



Mind Health: creating a win-win work environment

The AXA Mind Health
At Work Report (2023)

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Foreword by Patrick Cohen

In the past, employees needed to be physically fit – these days, in some cases, being mentally fit is more important.

Our report shows that, where employers actively promote mental fitness, there are clear benefits both for companies and their employees. For companies, it’s about creating a work environment in which employees can perform at their best. For employees, it’s about using the workplace as a positive in their lives – a place where they feel valued not just for what they do but for who they are.

In this report, we’ve set out what HR executives and managers should focus on to create this win-win work environment. Until now, the evidence has been mainly anecdotal – this report proves the connection between good mind health and productivity. It shows that employees who are mentally fit are less likely to quit their jobs and more likely to be able to cope with the pressures of working life.

Using the results of our Mind Health At Work survey, we’ve made recommendations – priorities that we believe, if acted on, will help companies create a safer, more inclusive, more positive, more modern work environment.



**Patrick Cohen,
CEO AXA Europe
and Health**

Introduction

This survey is based on a poll of more than 7,000 corporate employees in 16 countries and territories around the world.

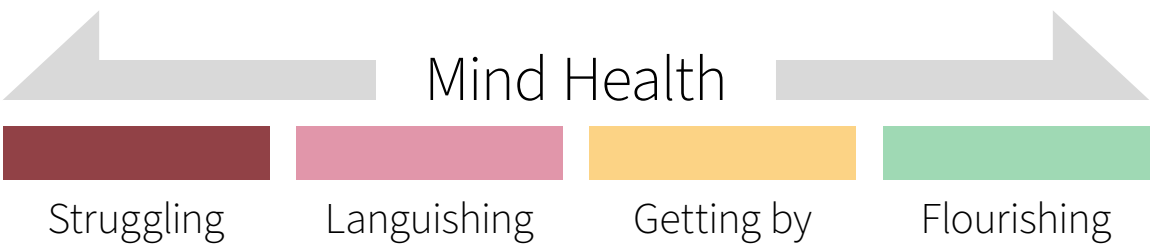
Our findings show a clear correlation between good mind health, productivity and retention. In particular, they show the positive effects of:

- Having access to mental health support at work.
- Working reasonable hours and having a good work-life balance.
- Giving employees some control over their workload.
- A safe, positive work environment where everyone feels protected from bullying, harassment and discrimination.

Where companies act in these areas, they are likely to see better engagement from their employees and improved retention. According to our survey, employees are more than twice as likely to *flourish*, the top rank in our AXA Mind Health Index. They're also more likely to be *in-flow* – a measure of productivity equivalent in sporting terms to being “in the zone.”

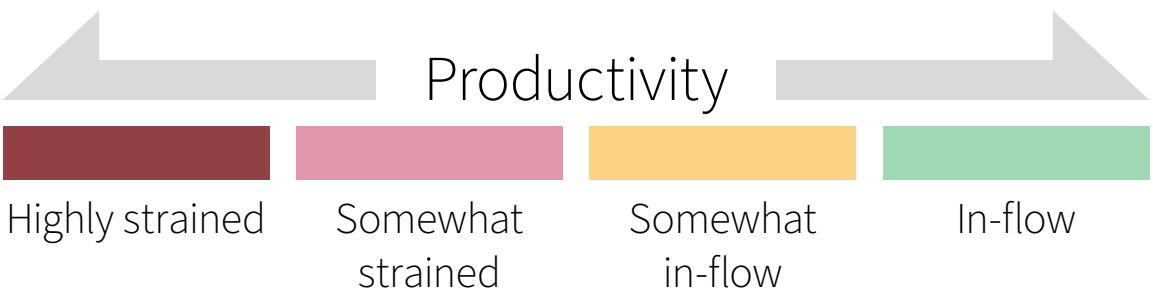
Please note the findings in this report are drawn from the AXA Mind Health Index. For more information, see the AXA Study of Mind Health and Wellbeing in 2023, available online. Details of our methodology may be found on page 15.

How we measure mind health and productivity



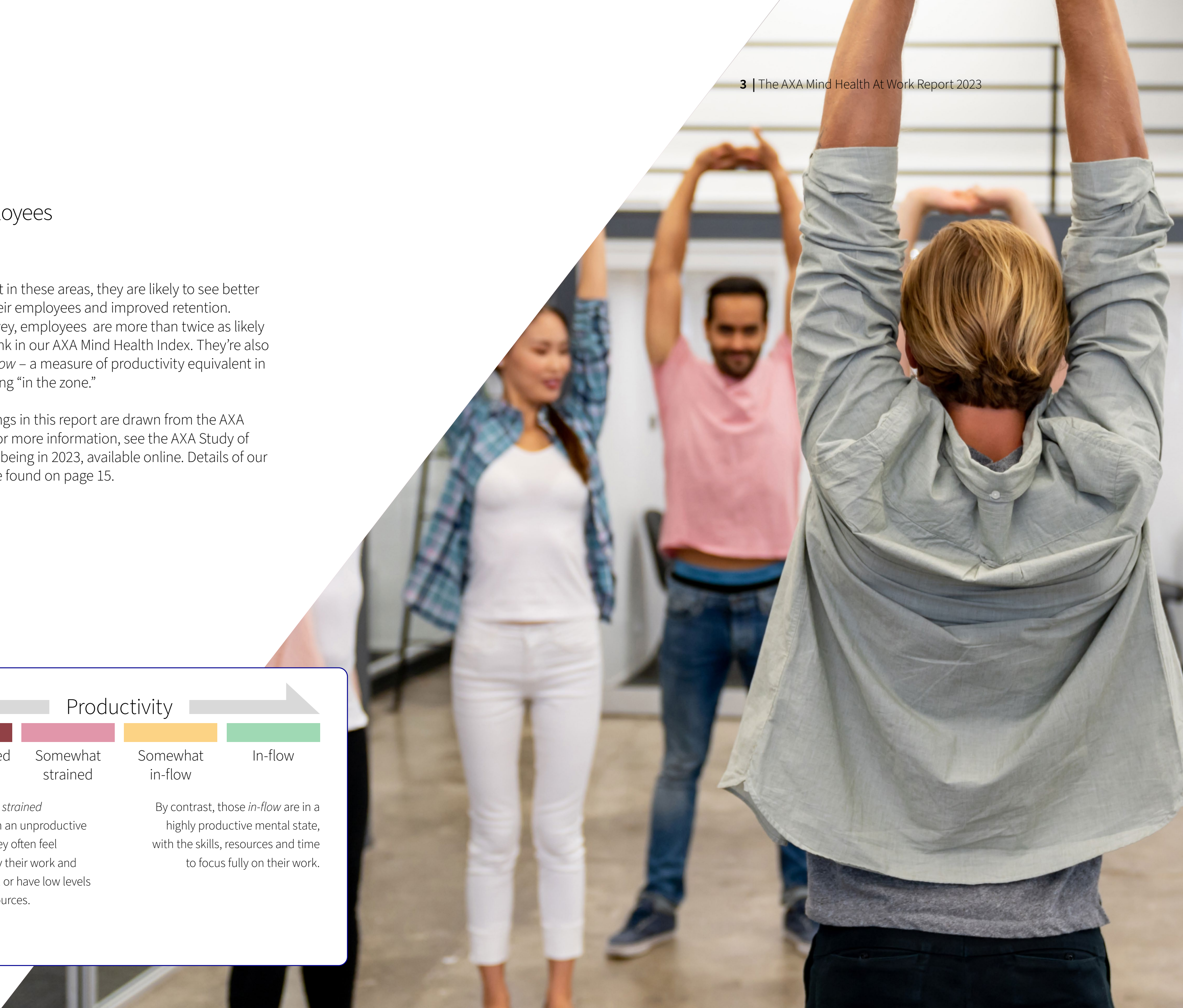
Individuals who are *struggling* usually lack a sense of wellbeing and are likely to experience emotional distress and psycho-social impairment.

At the other end of the scale, those *flourishing* are at the pinnacle of mind health and enjoy good social, psychological and emotional wellbeing.



Generally, *highly strained* individuals are in an unproductive mental state; they often feel overwhelmed by their work and may lack control or have low levels of skills and resources.

By contrast, those *in-flow* are in a highly productive mental state, with the skills, resources and time to focus fully on their work.



“Create a safe environment where people feel free to speak up.”

“It’s important to create a positive narrative around mind health in the workplace, to look at what employers can do to make people happier, to help them function better and flourish. The aim is to prevent mental disorders arising in the first place and avoid dealing with negative outcomes.

To combat any discrimination based on gender, race or sexuality, we want to create a safe environment where people are free to speak up if they experience something they feel isn’t right. That involves promoting good behavior, making sure employees know what’s expected of them and, in turn, what to expect from colleagues, supervisors or clients.

“Communication is key, preventing people from being stuck in their own little bubble. People should be encouraged to consider what they can do as individuals to motivate others and contribute to the wellbeing of everybody in their team.

“Diversity and inclusion should be embraced as a positive resource, with companies making use of the riches this brings. A problem considered from a single viewpoint will result in a rather limited solution, whereas a diverse group of people from different backgrounds will give a broader analysis and possibly a more complete solution.

“This needs to be backed with rules that also prevent any kind of bullying and harassment. Employees should be assured that action will be taken if any of these are breached. I often see policies in companies that aren’t followed. It’s a very dangerous situation. Under those circumstances employees may lose the faith in the company, making it harder to motivate them or to keep them on board.”

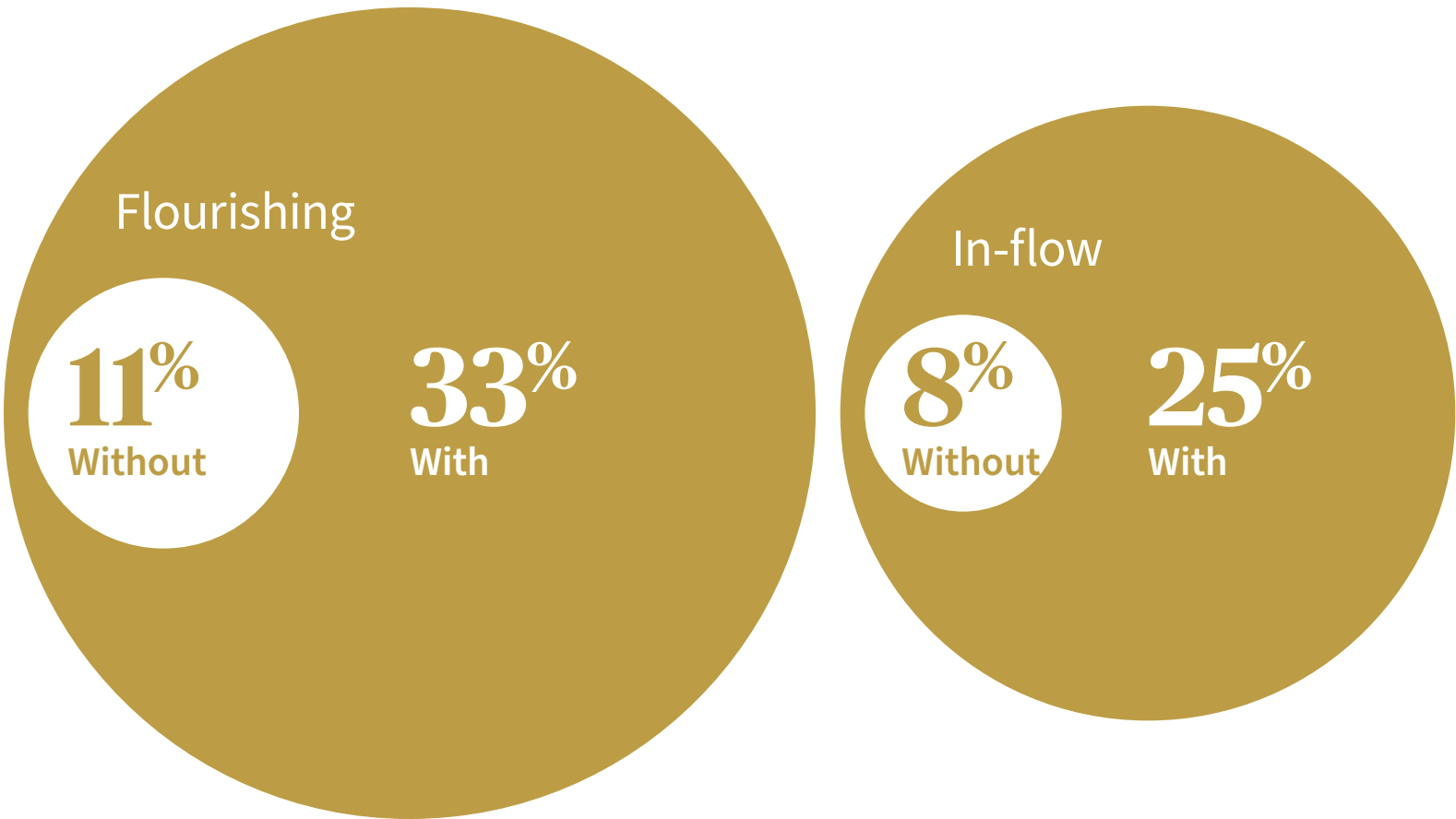


Professor Dr. Lode Godderis, Professor at the Center for Environment and Health at the University of Leuven

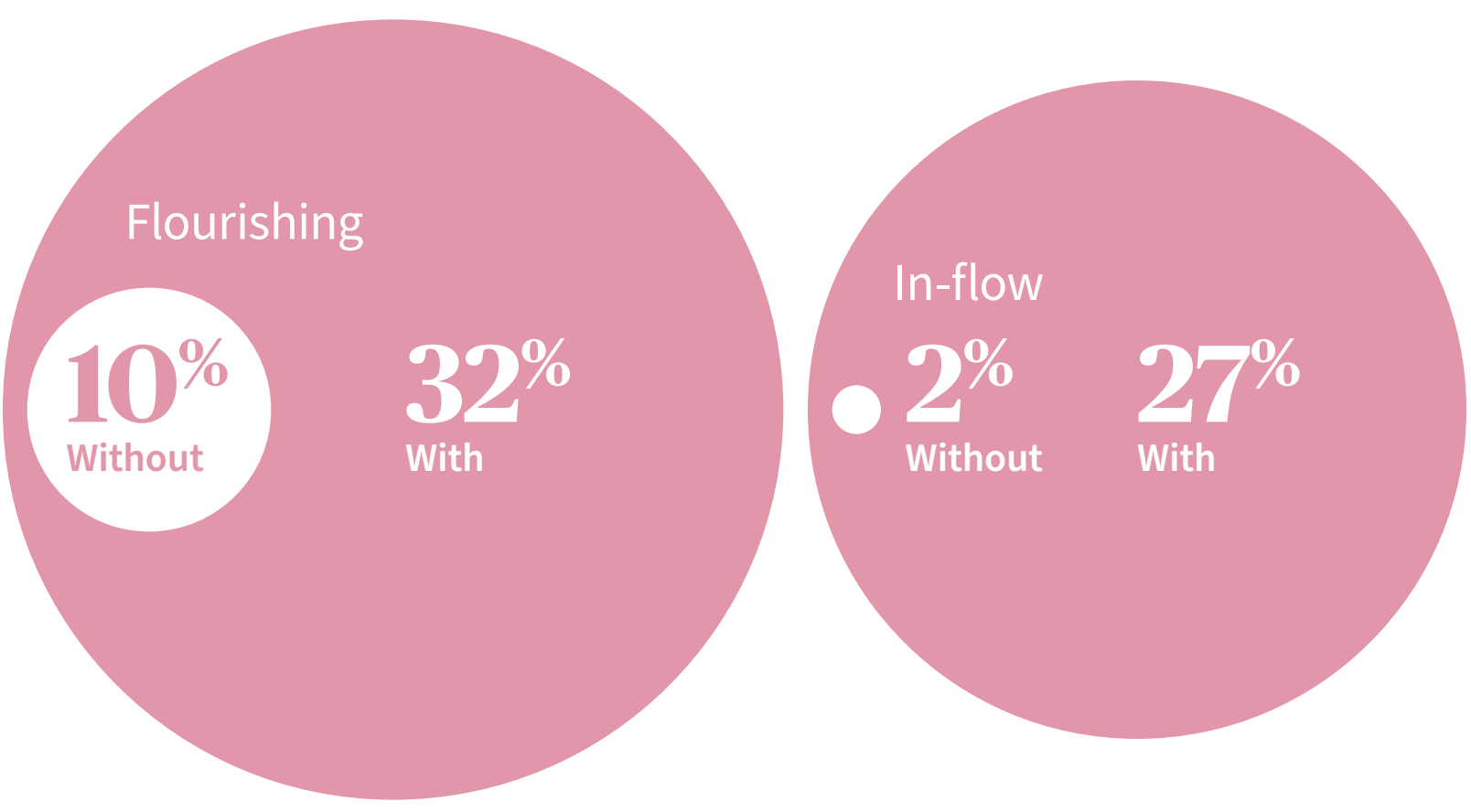
“Diversity and inclusion should be embraced as a positive resource, with companies making use of the riches this brings.”

It’s straightforward. If you offer your employees...

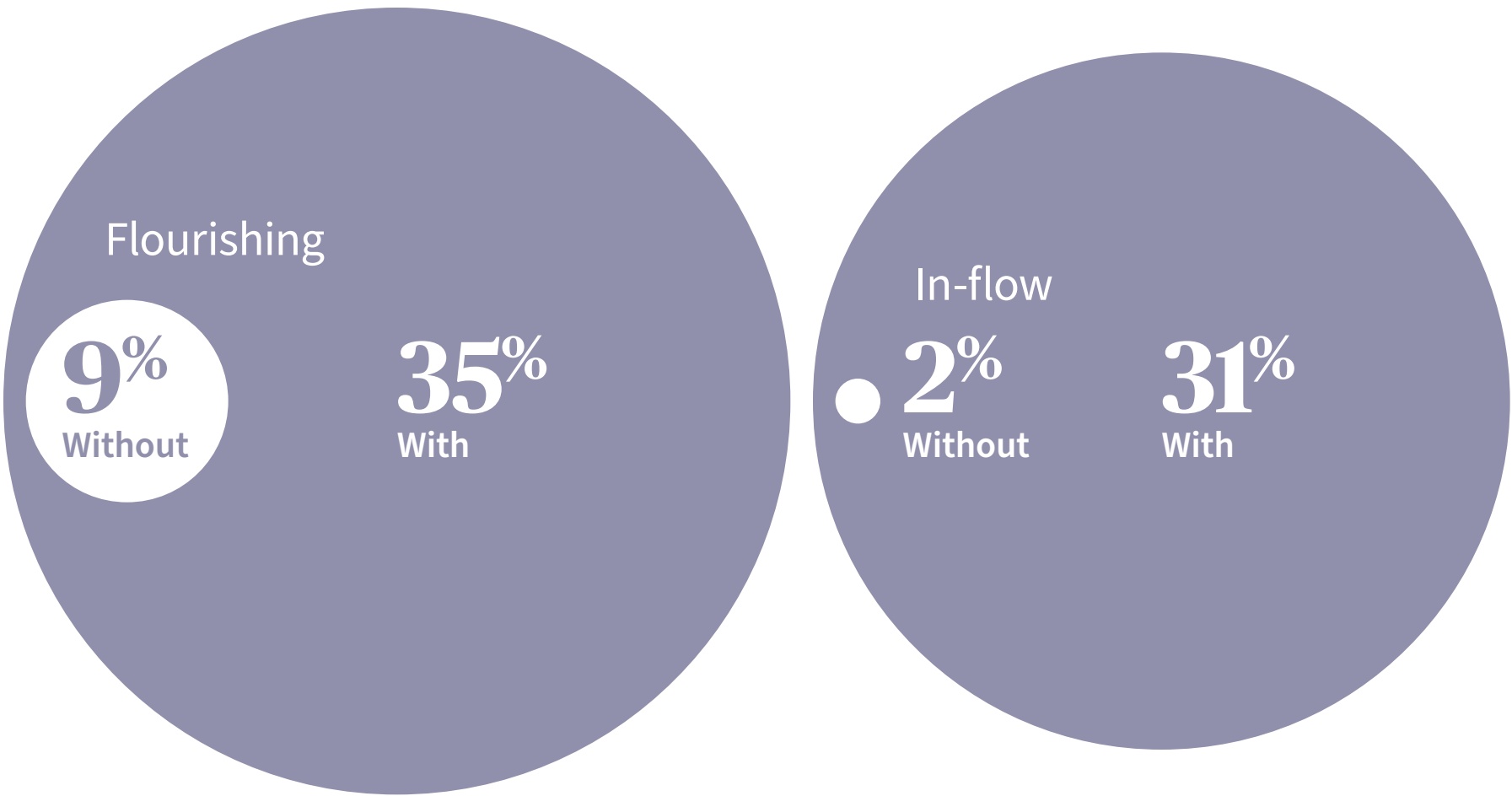
...access to mental health support



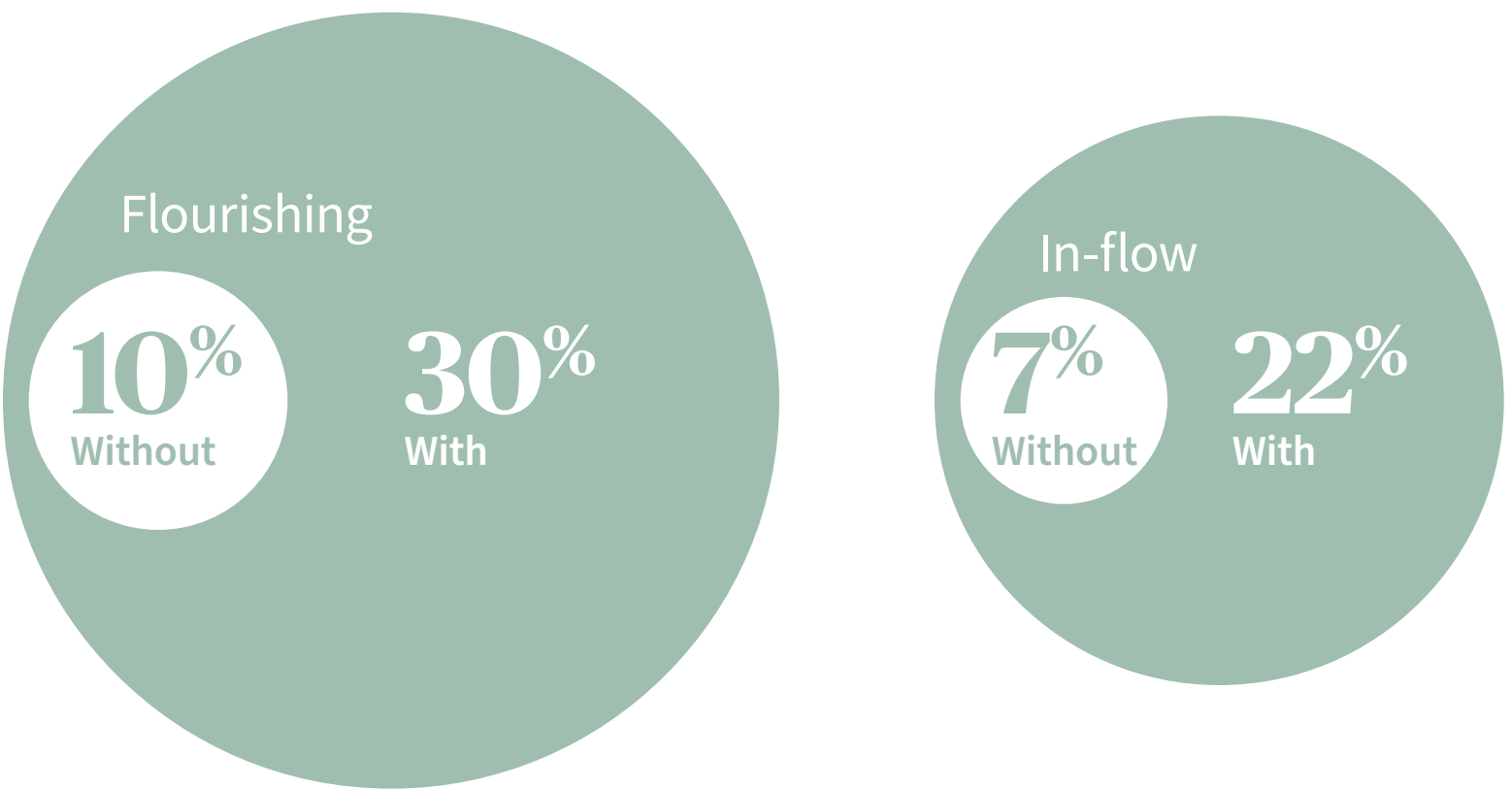
...some control over their workload



...reasonable working hours



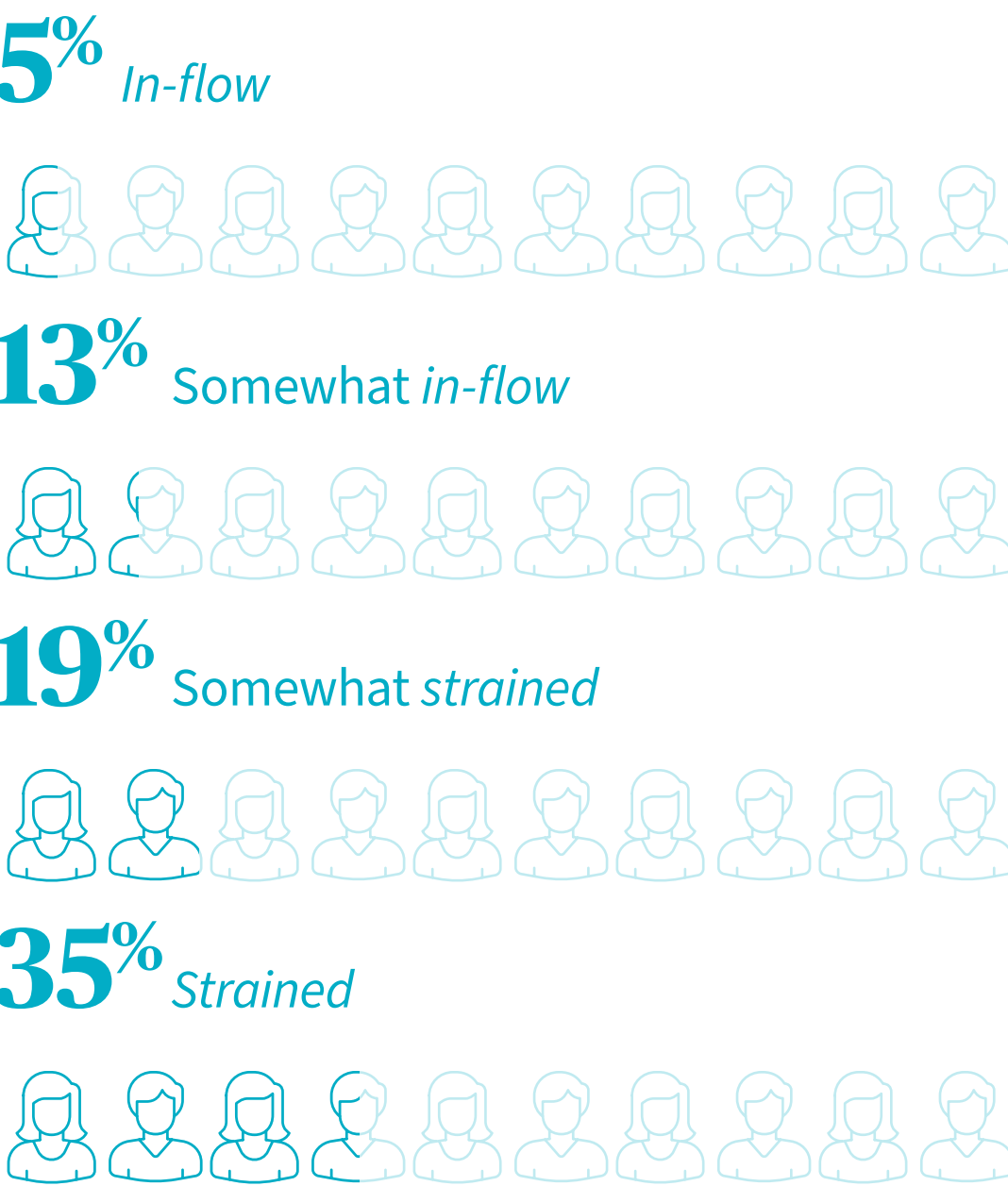
...and protection from bullying and harassment



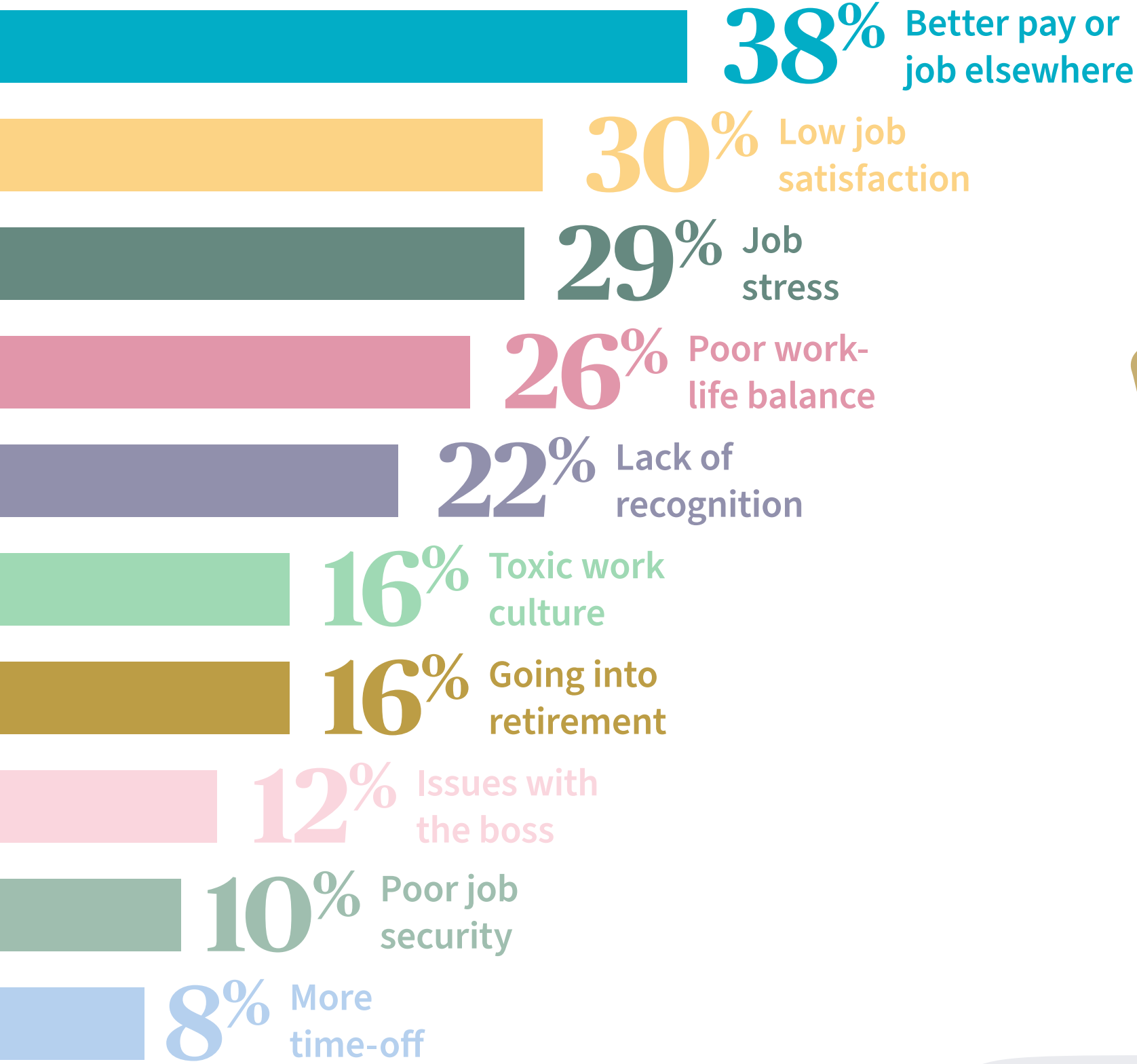
...They’ll be three times more productive and twice as likely to flourish at work.

...And the more your employees flourish, the more productive they are, the more likely they are to stay in their jobs.

Only 5% of *in-flow* employees intend to quit their jobs in the next twelve months, compared with 35% of *strained* employees.



Many people quit in search of better pay and better working conditions. But nearly a third of your employees will leave their jobs because of stress and a poor work-life balance.



Make sure employees have the right skills to do their jobs properly. It's clear that not having those skills takes a real toll on employees' mental health, wellbeing and performance.

Where there's a good fit, employees are much more likely to *flourish* at work — there's also a clear correlation between *flourishing* and those with easily manageable work demands.

3.8x
more likely to
flourish

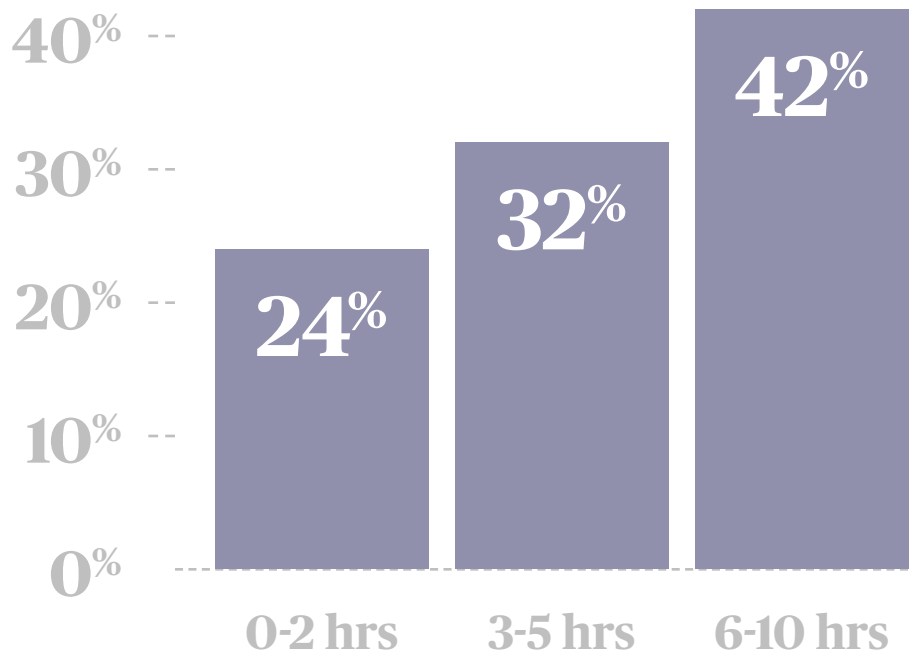
81%
of employees with easily
manageable work demands
are *flourishing*



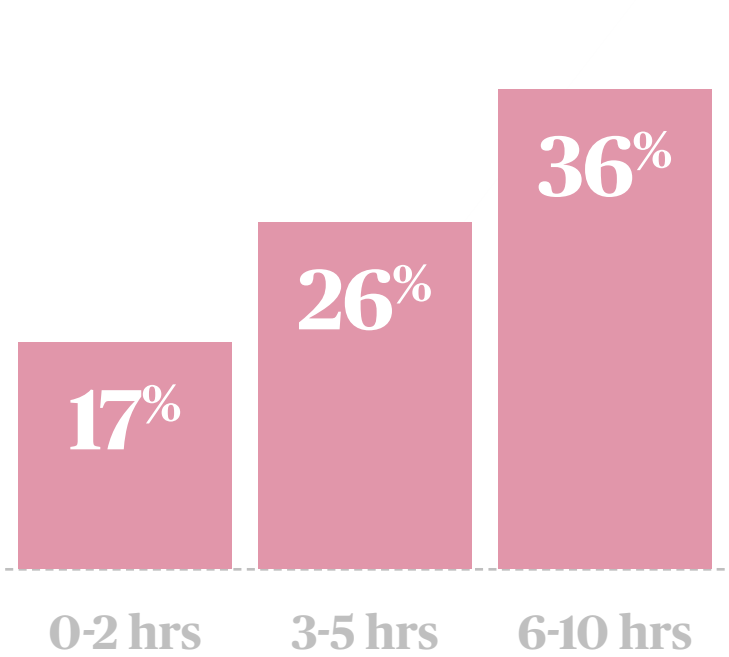
‘Hybrid working’ reduces the pressure of long hours and helps your employees become more productive. So allow your employees to work from home at least some of the time.

Levels of stress

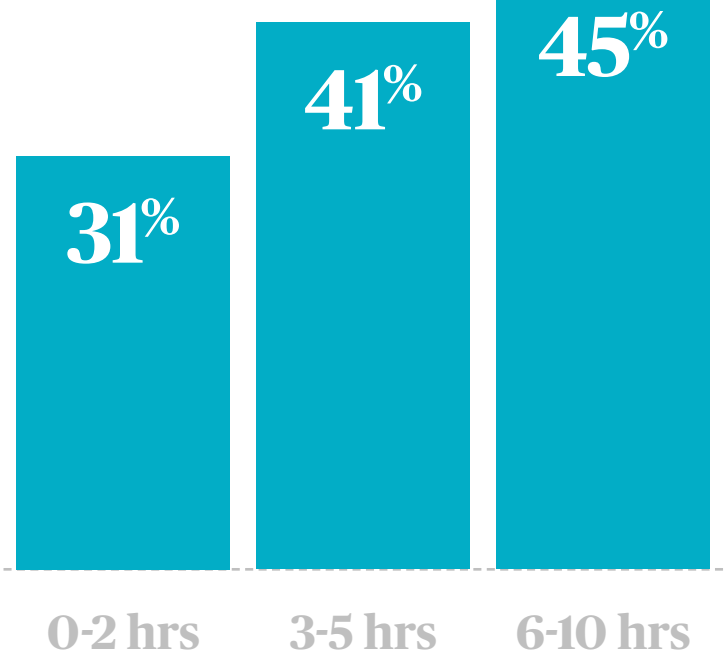
Those working exclusively at home or remotely



Those dividing their time between home and the office (hybrid)



Those working exclusively at the office



Charts show percentage of employees experiencing stress from working additional hours.

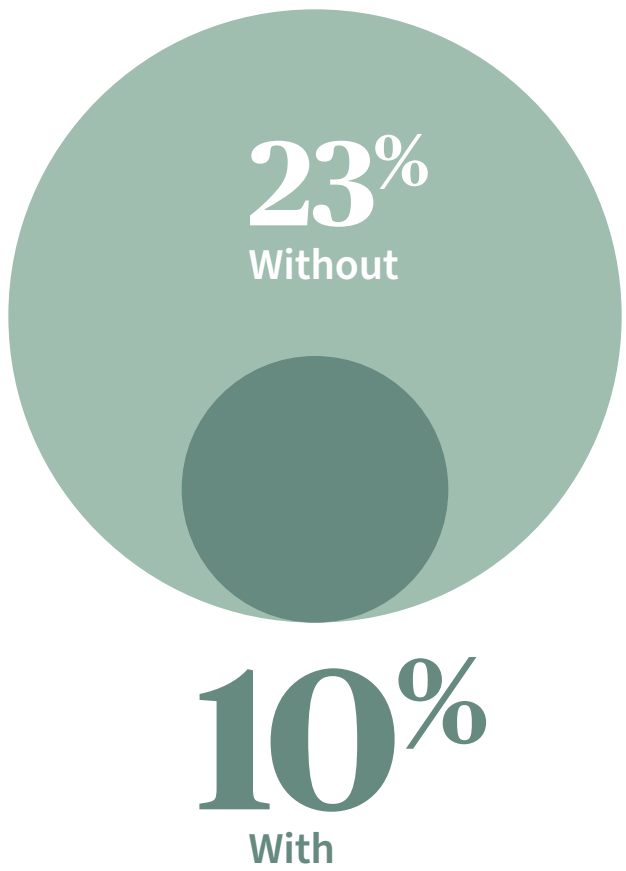
On average, hybrid workers are less stressed by extra hours than those working either at home or in the office.



Make your employees feel included – if they feel like they belong, they’ll perform better and they’ll be less likely to quit.

Those without a sense of belonging are more than twice as likely to quit during the next twelve months.

Intending to quit during the next year



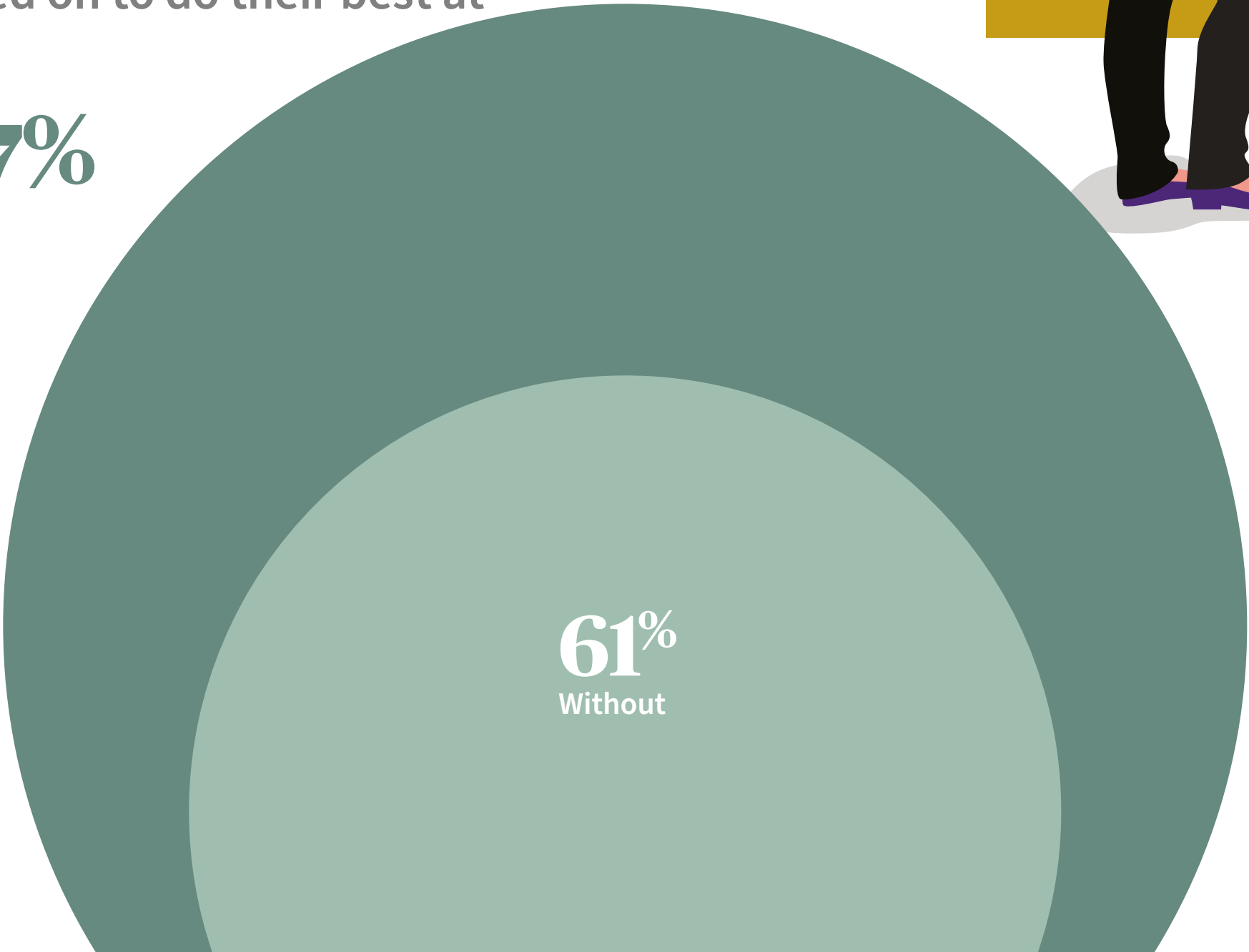
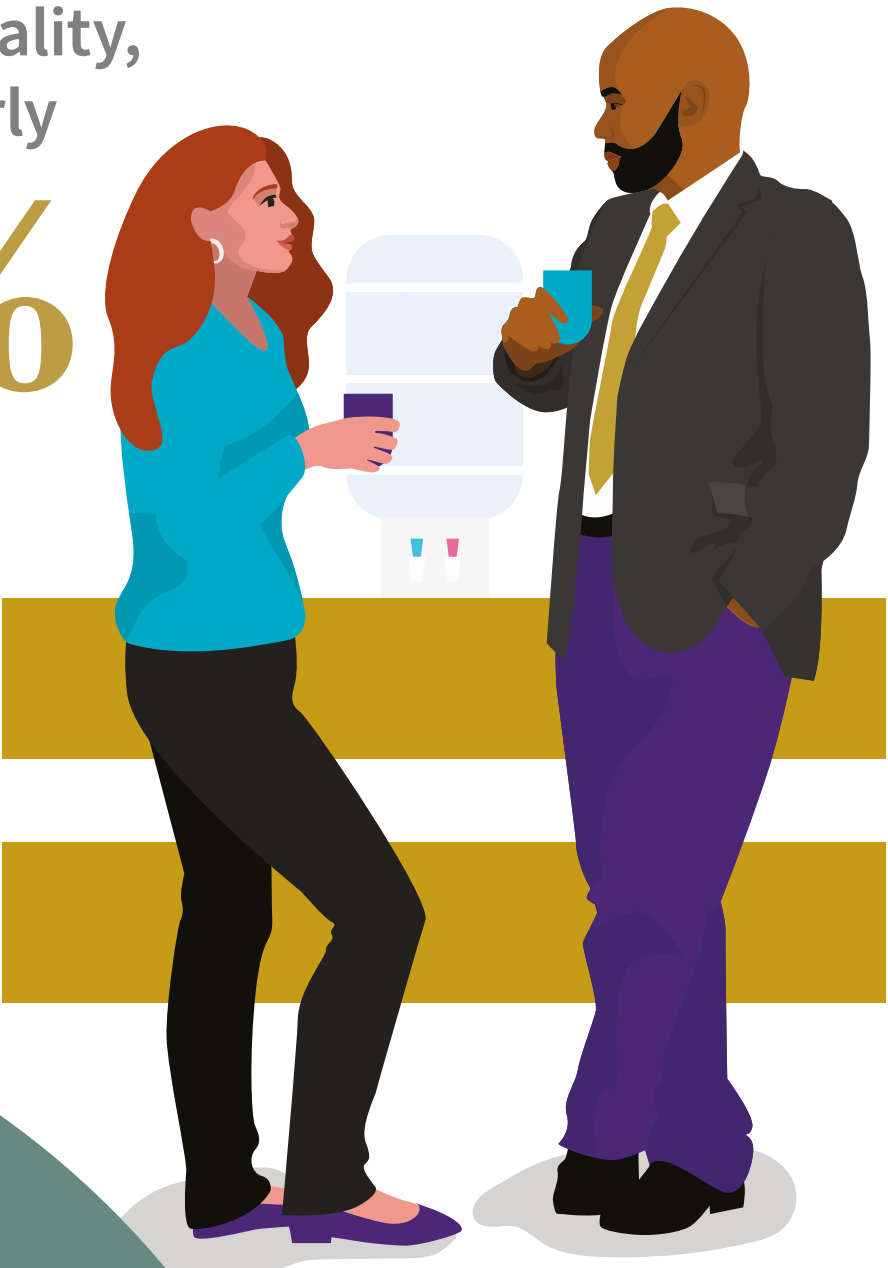
Whereas, almost nine out of every ten employees with a sense of belonging say they can be relied on to do their best at work



In workplaces where there is gender equality, employees are nearly

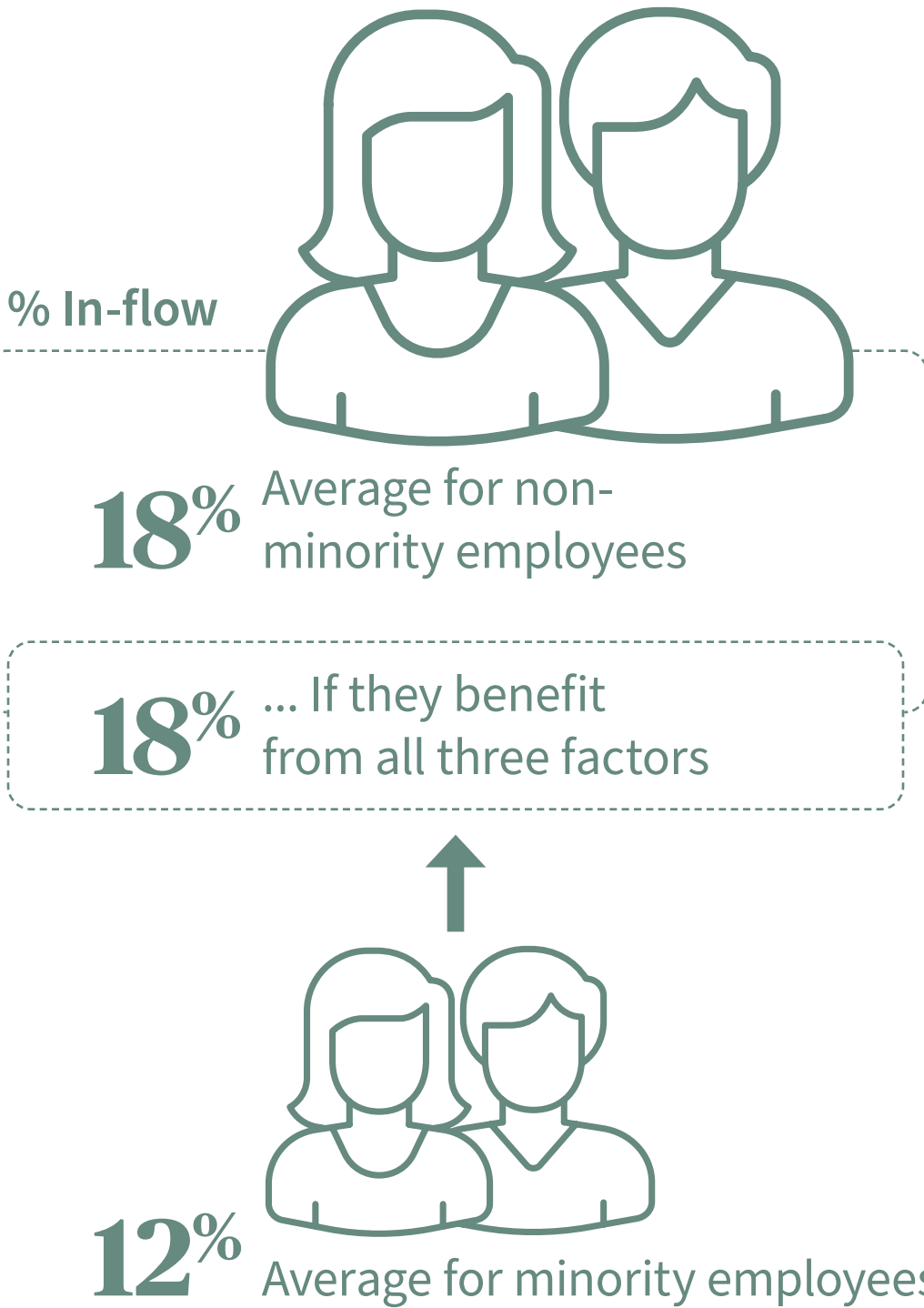


more likely to say they’re able to do their best at work.



Currently, employees from minority groups are likely to be less productive.

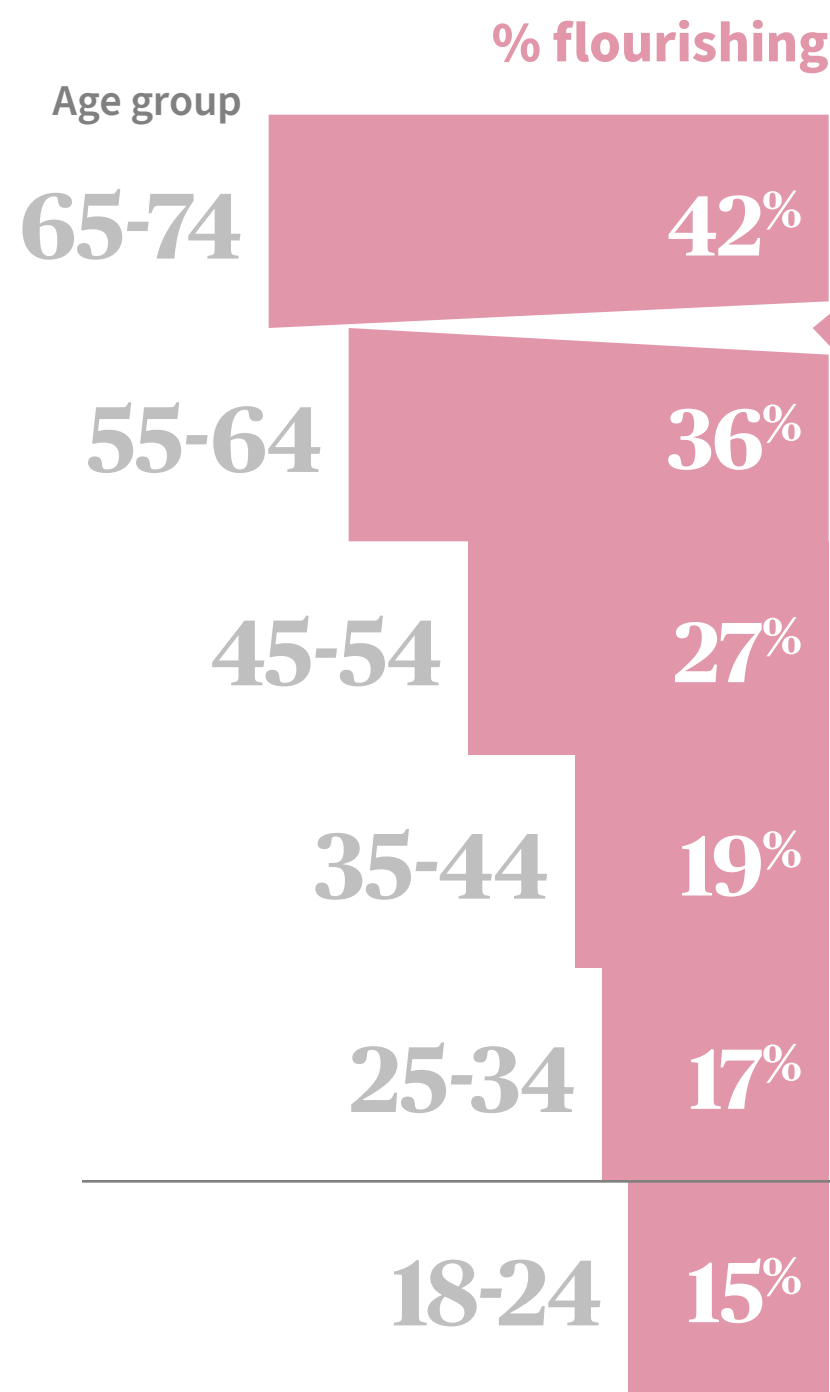
- But provide them with:
- a clear sense of belonging
 - protection from bullying and harassment
 - a positive work environment...
- And with your support, they will be 50% more productive.



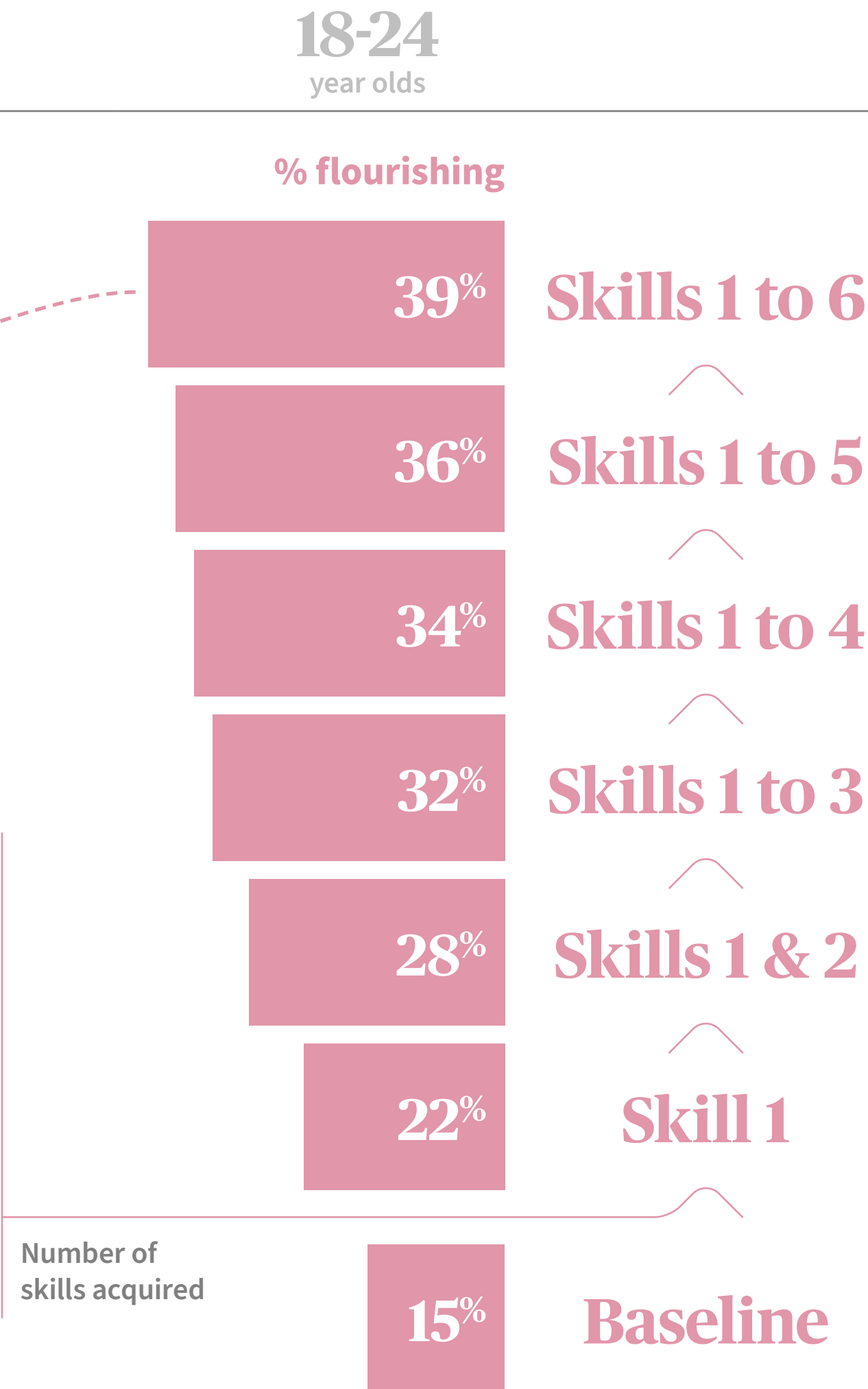
Don't neglect your younger workforce – 18-24 year-olds need to learn how to cope with the pressures of working life. If they do, they'll perform even better than most of your more experienced employees.

...but with the right coping skills they'll flourish more than any other group of working age.

Younger employees are the least likely to be flourishing...



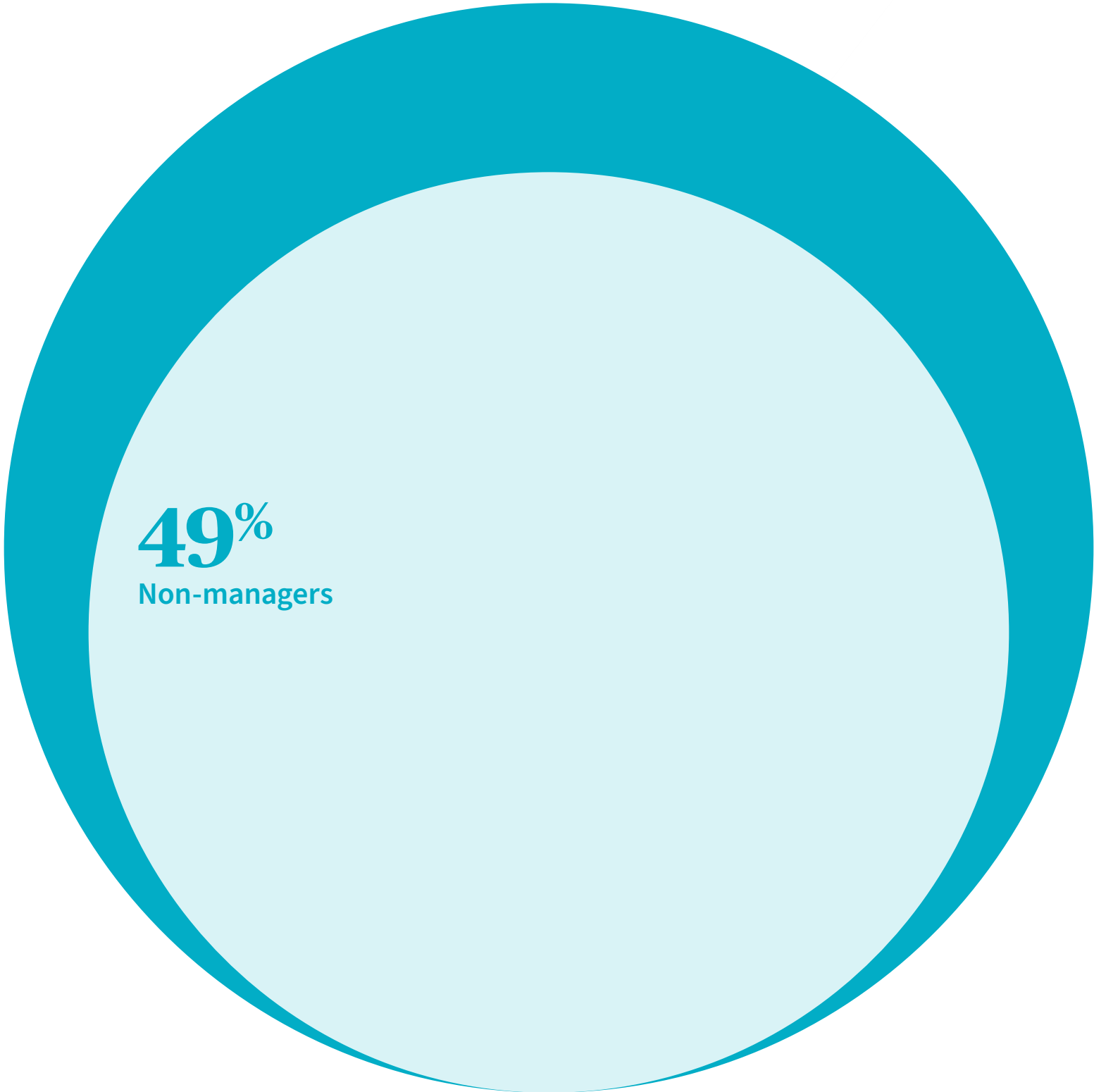
- What are these six coping skills?
- 1) Self-acceptance
 - 2) Optimism
 - 3) Meaning and purpose
 - 4) Pride in achievement
 - 5) Self-confidence
 - 6) Emotional intelligence



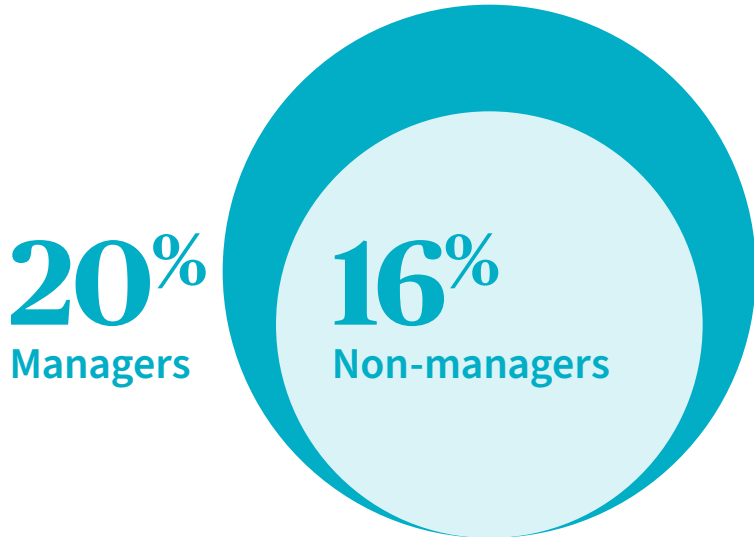
Managers hold the key. They determine what goes on in the workplace. Give them the right support and it will have a positive effect on the workforce as a whole.

Managers are more likely than other employees to experience stress, anxiety and depression.

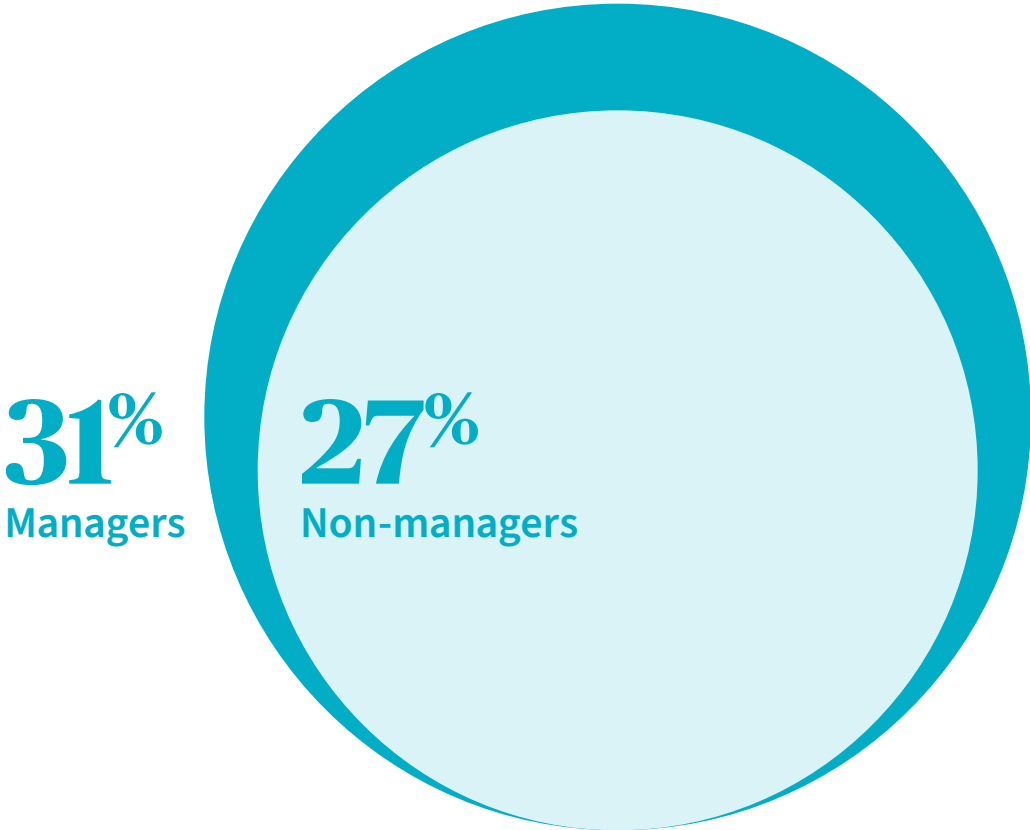
Stress



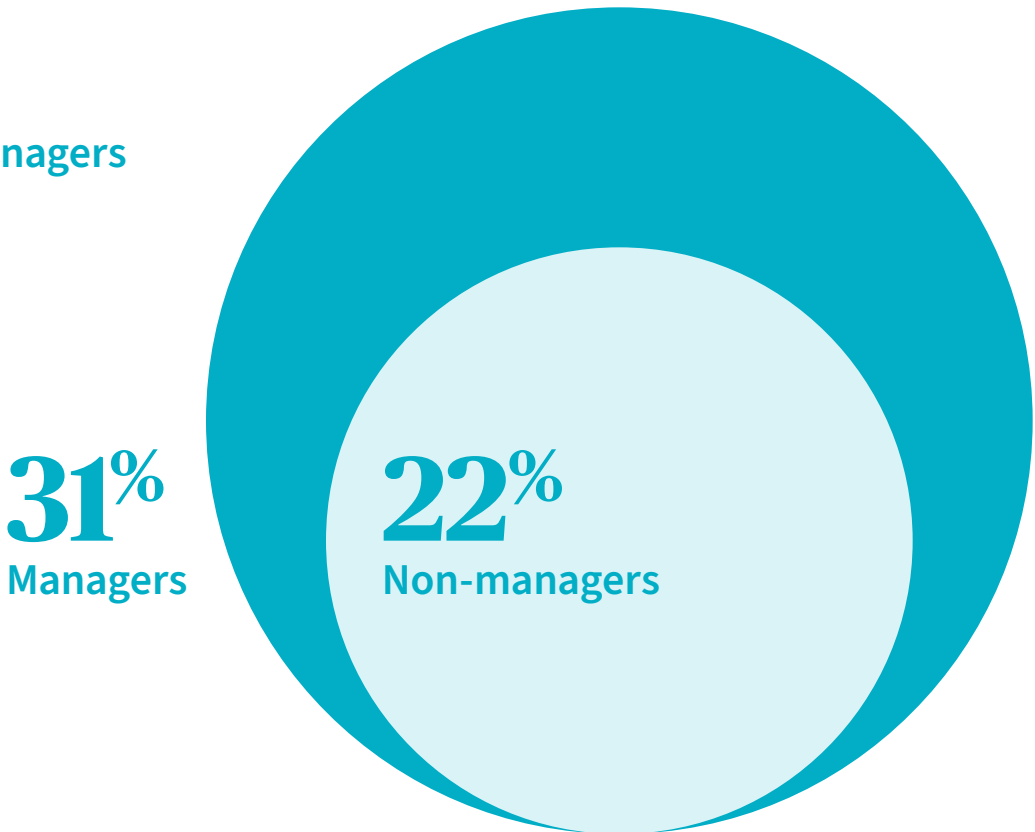
Depression



Job insecurity



Distressing work hours



Anxiety



Gender discrimination



“We can learn from younger generations’ openness.”

“Employers are at their most supportive when they approach their young employees’ mental health with a combination of preventative steps and help in the workplace.

Research shows that prevention works – for example, efforts to minimize work stress can reduce the risk of burnout and depression and therefore maximize retention too.

“However, there’s a limit to prevention, even if companies are well intentioned. Many factors contributing to mental health problems are completely outside employers’ remits, with staff perhaps not wanting their managers to know about what they’re going through – a boundary the employer must respect.

“That’s when it becomes important to help employees cope by creating the space they need to improve their own wellbeing. This could be by offering flexible working policies and time off, along with making offers to help but without forcing help on them – straightforward ways for companies to give young people room to get back on their feet.

“More generally, a transparent workplace where senior staff feel comfortable sharing their own struggles and experiences can be powerful because it gives tacit approval for newer, younger employees to do the same.

“Don’t forget – this is a generation who are more comfortable expressing vulnerability and discussing mental health problems. Not being allowed to do so would be unusual for them. And there’s plenty that senior figures can learn from them too. Adopting their younger workers’ openness could contribute to creating a healthier workplace overall, where injustices like racism and sexism – again, subjects this generation is acutely tuned into – are more likely to be called out.”



Dr. Jasmin Wertz,
Lecturer in Psychology,
University of
Edinburgh

“Adopting their younger workers’ openness could contribute to creating a healthier workplace overall, where injustices are more likely to be called out.”

Building a safer, more positive working environment

You don’t need us to tell you the obvious. People will flourish at work if there’s open and honest communication, for example – and if they’re paid well and have regular access to training and opportunities for career advancement.

What our research shows is where you should focus your efforts and resources. Below, we’ve identified five immediate priorities to improve mind health in the

workplace – we’ve also shown how better mind health can be incorporated throughout your HR processes to increase productivity and drive engagement.

Act now by:

1. Promoting flexible working

The fact is long hours are counter-productive. Our research shows that flexible – or ‘hybrid’ working – gives employees a sense of control over their workload and makes for a better work-life balance.

2. Focusing on your managers

In any workplace, managers are the “pacemakers.” They have a positive role to play in supporting mind health. And yet statistically they are more susceptible to stress, depression and anxiety. Get it right with managers and you’ve a better chance of getting it right with the workforce as a whole.

3. Ending gender inequality

It’s keeping potentially half your workforce down. It’s affecting productivity and you’re losing talent because of it. Our figures show that a more gender-equal workplace will increase productivity in both women and men.

4. Investing in young people

This is about investing in the future of your business. Currently, young people are more likely to be unproductive. They’re less likely to flourish at work. But help them learn the right coping skills and they will outperform most other, more experienced employees.

5. Emphasizing prevention

Prevention is always better than cure. Create a safe, anti-stress environment at work. That means putting the right policies and procedures in place, providing support for mental health, encouraging physical exercise and “time away,” and protecting your employees against bullying, harassment and discrimination.



Hardwire good mind health into your HR processes

Job design

Start with job design. Hardwire in the right working condition. Think about skills, roles and responsibilities, access to training – and, where possible, involve employees in designing their own jobs.

Recruitment

Make sure you hire the right person with the right skills. Employees will struggle if they don’t have the right skills – in the long run, that will harm your business if you can’t identify the right candidate first time.

Employer brand

Make mind health – and a healthy work-life balance – part of your employer brand alongside more conventional elements like salary and working conditions - it’s important in attracting new talent – but also in attracting the kind of talent that will flourish in the workplace.

Onboarding

When onboarding, emphasize the importance of mind health. Provide information on support available, courses, programs and workshops. And make sure your managers are prepared to model the right behavior.

Learning & development

Offer regular skills training, so employees can develop and evolve. Give them opportunities to progress. As they do, repeat the need for good mind health skills – they’re just as important as technical knowledge.

Tracking performance

Measure mind health performance – make it a component of regular performance reviews and link it to training, skills development, bonuses and promotions. Include mind health in employee surveys – so you can track performance at a team and department level as well.

Retention or exit

Don’t forget to include mind health in exit interviews – find out whether employees are choosing to leave because of stress or a toxic work culture, for example – doing so will help you pinpoint weaknesses and take appropriate action.

Be strategic

Incorporate mind health into your strategic workforce planning; show how it can drive productivity, retention and engagement. Make it part of your overall corporate strategy – to ensure senior management buy-in.

“Employers must focus on creating personalized, purpose-led work environments.”

“Work environments need to be personalized so that they play to employees’ strengths. It’s easier for employees to go from good to excellent rather than weak to average. So, to get them in-flow, employees need to focus on work they’re best suited for.

Benefits design and support needs to be personalized too. People’s lives constantly intersect – old, young, male, female, those who are responsible for care or part of a minority – and they have ever-changing needs. The new challenge in diversity, equity, and inclusion (DE&I) is making that connection with health and wellbeing.

“Then there’s purpose. And I mean in the individual sense, not the marketing term. A work environment must enable people to connect to their own ambitions and meaning because if you do that, you are more driven and more effective.

“One of the challenges is overcoming the constructive tension between ‘my purpose’ and the company’s. To develop a purpose of their own, employees need a sense of autonomy.

“Not everything has to be a decree from the top. Trust is needed – trust that people are experts on themselves, and that, given the right environment, they’ll discover the best way of working themselves.

“That’s not to say senior leadership doesn’t have a role to play in mindset change. If they are really trying to build psychologically safe companies and not just using DE&I or ESG because they have to, then leading by example is crucial.

“And it doesn’t mean companies have to throw out their own goals and objectives. They just need to change the way they reach them.”



Dr. Wolfgang Seidl,
Partner and Workplace
Health Consulting
Leader at Mercer
Marsh Benefits

“One of the challenges is overcoming the constructive tension between ‘my purpose’ and the company’s. To develop a purpose of their own, employees need a sense of autonomy.”

Note on methodology

This Mind Health Corporate Report is based on research carried out as part of AXA's Study of Mind Health and Wellbeing in 2023.

This research covered 7,294 corporate employees in 16 countries and territories: Belgium, China, France, Germany, Hong Kong, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Philippines, Spain, Switzerland, Thailand, Turkey, UK and US.

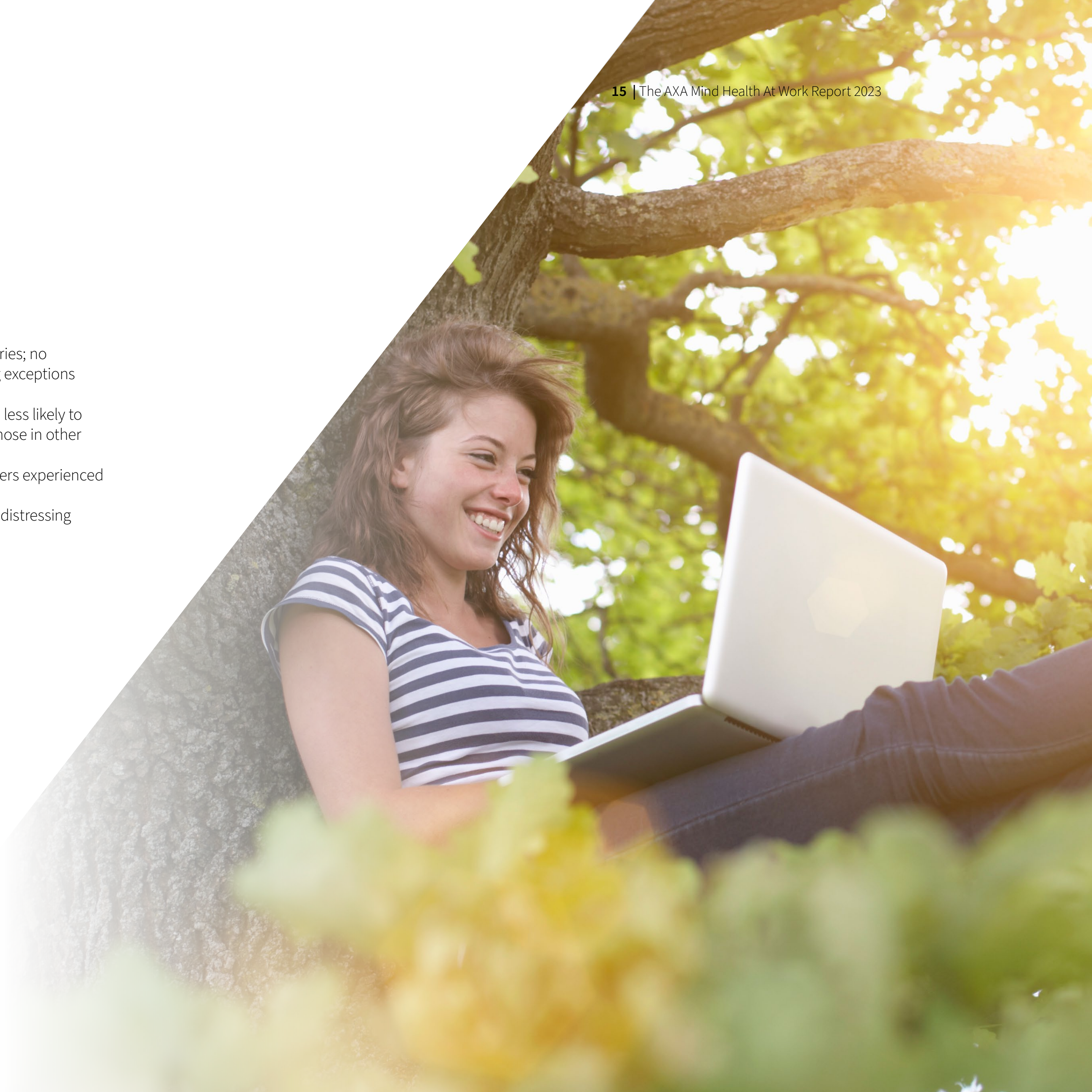
All initial fieldwork was carried out independently by Ipsos, based on representative samples (reflecting gender, age, region, occupation and market size). Respondents were surveyed through the Ipsos Access Panel. All respondents surveyed work for companies with at least 250 employees.

Results were analyzed by AXA Health UK, based on several factors, including: characteristics of the workplace environment, intention to leave, sense of belonging, loneliness, younger employees, women in the workplace, future of the workplace, availability of mind health support, hybrid or homeworking, and employee skills, as well as industry and employment type.

Results were analyzed for variance between countries; no significant variances were found with the following exceptions (relating to findings on page 12):

- In China, France and Switzerland, managers were less likely to experience depression, anxiety and stress than those in other countries.
- In Belgium, China, Spain and Switzerland, managers experienced less job insecurity.
- In China, managers were less likely to experience distressing working hours.

For more information on our research, read our [AXA Study of Mind Health and Wellbeing 2023 report](#) and [AXA Mind Health Index Methodology](#)



Contact & acknowledgements

For more information on
AXA’s approach to mind
health, please visit our
website at axa.com

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We welcome feedback and suggestions on our report.
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Colophon

- Scientific design:** AXA Health UK
- Survey research and design:** AXA Health UK
- Field research:** Ipsos
- Results analysis:** AXA Health UK
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