

Effectiveness in a wild world of work



Understanding and
combatting **work**
intensification

✱ With learnings from a
1000 person study
hosted by Remesh

What is work intensification?

Per research, it's work that's **broken** in one of these three ways:

1

**Too many tasks
in too little time**

*Ex: too many
meetings in a row,
having to load too
many boxes in an
hour*

2

**Too
interdependent**

*Ex: long chains of
approvals, overly
complicated
processes*

3

**Too emotionally
inflected**

*Ex: angry customers,
frantic managers,
stressed-out co-
workers*

Work intensification is a major driver of both productivity loss and burnout. It's not good for employers or employees.



Work intensification is the sneaky force behind many of today's debates about efficiency, burnout, return to office, and work-life balance. It's even slowing AI adoption!

Get work to down to the right density and intensity, and it becomes far easier to manage and balance.

Why study work intensification?

In April 2025, we conducted a **1000 person study** that showed **¾ of the workforce feels overwhelmed**.

Solving overwhelm could be the **effectiveness breakthrough** we've been seeking.

	<i>Always, Often, Sometimes feel Overwhelmed</i>	<i>Seldom or Never feel Overwhelmed</i>
All Respondents	76%	25%
Individual Contributor	75%	25%
Front Line Mngt	77%	23%
Middle Mngt	78%	23%
Snr Mngt & C-suite	74%	26%

What did we learn about work intensification?

Here are **6 highlights** from the study:



People who **passionately combat** all three aspects of work intensification feel **dramatically more effective**.



What's overwhelming people? Excessive workload and bad bosses...but also **difficult co-workers and messy tasks**.



Leaders at the **very top of organizations** are suffering from **overload in unexpected ways**.



Individual contributors are **quietly in crisis** - under-equipped or unempowered facing a deluge of work.



GenX remains poker-faced...but **struggle with motivation** under tough conditions.



Some **inspiration** on tackling intensified work comes from...the **finance function?**



People who **passionately combat** all three aspects of work intensification feel **dramatically more effective**.



1 in **8** respondents are **Work Intensification Warriors**. They **strongly** believe in - and act on - *reducing task load, reducing dependence on others' work, and reducing emotion in the workplace.*



This group of “strategy superfans” is **119% more likely to feel highly effective** than those who do not strongly agree with deploying with all 3 strategies.



They may not always feel great...they are **4 times** more likely to **always feel overwhelmed**.

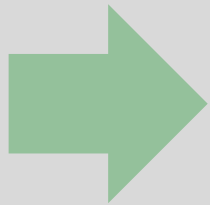


But they are pushing through with momentum - they are also almost **4 times** as likely to see themselves as **highly motivated**.

Actively fighting work intensification is a critical path to effectiveness at work.



What's **overwhelming** people? Excessive workload and bad bosses...but also **difficult co-workers and messy tasks.**



Respondents self-reported a couple of “**big rocks**”:



High **workload**/task volume
56%



Tight **deadlines**/time constraints
32%



But also noted some **interesting and useful themes**:



Classically **bad management**
13%

Lack of support; unclear expectations and priorities; poor communication micromanagement; lack of recognition



Stressful **co-workers**
14%

Low staffing levels; responsibility for other people's work/mistakes; difficult colleagues; team dynamics/conflict



“**Messy work**”
12%

Constant multitasking; unexpected tasks and emergencies; inconsistent workload and unpredictability; frequent interruptions

Traditional investment area for organizations

Often not an area of investment or focus



Leaders at the **very top** of organizations are suffering from **overload in unexpected ways.**

C-suite and senior leadership are



Almost **2.5x** **more likely** to **always** feel overwhelmed

Than the **rest of the organization**



The **reason** why senior leaders are overwhelmed may **surprise** you - it's **simple workload.**

This group is **15%** more likely than others to report a **high volume of work.**

66% of their self-reported reasons for feeling overwhelmed related **purely to tasks and time.**

What's going on? Some **addressable hypotheses:**

The **fall of the administrative assistant** and the **rise of technological self-service** have put more administrative tasks back on senior leaders' plates.



A more **complex and unpredictable world** has actually sent work back up the corporate ladder - **demanding more skills/experience.**



Years of underinvestment in developing leaders at lower levels has left senior management with an **underskilled layer below them**, forcing them to address more themselves.



Individual contributors are **quietly in an effectiveness crisis** - under-equipped or unempowered facing a deluge of work.

Individual contributors are **far less likely** than others to consistently deploy the **3 strategies to combat work intensification**:



46% less likely to strongly agree with **reducing tasks**



45% less likely to strongly agree with **working more independently**



52% less likely to strongly agree with trying to **bring down the emotional temperature** at work

Perhaps as a consequence, their **perceived effectiveness and motivation** are **markedly low**:



39% less likely to see themselves as highly **effective**



140% less likely to see themselves as highly **motivated**

Effective strategies to address this crisis will focus on either **upskilling the front line on fighting work intensification**, or **re-engineering their roles to create a more empowered stance** toward work intensification.



GenX remains poker-faced...but struggle with motivation under tough conditions.

GenX respondents state that **they feel pretty decent** and are **less concerned about emotion at work** than others...



66% less likely to report being **always overwhelmed**
20% more likely to see themselves as **highly effective**.
45% less likely to **strongly agree with reducing the emotional valence** of the workplace.

...but **unusually for a higher-effectiveness group** in this sample, their **motivation is slipping...**



They were **21% less likely to report being highly motivated** than the overall sample, which is **very different from other groups reporting high effectiveness** (the two generally correlated).

Here are some **useful questions** for **organizations to ask** about their GenX employees (**or GenXers to ask about themselves!**)



- Is what GenX is feeling - or I am feeling as a GenXer - a function of generation or something like **lifestage or role?**
- What **factors could be impacting the motivation** of my GenX employees (or myself)?
- Has my organization, or have I within my team, engineered **smart ways for different generations to work together?**



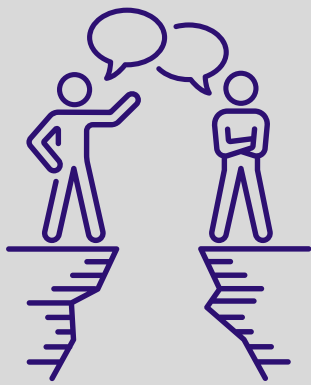
Some **inspiration** on tackling intensified work comes from...the **finance function**?

Self-reported strategies to manage feeling overwhelmed at work broke down into three general categories: **managing work, mindfulness, and self-care**. Of the three, **managing work is most interesting** due to our overall finding that people who actively combat work intensification feel more effective.

In **finance/accounting, respondents were 52% more likely to actively seek to manage work** than their peers in any other function. Is this the future of functional work?



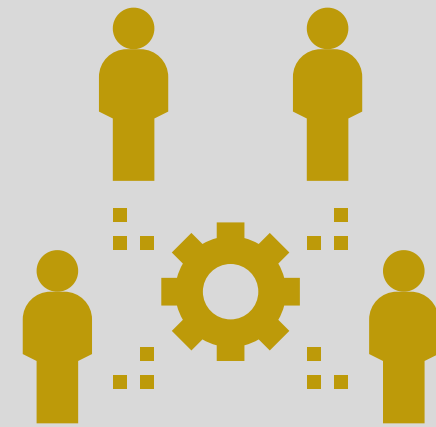
Two final thoughts: The frontline sentiment gap, and interdependence's sneaky importance



In a tricky workplace moment, **senior leadership & the C-suite** perceive their personal working world very differently than the front line does.

83% of senior leaders/C-suite have felt their motivation increase at least somewhat recently, compared to only **47% for individual contributors.**

Senior leaders/C-suite are also **68% more likely to perceive themselves as highly effective** than individual contributors.



Of the 3 drivers of work intensification, **interdependent work may quietly be the most powerful.**

Respondents who needed to involve a large number of people to do their work were 49% more likely to feel always or often overwhelmed as their peers who only needed to involve a small number of people.

Conversely, respondents who felt they were **highly effective** were **16%** more likely to report being able to work **largely independently.**

In light of these findings, what does Anthrome Insight recommend?

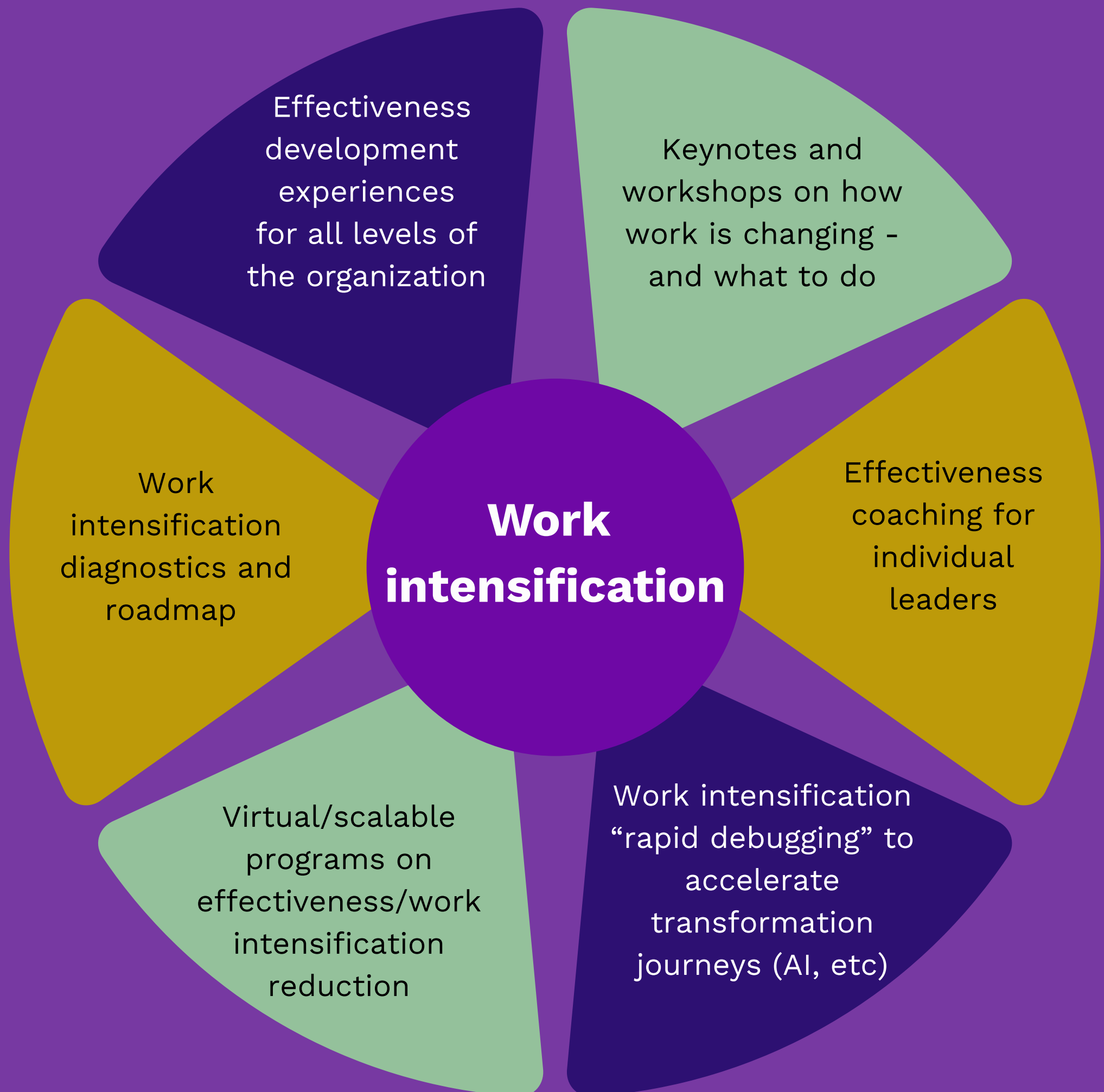
At organization and team level

- Examine and address workload as a mission-critical issue. Do not assume “the work is what it is.”
- Audit processes with an eye toward creating more independent work. Many organizations are in the “collaborative overload” described by Rob Cross and others. More collaboration is not always better.
- Dig in with senior leaders about the experience of work - both how it may differ from the frontline, but also how it may be overwhelming.
- Empower and upskill everyone - but especially individual contributors - to fight work intensification.

For individuals

- Take stock of which work intensification element may be affecting you: overload of tasks/tight timing, not enough ability to work independently, and/or excess emotion in the workplace.
- Actively strategize as to how you’ll combat the work intensification elements you’re grappling with - often including enlisting the help of your manager.
- If you manage people, initiate a conversation on work intensification - and strategies to combat it - with them.

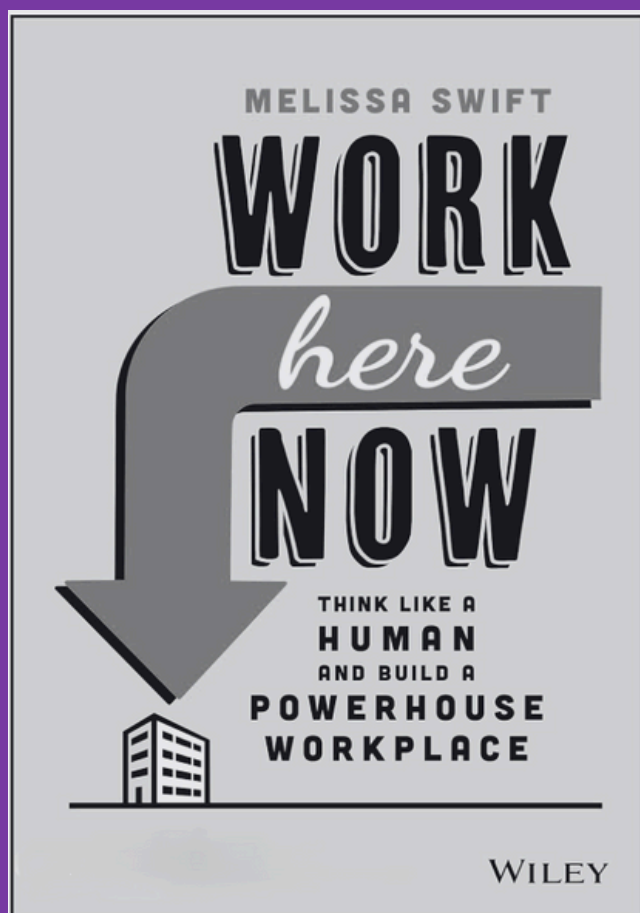
How does Anthrome Insight help with these issues?



About the author



**MELISSA
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Melissa Swift is the founder & CEO of Anthrome Insight - an advisory company focused on organizational and individual effectiveness in a challenging, technology-driven age of work.

She is the author of the award-winning book *Work Here Now: Think Like a Human and Build a Powerhouse Workplace* (Wiley, 2023), and writes a quarterly column on leadership and culture for *MIT Sloan Management Review*.

As a leader at Korn Ferry, Capgemini, Mercer, and Deloitte, Melissa has developed novel and market-leading analytical techniques to better understand and address the challenges of a ever-wilder working world. She has led large-scale people development and transformation work across industries and geographies.

Appendix: Study methodology

How we conducted the study:

- To develop a better understanding of work intensification, we conducted a field study using the Remesh platform in April 2025
- Using Remesh Recruit + Live & Flex, we surveyed 1,009 employees from various organizations
- Using a mixed-method approach, we asked a combination of open and closed-ended questions
- The Remesh platform allows participants to endorse or ‘up vote’ responses they agree with and ‘down vote’ responses they do not agree with
- Results provide insights into how current events are affecting employees’ experiences at work

Highlights of the sample:

- 52% Female, 48% Male, <1% Nonbinary
- 35% Gen Z, 48% Millennials, 12% Gen X, 5% Baby Boomers 28% Non-Management, 25% Front Line Manager, 28% Middle Manager, 14% Senior Manager, 6% C-Suite
- Participants work in a cross-section of industries, including Technology (22%), Hospitals & Healthcare (15%), Education & Research (10%), Manufacturing (9%), and Financial Services (7%)
- Respondents worked in a variety of functions, including IT (23%), Management (19%), Operations (14%), and HR (8%)



A huge thank you to thought partner Patrick Hyland, PhD, and hosting/analytics partner Remesh - both essential to the study's success.



**Research &
data +
pragmatic
strategies =
Anthrome
Insight =
Work
effectiveness**



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