



Where the Mind is Without Fear

Exploring Inclusion and Belonging in Indian Workplaces

2023 report





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1 Comscore, Total Visits, September 2022

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Foreword

About one in three employees reported they could not be their authentic selves at work, in Indeed's previous study of Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging at Indian workplaces.

Several studies have stated that organizations thrive when they embrace collaboration and foster a sense of belonging. However, psychological safety, or the need to build safe and inclusive workplaces, to encourage this kind of collaboration has been largely ignored.

Post-pandemic, there has been a greater impetus for organisations to build and foster more inclusive and equitable workplaces where people from diverse backgrounds can collaborate, innovate and excel. Given the radical shifts that the workplaces has witnessed over the last few years with changing modes of working, greater emphasis on communication and transparency and employee mental health and wellness, it becomes equally critical for organisations to evaluate the impact of their policy and process changes on their workforce.

These developments call for a study to identify the levers of impacting psychological safety and inclusion in Indian workplaces. Indeed commissioned a comprehensive, large scale study in November 2022 involving the survey of 1,200 distinct employers and 1,500 employees in a small, medium, and large industries across 15 sectors – including Manufacturing, Banking, Financial Services and Insurance (BFSI), IT and Knowledge Services, Media and Entertainment, Retail and Telecommunications – and across 16 Indian cities. The research also informed by in-depth interviews with Human Resource leaders and Diversity managers.

Our purpose is to make more and more organizations aware of the potential tangible and intangible benefits of Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging. After all, the future of work means better work for all.

Defining Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging

Psychological Safety is a key component of Diversity, Inclusion, and Belonging (DI&B) efforts.

Diverse opinions, experiences, and knowledge can be better leveraged if people feel comfortable speaking up and are accustomed to considering alternate viewpoints.

This study of the link between Psychological Safety and DI&B in Indian organizations was carried out across 15 sectors and 16 cities, and across 1,200 employers and 1,500 employees of small, medium, and large businesses.

In order to comprehend the needs of the modern workforce, we require a clear understanding of the associated terms – Psychological Safety and Diversity, Inclusion, and Belonging.





Psychological Safety means an absence of interpersonal fear

Psychological safety is the ability to share one's thoughts and feelings without the risk of damaging one's reputation or standing.

In organizations, it refers to organizational members believing that they can take risks without being shamed by other members. In psychologically safe organizations, members feel accepted and respected.

Diversity is the fair representation of different types of people in an organization

It refers to the existence of varying characteristics in a group of people. These characteristics could be everything that makes us unique, such as our cognitive skills and personality traits, along with the things that shape our identity (e.g. race, age, gender, religion, sexual orientation, and cultural background).

Inclusion is the degree to which different people are enabled to participate in an organization's processes

It is the culture in which a mix of people can come to work, feel comfortable and confident to be themselves, and work in a way that suits them to deliver business or service needs. Inclusion ensures that everyone feels valued and, importantly, adds value.

Belonging is a sense of connectedness and of being an integral part of an organization.

Human beings have an emotional need to belong – to family, society, organizations, religions, and other similar collectives. People have an 'inherent' desire to belong and be an important part of something greater than themselves. Belonging implies a relationship that is greater than superficial acquaintance or familiarity.

The Indeed-Valuvox survey identified the meaning of these terms as perceived by employees working in Indian organizations. Largely, the terms Diversity, Inclusion, and Belonging are collectively perceived as today's tools for success according to 31% of the employees. As per 21% of the employees surveyed, DI&B is perceived as something that allows people to be treated equally in all aspects. Meanwhile, 16% of employees are inclined to believe that the term "Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging" stands for having diverse knowledge of other people or groups involved at work.

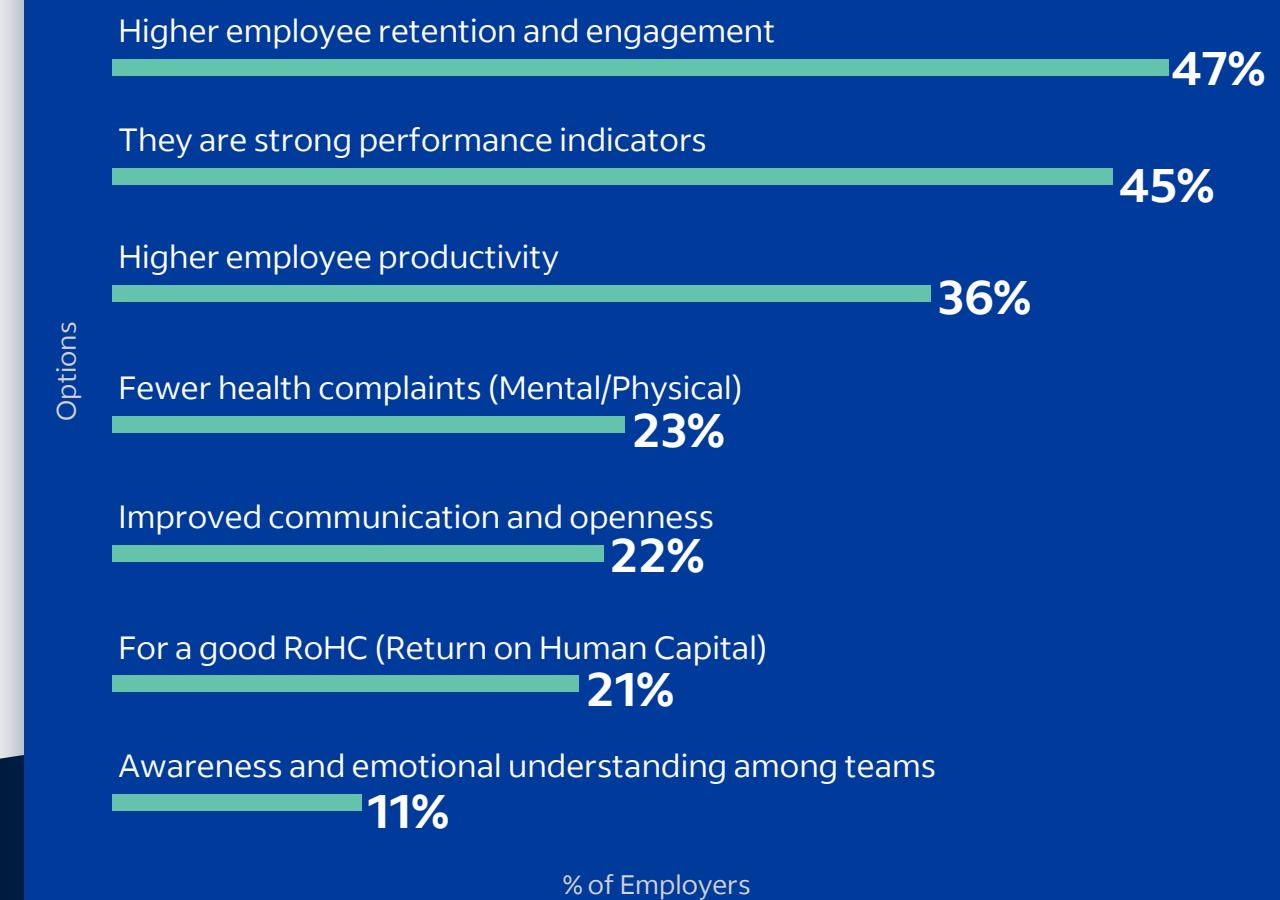
What people working in organizations think Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging mean

(Indeed-Valuvox Employee survey, November 2022)



Psychological Safety as an imperative

Need for psychological safety in the opinion of employers



Psychological safety is crucial for the performance of teams, which are the lifeblood of today's organizations. An apparent need for employee satisfaction at various levels within the organization has led to Psychological Safety at the workplace being an absolute necessity. With employee satisfaction comes a higher output which, in turn, facilitates the ask organizations have of their employees, and at the same time creates a culture of employee longevity.

47%

Nearly half of all employers surveyed (47%) believe that psychological safety is a crucial need since it leads to higher employee retention and engagement.

Additionally, 45% also believe that it is a strong performance indicator. 36% believe that Psychological Safety is a must in organizations because it improves employee productivity. 23% believe it reduces health concerns (both mental and physical) among employees and helps in its betterment. 22% of the employers believe Psychological Safety is a means to improve communication and openness at the workplace.



Why it really matters?

Psychological safety is the basis to enable interpersonal trust. There is a need for the other pieces of the puzzle as well, like dependability, clarity, and purpose. Otherwise, teams won't be motivated enough, nor will they be able to drive things in the right direction. In an environment without psychological safety, one would not be comfortable bringing creative ideas to the table.

Source: Psychological Safety: The Foundation to Build Your Team's Success, CodingSans, November 2019



Impact of psychologically unsafe workplaces on diverse groups

Psychological Safety being an imperative in organizations, we shall now look at the consequences of its negligence. Psychologically unsafe work cultures lead to employees facing undesirable experiences which, in turn, has an impact on how people go about their daily work. These experiences would in turn be detrimental to long term goals of organizations and employees alike.

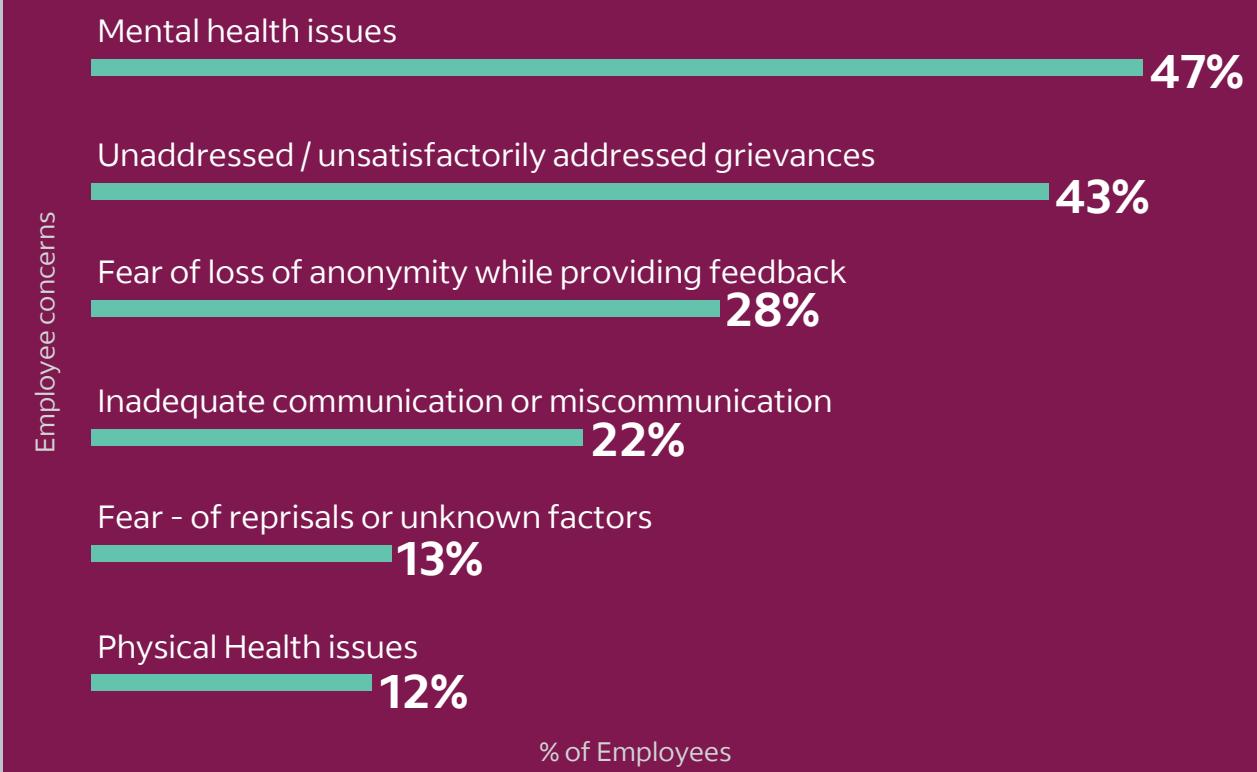
A major chunk of employees (**47%**) face mental health issues, and that has impacted their psychological safety.

A slightly lesser proportion (43%) feel psychologically unsafe due to unaddressed/unsatisfactorily addressed grievances. This calls for organizations to address employee concerns and help them feel psychologically safe. Fear over losing their anonymity while providing feedback is also a major concern according to 28% of those surveyed.

Women experiencing work-related stress is 50% higher in number than for men of the same age. This could have an adverse impact on their mental health.

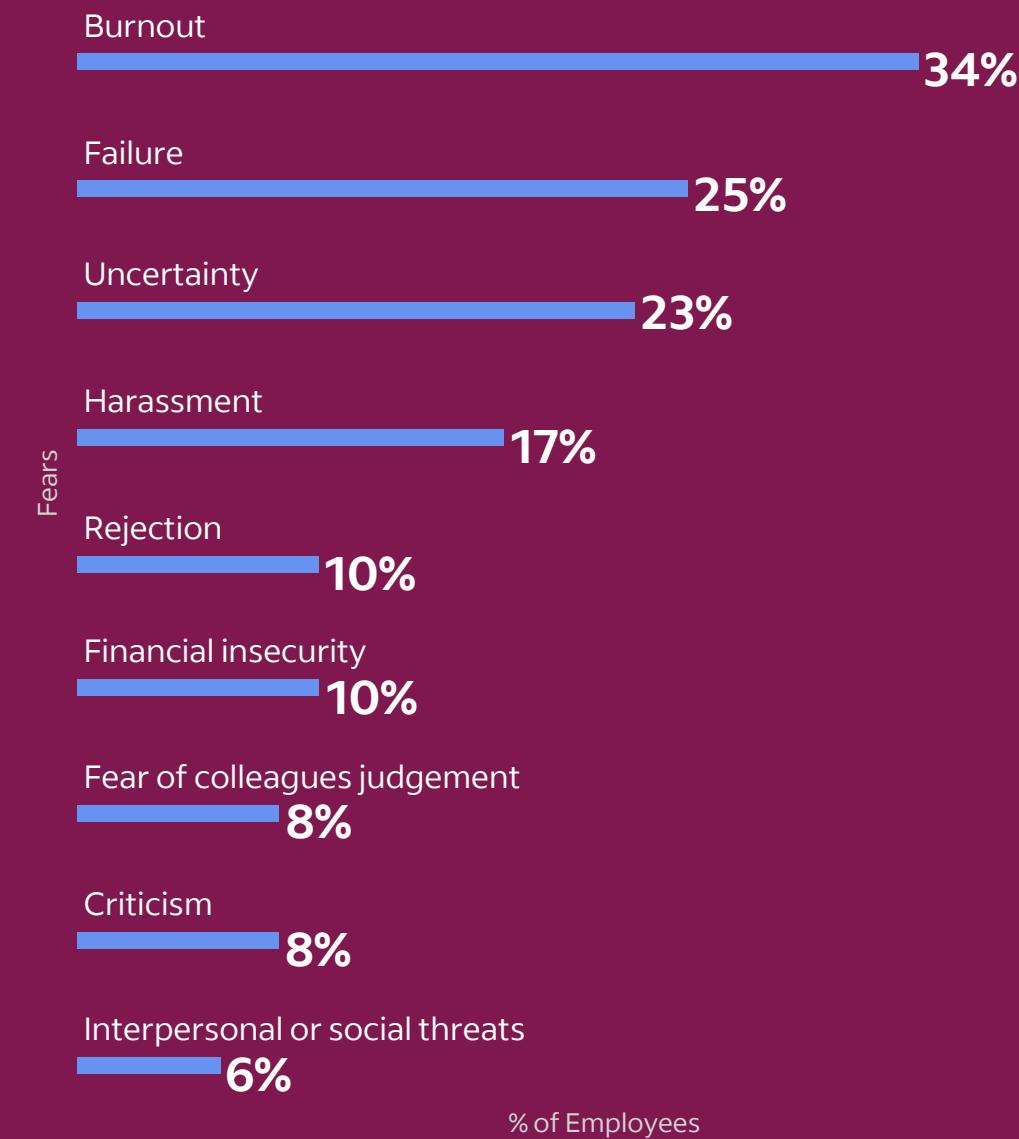
LGBTIQ+ individuals are more than twice as likely as heterosexual men and women to have a mental health disorder in their lifetime.

Biggest concerns of personal/interpersonal nature experiences/noticed by employees that have made them feel psychologically unsafe



Source: Why are stress levels among women 50% higher than men?, PrioryGroup LGBTQ Community Are More Vulnerable To Mental Health Disorder And Other Severe Diseases, Reveals Study, Theologicalindian, July 2022

Which of the following fears experienced/witnessed by employees have affected their psychological safety?



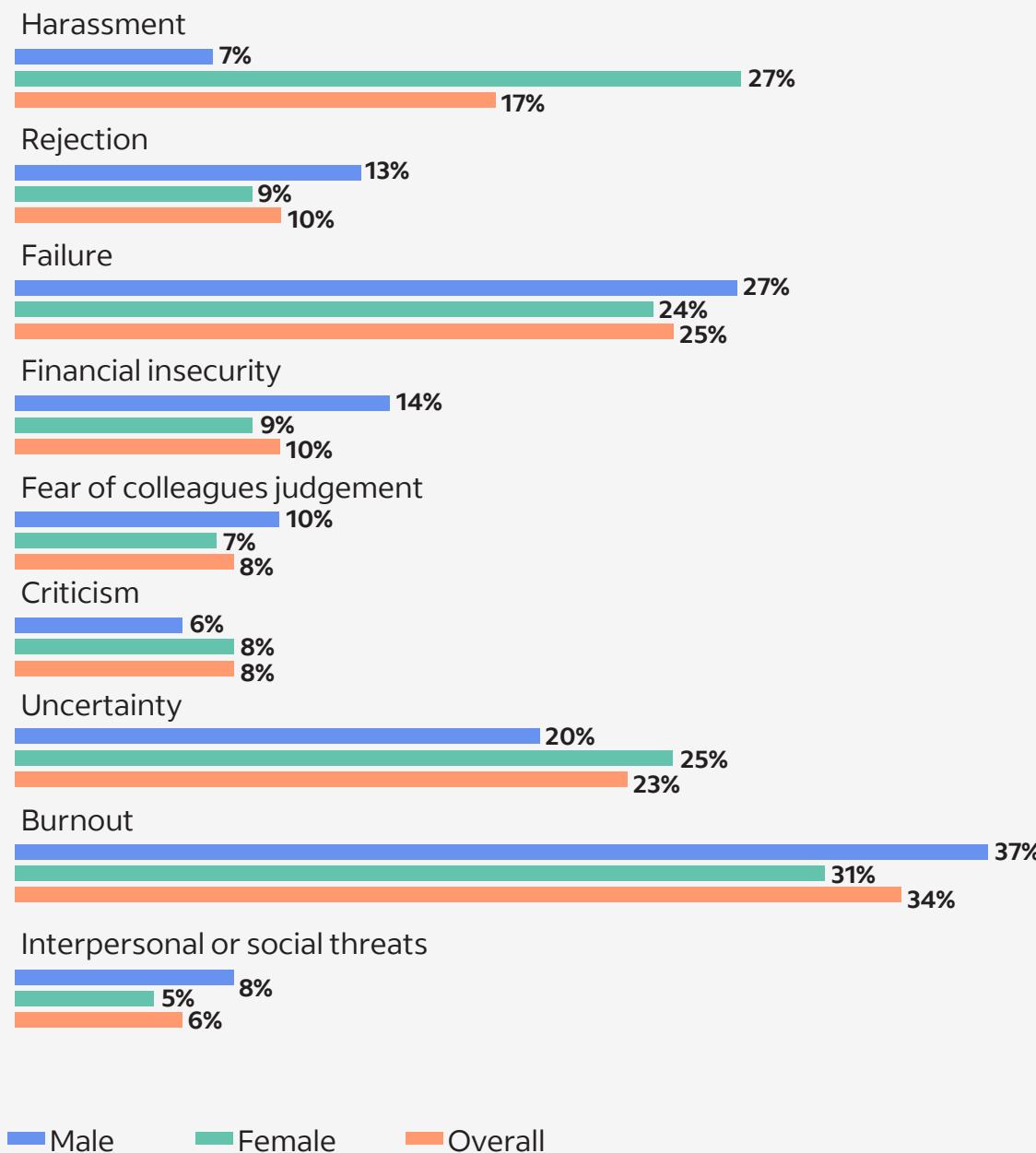
Employees facing fear due to various reasons could hinder their being true authentic selves at work and adversely affect psychological safety. These fears include burnout due to stress, fear of failure and harassment at work. The failure experienced varies with diversity – with some groups experiencing them more than others. As psychological safety affects diverse groups in different ways, establishing inclusivity and creating belonging also becomes a hard task.

Burnout prospects are a leading source of fears employees either face or witness in others. 34% have a fear of burnout resulting from workload and other related factors. Fear of failure is also prevalent in 25% of all employees surveyed. Meanwhile, 23% face fears of an uncertain near-future (fuelled further by the pandemic), and over incidents that could directly impact their place or experiences in the organizations they are a part of.

17% of employees fear harassment. Financial insecurity and rejection are fears cited by 10% of all respondents. [The pandemic has resulted in an increase in financial concerns](#). Fear of colleagues' judgements and criticism are feared by 8% of respondents.

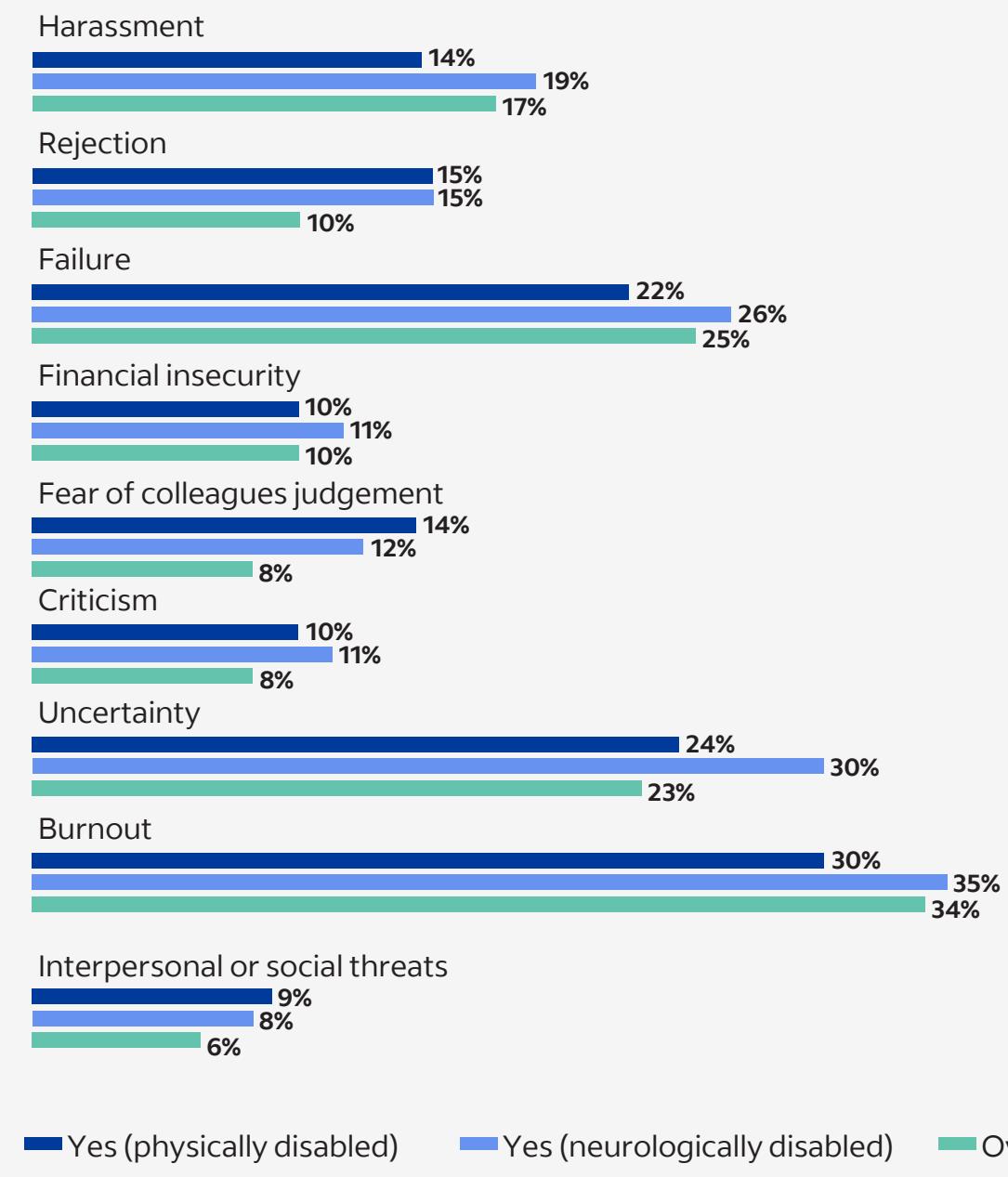
Fear of burnout (34%) and fear of failure (25%) are dominant among employees.

Which of the following fears experienced/witnessed by employees have affected their psychological safety?
– Gender wise



Fear of harassment is higher in women employees (27%) than in men. Also, fear of uncertainty appears to be marginally higher in women (25%) as compared to men, whereas fear of burnout (37%) and failure (27%) are marginally higher in men.

Which of the following fears experienced/witnessed by employees have affected their psychological safety?
– Disability Wise



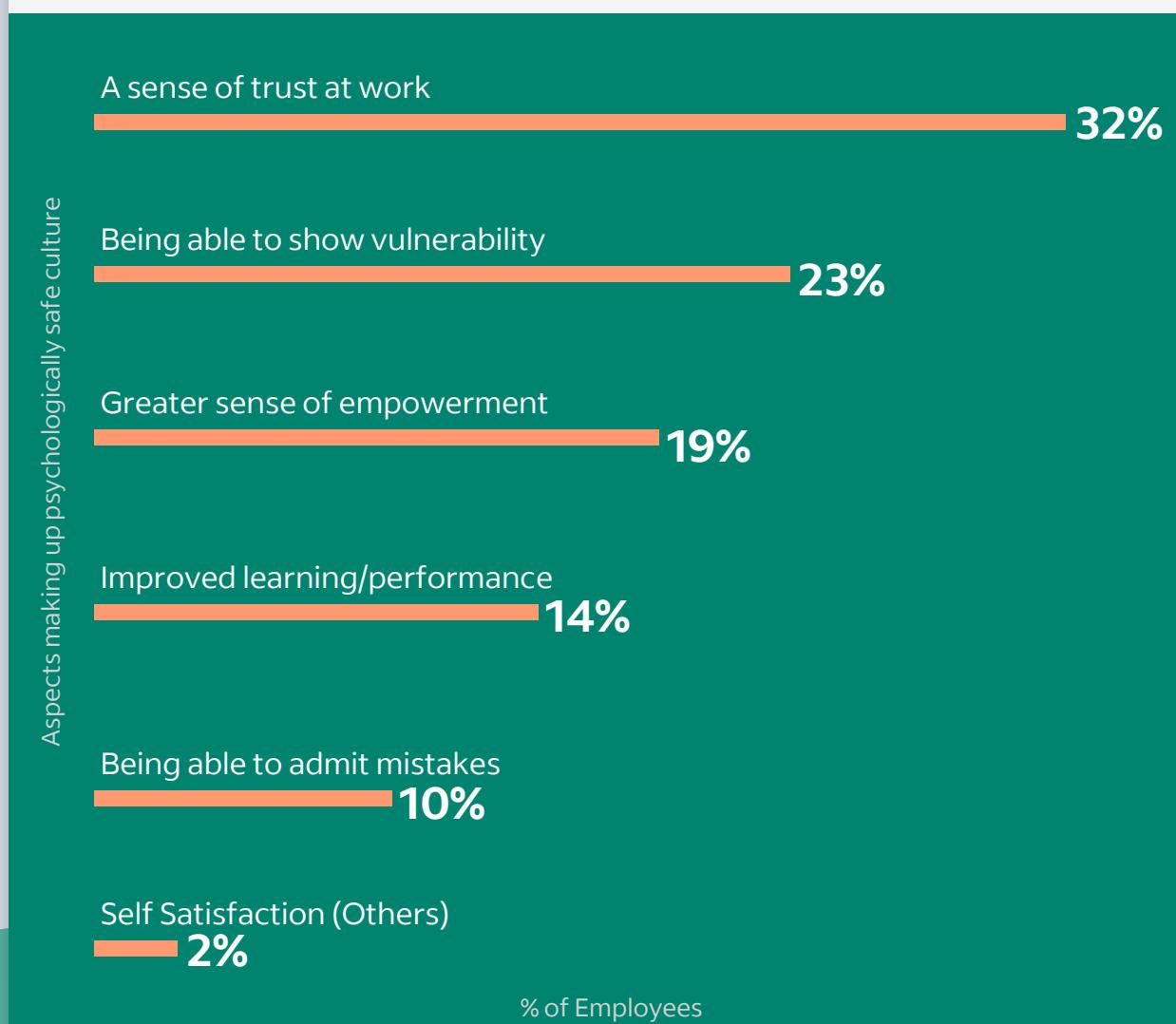
Marginally higher number of neurologically disabled employees face burnout (35%), uncertainty (30%), failure (26%), and harassment (19%). On the other hand, slightly higher proportion of physically disabled employees (14%) face fear of colleagues' judgements.

A photograph of a woman with long dark hair, wearing a green cable-knit sweater. She is smiling and gesturing with her hands as if speaking. The background is a blurred office setting.

Aspects that make up a **psychologically safe culture** for diverse and inclusive groups

What are the positive outcomes of Psychological Safety? For people to be their true authentic selves at work, an absence of interpersonal fear is a prerequisite. For diverse groups of employees in an organization, it further allows them to feel inclusive in the workplace and creates a sense of belonging.

According to employees, what can be achieved the most if one is able to show their true authentic self at the workplace?

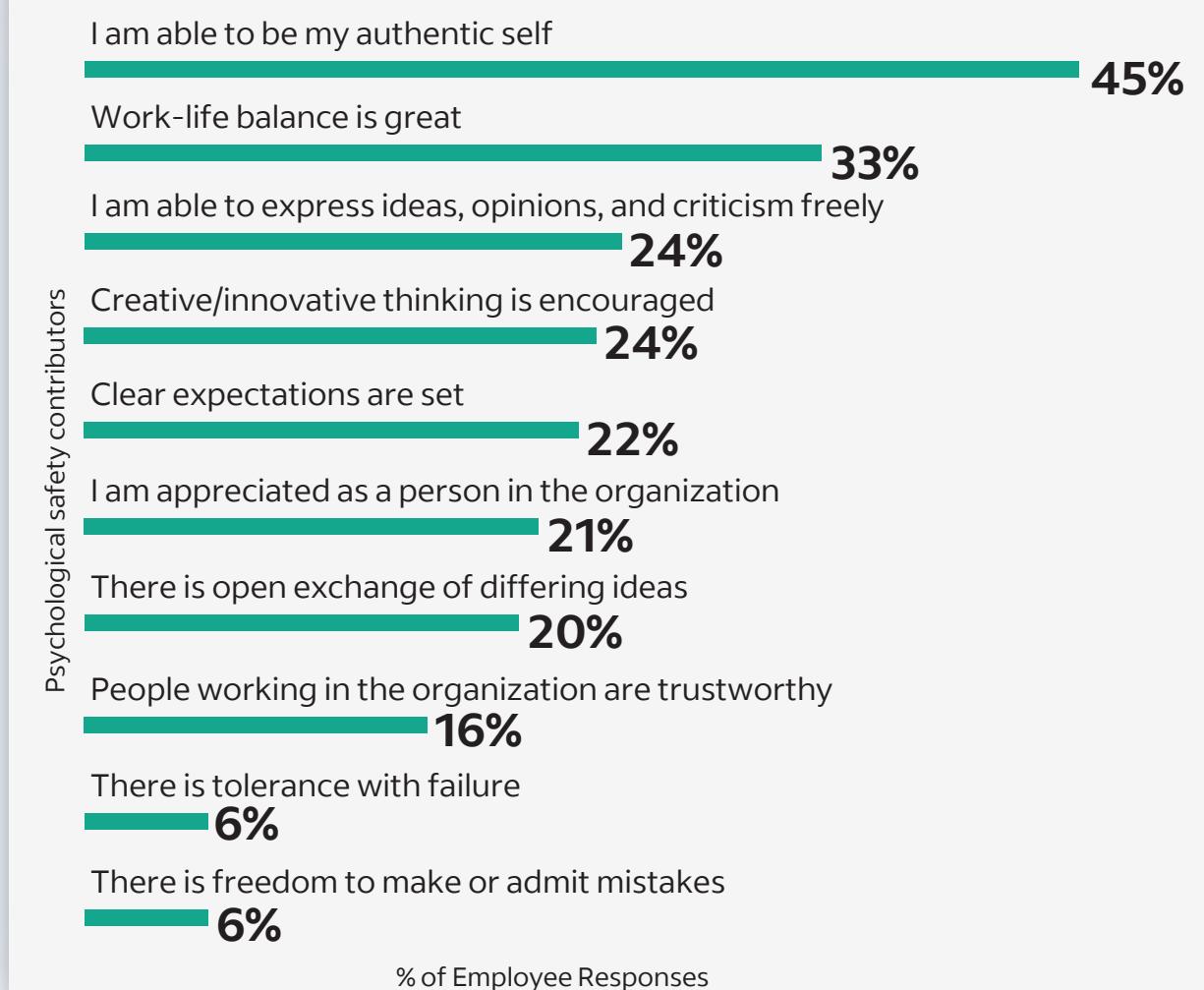


Almost a third of employees (32%) believe they can achieve a sense of trust when they are their true authentic selves at work.

A significant proportion of respondents (32%) believe that a feeling of psychological safety, and the ability to be one's authentic self, fosters a sense of trust. Another 23% of employees state that they can be vulnerable. Meanwhile, as per 19% of the respondents, it means a greater sense of empowerment, and for 14% it improves learning and performance at the workplace. Also, according to

10% of respondents, just being their authentic selves helps admit mistakes. All in all, employees have differing opinions on what empowers them to express themselves in an authentic manner at work. This goal can be achieved through efforts at organizational, individual and team levels to create an enabling culture. Establishing psychological safety for diverse sets of people naturally results in a feeling of inclusivity.

Which of the following factors experienced/noticed by employees, have contributed to their psychological safety?



When do employees feel psychologically safe? Various workplace experiences contributing to psychological safety are essential to answer this question. These contributors vary from appreciation at work to having a great work life balance.

Nearly half of all employees (45%) express that being their authentic selves at work, expressing ideas, opinions, and criticisms freely without the fear of judgment, contributes to psychological safety.

One out of three employees (33%) also noticed that work-life balance makes them feel psychologically safe at their workplaces. 24% state that the presence of psychological safety

helps express ideas, opinions and criticism freely, which results from open communication across team members. An equal proportion also feels that creative/innovative thinking is a positive consequence. A composition of employees with different thoughts and perspectives appears to be crucial for contributing to psychological safety.

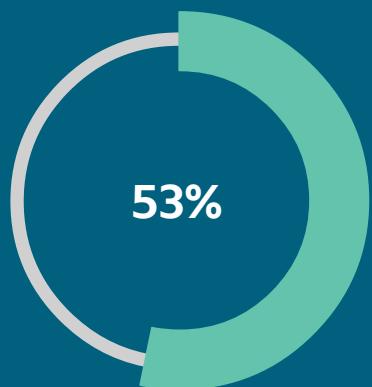
Certain aspects allow employees to be their authentic self and work without interpersonal fear. These contributing factors make up a psychologically safe culture and allow employees to freely express themselves.

When asked to rate how important some factors are to employees' well-being and psychological safety, feeling stress-free (4.39 on a 5-point scale), happy (3.48 on a 5-point scale), and appreciated by people at work (3.67 on a 5-point scale) top the charts. These happen to be the major contributors to psychological safety. Apart from the major contributors, other factors include a level of trust among people at work (2.63 on a 5-point scale) and having accomplices/friends at work (2.18 on a 5-point scale). Although these are not significant contributors as compared to the others, they are nevertheless required to contribute to one's psychological safety.

How these contributors link to diversity is essential to understanding how various factors fare for different employees having different experiences. **62% of employees experiencing/witnessing bias on gender and sexual orientation believe feeling appreciated by people at work would contribute to their psychological safety.** 65% of respondents believe feeling stress-free at work most of the time would contribute to psychological safety. Respondents experiencing /witnessing biases based on disability status cite feeling stress-free (28%) at work to be the major contributor to psychological safety.



Which statement among the following do employers agree with the most?



A psychologically safe work culture is both achievable and sustainable



A psychologically safe work culture is achievable but not sustainable



A psychologically safe work culture is neither achievable nor sustainable

Do employers think a psychologically safe work culture is an achievable goal?

Do they consider it to be sustainable over the long term?

How do employers perceive the prospect of accommodating this in the workplace?

Do they find it challenging to cater to the needs of employees in creating such a space?

Slightly more than half of all employers surveyed (53%) agree that a psychologically safe work culture is both achievable and sustainable. One out of three (32%) believe that while it is achievable, it cannot be sustained. A smaller 15% think that it is neither achievable nor sustainable at workplaces.

Does a psychologically safe work culture once achieved, need to be 'too' psychologically safe?

In other words, does it need to be extremely safe for employees to have no interpersonal fear? Sources suggest it doesn't need to be; however it is important to treat psychological safety distinctly from other kinds of safety. Various teams require different degrees of psychological safety, and hence it is important to find that balance to sustain it over the long term.

Source: Is it possible to be "too" psychologically safe?, psychsafety

Biases and Discrimination and their impact on psychological safety

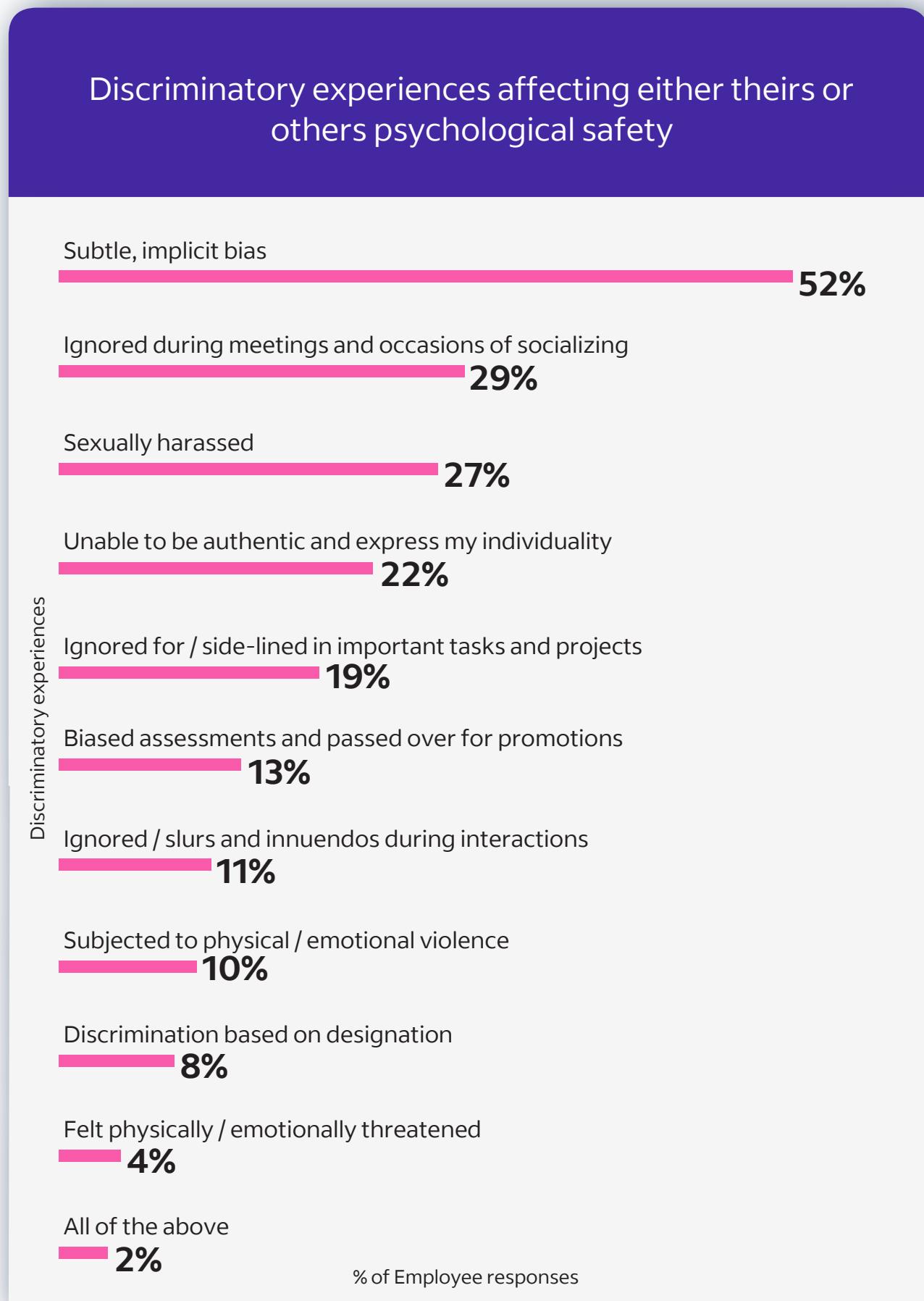
Employees happen to routinely experience biases in their workplaces. Besides the biases more commonly known across the world, Indian workplaces witness social and cultural biases unique to the country (such as caste). Biases – conscious and unconscious – have a counterproductive effect on organizational inclusivity and belonging.



People need to know that their identities do not impact how they are perceived at work to feel psychologically safe. However, data shows that employees face major biases at work, some of which are based on their gender and sexual orientation (59%), their religion, caste and ethnicity (32%), their physical, mental, and emotional disabilities (18%), and the language they speak (18%).



Three out of four employees (74%) perceive male domination in their organizations. Top sectors which are believed to be male dominated as per employees include **Manufacturing, Automobile and Consumer Durables**. The remaining 26%, on the other hand, believe that female employees dominate in their organizations. The sectors in which employees believe larger female proportion exists are **Educational Services, Travel & Hospitality and Media & Entertainment**.



Discriminatory experiences are perceived to be prevalent in organizations. These experiences vary from just being ignored at the workplace, to something as serious as being harassed.

Slightly more than half of the employees (52%) claim to face discrimination through subtle and implicit gestures, whereas almost three in ten (29%) feel that they are ignored during meetings and occasions of socializing. Another 27% have witnessed or experienced sexual harassment. Such discriminatory practices are hindrances for people from being their authentic selves. There is an apparent relation between people experiencing biases and the kind of discriminations they face at work. **79% of employees who have faced biases related to their gender and sexual orientation report that they are unable to be their authentic self, and 75% feel ignored during meetings and occasions of socializing.**

Among the ones who face biases on religion, caste and ethnicity, 57% face subtle, implicit biases. Likewise, 39% of employees who face language based biases also experience subtle, implicit bias. It is worth noting that 70% of employees who are discriminated against based on subtle implicit bias experience burnout, and 61% experience mental health concerns.

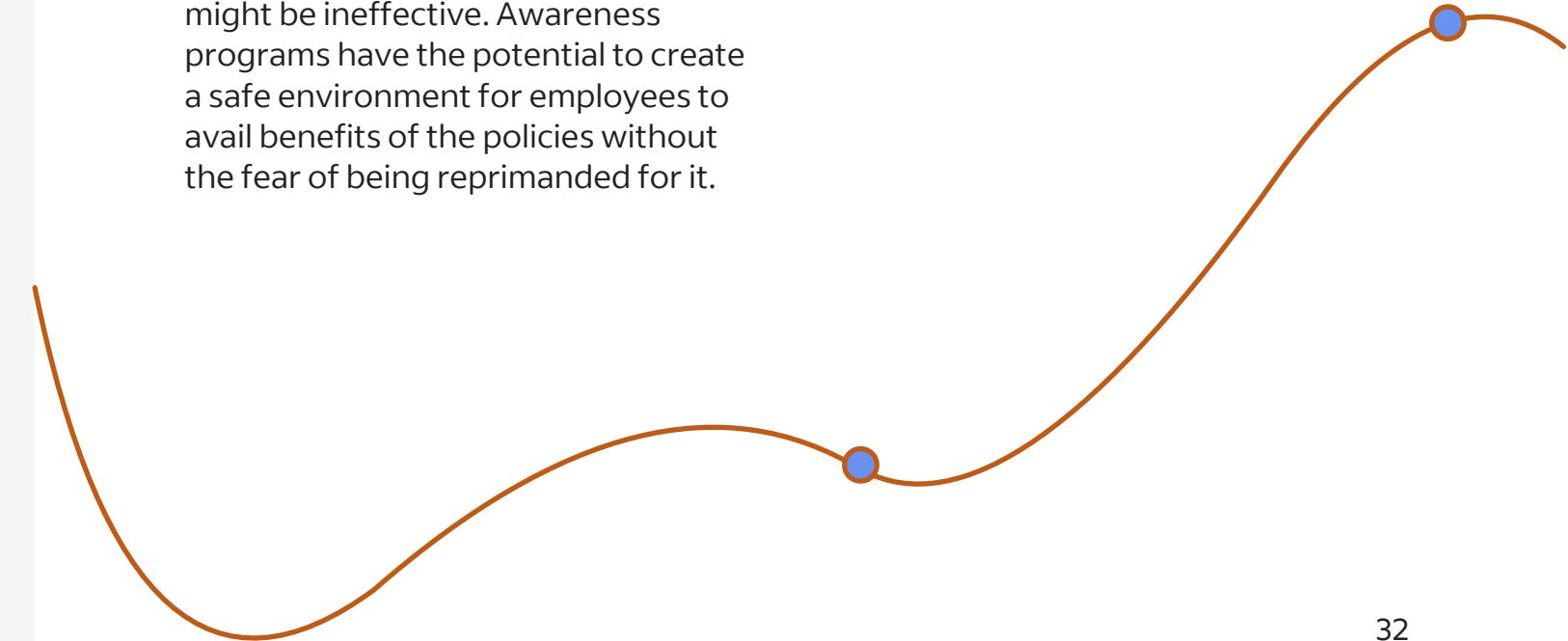
Additionally, among employees of all diverse groups who face biases due to their age and marital status, a higher proportion (35%) report to have been sexually harassed, of which more female employees (43%) face the same as compared to male employees (11%). Lastly, a big chunk of biases based on disability status sees employees feel physically/emotionally threatened (28%). Being ignored and language-based discrimination also indicate that inclusivity and belonging is at risk due to employees lacking a voice at work.



Programs and awareness sessions are one way to ensure that people in organizations are sensitized against discriminatory practices. Additionally, providing rewards and having micro-affirmations at the workplace could also help.

An additional 28% of the respondents have created a reward system for inclusivity, while one out of five (20%) have instituted employee resource groups. Reward systems for inclusivity can be seen as another form of raising awareness to catalyze and foster psychological safety. 19% of the employers promote micro-affirmations to build inclusivity. This subtle act of recognition and kindness can create a positive culture of validation and respect within teams and across organizations. Continuous Feedback-based interventions are popular amongst 17% of employers. Finally, 9% conduct storytelling sessions as a sensitization technique.

Evidently, organizations have taken some measures to reduce and remove biases at workplaces. A little less than a half of all employers (44%) conduct awareness and training programs to this effect. 28% of the employers identify and eliminate biases through the means of organizational policies. However, policies without awareness programs might be ineffective. Awareness programs have the potential to create a safe environment for employees to avail benefits of the policies without the fear of being reprimanded for it.

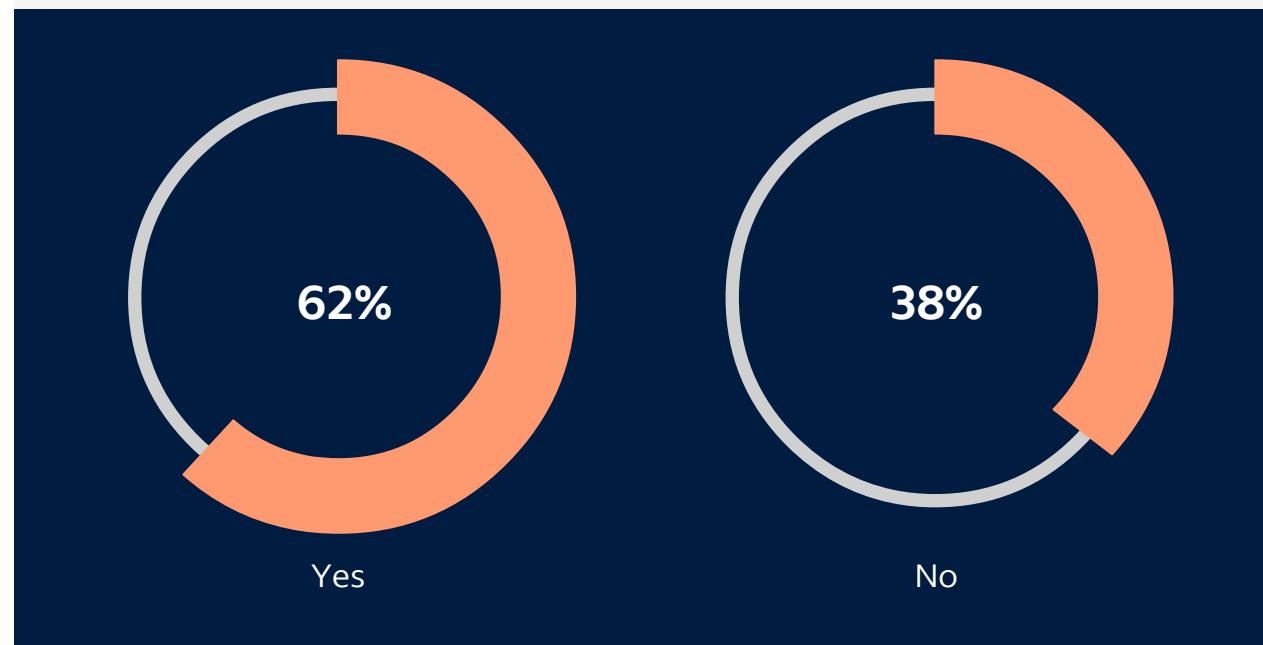


Return to Work perception across diverse groups, and organizational mandates.

Return to Work mandates have the potential to address employee mental/physical health and, consequently, their psychological safety.



Have employees been mandated to return to office in the last 12 months?

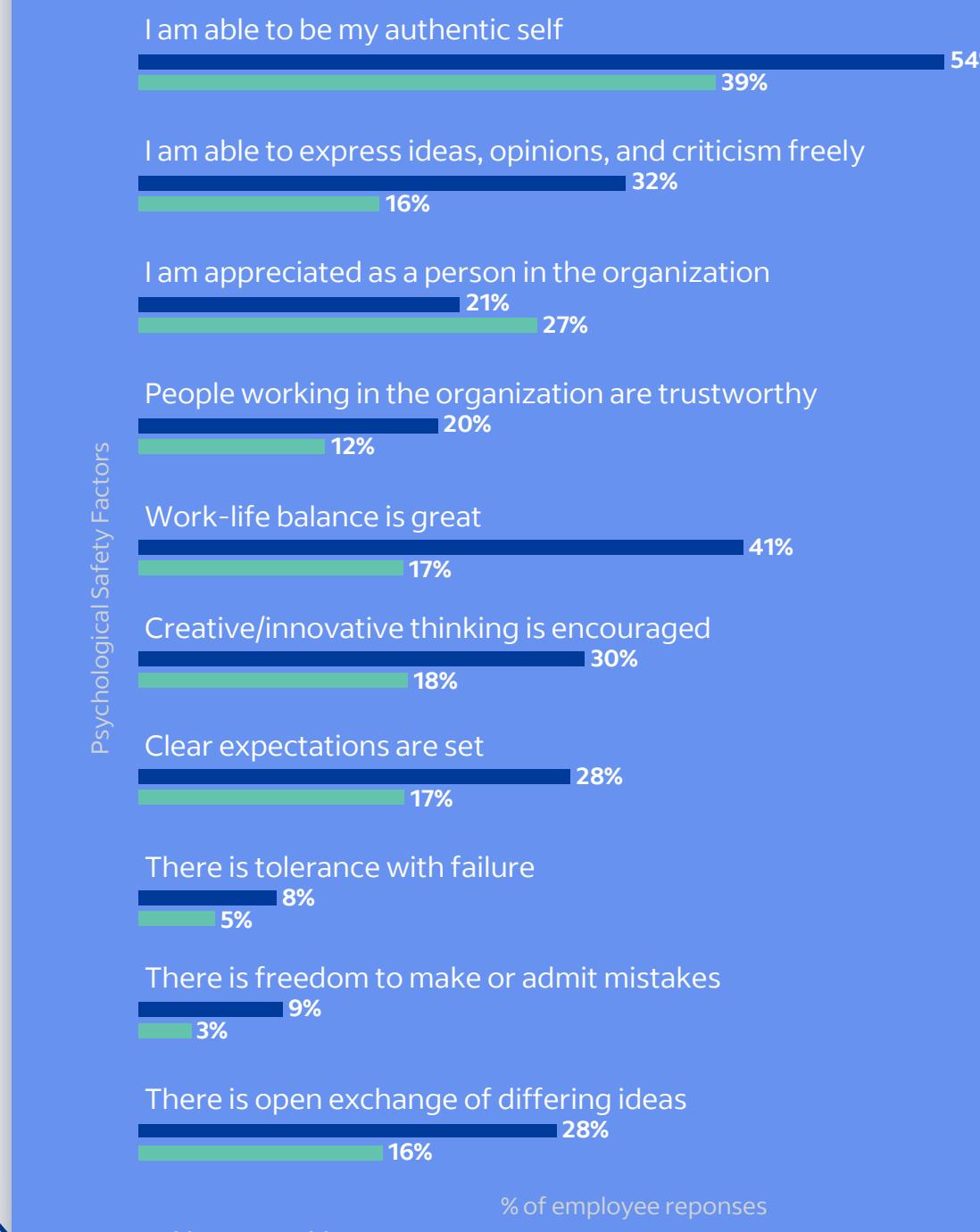


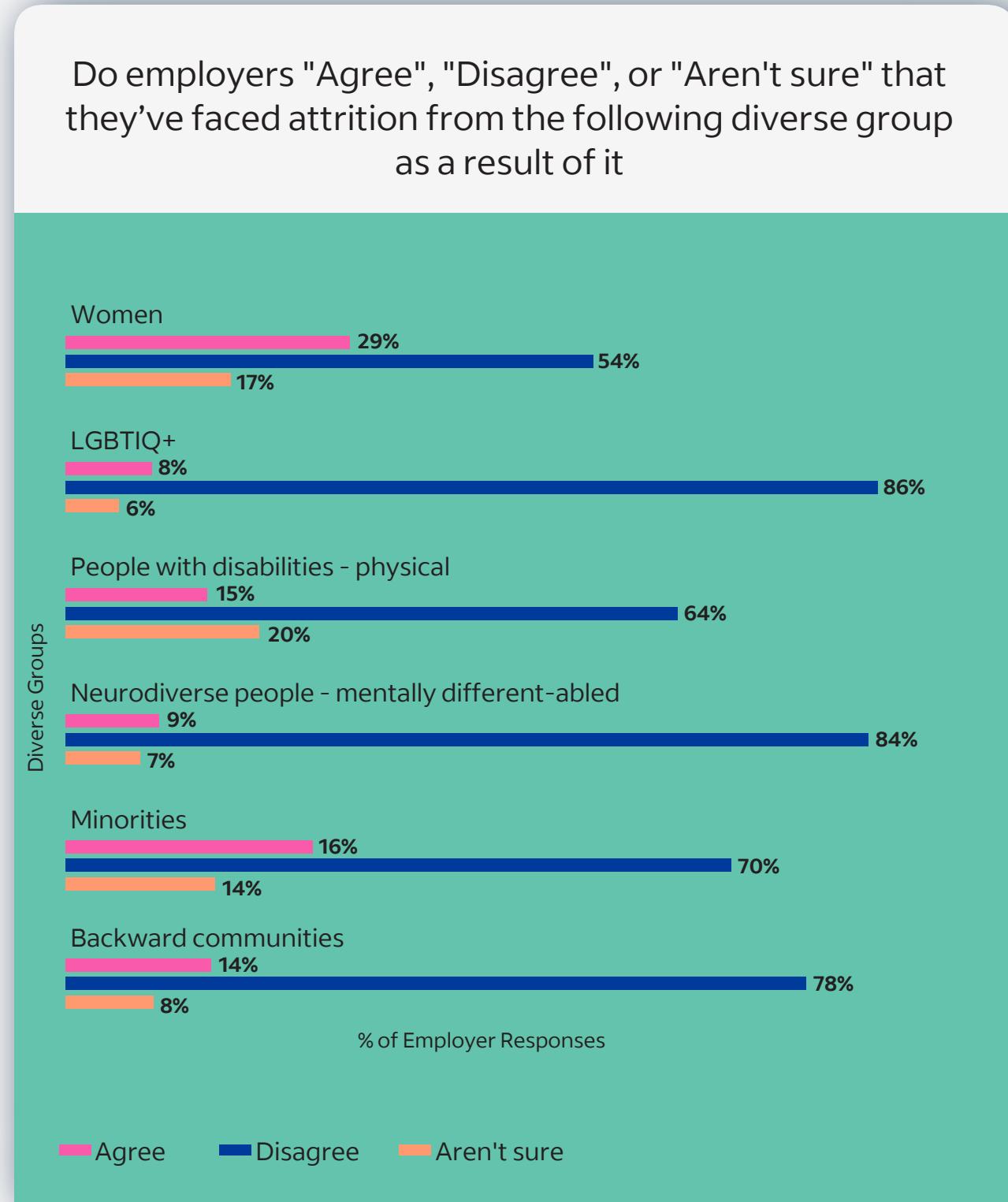
Most, if not all, organisations facilitated remote work when the COVID-19 pandemic hit. Since then, about three out of five employees (62%) report to have been mandated to return to office in the last 12 months. These mandates in turn have impacted their psychological safety. Employees believe that feeling appreciated impacts one's psychological safety, indicating that in-person interactions help with it. This sentiment is seen to be higher among those mandated to come back to work (27%).

On the other hand, not being mandated to work from office witnesses an overall better impact among employees' psychological safety. The sentiments for work-life balance see a contrasting difference indicating that the employees not mandated enjoy a much better work-life balance (41%) on an average in comparison to the employees mandated. Similarly, being able to show authenticity at work is higher on an average among those not mandated to work from office (54%). A work setting which is more flexible allows for various thoughts, ideas and perspectives. In comparison to the ones mandated to work from office, this attribute is seen to be rated higher among those not mandated to work from office (30%). Moreover, free expression of thoughts, ideas and perspectives is also rated higher by this group (32%).

Return to work mandate impact on psychological safety factors

How do return to work mandates impact employee psychological safety?





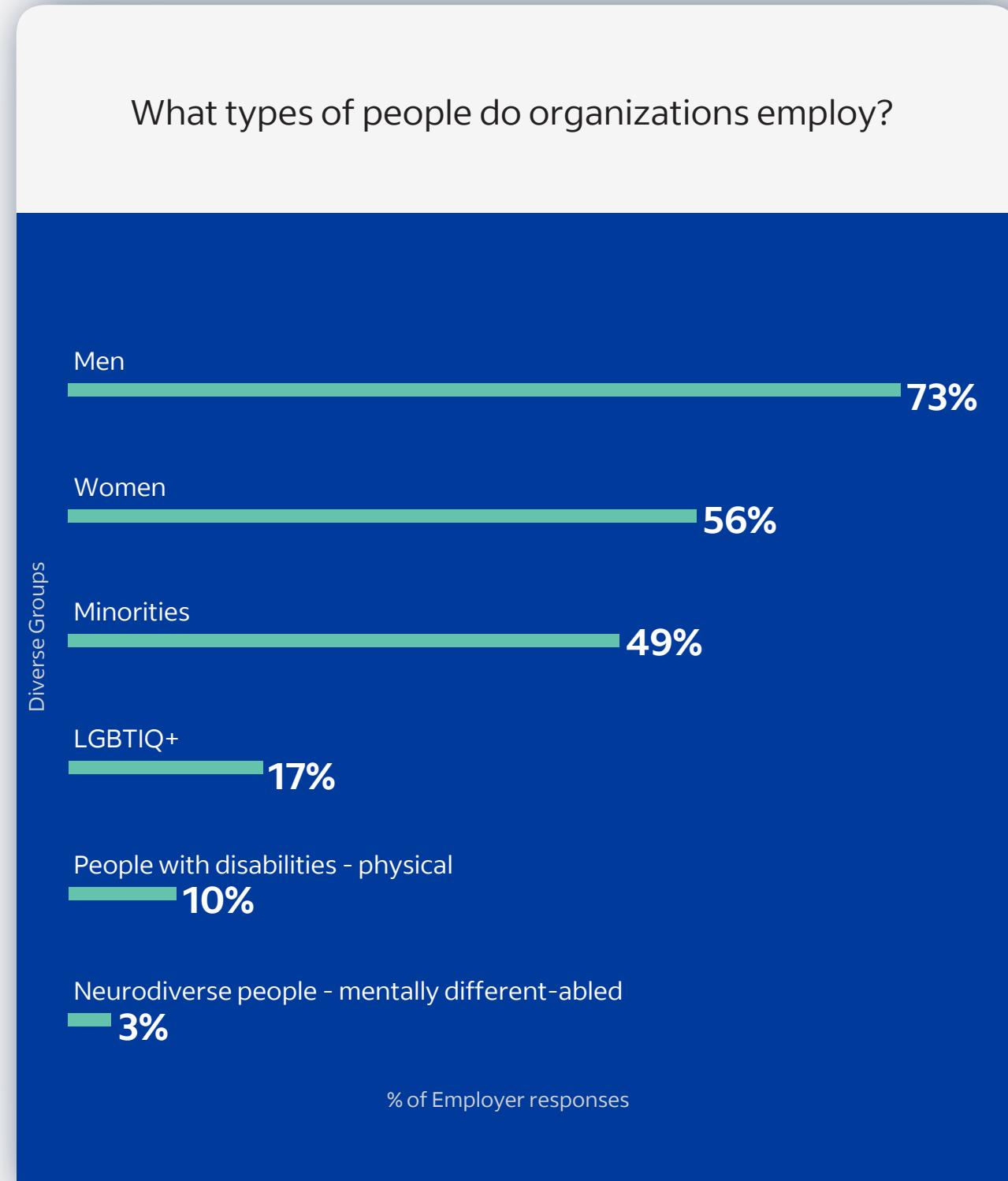
Most employers don't see their return-to-work mandate or relocation provision to be a major contributor in diverse groups leaving their organization. Among the small proportion who have witnessed attrition, a comparatively higher attrition is observed in women.

More employers (29%) have faced attrition from women employees compared to other groups. Further, 15% of the employers have faced attrition from people with disabilities when work from office was mandated. This not only reflects on the lack of accessible workspaces but also a possible lack of sensitivity. A significant 16% and 14% of the employers have also seen a drop in employees belonging to minority and backward communities which clearly indicates the need for flexibility of the workspace to be diverse and inclusive. Another 9% and 8% have faced attrition of people with neurodiversity and people who identify as LGBTQIA+.

Organizational approach on diversity hiring and associated implicit bias

Is there hiring based on diversity in organizations?





Diversity hiring often runs the risk of pandering to optics and show and tell. However, it is also about what follows in terms of development and implementation of a strategy that corrects for bias while attracting, and retaining, qualified candidates.

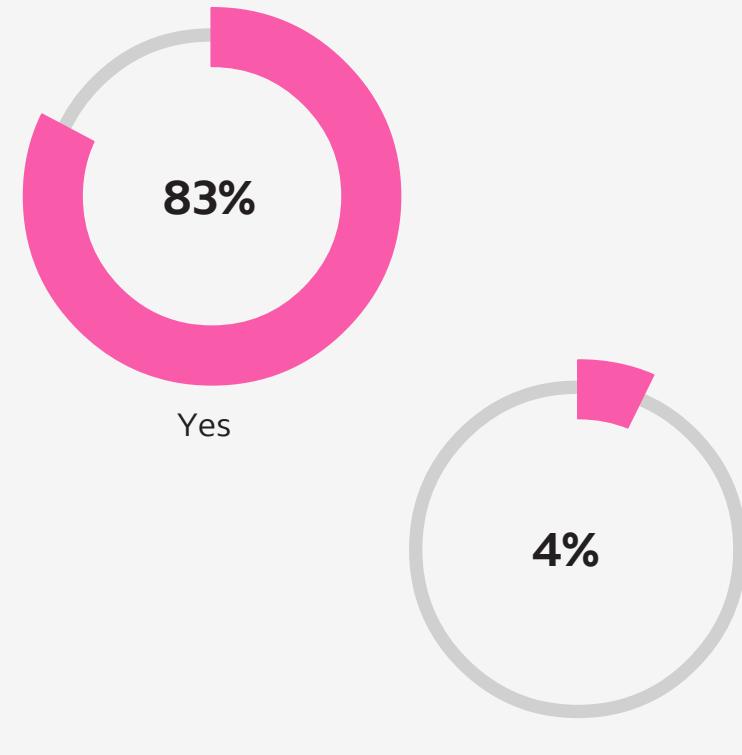
Source : The difference between diversity hiring and a 'diversity hire', BetterUp, Dec 2021

Overall, hiring for men appears to be 17% higher than women, and 56% higher than LGBTIQ+ candidates. 49% employers report hiring for minorities and 13% for people with disabilities. **Aerospace (52% higher), E-Commerce (48% higher) & Retail (35% higher) have more preference for hiring men than women.** Whereas **Media & Entertainment (5% higher), Educational Services (5% higher) and Travel & Hospitality (5% higher) industry have marginally higher preference for women.** In addition to hiring men and women, **IT and Knowledge Services (21%), Fast Moving Consumer Goods (18%), and Banking, Financial Services and Insurance (14%) also hire a considerable number of people with disabilities.**

Importance of 'Cognitive Diversity' at the workplace

Cognitive diversity is defined as the inclusion of people who have unique thought processes. It simply means having people with different ideas, thoughts, and perspectives in an organization. When we talk about diversity, the inclusion of different people based on their attributes from what we apparently notice in them, is what comes to mind. But is a workplace with people having different cognitive aspects also equally important?

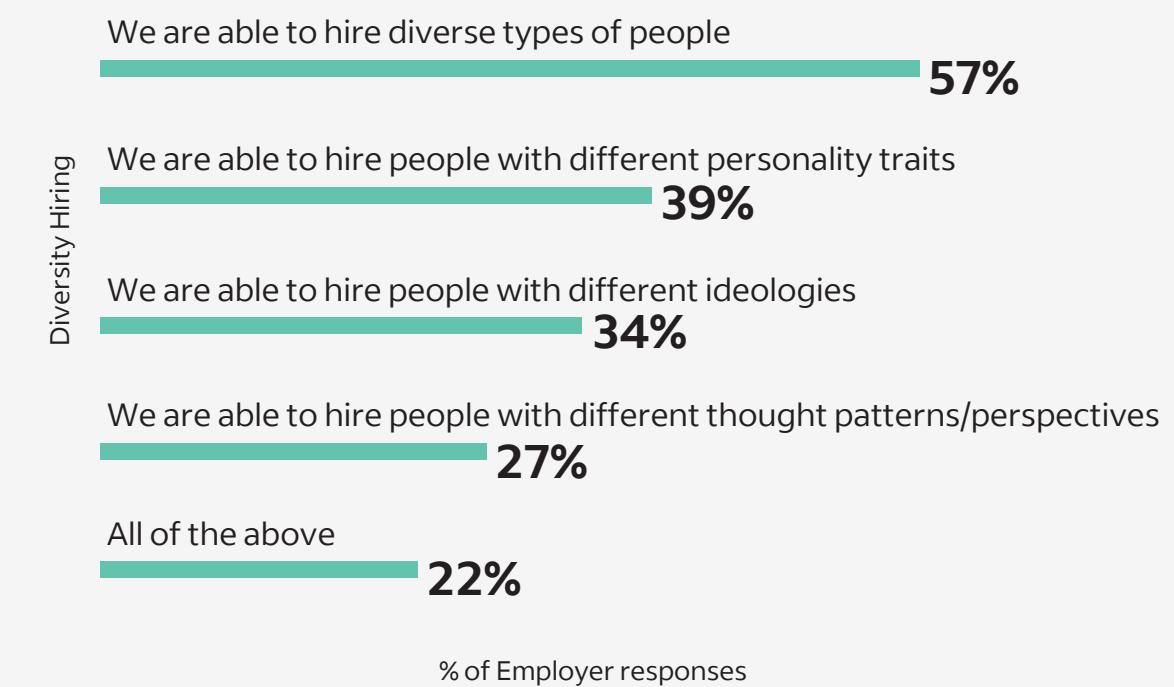
Do employees feel that for an organization to be diverse, it is necessary to have people with different ideas, thoughts, and perspectives?



Cognitive diversity ensures that organisations have plural ways of thinking and solving problems. A majority (83%) of employees feel that organisations can benefit from having people with different ideas, thoughts, and perspectives.

In a psychologically safe team with cognitive diversity, employees can challenge and help each other grow by bringing different perspectives on the table. People with different cognitive abilities in a team can also complement each other to make up for shortcomings or simply build the team stronger.

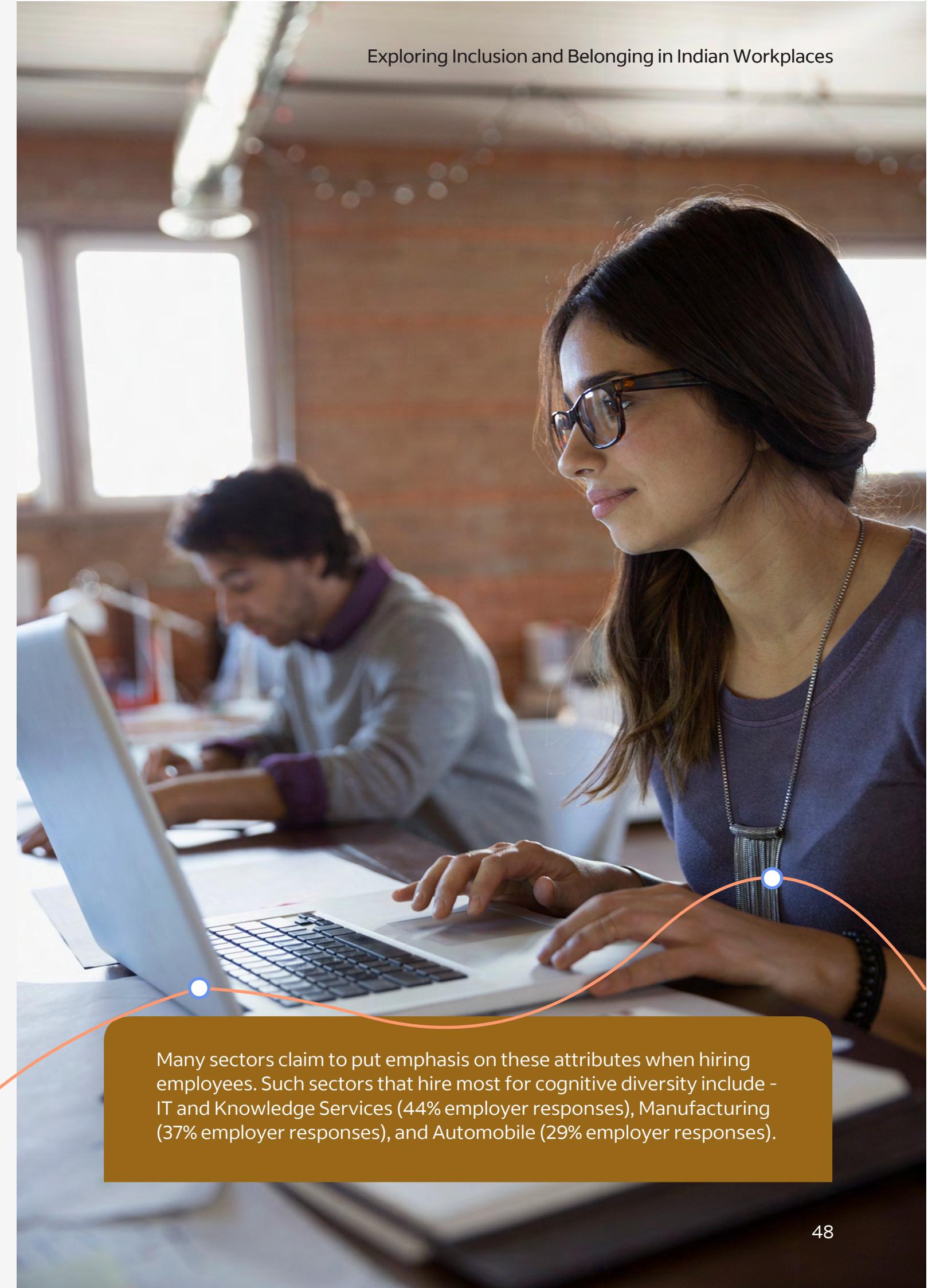
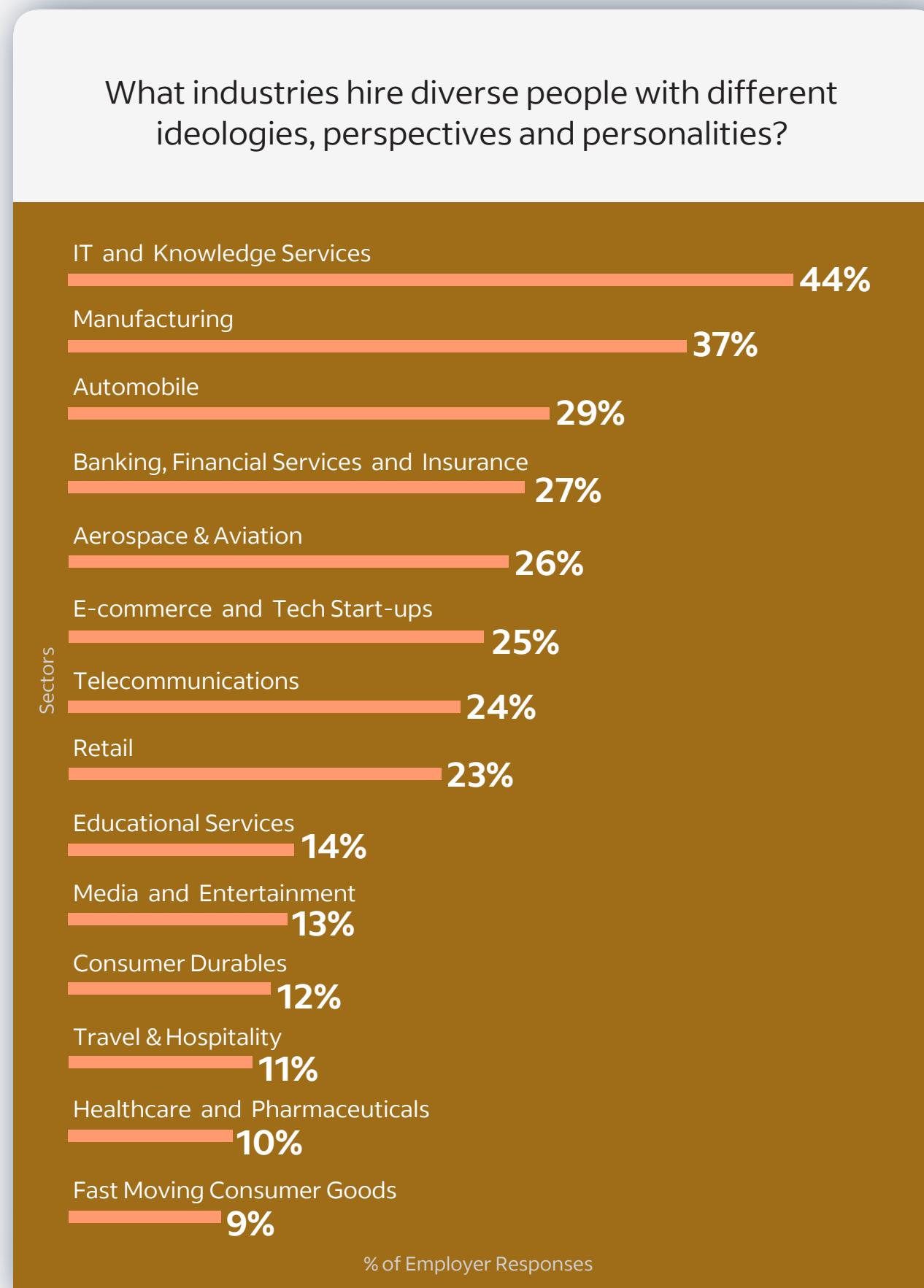
According to employers, which of the following statements is true regarding their organization?



Diversity hiring often runs the risk of pandering to optics and show and tell. However, it is also about what follows in terms of development and implementation of a strategy that corrects for bias while attracting, and retaining, qualified candidates.

To be able to make their organisations diverse and inclusive, 57% are hiring for diversity. Aside from the claim though, 73% employers hire men, whereas fewer employers hire women (56%) and minorities (49%), and only 13% hire people with disabilities (both physical and neurological). Others are focusing on creating cognitive diversity – 39% claim to be able to hire people with different personality traits and 34% agree to be able to hire people with different ideologies.

Hiring for cognitive diversity

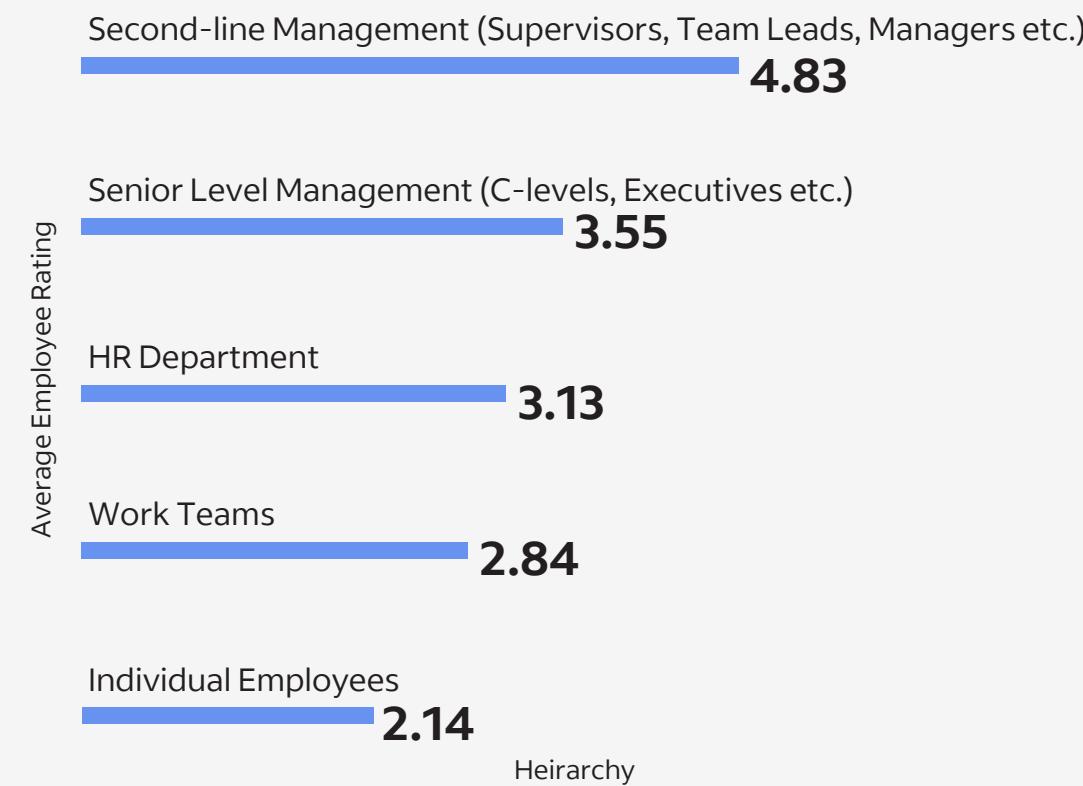


Roles and responsibilities in enabling psychological safety across organizational groups and individuals

Who carries the onus in ensuring psychological safety? There is a need to study employee perceptions about who are largely responsible for facilitating a psychologically safe work environment.



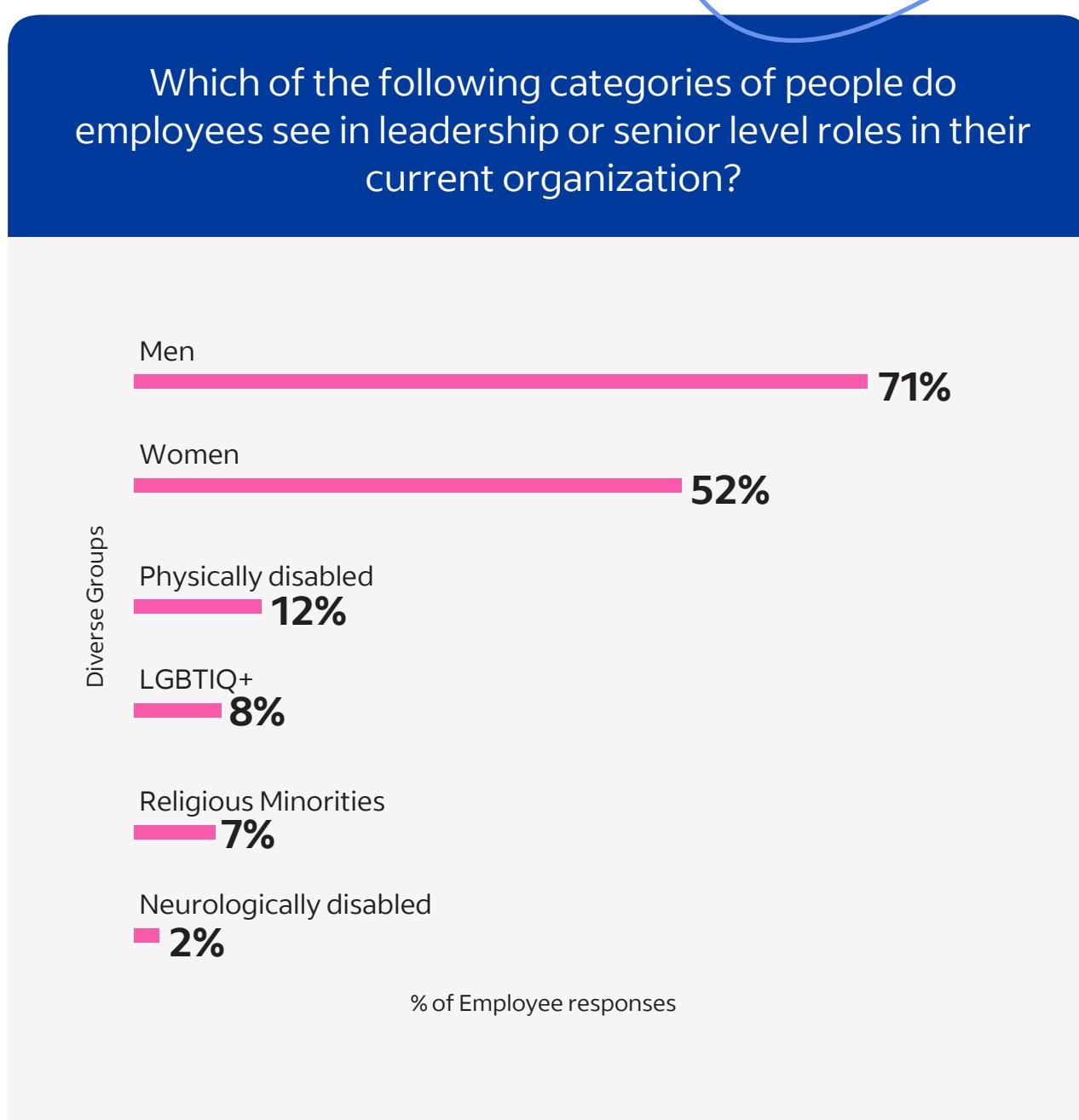
According to employees, to what degree do the following have a responsibility in enabling psychological safety at the workplace?



According to employees, the responsibility of enabling psychological safety at the workplace majorly lies on second-line Management (rated 4.83 on a 5-point scale). This includes supervisors, Team Leads, Managers etc. This is followed by Senior level management (rated 3.55 on a 5-point scale), which include C-levels, Executives etc. The next order of onus falls on the HR department (rated 3.13 on a 5-point scale), Work Teams (rated 2.84 on a 5-point scale), and Individual Employees (rated 2.14 on a 5-point scale).

Source: Psychological safety can't be left to hr, it's on everyone, thehrdirector

Leaders are largely responsible for ensuring a psychologically safe work culture, as per employees. We shall now look at the representation of diverse sets of people in these leadership roles and the various aspects leaders should take care of to ensure psychological safety in the organization. Most of these aspects are based on nurturing and facilitating an environment that helps employees be their true self at the workplace.

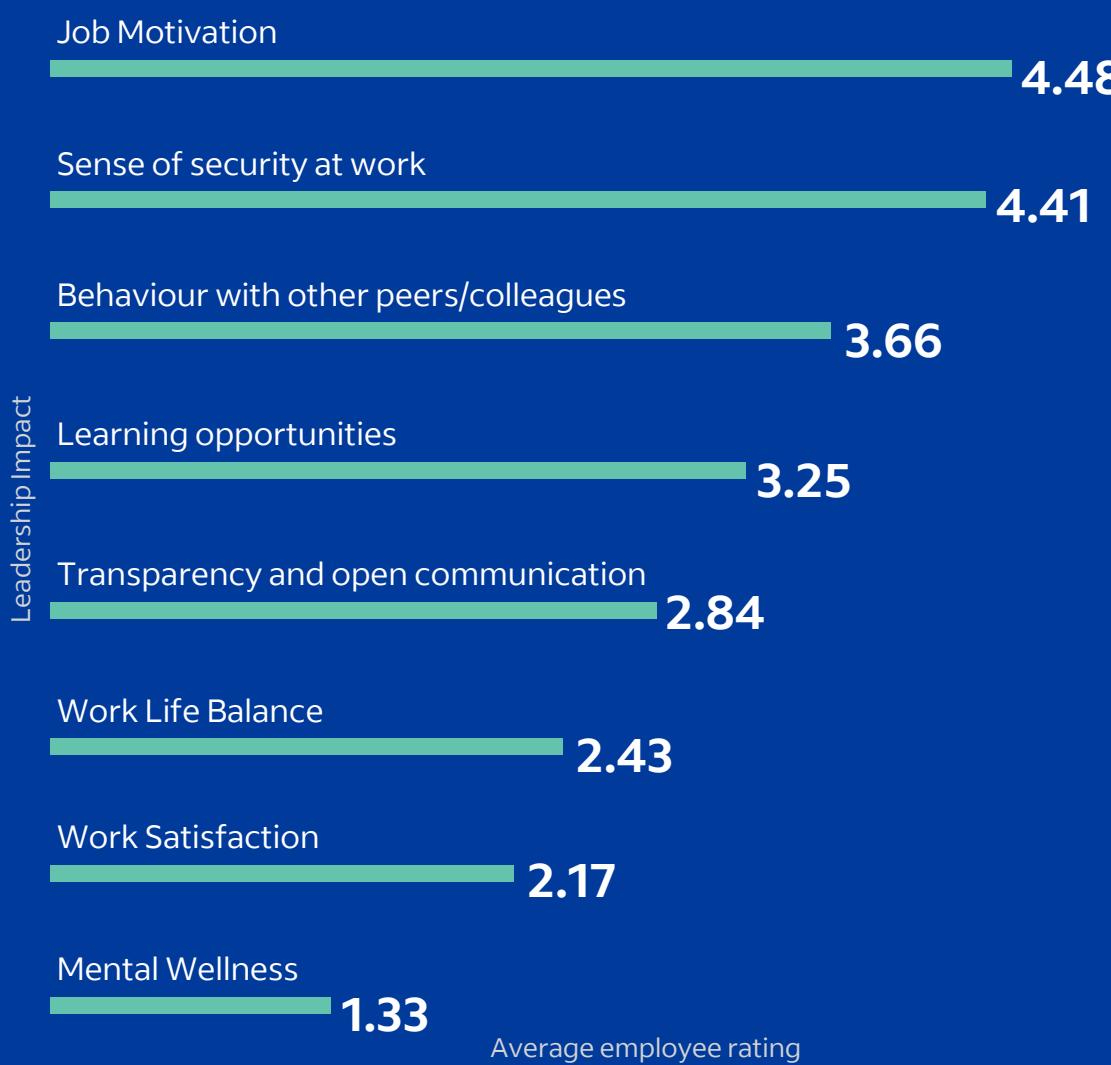


Nearly three out of four respondents (71%) state that they see men in leadership positions whereas 52% claim they see women in leadership roles. Only a far smaller 14% and 8% respondents say that there exists representation of people with disabilities and queer communities respectively in roles of leadership. So, the question that remains pertinent is whether there can be diversity in an organisation without diversity in leadership positions.

Since leaders have significant influence on employees, 55% employees suggest that leaders should facilitate communication in their organisations, followed by 42% who believe that leaders can foster a culture of appreciation and respect to ensure psychological safety.

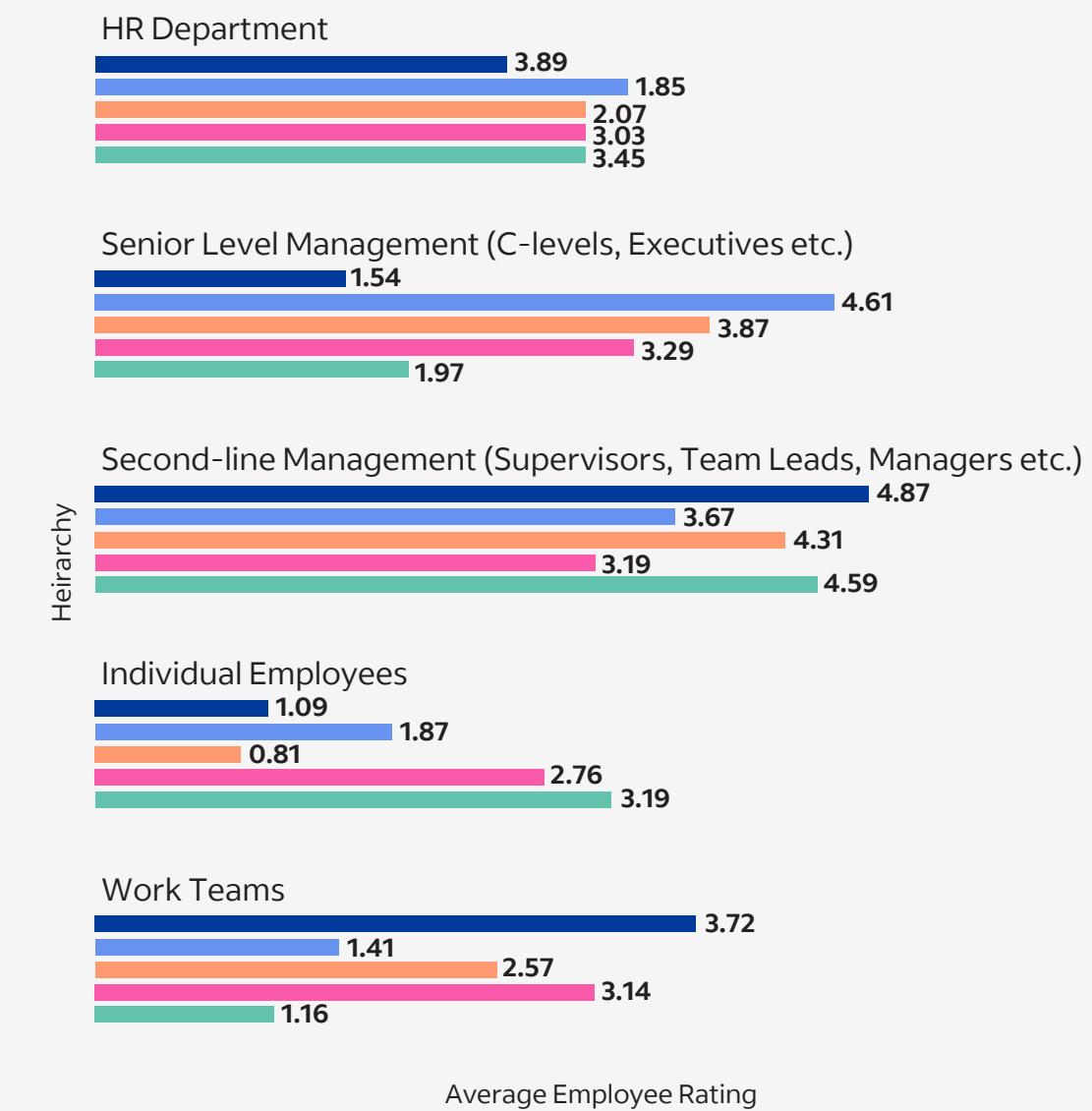


According to employees, to what degree do leaders have an impact on the following aspects of an employee?



To create a psychologically safe work environment, leaders can positively influence employees to be motivated at their job (rated 4.48 on a 5-point scale), provide a sense of security at work (rated 4.41 on a 5-point scale), and improve relationships with other peers or colleagues (rated 3.66 on a 5-point scale). However, employees believe that leaders can also negatively affect their work environment by impacting their mental well-being (rated 1.33 on a 5-point scale).

Employees' perspective on management and hierarchical levels and the onuses they carry



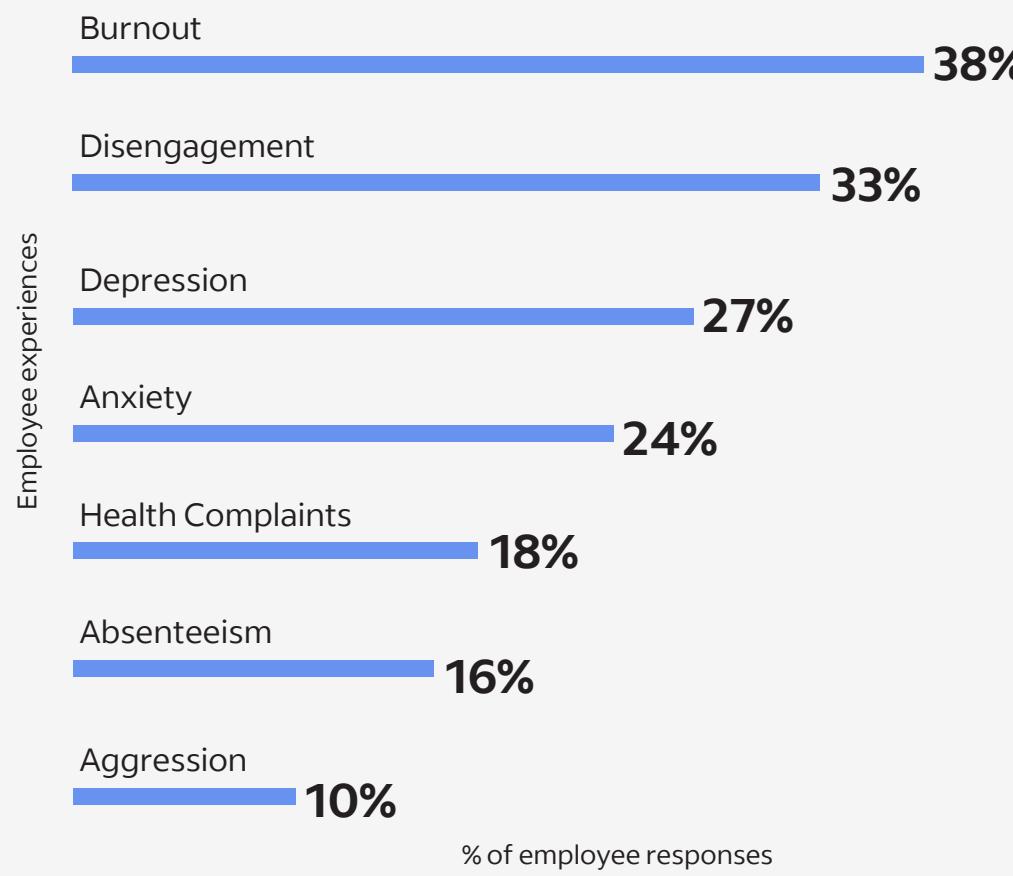
- Facilitating interactions and exchange
- Encouraging employees to be their authentic selves
- A culture of appreciation and respect
- Nurturing workplace relationships
- Encouraging the seeking of feedback and help

Employees accord a higher weightage to the HR department in facilitating interactions and exchange (rated 3.89 on a 5-point scale) and also on promoting a culture of appreciation and respect (rated 3.45 on a 5-point scale). Senior level management has the onus of nurturing workplace relationships (rated 4.61 on a 5-point scale).

Trend shifts over the past year

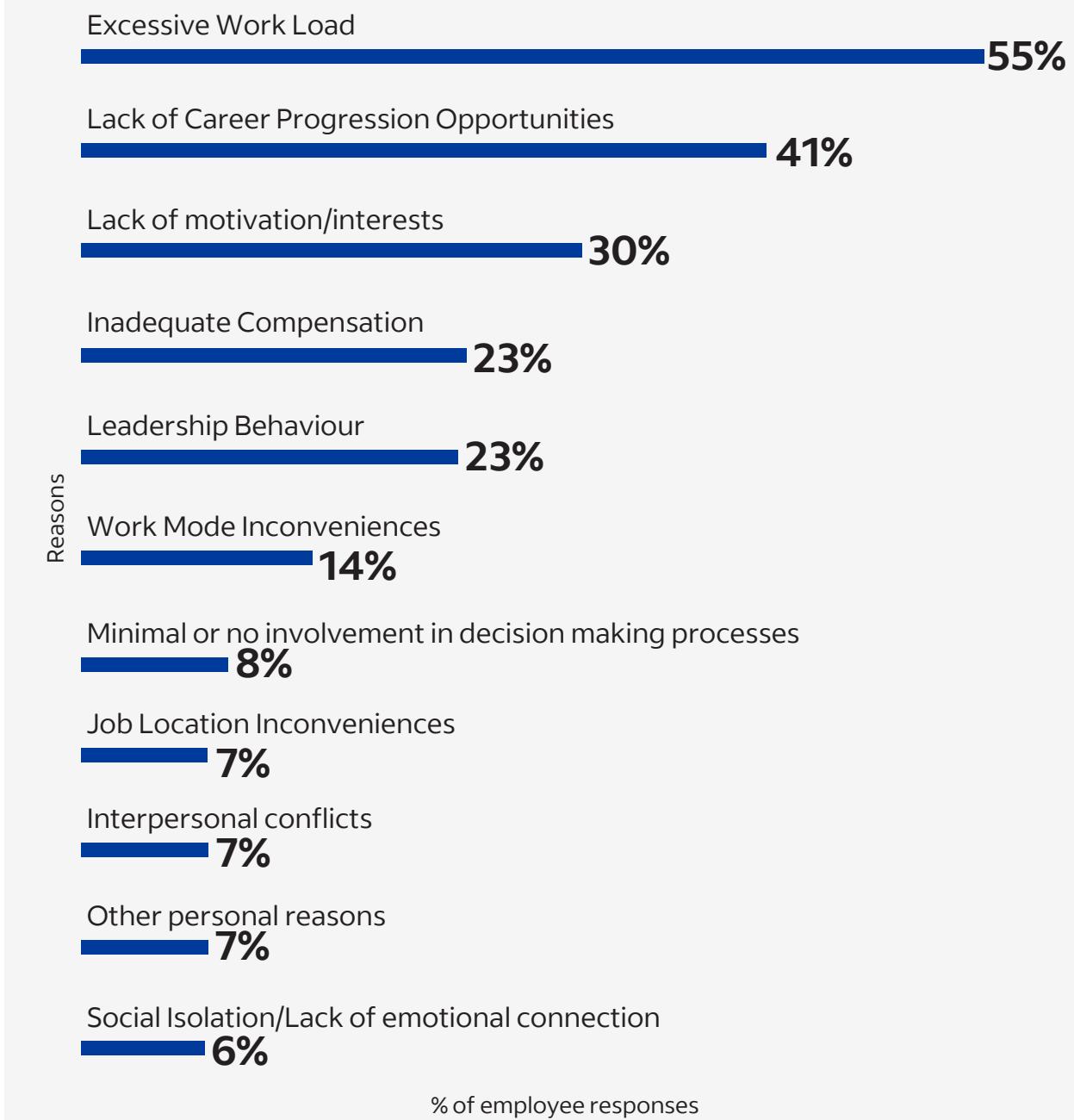


Which of the following did employees experience/observe at your workplace in the last 12 months?



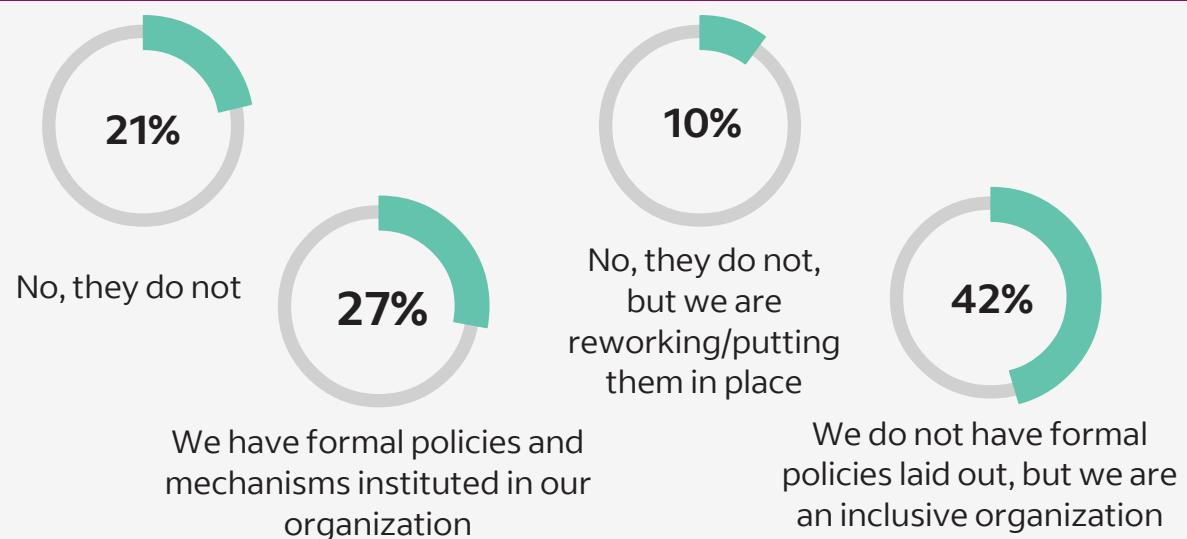
Most employees' responses (38%) suggest that burnout has been the most prevalent trend shift, followed by disengagement (33%) and other mental health related aspects such as depression (27%) and anxiety (24%).

What do employees think could be possible reasons for such experiences

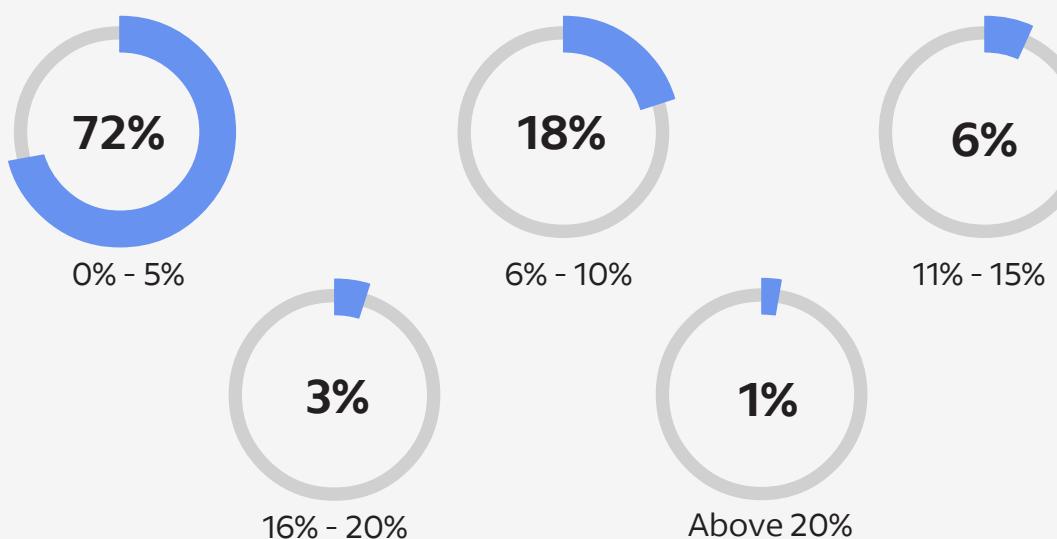


Excessive workload (55%) is cited as the major reason for disengagement. On the other hand, these experiences also arise from lack of career progression opportunities as indicated by 41% of the respondents. 30% of the respondents cite lack of motivation/interest as a major reason. Lastly, 23% respondents blame leadership behaviour and inadequate compensation for disengagement.

Do organizations policies and measures formally incorporate Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging at the workplace?



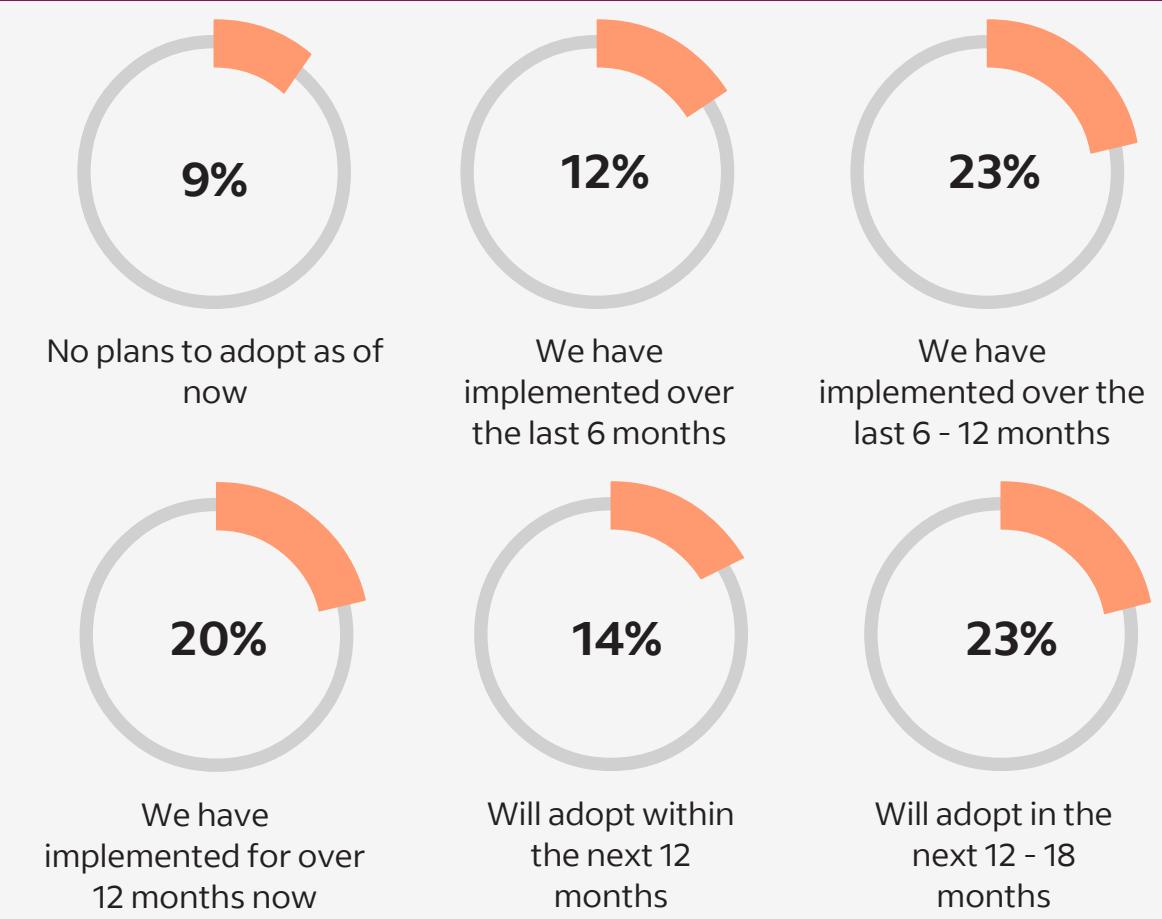
What percentage of your current HR budget is focused on DI&B



Only 27% of the employers report having formal policies instituted in their organizations currently, and 10% are reworking/putting them in place. Overall, 73% do not have formal policies in their organizations.

72% of employers say their organizations have 0-5% of their total HR Budget allocation dedicated to DI&B.

Do organizations policies and measures formally incorporate Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging at the workplace?

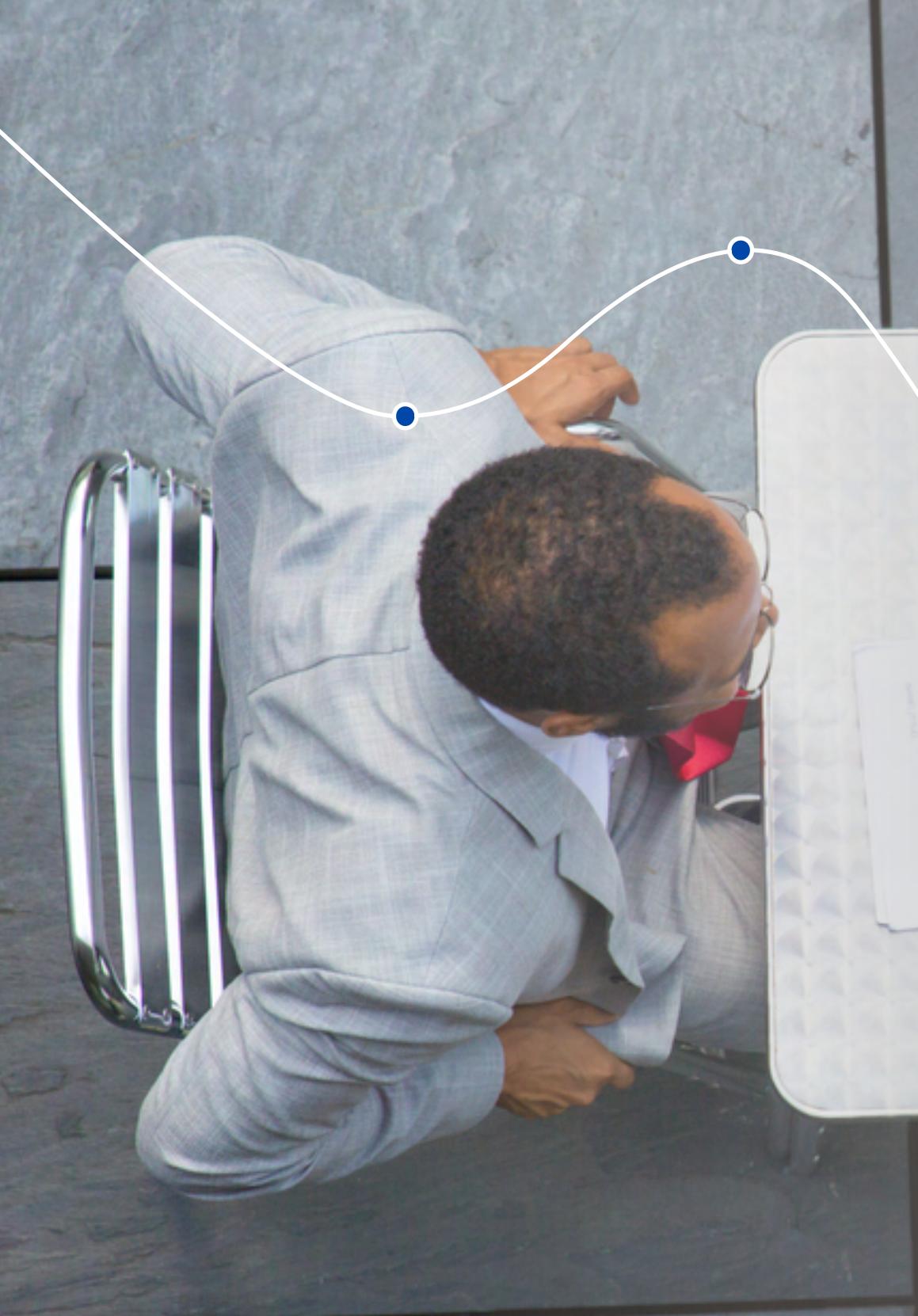


With 27% employers claiming to have implemented formal policies, how many were implemented in the near term? And do the remaining 73% have plans to adopt formal policies?

Of the 27% of employers who say their organizations have formal DI&B policies, more than one out of three (35% of these cases) were implemented in the past year, with 12% of the implementation being carried out in the last 6 months. Among those who haven't adopted yet, 14% are looking to adopt formal policies in the next 12 months, and 23% will adopt it in the next 12-18 months.

Near Future priorities from organizations and associated barriers

With an evident need for psychological safety, organizations are taking adequate steps to ensure their workplaces are suitable for diverse groups of people.



In the context of ensuring psychological safety, what are organizations' priorities during hiring and post hiring in the next 12 months?



More than one out of three employers (35%) are looking to spread awareness to ensure psychological safety. 29% say their organizations are prioritizing ensuring pay equity. About one out of four organizations (24%) see a need for diversifying interview panels in order to attract diverse talent. Additionally, 20% of them want to provide modes of working (remote/hybrid/in-office) per employees' conveniences.

According to one out of three employers (32%), a cultural legacy – the way people have perceived the notion of diversity over the years and the various stigmas and stereotypes associated with certain diverse groups – would not allow an organization to be diverse and hence inclusivity would also become hard to achieve. 28%, on the other hand, believe lack of policies in organizations restrict them from establishing DI&B within their organizations.

17% of all employers say trust deficit is adversely affecting the quality of feedback they have been getting. Lack of proper leadership/mentorship is also a big hindrance according to 17% respondents. Overall, these reasons cited by employers could pose major barriers in DI&B interventions, and companies must tackle them suitably if creating a work culture that is well appreciated by all employees is their priority.

Do organizations believe that their DI&B interventions are faced with any of the following hurdles?



Employee's and Leader's perspectives



Employee's and Leader's perspectives



Employee - Somya Matta, a working professional in the social sector who identifies as queer

How does psychological safety look like in your day-to-day experiences in the various organizations that you have worked in?

The major difference that I have seen in NGOs and MNCs is that while there are official mechanisms and institutions in a corporate set-up to deal with these issues, there's a lack of human connection in them. On the other hand, in most of the NGOs and field organizations, communication is open and free. Even though the mechanisms are there in MNCs, they are there just for the sake of it and no one is able to actually use them. Your team would be so close-knitted that if you approached an issue, you would be shut down quickly, and it's very hard to reach the HR or talk about it. There are many informal groups in the organization to have an immunity space, but they are not recognized officially. In a multinational organization, the policies reflect western ideas, but it doesn't match the Indian context. There is a huge gap between what the experiences of the people are and what the policies are.

There are great policies in place for mental health but it doesn't translate to action because there is no awareness amongst employees about mental health. So even if I have the option of taking the wellness leave, my manager will not know why I would require it. Then it will turn into asking four different people for taking a mental health day which becomes taxing.

How fearlessly are you able to interact with the leaders?

There is a lot of difference between corporations and non-profit organizations. In the Nonprofit organizations, it's easier to communicate and reach out to the superior. However, the majority of organizations will have one leader or one figure who is ultimately in-charge of the policies. There is no HR in a lot of these cases. In those cases, if you bring something up, it will go down to that one person's decision. Whereas in a corporate setup, it feels more mechanical. But what I have noticed is that it's very much dependent on your team, especially in MNCs.

So what should organizations and leaders do to ensure psychological safety?

First, there needs to be awareness about the issues for the new joinees as well as the other employees. If someone needs to access a counsellor or if they need to take mental health leave, they have to take multiple steps. Someone who is already disturbed would not be able to do all those things. The idea is not to add more to their plate but to help them. I think that kind of bureaucratic nature could use a little bit of work.

Second, a lot of the policies are not confidential even though there are events for LGBTQIA+ people. I think having stricter boundaries from the leadership point of view would also be a better step towards mental health in the organization. Other than that, it is crucial to ensure that even the leadership has certain training for awareness about these issues. Even though these trainings are mandatory for the new employees, the leaders never have to do it. They become an exception to the rule when they are the ones who require the most.

Do you think the organization would benefit from such kind of fearless interactions with its members?

I believe that conversation would help somewhat, but I don't know how long that can sustain in an organizational structure. What matters is the work at the organization and I don't think they will focus that much on the discourse, especially, but if it can hamper productivity. At the end of the day the team will have to work together.

Does the close-knit nature of the teams then become a hindrance for one able to pinpoint or rather highlight lapses in the work ethics or productivity?

Definitely! In the teams that are small, everyone knows everyone else. Even if it is something related to work, it will be taken as a personal attack instead because it's very hard to separate the individual from the work. Ultimately they also have to go through the proper organizational hierarchy or deal with the issue without involving the management. So I think when it is a very close-knit structure you cannot talk about these issues. Constructive feedback still may be possible but productive conflict is dependent on the hierarchy in the organization. If someone who is a manager brings out a conflict, that would still be respected and thought of as a good thing but not otherwise.

Have you faced any discrimination because of your identity, appearance, attire, or your thoughts and ideas?

In a few of the organizations, your identity can become the face of diversity, even though you don't want to. That becomes a tool against you. Then it also creates a niche for you that if there is any project related to marginality, then you will have it. You sometimes become the flag bearer of the whole community. Mostly, I have also noticed micro aggressions where I would not be included for after office hangouts and lunches. Of course, in such a space they are not allowed to discriminate openly, so it becomes subtle.

Does the stigma in organizations affect career progression?

When you are subtly left out of the room, other employees would have a sense of belongingness to the team, but you would never feel a part of the team. Others still have some sort of understanding about which project they are being assigned because they have become a very close-knit group and you are sort of just like outsider in that group. So, you will get whatever is remaining or whatever will suit your identity and the other projects that are bigger, have more options of learning, are more prestigious, and have more options of professional growth, those are something you wouldn't have access to. A lot of the grunt work will come to you. That is an unspoken thing and I think it also has little bit to do with my tenure in the company.

Do you still think the policy is a good idea or do you think something else should come before the policies?

I think policies and awareness should simultaneously be there because the policy will not help without sensitization. However, people are not aware of these policies and number are actually scared of accessing them because they know that if they do, they are outing their identities to everyone.



Leader - Sunita Cherian, Chief Culture Officer & Senior Vice President - Human Resources, Wipro

How does culture play a role in institutionalizing psychological safety? How does this lead to organizational benefits in the long run?

Having a culture based on clear values is critical. We call them the Spirit of Wipro, and these values serve as our moral compass. Much of our ways of work and leadership role-modeling reinforce this culture. We articulated these values in action with our Five Habits early in 2020. The pandemic made them more relevant than ever as we adapted to new ways of working and started our cultural transformation journey. In addition to the Five Habits, two additional cultural traits help to drive our success:

- First, we steadfastly believe it is essential to speak up, to call out things that can be improved.
- Second, we firmly believe that leaders need to lead – they need to be visible ambassadors for our customers and our company, and the culture we try to live every day. It's about creating safe spaces where every employee can bring their authentic selves to work.

We also embrace change as a big part of our cultural transformation journey. It's often said that "change is the only constant in business," and that's true at Wipro. Embracing the constant presence of change encourages us to break down barriers and consider new, innovative solutions.

Our Chairman, Rishad Premji – highlights this during his immersive sessions on the Five Habits with leaders. He discusses how being vulnerable and respectful when we call things out makes a big difference in showing that change does not have to be threatening. Finally, we always believe it is a big strength for our leaders and our company to genuinely listen, constantly learn, and help us grow as individuals and as a business.

What role do leaders play in fostering psychological safety? Do you feel others in the organization also shape this aspect?

Leaders can build psychological safety by creating the right team climate, mindset, and behaviors. They need to show openness to feedback and new ideas and, as much as possible, operate from a vantage of transparency so team members can see the big picture. Those who do this best genuinely act as catalysts, empowering and enabling other leaders and team members. This works even with those with no formal authority; we always believe leadership is not a function of title or hierarchy but of how one approaches solving customer problems and collaborating across teams. Such a focus helps to cultivate psychological safety by reinforcing the behaviors leaders expect from the rest of the team. Our CHRO often says that leaders live in glass houses. That's true. Every move that a leader makes is watched and reflected on by teams. People put far more weight, appropriately, on what a leader does, not just on what they say. As leaders, we must exemplify behaviors that build safe spaces and our culture. In short, leadership calls on individuals to reflect, be vulnerable, be empathetic and encourage people to come forward with great ideas. Of course, ongoing communication is critical so that team members are always aware of the end goal – especially aware of changes that occur while getting there!

How do you think psychological safety impacts inclusion and diversity in an organization? What could be the challenges?

Wiproites today work in more than 66 countries, with diverse nationalities and a multi-generational workforce. By its very nature, this recognizes, supports, and celebrates the idea that diverse teams with diverse backgrounds and ways to solve customer problems will arrive at the best solutions. This is true for many global organizations today. Helping people embrace others with different beliefs and behaviors takes continuous, sustained effort and must be genuinely supported by senior leaders. This focus on diversity and inclusion also needs to be reflected in policies and processes, as is the case at Wipro today. For us, inclusion is a way of life and an ongoing journey. We move forward, learn, and improve – as individuals and as a team – by driving mutual respect for all.

How do you think calling things out and sharing candid feedback are instrumental in sustaining an inclusive organization?

Driving improvement – for our employees and our culture – means it's critical to be open to giving and receiving candid feedback in a thoughtful way. This enables continuous improvement that helps individuals and organizations grow and evolve. This is by no means an easy task. But it tends to create an environment where people feel secure while supporting authenticity and honesty in all communications. It is also essential to remember that people constantly evolve, and their experiences shape the long-term evolution of our culture and inspire our growth.

What efforts are required to nurture diversity throughout the talent lifecycle of attracting, hiring, retaining, and promoting diverse talent?

As Jesse Jackson, the American civil rights activist, once said, "When everyone is included, everyone wins." Our focus is on creating and sustaining an environment where all Wiproites feel safe and respected and can do their best every day. We try to foster a culture of inclusion for all, irrespective of their backgrounds or identities. This requires much focus on creating more awareness about unconscious biases that can act as potential barriers to inclusion, thus, encouraging the best results from every individual. Inclusion and diversity are not just a "program" or a "department" in any successful company. They must be integrated into all aspects of business operations. That is why we have integrated inclusion into the employee experience lifecycle, from attracting, hiring, retaining, and promoting diverse talent to leading our ongoing success. Our CEO, Thierry Delaporte champions our I&D efforts. And he personally serves as the executive sponsor of our efforts, supported by central and local I&D councils to drive accountability deep into the business. Two key areas define our journey: Learning and listening. It's important to unlearn and learn as an organization. And it's equally important to listen to what is happening in the world, what employees are thinking, and new ways to truly create an inclusive environment. Across our focus areas, we have comprehensive frameworks that ensure our focus encompasses all aspects of talent management.

Every day we learn new things, and we are proud of our journey while realizing it is a never-ending journey.

How can having safe spaces in a culture add value to an employer's brand and business performance?

Creating a genuinely safe space for employees isn't just the right thing to do; it is a competitive advantage. It is central to how an employer brand can be experienced by diverse people in an organization who will come together to help a company succeed. Psychological safety impacts not just engagement but also the perception of an organization. Policies and processes that support and encourage inclusivity, ideation, and innovation play key roles in accomplishing the goals of an organization. The key? Creating robust organizations where people take pride in belonging. Here's a simple fact: Unhappy employees are less productive. That's why providing employees with a safe haven is critical to success. When there is no psychological safety in the workplace, people react and respond differently to situations. As a result, productivity and innovation drop, and revenue and profits fall. This translates into costs for the individual — such as health problems, poor decision quality, and low satisfaction — and into costs for the company, such as absenteeism, attrition, the inability to retain highly skilled workers, low engagement, low skill acquisition, low innovation, and low productivity. Eventually, such an environment translates into a poor employer brand and a sustained competitive disadvantage.

Tell us about some of your recent I&D initiatives designed to promote your employees' psychological safety and wellness.

The focus on our I&D charter has accelerated. While creating a safe space for our employees, we learned that only creating inclusive policies and processes alone may not help. A broader, inclusive ecosystem needs to be developed that enables all employees to come forward and speak up freely. Hence, we create awareness around unconscious bias, especially with our people managers, so they are well equipped with this knowledge and tools to overcome it as much as possible. We encourage Wipro employees to #BreakTheBias and have institutionalized an e-learning module on unconscious bias. We also recently completed our first year of Enrich program for high-potential women employees. It's a sponsorship program focused on strengthening the talent pipeline and creating an ecosystem of enablement. The key objectives include encouraging protégés to take on challenging assignments, enhancing visibility, and enabling networking with senior leadership and peers. To foster a culture of ongoing development, some of our senior leaders in key roles have been assigned executive coaches and enrolled in executive leadership programs at premier business schools around the world. We have another program called Begin Again, which provides a platform for women who have taken a career break to return to work.

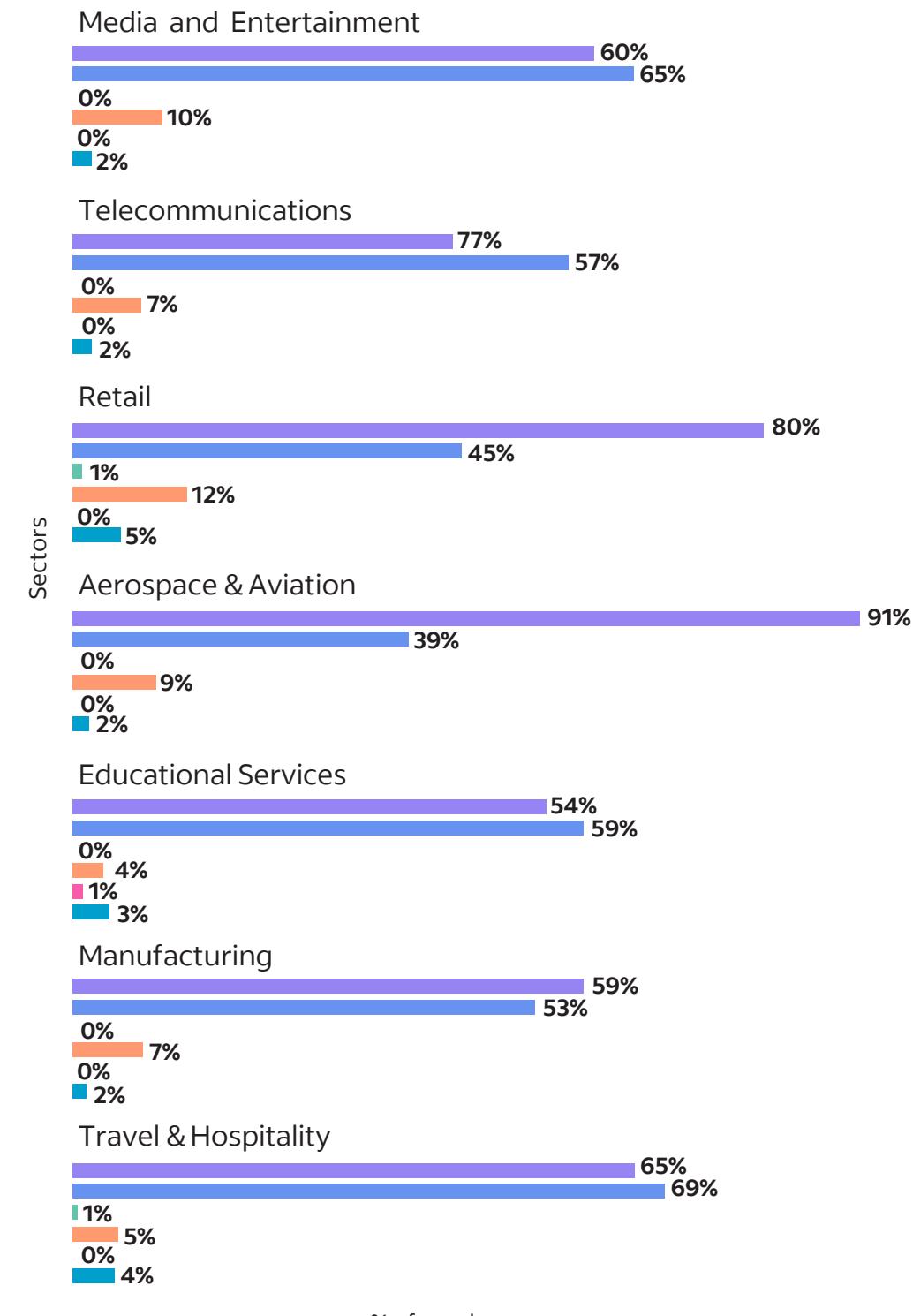
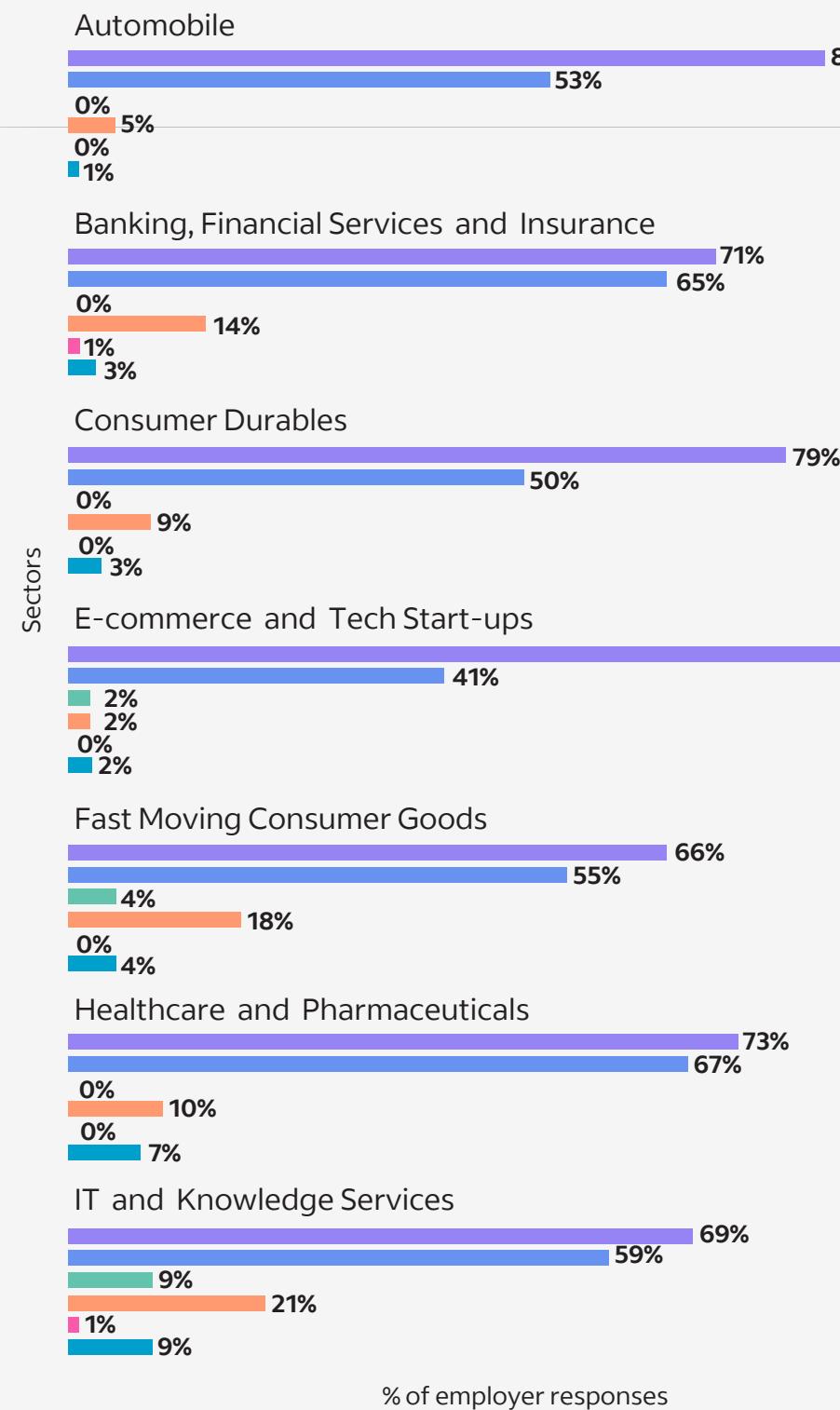
This program has helped women develop confidence and enhance their skills to be ready to return to the corporate world. Watching them feel empowered has been fabulous, and there is a lot to learn from our success with this program. At Wipro, our employees' safety, health, and well-being are paramount. To address the challenges of new ways of working, employee well-being has become a critical success factor strategically. We took several measures to ensure our employees' emotional and mental well-being. A whole set of initiatives are planned around wellness calendars globally which encourage and engage conversations, interventions on various aspects of wellness and activities that can help people be more aware of their wellbeing and health. Nurturing Wellness platform, which offers 24/7 emergency care for employees. When it comes to inclusion and diversity, we know it is a long journey. There is no reason to say we know it all or have learned all there is to know. It is evolving and changing. What people see as opportunities and an environment to enable these are constantly transforming. Successful companies are those that embrace this change and learn from it.



Annexure -

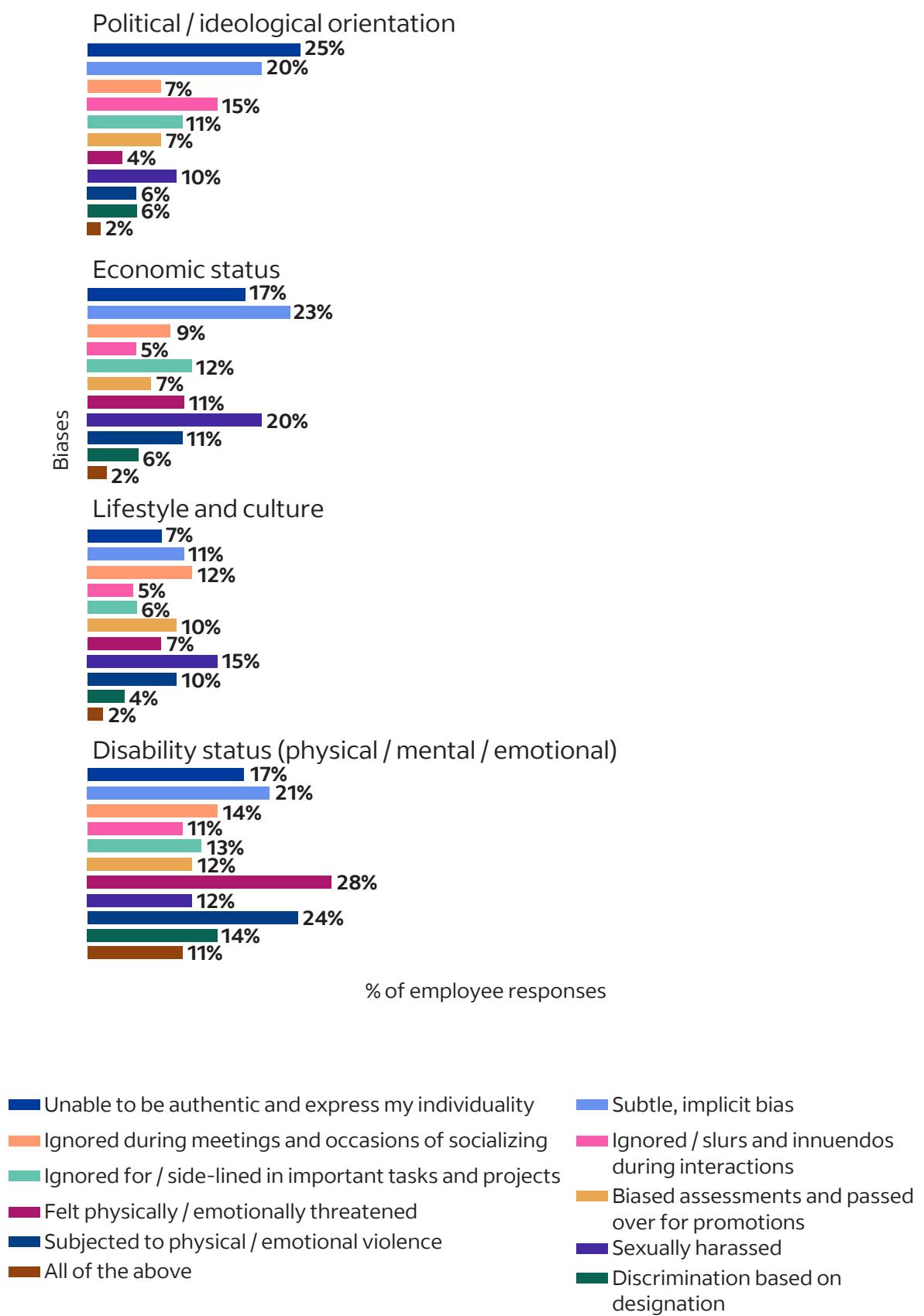
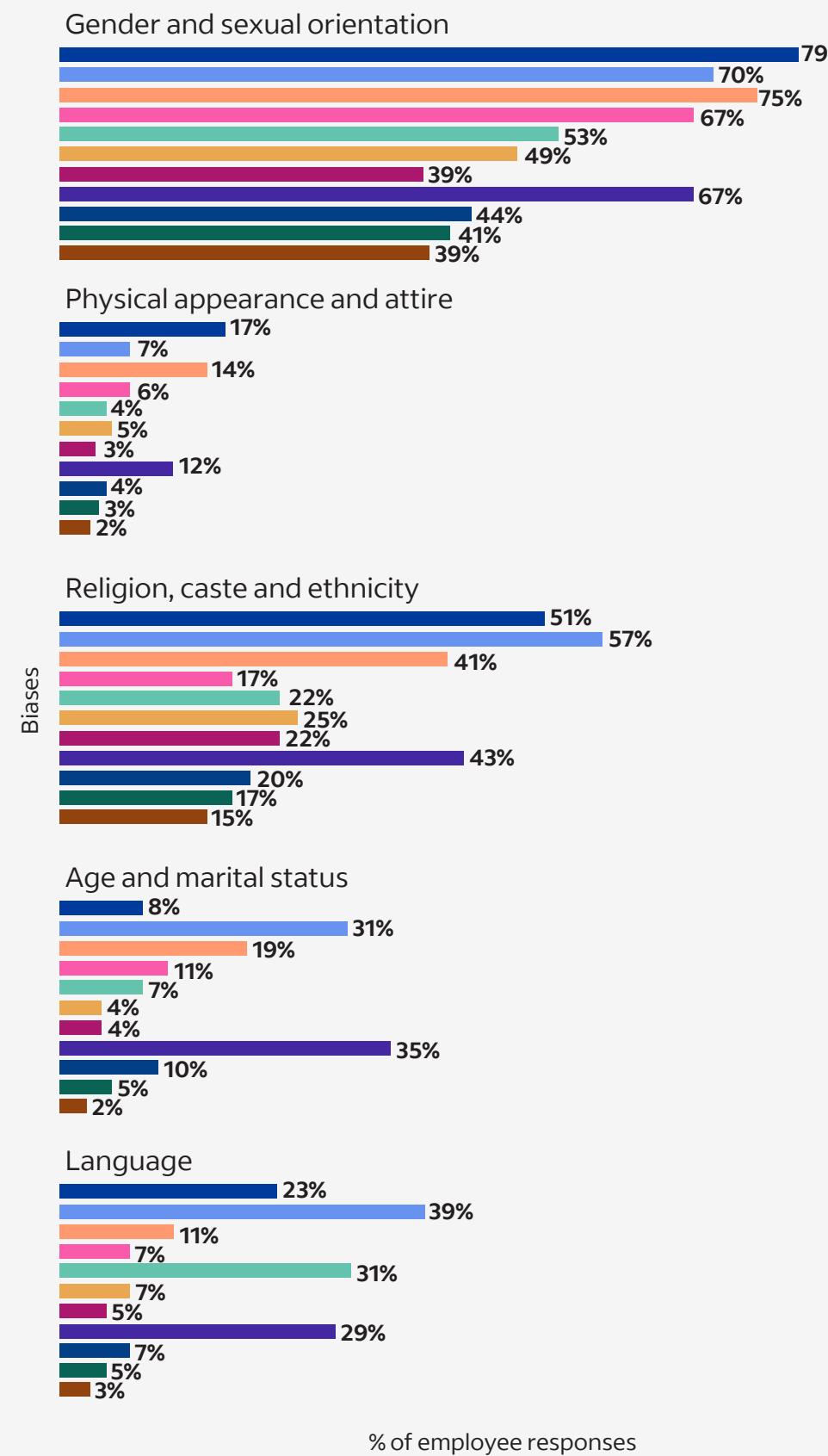
- > Additional Charts
- > Research Methodology
- > Bibliography and References

Diversity Hiring Across Sectors

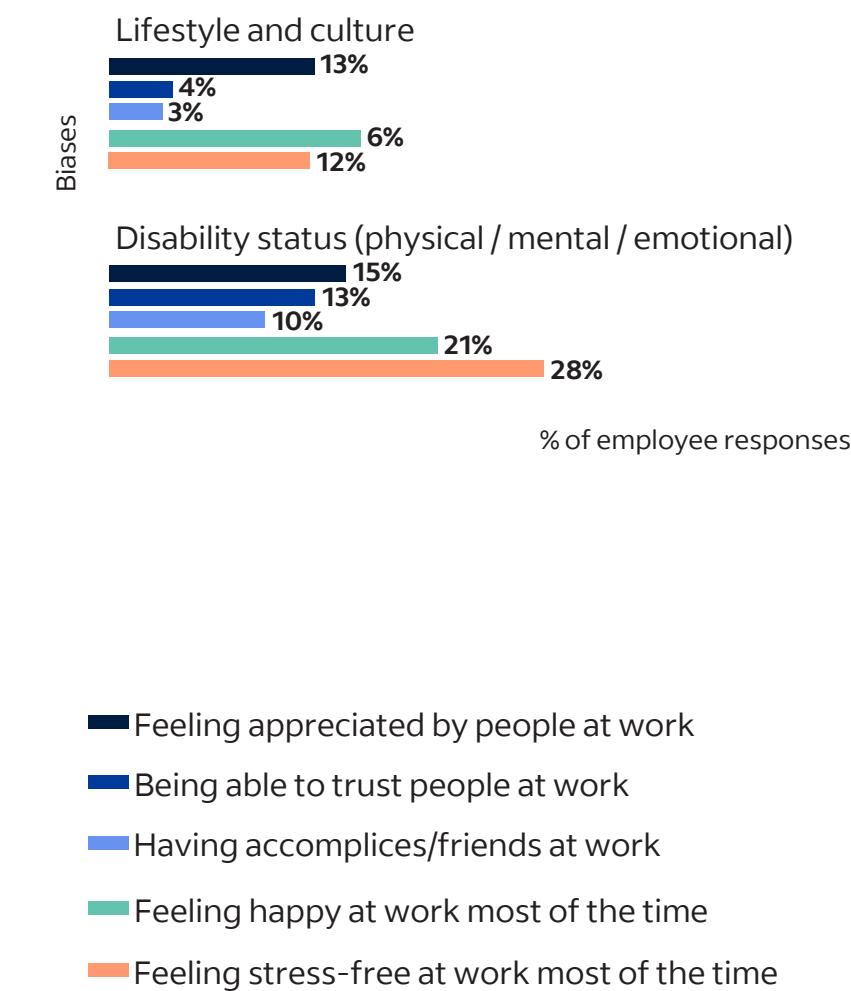
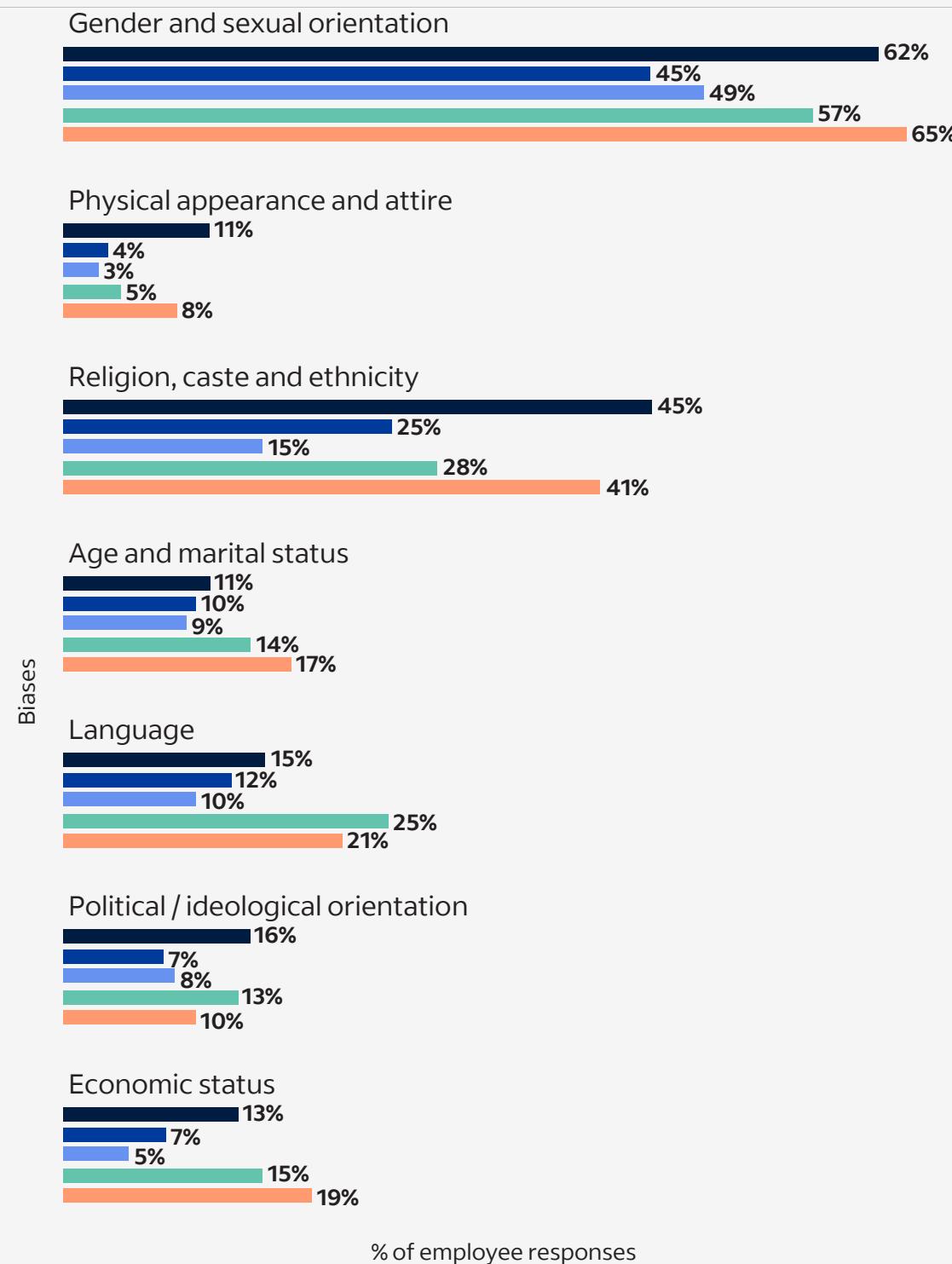


█ Men █ Women █ LGBTIQ+ █ People with disabilities - physical
█ Neurodiverse people - mentally different-abled █ Minorities

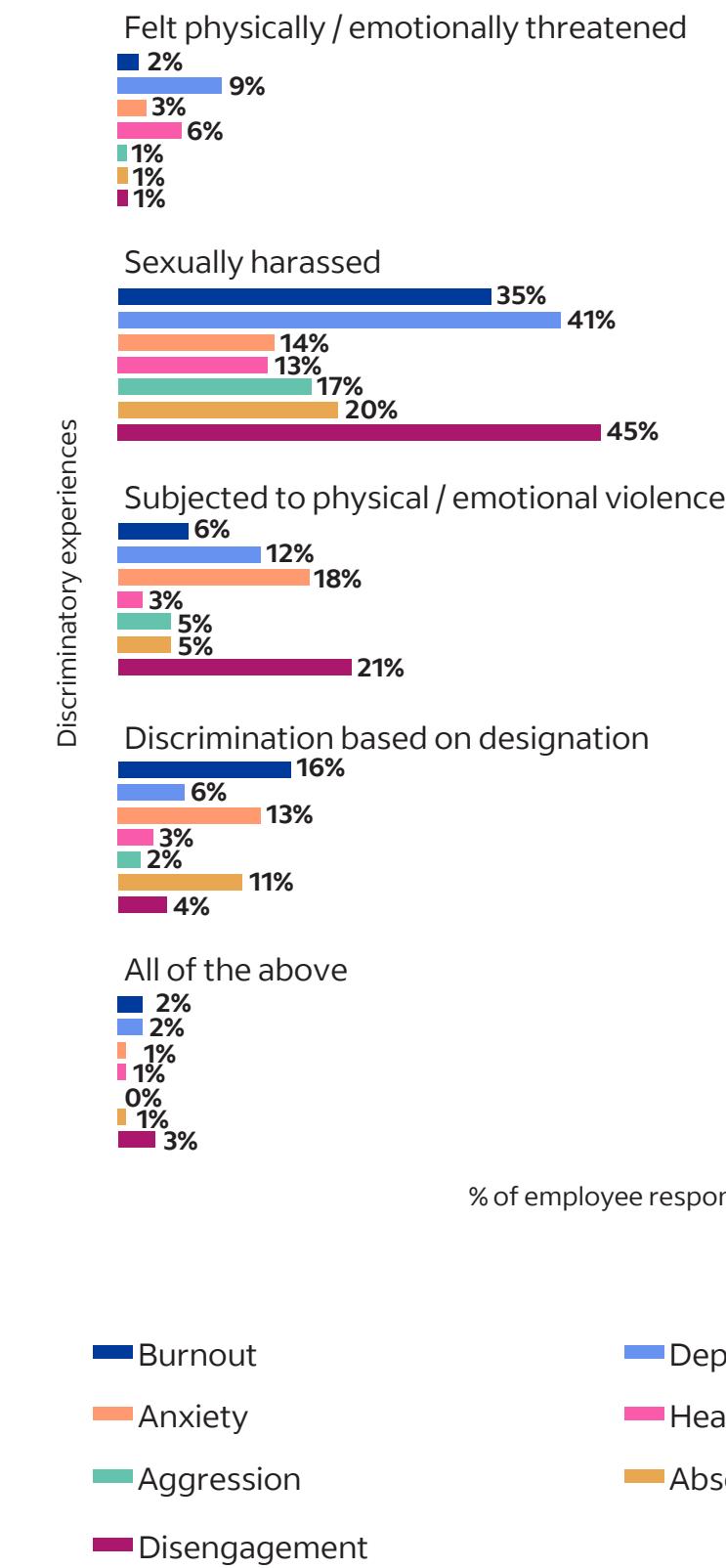
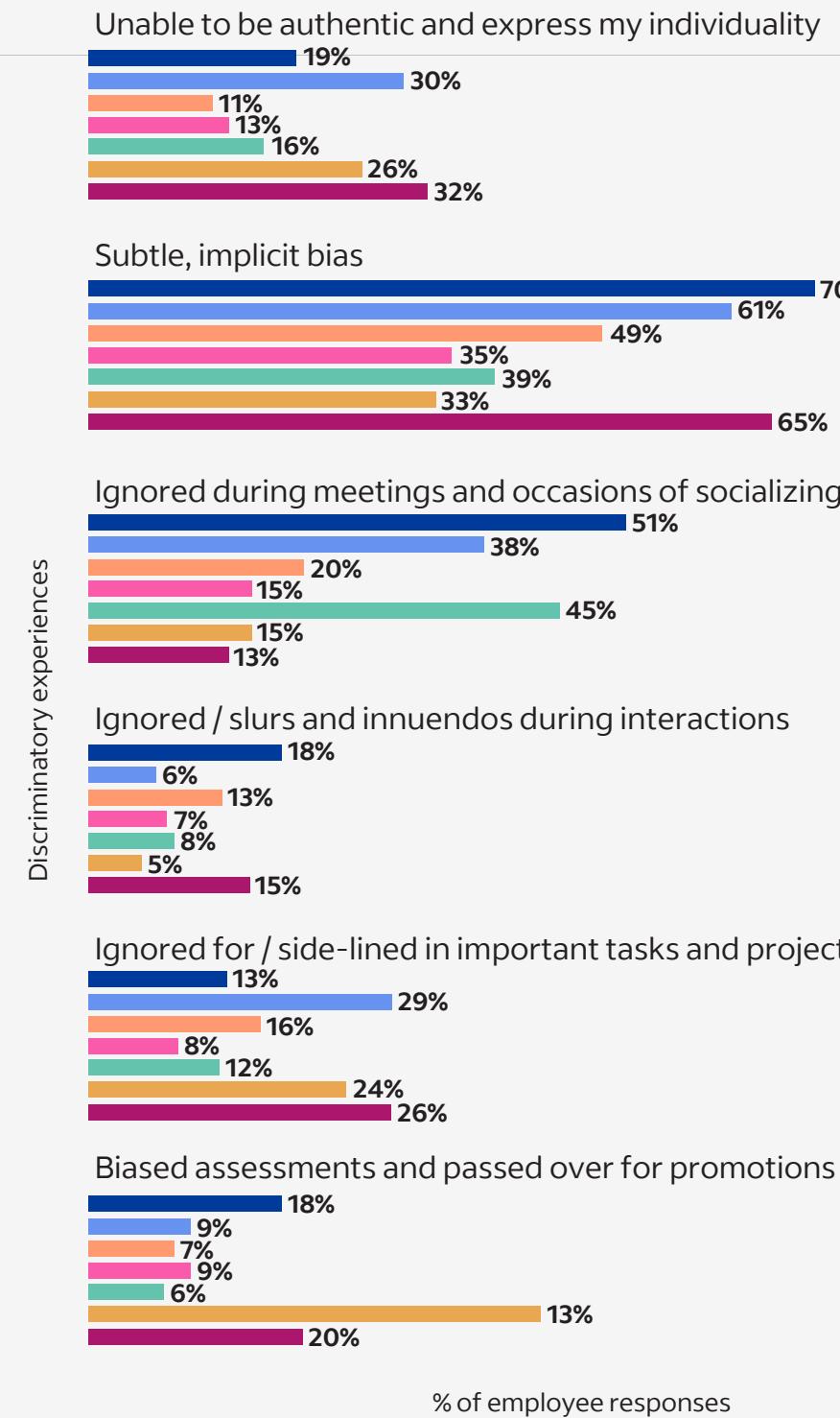
Discriminatory Experiences as a Consequence of Biases



What makes people facing biases feel psychological safety



Discriminatory experiences linked with employee experiences



Annexure - Research Methodology

This Indeed-Valuvox research exercise was carried out in three stages.

Stage 1: Secondary research – an extensive review of publicly available literature and data

Stage 2: Primary research – Quantitative research surveys were carried out among 1,200 distinct employers and 1,500 employees from distinct organizations in the month of November 2022.

Stage 3: Qualitative research – Managers and people working in different organizations participated in one-on-one depth interviews. A focused group discussion (FGD) consisting of 10 leaders (diversity managers) was also carried out.

Employer Sample Size: 1,206

City	N	Sector	N
Ahmedabad	87	Automobile	71
Bangalore	151	Banking, Financial Services and Insurance	89
Chandigarh	70	Consumer Durables	69
Chennai	121	E-commerce and Tech Start-ups	61
Delhi/NCR	109	Fast Moving Consumer Goods	67
Hyderabad	91	Healthcare and Pharmaceuticals	101
Kanpur	70	IT and Knowledge Services	146
Kolkata	77	Media and Entertainment	111
Mumbai	124	Telecommunications	129
Nagpur	44	Retail	102
Pune	93	Aerospace & Aviation	70
Gurgaon	44	Educational Services	96
Indore	29	Manufacturing	54
Coimbatore	55	Travel & Hospitality	40
Lucknow	41		

Organization Size	N
Small (less than 100 employees)	481
Medium (100 to 1000 employees)	357
Large (greater than 1000 employees)	368

Employee Sample Size: 1,518

City	N
Ahmedabad	97
Bangalore	190
Chandigarh	97
Chennai	151
Delhi/NCR	138
Hyderabad	164
Kanpur	79
Kolkata	101
Mumbai	132
Nagpur	71
Pune	67
Gurgaon	60
Indore	51
Coimbatore	67
Lucknow	53

Sector	N
Automobile	85
Banking, Financial Services and Insurance	151
Consumer Durables	133
E-commerce and Tech Start-ups	119
Fast Moving Consumer Goods	117
Healthcare and Pharmaceuticals	149
IT and Knowledge Services	174
Media and Entertainment	113
Telecommunications	105
Retail	94
Aerospace & Aviation	61
Educational Services	88
Manufacturing	89
Travel & Hospitality	40

Organization Size	N
Small (less than 100 employees)	603
Medium (100 to 1000 employees)	512
Large (greater than 1000 employees)	403

Disability Status	N
Yes (physically disabled)	291
Yes (neurologically disabled)	41
No	922
Prefer not to say	264

Annexure

Types of diversity

Type	Based on	Components
Demographic	Demographic background	Age, gender, caste, religion, ethnicity, race, ability and disability status
Experiential	Life experiences	Being a parent, being an employee, former doctor, being a policeman, immigrant, etc.
Informational	Individual knowledge and educational background	Completed schooling, being a graduate, post graduate, professional degree holder, etc.
Fundamental	Individual beliefs and values	Importance of ethics in workplace, relationship among the workforce

Dimensions of diversity

Primary dimensions	Secondary dimensions	Tertiary dimensions
Ethnicity	Religion	Beliefs
Age	Economic status	Assumptions
Gender	Sexual orientation	Perceptions
Disability	Thinking style	Attitudes
	Political orientation	Feelings
	Work-ex and education	Values
	Lifestyle	Group norms
	Culture	
	Family status	
	Nationality	

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your hiring and employer
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