meQ.

THE PROTECTIVE POWER OF HOPE AND BELONGING IN THE WORKPLACE

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

SINCE JULY 2020, meQ HAS BEEN TRACKING CHANGES IN EMPLOYEE WELL-BEING THROUGH A SERIES OF BI-ANNUAL SURVEYS OF ITS MEMBER POPULATION.
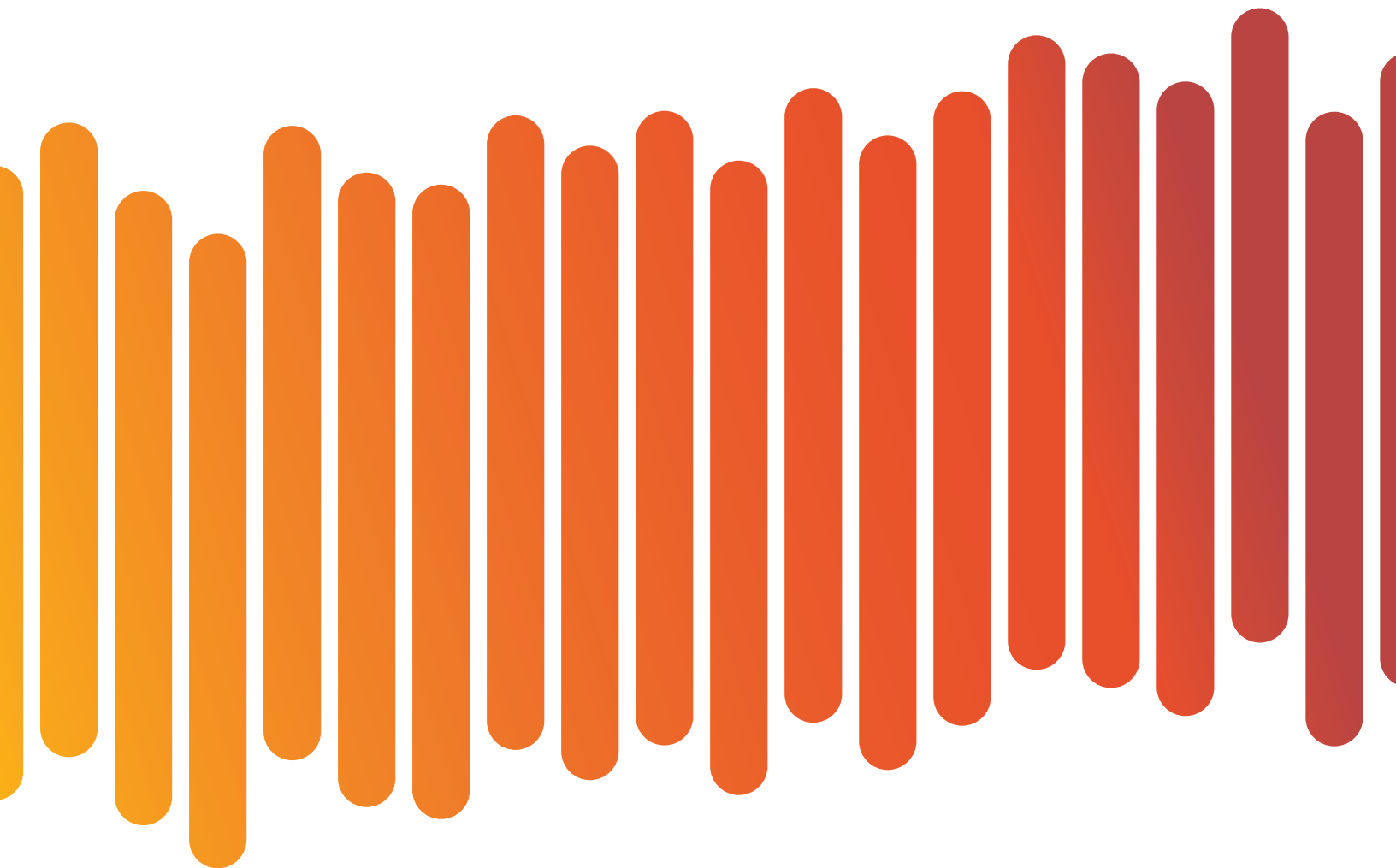
Hope, belonging, and employees' experiences with generative AI were the focus of this Spring 2024 Workforce Well-being study. The study population consisted of meQ members invited to participate in a January 2024 survey. The final sample consisted of 5,989 employed adults across a variety of industries.

The study offers insights into the key roles of hope, resilience, and belonging in cultivating a thriving workforce.

DISCOVER THE KEY FINDINGS THAT EMERGED FROM THE ANALYSIS.

KEY FINDINGS:

1

HOPE IS A POWERFUL POSITIVE FORCE THAT CAN GREATLY ENHANCE EMPLOYEE WELL-BEING, ENGAGEMENT, PRODUCTIVITY, AND RETENTION. Fostering an internal locus of hope, driven by positivity, self-confidence, and strong problem solving skills are particularly beneficial compared to extrinsic sources of hope.

2

RESILIENCE EMERGES AS A CRITICAL CAPACITY THAT CAN FUNCTION AS A "TREND REVERSER" FOR NEGATIVE WELL-BEING TRAJECTORIES LIKE RISING BURNOUT AND JOB STRESS. The resilience factors of positivity, self-confidence, and problem-solving skills are key drivers empowering employees with an internal sense of hope.

3

BELONGING IS A POWERFUL PROTECTIVE FACTOR. Cultivating a genuine sense of workplace belonging through inclusive cultures, empathetic leadership, and giving employees a real voice delivers compelling benefits. Employees with a strong sense of belonging face substantially reduced risks of burnout, anxiety, depression, and turnover intentions.

4

RESILIENCE IS A TREND REVERSER. While some positive trends in well-being are evident, the data reveals concerning levels of persistent burnout and economic anxiety weighing on the workforce. However, highly resilient employees exhibit remarkably stable and positive well-being, underscoring resilience as a powerful protective factor.

5

GEN Z REMAINS AN EXCEPTIONAL WORKFORCE SEGMENT REQUIRING FOCUSED ATTENTION. They exhibit significantly higher levels of job stress, lower resilience across many factors, and a more tenuous sense of workplace belonging compared to older employees.

6

IT'S NOT JUST RESILIENCE THAT GIVES EMPLOYEES AN EDGE WHEN IT COMES TO EMBRACING THE TRANSFORMATIVE POTENTIAL OF GENERATIVE AI. Specific cognitive traits and thinking styles can also play a pivotal role in shaping employees' attitudes toward AI, and their ability to effectively leverage these disruptive technologies.

THE POWER OF HOPE IN THE WORKPLACE

As a counterpoint to the focus on pessimism in the **previous Workforce Well-being study**, this time we took a look at a positive emotion–specifically asking about hope. Hope is a positive motivational state that energizes people to go after their goals. It involves believing a desired outcome is attainable and visualizing potential pathways to get there. Having hope means feeling a sense of agency to take active steps, even when facing difficulties. This cognitive process helps regulate emotions, providing optimism to persevere. We asked members about hope in a variety of ways–beginning with a look at where meQ members place their hope, and then drilling down to explore the differences between extrinsic and intrinsic hope.

HOPE IS A POWERFUL, POSITIVE FORCE IN THE WORKPLACE

Hope can greatly influence an individual's work life and overall well-being. In the professional realm, hope can provide employees with the motivation and resilience to persevere through challenges and setbacks. When employees have a sense of hope, they are more likely to approach their work with a positive mindset, which can enhance productivity, creativity, and overall job satisfaction.

Moreover, hope can foster a sense of purpose and meaning in one's work, leading to a deeper connection with organizational goals and values. Employees who find hope in their personal growth, creativity, and the impact of their work are more likely to feel engaged and invested in their roles. This, in turn, can contribute to a positive work culture and improved employee retention.

Hope can also play a crucial role in times of uncertainty or organizational change. When faced with challenges or adversity, a hopeful mindset can help employees adapt and embrace new opportunities for growth and development. By cultivating hope, organizations can foster a resilient workforce that is better equipped to navigate through difficult times and emerge stronger.

Ultimately, hope is an invaluable asset in the workplace, as it not only enhances individual well-being and performance but also contributes to a positive and productive organizational culture.

IN WHAT DO EMPLOYEES PLACE THEIR HOPE?

As a jumping off point, the study simply inquired which of the following areas give participants hope (**FIGURE 1**). Family stands out as the most significant source of hope, with 81.2% of employees drawing hope from their family relations. Financial stability (74.1%) and personal growth (74.0%) are also major contributors to employees' sense of hope, closely followed by friends (72.2%). A substantial portion of employees (66.4%) derive hope from the fruits of their hard work. Faith plays a notable role, with 56.9% of employees finding hope in their religious or spiritual beliefs. Improving oneself (55.2%) and creativity (48.9%) are also important sources of hope for many employees. Interestingly, political and social change (20.5%) appears to be the least significant source of hope among the employees, suggesting that their hope is primarily derived from personal, interpersonal, and financial factors rather than broader societal or political changes.
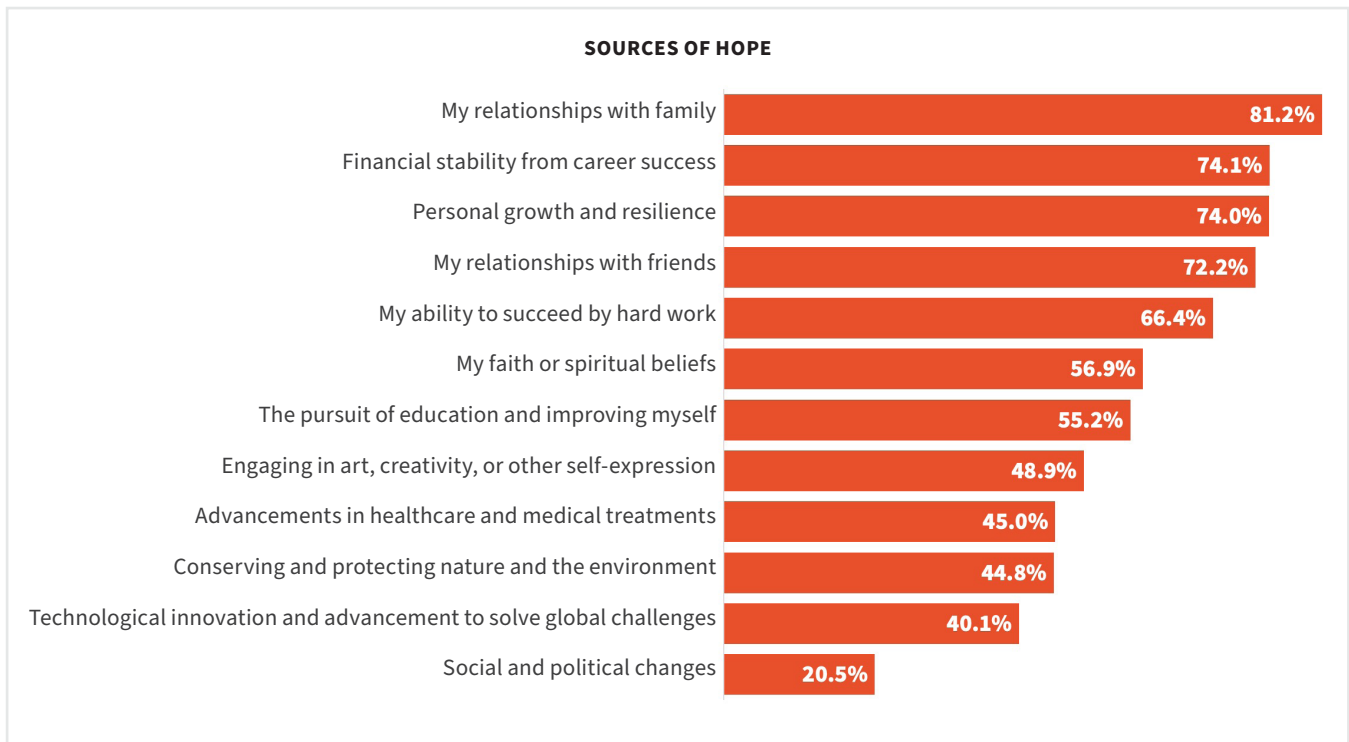
SOURCES OF HOPE

Source	Percentage
My relationships with family	81.2%
Financial stability from career success	74.1%
Personal growth and resilience	74.0%
My relationships with friends	72.2%
My ability to succeed by hard work	66.4%
My faith or spiritual beliefs	56.9%
The pursuit of education and improving myself	55.2%
Engaging in art, creativity, or other self-expression	48.9%
Advancements in healthcare and medical treatments	45.0%
Conserving and protecting nature and the environment	44.8%
Technological innovation and advancement to solve global challenges	40.1%
Social and political changes	20.5%

FIGURE 1

INTERNAL SOURCES OF HOPE OUTWEIGH EXTERNAL SOURCES OF HOPE

The distinction between **internal and external loci** of hope is crucial in understanding the nature of hope and its impact on our well-being. Internally-sourced hope stems from an intrinsic, self-generated sense of optimism and belief in the possibility of positive outcomes, even in the face of adversity. It is rooted in one's personal values, resilience, and inherent capacity for hope. On the other hand, externally-sourced hope is derived from extrinsic sources, such as the encouragement, assistance, or reassurance of others, or situational factors.

This distinction is important because internal sources of hope are more sustainable, empowering, and **beneficial for overall well-being**. When our hope is intrinsic, it is less dependent on external validation or circumstances, and it can serve as a powerful source of motivation and resilience in difficult times. Extrinsic hope, while potentially uplifting in the short term, can be more fragile and vulnerable to external influences. Cultivating a strong sense of intrinsic hope helps individuals navigate life's challenges with greater agency, self-determination, and inner strength.

To assess whether participants' hope tends more toward internal or external loci, study participants completed a set of eight items adapted from the **Locus of Hope questionnaire**, four items each for external and internal sources of hope. **FIGURE 2** shows the rate at which employees report they "Agree" or "Strongly Agree" with each statement. In general, employees were more likely to endorse internal than external sources of hope. An overwhelming majority of employees indicated that their previous experiences have set them up well for the future (92.5%) and reflect positively on their past success in meeting goals through their own efforts (88%). Internal sources of hope appear to play a more supportive role: only about half of employees (52.9%) report relying on others to help brainstorm ways to reach their goals.
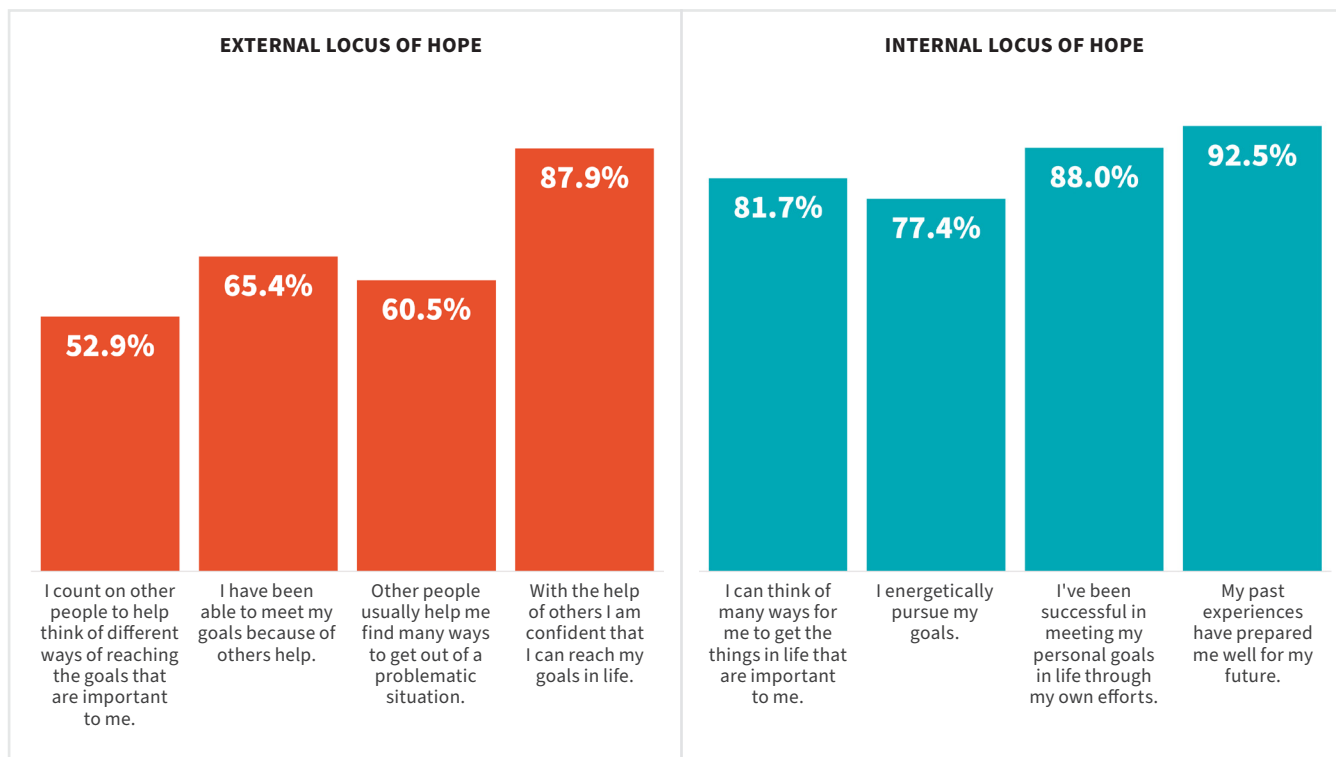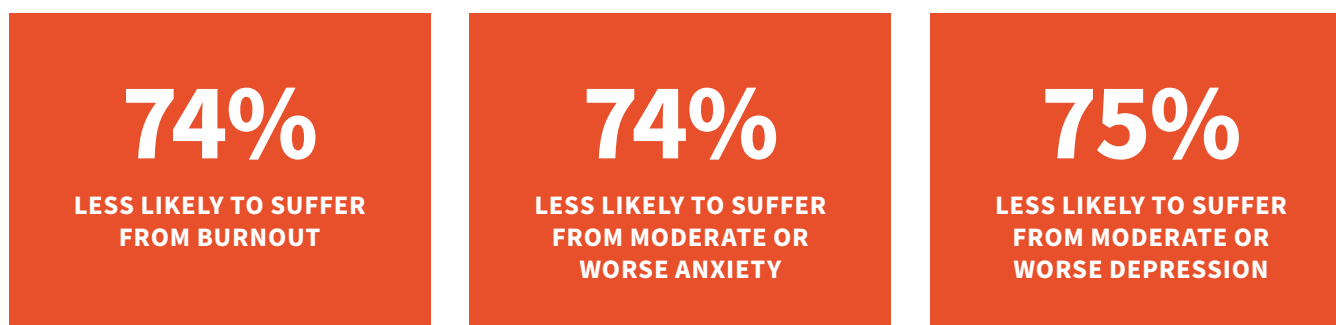
EXTERNAL LOCUS OF HOPE

- 52.9% — I count on other people to help think of different ways of reaching the goals that are important to me.
- 65.4% — I have been able to meet my goals because of others help.
- 60.5% — Other people usually help me find many ways to get out of a problematic situation.
- 87.9% — With the help of others I am confident that I can reach my goals in life.

INTERNAL LOCUS OF HOPE

- 81.7% — I can think of many ways for me to get the things in life that are important to me.
- 77.4% — I energetically pursue my goals.
- 88.0% — I've been successful in meeting my personal goals in life through my own efforts.
- 92.5% — My past experiences have prepared me well for my future.

FIGURE 2

INTERNAL SOURCES OF HOPE DRIVE POSITIVE OUTCOMES AT WORK

Matching data from the Workforce Well-being Study to data from the meQ warehouse permits a clearer understanding of the impact of internal hope on workplace-relevant risks including anxiety, depression, burnout and turnover intent. After combining answers to the four internal items from the Locus of Hope scale, employees were divided into four equal groups, or quartiles, based on their expressed level of internal hope. Arraying the groups from least to most hopeful reveals the powerful role internal hope plays as a protective factor across several key outcomes.

THE MAGNITUDE OF HOPE AS A PROTECTIVE FACTOR IS DRAMATIC. EMPLOYEES WITH THE HIGHEST LEVELS OF HOPE ARE (FIGURE 3):

74% LESS LIKELY TO SUFFER FROM BURNOUT	**74%** LESS LIKELY TO SUFFER FROM MODERATE OR WORSE ANXIETY	**75%** LESS LIKELY TO SUFFER FROM MODERATE OR WORSE DEPRESSION

EXTREME BURNOUT RISK

Least Hopeful: 27.0%
Most Hopeful: 7.0%

MODERATE+ ANXIETY RISK

Least Hopeful: 41.4%
Most Hopeful: 10.7%

MODERATE+ DEPRESSION RISK

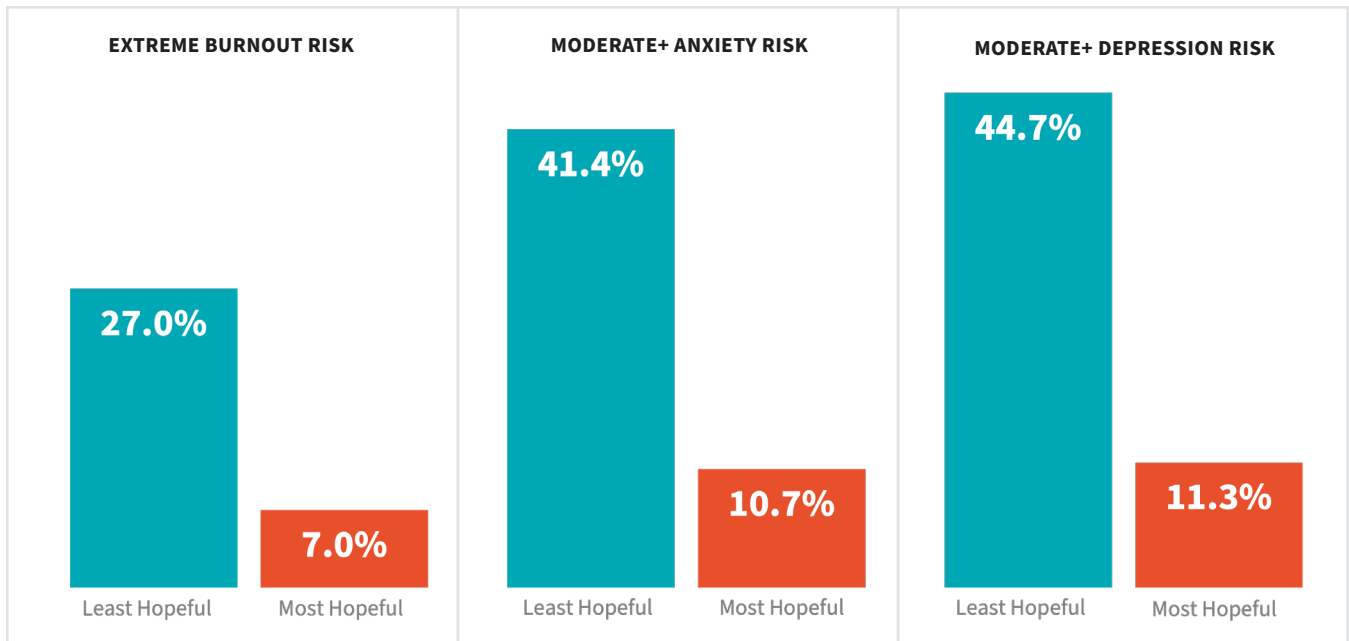Least Hopeful: 44.7%
Most Hopeful: 11.3%

FIGURE 3

Hope also reduces the risk of quiet quitting and turnover (**FIGURE 4**). The most hopeful employees were 33% less likely to endorse quiet quitting (essentially doing "just the minimum" at work) as the least hopeful employees. Turnover intent is cut in half (49% less) among the most hopeful employees.
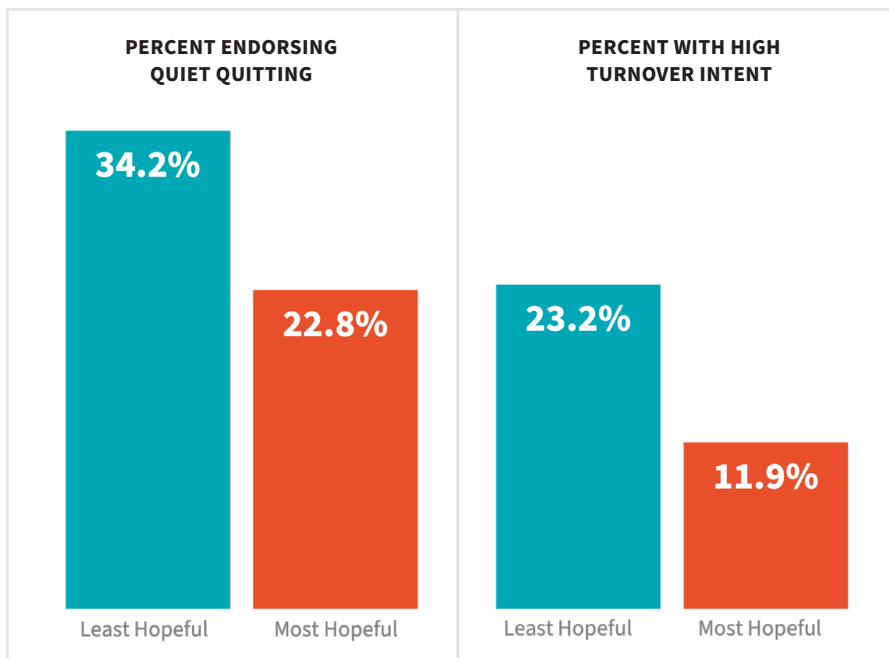
PERCENT ENDORSING QUIET QUITTING

Least Hopeful: 34.2%
Most Hopeful: 22.8%

PERCENT WITH HIGH TURNOVER INTENT

Least Hopeful: 23.2%
Most Hopeful: 11.9%

FIGURE 4

RESILIENCE IS A KEY DRIVER OF HOPE

Resilience can be a powerful source of hope for employees. By connecting data from this study to data from the meQ warehouse, we gain valuable insights into how an individual's resilience relates to their sense of hope. Resilient individuals are better equipped to navigate challenges and maintain a positive mindset, even when facing setbacks. This study sheds light on how resilience contributes to employees' ability to cope with stress, overcome obstacles, and find meaning in their work. When employees possess resilience, they are more likely to persevere, remain optimistic, and view challenges as opportunities for growth. These data provide valuable insights into the relationship between resilience and hope, and more importantly, they highlight which specific components of resilience are the key drivers of hope among employees.

Dividing the study population into four equal groups based on their meQ scores (a validated measure of overall resilience) allows us to compare levels of internal hope across different degrees of resilience. **FIGURE 5** highlights the stark contrast in responses to the four internal hope items between the most and least resilient employees. What stands out is the remarkably high endorsement of each internal hope dimension among the most resilient group. Nearly all (95% or more) of the most resilient employees strongly exhibited each aspect of internal hope. Compared to their least resilient counterparts, the most resilient employees were 67% more likely to believe they can find ways to achieve their important life goals, 84% more likely to actively pursue their goals with energy, 26% more likely to attribute their success to their own efforts, and 16% more likely to feel that their past experiences have prepared them well for the future.

INTERNAL HOPE ITEMS BY RESILIENCE LEVEL

I can think of many ways for me to get the things in life that are important to me.
- 57.7%
- 96.4%

I energetically pursue my goals.
- 52.6%
- 96.7%

I've been successful in meeting my personal goals in life through my own efforts.
- 75.5%
- 95.2%

My past experiences have prepared me well for my future.
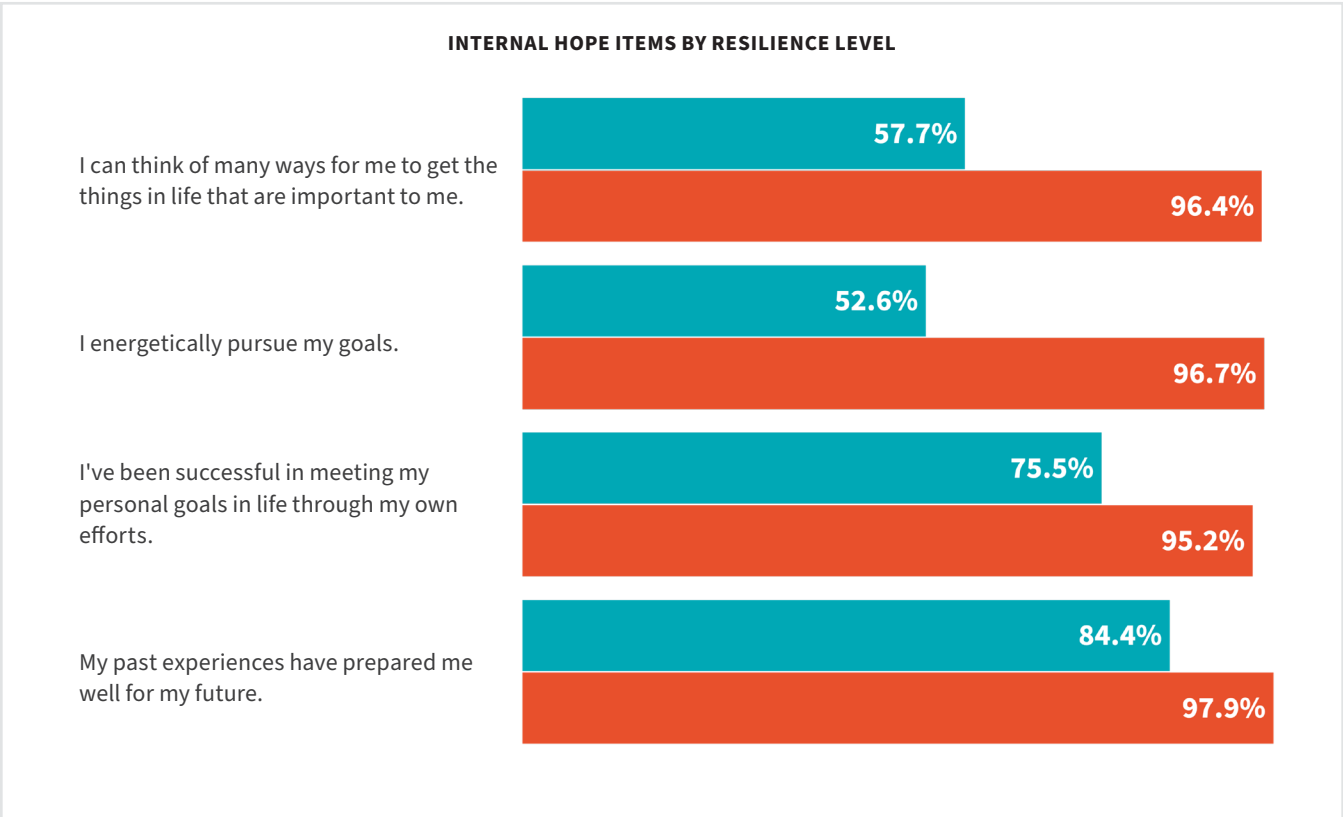- 84.4%
- 97.9%

FIGURE 5   ● LEAST RESILIENT   ● MOST RESILIENT

meQ'S POSITIVITY, SELF CONFIDENCE, AND PROBLEM SOLVING FACTORS ARE TOP DRIVERS IN THE RESILIENCE/HOPE RELATIONSHIP

The meQ Score provides an overall measure of resilience, but does not reveal the specific cognitive characteristics that are most closely linked to hope. By breaking down an individual's meQ Score into 18 resilience factors, we can identify which factors are best positioned to boost hope in the workforce. This was done by comparing responses to each of the hope questions across each of the resilience factors.

Three resilience factors stood out as strong drivers of an internal locus of hope: Positivity, Self-Confidence, and Problem-Solving. As shown in **FIGURE 6**, employees with the highest scores in these factors demonstrated significant enhancements in various dimensions of hope. They exhibited a 50-70% boost in their ability to think creatively about ways to achieve important goals. Remarkably, they also showed a 65-85% increase in their energetic pursuit of personal goals. Moreover, those high in Positivity, Self-Confidence, and Problem-Solving were 16-22% more likely to attribute their success to their own efforts, recognizing their pivotal role in achieving objectives. Finally, they demonstrated a 15-18% boost in feeling that their past experiences have prepared them well for the future, fostering confidence and readiness to tackle new challenges.
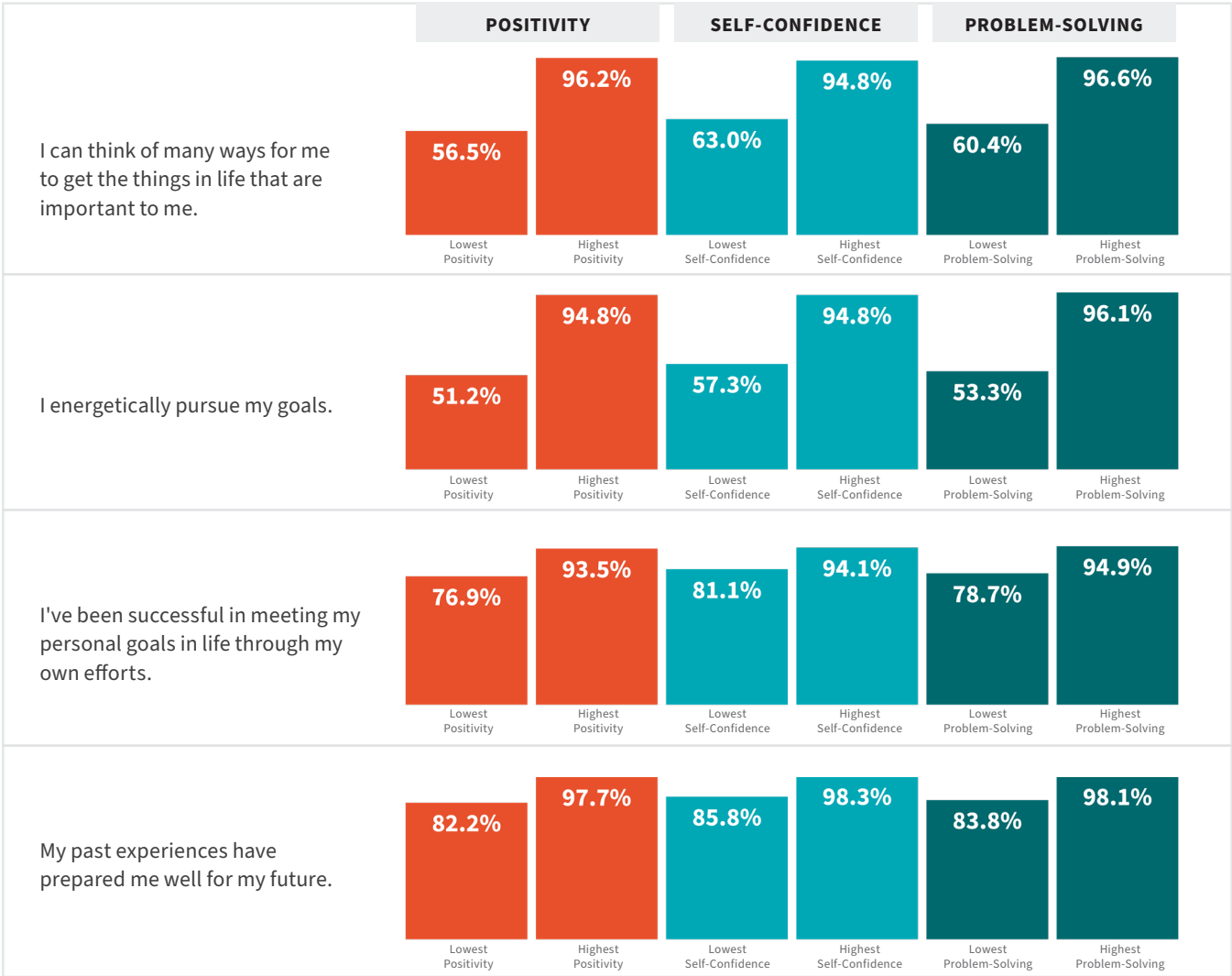

FIGURE 6

By what mechanism do these resilience factors drive hope? Increasing positivity helps individuals focus on potential opportunities and solutions, even in challenging situations, fostering an internal sense of hope in their ability to navigate difficulties. Enhancing self-confidence leads to a heightened belief in one's capabilities, allowing individuals to approach challenges with determination and a sense of control over the outcome. Improving problem-solving skills solidifies the ability to identify root causes and develop strategies to address problems, reinforcing the belief that individuals can actively shape their circumstances through their actions.

TOGETHER, TRAINING THESE COGNITIVE CHARACTERISTICS EMPOWERS INDIVIDUALS TO TAKE CHARGE OF THEIR SITUATIONS AND PERSEVERE THROUGH ADVERSITY, RATHER THAN SURRENDERING TO EXTERNAL FORCES. BY CULTIVATING meQ'S POSITIVITY, SELF-CONFIDENCE, AND PROBLEM-SOLVING FACTORS, ORGANIZATIONS CAN FOSTER AN INTERNAL DRIVE AND OPTIMISM AMONG EMPLOYEES, ULTIMATELY BOOSTING HOPE WITHIN THE WORKFORCE.
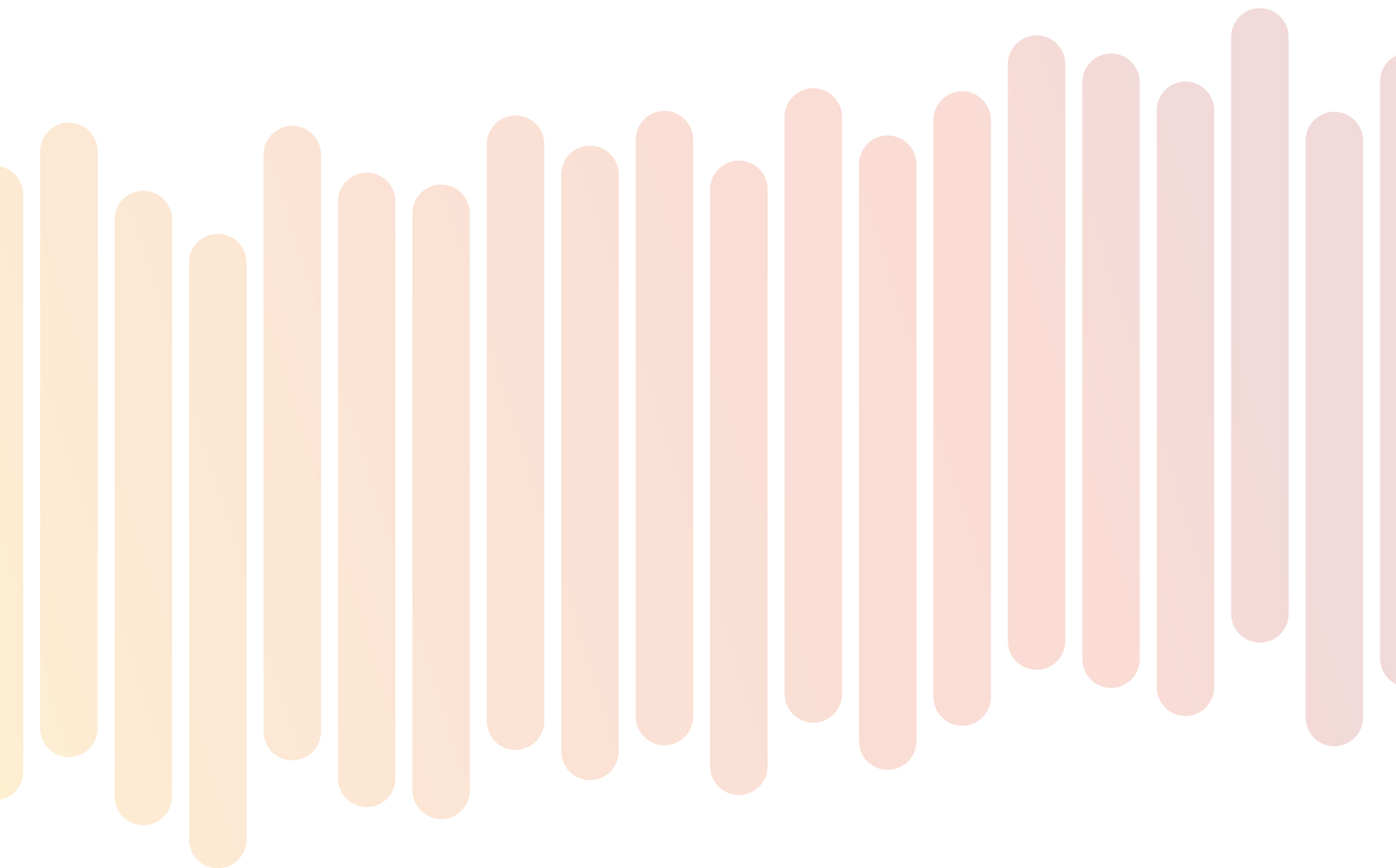
A SENSE OF BELONGING

In a work context, belonging refers to feeling accepted, valued, and included as an integral part of the organization's culture and community. It involves feeling a sense of connection, support, and shared purpose with colleagues and the broader organizational values and goals. A strong sense of belonging at work is important for several reasons.

Belonging contributes to overall well-being and job satisfaction, as individuals feel appreciated and comfortable being their authentic selves in the workplace. A sense of belonging also fosters engagement and motivation, as employees feel invested in the success of the organization and are more likely to go the extra mile. Additionally, it promotes psychological safety, encouraging open communication, collaboration, and the sharing of diverse perspectives, which can lead to increased innovation and problem-solving. A workplace that cultivates a sense of belonging is more likely to attract and retain top talent, as individuals seek environments where they feel accepted and valued. Ultimately, cultivating a culture of belonging within an organization can contribute to improved workforce outcomes, including increased productivity, employee retention, and overall organizational success.

We turned to the **Ridley Model** for a tool to measure belonging at work among study participants. The model is structured around four key components:

COMFORT
Employees feel valued, respected, safe, and supported in the workplace environment.

CONNECTION
Employees experience a shared sense of purpose and feel connected to their colleagues.

CONTRIBUTION
Diverse ideas and perspectives are welcomed and inform decision-making processes.

COMMITMENT
Diversity, equity, and inclusion are supported through leaders' words and actions.

In all, the questionnaire consists of ten items, responses to which for all study participants are shown in **FIGURE 7**. The percentages represent the rate at which participants endorsed each item with an "Agree" or "Strongly Agree" response.

PERCENT OF EMPLOYEES REPORTING STRONG FEELINGS OF BELONGING

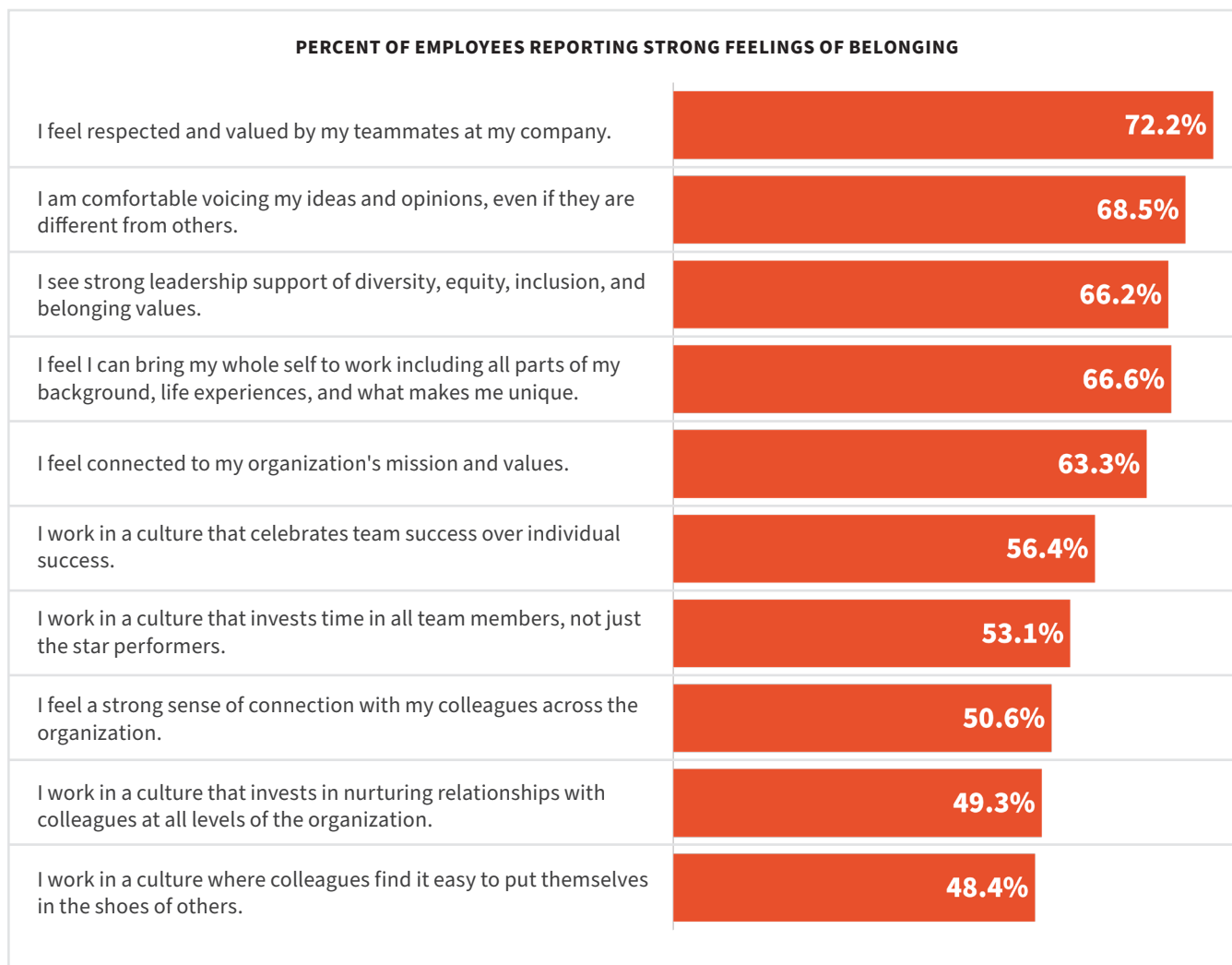| Statement	Percent
I feel respected and valued by my teammates at my company.	72.2%
I am comfortable voicing my ideas and opinions, even if they are different from others.	68.5%
I see strong leadership support of diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging values.	66.2%
I feel I can bring my whole self to work including all parts of my background, life experiences, and what makes me unique.	66.6%
I feel connected to my organization's mission and values.	63.3%
I work in a culture that celebrates team success over individual success.	56.4%
I work in a culture that invests time in all team members, not just the star performers.	53.1%
I feel a strong sense of connection with my colleagues across the organization.	50.6%
I work in a culture that invests in nurturing relationships with colleagues at all levels of the organization.	49.3%
I work in a culture where colleagues find it easy to put themselves in the shoes of others.	48.4%

FIGURE 7

Across the study population, responses provide insight into employees' perceptions of belonging within their organization. Overall, the results suggest a somewhat positive sentiment, with most questions receiving agreement from over 50% of respondents.

The highest levels of agreement were around feeling respected and valued by teammates (72.2%) and being comfortable voicing differing opinions (68.5%). This indicates a culture where many feel their voices are heard and diversity of thought is welcomed. Additionally, around two-thirds agreed that diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging values are supported by leadership and that they can bring their full, authentic selves to work.

However, the results also point to some areas for improvement. Questions related to organizational culture and interpersonal connections received relatively lower agreement rates. Only around half felt a strong sense of connection with colleagues across the organization (50.6%) or that the culture nurtures relationships at all levels (49.3%). Notably, under half (48.4%) agreed that colleagues find it easy to put themselves in others' shoes, suggesting a need to further build empathy skills.

Overall, while there are strengths in making employees feel respected and able to voice their perspectives, the results indicate opportunities to foster deeper interpersonal connections, empathy, and an organizational culture that proactively invests in the success and well-being of all employees.

MANAGERS PLAY A PIVOTAL ROLE IN EMPLOYEE BELONGING

Managers and team leaders play a pivotal role in shaping an employee's sense of belonging within the workplace. As direct points of contact and influence, they have the power to create an environment that either fosters or hinders feelings of acceptance, inclusion, and value. Their actions, words, and leadership style can significantly impact an employee's comfort level, connection to the team and organizational goals, ability to contribute ideas freely, and overall commitment to the company's diversity and inclusion efforts. When managers prioritize building trusting relationships, encouraging open communication, actively seeking diverse perspectives, and leading by example through inclusive behaviors, they send a powerful message that every team member is respected and belongs. Conversely, if managers fail to cultivate an inclusive culture, employees may feel alienated, undervalued, and reluctant to fully engage. Ultimately, managers and team leaders hold the key to creating a workplace where employees can thrive and feel a genuine sense of belonging.

Data from the present study strongly bear out this perspective and reveal a striking contrast in employees' sense of belonging based on whether they perceive strong or weak manager support for their mental well-being. Across all survey questions, employees who report strong manager support consistently express higher levels of agreement, often by substantial margins.
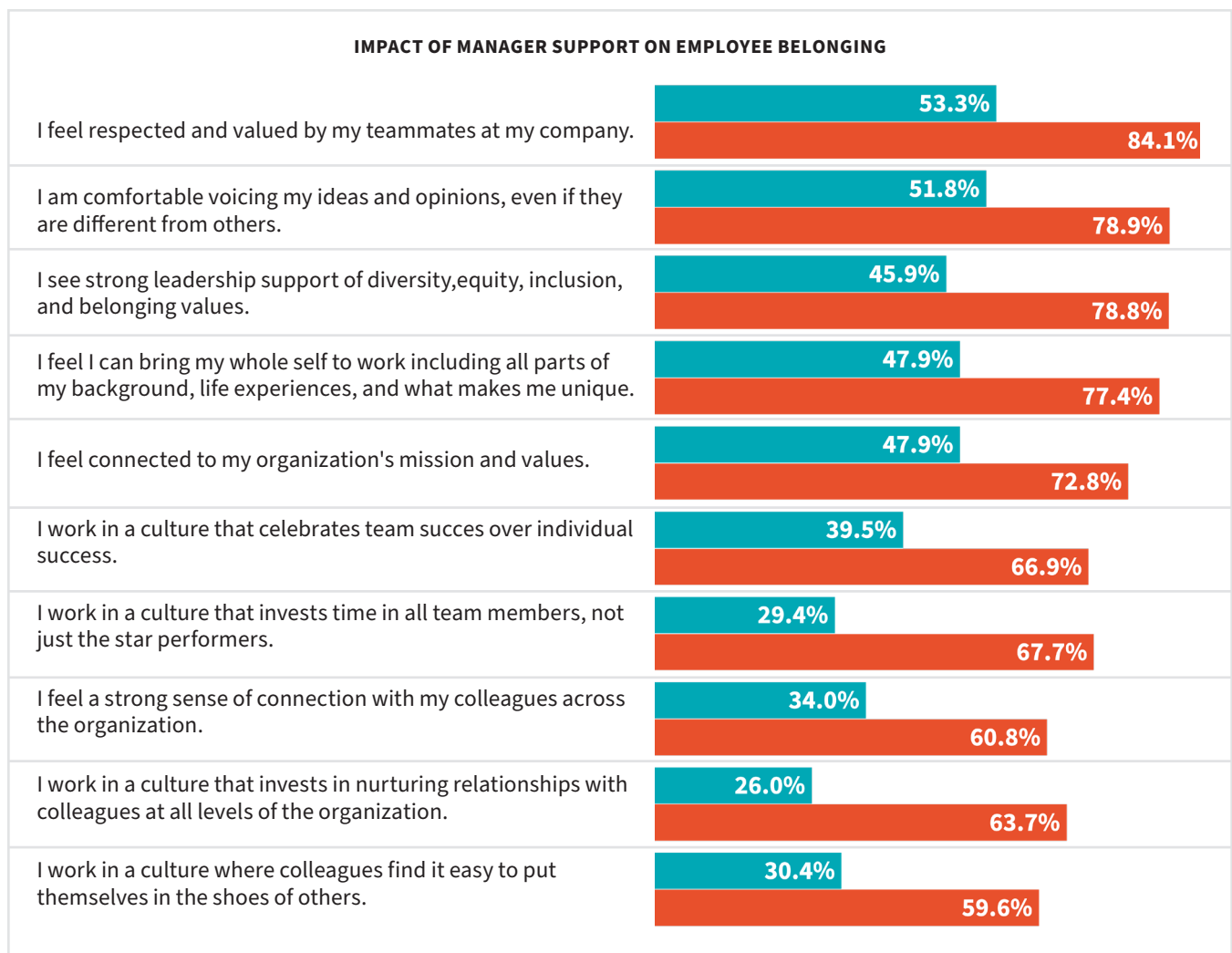
IMPACT OF MANAGER SUPPORT ON EMPLOYEE BELONGING

Statement	Weak Manager Support	Strong Manager Support
I feel respected and valued by my teammates at my company.	53.3%	84.1%
I am comfortable voicing my ideas and opinions, even if they are different from others.	51.8%	78.9%
I see strong leadership support of diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging values.	45.9%	78.8%
I feel I can bring my whole self to work including all parts of my background, life experiences, and what makes me unique.	47.9%	77.4%
I feel connected to my organization's mission and values.	47.9%	72.8%
I work in a culture that celebrates team succes over individual success.	39.5%	66.9%
I work in a culture that invests time in all team members, not just the star performers.	29.4%	67.7%
I feel a strong sense of connection with my colleagues across the organization.	34.0%	60.8%
I work in a culture that invests in nurturing relationships with colleagues at all levels of the organization.	26.0%	63.7%
I work in a culture where colleagues find it easy to put themselves in the shoes of others.	30.4%	59.6%

FIGURE 8 ● WEAK MANAGER SUPPORT ● STRONG MANAGER SUPPORT

The gaps are particularly pronounced for questions related to organizational culture and interpersonal connections (**FIGURE 8**). For example, only 29.4% of those with weak manager support agree that their culture invests time in all team members, compared to 67.7% with strong support–a difference of nearly 40 percentage points. Similarly, just 26% of the weak support group feel their culture nurtures relationships at all levels, versus more than twice as many (63.7%) of the strong support group.

Even on more individual-focused questions, the disparities are significant. While 84.1% of those with strong manager support feel respected and valued by teammates, only 53% of the weak support group agrees. The pattern holds for feeling comfortable voicing differing opinions (78.9% vs. 51.8%) and being able to bring one's whole self to work (77.4% vs. 47.9%).

These findings underscore the vital role that managers' support for employee mental well-being plays in cultivating a genuine sense of belonging within an organization. When employees feel their mental health is supported, they are far more likely to feel truly included, valued, and connected across all aspects of the workplace experience.

BELONGING SHARPLY REDUCES MENTAL HEALTH AND TURNOVER RISKS

Having a strong sense of belonging at work is consequential for employee mental health and turnover intent. When individuals feel accepted, valued, and included within their workplace community, they experience a supportive environment that promotes psychological well-being. Feeling a sense of connection and shared purpose with colleagues can buffer against stress, anxiety, and feelings of isolation. Conversely, when employees lack a sense of belonging, they may experience heightened levels of emotional distress, disengagement, and a diminished sense of self-worth, negatively impacting their overall mental health.

Furthermore, a lack of belonging at work can directly contribute to an employee's intent to leave the organization. Feeling like an outsider or being excluded from decision-making processes can foster resentment and dissatisfaction, prompting individuals to seek alternative employment where they feel more valued and respected. Ultimately, cultivating a culture of belonging is not only beneficial for employee mental health but can also play a crucial role in retaining top talent and reducing costly turnover within the organization.

Study participants' responses reveal a clear connection between an employee's sense of belonging at work and their risk of experiencing mental health challenges like burnout, anxiety, and depression. Those with the weakest sense of belonging face substantially higher risks across all three areas compared to those with the strongest sense of belonging.

MENTAL HEALTH RISKS BY SENSE OF BELONGING

EXTREME BURNOUT RISK	MODERATE+ ANXIETY RISK	MODERATE+ DEPRESSION RISK

EXTREME BURNOUT RISK
17.2% — Weakest Sense of Belonging
6.9% — Strongest Sense of Belonging

MODERATE+ ANXIETY RISK
29.0% — Weakest Sense of Belonging
9.1% — Strongest Sense of Belonging

MODERATE+ DEPRESSION RISK
30.4% — Weakest Sense of Belonging
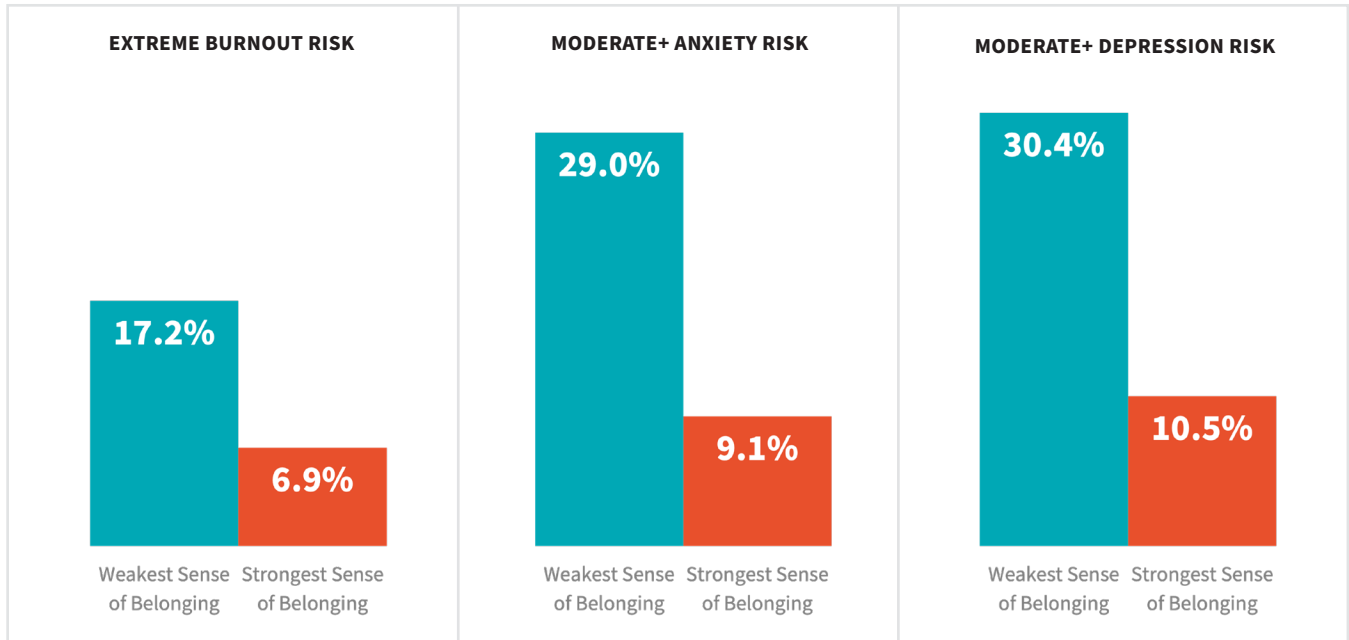10.5% — Strongest Sense of Belonging

FIGURE 9

The contrast is most stark for extreme burnout risk, which affects over 17% of employees with the weakest belonging, but only 6.9% of those with the strongest belonging - 2.5x the risk (**FIGURE 9**). Similarly, the risk of moderate or higher anxiety is more than three times greater for those lacking a strong sense of belonging (29%) versus those who feel a robust sense of belonging (9.1%). Depression risk also shows an almost 3-fold gap, with 30.4% of the weakest belonging group at moderate or higher risk, compared to just 10.5% of those with the strongest belonging.

These findings quantify the tangible mental health impacts that can stem from a lack of belonging in the workplace. When employees don't feel truly included, valued, and connected, they are far more vulnerable to burnout, anxiety, depression and other mental health challenges. Cultivating a genuine sense of belonging for all employees emerges as a critical factor for supporting their overall well-being and psychological safety.

WELL-BEING TRENDS

The measures tracked over the past four years reveal a mixed picture of employee well-being trends (**FIGURE 10**). Positivity levels have shown a marginal increase in the last six months, but the broader time trend reflects a 10 percentage point decline over the last year. Additionally, motivation levels are trending upward, and somatic symptoms of stress have remained stable. However, one concerning aspect is the persistent prevalence of burnout, with one in four workers strongly agreeing or agreeing that they feel burned out, indicating no significant improvement in this area. Furthermore, economic uncertainty continues to weigh heavily on workers, as job worries have increased by 7 points compared to the previous year, casting a pall over the overall well-being landscape. While some positive trends are evident, the data highlights ongoing challenges, particularly related to burnout and job stress, that need to be addressed to foster a healthier and more resilient workforce.

	JUNE 2022	JANUARY 2023	AUGUST 2023	JANUARY 2024
I feel burned out from my responsibilities and commitments.	26.3%	22.2%	26.9%	25.7%
I find myself worrying about my job.	23.9%	24.1%	33.0%	31.0%
It's hard to get myself motivated in the morning.	22.2%	21.0%	19.0%	17.5%
In the course of a day I experienced more positive than negative emotions.	56.6%	58.3%	46.7%	48.3%

FIGURE 10

RESILIENCE IS A TREND REVERSER FOR WELL-BEING OUTCOMES

The data reveals striking contrasts in well-being trends between the most resilient and least resilient individuals, highlighting resilience as a powerful "trend reverser" in the context of employee well-being. **FIGURE 10.5** traces changes in five well-being measures meQ has tracked over the last 18 months.

QUESTION	meQ SCORE QUARTILE	JUNE 2022	JANUARY 2023	JULY 2023	JANUARY 2024
I feel burned out from my responsibilities and commitments.	Least Resilient	43.2%	40.3%	46.0%	47.7%
	Most Resilient	12.2%	7.0%	8.6%	6.2%
I find myself worrying about my job.	Least Resilient	40.4%	41.9%	51.4%	52.0%
	Most Resilient	10.6%	9.8%	14.4%	10.3%
It's hard to get myself motivated in the morning.	Least Resilient	40.7%	40.7%	35.9%	33.7%
	Most Resilient	7.6%	5.9%	4.3%	3.7%
In the course of a day I experienced more positive than negative emotions.	Least Resilient	25.2%	28.5%	22.4%	20.0%
	Most Resilient	85.6%	88.8%	74.6%	77.3%

FIGURE 10.5

For the least resilient group, the trends are concerning. Burnout levels have steadily increased, with nearly half (47.7%) reporting feeling burned out in January 2024. Job worries have also escalated, reaching 52% in January 2024, reflecting the impact of economic uncertainty on this group's well-being. Additionally, the least resilient individuals consistently struggle with experiencing more positive emotions throughout the day, with only 20-25% reporting a predominance of positive emotions.

In contrast, the most resilient group exhibits remarkably positive well-being trends. In fact for burnout and job stress, the most resilient study participants actually show an improvement where less resilient individuals show relatively worse outcomes over time. The rate of burnout is cut in half among the most resilient (12.2% to 6.2%) and job stress shows a slight decrease (10.6% to 10.3%) in contrast to a 29% increase in job stress among the least resilient.

Resilience emerges as a powerful trend reverser, mitigating the negative well-being trajectories that afflict those with lower resilience levels. This data highlights the critical importance of cultivating resilience within the workforce, as it can serve as a protective buffer against burnout, job worries, and other well-being concerns, ultimately fostering a more positive and engaged workforce.

GEN Z REMAINS EXCEPTIONAL

The Workforce Well-being Reports from meQ have shed light on the contrasting trends between Gen Z and older workers, revealing notable generational differences across various measures. The **Fall 2023 Report** highlighted that Gen Z exhibits significantly higher job stress levels and a higher likelihood of near-term turnover compared to their older peers, primarily driven by financial strains and mental health demands.

GEN Z WELL-BEING TRENDS DIFFERENTLY

In terms of time trends by generation, Gen Z stands out as an exceptional case. Over the past 18 months (**FIGURE 11**), job stress levels among Gen Z workers have surged by 39%, a stark contrast to the 26% increase observed among older employees. The data reveals that nearly half of Gen Z workers (48.1%) reported high job stress, while significantly fewer older employees (29.3%) reported similar levels.

Furthermore, the most recent study paints a concerning picture of Gen Z's overall well-being. Across all well-being outcomes, Gen Z workers consistently score lower than their older counterparts. Notably, somatic symptoms of stress are 36% higher, burnout levels are 62% higher, and positivity is 26% lower among Gen Z employees. Additionally, Gen Z workers are 2.4 times more likely than older workers to report challenges in getting motivated in the morning.

These findings underscore the unique challenges faced by the Gen Z workforce, highlighting the need for targeted interventions and support mechanisms to address their specific well-being concerns. By recognizing and addressing these generational disparities, organizations can foster a more inclusive and supportive environment for employees across all age groups, ultimately contributing to a healthier and more resilient workforce.

QUESTION	AGE / GEN Z	JUNE 2022	JANUARY 2023	JULY 2023	JANUARY 2024
I feel burned out from my responsibilities and commitments.	Gen Z	32.1%	28.7%	37.1%	39.5%
	Not Gen Z	26.1%	21.8%	26.6%	24.4%
I find myself worrying about my job.	Gen Z	34.7%	34.5%	48.2%	48.1%
	Not Gen Z	23.3%	23.4%	32.1%	29.3%
It's hard to get myself motivated in the morning.	Gen Z	36.5%	40.3%	32.0%	38.4%
	Not Gen Z	21.5%	20.2%	18.3%	16.2%
In the course of a day I experienced more positive than negative emotions.	Gen Z	45.0%	49.2%	36.7%	37.2%
	Not Gen Z	57.3%	59.0%	47.5%	50.2%

FIGURE 11

GEN Z FEELS BELONGING DIFFERENTLY AT WORK

The data on belonging among Gen Z and older employees shown in **FIGURE 12** also reveals some notable generational contrasts. Gen Z employees feel substantially less comfortable voicing different ideas and opinions (59.5%) compared to older employees (69.2%). They also struggle more in bringing their whole authentic selves to work (56.8% vs 66.9% for older employees) and feel less well connected with colleagues (41.3% vs 51.5%). However, Gen Z reports stronger team-oriented cultures; 66.8% feel their workplace celebrates team over individual success, compared to only 56% of older employees. Gen Z also indicates higher investment in nurturing relationships across levels of seniority (55.6% vs 49.1%) and more even investment across all team members, not just star performers (59.1% vs 52.8%). The two groups are more aligned on factors like feeling respected by teammates, seeing leadership support for DEI, connection to the organization's mission, and working in a culture that promotes empathy.

A key implication for employers is to foster more inclusive environments where Gen Z feels empowered to speak up and show up as their full, authentic selves without fear. Promoting psychological safety could help unlock Gen Z's potential. At the same time, Gen Z's team-centric viewpoint presents an opportunity to build cohesive, collaborative cultures when properly channeled.
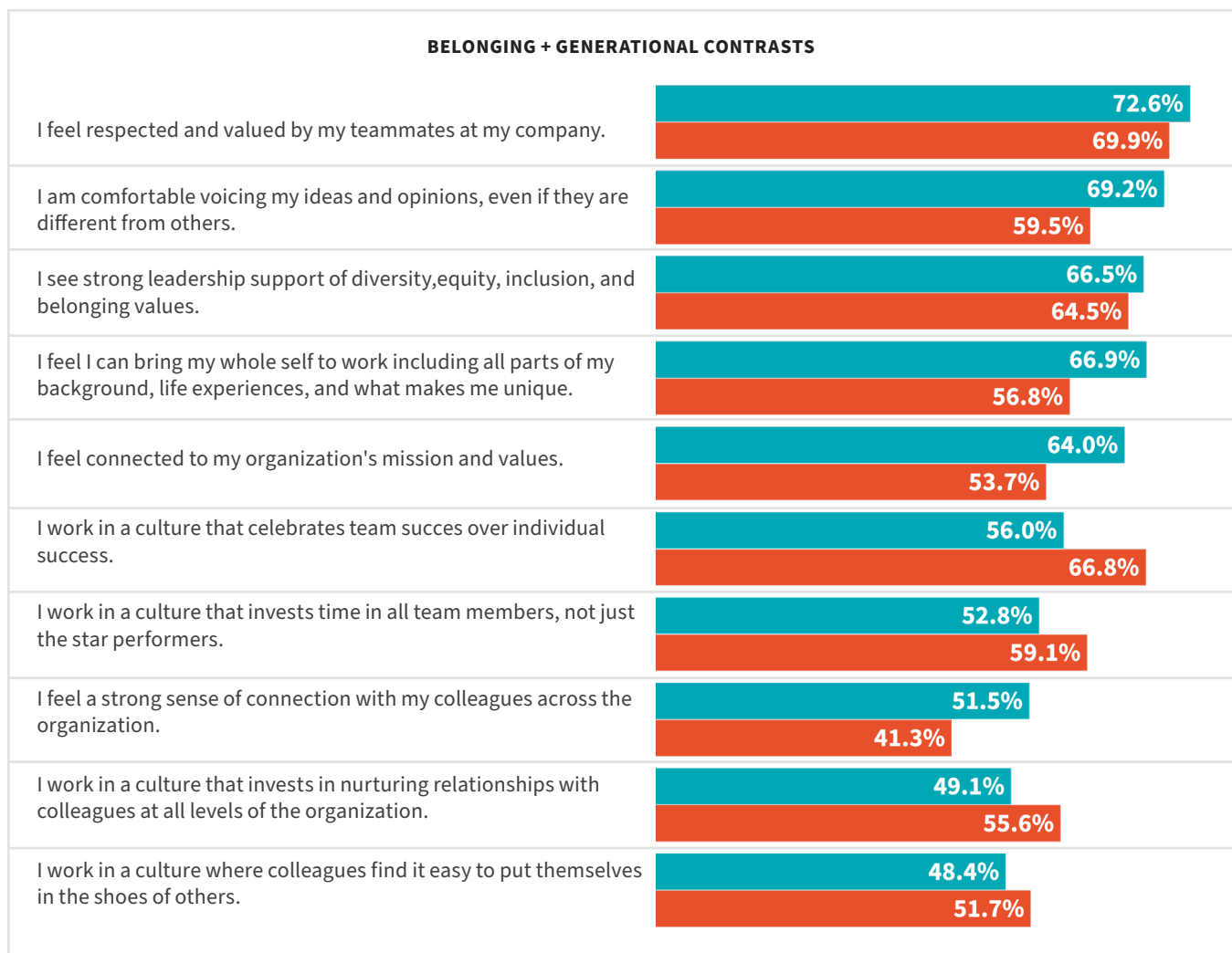

BELONGING + GENERATIONAL CONTRASTS

	NOT GEN Z	GEN Z
I feel respected and valued by my teammates at my company.	72.6%	69.9%
I am comfortable voicing my ideas and opinions, even if they are different from others.	69.2%	59.5%
I see strong leadership support of diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging values.	66.5%	64.5%
I feel I can bring my whole self to work including all parts of my background, life experiences, and what makes me unique.	66.9%	56.8%
I feel connected to my organization's mission and values.	64.0%	53.7%
I work in a culture that celebrates team succes over individual success.	56.0%	66.8%
I work in a culture that invests time in all team members, not just the star performers.	52.8%	59.1%
I feel a strong sense of connection with my colleagues across the organization.	51.5%	41.3%
I work in a culture that invests in nurturing relationships with colleagues at all levels of the organization.	49.1%	55.6%
I work in a culture where colleagues find it easy to put themselves in the shoes of others.	48.4%	51.7%

FIGURE 12 ● NOT GEN Z ● GEN Z

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WHAT'S DIFFERENT ABOUT GEN Z?

Some insight into the exceptionalism of Gen Z can be gained by comparing their score profile across meQ's 18 resilience factors to the profile of older employees. **FIGURE 12.5** shows that Gen Z employees score significantly lower on factors like stress management (40.7% lower), emotion control (32.3% lower), and work-life balance (29.5% lower) compared to older employees. They also exhibit lower levels of engagement (22.2% lower), sleep quality (22.1% lower), and positivity (20.5% lower). The only measures where Gen Z scores higher than older employees are empathy and physical activity. Overall, the data suggests Gen Z employees may struggle more with managing stress, regulating emotions, balancing work and life, and staying engaged and positive at work compared to their older counterparts. However, they may have an advantage when it comes to empathy. The contrasts are quite stark for resilience factors like stress management but minimal for other factors like problem-solving.
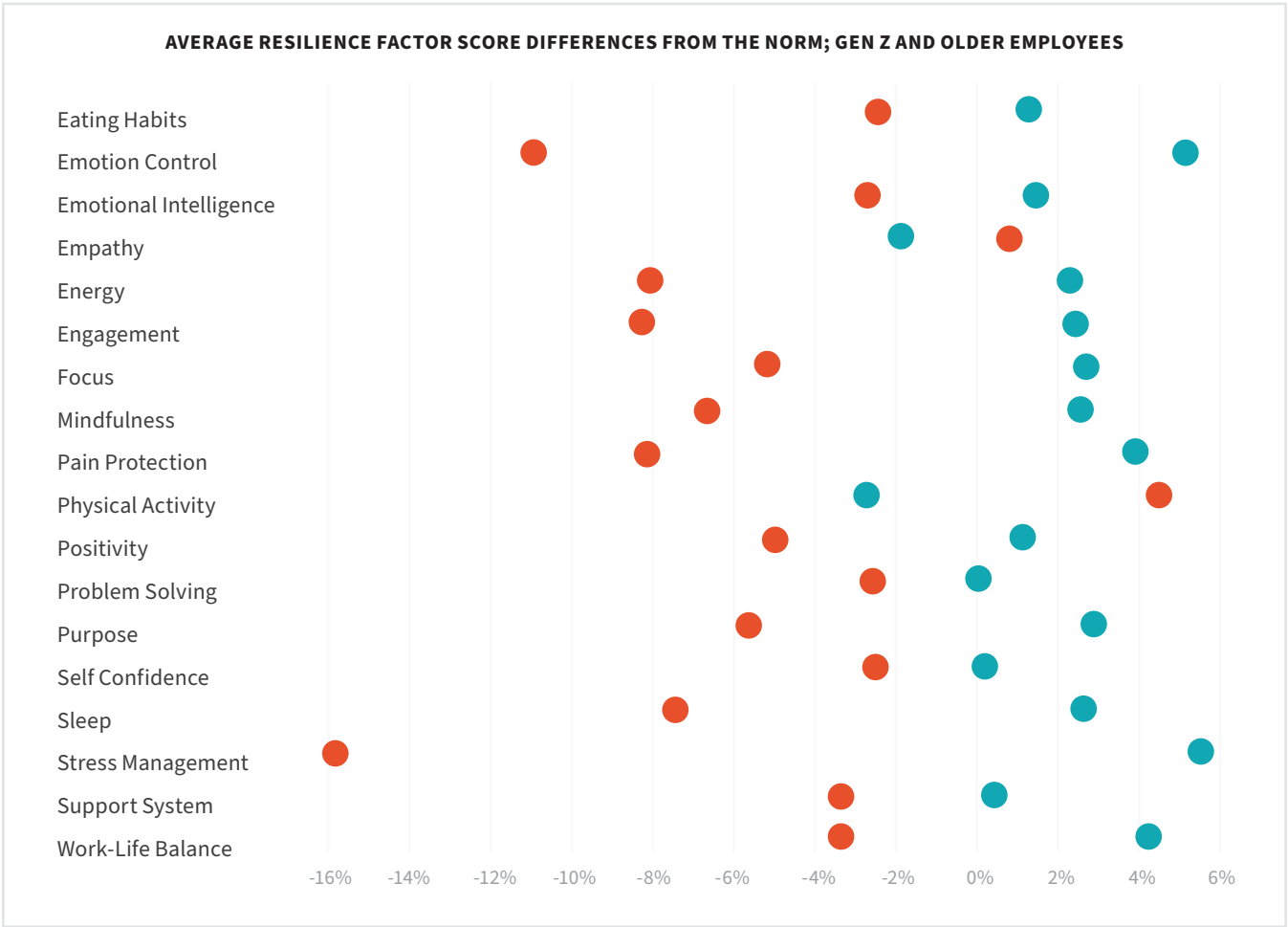

AVERAGE RESILIENCE FACTOR SCORE DIFFERENCES FROM THE NORM; GEN Z AND OLDER EMPLOYEES

FIGURE 12.5 ● NOT GEN Z ● GEN Z

SUCCESS WITH GENERATIVE AI DEPENDS ON TWO COGNITIVE SKILLS

Since the introduction of OpenAI's ChatGPT in November 2022, the rapid advancement of generative AI has significantly impacted the workforce. These powerful language models can automate a wide range of tasks, from content creation to data analysis, often leading to increased efficiency and productivity. However, this technological shift has also raised concerns about job displacement, as certain roles become increasingly automated. It is crucial for organizations to carefully consider the implications of generative AI on their workforce, and develop strategies to mitigate potential disruptions. Understanding workers' mindset and attitudes toward and experiences with these technologies is essential to properly shape policies and training programs that empower employees to leverage the benefits of generative AI while addressing potential challenges.
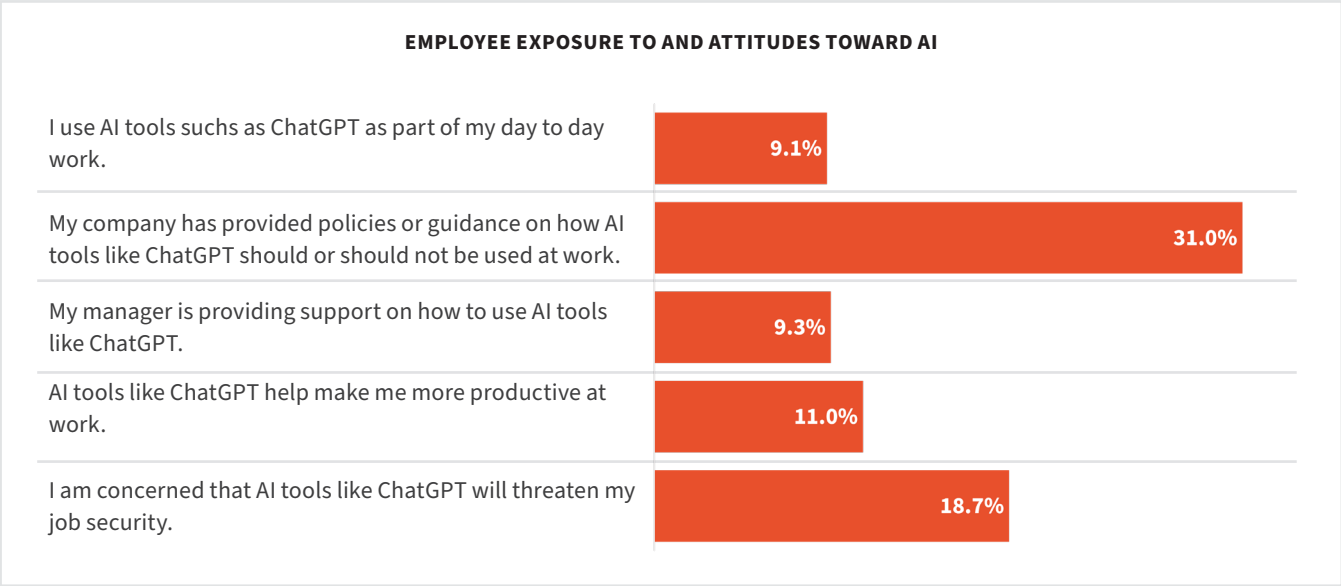
EMPLOYEE EXPOSURE TO AND ATTITUDES TOWARD AI

I use AI tools suchs as ChatGPT as part of my day to day work.	9.1%
My company has provided policies or guidance on how AI tools like ChatGPT should or should not be used at work.	31.0%
My manager is providing support on how to use AI tools like ChatGPT.	9.3%
AI tools like ChatGPT help make me more productive at work.	11.0%
I am concerned that AI tools like ChatGPT will threaten my job security.	18.7%

FIGURE 13

THE USE OF GENERATIVE AI ON THE JOB IS GROWING BUT NOT YET ENDEMIC

The data in **FIGURE 13** suggest that the adoption and integration of generative AI in the workplace is still a work in progress, with only about 1 in 10 employees reporting daily use of these tools in their work. While nearly one-third (31%) of respondents report their company has explicit guidance on the appropriate use of generative AI, just 9.3% of employees say their managers are providing practical support on how to effectively leverage these technologies. Employees' perceptions of the impact of generative AI on their productivity are mixed, with 11% finding it helpful as a productivity enhancer. Similarly, concerns about job displacement due to these AI systems are relatively uncommon, with just 18% of employees feeling their job security is threatened. These findings highlight the need for more comprehensive training and management support to help employees navigate the evolving landscape of generative AI in the workplace.

THE UPTAKE AND IMPACT OF GENERATIVE AI DIFFERS DRAMATICALLY BY INDUSTRY

The use and impact of generative AI was quite different across the six industries most heavily represented among study participants (**FIGURE 14**).

QUESTION	INDUSTRY					
	BUSINESS SERVICES	FINANCE / INSURANCE	HEALTH PRODUCTS & DEVICES	HEALTH SERVICES	MANUFACTURING	TECHNOLOGY SERVICES
I use AI tools suchs as ChatGPT as part of my day to day work.	68.3%	7.3%	12.2%	5.4%	11.4%	13.0%
My company has provided policies or guidance on how AI tools like ChatGPT should or should not be used at work.	23.8%	26.4%	43.3%	5.1%	35.0%	56.5%
My manager is providing support on how to use AI tools like ChatGPT.	5.3%	8.5%	11.3%	2.2%	7.1%	15.5%
AI tools like ChatGPT help make me more productive at work.	10.1%	9.9%	12.6%	5.4%	11.7%	15.0%
I am concerned that AI tools like ChatGPT will threaten my job security.	20.2%	20.0%	16.6%	11.5%	17.7%	19.1%

FIGURE 14

Tech companies are in the lead in identifying use cases for and implementing generative AI tools. Employees in that sector are most likely to report they use genAI tools in their daily work (13%), and also are most likely to believe that the tools help make them more productive at work (15%). The tech industry is also at the forefront when it comes to policy and management guidance on how generative AI tools should—and should not—be used. Over half of tech industry employees (57%) report their employer has provided guidance on appropriate use of generative technologies.

Generative AI seems to have made the fewest inroads in the health services industry–consisting largely of health care delivery organizations. Just 1 in 20 employees report being familiar with their company's policies about the use of generative AI, and only 2% report receiving guidance from their leader about how to use generative AI tools at work.

Across industries, 12-20% of employees report some degree of trepidation about their job security secondary to the growth of generative AI. Concern is highest among employees in the tech, business services, and finance/insurance industries, and least common among health services.

GENERATIVE AI LANDS DIFFERENTLY AMONG MANAGERS

The uptake and reactions to generative AI tools varies significantly between managers and individual contributors within an organization. Compared to individual employees, managers exhibit a more proactive and positive stance towards these transformative technologies (**FIGURE 15**). Managers are 20% more likely to be early adopters of generative AI in their daily work (9.1% vs 7.5%), and are 26% more likely to view these tools as productivity enhancers (12.3% vs 9.8%). Furthermore, managers are considerably more familiar with policy guidance on the use of generative AI, with 36.8% reporting awareness of such policies, compared to just 28.8% of individual contributors. Managers also receive more leadership support around AI, with 11% stating they get guidance on how to leverage generative AI tools, versus only 7.4% of individual employees. Finally, managers are 68% more comfortable than individual contributors in feeling that their positions are safe from the threat of replacement by generative AI. These disparities highlight the importance of fostering a shared understanding and equitable access to the opportunities presented by generative AI across all levels of the organization.
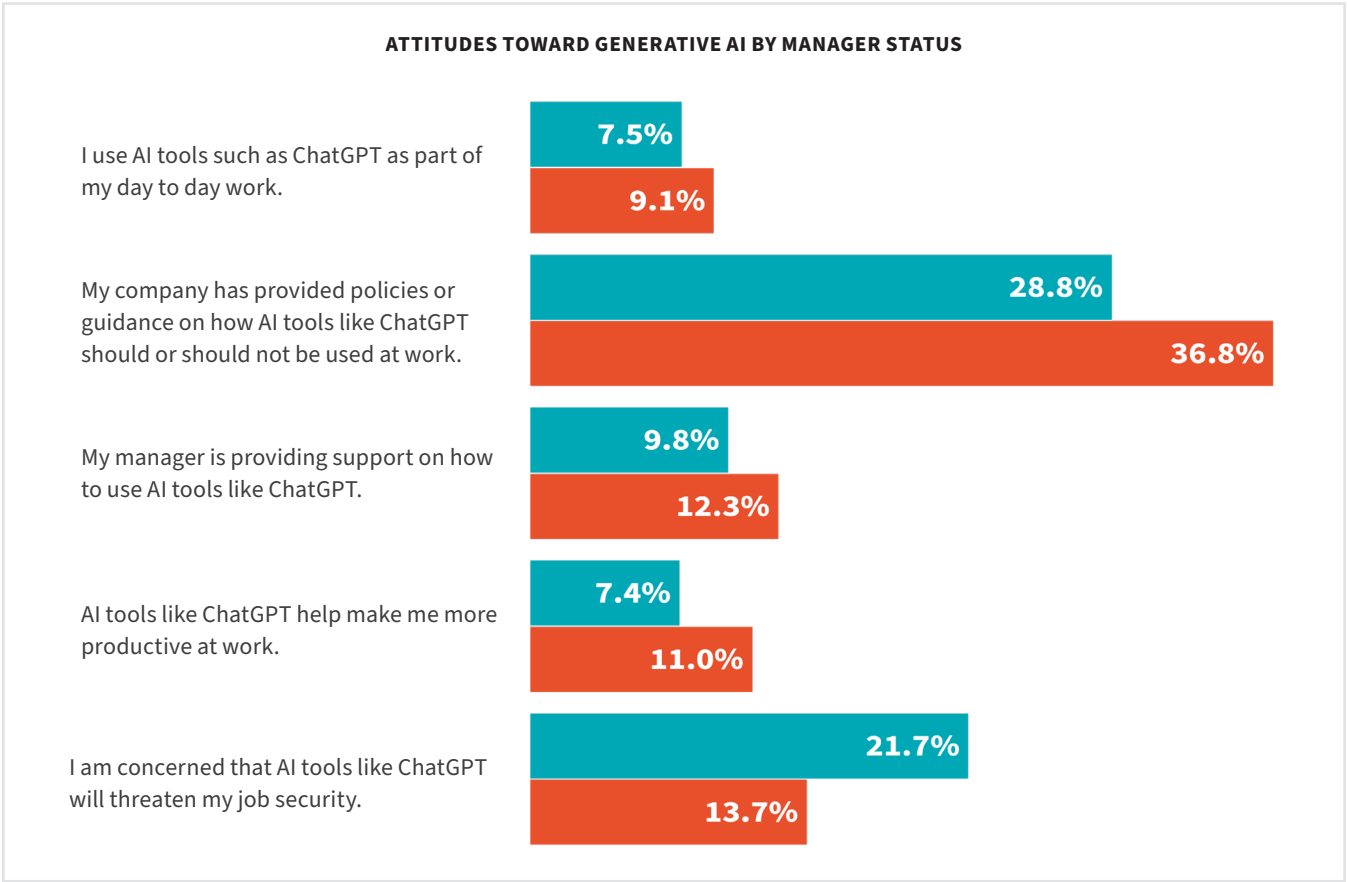

ATTITUDES TOWARD GENERATIVE AI BY MANAGER STATUS

I use AI tools such as ChatGPT as part of my day to day work.
- 7.5%
- 9.1%

My company has provided policies or guidance on how AI tools like ChatGPT should or should not be used at work.
- 28.8%
- 36.8%

My manager is providing support on how to use AI tools like ChatGPT.
- 9.8%
- 12.3%

AI tools like ChatGPT help make me more productive at work.
- 7.4%
- 11.0%

I am concerned that AI tools like ChatGPT will threaten my job security.
- 21.7%
- 13.7%

FIGURE 15   ● NOT A MANAGER   ● MANAGER

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...AND GENERATIVE AI ALSO LANDS DIFFERENTLY BY WORK LOCATION

ATTITUDES TOWARD GENERATIVE AI BY WORK LOCATION

I use AI tools such as ChatGPT as part of my day to day work.
- 7.5%
- 7.6%

My company has provided policies or guidance on how AI tools like ChatGPT should or should not be used at work.
- 34.3%
- 26.4%

My manager is providing support on how to use AI tools like ChatGPT.
- 10.1%
- 10.1%

AI tools like ChatGPT help make me more productive at work.
- 9.3%
- 6.3%

I am concerned that AI tools like ChatGPT will threaten my job security.
- 22.2%
- 16.6%

FIGURE 16 ● HYBRID/REMOTE ● I AM WORKING AT MY COMPANY'S NORMAL WORK SITE

The impact of generative AI in the workplace is felt differently by remote/hybrid employees compared to those working in-office (**FIGURE 16**). Interestingly, there is virtually no difference between these two groups in the actual uptake of generative AI tools or their perceptions of these technologies as productivity boosters. However, a closer look reveals that hybrid and remote employees are 40% more likely to report that their company has clear policies in place for the use of generative AI (34.3% vs 24.6%), and 48% more likely to say their manager provides support on how to effectively utilize these tools (9.3% vs 6.3%). Notably, remote employees are also 34% more likely than their onsite counterparts to express concerns about job security threats posed by generative AI (22.2% vs 16.6%). These findings suggest that while the overall adoption and perceived benefits of generative AI may be similar, the experiences and attitudes of remote/hybrid workers differ, highlighting the need for tailored approaches to integrating and supporting the use of these technologies across diverse work arrangements.

While the use of these transformative technologies is steadily increasing, the level of integration and support varies significantly across industries, management levels, and work arrangements. Tech companies are leading the charge in implementing generative AI, whereas the health services sector has seen the least amount of uptake. Interestingly, managers exhibit a more proactive and positive stance towards these tools, with higher adoption rates and greater perceived benefits compared to individual contributors. Furthermore, remote and hybrid employees tend to have more exposure to company policies and managerial guidance on the use of generative AI, although they also express greater concerns about potential job displacement.

HIGHLY RESILIENT EMPLOYEES FEEL LESS THREATENED BY GENERATIVE AI AND ARE MORE LIKELY TO MAKE PRODUCTIVE USE OF THE TOOLS

Examining employees' psychological resilience is critical to fully understanding their attitudes and responses to the integration of generative AI in the workplace. An individual's level of resilience, or ability to adapt to change and navigate challenges, directly shapes how they perceive and interact with these transformative technologies. More resilient employees are likely to be more open to learning and leveraging generative AI, recognizing the potential benefits it offers, while those with lower resilience may be more prone to feelings of anxiety, insecurity, and resistance. This "resilience advantage" is particularly evident in employees' perceptions of the productivity benefits and job security implications of these transformative technologies.
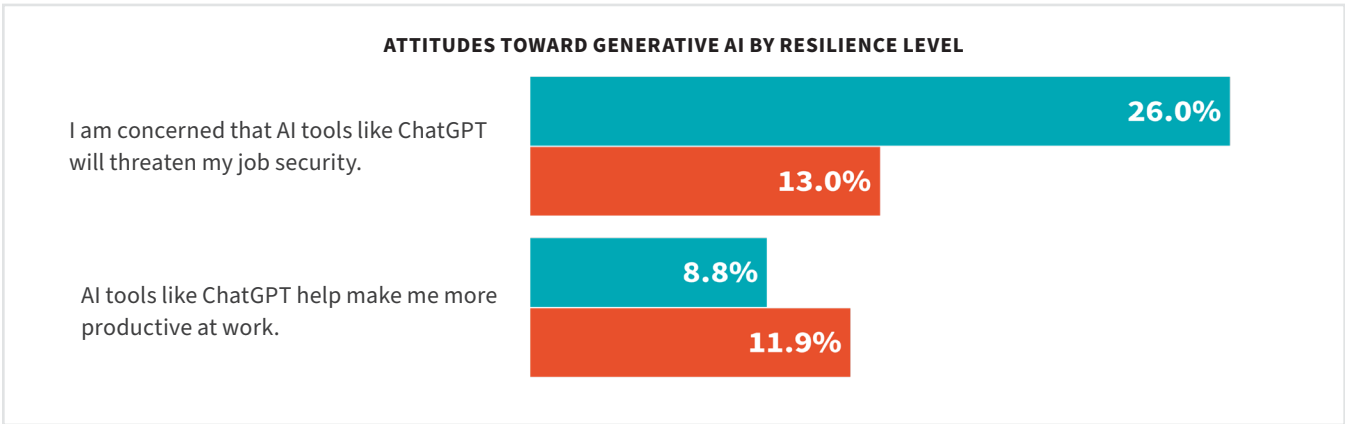

ATTITUDES TOWARD GENERATIVE AI BY RESILIENCE LEVEL

I am concerned that AI tools like ChatGPT will threaten my job security.
- 26.0%
- 13.0%

AI tools like ChatGPT help make me more productive at work.
- 8.8%
- 11.9%

FIGURE 17 ● LEAST RESILIENT   ● MOST RESIIENT

Contrasting the experiences of employees at both ends of the resilience spectrum, we see stark differences emerge (**FIGURE 17**). Highly resilient workers are 35% more likely to report that generative AI tools help them be more productive in their day-to-day work (11.9% vs 8.8%). Conversely, these resilient employees are half as likely to express fears that such AI systems pose a threat to their job security (13% vs 26%).

This disparity highlights the importance of cultivating resilience among the workforce as organizations continue to integrate and leverage the capabilities of generative AI. Employees who are better equipped to adapt to change and embrace new technologies are better positioned to harness the productivity-enhancing potential of these tools, while feeling more confident in their ability to navigate the evolving job market. By investing in the development of resilience, companies can empower their workforce to navigate the transformative impact of generative AI more effectively and with greater optimism.

POSITIVITY AND PROBLEM-SOLVING ARE THE KEY DRIVERS OF POSITIVE OUTCOMES WITH AND ATTITUDES TOWARD GENERATIVE AI IN THE WORKPLACE

meQ's unique cognitive dataset has shed light on two key factors that significantly influence experiences with and perceptions of generative AI: Positivity and Problem-Solving.

The Positivity factor reflects an individual's optimistic mindset and focus on the constructive aspects of life. Those who score highly on Positivity practice gratitude, savor positive moments, and reframe negative thoughts into more productive perspectives. In contrast, the Problem-Solving factor evidences an individual's capacity to approach challenges in a systematic, solution-focused manner - breaking problems down into manageable steps, considering multiple options, making a plan, and persistently working through obstacles.

The data reveal that these cognitive traits confer significant advantages when it comes to navigating the transformative impact of generative AI (**FIGURE 18**). Compared to their less positive counterparts, employees with the highest positivity scores are 40% more likely to report that generative AI tools enhance their productivity, and 37% less likely to feel their job security is threatened by these technologies.

The problem-solving advantage is even more pronounced (**FIGURE 19**). Individuals with strong problem-solving skills are 66% more likely to experience productivity gains from generative AI, and nearly half as likely (49% less) to worry about their job security being undermined.
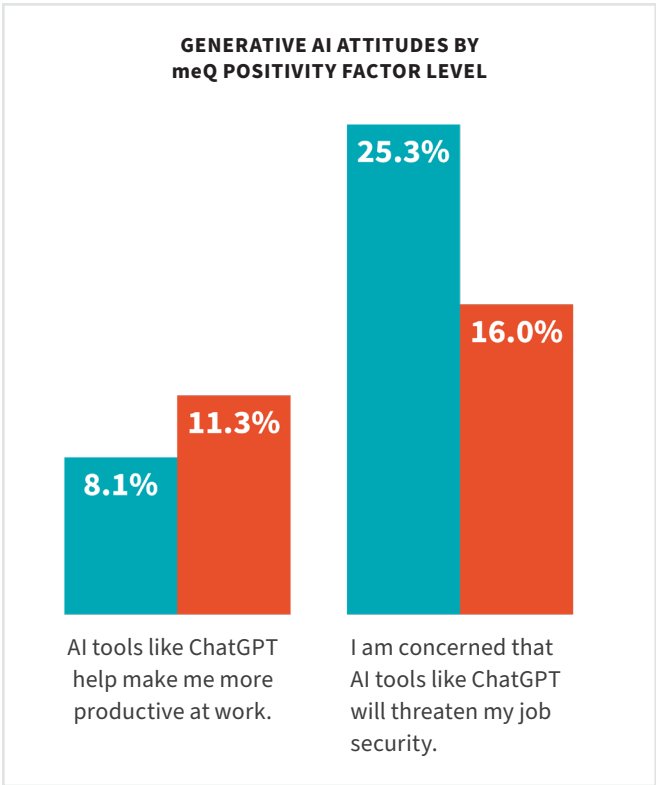

GENERATIVE AI ATTITUDES BY meQ POSITIVITY FACTOR LEVEL

- 8.1% / 11.3% — AI tools like ChatGPT help make me more productive at work.
- 25.3% / 16.0% — I am concerned that AI tools like ChatGPT will threaten my job security.

FIGURE 18 ● LEAST POSITIVE ● MOST POSITIVE

GENERATIVE AI ATTITUDES BY meQ PROBLEM-SOLVING FACTOR LEVEL

- 4.3% / 18.0% — AI tools like ChatGPT help make me more productive at work.
- 23.4% / 20.0% — I am concerned that AI tools like ChatGPT will threaten my job security.
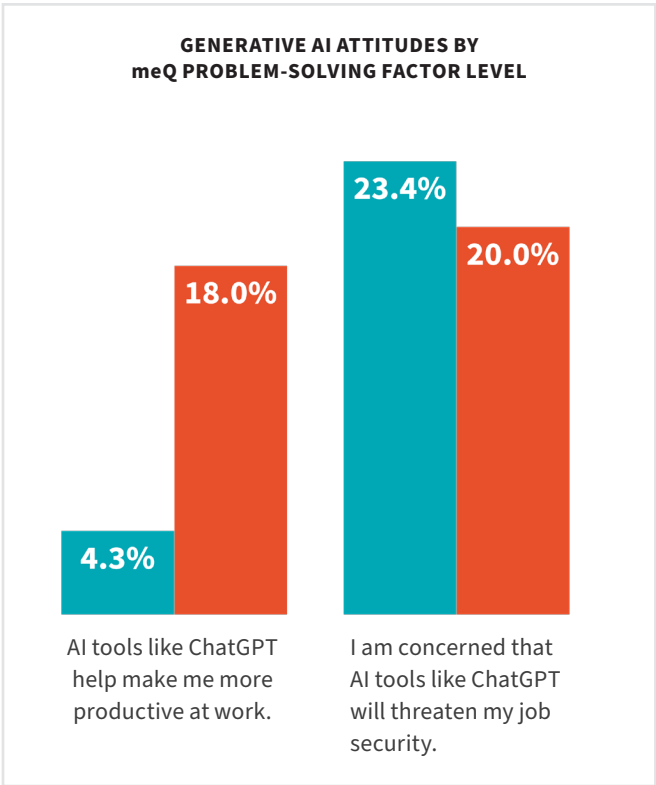
FIGURE 19 ● LOWEST PROBLEM-SOLVING SKILLS
● HIGHEST PROBLEM-SOLVING SKILLS

These findings underscore the importance of cultivating cognitive resilience and agility within the workforce. By empowering employees to maintain an optimistic outlook and approach challenges with a systematic, solution-focused mindset, organizations can better position their teams to harness the transformative potential of generative AI, while navigating the evolving landscape with confidence and adaptability.

BY ACCOUNTING FOR THESE KEY COGNITIVE FACTORS, ORGANIZATIONS CAN DEVELOP TARGETED TRAINING, SUPPORT, AND CHANGE MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES TO EMPOWER ALL WORKERS, REGARDLESS OF THEIR BASELINE PSYCHOLOGICAL TRAITS, TO SUCCESSFULLY AND PRODUCTIVELY INCORPORATE GENERATIVE AI INTO THEIR ROLES. THIS HOLISTIC APPROACH ENSURES A MORE INCLUSIVE AND EQUITABLE TRANSITION, AS ORGANIZATIONS FOSTER AN ENVIRONMENT WHERE ALL EMPLOYEES ARE EMPOWERED TO EMBRACE THE POWER OF THESE EMERGING TECHNOLOGIES, RATHER THAN FEELING THREATENED BY THEM.
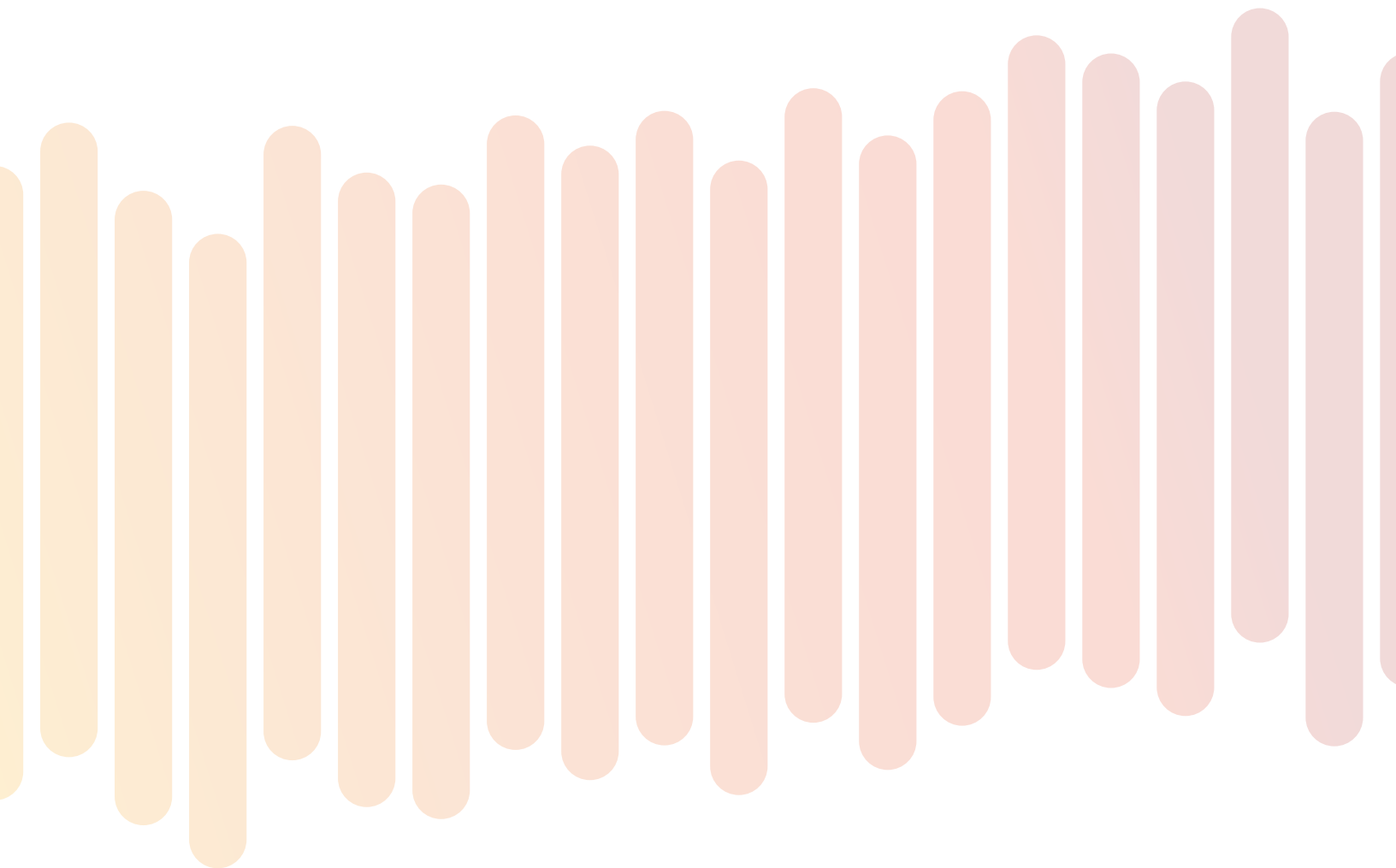
CONCLUSION

This important study sheds light on several key aspects of employee well-being, resilience, and belonging in the modern workplace. The findings underscore hope as a powerful positive force that can significantly enhance employee well-being, engagement, productivity, and retention. Resilience also emerges as a critical capacity that can function as a "trend reverser" for negative well-being trajectories like rising burnout and job stress. meQ's resilience factors of Positivity, Self-Confidence, and Problem-Solving are identified as key drivers empowering employees with an internal sense of hope.

The study also highlights the protective nature of workplace belonging. Inclusive cultures, empathetic leadership, and giving employees a real voice deliver compelling benefits, including reduced risks of burnout, anxiety, depression, and turnover intentions. And resilience itself acts as a powerful protective factor, with highly resilient employees exhibiting remarkably stable and positive well-being. The data also reveal concerning levels of persistent burnout and economic anxiety weighing on the workforce, making the cultivation of resilience and belonging even more crucial.

Gen Z emerges as an exceptional workforce segment requiring focused attention, exhibiting significantly higher levels of job stress, lower resilience across many factors, and a more tenuous sense of workplace belonging compared to older employees. Furthermore, the study sheds light on the role of specific cognitive traits, like positivity and problem-solving, in shaping employees' attitudes toward generative AI and their ability to effectively leverage these disruptive technologies. As organizations navigate an ever-evolving landscape of workplace challenges, prioritizing hope, resilience, belonging, and tailored generational support can pay dividends in uplifting the entire workforce's well-being, engagement, performance, and retention in a sustainable manner

meQ.