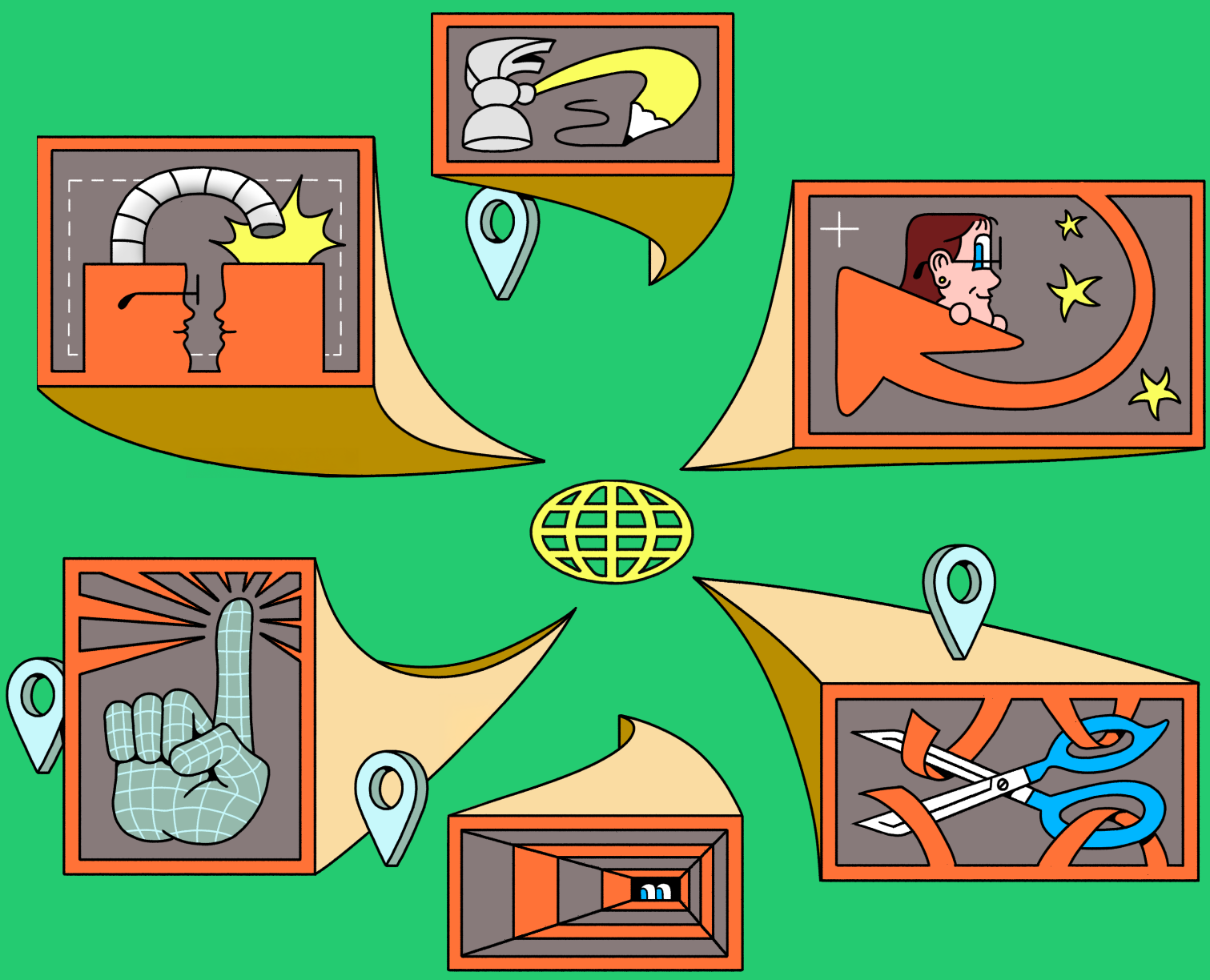
State of the Designer 2026



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As designers navigate new technologies and shifting norms, how are they turning these changes into creative momentum? Our annual report explores the tools, skills, and mindsets that can unlock success in an evolving landscape.

Design is at a turning point. New tools and technologies promise to reshape product development, introducing opportunities as well as uncertainties. Designers are discovering what these shifts can unlock: They're experimenting with AI, rethinking how they collaborate, and stretching their craft in ways that weren't possible even a few years ago. And as they look toward the future, they're reassessing the skills and support they need to do their best work.

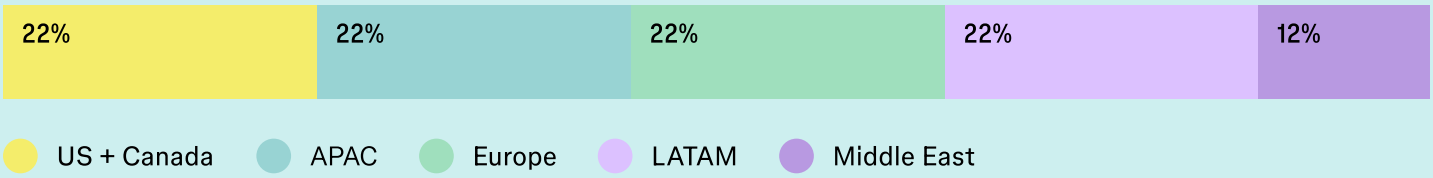
Our annual State of the Designer report explores how designers feel about their profession as the industry evolves. Last year's survey examined the impact of hybrid working models and the nascent influence of AI. Respondents knew that generative AI would change the design process in meaningful ways, but many were still figuring out how. This year, we wanted to double click on those changes, so we asked designers how AI tools are impacting not only their work, but also their outlook more broadly.

While there are still open questions, we have a clearer picture about what matters most to designers as the ground moves beneath them. What makes them happy, and what gives them pause? Here, we're sharing what we learned about their priorities, the challenges they face, and why they're optimistic about the road ahead.

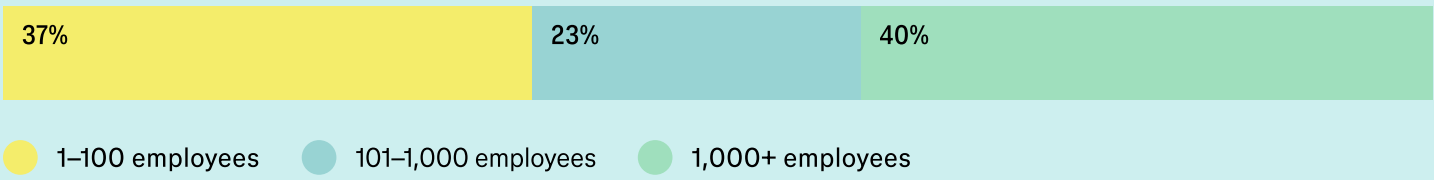
Methodology

Figma partnered with independent research firm NewtonX to conduct an online survey of 906 digital designers across North America, APAC, Europe, LATAM, and the Middle East. Conducted in September and October 2025, the survey asked a total of 25 qualitative and quantitative questions in seven languages: English, Spanish, French, Italian, Portuguese, Japanese, and Korean. The questions explored designers' sentiments about the profession and job market, job satisfaction and success, AI tools, and the craft of design.

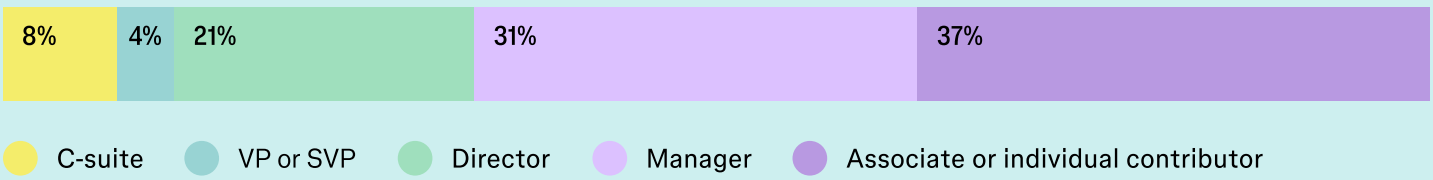
Regional breakdown



Organization size



Survey respondents by seniority



Terminology

- **Craft:** We asked respondents about their feelings on "craft" and their organization's "emphasis on craft." While designers define craft in different ways, we use it generally to describe the care and attention that goes into the design process. When we talk about an "emphasis on craft," we're referring to the way company leaders prioritize and value design excellence. We break this down into three key areas: whether respondents' leaders show an interest in design, help them develop their craft, and allow them to create work that makes them proud.

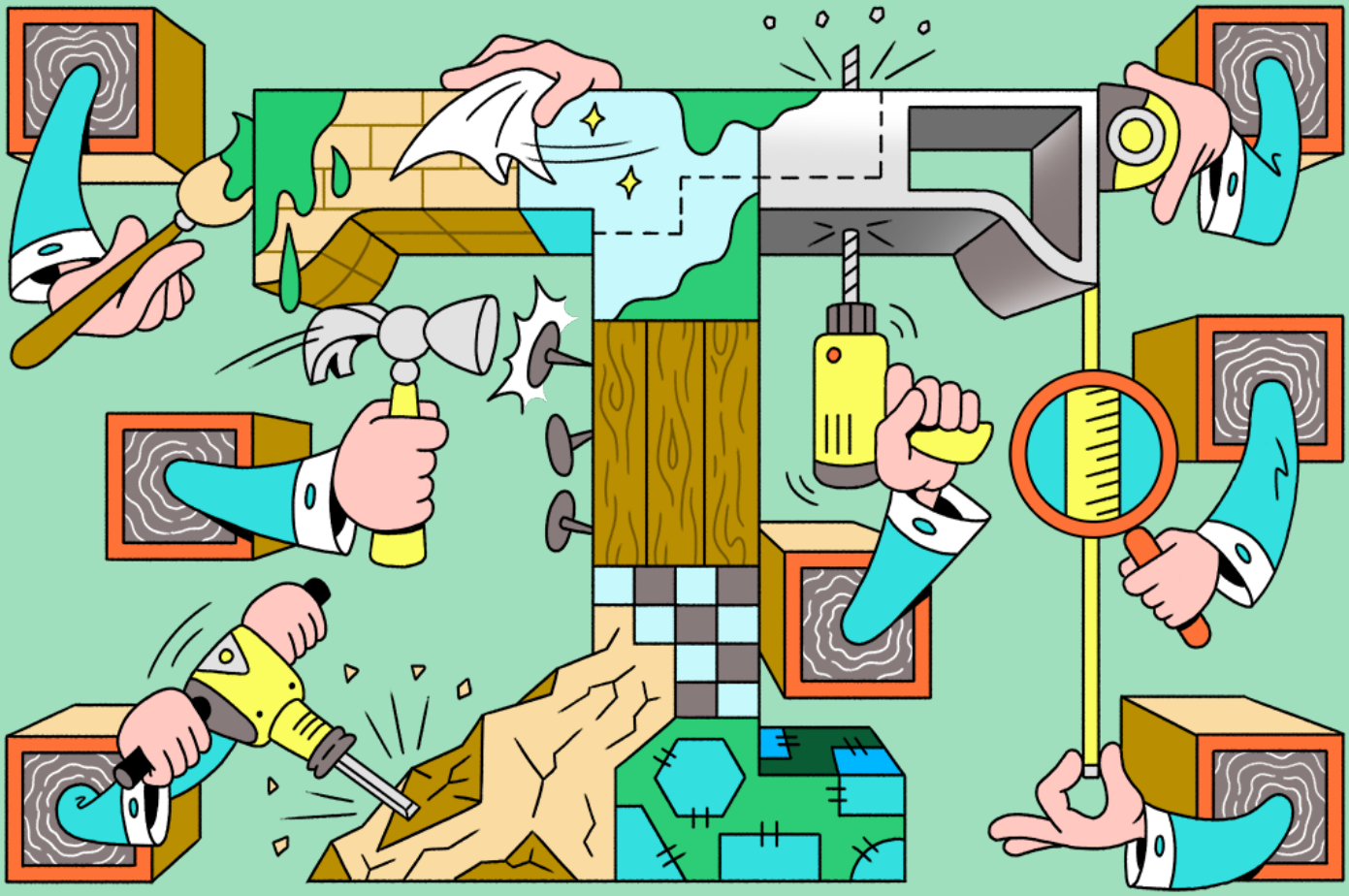
- **Job satisfaction:** We surveyed designers about whether their job satisfaction had increased, decreased, or stayed the same over the last year. Satisfaction is a measurement of how content designers are in their role, and we use "happiness" interchangeably in this report.

- **Company growth:** We asked designers if their company is growing faster, slower, or about the same than the industry average. When we talk about "growth," we mean how designers perceive it, not objective comparisons. Throughout this report, we also refer to growth as "business outcomes."

- **State of the profession:** We asked designers about their outlook on the "state of the design profession." When we say designers feel "better" or "worse" about the profession, we're referring to their overall sentiment toward the field. This could include the job market, their individual roles, the tools they use, or other industry trends contributing to their levels of optimism.

- **Regions:** When we discuss regional breakdowns, these are the groupings we use:
  - **APAC:** Australia, New Zealand, India, South Korea, Singapore, and Japan
  - **Europe:** UK, Germany, France, Italy, and Spain
  - **LATAM:** Brazil, Mexico, Argentina, Colombia, and Chile
  - **Middle East:** UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey
  - **North America:** United States and Canada

AI and creative outcomes



Designers are rapidly adopting AI with strong results, despite uncertainties

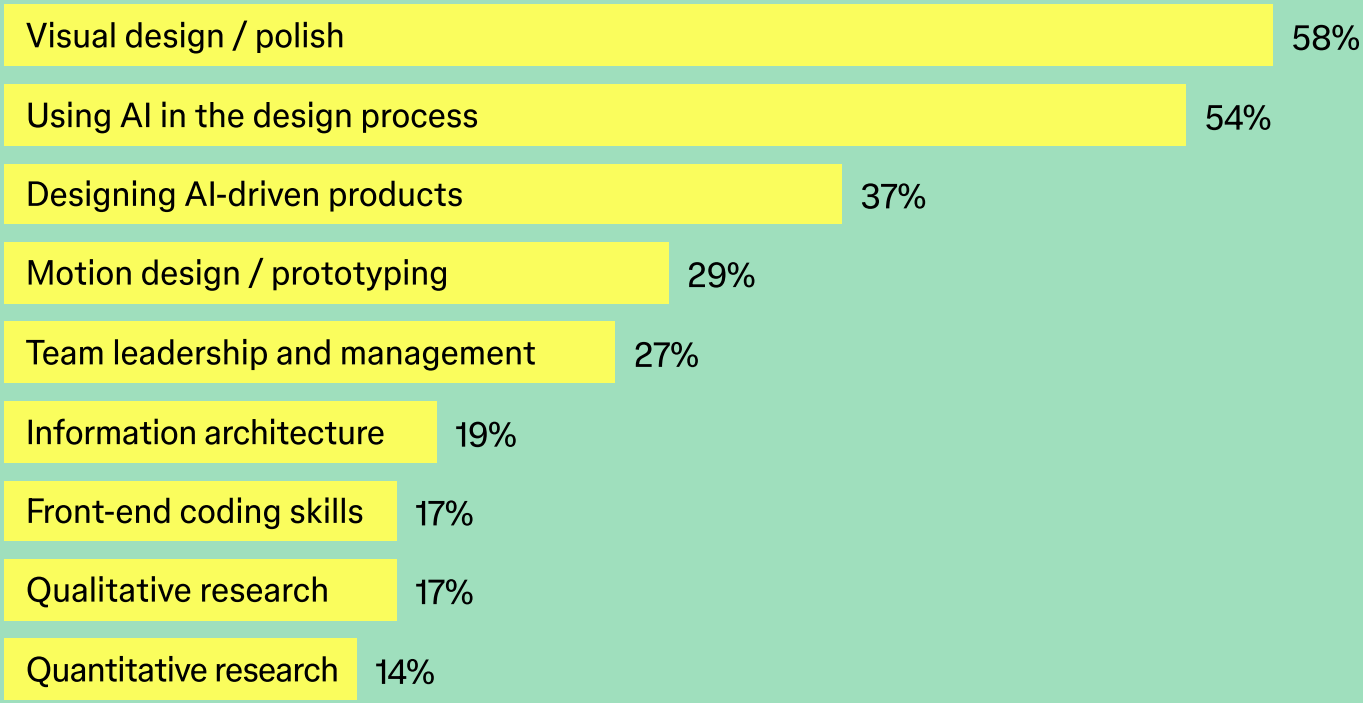
As AI reshapes the design process, many are tackling one of the biggest shifts they'll experience in their careers. "Designers are facing challenges in a rapidly changing work landscape," one Canadian freelance designer says. "From frequent updates and new features in standard design software... designers are forced to keep up in order to stay relevant." This feeling of pressure isn't surprising—but designers are taking meaningful strides to adapt. Over half (54%) say using AI is an in-demand skill, and 37% say the same of building AI tools. While these AI-centric skills eclipse motion design and prototyping, 29% of respondents still say that those core capabilities are the most important.

72%

of designers use generative AI tools, and **98%** increased their usage in the last year. Of those designers:

- **89%** say AI helps them work faster.
- **80%** say AI helps them collaborate more effectively.
- **91%** say AI improves the quality of their outputs.

Which skills are most in demand? We asked designers to select up to three:



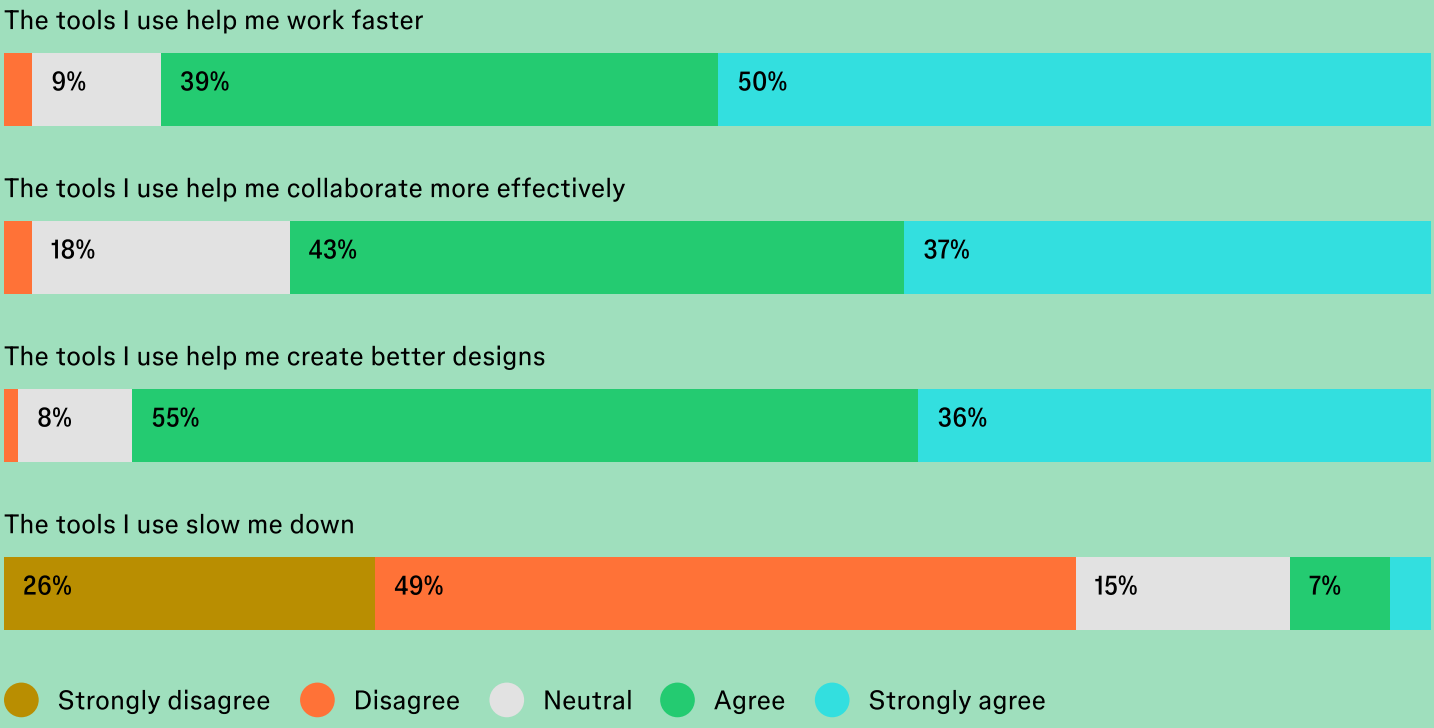
Designers say AI tools improve creative outputs

Using AI at work is more mainstream than it was even a year ago—new tools and improved models are released regularly, and generative AI is the fastest-growing category in the designer toolkit. The majority of designers (72%) are using it in their workflows, and nearly all (98%) say they've used it more in the last year. And this group reports remarkably positive impacts on their work. Despite fears about AI slop and low-quality outputs, in practice, designers are finding the opposite to be true. Those who increased their AI use in the last year overwhelmingly agree that their new tools help them create better designs (91%), work faster (89%), and collaborate more effectively (80%). As designers move from experimenting with AI to using it in earnest, they're seeing tangible impact on their craft.

57%

of product builders surveyed in 2025 said that AI helped them spend more time on high-value work.

The impact of AI tools on designer workflows



AI adopters are more satisfied than skeptics

Designers are still making sense of what new technologies and expectations mean for them. And as AI tools proliferate, so too do anxieties. While the most common perspective is that AI is a helpful tool that won't replace designers (43%), a quarter of designers express concerns about AI's impact on design jobs.

This uncertainty may explain other trends, too. Feeling new pressures to use AI, some designers may be wary of switching up workflows or afraid to make mistakes, and this plays out in the data. Forty percent of designers whose AI usage is stagnating report their job is getting worse—more than twice the rate of those whose AI usage is ramping up (18%). And designers who are leaning into AI are explicitly more satisfied: They're 25% more likely to report increasing happiness than those who aren't. These findings could reflect how AI skeptics are grappling with unresolved fears, both existential and practical. Experimenting with new tools makes them feel less intimidating—and designers who do report a more positive outlook.

> "AI can be an excellent tool to help designers do things better or faster [and] won't completely replace the design profession."

Brazilian designer in the financial services industry

AI accelerates momentum and exploration

This pattern extends beyond individual sentiment to perceptions of business momentum. The designers who are increasing their AI usage are more likely to say their company is growing faster than the industry average (41%) than those whose AI usage has stayed the same or declined (33%). It's possible that the teams championing AI are also the ones optimizing workflows, shipping more, or spending more time on high-impact ideas—all things that contribute to a sense of forward motion, extending to morale.

Crucially, these gains don't appear to come at the expense of craft or autonomy. When asked what they value most, respondents rank creative freedom at similar rates, regardless of how much they use AI. That parity matters. It indicates that for designers, AI and craft can not only coexist, but that they go hand in hand. AI can accelerate exploration while leaving the core creative decision-making up to designers. In fact, this was a through line in our findings: Connection to craft is central to the designer experience.

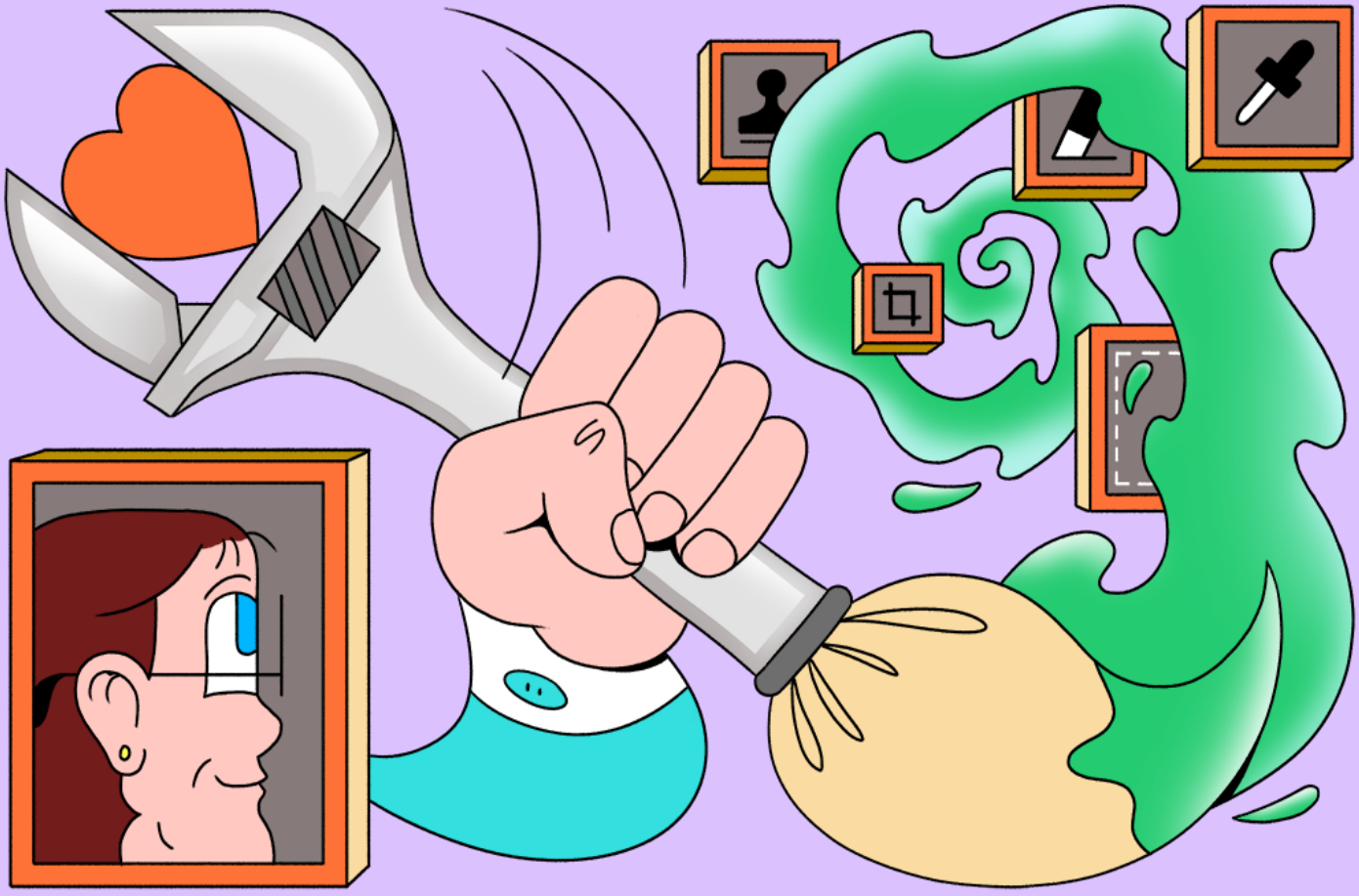
Related reading

Perspectives: Building a culture of AI experimentation

Product teams are navigating new pressures from their organizations to move faster and push further. To ship at this pace while keeping craft high, design leaders need to create a culture that supports risk-taking, celebrates bold mistakes, and encourages more dynamic ways of working.

Read Lessons from leaders: Building a culture of AI experimentation to learn how design leaders from Ramp, Target, SAP, and more are guiding their teams into a new era of product building.

The concept of craft

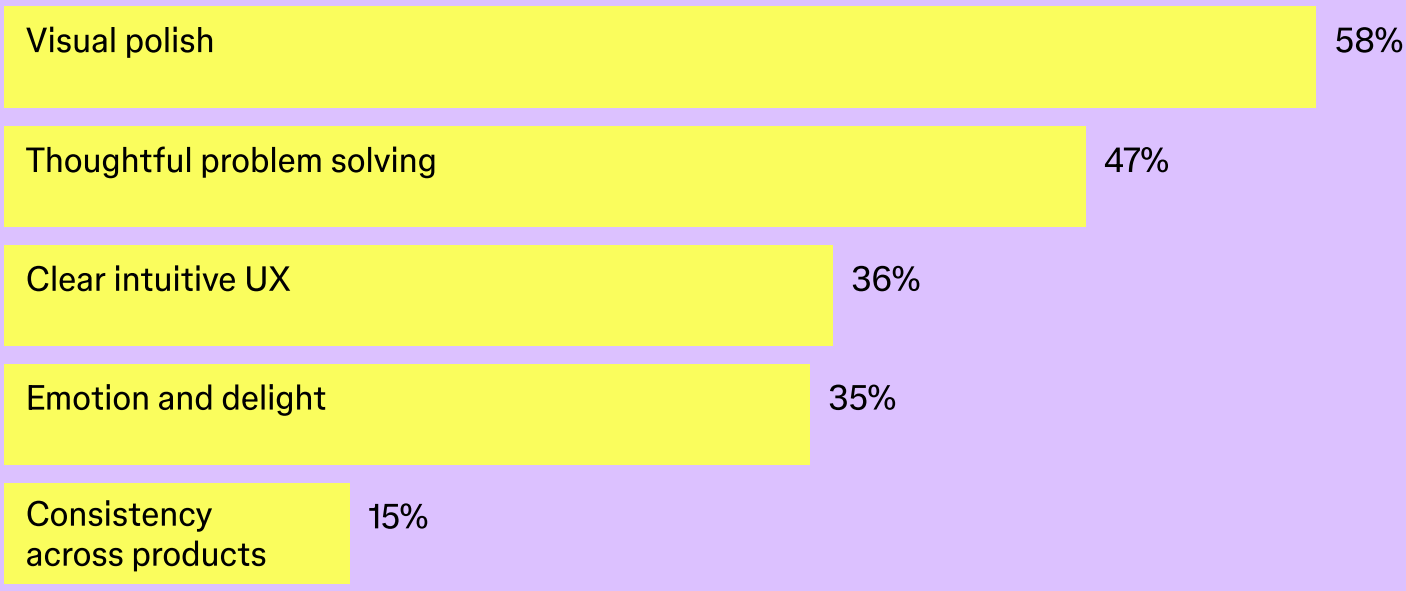


Craft is king—and subjective

In an era where anyone can use AI to prompt their way to a prototype, craft—the choices behind user interactions, visual systems, language, and product quality—becomes the differentiator. It's also subjective. We asked respondents to rank how they define craft, and "visual polish and attention to detail" is the most common interpretation (57%). "To me, 'craft' means skill, detail, and intentional effort," says one designer based in India. "It is not just about creating something, but doing it with care, precision, and artistry."

"Thoughtful problem solving and systems thinking" is the second-most commonly cited definition (47%), followed by "clear, intuitive user experiences," "emotion and delight in the experience," and "consistency across products and platforms." Responses to open-ended questions further emphasize skill and expertise (36%), the creative process (22%), and quality and excellence (20%) as fundamental to craft.

What is craft? We asked designers to select up to three definitions:



Designers who tie craft to emotion and visual quality are more optimistic

Definitions of craft that align more closely with creative outputs are linked to increased designer happiness. Those who associate craft with “visual polish” or “emotion and delight” report higher job satisfaction and better business outcomes, while designers who define it as problem solving are the least likely to report these benefits. It could be that designers who interpret excellence as tangible, high-quality deliverables are happier because they receive direct recognition for their craft—a visually delightful design results in words of appreciation from colleagues and customers. But for those who view their craft as an analytical input, the rewards may be less visible and overlooked.

> “To me, 'craft' means skill, detail, and intentional effort. It is not just about creating something, but doing it with care, precision, and artistry."
>
> **Indian designer** in the media industry

Designers are happier when their leaders prioritize craft

No matter the definition, craft proves to be a signal of designer happiness. We asked respondents about their companies' "emphasis on craft," which we broke down in three key ways: whether leaders show an interest in design, help designers develop their craft, and allow them to create work that makes them proud. For many, the way their team prioritizes design excellence materially impacts not only how they feel their work is perceived and supported, but also their outlook on the design profession more broadly. Forty-five percent say their company has increasingly focused on craft in the last year. Of this group, the majority say their job satisfaction has increased—in fact, they're twice as likely to be happier in their jobs and more optimistic about the field than designers whose companies lack this focus.

67%

of designers whose companies have increased their emphasis on craft are happier in their job.

The strongest indication that an organization cares about craft comes directly from leadership. Designers tend to feel more positively when company leaders give time and attention to design excellence. This could look like promoting design's role in product strategy, linking design to business outcomes, or amplifying positive feedback and recognition. Among those who see interest in their designs from leadership, the majority (60%) are more satisfied in their job compared to those who don't.

60%

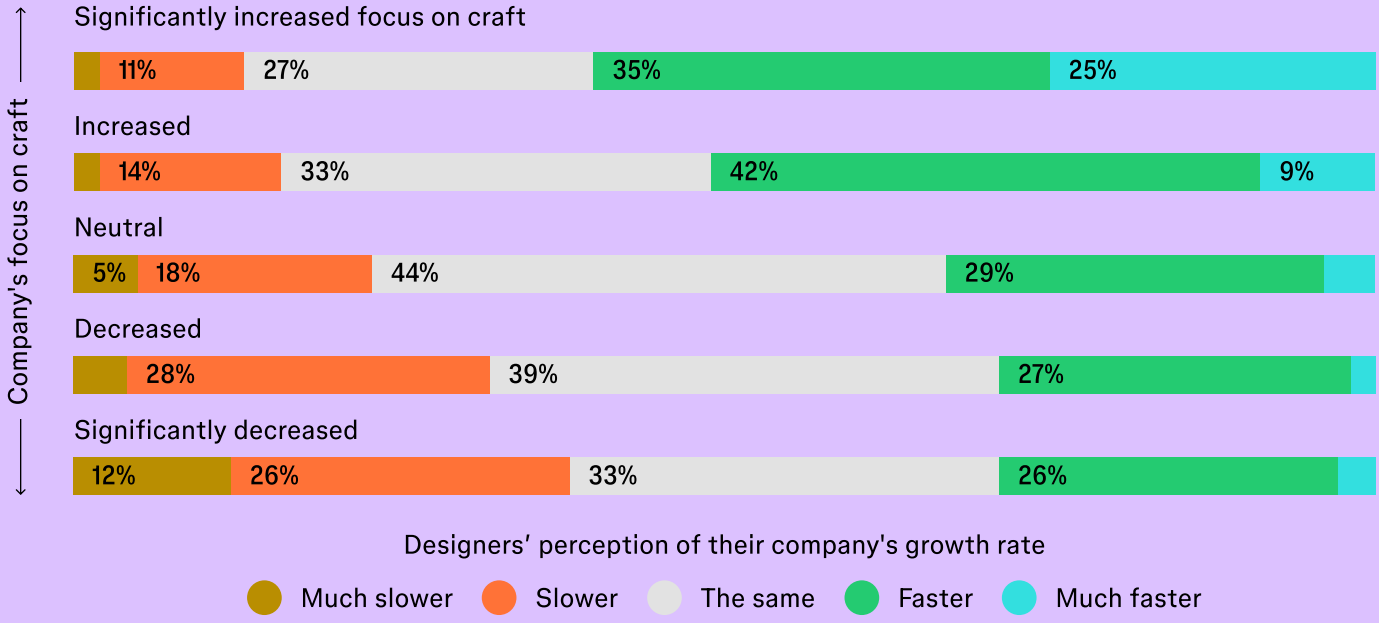
of designers are happier in their job when leadership pays attention to their work.

We see a similar pattern when leaders offer designers the room to further their craft and feel proud of their work. Over half of designers who had these opportunities report higher satisfaction in their job. Pride, in this sense, functions as both an outcome of craft-focused practices and a leading indicator of engagement.

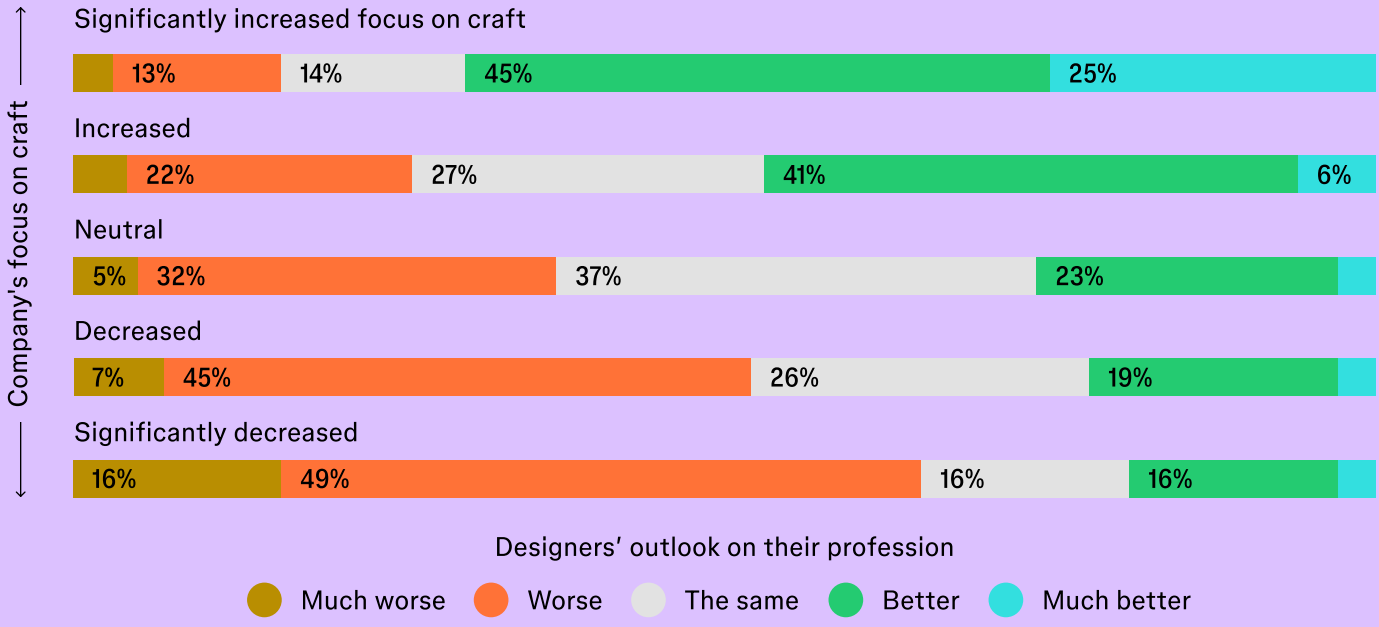
Craft correlates with better outlooks

Designers who say their leaders are invested in craft are more likely to report better business outcomes, perceiving their companies as growing faster than the industry average. They also have an improved outlook on the state of the profession—showing that craft is key to the designer experience at all altitudes.

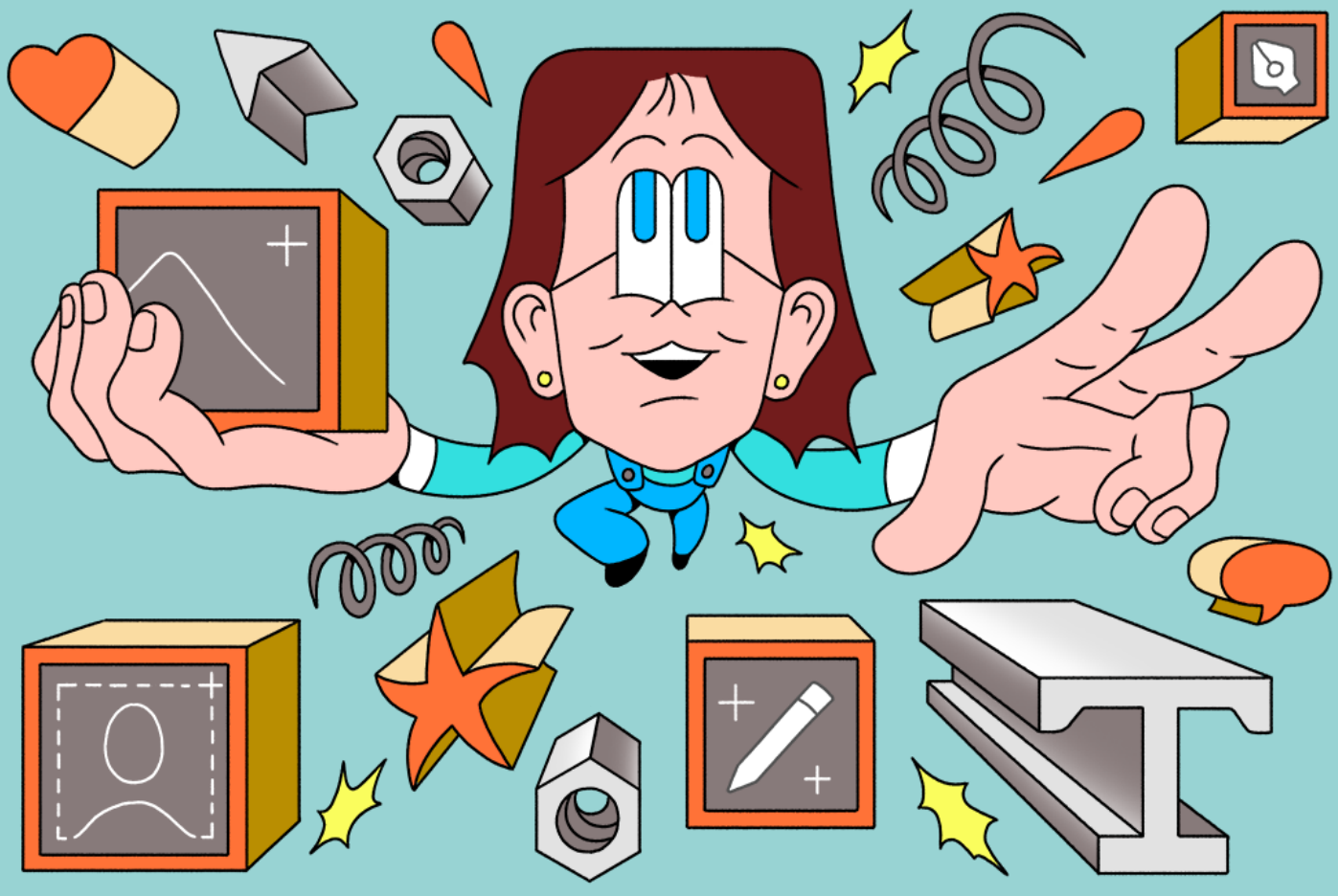
The correlation between craft and business growth



The correlation between craft and optimism about the profession



Creative freedom and happiness



Designers value creative freedom, clarity, and collaboration

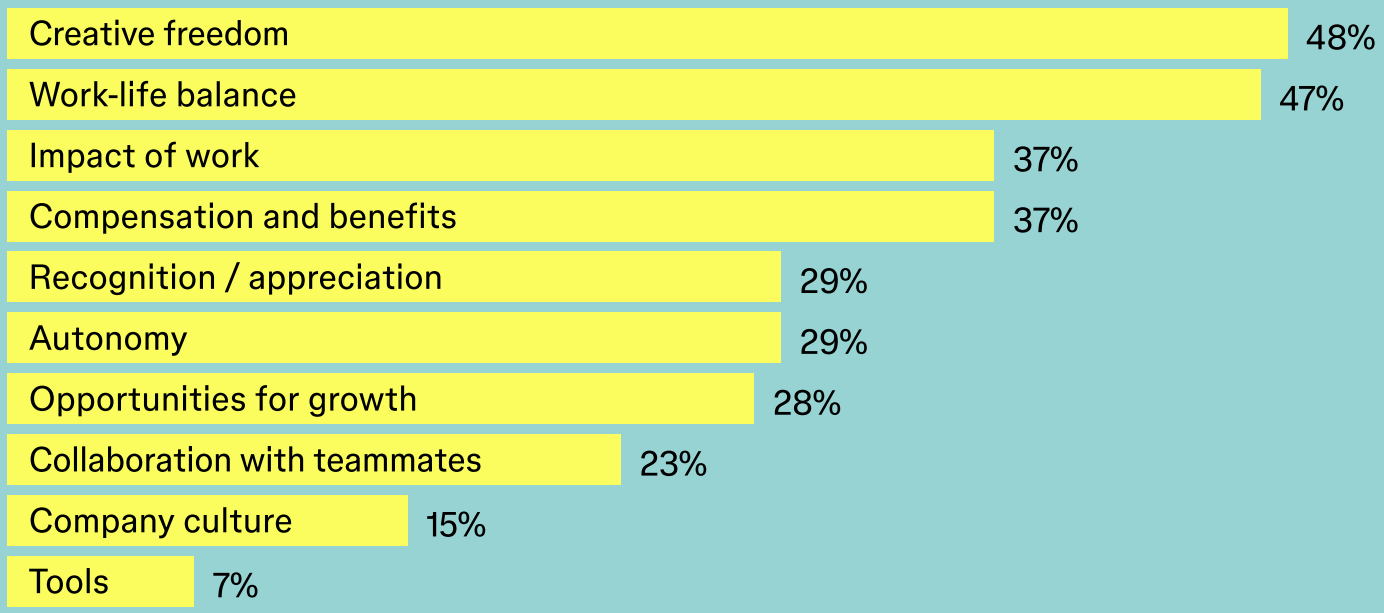
One theme comes through loud and clear: Designers are happiest when they have creative freedom. In fact, it's the number-one contributor to overall happiness, with 29% of respondents ranking it at the top, and nearly half placing it in their top three.

Whether it's breaking out of existing frameworks or using quick prototypes to experiment with new directions, creative freedom is about having the space and support to explore bold ideas. Design is an inherently creative profession, and as AI introduces automation, designers strive to retain creative influence. "The increase in the use of AI tools makes things much faster, but at the same time, makes everything seem too perfect and too generic," says one Brazilian designer. "The precise designer's vision is what makes the difference."

29%

of designers rank creative freedom as the top factor in their happiness at work. **48%** say it's in their top three.

The most important job attributes, according to designers



"The craft has matured. AI has automated a lot of surface-level design work, so now the value lies in systems thinking and the ability to translate complexity into clarity."

Italian freelance designer

Not only does creative freedom make designers happy, it helps them do their jobs better. Eighty-seven percent of designers agree that decision-making power boosts their job performance, and many report better business outcomes tied to increased autonomy.

87%

of designers say autonomy helps them do their best work.

While designers crave the space to work independently, they still benefit from clarity: Nearly all (91%) of designers say that clear goals and expectations help them do their best work. This desire for structure comes as AI tools are dissolving traditional boundaries in product design. "The craft has matured," says one Italian freelance designer. "AI has automated a lot of surface-level design work, so now the value lies in systems thinking and the ability to translate complexity into clarity."

On the other hand, what prevents designers from doing their best work?

- Lack of clarity and direction
- Micromanagement and poor leadership
- Lack of communication and feedback
- Unrealistic timelines

Armed with tools that provide this automation, non-designers are increasingly able to participate in the process. Most designers welcome collaboration—90% agree that it's key to producing good work. But these fluid swimlanes are new territory for many. When the ground is shifting beneath them, both in their work and their ways of working, designers are looking for stability and connection. Concrete objectives and a shared vision act as both anchor and compass to help design teams stay on track.

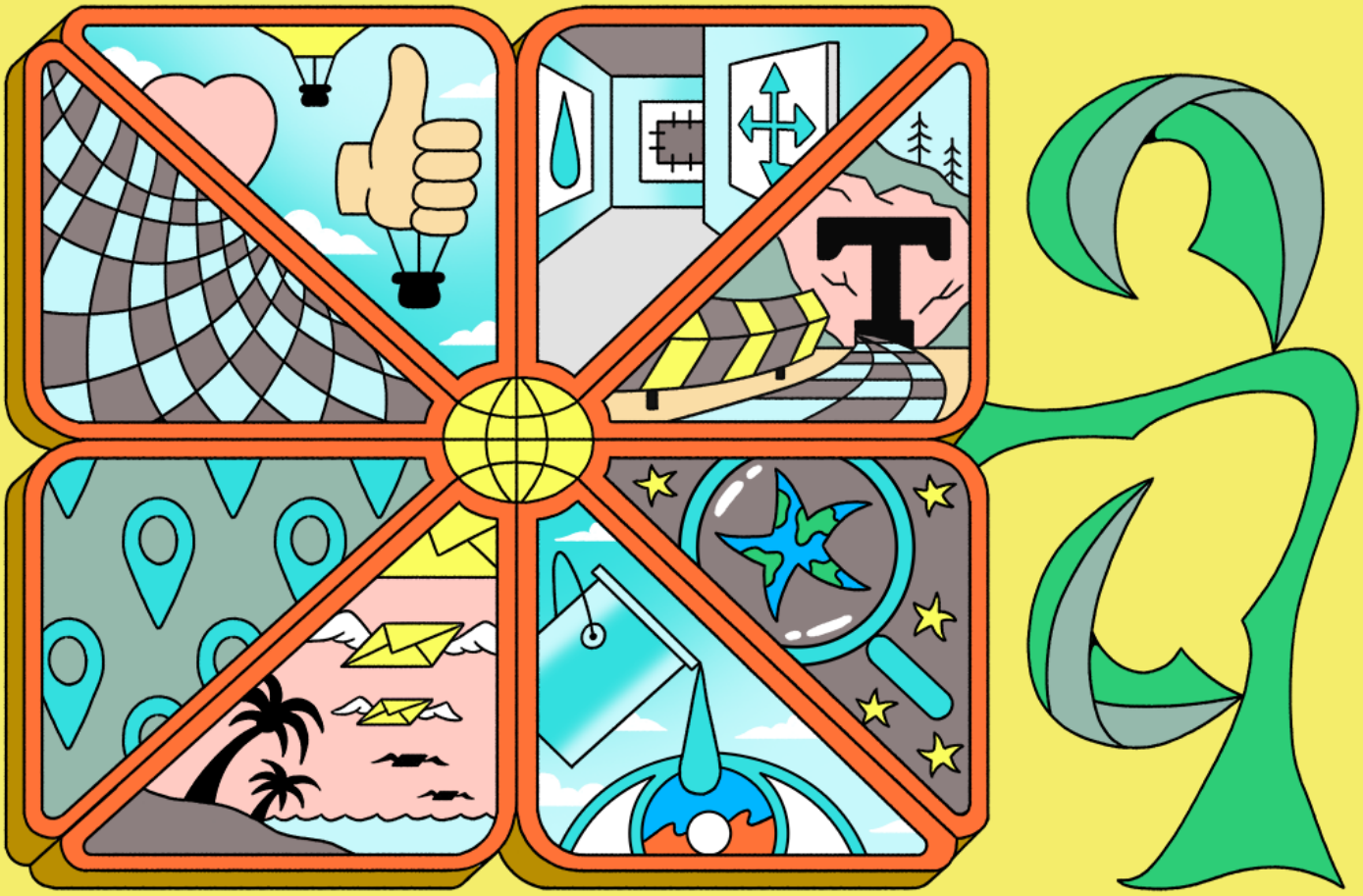
Related reading

Figma research: Shifting roles in the design process

The roles that shape product development are no longer neatly defined. New AI tools are democratizing design, inviting PMs and developers to participate in the process while helping designers step into higher-order strategic thinking. As the market adapts, product teams are wrestling with evolving boundaries that bring traditional titles into question.

Read Shifting roles: How product teams are evolving in 2025 to learn more about how roles are blurring, shifting, and deepening, and what that means for how we build.

A field in flux



Globally, designers are split on the state of the profession

36%

of designers say the state of the profession has gotten better, **35%** say it's gotten worse, and **29%** say it's stayed the same.

Designers interpret macro forces and pressures differently; for example, while some see new technologies as a threat to their workflows and craft, others see them as a way to push ideas further. The data reflects these diverging attitudes. Respondents are more or less evenly divided on whether the profession has gotten better (36%), worse (35%), or stayed the same (29%) over the last year. Lacking a dominant perspective, the balanced distribution of responses indicates that designers aren't experiencing industry shifts as a collective whole, but with far more nuance. One through line, however, is that designers generally offered tempered responses. The vast majority (89%) selected moderate ways to describe the profession, replying with "better," "worse," or "about the same" as opposed to "much better" or "much worse."

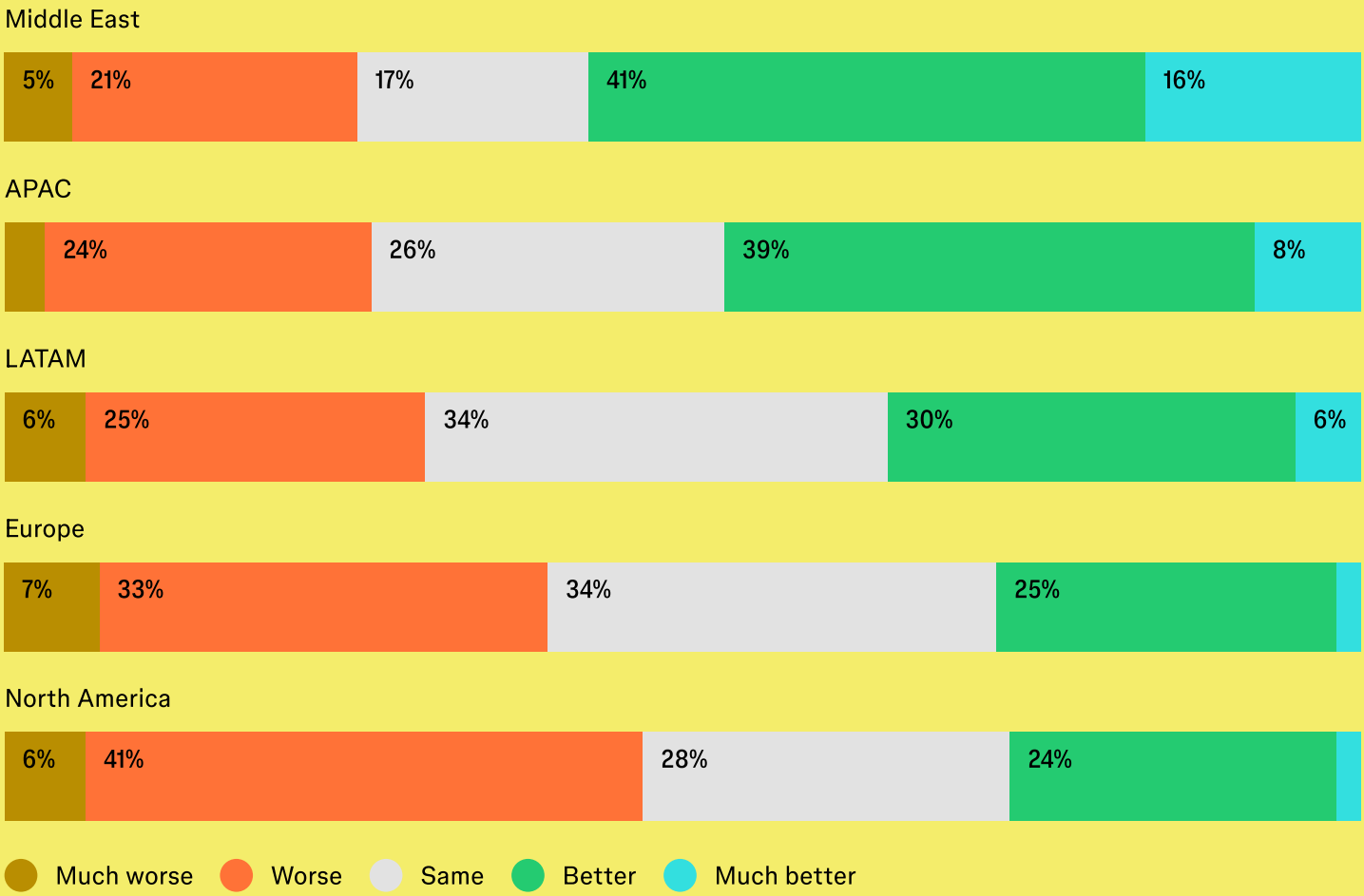
Feelings about the field correlate with perceived strength of the job market: 71% of designers who believe the market has improved also feel better about the state of their profession, whereas 60% report the inverse. But sentiments vary across regions and economic climates, revealing a field that's evolving unevenly rather than universally.

The Middle East's digital economy is booming, and its designers are the most optimistic. Over 70% have positive or neutral outlooks on the market and profession. By contrast, those in North America (63%) and Europe (59%) believe the job market has declined, likely a result of widely publicized and ongoing layoffs. Meanwhile, APAC and LATAM sit in the middle.

Like feelings toward the field, job satisfaction is closely tied to local market dynamics. Designers in regions with growing tech industries are the most content in their jobs: Those in the Middle East (63%), APAC (56%), and LATAM (56%) are substantially more satisfied compared to those in North America and Europe (both 38%). However, designers in North America are also the most neutral, with 42% saying their happiness at work hasn't changed. Europe, on the other hand, has the sharpest decline in satisfaction (26%).

Instead of signaling instability, this divergence in attitudes points to a profession expanding in multiple directions at once—creating new opportunities, pressures, and interpretations of success. The design profession is in flux, but not in decline. Designers are learning to navigate a landscape where optimism and uncertainty coexist, and where context increasingly shapes confidence.

How designers rate their profession compared to last year



The designer in 2026

This year, the state of the designer is one of transition. Our findings paint a picture of a profession in motion—balancing optimism, uncertainty, and creative integrity. Even while designers grapple with underlying questions about AI, they're actively recalibrating and adapting. They're experimenting with new tools while reinforcing that their work is profoundly human. Design excellence continues to anchor the profession, acting as the connective tissue between technological acceleration and enduring creative values. The designers who thrive this year and beyond will be those who harness AI to amplify their thinking while protecting the craft, judgment, and collaboration that define exceptional design.

Key takeaways

AI shapes the narrative. Designers who embrace new tools are finding more speed, clarity, and creative range, reshaping both their workflows and their expectations for what design can be. Most understand that AI doesn't replace design, but that adaptability is a core competency. The designers who thrive will be those who treat AI as a catalyst for higher-value work.

Craft is at the core of the designer experience. As tools evolve faster than ever, designers are returning to craft—the quality, intention, and emotional resonance behind the work—as their north star. The organizations that invest in nurturing this craft by providing development opportunities and celebrating excellent work will see better morale and stronger momentum.

Designers need space to create. Creative freedom remains essential to designers' happiness. But they still need direction, especially as AI broadens who participates in the process. Designers are asking for both empowerment and clarity: the ability to push ideas forward, anchored by shared goals, communication, and trust. The future of product building will depend on teams that can strike this balance, pairing bold exploration with the structure needed to move quickly and cohesively.



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