

THE FRONTLINE GAP



workvivo
by zoom



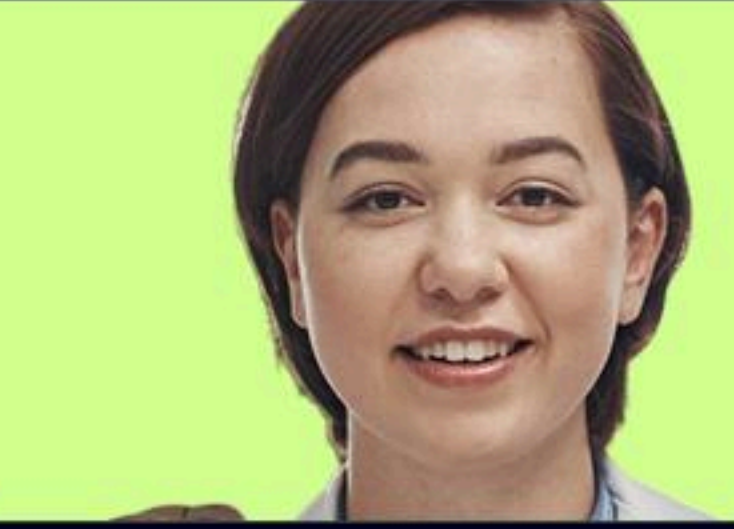
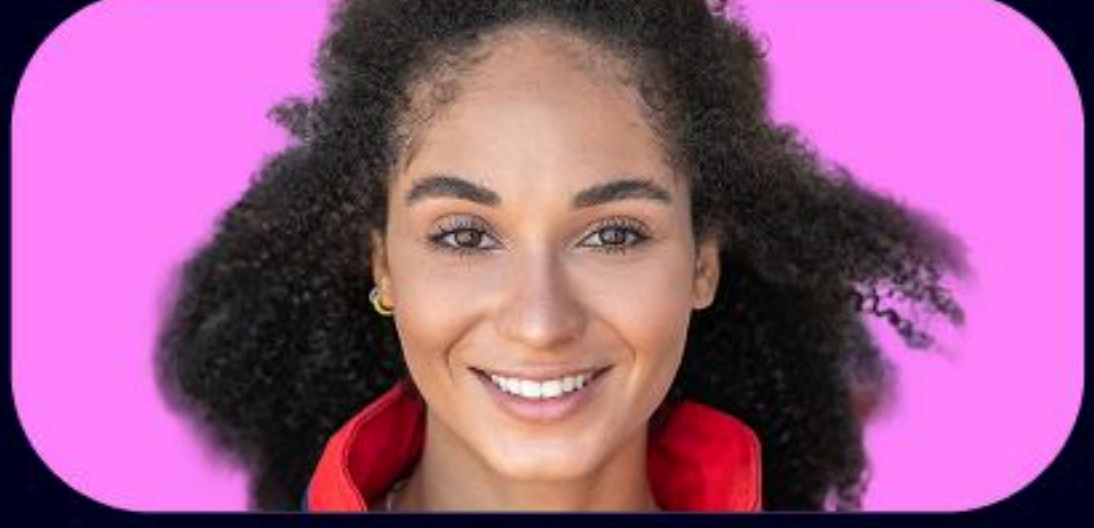
ARE YOUR  
  EMPLOYEES
 SEEN    
     AND
   HEARD?



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INTRODUCTION

The Frontline Gap

Frontline workers are the backbone of every industry. From providing healthcare and emergency services, to operating and maintaining the machinery that makes your product, to providing top-notch experiences for your customers in shops and restaurants, frontline workers are essential to our society and economy – and to your organization's success.

BUT DO THEY FEEL THAT WAY?

Despite being vital members of the team, many frontline employees are experiencing a 'Frontline Gap'. This is the significant divide between desk and non-desk employees that causes frontline workers to feel **disengaged, disempowered, and disconnected** from the company they work for. In fact, half of frontline workers feel less valued than their desk-based counterparts.

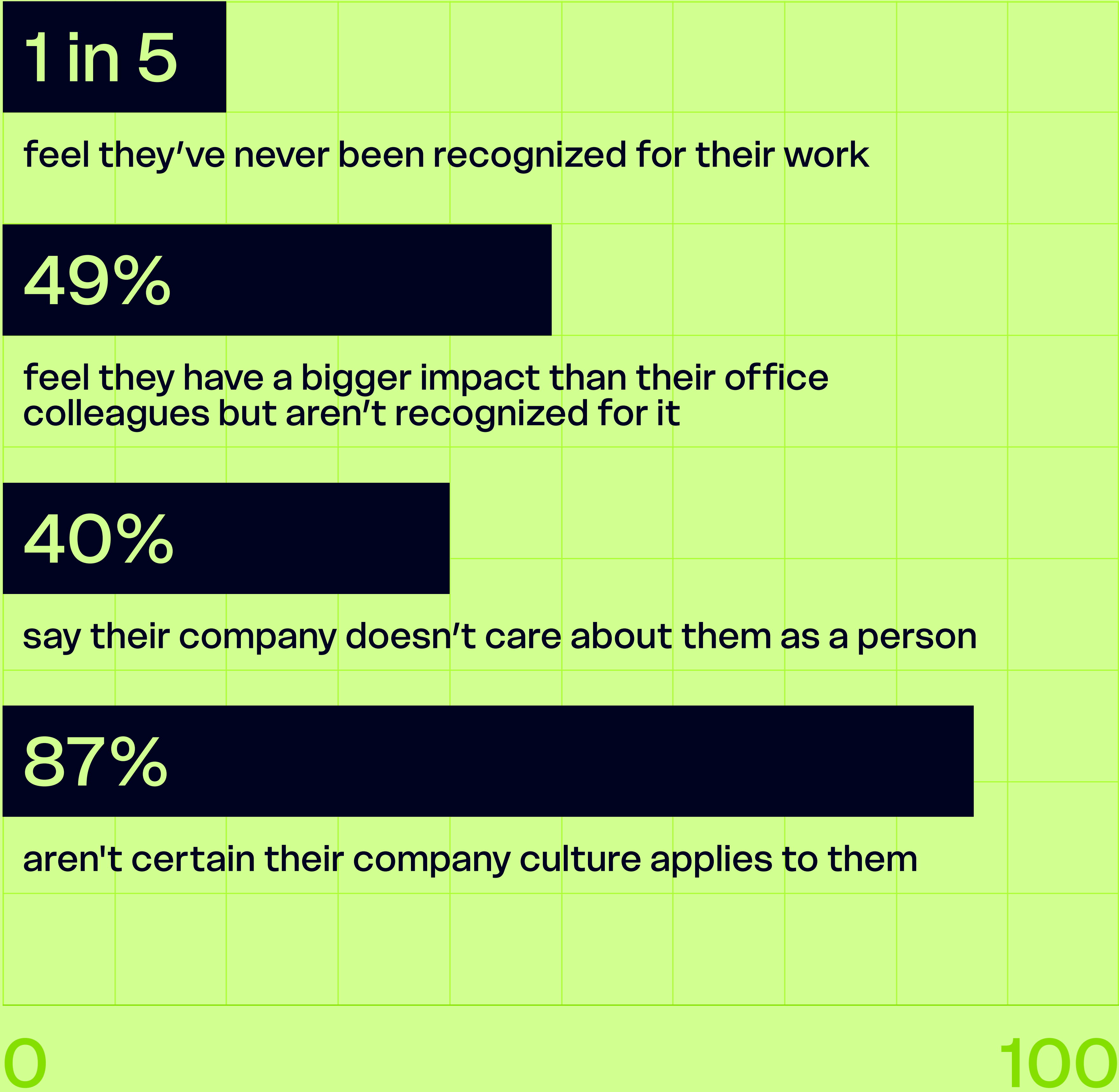


Half of all frontline workers say their company **cares more about office workers than them.**

This is a major issue. If left untreated, the growing employee dissatisfaction created by the Frontline Gap can lead to attrition and turnover, negative employer and brand reputation, and poor customer service and experiences.

To understand the impact of this gap – and how to fix it – we surveyed over 7,500 global frontline workers across multiple industries.* We discovered that there isn't just one gap: the Frontline Gap manifests in a number of ways, across culture, recognition, communication, technology, and career growth.

Our research revealed that frontline workers are feeling left out and left behind:



THE KEY TAKEAWAY?

Poor communication and engagement is negatively impacting frontline workers, making them feel underappreciated and like they don't belong.



Lack of recognition is the #1 reason frontline employees feel they don't belong at their company.



To bridge the gap, organizations need to ensure frontline workers feel as valued as they really are. But how? Read on to discover how frontline workers really feel — and get actionable tips to transform your employee engagement.



Survey respondents

📍 Location

36%

North America

24%

Asia or Australia

19%

South America

11%

UK

10%

Europe or Middle East

🏢 Industry

15% ✈️ Aviation

15% 🍽️ Food and beverages

14% ⚡ Energy/utilities

10% 🏭 Manufacturing

9% 🏥 Healthcare

8% 🚚 Transport

8% 🏪 Retail

5% 🏨 Hospitality

14% ✳️ Other

👥 Company Size

38%

100 to 1,000 employees

28%

1,001 to 5,000

15%

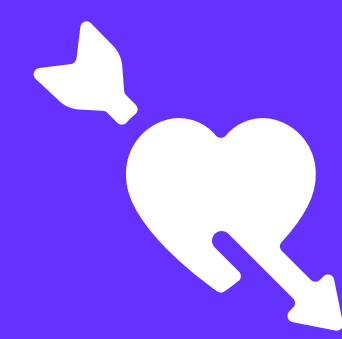
5,001 to 10,000

18%

More than 10,000

* Workvivo commissioned an independent research firm, TrendCandy, to survey 7,550 frontline employees across a range of industries and global locations. The margin of error is plus or minus 1.2% at the 95% confidence level.





The Culture Gap

Company culture isn't reaching the frontline — so workers are creating their own

The vast majority of frontline workers feel disconnected from overall company culture, with many respondents saying they don't feel it, aren't sure it applies to them — and some even questioning if it's real at all.

13%

Only 13% of frontline workers are certain their company culture applies to them

37%

of frontline workers feel culture is something they hear about but not something they can feel

42%

Only 42% of frontline workers say their company culture feels real to them



Where does this disconnect stem from?

Clearly, there's a knowledge gap at play. More than half (56%) of frontline workers aren't confident they know what their company's mission and values are. This suggests that many organizations are falling short when it comes to sharing important company information and getting buy-in from frontline workers about organizational goals.

But it also speaks to frontline workers' lived experience. Even when they *are* familiar with the mission and values, 63% of frontline workers don't feel strongly connected to them.

In fact, our research revealed many frontline workers are creating their own microcultures. Half of all respondents feel their team has its own workplace culture distinct from the broader company culture — and 61% feel more connected to their team than to the rest of the company.

This has pros and cons. While team camaraderie and loyalty are great, the formation of microcultures reflects a clear fracture between frontline and desk workers.

When company culture fails to resonate or doesn't feel applicable, workers turn to their peers. But this only widens the culture gap, creating a greater chasm between frontline and non-frontline workers that (as we'll see in the next chapter) can quickly grow into disengagement.

This is a stark reminder that company culture can't be dictated — it has to be *felt*. Frontline workers have unique needs that can't be glossed over with a one-size-fits-all approach, so you need to be proactive.

• 50%

of frontline workers feel their team has its own workplace culture distinct from the broader company culture

• 61%

of frontline workers feel more loyal to their coworkers than their company

What does this mean for frontline workers and the HR teams who want to better support them?

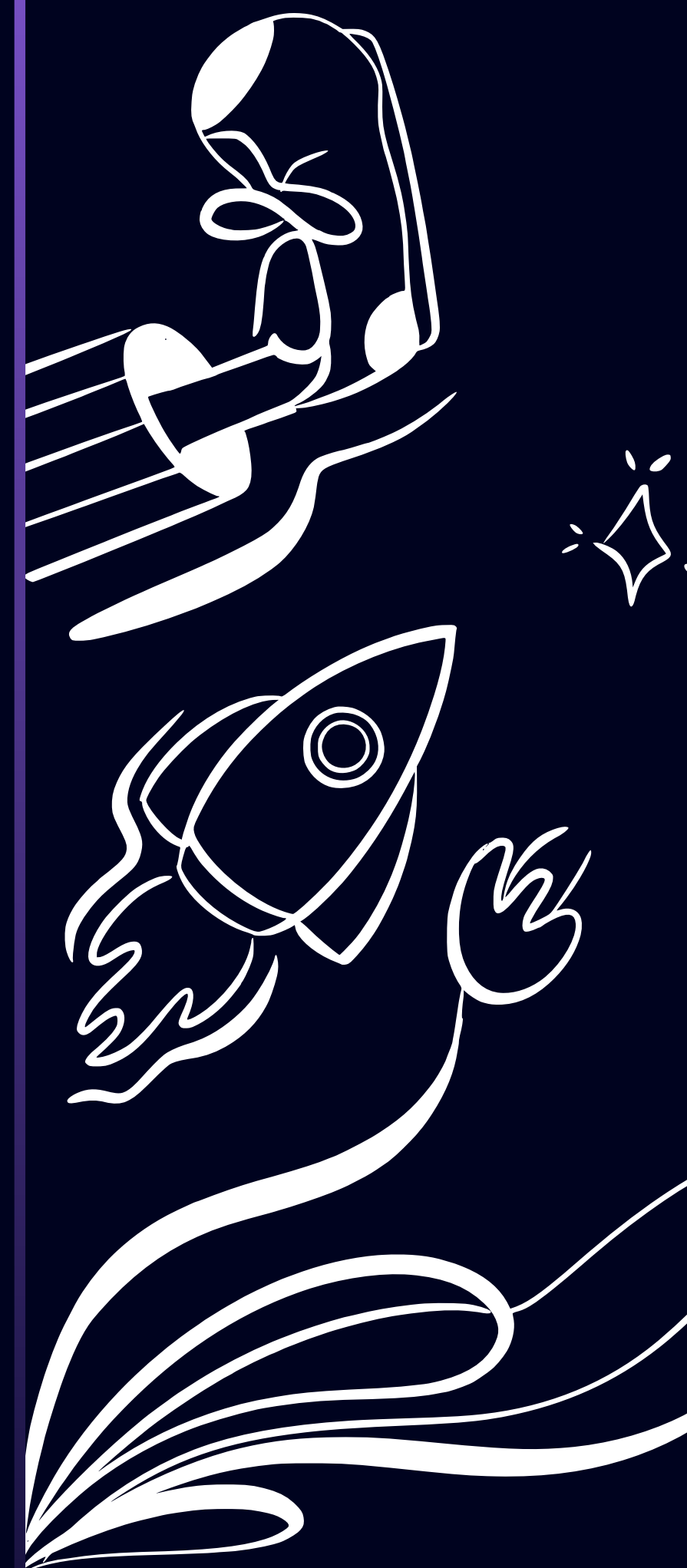
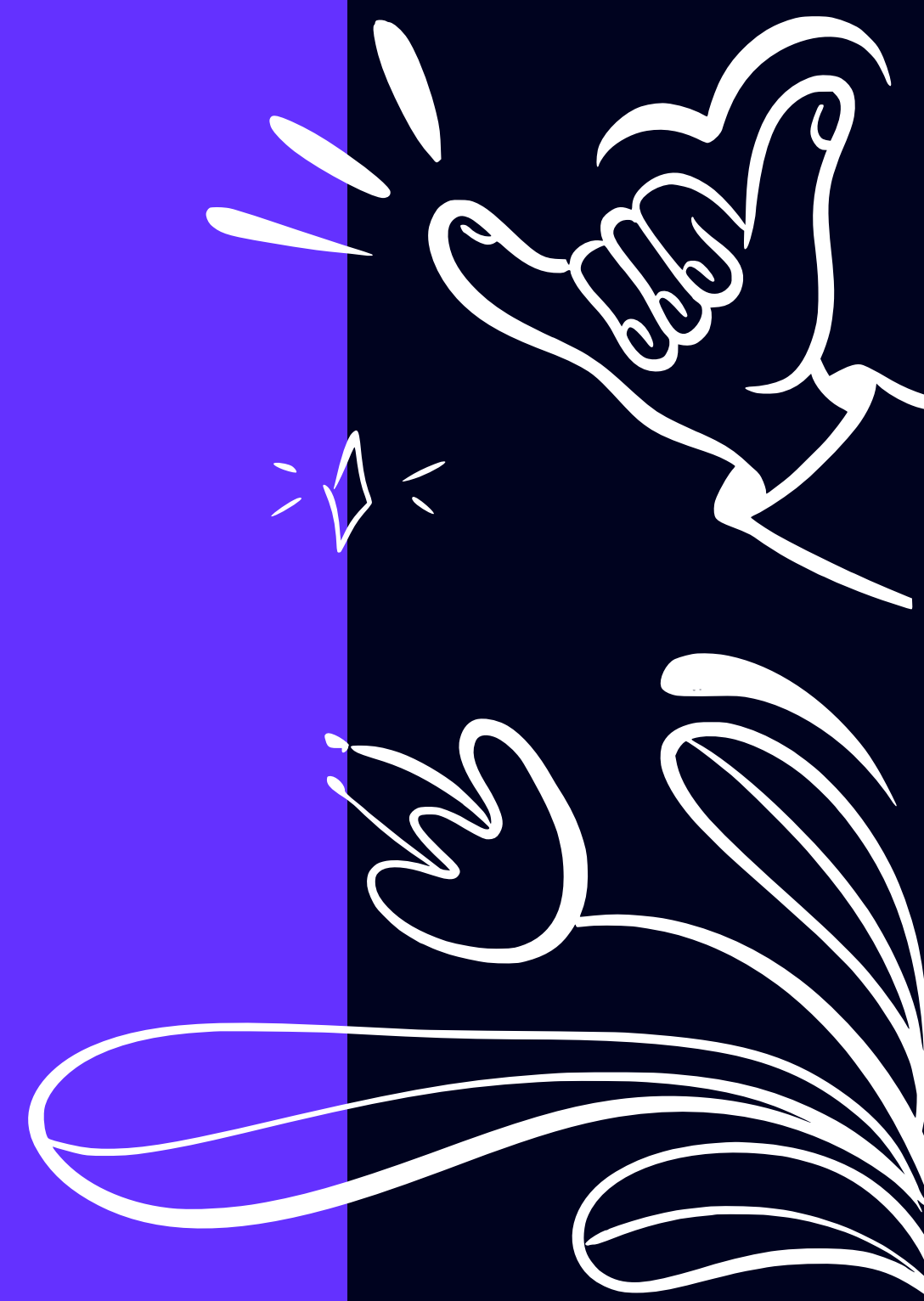
To bridge the culture gap, you need to make sure everyone has access to the same mission-critical information, like key company documents and real-time updates. But you also need to create accessible virtual spaces that showcase your company culture, decoupled from office buildings.

Bring frontline team members and cross-functional colleagues together by providing a shared employee experience platform that enables them to connect and communicate across the company. From sharing the latest company news to discussing industry trends to posting cute pet pics that brighten each others' days, these virtual spaces become the digital heartbeat of your company, transcending location and bringing culture to life.

★ PRO TIP

GET DIRECT^{1e} FEEDBACK WITH EMPLOYEE SURVEYS

If frontline employees don't feel engaged with company culture or think it doesn't apply to them, it's worth asking why not. Use an employee experience platform (EXP) like Workvivo to launch surveys to specific employee cohorts (like your frontline workers) to understand the reasons they feel the way they do – and get their candid feedback on how you can improve.

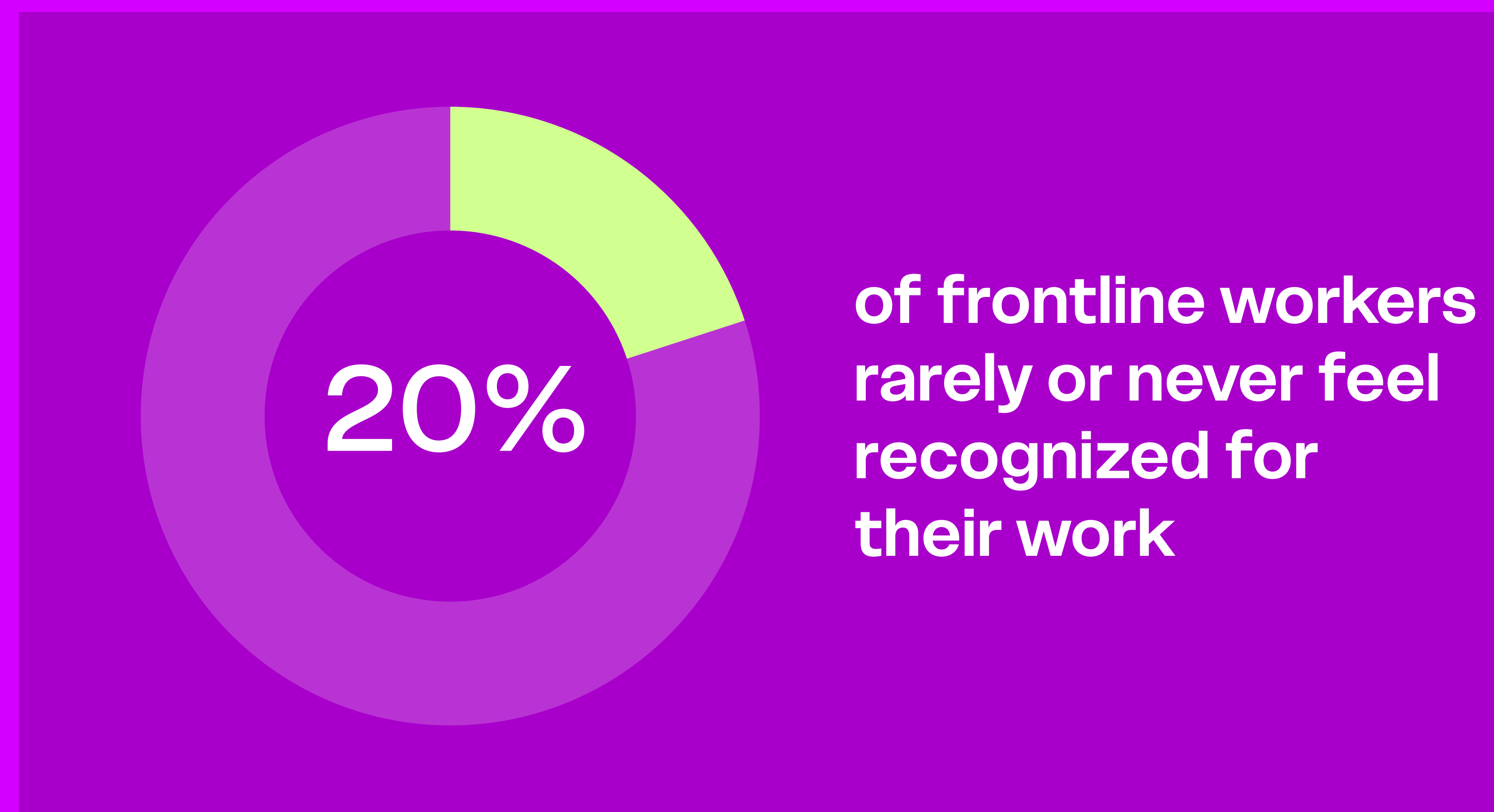


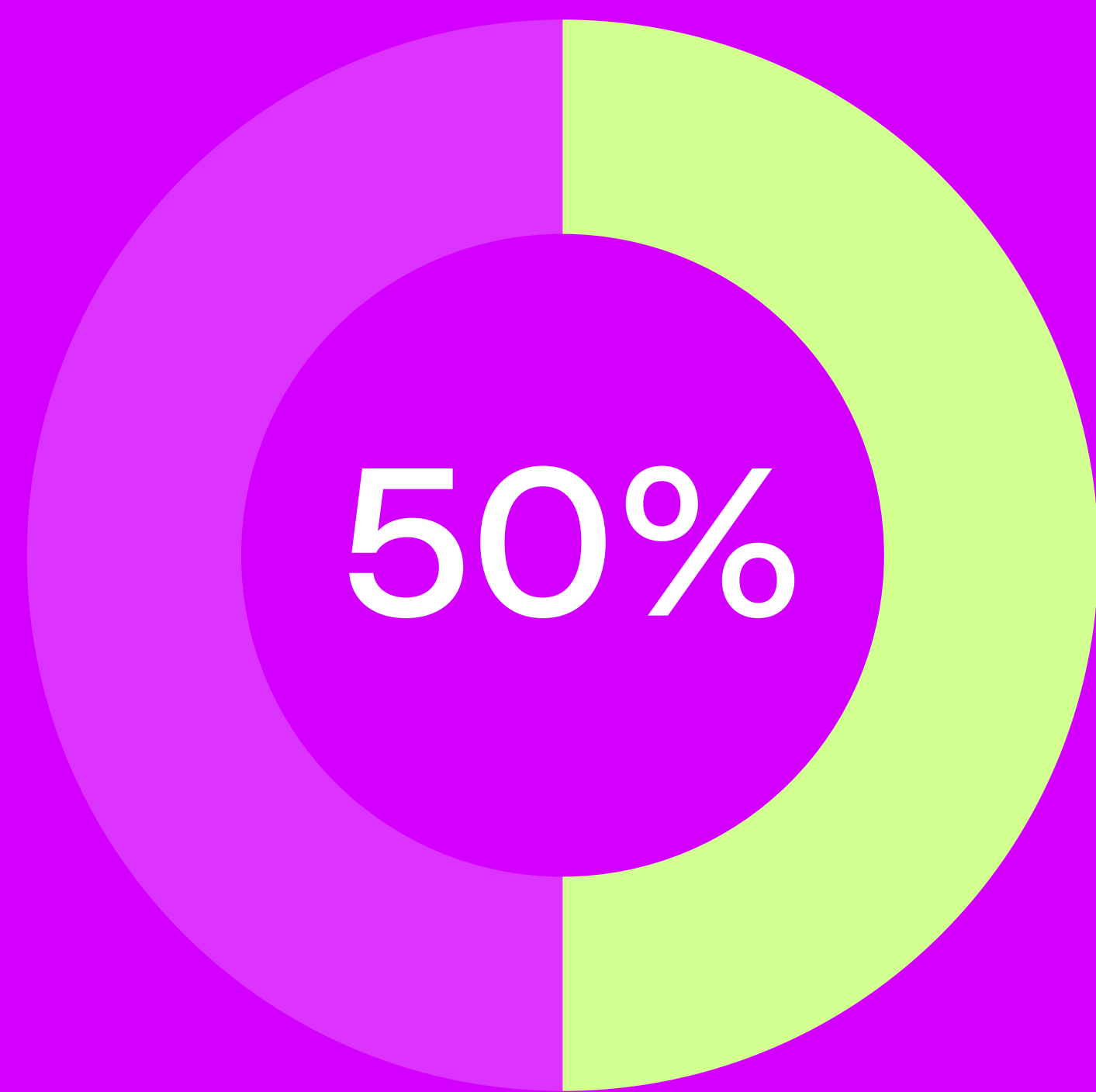
The Recognition Gap

Frontline workers have an outsized impact but feel undervalued

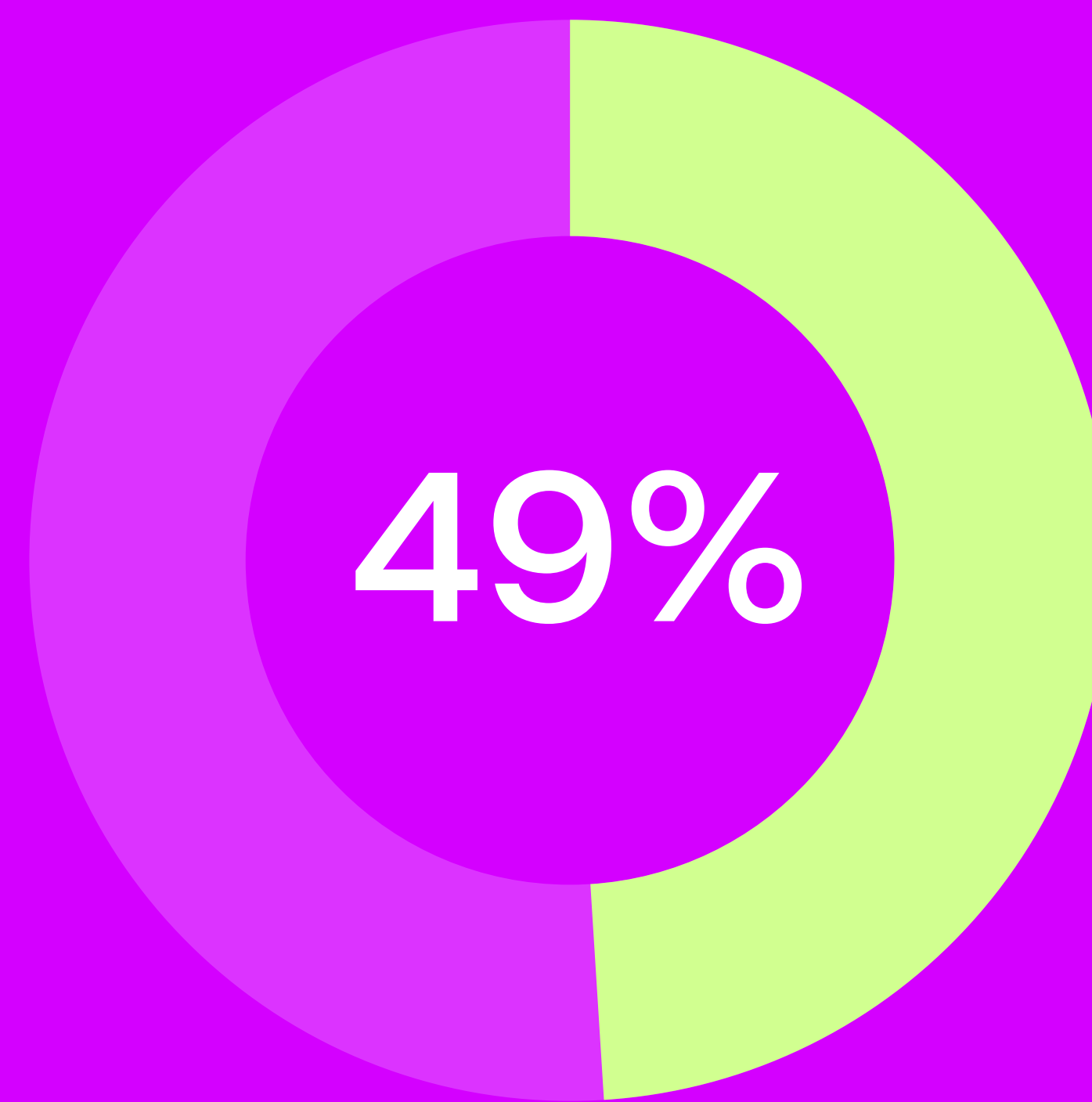
Frontline workers do some of the most difficult and demanding jobs, but only a third (35%) feel that they're frequently recognized for their work. Worryingly, one in five feel they've *never* received any form of recognition.

What's more, half believe their company cares more about office or desk workers than them –despite many frontline workers feeling that they have a bigger impact than their office colleagues.





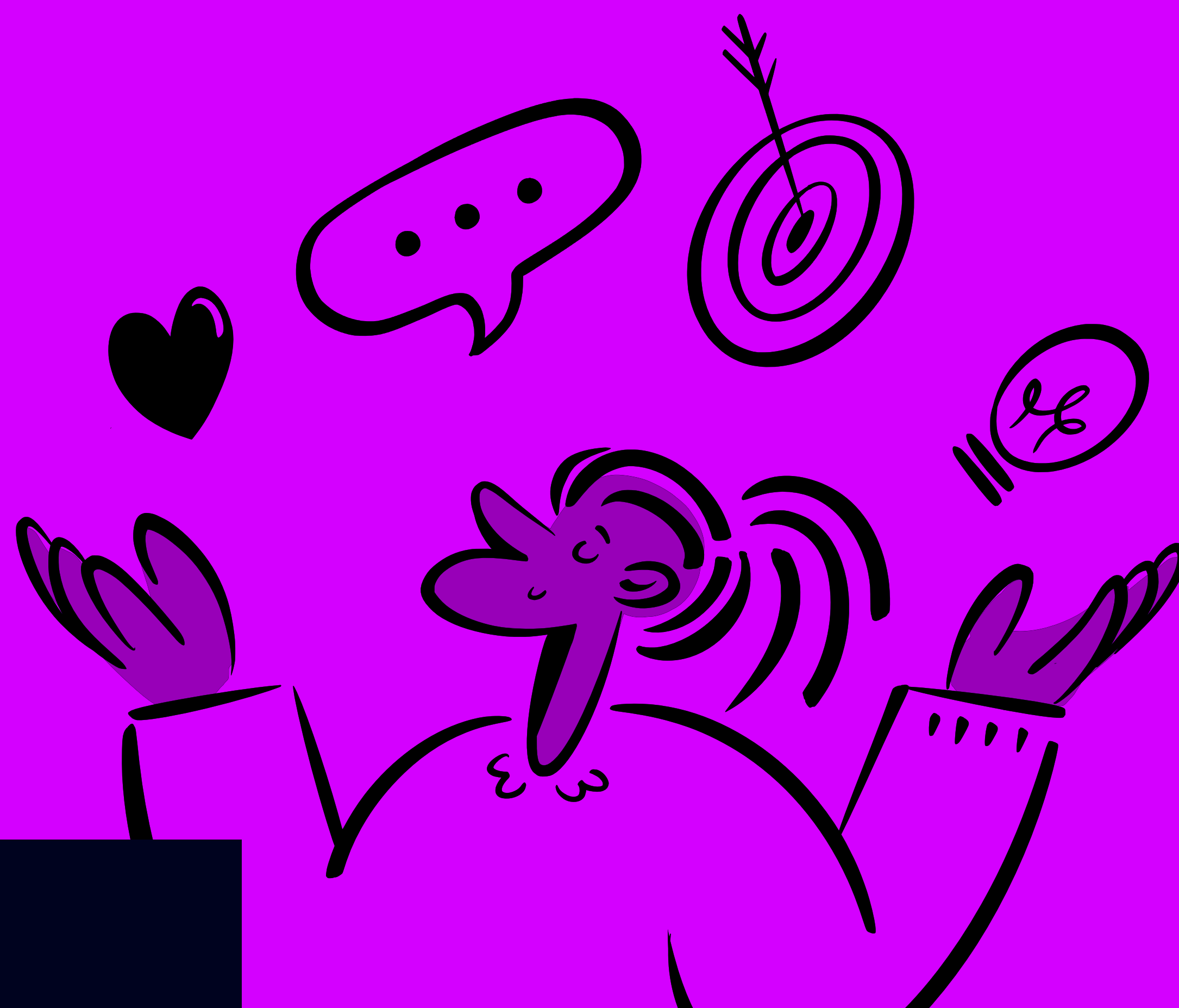
50%
of frontline workers say
their company cares
more about office
workers than them



49%
of frontline workers
feel they have a bigger
impact than their office
colleagues – but aren't
recognized for it

This reveals a significant frustration and hints at an underlying loneliness. Frontline workers feel disposable and unimportant, particularly in contrast to their desk-based peers, with 40% saying their company doesn't care about them as a person.

Why is this? Frontline workers deal with a lot of challenges, from high stress levels, understaffing, and emotional exhaustion to physical demands and risk of injury. But only 10% are sure their managers understand these struggles and their impacts. And how can managers accurately acknowledge what they can't understand – or even see?



What's the hardest part of a frontline employee's workday?



34%

High stress levels



31%

Understaffing



30%

Physical demands



28%

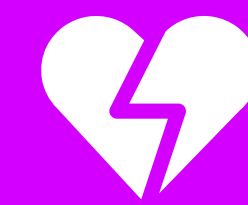
Long working hours



26%

Emotional exhaustion

* Respondents could select more than one answer.



This lack of recognition is the #1 factor negatively affecting frontline workers' sense of belonging at work.

But the good news is that the recognition gap is easy to close — and doing so could have a huge impact. 35% of frontline workers say being recognized for their individual contribution is one of the top ways they would feel more valued at work, with 39% even preferring it to a bonus.



35%

of frontline workers say recognizing their individual contributions is the top way to make them feel more valued at work, aside from compensation



39%

of frontline workers say being praised in front of peers makes them feel more valued than getting a bonus

Like everyone, frontline workers want to be recognized for their hard work.

But often, visibility of their contributions – and their value to the organization – suffers because they're in the field, disconnected from the wider company, their managers, and their office-based peers.

When it comes to keeping frontline employees engaged and satisfied, you can't overstate the power of a simple shout-out for a job well done. A thoughtful acknowledgement makes all the difference between disengaged employees and happy workers.



★ PRO TIP

CALL OUT WINS AND HIGH PERFORMANCE IN REAL TIME

Encourage leaders, managers, and peers to recognize frontline employees and share their appreciation with the wider company.

With an employee experience platform, everyone can celebrate achievements in real time. Post a shout-out right in your activity feed to give kudos to a colleague or say thank you for their support, and let others chime in with comments. You can also collect nominations for awards, like quarterly MVP, and present recipients with badges that they can display proudly on their profiles.

Connect shout-outs or awards to your company goals or values to really embed your culture into everyday actions and engage frontline workers with your mission in a fun, social way.



The Communication Gap

Frontline workers want meaningful two-way company communications, but irrelevant messaging makes them switch off

Just under half (42%) of frontline workers say their company is bad at communicating with them, creating a gap that important company updates – and valuable feedback – struggle to cross.

42%

of frontline workers say their company leadership is not good at communicating with them

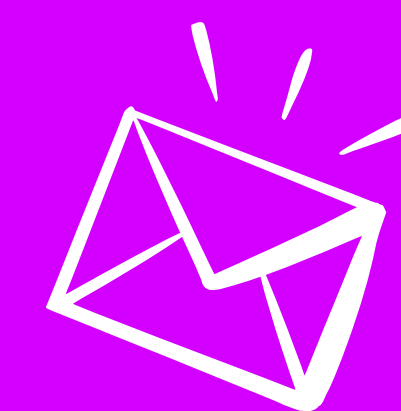
46%

of frontline workers don't know who the CEO is

We've already seen the impacts of this on organizational culture, where frontline workers aren't aware of key company information like values, while 46% don't know who the CEO is. Poor communication reinforces the sense of disconnect many frontline workers feel from their company's mission.

But our research shows that frontline workers *want* relevant, open communications. More than half would like to hear updates from their CEO, and 69% want to understand their company's decisions better.

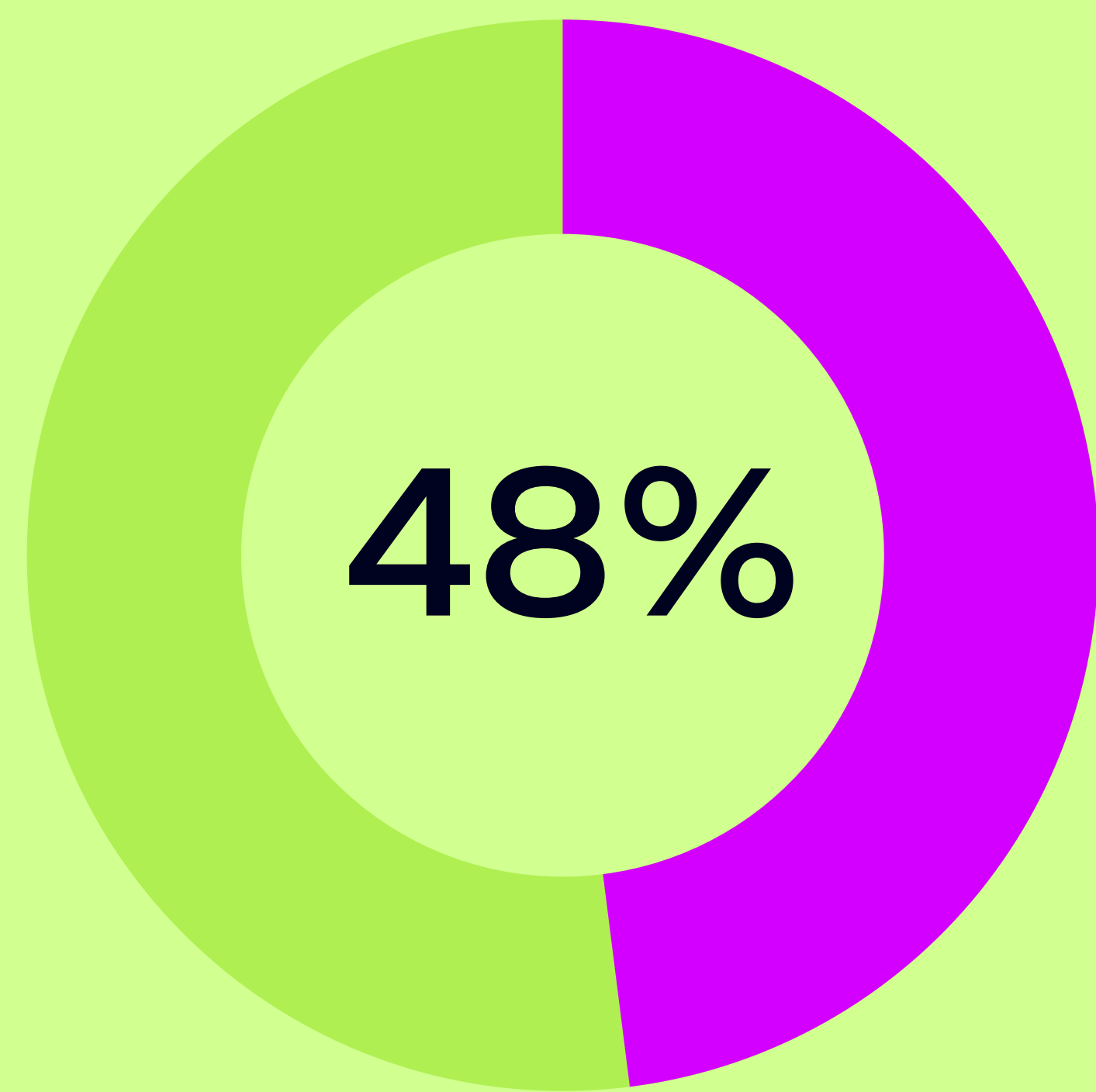
For this to work, however, these communications need to go both ways. Over a third of frontline workers have feedback they want to share with leadership but no good way to share it, while nearly a quarter say they're rarely or never asked for their opinion on how work gets done.



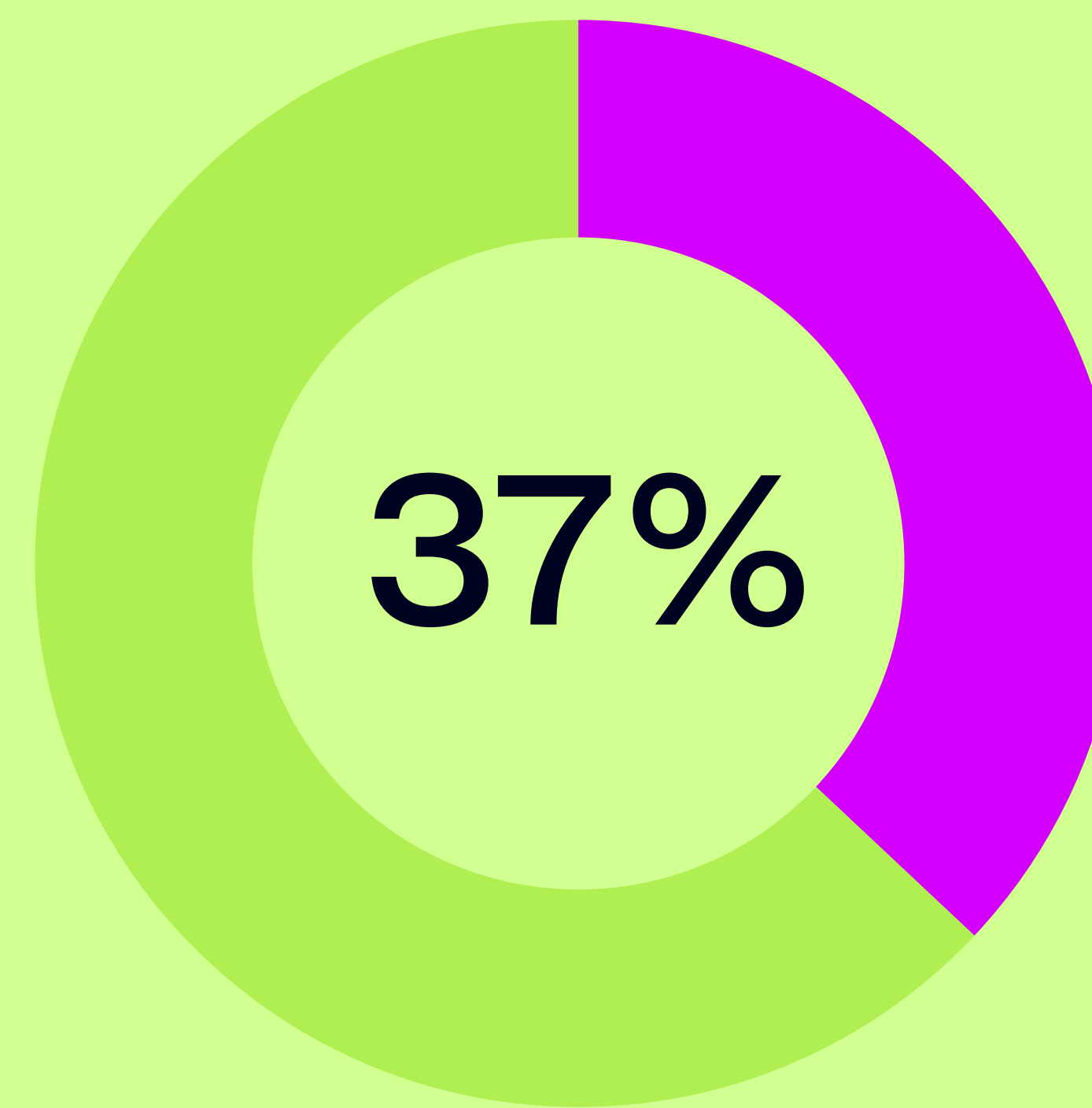
Even though frontline workers want to engage, poor communication strategies make it difficult or impossible.

Almost half of frontline workers say most of their company's communications seem irrelevant to them, causing the majority to skip reading them some or all of the time.





**of frontline workers say
much of their company's
communication seems
irrelevant to them**



Only 37% of frontline workers frequently read company communications, while 19% 'rarely or never' read them

If companies continue to spam frontline workers with irrelevant comms without asking for their feedback or input, they risk causing them to switch off entirely.

Instead, organizations need to create tailored comms strategies that meet different users' needs and preferences. This means surfacing priority communications, sharing behind-the-scenes insights about key decisions, and cutting through the noise to deliver relevant updates to the right people – all while still keeping teams engaged and up to date.

★ PRO TIP

ANALYZE ENGAGEMENT TO OPTIMIZE YOUR COMMS STRATEGY

Use your employee experience platform to measure engagement with key communications and create targeted strategies to reach the right employees.

- **Get reach and engagement insights** for your content (such as posts, articles, events, and more) to understand which topics and formats your employees love.
- **Track usage behaviors** like active users, logins, posts, and comments to spot trends over time and proactively address any declines in engagement.
- **Compare these behaviors across teams and individuals** to see how frontline and desk-based teams differ and identify opportunities to re-engage frontline workers with content they actually want.

★ PRO TIP

TAILOR COMMUNICATIONS TO EMPLOYEE NEEDS

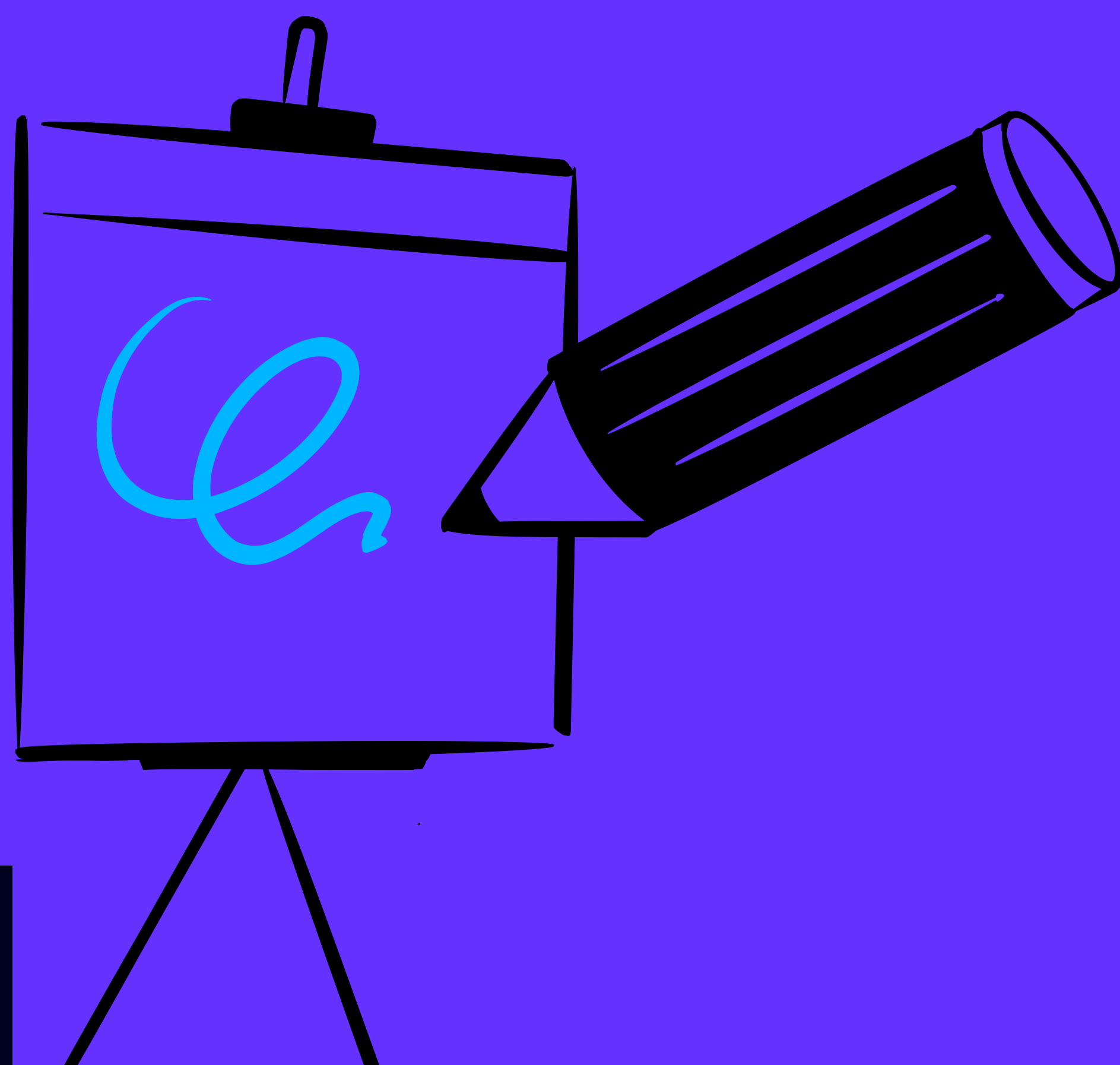
Remember that frontline workers have different communication needs. They're often on the go, have less time with their devices than desk-based workers on their laptops, and some of them may not interact with another person for the majority of their day.

Consider making your updates shorter and simpler for time-strapped frontline workers, or share a video update from your CEO to help teams who don't work in an office feel personally connected to leadership.

⚙️ The Tech Gap

Many communication tools don't meet frontline workers' needs, so they're improvising – but it puts your business at risk

The majority of frontline workers feel frustrated and disempowered by the company communications technology they have to use, leading most of them to take matters into their own hands.



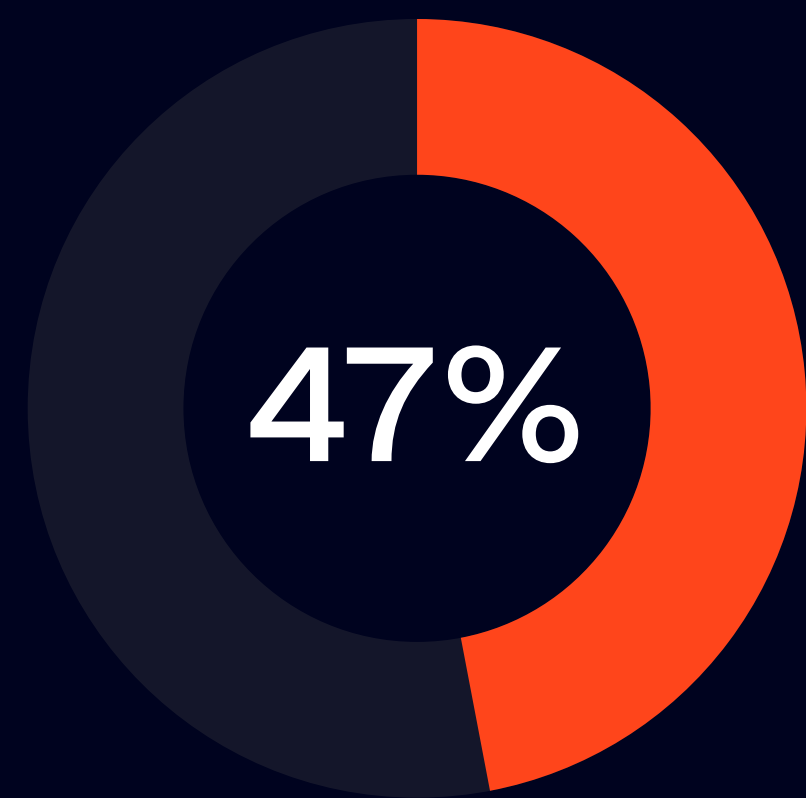
66%

of frontline workers feel frustrated by the company communications technology they have to use



69%

of frontline employees use their personal messaging apps for work purposes



Almost half of all frontline workers (47%) say the communication tools their company uses feel **designed for desk workers, not them.**

Not only does this limit productivity and engagement, it undoubtedly feeds into the belief we saw earlier that companies care more about office workers than frontline employees.

The technology needs of frontline workers are different to those of their desk-based colleagues. As they're often dispersed across locations — whether that's a retail store, a warehouse, or an oil rig — and constantly on the move, they need mobile-first communication tools that can keep up with them.

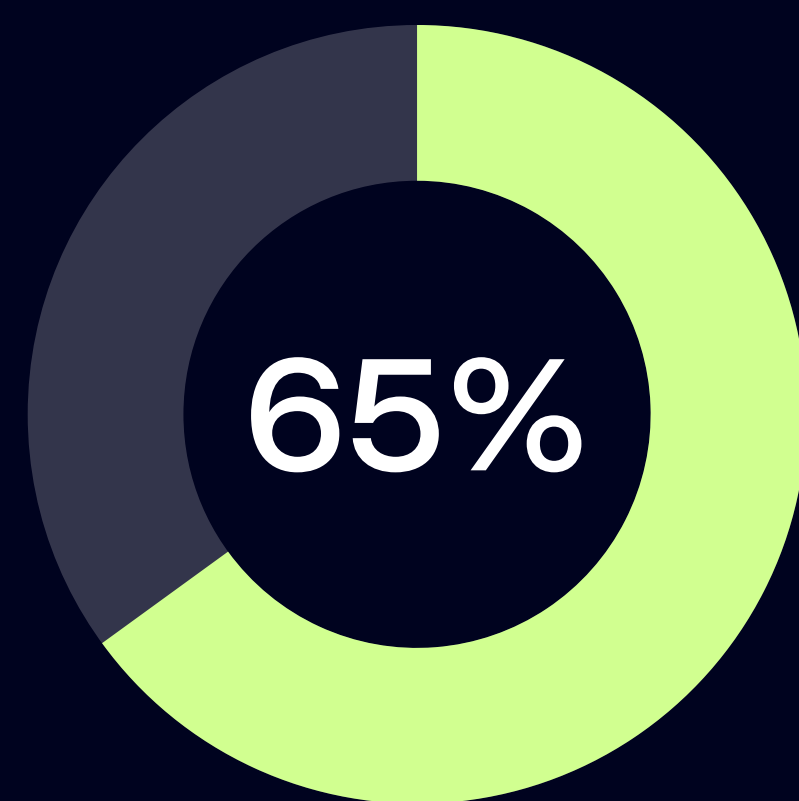
But because most company communication tools don't feel fit for frontline workers' unique needs, a whopping 69% resort to using personal messaging apps to communicate about work.

This is also known as shadow IT: when employees use unauthorized, unsupported tools that aren't managed or controlled by your IT department. Shadow IT opens up a huge range of problems, such as:

- **Security and compliance issues** that put your business at risk
- **Lack of transparency and alignment** across teams and workers, which can lead to missed information, inefficient processes, and extra work
- **Information silos** for important or confidential company information, which could get lost or leaked when team members leave
- **Lack of visibility** for HR and people teams about sentiment, engagement, and performance

Not to mention, this creates a poor work-life balance for frontline employees whose personal apps are buzzing with company comms out of hours, making it hard for them to truly switch off.

If your existing tech doesn't meet your frontline workers' needs, it's only natural for them to seek out a solution that does. Currently, only 35% of frontline workers say their employer's app or scheduling tool makes them feel empowered, so it's not surprising that they're looking elsewhere.



of frontline workers don't feel empowered by their company's app or scheduling tool

Clunky apps, poor user experiences (UX), and multiple disconnected communication tools or channels are a barrier to adoption – and they ultimately put your company's security at risk as frontline workers turn to shadow IT instead. But to truly engage frontline workers, your tech needs to meet every employee's needs, not just those who are already at a desk and regularly on their laptop or in front of a screen.

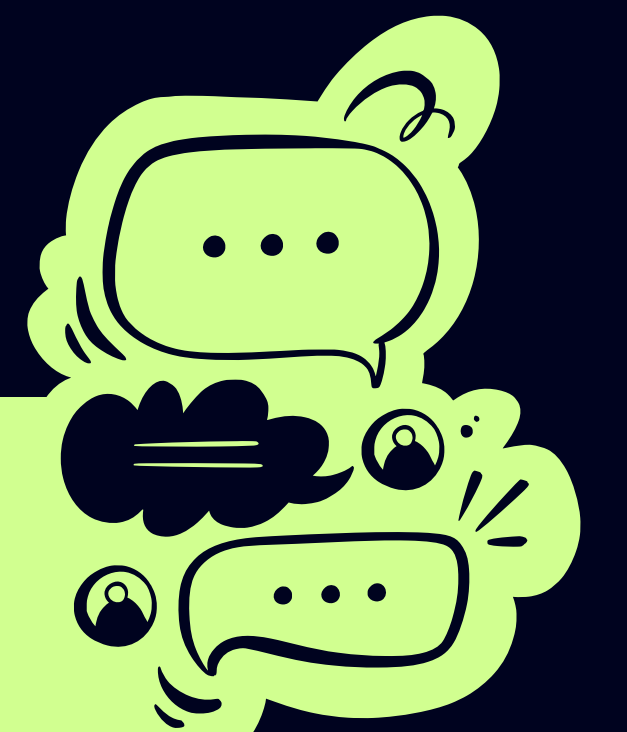
★ PRO TIP



BRING SHADOW TOOLS INTO THE LIGHT

Look at what apps your frontline workers actually use – yes, even unofficially – to understand their needs and expectations. For example, relying on tools like WhatsApp suggests they want consumer-grade experiences, easy-to-use UX, and real-time connections with colleagues, so look for an employee communication and engagement tool that ticks all these boxes.

★ PRO TIP



INTEGRATE YOUR TECH STACK TO CREATE A CENTRALIZED EMPLOYEE HUB

Integrate your employee experience platform with other tools – such as the HR, payroll, service desk, and productivity apps you use every day – to create a streamlined, simplified workflow for frontline and desk workers.

↗ The Career Gap

Frontline workers want career paths where desks aren't the only destination

Growth opportunities are a top priority for frontline workers, but over half feel they have fewer than their office-based colleagues. This may lead to retention issues as frontline workers consider moving to other companies with clearer advancement opportunities.



52%

of frontline workers feel they have fewer career growth opportunities than their office colleagues

54%

of frontline workers say they would leave for another company offering the same pay but better career growth



Frontline workers enjoy what they do. In addition to the job stability their role provides, they like solving daily challenges, helping people, and building relationships. But only 13% of frontline workers who want career progression are confident there's a clear path forward at their company.

What do frontline workers like most about their job?



39%

Having job stability



34%

Solving daily challenges



34%

Helping other people



30%

Building relationships



29%

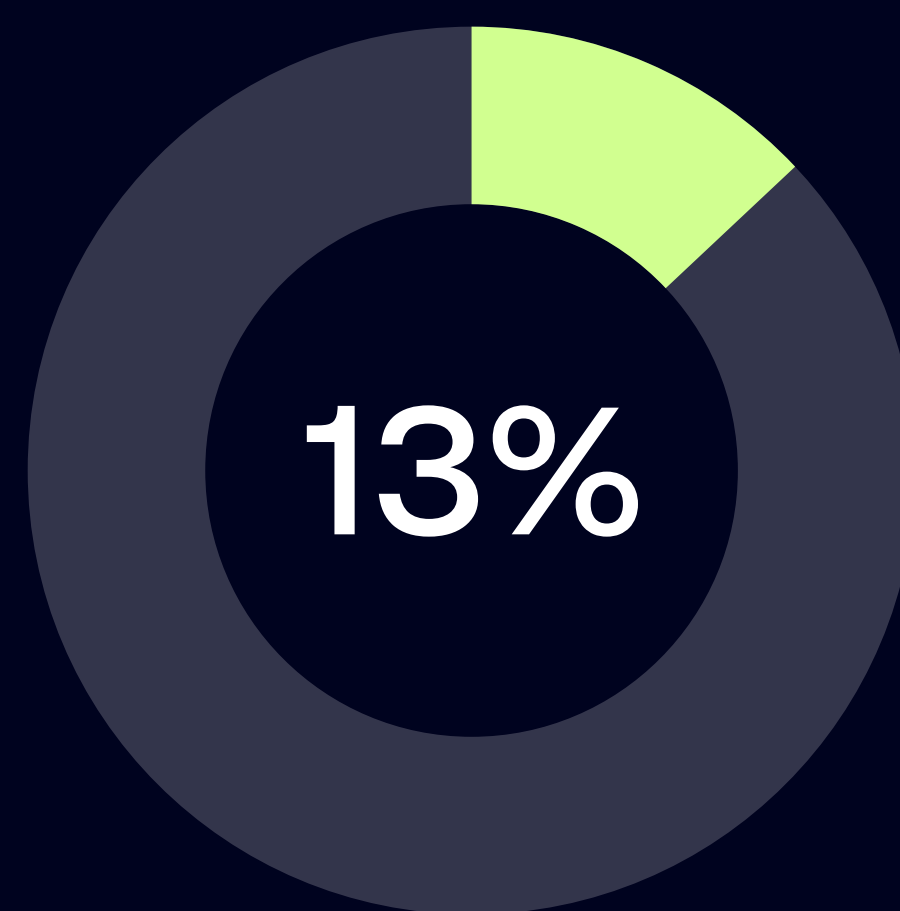
Feeling needed or important

Providing growth opportunities was cited as the number-one thing that would make frontline workers feel more valued at work, aside from compensation. And if your company doesn't provide these opportunities, they'll find one that does: more than half of frontline workers would leave their current job for another company offering the same pay but better career growth.

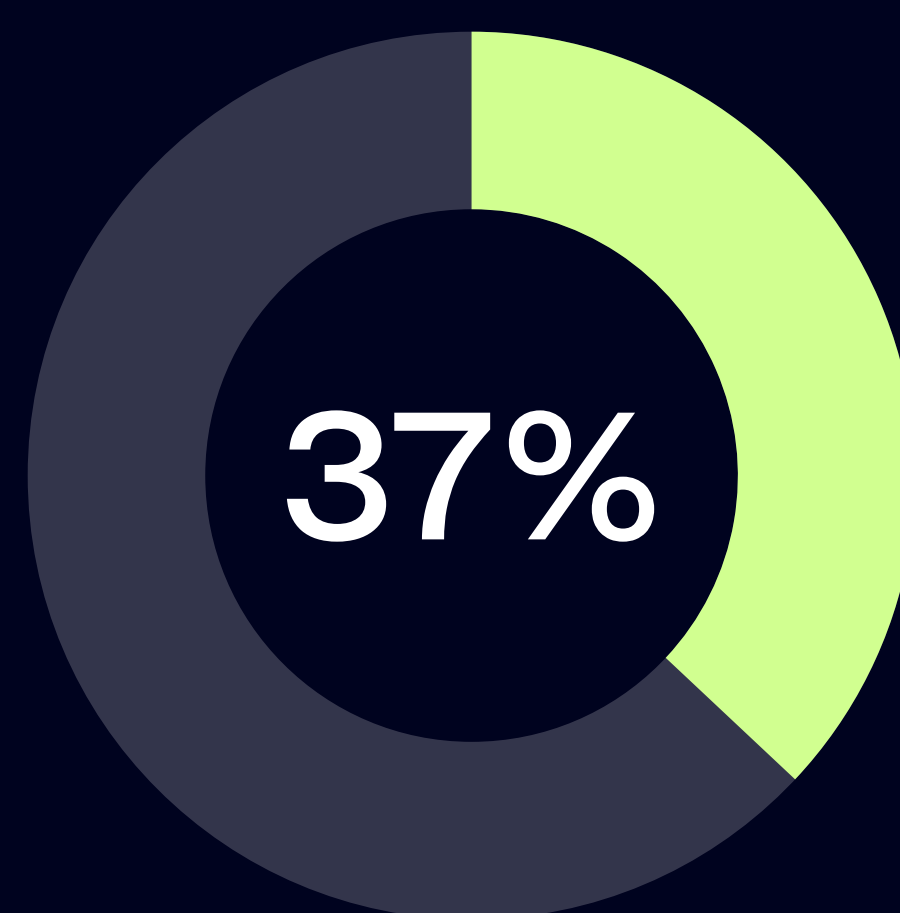
Like communication and tech, this is another area where frontline workers have unique needs. For them, career growth doesn't mean 'graduating' to an office job. In fact, 37% of frontline employees wouldn't want a desk job if offered one.

This is good news, considering how valuable and essential these roles are. But in order to keep this experience and expertise in the field, businesses need to make sure frontline workers have room to grow in the way they want.

* Respondents could select more than one answer.



Only 13% of frontline workers feel there's a clear path forward at their current company



37% of frontline employees wouldn't want a desk job if offered one

We can see the lingering impact of the recognition gap at work here. Our findings suggest that when it comes to advancing their careers, frontline workers can feel like their achievements are invisible or undervalued, which they may worry puts them at a disadvantage compared to their office-based peers.

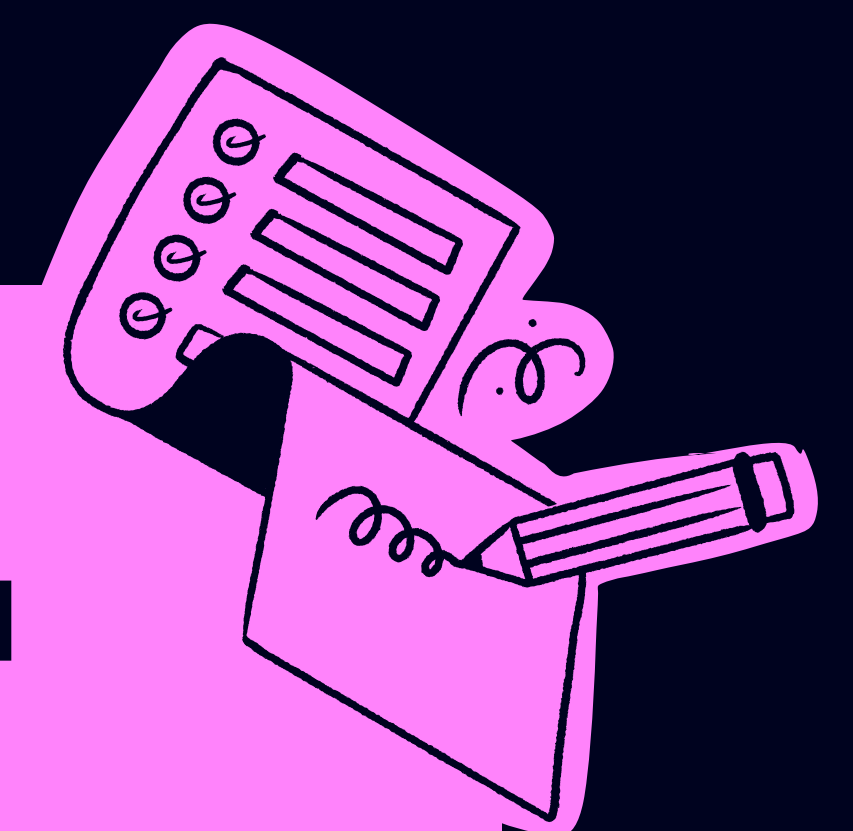
By publicly shining a light on frontline workers' contributions at an organizational level, they can be confident that managers and leadership are aware of their work and its importance.

Likewise, the communication gap might mean that these employees don't hear about internal openings or aren't certain how performance reviews and promotions are evaluated. Clear communication about company plans and new growth opportunities is crucial to ensuring frontline employees see a future with your organization.

★ PRO TIP

KEEP KEY COMPANY INFORMATION WHERE EVERYONE CAN FIND IT

It's hard to picture career growth if you don't know what the path looks like or how to get there. Share helpful resources like role descriptions, career pathways, and promotion procedures in centralized knowledge hubs or spaces that can be accessed right from your employee experience platform, so every worker is aligned on what success looks like – now and in the future.





Closing the gaps: bringing company culture and engagement to the frontline



Frontline workers experience your company differently to desk workers — and our research reveals just how they feel about it. But while we see clear evidence of a frontline gap, we also see emerging ways to address it.

To make frontline workers feel truly valued, you need to embrace their unique engagement and communication needs and meet them on their terms, where they are, by bringing culture and comms right to the frontline.

With the right employee experience platform, you can bridge the gap. Use a winning combination of tech and strategy to tailor your approach and make your frontline workers feel engaged, inspired, heard, recognized — and, most importantly, happy.





Workvivo is an employee communication platform with the power to bring your whole organization together — whether they're at their desks or working hard on the factory floor. Our platform helps your employees to communicate, share ideas, and better understand your company's core mission and values.

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