wrike

Impactful Work Report

2024

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Introduction

Over the past few years, organizations have been adapting to the seismic changes associated with a remote and hybrid workforce while faced with economic turbulence. Financial uncertainty and industry headwinds have led to a heavy focus on improving efficiency via various methods, from tech consolidation to layoffs.

There's been a consequential cutback on resources, leading to a "do more with less" approach within organizations. Workloads have increased, causing confusion around work that matters most, disrupting workflows, and creating burnout. The unintended consequence? Knowledge workers are now doing more but achieving less.

Wrike's vision is a world where everyone is free to focus on their most impactful work together. We're very passionate about it. We believe that the future state of work is the opposite of where we're at currently. We believe in doing less and achieving more. By eliminating unnecessary work, automating low-impact work, and prioritizing the most impactful work, organizations can decrease burnout, improve employee morale, and drive businesses forward. Business leaders believe just 57% of their work is high impact.

Preface

Wrike released a **report** several years ago focused on employee happiness. We found that the happiest employees say "doing meaningful work" is the most critical factor in workplace happiness, ranking even higher than compensation.

Impactful work has always been our north star because we know it builds a better company culture and, ultimately, produces better outcomes. Happy employees = happy brands and happy customers. Organizations have reached this conclusion, as well. More business leaders say they are prioritizing impactful work now compared to six months ago.

But what does that really mean? And what quantity of day-to-day work can be considered impactful?

Definitions vary, but most business leaders broadly agree that impactful work contributes to the strategy, growth, and revenue of the business. At the other end of the scale, administrative tasks are considered to be low impact.

Impactful work means work that will have an effect on the overall running and quality of the business. These are essential working standards.

I define impactful work as productive work that'll benefit both the person doing the work and the corporation responsible for assigning the work. It should inspire and motivate others to follow the footpath to success.

Impactful work is work that's done by an individual or a team that aligns with and advances the mission of the brand.

Because of Wrike's focus on impactful work, we've previously made it our mission to uncover the **Dark Matter of Work** (activity that is not visible or easily trackable for knowledge workers or business leaders due to the wide range of touchpoints it takes place across). We've also **examined efficiency** before — but organizations are facing even more headwinds than they were in the past.

Are they now at a breaking point and ready to say enough is enough? If so, how can organizations tackle that challenge sooner rather than later? To find out, we've taken our investigation a stage further by exploring how organizations have addressed their inefficiencies this year in order to align on goals and focus on the work that drives outcomes.

It turns out that knowledge workers and business leaders recognize impactful work when they see it, and believe roughly the same amount of their workload fits the description. The bad news is, just over half of work is viewed as high impact across both groups — with the remaining half being low-impact work – and only 28% of leaders are prioritizing high-impact work.

Knowledge workers believe just 54% of their work is high impact.

54% high impact work   46% low impact work

Business leaders believe just 57% of their work is high impact.

57% high impact work   43% low impact work

23% of knowledge workers believe their senior leadership is focused on aligning the entire organization around strategic priorities, compared to 20% six months ago.

6 months ago

28% of business leaders are now prioritizing high-impact work.

In this report, we've also looked at how the introduction of AI has impacted workflows, and gauged the general perception of early wins from introducing the technology. And we've benchmarked employee happiness as an indicator of where teams may need some additional support.

Wrike's findings:

- Compared to six months ago, businesses are more focused on prioritizing high-impact work.

- However, reducing the amount of strategic priorities organizations track on a quarterly basis was the lowest priority on their list.

- Knowledge workers and business leaders agree that meetings and duplicative work are key sources of inefficiencies.

- There's a concerning disconnect between business leaders and knowledge workers in the perception of how much AI is impacting workloads.

- Businesses are seeing a significant monetary impact from efficiency measures they have implemented in the last year, but there's still plenty of room for improvement.

The Current State of Play

Increasing workloads

Knowledge workers are experiencing increased workloads over the past year — albeit to a slightly lesser extent than business leaders believe. Shifting expectations, working methods, and economic circumstances have led to a scenario where organizations' employees have more on their plates than ever before, and not enough is currently being done to help them.

+31%

+46%

Knowledge workers report that their workload has grown by 31% in the last year.

Business leaders report an increase of 46% for their department/ team.

What could be causing it? Businesses have relied on **quiet hiring** (one of the nine workplace trends named by industry leader Gartner for 2023) to help weather economic uncertainty in the last year. This involves upskilling existing employees to meet evolving organizational needs without changes in overall headcount — another example of strategic reprioritization in action. Business leaders and knowledge workers agree that upskilling was the number one method used to increase efficiency in the past year.

While quiet hiring can be beneficial for organizations and knowledge workers alike when approached in the right way, there's no doubt that in some cases, increased responsibility and correspondingly larger workloads can become a reality for knowledge workers. In this situation, it's more important than ever for them to be able to effectively prioritize impactful work.

Division over AI

In a bid to transition from doing more with less to simply doing less while being more effective, organizations have invested in technology and software solutions. The goal was to give knowledge workers more time to focus on impactful work, allowing these solutions to take on the tasks that weren't inspiring or mission critical, but still necessary.

Since the launch of ChatGPT in November 2022, a significant burden of hope has been placed on GenAI and automation technologies as a potential salvation from the tedious, repetitive, and burdensome

work that forms a certain percentage of any role. So, almost two years on, how close are we to this becoming a reality?

In short, it depends on who you ask. There's a stark difference between the extent to which knowledge workers and business leaders perceive work within their organization to be AI assisted, as business leaders believe it's helping with more than double the proportion of work that knowledge workers do.

32%

14%

Business leaders estimate that 32% of their team's workload is assisted by AI.

Knowledge workers estimate that only 14% of their workload is assisted by AI.

In reality, it's likely that the true assistance AI provides is somewhere in between the differing assessments, which still represents a significant proportion of the overall workload. And knowledge workers are clear that where AI is assisting with workloads, it's effective in doing so. For their part, business leaders believe the impact to be even more significant.

80%

of business leaders say their investment in new technology has somewhat or significantly improved their employees' ability to do their job.

51%

the proportion of knowledge workers employees who agree that automation and AI have somewhat/greatly improved their ability to do their role is lower.

Employee happiness

Despite any potential assistance from AI, less than two-thirds of knowledge workers report feeling happy at work. Workload increases and a lack of clear strategic prioritization are contributing to burnout.

49% of knowledge workers don't feel their work is recognized.

48% don't feel like they can contribute to business outcomes.

40.8 hours

The amount of personal time knowledge workers spend making up for wasted time at work.

There's also a disconnect between employee happiness measures that business leaders believe have been implemented in their organizations — they either haven't materialized or haven't been communicated to knowledge workers.

For example, **52%** of the knowledge workers we surveyed work in an office, while just **14%** work from home.

And yet, flexible work is supposedly the number one way organizations are improving employee fulfillment. Clearly, then, there is scope for these schemes to go further.

Other key disparities between knowledge workers and business leaders with regard to their perception of employee happiness measures are related to how work aligns with business goals, as well as investing in AI/tech to upskill and help with productivity. If these steps are being taken in the engine room, the benefits aren't yet being felt at the coalface of many organizations.

26% of business leaders mention the importance of aligning work with organizational goals compared to 19% of knowledge workers:

26%

19%

27% of business leaders reference investing in new tech/AI compared to 13% of knowledge workers:

27%

13%

Lack of visibility and alignment

In order for both knowledge workers and business leaders to assess the relative importance of tasks (both their own and those of their teams) and act accordingly, they need holistic visibility over individual and departmental workloads. In reality, this is rarely the case.

As the **Dark Matter of Work** report demonstrated, certain elements of work can be extremely difficult to track and quantify because they are spread across so many different touchpoints.

So knowledge workers are doing more, but they are achieving less as things stand. Despite good intentions, increasing the number of applications knowledge workers use on a daily basis has added to workloads instead of reducing them.

The lack of a single source of truth impedes efficiency. There's often no holistic visibility over projects, so **knowledge workers end up repeating work across multiple platforms** while experiencing delays or crossed wires in communication due to an overwhelming number of touchpoints that are almost impossible to keep track of.

Speaking of inefficient communication, meetings are the chief culprit for wasting everyone's time. They are often considered necessary to

"stay on top of things" but the truth is, they're an ineffectual way of doing so. Most status updates, action items, and announcements can be made with a few clicks if a workflow is streamlined enough, allowing knowledge workers to continue with impactful work in the meantime.

But above all, **there's a lack of clarity and alignment across many organizations.** Business leaders aren't currently prioritizing the most impactful work and making sure everyone is pulling in the same direction, or simplifying goals by narrowing the strategic focus. This creates confusion around the prioritization of work, often leading to conflict and chaos.

These factors have given rise to the proliferation of both unnecessary work (e.g., duplicative work and unproductive meetings) and low-impact work (tasks that are necessary to complete but do not directly impact goals).

Aligning the entire organization on strategic priorities (19%) and reducing the amount of strategic priorities tracked on a quarterly basis (5%) are currently viewed as the **lowest priorities for business leaders.**

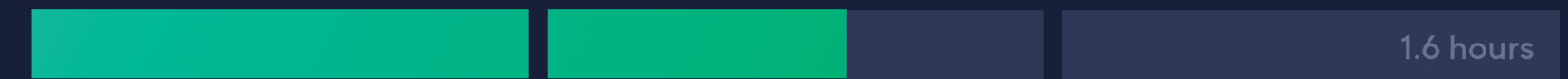Part Two

The Business Consequences

Time

Despite wasted time being the biggest cause of inefficiency, only 21% of businesses are reducing time spent in meetings. This means almost four companies in five are still overlooking one of the most straightforward "quick wins" in terms of doing less and achieving more.

To make matters worse, **nearly 1.5 days out of each week (30% | 11.24 hours) are being spent on unnecessary work.** In addition to the aforementioned unproductive meetings, for knowledge workers, this means:

1.6 hours

Having to find and send information to other people they work with because it isn't easily accessible to them

1.5 hours

Chasing other people they work with for status updates, approvals, etc.

1.1 hours

Doing work only to find actions weren't recorded correctly, so it isn't what should have been done

2.4 hours

Finding information from multiple systems because it isn't all accessible through a single interface, e.g., searching across emails, collaboration software, and written documents for a specific piece of information

1 hour

Repeating work they've already done because the original work was lost, e.g., rewriting a deleted document or reattending a meeting because the information and actions weren't recorded

$15,138.03		1 hour

Doing work only to find out someone else has also done the same thing,
so they've duplicated one another's actions

		0.9 hour

Repeating work they've already done because they can't demonstrate
to superiors that it's been done

And as we all know, wasted time equals wasted money.

Money

On average, organizations are currently wasting a whopping **$15,138.03**
per employee per year on unnecessary work, and that doesn't include
low-impact work. Almost half (46%) of work taking place is low-impact
work. That's **18.4 hours per week!**

Even more alarmingly, only 57% of business decision makers' work is
high impact. The rest of their time is being spent on low-impact work,
which includes:

- Attending meetings, whether in person or over the phone or video

- Telling people they now have to complete an action and/or finding
  out whether they themselves need to complete an action

- Providing status updates to teams/individuals

Wrike has calculated that this equates to **$7,016.82** wasted per
business leader per year on low-impact work, excluding project
setup time.

Can Efficiency Measures Help?

Implementing efficiency measures has been widely regarded as a smart strategic move for businesses over the last year. But what does success look like for these initiatives? The yardstick varies at an organizational level, but tracking the success of KPIs and monitoring employee productivity are the two most common measures, used by around a quarter and one-fifth of companies respectively.
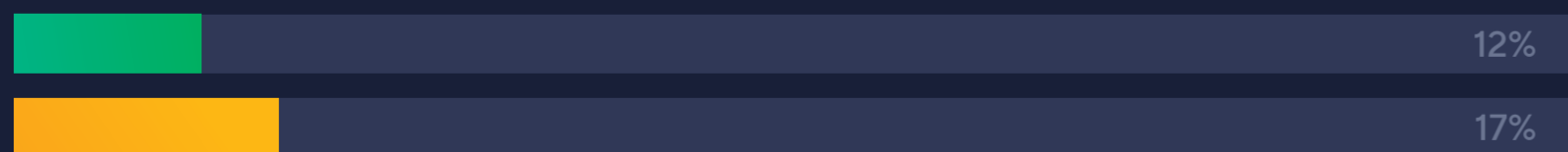
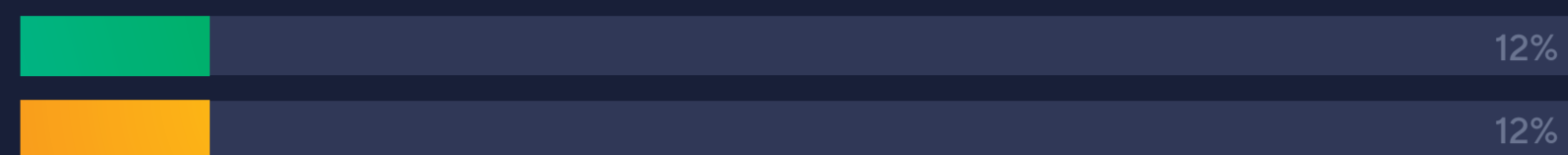Ways that impact of efficiency measures is assessed:

23%	
19%	

We track the success of key performance indicators

20%	
18%	
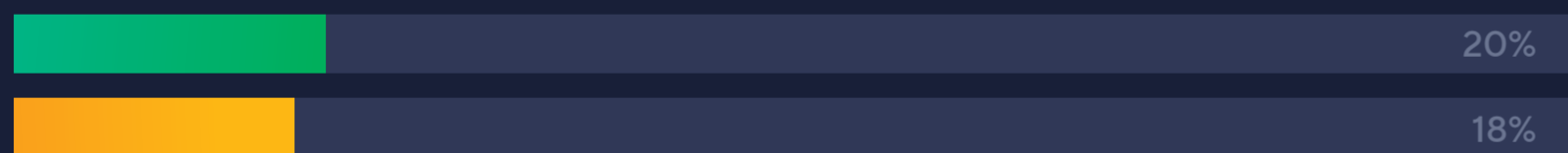
We have monitored employees productivity, including employee's tasks, responsibilities and projects, and how they are executed on them
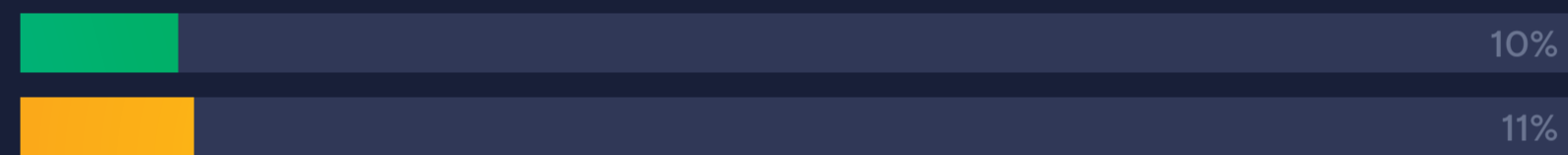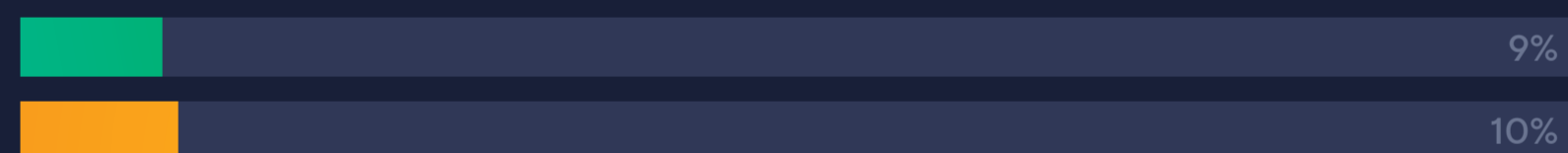
12%	
17%	

We have monitored workload

12%	
12%	

Resource allocation tracking

11%	
11%	

We have looked at time saved

10%	
11%	

Headcount optimization

9%	
10%	

We have looked at money saved

3%	
2%	

We have struggled to measure these outcomes

■ primary way   ■ secondary way

Business leaders are very positive about the effectiveness of the efficiency measures introduced in their organization overall. Over half believe that measures have improved knowledge workers' ability to be productive, saving members of their team/department **5.3 hours per week** on average.

Where revenue is the barometer, results appear particularly impressive: business leaders estimate that efficiency measures have increased this by more than a quarter. The vast majority also claim to have noticed improvements in their team's productivity.

On the other hand, knowledge workers are slightly less ebullient about the situation, indicating another disconnect between the boardroom and those conducting daily operational tasks. They believe **only 3.7 hours** have been saved per week due to efficiency measures on average, while only slightly over half claim to have noticed productivity improvements.
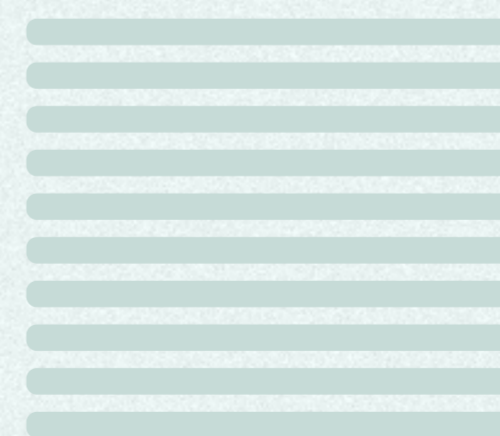
56% of business leaders believe their organization's efficiency measures have improved their employees' ability to be productive.
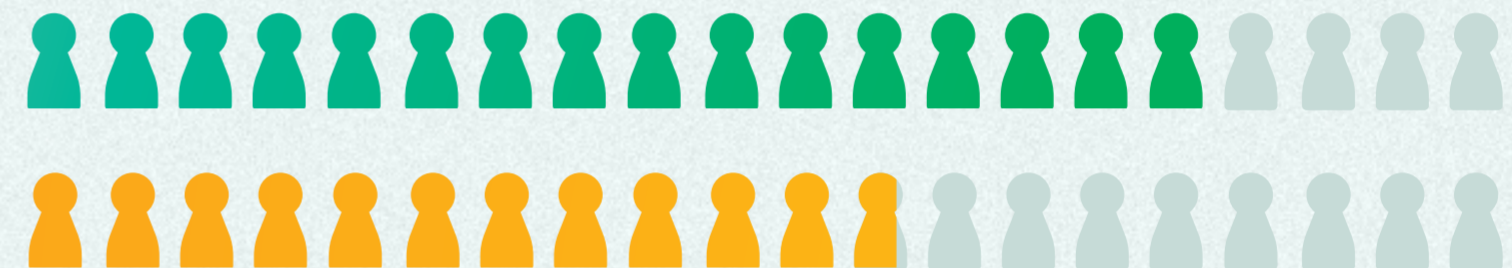
80% of business leaders say they have noticed improvements in their team's productivity as a result of efficiency initiatives, but only 59% of knowledge workers agree.

+26%

Business leaders estimate that efficiency measures have increased their business's annual revenue by 26%.

Only 9% of organizations look at money saved as the primary way they assess impact. This is something of a surprise, given that business leaders estimate they have saved over **$110,000** as a result of measures they have implemented in the last year, and an average of **$3,046 per employee** per year.

But the strongest advocacy for efficiency measures is implicit. Business leaders are voting with the company wallet; more than half anticipate an increase in budget for efficiency measures toward the end of 2024, indicating that there is still appetite and expectation for further returns.

These renewed efforts are likely to be widely supported by knowledge workers, who still report having to spend an **average of 3.4 hours of their own time per month** making up for lost time, thanks to inefficiencies in their workplace.

On average, business leaders believe they have saved

$113,545.67

as a result of efficiency measures implemented in the last year.

On average, businesses have been able to save

$3,046

per employee per year through efficiency measures.

62%

of business decision makers anticipate an increase in budget for efficiency measures toward the end of 2024.

Do Less, Achieve More

To remedy the current situation, organizations must eliminate unnecessary work, consolidate solutions, upskill their workforce, automate low-impact work, and – most importantly – prioritize high-impact work.

Here are the top 5 ways to get high-impact work back on track.

1. Eliminate

Embrace a lean work environment. Imagine a work day without redundant, ineffective, or overrun meetings, where time is utilized with maximum efficiency. Here are practical tips on how to replace your traditional meetings to enhance productivity and foster a lean work culture.

Tips for Replacing or Improving Meetings

- **Evaluate Meeting Necessity:** Use the PAO (Purpose, Agenda, Outcomes) approach in Wrike to decide meeting necessity.

- **Use Real-time Collaboration Tools:** Adopt a work management solution like Wrike for transparent project tracking.

- **Encourage Digital Brainstorming:** Implement independent brainstorming using software like Wrike.

- **Streamline Status Updates:** Use Wrike dashboards for real-time project updates.

- **Archive Lessons Learned:** Record and share lessons via Wrike for consistency.

- **Test Wrike:** Experiment with replacing your next meeting with Wrike and track the increase in productivity.

2. Consolidate

Three companies in four have invested in new work management software to increase efficiency this year — and the vast majority have seen positive results. Crucially, though, the specific approach taken by individual companies can be the difference between success and failure with this strategy.

Knowledge workers have saved over four hours per week on average by consolidating their tools, spending less time locating information across multiple systems, and attending unproductive meetings. Almost three in four also think consolidating software has made it easier to see how their work contributes to company goals.

But perhaps the best news for organizations and business leaders successfully attempting consolidation is that there's scope to take it even further for better results. More than half of knowledge workers would still like to use fewer software applications to do their job, and flag issues with communication and data loss.

76%
of businesses have invested in new work management software applications to increase efficiency.

85%
have experienced increased efficiency as a result.

72%
of knowledge workers say that consolidating software has made it easier to see how their work contributes to company goals.

51%
of knowledge workers would still like to use fewer software applications to do their job.

On average, knowledge workers save

4 hours per week

as a result of consolidating software applications.

3. Upskill

Knowledge workers believe that upskilling has been the most effective efficiency measure this year — and they're likely not wrong. Knowledge workers who regularly sharpen their skills are more likely to deliver higher-quality work, bring fresh approaches to problem solving, and enjoy increased levels of job satisfaction.

In the workplace, upskilling is no longer a nice-to-have — it's a must. As noted by the World Economic Forum's Future of Jobs Report 2023, almost a quarter of jobs (23%) will change by 2027. So both employers and employees need to be constantly monitoring trends and keeping pace with new developments (AI in particular).

4. Automate

Only 14-31% of work is currently assisted with AI, according to knowledge workers and business leaders respectively. However, where it is in place, 79% of knowledge workers feel AI/automation improves their ability to do their job. Investments in tech, specifically AI, can take on a significant burden from low-impact work if implemented correctly.
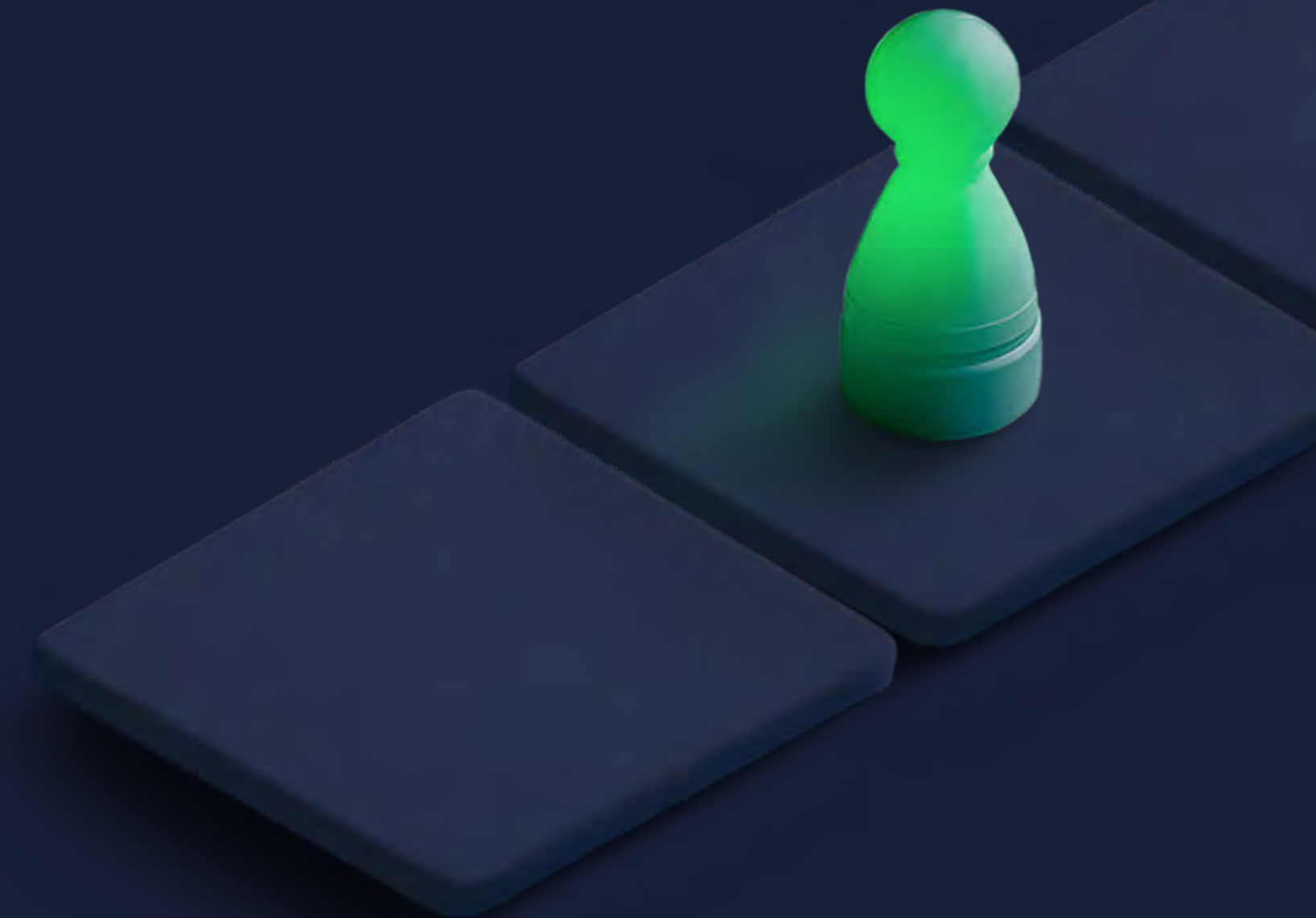
Case Study

Window Nation, a leading residential window replacement company, encountered issues with project progress visibility and task responsibility, causing disruptions in interdepartmental collaboration and efficient project completion.

Introducing Wrike, a work management tool with AI capabilities, to their creative team changed everything. Wrike facilitated coherent task tracking and seamless collaboration, transforming the team's workflow from scattered and hard to manage to centralized and easily accessible. The system's AI-recommended tasks and workflow automation significantly saved time, improved accuracy, and enhanced productivity. Wrike's intuitive design and user-friendly interface led to quick adoption. The platform's generative AI and well-integrated machine-learning capabilities were useful for lean periods, preventing burnout and maintaining project momentum.

Wrike ultimately emerged as an indispensable part of Window Nation's project management toolkit, driving overall organizational success.

> Wrike's AI features have become indispensable in my daily workflow, enabling me to accomplish more in less time and with greater accuracy.
>
> **De Lisa Patterson, Creative Director**

5. Prioritize

The majority of business decision makers value impactful work (work that actively contributes to the strategy, growth, and revenue of the business) but most are also not doing enough to help employees focus on key deliverables.

While knowledge workers say their organizations are now more aligned on strategic priorities, they aren't reducing the overall number.

- **65%** say their organization has not taken steps to decrease unnecessary work.

- **50%** say their organization does not empower them to prioritize work.

Across the board, workloads have increased (by 31% for employees and 46% for business leaders) so smart implementation of AI and automation to handle low-impact work in particular is key.

Setting Organizational Objectives

- **Understand the Importance of Goals:** Organizational goals provide direction, align efforts, measure performance, allocate resources, and motivate employees.

- **Set Goals Aligned with Vision and Mission:** Objectives should sync with the organization's vision and mission. Gather inputs from employees, managers, and executives to create buy-in and realistic objectives.

- **Communicate Aims:** Make sure everyone in the organization knows about these objectives and understands their role in achieving them.

- **Cascade Objectives to Individual Goals:** Break down high-level goals into departmental or team goals, then further into individual SMART goals.

- **Review and Adjust Goals Regularly:** Consider business environment changes, challenges, or new opportunities and adjust goals accordingly.

- **Support and Resources Provided:** Equip employees with necessary resources to achieve goals.

- **Use Tools to Set and Cascade Goals:** Platforms like Wrike aid in selecting objectives, breaking them down into projects and tasks, and providing a centralized hub for documenting, assigning, and tracking goals.

Take no for an answer

Only one in three knowledge workers believe their organization has taken steps to decrease unnecessary work, and even fewer would feel comfortable turning down additional work because of their existing workload or personal objectives.

Many business leaders are unaware of this. A significant majority believe knowledge workers would say no to projects when they do not align with their goals. So strategic realignments towards efficiency are not being translated effectively from the top down in all cases.

- Only **30%** of knowledge workers feel comfortable saying no to work because of their workload or personal objectives.

- **59%** of business leaders think knowledge workers feel comfortable declining projects when they do not align with their goals.

The Bottom Line

Our research shows that there is less focus on AI vs. a year ago and more on prioritization — but this pendulum swing hasn't been effective. Rather than workloads decreasing with prioritization, the number of priorities has generally increased instead. To achieve optimal results, **strategic AI usage and clear company-wide prioritization need to be focused on in equal measure,** because the former supports the latter.

A better employee experience should be one of the ultimate aims. It's a crucial factor for boosting efficiency, maintaining productivity gains, and retaining talent, especially in wake of increased pressure, layoffs, and even quiet hiring.

To achieve this, take the resources being pooled into unnecessary and low-impact work and funnel them to high-impact work. Watch employee happiness and engagement increase. Watch revenue grow. Do the following:

1. Decrease the number of priorities for knowledge workers.

2. Set clear goals with them.

3. Shift work to one platform.

Getting back on the same page with collaborative work management

This year, business leaders have supported knowledge workers with the introduction of new technology and software tools to help them prioritize impactful work.

But the thing knowledge workers crave above all is simplicity. They see this as the key to avoiding frustrations around unproductive meetings, duplicative work, and effort without impact. The evidence clearly suggests that they're on to something, as organizations that have consolidated existing technology stacks have seen the most benefit from efficiency measures.

While surprisingly few organizations have focused on money saved through efficiency measures as a metric for success, the testimony of those that do indicate it is delivering significant returns in this capacity. But the signs clearly point to more efficiency gains available for savvy companies aiming to simplify and consolidate further. Organizations need a long-term solution that works seamlessly with

the tools they are already using: an intelligent work management solution that can be customized to meet the needs of individual teams while scaling to support large, cross-departmental workflows, supporting simplification across the board.

Wrike

Wrike is the most intelligent work management platform for any workflow. At Wrike, we're liberating work by democratizing workflows so anyone can easily create simple to complex workstreams, automate mundane tasks, and manage impactful work from start to finish.

Start a 14-day free trial, and join 20,000 other companies that have chosen Wrike as their single source of truth.

Try Wrike for free
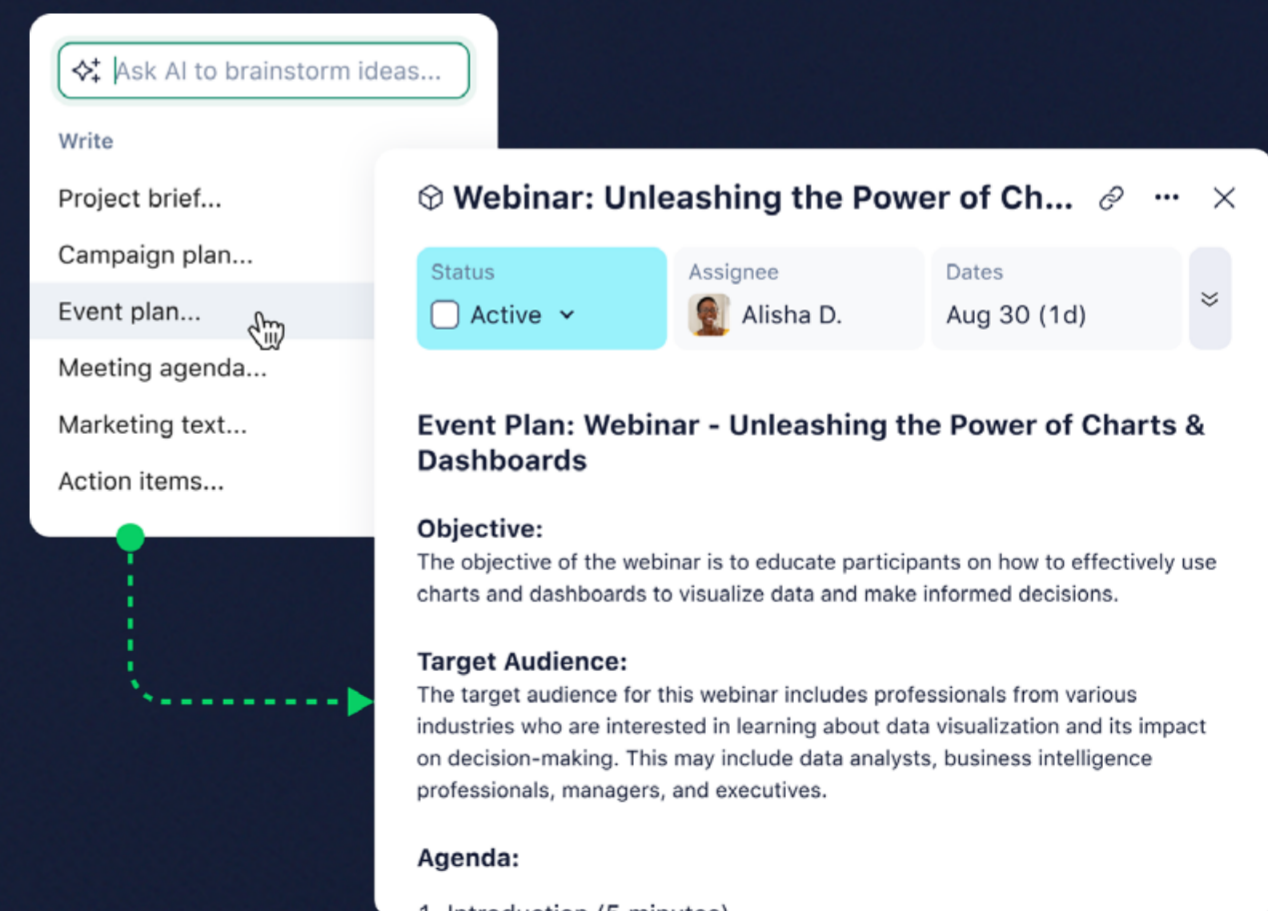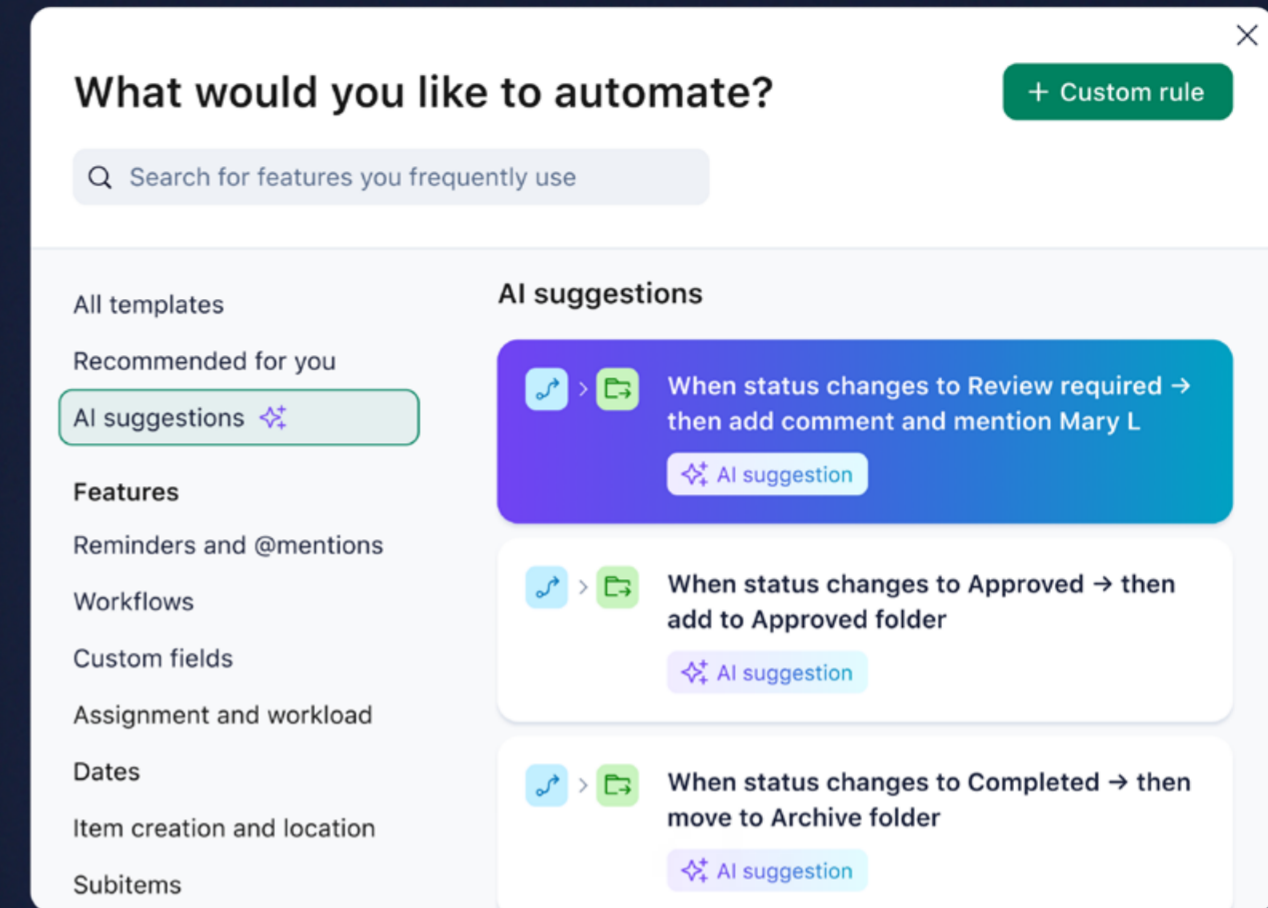
Methodology

Our research was conducted by Sapio Research, which surveyed 1,000 business leaders and 2,500 knowledge workers across the U.S., U.K., DACH, France, and Japan. In both cases, individuals working in companies with 500+ employees were targeted.

The research consisted of interviews via an online panel and took place across March and April 2024. Respondents operate across a wide range of job functions, departments, and industries, providing as comprehensive an overview of the issues examined as possible.