

The OOO Index

A new national survey of 1,000 U.S. knowledge workers examines why taking time off has become a source of stress rather than relief. From the anxiety that builds before workers leave to the pile-up that greets them on return, the findings show workplaces lack continuity year-round, and those structural cracks are compounded during summer. The study examines the biggest PTO pain points and how AI tools can finally help workers step away with confidence.

Conducted by Morning Consult on behalf of Zoom · June 16–29, 2026

THE STATE OF PTO

The cost of taking time off is too high for many workers

61%

dread the amount of work waiting when they return

51%

feel guilty asking coworkers to cover while they're away

57%

left at least some available PTO unused last year

42%

say PTO stress has made them consider skipping time off entirely

☀ Summer Spotlight

Social pressure is heightened during the summer months

48%

feel they can't take the most popular summer weeks because too many others are already out

46%

feel guilty taking time off during the busiest stretches of summer

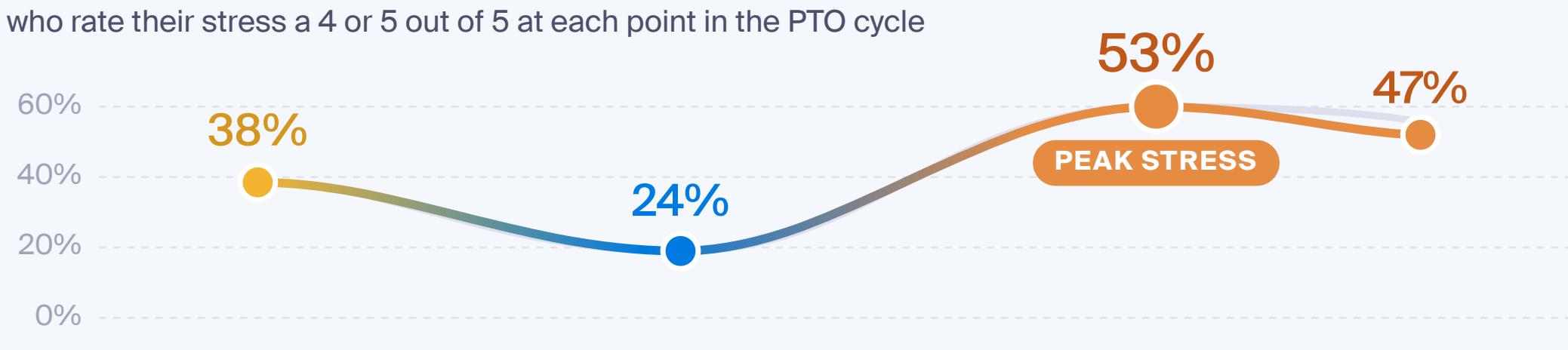
46%

have shifted PTO to a less hectic time even though they'd rather take it in summer

ARC OF ANXIETY

PTO stress starts early and peaks the moment workers return

% who rate their stress a 4 or 5 out of 5 at each point in the PTO cycle



BEFORE PTO

48%

feel anxious in the days leading up to PTO

65%

work extra hours before PTO to get ahead

DURING PTO

60%

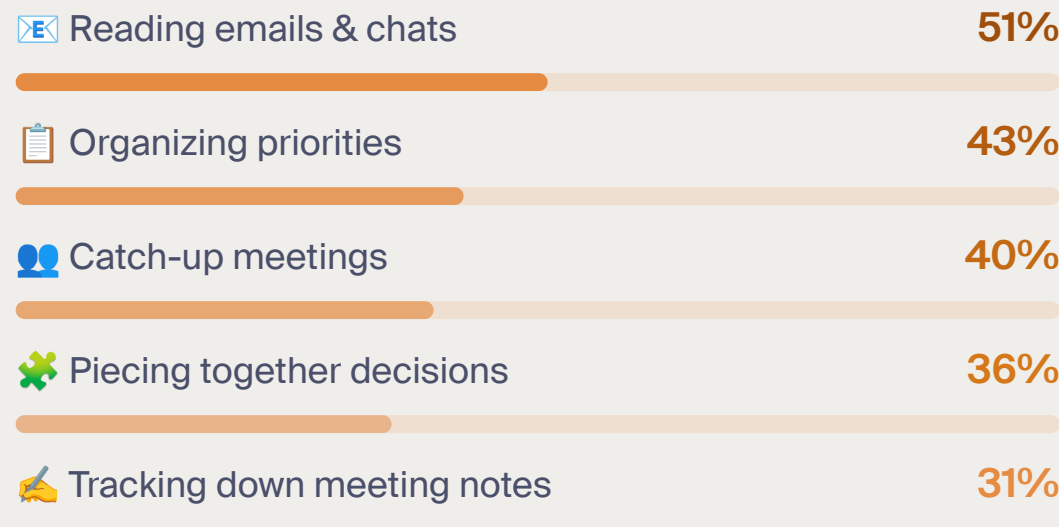
check or respond to work messages at least a few times during PTO

68%

would rather monitor their inbox during PTO than return to 500 unread emails

FIRST DAY BACK

% spending 1+ hour on each activity



Recovery from the backlog is slow

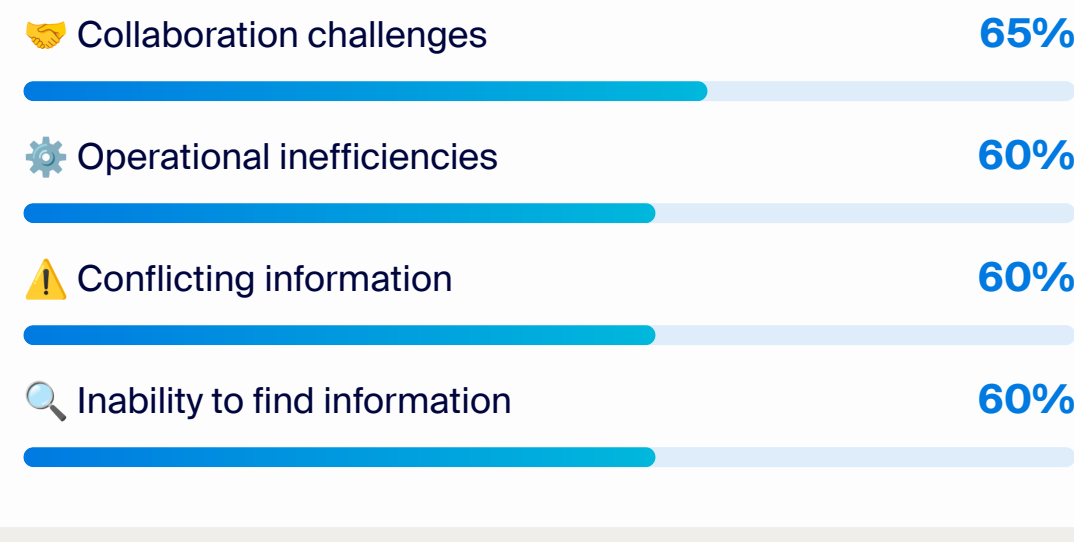
88% say it takes **a day or more** to feel fully caught up after returning**53%** say it takes **3 or more days** to feel fully caught up

ORGANIZATIONAL IMPACT

The hidden cost of time off is also paid by teammates staying behind

WHEN A COLLEAGUE IS ABSENT, TEAMS EXPERIENCE...

% at least sometimes

**65%**

report having to wait for someone to return to move work forward

75%

say when a key person is out, the work that depends on them is delayed by **a day or more**

☀ Summer Spotlight

When many people are out during peak PTO seasons, existing collaboration gaps widen

51%

agree it is more difficult to coordinate work during summer

44%

say they're less productive during summer because so many colleagues are out

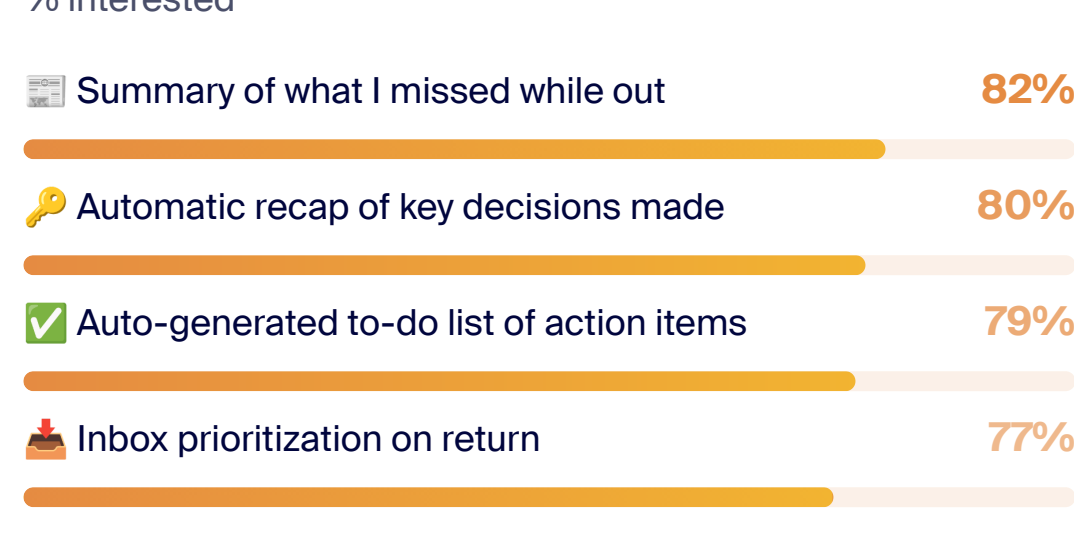
THE AI OPPORTUNITY

AI tools can help break down barriers to time off and effective catch-up

Workers want AI features that map to their biggest post-PTO pain points

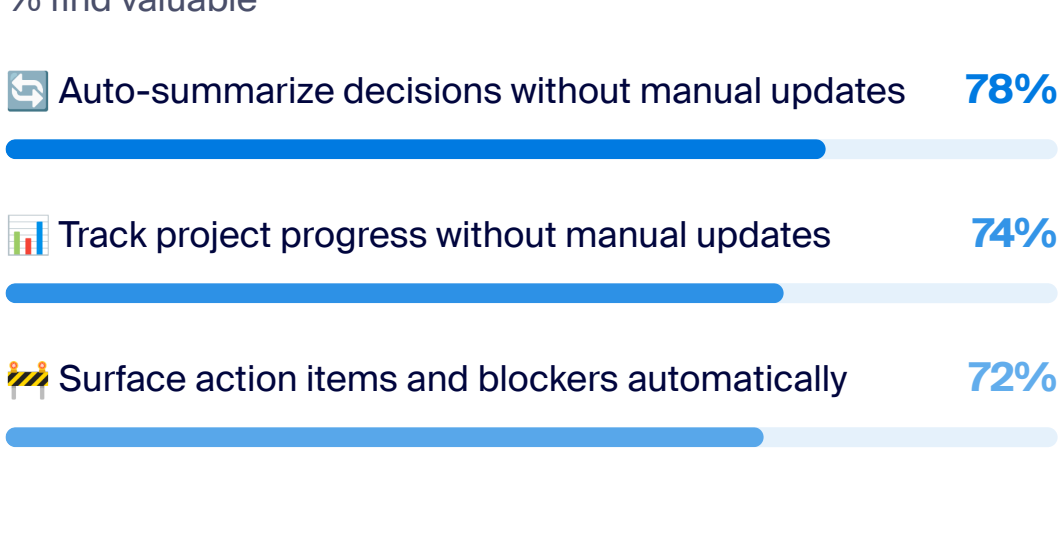
FEATURES TO EASE PTO RETURN

% interested



FEATURES TO PROTECT TEAM CONTINUITY

% find valuable



AI can encourage healthier work behavior, not just productivity

**78%**

would be more likely to fully disconnect if AI reliably caught them up

**76%**

would use more of their available PTO if AI reliably caught them up

**69%**

say using AI tools could improve their work-life balance

AUDIENCE DEEP DIVES

Where the PTO burden is largest, so is the optimism for AI catch-up

BY GENERATION

Younger workers are the most anxious about PTO and work harder around time off

52%

of Gen Z considered not taking PTO at all due to work stress

vs 42% Millennials · 40% Gen X

24%

of Gen Z rate their first-week-back stress a 5 out of 5

vs 14% Millennials · 13% Gen X

69%

GEN Z

70%

MILLENNIALS

57%

GEN X

work extra hours before PTO to get ahead

65%

of Gen Z left some or most PTO unused last year

vs 55% Millennials · 55% Gen X

41%

of Gen Z check in at least once a day during PTO

vs 32% Millennials · 30% Gen X

81%

GEN Z

83%

MILLENNIALS

70%

GEN X

would **disconnect fully** if AI reliably caught them up

83%

GEN Z

81%

MILLENNIALS

70%

GEN X

would **use more of their available PTO** if AI reliably caught them up

BY ROLE

Managers have a larger re-entry tax and leave more time on the table

45%

of managers say PTO stress made them consider skipping time off

vs 35% Individual Contributors

60%

of managers left at least some PTO unused last year

vs 50% Individual Contributors

66%

of managers spend their first day back just clearing their inbox

vs 59% Individual Contributors

30%

of managers need 3–4 days before feeling fully caught up

vs 17% Individual Contributors

MANAGERS

83%

would **use more of their available PTO** if AI reliably caught them up

INDIVIDUAL CONTRIBUTORS

58%