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CORPORATE CULTURE RESEARCH

Understanding the future of
workplace culture through a
Social Values lens

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THE WORK/LIFE LANDSCAPE HAS SHIFTED

Context

The Work/Life Landscape Has Shifted

Massive disruptions are arriving with increasing frequency and intensity – from technological upheavals to convulsive social movements to a global pandemic.

Against this backdrop, how people think and feel about work has been undergoing important changes. When the pandemic disrupted many of the routines and assumptions of work, changes in perspective came out into the open – sparking workplace conversations that were sometimes productive, sometimes challenging.

Today, employers are struggling to figure out how to meet employee needs while running a business. Many employees feel their employers don't understand them – are not responding to their evolving needs or true motivations.

Leading businesses are working hard to bridge this disconnect, seeking to understand employees' thinking and meet them where they are.

The Social Values method provides a valuable tool for employers, helping them gain nuanced insight into what employees really want and how to deliver.



Introduction

A New Work Landscape Demands New Insights

As personal and societal values evolve, so do workplaces. The last decade has seen tremendous change in the workplace – and the pace of transformation has only increased in recent years.

During the pandemic, workplace environments became instant field experiments, where previously unthinkable or “maybe someday” ideas were implemented out of necessity. In many cases, feared consequences such as lost productivity did not materialize and unexpected benefits, often in the form of improved work-life balance, were clear.

But while many commentators have suggested that COVID-19 unleashed totally new trends, the seeds of recent changes were planted long before the pandemic. Adaptations the pandemic forced on organizations simply hastened trends that were already underway. For example, Social Values research has consistently shown increasing attraction to autonomy and desire for personal control among knowledge workers, who now expect a greater say in the nature of their jobs and their overall working conditions. We believe these changes will be enduring and that the workplace will continue to evolve in fundamental ways.

In this context, companies need to develop a better understanding of the underlying values and motivations of their employees in order to create harmonious and productive work environments. Many firms already show a growing awareness of the importance of corporate culture and of the value of tools to measure, evolve and manage this key element of the corporate work environment. Environics’ suite of social values-based tools offer a unique way of understanding and shaping organizational culture, especially by understanding psychographic differences and diversity within teams.



Overview

Three Key Challenges to Consider

1

Accounting for Workforce Differences

2

Enhancing Cohesion and Collaboration

3

Supporting Employees Through Change

Key Work Issues

Accounting for Workforce Differences

GENERATIONS UNDER ONE 'ROOF'

With members of younger generations making up a growing share of the workforce, most organizations will have staff of different ages and experience levels collaborating and working together. This mixing of life stages and perspectives introduces a wealth of opportunities for learning and growth – as well as potential challenges.

DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES

When managers and pundits discuss generational diversity, they often focus on differences in expectations, behaviours, ways of working, experience levels, expertise and skillsets, including technological capabilities. Less often discussed are the values that shape employees' needs and engagement at work – and how values differences manifest in the workplace. When it comes to diversity in the workplace, there's a range of important and distinct perspectives to consider, whether internal or external to the organization.

EMPATHY AS CRITICAL BUSINESS TOOL

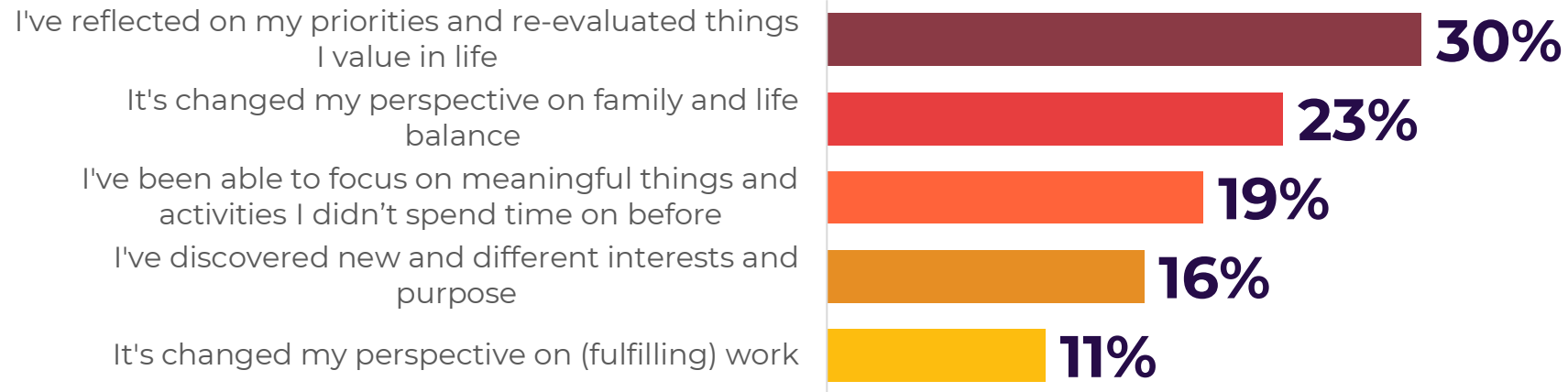
Empathy is becoming more widely recognized as an essential quality for all employees. The ability to understand and engage with a diversity of perspectives is increasingly seen as an invaluable workplace asset – whether employees are working with organizations' clients/customers, collaborating across and within teams, or taking on leadership roles.



Accounting for Workforce Differences

Shift in life priorities affecting some more than others

The pandemic has inspired reflection and re-evaluation among many workers; this is accompanied by a sense of overwhelm and search for awareness as they strive to navigate their path forward. (See *next slide*.) Thus, it's important for employers to understand how their teams' perspectives have changed (as well as remained the same) – and to evolve the workplace to ensure continued alignment with employees' current and emerging needs, differences, and values.



It's also important to account for generational differences in attitudes, as definitions of what constitutes meaningful work – and approaches to balancing the personal and the professional – can vary widely, even leading to misunderstanding or conflict. Gen Z and (young) Millennials in particular, are markedly more likely than Boomers to have changed their thinking about what defines fulfilling work, while Gen X (older and more likely to be parents) are more inclined to feel squeezed by the juggle of family and work.

Social Values of... Those whose perspectives have changed (11%)

Below are five key values of Canadians who agree that altered rhythms during the pandemic “changed my perspective on (fulfilling) work”.



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ANOMIE AIMLESSNESS

The feeling of having no goals in life. Experiencing a void of meaning with respect to life in general. A feeling of alienation from society, having the impression of being cut off from what's happening.



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WORK ETHIC

Following the “golden rule” and guiding one's life according to the principles of deferring pleasure in order to realize greater gains in the future. Individuals who score high on this construct believe that children should be taught to work hard in order to get ahead.



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INTROSPECTION & EMPATHY

Tendency to analyze and examine one's actions and those of others, rather than being judgmental about variances from the norm or from one's own way of doing things. An interest in understanding life rather than taking sides.



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TIME STRESS

Feeling of never having enough time in a day to get everything done. The sense that being overwhelmed by what is to be done and of always “running against the clock” causes stress and anxiety in one's life.



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VOLUNTARY SIMPLICITY

Balancing quality vs. quantity in life. The desire to achieve a sense of quality of life combined with the willingness to scale back one's material expectations or concentrate on those things that are truly important in life.



IMAGE CREDIT:
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As employees increasingly engage in self-reflection and evaluate how and where they want to spend their valuable time and energy, it will be critical for employers and leaders to understand individual perspectives and experiences.

This insight will help organizations provide for personally fulfilling work that earns employees' trust and commitment.

—Susan Seto, Senior Vice President
Market Strategy

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Key Work Issues

Enhancing Cohesion and Collaboration

HYBRID AS COMPROMISE

There's been a tug of war between the remote working arrangements that many organizations adopted during the pandemic and more recent calls to return to office. Many organizations have landed on a hybrid approach, meaning that today's work rhythms bear little resemblance to those most people experienced before the pandemic, even among organizations mandating a full week in the office.

TOGETHER, YET ALONE

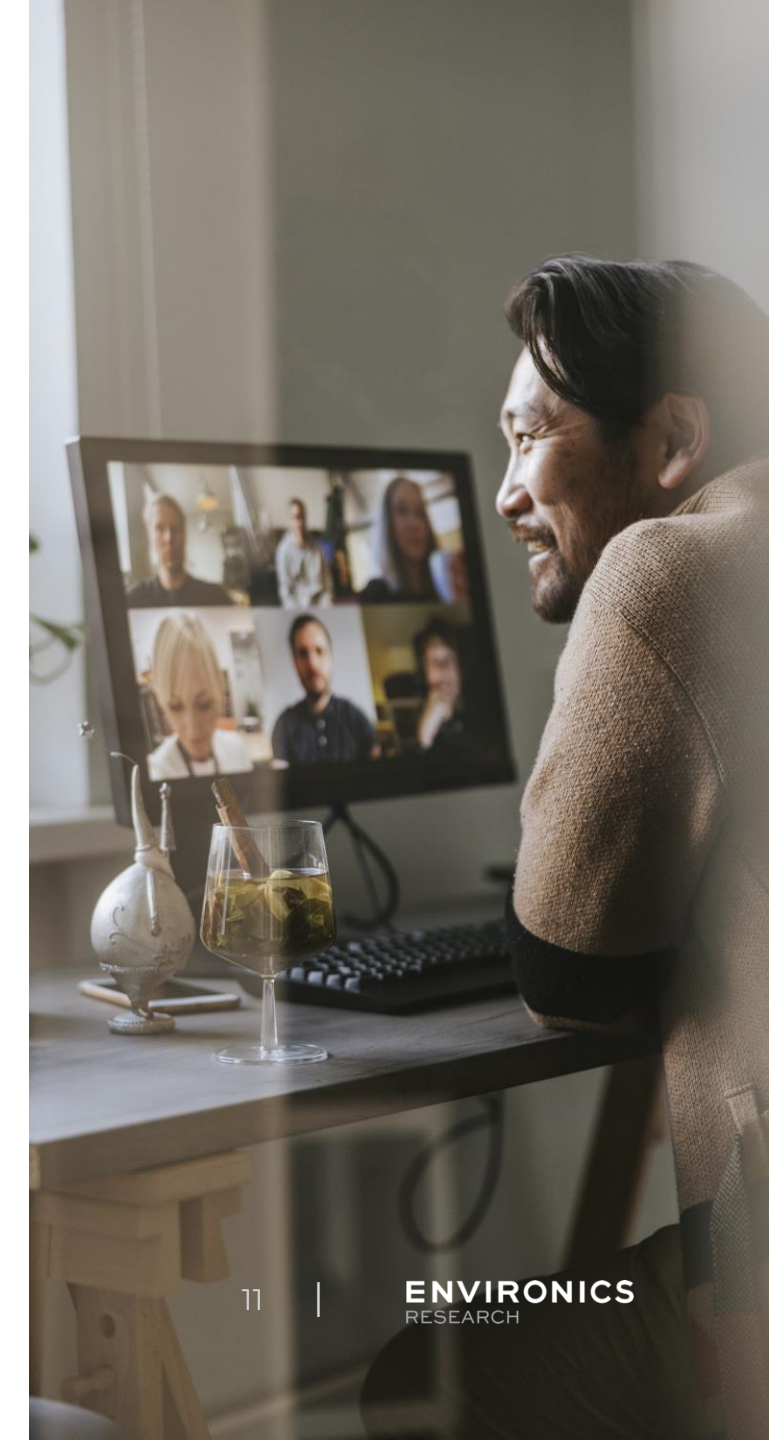
Staff may have settled into working independently/remotely, but social interactions, teamwork and collaborative opportunities still matter. At least some form of gathering is essential, whatever the frequency and format. 'Never-ending' online video meetings have led to fatigue. Opportunities to interact and collaborate in person and learn from each other are fewer and farther between. Social and physical cues are more difficult to read (and to express well), leading to easy misinterpretation of communication and intents. A genuine sense of connectedness is lacking.

ESSENTIAL CONNECTIONS

Different teams operate differently and have varying requirements in terms of teamwork and collaboration. Individuals also vary in their personal needs and preferences with respect to social interactions and bonding. While some staff may be in nirvana working independently and remotely, others crave more connection. However they're built, successful teams and organizations need trust and some level of social cohesion in order to collaborate effectively. Meeting employees' diverse social needs is more important – and more difficult – than ever before.

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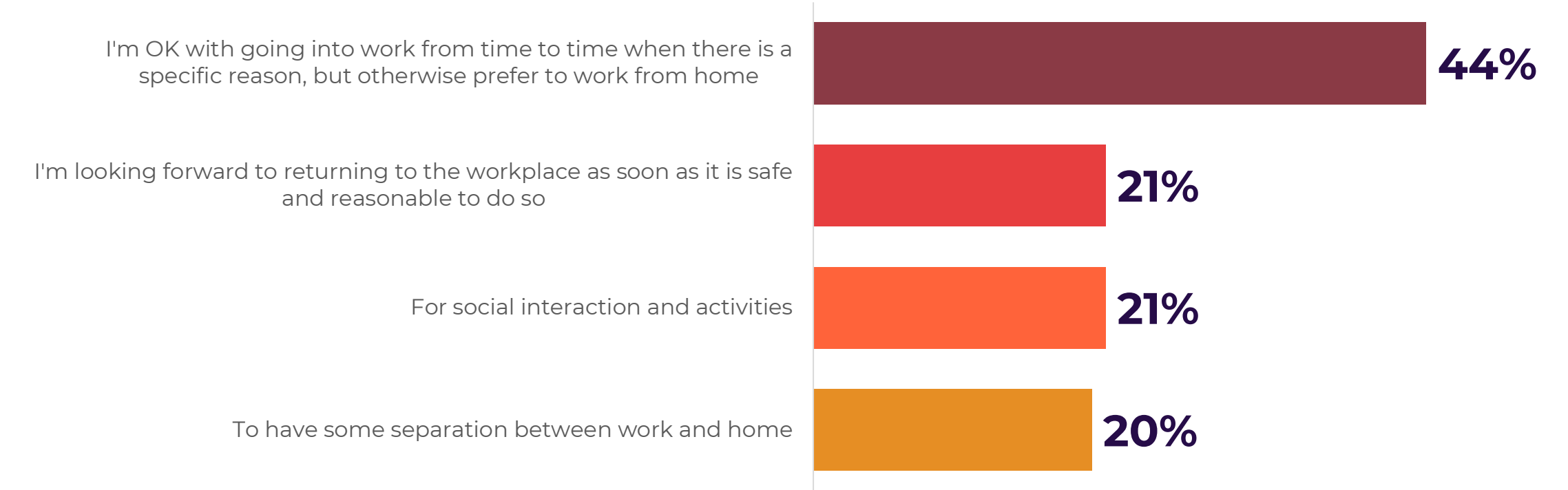
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Enhancing Cohesion and Collaboration

Getting back to the workplace for a purpose

Remote work is great, and a return to in-person has some value. Social interactions and activities, as well as the ability to separate work from home, are reasons driving staff back into offices. Canadians who are looking to get back to the workplace hold values that are more risk-taking, novelty-oriented, status-seeking and attracted to sensory experiences than average. (See next slide.)



Social Values of...

Those who are eager to return to the workplace (21%)

Below are five key values of Canadians who agree that “I’m looking forward to returning to the workplace as soon as it is safe and reasonable to do so.”



PENCHANT FOR RISK

Desire to take risks in order to get what one wants out of life. Also, indulging in dangerous and forbidden activities for their associated emotional high.



PERSONAL CREATIVITY

Desire to use one's imagination and creative talents in daily life, both at work and at play.



ATTRACTION TO CROWDS

Enjoyment of being in large crowds as a means of deindividuation and connection-seeking.



PURSUIT OF NOVELTY

Active desire to discover new “modern” products, services and experiences, and to integrate them into the routine of daily life. People who are strong on this construct want to experience something new every day.



NEED FOR STATUS RECOGNITION

Desire to be held in esteem and respect by others, and to express one's social standing or aspired status, through a display of fine manners, good taste, style or “chic”.

Key Work Issues

Supporting Employees Through Change

ZEITGEIST OF WORK-LIFE APPRAISAL

The pandemic prompted discussion of a number of related trends, including the great resignation/retirement and quiet quitting/firing/hiring. Although the prevalence of these trends was perhaps not as great as media coverage and social media conversation might have suggested, the conversations themselves attested to an appetite for a re-examination of work and life. Related topics included employee burnout, workplace wellness, elevated stress, mental health and wellbeing, and the reevaluation of priorities and purpose. Organizations would be wise to heed and reflect on these conversations rather than assume that “normal” is coming back on its own.

ORGANIZATIONAL TURBULENCE

No employee at any level is immune to the stresses the pandemic introduced. Senior managers experience special strains, facing the pressures of leadership (company performance, organizational steering, team support, financials/resources and hard decision-making in a context of uncertainty) while striving to meet employees’ various needs for support, reassurance and accommodations. Not surprisingly, few are able to meet all these goals simultaneously – and so additional strains arising from staff turnover and related disruptions are added to the mix. Leaders need support in navigating these new cultural and operational challenges.

SUPPORTING INDIVIDUAL EXPERIENCES

People have different personal circumstances and capacities for managing change, juggling pressures, and dealing with the kinds of complexities that the pandemic period continues to present to organizations and employees. One-size-fits-all solutions aren’t well suited to this period; employees’ needs and experiences are just too varied. It’s imperative for organizations get to the heart of what matters to individual team members; not doing so means risking the loss of valuable staff and talent.

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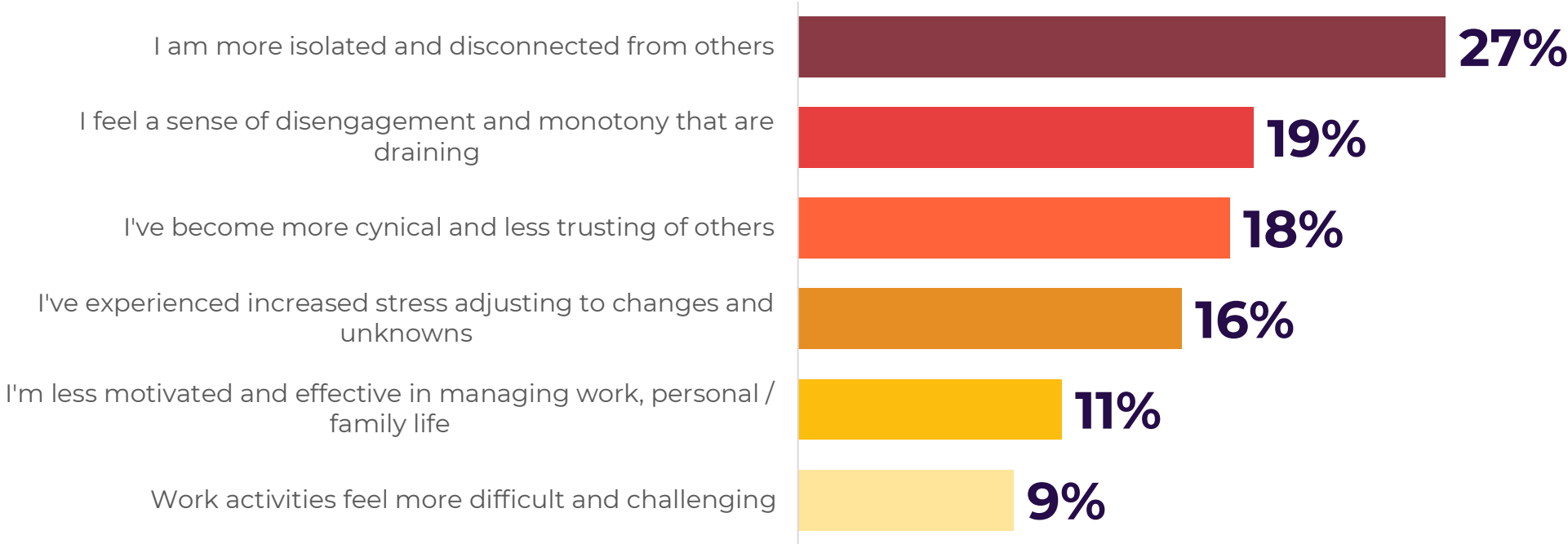
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Supporting Employees Through Change

Disengagement, isolation & demotivation is evident

Almost half of employees have experienced a sense of work stress, disengagement and isolation in their workplace over the course of the pandemic. Time stressed, these groups commonly share a strong need for social and personal connection, learning, expression and interactions. (See next slide.)



Social Values of...

Those who now feel more isolated/disengaged (27% & 19%)

Below are five key values of Canadians who agree that “I am more isolated and disconnected from others [since the pandemic]” (27%) AND agree that “I feel a sense of disengagement and monotony that are draining” (19%)



PERSONAL EXPRESSION

The desire to develop and express one's personality, combined with a desire to communicate in an authentic and sincere manner with others.



SOCIAL INTIMACY

A desire to be around and connect with smaller, closely knit groups of people. Feeling that smaller organizations are better than larger ones.



TIME STRESS

A feeling of never having enough time in a day to get everything done. The sense that being overwhelmed by what is to be done and of always “running against the clock” causes stress and anxiety in one's life.



PURSUIT OF NOVELTY

Active desire to discover new “modern” products, services and experiences, and to integrate them into the routine of daily life. People who are strong on this construct want to experience something new every day.



VITALITY (LOW)

The sense that one has a great deal of energy and is in contact with this energy. Measures an energetic, lively approach to life, a feeling that one has more vigor and initiative than most other people.

Key Work and Employee Issues

Leveraging Values to Impact Culture

A social values approach offers a number of important advantages to teams and leaders seeking to retain talent and support performance as their organization emerges from the pandemic period.



Staff Differences

Gaining insight into the values-driven motivations and mindsets that underlie colleagues' or employees' expectations or behaviours can promote empathy and understanding. It can also help to mitigate conflict and identify common ground. This in turn can enhance engagement and collaboration across the diversity in the organization and within teams.



Team Cohesion

Understanding the needs, perspectives and values of individuals on a team and of other staff within an organization enables smoother interactions, a stronger sense of connection and more authentic exchanges. These deeper connections can support increased flexibility and build a stronger culture.



Meaningful Engagement

A values lens can help to identify which groups and individuals are more adaptable, and which may need more help navigating difficult or uncertain circumstances. This helps organizations engage individuals, teams and overall organizational processes in the most effective and informed way. It also helps leaders develop relevant support systems, initiatives and development pathways to maintain wellbeing and foster meaningful engagement and purposeful work.

Thank you.

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