

The Time-Tech Conundrum

**Balancing the need and time for tech
in modern accounting practices.**

2026 Industry
Research Report



Foreword

The accounting profession in Australia has never lacked ambition. Practices work tirelessly to deliver not only accuracy and compliance, but also strategic insight, while navigating growing workloads, evolving legislation and constant change. At Dext, we see this every day. We've also come to understand that technology, the very thing designed to reduce this burden, has become one of its biggest contributors.

Four years ago, we published the original *Tackling the Time / Tech Conundrum* report, highlighting a challenge the profession already felt but hadn't yet clearly defined: the technology designed to save time also demands time to implement and master. That insight resonated across the region and has shaped how we approach our role as a software provider.

Four years on, the challenge hasn't disappeared. If anything, it has intensified as technology continues to evolve.

This year's research, based on responses from 412 Australian accounting professionals, reveals a profession experiencing both meaningful progress and ongoing frustration. AI is delivering measurable productivity gains for most users, yet platform overwhelm has increased by 50% since 2022. While the time required to adopt new technology has grown, and practitioners still lose an average of two hours each day to tasks they believe technology should already be handling.

What makes this particularly significant is that Australian and New Zealand practices have long been leaders in cloud accounting and digital adoption. They invested early, built sophisticated technology stacks, and developed their capabilities ahead of many global markets. Their frustration isn't driven by resistance to change, but by questioning whether today's technology is delivering its promise.

The data shows that the profession's challenge is no longer awareness or access to technology. It is integration, accuracy and change fatigue.

At Dext, we see this as a clear mandate. Practices have invested heavily in new systems, refined their workflows and committed significant time to learning. They now expect software providers to deliver tools that integrate seamlessly, work reliably and accurately, and evolve in ways that support, rather than disrupt their businesses. Those are expectations we're committed to meeting.

I hope this report provides an honest reflection of where the profession stands today while offering valuable insight into what comes next. As practitioners navigate an increasingly complex technology landscape, providers like Dext have a responsibility to make that journey simpler.

Paul Wittich General Manager
Dext Asia Pacific



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Executive summary

Four years ago, we published *Tackling the Time / Tech Conundrum report* and found an industry under strain. The primary theme we identified was the concept of the 'time-tech conundrum'.

The core of the issue is that accountants and bookkeepers are struggling for time and need technology to help save them, but they need the time to research, adopt and implement tech, leading to a never-ending cycle.

With the introduction of AI, we're seeing this continue to play out, even deepen, with more platforms becoming available, but without due thought about how accountants can actually use these and align them with their existing tech stack to improve their workloads.

Here's what we found in this year's study:

AI is here, and it's helping.

Eighty-five percent of practitioners now use AI for at least one task, and 71% report productivity gains. Stress levels have dropped 15 percentage points since 2022.

But the overwhelm hasn't gone away.

Platform fatigue has grown and 72% feel pressured to stay up to date with technology and 39% say that pressure has worsened since AI arrived.

The impact of AI is not even.

Nearly half the profession (46%) says AI has improved their workload and stress. Yet nearly half (48%) report no improvement or active harm.

The manual work problem persists.

Despite four years of technology investment, 82% of practitioners still lose at least one hour daily to tasks they believe technology could handle.

The path forward is consolidation, not proliferation.

Time remains the top barrier to adoption (65%), followed by cost concerns (52%).

Key takeaways



AI adoption is wide but shallow

While 85% of practitioners now use AI, usage clusters around narrow, transactional tasks like data extraction (48%) and research (45%). High adoption doesn't equal high impact; the profession has scratched the surface but has yet to unlock transformational gains.



The manual work burden has gotten worse

Despite four years of technology investment and reported productivity gains, 82% of practitioners still lose at least one hour daily to tasks they believe technology could handle, up from 75% in 2022. The average time lost has risen from 1.4 to 1.9 hours per day.



AI has created a "winner's gap", nearly half see no benefit or harm

The impact of AI is starkly uneven. While 46% report AI has improved their workload and stress, 48% report no improvement or active worsening. For nearly one in five (19%), AI has made things explicitly worse. The profession is splitting into those who've integrated AI successfully and those drowning in the additional complexity it brings.



The path forward is consolidation and accuracy, not more features

Practitioners are clear about what they need: fewer platforms that integrate better, automation of manual data entry and client chasing, and, critically, accuracy before speed. They've done their part mapping processes and building verification workflows; now they need vendors to deliver tools that work reliably without constant relearning. The mandate is "evolution, not revolution", change fatigue is real and actively slowing adoption.

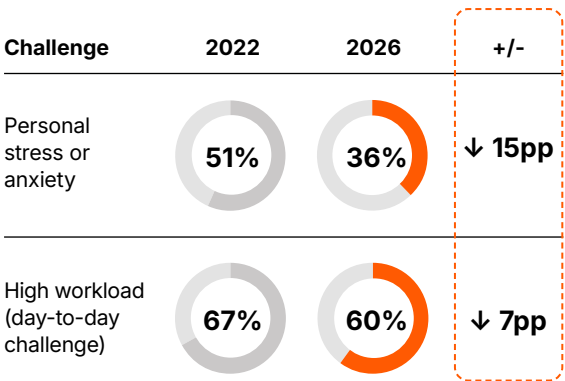
2022 vs 2026: Four years on

In 2022, we published the original *Tackling the Time / Tech Conundrum* report amid a profession that was overworked, overwhelmed, and searching for solutions. Four years on, the landscape has shifted. Some pressures have eased. Others have intensified. And some haven't moved at all.

What's Improved

Stress is down 15 percentage points and 'high workload' day-to-day stress is down

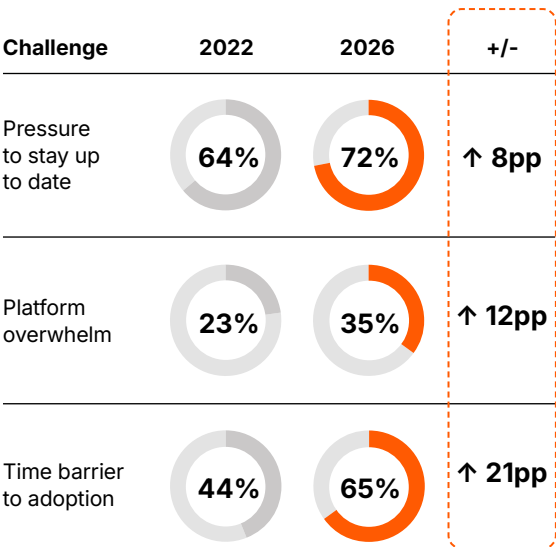
Personal stress and anxiety has dropped from 51% to 36% since 2022. High workload as a day-to-day challenge has eased from 67% to 60%.



What's Worsened

Platform overwhelm has grown 50%, AI has added to the pressure, not reduced it

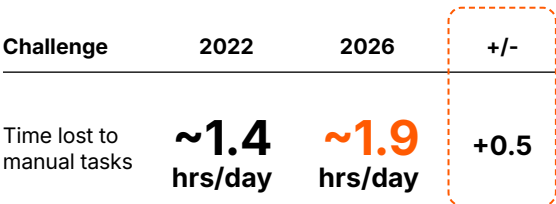
The pressure to stay up to date has climbed from 64% to 72%. Platform overwhelm has jumped from 23% to 35%, a 50% increase. Overwhelm with organisational tech adoption has risen from 31% to 42%. And the time barrier to adoption has surged from 44% to 65%.



What's Unchanged

57% still lose 1–2 hours daily to manual tasks, unchanged in four years

Despite four years of technology investment, the manual work burden has not moved. In 2022, practitioners averaged 1.4 hours per day on tasks they believed technology could handle. In 2026, 82% still lose at least 1 hour daily, roughly 10 hours per week of recoverable capacity.



Section 1

A profession under pressure

The profession faces pressure from workload, talent shortages, and tech complexity. Before discussing solutions, the data must establish the scale of the problem.

1.1 Practice-level challenges

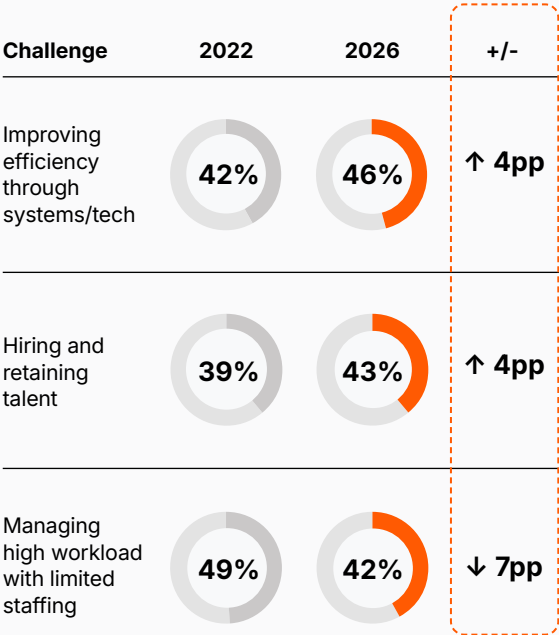
46% cite tech efficiency as their #1 practice challenge, ahead of talent and workload

When asked to identify their top three practice-level challenges, Australian accounting professionals put technology efficiency at the top of the list (46%). This is slightly ahead of hiring and retaining talent (43%) and managing high workload (42%).

These three challenges are tightly linked. Better systems free capacity, which eases staffing pressure and reduces burnout.

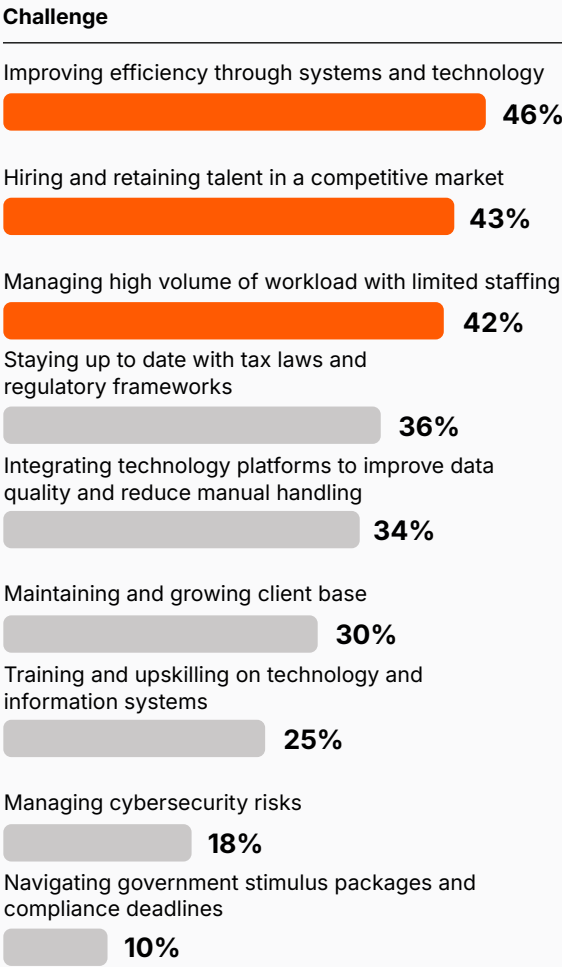
Overall, the observation that improving systems and technology is now the number one challenge faced by practices highlights that accounting professionals are trying to juggle clients, compliance and technology, with technology being the most common challenge.

What's changed since 2022:



Workload pressure has eased post-pandemic, but talent and tech efficiency challenges have intensified. The profession has shifted from crisis mode to optimisation mode.

What are the top three challenges faced by your practice? (2026)



Source: n=412, multi-select (top 3)

1.2 Day-to-day work challenges

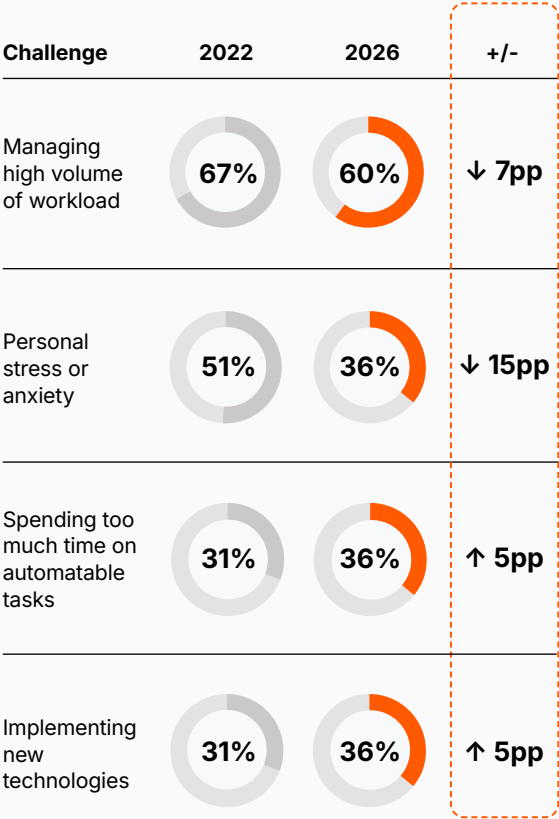
60% cite high workload as their top daily challenge. Stress is down 15pp, but friction is rising

In exploring the day-to-day challenges of professionals, we found that managing high workload remains the dominant day-to-day challenge, but the nature of the stress has shifted to the professional's 'potential'.

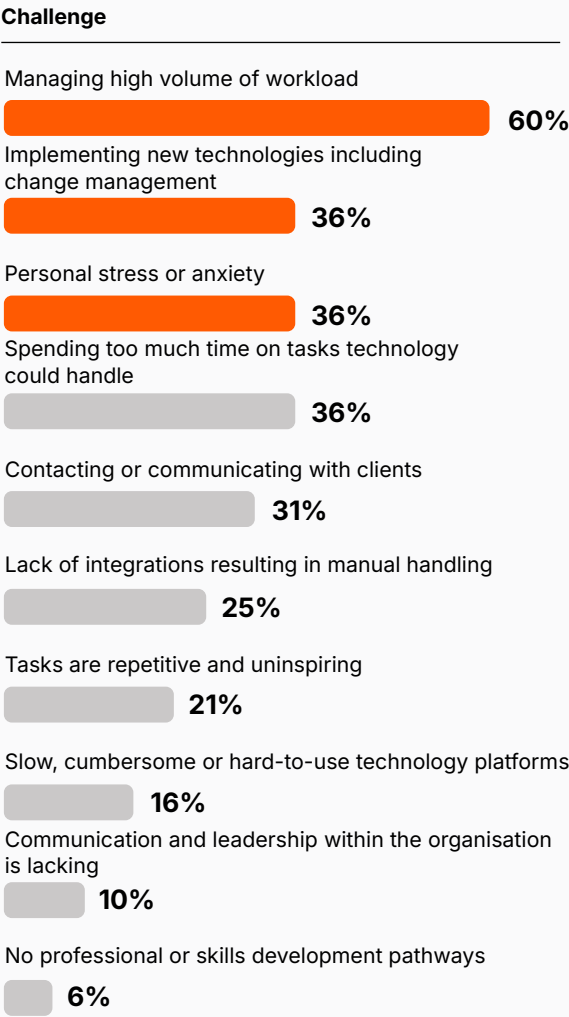
In 2022, personal stress and anxiety ranked second at 51%. In 2026, it dropped to 36%, a 15 percentage point decline.

Taking its place, however, is frustration with manual tasks (36%) and implementing new technologies (36%) which now rival stress as daily pain points, highlighting that the expectations of professionals are now higher as they know what's possible with new technologies.

What's changed since 2022:



What are the top three challenges you face in your day-to-day work?



Source: n=412, multi-select (top 3)

1.3 The manual work problem

57% lose 1–2 hours daily to manual tasks, unchanged since 2022

Despite four years of technology investment, the manual work burden has not moved. In 2022, practitioners averaged 1.4 hours per day on tasks they believed technology could handle.

Fast forward to 2026, 82% still lose at least one hour daily with an average of 1.9 hours per day across the board.

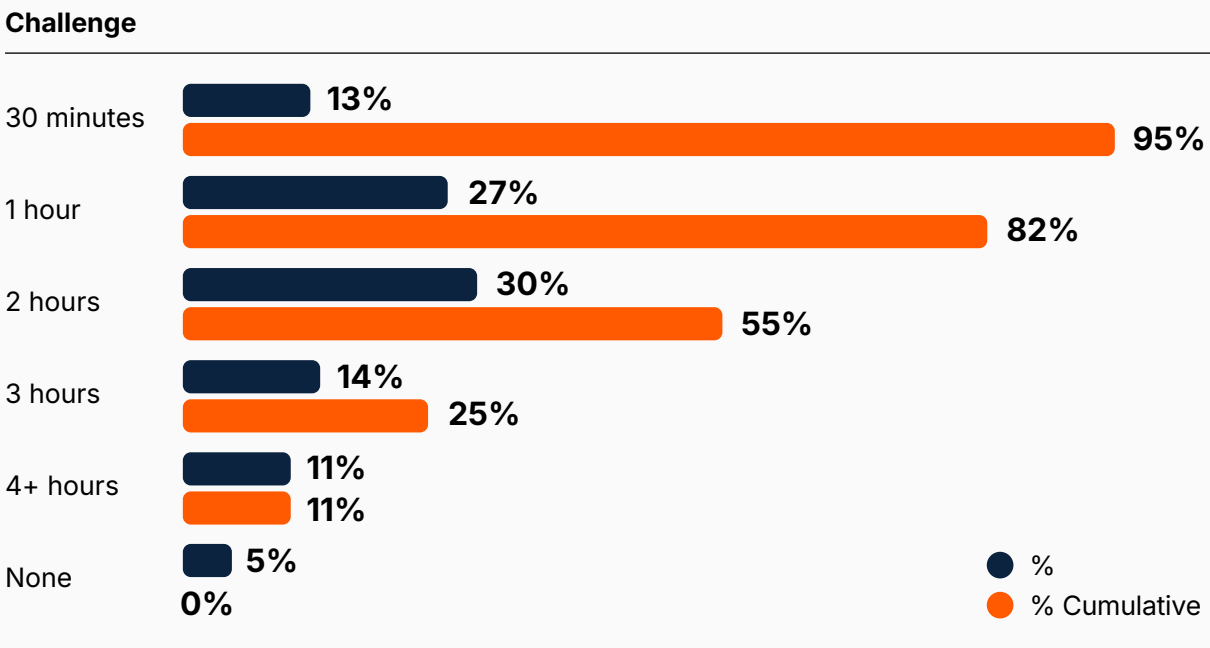
Despite the reported productivity gains from tools like AI, it appears that the ‘perceived’ time spent on automatable tasks has not changed.

The question we must ask here is whether these tasks are the same as they were in 2022 or whether the goalposts have now shifted with the new potential of technology.

What's changed since 2022:

Challenge	2022	2026	+/-
Average time lost to manual tasks	~1.4 hrs/day	~1.9 hrs/day	+0.5
Practitioners losing 1+ hours/day	75%	82%	+ 7pp

How much time per day do you spend completing manual tasks that you believe could be handled by technology?



Source: n=412, multi-select (top 3)

1.4 The pressure to keep up

72% feel pressured to stay up to date with technology, up 8pp since 2022

Nearly three-quarters of Australian accounting professionals feel pressured to stay current with the latest technology.

From 64% in 2022, it rose to 72% in 2026, out of which nearly a quarter (24%) strongly agree.

While AI was supposed to simplify things, it added an unintended layer of complexity. As new tools emerge faster than the profession can meaningfully adopt them, practitioners find themselves stretched across multiple new platforms and technologies.

What's changed since 2022:

Challenge	2022	2026	+/-
Feel pressured to stay up to date	64%	72%	↑ 8pp
Overwhelmed by number of platforms I use	23%	35%	↑ 12pp
Overwhelmed by org adopting new tech	31%	42%	↑ 11pp

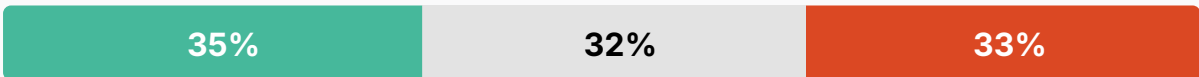
How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

Challenge

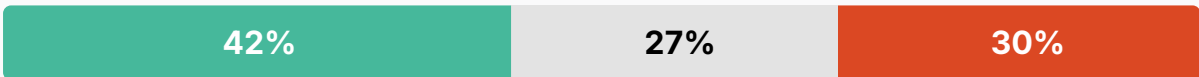
I feel pressured to stay up to date with the latest technology



I feel overwhelmed by the number of platforms I use



I feel overwhelmed by my organisation adopting new technologies



● Agree ● Neutral ● Disagree

Source: n=412. "Agree" combines Strongly agree + Agree. "Disagree" combines Disagree + Strongly disagree

1.5 Overwhelm hasn't gone away

39% say pressure to stay updated has worsened since AI arrived

Since the introduction of AI, we hear that there are more solutions available, with more options and avenues possible to solve a single problem.

The challenge with this is that it is causing increased tech overwhelm and fatigue among accounting professionals.

Each dimension of tech overwhelm have net negative results (when comparing positive to negative percentages of each statement).

We found that nearly four in ten practitioners (39%) say the pressure to stay up to date has worsened since AI arrived.

Overall, this insight highlights that accounting professionals are now trying to manage an even greater list of potential solutions and it's having a negative impact on their ability to navigate the accounting tech landscape.

How have your feelings of overwhelm changed in these areas since the introduction of AI?

Dimension	Improved	Same	Worsened	Net impact
I feel pressured to stay up to date with the latest technology	19%	41%	39%	-20pp
I feel overwhelmed with the idea of my organisation adopting new technologies	22%	47%	31%	-9pp
I feel overwhelmed with the number of technology platforms I use	19%	56%	24%	-5pp

Source: n=412. "Improved" combines Significantly + Somewhat improved. "Worsened" combines Somewhat + Significantly worsened

Section 2

The impact of AI, adoption & productivity gaps

AI adoption is accelerating but not yet delivering its full promise. A "productivity gap" persists where early gains are real, but the larger opportunity remains untapped.

2.1 Where AI is being used today

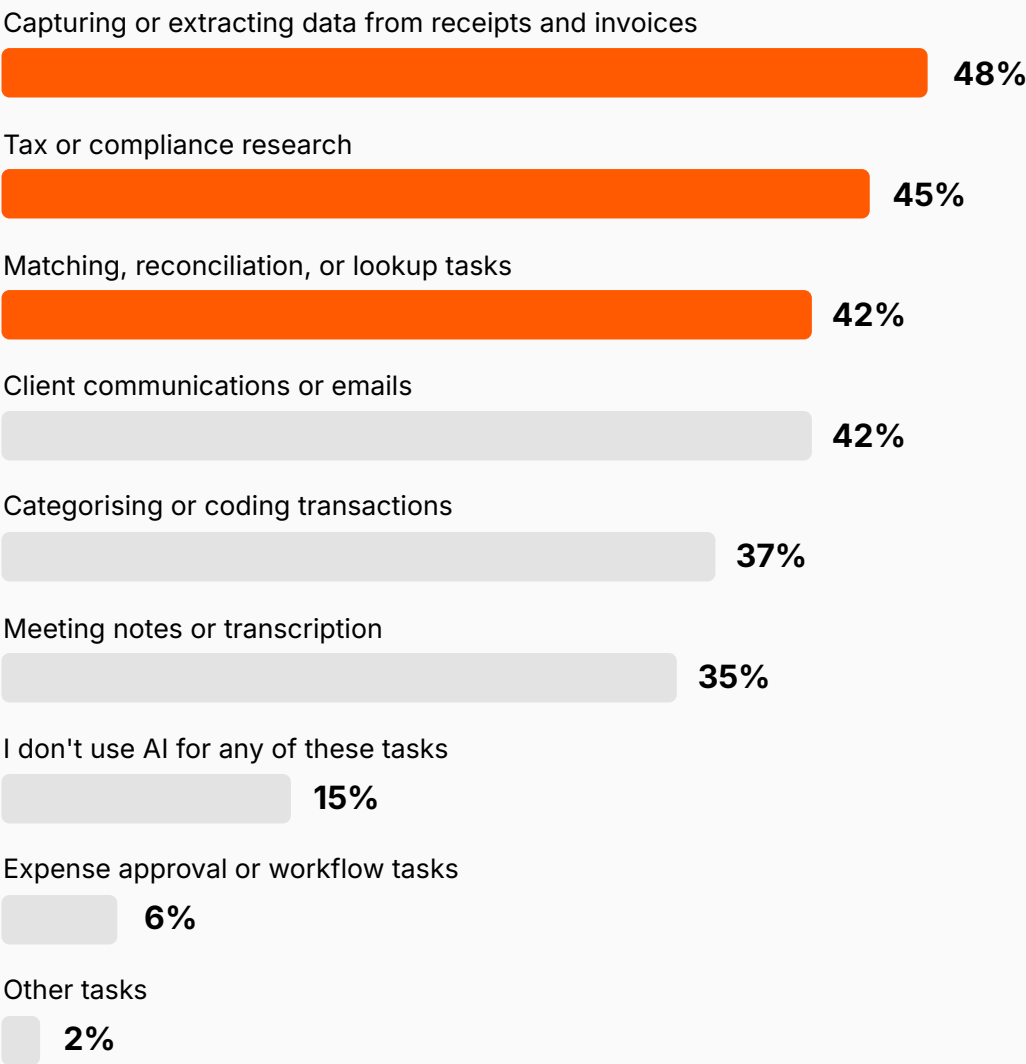
85% use AI for at least one task, but only 6% apply it to workflow automation

AI adoption is widespread but shallow. Eighty-five percent of practitioners use AI for at least one task, but the use cases cluster around narrow, transactional work: data extraction from receipts and invoices (48%), tax and compliance research (45%), and matching or reconciliation tasks (42%).

Workflow transformation comes when automation goes beyond the singular. Currently, only 6% use AI for expense approval or workflow tasks, the kind of process automation that delivers compounding time savings. Despite the high adoption of AI in accounting, real transformation is still on the horizon.

For which of these tasks do you currently use AI?

Task



Source: n=412, multi-select

2.2 The productivity uplift story

71% report productivity gains from general AI tools, only 5% see degradation

Seven in ten practitioners report productivity uplift from general-purpose AI tools like ChatGPT and Copilot.

Accounting platform AI is close behind at 64%. Only 5% report any form of productivity degradation from either.

These productivity uplifts are but floor-level returns. The majority report "some" uplift rather than "significant" uplift, meaning, these are incremental gains, rather than transformational ones.

How would you rate the productivity impact of each of the following types of AI tools?

Tool type

General purpose AI (ChatGPT, Copilot)



Accounting platform AI



● Uplift ● No change ● Degradation ● Don't use

Source: n=412. "Uplift" combines Significant + Some uplift. "Degradation" combines Some + Significant degradation

2.3 The central tension, impact on workload & stress

46% say AI reduced workload and stress but 19% say it made both worse

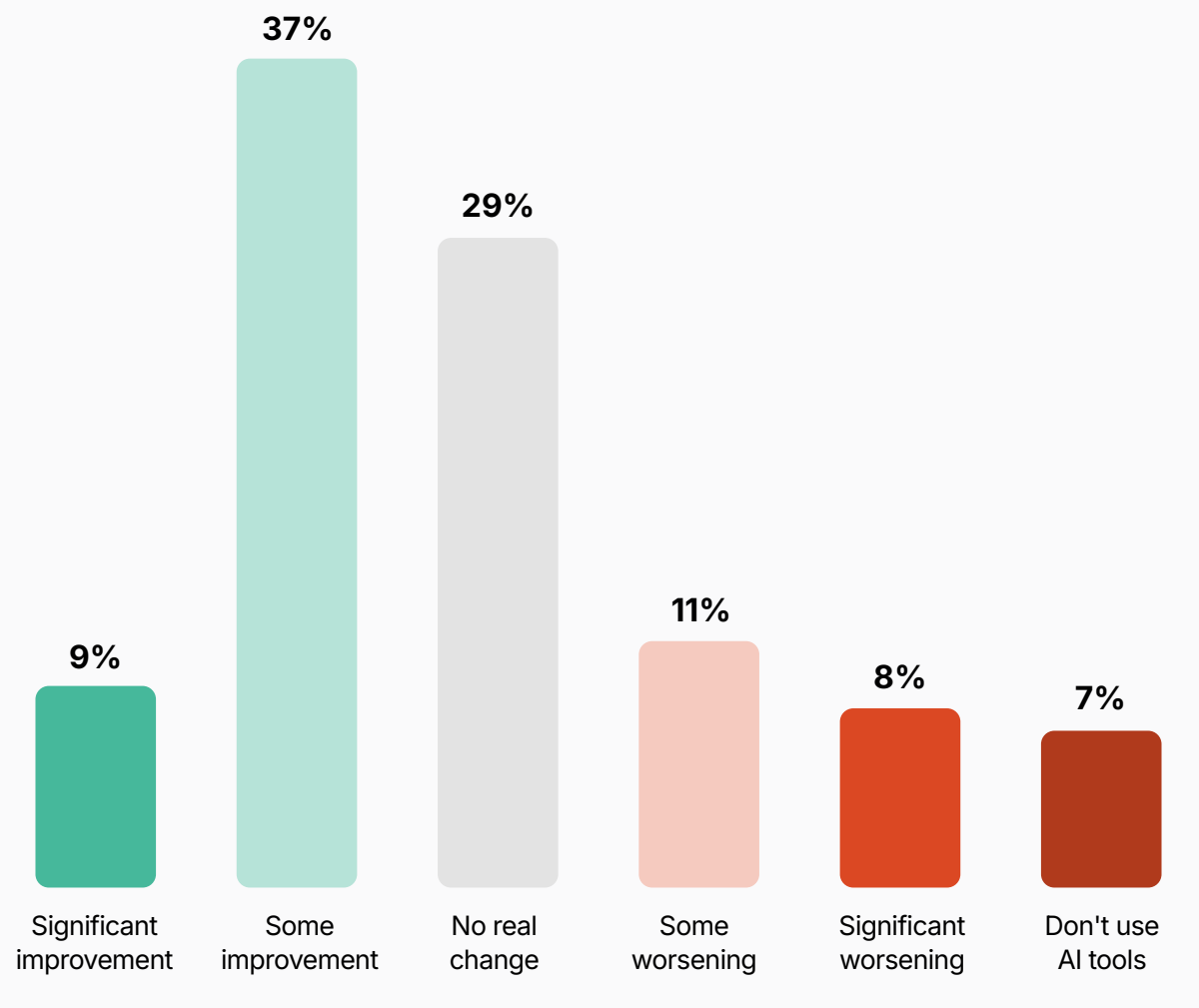
While almost half of participants (46%) report improvement in workload and stress, nearly one in five (19%) say AI has made things worse.

However, there's still a portion of the profession, almost 1 in 5 (19%) who say it has negatively impacted them.

On the whole, this implies that AI has had a net positive impact on the workload and stress of accounting professionals.

Accountants often cite “managing high volume of workload” and “work-related stress” as key issues. How has the introduction of AI tools into your workflows impacted this for you?

Impact



Source: n=412

2.4 The main barrier to adoption is time

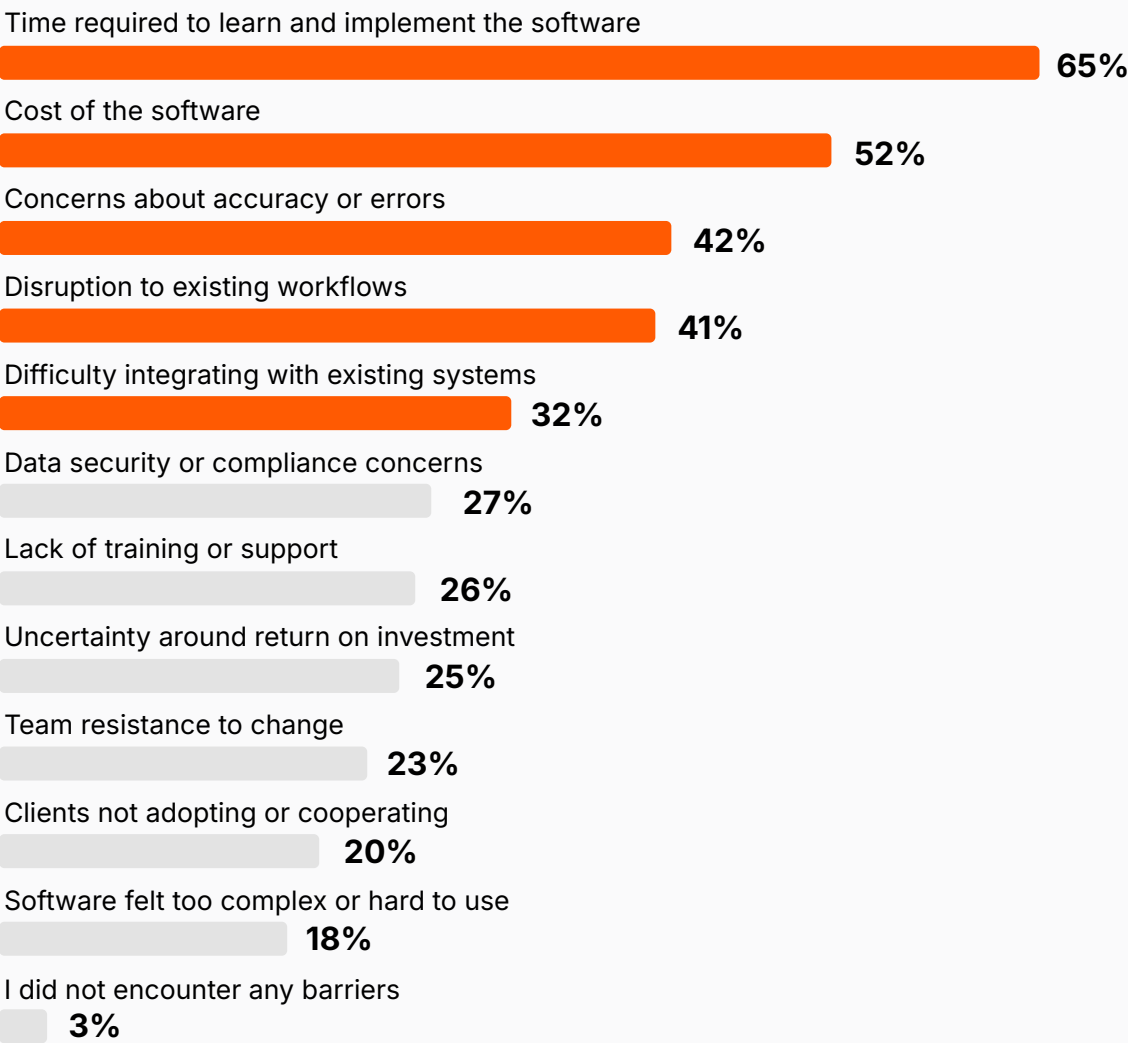
65% cite time to learn & implement software as the top barrier

Core to the time-tech conundrum thesis is that accounting firms need technology to help create efficiencies in their workday to relieve workload and staffing issues. However, the time involved in exploring, researching and implementing these software solutions into their practice becomes a barrier to this desired end state.

Like in our 2022 study, two-thirds of practitioners (65%) cite the time required to learn and implement software as a barrier to adoption. Cost is the secondary concern (52%), and new friction points have emerged: accuracy concerns (42%), workflow disruption (41%), and integration difficulty (32%).

Thinking about your most recent experience considering or adopting a new accounting technology, what barriers did you encounter?

Impact



Source: n=412, multi-select

Section 3

Voices of practitioners solving the time-tech conundrum

The data is clear: the profession is under pressure. But practitioners aren't waiting for someone else to solve the problem. They've told us, in their own words, what they're doing to navigate the technology landscape, and what they need from software providers to close the gap.

This section presents their solutions: a practical roadmap for escaping the time-tech conundrum, with responsibilities on both sides.

3.1 What practitioners can do: Taking control of the technology journey

"What practical advice would you give to accounting professionals similar to yourself about how best to use technology?"

When we asked practitioners how to navigate the technology landscape, they didn't ask for sympathy. They offered solutions, practical, hard-won strategies for making technology work rather than adding to the burden. We were struck by the consistency of their advice.

Strategy 1: Map your processes before shopping for tools

The most sophisticated advice centres on a **workflow-first philosophy**: understand how your practice operates before introducing new technology. This directly addresses the top adoption barrier, time to implement (65%).

- “ Start with your workflow, not the software. Before bringing in any new technology, take the time to truly understand how your work flows, from bookkeeping, BAS preparation and payroll to year-end processes and client communication. When you map this out clearly, you gain control over how your practice operates. Technology should elevate that flow, not disrupt it.
- “ Design the process first and then find technology.
- “ Need to standardise the way your practice gets work done in order for the AI technology to work best. You want consistent prompts and procedures, if everyone is doing things differently it can be harder to implement.

The insight: Technology adoption fails when it's imposed on chaos. Standardised processes create the foundation for successful automation.

Strategy 2: Build verification into every workflow

Nearly a third of respondents converge on one non-negotiable principle: **human oversight is essential**. AI requires a "trust, but verify" approach.

- “ I am reminded of the old adage 'garbage in, garbage out'. Technology is only as good as the data going into it. Much time is wasted double-checking the results.
- “ Be super careful when adopting AI. Relying on AI is dangerous and you still need to check the clarity of what the software is doing.
- “ At present, research is good but I would not trust AI with confidential information. Remember, you can't blame AI for any misinformation. You, the human, must own the output.
- “ Double check the workings of AI tools, most of which existed before they were suddenly all called AI.

The insight: Time savings evaporate without verification workflows. Build quality checks into the process from day one.

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Strategy 3: Target high-impact pain points first

Practitioners recommend a **surgical approach** to technology adoption: start where the payoff is clearest.

- “ Start with the biggest impact, data capture.
- “ Find your pain points and use AI to find a solution.
- “ ChatGPT reduces research time enormously, even after allowing for the fact that it is not always right.
- “ Make sure the technology is the right fit for your firm, the tech has to improve processing time not add to it. Make sure it's the right investment and if not, get rid of it.

The insight: Don't try to transform everything at once. Pick the most painful manual task, likely data entry, and automate that first.

Strategy 4: Embrace experimentation, stay curious, evaluate ruthlessly

We observed a pragmatic tension in the responses: **adopt early to stay competitive, but evaluate rigorously to avoid costly mistakes**. The common thread? A mindset of curiosity paired with discipline.

- “ The best way to use technology is being curious. Curious enough to evaluate where you are at currently and curious enough to think 'can this be improved or changed to provide better outcomes'. Curiosity will allow you to learn more about technology and the ins and outs of it, not just take it off at face value.
- “ Embrace new technology as if you don't then someone else will and you could lose your client.
- “ Don't be afraid to use AI, ask it anything!
- “ Try and see! It's scary and exciting all at the same time.

Yet alongside the enthusiasm, we heard caution:

- “ Do your research. Don't jump into it. Take your time for the transition.
- “ See what works for others and try and adopt that, stay current with what is happening in tech.
- “ Don't believe all the hype and double check the output of the so-called efficiency. It's not always producing the expected result.

The insight: Start small, learn fast, iterate, but kill tools that don't deliver. The profession is changing, and those who treat learning as a core capability will adapt faster.

3.2 What practitioners need from software providers

"What areas of your workflows would you like technology providers to focus on the most to reduce your workload and work-related stress?"

We believe practitioners have done their part: mapped processes, built verification workflows, invested in learning. Now they need software providers to meet them halfway. The following priorities emerged clearly from our analysis.

Priority 1: Automate the manual work, data entry and client communications

The #1 request we received is **automation of manual, repetitive work**: data entry, reconciliations, and the endless chase for client information. We see this aligning directly with Section 1.3, the profession still loses 10+ hours per week to tasks technology should handle.

- “ Technology providers should focus on automating repetitive tasks like data entry and reconciliations.
- “ Any administrative tasks and functions like time sheet entry, job tracking, summarising, organising, prioritising and presenting tasks/emails/chats.
- “ Automate initial client information request, automate client reminders if they have not provided all the information.
- “ Assistance with reviewing client emails and drafting responses based on technical folders/files with information, ready for review/finalisation by qualified staff.

The mandate: Fewer keystrokes, not more features. Handle the chase, so practitioners can focus on the advice.

Priority 2: Integrate platforms, stop adding point solutions

The second-most-cited frustration we encountered is the **fragmented technology landscape**: multiple platforms that don't communicate. We see this echoing the 50% growth in platform overwhelm since 2022.

- “ Integration between software programs, Xero improving their service offering.
- “ Better integration between systems would also reduce manual work and errors.
- “ Getting the huge amount of apps to work together natively and not need a dedicated staff member to manage them all syncing and performing correctly in the ecosystem.
- “ One platform that integrates everything. For example with Xero we are navigating HQ, Tax, My Practice etc.

The mandate: Build bridges between existing tools, not more islands.

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Priority 3: Deliver accuracy before speed

This theme was so strong we saw it appear in both questions. Practitioners want faster tools, but **not at the cost of correctness**. We believe that when AI creates more work than it saves, trust collapses.

- “ Accuracy. AI appears to save time initially but it makes so many errors that you have to double check everything anyway and if you overlook something that's been 'reconciled' the wrong way it is incredibly frustrating having to go back and fix things, this can even impact client accounts, matching payments to the wrong invoices is a MAJOR issue I have with automated AI.
- “ ACCURACY.
- “ Better accuracy, stay up to date in real time with regulations and laws.
- “ More reliable reporting and alerts for errors or compliance issues would also reduce workload and stress.

The mandate: Trust = accuracy x speed. Invest in getting it right before getting it fast.

Priority 4: Evolve gradually, simplify, don't complicate

Finally, we heard practitioners offer direct feedback on **how to engage with the profession**. The message was consistent: slow down, listen, and make change manageable. Regulatory complexity is growing, AI should simplify it, not add another layer.

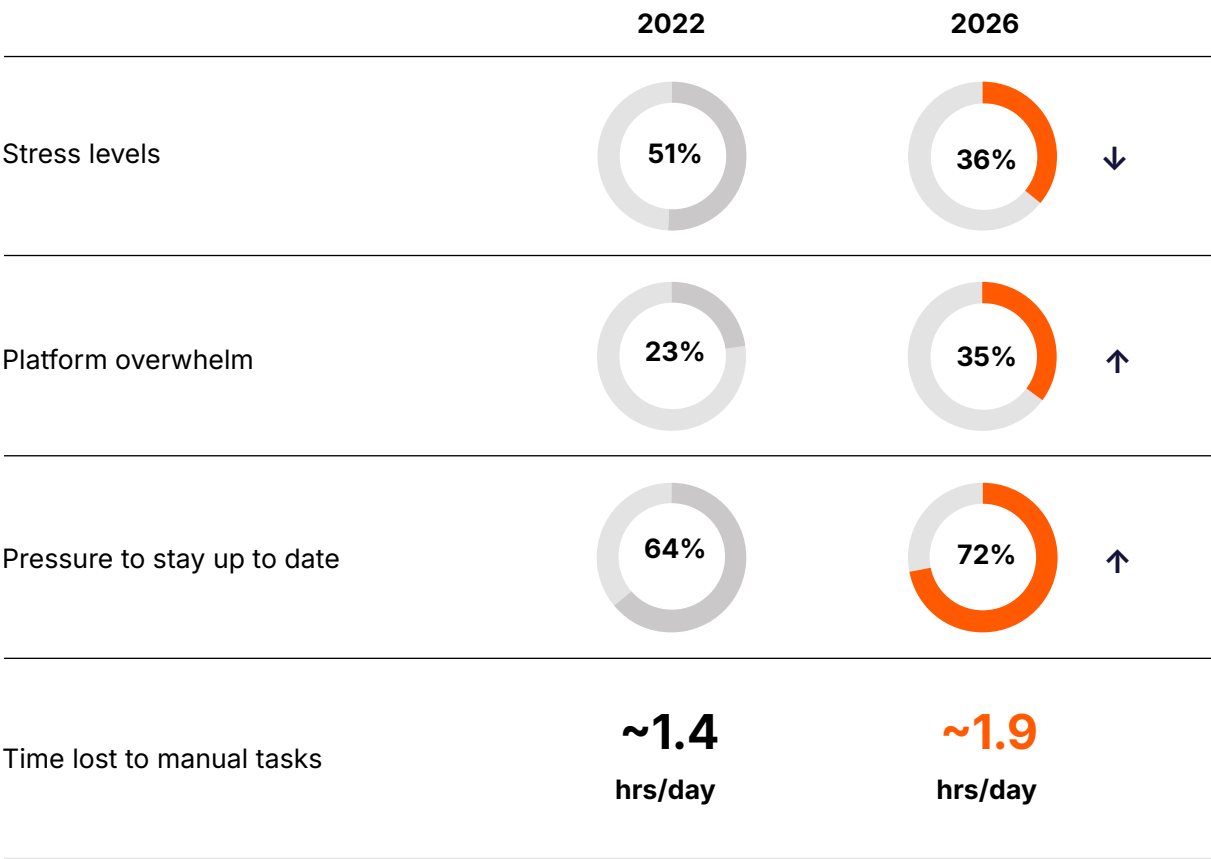
- “ Improve the software but stop making the changes dramatic. Incremental and gradual constantly so the software evolves rather than earth-shattering 'events' which help them but not us. And actually talk to us, do UX research to see HOW we work.
- “ Focus on providing great support and training materials; however, they often make changes to their software, so it's hard to keep up. They don't engage with the industry during beta testing before release. They then don't listen to our feedback to improve systems, with the same urgency they use to release the next feature. We are overwhelmed with webinars constantly and can't keep up.
- “ Decide on tax deductibility of an expense once given the industry description of the business or the occupation of the employee. Ability to reduce the time which will be used to comply with upcoming AML/CTF changes.
- “ Ease and more support in training.

The mandate: Evolution, not revolution. Change fatigue is real, and it's slowing adoption.

Conclusion

Where we are

Four years on from the original *Tackling the Time / Tech Conundrum* report, we found progress in some areas and new challenges in others.



What we learned

AI is delivering productivity gains for 71% of users. But for 48%, it has made no difference or added to the burden.

The issue isn't adoption, it's integration, accuracy, and change fatigue.

Practitioners told us what they're doing to manage it: mapping processes first, building verification into workflows, targeting high-impact areas, and experimenting while staying critical.

They also told us what they need from software providers: automation of manual tasks, better platform integration, accuracy before speed, and gradual evolution rather than disruptive overhauls.

What comes next

The profession wants technology that works reliably without constant relearning. The path forward requires effort on both sides.

About the study

Dext's *Time-Tech Conundrum* report derives insights from a survey of 412 Australian accounting professionals. The survey was conducted by independent market research agency, Agile Market Intelligence. The survey collected responses between 9th April and 6th May 2026 with invitations extended to accounting professionals via email.

How would you describe your role?

Public practice accountant	72%
Corporate accountant	11%
Public practice bookkeeper	8%
Corporate bookkeeper	3%
Other	6%
Total	100%

How many people does your organisation employ?

Sole trader	18%
1 to 9 employees	45%
10 to 49 employees	22%
50 to 99 employees	4%
100+ employees	11%
Total	100%

How would you describe your position?

Director/Owner	45%
Partner	7%
Senior Manager	23%
Manager	13%
Associate	9%
Entry-level	4%
Total	101%

What is your age?

18 to 24	2%
25 to 34	15%
35 to 44	29%
45 to 54	23%
55 to 64	19%
Over 65	12%
Total	100%

Due to rounding errors, some figures may not exactly equal 100%. All figures have been rounded to their nearest decimal for the purpose of this report.

About Dext

Dext, part of the IRIS Software Group, is the leading provider of AI-powered bookkeeping automation. Founded in 2010, the company empowers businesses, accountants, and bookkeepers to thrive through cutting-edge artificial intelligence and machine learning technology that simplifies accounting processes and enables smarter, more timely financial decisions.

For more information, visit www.dext.com.



About Agile Market Intelligence

Agile Market Intelligence is a market research agency that delivers meaningful insights and analysis for more informed decision-making.

Our expertise is in delivering robust quantitative and qualitative research, combining the voice of our survey participants with expert methodologies to explore attitudes and behaviours of consumers, investors, customers, employees and more.

For more information about how we can help you navigate your marketplace, visit www.agilemarketintelligence.com.au.



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