

WorkPossible

# THE FUTURE OF WORK HAS A HEARTBEAT

Fauna



# The future of work is undeniably human. Now we're designing what that actually looks like.

**WorkPossible is a global employee experience research project, created in partnership with Fauna and CultureCon. We've been researching for people and now we're researching with them. This research was co-created with the CultureCon community. They chose the topic and set the direction.**

We're not here to question whether the future of work should be more human. The evidence is already overwhelming: generational expectations have shifted. AI is transforming what work means. Purpose matters more than ever.

What we are here to understand is how organizations show up when life gets real. We're exploring what happens when life collides with work, the grief, the celebrations, the struggles, the breakthroughs. Because it's in those moments that the true human experience of work is revealed. And, the impact that a human work experience has on core outcomes from loyalty to performance.

The impact is significant. Employees who described their support as 'above and beyond' during life's most difficult moments are 4 times more likely to say their experience made them more loyal to their organization, compared to those receiving poor support.

What's changing is how humanity shows up. In a world transformed by AI, shaped by generational values that prioritize purpose and belonging, and challenged by unprecedented and ever-increasing complexity, organizations face a clear choice: design workplaces that see whole people, or lose them to those that do.

We didn't discover that organizations are failing because they don't care. They're failing because they don't understand what genuine support actually looks like. Policy compliance isn't care. Consistency is. Flexibility matters, but so does presence. Recognition works when it's timely and personal, not just scheduled.

This is the intersection of life and work. The moments that matter most. The support that changes everything. The everyday interactions that make people feel seen or invisible. The inevitability of needing to make our lives work. And ultimately, our ability to support people to do their best work. For happier people, stronger teams, and better businesses.

We're not here to measure satisfaction. We're here to ignite possibility.

**DREAM BIG.**  
**Because this is WorkPossible.**

# Shaped by a global community

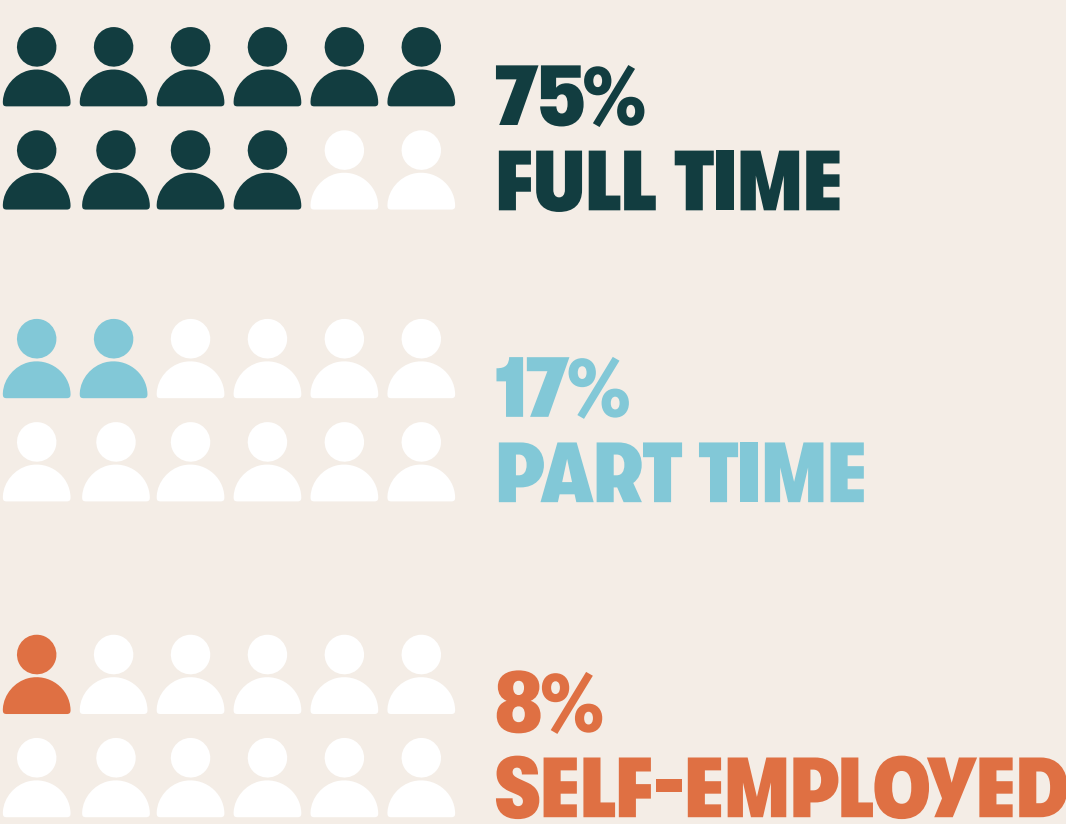
## WHO WE HEARD FROM

**11** COUNTRIES

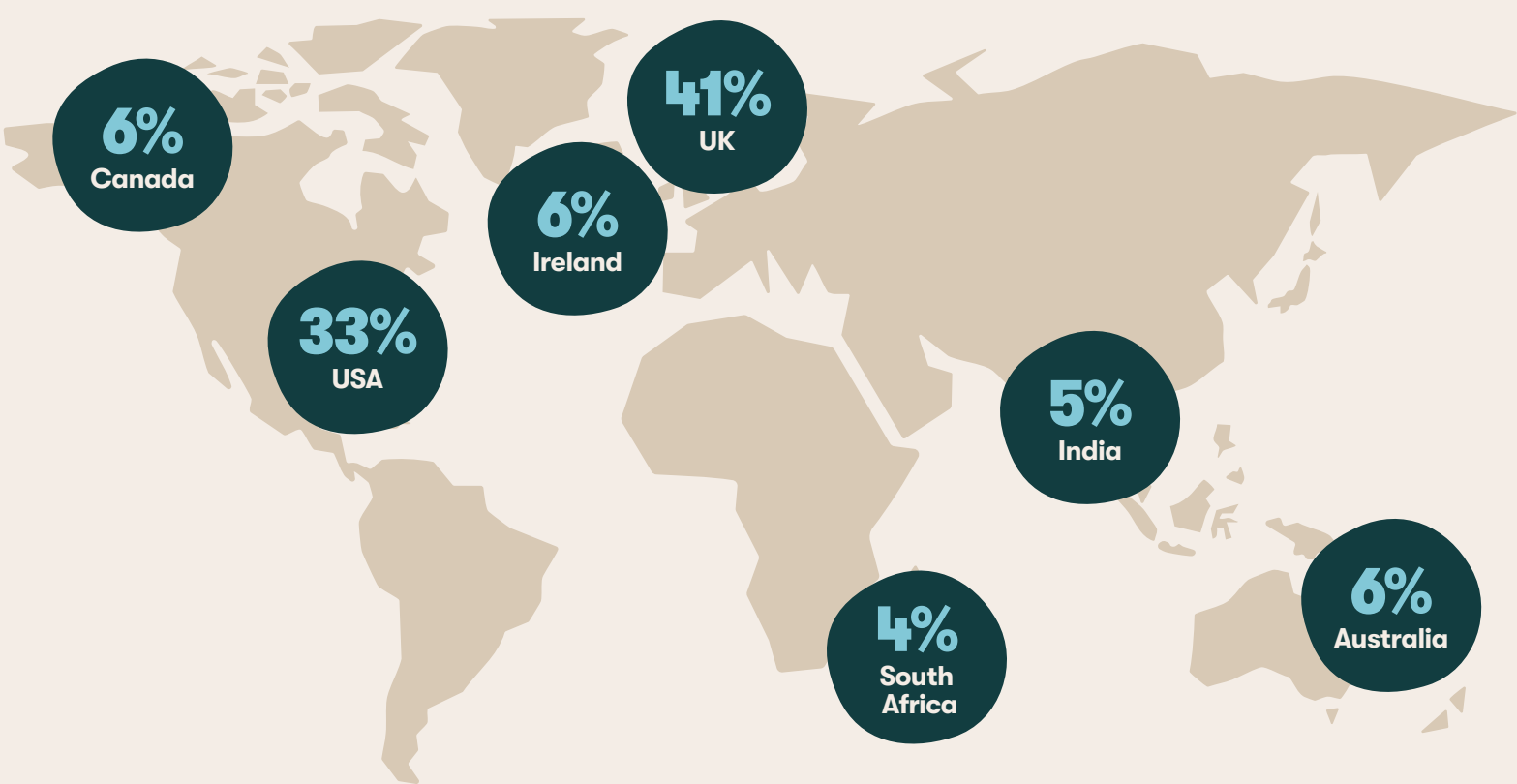
**6,122** PEOPLE

**4,169** STORIES

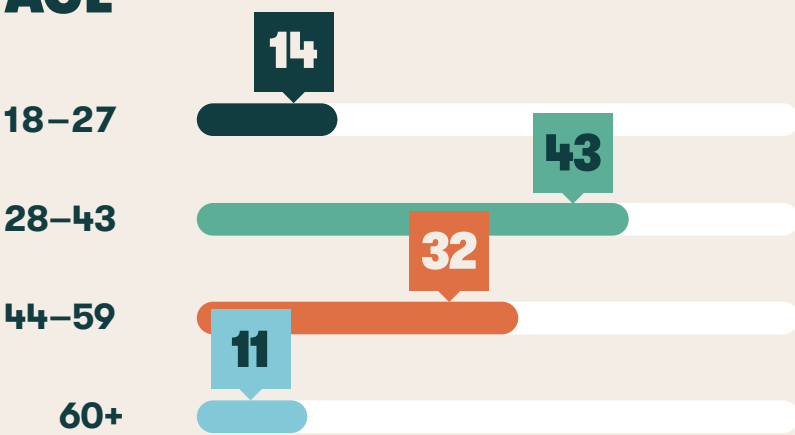
## EMPLOYMENT:



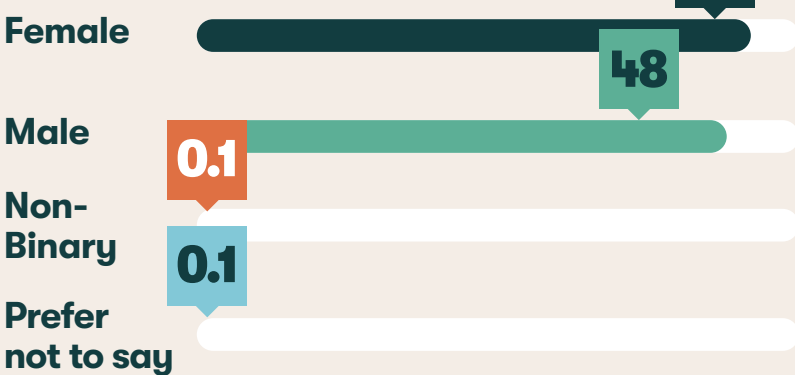
## WHERE IN THE WORLD DO YOU LIVE?



## AGE



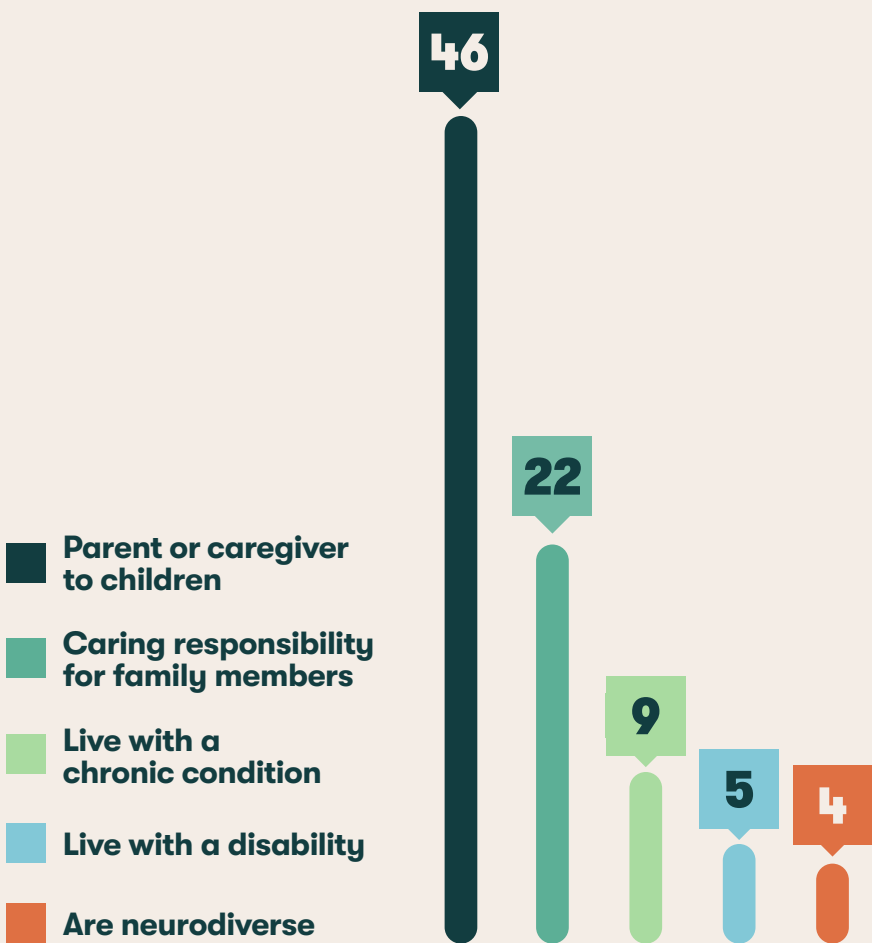
## HOW DO YOU IDENTIFY?



- White 74%
- Asian 9%
- African 7%
- Caribbean or Black 4%
- Mixed or multiple ethnicities 4%
- Other 1%



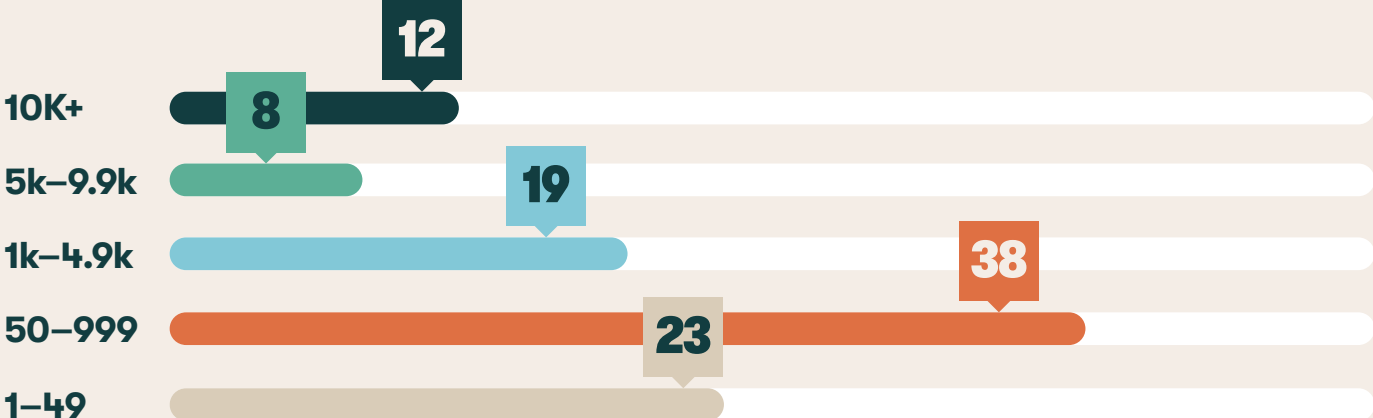
## THE PEOPLE BEHIND THE NUMBERS



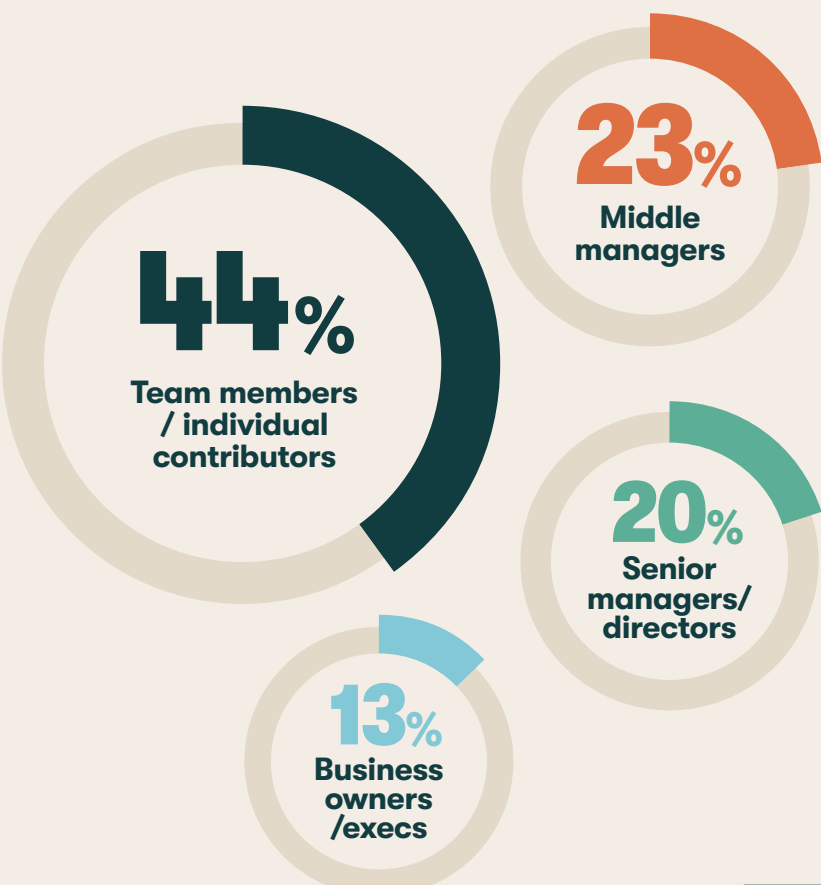
## WHICH INDUSTRY DO YOU WORK IN?



## HOW BIG IS YOUR ORGANIZATION'S WORKFORCE?



## WHAT BEST DESCRIBES YOUR JOB LEVEL?



It's time to get real. We can't keep using 'the future of work is human' as a buzz-phrase.

It's time to start translating it into action, in the way we design employee experiences from first hellos to fond farewells.

We asked over 6,000 people globally to define what 'A human employee experience' means to them. In practice.

The Human Employee Experience framework is built from six defining consistencies from WorkPossible research, both quantitative data and sentiment analysis from story themes.

You'll see these consistencies shine through the report, presenting themselves as the very real way that people want to experience work at every moment of their lives.

Life isn't structured. It can't be planned. It won't be tamed into a catch-all policy. But how we show up for people as organizations is decidedly less complicated.

Work doesn't happen despite our humanity. It happens because of it.



## Part 1

# THE HUMANITY SCORE

How human is the employee experience today?

From workplaces that see you as a whole person, to those that measure only output. We're humans, not machines. Humanity isn't a formula to unpick.

It's as changing as our days. But the numbers tell a story, and if we understand the gap, we can start working on closing it.



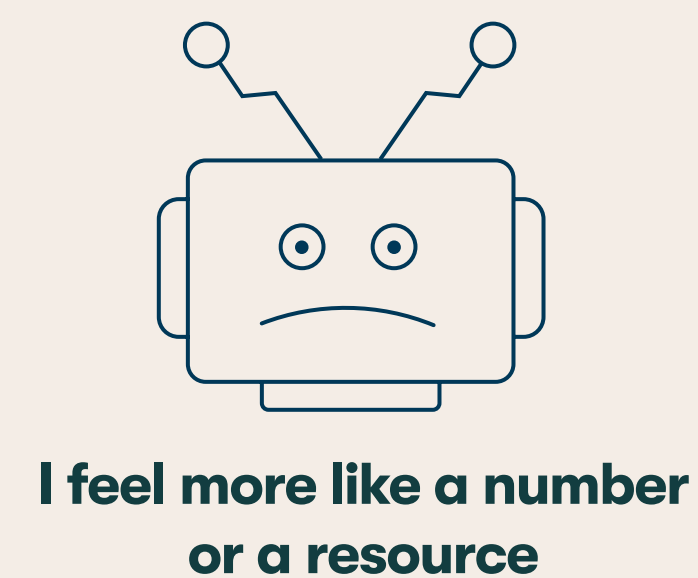
*My organization*  
**TREATS ME  
AS A HUMAN**

Before the detail, we asked a binary question.  
The type of gut-feel response that we all give to a true/  
false statement. Do you feel treated as human at work?  
*89% said yes. 11% said no.*

It feels conclusive. But the human experience at work  
is anything but binary. The next few pages peel back  
the layers, one step at time...

# Setting the organizational score

Overall score on 'how human does your workplace feel on a scale of 1 to 5'



THIS IS OUR GUT FEEL (FALSE)

4%  
1.

7%  
2.

THIS IS OUR GUT FEEL (TRUE)

19%  
3.

37%  
4.

33%  
5.



I feel seen, understood and treated like a real person

You can see that the **89% who said 'true', make up a wider scale of feeling.**



**Think about the other 11%.** This represents more than **1 in 10 people** experiencing their work life as something less 'human'.

## Then there's an uncomfortable middle ground

Sentiment analysis from stories reveals that employees who rate their organization as 3 on the scale have a **more complex relationship** with their employer compared to those rating their organization as a 1 or 2. Employees rating '3' also **perform worse** than rating 1-2 employees across every outcome from their ability to do their best work, loyalty, and intent to stay.

### WHEN YOU'RE LIVING WITH **UNCERTAINTY**

"Sometimes they support me, sometimes they don't"  
"It depends on who you ask"  
"Well-intentioned but inconsistent"  
"I never know which version I'll get"  
"It's better to be honestly transactional than to promise humanity you can't consistently deliver"

### QUOTES FROM EMPLOYEES WHO **RATED 1 OR 2**

"This is a transactional relationship"  
"I work, they pay, nothing more"  
"At least I know what to expect"

**These employees can adapt their expectations and plan accordingly.**

### THIS **'3'** IS WHERE WE SEE

- **Constant anxiety** about whether support will materialize
- **Decision paralysis** "Should I ask? Will this hurt me?"
- **Erosion of trust** "They say they care, but..."
- **Cognitive dissonance** between values and action

# A moment that mattered

---

“When my father was diagnosed with terminal cancer, my organization’s response was frustratingly inconsistent.”

---

Some days, my direct manager would be understanding and tell me to take whatever time I needed. Other days, I’d receive emails questioning my commitment or asking for detailed documentation of my absences.”

---

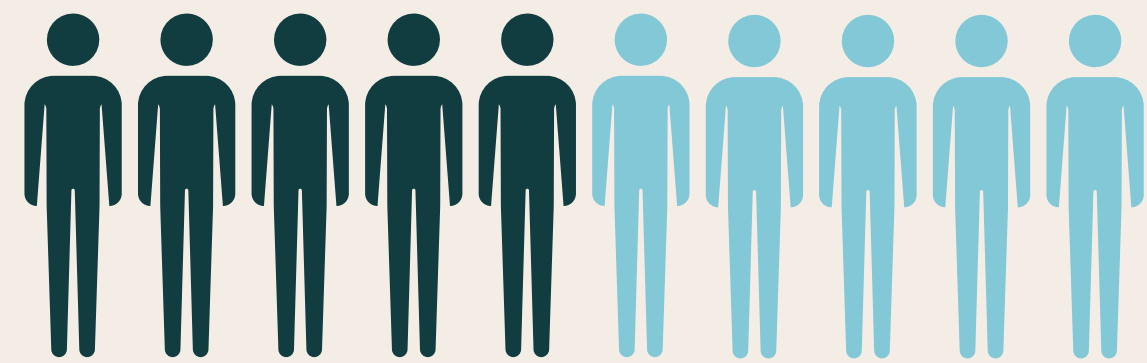
## RETAIL SECTOR

Middle Manager

Rating 3

# Beyond our gut feeling

The more we defined ‘human’ and translated it into action, the more nuanced the picture gets.



When we asked HOW people are supported just **under half (49%)** said their workplace actively supports their whole self. Genuine care. Flexibility. Recognition of the person beyond their productivity.

But there’s a difference between intention and reality.

**38%**

**38% said their workplace acknowledges they’re human with life needs but only offers basic policy support.** People might be feeling seen, but they’re not all feeling supported. Many organizations are ticking all the boxes, from statutory leave, to an employee assistance program, but they’re stopping there. It’s certainly not dehumanizing, but it’s not holistically representative of the messy complexity of life either. It’s transactional.

There’s no playbooks for humans. No cut and paste. No standalone policy that equips us for every scenario or every conversation.

There’s no written word or guideline that tells us what happens when we’re grieving at work. Or getting divorced. Or living with cancer. Just like there’s no rules to apply when someone’s life event impacts the performance of a whole team.

**There’s nowhere to hide behind the handbook.**

WHICH OF THESE STATEMENTS  
**BEST DESCRIBES YOUR EXPERIENCE?**

**49%**  
Actively supports

**9%**  
Focuses on output

**38%**  
Acknowledges

**4%**  
Treats as resource

☐ My workplace **actively supports my whole self** – personal circumstances, wellbeing, and individual needs

☐ My workplace **focuses primarily on my work output** with minimal consideration of me as a person

☐ My workplace **acknowledges I’m a human** with life needs, but support is limited to basic policies

☐ My workplace **treats me more like a resource** than a human being with individual needs

# A moment that mattered

“During a critical period in my life, I had to face a sudden and serious family health crisis that required me to be the primary caregiver.

The support I received was immediate and holistic. My manager and the senior leadership team were the first to reach out. They didn’t just offer condolences; they immediately took action to adjust my workload and responsibilities. My manager insisted that my primary focus should be on my family and told me not to worry about my work.

They proactively arranged for my key projects to be temporarily reassigned to other team members, ensuring a seamless transition and zero pressure on me. They also made it clear that I could take as much time as I needed, without it counting against my annual leave.

---

What made their support exceptional was the humanity behind their actions. My manager made weekly check-in calls, but they were never about work. They were to simply ask how my family and I were doing and if there was anything I needed.

---

When I eventually returned to work, I was not only ready to be productive again but also deeply motivated to contribute to a company that had stood by me during my most challenging moment.”

---

## HEALTHCARE SECTOR

Senior Manager

Small Organization



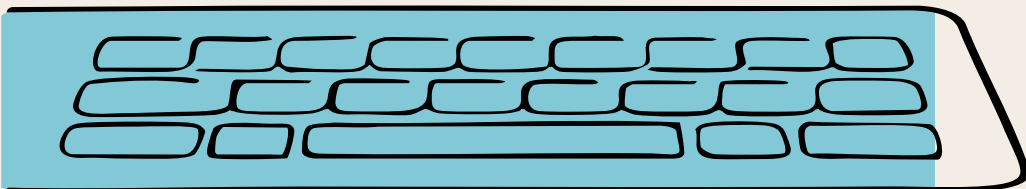
# Running the numbers on humanity

You're **4.3x more likely** to feel like a number if you work in transport or logistics than if you work in technology.

## THE TOP 3 MOST HUMAN INDUSTRIES

### Technology

Significantly ahead of the pack



% feel treated as human:

95%

### Media/Creative

Strong culture of authenticity



91%

### Professional Services

Values human connection



91%

## THERE'S A CRITICAL CRISIS IN THE FAST LANE

More than **1 in 5** transport/logistics employees feel more like a number than a human.

### Critical risk

(>20% dehumanization)

Transport/Logistics

22%

### High risk

(15-20% dehumanization)

Public Service

18%

Retail/Commerce

18%

Healthcare

17%

### Moderate risk

(10-15% dehumanization)

Hospitality/Food

14%

Education

12%

Industrials

11%

Financial Services

10%

### Low risk

(<10% dehumanization)

Media/Creative

9%

Professional Services

9%

Technology

5%

0 5 10 15 20 25

## THE SENTIMENT STORY

Industries that **rank highest** on humanity shape their experience around:

- **Flexibility as default, not exception**  
(Tech/Media/Professional Services lead here)
- **Caring leadership visible at all levels**  
(versus policy-driven responses in struggling sectors)
- **Safety to be vulnerable**  
(high in creative industries where authenticity is valued)

**Low humanity** score industries have clear experience consistencies:

- **Pressure to prioritize output over people**  
(Retail, healthcare in crisis moments)
- **Rigid, one-size-fits-all policies**  
(Transport, public service)
- **Invisible/stigmatized support**  
(Mental health is especially underserved in high-pressure industries)

# Three moments that mattered

“I had to ask for reduced hours once I had my first child. My original proposal was refused by my manager and so I had to go back and think of a different pattern. My work are mostly accommodating of flexible work requests but you have to have a lot of meetings with HR first.

My overall manager sometimes is not mindful of school hours at all and sets ad hoc mandatory meetings that must be attended in person.

I have set my hours around school time purposely, and when the meetings are put in outside of these times, it is incredibly frustrating.”

**TRANSPORT**

“When I needed emergency surgery followed by six weeks of recovery, my organization’s response was technically correct but emotionally damaging. HR processed my medical leave paperwork efficiently, but there was zero human touch.

My manager never once called to check on me, all communication was through automated HR emails.

When I returned, I discovered I’d been removed from a major project I’d been leading for months. The explanation was that ‘the business couldn’t wait.’ My performance review that year noted ‘limited contribution to key initiatives’ despite my medical leave being fully documented.”

**HEALTHCARE**

“After a car accident left me with mobility limitations requiring accommodations, my employer’s true colors showed. Despite doctor’s documentation and legal requirements, every accommodation request was met with resistance. They questioned whether I ‘really needed’ each modification.

My schedule was changed to shifts they knew were difficult for me. When I couldn’t comply, it was marked as ‘performance issues.’

The systematic campaign to force me out was obvious but hard to prove.

I eventually left on disability, emotionally and physically broken. They replaced me within a week with someone who had no accommodation needs.”

**RETAIL**

## Part 2

# A HUMAN EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCE

**What does humanity look like across the employee journey, from first hellos to fond farewells?**

From understanding a person beyond their CV, to a meaningful recognition of your contribution as a person. People are craving human connection and experiences designed with them in mind.

These experiences are more than initiatives, programs or projects. Human centred employee experience design is an expression of our humanity as employers. These are the tangible moments that shape the conditions where people can show up as their whole selves, do their best work, and build loyalty that outlasts any policy or benefit.

# Your **human** employee experience

**We crave humanity at work from first hellos to fond farewells.**

We asked people to rank what's most important to them at every moment of the employee journey. And a single thread feels true for every touchpoint, people want to be known and seen, not just processed.

## ONBOARDING

(TOP 3 RANKED)

- 1** **Gradual introduction** to responsibilities without overwhelming you
- 2** **A dedicated person** who genuinely invest in your success
- 3** **Clear expectations** balanced with patience as you learn

## RECOGNITION

(TOP 3 RANKED)

- 1** **Personal acknowledgment** from someone whose opinion you value
- 2** Recognition that highlights your specific **contribution and impact**
- 3** Recognition that comes at the right moment, **not just scheduled times**

## GROWTH

(TOP 3 RANKED)

- 1** Honest feedback delivered with genuine **care for your growth**
- 2** **Regular, informal conversations** rather than formal annual reviews
- 3** **Recognition** of your unique strengths and contributions

## FIRST HELLOS

(TOP 3 RANKED)

- 1** **Genuine interest** in who you are, not just your technical skills
- 2** Interviewers who are **authentic** and show their real personality
- 3** **Clear information** about growth opportunities and career development

## FOND FAREWELLS

(TOP 3 RANKED)

- 1** Genuine **appreciation** for your contributions and impact
- 2** **Understanding and respect** for your decision to move on
- 3** **Open door** for future opportunities or collaboration

# The business case for being human

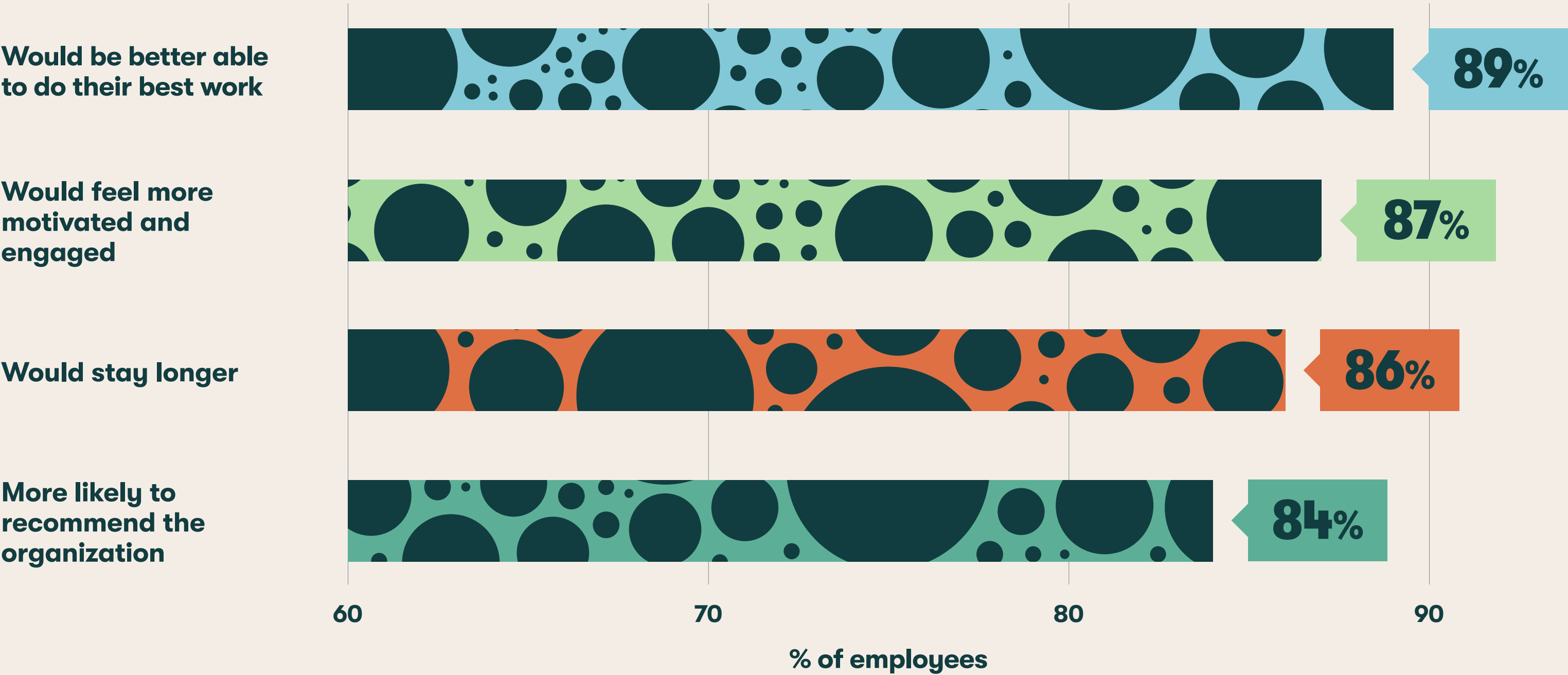


When people feel treated as a  
unique human being at work

**NEARLY 9 IN 10**

employees say they'd be better  
able to do their best work.

## WHEN HUMANITY WORKS



Humanity isn't soft. **It's strategic.**  
Organizations that treat people as  
people see **85%+ positive outcomes**  
across every metric.

Our humanity is translating to  
performance. Beyond policies  
and productivity units.

### THE CONSISTENCY MATTERS

It's not four separate outcomes from four different  
initiatives. It's one coherent principle creating ripple effects  
across everything that matters: **performance, loyalty,**  
**advocacy, engagement.**

This is the **transformative power** of humanity in practice.

# A human performance

We asked people what has the **biggest positive impact** on their ability to do their best work. The sort of work that you're proud of, at your best, or when you feel the most productive.

**The top three were overwhelming.** The stats show the % of people who ranked as their number one enabler.

1. **Feeling heard and listened to in meetings: 27%**
2. **Being trusted to make decisions about your work: 24%**
3. **Regular recognition of your contributions: 21%**

These experiences aren't new. They're not revolutionary. They're a baseline for performance. They're a baseline for humanity. People aren't asking for more perks or policies. They're asking to be treated as human beings. To be listened to. To be trusted with agency. To be seen for what they contribute.

## THE GAP

In the industries where **1 in 5 people feel dehumanized**, these three things are missing in their sentiment and stories.

1 Listen  
2 Trust  
3 Recognize

**It sounds simple, doesn't it? But this is the recipe.**

This is the baseline blueprint we need to enable people to do their best work.

**This is the daily heartbeat of humanity at work.**

Not just across the big moments that matter. It's the little things in-between. The conversations where you're actually listened to. The decisions where you're trusted. The moments when someone notices what you've done.

## Part 3

# LIFE'S BIG MOMENTS

**Does your organization show up for you when it counts?**

Life doesn't wait for performance reviews. It crashes in during project deadlines, shows up at the most uninvited moments, and shapes how able people are to do their best work.

This is the exploration of policy in practice during life's biggest moments, the experience it translates to in the everyday, and ultimately, the difference it makes to everything that matters to people and performance.

# Life's big moments

Life doesn't tend to come at us when we're on a career break. It shows its ugly side at the least convenient moments. These events shape our lives, but they can also shape our work experience.



ONLY 1 IN 4 PEOPLE SAID THEIR ORGANIZATIONS WENT ABOVE AND BEYOND TO SUPPORT THEM

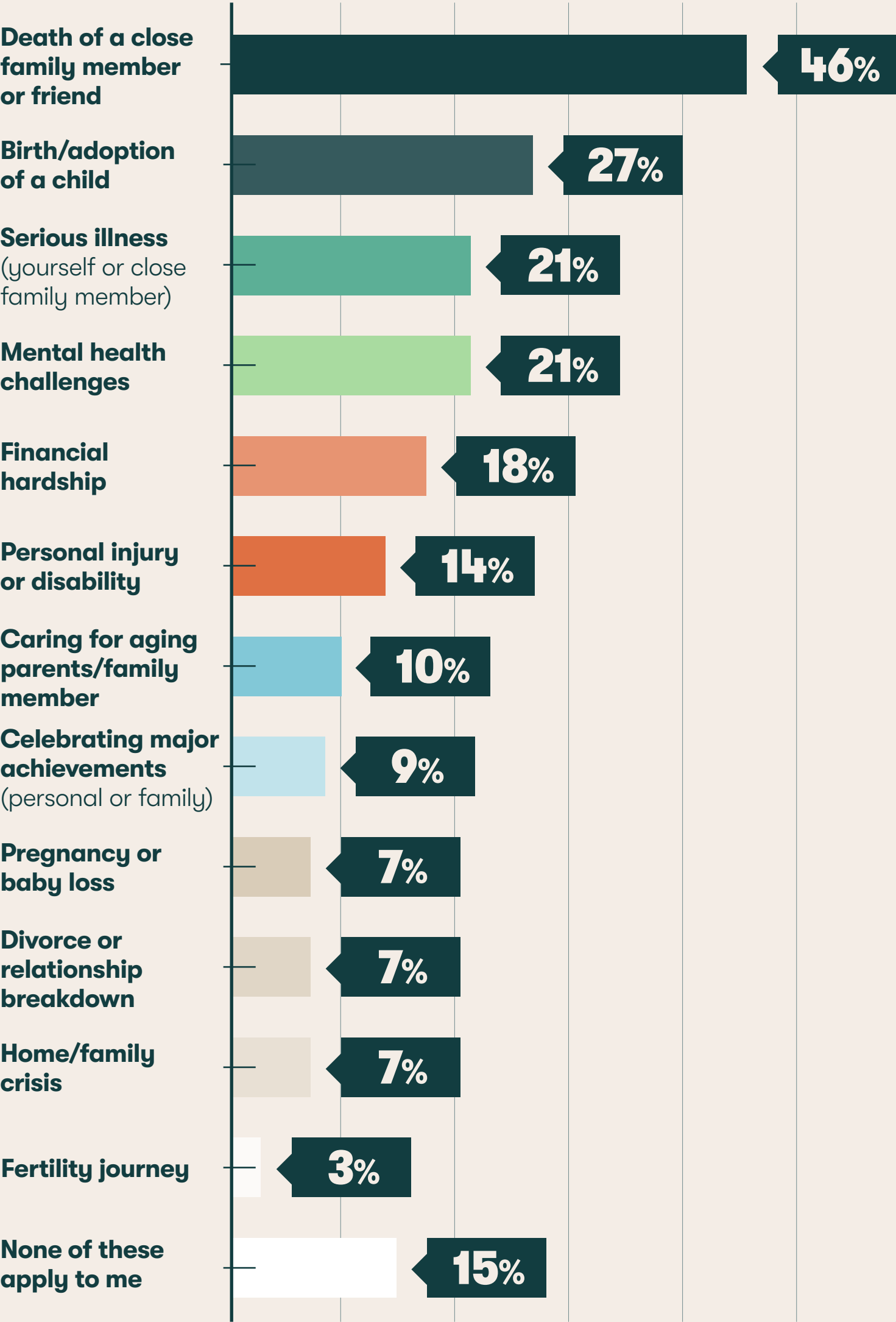
**How employers shows up in our biggest moments** (especially the more challenging ones) predicts their likely future relationship with the employee.

Employees who receive “above and beyond” support in these moments are **4x more likely** to say their experience made them more loyal to their organization, compared to those receiving poor support.

It’s easier to show our humanity when times are good and performance is high. But life doesn’t pause for work, and all too often work demands that it does.



**85%** of people have experienced at least one significant life event during their career.

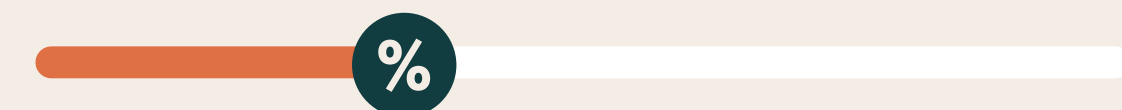


# The support spectrum

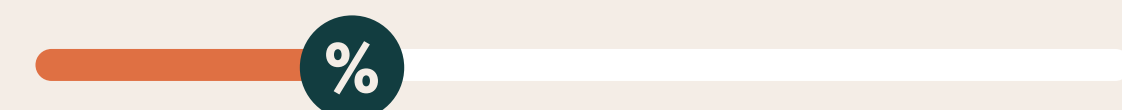
When life's biggest moments hit, how are organizations actually showing up? Let's get tangible about what's working and, what's clearly not.



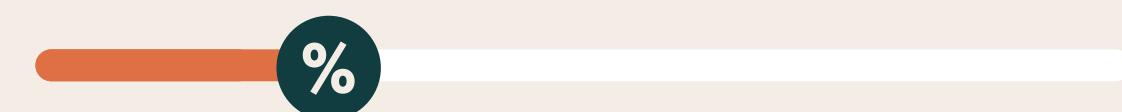
**53%** of organizations offered a level of flexibility in life's difficult moments. By far the most common way to support.



Followed by **16%** offering financial support or assistance



**14%** offering emotional support



And **13%** offering reduced expectations or workload

## WHAT'S WORKING

### Practical:

"My colleagues divided up my tasks"



### Emotional:

"Check-ins about how I was doing, not about work"



### Financial:

"2 months off with full pay"



### Flexible:

"Take as much time as you need"



## WHAT'S NOT WORKING

### Productivity not person:

"I was removed from key projects and told it was because I was no longer reliable"

### Hiding behind the handbook:

"My manager never once called to check on me, all communication was through automated HR emails"

### Personal financial impact:

"I had no option but to take time off with statutory sick pay and paid for my own counselling sessions"

### Policy over practice:

"You're here working, you can't leave till your shift is done" (during parent's medical emergency)

When support is  
bad, **57%** of people  
want to leave.



When it's good, only **2%** do.

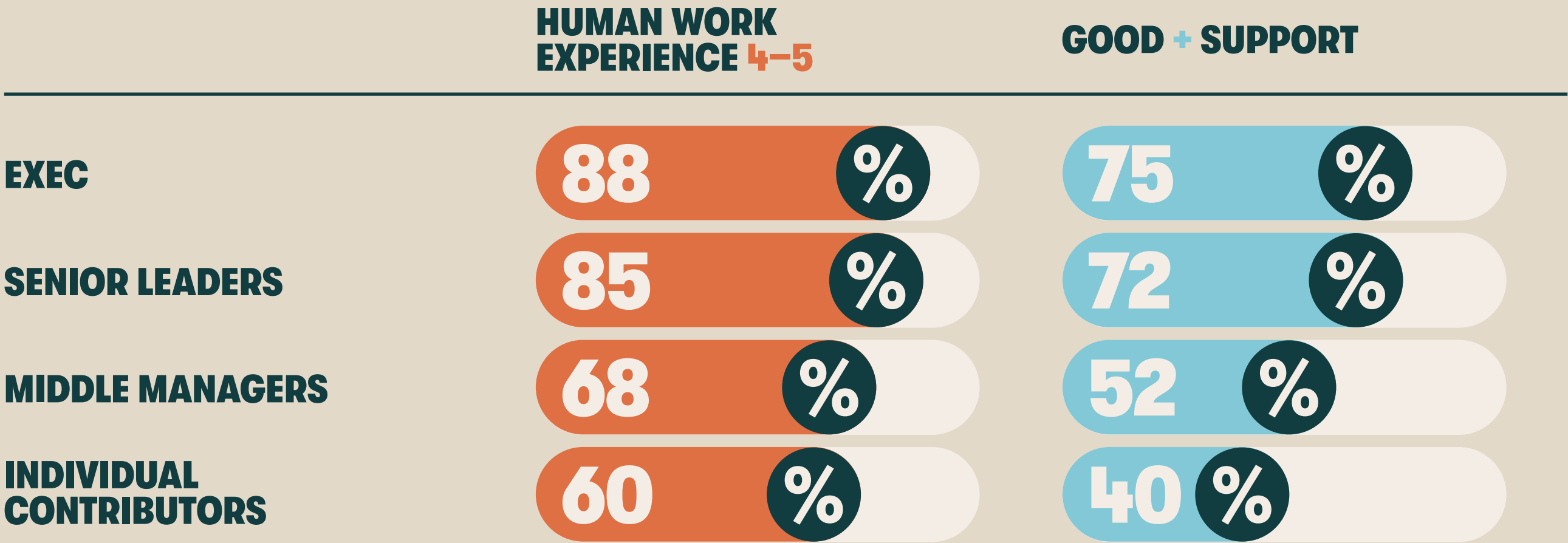
# Humanity has a **hierarchy**

We know that the more senior you are, the better you rate your employee experience. We saw that in WorkPossible 2024. And nowhere is this starker than during life's **most challenging moments**.

**Leaders aren't inherently more deserving of humanity.** It's about systems, visibility, and power.

**Senior leaders have advocates.** They have autonomy. They have relationships that buffer them.

Meanwhile, the people **closest to customers**, closest to the work, furthest to organizational intent, they're the ones **most likely to face a crisis alone**, with minimal support, and a message that business continues as usual.



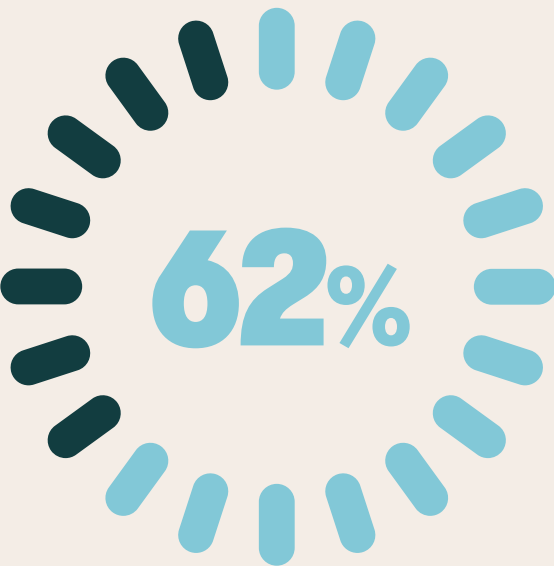
When leaders face significant life events, **60%** receive good or above and beyond support.

For individual contributors, that drops to **40%**.  
That's a 20 percentage point gap, at precisely the moment when support **matters most**.

Each step down brings **fewer human experiences**, less genuine support, more transactional responses.

# Leading human

They want to. They can't always.



62% of leaders feel very confident supporting team members



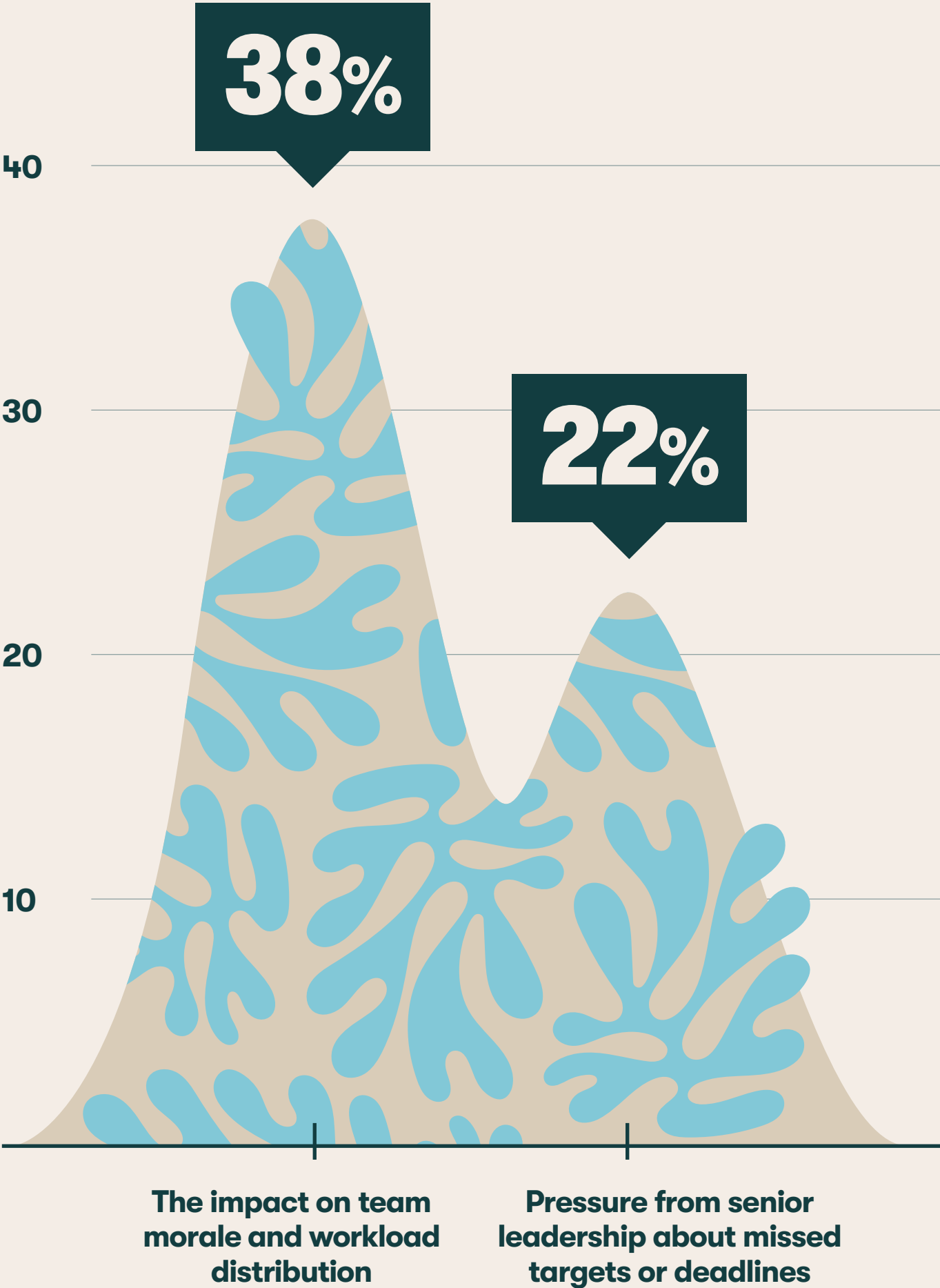
but only 42% feel well equipped to balance support with performance.

**This is the tension.** Leaders believe they know what to do, but when faced with the inevitable complexity of workload distribution, team dynamics and pressure on performance, that confidence drops significantly.

**Leaders get better support during life events**, they're experiencing humanity and seeing it's value, but there's still a clear struggle to consistently create it for their teams.

## THE PRESSURE IS REAL

When a team member can't work at full capacity, leaders' **top two concerns** are:



## 1 IN 4 LEADERS WANT TRAINING ON HOW TO HAVE SENSITIVE CONVERSATIONS.



We expect our leaders to understand the ever-changing nuance of leadership.

We expect them to **perform**.  
We expect them to **build high-performance**.

We have to match these expectations with **real support**. Policies in black and white might be important, but they're supported by how well our leaders are able to bring them to life. This is the grey area.

## WHAT LEADERS NEED TO LEAD HUMAN



# A moment that mattered

## INDIVIDUAL CONTRIBUTOR

Experience rating '1'.

“When my child was born with significant health complications requiring multiple surgeries, my organization’s response was devastating. Despite having worked there for five years with exemplary reviews, I was told that my request for flexible working arrangements ‘didn’t align with company policy.’

My manager literally said, ‘We hired you for a full-time role, and if you can’t fulfill that, perhaps this isn’t the right fit anymore.’

This was while my infant was in the NICU. The HR department’s response was to send me links to our employee handbook highlighting the attendance policy.

I was forced to use all my vacation days for hospital visits, then moved to unpaid leave. When I returned, I was removed from key projects and told it was because I was ‘no longer reliable.’ My performance review that year cited ‘lack of commitment’ despite the circumstances being fully documented.

The final insult came when the company won an award for being a ‘family-friendly workplace’ that same year.

I resigned shortly after, taking a 20% pay cut for a role at a smaller company that actually treats employees as humans.”

# We asked 6,122 people across 11 countries to tell us what humanity at work means for them, in practice.

We all know life is messy and defined by twists and turns beyond our control. We know that people want to perform and that organizations need them to. WorkPossible research is giving us a new lens to put humanity into practice, from first hellos to fond farewells. It's time to look beyond policy and into possibility.

Too many organizations are still structured around one-size-fits-all experience design. Crisis response instead of prevention. Transactional relationships instead of real ones. Leaders who care but lack the tools to act on it. There's no inevitability that people should feel treated as a number in any industry. More than 1 in 10 is too many. This is a choice.

## TOGETHER WITH CULTURECON, WE'RE WORKING ON A TOOLKIT

A tangible way of mapping – and designing for – a more human experience at work based on our six defining consistencies.

### NEED TO START NOW?

We don't have to make this complex. But simple doesn't mean easy. It's intentional design. It's systems, and leadership development, mindset shift and communications work. The data is clear. The opportunity is real. And it's not waiting for perfect conditions or unlimited budget. It's waiting for the decision to treat work like a human experience.

- 1 Move from transactional to relational.** Experiences that enable us to shape genuine relationships at every stage of the employee journey.
- 2 Shift from standardized to personalized leadership.** Equipping our leaders to meet people where they are. People deserve better. Businesses deserve their full potential.
- 3 Make space for vulnerability.** Practices that invite the tough conversations and an expectation of transparency that demands our humanity, as people and organizations.

### THE FUTURE OF WORK HAS A HEARTBEAT.



WorkPossible

**POWERED  
BY HUMANITY.  
CHANGED  
BY PEOPLE.**

Fauna is founded on our unwavering belief that work can – and should – be a positive force for good. So let's bin the playbook and start from a place of possibility. **Together.**



Follow Fauna on  
LinkedIn to keep up  
with our thinking

**Fauna**



**JOIN US AT CULTURECON  
WITH AN EXCLUSIVE  
WORKPOSSIBLE DISCOUNT**

20% off CultureCon 2026

20% off CultureCon West 2026

**CODE: FAUNA20**