

INSIDE PHARMA'S TALENT RETENTION CRISIS



workvivo
by zoom



TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	AN INDUSTRY AT A CROSSROADS	03
PHARMA INDUSTRY OVERVIEW		05
THE BIGGEST CHALLENGES IN PHARMA		08
THE 4-POINT PHARMA SOLUTION	CREATING A CULTURE OF INNOVATION EXCELLENCE	13
TOOLS AND TECH	PROCESSING POWER FOR THE PEOPLE	19
CONCLUSION	ONE COMPANY, ONE CULTURE	23
ABOUT WORKVIVO		24



01. INTRODUCTION

AN INDUSTRY AT A CROSS-ROADS

The pharma industry could use a dose of its own medicine.

AI and other technologies have the potential to revolutionize how drugs are discovered, developed, and tested, but the cost of innovation is steep and the talent needed to reinvent processes that have been the status quo for decades is in short supply. When pharma is ailing, who will heal the healers?



Although pharma is and will remain a major part of the global economy, a rising tide of challenges are making it more difficult than ever for pharma companies to continue developing and delivering cutting-edge medicines, including:



Legal hurdles regarding international regulations, marketing to healthcare professionals, and government-imposed costs



Systemic changes including supply chain disruptions, changes to the way research is conducted and funded, and tech innovations that require huge initial investments



Difficulties recruiting and keeping workers with the proper expertise to continue innovating how drugs are developed





The pharmaceutical companies who understand how to **attract, develop, and retain expert talent** while **embracing technological transformation** will increase **their speed of innovation** and prosper in an increasingly complex healthcare environment.



In this guide, we'll explore the most pressing **challenges and concerns** facing workers in the pharma industry today and the often-overlooked solution for attracting and retaining talent, increasing engagement, and improving employee output: **culture**.

We'll see how a strong company culture is the **secret advantage** that can elevate your company above the competition, and we'll offer **actionable steps** to help leaders build a resilient, dependable workforce that is equipped to take on the challenges of the future.



02.

PHARMA INDUSTRY OVERVIEW



Prognosis: negative

Big Pharma is [big business](#), employing nearly 8 million people directly, over 44 million indirectly, and contributing an estimated 2,295 billion to the global GDP. That's the equivalent of [.7% of the world's GDP](#), about the same as the entire country of Switzerland. Lately, this dominance has been challenged by a number of factors.



Regulatory roadblocks

The legalities of the global pharmaceutical industry are complex enough to make your head hurt, and to date there is no approved medication you can take to stop the pain. Regulations are determined on a country-by-country basis, and drug manufacturers

bear the burden of having to navigate them, costing them both money and time. Drug marketing's wild, wild West era has been curbed, making it difficult and expensive to get your drug in front of a critical mass of healthcare professionals. Recent legislation, most notably the U.S. Inflation Reduction Act of 2022, included cost control measures that lowered the profit margin for pharmaceuticals, leading to reduced revenue.



Systemic shakeups

You know what they say about living in interesting times, and the times we're living through are so interesting it's giving us heart palpitations. Supply chain interruptions have become commonplace, due to environmental catastrophes, disease outbreaks, and geopolitical turmoil, causing drug companies to invest heavily in optimization. The public-to-private pipeline that undergirds pharmaceutical development has been disrupted by cuts to publicly funded universities and medical research facilities, impacting where research is being done, and by whom. AI promises to be hugely transformative and cost-effective, but the models are still a work in progress, and the cost of implementing new processes and training employees is high.





Staffing struggles

The instability of the pharma sector has had a big impact on workers. Layoffs continue to increase year-over-year due to high research costs and the end of many high-profile patents. Ongoing restructuring initiatives are also keeping employees on edge, with little clarity on where layoffs will land. This creates a vicious cycle of employees leaving before they can be fired, with high-value employees taking institutional knowledge with them that weakens the organization.

On the flip side, other areas of the industry, like research, manufacturing, and regulatory affairs, are struggling to staff up. The rapid adoption of AI and other tech solutions require candidates with completely different experience than the researchers of yesterday. In short: finding the right people for the job is crucial to continuing to innovate and grow.



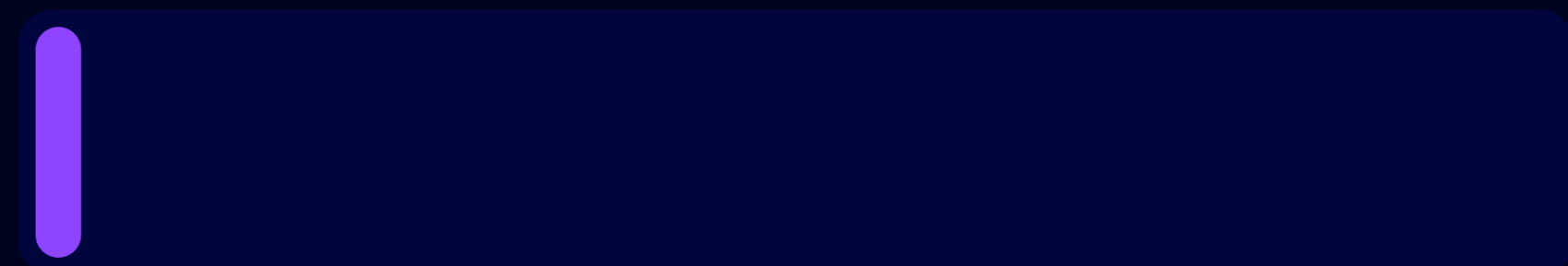
The state of pharma at a glance

36%



of drug developers say talent shortages are limiting progress

3%



Pharma layoffs rose by 3% from 2023 to 2024

83%



of pharma leaders say increasing automation is impacting talent needs

#1



The #1 biggest concern for life sciences and pharma execs is "talent scarcity and people leaving the workforce."



Pharma companies can't easily tidy up the patchwork web of healthcare regulations or predict the next disruptive weather event.



But setting your people up for success? That's totally within your control. If you expect to win in the future of pharma, it's your people who are going to get you there.

03.

THE BIGGEST CHALLENGES IN PHARMA

What's pharma so afraid of?

Frontline and knowledge workers in many different industries are worried that AI will take their jobs, and we're already seeing the impact in entry-level roles. Pharma workers, on the other hand, are more concerned about getting their AI transformation underway before the competition.

To date, AI has mostly been used in medicine to help experts conduct research and develop new drugs faster, safer, and more effectively, not as a replacement for expertise. In fact, tech-enabled growth may lead to an explosion of new jobs in the pharma industry.

To get there, pharma companies will have to make decisive moves to reverse some of the trends affecting the industry today, such as:



Industry-wide layoffs

Difficulty recruiting and retaining employees

Lack of internal opportunities

A lack of qualified candidates



Let's take a closer look at some of these trends and the impact they have on your business.



CHALLENGE 01

Lay off the layoffs

The race to find a cure for COVID brought a big influx of funding into the pharma sector, which businesses used to staff up.

Once the vaccines took effect and life got back to normal (or, at least, as close to normal as things get nowadays), much of that funding dried up, leading to industry-wide layoffs. Although the situation stabilized somewhat in 2024, pharma layoffs are still all too common for employees to feel safe in their roles.

THE IMPACT

Are layoffs the long tail result of the COVID shakeup or a sign of a destabilized industry? If the pattern continues much longer, it could discourage promising talent from pursuing pharma careers. Innovation suffers when employees are anxious about job security.

Skilled workers are going to gravitate toward the most well-funded companies that weathered the storm with the fewest layoffs, making it more difficult for smaller companies to find the talent they need to be competitive.

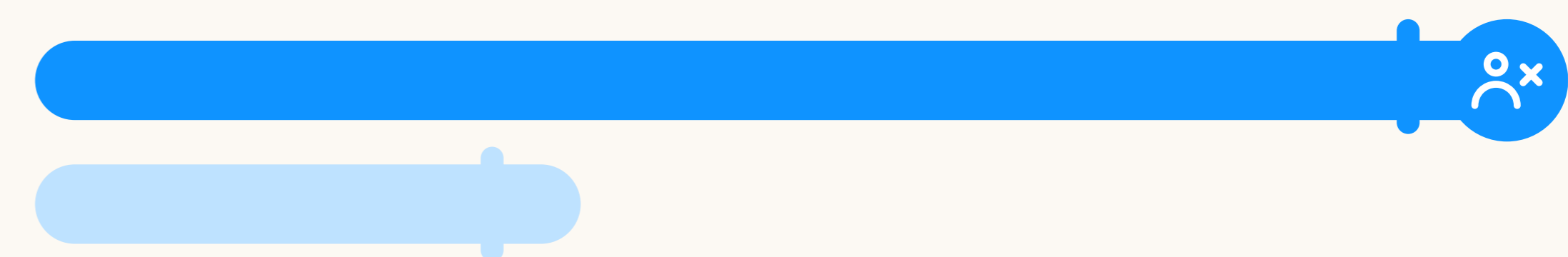


3%

Pharma layoffs rose by 3% from 2023 to 2024.

281%

Big Pharma layoff rounds increased by 281% in 2024.



CHALLENGE 02

Missing persons

Amid the high layoffs, there's simultaneously a lack of qualified candidates for employees in areas such as research, manufacturing, and regulatory affairs. The qualified candidates who are out there are in high demand.

THE IMPACT

When qualified candidates are scarce, retaining your best people becomes harder. Employees can easily be lured away if their current employer isn't giving them what they need.

Key positions often remain unfilled for long periods of time, slowing research and development. Existing employees can be forced to pick up the slack, leading them to feel overworked and burned out.

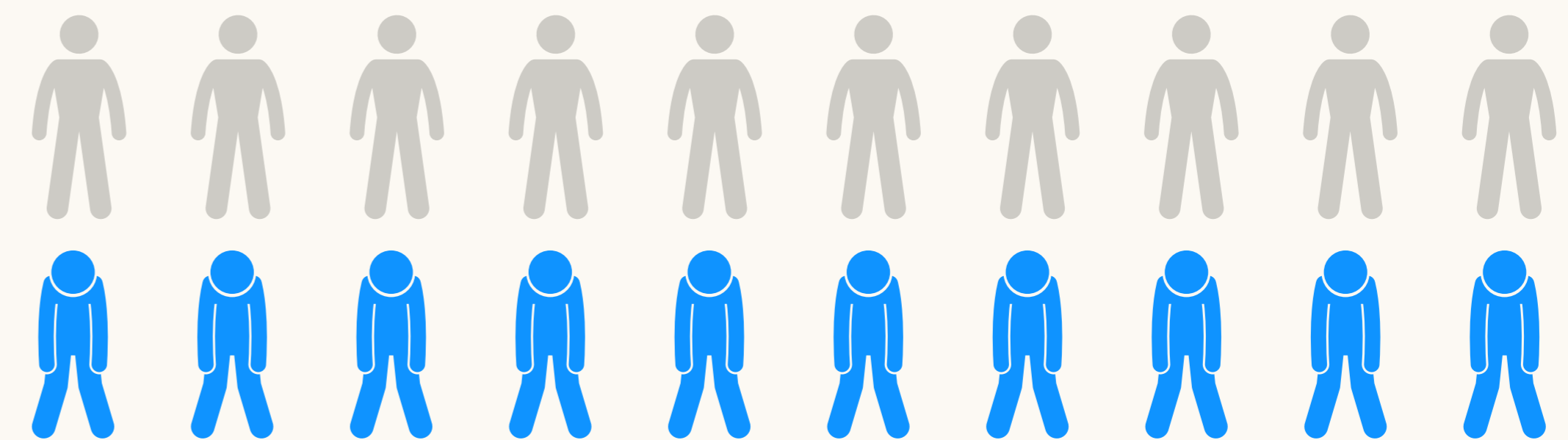


80%

of biotech and pharma firms struggle to fill roles in research, manufacturing, and regulatory affairs.

48%

of pharmaceutical workers describe their work as "exhausting"



CHALLENGE 03

Too much transformation, not enough change



Pharma's digital transformation has changed the roles and skills needed in medicine, but the industry has not done enough to change how they recruit and retain new employees. The tech-savvy employees needed for the new era of pharma have more choices for which industries they want to work in, forcing pharma companies to rethink their incentive structures.

THE IMPACT

Employers are having to pay top dollar for talent and offer new incentives to keep them from going to other sectors where they can make more money.

Workers are having to learn new skills, which means pharmaceutical companies are having to invest more in training and upskilling. Employers can face resistance from older employees who are not eager to change the way they work.

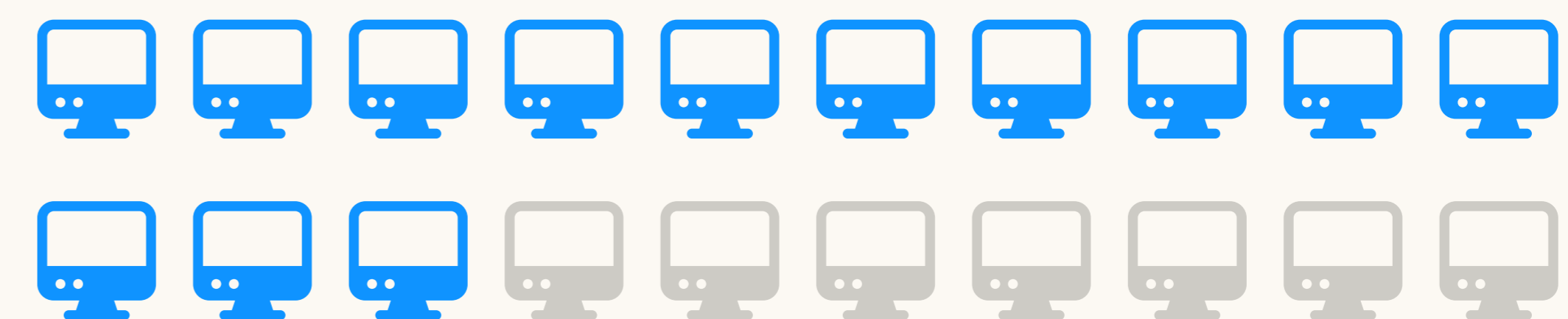


83%

of pharma leaders say increasing automation is impacting the kind of talent they're looking for

65%

of talent leaders say digital transformation is "happening too fast and they're struggling to keep up"



CHALLENGE 04

The innovation brain drain

The pharma workforce is aging out and retiring, creating a knowledge transfer crisis. Yet pharma companies aren't promoting from within, due to the difficulty of retraining candidates for what are often highly specialized roles.

THE IMPACT

Critical expertise is lost when senior employees retire, while new hires lack the mentorship they need to succeed and grow in their roles.

Companies struggle to maintain continuity in research and development. Experienced workers often take vital institutional knowledge with them when they leave which can lead to delays while their replacements get up to speed.

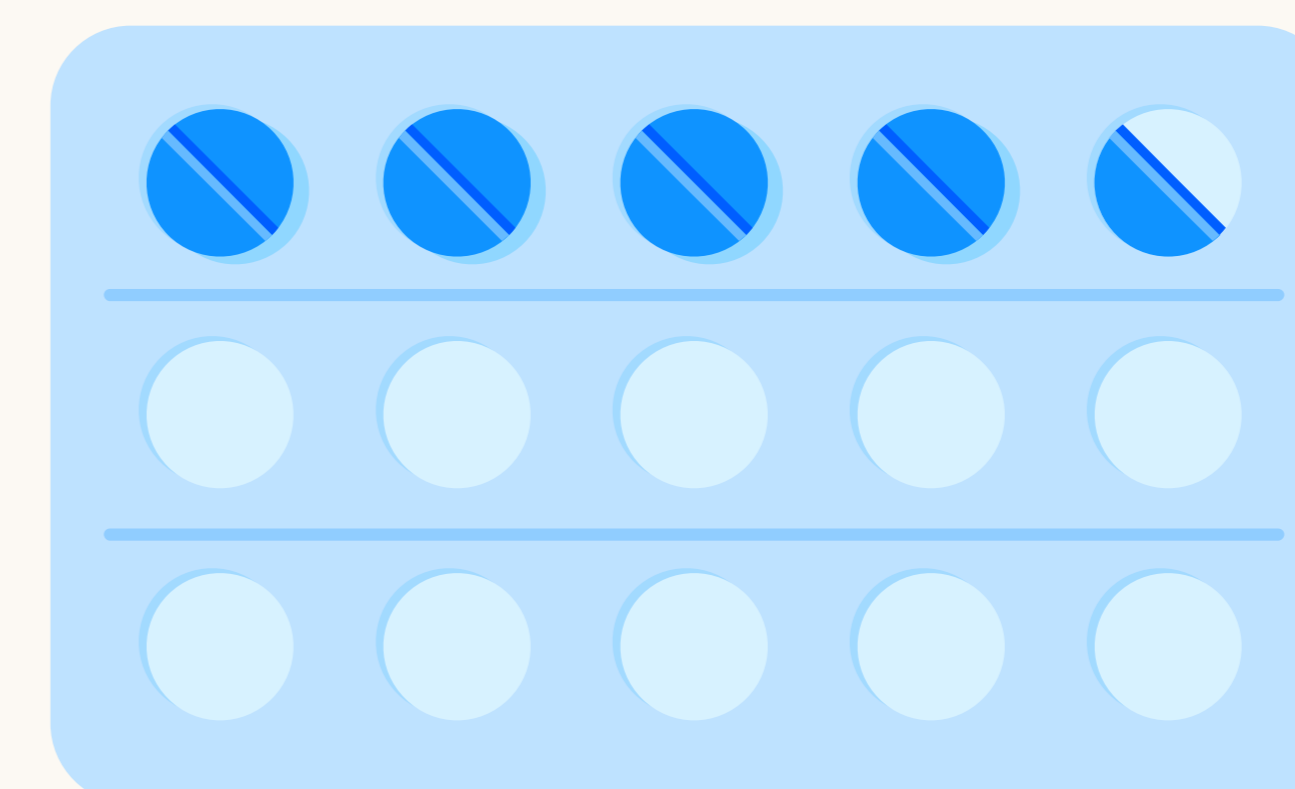


#1

The #1 biggest concern for life sciences and pharma execs is "talent scarcity and people leaving the workforce."

29%

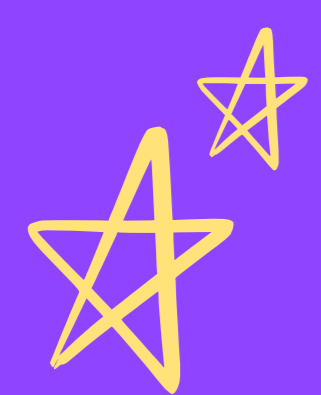
Only 29% of pharma roles are filled by internal candidates.



04.

THE 4-POINT PHARMA SOLUTION: CREATING A CULTURE OF INNOVATION EXCELLENCE

Innovation is the name of the game in pharma, where blockbuster drugs like Keytruda and Ozempic can have a huge impact on both a company's bottom line and society as a whole. While tech is great for crunching data and evaluating scenarios, it's only human knowledge, skills, judgment, and imagination that can turn groundbreaking research into the next world-changing medicine.



**So how do you invest in innovation?
By investing in your people.**

Most people who devote their lives to medicine go into it with a higher purpose than just earning a paycheck, and they need to know their employer cares about more than just profit, too. Pharma workers want to feel a sense of mission, value, and appreciation for the work they're doing.



If you want innovation to thrive, you should build a culture of support, transparency, and respect so your employees feel invested in your company and free to do the work people do best.



To attract and retain the expert talent needed to move pharma into the future, **invest in technologies to handle the grunt work** so employees can do **the creative thinking and experimentation they do best**, while **building community and stability** in the workplace so workers can spend **less time stressing about the future and more time improving it.**



We propose a 4-point solution to create a culture of innovation excellence:

01

Improve communication so employees feel more actively engaged with and attuned to important company decisions.

02

Recognize your employees' desire to feel a sense of purpose around their work. Highlight the good your company is doing and celebrate employee wins.

03

Adopt helpful technology that will make life easier for your workers and train your employees to get the most out of it.

04

Stop putting workers in boxes; give employees the opportunity to learn new skills so they feel more freedom and opportunity at work.



SOLUTION 01

Clear the airwaves



Employees who see competent colleagues getting axed every time there's a bad quarterly report are not going to stay loyal to your company.

Although layoffs are, sadly, an inevitable reality of modern life, it's important to communicate clearly and openly about the status of your company with your employees so they're not living in fear that every day might be their last. When you communicate with clarity, you show your staff you respect them and that they, in turn, can trust that you're doing everything you can to take care of them.

HOW TO DO IT

Good communication starts at the top. Give leadership the space to speak directly and honestly with employees, so they feel in the loop on the status of your business and prepared if things take a downturn.

Establish a culture of two-way communication in which employees feel free to ask the difficult questions and know they can receive honest responses. Your employees are adults; treat them as such. They'll feel respected and in turn be more willing to work hard to help your company prosper.



We try never to forget that medicine is for the people. It is not for the profits. The profits follow, and if we have remembered that, they have never failed to appear.

George W. Merck
Former CEO,
Merck Pharmaceuticals



SOLUTION 02

Be purposeful about purpose

Let's be honest: Big Pharma ranks about on par with Big Oil on the public's list of "industries we trust."

Most of this perception is due to the complex economics of for-profit healthcare, and not the well-meaning people who dedicate their lives to medicine. The vast majority of workers who go into medicine do so because they want to help people and make the world a better, healthier place. They want to feel that their contributions matter, and that their company values them. Unite your employees around a sense of purpose and it won't just motivate them to work better and attract better talent, it could help elevate the reputation of the industry as a whole.



HOW TO DO IT

Give employees a sense of purpose. It's easy for employees to forget the bigger picture when they're in the weeds of research and development; use your internal and external communications channels to tell the story of how your employees' efforts are making the world a better place. By making your company a mission-driven organization, you will attract purpose-oriented workers.

Recognize employees for their efforts. A little bit of recognition can go a long way. Give employees the opportunity and space to praise their coworkers for a job well done, and encourage managers to use positive reinforcement to keep their team feeling appreciated and respected.



A strong reputation is earned in drops but can be lost in buckets. That's why it is imperative for us to continue to act with integrity, so we can earn the public's trust time and time again – and we work to do this every day.

Albert Bourla
PhD., CEO, Pfizer



SOLUTION 03

Say "tech yeah!" to workplace innovations



Tech is only going to become a more prevalent part of pharma workers' jobs.

Employers need to make technology adoption a collaborative process that empowers employees rather than threatens them.

HOW TO DO IT

Develop a communications program to inform workers about transformation efforts and how they will impact their work. Empower HR to create a robust program that runs the full gamut of media, from wiki articles to podcasts to educational webinars. Create a central hub for information so workers can easily find what they need to know.

Uplevel training so workers know how to incorporate tools like AI into their jobs. Teach them how they can use technology to eliminate busywork so they can spend more time focusing on discovery. With the right guidance, workers will feel more comfortable embracing new ways of working and will be more prepared for changes to come.



Technology alone isn't enough, it has to be aligned with incentives, payment models, local culture, workflow, social determinants, regulatory and ethics, and integration into medical education.

Daniel Kraft, MD
Stanford School of Medicine



SOLUTION 04

Look inward to go upward

While it's true that many pharma jobs require specialized knowledge, there's no reason to pigeonhole competent employees and assume they're incapable of change.

People who work in the life sciences are intelligent, motivated employees – if you give them the opportunity to learn new skills that are outside of their prior experience, you may be surprised at their abilities to rise to the challenge.



HOW TO DO IT

Consider changing the way you recruit. Traditionally, pharma companies looked for employees with particular experience. Today, more and more companies are focusing on a skills-based approach: looking for candidates based on their ability to learn and adapt to new challenges, rather than making sure they have checked all the right boxes on their CVs. Broadening the talent pool means roles can be filled more quickly by a more diverse population of workers who can set your company up for success in the future.

Give employees greater freedom to move within the company to develop new skills in different departments. Inform employees about open positions that might be a good fit for their skills and invest in mentorship programs to transfer knowledge from senior to junior employees.



I like to keep the median age in my lab low because they will indulge me in my dreams. They don't yet think things are impossible.

Dr. George Church
Geneticist



05.

TOOLS AND TECH: PROCESSING POWER FOR THE PEOPLE



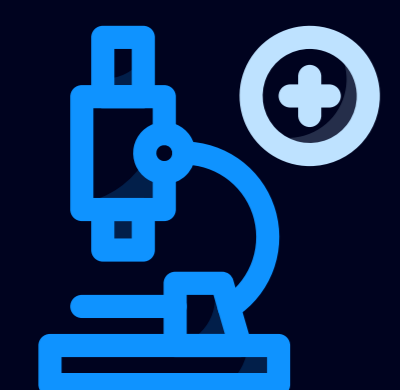
We've mentioned it throughout this guide, but it bears repeating: the tech revolution in medicine isn't on its way, it's already here. In just the past decade, technology has led to such advances as:



Using genomics and biomarkers to create hyper-personalized medicines and plans for patients, based on their unique body chemistry



The ability to edit genes directly to eliminate mutations responsible for genetic disorders



Faster identification of possible toxicology effects, helping researchers eliminate unsustainable paths of research before they go to trial



Optimization of drug discovery, using AI to analyze vast data sets quickly



Automation of processes to speed up the product development and distribution cycle from R&D to commercialization and manufacturing



ALL OF THESE ADVANCES HAVE HAD A MAJOR IMPACT



on how drugs are discovered, designed, and distributed, leading to faster medical breakthroughs and ultimately, better outcomes for patients. Amid the rush to optimize processes and workflows, one thing has taken a backseat: culture. As the speed of work increases, it becomes that much more important to focus on your employees' well-being to ensure they don't get burned out.

Improve your culture to unlock innovation

Pharma is dedicated to helping people live longer, healthier, and happier lives, and the best place to start is right at home. If you're in HR, Internal Comms, Operations, or Leadership, you have both the responsibility and the duty to create a culture that makes your best employees want to stay and attracts employees who will never want to leave. Breakthroughs don't happen in a vacuum or under duress; to create the innovations that will propel humanity into the future, you must give your employees an environment where they are trusted to do their work their way.

A holistic transformation requires internal communications and alignment that stretches from R&D to leadership to the marketing department. Pharma companies need to invest in technology that brings their entire organization together, removing siloes so the entire org can move together as one unit in pursuit of the same mission.



This means, implementing a tech solution that:

- ★ Empowers two-way communication
- ★ Gives workers instant access to the information they need
- ★ Enables employee rewards and recognition
- ★ Assists in training and upskilling
- ★ Creates space for helpful feedback that can improve processes and speed innovation
- ★ Brings the entire organization together in the same space



\$60-100 B

McKinsey estimates that Generative AI could generate between \$60 to \$110 billion a year in economic value for the pharma and medical-product industries.

77%

of life sciences and pharma workers say they're ready to use AI in their jobs.

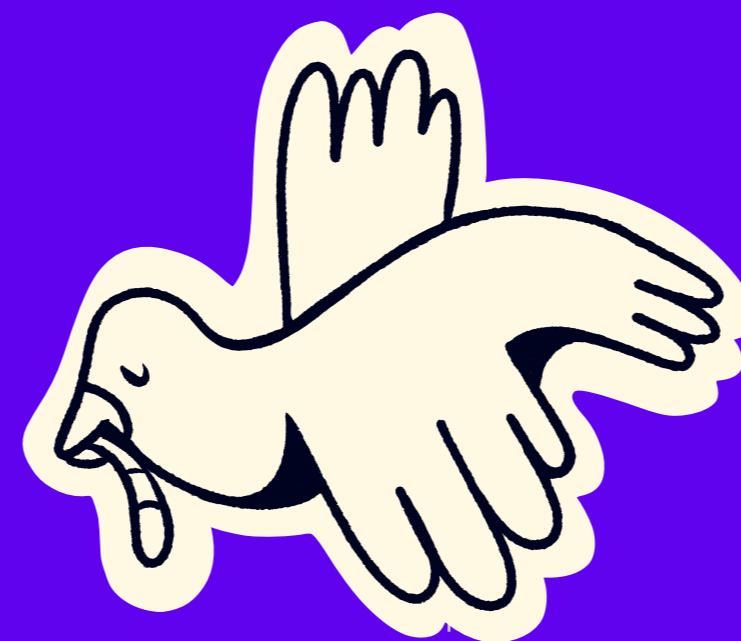


06. CONCLUSION

ONE COMPANY, ONE CULTURE

The pharma companies that will thrive this year and beyond will be the ones that understand it's not what technology you implement, it's how you use it. Are you using tech to replace expertise and force your remaining employees to work at capacity? Or are you using it to empower your workers to reach new heights? The companies that will succeed will be the ones who successfully unite their entire workforce, from the CEO to the newest lab tech, around a shared culture of innovation excellence, enabled by tools that bring workers across the org together in pursuit of one shared vision.

All the challenges facing pharma right now – well, the ones within their control, anyway – really boil down to one question: how do you get the most out of your people? And the answer is: by putting the most into your people. The key to attracting and retaining high-quality talent, increasing productivity, boosting discovery, and developing groundbreaking medicines is to create a **culture where everyone feels empowered to do their best work.**



This means:



Improving how your company communicates so your workers from all departments feel like they're a part of one united team.



Investing in systems that get everyone in your organization on the same page, working to move the org forward.



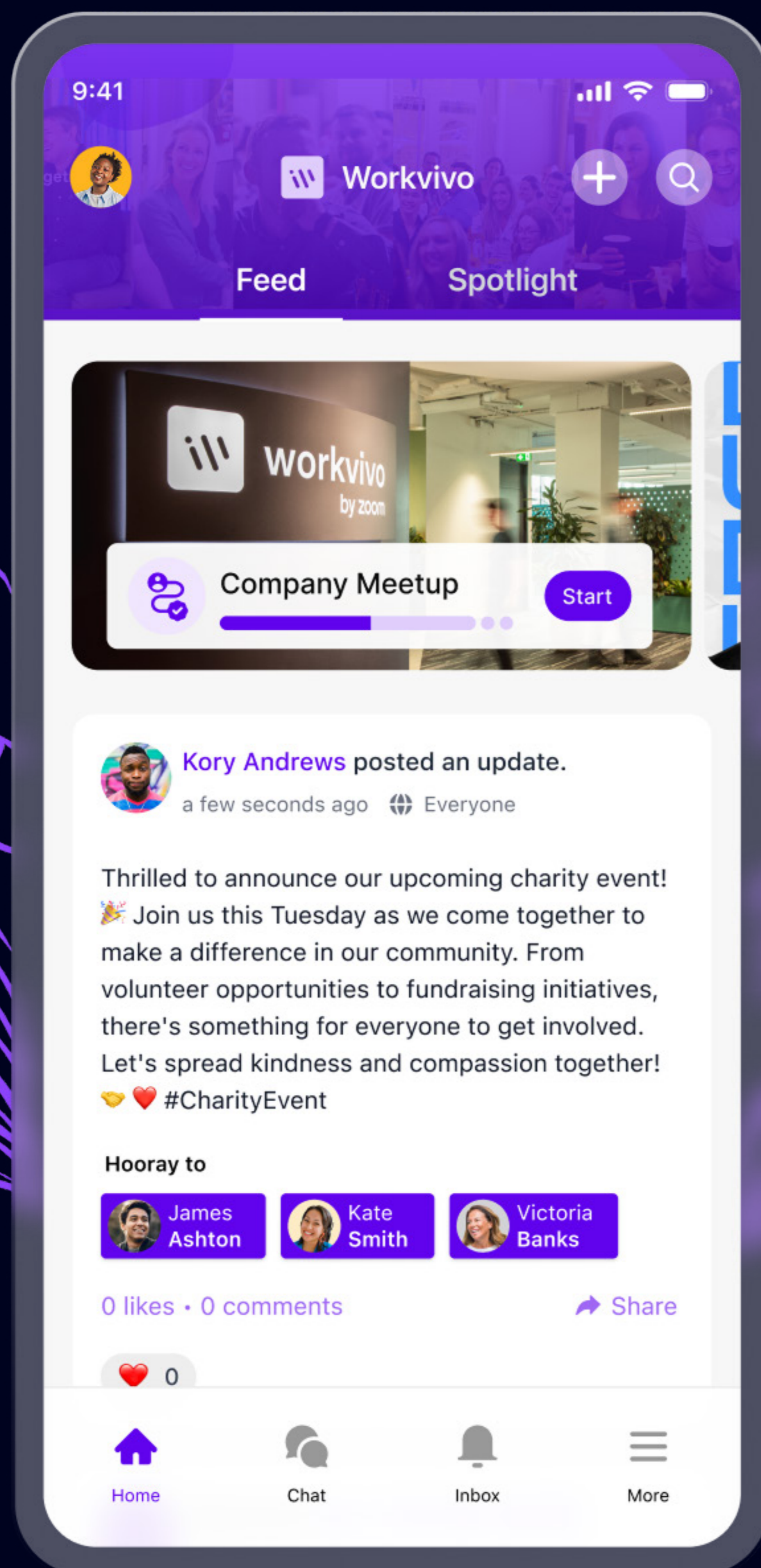
Creating a hub where information can flow freely and every employee can understand how their role contributes to the mission of the organization.



Most importantly, demonstrating through your actions that you value your people's contributions, well-being, and future. Your employees will become invested in your success because you've shown that you're invested in their success.

When you build this united organization, you don't just increase employee satisfaction and loyalty – you create the competitive advantage that will define your success in the years to come.





07.

About Workvivo

Workvivo is the all-in-one employee experience platform built to meet the complex needs of pharmaceutical organizations with diverse, distributed, and specialized teams. From research labs to manufacturing facilities to regulatory affairs, Workvivo provides a centralized digital hub that brings communications, culture, and operations together in one intuitive experience.



With secure, compliant communication tools, pharma teams can access critical updates, share discoveries, and celebrate breakthroughs from anywhere. Workvivo supports real-time collaboration and knowledge sharing across departments through powerful, easy-to-use tools and features, including:

Chat (1:1 and Group)

Enable secure, real-time coordination between teams and cross-functional partners with HIPAA-compliant chat – perfect for quick communication in fast-paced environments.

Voice and Video Calling

Supports urgent escalation and direct communication between researchers, clinical teams, and leadership for critical decision-making when chat isn't enough.

Surveys & Employee Insights

Collect instant feedback – by department, location, or project – to surface operational challenges, engagement drivers, or training needs across the organization.

Advanced Analytics & Sentiment Analysis

Combine structured survey data with platform interaction trends to identify sentiment patterns and early warning signals of issues that might be impacting employees.

Workvivo AI 'Ask'

Let employees instantly find SOPs, regulatory guidelines, or research protocols using natural language, saving time and reducing reliance on supervisors for routine information.

Document Storage

Give research teams easy access to study protocols, safety manuals, regulatory documents, and training materials – right from their devices, with appropriate security controls.

Digital Forms (Coming Soon)

Streamline safety compliance, research protocols, quality control checklists, and regulatory documentation with mobile-first, customizable forms – no paperwork or separate systems required.

Workvivo TV (Digital Signage)

Keep lab teams, manufacturing staff, and office workers informed with rotating updates on research milestones, safety protocols, and regulatory changes displayed in common areas.



Primary benefits of Workvivo for pharmaceutical teams include:



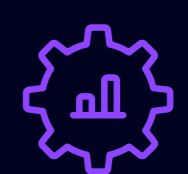
Enhanced cross-functional collaboration

Benefit: Real-time updates and secure messaging ensure that research, regulatory, manufacturing, and clinical teams stay aligned – reducing delays in drug development timelines and improving decision-making speed.



Stronger scientific community and culture

Benefit: Research teams feel more connected to the organization's mission and each other – leading to higher engagement, better knowledge sharing, and reduced turnover in a competitive talent market.



Streamlined regulatory compliance and documentation

Benefit: Centralized document storage and Digital Forms (coming soon) reduce compliance risks and manual processes, so teams can focus more time on innovation and less on administrative tasks.



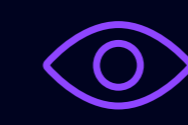
Faster knowledge transfer and onboarding

Benefit: Store research protocols, safety procedures, and regulatory guidelines in one secure location. With AI-powered "Ask," employees can self-serve answers to technical questions, accelerating new hire productivity.



Purpose-driven engagement in a mission-critical industry

Benefit: Company-wide recognition, milestone celebrations, and purpose-driven messaging help build community across distributed teams – keeping people connected to the life-saving impact of their work.



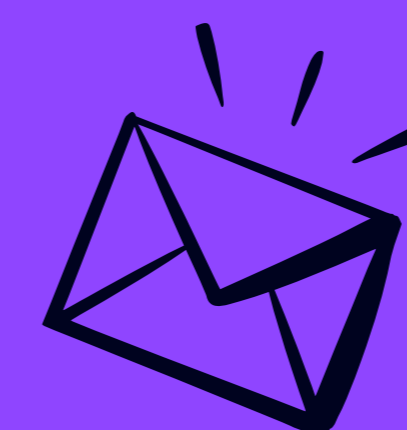
Real-time insights for R&D and operations leaders

Benefit: Employee Insights and Surveys give leaders visibility into team sentiment, project challenges, and resource needs – enabling proactive support before issues impact research timelines.



Secure, compliant communication across all sites

Benefit: Workvivo ensures sensitive information reaches the right people through appropriate channels – whether it's a safety update, regulatory change, or breakthrough discovery – via mobile, chat, feed, or digital signage.



Ready to take the next step in creating a culture of innovation excellence?

[Click here](#) to schedule a demo and learn how Workvivo could work for you.





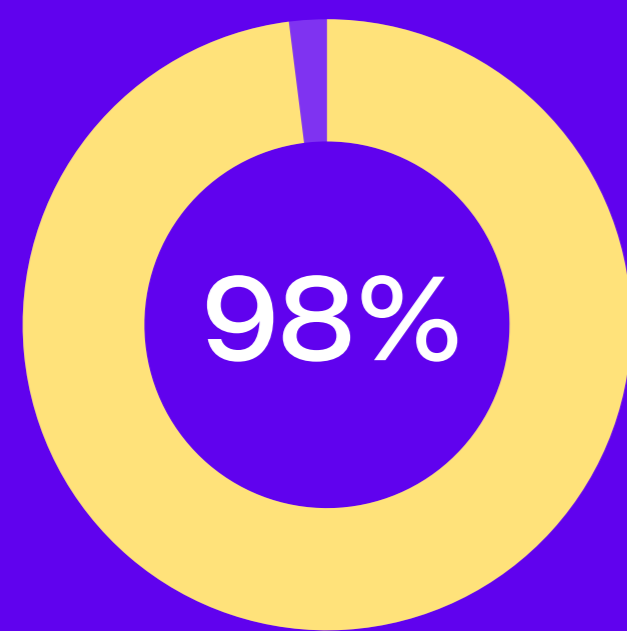
2M

Workvivo has over 2 million global users, 100% YoY growth for the last 4 years

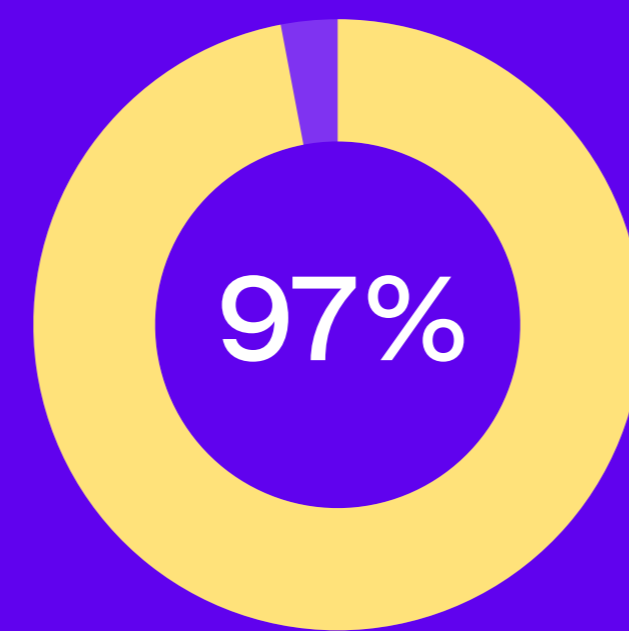
Workvivo was named a Leader in the 2024 Gartner® Magic Quadrant™ for Intranet Package Solutions

Gartner

[Learn more](#)



Our customer satisfaction scores (CSAT)



Workvivo customer retention

#1 Rated Employee App

Market leader per user reviews in 6 G2 categories





workvivo.com