

# Work Happiness in America, 2020

# Table of contents

## Work Happiness in America, 2020

This report shares the findings of commissioned research conducted online by Forrester Consulting on behalf of Indeed, fielded in January 2020. Forrester Consulting surveyed adults ages 18+ who reported working either full-time or part-time: 5,011 US adults were surveyed.

To ensure a representative sample, quotas were set by age, education, gender, geography, and income.

The research explored a variety of topics related to happiness at work, including happiness in different aspects of respondents' overall lives, the contribution of workplace happiness to overall happiness, the importance of different dimensions of workplace happiness, and underlying factors that respondents believe would influence the different dimensions of workplace happiness.

|  |    |
|--|----|
| Key takeaways . . . . .                      | 3  |
| Does work happiness matter? . . . . .        | 6  |
| Are people happy at work? . . . . .          | 11 |
| What drives work happiness? . . . . .        | 17 |
| How can we elevate work happiness? . . . . . | 24 |
| What's next? . . . . .                       | 32 |

# Key takeaways



1. **Work is a big deal.** By some estimates, we spend a quarter of our waking lives devoted to work, but too often people experience a lack of energy, learning, support, trust or belonging. Happiness with work ranks below all other major areas of people's lives.
2. **How we feel at work affects our lives.** We found that only 62% are happy at work most of the time. We also found that happiness really matters: for most of us, it affects our mood at home, it's one of the leading reasons why people leave their jobs, and most believe happiness drives success, rather than vice versa.
3. **What we think drives our happiness - actually doesn't.** When analyzing what drives happiness, we found a surprising gap between what people say drives happiness, and what the data reveals *actually* drives happiness. Both are important — but understanding the difference can help employees and companies move forward.
4. **And here's what actually does.** Fair pay and flexibility are important, but the data suggests other factors play an even more important role: feeling energized in work tasks, feeling a sense of belonging, trust, purpose, inclusion and support.
5. **Work happiness does not have to cost a lot.** While happiness at work has a significant impact on people's lives, and on business success, what drives work happiness is available to almost anyone, and any company. It's more about people than perks. By knowing what matters, and how we're doing, we can begin the journey to increasing work happiness together.

**“ As the largest job platform in the world, we wanted to bring more clarity to the experience people are having at work, and through that, identify how we might improve it. Our mission is to help people get jobs — and as part of that, we want to help people get jobs that are right for them.”**

— Paul Wolfe, SVP/ Global Head of Human Resources, Indeed

# Digging deep

## Does work happiness matter?

**Yes.** Work affects our broader lives, and work happiness influences which companies people want to work for.

- 84% report happiness at work affects their mood at home
- 63% say work is one of their greatest stressors
- 68% believe happiness leads to success, not the other way around
- Lack of happiness is a leading reason people consider leaving a job.

There is also a significant body of research that happiness affects productivity, customer satisfaction, employee turnover, and company revenue.

## Are people happy at work?

**Not enough.**

- 62% report being happy at work most of the time, and most people rank work below most other aspects of life
- 52% agree they are energized in most of their work tasks
- 54% feel their manager helps them succeed

## What drives work happiness?

**Pay, flexibility, and even more importantly, less tangible factors.**

- People say that fair pay and flexibility of time and location matter most to their happiness

- The data reveals other factors are actually more important to work happiness — including feeling energized, a sense of belonging, trusting people and inclusive, respectful environments

## How can we elevate work happiness?

**Beyond paying fairly and offering needed flexibility, the top five areas companies can provide are:**

- 1) Make work energizing
- 2) Foster belonging
- 3) Build trust
- 4) Nurture a sense of purpose
- 5) Respect and inclusion

This report includes perspectives from American workers on what's most important to achieving these top five. Over the coming months, we will be sharing insights and perspectives from experts on steps companies and employees can take.

## What's next?

At Indeed, we're committed to helping elevate work happiness. That's why we are launching the **Work Happiness Score**, which shows how happy people are at companies, and dimensions that drive happiness.

Learn more about the Work Happiness Score at [go.indeed.com/happiness](https://go.indeed.com/happiness)

# Does work happiness matter?

(Yes.)

**84%** report happiness at work affects their mood at home

**63%** say work is one of their greatest stressors, out of all options in their life

**88%** say seeing whether people are happy at work would be important in choosing to work at a company



Does your happiness at work affect your mood at home? (yes, a little bit; Yes, to a large extent). Which of these aspects have the greatest stress for you on a daily basis? (select up to 3) If you could see what percent are "happy at work" for a particular employer you are considering applying to, how important would that be for deciding where to apply for a job or whether to accept a job? (Somewhat important to important; 3-5 on 5 point scale).  
Indeed Work Happiness in America Report, a commissioned study (n=5011) conducted by Forrester Consulting, 2020

68%

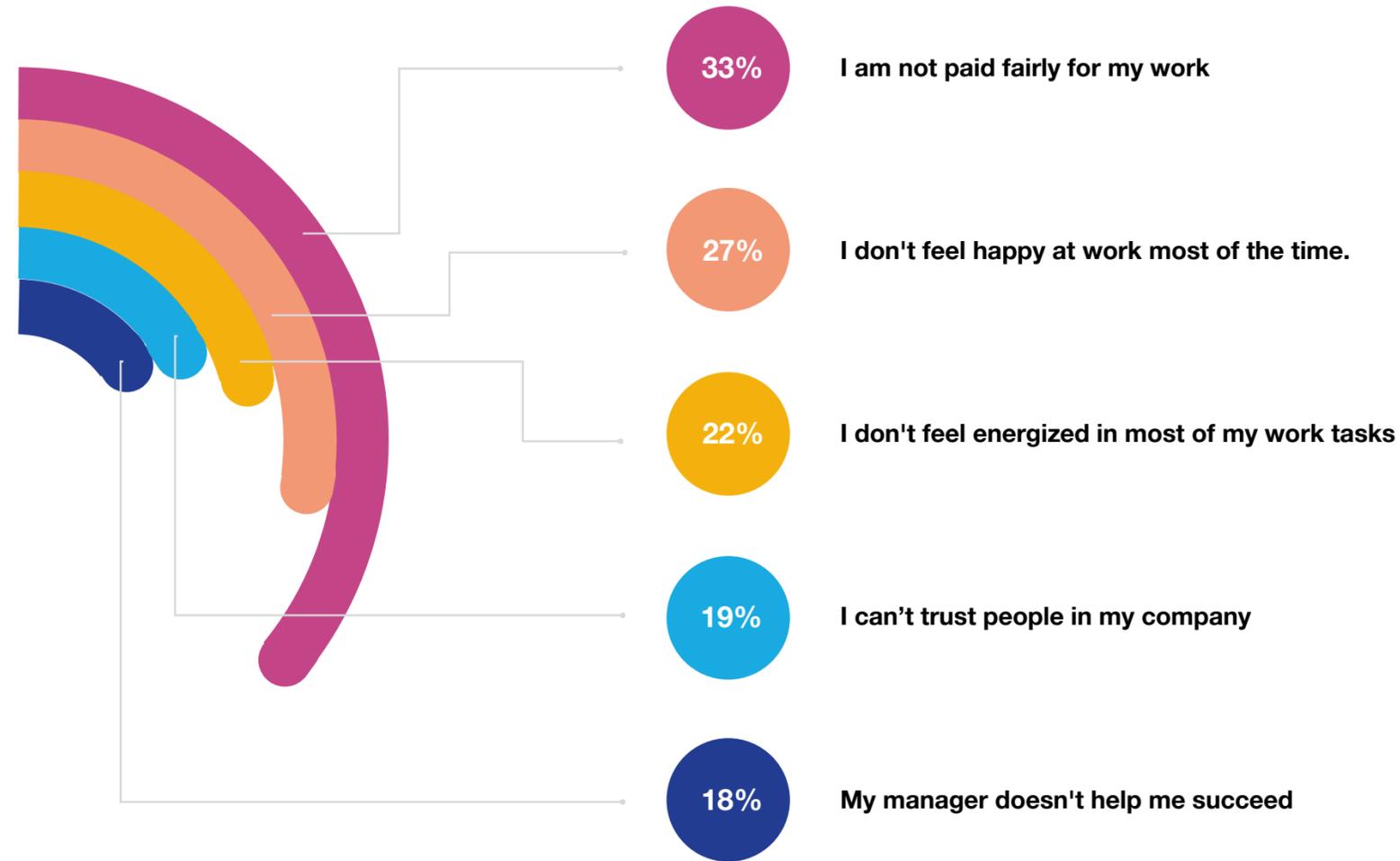
believe happiness  
leads to success

When asked to choose which of two statements is most true, the majority of people believe happiness leads to success, rather than success leading to happiness (32%).

It should be noted that although people state this belief, other research has shown that people's actions do not always align.

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Which statement is most true? Happiness leads to success. Success leads to happiness.  
Indeed Work Happiness in America Report, a commissioned study (n=5011) conducted by  
Forrester Consulting, 2020



## Lack of happiness is a leading reason people consider leaving a job

We asked people who dislike something about their current job to tell us the primary reasons they would consider new opportunities. Not being fairly paid is the most important reason stated, followed by not feeling happy at work most of the time and not feeling energized. It is important to note that all of these responses contribute to people being unhappy at work.

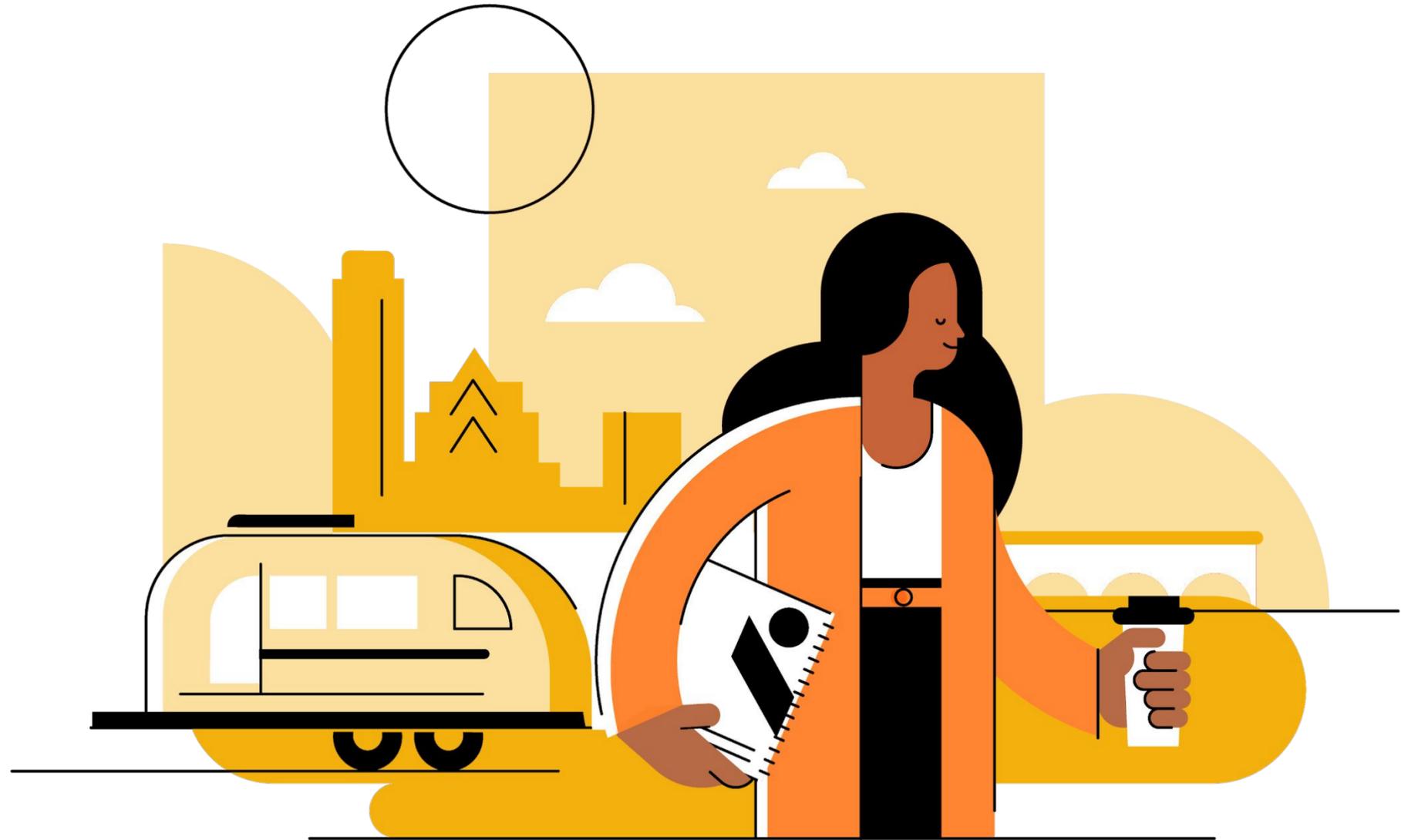
Could you please tell us more about the reasons why you would consider new opportunities?  
Indeed Work Happiness in America Report, a commissioned study (n=1,274) conducted by Forrester Consulting, 2020

“I’ve spent my career doing scientific research on happiness.

**Happiness matters.**

Research has shown that **happiness is a cause of success**: happier people receive more positive reviews at work, are more productive and more creative, earn higher incomes, and are less likely to burn out or be absent from work. Happier people are also more likely to get jobs and to keep jobs.”

Dr. Sonja Lyubomirsky, Distinguished Professor of Psychology and Vice Chair, University of California, Riverside



# Are people happy at work?

(well, it's complicated)

# 62%

report being  
happy at work,  
most of the time

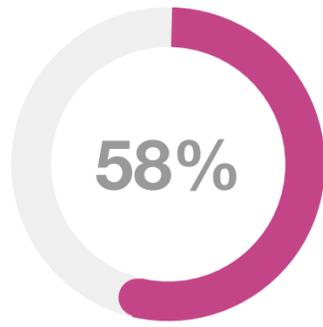
This means of 157 million people in the American workforce, approximately 60 million may not be happy at work, most of the time.

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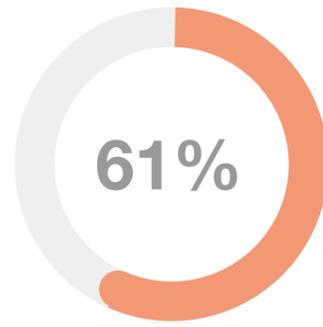
I feel happy at work, most of the time (Happy = 4 or 5 on 5pt scale).

Indeed Work Happiness in America Report, a commissioned study (n=5011) conducted by Forrester Consulting, 2020

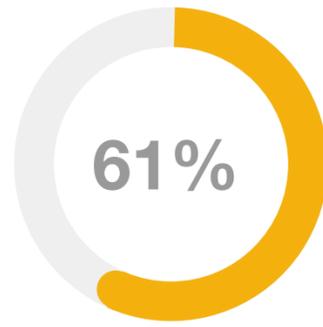
Survey results extrapolated to US working population; US workforce size source: Pew Research, 2019



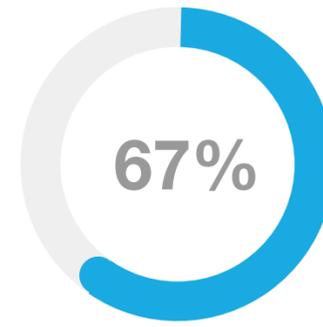
Gen Z



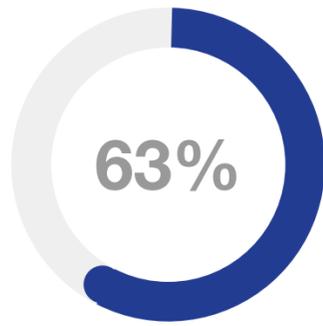
Millennials



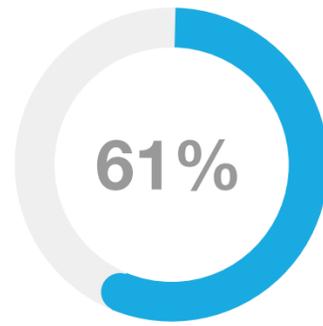
Gen X



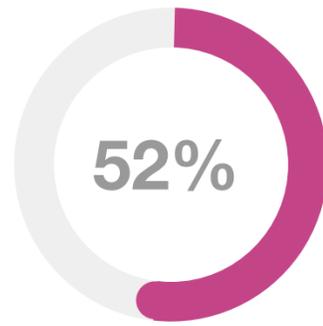
Baby Boomers



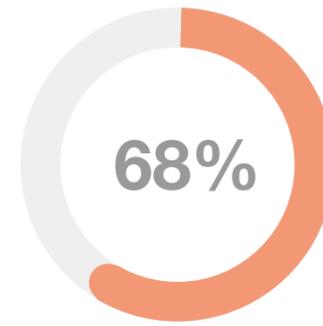
Male



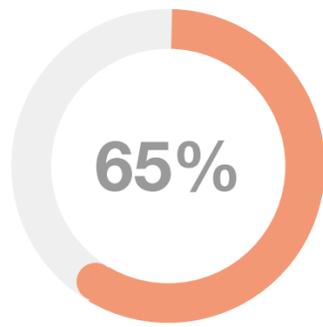
Female



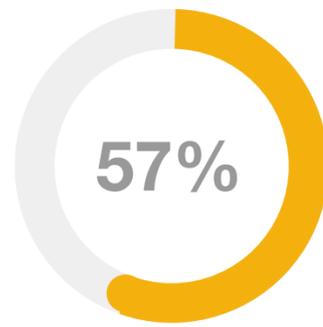
More Routine/  
Physical Labor



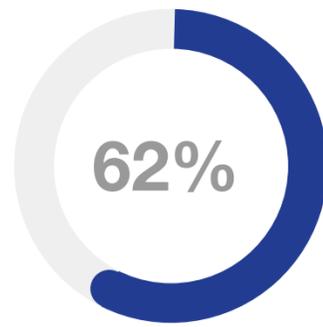
More Creative/ Intellectually  
Challenging Work



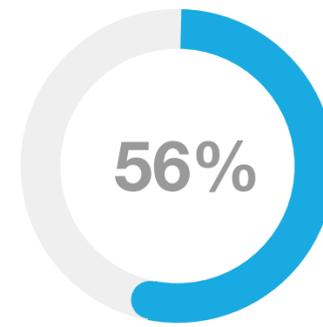
Higher Income



Lower Income



Steady Schedule



Work Shifts

## Who is happier at work?

**Baby Boomers** are happier than younger workers.

**Men** are slightly happier than women.

Those in **more creative and/or intellectually challenging** work are happier than those in more routine and/or physical labor.

Workers with **higher incomes** are happier than those with lower incomes.

Those with **steady schedules** are happier than those working shifts.

I feel happy at work, most of the time. (Happy = 4 or 5 on 5pt scale).  
Indeed Work Happiness in America Report, a commissioned study (n=5011) conducted by Forrester Consulting, 2020

Only

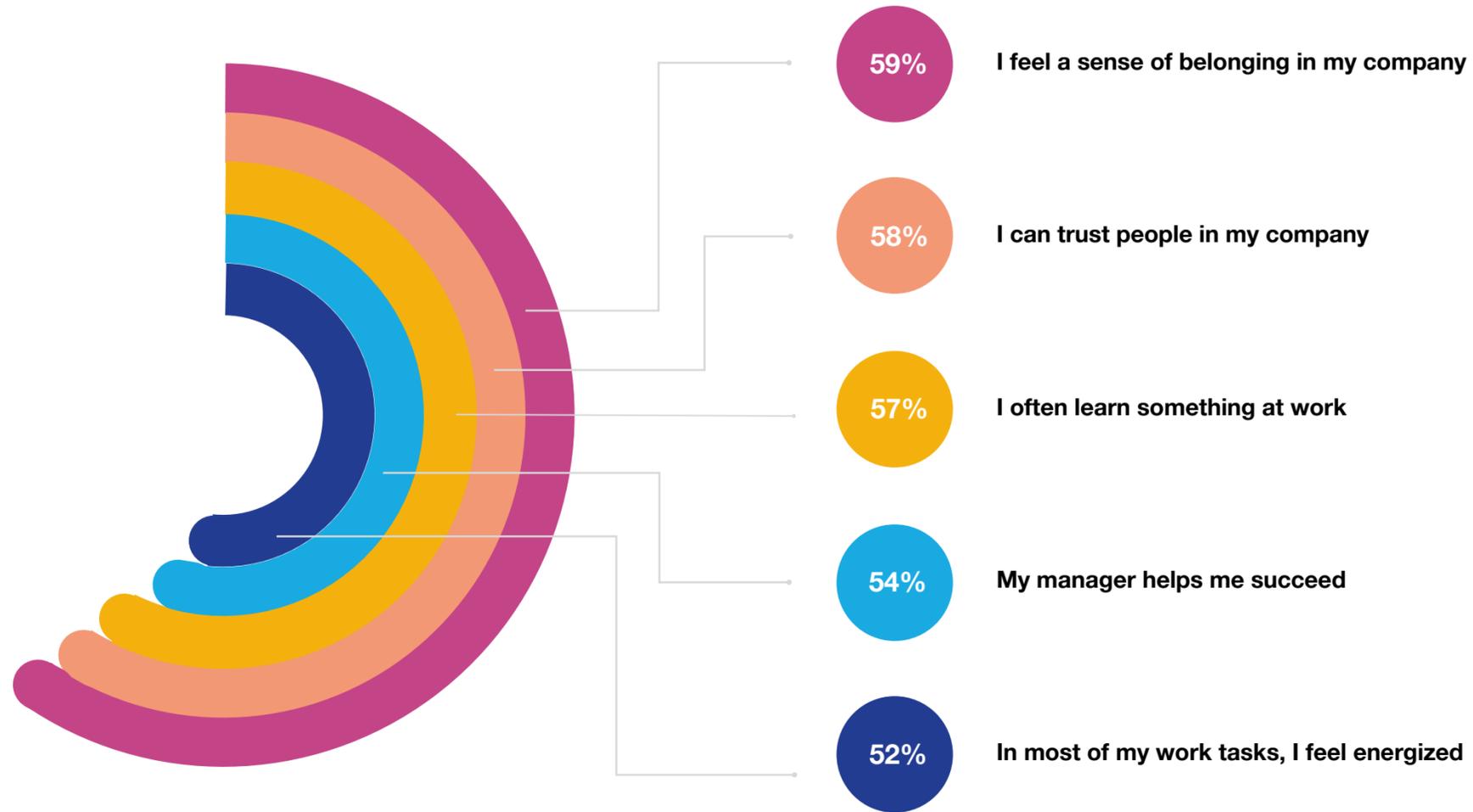
**52%**

**of workers involved in physical labor and/or more routine work are happy at work**

Versus 68% of workers in more creative and/or intellectually challenging work.

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I feel happy at work, most of the time. (Happy = 4 or 5 on 5pt scale).  
Indeed Work Happiness in America Report, a commissioned study (n=5011) conducted by  
Forrester Consulting, 2020



## Half of Americans are not feeling energized in their work

Just 52% of people surveyed feel energized in most of their work tasks. Just over half of people report their manager helping them succeed, learning something often, trusting people at work, or feeling a sense of belonging.

How much do you agree or disagree with the statements below about your current workplace? (Agree — 4 or 5 on 5pt scale).

Indeed Work Happiness in America Report, a commissioned study (n=5011) conducted by Forrester Consulting, 2020

But...

96%

think it is possible to  
be happy at work,  
most of the time

Even if not happy at work today, almost all  
American workers believe it is possible.

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Do you think it's possible for people to be "happy at work, most of the time"?  
(Yes, to a large extent,; Yes, to some extent).  
Indeed Work Happiness in America Report, a commissioned study (n=5011) conducted by  
Forrester Consulting, 2020

# What drives work happiness?

(may not be what people think)

What people **say** is important to happiness differs from what **actually** drives happiness.

Pay and flexibility are critically important — particularly in choosing to join a company.

But other factors like feeling energized, belonging, trust and inclusion are more important in driving happiness than we realize — and impact whether people stay at a company.



## What we think makes us happy at work (stated importance)



## People say fair pay is the most important factor to feeling happy at work

By far, the two most important factors people report affecting their happiness are fair pay and time/ location flexibility. Less tangible factors, like belonging, trust, and feeling energized, are rated significantly lower in importance.

Stated importance analysis via a Max Diff analysis  
Indeed Work Happiness in America Report, a commissioned study (n=5011) conducted by Forrester Consulting, 2020

### What actually makes us happy at work (revealed importance)



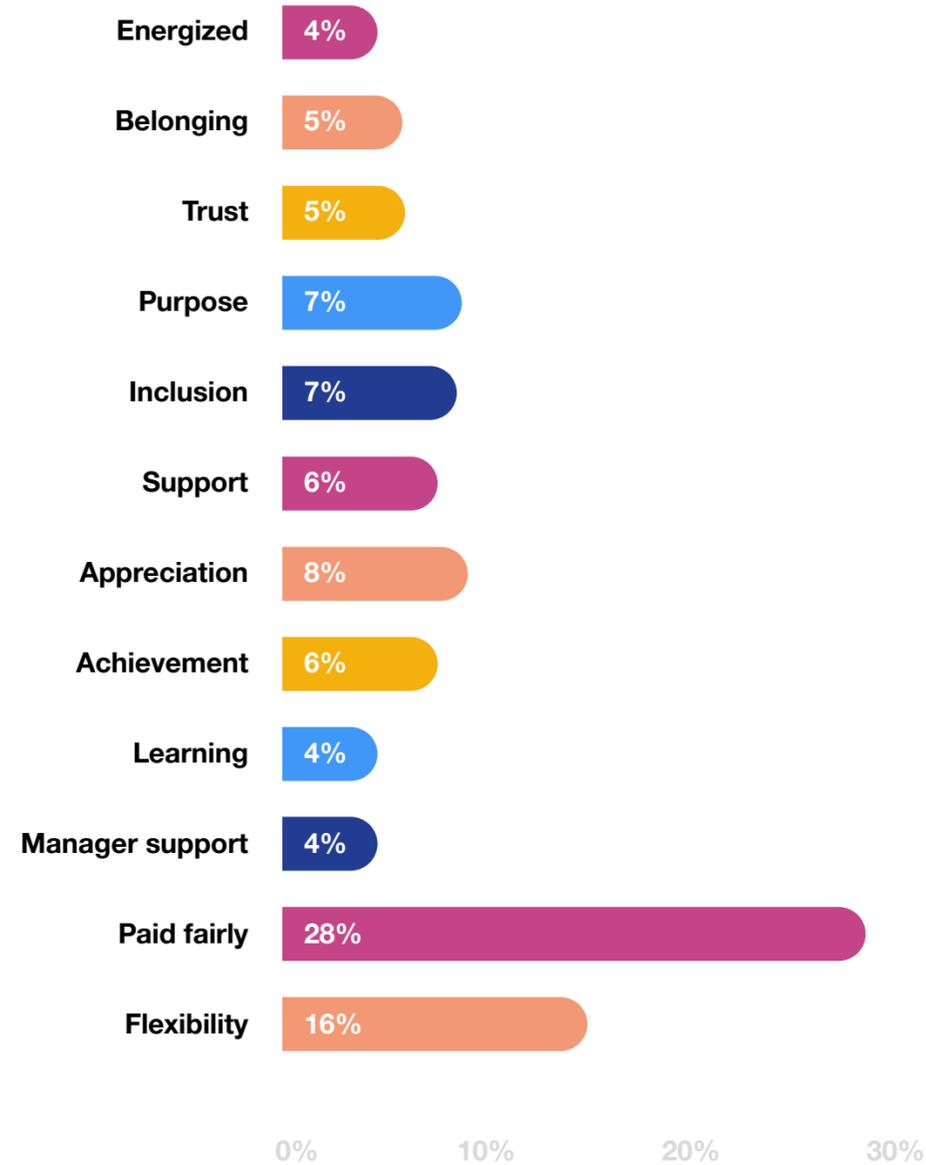
## But other factors are much more important when we observe what drives happiness at work

By analyzing the data, we are able to see the factors that most impact people’s happiness. The results vary significantly from the stated importance — in other words, there are critical factors that we may undervalue, like feeling energized, a sense of belonging, trust and purpose.

Revealed importance analysis via a Shapley Regression  
Indeed Work Happiness in America Report, a commissioned study (n=5011) conducted by Forrester Consulting, 2020

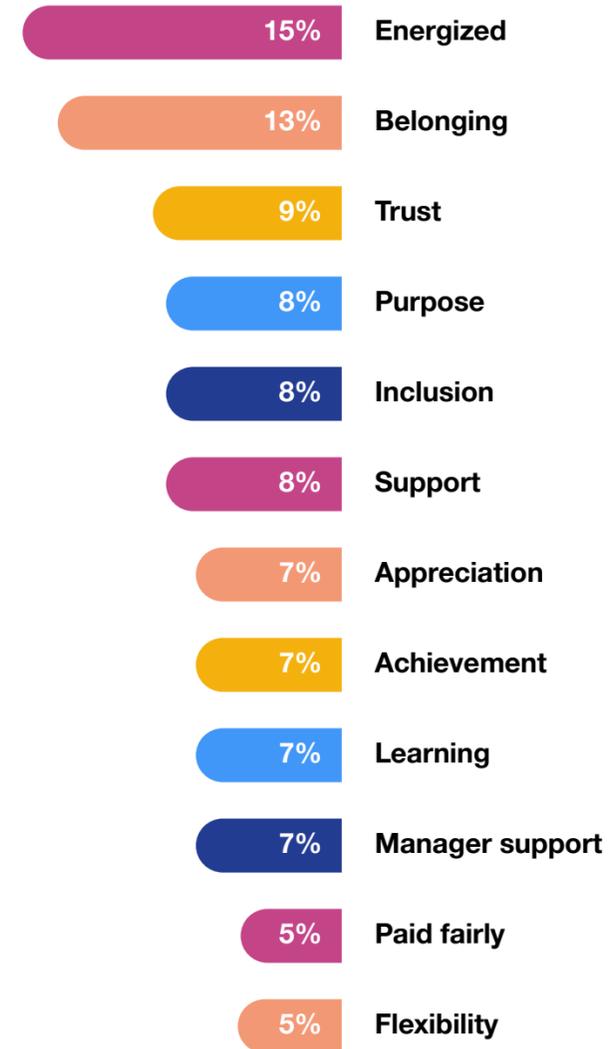
### What we think makes us happy at work

(stated importance)



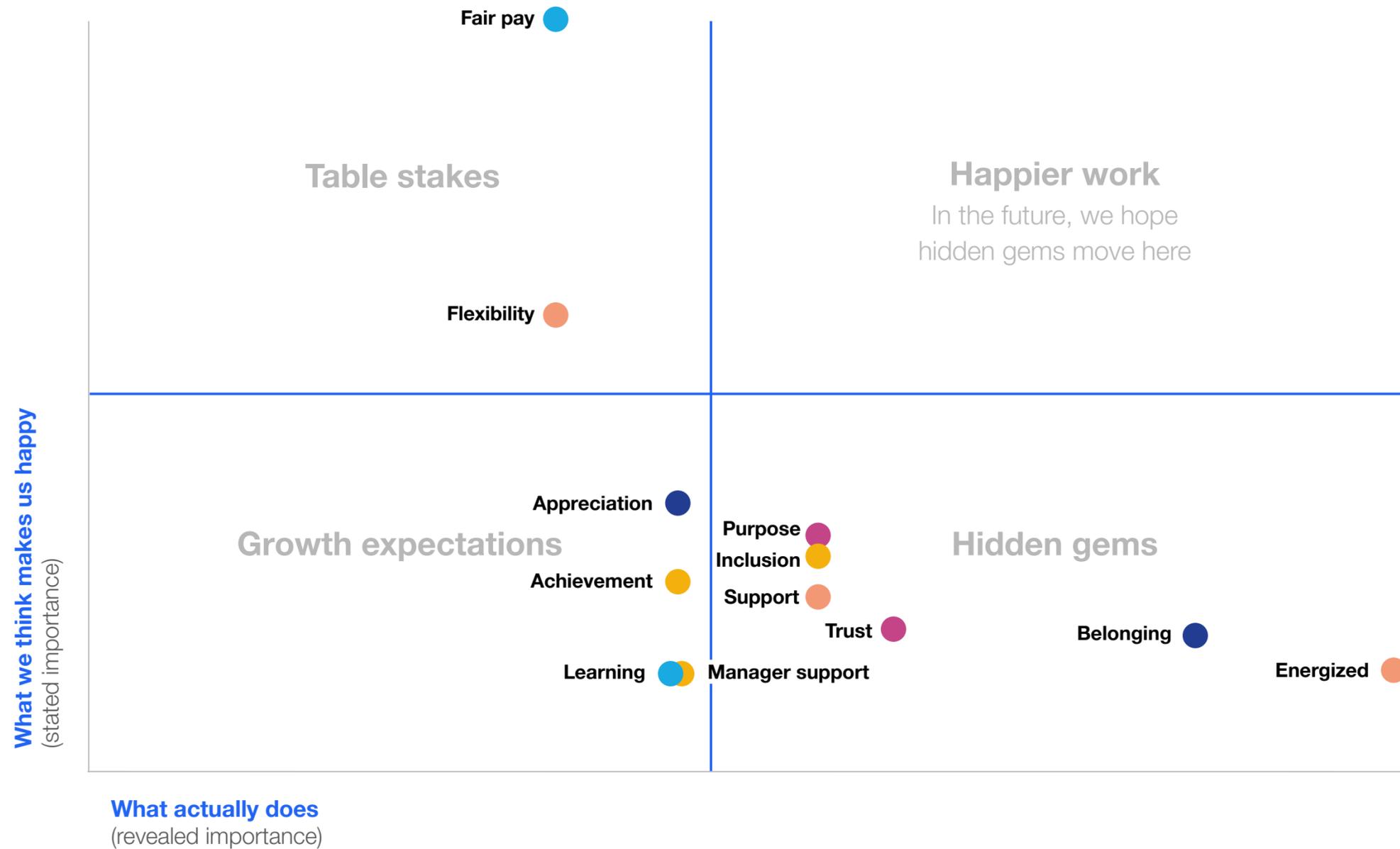
### What actually makes us happy at work

(revealed importance)



Stated importance analysis via a Max Diff analysis  
 Revealed importance analysis via a Shapley Regression  
 Indeed Work Happiness in America Report, a commissioned study (n=5011) conducted by Forrester Consulting, 2020

## What we think makes us happy vs. what actually does



## Hidden gems are under-appreciated drivers of work happiness

Many dimensions of work happiness are under-recognized, and therefore likely suffer from under-investment.

Understanding these hidden gems, and making efforts to prioritize them, offers people and companies opportunities to boost work happiness.

In the future, aligning what we *think* makes us happy at work with what *actually* makes us happy (moving hidden gems to the top right quadrant) will help make happier people and happier companies.

Stated importance analysis via a Max Diff analysis  
 Revealed importance analysis via a Shapley Regression  
 Indeed Work Happiness in America Report, a commissioned study (n=5011) conducted by Forrester Consulting, 2020

## What we *think* drives happiness is only part of the answer

Being paid fairly and having the flexibility you need are foundational building blocks for work happiness, and are significant factors in choosing whether to join a company.

Feeling energized, a sense of belonging, trust, purpose and inclusion are important elevated work needs — and are significant factors in choosing whether to stay at a company.

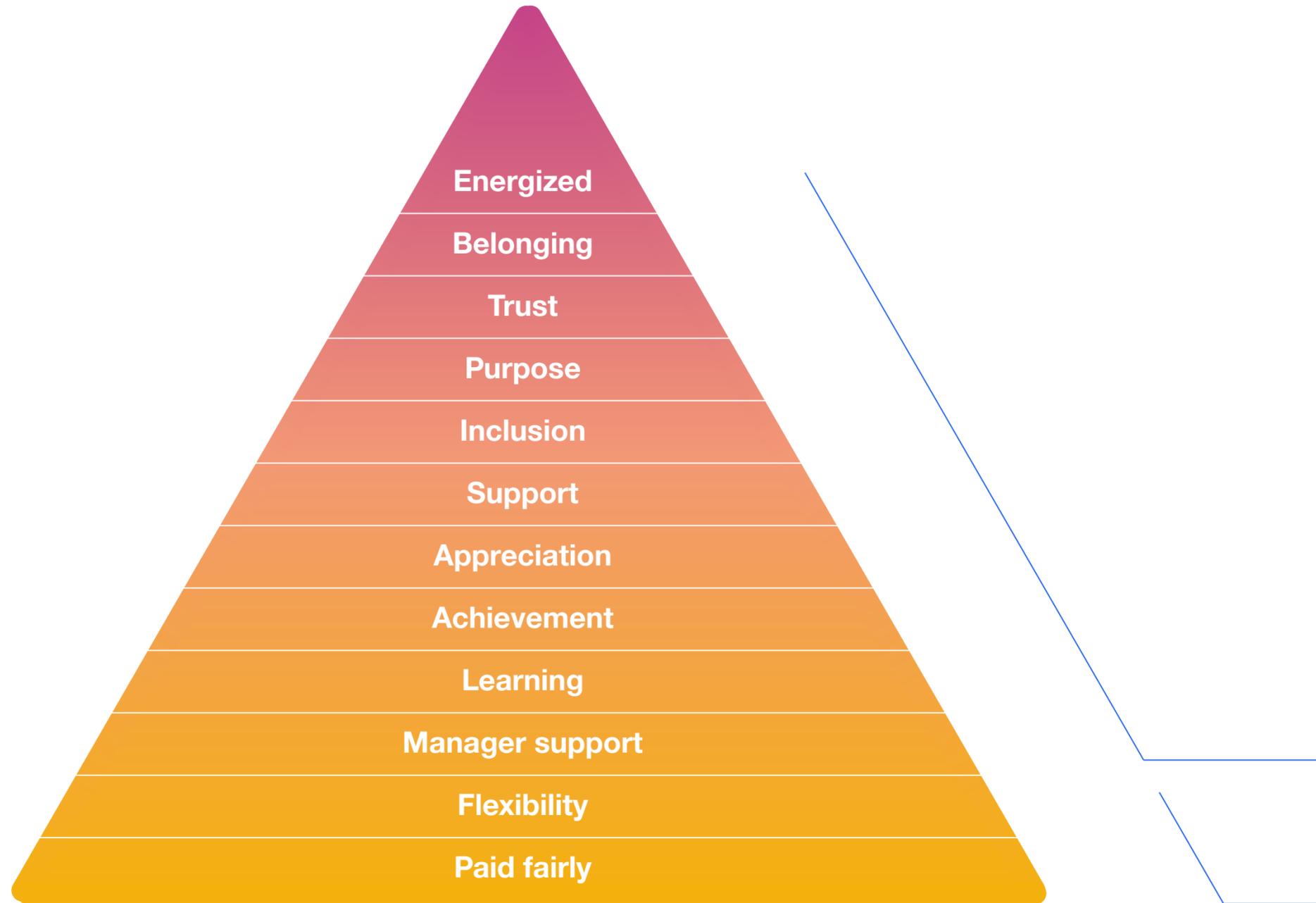
In other words: how we *feel* at work matters.

### Elevated needs

Lower stated importance,  
higher revealed importance

### Basic needs

Higher stated importance,  
lower revealed importance



# How can we elevate work happiness?

# Top five actions for work happiness

(beyond providing fair pay and flexibility, which are foundational)

**1/ Make work energizing**

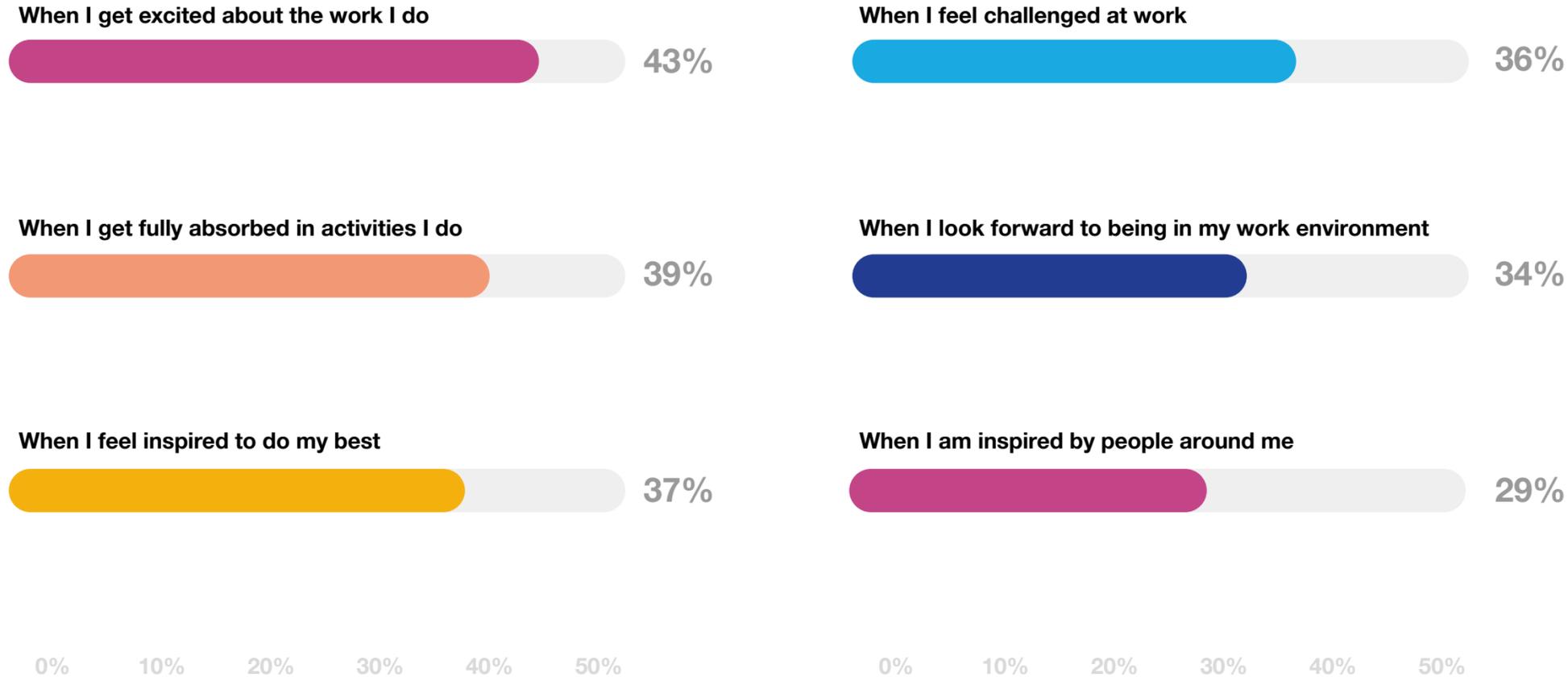
**2/ Foster belonging**

**3/ Build trust**

**4/ Nurture a sense of purpose**

**5/ Respect and inclusion**

## What makes you feel energized at work?



## 1/ Make work energizing

**52% feel energized in most of their work tasks.**

This is the factor with the highest revealed importance to work happiness. We asked what would make people feel more energized, and it's something innate to the work type: something that excites people, that they can get fully absorbed in, that inspires them to do their best — and that challenges them.

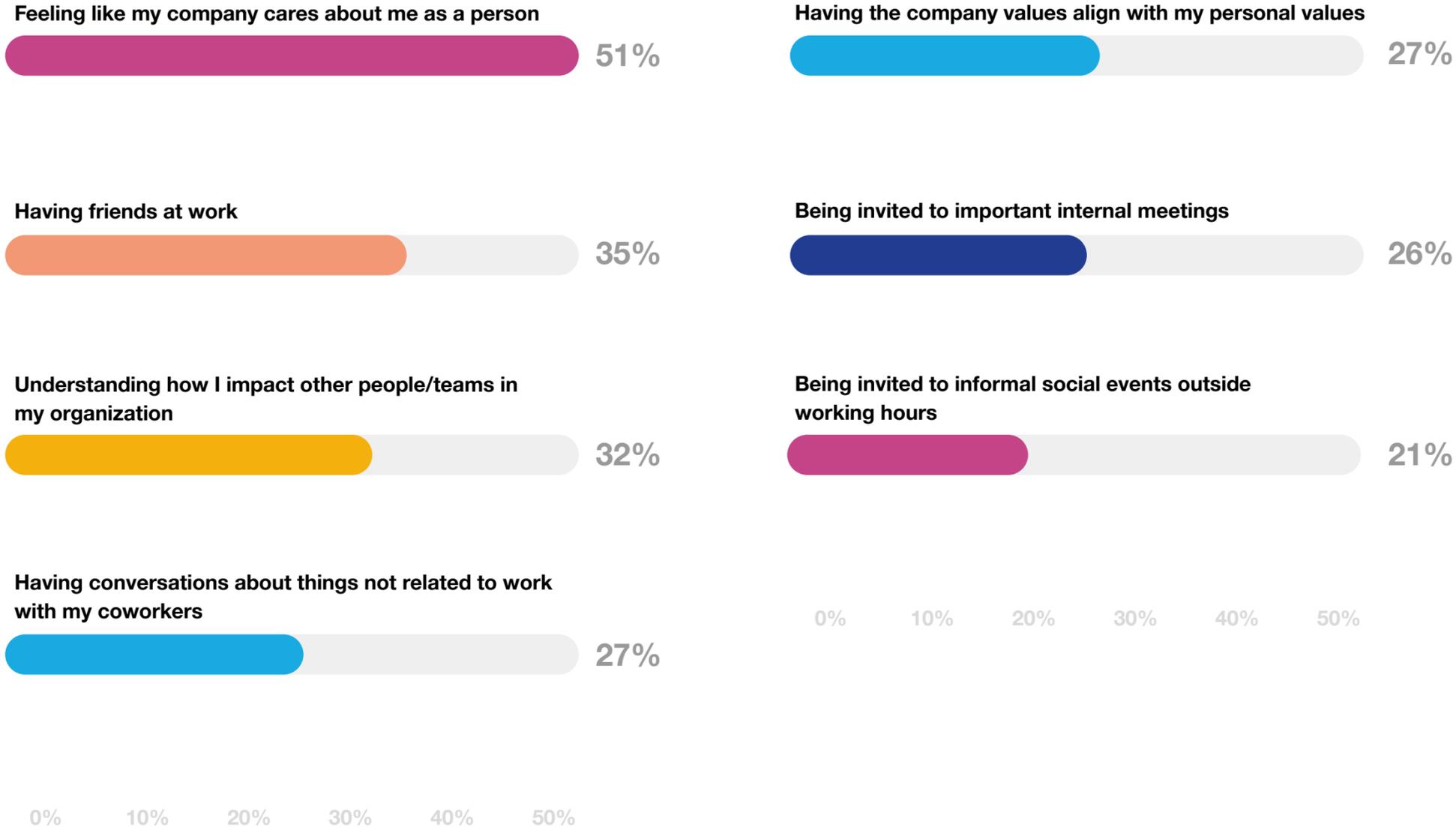
Those in more creative and/or intellectually challenging work feel more energized than do those in routine and/or physical labor (53% vs 39%). Men feel slightly more energized than women (55% vs 49%), and Gen Z more than Millennials or Gen X (57% vs 52% vs 50%). Perhaps unsurprisingly, managers are more energized than less senior workers (62% vs 45%).

How much do you agree or disagree with the statements below about your current workplace?  
(Agree = 4 or 5 on 5pt scale)

What makes you feel energized at work? (Select up to 3)

Indeed Work Happiness in America Report, a commissioned study (n=5011) conducted by Forrester Consulting, 2020

## What would make you feel like you belong at your company?



## 2/ Foster belonging

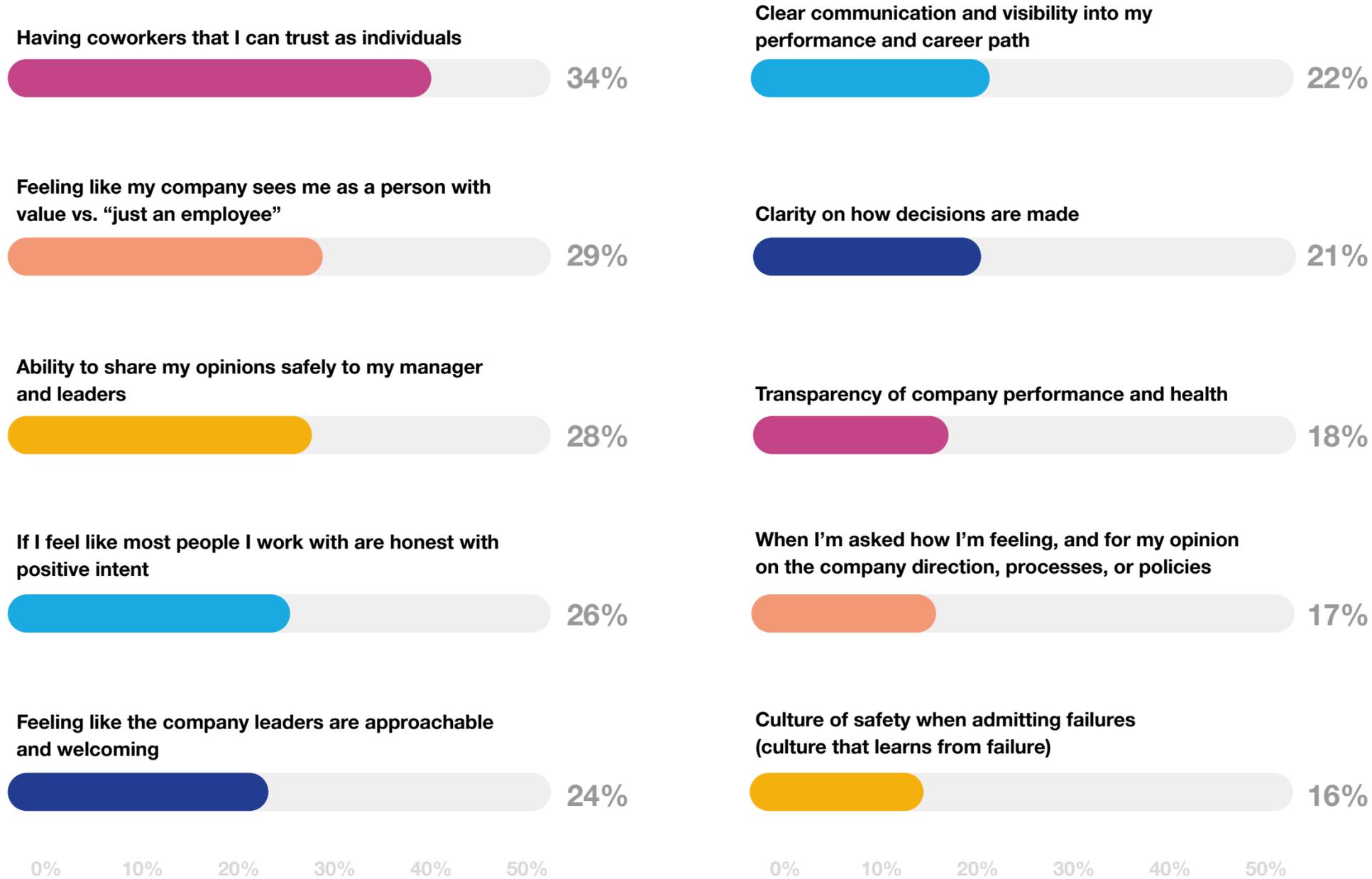
**59% feel a sense of belonging in their company.**

The most important factors to building belonging: people want to feel like their company cares about them as a person, have friends at work, understand their impact on other people and teams — and have aligned values with their company.

Those aged 45-54 years old feel lower belonging than do younger workers (54% vs. 61% for 35-44 years). More senior workers (manager or above) feel significantly more belonging than do individual workers (70% vs. 51%). Those working full time feel more belonging than do those working part time (60% vs. 55%).

How much do you agree or disagree with the statements below about your current workplace? (Agree = 4 or 5 on 5pt scale)  
What would make you feel like you belong at your company? (Select up to 3)  
Indeed Work Happiness in America Report, a commissioned study (n=5011) conducted by Forrester Consulting, 2020

## What makes you feel a sense of trust at work?



## 3/ Build trust

**58% feel they can trust people in their company.**

Feeling that coworkers are trustworthy individuals is important, as is feeling that, "the company sees me as a person with value versus 'just an employee'". Leaders are critical: a sense that leaders are approachable and welcoming, and opinions can be safely shared.

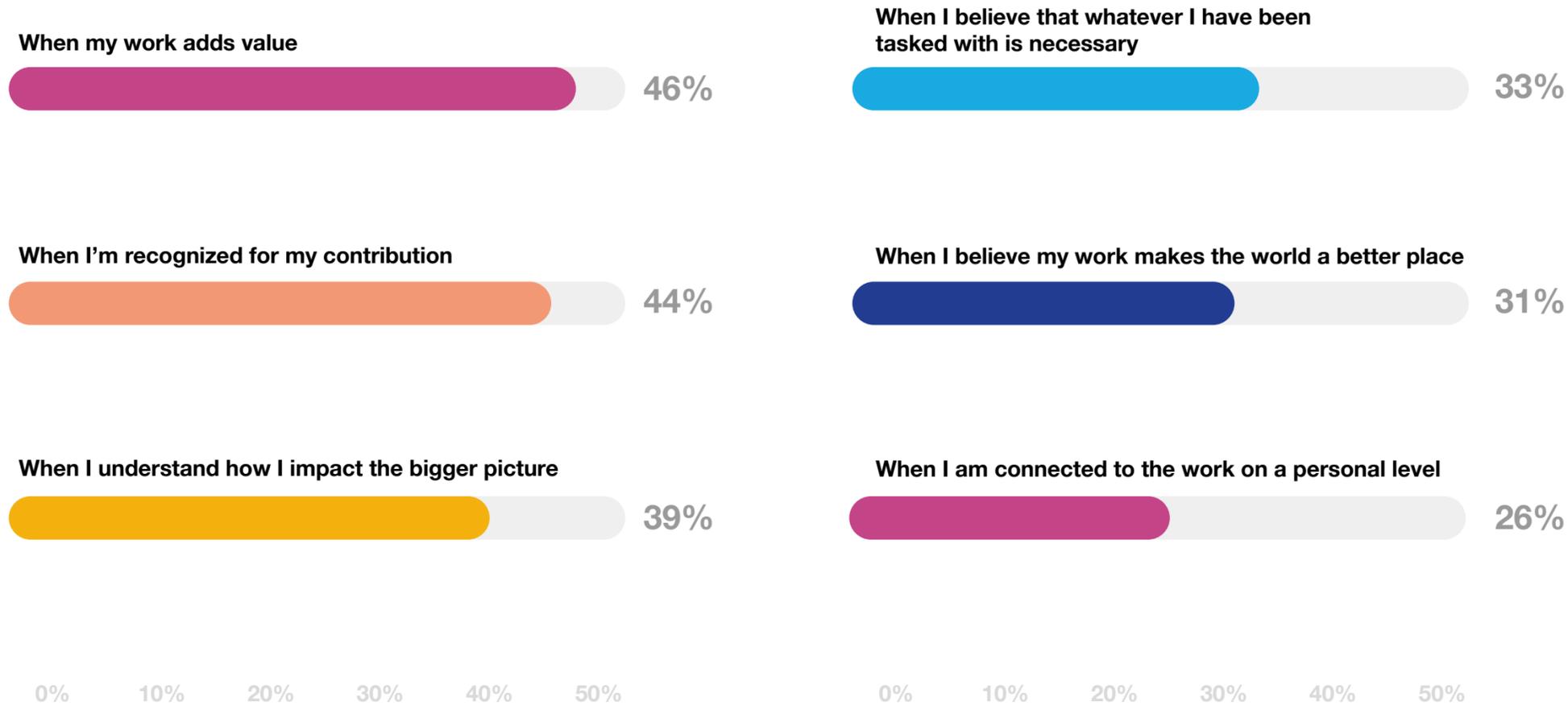
Gen Z and Millennial workers trust people in their company (61%) more than do older workers, in particular Gen X (54%). Workers doing more routine, physical labor feel a significantly lower level of trust than do those in creative and/or intellectually challenging fields (48% vs 62%).

How much do you agree or disagree with the statements below about your current workplace? (Agree = 4 or 5 on 5pt scale)

What makes you feel a sense of trust at work? (Select up to 3)

Indeed Work Happiness in America Report, a commissioned study (n=5011) conducted by Forrester Consulting, 2020

## What makes you feel a sense of purpose at work?



## 4/ Nurture a sense of purpose

**70% feel their work has a clear sense of purpose.**

The leading factor for people feeling purpose in their work is a sense that it adds value, followed by being recognized for a contribution, and understanding how work contributes to a bigger picture. This sense of feeling necessary, and of contribution, is even more important than feeling connected on a personal level to the work.

Managers or more senior workers feel a stronger sense of purpose than do those less senior (75% vs 66%). People doing more creative and/or intellectually challenging work feel a greater sense of purpose than do those doing more routine and/or physical labor (77% vs 60%). People working in the public sector & healthcare have a greater sense of purpose than do those working in media, entertainment and leisure (73% vs 63%).

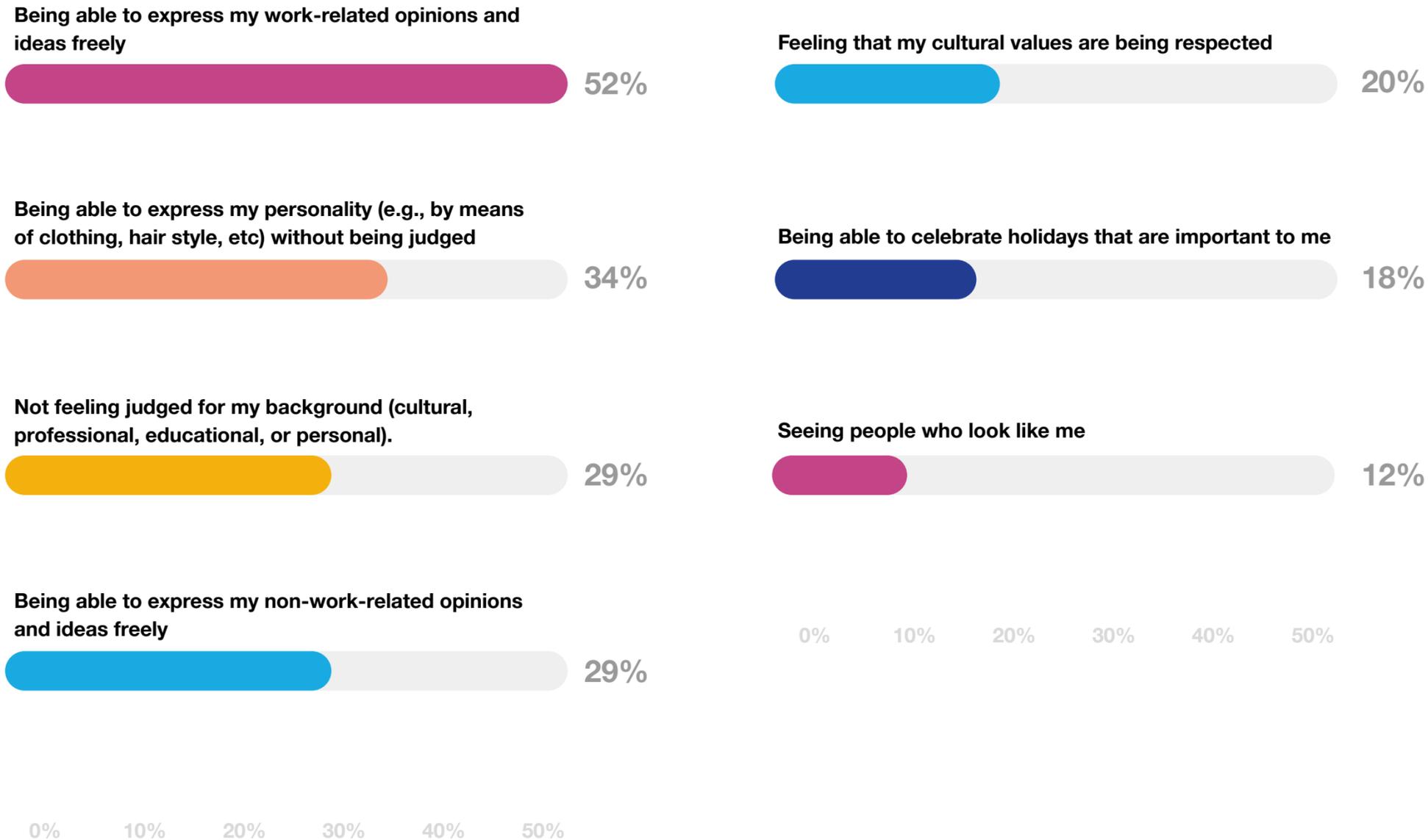
How much do you agree or disagree with the statements below about your current workplace?

(Agree = 4 or 5 on 5pt scale)

What makes you feel a sense of purpose at work? (Select up to 3)

Indeed Work Happiness in America Report, a commissioned study (n=5011) conducted by Forrester Consulting, 2020

## What would make you feel included in your company culture?



## 5/ Respect and inclusion

**65% say their work environment feels inclusive and respectful of all people.**

The most important dimensions people report for driving a sense of respect and inclusion are: being able to express work-related opinions and ideas freely, an ability to express personality without being judged, in any way. Being able to express non-work opinions and ideas, and having cultural values respected are also important.

Managers and more senior workers feel slightly higher inclusivity and respect in the workplace than do less senior workers (70% vs 62%), and younger workers more so than Gen X (Gen Z: 67%, Gen X: 63%).

How much do you agree or disagree with the statements below about your current workplace? (Agree = 4 or 5 on 5pt scale)

What would make you feel included in your company culture? (Select up to 3)

Indeed Work Happiness in America Report, a commissioned study (n=5011) conducted by Forrester Consulting, 2020

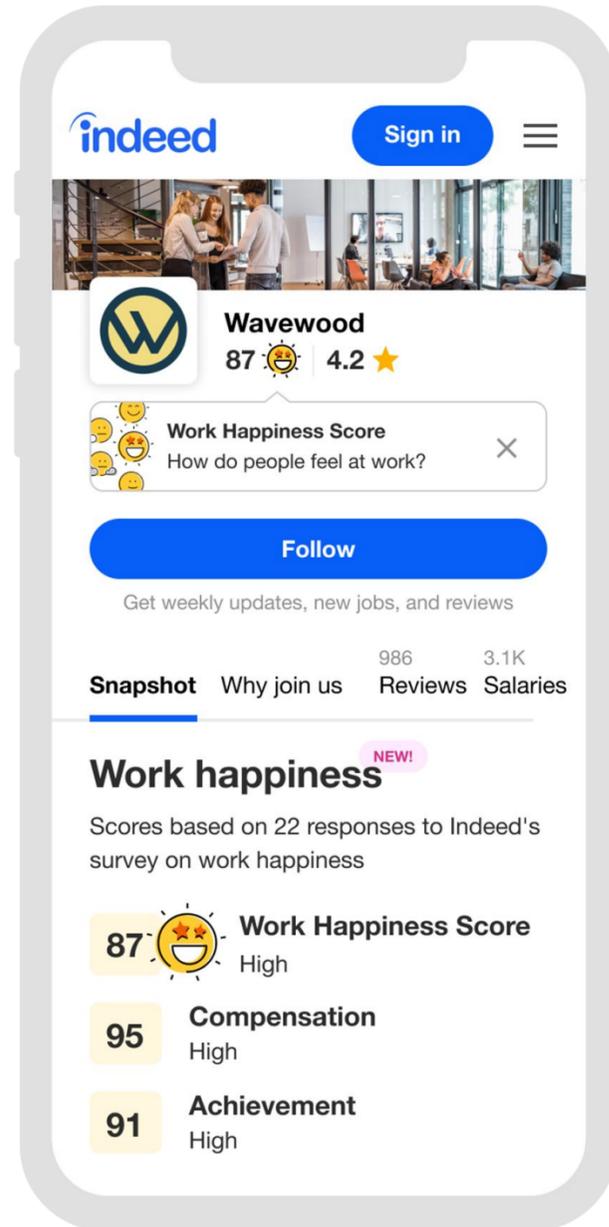
**“ Our research has shown that happiness at work increases productivity and performance. So we shouldn’t just measure financial metrics, companies should also look at employee wellbeing metrics — after all, we treasure what we measure.”**

— Dr. Jan-Emmanuel de Neve, Professor of Economics at Saïd Business School, University of Oxford

# What's next?

Our plan to help elevate work happiness.

# Introducing the Work Happiness Score



To bring new clarity to how people are feeling at work, Indeed has created the Work Happiness Score.

Derived from millions of data points from users, the Work Happiness Score shows how happy people are at companies, and the ability to see what's driving happiness: factors ranging from inclusion and belonging to feeling supported and appreciated.

Job seekers, employees and managers can find the Work Happiness Score at [go.indeed.com/happiness](https://go.indeed.com/happiness).

The Work Happiness Score evaluation methodology has been developed with the guidance of Dr. Sonja Lyubomirsky (Distinguished Professor of Psychology and Vice Chair, University of California, Riverside), and Dr. Jan-Emmanuel de Neve (Professor of Economics at Saïd Business School, University of Oxford).

In addition, Indeed has worked with Harvard Business Review Analytical Services to understand business leaders' perspectives on work happiness; this work will be published in May 2020.

# Work Happiness Score

How are  
you feeling  
at work?

[go.indeed.com/happiness](https://go.indeed.com/happiness)