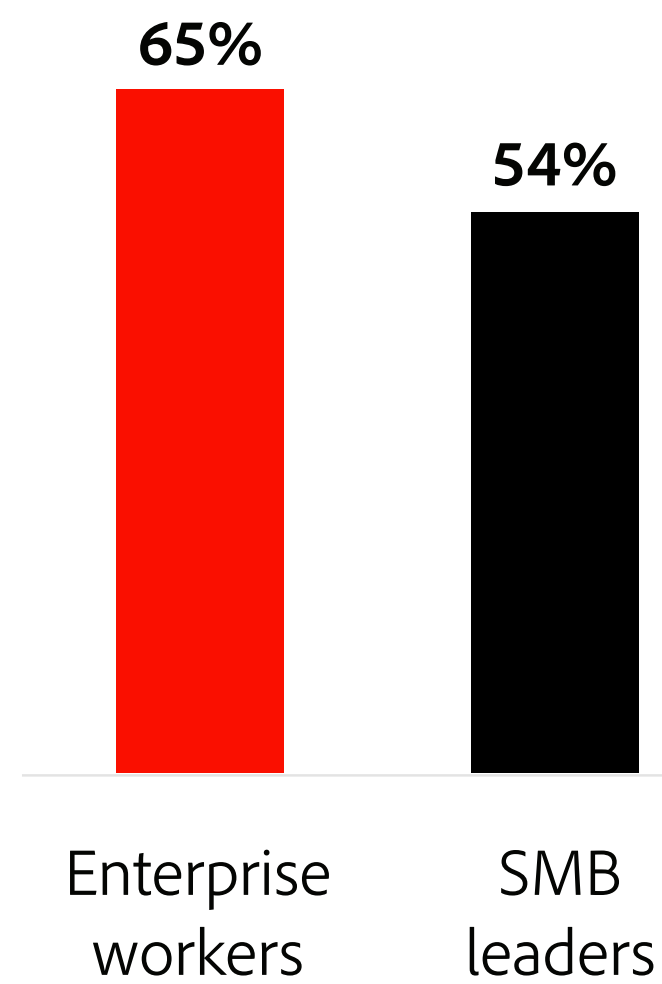
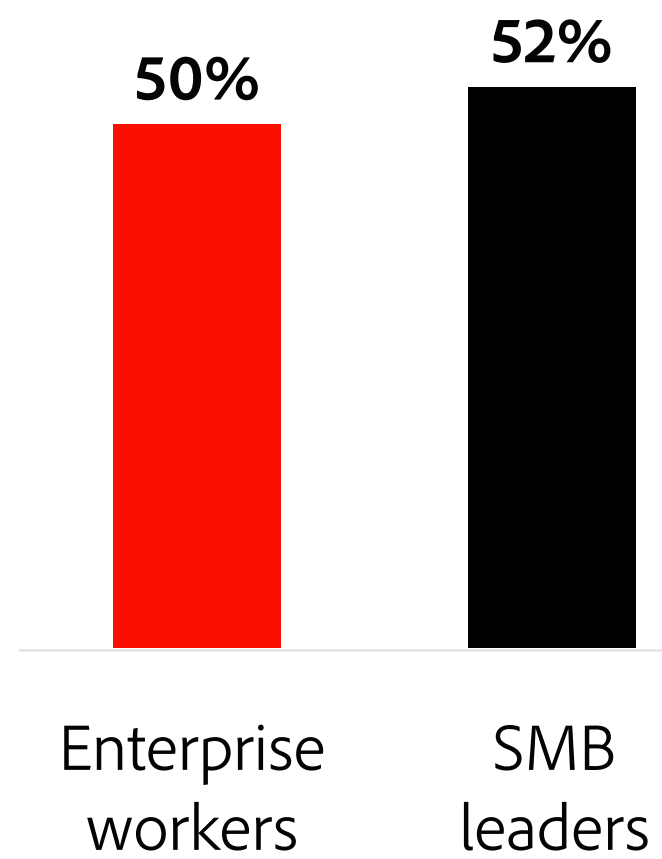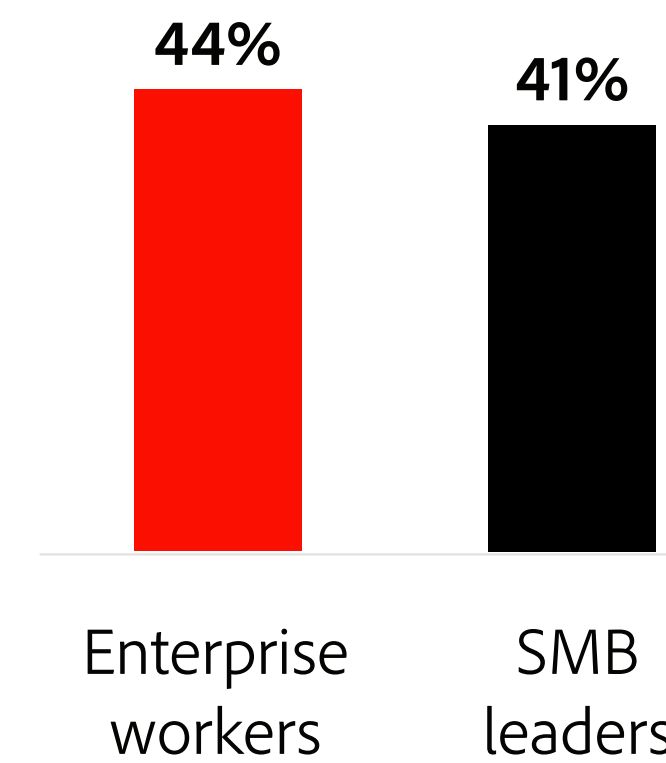## Desired Ways to Spend More Time Beyond Work
% selected

Hobbies or relaxation

67%	54%
Enterprise workers	SMB leaders

Health, wellness and sleep

65%	54%
Enterprise workers	SMB leaders

Family time or caretaking

50%	52%
Enterprise workers	SMB leaders

Social activities and dating

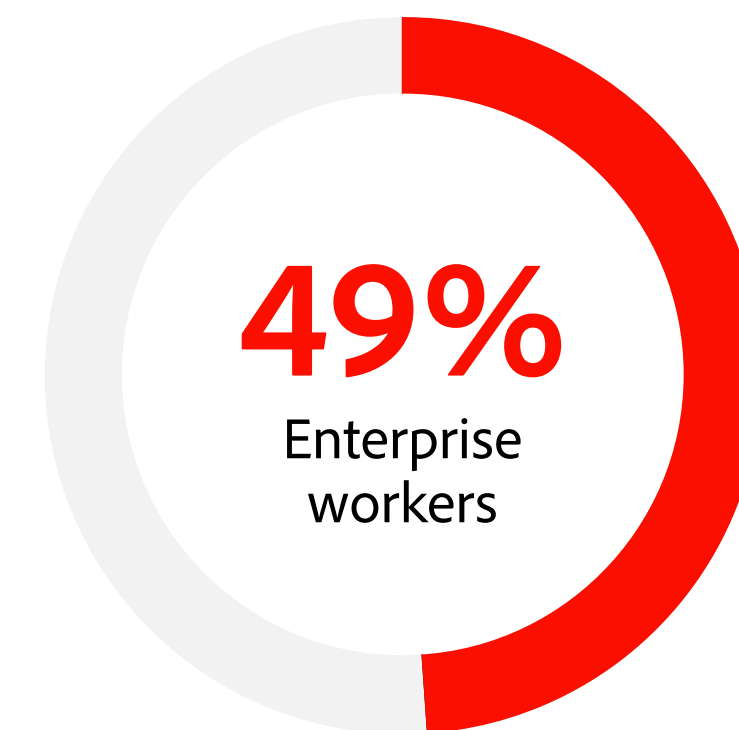|	
44%	41%
Enterprise workers	SMB leaders

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

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

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

An extra week of vacation or holiday time

49%
Enterprise workers

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.

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

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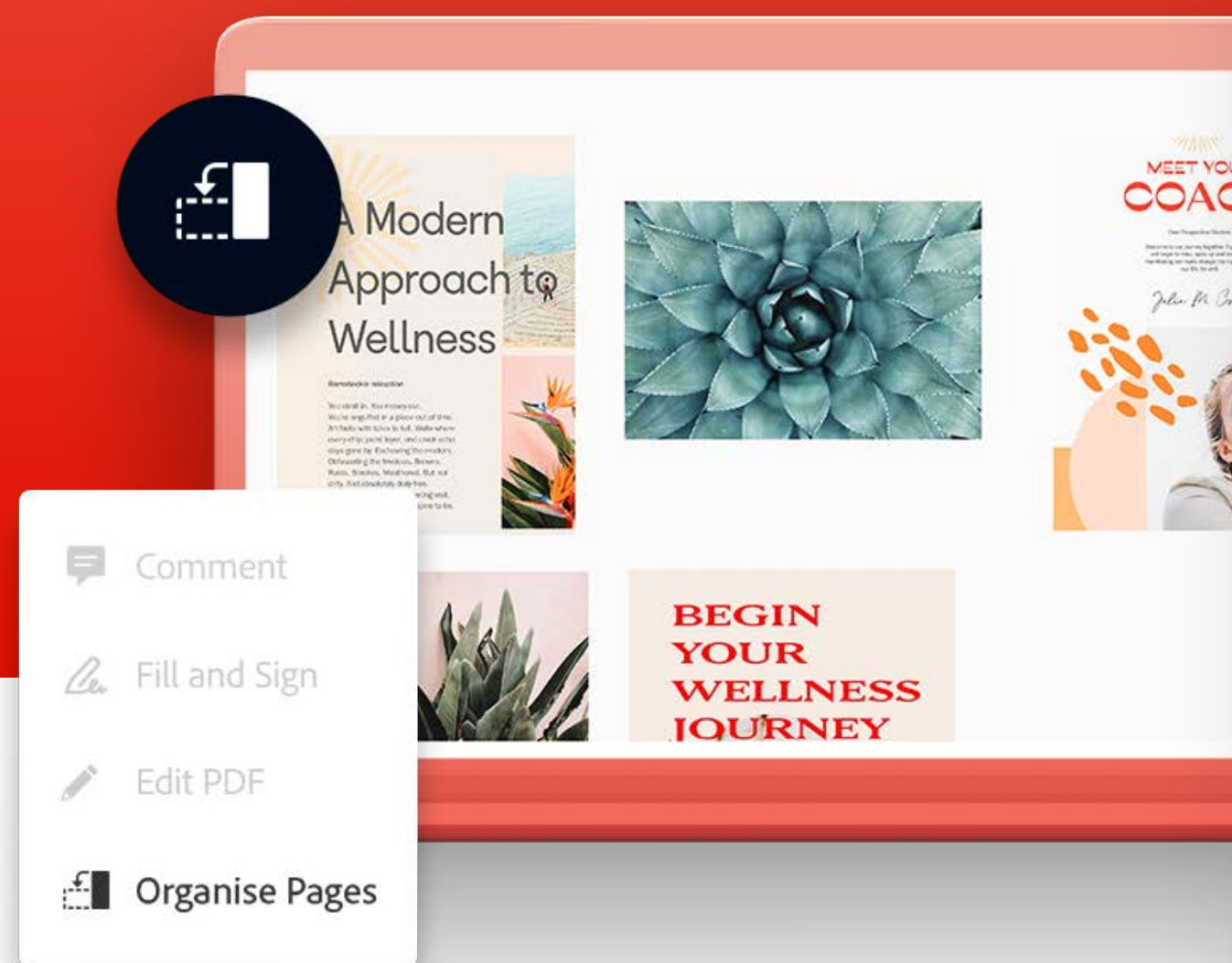
Adobe Acrobat puts the power of PDF productivity to work for your business with 100% digital workflows.

→ **We know PDFs. We invented them.** Adobe Acrobat DC is the global standard for creating, scanning, editing, signing, protecting and managing PDFs.

→ **Collaborate like you're in person.** Collect comments, collaborate on responses and track progress – in real time – all in one place from desktop, mobile or web.

→ **Business transformation – built in.** Embed PDFs into any digital experience, streamline forms and deliver a better customer experience with artificial intelligence and deep learning powered by Adobe Sensei.

→ **Streamline document workflows.** Create, edit, view and collaborate on PDFs right in Microsoft apps, including Teams, Word, PowerPoint, Excel, SharePoint and OneDrive.

Do business faster and easier with e-signatures in Adobe Sign.
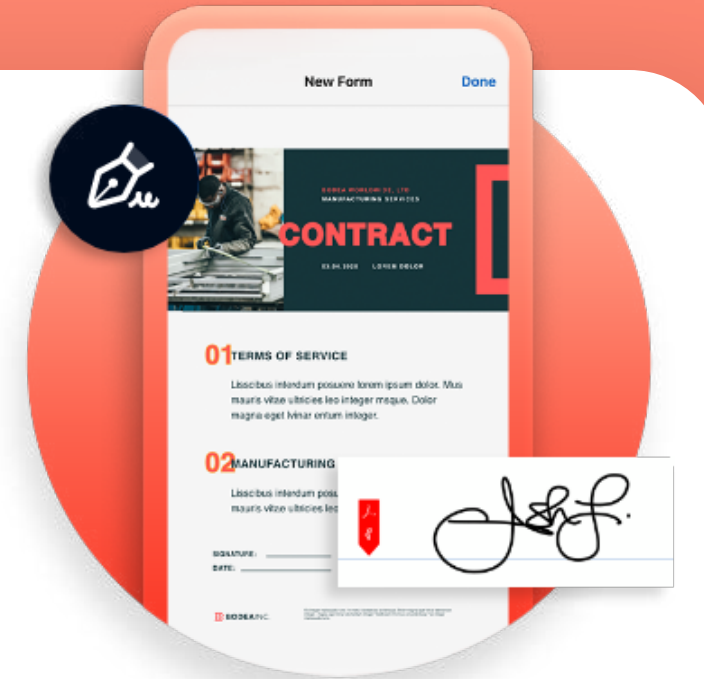
→ **Seamlessly simple e-signatures.** E-sign any document with a quick click, tap or swipe and track progress in real time using e-signatures in Acrobat.

→ **Enhanced e-sign advantages.** Embed custom web forms, collect payment with PayPal & Braintree, add custom branding and utilise advanced form fields with our advanced digital signing software.

→ **PDF and e-signatures in one app.** Create and edit PDFs, collaborate with others and manage e-signatures with Adobe Acrobat Pro DC – all in one simple experience.

→ **Security you can trust.** With 8 billion e-signatures and counting, trust that every transaction is secure and legally binding.

Sources

"*The future of work: A hybrid work model,*" Accenture, 2021.

"*State of Small Business,*" Facebook, 2021.

"*The Total Economic Impact of Adobe Sign,*" Forrester, 2020.

"*Organisations Are Forecast to Spend Nearly £493 Billion on Future of Work Technologies in 2021, According to New IDC Spending Guide,*" IDC, 2021.