Starmind

Productivity drain and the urgency of eliminating the endless *search for answers*

Executive *summary*

Not being able to find the answers you need, at the time you need them most, is beyond frustrating. **Lost time spent seeking information**, rather than activities employees are paid for, **amounts to millions of dollars wasted.** It also means **decisions are frequently made without access to reliable data** and the cost of decisions made based on assumptions is potentially vast.

Most existing tools and applications for finding answers only exacerbate the problem. Searching for answers in documents and knowledge management systems takes **too much time,** and the information they yield is often **out–of–date.** Meanwhile, reaching out to colleagues using collaboration tools to ask for answers imposes its own burdens, soaking up enormous amounts of time. **Employees are unable to identify the right people to ask,** and those with useful knowledge are asked the same questions again and again.

Companies urgently need to **bridge the gap between people with questions and the answers they seek.** Knowledge, as well as the identity of knowledgeable people across every topic, needs to be captured and surfaced within frictionless systems that **allow every individual to harness the whole knowledge of the organization,** in a true solution for knowledge collaboration.

Key findings

Within larger organizations, 37% of employees spend **over two hours a day searching for answers**
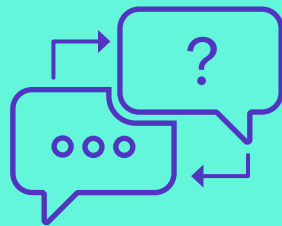
In companies with 3,000+ employees, **around 450,000 hours a year are spent asking and answering the same questions.** Most employees are asked previously answered questions more than once a day

The vast majority of employees (84%) **make decisions based on assumptions four times every week** because they can't find answers that exist within the organization.

Half (49%) of workers say they **spend too much time searching through documents,** and this affects their capacity for deep work

Half (48%) of knowledge workers **don't know who to ask** when they have questions

Knowledge silos between departments affect 41% of organizations, limiting access to the available information

Starmind

In the following sections, we share our findings:

1. Lost productivity

In **Lost productivity**, we reveal how businesses are losing thousands of hours of productive work each year, and of course the monetary value of those hours, to time spent searching for information.

To understand how our **endless search for answers severely impacts productivity,** and to highlight **the importance of making the right answers easily available,** we analyzed the behavior and attitudes of over 1,000 knowledge workers, people working in an office environment, at large organizations in the United States, Germany and Switzerland.

2. Expanding silos

Lost productivity issues are shown to be compounded in the **Expanding silos** section, as we find that fragmentation — whether hierarchical, cultural, functional or geographical — creates barriers to knowledge discovery, preventing that knowledge from being used to grow the business.

3. Searching for answers

Searching for answers describes how employees with questions are prevented from finding the answers they need to make informed business decisions. This happens because of unreliable processes and tools, lack of access to data or to the right, knowledgeable colleague.

4. The human factor

In **The human factor** we quantify the extent to which knowledge remains hidden in organizations, and the effect untapping it can have on both employee satisfaction and retention.

5. Find an answer

Finally, in **Finding an answer** we explore the role technology and AI can play in solving the productivity conundrum, and its ability to empower organizations and their people with untapped knowledge.

Starmind

Lost productivity

Productivity — the value created by a business as a proportion of the resources it commits to producing that value — is a critical measure of commercial success.

For knowledge workers, the principal resource they use to create value is time:

Time that's not spent creating value causes a direct hit to productivity, and the company's bottom line.

Many factors affect how much time at work is spent productively, but a key culprit when it comes to wasted time is the difficulty people encounter obtaining the answers they need to get work done.

Our survey uncovered gravely unsettling findings:

1 in 20

workers **spends over half of their working day looking for information**, rather than getting work done.

More than *a third*

(37%) of knowledge workers in larger organizations **spend over two hours a day searching for the information** they require to complete tasks.

The cost of just two hours is staggering. In an organization with 4,000 workers, across 250 working days in a year, that adds up to a minimum of **740,500 lost hours over 12 months.** In the very unlikely event that all these workers earned a low wage of just $20/h, that's already nearly **$15M annually, lost to businesses through looking for information** that could be readily in–hand, with the correct tools.

To make matters worse, the proportion of those reporting large amounts of time lost in searching for answers increases according to seniority, and thus enormously inflates the financial impact of those lost hours. Among the C–suite, 81% report losing over an hour a day **(with 54% losing more than two hours)** in the search for answers that should be readily accessible.

The cost of searching for information in a 4,000 worker company

Calculated assuming all workers earn a low wage of just $20/h.

740,500
lost hours

$14.8M
*lost revenue*

Assumptions vs. data

On top of these large amounts of wasted time, the impact of inaccessible information runs even deeper: instead of being data–driven, decisions are very frequently made using assumptions and best–guesses.

On average, knowledge workers make a decision based only on assumptions and guesswork four times a week.

Unfortunately, this is especially true of C–level execs, 73% of whom say they make five or more decisions based on assumptions every week because they can't find the necessary data to make judgements based on facts. The consequences of these uninformed decisions might be financially devastating — and could have been avoided altogether.

Decisions based on assumptions
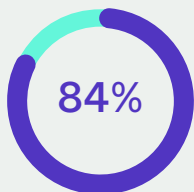
84% of employees **make decisions based on assumptions four times every week** because they can't find answers that exist within the organization
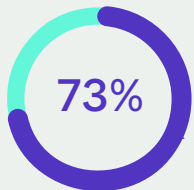
73% of **C–level execs make 5+ decisions a week based on assumptions**

Easily accessible answers to work questions thus have considerable value. But in most organizations, the information is unavailable. **Only 20% of workers believe that company knowledge is thoroughly documented** and easy to find in their organization. Even worse, **49% say the information they do find is frequently out–of–date.**

The failure of existing systems to provide the right answers means the same questions are asked again and again.

On average, knowledge workers are asked six questions every week they have answered previously.

The potential costs, in terms of lost time, are again considerable.

Cost of repetitive questions

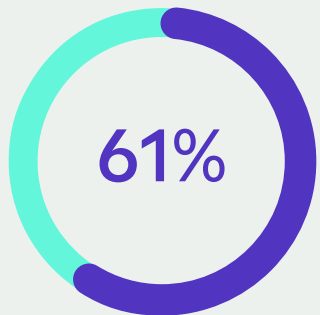**15** minutes   **x 3,000** employees   **450,000** hours

If each question and answer takes an average of 15 minutes out of two employees' days, then in an organization of 3,000 employees, over a 250 –day working year, that's **450,000 hours spent on previously answered questions.**

If knowledge is not captured, then it's only contained in people's heads. This creates its own friction and waste in addition to the repeated questions, particularly as people leave and start working for an organization, with each of these events having a considerable impact on productivity. **When people leave an organisation, on average, 53% of their knowledge is captured,** with this figure varying with the employee's length of service.

At the other end of the employment lifecycle, when starting a new job, almost **two–thirds (61%) of knowledge workers believe that it took them over two months to achieve full productivity** in their roles: 18% said the process took more than six months, with this figure rising to over one quarter (26%) among U.S. employees. And knowledge workers are more skeptical about other people's learning speed than their own — 67% believe it takes over two months for a new employee to become fully productive.

The financial impact of searching for answers, acting on assumptions, asking and answering repetitive questions, and the loss of knowledge whenever there's any turnover in the workforce, is immense. But unfortunately, the systems most organizations adopt to try to shore up against these challenges are ineffective, as we shall see in the following sections.

Only half (53%) of the knowledge held by those leaving an organization is retained and documented.

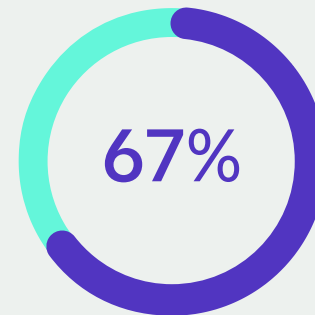**How long did it take employees as a new joiner to feel like they were achieving full productivity?**

61% of knowledge workers believe that it took them **over two months to achieve full productivity** in their roles

67% of knowledge workers believe it takes **over two months for a new employee to become fully productive**

Searching for answers

Finding answers to questions is time–consuming, as we have shown, and this is equally true whether or not knowledge management and/or collaboration tools have been implemented. Almost one–third (30%) find it takes too long to go through documents on knowledge management or collaboration platforms when looking for an answer to a critical business question. And it's also frustrating, when the available tools and documentation fail to provide the required information or that information is outdated.

Almost half (48%) of knowledge workers have at least one question per day where it is unclear to them who might be the best person to provide an answer.
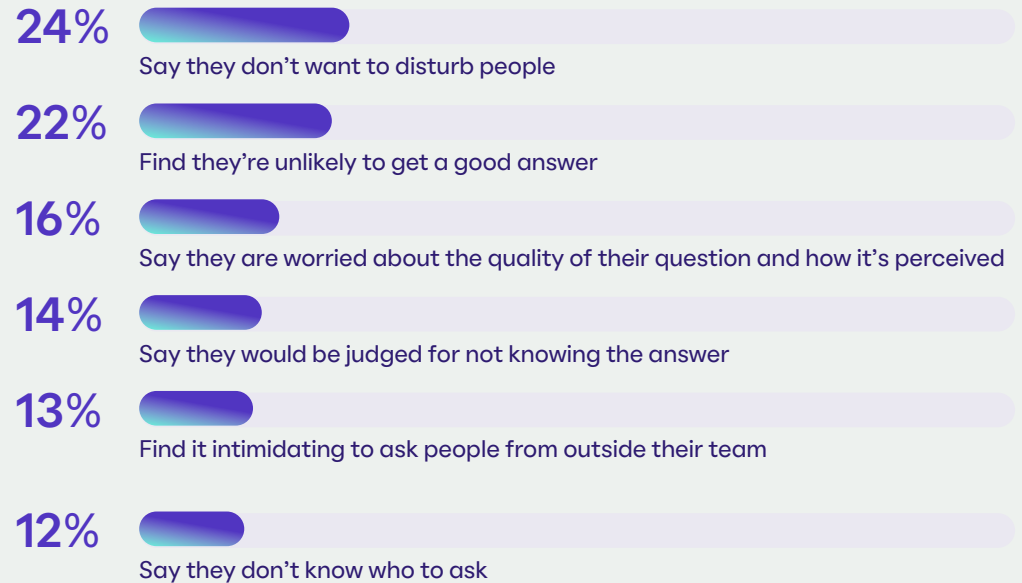
The most common action taken to resolve urgent business questions is to reach out to a colleague through either a collaboration tool or email. This was the first response chosen by 55% of respondents.

But this route poses a number of challenges for knowledge workers.

First, employees **need faster and more intuitive ways to identify who can answer their queries.** Almost half (48%) of knowledge workers have at least one question per day where it is unclear to them who might be the best person to provide an answer.

Even if a suitably knowledgeable person is identified, there are added cultural and quality barriers to finding the right answer. A quarter of respondents said they sometimes don't reach out to a colleague for help because they feel anxious about disturbing them; **16% said they worried about the quality of their questions** and the impression they would create, while **14% said they believed they might be judged** for not knowing the answer.

Why employees won't ask questions

24%
Say they don't want to disturb people

22%
Find they're unlikely to get a good answer

16%
Say they are worried about the quality of their question and how it's perceived

14%
Say they would be judged for not knowing the answer

13%
Find it intimidating to ask people from outside their team

12%
Say they don't know who to ask

The second route to finding answers, if no suitable colleague can be found, is through searching document systems or knowledge management tools, or asking open questions through collaboration tools.

Unfortunately, these tools often lead to information–overload, rather than clear answers. **Over half of employees (51%) find both that the volume of notifications received on collaboration channels is overwhelming,** and that the volume of information sources available makes it hard to find the answers they need. However, volume is only one part of the problem; **50% of knowledge workers also say that the documented information they can access is out–of–date.**

With huge volumes of information to search through, much of it irrelevant or old, it's unsurprising that half **(45%) say they can't access the knowledge they need quickly and easily to do their job effectively.**

For the majority of workers (61%), the time lost searching for information impacts the time they have available to commit to deep work. Around half **(49%) indicate they spend too long searching through documents for answers on a daily basis.**

According to most workers, the two main routes to answers on a daily basis aren't fit for purpose. Turning to colleagues leaves individuals not knowing who to ask, anxious about how they are perceived, and unsure over the quality of the answer they'll receive. Meanwhile, knowledge management tools impede access to useful answers, leaving employees spending hours (which could be put to productive work) sifting through information.

To put a stop to the endless search, businesses have a **pressing need for a platform that bridges the gap between people's knowledge and that which has been documented;** a platform that can autonomously and anonymously connect employees with questions to their colleagues with the **right answers, in real–time.**

The challenges employees face when searching for information

61%

Find that the amount of **time spent searching for information impacts** the time employees have for **deep work**

51%

Find the **volume of information available on knowledge management platforms** makes it **hard to find the answers** they need

49%

Find the **data** they are able to find **is often outdated**

45%

Can't access the knowledge they need **quickly** and **easily** to do their job effectively

37%

Are **not clear on which co–worker they should ask** to help with specific tasks

Expanding silos

The knowledge within an organization is widely distributed, as we have seen, and the first action to find an answer for most employees is to ask colleagues. In some situations, this works extremely well, but the larger, more specialized and more distributed the workforce becomes, the more difficult it becomes to obtain answers.

Knowledge becomes siloed. And this difficulty has been exacerbated by rise of remote and hybrid working environments, initially accelerated by the Covid–19 pandemic, but now widely expected to become normalized into the future.[1]

The ability to collaborate drops significantly beyond the interaction with immediate team members, when needing to work together with colleagues across other teams, departments or locations.

When interacting with immediate colleagues, people within their direct teams, the clear majority of respondents (85%) say their ability to share knowledge, and ask questions is 'excellent' or 'good', with 45% giving an 'excellent' rating. When an existing social and/or work relationship exists, the frictions around asking for help or offering help are low.

The ability to collaborate drops significantly, however, when employees need to collaborate with teams in other departments or colleagues located in different countries. In these circumstances, the number reporting good or excellent knowledge–sharing drops to 65% and 62% respectively for departments and countries — the proportion reporting 'excellent' communications with these extended colleague sets drops to 19%.

Knowledge sharing also suffers when the organization's leadership team needs to be involved, with just 63% reporting good or excellent communications, and 11% describing knowledge sharing with these groups as 'poor' or 'terrible'.

Silos of knowledge — knowledge that isn't shared beyond particular groups — exist within many organizations, but emerge in different ways. The most commonly reported **silos exist between departments, noted by 41% of respondents,** and especially in larger organizations: 46% of those in organizations with over 5,000 employees reported departmental silos.

Starmind

Information silos also exist between levels of seniority, such as between managers and junior team members at 39% of companies. Over recent months, in particular, silos of knowledge exist between home workers and office workers — the most frequent type of information silo noted by C–level respondents, with 47% reporting such gaps in communication.

Hybrid and remote working in recent times has, of course, reduced the physical proximity of team members — and in–person meetings and day–to–day chance encounters with colleagues have been eliminated in many cases. This has made collaboration and communication more complex and difficult for most (65%). This opinion is more widely held among more senior staff, with 78% of C–Level respondents agreeing that the situation has made communication more difficult.
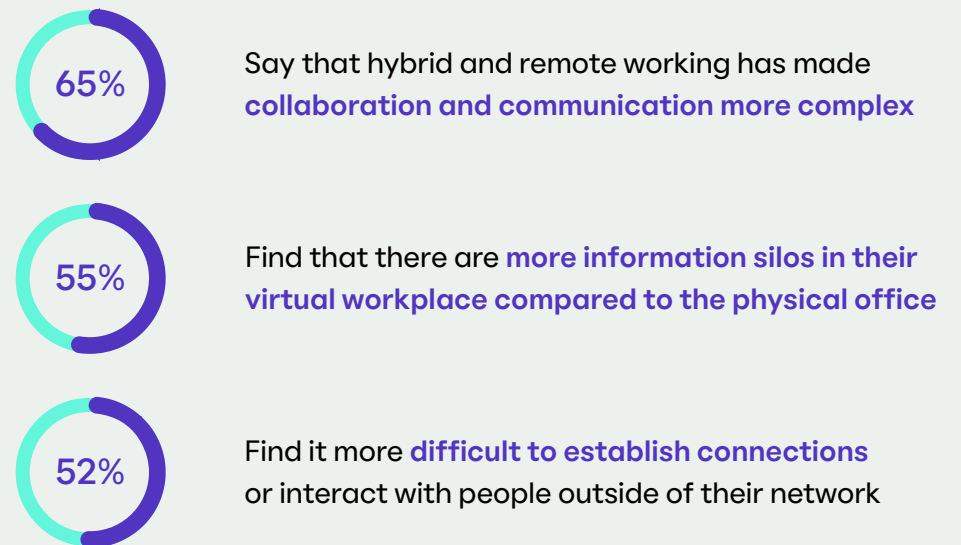
Across organizations, the majority (52%) believe that it's become more difficult to establish connections or to interact with colleagues outside their immediate network. The majority (55%) also agree that more information silos have emerged alongside the rise of virtual office environments.

With the likelihood that remote and hybrid working will remain a part of the mix for many organizations into the foreseeable future, it has become clear that new systems able to surface and share knowledge, breaking down these silos, have become crucial.
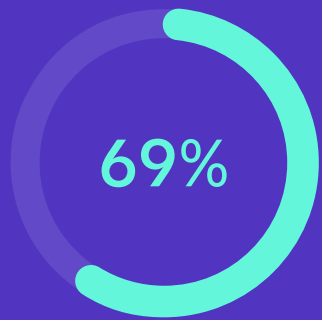
Where silos reside

41%
Between departments

39%
Between levels of seniority

36%
Between different locations/geographies

32%
Between remote workers and office workers

29%
Between teams within the same department

How remote and hybrid work is impacting collaboration

65% Say that hybrid and remote working has made **collaboration and communication more complex**

55% Find that there are **more information silos in their virtual workplace compared to the physical office**

52% Find it more **difficult to establish connections** or interact with people outside of their network
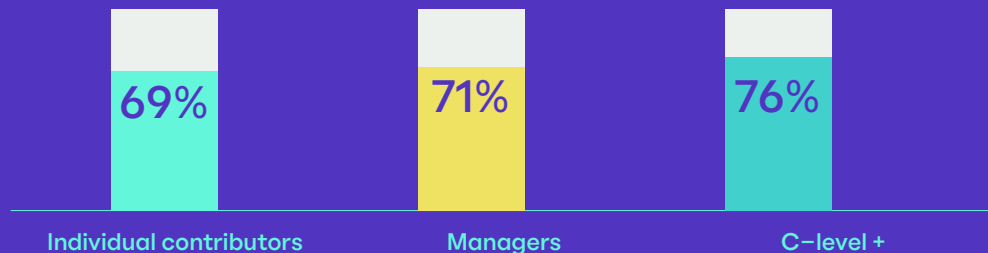
The human factor

Every business runs on the knowledge of its employees. Their knowledge is often the primary capital of office–based businesses, and also the way in which individuals are able to demonstrate their worth, feel a sense of purpose and be recognized for their value. Generally, employees are also at their happiest when sharing their knowledge with colleagues.

Yet, too often, organizations squander the wealth of knowledge at their disposal, letting it go underutilized on a daily basis. On average, employees estimate that just over two–thirds (69%) of their knowledge and experience is used each day — leaving almost one–third (31%) unused. This gap is starkest in Germany, where workers use the least amount of their knowledge each day; just 65%.

By failing to tap into employee knowledge, organizations are missing out on a powerful resource. Capturing the details and creating access to the knowledge of all employees across the organization could be used to boost productivity, reduce the burden on 'go–to' specialist employees, and cut the costs of processing support needs. While the **potential for currently uncaptured knowledge** might come as news to businesses, employees themselves are very much aware of just how valuable it could be.

Over three–quarters **(79%) say that their employer would benefit from accessing more of their knowledge,** with this rising to 95% of C–suite executives, whose experience is hopefully of even greater value. Meanwhile, over two–thirds **(67%, and 84% of C–suite respondents) believe they could have avoided a prior mistake** if only they'd had access to the right people or information.

69%

Knowledge workers estimate only around two–thirds (69%) of their knowledge and experience is used daily
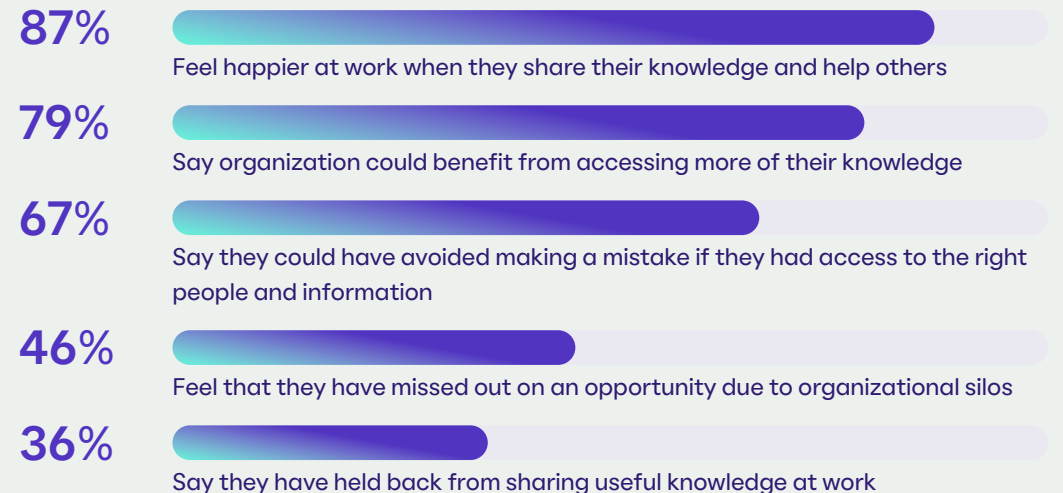— *leaving 31% unused.*

Percentage of knowledge used on a daily basis increases with seniority

Individual contributors	Managers	C–level +
69%	71%	76%

How employees feel about knowledge access and sharing

87%
Feel happier at work when they share their knowledge and help others

79%
Say organization could benefit from accessing more of their knowledge

67%
Say they could have avoided making a mistake if they had access to the right people and information

46%
Feel that they have missed out on an opportunity due to organizational silos

36%
Say they have held back from sharing useful knowledge at work

When put to use, **employee knowledge doesn't only drive productivity and reduce mistakes, but also boosts employee satisfaction and fosters a more inclusive culture** where everyone feels empowered to contribute.

The vast majority of respondents **(87%) say they feel happier at work when sharing their knowledge** and helping others; showing a natural inclination toward collaboration. For U.S. employees, this is felt most acutely — almost every employee (93%) states that they feel happier when able to share their knowledge. Conversely, just under half of all respondents (43%) say that **an organizational failure to recognize their experience and capabilities would be a key reason for leaving** their current role, with this again rising, to 45%, among U.S employees.

As we have seen, employee turnover is costly — particularly when it comes to the amount of time it takes for a new hire to become fully productive. These already high turnover costs, however, are compounded by limited knowledge retention when employees move on. On average, it's estimated that **just 53% of knowledge held by those leaving the organization is retained and documented.** This is an issue across organizations, but for those in senior or specialist roles, such lost knowledge can be irreplaceable.

The knowledge deficit that comes with employees leaving highlights the **urgent need for organizations to both nurture existing knowledge in order to boost satisfaction** (and thus reduce turnover) and collect knowledge to ensure it is retained when employees move on. In order to do so, businesses need a way to **capture knowledge, make it quickly and transparently accessible and remove the barriers** currently preventing employees from collaborating efficiently.

Almost every employee (93%) states that they feel happier when able to share their knowledge.

Key reasons employees would consider leaving their organization
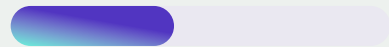
43%	43%	39%	29%	26%
If their **experience and capabilities were not recognized**	If they felt **overworked/burned out**	If there was **no opportunity to shine or grow** within the organization	If the organization did **not foster a culture of collaboration**	If they were frustrated with the **slow decision–making process**

Finding an answer

From boosting productivity and breaking down silos, to improving job satisfaction and happiness, it's clear that knowledge has potentially transformative effects. With the pandemic leaving many feeling more disconnected than ever, untapping this power has become equally more urgent. But how can it be done? Starmind, a unique, human–centric AI solution **connects people who have questions to colleagues with answers.** And it's an approach that's validated by the research.

Knowledge workers are clear that investment in technology, particularly, AI, is vital in building more fulfilling and productive enterprises. However, such investment must be undertaken with a human–centric approach that empowers teams to better utilize and access knowledge.

Streamlining information access and communication has to be a key function of future–ready tools. The vast majority **(81%) of respondents say that a simplified platform that creates real–time access to knowledge would significantly improve productivity,** with this proportion rising to 86% amongst U.S. respondents. Meanwhile, almost **half of all respondents (48%) specifically highlight a need for investment in cross–team collaboration** and 46% say the same of cross–business communication.

Breakdown of estimated time saving enabled by a platform that connects people who have questions to colleagues with answers

Less than 15 minutes
13%

15 – 30 minutes
21%

31 minutes – 1 hour
30%

1 – 2 hours
23%

2:01 – 3 hours
10%

3:01 – 4 hours
3%

More than 4 hours
1%

Starmind

The benefits of a platform like Starmind that can identify and help connect to the right people, and create access to accurate answers in real-time, are clear. **Over one-third (37%) estimate that they could save one hour or more each day with such a platform,** with this highest amongst Swiss respondents (41%).

The time-saving benefits are amplified further in large organizations, with **half of employees (50%) at businesses with 3,001–5,000 employees estimating they could save one hour or more daily.** For a business with 5,000 employees, that equates to over 2,500 work hours, every day, that could be reinvested in productive activities.
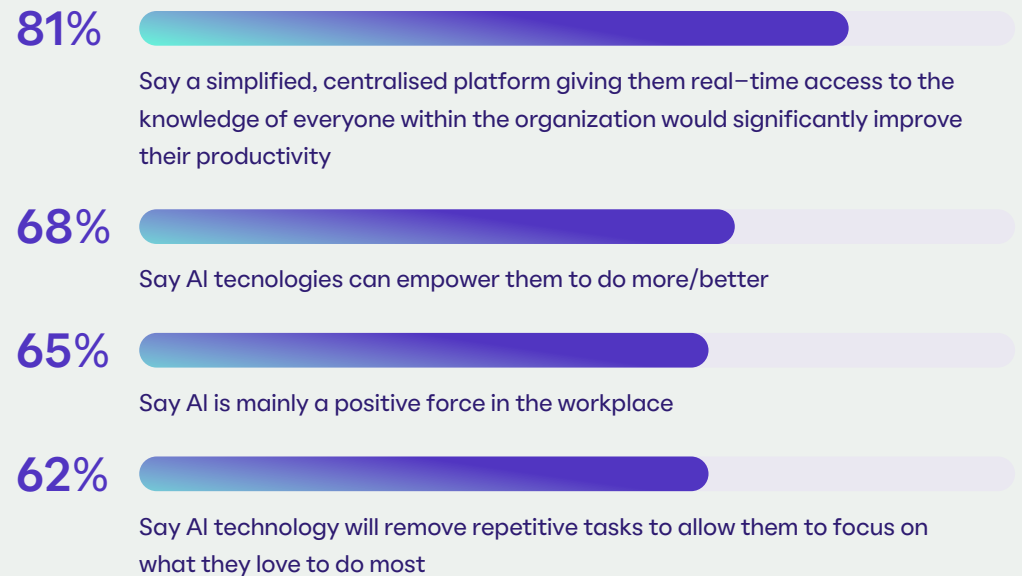
66%
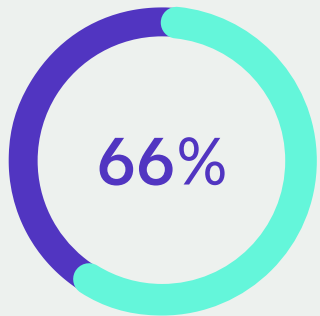
Two-thirds (66%) of those in the C-suite estimating they could save at least one hour each day.

The estimated time-saving also increases with seniority, with a higher proportion — two-thirds (66%) — of those in the **C-suite estimating they could save at least one hour each day.** Such employees may be fewer in number, but they are also often time-poor and highly remunerated. Seeking solutions that can increase the productive hours at this level therefore should be a **key priority for organizations aiming to boost overall performance.**

Artificial intelligence is recognized by employees as key to creating a more productive future for all employees. Over two-thirds (68%) believe that AI technologies can empower them to do more at work, and 65% believe it is a mainly positive force in the workplace. Specifically, the majority (62%) believe that AI technology will allow them to focus on what they love at work, and remove the need for them to complete tedious tasks. AI-powered tools can also remove the social anxieties and frustration over not knowing who to ask — questions can be asked anonymously and be automatically routed to those most likely to possess answers, no matter who or where they are.

How workers believe AI can transform work

81%
Say a simplified, centralised platform giving them real-time access to the knowledge of everyone within the organization would significantly improve their productivity

68%
Say AI tecnologies can empower them to do more/better

65%
Say AI is mainly a positive force in the workplace

62%
Say AI technology will remove repetitive tasks to allow them to focus on what they love to do most

Starmind

With these possible benefits, businesses must do more to grasp AI's potential — as currently they are falling short. Over half (56%) don't believe their organization is using AI to make the workplace more efficient. However, AI decisions must be taken carefully, as knowledge workers believe it should elevate human connections and help employees access the knowledge they need; the vast majority **(80%) would trust colleagues over an automated response,** and 42% fear that AI could make their job irrelevant.

An AI-powered platform like Starmind can foster a knowledge exchange culture that boosts productivity and employee empowerment. This empowerment is found through platforms that harness AI to untap knowledge, forge stronger more satisfying collaboration between employees and **eliminate the endless search for answers that drains the day of valuable work.**

Knowledge collaboration bridges the gap between collaboration tools and documented knowledge. It removes the notifications and information overload these tools cause when searching for information, to enable true knowledge-based connectivity across all employees.

Starmind is a knowledge collaboration platform, designed to help organizations overcome the endless search for information. Its unique **human-centric AI solution connects people who have questions to colleagues with answers.** It ensures employees always have access to the information they need, when they need it most.

It transforms information into accessible, retained knowledge, reducing search times and improving search success. Starmind reduces the silos and barriers to knowledge, accelerates onboarding, brings relevant information and experience to decision-making, and reduces the workload of support departments, experts and managers.

Visit **www.starmind.ai** to learn more about how Starmind can boost productivity and help leverage the collective knowledge of your whole organization.

Starmind
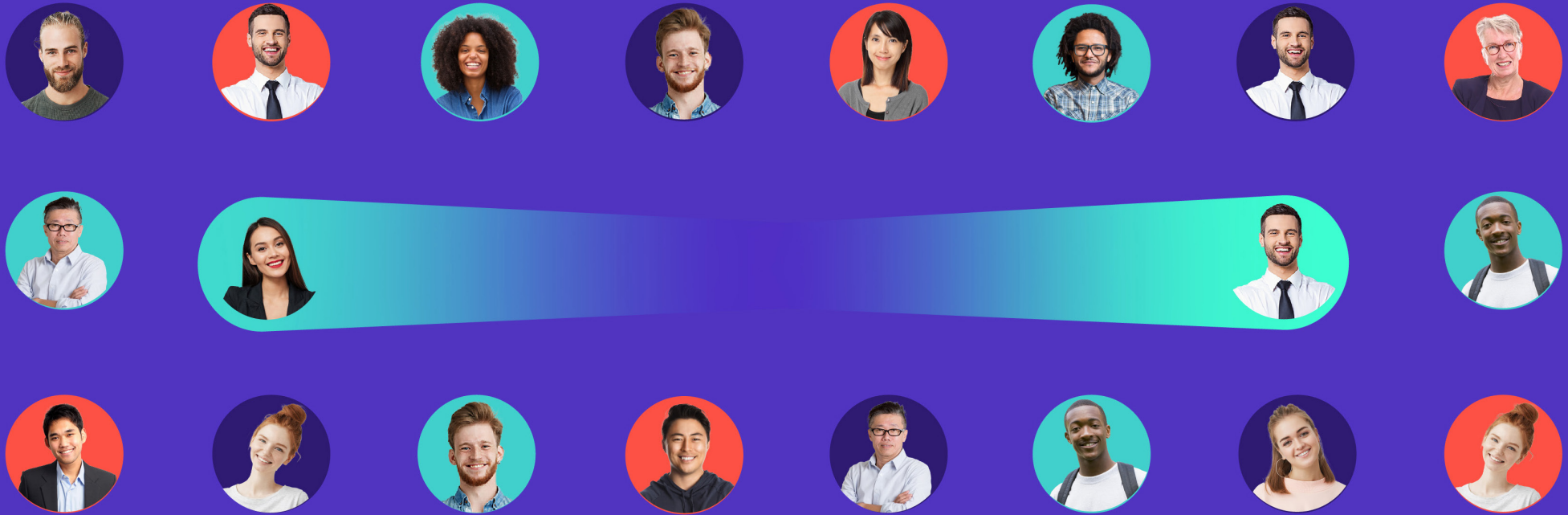
Methodology

The survey was conducted among 1,017 Knowledge workers from companies with 2,000+ employees in the following countries:

- Germany (345)
- Switzerland (335)
- US (337)

At an overall level, results are accurate to ± 3.1% at 95% confidence limits assuming a result of 50%. This means that if 50% of our sample agree with a statement – we can be 95% confident that in the real world the same proportion, plus or minus 3.1%, of knowledge workers in large organizations actually agree with this.

The interviews were commissioned by Starmind and conducted online by Sapio Research in March 2021 using an email invitation and an online survey.