



THE  
WELLBEING  
LAB 2020  
WORKPLACE  
REPORT

THE STATE OF WELLBEING IN AMERICAN WORKPLACES

THEWELLBEINGLAB

A MICHELLEMCQUAID PROGRAM



Center for the  
Advancement of Well-Being

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# FROM THE CENTER FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF WELL-BEING

One of the most powerful, yet simplistic reasons why so many of us are engaged in the work of well-being is that *people matter*. This same premise rings true in American workplaces as evidenced by the findings in The Wellbeing Lab 2020 Workplace Report – a collaboration between The Wellbeing Lab and the Center for the Advancement of Well-Being. As the findings in this report show, leaders can impact employees' well-being for powerful results. But it's not the sole responsibility of leaders and managers – everyone matters in creating conditions where all employees thrive.

We are no longer at an inflection point of making the business case for well-being in our organizations. COVID-19 is the new business case. And while there were compelling reasons prior to this pandemic, like lower levels of employee engagement combined with growing mental health challenges in the workplace, this time is different. As many employees return to their work sites, their mental states will be filled with additional distress and anxieties about new health risks – theirs and others.

This pandemic is ushering in many disruptions with health at the top of the list. And because of that, we are in search of the new workplace that minimizes risk while keeping employees and teams engaged and connected to each other. For leaders, this is an opportunity to rethink the social compact between employees and their organizations. As regions around the world begin to return to work, we need to think creatively about how we create and sustain conditions in the new workplace where *everyone matters and thrives*.

Some of the findings in this report inspire a call to action for leaders if they want to get the best out of their employees and teams. For example, only 14% of American workers in this study reported that their manager regularly shows care, compassion, and appreciation for them, yet other surveys reveal that being appreciated for the work employees do is more important than receiving a bonus or raise.

Workers who report higher levels of psychological safety are more likely to be thriving despite any challenges they may be experiencing. Only 42% of the respondents in this report feel psychologically safe at work. Managers and leaders can learn how to create environments where employees and teams feel safe to express their concerns and identify areas where they need help without fear of losing their jobs.

This is a major implication for the new workplace compact and what leaders can do to ease the additional anxieties employees bring with them as they return to their physical workplaces. Showing care and compassion towards others are essential (typically referred to as soft) skills of effective leaders. These essential leadership skills will be the dividing line for organizations that succeed in a post-COVID world.

A common goal that all managers and leaders care about is productivity. And yet there's an order to achieving this – starting first with investing in people, followed by aligning purpose, which results in greater productivity. The findings in this report validate this strategy.

This is the moment for leaders to be asking great questions about what they can do to better invest in their employees' well-being, and then engage the whole organization in creating those changes. Another critical finding was that employees who have access to these resources and know how to apply them in their lives are more engaged and thriving when their well-being was supported in the workplace. The workplaces that succeed in making this new compact in a post-COVID world will be the ones where people feel cared for, feel safe, and are connected to others in meaningful ways – where health and well-being are priorities. Those are the organizations where employees will be more motivated to return to work and who will most likely thrive beyond these new challenges.

I commend The Wellbeing Lab, led by Dr. Michelle McQuaid, and the research team for illuminating these important findings and implications for leaders and managers. Now let's together create workplaces where *everyone matters and thrives*.

**Nance Lucas, Ph.D.**

Executive Director & Chief Well-Being Officer  
Center for the Advancement of Well-Being  
George Mason University



# ABOUT THIS STUDY

The Wellbeing Lab Workplace Survey was first conducted in February 2019. A sample of 1,026 randomly selected workers across America completed the survey.

The Workplace Survey was a variant of the PERMAH Wellbeing Survey ([www.permahsurvey.com](http://www.permahsurvey.com)) developed by **Dr. Peggy Kern** from the University of Melbourne. The refined survey was designed to help employees and their organizations better understand the factors that support and undermine wellbeing in the workplace, and to more intelligently shape workplace wellbeing strategies.

In early May 2020, with non-essential workplaces shut down due to the COVID-19 pandemic and more than 20 million Americans out of work, we gathered a new sample of 1,073 randomly selected American workers. All respondents were employed at the time of the survey, such that this report represents the current workforce, not those recently unemployed.

We partnered with Dr. Mandy O'Neill from George Mason University to add a set of questions to gauge the levels of concern about the impact of the coronavirus and the economy on workplace wellbeing and performance.

Respondents were representative of the American workforce and included the following:

GENDER	
Men	525
Women	543
Non-Binary	5

AGE GROUPS	
18 – 24 years	156
25 – 34 years	231
35 – 44 years	242
45 – 55 years	258
55+ years	187

LOCATIONS	
North East	188
Midwest	219
South	419
West	247

COMPANY SIZES	
Self-Employed	88
2 – 15 staff	157
16 – 50 staff	147
51 – 100 staff	138
100 – 200 staff	109
201 – 500 staff	92
500+ staff	342

JOB ROLES	
Owners	130
Directors	74
C-Suite/Managers	236
Professionals	220
Technical Experts	49
Administrative	108
Customer Service	133
Contractors	35
Other	108

Industries were representative of American workplaces, and included Agriculture, Banking, Education, Community Services, Healthcare, Hospitality and Tourism, Government, IT and Telecommunications, Manufacturing, Mining, Science, Retail and Call Centres, and Transportation and Warehousing.

If you would like more information about this report, or additional findings by gender, age, location, job role, or industry (not reported), please contact us at [chelle@thewellbeinglab.com](mailto:chelle@thewellbeinglab.com).

# 1.

## CURRENT STATE: WELLBEING IN AMERICAN WORKPLACES

In its simplest form, wellbeing is the ability to feel good and function effectively, as we navigate the inevitable highs and lows of work and life. Studies – including this one – find that how we feel (physically, mentally, and socially), and how we perform at work, have a mutually reinforcing cycle. Work provides opportunities for ongoing learning and development, meaningful achievement, and connection with others, which nourish our wellbeing. And when we feel physically, mentally, and socially well, we bring more energy, focus, and motivation to work and are more productive. Thriving occurs when we consistently feel and function well and are able to effectively manage the stresses and challenges that we encounter.



13%

OF AMERICAN WORKERS WERE  
CONSISTENTLY THRIVING  
VERSUS 19% IN 2019.

# THRIVING ≠ PROBLEM FREE

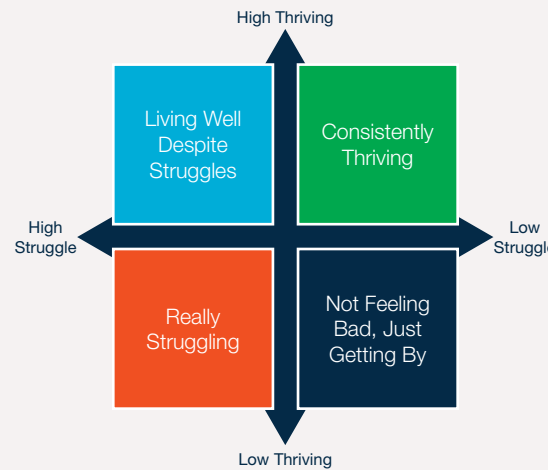
Wellbeing ranges from languishing (low levels of wellbeing) to thriving (high levels of wellbeing). We might imagine that those who thrive have problem-free lives. But in our 2019 study, we discovered that 37% of American workers reported that they were *living well, despite struggles*, and that their levels of job satisfaction and performance were no different from workers who reported that they were *consistently thriving*.

We were intrigued by the result. Perhaps it was a fluke in the sample or a problem with the wording of the question. And then we saw the same pattern in three different surveys, each consisting of 1,000+ Australian workers. This pattern replicated again in this data.

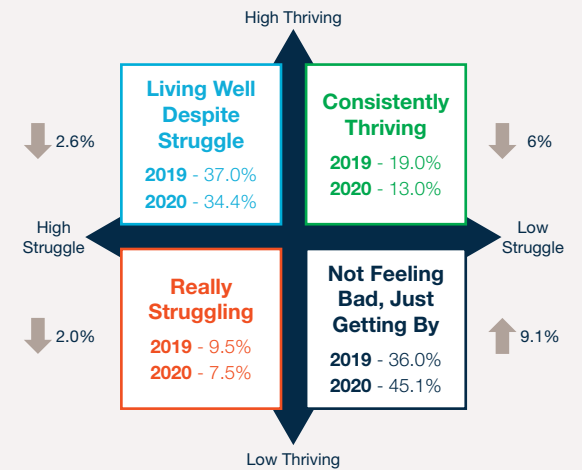
Notably, both workers who reported that they were consistently thriving, and workers who reported that they were *living well, despite struggle*, were statistically more likely to have higher levels of job satisfaction, better performance, and greater commitment to their organization. They were also likely to report higher levels of performance for their team and their organization.

It appears that it is possible to thrive despite struggle, and it is possible to not experience wellbeing even in the absence of struggle.

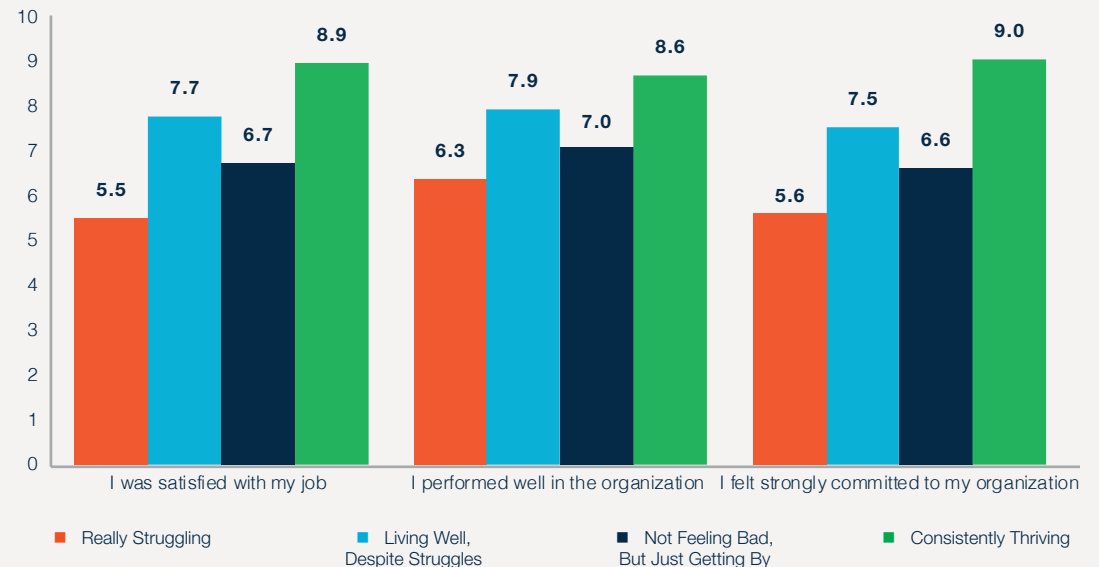
STATE OF WELLBEING



% STATES OF WELLBEING IN AMERICAN WORKPLACES



STATES OF WELLBEING FOR INDIVIDUAL OUTCOMES



# CONTEXT MATTERS

There were no significant gender differences in the reported states of wellbeing.

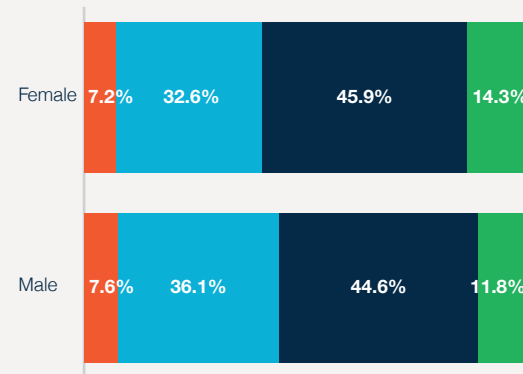
Workers aged 18-24 years were the most likely to be *consistently thriving*, but also the most likely to be *really struggling*. Workers aged 45+ years were the most likely to be *living well, despite struggles*.

Education levels also shaped workers' wellbeing. Workers with a bachelor's or graduate degree were more likely to be *consistently thriving*, while those with a high school degree were more likely to be *not feeling bad, but just getting by* or *really struggling*.

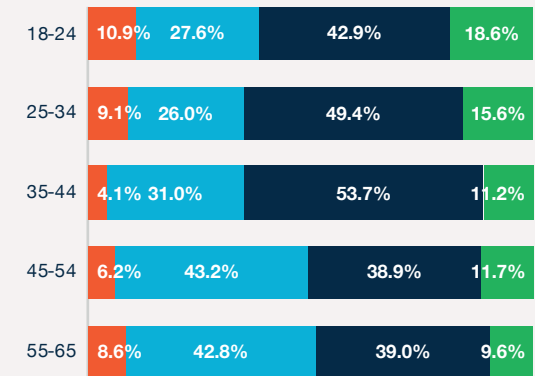
Workers in job roles with more autonomy (e.g., owners, directors, c-level/managers, and contractors) were more likely to report they were *consistently thriving*. However, those who were self-employed were the most likely to be *really struggling*.

Workers in banking, finance, and insurance were the most likely to be *consistently thriving*, while workers in IT and Telecommunications were the most likely to be *not feeling bad, just getting by*, and workers in transportation and warehousing were the most likely to be *really struggling*.

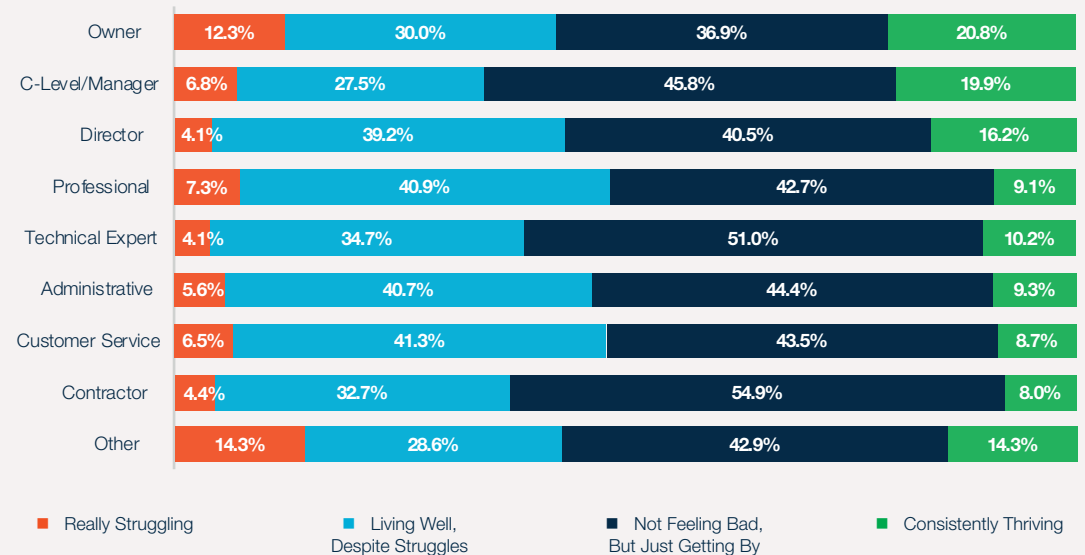
STATE OF WELLBEING BY GENDER



% STATES OF WELLBEING BY AGE



% STATES OF WELLBEING BY JOB ROLE



# WORK LOCATIONS MATTER

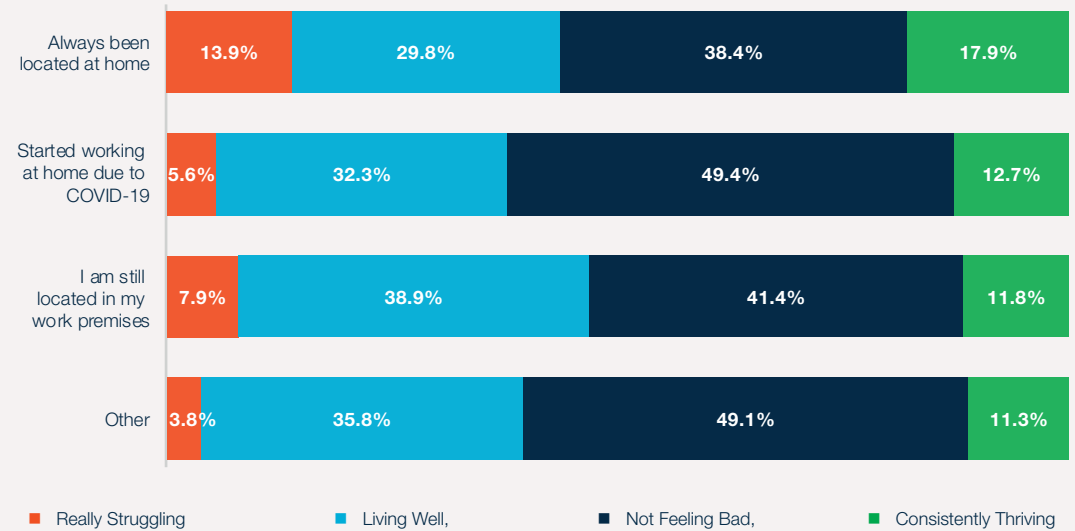
To help minimize the spread of COVID19, many workers were required to relocate from their work premises to their homes. We examined how wellbeing varied across those who changed, or remained in, their current work location.

Workers who had always worked from home were most likely to report that they were *really struggling*. Like other studies, it appears that permanently remote workers are more likely to report significantly higher levels of stress, than those located at work premises, possibly due to a lack of face-to-face social interactions and informal forms of social support.

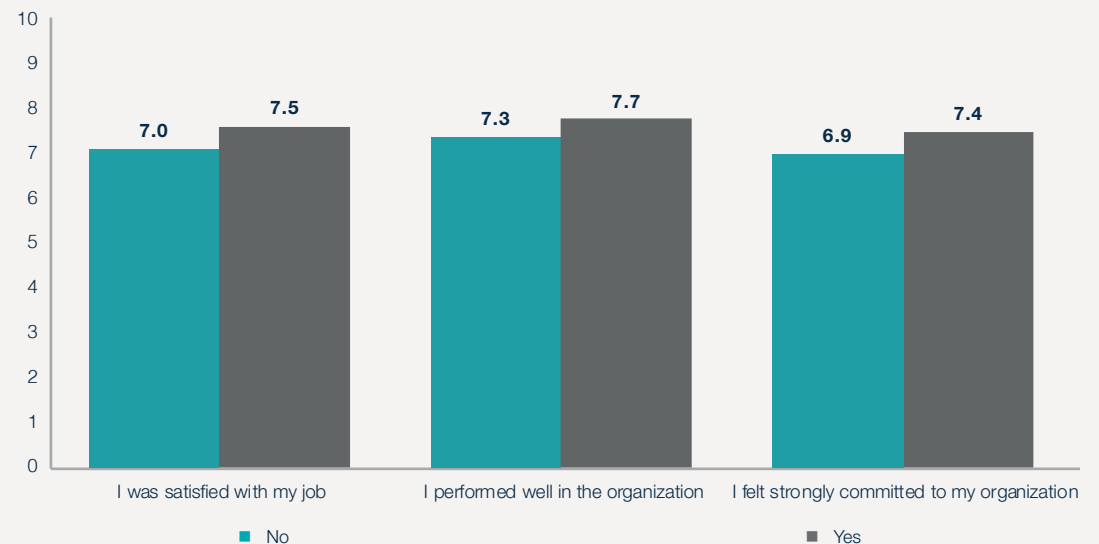
Workers who started working from home due to COVID-19 were more likely to be *not feeling bad, but just getting by*. This is not surprising, given considerable changes in social structures, the need to navigate new technologies, managing families, the need to turn homes into functional offices, and the blurring of lines between work and non-work.

Interestingly, workers who had children at home reported being able to better manage their wellbeing, and had higher levels of job satisfaction, performance, and commitment to their organization

% STATES OF WELLBEING BY WORK LOCATION



CHILDREN AT HOME IMPACT ON INDIVIDUAL OUTCOMES



# AN AH-HA MOMENT

Our findings make it clear that feelings of struggle and stress don't have to undermine workers' wellbeing or performance. In fact, they can enhance it, provided they know how to respond to these signs as opportunities for learning and growth.

As many workers may be required to continue working from home for the foreseeable future, or to return to their workplaces in phases, workplaces need to consider how they can help workers in all locations have opportunities for more informal connections, consider what supports workers might need depending on their context, and how to adapt to ongoing changes.

*Does your definition of workplace wellbeing give workers permission to struggle? Do you have formal and informal strategies in place to help workers through struggle?*



# 2.

## THE IMPROVEMENT GOALS: WELLBEING REQUIRES WAY POWER, WILL POWER, AND WE POWER

Our levels of wellbeing naturally ebb and flow as we experience the ups and downs of life. Thus, the goal is not to constantly achieve the highest amount of wellbeing. Rather it is to use our wellbeing scores to help ourselves and others to become more intelligent and active agents so that we can effectively engage and function well at work, regardless of what life throws at us. How can we be more intelligent and active agents? Our findings indicate three key ingredients: ability (“way power”), motivation (“will power”), and psychological safety (“we power”).



49%

OF AMERICAN WORKERS  
FELT VERY CONFIDENT TO  
MANAGE THEIR WELLBEING,  
VERSUS 61.9% IN 2019.



# WAY POWER AND WILL POWER

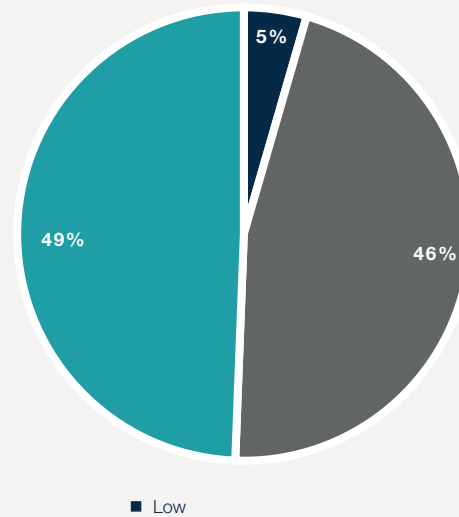
Workers who reported higher levels of confidence in their ability to care for their own wellbeing were statistically more likely to be *consistently thriving*, or *living well, despite struggles*, than other workers. Put simply, they have the “way power” to effectively care for their wellbeing, with the knowledge, tools, or support they need.

Given the challenges of the current environment, it is perhaps not surprising that workers’ perceived ability to care for their wellbeing fell from 61.9% in 2019 to 49.0% in 2020.

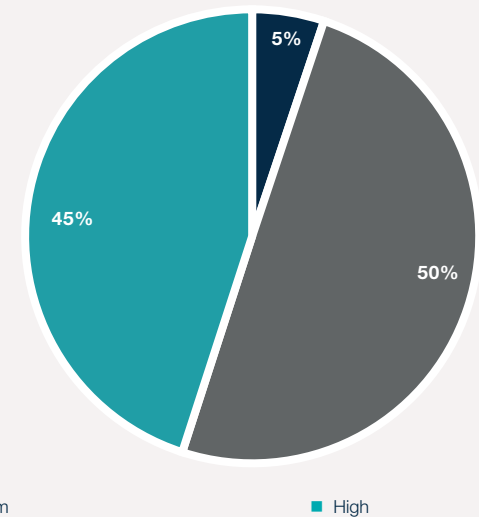
Ability is necessary but not sufficient for wellbeing. Thriving takes ongoing effort. Workers who reported higher levels of motivation to improve their wellbeing were statistically more likely to be *consistently thriving*, or *living well, despite struggles*, than other workers. Put simply, they have the “will power” to do what they need to care for their wellbeing, such as purposefully engaging in health-promoting activities and learning new strategies that can be helpful in times of struggle.

“Way power” and “will power” provide workers with the tools they need to be more intelligent and active agents in caring for their wellbeing. They can also be sources of support for others who may be struggling with their wellbeing.

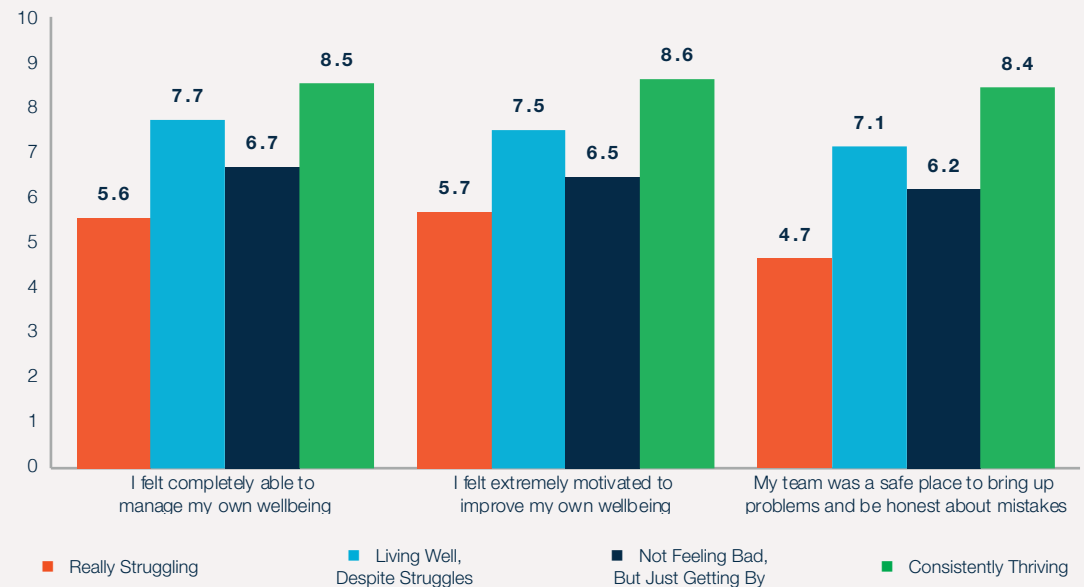
% WELLBEING ABILITY



% WELLBEING MOTIVATION



STATE OF WELLBEING BY ABILITY, MOTIVATION, & PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY



# THE IMPORTANCE OF WE POWER

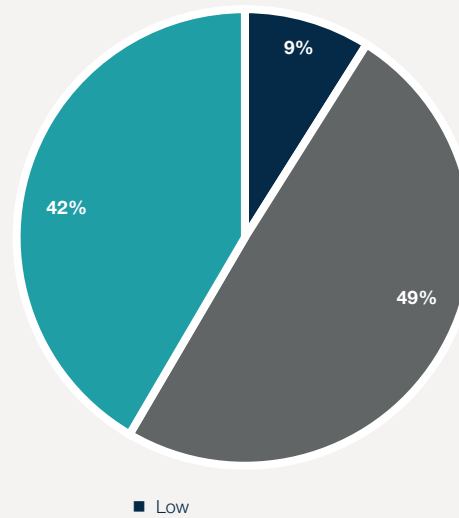
Beyond “way power” and “will power”, social aspects of the workplace also matter. A growing number of studies – including ours – find that workers experience greater wellbeing and better performance when they feel psychologically safe to bring up problems, talk honestly about mistakes with each other, and trust their co-workers.

Workers who reported higher levels of psychological safety were statistically more likely to be *consistently thriving* or *living well, despite struggles* than other workers. Unfortunately, only 42% of the sample reported that they felt psychologically safe at work.

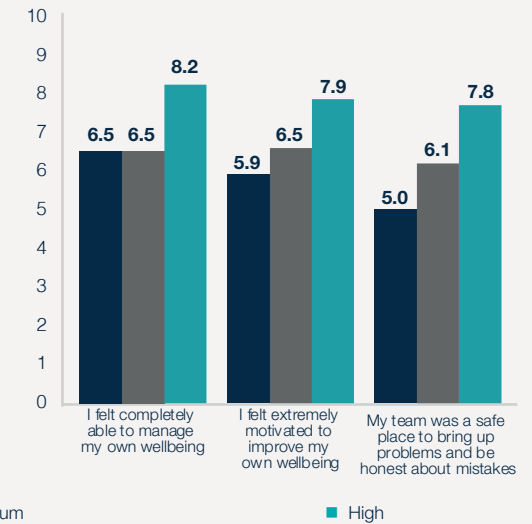
“Way power”, “will power”, and “we power” were impacted by feelings of safety at work, trust in management to make sensible decisions about issues that affect the future of workers, and being able to rely on co-workers to not be careless.

These findings suggest that workplaces need to prioritize building and maintaining trust and supportive relationships as a key strategy for supporting their workers’ wellbeing and performance.

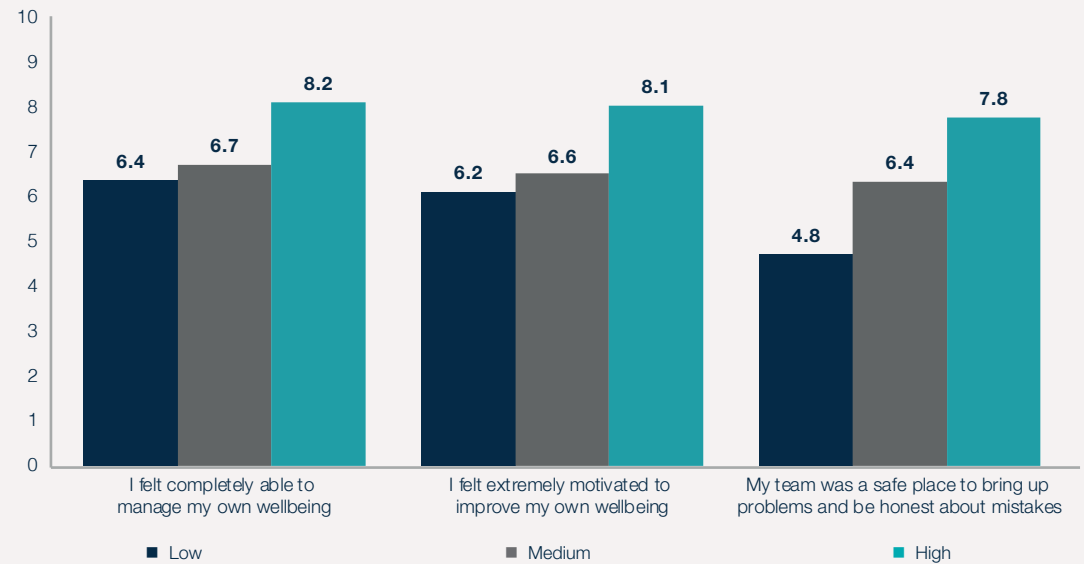
% PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY



I RELY ON CO-WORKERS NOT TO MAKE MY JOB MORE DANGEROUS



I TRUST MANAGEMENT TO MAKE SENSIBLE DECISIONS ABOUT MY FUTURE



# AN AH-HA MOMENT

Caring for our wellbeing requires “way power” (wellbeing ability), “will power” (wellbeing motivation), and “we power” (psychological safety). To support thriving, workplaces need to prioritize training, tools, rituals, and norms that help workers to feel confident, committed, and connected.

As the need for physical distancing will continue to demand new ways for working safely with others, workplaces need to continue prioritizing responsible wellbeing choices, clear communication, and transparent guidelines for workers to ensure high levels of trust for management and co-workers is maintained.

*Do your workers feel psychologically safe enough to talk honestly with each other about caring for their wellbeing?*



# 3.

## BOOSTING THRIVING: WHY LEADERS MATTER

Caring for our wellbeing is not a solo endeavor. Wellbeing perceptions, experiences, and behaviors are diverse and spread through a complicated web of social connections. Our leaders' actions play a significant role in nurturing or impairing that web.

14%

OF AMERICAN WORKERS  
REPORTED THAT THEIR  
MANAGER REGULARLY SHOWS  
CARE, COMPASSION, AND  
APPRECIATION FOR THEM.

# WELLBEING IS MULTI-FACETED

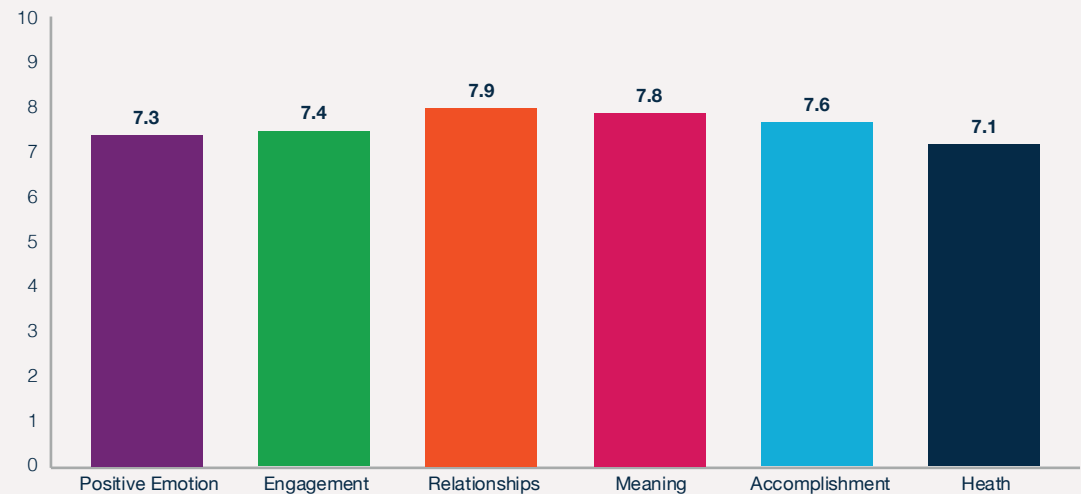
One way to understand, measure, and action evidence-based approaches for improving wellbeing is Professor Martin Seligman's PERMAH Wellbeing Framework, which suggests that wellbeing comprises: Positive Emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, Accomplishment, and Health.

Each of the PERMAH factors provide indications of wellbeing in a number of areas. Importantly, there is no single number or specific profile that indicates thriving. Depending on one's values and preferences, different numbers and profiles are best for different people. But as the six factors are interconnected and influence one another, feeling poorly in one area often result in feeling poorly in other areas as well.

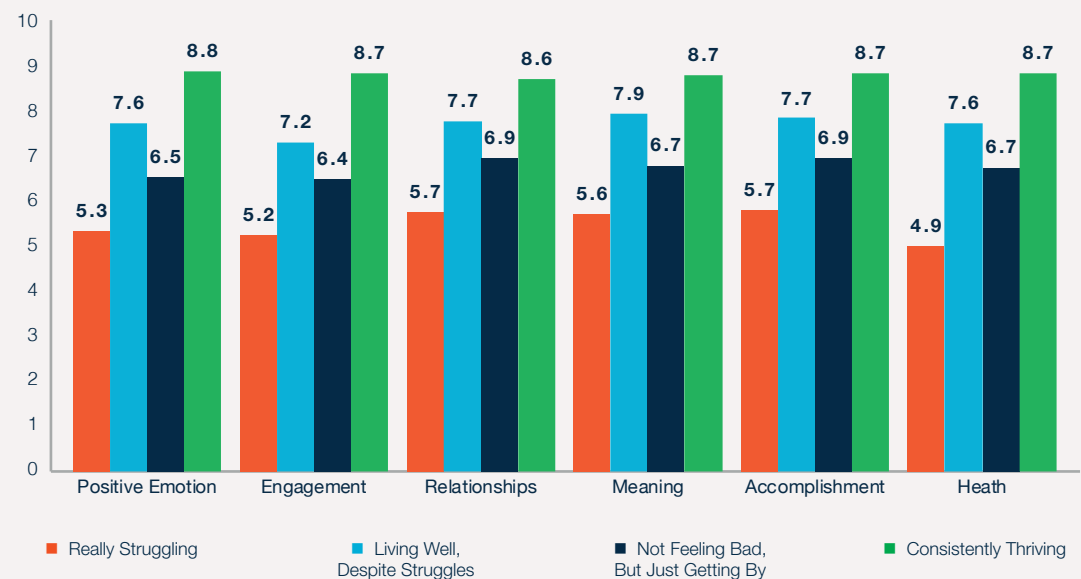
Workers who were *consistently thriving* or *living well, despite struggles* reported statistically higher scores on all PERMAH factors than other workers. Meaning was particularly important for those *living well, despite struggle*, and Relationships and Accomplishment were important across all groups.

While workers who were *really struggling* were lower across dimensions than other workers, they particularly reported low levels of physical Health, pointing to the important connection between our physical and mental functioning.

PERMAH WELLBEING FACTORS



STATE OF WELLBEING BY PERMAH WELLBEING FACTORS



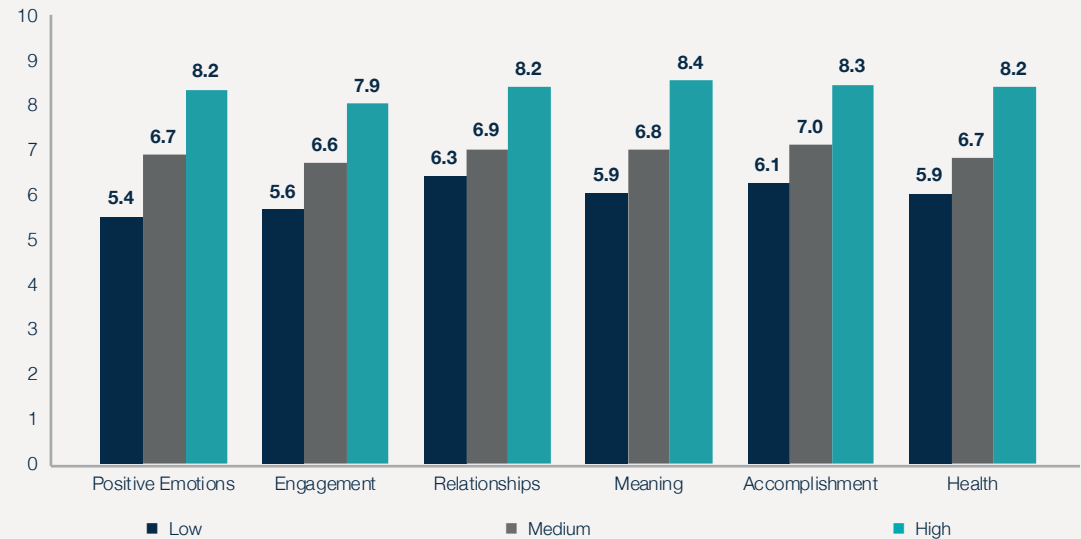
# LEADERS HAVE A BIG IMPACT

Previous studies have found that leaders have a significant impact on workers' wellbeing. Our data confirm these findings, with workers who reported that their managers regularly expressed care, compassion, gratitude, and appreciation towards them showing significantly higher scores across the PERMAH factors.

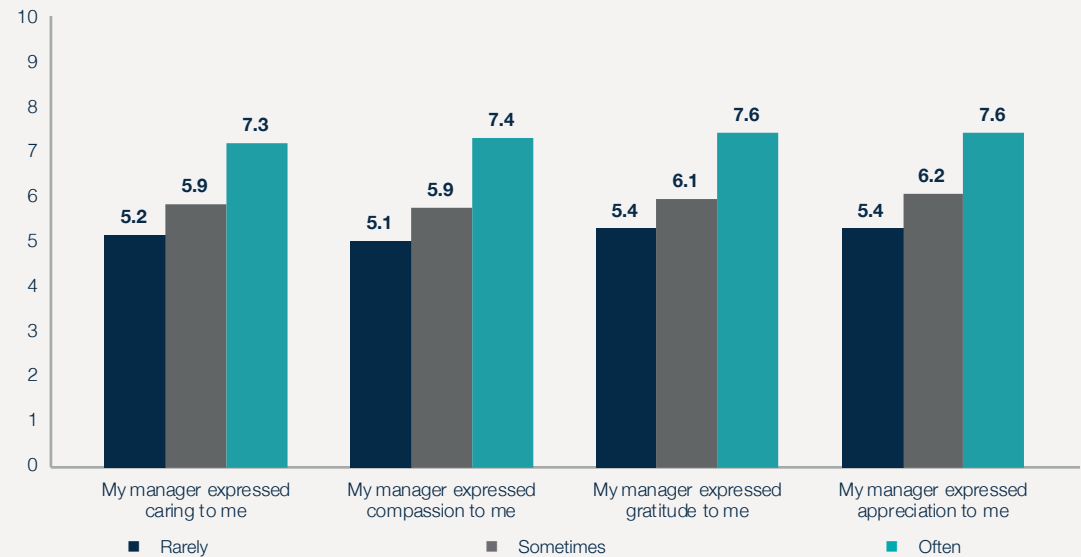
In addition, workers who reported that their managers regularly expressed care, compassion, gratitude, and appreciation towards them were more likely to be able to manage their wellbeing, and reported higher levels of job satisfaction, performance, and commitment to their organizations. They also reported significantly higher levels of productivity over the past month compared to their pre-COVID productivity levels.

While all workers appear to perform better and be more engaged with managers who express care and compassion, lack of care and compassion appears to be particularly problematic for workers with moderate to high levels of anxiety about COVID-19. Caring and compassionate managers may be able to buffer the negative effects of anxiety that workers may be experiencing at the moment.

MANAGER EXPRESSED CARE IMPACT ON PERMAH MEANS



MANAGER EXPRESSIONS IMPACT ON PRODUCTIVITY SINCE COVID-19



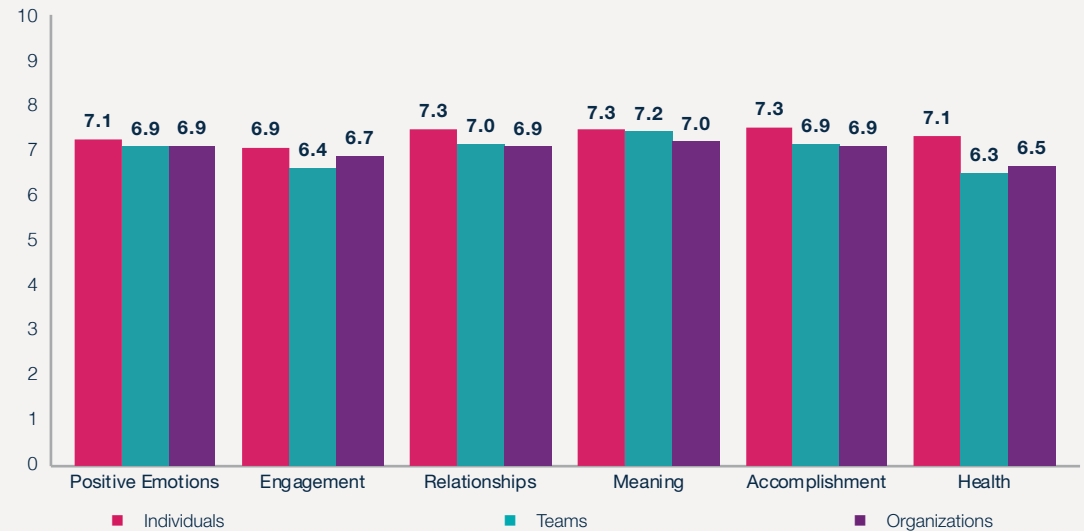
# WELLBEING IS SYSTEMIC

Respondents rated their own wellbeing, along with their perceptions of the wellbeing of their team and organization. Across the PERMAH factors, workers reported significantly higher levels of individual Engagement, Relationships, Accomplishment, and physical Health than their teams or their organizations. They also reported significantly higher levels of individual Meaning than their organization.

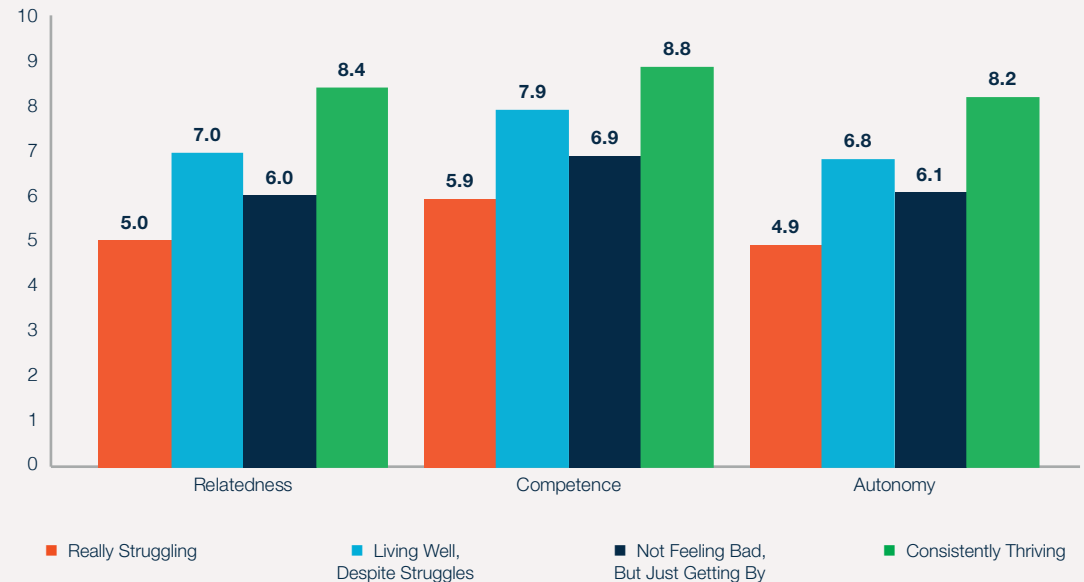
The team and organization scores represent workplaces norms, attitudes, and actions that undermine or amplify individual experiences of wellbeing. Given that studies find that these factors can be contagious, it is important for workplaces to be mindful of the impact their choices have on workers.

For example, studies have found that workplaces that support people's basic psychological needs of autonomy (having a sense of freedom of choice), competence (able to do one's work, learn, and grow), and relatedness (connecting deeply with others) make it easier for people to thrive consistently. The extent to which these needs were being met helped to distinguish those who were *consistently thriving* and *living well, despite struggles* from other workers.

COLLECTIVE PERMAH WELLBEING FACTORS



WORKPLACE SELF-DETERMINATION WELLBEING NUTRIENTS





# A NEED FOR BENEFITS & SKILLS

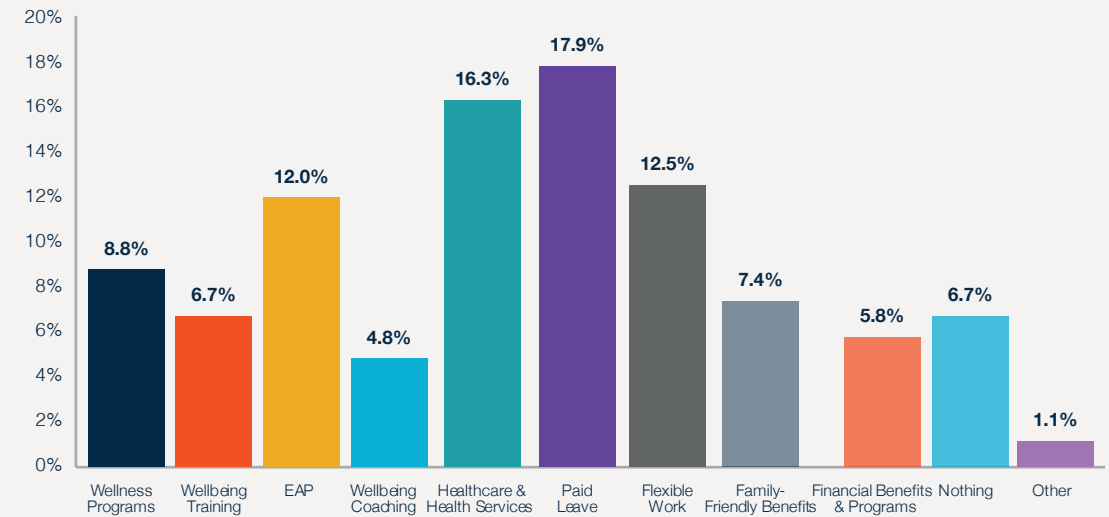
Most (93%) workplaces provided at least some forms of wellbeing support. Healthcare and health services benefits (e.g., Telehealth, virtual healthcare, PPO, HMO, prescription, dental, vision), paid leave (e.g., vacation, sick leave, holidays), 12.5% flexible work (e.g., telecommuting, flexible scheduling), and employee assistance programs (EAP) were the most likely to be offered.

Workers reported higher levels of engagement when they had access to three or more forms of wellbeing support. However, for workplaces that were not able to afford multiple forms of wellbeing support, we found that caring managers compensated for fewer benefits.

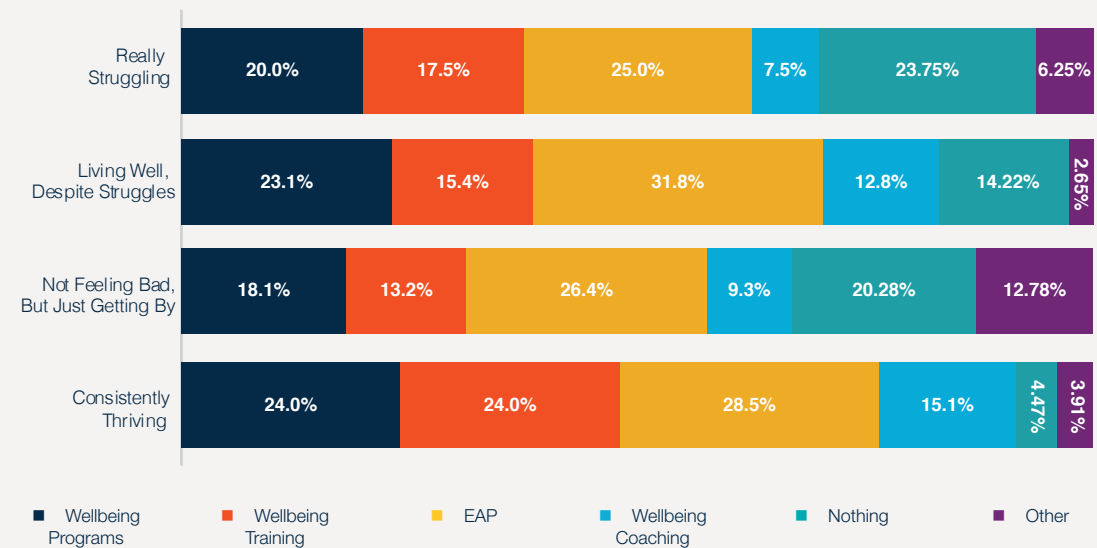
Workers who were *not feeling bad, but just getting by* or *really struggling* were significantly more likely to be in workplaces where no support is available.

When it comes to building workers' skills for caring for their wellbeing, workers were more likely to be *consistently thriving* when they had wellbeing training, wellbeing coaching, and wellness programs to support their wellbeing.

% WORKPLACE WELLBEING SUPPORT PROVIDED



% STATES OF WELLBEING BY WELLBEING SUPPORT FOR SKILLS-BUILDING



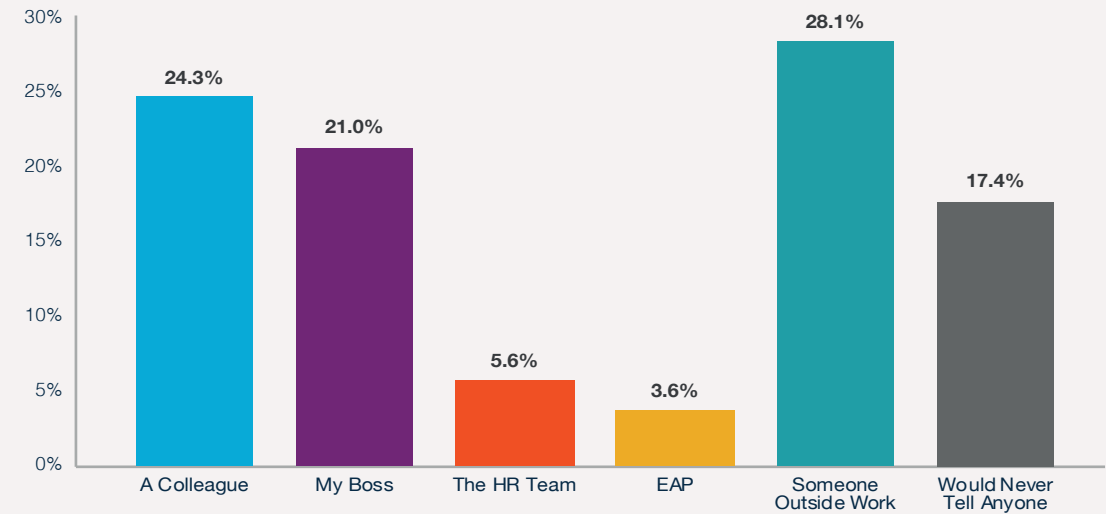
# SEEKING HELP

Workers who asked others for help when struggling were significantly more likely to experience higher levels of wellbeing. Yet almost one in five workers indicated that they would never tell anyone that they are struggling. Notably, workers who were *not feeling bad, but just getting by* or those who were *really struggling* were less likely than other workers to seek help, suggesting that those who would benefit from support the most are the least likely to ask for it.

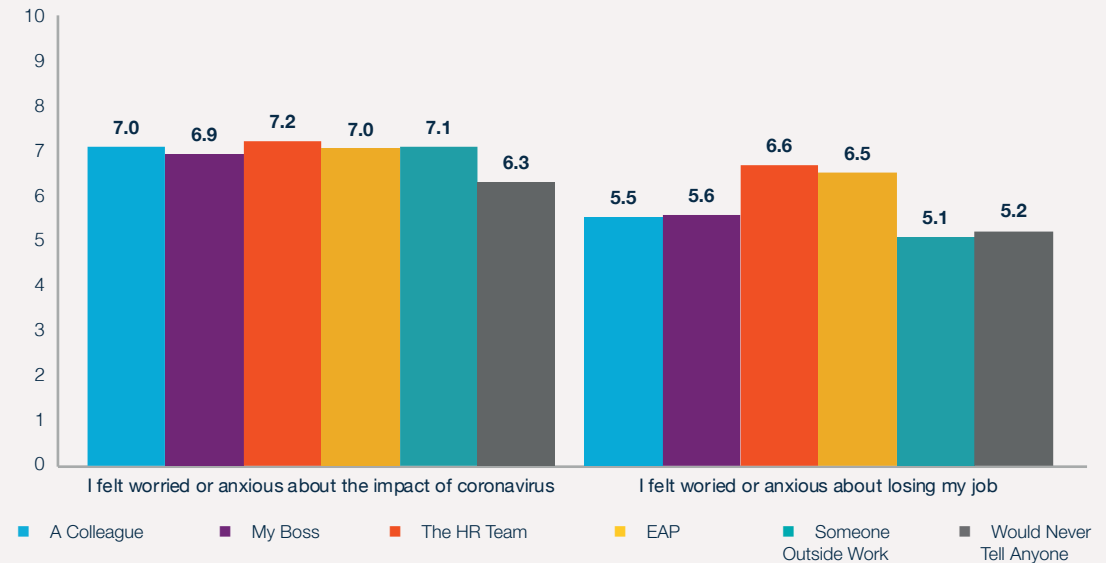
Pointing again to the importance of relationships, workers were most likely to turn to someone outside of work for help, even though people outside of work were generally less effective in supporting workers' ability and motivation to care for their wellbeing. Within the workplace, team members were the most likely people workers turned to for help, followed by bosses. Both were perceived to be good forms of support.

It is worth noting that less than 6% of American workers would turn to their HR team when they are struggling, even though HR teams were considered a good source of support. The exception was for concerns about losing one's job, then HR Teams and EAP services became the most likely sources workers turned to for help.

FIRST PERSON I ASK FOR HELP WHEN STRUGGLING



SAFE TO SHARE MY STRUGGLES AT WORK BY LEVELS OF WORRY & ANXIETY ABOUT COVID-19 IMPACT



# AN AH-HA MOMENT

Caring for workers' wellbeing requires diverse and sustained support at the individual, team, and whole workplace levels to create a thriving workplace environment.

Encouraging managers to authentically and regularly express care, compassion, and appreciation for their workers may be useful for boosting both wellbeing and productivity during this challenging time.

*Does your wellbeing strategy prioritize diverse forms of support to help workers, teams, and your workplace care for each other's wellbeing?*



# 4.

## REDUCING STRUGGLE: EFFECTIVELY MANAGING MENTAL HEALTH

Feelings of struggle, anxiety, and stress are signs that something important for us is unfolding that needs our attention and action. When effectively managed, then struggle does not undermine thriving. But when struggle is ignored and avoided for too long, people start breaking. To unnecessarily avoid prolonged struggle, we must feel safer talking about the challenges we are experiencing with each other.



69%

OF AMERICAN WORKERS  
REPORT THAT THEY DON'T  
FEEL SAFE SHARING THEIR  
STRUGGLES AT WORK.

# BIGGEST CAUSES OF STRUGGLE

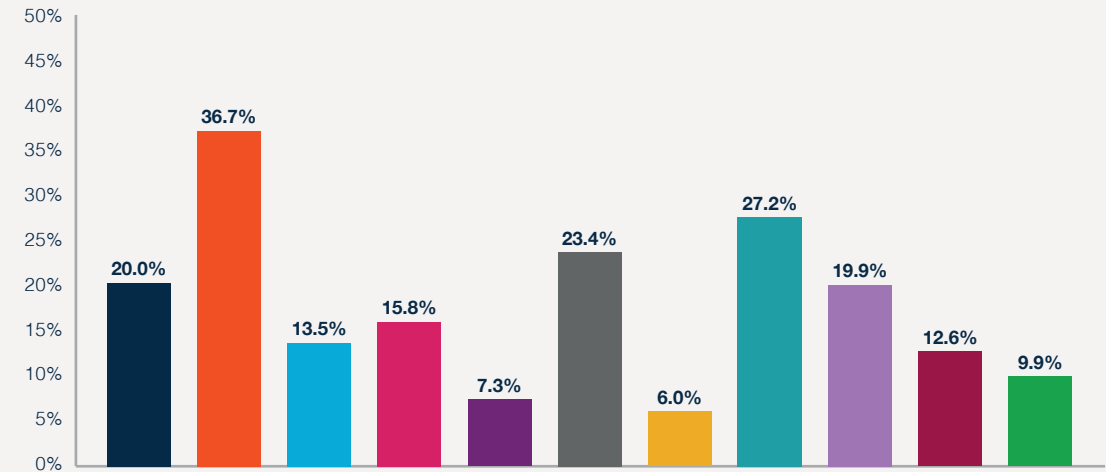
Mental health was the leading cause of struggle (36.7%), especially for those who were *not feeling bad, just getting by* or *really struggling*.

Perhaps not surprising with the rapid changes that lockdowns created, changes at work was the second greatest area of struggle. This was especially a greater struggle for those who were *living well, despite struggles*.

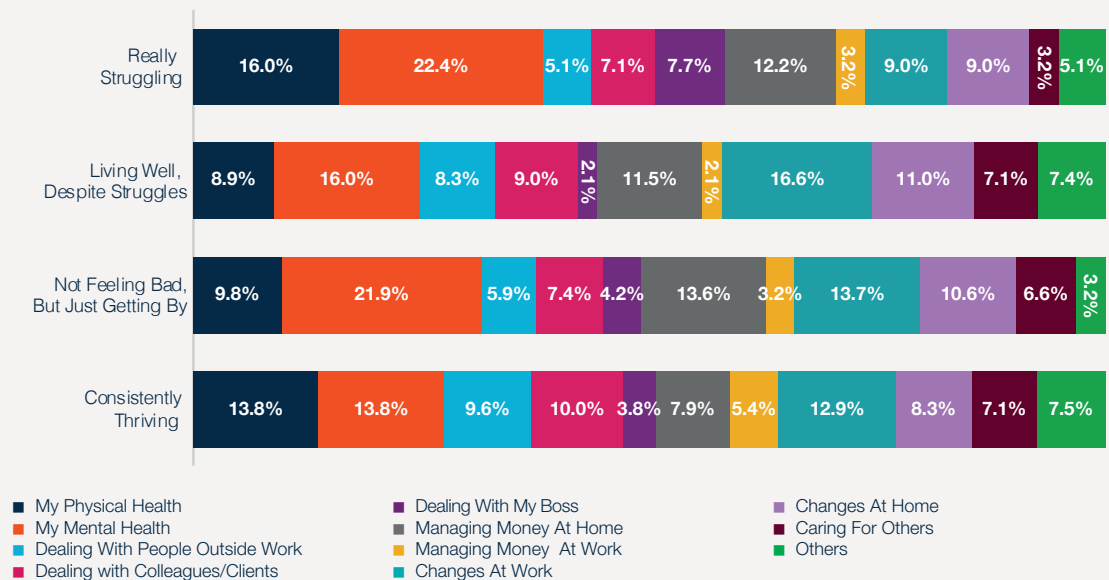
Given the economic concerns America is facing, it was also not surprising to see that managing money at home was the third biggest struggle for most workers. However, this was significantly less of a struggle for workers who were *consistently thriving*.

Physical health was the fourth greatest are of struggle, with health being more of a concern for workers who were *consistently thriving* or *really struggling*.

TOP THREE STRUGGLES AT WORK BY % FREQUENCY



% STATES OF WELLBEING BY STRUGGLES



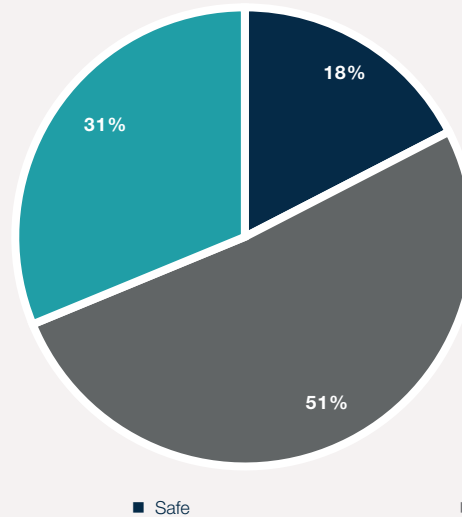
# NOT SAFE TO SHARE STRUGGLES

Studies have consistently found that feeling safe to share struggles with others relates to greater levels of engagement, productivity, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment.

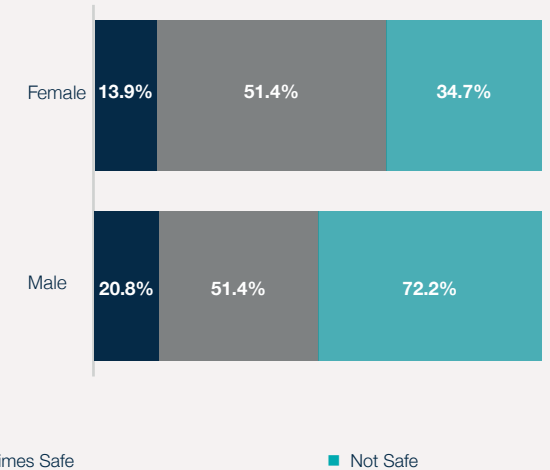
Unfortunately, only two out of every ten American workers felt safe to share their struggles at work. This was particularly true for men, and for workers who were *really struggling* or *not feeling bad, just getting by*. These findings highlight the importance of normalizing struggle as a part of wellbeing and creating opportunities for people to talk about struggle as a normal part of work experience.

It is worth noting, however, that some workers may prefer to keep their struggles to themselves, and people should not be forced into sharing things they do not feel comfortable sharing. Indeed, being forced to share would undermine psychological safety and feelings of support. In addition, workers who overshare their struggles are at risk of being viewed by their managers and colleagues as whining, and this can have a negative impact on their relationships.

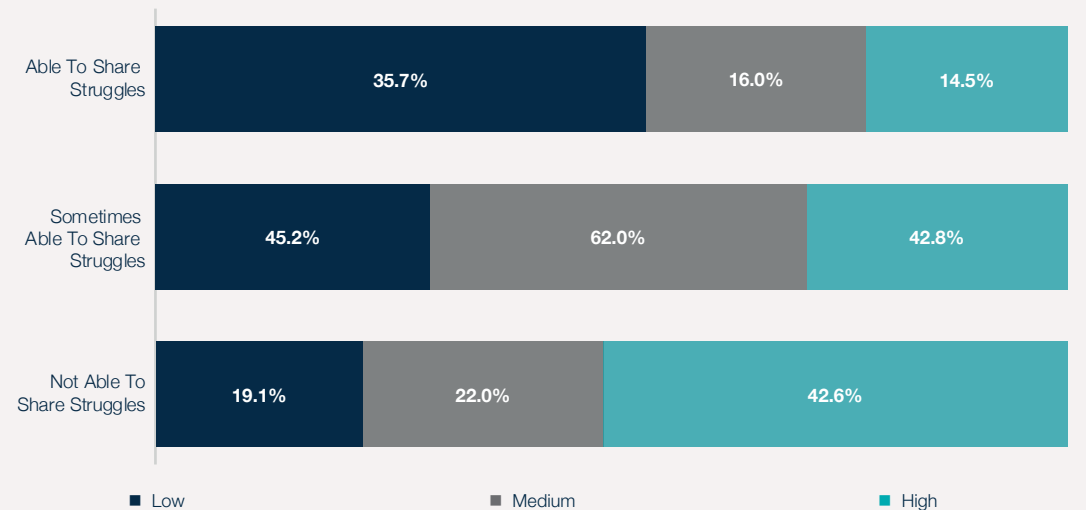
SAFE TO SHARE MY STRUGGLES AT WORK



SAFE TO SHARE MY STRUGGLES AT WORK BY GENDER



SAFE TO SHARE MY STRUGGLES AT WORK BY LEVELS OF WORRY & ANXIETY ABOUT COVID-19 IMPACT



# THE LONELINESS CHALLENGE

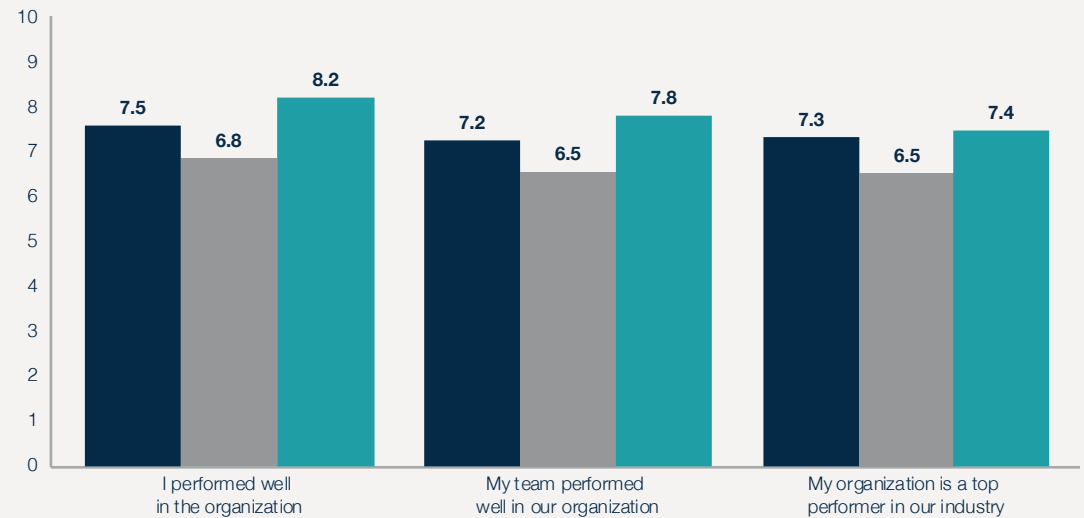
24% of American workers reported feeling lonely and isolated at work. This was particularly true for those workers who have always been located at home or have started working at home due to COVID-19. Workers who were still working on-premises also felt lonelier than those who began working from home as a result of COVID-19.

While some studies point to the negative impact that loneliness can have on workers' wellbeing and performance, our results produced some interesting patterns to consider. Workers who reported either low or high levels of feeling alone and isolated reported better performance than workers who reported moderate levels of feeling alone and isolated. Why might this be?

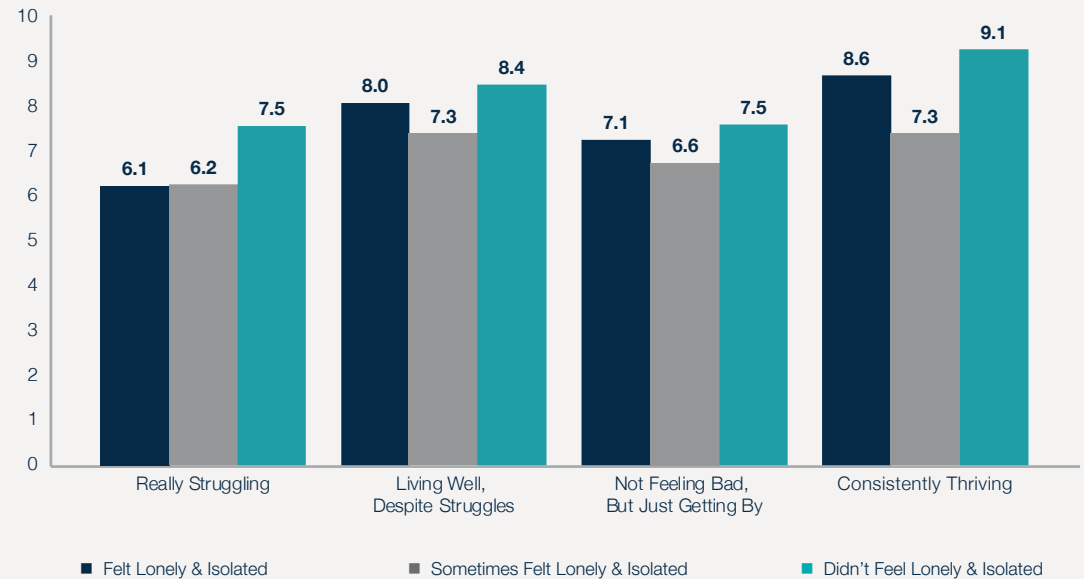
Workers who were *consistently thriving* were both the least and most likely to report feeling very alone and isolated at work. In both cases, they also reported significantly higher levels of way power, will power, we power and PERMAH. This suggests that these other aspects can buffer the otherwise negative effects of loneliness.

This same pattern appeared, to a lesser extent, for workers who were *living well despite struggle* and *not feeling bad but just getting by*. However, those who were *really struggling* seemingly did not have enough of these protective wellbeing factors to buffer the impacts of loneliness.

LONELINESS AT WORK BY PERFORMANCE MEANS



LONELINESS AT WORK BY STATE OF WELLBEING MEANS





# HIGH LEVELS OF WORRY & ANXIETY

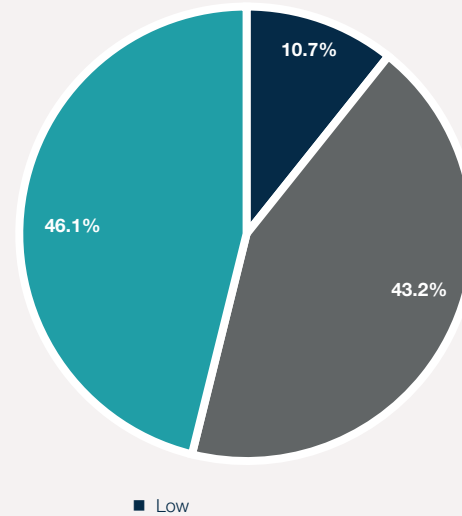
While it is not surprising that 89.3% of workers are feeling worried and anxious about the impact of the coronavirus, of particular concern are the 20% of workers who are not worried or anxious about spreading the coronavirus. Unfortunately, given the highly contagious nature of the coronavirus, it may only take this 20% of workers to spread further chaos into our workplaces and communities.

Workplaces should also be concerned that only 24.4% of workers feel certain about what actions they should be taking in response to coronavirus. While community updates are changing daily, 75.6% of workers would likely benefit from clear and consistent communication on the actions their workplaces want them to be taking.

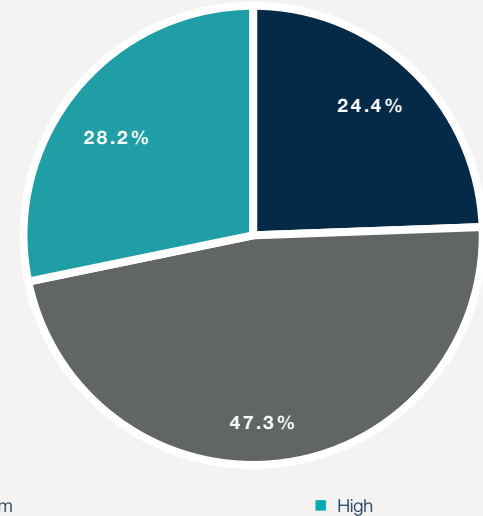
Interestingly, workers who reported high levels of worry and anxiety about the impact of coronavirus or the economy were performing just as well as those workers with low levels of worry and anxiety. In contrast, workers who reported medium levels of worry and anxiety about these challenges were significantly more likely to report lower levels of performance.

Why might this be? Worry about the virus or the economy might motivate productive action, whereas moderate worry might reflect uncertainty and passivity, undermining performance. For immediate performance, a little or a lot of anxiety may be better, though, over the longer term, high levels of anxiety likely become less productive.

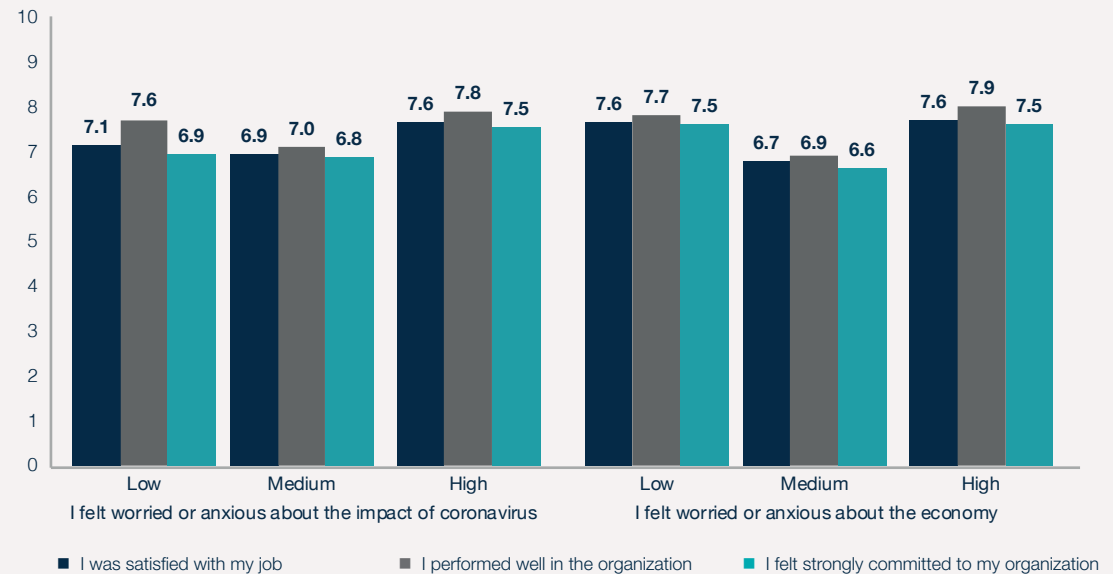
% WORRIED & ANXIOUS ABOUT COVID-19 IMPACT



% UNCERTAIN ABOUT COVID-19 ACTION



IMPACT OF WORRY & ANXIETY ABOUT CORONAVIRUS & THE ECONOMY



# RELUCTANCE TO RETURN TO WORK

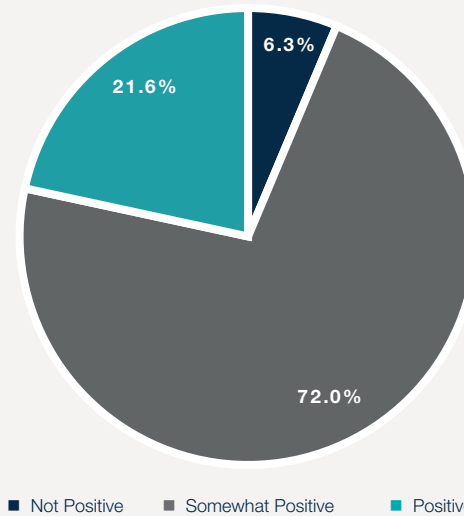
Only 21.6% of workers who have started working from home due to COVID-19 are feeling positive about returning to work, with many workers expressing mixed feelings. Generally, men felt more positive than women.

Notably, 90% of workers who have started working from home due to COVID-19, reported feeling satisfied with their current working arrangements, suggesting that they have successfully managed to navigate the considerable changes in working arrangements. The need for further change may create some barriers and resistance to returning to regular arrangements, especially as expectations and “normal” ways of functioning remain uncertain.

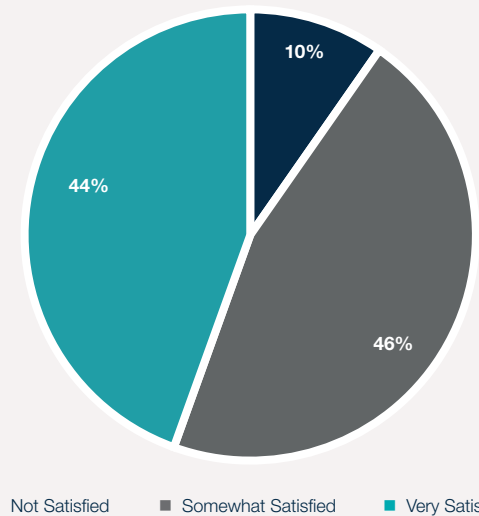
Notably, workers who somewhat and strongly trust management to make sensible decisions about issues that affect their future are more positive about returning to work, as are workers who can strongly rely on their co-workers not to make their job more dangerous by being careless.

Workers who had been working from home but often visited their work premises since COVID-19 closures were significantly more positive about returning to work. Workers may benefit from gradually transitioning back to the workplace, combined with clear communication about protocols and expectations.

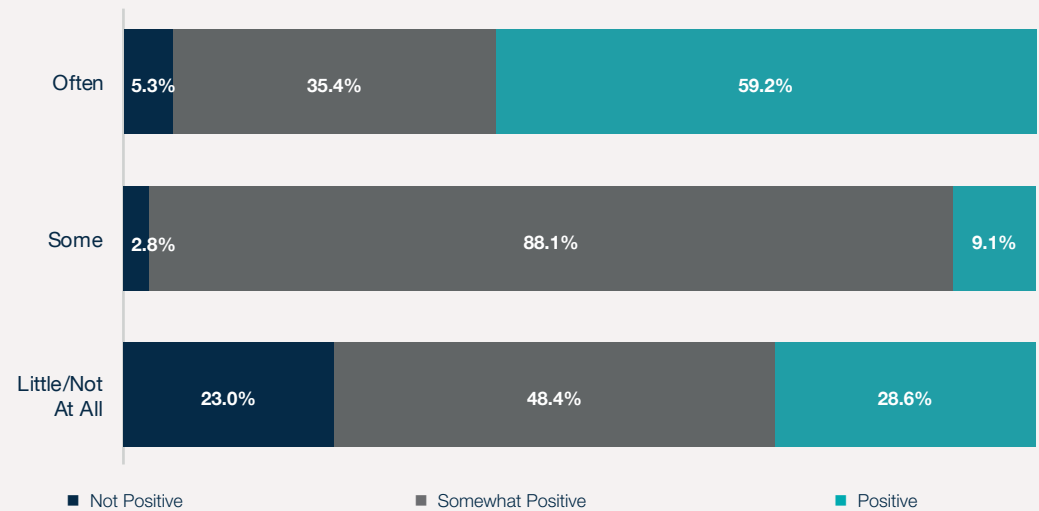
% FEELING POSITIVE ABOUT RETURNING TO WORK



% SATISFIED WITH CURRENT WORK ARRANGEMENTS



FEELING POSITIVE ABOUT RETURNING TO WORK BASED ON FREQUENCY WORKPLACE VISITS



# AN AH-HA MOMENT

Making it acceptable to talk about struggle, anxiety, and worry can help workers feel less lonely and isolated. Workers need to know that there is no shame in struggling; rather it is a neurological, physical, and social invitation for learning and growth.

Many workers have mixed feelings about returning to their work premises. Gradual transition, clear communication about protocols and expectations, and prioritizing establishing a sense of trust for management and co-workers to make sensible decisions could help workers with the transition.

*Do you know what the most common struggles are for workers in your workplace? How are you helping your workers feel safer to share their struggles at work?*



# HOW CAN YOU HELP WORKERS THRIVE AS THEY RETURN TO WORK?

With only 21.6% of workers reporting that they feel positive about returning to work, in addition to the physical measures that need to be put in place to care for workers' wellbeing, we recommend workplaces also prioritize:

- ❑ **Gauge Workers' Mental Temperature** – Understand how workers are feeling about returning to the workplace. Are they relieved at the idea of getting out of their house or are they worried about caring for their health and finding new ways of safely working together? Make it safe for workers to speak openly and honestly about their concerns and their hopes for creating new norms for working safely and productively together. Think about and discuss 'graded' returns to work, where possible.
  - ❑ **Offer Free Wellbeing Testing** – Encourage your workers to measure their wellbeing so they understand what's working, where they're struggling and what they want to prioritize when it comes to caring for the mental, social, and physical wellbeing. Free tools like the PERMAH Wellbeing Survey ([www.permahsurvey.com](http://www.permahsurvey.com)) provide confidential testing in just 5 minutes.
  - ❑ **Recognize The Symptoms Of Struggle** – Educate your workers that feelings of stress and struggle are not signs that their wellbeing is breaking, but rather reflect internal and external challenges. Some struggles are within a person's control, others are not. Make it safe to talk about the struggles that people are experiencing. For struggles that can be controlled, help workers identify actions they can take to address concerns. Consider whether adjustments can be made in the workplace to support people well. And for struggles that cannot be controlled, encourage workers to practice self-compassion and compassion towards each other as they adjust to the ongoing uncertainty and changes required of them.
  - ❑ **Encourage Personal Wellbeing Practices** – Give your workers access to short, simple, wellbeing training sessions and small group coaching check-ins that put simple, evidence-based, daily practices to care for their wellbeing at their fingertips. Help workers to support and celebrate each other's efforts as they prioritize caring for their mental and physical wellbeing.
  - ❑ **Recommend A Daily Dose of Leader Care** – Teach leaders the skills to genuinely connect and coach their people through this challenging time. Encourage leaders to deliver daily doses of care, compassion, and appreciation for their team members. Help your leaders understand that this it is more important to care for workers well than to manage performance during this time.
  - ❑ **Plan Regular Staff Check Ups** – Invite your people to provide feedback and feed forward in their teams and across your workplace to continue co-creating a new working reality as circumstances continue to unfold.
- These steps will help workers more successfully return to work, providing simple actions that can help your workers to thrive.

# WANT MORE?



## TAKE THE FREE PERMAH WELLBEING SURVEY

Measure your wellbeing and see how you're doing when it comes to your levels of thriving and struggle, and your abilities and motivation to care for your wellbeing, at [www.permahsurvey.com](http://www.permahsurvey.com). You can even create a free personal wellbeing plan, drawing on more than 200 evidence-based wellbeing actions. You can also use this tool for teams or entire workplaces.



## BOOK A WORKPLACE WELLBEING STRATEGY BRIEFING

Take a deeper dive into the workplace wellbeing research, accelerate your HR or Leadership team's understanding of how to improve workplace wellbeing, and assess how your workplace is currently performing. Drawing on an appreciative human-centered design process and tailored to meet the needs of your team, this briefing is designed to give you the confidence, support, and actions you need to improve wellbeing across your workplace. [Click here to learn more about booking your session.](#)



## CERTIFY WORKPLACE WELLBEING CHAMPIONS

Put the latest research and practices for improving wellbeing at your workers' fingertips. 91% of participants in our workplace wellbeing training programs are confident they can apply the knowledge and skills they learned, and 98% recommend our programs to others. Tailored for the needs of your workplace, upskilling internal wellbeing champions – be they leaders, your HR team, or staff – is an affordable and effective way to care for your workers' wellbeing.

# ABOUT THE WELLBEING LAB RESEARCHERS



## DR. PEGGY KERN

Dr. Peggy Kern is an associate professor at the Centre for Positive Psychology at the University of Melbourne's Graduate School of Education. Her research is collaborative in nature and draws on a variety of methodologies to examine questions around who thrives in life and why, including understanding and measuring healthy functioning, identifying individual and social factors impacting life trajectories, and systems-informed approaches to wellbeing. She has published three books and over 90 peer-reviewed articles and chapters. You can find out more about Peggy's work at [www.peggykern.org](http://www.peggykern.org)



## DR. MICHELLE MCQUAID

Dr. Michelle McQuaid is a best-selling author, workplace wellbeing teacher and playful change activator. An honorary fellow at the University of Melbourne's Graduate School of Education, in addition to hosting the highly acclaimed weekly podcast, "Making Positive Psychology Work" which features leading researchers and practitioners from around the world, Michelle blogs for Psychology Today, The Huffington Post and Thrive, and her work has been featured in Forbes, The Harvard Business Review, The Wall Street Journal, Boss Magazine, The Age and more. You can find more of Michelle's work at [www.michellemcquaid.com](http://www.michellemcquaid.com)



## LOUIS ALLORO

A champion of enabling change leaders to design and deliver positive change experiences that improve wellbeing, Louis Alloro helps schools, workplaces, communities, and cities to build their psychological muscles and rally together to be the change they want to see in the world. A social entrepreneur with a Masters in Applied Positive Psychology, Louis designs and delivers highly sought after, evidence-based wellbeing and positive change learning experiences around the world, and is currently pursuing his Ph.D. in systems-informed positive psychology and social impact evaluation. Louis is a Senior Fellow at the Center of Advancement of Wellbeing at George Mason University. You can find out more about Louis' work at [www.louisalloro.com](http://www.louisalloro.com).



## DANIELLE JACOBS

Danielle Jacobs is a registered psychologist and wellbeing specialist, speaker, trainer and coach. Danielle uses evidence-based organizational scholarship and positive psychology practises within businesses across Australia to help their people flourish, improve their mental and physical health and achieve peak performance at the individual, team and organizational levels. She also leads the Australasian delivery of world-renowned and high impact Potentiallife leadership development program (the brain-child of Dr. Tal Ben Shahr), is a Certified and Licensed Tiny Habits® Coach, and an affiliate member of APS College of Organisational Psychologists. You can find more about Danielle's work at [www.daniellejacobs.com.au](http://www.daniellejacobs.com.au)

# ABOUT ADDITIONAL RESEARCHERS



## **DR. MANDY O'NEILL**

Dr. Olivia (Mandy) O'Neill is an Associate Professor of Management at the George Mason University School of Business and Senior Scientist at the university's Center for the Advancement of Well-Being. She holds a Ph.D. in Organizational Behavior from Stanford University. Mandy is a passionate about researching and (co)creating positive organizational cultures and has worked with a wide range of organizations in that pursuit. Her work has been published in a variety of scholarly and practitioner journals. You can find out more about Mandy's work at <http://mason.gmu.edu/~ooneill>



## **DONALD E. FREDERICK (PH.D.)**

Donald is a data science consultant, technologist, and entrepreneur focused on the future of technology, work, and flourishing. He completed his postdoctoral research on the psychology of work and flourishing at The Human Flourishing Program at Harvard University's Institute for Quantitative Social Science. He holds a Ph.D. in Psychology from The University of Chicago. He also holds master's degrees in computer science and divinity, also from Chicago. You can find out more on his website [www.neurofoo.com](http://www.neurofoo.com)