



# Flipping the script

Working men disrupt gender constructs

October 2024

*Deloitte's DEI Institute™ sought to explore what success at work means to women, the barriers they face in achieving it, and the supports they require from their organizations.*

*After surveying workers across genders and generations, responses from **men** revealed the need for a deeper conversation.*

*This research affirms that many of the aspirations and needs women have been championing are universal—and the solutions can benefit everyone.*

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# The imperative

## We need to talk about working men<sup>i</sup>

Many organizations have put a lot of effort into trying to make work “work” for *women*.<sup>ii</sup>

And yet, despite these well-intentioned efforts, undeniable gaps continue to persist. Women constitute 58% of the United States workforce, yet only occupy 35% of senior leadership positions<sup>1</sup> and make up only 10.4% of Fortune 500 CEOs.<sup>2</sup> Inequities are further aggravated by persistent wage disparities, with women earning on average 16% less than men, and Black, Latina, and Native American women earning even less than the average for all women.<sup>3</sup> Stagnant organizational cultures continue to erode progress, as 43% of women report being on the receiving end of noninclusive behavior.<sup>4</sup>

Those who acknowledge the business advantage of having women as thriving members of the workforce understand gender inequity to be a liability. Research consistently shows women leaders are integral to improved organizational outcomes—contributing to more effective decision-making, enhanced innovation and transformation, better working environments, increased retention and productivity, and superior financial performance.<sup>5</sup> The imperative to determine how to ensure women at work succeed is clear.

*But despite appearances to the contrary, today’s corporate environment isn’t designed to support the success of most men either.*

For this research, Deloitte’s DEI Institute™ surveyed 4,016 adult workers (ages 21+) from private and publicly owned companies in the United States with a minimum of 500 employees, about what success at work means to them, the barriers they currently face in achieving it, and the supports they require from their organizations in order to do so. We then analyzed this data at the intersection of gender and generation, and it was the responses from *men* that revealed the need for a deeper conversation about what needs to change.

Our findings disrupt gendered assumptions that suggest there is a profound difference in what women, men, and nonbinary<sup>iii</sup> workers want and need. Rather, organizational interventions that make assumptions based on narrowly defined gender constructs may continue to miss the mark and underserve the workforce as a whole. *Critically, gender bias and enduring norms can stifle all workers—including men—and undermine well-intentioned efforts toward fostering gender equity and belonging at work.*

Because men hold the majority of senior leadership positions in the United States, they play a critical role in achieving gender equity and influencing organizational culture.<sup>6</sup> However, they are too often positioned *only* as allies in this cause, rather than as the potential beneficiaries of changes. The benefits of gender equity for men—such as freedom from restrictive gender stereotypes and roles, improved well-being, and more rewarding relationships<sup>7</sup>—are rarely emphasized, yet can be leveraged to meaningfully engage men as active participants in these efforts.

Challenging the gender norms that men, women, and nonbinary individuals are routinely measured against can lead to greater productivity, increased commitment, and the enhanced belonging and psychological safety of all workers.<sup>8</sup> As our research reveals, doing so is critical to recognizing the barriers workers are experiencing and providing the supports they *actually* need to succeed.<sup>iv</sup>

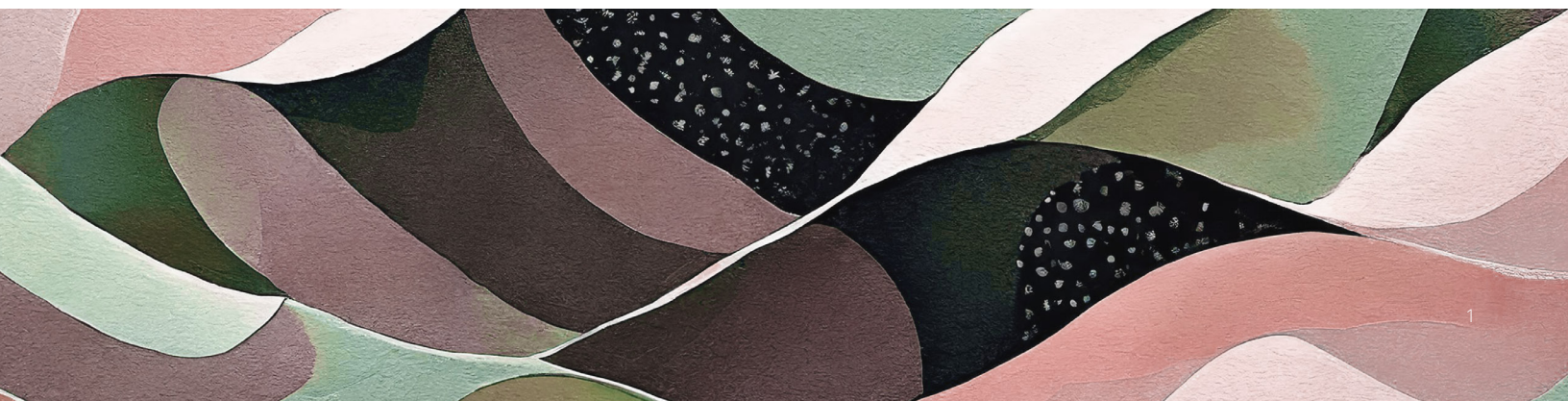
**While women and nonbinary workers strive to “flip the gender scripts” that limit them in ways that make work better for everyone, our research affirms that men across generations are looking to do the same.**

i This report refers to “men” as those who self-identify as such, whether cisgender or transgender.

ii This report refers to “women” as those who self-identify as such, whether cisgender or transgender.

iii This report uses “nonbinary” as an umbrella term to refer to those whose gender self-identifications are not exclusively man or woman.

iv While this report analyzes respondent data at the intersection of gender and generation, intersectionality necessitates an acknowledgment and understanding of the unique experiences of workers across other facets of identity—including but not limited to race/ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, etc.



# The status quo

## Restrictive gender constructs are stifling progress for everyone

Work cultures often exhibit and reinforce *masculine defaults*, a form of gender bias in which certain socially constructed and stereotypical characteristics, behaviors, and values associated with men are expected and rewarded.<sup>9</sup> Western industrialized societies have long perceived these masculine defaults as necessary due to the historical dominance of men in these spaces.<sup>10</sup> These biases are often deeply embedded in the ways we conceptualize work and work culture—often undetected in the design and execution of processes and programs—and therefore are difficult to challenge.<sup>11</sup>

Gender norms define how women and men *are expected to* behave, and any actions outside these culturally specific and reinforced behaviors are often criticized or rejected.<sup>12</sup> These are generally framed as oppositional, with women stereotyped as having communal or *feminine* characteristics, such as interdependence, nurturance, and agreeability, and men as having agency or *masculine* characteristics such as self-reliance, assertiveness, and rationality.<sup>13</sup> *Femininity* and *masculinity* are defined by the behaviors, roles, and attributes associated with women and men, respectively. However, individuals of all genders can exhibit these traits, and research indicates that both types are essential for success at work.<sup>14</sup> They have historically, however, been ascribed different values that are reinforced by social structures.<sup>15</sup>

Importantly, men are more likely to be socialized to conform to these definitions of masculinity and, therefore, many benefit from masculine defaults, especially heterosexual, White, cisgender men.<sup>16</sup> These biases are perpetuated when senior leaders reflect these characteristics.<sup>17</sup> Men who do not conform to these gender norms, and nonheterosexual men, women, and nonbinary individuals especially, are more likely to be disadvantaged.<sup>18</sup>

Masculine defaults can create structural barriers to women's advancement (e.g., embedded in seemingly objective performance measures, decisions regarding project assignments, or development opportunities).<sup>19</sup> Women additionally face a unique double bind—they may be perceived as less competent when conforming to feminine norms, and yet experience negative repercussions (such as being regarded as unlikable or unemployable) when demonstrating traditionally masculine traits or behaviors.<sup>20</sup> The consequences of challenging gender norms and stereotypes further vary across racial groups.<sup>21</sup> Traits or behaviors traditionally associated with masculinity or expected of men may simply go unrecognized in women.<sup>22</sup> These gender norms persist beyond the workplace, as our research confirms women continue to report taking on the greatest responsibility for caregiving (childcare: 68%; care for adult dependents: 76%) and domestic tasks (71%), in addition to their work responsibilities.<sup>23</sup>

### Masculine defaults at work might include:

- Equating being more vocal or visible with confidence or competence<sup>24</sup>
- Preferring hierarchical and authoritative leadership styles over democratic and participatory approaches<sup>25</sup>
- Organizing networking events around traditionally masculine activities (e.g., men's sports games, happy hours) and scheduling these outside of work hours<sup>26</sup>
- Emphasizing individual achievement and competition over collective success and cooperation<sup>27</sup>
- Relying heavily on quantitative success metrics that may not capture the scope of an individual's contributions when assessing performance<sup>28</sup>
- Requiring workers to engage in self-promotion for professional advancement<sup>29</sup>
- Expecting workers to prioritize work over other responsibilities, or expecting constant availability<sup>30</sup>

But research shows that men, like women, are *also* penalized when defying masculine stereotypes in the workplace, discouraging them from engaging in behaviors that could otherwise be of benefit.<sup>31</sup> They are more likely to earn less and are perceived to have less leadership potential when being communal or warm, and as less competent or likable when practicing empathy or similar behaviors.<sup>32</sup> Because narrow definitions of masculinity in particular are easily threatened and require that they be constantly proven or earned through adherence to gender norms,<sup>33</sup> conforming men risk anxiety, depression, aggression, and harmful behaviors to self and others at work, due to fear of judgment or ridicule.<sup>34</sup>

These enduring gender constructs may prevent individuals of all genders from authentic expression and, left unchallenged, can prevent leaders from acknowledging what actually motivates workers, understanding the barriers they may be facing, and providing the supports they need to succeed—all to the benefit or cost to the organization.

# The shift

## What working men *really* want

With growing social awareness of the potential harms of restrictive gender norms, the importance of embracing more inclusive, healthy, and emotionally conscious forms of gender expression has never been more pressing.<sup>35</sup> While women have played a pivotal role in heralding this call to action,<sup>36</sup> our research findings indicate that men are breaking from gender scripts and calling on organizations to acknowledge and champion their true needs.

### Working men's definitions of success defy traditional gender stereotypes

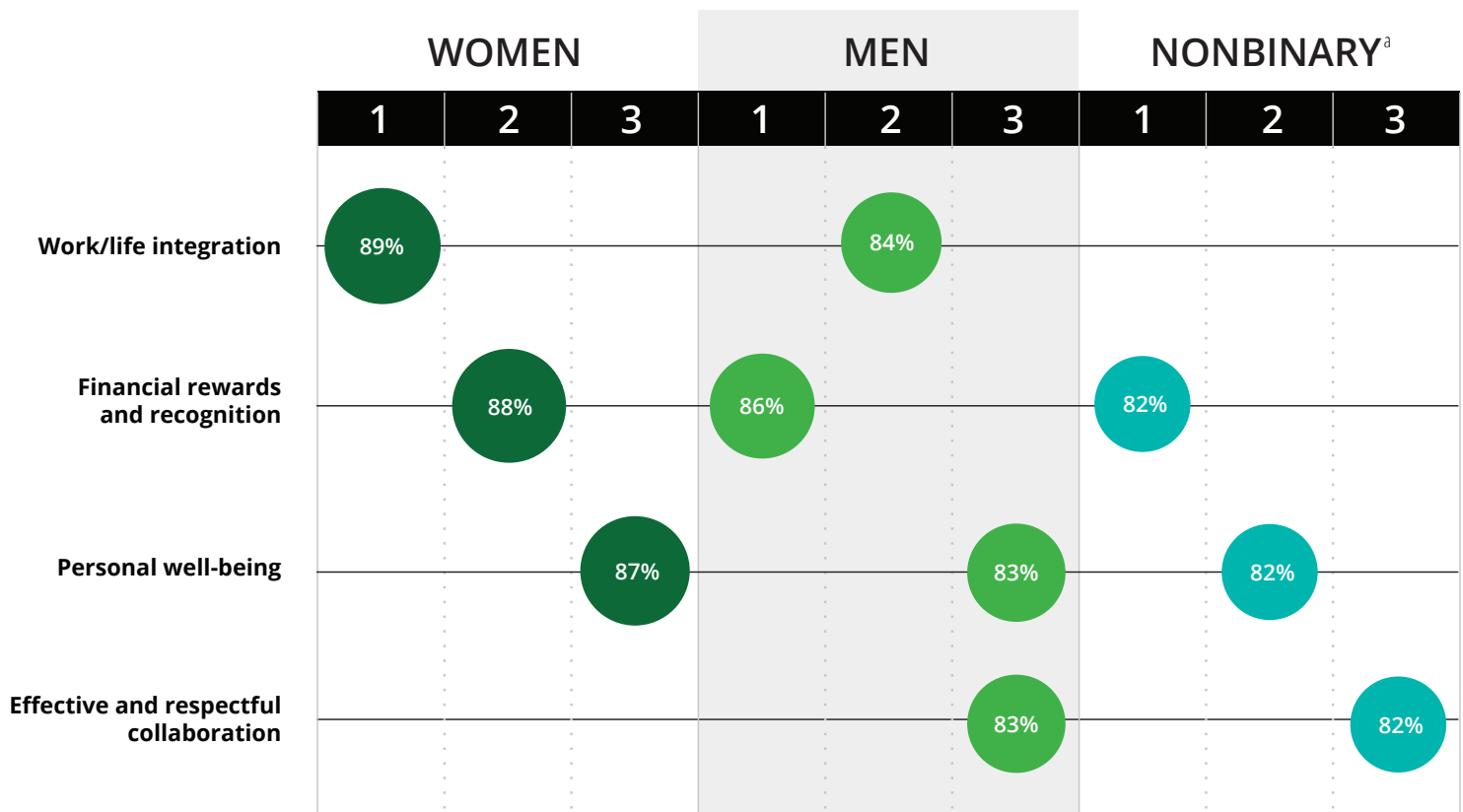
Successful performance of masculine norms has long been tied to earnings at work.<sup>37</sup> But as women's financial contributions have steadily increased over the past 50 years and have become more equal in opposite-sex marriages,<sup>38</sup> and as economic uncertainty has led younger generations of men to rethink their relationship with work,<sup>39</sup> men, like women and nonbinary workers, are looking for more.

When asked to rank the importance of various criteria in defining what success at work means to them, workers' responses reveal more similarities than differences across gender (figure 1).

Figure 1

### Top 3 definitions of success as reported by women, men and nonbinary workers

■ Women ■ Men ■ Nonbinary



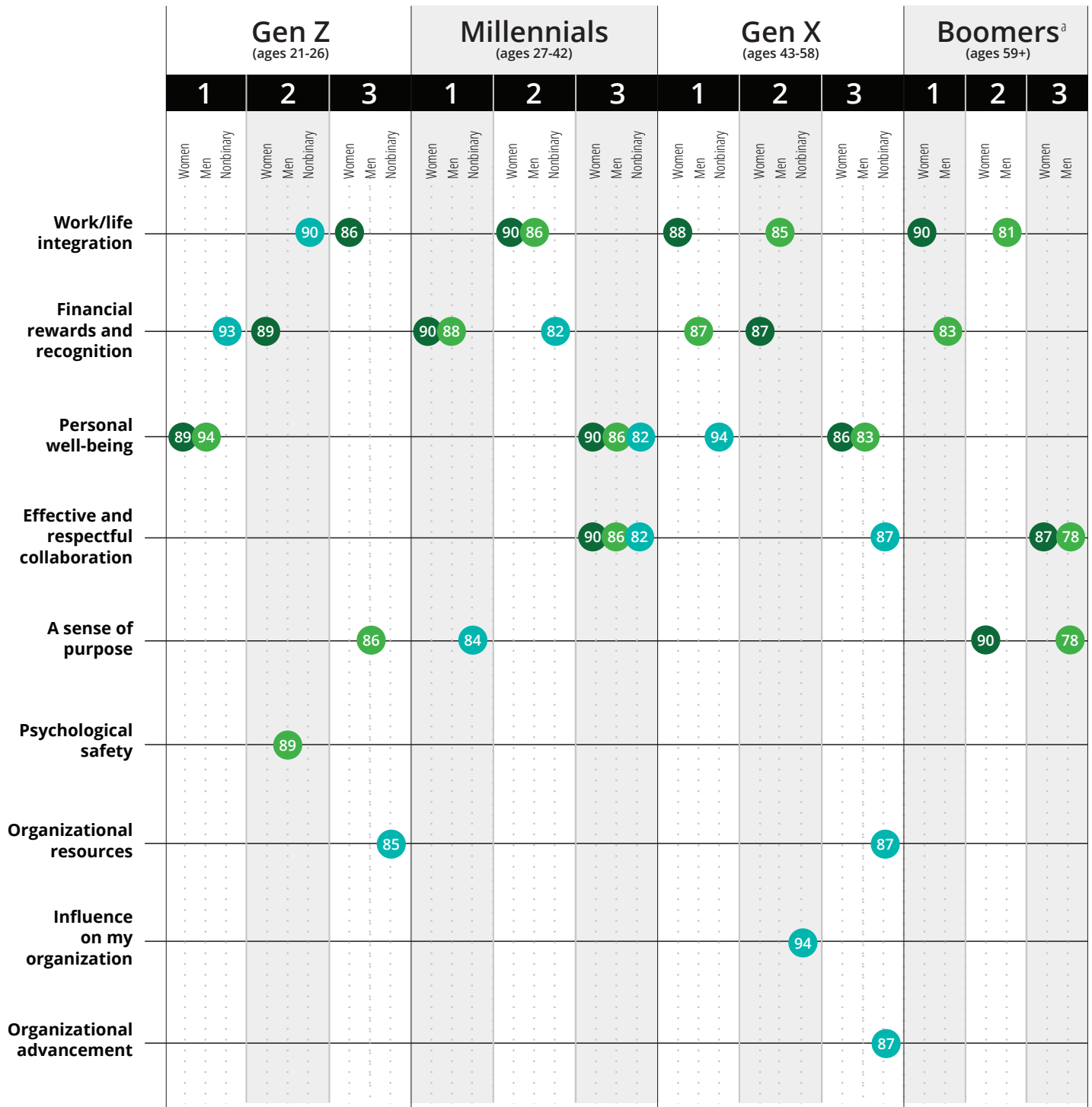
(a) For the purposes of data analysis, nonbinary is used as an umbrella term to refer to survey respondents who self-identified as nonbinary, gender nonconforming, or agender.

A generational analysis<sup>v</sup> provides further insight into men's definitions of success that question—and are perhaps a response to—orthodoxies about what men really want from work.

Figure 2

## Top 3 overall definitions of success by generation as reported by women, men and nonbinary workers (%)

■ Women ■ Men ■ Nonbinary



(a) No survey respondents among the baby boomer generation self-identified as nonbinary, gender nonconforming, or agender. For purposes of data analysis, respondents who self-identified as ages 78+ were aggregated with baby boomers due to small sample size (n=14).

<sup>v</sup> Generational groupings of respondents at age of survey completion include Gen Z (ages 21–26), millennials (27–42), Gen X (43–58), and baby boomers (59+).

## Disrupting gender constructs Working men across generations redefine success

### Personal well-being

*"[Success is] being able to manage your work and personal life effectively, maintain your physical and mental health, and increase your sense of well-being and satisfaction."*

—Working man, age 44

*"[Success is] being able to maintain physical and mental health and happiness at work, avoiding excessive stress and negative effects caused by work."*

—Working man, age 48

Studies on Gen Z often indicate they value and normalize prioritizing mental health and wellness at work,<sup>40</sup> and "personal well-being" is the top definition of success for both Gen Z and millennial women (tied with "financial rewards and recognition"), Gen Z men, and Gen X nonbinary workers. Interestingly, "personal well-being" is **most strongly endorsed by Gen Z men (94%, along with Gen X nonbinary workers), in contrast to traditional masculine stereotypes associated with toughness,<sup>41</sup> control, and detachment.** "Personal well-being" is also a top three definition of success for every generation of women and men except baby boomers, and millennial and Gen X nonbinary workers.

### Psychological safety

*"[Success is having] good relations with superiors and subordinates, with a certain right to speak."*

—Working man, age 34

*"[Success is] loyalty, trust, and honesty."*

—Working man, age 55

While research has found that Gen Z workers prefer work structures that allow them the ability to share ideas, ask questions, make mistakes, and ask for help, "psychological safety"—a "team climate characterized by interpersonal trust and mutual respect in which people are comfortable being themselves"<sup>42</sup>—is **uniquely identified as the second-most highly endorsed definition of success by Gen Z men, who may be looking for permission to show up vulnerably and without fear of judgment or shame.**

### Work/life integration

*"Success at work for me is defined as accomplishing all my goals and adding value for my employer, while still maintaining a balance with my home life that allows me to be there for my family."*

—Working man, age 59

*"[Success is] effectively managing work and personal life needs; having time and energy to invest in family, leisure hobbies, and self-development."*

—Working man, age 41

Too often positioned as a goal for women alone, "work/life integration" is a top three definition of success for nearly every cohort across gender and generation except Gen Z men, as well as millennial and Gen X nonbinary workers. Our research confirms that **men are also searching for harmony between work and other aspects of their lives,<sup>43</sup> but gendered stigmas limiting the definition of success to being "on the job"<sup>vi</sup> often prevent men from achieving this<sup>44</sup> and can also hinder women's and nonbinary workers' capacities to do the same.**

### Effective and respectful collaboration

*"Success at work begins with communication, working on the same page, giving respect and getting respect, [while] working alongside your teammates."*

—Working man, age 65

*"Whether it is giving help and support to others or suggesting innovation and improvement, being able to actively participate in teamwork and contribute to the development of the entire organization is part of success at work."*

—Working man, age 52

Identified by millennial and baby boomer women and men, and millennial and Gen X nonbinary workers as one of their top three definitions of success, "effective and respectful collaboration" reveals **a need to balance long-established masculine defaults of self-reliance, competition, and individualism.**

<sup>vi</sup> "On the job" refers to the societal expectation or stereotype that men should primarily focus on their professional responsibilities and work-related activities.



A number of men’s definitions of success at work indicate a shift among younger generations (figure 3). By more strongly endorsing “personal well-being,” “psychological safety,” “organizational culture that fosters belonging,” “organizational resources,” and “appreciation and recognition (nonfinancial)” as important to them, these men seem to be calling for more supportive organizational cultures and are reconceptualizing what success at work looks like for men more generally.

While women are more or less consistent in their endorsement of these definitions regardless of generation, *men’s endorsement demonstrates a distinctly observable correlation with generation* (the younger the generation, the greater the reported importance). Moreover, while endorsement of these criteria on the aggregate is highest for women across gender cohorts, Gen Z men endorse more strongly than Gen Z women and Gen Z nonbinary workers. Interestingly, nonbinary respondents’ endorsement correlates with generation for “personal well-being” and “organizational culture that fosters belonging”—but in the *reverse* (the older the generation, the greater the reported importance).

These findings seem to contradict the suggestion that men are more motivated than women by individual rather than collective factors, such as organizational culture,<sup>45</sup> and are consistent with research that says that younger men exhibit more stereotypically feminine approaches to structuring and relating at work.<sup>46</sup>

Figure 3

### Men's shifting definitions of success Importance of success criteria, correlating with generation



*Men are just as likely or even less likely than women to report having accomplished most of the success criteria they both value*

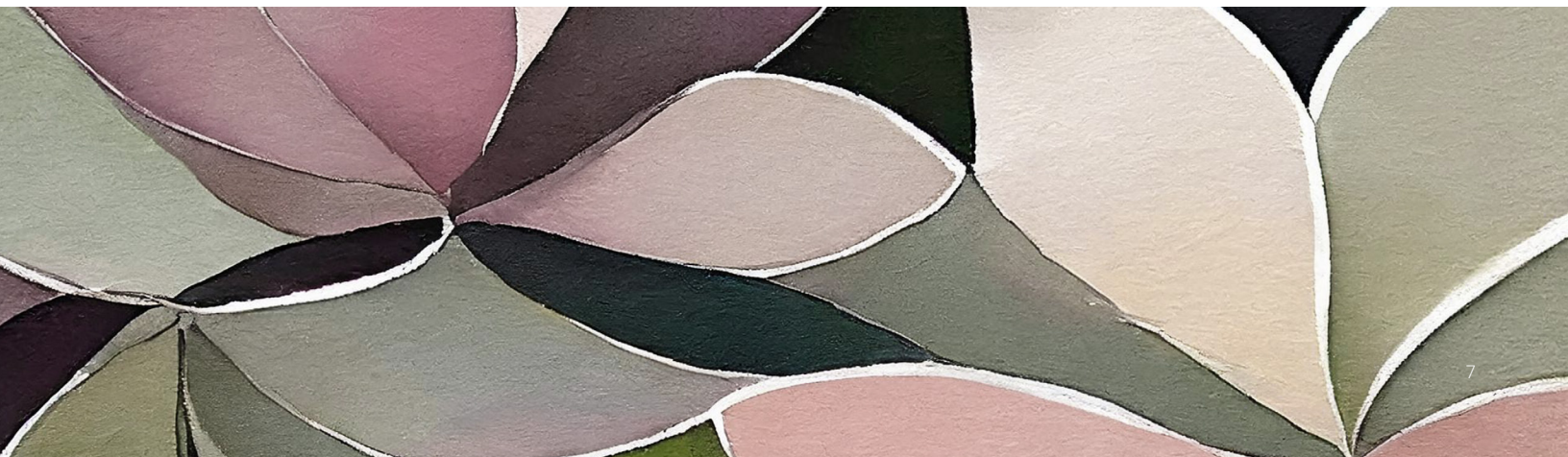
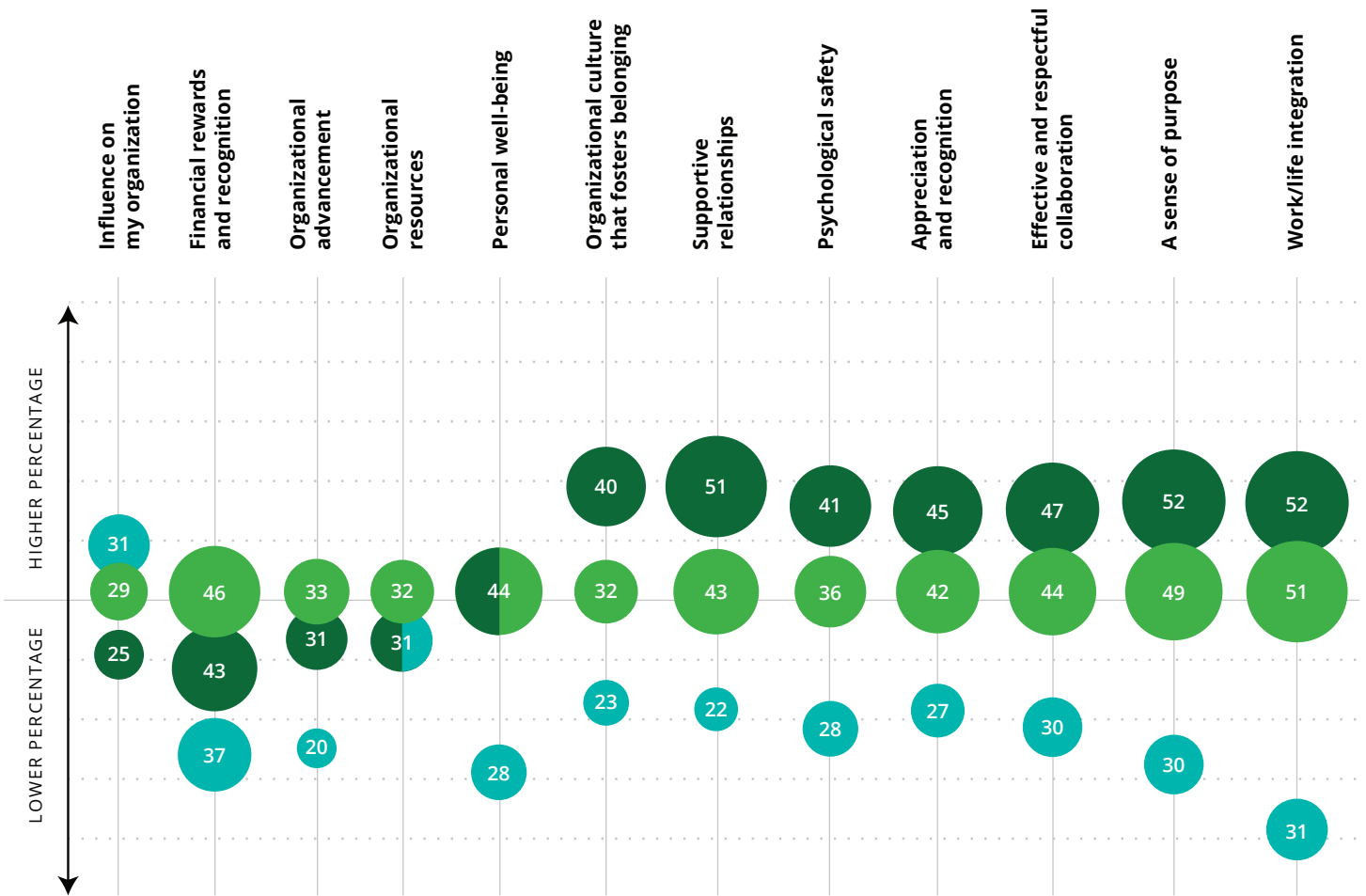
Notwithstanding the masculine defaults from which they are more likely to benefit, men, along with women and nonbinary workers, report relatively low achievement of the success measures they deem to be “very” or “extremely” important (figure 4).

Figure 4

**Perceived accomplishment of success**

Women, men, and nonbinary workers who perceive accomplishment of success criteria they rate as “very” or “extremely” important (%)

■ Women ■ Men ■ Nonbinary



Among those who rate the above success criteria as “very” or “extremely” important, women are slightly less likely than men to report accomplishing “influence on my organization,” “financial rewards and recognition,” “organizational advancement,” and having the necessary “organizational resources.” Women are equally as likely as men to report having accomplished “personal well-being.” While nonbinary workers are least likely to report accomplishing nearly all success criteria, they are equally as likely as women to report having the necessary “organizational resources” and most likely overall to report accomplishing “influence on my organization.”

Notably, men are less likely than women to report having accomplished success criteria that relate to organizational culture and interpersonal relationships in particular, including an “organizational culture that fosters belonging,” “supportive relationships,” “psychological safety,” “appreciation and recognition,” “effective and respectful collaboration,” “a sense of purpose,” and “work/life integration.”

A generational analysis of the percentage point difference between rated importance and perceived accomplishment<sup>vi</sup> additionally uncovers that Gen Z and millennial workers are most likely to experience the greatest gaps in perceived achievement of success among women and men (figure 5). Nonbinary workers experience the greatest gaps overall, many of which are most pronounced for Gen X.

**In contrast to claims that women generally have a more negative perception of work culture than men,<sup>47</sup> these findings suggest a more nuanced interpretation. Because men historically outnumbered other genders in the workforce, earn more, and are overrepresented in senior leadership, it is easy to assume that work cultures are designed to support their overall success.<sup>48</sup> However it is precisely that gender bias that may be preventing some organizations from recognizing where intervention is most needed.**

*Organizations may have the opportunity to do a better job of supporting workers of all genders in accomplishing success on their terms, and in identifying obstacles experienced in the pursuit.*

<sup>vi</sup> Calculated for each cohort by subtracting the proportion of respondents who report having accomplished each success criterion from the proportion who report that criterion to be “very” or “extremely” important.

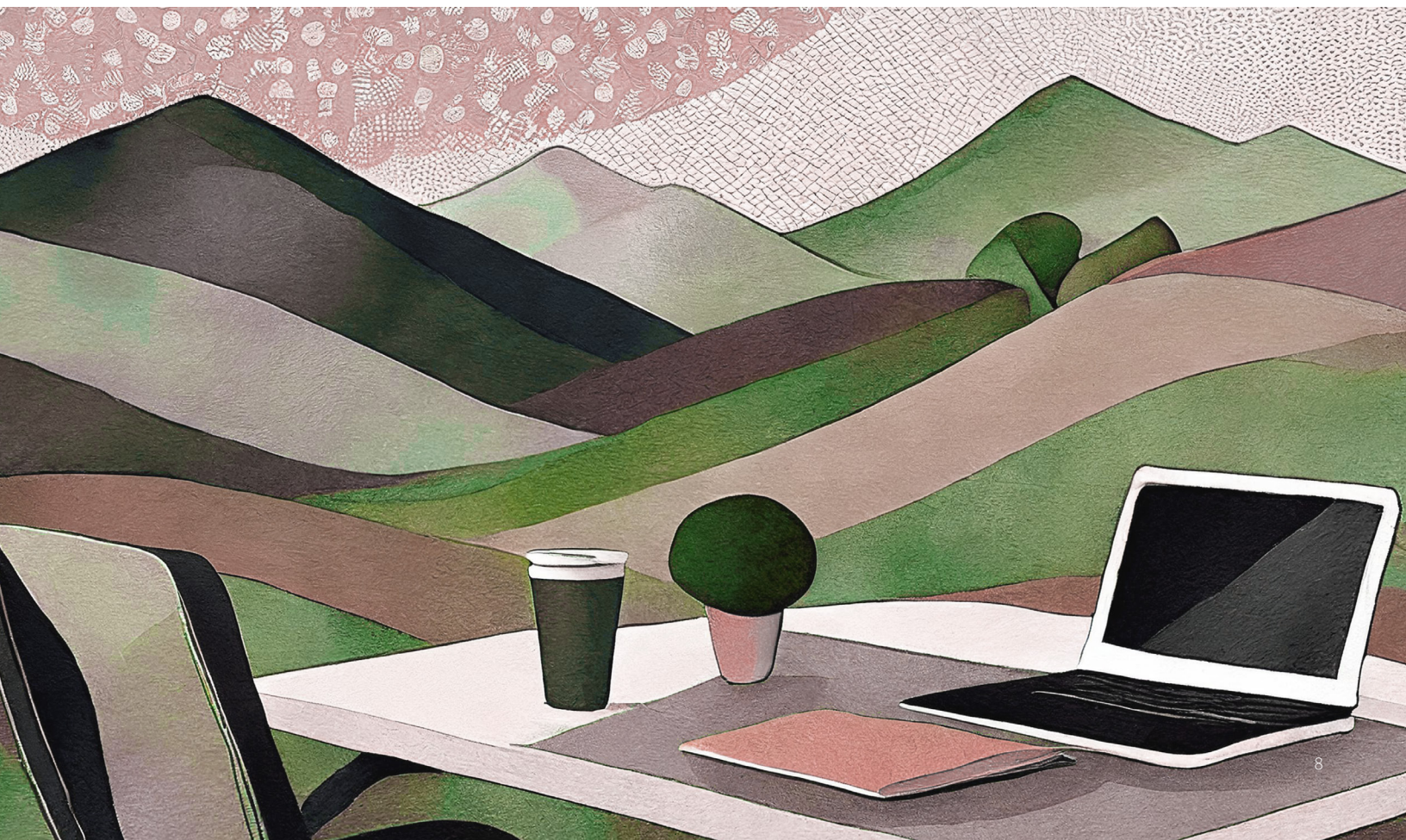
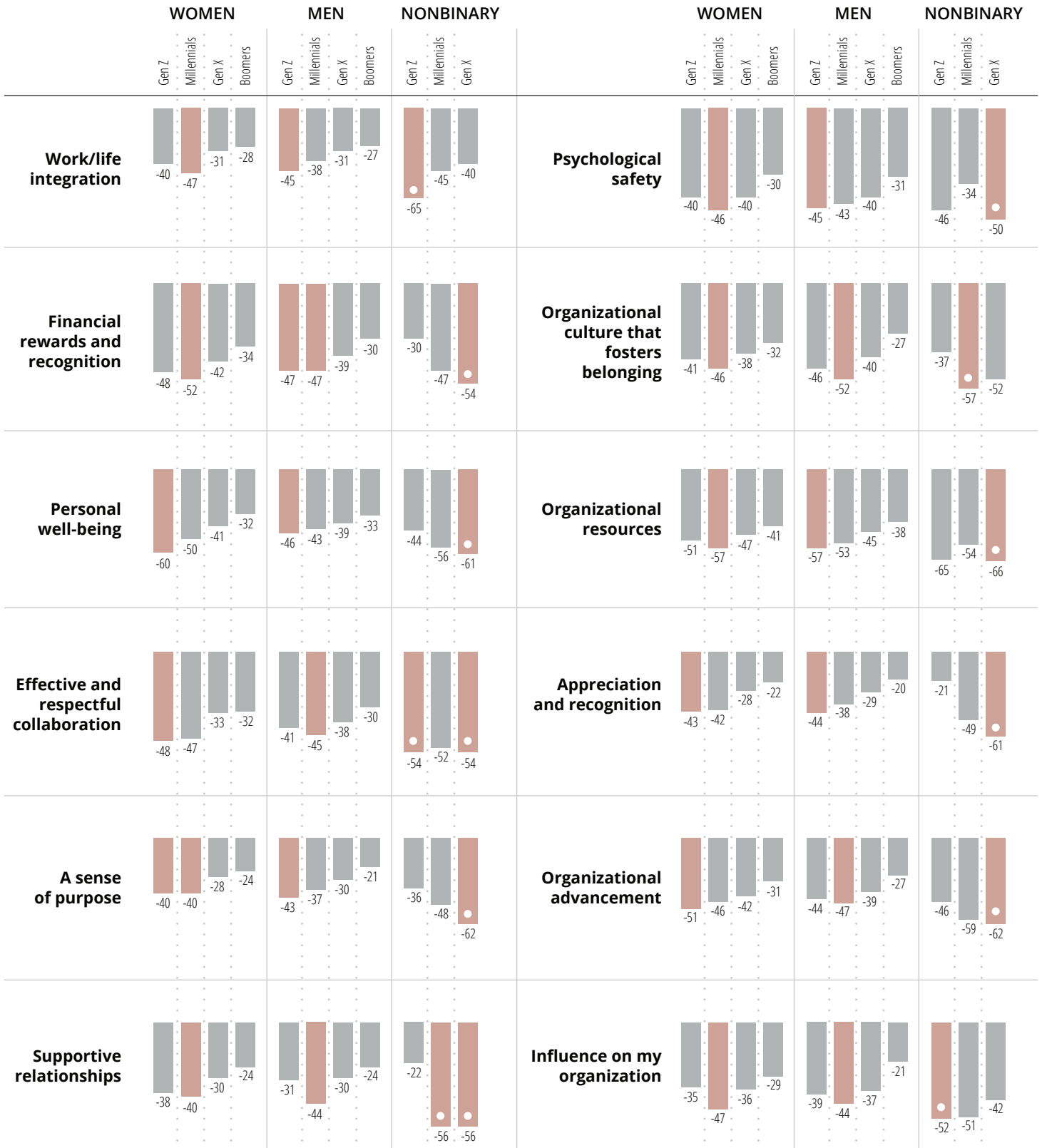


Figure 5

# Perceived achievement gaps

- Greatest perceived achievement gaps by generation
- Greatest perceived achievement gaps overall

**Equation calculation**  
 importance of success criterion — perceived accomplishment = perceived achievement gap (percentage point difference)



### *The barriers men identify and the supports they require reveal a need to disrupt assumptions of men at work*

When asked to identify barriers to their own success they have experienced at their organization in the last 12 months, women report “lack of financial rewards and recognition,” followed by “lack of organizational advancement” (figure 6). While slightly less strongly endorsed, these top two barriers are *also* reported by men, as are the top desired supports for these barriers (“pay increases aligned with my performance” and “opportunities for promotion to higher-level positions/clear path and expectations for promotion,” respectively).

The third top-rated barrier for women, “lack of appreciation and recognition (nonfinancial),” is actually only reported by baby boomer

women, and shared by Gen X and baby boomer men, while the third top barrier for men, “lack of organizational resources,” is reported by every generational cohort of men except Gen Z, as well as by Gen X women.

Intriguing subtleties appear in the variations of the top negative impact reported by both women and men for the same barrier experienced (figure 6).

The top three barriers identified by nonbinary respondents include “lack of financial rewards and recognition” (24%), “lack of supportive relationships” (23%), and “lack of purpose” (22%); however, we are unable to report on negative impacts or desired supports for nonbinary respondents, or complete a generational analysis, due to insufficient sample sizes.<sup>vii</sup>

<sup>vii</sup> The importance of obtaining representative data that speaks to the lived experiences of nonbinary workers cannot be understated, and provides impetus for gender-inclusive self-identification efforts and further research. We hope that inclusion of the data we were able to obtain from nonbinary workers helps narrow this gap further, and serves to meaningfully support organizations in working toward achieving gender-equitable outcomes and belonging at work for all.



Figure 6

## Top 3 overall barriers to success

with corresponding top negative impact experienced as a result, and top desired support as reported by women and men<sup>a</sup>

- Overall barrier
- Negative impact
- Desired support

WOMEN		MEN
<p><b>Lack of financial rewards and recognition</b> [28%]</p> <p>.....</p> <p><b>My plans to stay at my organization</b> [38%]</p> <p>.....</p> <p><b>Pay increases aligned with my performance</b> [56%]</p>	<b>1</b>	<p><b>Lack of financial rewards and recognition</b> [21%]</p> <p>.....</p> <p><b>My self-esteem/self-worth</b> [33%]</p> <p>.....</p> <p><b>Pay increases aligned with my performance</b> [45%]</p>
<p><b>Lack of organizational advancement</b> [21%]</p> <p>.....</p> <p><b>My ability to develop professionally</b> [36%]</p> <p>.....</p> <p><b>Opportunities for promotion to higher-level positions/clear path and expectations for promotion</b> [31%]</p>	<b>2</b>	<p><b>Lack of organizational advancement</b> [19%]</p> <p>.....</p> <p><b>My ability to develop professionally</b> [29%]</p> <p><b>My trust in leaders at my organization</b> [29%]</p> <p>.....</p> <p><b>Opportunities for promotion to higher-level positions/clear path and expectations for promotion</b> [20%]</p>
<p><b>Lack of appreciation and recognition (nonfinancial)</b> [19%]</p> <p>.....</p> <p><b>My trust in leaders at my organization</b> [46%]</p> <p>.....</p> <p><b>My managers/senior leaders expressing their value and appreciation for me</b> [27%]</p>	<b>3</b>	<p><b>Lack of organizational resources</b> [19%]</p> <p>.....</p> <p><b>My ability to perform my job</b> [37%]</p> <p>.....</p> <p><b>Effective team communication</b> [28%]</p>

(a) The percentages for the top barriers represent the proportion of women or men who identified each barrier. Similarly, the percentages for the top negative impacts and top desired supports indicate the proportion of women and men who reported each barrier. We are unable to report on nonbinary respondents for this analysis due to insufficient sample size. This also applies to the generational analysis in figure 7 (pages 14-17).



## Disrupting gender constructs

Barriers to success and desired supports, for working men across generations

### My mental well-being

*"[The] stigma around mental health discourages individuals from seeking help when needed, impacting job performance and career prospects."*

—Working man, age 28

*"Long hours, high levels of stress, and neglect of rest can lead to physical and mental health problems and relationship distress."*

—Working man, age 30

*"I face a lot of mental obstacles that I never speak about but I just push through it all."*

—Working man, age 28

*"I need the time to take care of my spouse and to take care of myself. I can't do my job when I [have] personal issues that are ignored by my leaders."*

—Working man, age 51

For Gen Z men, the top negative impact of "lack of purpose" (the only cohort to report this as the top barrier and only cohort of men to note this as a top three barrier) is "my mental well-being." This top negative impact is only otherwise noted by millennial women, likewise for the top three barrier of "lack of purpose." As noted previously, **this finding corroborates Gen Z men's prioritization of and attention to personal well-being.**

### Encouragement and/or reward for speaking up

*"I'm too shy to reach out when needed. I have self-doubt and a hard time reaching out. Most of my team is remote so I'm having problems connecting."*

—Working man, age 61

*"The company and leaders can encourage me to demonstrate innovation and autonomy, giving me the opportunity to propose new ideas and solutions."*

—Working man, age 41

*"[The support needed is] an internal culture that doesn't penalize staff for mistakes where staff have piloted new ideas but uses them as opportunities to learn lessons and grow."*

—Working man, age 61

*"I would like to be able to talk to someone in case I ever feel unsafe. I would like to have mental health support, like having time off to see a doctor about my mental health. Also being able to feel safe for expressing my personality and sexuality."*

—Working man, age 31

The top desired support identified by and unique to millennial men in addressing a "lack of organizational advancement" is receiving "encouragement and/or reward for speaking up with ideas, questions, concerns, admitting mistakes, asking for help, being my authentic self and expressing my various identities."

Curiously, women's lack of organizational advancement is often attributed to insufficient self-advocacy, but gender socialization often discourages women from engaging in these behaviors.<sup>49</sup> **Whereas men are generally assumed to be self-promotional, assertive, and risk-taking, millennial men share that the support required to embody these traits may not be as readily available to them either.** Research shows that empathic leadership is highly valued by Gen Z<sup>50</sup> and is foundational for the cultivation of psychologically safe environments for all workers.

## Supportive relationships

*"I need my leaders to commend me for what I do and give me emotional support."*

—Working man, age 24

*"To achieve success, I need training and guidance from my organization, mentorship from leaders and [a] collaborative culture among colleagues."*

—Working man, age 45

*"[The support needed is] to be treated as human beings. Have respect for the people you manage. Work is not the only thing in their lives. They have personal issues and lives outside of work."*

—Working man, age 76

*"I just need general backup. Just real people who care. People who will understand."*

—Working man, age 22

While personal workplace relationships are widely considered a feminine value sought by younger generations,<sup>51</sup> baby boomer men are the only cohort to note a "lack of supportive relationships" as a top three barrier to success at work. Gen Z men experiencing a "lack of work/life integration" particularly note "my social well-being" as the top negative impact of this barrier and are seeking "strong interpersonal relationships with colleagues" as a support.

**Men—in contrast to masculine stereotypes of self-reliance, competitiveness, and individualism—are expressly looking for connection with others at work.**

## Effective team communication

*"Excessive competition among colleagues always creates a hostile work environment and hinders collaboration."*

—Working man, age 44

*"Misunderstandings and differences in communication styles can create barriers to effective collaboration and integration within diverse work environments."*

—Working man, age 28

*"Establish transparent and open communication ... to facilitate the flow of information and exchange of views."*

—Working man, age 62

*"[The support needed is] high levels of collaboration, trust, and very good listening skills. A willingness to participate openly and with a great heart [to address] certain barriers like loss of connection."*

—Working man, age 60

Every generation of men (except Gen Z) notes "effective team communication" as the top desired support for the barrier of "lack of organizational resources" (the top support noted by Gen X women, the only group of women to share this top three barrier, is "opportunities for professional learning and development"). An acknowledgment of "lack of organizational resources" suggests that **men across generations see their success in direct relationship to the supports they receive, despite masculine conventions of self-reliance, autonomy, and resourcefulness; and "effective team communication" as a remedy that instead emphasizes collaboration and connection.** It is also the top desired support of baby boomer men for the barrier of "lack of supportive relationships."



A deeper analysis of the barriers, negative impacts, and desired supports detailed by men of all generations further corroborates how gender bias can contribute to the misalignment of organizational efforts with the lived experiences of workers (figure 7):

Figure 7

## Top 3 barriers for Gen Z

with corresponding top negative impact experienced as a result, and top desired support as reported by women and men

- Overall barrier
- Negative impact
- Desired support

WOMEN		MEN
<p>Lack of organizational advancement [29%]</p> <hr style="border-top: 1px dotted #000;"/> <p>My plans to stay at my organization [43%]</p> <hr style="border-top: 1px dotted #000;"/> <p>Opportunities for professional learning and development [27%] (e.g., workshops, conferences, educational stipends)</p>	1	<p>Lack of purpose [22%]</p> <hr style="border-top: 1px dotted #000;"/> <p>My mental well-being [37%] My ability to be successful at work [37%]</p> <hr style="border-top: 1px dotted #000;"/> <p>Mentors and sponsors who advocate for me [27%]</p>
<p>Lack of financial rewards and recognition [28%]</p> <hr style="border-top: 1px dotted #000;"/> <p>My willingness to perform my job to the best of my ability [40%]</p> <hr style="border-top: 1px dotted #000;"/> <p>Pay increases aligned with my performance [48%]</p>	2	<p>Lack of financial rewards and recognition [20%]</p> <hr style="border-top: 1px dotted #000;"/> <p>My self-esteem/self-worth [42%]</p> <hr style="border-top: 1px dotted #000;"/> <p>Pay increases aligned with my performance [36%]</p>
<p>Lack of purpose [24%]</p> <hr style="border-top: 1px dotted #000;"/> <p>My willingness to perform my job to the best of my ability [41%]</p> <hr style="border-top: 1px dotted #000;"/> <p>Pay increases aligned with my performance [18%] Opportunities to work on challenging and/or meaningful projects [18%] My colleagues expressing their value and appreciation for me [18%] Colleagues and leaders who nurture self-confidence, belief, and esteem [18%] Organization providing access to opportunities for professional development to all talent [18%]</p>	3	<p>Lack of work/life integration [20%]</p> <hr style="border-top: 1px dotted #000;"/> <p>My social well-being [52%]</p> <hr style="border-top: 1px dotted #000;"/> <p>Paid time off [26%] Strong interpersonal relationships with colleagues [26%]</p>

## Top 3 barriers for millennials

with corresponding top negative impact experienced as a result, and top desired support as reported by women and men

- Overall barrier
- Negative impact
- Desired support

WOMEN		MEN
<p>Lack of financial rewards and recognition [29%]</p> <p>.....</p> <p>My plans to stay at my organization [40%]</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Pay increases aligned with my performance [48%]</p>	1	<p>Lack of financial rewards and recognition [22%]</p> <p>.....</p> <p>My plans to stay at my organization [34%]</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Pay increases aligned with my performance [40%]</p>
<p>Lack of organizational advancement [24%]</p> <p>.....</p> <p>My ability to develop professionally [34%]</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Opportunities for promotion to higher-level positions/clear path and expectations for promotion [28%]</p>	2	<p>Lack of organizational advancement [22%]</p> <p>.....</p> <p>My ability to develop professionally [28%]</p> <p>My plans to stay at my organization [28%]</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Encouragement and/or reward for speaking up with ideas, questions, concerns, admitting mistakes, asking for help, being my authentic self and expressing my various identities [18%]</p> <p>Opportunities for professional learning and development (e.g., workshops, conferences, educational stipends) [18%]</p>
<p>Lack of work/life integration [20%]</p> <p>.....</p> <p>My mental well-being [38%]</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Flexible work hours [30%]</p>	3	<p>Lack of organizational resources [21%]</p> <p>.....</p> <p>My ability to perform my job [31%]</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Effective team communication [31%]</p>
<p>Lack of purpose [20%]</p> <p>.....</p> <p>My mental well-being [30%]</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Frequent and clear feedback regarding performance [17%]</p>		

## Top 3 barriers for Gen X

with corresponding top negative impact experienced as a result, and top desired support as reported by women and men

- Overall barrier
- Negative impact
- Desired support

WOMEN		MEN
<p>Lack of financial rewards and recognition [29%]</p> <p>.....</p> <p>My plans to stay at my organization [38%]</p> <p>My respect for leaders at my organization [38%]</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Pay increases aligned with my performance [59%]</p>	1	<p>Lack of financial rewards and recognition [24%]</p> <p>.....</p> <p>My self-esteem/self-worth [36%]</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Pay increases aligned with my performance [47%]</p>
<p>Lack of organizational resources [22%]</p> <p>.....</p> <p>My ability to perform my job [46%]</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Opportunities for professional learning and development [31%] (e.g., workshops, conferences, educational stipends)</p>	2	<p>Lack of organizational resources [20%]</p> <p>.....</p> <p>My ability to perform my job [38%]</p> <p>My ability to be successful at work [38%]</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Effective team communication [24%]</p>
<p>Lack of organizational advancement [19%]</p> <p>.....</p> <p>My ability to develop professionally [41%]</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Opportunities for promotion to higher-level positions/clear path and expectations for promotion [37%]</p>	3	<p>Lack of organizational advancement [20%]</p> <p>.....</p> <p>My ability to develop professionally [28%]</p> <p>My plans to stay at my organization [28%]</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Opportunities for promotion to higher-level positions/clear path and expectations for promotion [23%]</p> <hr/> <p>Lack of appreciation and recognition [20%]</p> <p>.....</p> <p>My respect for leaders at my organization [35%]</p> <p>.....</p> <p>My managers/senior leaders expressing their value and appreciation for me [37%]</p>

# Top 3 barriers for baby boomers

with corresponding top negative impact experienced as a result, and top desired support as reported by women and men

- Overall barrier
- Negative impact
- Desired support

WOMEN		MEN
<p>Lack of financial rewards and recognition [25%]</p> <p>.....</p> <p>My respect for leaders at my organization [39%]</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Pay increases aligned with my performance [69%]</p>	1	<p>Lack of financial rewards and recognition [17%]</p> <p>.....</p> <p>My respect for leaders at my organization [49%]</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Pay increases aligned with my performance [54%]</p>
<p>Lack of appreciation and recognition (nonfinancial) [21%]</p> <p>.....</p> <p>My respect for leaders at my organization [54%]</p> <p>.....</p> <p>My managers/senior leaders expressing their value and appreciation for me [27%]</p>	2	<p>Lack of organizational resources [16%]</p> <p>.....</p> <p>My ability to perform my job [52%]</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Effective team communication [26%]</p>
<p>Lack of organizational advancement [18%]</p> <p>.....</p> <p>My trust in leaders at my organization [44%]</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Opportunities for promotion to higher-level positions/clear path and expectations for promotion [31%]</p>	3	<p>Lack of organizational advancement [14%]</p> <p>.....</p> <p>My trust in leaders at my organization [33%]</p> <p>My ability to develop professionally [33%]</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Opportunities for promotion to higher-level positions/clear path and expectations for promotion [25%]</p> <hr/> <p>Lack of supportive relationships [14%]</p> <p>.....</p> <p>My trust in leaders at my organization [47%]</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Effective team communication [31%]</p> <hr/> <p>Lack of appreciation and recognition [14%]</p> <p>.....</p> <p>My trust in leaders at my organization [44%]</p> <p>.....</p> <p>My managers/senior leaders expressing their value and appreciation for me [40%]</p>

## Younger generations of men are more likely than older generations to report engaging in behaviors that benefit others

Thriving organizations are often those whose cultures position success as a collective and communal pursuit, rather than an individual undertaking. However, when workers practice supportive behaviors—and even the same behaviors—men are likely to receive higher levels of encouragement and material rewards than women.<sup>52</sup> Due to gender socialization,<sup>53</sup> women are more likely to provide emotional and esteem support, while men are more likely to engage in instrumental behaviors<sup>54</sup> (see figure 8 for examples of these behaviors). The types of supports that are then *valued* by organizations reveal gendered biases. Stereotypically feminine supports, when exhibited by women, are more likely to go unnoticed.<sup>55</sup>

When workers<sup>viii</sup> were asked to rate the frequency with which they engage in a number of supportive behaviors at their organization, results confirm that on the aggregate, women report engaging in most of the emotional and esteem supportive behaviors at higher rates than men (figure 8). Women also engage in informational supports at equal and slightly higher rates than men. Men report engaging in most instrumental, as well as social supports, at slightly higher rates than women.

viii We are unable to report on nonbinary respondents for this analysis, due to insufficient sample size.

However, younger generations of men are more likely than older to engage in supports of all types and report more often engaging in most behaviors. Younger generations of women are also more likely than older to engage in informational, social, and most instrumental supports.

Importantly, the overall reported rates of often engaging in these supportive behaviors ranges between 16% and 44%, and the data further points to a discrepancy between what is important to workers and the supportive behaviors they themselves engage in (e.g., personal well-being is a top three definition of success for 82% to 87% of workers across gender, yet only 32% to 37% report often prioritizing the well-being of others). This suggests a marked opportunity to empower and equip individual workers as change agents in fostering more communal, resilient, and sustainable work cultures in mutually reinforcing ways. **Organizations can actively encourage workers to provide supports of all types. By arranging for development opportunities to cultivate the required skills to do so, measuring the impact of the supports provided on intended recipients, and ensuring equitable recognition of these efforts—organizations can yield exponential returns.**



Figure 8

## Supportive behaviors

How often do you engage in the following behaviors at your organization? (% results for “often” response category)<sup>a</sup>

Higher overall engagement    Engagement higher for both Gen Z and millennials than Gen X and baby boomers

		TOTAL		WOMEN by generation				MEN by generation			
		WOMEN	MEN	Gen Z	Millennials	Gen X	Boomers	Gen Z	Millennials	Gen X	Boomers
EMOTIONAL	Provide emotional support	43	35	42	42	44	44	37	37	35	31
	Encourage/foster collaboration and trust among others	38	38	39	39	36	38	38	43	35	36
	Prioritize the well-being of others	37	32	35	39	34	38	34	34	33	26
ESTEEM	Build the self-esteem of others	43	36	42	41	44	43	41	40	32	31
	Provide others with recognition/rewards for good work	37	34	46	40	34	35	34	40	34	25
INFORMATIONAL	Provide information to others	40	37	47	44	36	36	40	40	38	30
	Make sure others have the training and resources they need for their job	34	34	35	40	32	30	32	39	33	30
INSTRUMENTAL	Include others in appropriate meetings and discussions	44	39	40	42	46	46	44	40	40	37
	Give others constructive feedback	33	38	36	39	30	29	42	42	36	33
	Assist others with the latest technology and tools	32	36	35	38	29	25	34	42	36	26
	Seek out the opinions and perspectives of others that differ from my own	29	31	32	32	28	24	31	37	29	25
	Advocate for others to make sure they are being treated and paid equally and fairly	29	27	36	32	28	24	25	34	27	18
	Mentor/sponsor others	28	31	35	36	23	22	32	40	27	22
	Engage in allyship	27	30	33	33	24	22	42	38	25	21
	Share opportunities for professional development with others	26	29	29	29	24	22	26	37	28	20
SOCIAL	Organize social events for others	17	23	28	26	12	10	33	31	22	9
	Suggest ERGs/people others can connect with	16	19	19	23	12	12	21	27	18	7

(a) We are unable to report out on nonbinary respondents for this analysis, due to insufficient sample size.  
 ERG = employee resource group

*By better understanding how they define success and their perceived accomplishment of success criteria, organizations may do a better job of supporting workers of all genders in accomplishing success on their terms, and in identifying obstacles experienced in the pursuit.*

# The solution

## Success for all workers requires “flipping the (gender) script”

### *Acknowledge the diverse and lived experiences of men to reactivate their investment in equity*

Organizational interventions instituted to advance gender equity have too often neglected to engage men with intentionality, despite evidence that gender bias contributes to the barriers and insufficient supports they also experience. Our research provides comprehensive insights into where current gaps exist and the similar needs of workers across genders. **Organizations should consider bringing men into the conversation as beneficiaries of mitigation strategies, rather than benefactors.**<sup>56</sup> They can do this by engaging working men on the personal costs of gender bias and stereotypes, and through both recognizing and unpacking the ways that men’s multiple identities also intersect to shape their experiences of inequity in different ways.

Traditional masculine norms themselves can impede these efforts and lead to resistance, as many men may fear judgment from other men or loss of the benefits conformity often provides.<sup>57</sup> Creating the necessary conditions for workers of all generations to safely unpack their experiences and discuss gender-related barriers and stigmas, as well as their impact on mental and physical health,<sup>58</sup> allows for vulnerability and the cultivation of supportive relationships, leading to not only men’s enhanced well-being<sup>59</sup> but that of women and nonbinary workers in turn.

### *Reconceptualize masculinity and role model conscious leadership*

Left unaddressed, adherence to restrictive gender norms can erode individual and collective well-being, connection, authenticity, and productivity.<sup>60</sup> As men increasingly look to show up in ways that honor their whole selves, organizations can encourage this further by identifying and reducing the pressures workers face to “cover” or minimize aspects of who they are to fit into mainstream corporate cultures.<sup>61</sup> They can further develop and encourage desirable traits and behaviors reflective of conscious leadership (e.g., empathy and emotional intelligence, conflict resolution, teaming and collaboration, work/life integration) in all workers to challenge stereotypes and establish sustainable ways of working.<sup>62</sup>

Leaders of all genders and generations—and especially men in senior leadership positions—are particularly influential in setting the example for preferred behaviors (such as prioritizing personal commitments and well-being, building connections with others, admitting mistakes or asking for help), and informally reinforcing expectations that may or may not be aligned with

stated organizational values.<sup>63</sup> **Leaders who actively advocate for gender equity and who role model, nurture, and reward healthy, boundless gender expression both at the macro level and in their everyday interactions give others permission to follow suit.**<sup>64</sup>

### *Debias programs, practices, and policies to address masculine defaults*

Programming aimed at enhancing women’s leadership skills, or professional development in particular, should be further supplemented by efforts to address the *systemic* biases that necessitate women-focused programs in the first place.<sup>65</sup> Without critical examination of and intervention in the culture, structures, and practices that may be contributing to gendered inequities, women continue to carry the burden of learning how to navigate them.<sup>66</sup>

Instead, organizations can address gender disparities at the root, by debiasing work and work cultures. This can be achieved through an internal audit of informal cultural practices and the values that underpin them (e.g., management styles, communication norms, networking activities), as well as more formal processes, policies, and programs (e.g., work hours and arrangements, role descriptions and requirements, performance evaluations and promotion criteria, training and development programs), to identify where masculine defaults may be undermining progress.<sup>67</sup>

To account for potential disparate impacts and diagnose underlying contributing factors, organizations can increase transparency and gain required insight into the effectiveness of implemented solutions by measuring outcomes against objectives.<sup>68</sup> For example, in order for flexible work arrangements or family leave policies to yield maximum benefit, they need to be not only *designed* for workers of all genders, but workers need to be equally encouraged and rewarded for *using* them. Research shows that traditional masculine norms of work devotion prevent men from taking advantage of being out of office or taking time off work,<sup>69</sup> stigmatize those who do,<sup>70</sup> and inadvertently contribute to the inequities endured by women when they are expected and required to do so instead.<sup>71</sup> When men take family leave the wage gap decreases, women are more likely to be employed full-time and to serve in senior leadership positions on boards—all to the benefit of the organization and to men who wish to expand upon their roles or activities outside of work.<sup>72</sup> In that, **our research confirms women, men, and nonbinary workers are all looking for fair compensation, personal well-being, and the ability to more effectively integrate work with life**—organizations endeavoring toward equitable outcomes that reflect these shared priorities can provide a litmus test for success.



## Beyond the (gender) box

It should not be surprising that workers, regardless of gender, ultimately want the same things. However, this brings to question the gendered frameworks to which organizations ascribe value and which can become embedded within their work and culture. Doing so allows us to reenvision the possibilities for the workforce as a whole.

What women, men, and nonbinary workers understand as success, the obstacles they experience along the way, and the supports they're looking for are, in many ways, a direct response to masculine defaults embedded in organizational culture. This response should be met with the organizational imperative to debias business approaches, practices, and work cultures. Doing so might be exactly what we need to meaningfully advance gender equity at work. What women have been asking for does not benefit them alone.

Reimagining and creating the present conditions and future reality where work "works" for everyone will require doing away with the gender "scripts" that can keep all people, and therefore businesses, from thriving. Organizations that embrace this transformation will likely not only deepen their impacts but actualize returns on their investments in gender equity.

# Additional information

## Methods

A third-party research vendor conducted a survey of 4,016 adult workers (ages 21+) from companies with a minimum of 500 employees of private and publicly owned companies in the United States. This online survey captured responses across multiple industry categories. Quotas (for level, age, race/ethnicity, region) and weighting were applied to ensure the sample's composition reflects the population of interest. Job-level proportions were weighted to match natural fallout from the general population sample. The survey was fielded from August 18 through September 25, 2023.

The online questionnaire asked a series of demographic and firmographic questions to allow respondents to self-identify. Respondents self-identifying as women (n=1934) or men (n=1847), include those who identify as either cisgender or transgender. For the purposes of data analysis, nonbinary (n=119\*) is used as an umbrella term to refer to survey respondents who self-identified as nonbinary (n=25), gender nonconforming (n=38), or agender (n=57). In addition, we note that 116 participants self-identified as more than one gender and therefore were not included in gender-specific data breakout.

This report relies on the following definitions as related to gender:

**Gender identity:** *A person's innate sense of their own gender, whether man, woman, or something else, which may or may not correspond to the sex assigned at birth, and which may or may not be visible to others.*

**Agender:** *A person who does not have a strong internal sense of gender or who has a neutral or absent gender identity.*

**Gender nonconforming:** *A person whose identity and expression of gender does not ascribe to the gender binary, or, rather, traditional male/female expressions.*

**Man:** *A person whose gender identity aligns with those typically associated with men.*

**Nonbinary:** *A person whose gender is not exclusively man or woman.*

**Woman:** *A person whose gender identity aligns with those typically associated with women.*

**Cisgender:** *A person whose internal sense of gender identity matches their sex assigned at birth.*

**Transgender:** *A person whose gender identity is different from the sex that was assigned at birth.*

Respondents were provided a comprehensive list of prompts and asked to rank the importance of these in defining what success means to them at work. For those ranked "very" or "extremely" important, they were asked to then identify which they have already accomplished.

These were described as follows:

**Organizational advancement** (e.g., promotions, professional learning and development, participation in high-impact projects, leading teams)

**Organizational resources** (e.g., funding, technology and tools, personnel support, time, training)

**Influence on my organization** (e.g., involvement in key decisions, my opinions and feedback are sought and valued)

**Financial rewards and recognition** (e.g., salary, benefits, awards)

**Appreciation and recognition** (nonfinancial) by my colleagues and/or managers/senior leaders (e.g., for my experience, expertise, and/or contributions)

**A sense of purpose** (e.g., doing work that I am passionate about, working on meaningful projects, having an impact on my organization and/or society)

**Effective and respectful collaboration** (e.g., with internal and/or external teams)

**Supportive relationships** (e.g., strong interpersonal relationships with colleagues and/or managers/senior leaders)

**Organizational culture that fosters belonging** (e.g., regardless of age, gender, sexual orientation, disability, etc.)

**Psychological safety** (e.g., safety in sharing my ideas, questions, concerns, mistakes, asking for help; safety in being my authentic self and expressing my various identities)

**Work/life integration** (e.g., managing the demands of both work and personal life)

**Personal well-being** (e.g., support and resources to prioritize my mental and physical health)

Respondents additionally selected up to three top barriers to achieving success experienced at their current organization in the last 12 months (or otherwise specified these), as well as selected all (or otherwise specified) the negative impacts they have experienced as a result of these barriers. Respondents then chose up to three supports that would help most to address each of these, as well as ranked the frequency with which they engaged in a list of supportive behaviors at work (although these were intentionally not categorized as such).

Unless another source is indicated, all of the quotations in this paper are from survey respondents self-identifying as men. All reported quantitative data is a representation of those who responded to the specific survey question referenced.

\*Total represents weighted data; unweighted n=120.

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