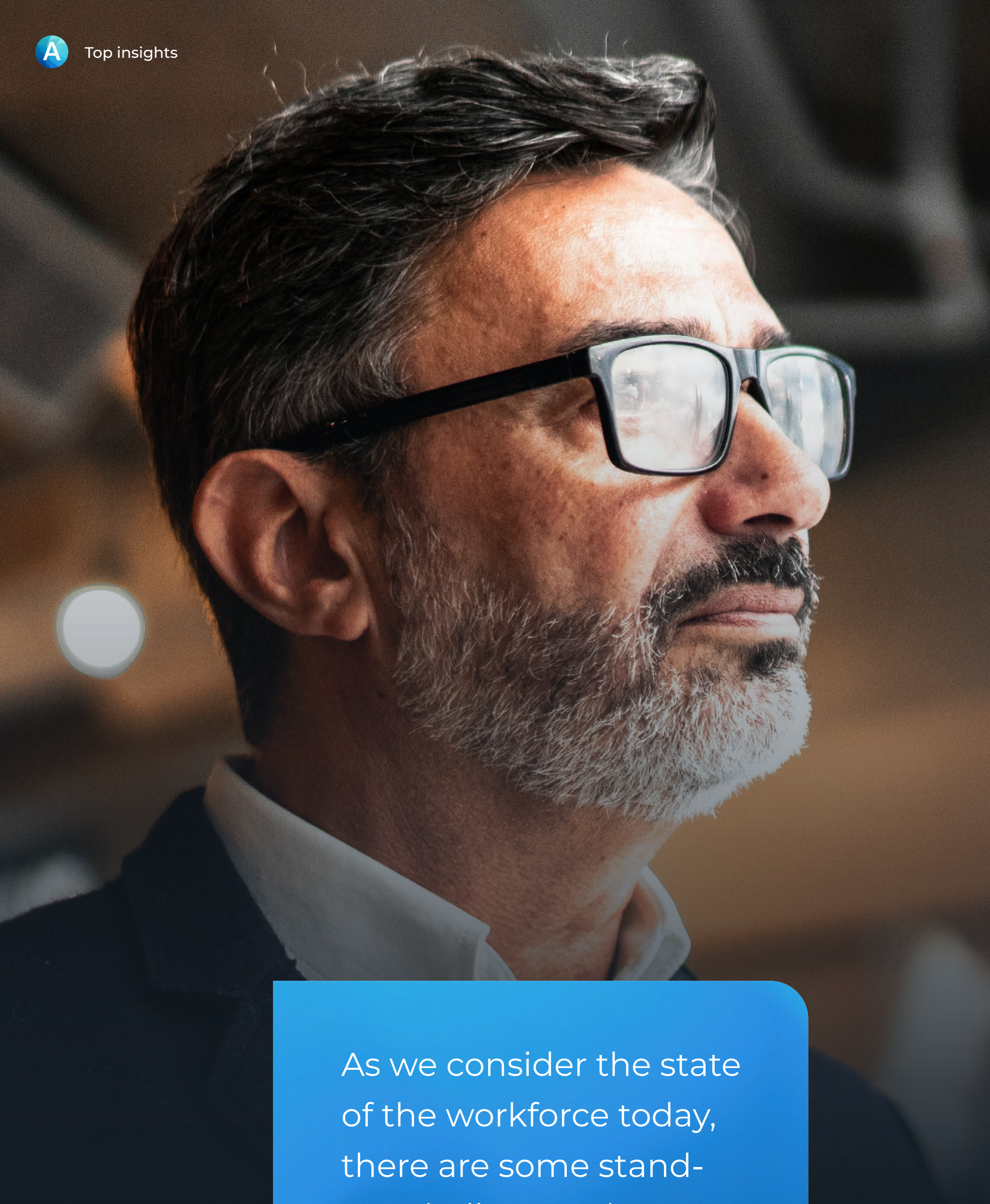Arbinger
Institute

2024 Workplace Trends:

Embracing Humanity at Work

Top insights

In 2024,
employers who want to succeed need
to prioritize their company's most
important asset: *its people.*

02

Common challenges

Job satisfaction is at an all-time low

Less than one-quarter (22%) of all professionals surveyed described job satisfaction at their company as excellent. This number drops to a mere 13% of non-supervisory employees who rate job satisfaction as excellent.

Executives are out of touch with their employees

There are significant disparities between what executives perceive as wins and challenges for their organization when compared to the opinions of their employees.

Work-life balance is even more important than salary.

According to professionals surveyed, work-life balance beats out salary as the top contributor to job satisfaction.

As we consider the state of the workforce today, there are some stand-out challenges that organizations are facing.

Common challenges *continued*

Standard performance reviews are outdated and ineffective

Our data shows us a new standard for performance reviews. The most effective performance reviews for both employees and managers are more frequent and address each individual's impact on company goals and their peers.

Employee retention is a primary objective

Companies will need to prioritize creating a desirable workplace where employees feel they are contributing meaningful work with a sense of safety, belonging, and appreciation to improve retention.

Inability to collaborate effectively

As companies navigate hybrid workplaces and the evolving needs of employees, effective collaboration becomes even more vital to success.

An increased focus on company culture

The progression of the modern workplace is forcing organizations to look at culture from a different perspective. A positive culture is a catalyst for employee engagement and productivity.
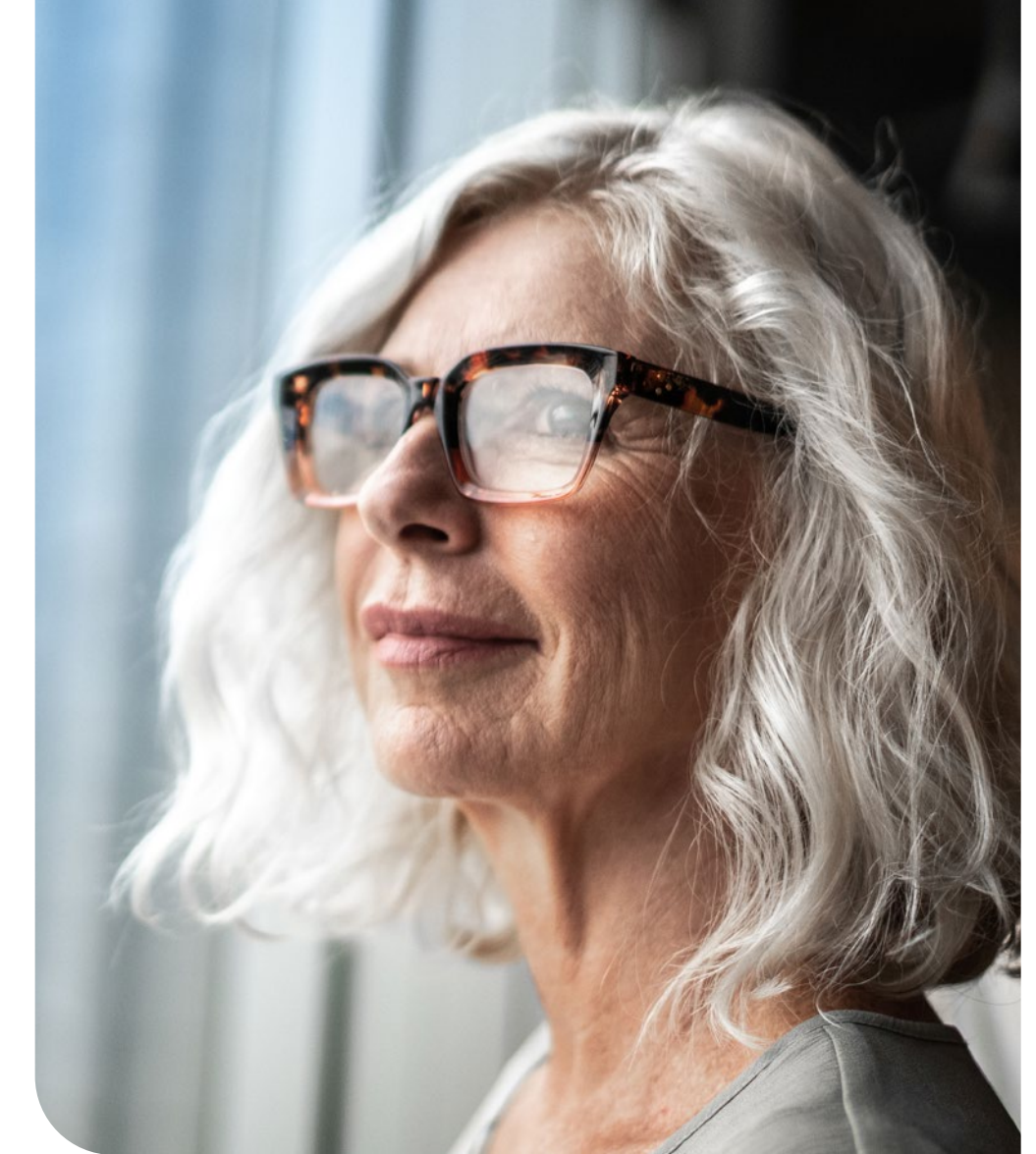
Focus on bringing humanity to the workplace

In this report, we're going to dig into five key trends that emerged from our global survey of over 300 professionals.

In 2024, employers who want to succeed need to prioritize their company's most important asset: its people. With a focus on bringing humanity to the workplace, employers can emphasize individual strengths, promote meaningful contributions, and ultimately improve employee satisfaction and retention.

In this report, we're going to dig into five key trends that emerged from our global survey of over 300 professionals about the inner workings of how their workplaces function. These trends should serve as a focus for employers as they navigate the evolving needs of the modern workforce. We hope you enjoy the report!

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The state of job satisfaction

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The state of job satisfaction and employee engagement

Before we dig into this year's trends, we wanted to start by calling out some of our findings around the state of employee job satisfaction and what that really means for employers.

Overall job satisfaction has hit an alarming low, with just 22% of professionals surveyed giving their company a rating of excellence. Even fewer non-supervisory employees would describe their company's job satisfaction as excellent (13%).

22%
Excellent job satisfaction

Employee job satifaction

A people-centric culture, focused on high-performance is now a critical component in achieving desired business results.

But why does job satisfaction matter?

And how does it play into the bigger picture of embracing humanity at work? Let's take a closer look at the companies that were rated as excellent for overall job satisfaction. **This group of companies, our Job Satisfaction Excellence segment, is:**

3x
more likely to experience significant revenue growth

Those who report excellence in job satisfaction are 3x more likely than others to be working for companies that experienced significant revenue increases in the last year.

3.5x
more likely to have employees with a more positive outlook on future success

Those who report excellence in job satisfaction are 3.5x more likely than others to have an extremely positive outlook on their company's ability to grow sustainably in the future.

6x
more likely to have best-in-class efficiency

Those who report excellence in job satisfaction are 6x more likely than others to report that their companies are extremely efficient.

The state of job satisfaction

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Our research indicates that work-life balance is even more important than salary

While you may be thinking, "Of course booming businesses have happier employees"—a business' success isn't the driving factor for how satisfied today's employees are with their work. As you'll see, the factors that contribute most to employees' job satisfaction have little to do with their jobs themselves, but are more broadly about how employees are treated and how they feel while on the job.

Today's professionals crave a workplace that not only complements their life outside of work, but also serves as a

place where they can contribute with purpose. While "hustle" cultures and growth-at-all-costs mentalities once dominated the world of work, we're seeing a major shift. A people-centric culture, focused on high-performance, is now a critical component in achieving desired business results.

In fact, according to professionals surveyed, work-life balance is even more important than salary, and not far behind on that list of greatest contributions to job satisfaction is the feeling of doing meaningful work.

Which of the following contributes most to your overall job satisfaction?

Work-life balance	51%
Salary	47%
Meaningful work	38%
Recognition & appreciation	34%

Opportunities for growth	33%
Relationships with employees	31%
Relationships with leaders	27%
Feeling safe, included	20%
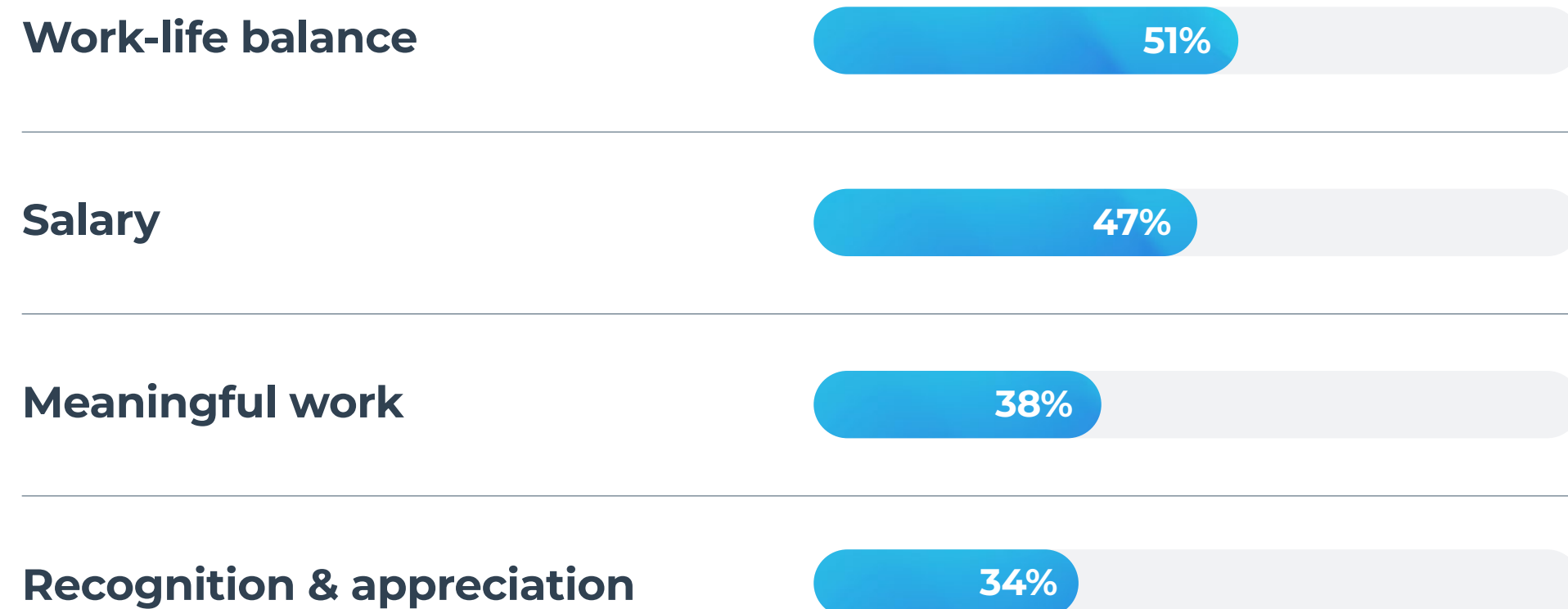
Prioritizing people-centricity

What's interesting is that out of the employees surveyed, those who report the highest rates of job satisfaction value certain areas more than those with lower overall job satisfaction. Notably, employees who are most satisfied with their jobs put less weight on salary than all others, and place significantly more weight on relationships with both employees and leaders.

Also strongly linked to job satisfaction is employee morale and engagement. Those working for companies with less-than-stellar job satisfaction are **4.5x** more likely than our Job Satisfaction Excellence group to list low morale and engagement as a top challenge to their organization's success.

Which of the following contributes most to your overall job satisfaction (JS)?

49%
All others

42%
Excellent JS

Salary

28%
All others

39%
Excellent JS

Relationships with employees

24%
All others

37%
Excellent JS

Relationships with leaders

Low engagement is far more likely to be recognized as a top challenge by managers and non-supervisory roles than by executives and other leadership.

Non-supervisory employees are more than **2x more likely** to identify low engagement as a challenge than executives. Later in this report, we'll take a deeper dive into other disparities between the opinions of executives and their employees.

Percent of those who rated low morale and engagement as a significant challenge to the success of their organization:

21%
Executives

34%
VP/Director

42%
Manager

50%
Non-supervisory employees

People-first workplaces are the ones coming out on top

While job satisfaction and employee engagement may have historically been considered "softer" metrics when it comes to gauging a business' success, today's reality is that couldn't be further than the truth. More often than not, low satisfaction and engagement rates are symptoms of larger issues rippling through your business. Consider them warning signals or early signs of trouble.

As you read through this report, consider that all of these trends contribute to job satisfaction and employee engagement in a major way.

The 2024 trends point to the importance of recognizing the humanity in our peers and prove that people-first workplaces are the ones coming out on top. And by on top, we mean greater productivity, stronger morale, lower turnover, and more revenue.

Special segments

These special segments are featured throughout the report to show you the impact of company growth, good morale, and your employees' job satisfaction have on the five trends outlined.

Accelerated growth

14% of organizations surveyed experienced a significant increase in revenue in the last year.

Excellence in job satisfaction

22% of those surveyed describe the overall job satisfaction at their organization as "excellent".

Positive outlook

31% of organizations surveyed have an extremely positive outlook on their ability to grow sustainably in the coming two years.

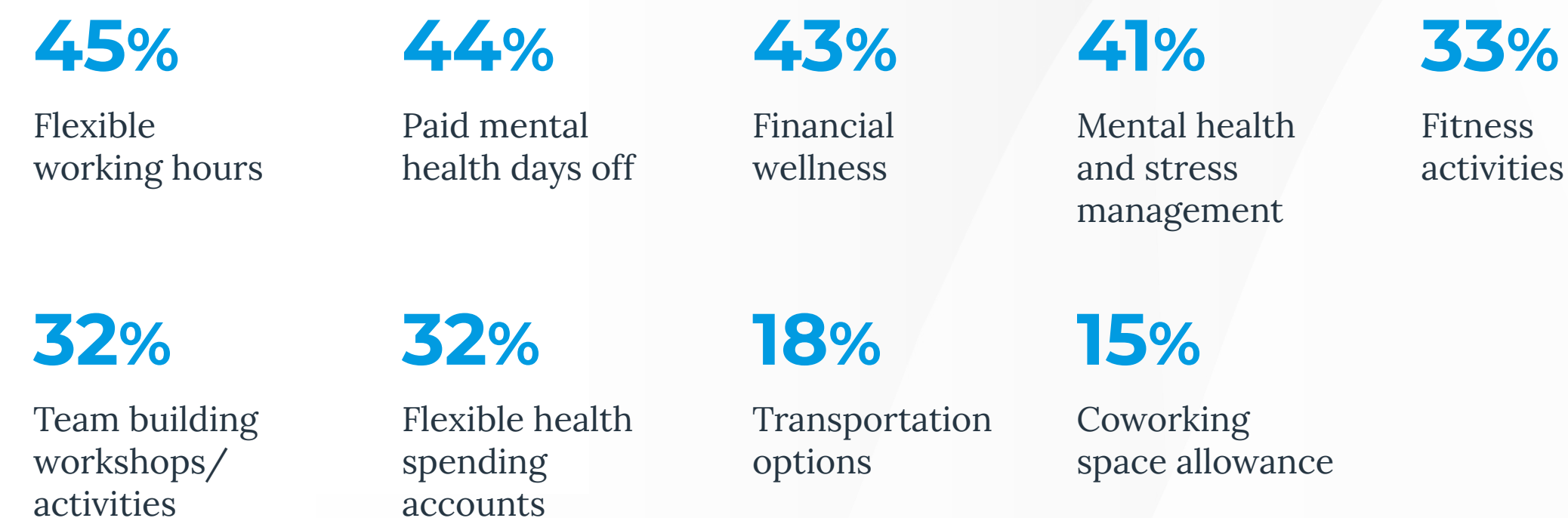Trends

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A new approach to employee wellness

Employee well-being is an integral part of the employee experience. According to those surveyed, flexible working hours and overall mental health and stress management are among the top areas that professionals would like to see invested in by their company when it comes to wellness.

Only **29%** of those surveyed report being very satisfied with the steps that their company has taken to address the well-being and mental health of employees.

TREND / 01

Redefining the employee experience

What investments would you like to see your company make in employee wellness?

45%
Flexible working hours

44%
Paid mental health days off

43%
Financial wellness

41%
Mental health and stress management

33%
Fitness activities

32%
Team building workshops/ activities

32%
Flexible health spending accounts

18%
Transportation options

15%
Coworking space allowance

The importance of feeling valued and appreciated

When considering employee mental health and wellbeing, stress and burnout come to mind. But combatting stress and burnout to improve employee well-being is more than just awareness of workload and hours. It comes back to the concept of doing meaningful work and feeling appreciated for that work.

According to professionals surveyed, feeling unappreciated is among the top three greatest contributors to feeling stressed or burnt out at work. This number increases for non-supervisory employees, with half (50%) saying that feeling unappreciated is a factor contributing to their feeling stressed or burnt out at work.

What factors contribute to you feeling stressed or burnt out at work?

Heavy workload   55%

Long hours   42%

Feeling unappreciated   36%

Lack of recognition   32%

Unclear expectations   30%

Unsupportive managers   27%

Lack of flexibility   25%

Poor relationships   24%

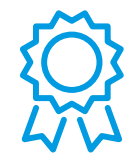# 5 ways to make employees feel appreciated at work
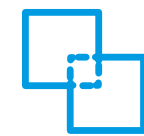
Provide regular feedback

Express your gratitude

Listen and act on employee feedback

Recognize accomplishments publicly

Ensure employees understand how their efforts impact company goals

Feelings of value and appreciation can come from more than just acknowledgement with rewards. Treating employees as people who matter equally, allowing them to see the positive impact they make on company goals, as well as their impact on others—and emphasizing that their contribution matters—all contribute to promoting appreciation and employee well-being.
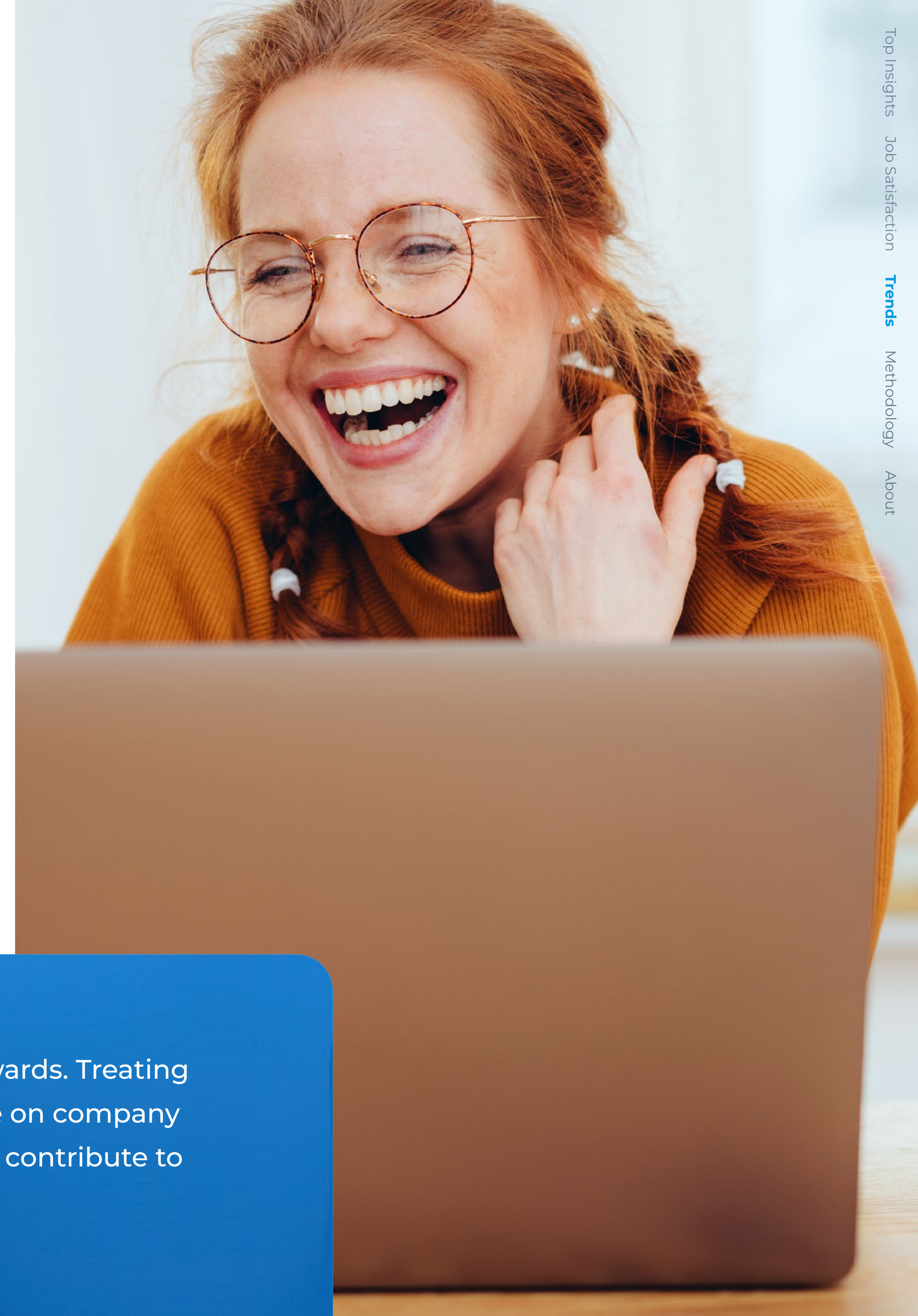
Recognizing individual impact on company goals

Feelings of appreciation, inclusion, and belonging start with an individual being able to identify the impact they're making on overall company objectives. Individual impact on company goals is included in performance reviews for 52% of professionals surveyed.

Those who discuss their impact on company goals are over 2x more likely than others to feel recognized by leaders.

Furthermore, those who discuss their impact on company goals are also significantly less likely to have considered leaving their job due to feeling unheard or undervalued.

How does your impact on company goals fit into your performance review discussion?

52%
Included

48%
Not included

Making the effort to show every employee they matter

55% of those who work from home say they have at some point considered leaving their job due to feeling unheard or undervalued, compared to 41% of those in an office setting.

It's critical for both company culture and retention to ensure that all employees feel seen and valued. Take a moment to think about how you can create opportunities for remote employees to feel the same levels of involvement as in-office employees. How can you adjust communication practices? What tools and frameworks can you try?

TREND / 02

Bridging the divide between leaders and employees

Executives are overestimating their success

There is a major gap between what executives perceive to be issues and triumphs at their organization and what their employees feel. We tracked significant disparities between the opinions of executives and those of other employees when it comes to job satisfaction, providing development opportunities, and more.

Executives rate everything from job satisfaction at their company to communication, innovation, and efficiency significantly better than non-executives. **We're calling this the 'disconnect effect.'**

If executives, often with the best of intentions, are out of touch with how their employees and teams feel, then it will ultimately impact performance and company growth. Not to mention the culture, leading to lack of employee engagement and feelings of resentment that can truly impact productivity and innovation.

The disconnect effect

2.5x

Executives feel 2.5x more strongly that their company is **providing adequate opportunities to enhance skills** and career development

3x

Executives feel nearly 3x more satisfied with the steps their company has taken to **address the well-being and mental health of employees**

3x

Executives feel over 3x more satisfied with their company's current **level of communication and collaboration**

Rate the performance of your company for each of the following areas overall (% who selected "excellent"):

Collaboration	Efficiency	Innovation
18% All non-execs	16% All non-execs	21% All non-execs
43% Executives	30% Executives	37% Executives

Training & development	Communication	Job satisfaction
16% All non-execs	15% All non-execs	19% All non-execs
35% Executives	33% Executives	37% Executives

Opening up communication humanizes leaders

Feelings of connection **between leadership and employees** can be fostered through open communication, but less than half (43%) of organizations offer conversations or communications with leaders regularly to employees.

43%

Reported regular communication with leaders

Organizations that offer employees regular communication with leaders

Percent of those who have ongoing discussions about the following:

23%

Personal development & wellbeing

19%

Overall job performance

43%
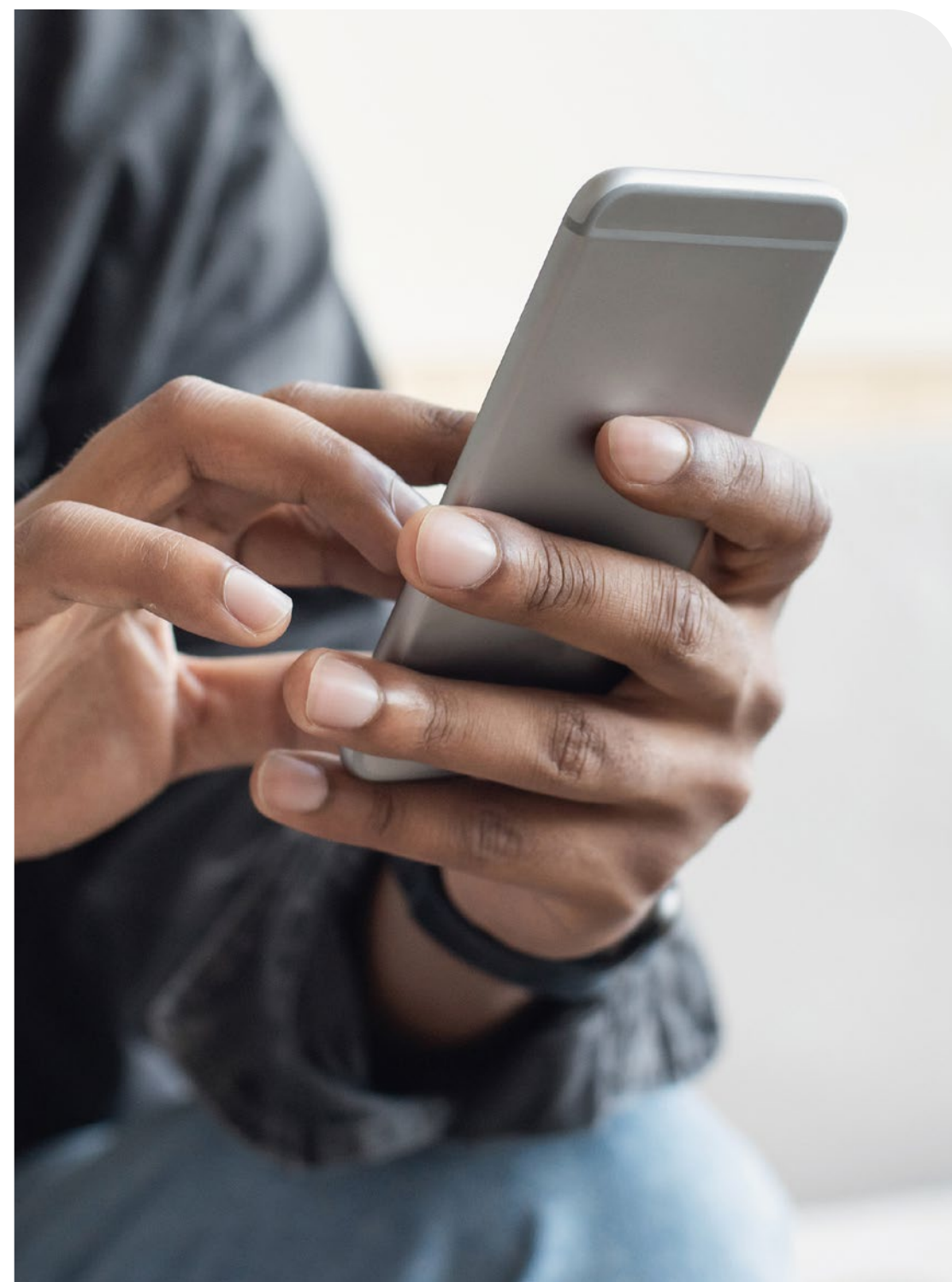
Career development opportunities
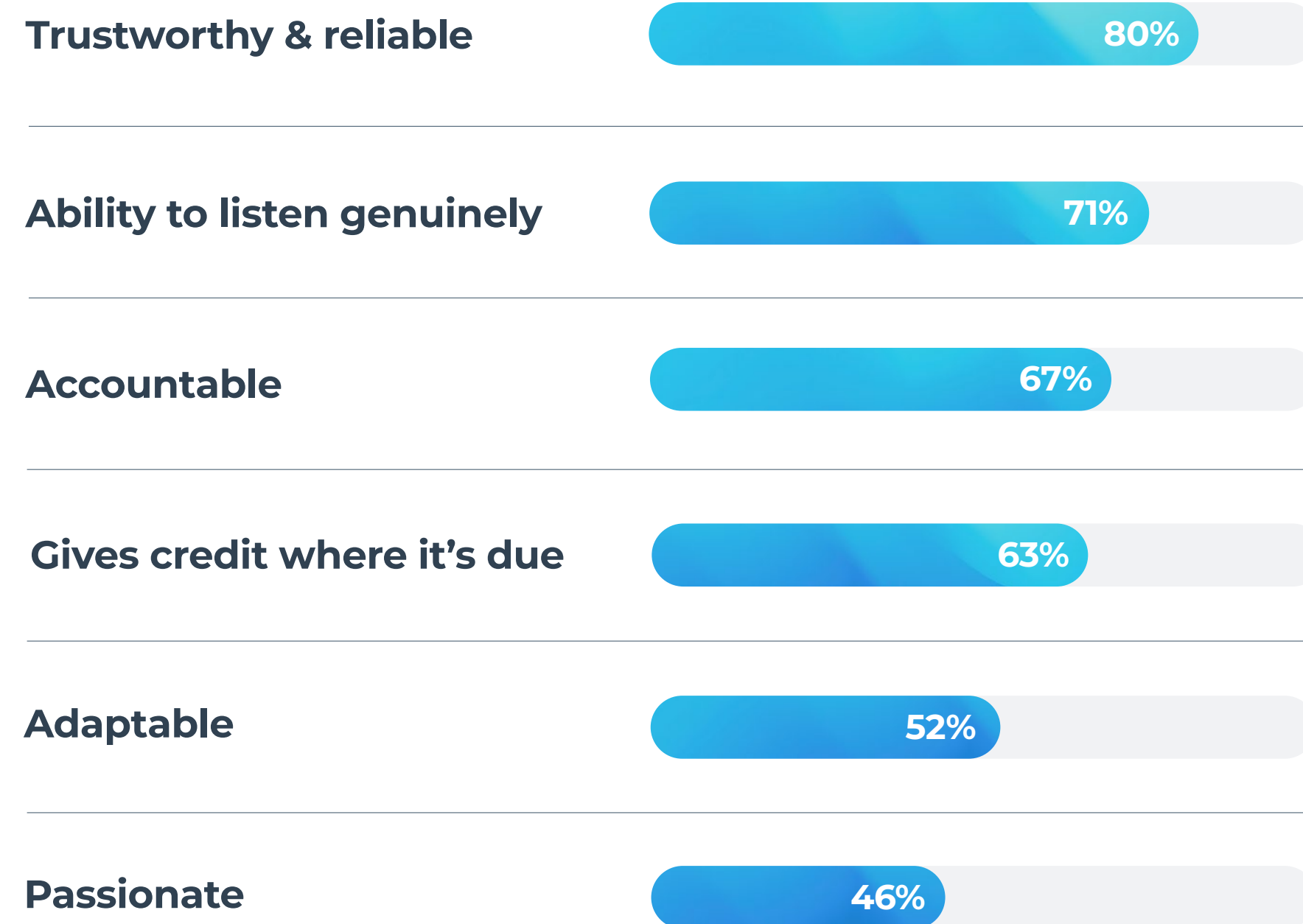
41%

Compensation & benefits

Those who have the opportunity to provide feedback for leadership feel more heard than others

Regular and ongoing discussions can not only humanize leaders from the perspective of employees, but also open the eyes of leaders to better understand employees' wants and needs. Ongoing feedback regarding personal development and well-being, overall job performance, career development opportunities, and compensation are also relatively uncommon according to professionals surveyed.

What qualities do you look for in a good leader?

Trustworthy & reliable 80%

Ability to listen genuinely 71%

Accountable 67%

Gives credit where it's due 63%

Adaptable 52%

Passionate 46%

What do employees want in a leader?

8 out of 10 professionals surveyed are looking for a trustworthy and reliable leader, and nearly three-quarters highly value a leader's ability to listen genuinely.

Leaders aren't born, they're made

Leadership is a skill that can be learned. It's not about "being in charge," it's about influencing and inspiring others to do their best work. This starts with:

Leading by example with the right mindset

Helping teammates recognize their impact

Providing ongoing feedback

Offering ongoing coaching

Empowering employees to make their own decisions

Investing in future leaders

TREND / 03

Turning the performance review on its head

Most performance reviews are not effective. Performance reviews have been a long-time standard procedure for issuing feedback to employees. But employees and managers alike find this one-way, annual feedback system—based solely on output and meeting predetermined expectations—is ineffective.

Many employees believe performance reviews are a complete waste of time

Only one-third of professionals surveyed say they value, actively participate in, and use performance reviews for improvement. Another 38% find them somewhat helpful, leaving nearly 30% saying they are not useful or a complete waste of time. Active participation in performance reviews develops employees' ability to use feedback for improvement and hold themselves accountable for their continuous performance.

Rating the helpfulness and value of employee performance reviews

30%

Reported performance reviews were not useful or a complete waste of time

Which option best describes how you view performance reviews at work?

Those who value performance reviews and use them for improvement are over **3x** more likely than others to have a positive outlook on their company's ability to grow sustainably in the next two years.

33%

Value them, actively participate, and use them for improvement

20%

See them as a mere formality, not very useful

2%

Never had one, unsure about the value

38%

Find them somewhat helpful but not transformative

7%

Consider them a complete waste of time

What do high-value performance reviews look like?

Those who value, actively participate in, and use performance reviews for improvement are significantly more likely than others to be having discussions that include feedback for leadership, training and growth opportunities, and their impact on both company goals as well as their peers.

Evaluating my impact on company goals

72%

Of those who value performance reviews, 72% use the time to discuss how their efforts contribute to company goals and initiatives

How do the following areas/subjects fit into your performance review discussions?

● Those who value performance reviews   ● All others

Company goals & initiatives
- 72% / 82%
- 50%

Team goals
- 76%
- 60%

My impact on company goals
- 72%
- 42%

Feedback for leadership
- 82%
- 41%

Training opportunities
- 74%
- 44%

Bonuses/salary increases
- 69%
- 50%

Growth opportunities
- 77%
- 46%

Individual goals
- 73%
- 70%

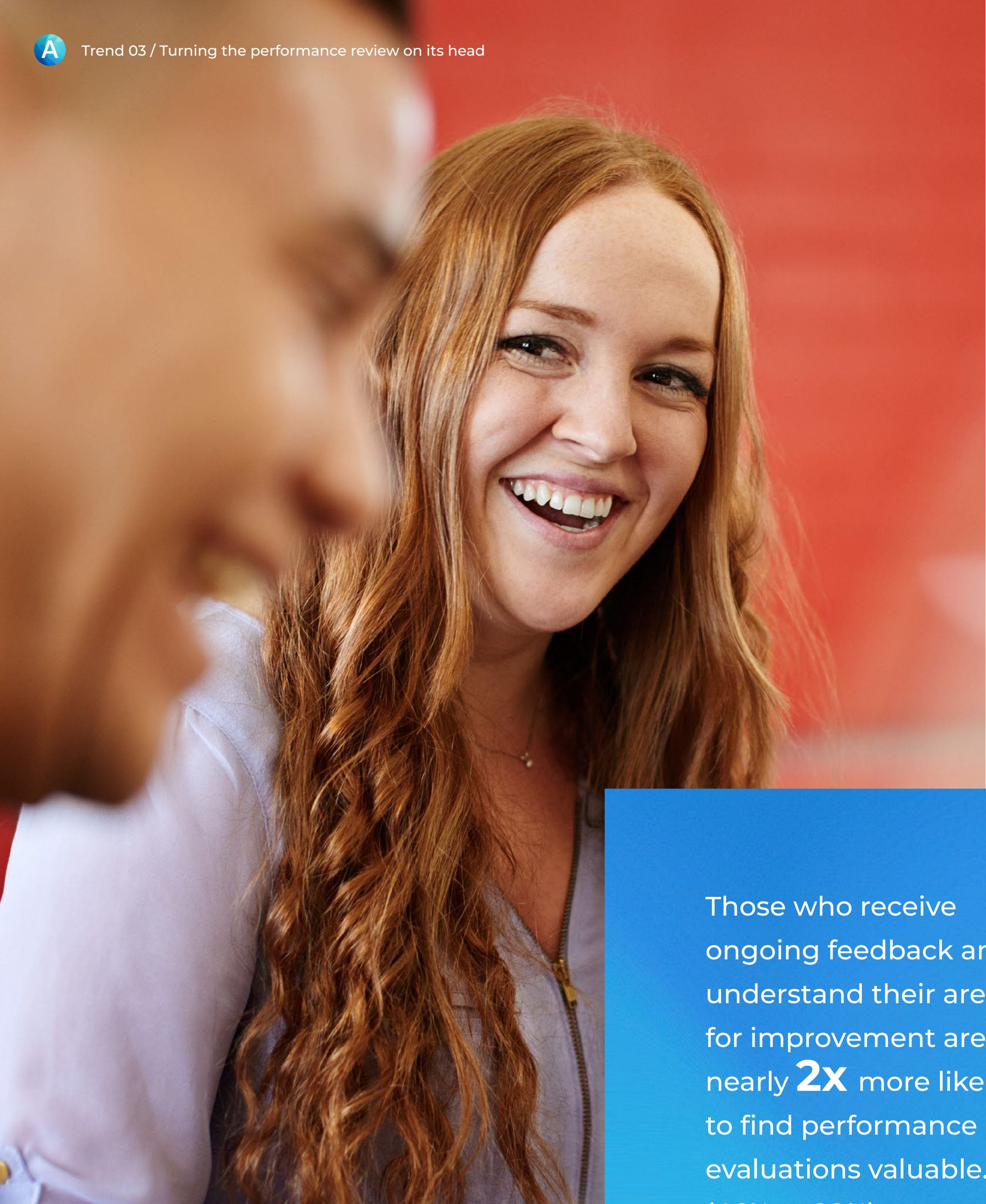**My impact on my peers**
- 66%
- 39%

Creating awareness of an individual's *impact on peers*

People who discuss their impact on their peers during performance reviews are **2x** more likely to rate the performance of their organizations as excellent in several areas than those who do not discuss their impact on their peers in performance review discussions.

Percent of those who rate the performance of their company as "Excellent" for each of the following areas:

Job satisfaction
- 30%
- 14%

Efficiency
- 28%
- 16%

Innovation
- 36%
- 13%

Collaboration
- 28%
- 16%

Communication
- 27%
- 12%

Training and development
- 28%
- 13%

● Impact on peers included   ● Impact on peers not included

The power of ongoing feedback

Ongoing feedback is a cornerstone of developing accountable employees. However, less than one-quarter of employees report receiving ongoing feedback about their overall job performance, career and development opportunities, personal development and wellbeing, and compensation.

Those who receive ongoing feedback and understand their areas for improvement are nearly **2x** more likely to find performance evaluations valuable. (46% vs 28%)

How often are the following aspects of performance discussed with your manager/leader?

Aspects of performance	Annually	Bi-annually	Quarterly	Ongoing
Overall job performance	**35%**	**23%**	**23%**	**19%**
Career development opportunities	**38%**	**22%**	**21%**	**19%**
Feedback and areas for improvement	**28%**	**18%**	**26%**	**28%**
Compensation and benefits	**61%**	**15%**	**14%**	**10%**
Collaboration with others	**23%**	**16%**	**24%**	**37%**
Personal development and wellbeing	**31%**	**22%**	**24%**	**23%**

Try this approach to performance reviews

Bookmark this template to try this structure for yourself.

See template

Empower employees to take control of their own performance by enabling them to schedule their own check-in conversations.

Schedule

Employees prepare for, schedule, and conduct the check-in meeting. We recommend a monthly cadence to keep discussions as actionable as possible.

Rate

Employees rate themselves and their impact on their peers. We advise employees to meet with teammates regularly to evaluate their impact on others.

Meet

The employee shares their action plan for improvement and/or next steps.

Feedback

Both the direct report and their manager have the opportunity to share feedback and gain a better understanding of where they could be more helpful to each other.

TREND / 04

Catalyzing communication to improve collaboration

Communication and collaboration go hand-in-hand

Effective communication can create a positive ripple effect across an organization and directly impact outcomes. Only 19% of those surveyed, however, rate the communication at their organization as excellent. This group reporting best-in-class communication for their workplace has markedly better ratings for collaboration as well: 60% of those with excellent communication have excellent collaboration vs 13% of all others.

Excellence in communication and collaboration drive growth. There is also a notable correlation between revenue increases last year and ratings for communication and collaboration. Companies that experienced significant increases in revenue last year are more likely than others to have excellent communication and collaboration in their organization.

41%
of those in accelerated growth mode have **excellent communication** vs. 15% of all others

48%
of those in accelerated growth mode have **excellent collaboration** vs. 17% of all others

Improving communication and collaboration should be a top priority for employers focused on growth

Only **21%** of professionals report being very satisfied with their company's current level of communication and collaboration.

5x

Those who are most satisfied with communication and collaboration at their workplace are 5x **more likely than others to be working for companies that experienced significant revenue growth** last year.

3x

Those who are most satisfied with communication and collaboration at their workplace are more than 3x **more likely to feel extremely positive about their company's ability to grow sustainably** over the next two years.

Navigating hybrid workplaces effectively can help improve communication

There is substantial room for companies to improve their communication and collaboration. Communication gaps rank at the very top of the list of most challenging aspects of a workplace (40%) according to those surveyed.

Most challenging aspect of workplace

40%

Ranked communication gaps as most challenging aspect

Working from home vs. at the office

Our data indicates that the workplace environment impacts perceived communication challenges. **Communication gaps are a more commonly reported challenge for those in an office setting than those at home (42% vs 32%)** despite communication, topping the list of challenges for those working from home.

What are the most challenging aspects of your workplace?
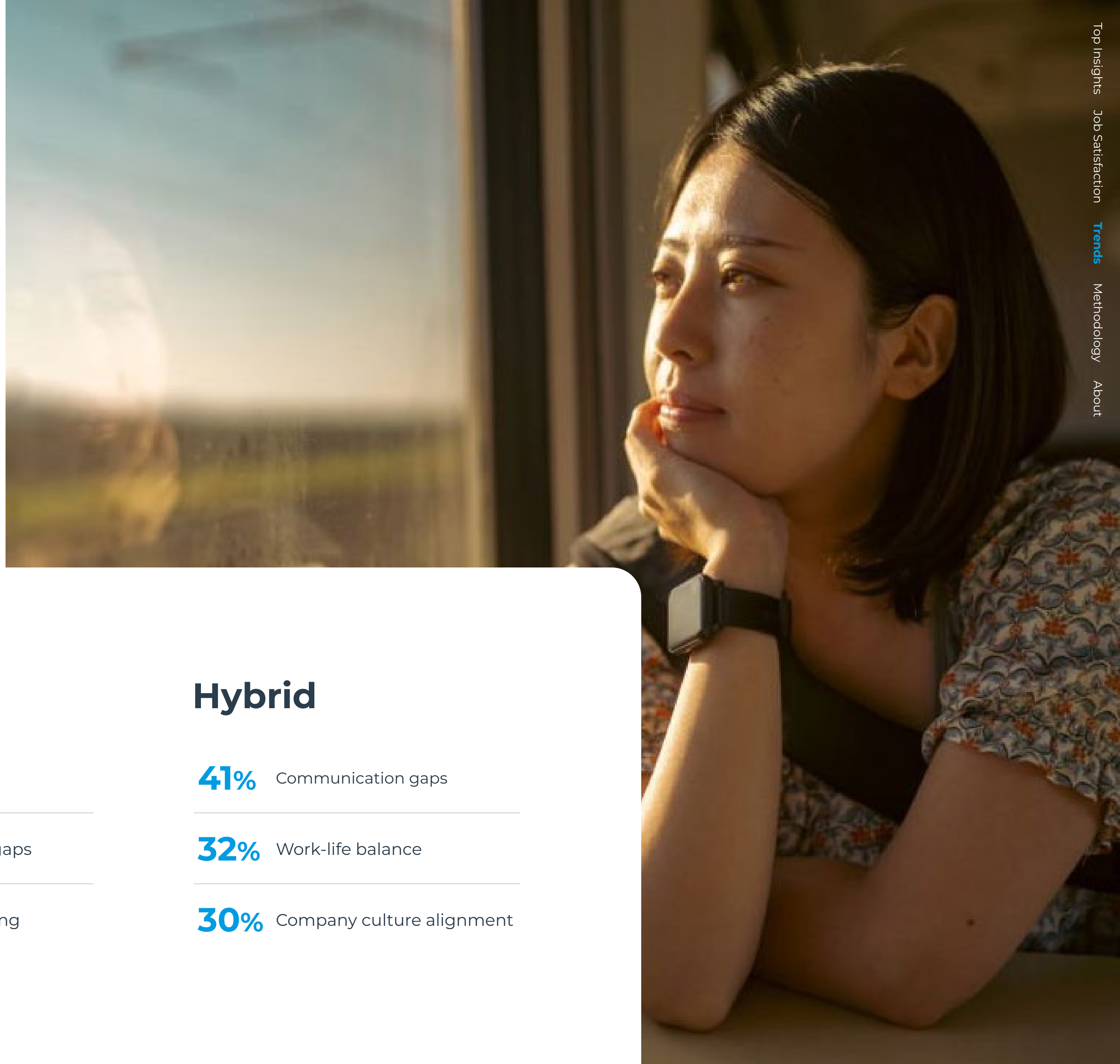
Home

32%   Communication gaps

32%   Team collaboration

30%   Poor leadership

Office

46%   Work-life balance

42%   Communication gaps

31%   Employee wellbeing

Hybrid

41%   Communication gaps

32%   Work-life balance

30%   Company culture alignment

Steps to promote better communication at work

Enabling more effective collaboration

When it comes to the most significant obstacles to effective collaboration, tools and time zones pose little challenge compared to the people problems that lead the list.

Improving communication and collaboration is an ongoing process that requires shifts in mindset across an entire organization. With a focus on building relationships across teams, individuals, and organizational leaders, employers can mend gaps in communication and collaboration to drive growth.

Regardless of workplace environment, there are steps employers can take to promote better communication at work:

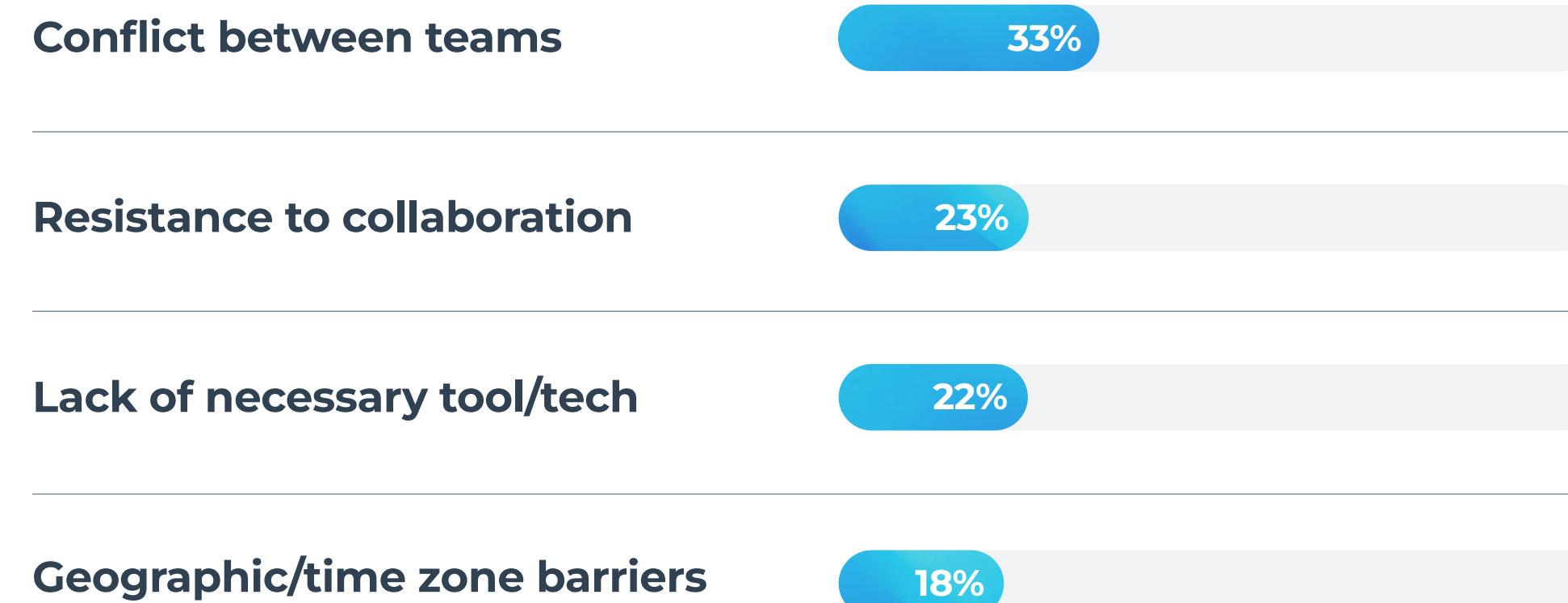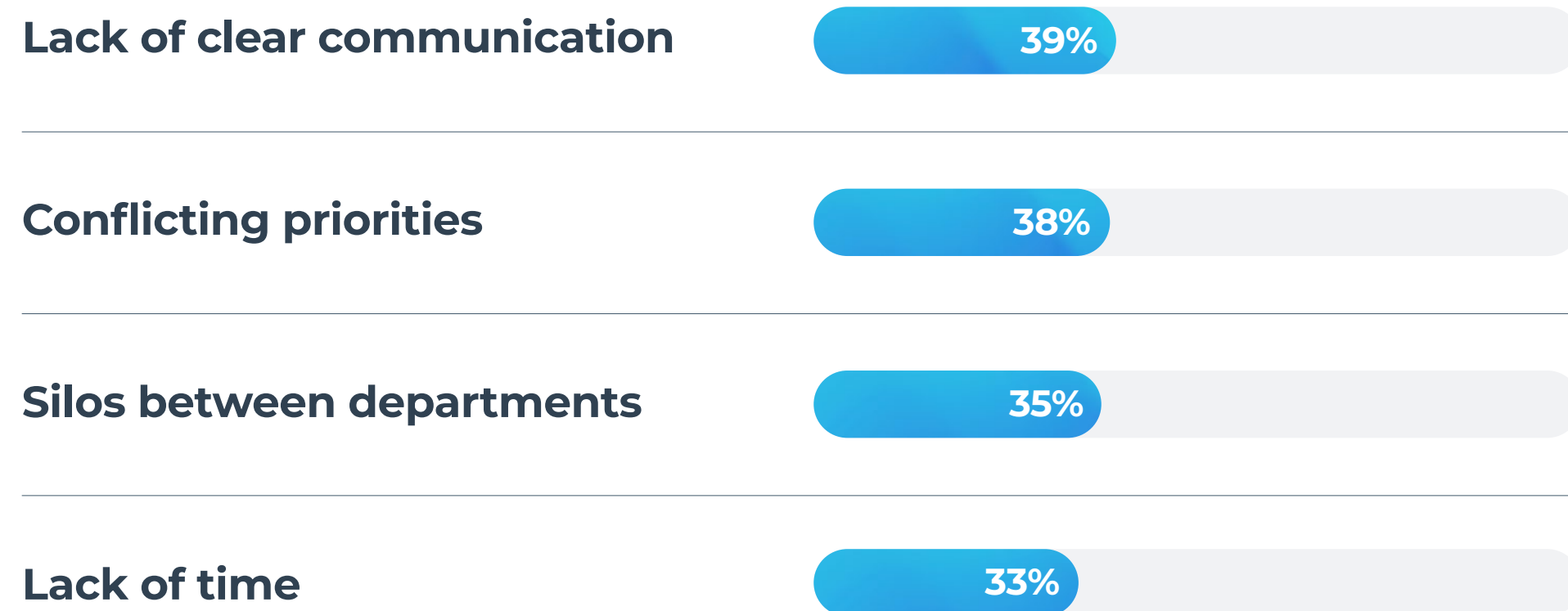**Make coaching and feedback an ongoing process**

Promote regular check-ins with both managers and peers

Enable more transparency

Designate social time to boost personal relationships
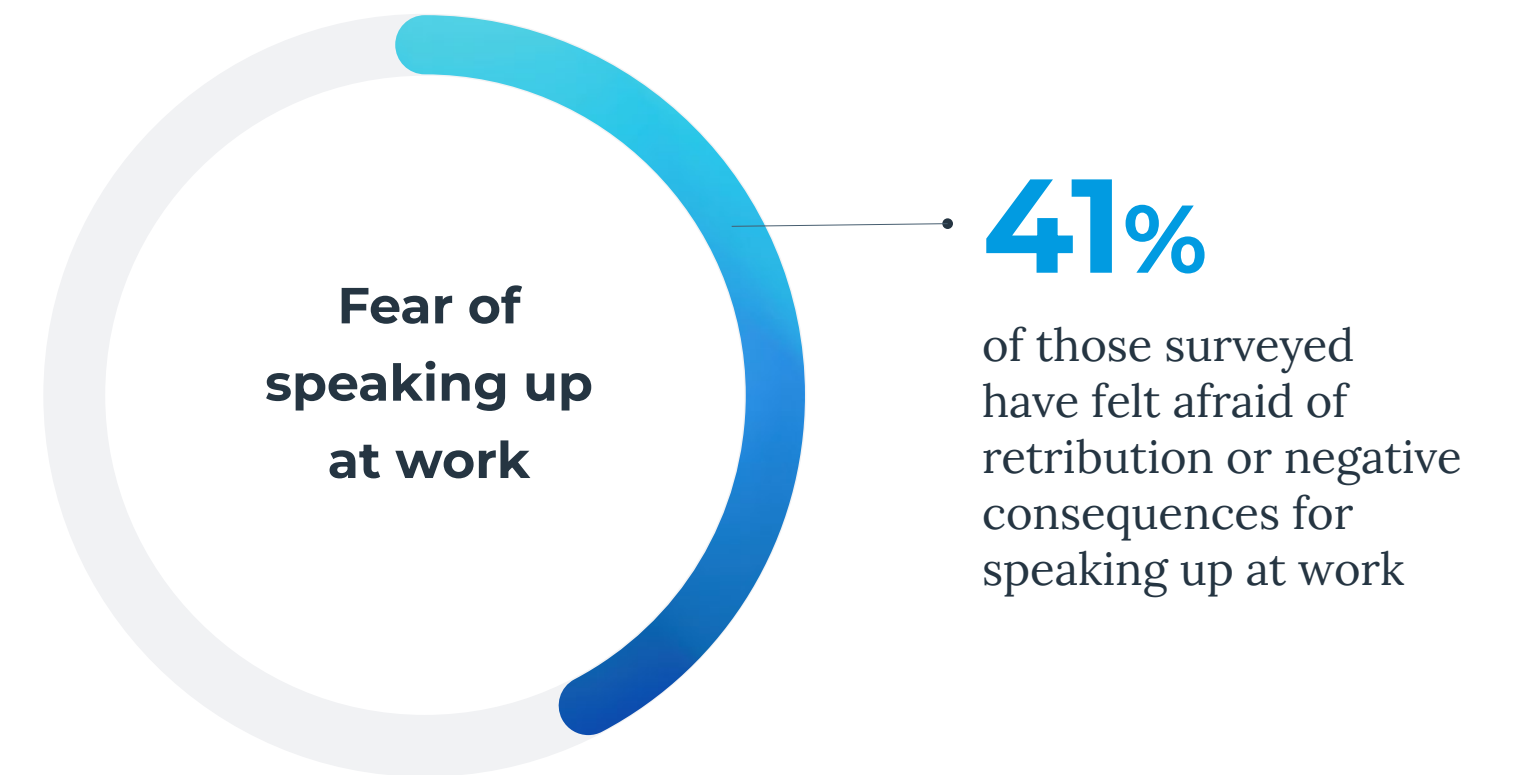
Foster psychological safety

What are your most significant obstacles to effective collaboration?

Lack of clear communication	39%
Conflicting priorities	38%
Silos between departments	35%
Lack of time	33%

Conflict between teams	33%
Resistance to collaboration	23%
Lack of necessary tool/tech	22%
Geographic/time zone barriers	18%

Feeling heard by your leaders impacts satisfaction with communication and collaboration

Those who are very satisfied with the level of communication and collaboration are significantly more likely to feel heard by leadership. 70% strongly agree that their opinions and input are recognized and considered by leaders in their company, compared to 20% of those with less satisfaction.

Fear of speaking up at work

41%

of those surveyed have felt afraid of retribution or negative consequences for speaking up at work

Making employees feel psychologically safe

When employees feel psychologically safe at work, they're empowered to "think out loud," ask bold questions, openly challenge the status quo, share feedback, and work through challenges and disagreements without fear of humiliation or retaliation. This stems from a culture of respect, trust, and openness—where people are made to feel comfortable bringing their full, authentic selves to work and "laying themselves on the line" in front of others for the betterment of the organization.

TREND / 05

Prioritizing training and development to boost performance

A challenge worth taking on

While only 27% of those surveyed feel strongly that their company provides adequate growth and development opportunities, those who report higher rates of job satisfaction are over 5x more likely than others to agree strongly. Training and development relates to job satisfaction in a big way.

Skills development and leadership development are among the top challenges that organizations face today according to professionals surveyed. An effective approach to training and development can improve employee retention, accountability, productivity, and build more constructive leaders.

Which of the following are significant challenges to your organization's success?

52%
Skills development

43%
Navigating a hybrid workplace

39%
Leadership development

36%
Low morale/ engagement

36%
Poor communication/ collaboration

24%
Inclusion/ belonging

23%
Lack of employee accountability

16%
Psychological safety

Those with the most job satisfaction are 5x more likely to work for companies that provide opportunities to enhance their skill set to develop their career

Training and development also plays a critical role in ensuring employees are well-equipped to handle their jobs, feel a sense of support, value, and competence, and have opportunities for career advancement. Together, all of these things directly influence other factors like engagement and retention, making them essential to your talent management strategy.

When it comes down to it, engaged employees aspire to expand their skills and embrace challenges. Their aim goes beyond mere job performance—they seek meaningful work and avenues to advance in their careers.
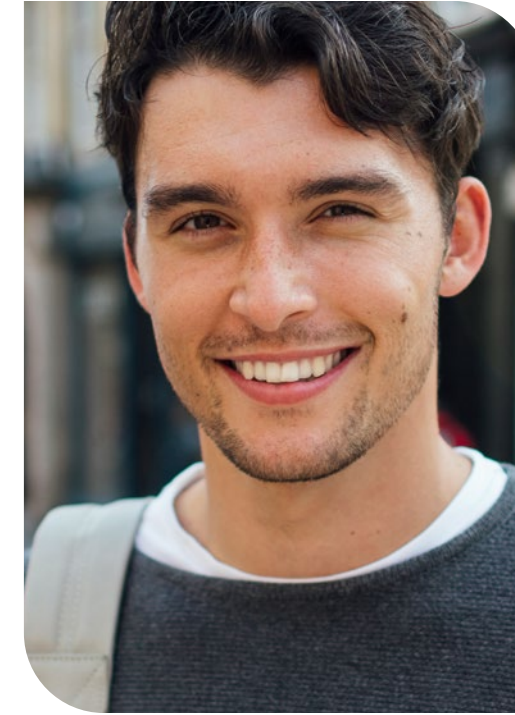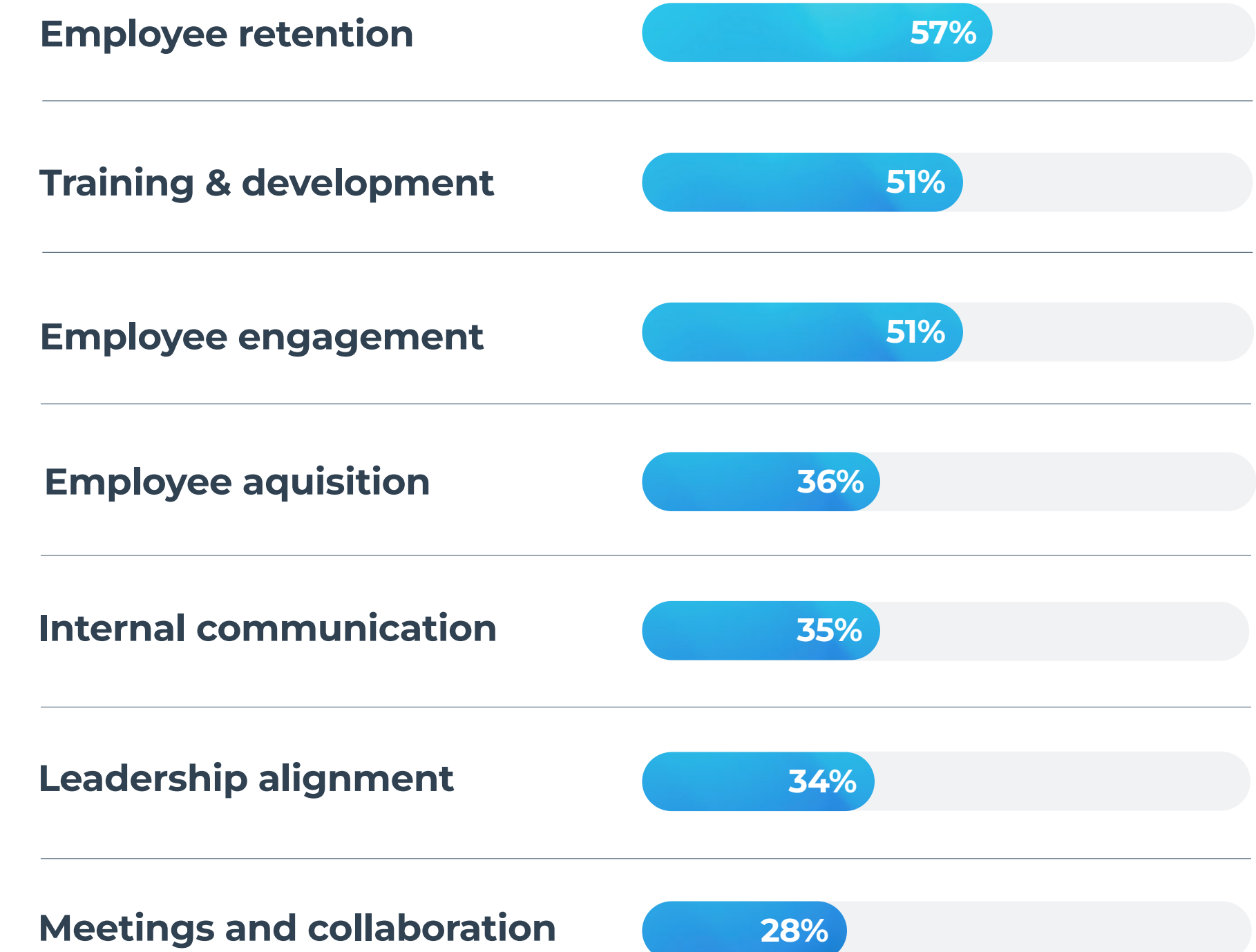
The benefits of improving training and development

Employee training and development also ranks toward the top of the list of areas that need to be improved in order for companies to meet their top objectives. Effective training and development naturally improves the other top objectives including employee retention and engagement.

Which of the following areas need to be improved to achieve your company's primary objectives?

Employee retention — 57%

Training & development — 51%

Employee engagement — 51%

Employee aquisition — 36%

Internal communication — 35%

Leadership alignment — 34%

Meetings and collaboration — 28%

Only 21% of those surveyed rate the training and development at their company as excellent

But those who do see morale and engagement as less of a challenge, also see retention as less of a problem area, and have higher rates of efficiency and innovation.

3x

Employees who **receive less-than-excellent training and development are over 3x as likely to list low morale and engagement** as a top challenge to their organization's success

4x

Those with **best-in-class training** and development are nearly 4x more likely than others to rate the **efficiency** of their organization as excellent

4x

Those with **best-in-class training** and development are over 4x more likely than others to rate the **innovation** of their organization as excellent

3x

Those with **best-in-class training** and development are over 3x more likely than others to work for organizations that experienced significant **revenue growth** last year

A final thought on *humanity* in the workplace

When it comes to organizational success, it's imperative that we remember what a critical role our people play. They're the architects of innovation, the drivers of progress, and the heartbeat of a thriving workplace. Recognizing that individuals are not cogs in a machine, but unique contributors with passions and potentials, is the key to unlocking limitless possibilities. When people feel acknowledged, heard, and valued, they become dedicated catalysts for change.

At the end of the day, it's not about managing resources—it's about empowering people. In an environment filled with support and genuine understanding, the sky's the limit for what both people and the organization can accomplish. After all, a company's greatest asset isn't its products or services, it's the individuals who bring them to life.

Methodology

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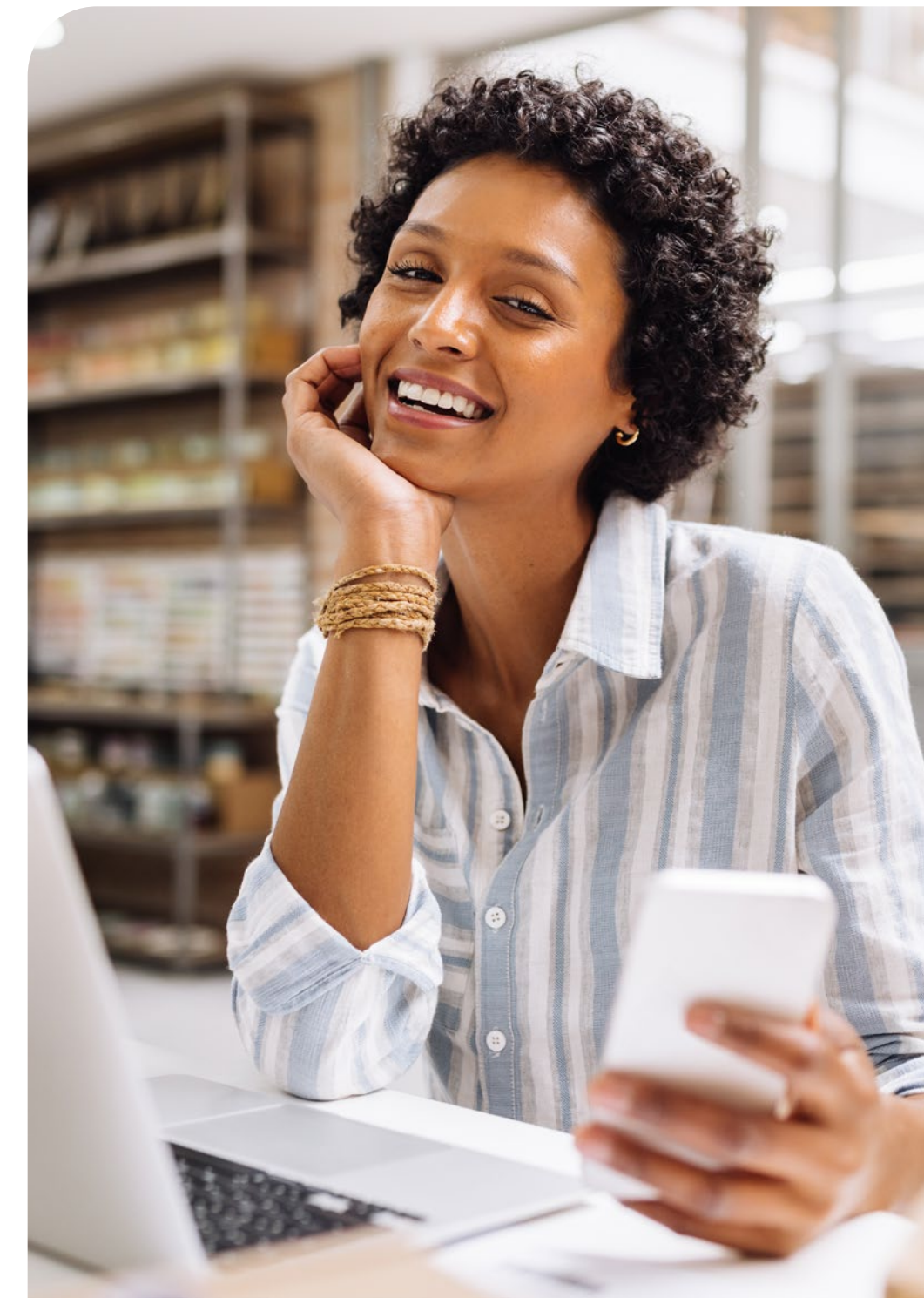
Methodology and participants

Ascend2 benchmarks the performance of business strategies and the tactics and technology that drive them. With a custom online questionnaire, we surveyed 304 professionals from non-supervisory employees to executive leadership. These individuals represent organizations located in North America, Europe, and APAC regions with 500 to 10,000 employees operating in a variety of industries. The survey was fielded in November 2023.

About the participants

Region

67%	North America
29%	Europe
4%	APAC

Number of employees

27%	500-1,000
35%	1,001-5,000
38%	5,001-10,000

Job role

21%	C-Level/executive
32%	Vice President or Sr. Vice President
28%	Director
19%	Manager/supervisor
21%	Non-supervisory employee

Human Resources department

60%	Yes
40%	No

Want to bring more humanity to your workplace this year? Arbinger helps organizations foster people-centric cultures that drive results.

Learn more

Research partners

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About the Research Partners

Arbinger Institute

Organizational change starts with the way people think. So, if you want to achieve organization-wide change, you have to start with individuals. The Arbinger Institute brings four decades of research and experience helping thousands of clients worldwide achieve a dramatic improvement in results through a shift from an inward to an outward mindset.

With our proven training and coaching methods, people at all levels of an organization discover how a shift in mindset empowers them to break down silos, spark productivity, inspire greater

inclusivity, create sustainable cultural changes, accelerate innovation, and improve their bottom-line. We've also helped millions of professionals expand their potential and advance their careers by applying the tools first presented in our best-selling books: Leadership & Self Deception, The Outward Mindset, and The Anatomy of Peace.

Whether you're interested in leadership development, building a high-performing team, or transforming an organization's culture, we'll show you how to create the mindset transformation that is the key to driving lasting change.

Ascend2
RESEARCH-BASED MARKETING

Companies partner with Ascend2 to create original research from survey conceptualization through report and content creation to media outreach. Ascend2 helps companies fuel marketing content, generate leads, and engage prospects to drive demand through the middle of the funnel.