

Optimizing Creative Teams: *Proven Strategies for Success in 2025*

- ▲ A Stoke Research Report
- ➔ Conducted with TrendCandy



Executive summary

Turning creativity into captivating brand stories and successful campaigns relies on the dynamic structure of creative teams. Stoke's study highlights the critical need to build creative teams that are not only ready to succeed but also adept at tackling the unique challenges that come with creative work.

Our research underscores that a strategically planned team structure is vital for navigating the fast-paced and often chaotic world of creativity. Creative leaders understand the power of well-organized teams in shaping brand identity and driving engagement. Despite this, many feel their teams are undervalued, facing systemic underestimation that stifles potential.

Burnout and stress are rampant, with tight timelines, communication hurdles, and approval bottlenecks being the main culprits that drain creative energy. Although most teams have formal processes for prioritizing projects, confidence in structural efficiency remains low.

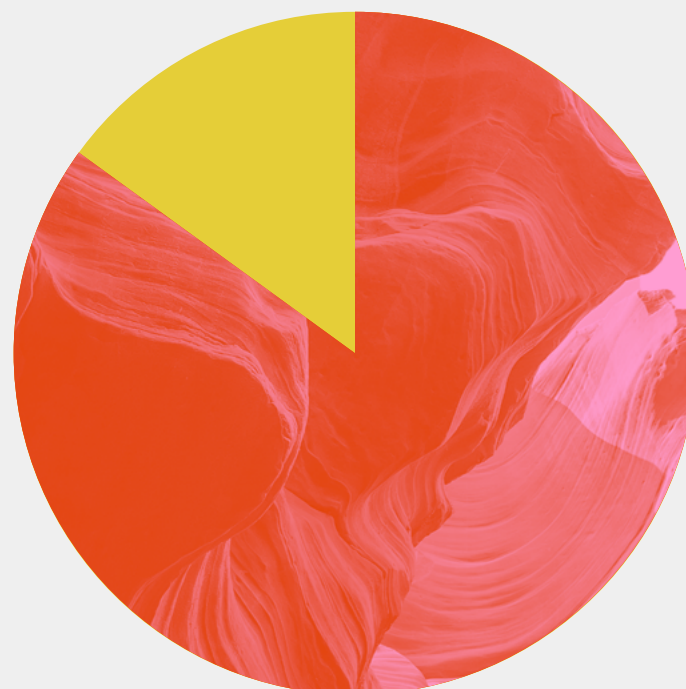
The findings reveal a significant gap between recognizing the importance of structure

and effectively implementing it. Leaders overwhelmingly agree that a well-thought-out team is crucial for producing exceptional work. Our report provides actionable recommendations to foster creative collaboration, balance workloads, and integrate technology—all while championing diversity and inclusion.

By addressing burnout, embracing flexible structures, and leveraging artificial intelligence (AI), organizations can transform their creative teams into strategic assets. This report serves as a roadmap for creative leaders to navigate these challenges, leading their teams toward a future of innovation, adaptability, and sustained creative excellence.

85%

of creative leaders agree that a strategically planned creative structure is essential for producing exceptional work.



Key findings



Undervalued yet essential

Nearly 70% of creative leaders feel their teams are undervalued. Despite their pivotal role in shaping brand identity and driving engagement, many creative teams face systemic underestimation.



Burnout and stress

Burnout and stress are the top challenges for creative teams, followed by tight timelines, communication hurdles, and approval bottlenecks, which stifle creative energy and hinder productivity.



Formalized processes, structural inefficiencies

While 86% of creative teams have formalized processes for project prioritization, only 33% of leaders are confident in their team's structural efficacy.



Strategic importance of structure

A total of 85% of surveyed leaders agree that a strategically planned creative structure is essential for producing exceptional work.

Strategic recommendations

01

Foster creative collaboration: Prioritizing creative collaboration, efficient workflow management, and fostering cross-functional teamwork are critical for overcoming operational challenges.

02

Balanced workloads and clear vision: Ensuring balanced workloads, clear objectives, recognition, and consistent, open communication channels are the linchpins of a thriving creative environment.

03

Reimagining creative team structures: Embrace flexible and adaptive structures, such as the “sticky trios” and agile models, to align with business goals and maximize creative potential.

04

Leveraging technology and AI: Integrating artificial intelligence and other technologies can enhance efficiency, freeing creative teams to focus on high-value tasks that require human ingenuity.

05

Championing diversity and inclusion: Building inclusive teams that harness diverse perspectives leads to unparalleled creativity and innovation.

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Introduction

Creative teams are the architects of brand voice and the storytellers who captivate audiences and drive engagement. They paint the big picture with the sights, sounds, and stories that propel businesses forward. They fuel momentum by inspiring audiences and stakeholders to lean in and think big. They drive success, scale, and influence across every industry.

However, the dynamic nature of creative work—with its relentless pace and constant demand for fresh ideas—presents unique, ongoing challenges. The pressure to be creative on demand makes team organization the key difference between success and stagnation.

Building an efficient, effective, and creative team structure isn't easy. But finding that perfect-fit team—supported by the right structure—is how meaningful, memorable campaigns and experiences are created.

Stoke's research shows that 85% of creative leaders believe a strategic team structure is crucial for producing exceptional work, yet 68% feel their teams are undervalued.

Despite having formalized processes for project prioritization in 86% of teams, only 33% of leaders are confident in their team's structural efficacy. Burnout and stress are top challenges, highlighting the need for better team organization.

By surveying 160 creative leaders across the US, we've identified key factors that influence productivity, content velocity, quality, and, ultimately, business success. Stoke's comprehensive study offers a fresh perspective on what makes a successful creative team and provides strategies to harness creativity's power into impactful, memorable campaigns.

Each leader surveyed directly manages internal creative teams, bringing their unique viewpoints and experiences. Our findings reveal why some creative teams thrive while others struggle. This report offers a roadmap to effective creative team structures, emphasizing balanced workloads, clear vision and objectives, performance recognition, open communication, and precise project requirements as key factors for success.

We'll also explore the organizational perception of creative teams and how viewing them as support functions rather than strategic partners affects their work's initiation, processing, and value.

This report recaps the current state of creative teams, dissects common structures and their impact on brand work, and looks at optimizing team composition with new success and value measurement approaches. We'll dive deep into the need to evolve organizational structures to stay competitive and relevant in an increasingly complex brand landscape.

Our findings provide critical insights into the changing landscape of creative work and the significant impact of team structure on productivity, quality, content velocity, and organizational success. This report makes the case for reimagining creative team structures to enhance operational efficiency and elevate the creative function as a cornerstone of strategic brand success.



The *Current* *State of* *Creative Teams*

Creative teams are the heartbeat of any business. They drive brand and marketing efforts, enhance business capabilities, and define how a brand presents itself to the world. Without creative teams, a company lacks a distinct identity; without a clear identity, meaningful customer connections are impossible. ▶



“**↓ BURNOUT AND STRESS** followed by the struggle to balance creativity with constraints, tight timelines, communication challenges, and approval bottlenecks — **THAT’S STIFLING THE ✨ CREATIVE SPIRIT**. It’s a major problem. As an industry, we must **STEP BACK AND ◀ REASSESS** how creative teams are structured and managed.”

Laurie Lohner
Managing Partner, Stoke

According to our research, 68% of creative leaders believe their teams are undervalued within their organizations, pointing to a systemic underestimation of the creative function's potential to drive business success. These same teams face burnout, stress, and other operational challenges—from balancing creativity within constraints to managing tight timelines to navigating communication hurdles and approval bottlenecks. Pain points like these stifle creative energy and underscore the need for a reimagined approach to creative team structure.

“What we’re seeing over and over, and what the research reveals, is that the lion’s share of

creative teams grapple with the same challenges. And those challenges keep them from delivering to their full potential,” says Stoke managing partner Laurie Lohner. “Burnout and stress topped the list, followed by the struggle to balance creativity with constraints, tight timelines, communication challenges, and approval bottlenecks.” She says these hurdles may seem straightforward, but they have a significant and consistent impact on workflows and overall morale. “That’s stifling the creative spirit. It’s a major problem. As an industry, we must step back and reassess how creative teams are structured and managed.”

➤ **68%** of creative leaders believe their teams are
★ **UNDervalUED** within their organizations,
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of the creative function’s ✨ **POTENTIAL** to drive
business ★ **SUCCESS.**

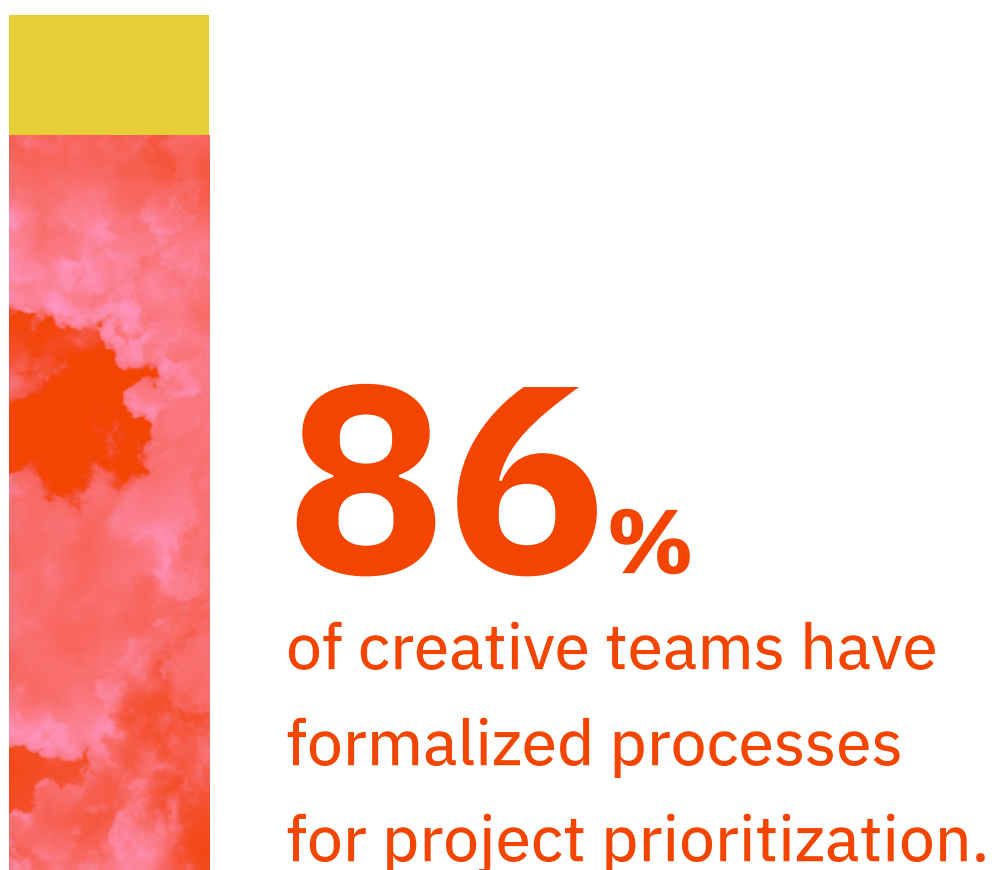
These challenges aren't for lack of trying—86% of teams have formalized processes for project prioritization, and a majority have clear roles and responsibilities, which indicates an underlying organizational strength in creative team approaches. However, the structure around maximizing creative talents needs improvement, with only 33% of leaders confident in their team's structural efficacy.

These findings support the deep correlation between team structure and creative output, with 85% of surveyed leaders agreeing that a strategically planned creative structure is essential for producing exceptional work. “This means moving past common assumptions about team configuration and advocating for adaptability and alignment with overarching business objectives,” Lohner adds.

It's clear that organizations must meet certain conditions for creative teams to reach their peak.

Top priorities must include fostering creative collaboration, managing workflows efficiently, and facilitating collaboration across diverse teams and locations. Also key are balanced workloads, clear vision and objectives, recognition and appreciation, open communication channels, and clear project requirements—the foundations of a thriving creative environment.

The organizational context surrounding creative teams is also necessary for success, but that context is often overlooked—just 21% of creative teams are recognized as strategic partners, while 27% are often viewed merely as support functions. This perception significantly impacts how creative initiatives are conceived and executed, highlighting an opportunity for organizations to leverage their creative teams more strategically for branding impact.



Common *Structures* and *Their Impact*

Just as no two businesses are the same, Stoke's survey findings prove that organizations use many different types of creative team structures, with the majority centered around three central approaches:

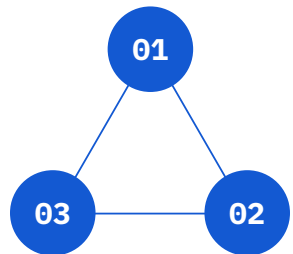
- **39%** are structured around product
- **34%** are organized by discipline
- **26%** are structured by channel

This variety reflects the adaptive nature of creative organizations—teams readily adjust to their business's specific and immediate needs, tailoring structures to meet emerging goals and operational needs. However, these three approaches also suggest that the grouping process does not come from creatives but from an outside framework less sensitive to a creative team's unique requirements for optimum results. This insight suggests the need for creative leaders to spearhead the forming and managing of creative teams.

Let's look at some models that organizations can use to help creative teams reach their potential. ▶

The “sticky trios” model

Eighty-five percent of surveyed leaders agree that a well-structured team is essential for producing exceptional work. Drawing from these insights, the “sticky trios” model reimagines creative team structures to enhance efficiency and creative output.



At its core, the sticky trios model segments teams into three distinct but interconnected roles, each with a specific focus. When combined, they cover the entire spectrum of brand development and communication.

01

Long-term brand focus: This segment is dedicated to the brand’s overarching narrative and identity. Team members in this role are visionaries tasked with ensuring that every project aligns with and enriches the brand’s long-term goals and values. With 39% of creative teams currently structured around products, maintaining a long-term brand focus can ensure consistent and cohesive brand messaging.

02

Short-term performance: In contrast to the long-term focus, this role hones in on the immediate impact of creative efforts. Specialists in this area are agile, adept at navigating the fast-paced demands of marketing campaigns, and focused on metrics and outcomes. Many teams (34%) are organized by discipline, emphasizing the need for short-term performance roles that maximize the effectiveness of each project and ensure measurable results.

03

Brand strategy: This final piece of the puzzle bridges the gap between long-term vision and short-term performance. Brand strategists work to understand market trends, audience insights, and competitive landscapes to inform strategic decisions. This role ensures that each project is creatively compelling and strategically sound, positioning the brand advantageously in the market. With 26% of teams structured by channel, the importance of strategic alignment in creative work becomes evident.

The sticky trios model deviates from traditional client service intermediaries, advocating for a more direct and cohesive workflow among the creative team. This structure facilitates a dynamic where creatives are more deeply invested in and connected to the projects they work on, fostering a sense of ownership and accountability.

Additionally, the emphasis on hiring for fit within these trios rather than for general fit within

broader verticals encourages the formation of tightly knit teams aligned in skills, perspectives, and working styles. This is crucial for a seamless transition from project to project, ensuring team members can effectively collaborate and leverage their strengths to overcome challenges and capitalize on opportunities.

“It’s crucial that the organizational structures are aligned with your **↗ STRATEGIC BUSINESS MISSION**. Creative leaders need to ask themselves, ‘Am I setting up my team in a way that **★ TRULY SERVES** what needs to happen?’”

Michelle Stuhl

Executive Creative Recruiter, Michelle Stuhl & Company, Inc.

The agile model

Agile methodologies have long been celebrated for their potential to enhance responsiveness and innovation as situations, campaigns, or clients require. However, creative teams often struggle to implement a truly agile model successfully.

“Some creative leaders have reservations about agile models,” explains Brian Barrus, creative director and chief design officer at Stoke. “It’s understandable—they’re concerned about compromising creative quality in the name of agility. But there’s a balance.”

Addressing these concerns begins with a nuanced evaluation of team structuring that considers both the benefits of agility and the imperative of maintaining high-quality outputs.

“There’s ‘agile,’ and then there’s agility in a creative context,” Barrus says. “In e-commerce, for example, stores need to drive engagement and conversion, so creative teams must move quickly and serialize their processes. Stability, appropriately sized teams, and iterative course correction and optimization are essential to success within an agile framework. Leaders need to promote a direct, positive impact on creative outcomes to build creative teams’ capabilities.”

Stoke’s survey found that creative leaders’ top priorities include fostering creative collaboration (44%), managing workflows efficiently (38%), and facilitating collaboration across disparate teams and locations (37%). These findings suggest the need for a strength-based approach to an agile framework because it is foundational to the creative team’s success in process and execution.

For a creative team to truly embrace agility, it must be built on a deep understanding of teamwork dynamics. Continuous iteration of these dynamics is essential. Effective teams thrive on creative collaboration, efficiently managed workflows, and a synergy-focused culture across diverse groups and locations.

By adopting this approach, creative teams can address challenges such as balancing creativity with constraints and managing tight timelines, ensuring that agility enhances rather than compromises creative quality. When implemented thoughtfully, the agile model supports the development of high-performing teams capable of producing exceptional work in a fast-paced, ever-changing environment.

Top priorities for creative leaders:

44%

Creative
collaboration

38%

Managing
workflows

37%

Fostering
collaboration

Hybrid models

Hybrid models, which blend elements of traditional pool, pod, and agile configurations, are increasingly popular in building creative teams post-pandemic. This trend reflects a collective move toward more flexible and adaptable team structures, improving collaboration and efficiency through dynamic models that enable dynamic resource allocation and quicker adaptation to changing project demands. **Hybrid models are crucial for maintaining a competitive advantage in fast-paced environments.**

“Hybrid models are showing up more and more, from small studios to enterprise creative teams,” Barrus says. “These hybrid structures blend elements of traditional pool, pod, and agile configurations, capitalizing on the strengths of each while mitigating their limitations.” This shift, he notes, indicates a growing recognition of the need for structures that can evolve in response to changing market demands and creative challenges.

Stoke’s findings align with broader industry data, indicating creative teams are increasingly

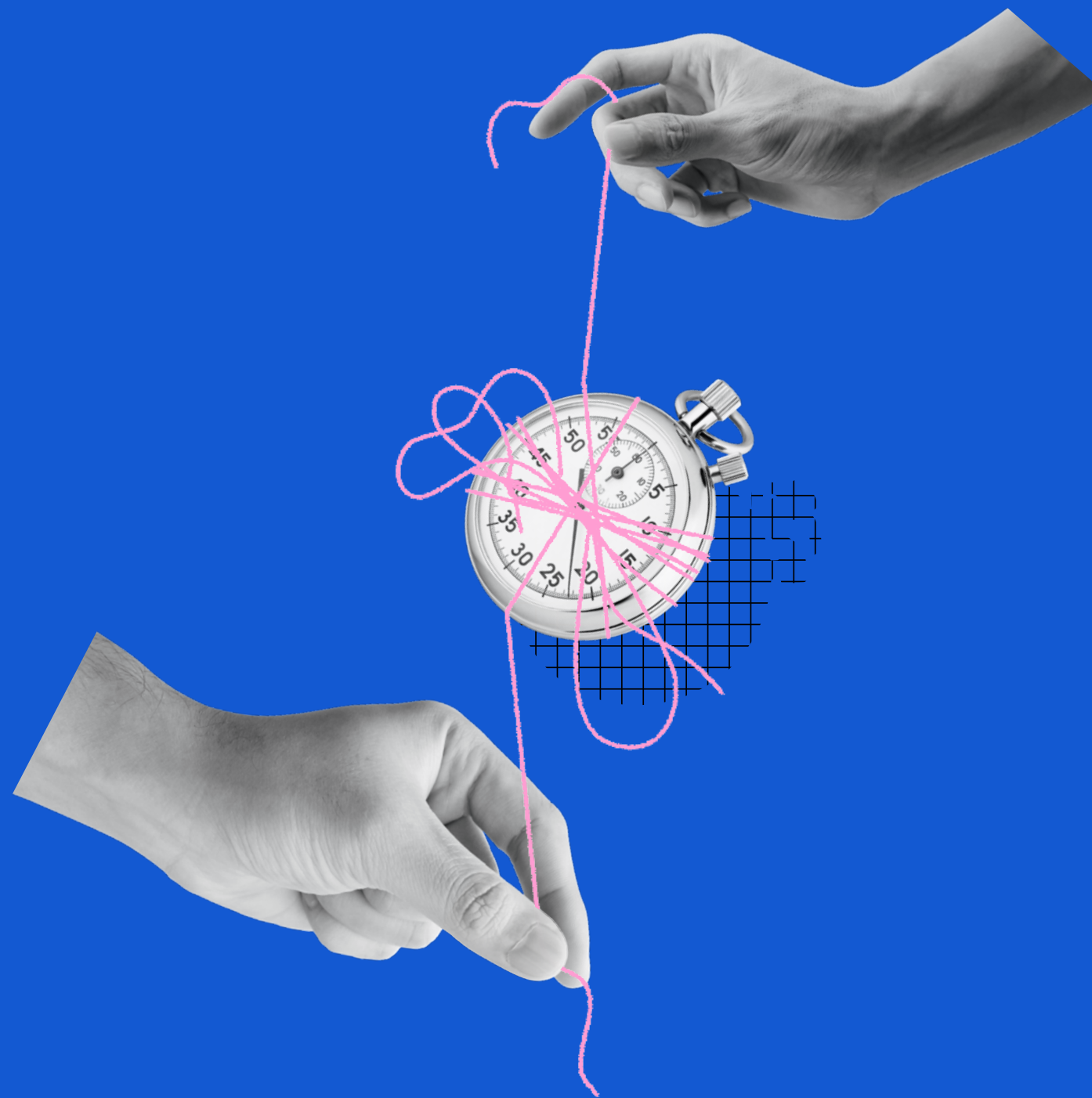
struggling with burnout, stress, and feelings of being undervalued. According to a 2023 survey by Workforce, [nearly two-thirds of US employees have experienced burnout at some point, with 67% reporting that burnout worsened](#) during the pandemic. Creative professionals, who often face tight deadlines and high expectations, are particularly vulnerable. Another study found that 61% of [workers feel exhausted](#) at the end of most working days, highlighting the intense pressure within many creative environments.

These concerns underscore the need for organizational structures that provide robust support rather than adding constraints. The growing preference for hybrid models—those that blend traditional, pod, and agile team structures—reflects a collective search for a system that fosters rapid innovation and flexibility, promotes cohesion, and protects team members’ well-being.



Optimizing Team Composition

Many creative teams are leaning on outside support to help solve the impact of structural challenges. Given the rise in the “gig economy,” outsourcing was a non-surprising topic among survey respondents. Ninety-three percent of creative teams report outsourcing at least some of their work, with design, video editing, and project management being the most commonly outsourced functions. ▶



“**↗ IMMATURE** creative departments
📊 MEASURE their **VALUE ON ⌚ TIME**—
especially because it’s a big industry thing. If all of us
could just **🛑 STOP** this bad practice and
➔ MOVE BEYOND it, it would be phenomenal.”

Adam Morgan

Vice President of Brand, Twilio

“Outsourcing can be extremely beneficial in certain contexts,” Barrus says. “Bringing in diverse creative talent and unique perspectives can instantly elevate your team and their approach to innovation, collaboration, and success. At the same time, over-reliance on external players can lead to questions about work quality, especially in areas like UX/UI and campaign ideation.”

With the vast majority of creative teams leaning on external partnerships to outsource at least a portion of their workload, augmenting internal capabilities with specialized external expertise is becoming increasingly the norm.

That said, this trend is about more than just offloading tasks. Instead, it represents a paradigm

shift toward viewing agencies as vital extensions of the internal team. By outsourcing functions such as writing (24%), video editing and motion graphics (35%), and design (41%), creative leaders signal recognition of areas where internal resources might get an outside boost to enhance productivity and innovation.

These numbers show that agency collaboration emerges as a strategy aimed at supplementing specific skill gaps and managing workloads rather than as a competitive dynamic. This approach reflects a broader trend toward flexibility and adaptability, where the boundaries between internal and external team members blur in favor of shared creative objectives.

Top tasks outsourced by creative teams:

24%

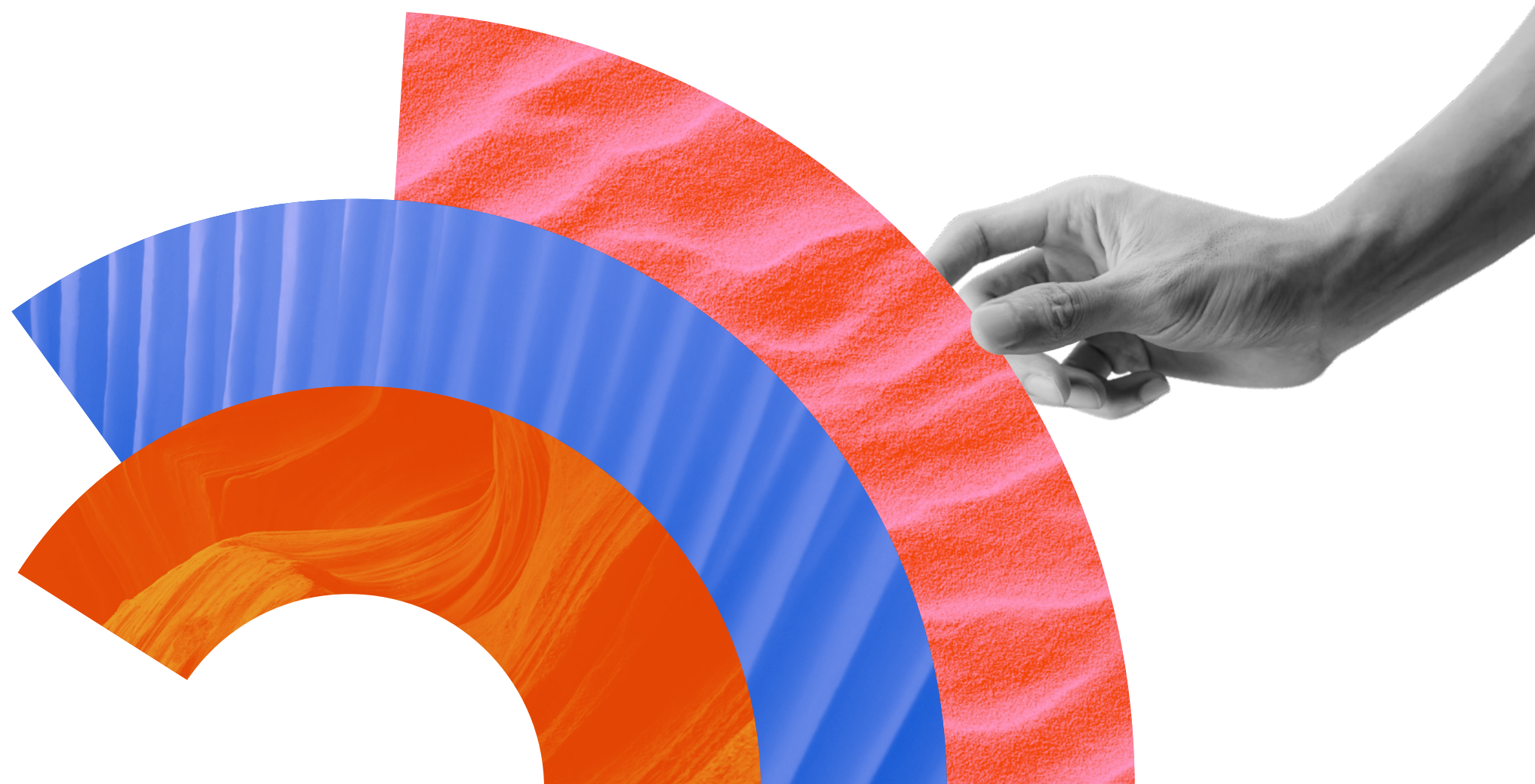
Writing

35%

Video editing and motion graphics

41%

Design



Introducing AI into the creative process also marks a significant team structure and functional pivot. Instead of displacing creatives, teams are leveraging AI technologies to optimize efficiencies, freeing human creativity from the constraints of repetitive and administrative tasks.

“AI is proving to be the ultimate sidekick for creative leaders and teams,” says Lohner. “In this new landscape, we’re absolutely advocating for a synergistic relationship between human creativity and machine intelligence—and finding innovative ways that AI can support creativity not by replacing it but by enabling creative professionals to focus on high-value, innovative tasks that require emotional intelligence, critical thinking, and deep domain expertise.”

Stoke’s research, Lohner notes, underscores this potential and the broad-reaching ability of AI to transform the creative workplace into a skills-based organization, one that’s 63% more likely to achieve notable results, effectively place talent, and retain high performers.

“The increased adoption of Gen AI gives us a glimpse into what’s next,” Lohner adds. “And that’s a future where the tasks and skills we deploy in creative work shift toward a collaborative model between human creativity and machine efficiency.”

This transition has challenges, including the increased demand for high-skilled work, concerns about privacy and trust, and the need for continuous adaptation. At the same time, AI’s opportunities for agility, reskilling, upskilling, and fostering essential soft skills such as creativity,

leadership, coaching, and collaboration are proving transformative to individuals, teams, and brands. With AI becoming central to our creative futures, there’s a real need to get managers and leaders up to speed on what comes next. Machines are taking on more administrative functions, leading to flatter, faster-moving organizations and a closer connection between idea generation and execution. As a result, leaders need to evolve into more creative thinkers—whether we’re talking about high-tech advances or structuring teams for success.

Optimizing team composition in this context means balancing internal capabilities and external partnerships, leveraging AI to enhance creative potential, and fostering a culture that values deep specialization alongside broad collaborative skills. The emphasis shifts from assembling a team with a diverse skill set to strategically integrating technology, external partnerships, and internal talent to create a cohesive, agile entity capable of navigating the complexities of modern creative production.

Measuring *Success* and *Value*

Defining and measuring success present unique challenges in creative production. Stoke's comprehensive research into creative team dynamics finds the majority of creative leaders feel their teams are undervalued, emphasizing creatives' persistent struggle for recognition. This disconnect between the perceived and actual value of creative contributions necessitates reevaluating how success and value are quantified in creative contexts.

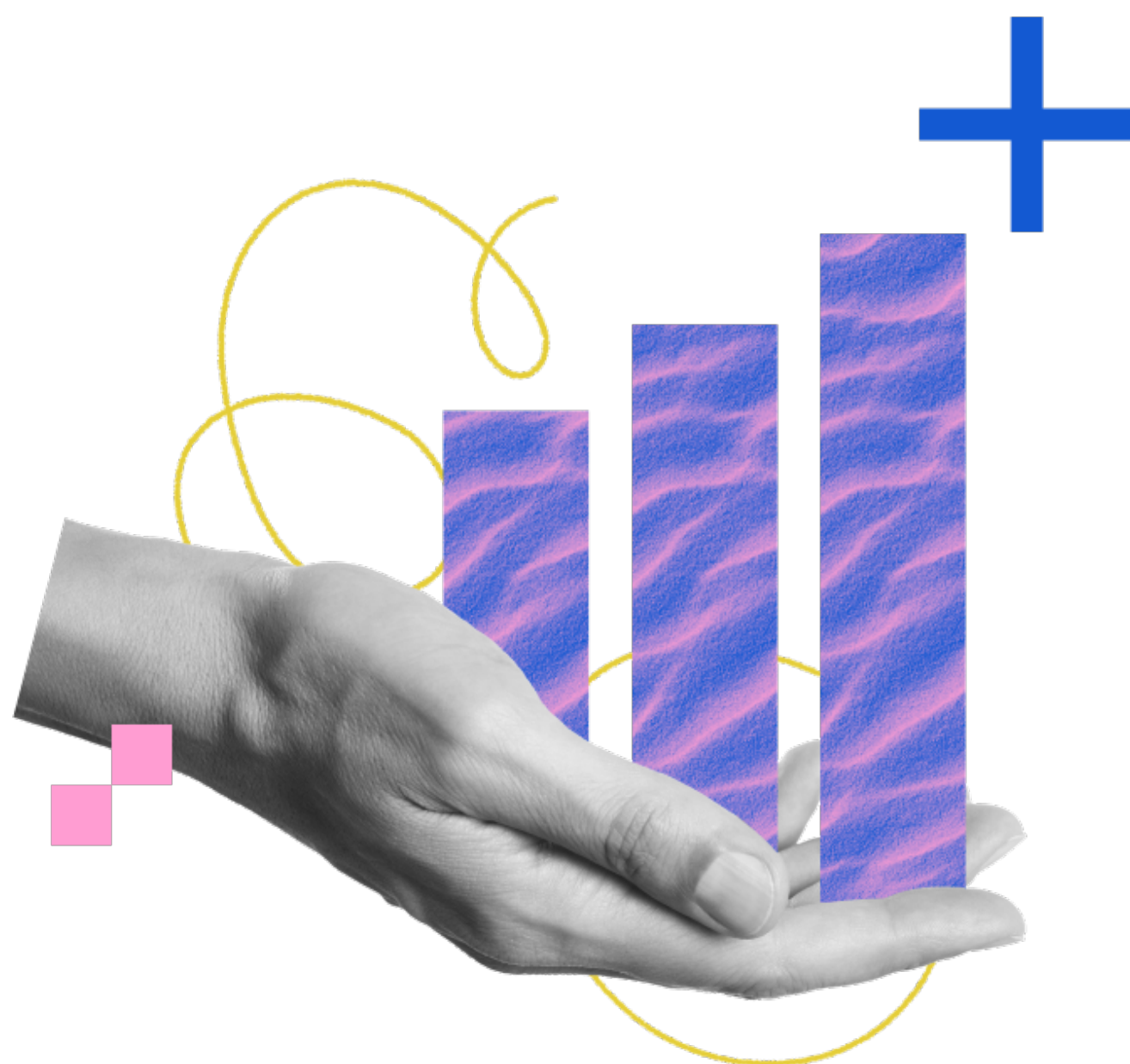
Traditional metrics, though valuable, often need to capture the full spectrum of creative impact. Creative teams are increasingly adopting a multifaceted approach to performance evaluation, employing diverse success metrics that encompass the quality of work (40%), alignment with business goals (24%), and adherence to creative vision (15%). This holistic perspective illustrates that conventional standards alone can't measure creative excellence. ▶

Customer-centric measures

Our findings suggest that quantifying the impact of creative work beyond traditional metrics will bring creative teams to the table in an even bigger way. As teams look to define and redefine success metrics, customer experience has quickly become a major part of the evaluation equation. The growing focus on customer-centric measures aligns creative efforts more closely with broader business outcomes, emphasizing the integral role of creative work in driving customer engagement and satisfaction.

Salience measurement algorithms

Increased AI and technology adoption also brings new dimensions to measuring creative effectiveness. Tools like salience measurement algorithms, which apply heatmaps to visualize attention-grabbing elements in creative content, offer objective insights into the visual impact of marketing materials. Such technologies enable creative teams to fine-tune their work based on scientific data rather than guesswork, enhancing the efficacy of creative campaigns and customer experiences.



KPIs

Another approach is to use key performance indicators (KPIs) tailored to creative teams. These KPIs aim to bridge the gap between creative output and organizational value, providing a framework for understanding performance in terms of both cost and impact. Some common KPIs creative teams consider:



Project cost and profit

Evaluating the financial aspects of creative projects, including expenditure and revenue generation, offers insight into creative efforts' economic efficiency and sustainability.



Time spent on rework and project time estimate accuracy

These metrics focus on operational efficiency, highlighting areas for process improvement and better resource allocation.



Work vs. capacity and lead time per project

By comparing expected versus actual output and the time taken to deliver projects, creative leaders can assess team productivity and streamline workflows for better efficiency.



Software utilization rates, content freshness, and template adoption

These indicators gauge how creative teams leverage technology to enhance productivity, maintain brand consistency, and optimize content relevance.



Client satisfaction

Gauging client satisfaction through post-project surveys provides direct feedback on how effectively creative work meets client expectations.

“It’s important to have clear-cut KPIs going into the creative evaluation process,” says Enid Bryant, vice president of strategy, editorial, and marketing services at Stoke. “This empowers creative teams to measure their performance more accurately, and that means recognizing successes and finding ways to utilize resources as effectively and efficiently as possible.” Beyond that, she says, these evaluation frameworks enable teams to leverage quantitative and qualitative metrics to better understand creative value and align creativity with strategic impact.

Evolving Creative Organizations

As we navigate through the transformative era of digital acceleration, embracing AI is the heart of organizational evolution. Stoke's comprehensive research emphasizes that a strategic pivot toward AI integration is imperative for creative organizations to stay competitive and relevant.

This evolution extends beyond merely adopting new technologies. It requires reshaping organizational structures to be more dynamic and flexible, fostering a culture of diversity and inclusion, and reimagining leadership to thrive in an AI-driven landscape. The urgent imperative is that creative teams need to evolve organizational structures to remain competitive and relevant in an increasingly complex landscape. This evolution means adopting more dynamic and flexible organizational frameworks, a deeper integration of technology in work processes, a commitment to diversity and inclusion, and a new vision of leadership and collaboration.

Here's what an organization with an evolved strategy for creative teams looks like. ▶

01. Leveraging technology to allow more space for creative work

Flexible team structures, characterized by cross-functional groups and fluid roles, embrace opportunities to automate work. Healthy, mindful uses of AI and machine learning tools enable organizations to respond to changing business needs and creative challenges by freeing up their creative teams to do the work crucial to fostering innovation, speeding up the decision-making process, and facilitating a continuous learning and improvement culture.

The shift toward leveraging technology to augment creativity and efficiency is in step with the structural evolution we're seeing.

Research shows that around 93% of creative teams outsource at least some of their work, which indicates a reliance on external resources to manage workloads and enhance capabilities.

This trend highlights the potential for AI and machine learning to fill similar roles internally, thereby creating efficiencies for the external agencies they use.

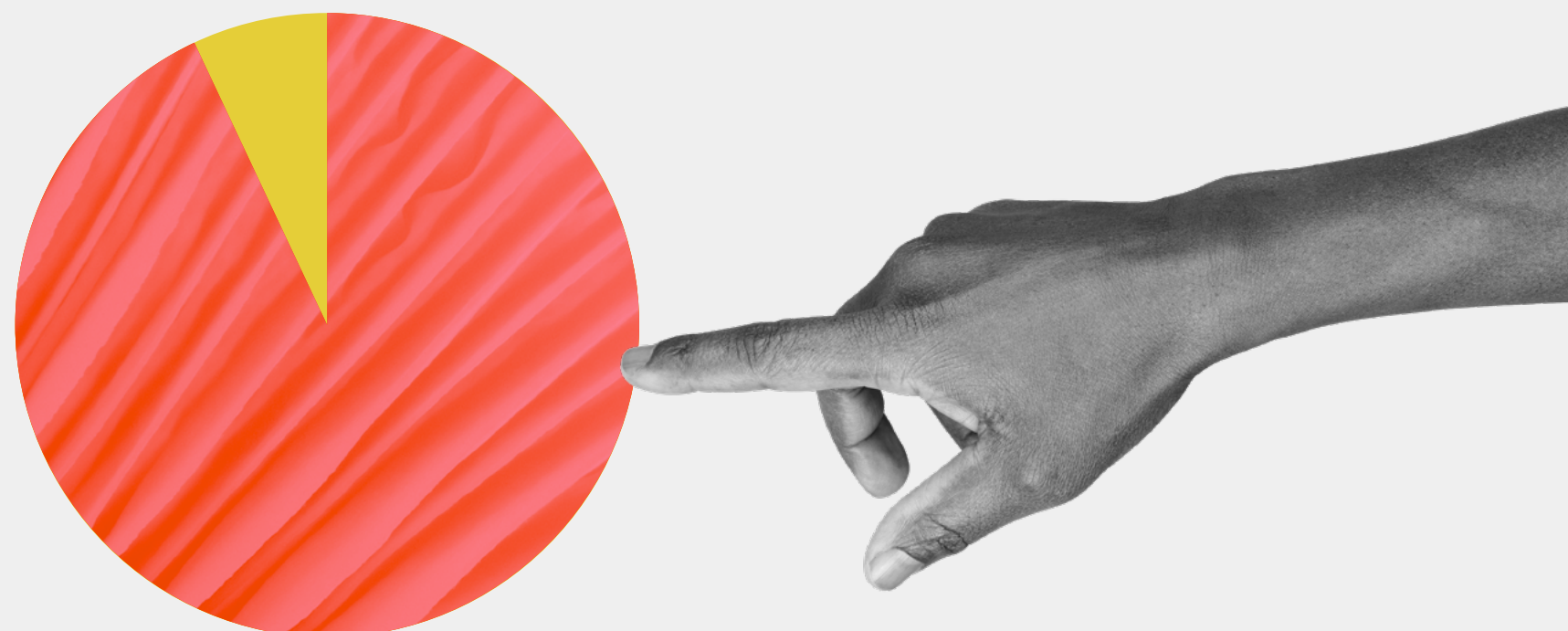
AI, machine learning (ML), and collaboration tools are transforming the creative process from ideation to execution. This new technology offers unprecedented opportunities to enhance team collaboration, streamline workflows, and unlock new avenues for creative expression.

“By automating routine tasks and generating insights from data, AI, and ML, leaders can enable creative teams to focus on high-value, strategic work that requires human ingenuity and emotional intelligence,” Barrus adds.

Beyond this, integrating technology into creative workflows not only enhances productivity but also fosters a culture of continuous learning and improvement. This makes creative teams more adaptable and resilient in a rapidly changing business landscape, allowing them to move beyond mundane tasks and strategically contribute to business objectives.

93%

of creative teams outsource
at least some of their work.



02.

Leaning into inclusion and diversity to achieve a deep bench of talent

Diverse teams bring many perspectives, experiences, and ideas. Inclusion, though, goes beyond assembling a varied workforce; it involves creating an environment where everyone feels valued, understood, and empowered to contribute fully. As creative organizations evolve, emphasis is increasingly placed on building inclusive cultures that harness diversity to produce work that resonates with a broad spectrum of audiences. Research agrees, showing that **diverse teams are 35% more likely to outperform their peers.** Furthermore, companies in the top quartile for ethnic and cultural diversity on executive teams were **33% more likely to have industry-leading profitability.**

“Truly unparalleled creativity comes from diverse perspectives and experiences,” says Lohner. “Leaning into inclusion and diversity can’t just be a policy. It needs to be woven into your creative team dynamics.” Creative leaders,

she adds, must focus on creating spaces where every voice is heard and valued and where every team member can bring their whole selves to the table. “This enables us to tap into top creative talent, producing work that resonates across the spectrum of our audiences. It’s this diversity of thought and experience that propels us forward, ensuring our work is not just seen but felt.”

Additionally, the emphasis on inclusion and diversity is backed by findings that show **diverse companies are 70% more likely to capture new markets.** This increased market reach is driven by the variety of insights and perspectives that diverse teams bring to the table, which allows for more innovative and comprehensive solutions to complex problems. By fostering an inclusive environment, creative organizations can better connect with a broader audience, driving engagement and success in increasingly competitive markets.

Diverse teams are:

35%

more likely to
outperform their peers.



70%

more likely to
capture new markets.



03.

Embracing an evolutionary approach to processes, teams, and best practices

Evolved organizational structures are a strategic imperative. Organizations that embrace this evolution can anticipate a future marked by enhanced creativity, greater resilience, and a more profound impact on their industries and communities. Research indicates that companies with agile and adaptive structures are 2.7 times more likely to be top performers in their market. Additionally, these organizations are 1.5 times more likely to innovate and bring new products to market quickly, demonstrating their ability to stay ahead of competitors.

Conversely, those who resist change risk becoming obsolete in an era of rapid technological advancement and shifting consumer expectations. Data reveals that 52% of Fortune 500 companies have disappeared since the year 2000 because of their inability to adapt to changing market conditions. This statistic highlights the critical need for organizations to continuously evolve their processes, team structures, and best practices to remain competitive and relevant.

Embracing an evolutionary approach involves integrating business operations and analytics into unified teams, abandoning the top-down approach favoring data-driven decision-making and fostering a test-and-learn mentality. Findings show support for an adaptive strategy. Companies that employ data-driven decision-making are 6% more productive and 5% more profitable than their competitors. By constantly reassessing and

refining their organizational mechanics, these companies can effectively navigate uncertainties and capitalize on new opportunities.

“As client needs change, we must be agile about everything we provide for them—services, processes, approaches, and communication,” says Sarah Ekins, vice president of operations at Stoke. “This agility lets us respond effectively to our clients without compromising efficiency. It really is the secret to smart organizations and businesses.”

Integrating AI and advanced technologies plays a crucial role in this evolution. Organizations prioritizing AI and machine learning integration are 1.7 times more likely to achieve a faster time to market for new products and services. This technological focus automates routine tasks, freeing creative teams to focus instead on high-value, strategic work that drives innovation and growth.

“As client needs change, we must be **▶▶ AGILE** about everything we provide for them... This agility lets us **RESPOND ✦ EFFECTIVELY** to our clients without compromising efficiency. It really is the secret to **➤ SMART ORGANIZATIONS AND BUSINESSES.**”

Sarah Ekins

Vice President of Operations, Stoke

04.

Creating and maintaining a future-focused vision

Adaptive organizations constantly reassess even their best operational mechanics and structural procedures. These forward-looking organizations make effective shifts before they become necessary. They integrate business operations and analytics into unified teams, abandoning the top-down approach in favor of data-driven decision-making and a test-and-learn mentality. Leaders play a pivotal role in setting teams up for success. They proactively make future-

driven changes with thoughtful guardrails, such as prioritizing clear communication in remote work environments, anticipating and addressing barriers to change, and investing in effective technology adoption and integration.

“Being a leader with a future-focused vision means I’m always looking for ways to innovate. All teams and approaches are under constant examination,” says Ekins. “That’s how we remain relevant.”

05.

Preparing for scale through reasonable hiring, promotion, and organizational practices

Scaling is part of every business and brand life cycle. Doing it competently involves creating an intentional strategy informed by thorough research, planning, and team buy-in. Start by establishing a governing coalition that balances centralized oversight with decentralized execution (the “hub and spokes” model). This structure supports efficiency and effectiveness, facilitating cross-team collaboration, data integration, and the strategic allocation of resources.

Next, follow a new talent playbook. The evolving creative organization necessitates a new approach to talent management. Jobs are redefined based on skills and tasks rather than static titles, focusing on continuous learning and adaptation. Embracing AI allows teams to prioritize human-to-human collaboration and leverage technology to enhance the creative human touch rather than replace it.

06.

Achieving the common good through a nuanced approach to AI

In the age of AI, reaching accountable and sustainable use of technology requires a proactive regulatory framework supported by rigorous corporate policies and enforcement mechanisms. Organizations must navigate the ethical dimensions of AI use with a consensus on risk avoidance that promotes trust and transparency.

An evolved strategy for creative work puts creators in the driver’s seat of ideation and execution. Policies encouraging teams to use AI wisely help creatives dream, innovate, and execute work that raises brands and organizations. Design a well-considered framework for AI that benefits creativity and champions teams.



“There’s more to being a **GOOD CREATIVE LEADER** than knowing how to spot a good piece of design. Going through **DETAILS ✨ MATTERS** to the work. Without it, things like org structure and operations become more of a roadblock, and it’s impossible to get **GREAT ✨ WORK DONE.**”

Adam Morgan

Vice President of Brand, Twilio

Reflections on the *Future*

The future of creative teams and organizational structures is not just a passing challenge but a living, breathing reality that impacts how we communicate, innovate, and connect in a digital-first world. The journey through the dynamics of creative teams, the integration of technology, and embracing diversity and inclusion have illuminated the path forward for organizations aiming to thrive in this new landscape.

The future promises endless possibilities for creative teams willing to adapt, evolve, and embrace new paradigms of work. As organizational structures become more fluid and technology-driven, the essence of creativity remains distinctly human, fueled by diversity, collaboration, and an unyielding pursuit of innovation. The challenge and opportunity lie in harmonizing these elements to forge unabated environments where creativity can flourish. ▶

Key takeaways and strategic advice



Embrace change: The only constant in the creative landscape is change. Adopt flexible, adaptive organizational structures that enable your team to navigate the complexities of the modern world while accounting for team size and growth.



Leverage technology: AI and digital collaboration tools are not threats but allies in the creative process. Use them to augment your team's capabilities and free up space for innovation.



Champion diversity and inclusion: Diverse perspectives fuel creativity. Build inclusive environments where every voice is heard and valued to foster innovation.



Cultivate a learning culture: In an ever-evolving landscape, continuous learning is a through line to thriving. Encourage your team to embrace new skills, technologies, and ways of thinking.



Stay human-centered: Amid technological advancement, remember that creativity thrives on human insight, empathy, and connection. Keep the human experience at the heart of your creative endeavors.

Unlock your team's full potential with Stoke.

Embracing the future of creative teams means navigating change with agility, harnessing the power of technology, and cultivating environments where diversity and creativity thrive. Stoke can guide you through this journey, transforming challenges into opportunities for growth and innovation.

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This report is grounded in comprehensive research. In partnership with TrendCandy, Stoke surveyed 160 leaders of creative teams, with a margin of error of 7.75% and a confidence level of 95%. Additional sources include industry reports, expert interviews, and academic literature.

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