THE
WELLBEING
LAB 2018
WORKPLACE
SURVEY

THE STATE OF WELLBEING IN
AUSTRALIAN WORKPLACES

THEWELLBEINGLAB
A michellemcquaid PROGRAM

AHRI
Australian HR Institute

CONTENTS

FROM THE AUSTRALIAN HR INSTITUTE

I am very pleased to commend the research that contributed to the findings in this report by The Wellbeing Lab.

There was a time when employers considered it in their interests to look after workers' wellbeing by providing them with resources which are summarised in the report as the three Fs: fruit, fitness and flu shots. More enlightened employers now tend to see those contributions as useful, but somewhat tokenistic and are more interested in interventions that contribute to, what I like to call, employee vitality. Those employers want their workers to be in such physical, mental, and social shape that they are ready, willing, and able to contribute, through their work, to the competitiveness and sustainability of the enterprise.

That doesn't simply mean creating workplaces which are not harmful to workers' physical and mental health but, more positively, creating workplaces that contribute to meaning and purpose in workers' lives. That, in turn, means enabling workers to be present and fully engaged in work, with the potential of also gaining a sense of satisfaction and achievement.

Being fully energised goes beyond simply examining a person's employment, though for a great many people work constitutes a significant proportion of their waking hours.

Because The Wellbeing Lab data looks at workers from the perspectives of individual, team, and organisation in order to get a sense of what influences where they are on a continuum from thriving to struggling, the data enables us to understand better the things that sustain thriving workplaces and the things that undermine them.

At an individual level, we know, for example, that people who have more autonomy in their work are more likely to thrive, especially if they can make use of support options through their team and the organisation. The data also reveals that organisations which create work that is worthwhile, enable their workers to enjoy a sense of purpose and meaning. Skilled HR practitioners have long understood the usefulness of that strategy.

By contrast, iworkers' sense of wellbeing is undermined when they have limited control in how they go about their work, and/or have no option other than to confide in outsiders when they are struggling, or alternatively bear the burden alone and tell no one. This may, in part, reflect the challenge many of us feel in relation to privacy in our lives.

Some of the data reveals interesting but unsurprising results. For example, on average, 23% of men report that they are thriving, while only 14% of women see themselves at that end of the continuum. Similarly, 40% of C-suite executives report being 'on top of the world,' while only 11% of administrative staff and 10% of retail, sales or customer service staff, see themselves thriving. While not explored in this research, understanding the role gender plays in these workplace self-assessments is an area worthy of further exploration.

Speaking as the head of the HR Institute, it was disturbing to see the data that revealed workers who were struggling to maintain a sense of wellbeing at work confide in an outsider, another team member, the leader, or no one at all, before they will tell HR.

AHRI's answer to that state of affairs has been to acknowledge it as a reality and to continue to work towards significantly lifting standards through professional certification. In Australia today, we have a situation where anyone off the street can call themselves an HR practitioner, and it is for that reason that AHRI is driving a strategy that will, in time, require all HR practitioners to be certified. In this way, employers and workers can have increased confidence in the professionalism of the HR practitioners they work alongside.

As the professional certification momentum gathers pace, a greater number of HR practitioners are behaving in ways which increase the likelihood that workers will see the value in approaching HR in times of difficulty. While HR is tasked with creating sustainable organisational value, that value will only be derived when the people and resources within the organisation are connected through common purpose, and they feel safe and confident that they will be treated fairly.

Lyn Goodear
Chief Executive Officer
Australian HR Institute

ABOUT THIS STUDY

The Wellbeing Lab 2018 Workplace Survey is the largest comprehensive survey of the State of Wellbeing in Australian Workplaces since 2010. The Wellbeing Lab and the Australian HR Institute (**www.ahri.com.au**) have published this report to give organisations and workers the information they need to better understand the factors supporting and undermining wellbeing in our workplaces in order to more intelligently shape workplace wellbeing strategies.

Based on the PERMAH Workplace Survey (**www.permahsurvey.com**) developed by **Dr. Peggy Kern** from the University of Melbourne, a sample of 1,002 people completed the Workplace Survey. Respondents were representative of the Australian workforce during September 2018, and included:

GENDER	
Men	Women
500	502

AGE GROUPS			
25 – 34 years	35 – 44 years	45 – 54 years	55 – 65 years
269	252	248	233

LOCATIONS							
NSW	VIC	QLD	SA	WA	ACT	TAS	NT
324	259	200	70	102	18	21	8

JOB ROLES			
Owners	500	Community/Personal Services	27
C-Suite	22	Administrative	198
Directors	17	Retail/Customer Service	59
Managers	214	Tradespeople	112
Professional	264	Other	22
Technical	31		

Industries were representative of Australian workplaces ranging from Agriculture to Banking, Education, Telecommunications, Manufacturing, Mining, Science, Trades and Tourism to name just a few.

If you would like more information about the report or additional findings by gender, age, location, job role or industry, please contact **chelle@thewellbeinglab.com**.

AUSTRALIAN WORKPLACE WELLBEING SNAPSHOT

THE CURRENT STATE OF WORKPLACE WELLBEING IN AUSTRALIA

Legend:
- ■ Really Struggling
- ■ Living Well, Despite Struggles
- ■ Not Feeling Bad, But Just Getting By
- ■ Consistently Thriving

n = 1002

Chart values: 19%, 8%, 37%, 36%
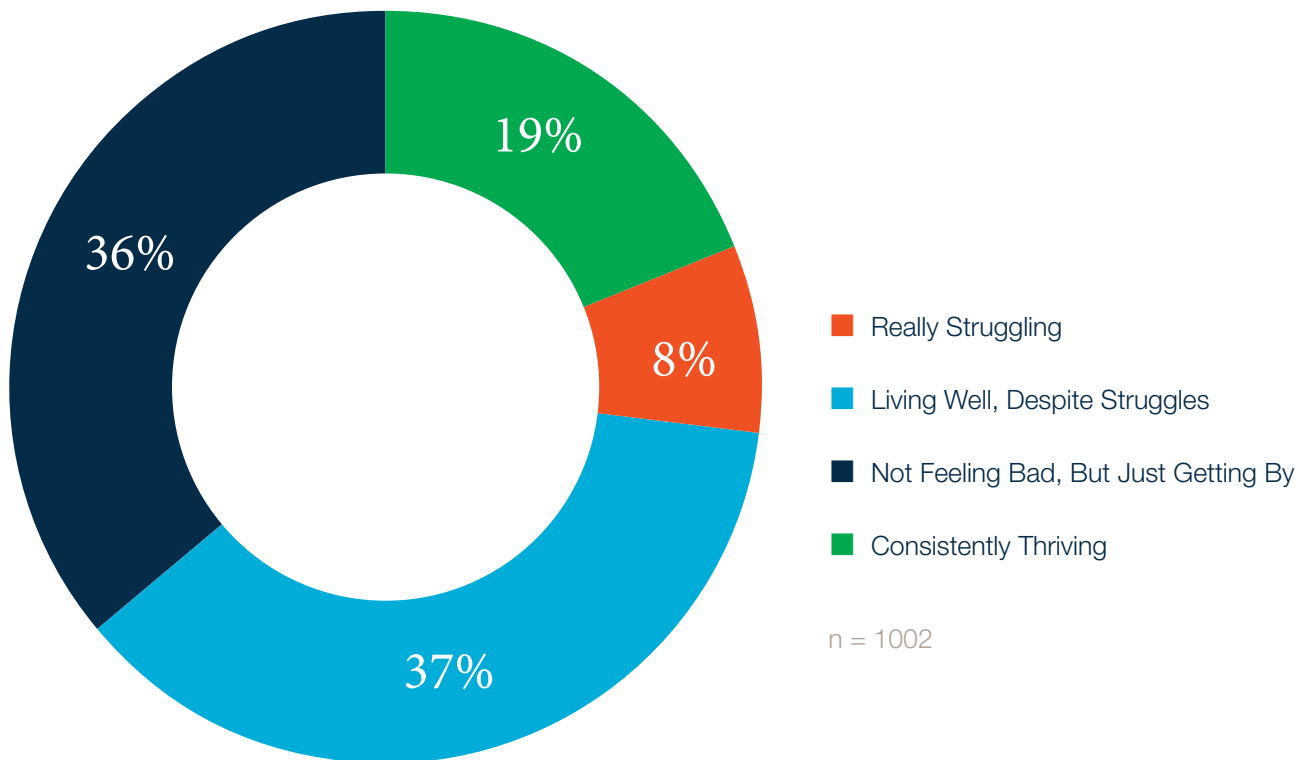
- Men were more likely to be consistently thriving.

- There are real no real age differences in the results.

- South Australians more likely to be consistently thriving than workers in other parts of Australia.

- Workers in the Consulting industry were more likely to be consistently thriving, while workers in the Mining and Resources industries were living well despite struggles.

- Workers in more senior job roles that have high levels of autonomy and control were more likely to be consistently thriving (i.e., directors 41.2% and C-suite 40.3% - almost double any other role in workplaces), while those in high responsibility/ low power roles were more likely to be really struggling or just getting by (i.e., administrative roles 43.4% and sales/customer services role 44.1%).

FACTORS THAT APPEAR TO SUPPORT WELLBEING AND RESILIENCE

INDIVIDUALS	TEAMS	ORGANISATIONS
Workers who are consistently thriving are differentiated by their high levels of positive emotions and engagement at work.	Teams where members are consistently thriving provide a sense of safety and mutual support.	Organisations with consistently thriving workers are positive, engaging places to work and do work that is perceived to be valuable, worthwhile and provide a sense of meaning.
Resilient workers have strong relationships and a sense of meaning.	Teams where members are resilient are differentiated by their higher levels of meaning.	Providing fruit, fitness & flu shots, mental first aid, and employee assistance programs are necessary foundations to support workers, but consistently thriving organisations provide a broader range of wellbeing offerings.
Workers who have more autonomy and are able to choose how they go about their work are more likely to be consistently thriving.	Supportive leaders and team members help each other to thrive and be resilient.	Organisations where HR teams are viewed as a source of support when workers are struggling are more likely to be consistently thriving.
Workers who are consistently thriving access a range of wellbeing support options.		

FACTORS THAT APPEAR TO UNDERMINE WELLBEING

INDIVIDUALS	TEAMS	ORGANISATIONS
Workers who feel they have less choice in how they go about their work.	Teams that are not encouraging or supportive of each other.	Organisations who do not provide support for people's wellbeing are less likely to have workers who are consistently thriving or living well, despite struggles.
Workers relying primarily on people outside of work for help when they're really struggling or telling no one.	Teams where leaders are not seen as sources of support when workers are really struggling with their wellbeing.	

WHY MEASURE WORKPLACE WELLBEING?

While there are many ways of thinking about wellbeing, in its simplest form wellbeing is our ability to feel good and function effectively physically, mentally, and socially, and is not merely the absence of disease.[1] Thriving individuals are those who are able to consistently maintain a high level of wellbeing, even as they navigate the highs and lows of life.

As workplaces have become more diverse, technically connected, fast-paced and complex, the ability of workers to thrive as they go about their jobs has become a growing topic of conversations and concern in many boardrooms and at leadership tables. For example, the World Bank's Human Capital Index recently reported that there is a direct link between improving outcomes in health and productivity and economic growth in a rapidly changing world.[2] That is, wellbeing has a bottom-line impact for workers, organisations, and society.

Studies have found that when people are thriving at work, on average they are:

Nearly 6X
more likely to
feel engaged[3]

29%
more likely to be
more productive[4]

45%
more likely to be
satisfied in their jobs[5]

46%
less likely to experience
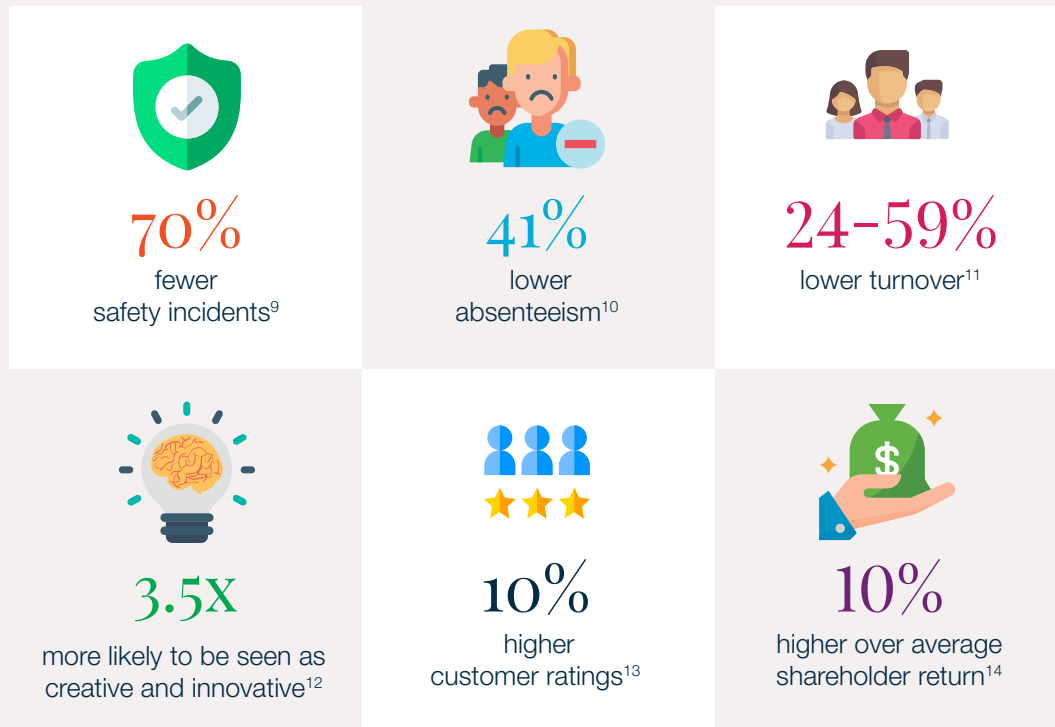unhealthy days[6]

125%
less likely
to burn out[7]

32%
less
likely to quit[8]

In addition, workplaces that choose to invest in employee wellbeing and have happy and engaged workers experience, on average:

70% fewer safety incidents[9]	**41%** lower absenteeism[10]	**24–59%** lower turnover[11]
3.5X more likely to be seen as creative and innovative[12]	**10%** higher customer ratings[13]	**10%** higher over average shareholder return[14]

Wellbeing and work can create a mutually enhancing cycle. When we feel physically, mentally, and socially well, we bring more energy, focus, and motivation to work and are more productive, thereby creating positive outcomes for both workers and their organisations. For example, research has found that for every dollar spent on improving wellbeing in workplaces there is, on average, a $2.30 positive return on their investment[15].

Work also provides opportunities for creating learning moments, meaningful accomplishments, and joyful connections, which nourish our wellbeing.

An important question then becomes how to support wellbeing in workplaces. Professor Martin Seligman from the University of Pennsylvania suggests that the single most important step workplaces can take when it comes to improving worker's wellbeing is to measure it. "When team leader A, knows that team leader B's people are doing much better they will come up with all sorts of local ways to improve wellbeing," he explained.[16]

The 2018 Wellbeing Lab's Workplace Survey set out to do just that. using the PERMAH Workplace Survey (**www.permahsurvey.com**) developed by **Dr. Peggy Kern** from the University of Melbourne.[17]

WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED ABOUT WORKPLACE WELLBEING?

Thriving shouldn't be our only goal for improving wellbeing in workplaces. Workers can live well and perform well, despite some struggles.

Different factors impact worker's wellbeing in different ways – a more nuanced understanding of wellbeing aids identification of enablers and barriers of wellbeing.

Workers, teams, and organisations all play a role in supporting, developing and maintaining wellbeing at work. Wellbeing is a collective proposition, not a sole endeavour.

Fruit, fitness, flu shots (the 3Fs) and Employee Assistance Programs are necessary, but not sufficient for workers to thrive.

Leaders and HR teams play an important role in supporting wellbeing for themselves and workers across the organisation.
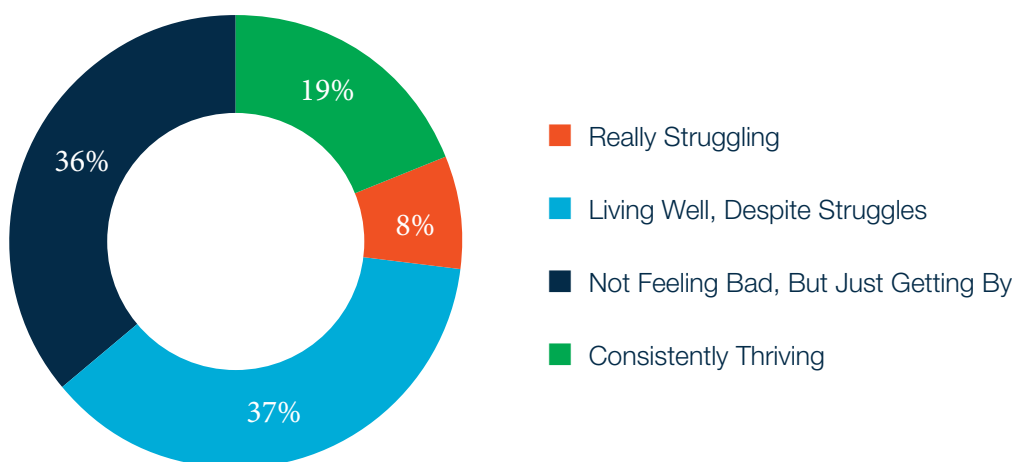
YOU CAN LIVE WELL DESPITE STRUGGLES

Wellbeing is generally measured as a continuum from languishing (feeling bad, functioning poorly, mental disorder) to flourishing (feeling and functioning well across multiple domains of life)[18, 19]. As a result, most workplace efforts to improve wellbeing focus on trying to help workers who are functioning move towards flourishing, so they can reap the potential bottom-line rewards of an organisation full of flourishing people.

If we were to look at the data we've gathered on Australian workplaces through this lens, 19% of workers were *consistently thriving*, 73% were *functioning*, and 8% were *really struggling*. However, of the 73% of workers *functioning*, further investigation uncovered that almost half of these people considered themselves to be *living well despite struggles*.

SINGLE CONTINUUM: WELLBEING TO ILL-BEING

- 19%
- 8%
- 73%

■ Really Struggling

■ Consistently Thriving

■ Just Functioning
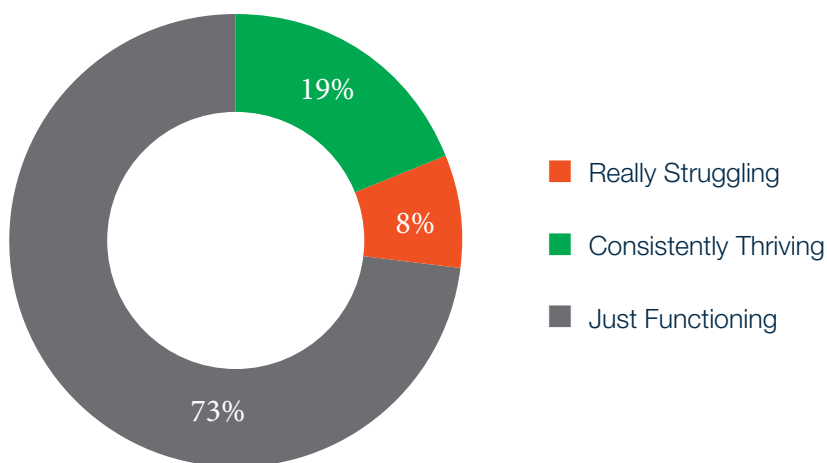
DUAL CONTINUUM: THRIVING + STRIVING

- 19%
- 8%
- 37%
- 36%

■ Really Struggling

■ Living Well, Despite Struggles

■ Not Feeling Bad, But Just Getting By

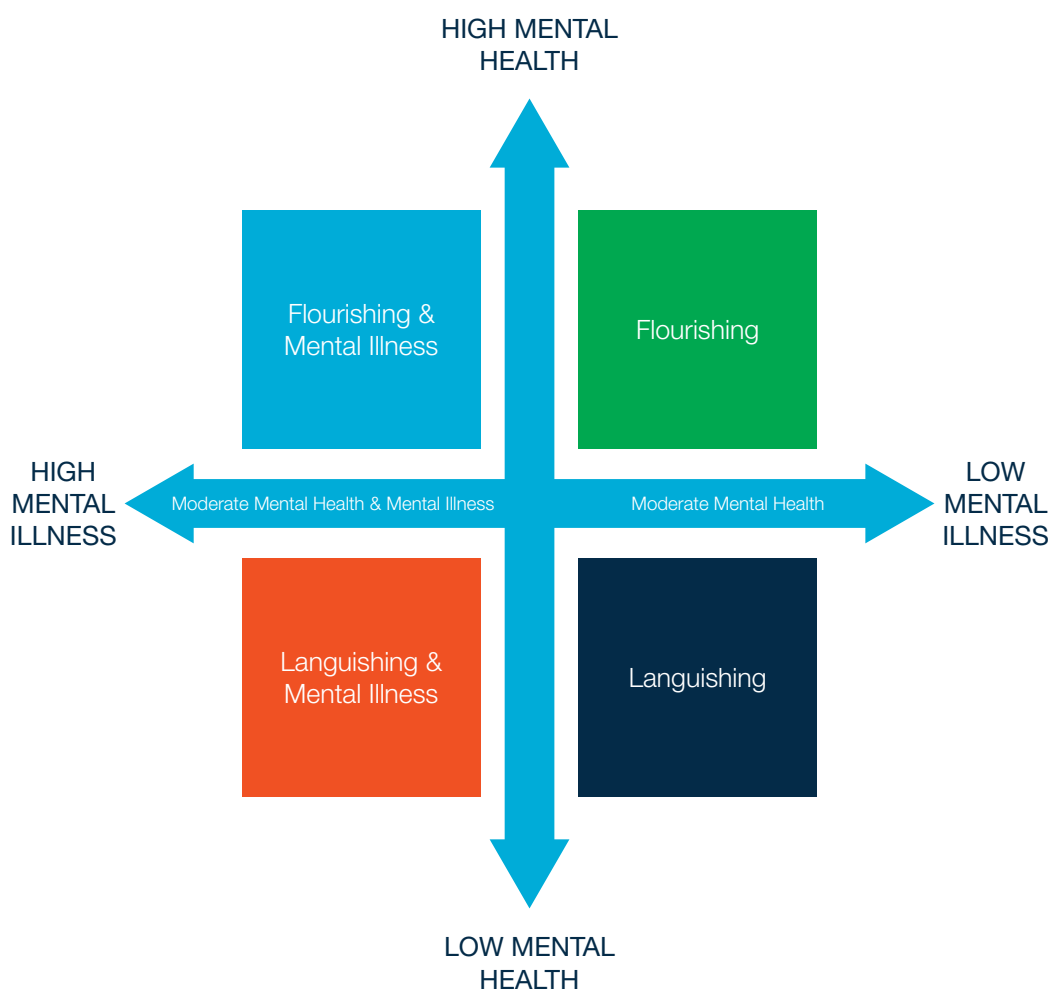■ Consistently Thriving

Closer examination of the profiles of workers who were *living well despite struggles* also revealed that they resemble the *consistently thriving* group more than the *really struggling* group. For example, respondents reported significantly higher levels of wellbeing in every dimension we measured (positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, accomplishment, and health) than those workers who were *not feeling bad but just getting by*. They were also more likely to feel that they could do their job well and had significantly higher levels of job satisfaction.

AVERAGE INDIVIDUAL OUTCOMES BY STATE OF WELLBEING

Really Struggling

Living Well, Despite Struggles

Not Feeling Bad, But Just Getting By

Consistently Thriving
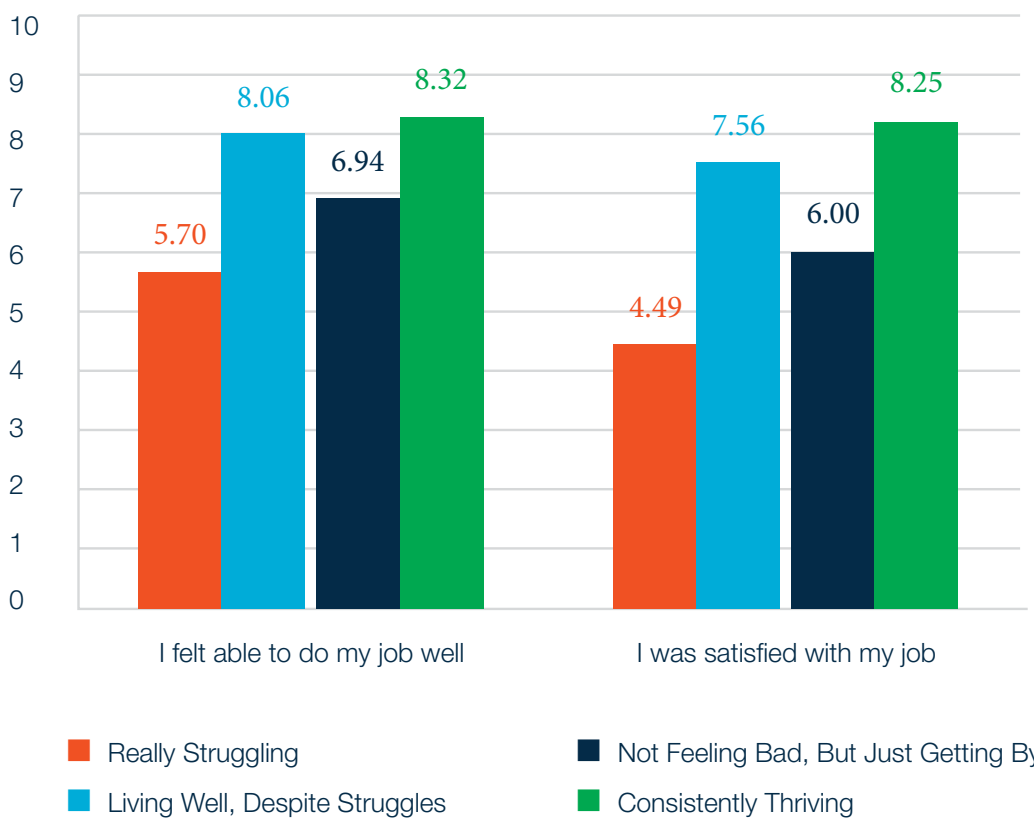
This suggests that the presence of wellbeing and the absence of struggle are related but distinct dimensions. It is possible to thrive despite struggles, and it is possible to not experience wellbeing even in the absence of struggles.

We are not the first people to reach this conclusion. Several decades ago, Professor Corey Keyes[20] proposed a two continua model that measures the presence or absence of mental health on one continuum (i.e., is someone thriving), and the presence or absence of mental illness on an intersecting continuum (i.e., is someone struggling).

HIGH MENTAL
HEALTH

Flourishing &
Mental Illness

Flourishing

HIGH
MENTAL
ILLNESS

Moderate Mental Health & Mental Illness   Moderate Mental Health

LOW
MENTAL
ILLNESS

Languishing &
Mental Illness

Languishing

LOW MENTAL
HEALTH

Keye's also found that individuals who were living well despite their struggles generally functioned better than those who were not feeling bad but just getting by.[21] While our research did not limit respondents' 'struggles' to mental illness, it does replicate his general findings.

As a result, we believe that this data suggests that instead of just functioning, people who are *living well despite struggles* are demonstrating incredible levels of resilience with many of them thriving in their own ways. This group of workers could offer rich insights and practices to help us understand and enable resilience in the face of struggles – something that is absent from current research and workplace wellbeing strategies, and we believe needs further exploration. As they were significantly more motivated to support their own wellbeing than workers who were *just getting by* or *really struggling*, they also potentially require different types of workplace wellbeing programs and support.

AVERAGE WELLBEING CONFIDENCE & MOTIVATION BY STATE OF WELLBEING

Legend:
- Really Struggling
- Not Feeling Bad, But Just Getting By
- Living Well, Despite Struggles
- Consistently Thriving

DIFFERENT WELLBEING FACTORS IMPACT DIFFERENT PEOPLE

Researchers have proposed numerous theories of what comprises wellbeing. In 2011, Professor Martin Seligman one of the world's leading wellbeing researchers offered his own model, known as "PERMA". Seligman's model suggests that wellbeing arises from five factors:

- **Positive emotions:** experiencing positive feelings such as joy, calmness, and happiness.

- **Engagement:** being interested and involved in life.

- **Relationships:** feeling loved, valued, and connected with other people.

- **Meaning:** having a sense of direction, feeling that our lives are valuable and worthwhile, and connecting to something bigger than ourselves.

- **Accomplishment:** the belief and ability to do things that matter most to us, achieving goals, and having a sense of mastery.[22]

We (and many others, including the World Health Organisation[23]) believe that physical health is also a key part of wellbeing. Everything is just easier when you feel physically healthy. So, we refer to this model as "PERMAH" – adding the H for health.

Seligman has previously explained that in order to flourish, people need to cultivate each of these pillars of wellbeing. But how much we need of each varies depending on the type of person we are, the situations we're in, and the outcomes we want to achieve.[24] This means that the 'right' wellbeing approach looks different for each of us.

We chose the PERMAH framework to measure wellbeing in Australian workplaces because it provides a practical way to start developing a personalised approach to building and sustaining wellbeing. We did not choose it because we believe it has been conclusively proven as the roadmap to wellbeing; after all, good science is never proven but is an evolving process of ongoing learning and refinement. Rather, we chose it because we've found that the PERMAH framework is a useful, easy way for people to understand, measure, and take action, using evidence-based research and tools.

For example, the *consistently thriving* workers reported significantly higher levels of positive emotion, engagement and physical health than other workers, but had similar levels of relationships, meaning, and accomplishment as the *living well despite struggles* workers. For workplaces focused on developing employee engagement, there might be greater benefit in focusing on developing strong, positive relationships, helping workers see the value of the work they do, and incorporating goal-setting strategies to assist workers in setting and achieving meaningful goals. This is especially true of those people who are *really struggling* or *just getting by*.

More research specifically testing these hypotheses is needed, but this more nuanced perspective provides insights into potential enablers and barriers toward assisting more workers to thrive despite struggles.

STATE OF WORKPLACE WELLBEING BY PERMAH INDIVIDUAL FACTORS

- Really Struggling
- Living Well, Despite Struggles
- Not Feeling Bad, But Just Getting By
- Consistently Thriving
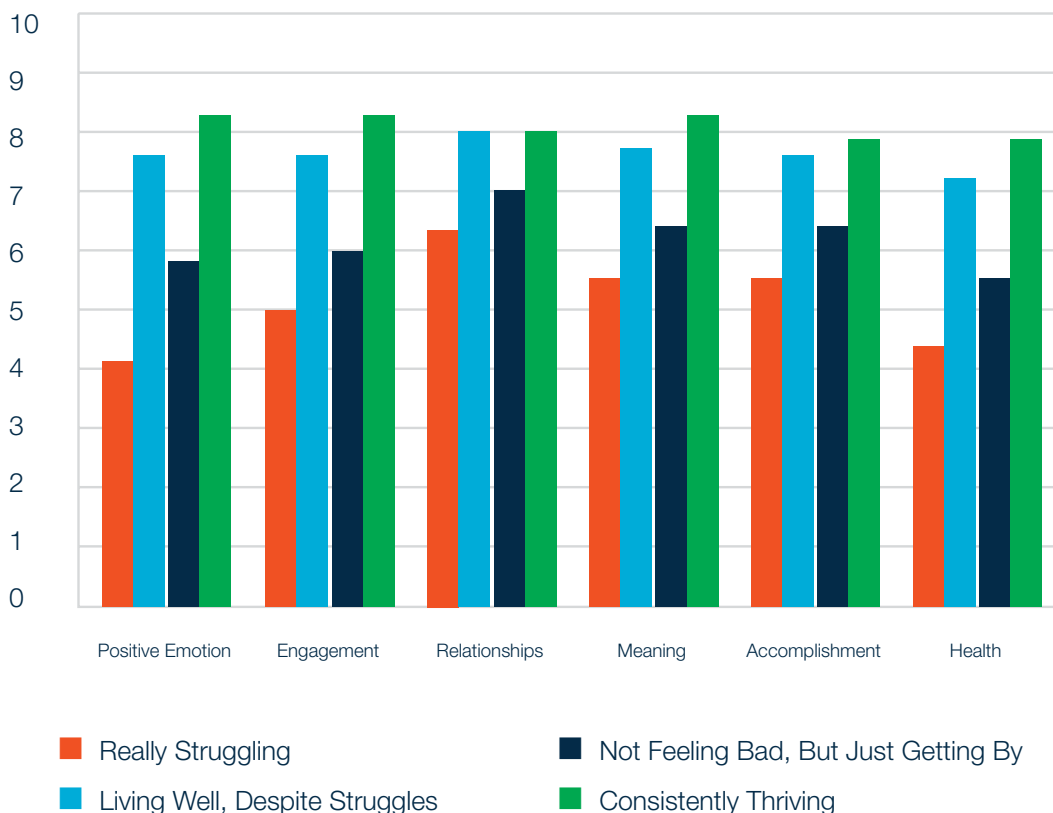
WELLBEING IS NOT A SOLO ENDEAVOUR

A growing body of evidence suggests that there is a lot that each person can do to look after their own wellbeing.[25] Rather than setting the goal of thriving all the time, having perfect PERMAH scores, or achieving any other number on a wellbeing report, we've found that the real prize is in helping people to become informed, confident, and active participants in shaping their own wellbeing. This helps them to develop the knowledge, tools, and support so they can wholeheartedly show up and be fully engaged in work and life — whatever it throws at them.

It is also important to understand that wellbeing habits, attitudes and actions spread through a complicated web of social connections around us.[26] For example, when we measured the PERMAH factors at an individual, team and organisation level we found that, overall, Australian workers weren't doing too badly when it comes to looking after their own wellbeing and, generally, their team also helps to support their wellbeing. However, organisational decisions and actions often undermine workers' sense of wellbeing, particularly when it comes to being encouraging and supportive of each other at work.

AVERAGE PERMAH SCORES
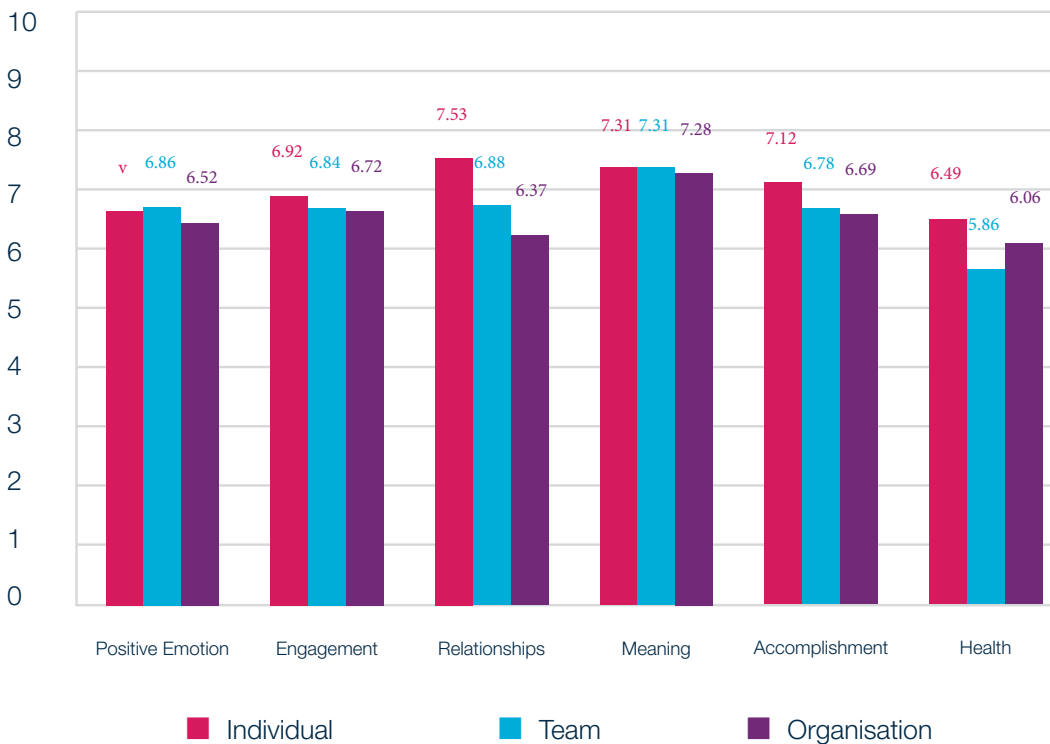
The data we gathered shows that workers who were *really struggling* or *just getting by* especially felt that their team was not a safe place to bring up problems; their organisation was not a positive, supportive, or encouraging place to work; and neither their team nor the organisation support their physical health. They felt negative at work - disengaged, disinterested, and dissatisfied with their job. They were also much less likely than other workers to tell someone that they were struggling.

Respondents who were *living well despite struggles* indicated that even though they tried to be encouraging and supportive of others and felt supported by their team, paradoxically they didn't always feel like their team was a safe place to bring up problems and be honest about mistakes. They also felt that their organisation was less encouraging and supportive of their workers and, although their workplaces typically provided fruit, fitness, and flu shot programs (the 3Fs as we like to call them), they were less likely to believe that their organisation tried to help them to feel physically strong and healthy.

Respondents who told us that they were *consistently thriving* were more likely to feel supported by both their teams and organisations across each of the PERMAH factors. This suggests the need for systemic approaches that support individual, team, and organisational wellbeing strategies in workplaces, to help as many people as possible to thrive at work consistently.

AVERAGE PERMAH SCORES BY STATE OF WELLBEING

	Really Struggling	Living Well, Despite Struggles	Not Feeling Bad, But Just Getting By	Consistently Thriving
Positive Emotion - Ind	4.08	7.50	5.86	8.17
Positive Emotion - Team	5.19	7.45	6.12	7.83
Positive Emotion - Org	4.31	7.11	5.64	8.00
Engagement - Ind	5.01	7.53	6.07	8.13
Engagement - Team	5.14	7.37	615	7.83
Engagement - Org	4.93	7.32	5.93	7.82
Relationships - Ind	6.39	8.04	7.00	8.00
Relationships - Team	5.09	7.40	6.21	7.91
Relationships - Org	4.56	6.91	5.58	7.60
Meaning - Ind	5.50	7.89	6.65	8.21
Meaning - Team	5.94	7.73	6.81	8.02
Meaning - Org	6.15	7.71	6.68	8.07
Accomplishment - Ind	5.41	7.64	6.51	7.96
Accomplishment - Team	5.44	7.21	6.13	7.76
Accomplishment - Org	5.29	7.08	6.01	7.80
Health - Ind	4.46	7.13	5.51	7.97
Health - Team	4.44	6.34	4.99	7.19
Health - Org	4.40	6.57	5.12	7.58

■ Really Struggling   ■ Not Feeling Bad, But Just Getting By
■ Living Well, Despite Struggles   ■ Consistently Thriving

While researchers are still discovering the best approaches for systemically supporting people's wellbeing, studies to date suggest that environments that enable people to fulfil their basic psychological needs of autonomy (having a sense of freedom of choice in one or more ways), competence (able to do one's work, learn, and grow), relatedness (connecting deeply with others)[27], and provide a sense of safety (physical and psychological), can make it easier for people to thrive consistently[28].

For example, Professors Edward Deci and Richard Ryan's extensive and renowned body of research on Self-Determination Theory shows that when people feel a sense of autonomy, competence, and relatedness, they feel more motivated, energized, and willing to act and to flourish in process[29]. Autonomy-supportive leadership has been found to support optimal functioning in work settings[30].

Overall our data suggests that the extent to which these needs were being met helped to distinguish those who were *living well despite struggles* versus those who were *really struggling* or *just getting by*. *Consistently thriving* workers reported providing support and encouraging others at work; and felt supported by their team (relatedness), were able to choose how they worked (autonomy) and were able to do their job well (competence).

Our data points to an opportunity for leaders to support worker autonomy by setting and clearly communicating a vision, strategies, and goals for people to follow, but also providing workers choices in terms of how those goals are achieved. This should be coupled with ensuring that people have the skills and resources needed to do their job well.

AVERAGE SCORES SELF-DETERMINATION THEORY

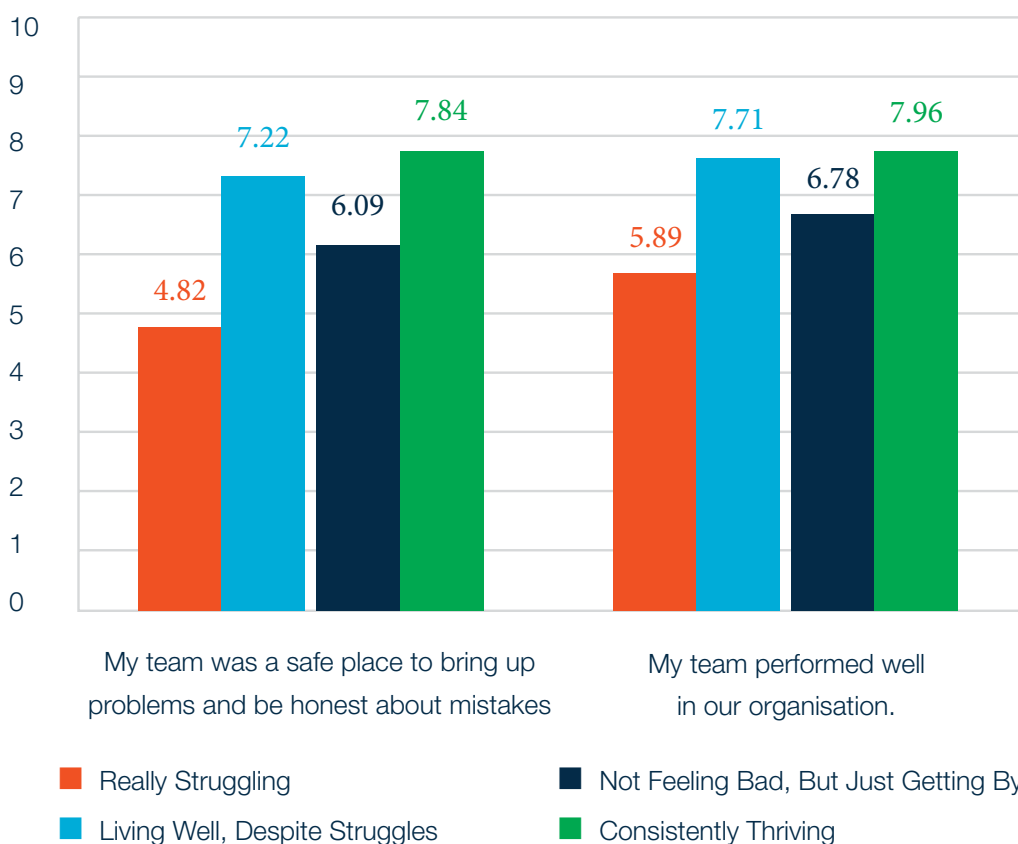Bar chart showing average scores: Relatedness 7.18, Competence 7.32, Autonomy 7.30
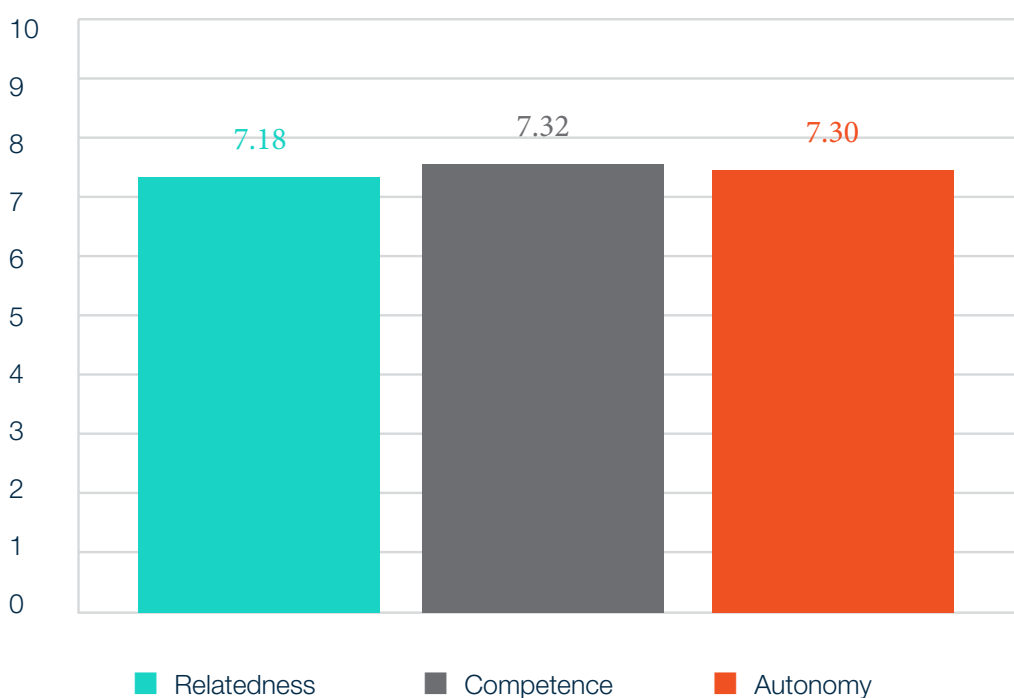
In addition, as workplaces have become increasingly complex, dynamic, and diverse, a growing body of research suggests that the ability for people to feel safe at work – to be able to ask questions, seek help, take risks, and learn from mistakes – also impacts their performance and wellbeing. For example, a large-scale two-year study at Google found that their best performing teams were able to thrive because they had higher levels of psychologically safety[31].

There's also the need to feel safe in terms of reaching out for support, whether for performance or mental health needs. Stigmas around mental health remain, such that many are unwilling to reveal their struggles to others.

Indeed, our data found that participants who were *just getting by* or *really struggling* were less likely to tell anyone they were struggling, pointing to a lack of psychological safety within their organisations. For those who were *living well despite struggles*, although they felt supported by their teams, they also were less likely than workers who were *consistently thriving* to feel that their team was a safe place to bring up problems and be honest about mistakes, and more likely to get support from someone outside of their workplace.

Given how important relationships are, organisations and teams need to remain mindful about levels of psychological safety, including conversations, social norms, and stigmas that might create a barrier to reaching out for help.

AVERAGE TEAM OUTCOMES BY STATE OF WELLBEING

My team was a safe place to bring up problems and be honest about mistakes: Really Struggling 4.82, Living Well Despite Struggles 7.22, Not Feeling Bad But Just Getting By 6.09, Consistently Thriving 7.84.

My team performed well in our organisation: Really Struggling 5.89, Living Well Despite Struggles 7.71, Not Feeling Bad But Just Getting By 6.78, Consistently Thriving 7.96.

Legend:
■ Really Struggling
■ Living Well, Despite Struggles
■ Not Feeling Bad, But Just Getting By
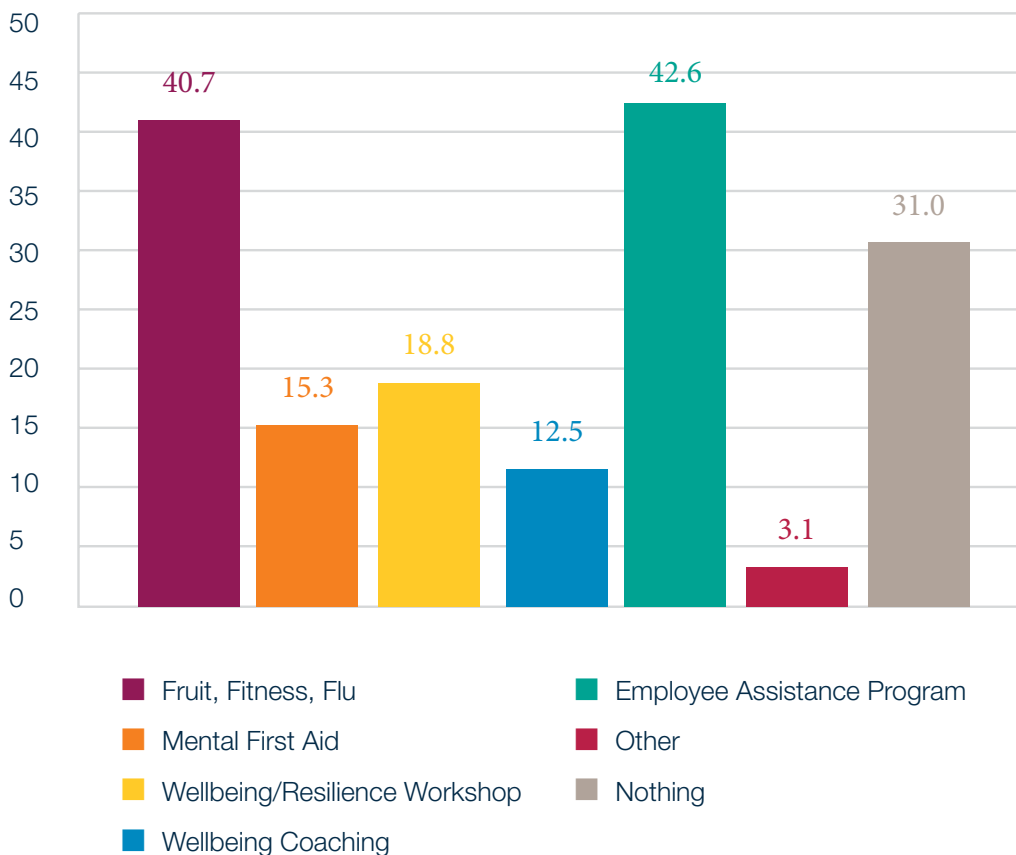■ Consistently Thriving

IT TAKES MORE THAN FRUIT, FITNESS, FLU SHOTS & EAPS

Researchers have found that people generally have reasonably positive and stable levels of wellbeing[32] and are naturally resilient[33]. Despite this, studies estimate that workplace wellness now represents a sizable and growing market worth US$40.7 billion globally[34]. So where and what is this money being spent on, and is it having any tangible impact when it comes to improving people's wellbeing?

In Australian workplaces, we found there were no significant differences across groups in terms of their workplaces providing fruit, fitness or flu shots (the 3F's of wellbeing), wellbeing and/or resilience workshops, or employee assistance programs (EAPs) that provide free and confidential counselling services. A smaller percentage of workplaces were providing mental first aid training or wellbeing coaching, the latter being significantly more prevalent for the *consistently thriving* workers. This suggests that many workplaces are indeed making an effort to support health and wellbeing, although, for 31% of workplaces, workers perceive that no support is offered.

% WELLBEING WORKPLACE SUPPORT

Legend:
- Fruit, Fitness, Flu
- Mental First Aid
- Wellbeing/Resilience Workshop
- Wellbeing Coaching
- Employee Assistance Program
- Other
- Nothing

Notably, respondents who were *consistently thriving* or *living well despite struggles* were more likely to have access to a range of workplace wellbeing supports, suggesting that it takes more than the 3Fs and EAPs to improve workers' wellbeing. *Consistent thrivers* were significantly more likely to have wellbeing coaching sessions available, suggesting the benefit of more targeted, individualised approaches to supporting worker's wellbeing.

Comparison across industries provides several examples of how the 3Fs and EAPs are necessary but not sufficient for helping workers to thrive. For example, workers in the Consulting industry were the most likely to report that they were *consistently thriving* and while they were provided with fruit, fitness, flu shots, and employee assistance programs, they were also offered considerably more wellbeing coaching, wellbeing and resilience workshops, and mental first aid training than other industries.

Respondents who were *living well despite some struggles* mirrored a similar selection of workplace wellbeing support. Interestingly, they were the most likely workers to be taking advantage of fruit, fitness and flu shots, and employee assistance programs, suggesting that the 3Fs and EAPs are important protective factors for maintaining resilience. This was particularly notable in the Human Resources industry who were the highest users of employee assistance programs.

Respondents who were *just getting by* and those who were *really struggling* also sought workplace wellbeing support primarily from fruit, fitness, and flu shots, and employee assistance programs. They were also much more likely to be in workplaces where no wellbeing support was being provided. This was particularly notable in the Legal and Trade industries.

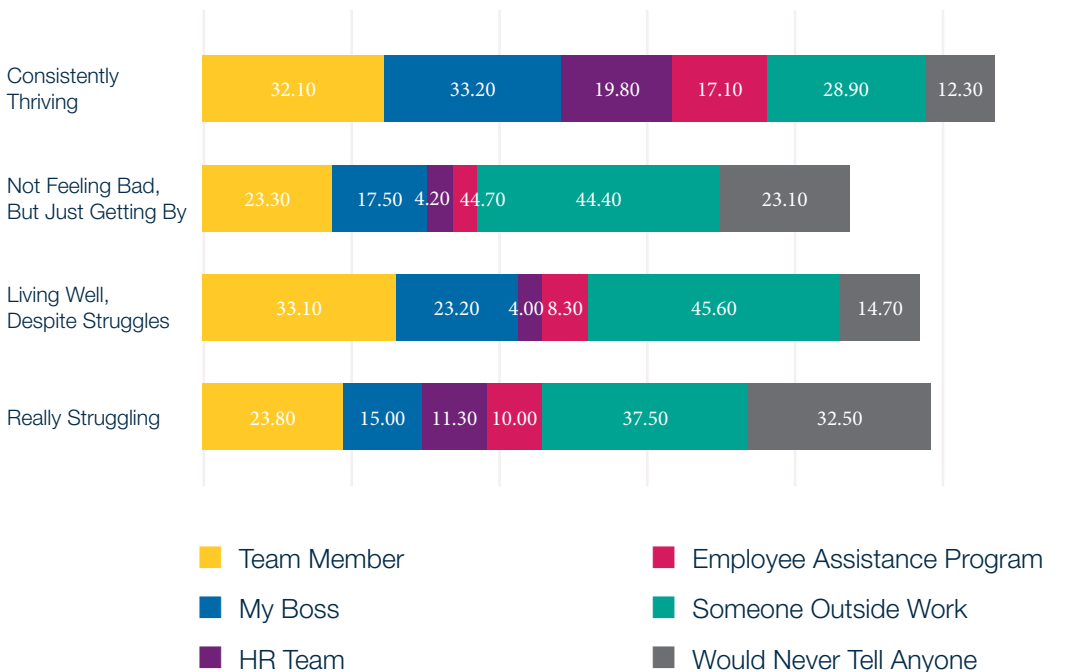## % WELLBEING WORKPLACE SUPPORT BY STATE OF WELLBEING
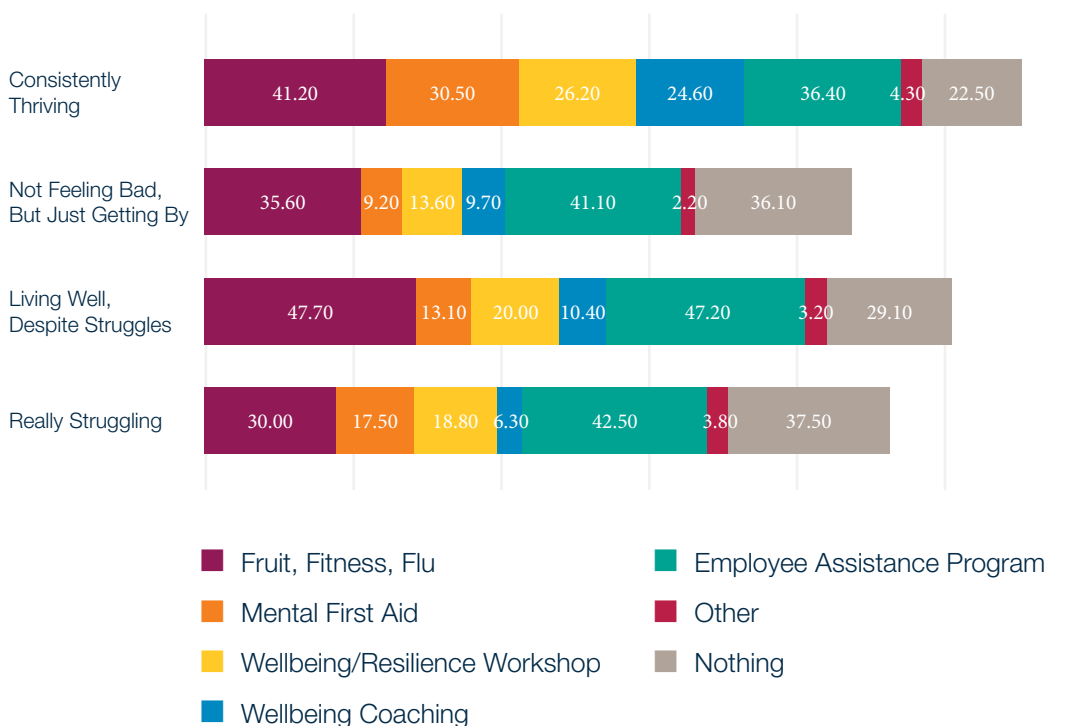
WHY LEADERS & HR TEAMS NEED TO STEP UP

As rates of loneliness continue to grow in workplaces[35], having someone you can reach out to at work when you are struggling with wellbeing becomes increasingly less likely. Add to this the stigma that exists of being seen to struggle with your wellbeing, and it's no wonder 55% of Australian workers recently reported that they wouldn't take a mental health day even when it was needed for fear of the repercussions[36].

In Australian workplaces, we found that workers who were *really struggling* were significantly less likely to tell others that they were struggling. Although workers who were *consistently thriving* were willing to reach out to a range of people, including leaders, the Human Resource team, and EAPs, other respondents were more likely to reach out someone outside of work if they were struggling with their wellbeing or not to tell anyone. And although reaching out to a colleague or a leader was an option for some, the last resort was consistently the Human Resources team.

% PERSON I REACH OUT TO WHEN I'M STRUGGLING WITH WELLBEING BY STATE OF WELLBEING

State of Wellbeing	Team Member	My Boss	HR Team	Employee Assistance Program	Someone Outside Work	Would Never Tell Anyone
Consistently Thriving	32.10	33.20	19.80	17.10	28.90	12.30
Not Feeling Bad, But Just Getting By	23.30	17.50	4.20	44.70	44.40	23.10
Living Well, Despite Struggles	33.10	23.20	4.00	8.30	45.60	14.70
Really Struggling	23.80	15.00	11.30	10.00	37.50	32.50

Legend:
- Team Member
- My Boss
- HR Team
- Employee Assistance Program
- Someone Outside Work
- Would Never Tell Anyone

For example, C-suite executives were who were one of the job roles most likely to be *consistently thriving*, were the most likely people to reach out to their leader, the Human Resources team, or an employee assistance program when they were struggling with their wellbeing, and the least likely to turn to someone outside of work. We believe leaders at every level need to demonstrate their willingness to ask for help when they are struggling with their wellbeing and, in doing so, normalise this practice for others.

In contrast, professionals and people with administrative duties who were the most likely to be *living well despite struggles* were also the most likely to reach out to someone outside of work or someone in their team. However, they were the least likely to reach out to Human Resources teams perhaps suggesting that they feel their struggles may be less understood or supported by their workplaces.

Finally, respondents who were *just getting by* were similarly more likely to reach out to someone outside of work (particularly noticeable for business owners). Alternatively, they would reach out to a colleague (particularly noticeable for workers in community or personal service roles), or not tell anyone (particularly noticeable for tradespeople).

HOW CAN YOU IMPROVE WELLBEING IN YOUR WORKPLACE?

Incorporate multidimensional measures of wellbeing so you can be intelligent about the kind of support that is most likely to help different workers.

Build a common language around the diversity of wellbeing and that people can live well despite struggles, making it safer to talk about what's happening and ask for support.

In addition to the 3Fs - fruit, fitness, flu shots - consider ways of supporting the 3Ms - meaning, motivation, mentoring - to help more workers live well despite their struggles or to thrive consistently.

Draw on evidence-based practices to create shared, holistic, evidence-based toolboxes for workers, teams, and organisations to draw on that provide a range of easy-to-use wellbeing tools that can be incorporated into busy workdays.

Support leaders and HR teams to step up as sources of wellbeing support and/or coaches in workplaces by explicitly making supporting and improving workers wellbeing one of the responsibilities for which they will be held accountable.

What do these findings and the growing body of research from around the globe on improving workplace wellbeing suggest that workplaces should do practically to help more people consistently thrive at work?

1. USE MULTIDIMENSIONAL MEASURES OF WELLBEING SO YOU CAN TAILOR SOLUTIONS TO THE UNIQUE NEEDS OF YOUR WORKERS.

Measuring and being accountable for wellbeing sends a strong message about the value this holds in your workplace. We value what we measure and measure what we value[37]. Measuring wellbeing gives the message that it matters.

Measuring wellbeing provides a way to understand the strengths and needs of workers, helping to inform decisions on how to best support individuals and teams. When monitored over time, measurement can inform which programs and interventions are helpful and which are not, and provide an indication of return on investment.

However, it is important to consider what to measure. Our data demonstrates the value of understanding wellbeing not as a single number, but as a profile across a variety of factors. Recognise that people can be doing well despite struggles and consider the factors that might support and undermine wellbeing for different people.

As you measure, be mindful that improving wellbeing is not simply a matter of building or supporting individual skills, but that wellbeing habits, attitudes, and actions spread through a complicated web of social connections around us. Thus it is important to measure individual, team, and organisational wellbeing. After all, you don't want to undermine your investment in improving individual wellbeing because, at an organisational level, your senior leaders are overlooking the impact strategic decisions and company-wide communications, or actions, can have on people's levels of wellbeing.

Finally, wellbeing is not a one-size-fits-all proposition, so be sure to measure the impact of your efforts on improving people's wellbeing. What is working well in terms of the types of support you're providing? What impact are your efforts having on the environment in which your people are working? How is this impacting bottom-line outcomes in your business?

For example, our findings suggest that if your workplace has more people who are able to consistently thrive, then wellbeing and resilience training, and wellbeing coaching programs, are important investments to consider. However, if your workplace has more people who may be struggling, then our findings suggest that your investment in fruit, fitness, and flu shots, and employee assistance programs may help support their resilience.

It's important to remember that the very best research on human behaviour can only tell us what works for some of the people, some of the time. So while studies are great to accelerate our understanding, and inspire our practices, it is the ongoing responsibility of each workplace to continue measuring and adjusting their wellbeing strategies. After all, supporting people's wellbeing is a dynamic process. It is a fluid experience of highs and lows for every one of us that requires an ongoing journey of learning, rather than the expectation of reaching a final destination.

2. BUILD A COMMON LANGUAGE AROUND THE DIVERSITY OF WELLBEING AND THAT PEOPLE CAN LIVE WELL DESPITE STRUGGLES.

Researchers have identified the need for a common language and body of knowledge about wellbeing as an essential ingredient to helping more people to consistently thrive[38]. As people learn the language of wellbeing, it helps them to have more wellbeing related conversations that cascade throughout a workplace, and to unearth more aspirational and intentional approaches to improve wellbeing. By changing the discourse about wellbeing, you can positively impact wellbeing itself.

A core aspect that arose from our data is the benefit of distinguishing wellbeing and struggles. Typical discussions of wellbeing place thriving on a continuum, suggesting that if you are going through a time of struggle, you are not flourishing. And yet we saw that a considerable number of people are doing well despite struggles, demonstrating a clear sense of resilience. Shifting language to embrace struggle could remove a lot of the stigma and fear of repercussions currently found in the workplace for anyone who doesn't have high levels of wellbeing. Based on the data gathered, we also think this may help to improve levels of psychological safety and people's willingness to reach out to their leaders and Human Resource teams, who often have knowledge or access to resources that can help people when they are struggling.

While many workplaces have wellbeing and resilience training programs it may be helpful to consider how to go beyond simply offering programs, to shifting the workplace culture to embrace wellbeing as a core part of business. Consider a culture that is created through conversation, policy documents, and workplace norms.

3. IN ADDITION TO THE 3FS - FRUIT, FITNESS, FLU SHOTS - CONSIDER WAYS OF SUPPORTING THE 3MS- (MEANING, MOTIVATION, MENTORING.

Many workplaces now have policies to help support employee wellbeing, but what does that look like?

It's encouraging to see that many workplaces are offering wellbeing and resilience trainings, taking actions to support employee health (the 3Fs), and providing opportunities for assistance where needed (EAPs). While these are necessary supports, our data suggests that they are insufficient for helping workers to thrive consistently. Indeed, such approaches may come across as insincere – the workplace claiming to support wellbeing, but acting in ways that undermine wellbeing, employee confidence, and job satisfaction.

The 3Fs (and related strategies) might benefit from being complemented by the 3Ms: meaning, motivation, and mentoring.

Amongst the wellbeing domains, workers who were *just getting by* or *really struggling* were less clear on the value and worth of their work. Research suggests that understanding the meaning of work distinguishes those who see work as a source of income, versus those who consider it the source of a deeper sense of meaning[39].

Insights from Self-Determination Theory suggest that we are motivated to fulfil our basic needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness which underlie much of human behaviour. In our data, *consistently thriving* workers were more likely to feel that these needs were being satisfied. Leaders can benefit from motivating their workers to fulfil these needs – through allowing people to have a choice in how they do their work, by providing skills and resources needed so they can do their job well, and by providing opportunities for connection and relatedness with others.

In addition, it appears that wellbeing coaching may amplify the impact of these resources by helping people put what they have learned into regular practice. Researchers support this finding, recommending that wellbeing coaching form a key part of a broader mental health and wellbeing strategy to create a coaching culture that moves beyond just the historical focus of performance[40]. Increasingly, we have seen Australian workplaces offer not just one-on-one wellbeing coaching support, but also small group wellbeing coaching run internally to harness the benefits of social support and improve the affordability of wellbeing coaching. This may come from formal coaching but alternatively may come from mentoring – more experienced members of the organisation teaching and supporting newer members.

4. CREATE A SHARED, HOLISTIC, EVIDENCE-BASED TOOLBOX FOR INDIVIDUALS, TEAMS, AND ORGANISATIONS TO DRAW UPON.

Researchers have consistently found that wellbeing interventions are never one-size-fits-all. This means that people, teams, and organisations need a shared, holistic, evidence-based toolbox of interventions so that different people, in different situations, can select the wellbeing practices that are right for them[41].

Based on our research and experiences over the years, we believe that having an evidence-based range of approaches to help improve people's individual and collective knowledge, tools, and support for wellbeing helps them to feel more confident and motivated to improve their wellbeing. While fruit, fitness and flu shots, employee assistance programs, and wellbeing and resilience training can help to improve people's knowledge, developing a shared toolbox specific to the organisation may further help support workers.

Evidence-based practices and tools that can help to improve the workplace environments to support rather than undermine people's wellbeing should be drawn upon. For example, psychological safety can be improved by adopting practices like Netflix's 'radical honesty' to give each other more feedback in an honest, timely, and respectful manner[42]. People's sense of autonomy can be improved by adopting practices like Zappos' co-creation of job descriptions and titles around people's strengths[43].

Encourage people to be intelligent, active stewards in shaping wellbeing for themselves and others in your workplace. While the team and organisation should create a supportive wellbeing environment, it's also important to encourage workers to take responsibility for their own wellbeing, drawing on the tools and supports available to them and doing what they can to support themselves and others. Help them to accelerate their knowledge about the science of wellbeing, inspire their practices with evidence-based ideas and tools, and give them permission to experiment so they can uncover what works best for each of them, in their teams, in your workplace, to achieve different outcomes at different times.

5. SUPPORT LEADERS AND HUMAN RESOURCE TEAMS TO BE WELLBEING ADVOCATES AND SUPPORTERS.

Researchers have found that leaders play an integral role in supporting worker wellbeing[44]. By creating a strong sense of 'us' and belonging within their teams, leaders help people to feel psychologically safe enough to talk more openly about their own wellbeing, explore new ways of supporting each other's wellbeing, and to ask for help when it is needed.

As the designers and advocates of people management policies, processes, and wellbeing resources, Human Resource teams also play an important role in supporting worker wellbeing[45]. As the nature, location, and duration of work continues to evolve, Human Resources teams can help leaders and people to navigate these changes in ways that support workers' needs for relatedness, autonomy, and competence. They can also provide a trusted and confidential source of knowledge and resources when workers are struggling with their wellbeing.

For example, we believe that by providing leaders and Human Resources team with wellbeing and resilience training and coaching, they could be more effective advocates and supporters of workplace wellbeing. Based on the data gathered, a key difference of people who were *consistently thriving* at work was their ability and willingness to seek help from their leaders and Human Resource teams, rather than seeking help from people outside of work when they were struggling.

In addition, we believe the more leaders and human resources teams understand how to support people's wellbeing and resilience, the more likely these approaches are to be incorporated into workplace strategies, operations, and communications to create a culture of wellbeing.

Moving closer to helping more people to thrive in our workplace consistently begins with a single step. It might be:

- Sharing this report with a colleague;

- Encouraging your leadership team to learn more about the impact of workplace wellbeing;

- Establishing or reviewing your workplace wellbeing measures to ensure you really understand what is happening for your people, your teams and your organisation;

- Diversifying and/or amplifying your current efforts to support people's wellbeing by building a common language and providing wellbeing coaching;

- Helping your leaders and human resources team become trusted advocates and champions for wellbeing; and/or,

- Taking the free PERMAH Workplace Survey (www.permahsurvey.com) to measure your own wellbeing and create a personal wellbeing plan.

You don't need to be a wellbeing expert, just be honest about what you're learning, your hopes for the future, the support you may need, and open up the space for others to do the same. Whatever steps you take, we wish you well with your journey and hope the insights and ideas we've provided help you and the people you serve to thrive at work.

"My mission in life is not merely to survive, but
to thrive; and to do so with some passion, some
compassion, some humor, and some style."

- MAYA ANGELOU

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Michelle is a best-selling author, workplace wellbeing teacher, and playful change activator. With more than a decade of senior leadership experience in large organisations around the world, she's passionate about translating cutting-edge research from positive psychology and neuroscience, into practical strategies that help people and workplaces to thrive. A senior fellow at Melbourne University's Graduate School of Education, she holds a Masters in Applied Positive Psychology from the University of Pennsylvania and recently completed her Ph.D. in Appreciative Inquiry under the supervision of Professor David Cooperrider. The host of the top-rated Making Positive Psychology Work podcast, each week Michelle interviews the world's leading researchers to gather the latest evidence and practices on human and systemic flourishing

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REBECCA MELVILLE

Beck Melville specialises in workplace wellbeing and is passionate about affecting positive change and inspiring people to unlock their human potential. Executive roles in structured finance, leadership development, telecommunications, and Not For Profits both in Australia and internationally, means she has practical experience in helping teams to navigate and embrace change. With undergraduate qualifications in Commerce and Finance and postgraduate studies in Applied Positive Psychology at Melbourne University, Beck draws on a unique blend of business acumen and the latest research from the fields of positive psychology and neuroscience to support individuals and organisations to flourish.

For more visit www.thewellbeinglab.com.

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Kim is the General Manager of HR Standards and Practice at the Australian HR Institute. With over 25 years' experience in human resource management roles and capability development, Kim currently leads AHRI's HR certification strategy. Previously Kim held roles as the Deputy Commissioner with the WA Public Sector Commission, and Senior Lecturer of Strategic HRM at Curtain University.

THE
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For just $497 you can have as many people complete the PERMAH Workplace Survey as you need. To find out more visit www.permahsurvey.com.

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