



GIBS OCTOBER HEALTH



**Gordon Institute
of Business Science**
University of Pretoria

Workplace Wellbeing Report

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By Alon Lits

CEO, October Health

“Individual wellbeing doesn’t live in isolation—it’s a function of culture, leadership, skills, and our holistic health” — Alon Lits

This is the second edition of our annual Workplace Wellbeing Index, and it’s been incredible to see how much interest, debate, and practical action it sparked across South Africa. The response confirmed what we’ve always believed at October Health: leaders are hungry for data-driven, credible insights that help them build healthier, higher-performing organisations. This year’s Index builds on that momentum with a richer, more comprehensive view of how employees are really doing—and what they need next.

The motivation behind the Index

At October Health, our mission is simple: help organisations retain, engage, and grow their best people. And we’ve learnt that wellbeing is not an individual issue—it’s systemic. It’s shaped by leadership, culture, financial stress, clarity, and everyday behaviours. That’s why we partnered with GIBS: their academic rigor combined with our organisational insights allowed us to create a credible, independent, and actionable national wellbeing benchmark.

What the data is telling us

Overall wellbeing in the South African workforce improved from **69 to 75** this year.

- Mental, physical, emotional, and social wellbeing all strengthened
- Financial wellbeing improved the most (+8 points)
- Yet fewer employees describe their workplace as “very healthy”
- And more are uncertain about their culture

“Uncertainty about culture is one of the strongest early indicators of retention risk.”

What employees really want

This year’s Index confirms a major shift: employees no longer want “programme-first” wellbeing. They want healthy culture, leaders who walk the talk, managers equipped to support wellbeing, predictability and psychological safety, and support that reflects real-life pressures. These insights validate our approach at October Health: you cannot tick a box and expect people to thrive. Real impact requires a holistic model that supports employees from the ground up while reinforcing culture and trust from the top down.

The data in this Index excludes October Health clients; our clients typically see 18%–52% improvements on a Wellbeing Index Composite when organisations take this dual approach. Performance improves. Retention stabilises. People do better work.

The road ahead

As South Africa prepares to host the 2025 G20 Summit, we have a unique opportunity to redefine what healthy, high-performing work looks like. With uncertainty becoming a permanent feature of the world of work, building resilience has never mattered more. My hope is that this Index gives leaders a clear, evidence-based blueprint for investment, one that prioritises culture, clarity, capability, and human connection over one-off interventions.

Thank you to the GIBS team for their partnership and to every organisation choosing to build a better workplace. We’re proud to support you on this journey.

Alon Lits

CEO, October Health

About

October Health

October Health (“October”) helps their clients retain their best people by building an engaged workforce that owns their wellness and performance, while equipping managers with insights to understand their teams and drive impact.

Founded by Allan Sweidan and Alon Lits, October brings together decades of experience across clinical psychology, business leadership, and technology innovation. Sweidan previously founded Akeso, which became Africa’s largest network of psychiatric hospitals, while Lits was Uber’s first employee in Africa, scaling its operations across the continent.

Today, October partners with leading organizations across sectors to build cultures of wellbeing and high performance. They take a holistic approach to individual wellbeing, supporting individuals with their mental and physical health whilst also equipping them with the skills that they need to thrive. At the same time, October works with leaders to drive a more positive and inclusive culture with high trust in leaders. Winner of the FNB App of the Year 2024 in the Health Category, the platform delivers measurable impact by improving engagement, reducing burnout, and empowering people to show up as their best selves — both personally and professionally.

Gordon Institute of Business Science

Proudly based in Africa, the Gordon Institute of Business Science (GIBS) is a globally renowned institution in Africa committed to serving, inspiring, and advancing world-class business practices across the continent and beyond. Founded in 2000 on the back of a significant endowment by Sir Donald Gordon, the University of Pretoria’s business school was started as a “business school for business”. It has built a reputation for entrepreneurial thinking and excellence, and continues to evolve in step with the needs of business, embracing technology and disruption, while addressing the importance of humanising the world of work. Research is an important focus of the School’s identity, which conducts studies in Africa

for Africa, making business healthier. GIBS is dedicated to disseminating research findings to both academic and practitioner communities, publishing in high-impact journals and white papers, presenting at conferences, and actively engaging in knowledge-sharing activities. This commitment ensures that the School’s research has a broader impact, influences policy decisions, informs industry practices, and contributes to the advancement of knowledge in various fields. In May 2024, GIBS was ranked amongst the world’s top 50 business schools by the renowned United Kingdom’s Financial Times Executive Education rankings, placing 37th for open-enrolment programmes —the highest-ranked African business school.

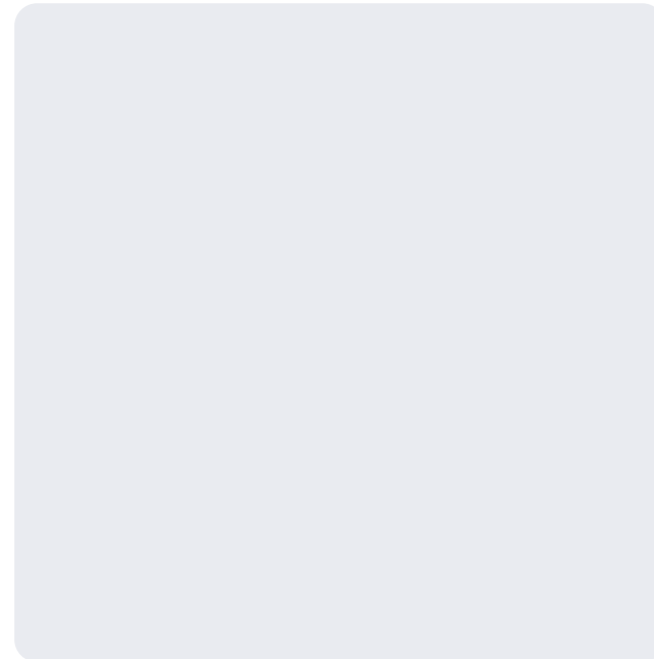
Context and Research Objectives

While South Africa's economic environment remains challenging, easing inflation, lower interest rates, and improved electricity generation have contributed to a more stable outlook. The Government of National Unity, though not without its challenges, appears to be functioning effectively. National pride has been buoyed by the strong performance of South Africa's rugby and cricket teams, and by Bafana Bafana's qualification for the 2026 World Cup. As the country prepares to host the 2025 G20 Summit, confidence is gradually strengthening, and working South Africans are reporting higher levels of well-being than a year ago.

Building on the combined expertise of both organisations, the Gordon Institute of Business Science (GIBS) and October Health have continued their partnership to advance employee well-being thought leadership in South Africa. Through this workplace well-being report, we seek to deliver meaningful insights into the overall well-being of working South Africans and to identify the key factors influencing different dimensions of well-being. Primarily, we track:

1. **The overall well-being of working South Africans as well as across the seven dimensions of well-being;**
2. **Job satisfaction, psychological safety, and self-rated job performance;**
3. **The availability of well-being resources in the workplace; and**
4. **The role of perceived organizational support for well-being.**

The second annual GIBS–October Health Workplace Well-being Report reveals a clear strategic blind spot in organisational well-being: while employees are calling for a workplace culture and leadership behaviours that genuinely support well-being, many organisations continue to rely on traditional employee wellness programmes.



In response to feedback from readers of the 2024 report, we have introduced spiritual well-being as a new dimension in this year's well-being report. Many readers identified its absence as a significant gap, noting that spiritual well-being plays a vital role in their lives and overall well-being. Also, the growing academic interest in this domain supports its inclusion. Research over the past decade has highlighted spiritual well-being as an important predictor of ethical leadership, mental health, life satisfaction, and workplace engagement.

The report further highlights encouraging progress across multiple dimensions of well-being among working South Africans, spanning different life stages. This improvement follows five challenging years marked by heightened anxiety, stress, and worry in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

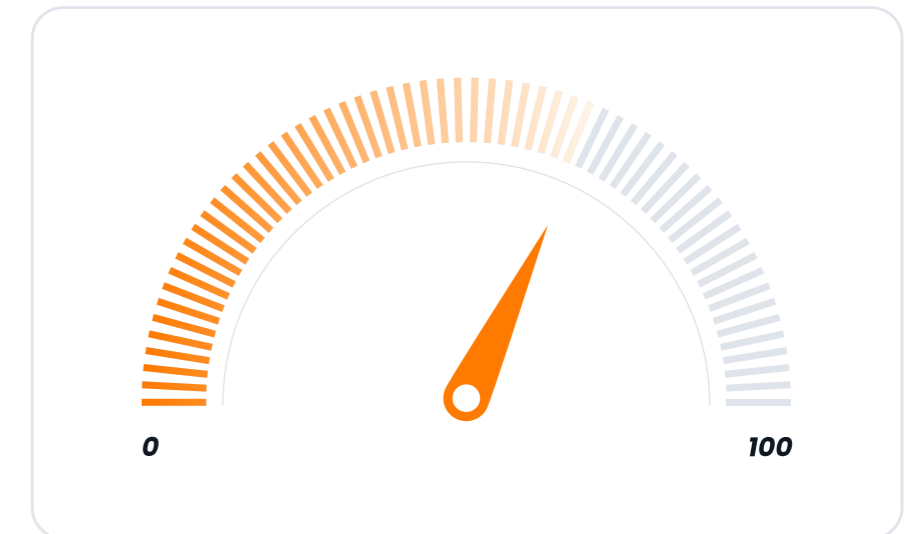
Building on the insights of the inaugural 2024 report, the second annual GIBS–October Health Workplace Well-being Report reveals a clear strategic blind spot in organisational well-being: while employees are calling for a workplace culture and leadership behaviours that genuinely support well-being, many organisations continue to rely on traditional employee wellness programmes.

How we measured the data:

1

Sample & timing:

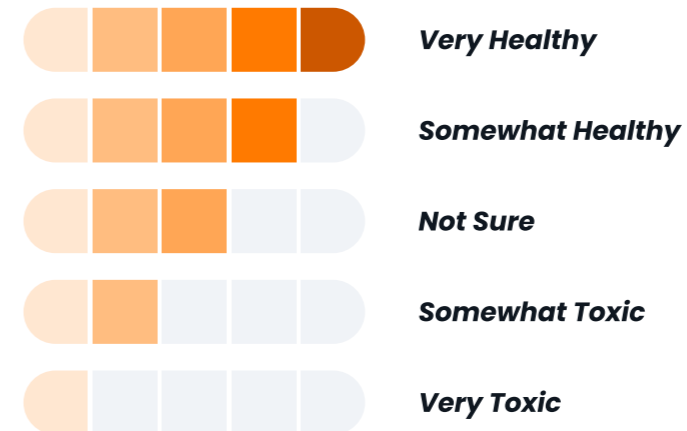
N=503 South African employees. Items used 5-point Likert scales in 2025 (1–5), with 2024 baselines (some 7-point) converted to 0–100 scores for comparability where provided.



2

Indices & scaling:

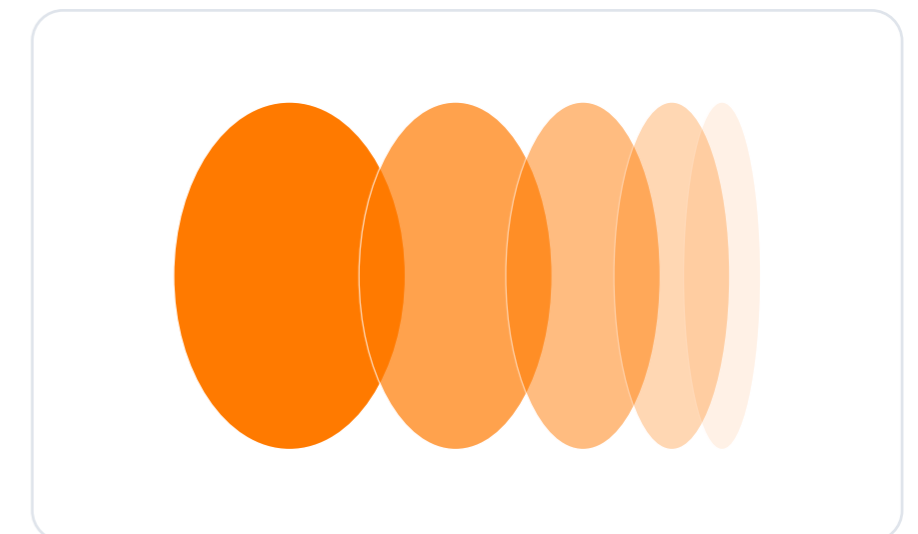
Domain means were converted to scores out of 100. We also report composite constructs: POSEWB (perceived organisational support for employee wellbeing), Financial Scarcity, Job Insecurity, Psychological Safety and Subjective In-Role Performance. POSEWB items loaded on a single factor (eigenvalue 4.13, 59.1% variance explained).



3

Analytics:

Multiple linear regressions identify predictors of job satisfaction (Adj. R² 51.4%), self-rated performance (Adj. R² 19.1%), and psychological safety (Adj. R² 47.7%). Coefficients cited below are unstandardised Bs; significance noted where p < .05.



Sample and Methodology

The GIBS October Health Workplace Well-being Report focuses its lens on working South Africans.

Fieldwork Timeline:

3 October – 28 October 2025

Survey Type:

Online

Survey Length:

27 Minutes

Sample:

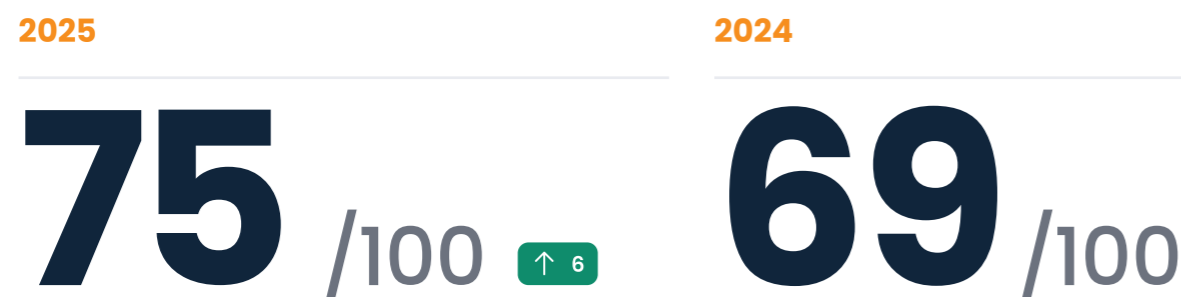
In our sample of 503, age, personal income, gender and population group were all quota-controlled, and the data were reweighted according to the income and demographic profiles of working South Africans using the Marketing All Product Survey (MAPS) as a benchmark.

Category	Frequency (%)
Province	
Gauteng	27.4
North-West	6.6
Western Cape	11.5
Limpopo	10.3
Kwa-Zulu Natal	22.5
Eastern Cape	9.1
Free State	4.6
Northern Cape	0.6
Mpumalanga	7.4
Number of employees in organisation	
0-50	27.4
51-200	21.7
201-500	9.5
501-1,000	8.9
1,001-2,000	3.6
2,001-3,000	1.2
3,001-4,000	0.8
4,001-5,000	4.2
More than 5,000	6.4

Category	Frequency (%)
Role in organisation	
Top management / Owner	22.3
Senior management	15.5
Middle management	15.1
Junior management	12.7
Individual contributor	34.4
Working Status	
Full-time	51.1
Part-time	20.8
Self-employed	28.1
Age	
18-24	17.5
25-34	31.8
35-44	24.1
45-54	11.9
55-64	10.5
65+	4.2
Gender	
Male	52.5
Female	47.5
Race	
Black	65.8
Coloured	8.2
Indian/Asian	4.6
White	21.5
Monthly Income	
Less than R5,000	18.1
R5,000-R10,000	16.9
R10,000-R15,000	14.7
R15,000-R20,000	10.5
R20,000-R30,000	12.7
R30,000-R50,000	16.9
More than R50,000	10.1
Work Patterns	
All-in-person (You go into work everyday)	52.1
Mostly in-person (You go into work on most days)	24.5
Equal split between going into work and working remotely	11.9
Mostly remote (from home etc.)	6.0
All remote (from home etc)	5.6

Executive Summary

This Index summarises what South African employees told us about working life in 2025 and where organisations can act next. Data come from a national sample of 503 employees who completed a multi-domain wellbeing survey. Unless otherwise stated, all scores are converted to a 0–100 scale to aid year-on-year comparison. Overall wellbeing in the South African workplace has improved:



Gains were broad-based across mental, physical, social, emotional and work domains, with financial wellbeing improving the most. However, fewer employees now rate their

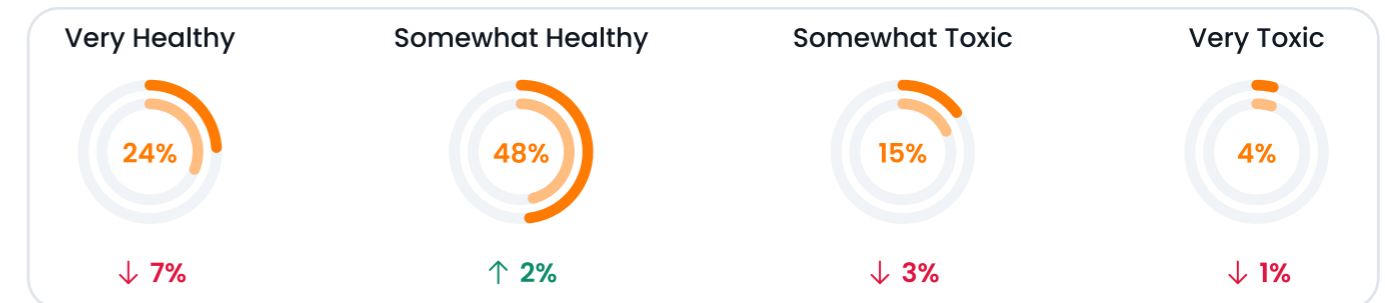
workplace as “very healthy”, signalling progress is uneven and cultural consistency remains a challenge.

Five headlines at a glance

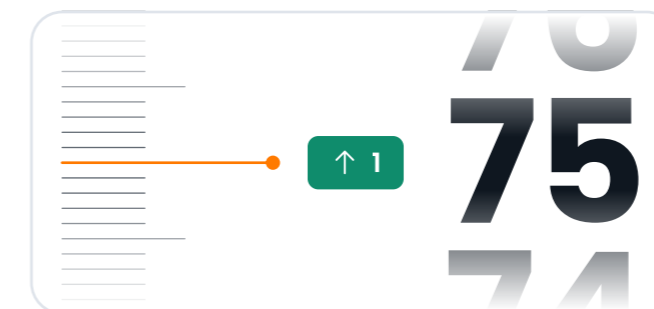
1. Composite Wellbeing Scores

Domain	Score	Δ
Mental	76	↑ 5
Physical	75	↑ 4
Social	78	↑ 5
Emotional	78	↑ 5
Work	77	↑ 5
Financial	64	↑ 8
Spiritual - New category we introduced based on feedback last year.	77	New

2. Work Environment Health



3. Support & Culture



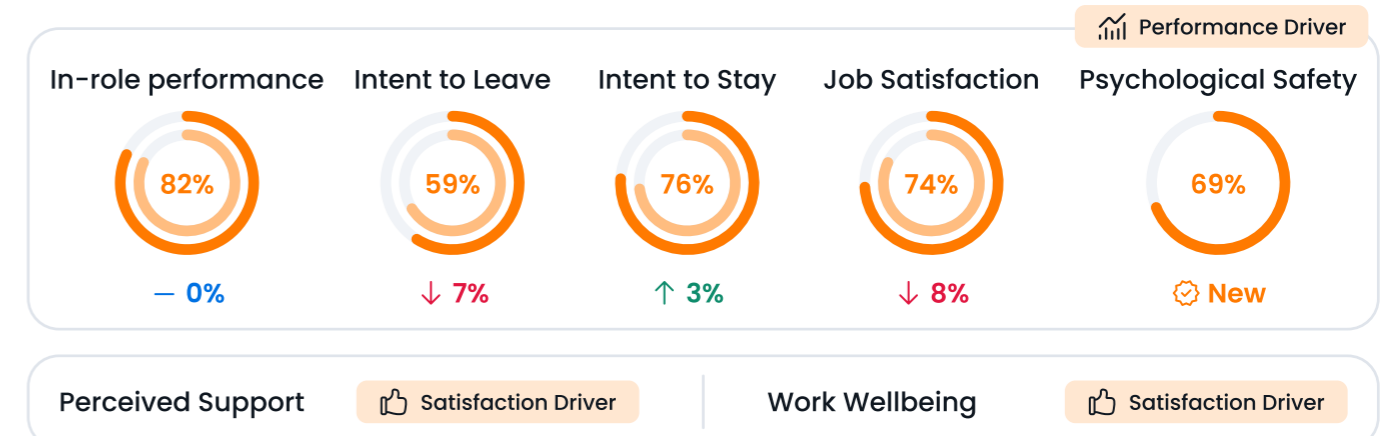
Perceived organisational support for employee wellbeing (POSEWB) edged up to 75/100 (from 74).

Employees most want a healthy, sustainable culture and leadership that prioritises wellbeing; requests for one-off events decline.

4. Benefits: Reality vs Demand

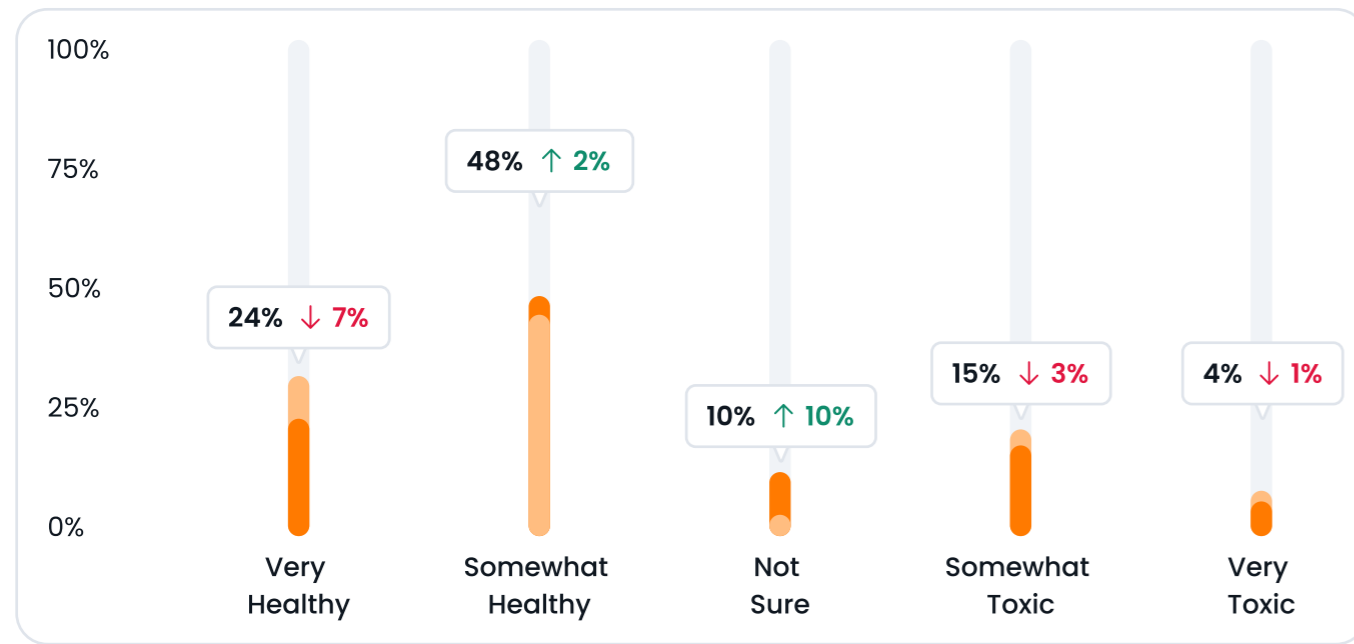
Category	Benefit	Change	Type
Availability Increase	On-site Fitness	+10.3	Availability growth
	Healthy Snacks	+10.1	Availability growth
	Team Building	+7.0	Availability growth
	Health Screenings	+7.2	Availability growth
Availability Decrease	Mental Health Apps	-4.9	Availability drop
	Executive Wellness	-5.1	Availability drop
Demand Increase	Culture Prioritising Wellbeing	+11.8	Demand Growth
	Encouraged Breaks	+9.3	Demand Growth
Demand Gaps	Flexible Hours	+7.8	Demand Gap
	Support for caregivers	+8.6	Demand Gap
	Social connection	+9.0	Demand Gap

5. Performance and Retention



1. The state of the work environment

Health of the work environment (employee perception):



2. Leadership, trust and manager support

Perceived organisational support (POSEWB):



Perceived organisational support for employee wellbeing (POSEWB) edged up to 75/100 (from 74).

Employees most want a healthy, sustainable culture and leadership that prioritises wellbeing; requests for one-off events decline.

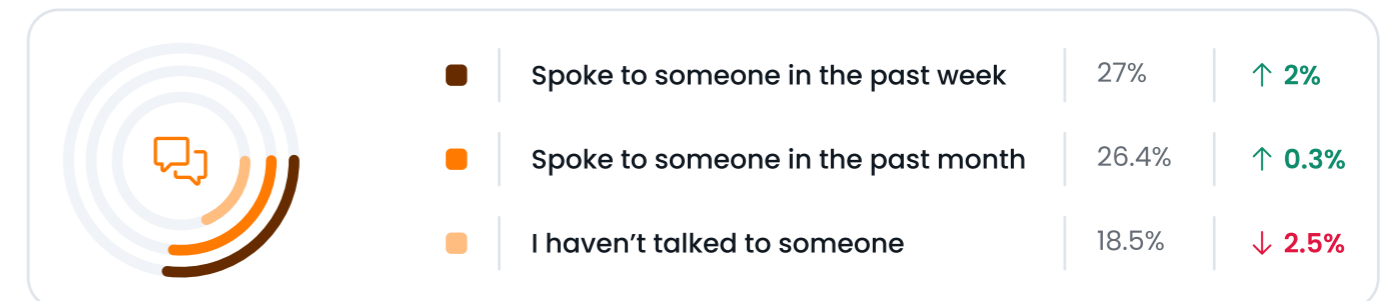
Manager relationship on wellbeing:



Leadership communication cadence:



Employee conversations about wellbeing:

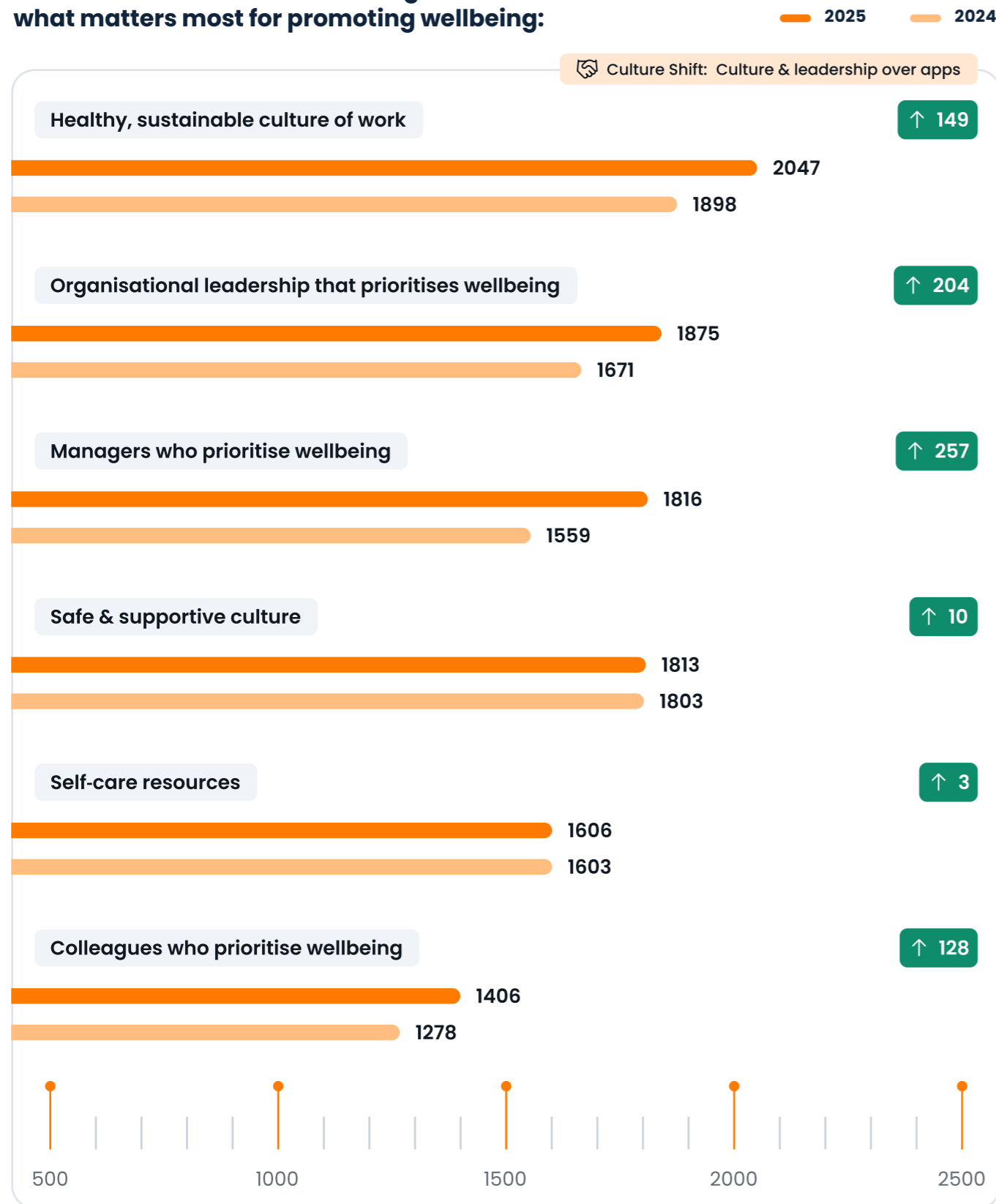


Conversation outcomes:



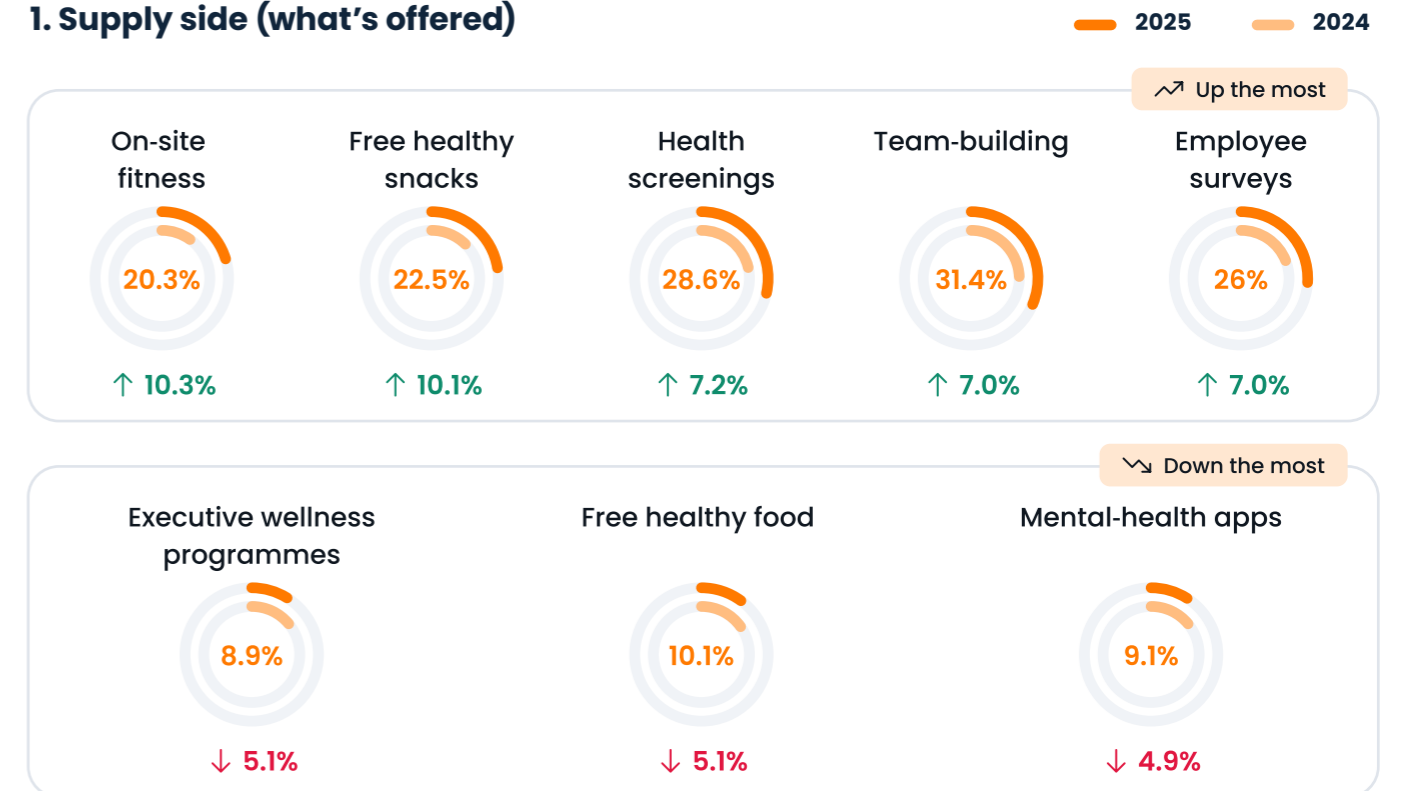
3. What employees value most for wellbeing

“Culture first” is the clear message. When asked to rank what matters most for promoting wellbeing:

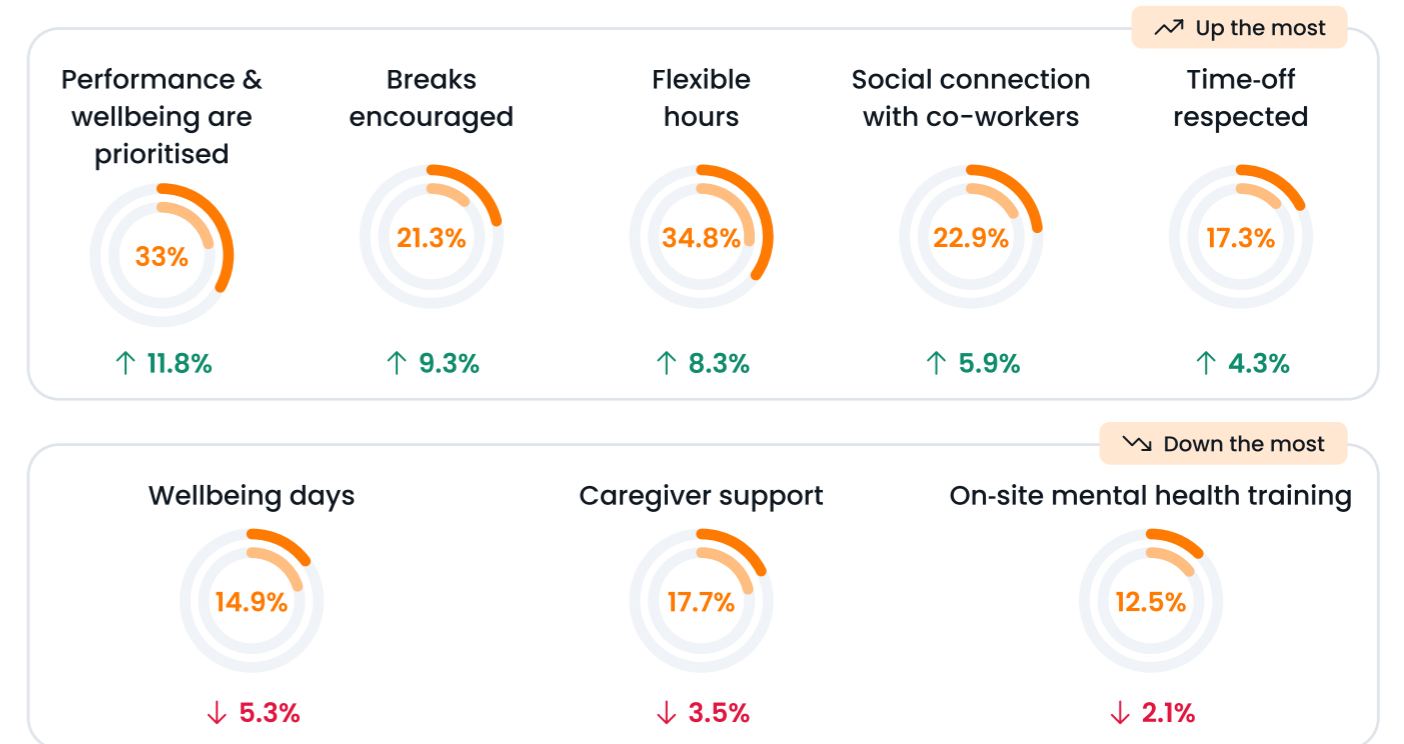


4. Benefits on offer vs what people want

1. Supply side (what's offered)



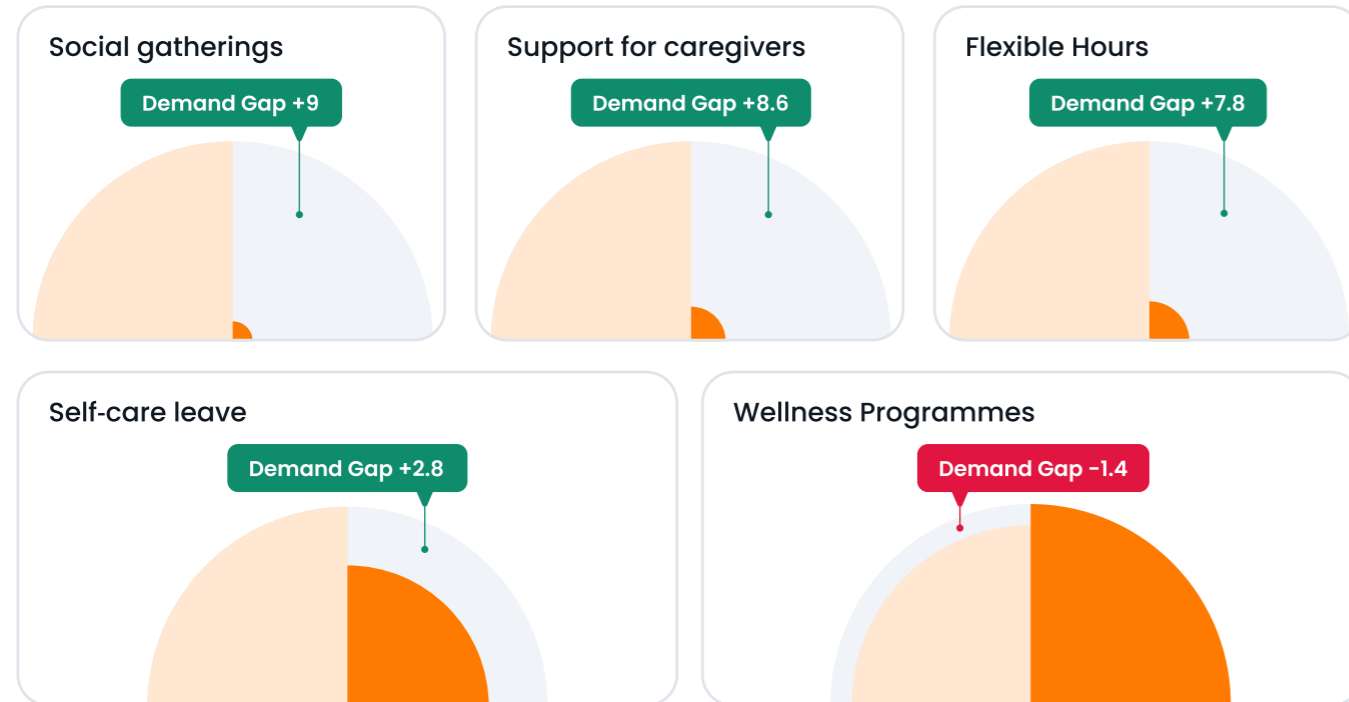
2. Demand side (what's desired)



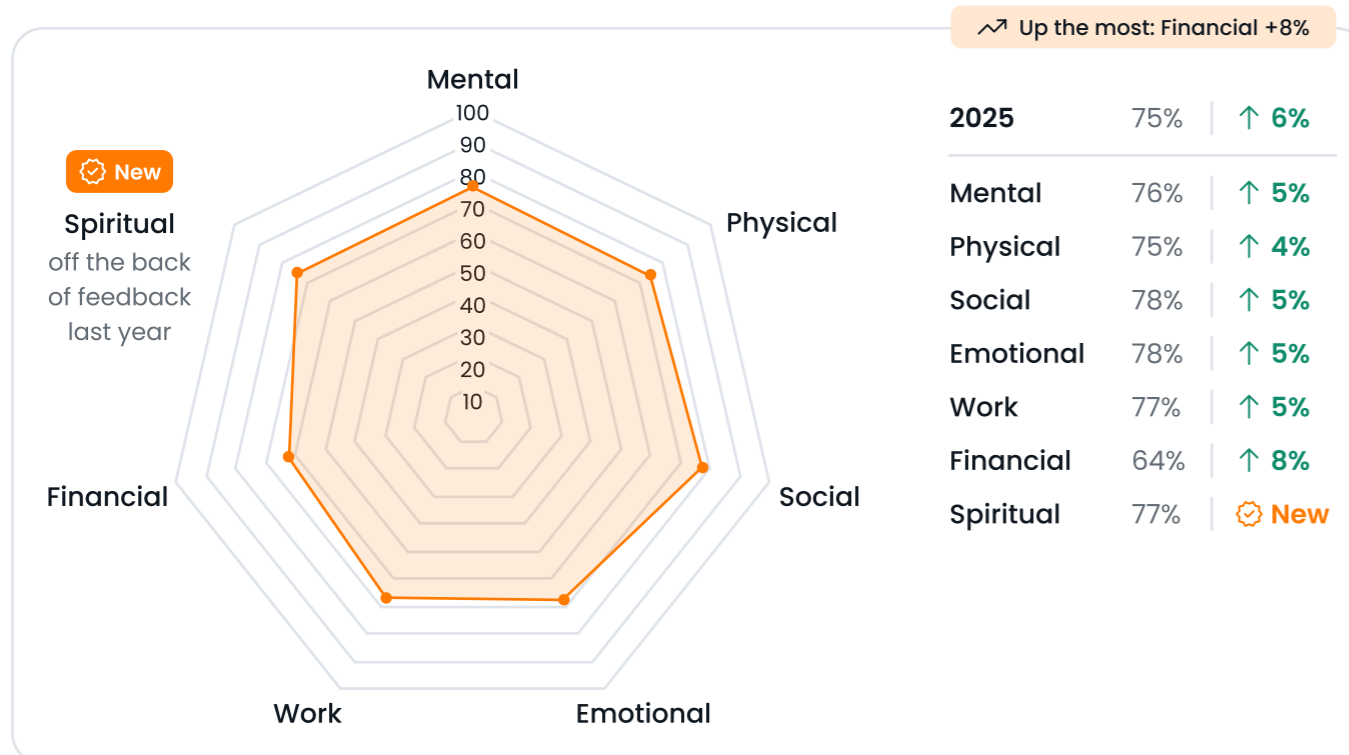
3. The gaps that matter

Interpretation:

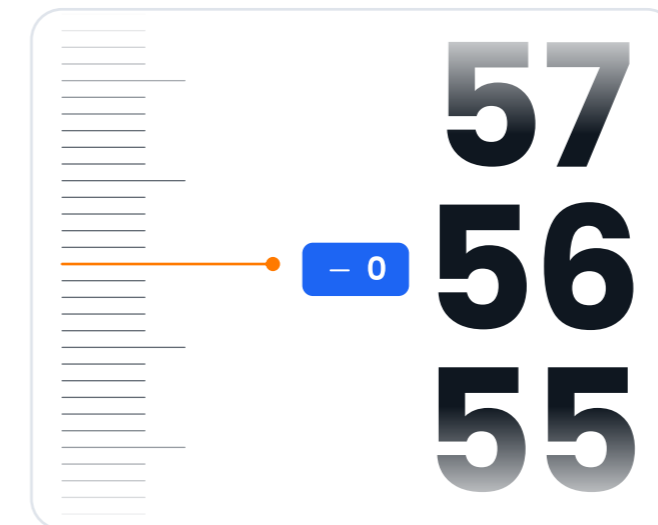
Employees are switching from “programme-first” to culture-led wellbeing: norms that allow breaks, respect time off, and enable flexible, sustainable performance.



5. Wellbeing domains



6. Money, job security & psychological safety

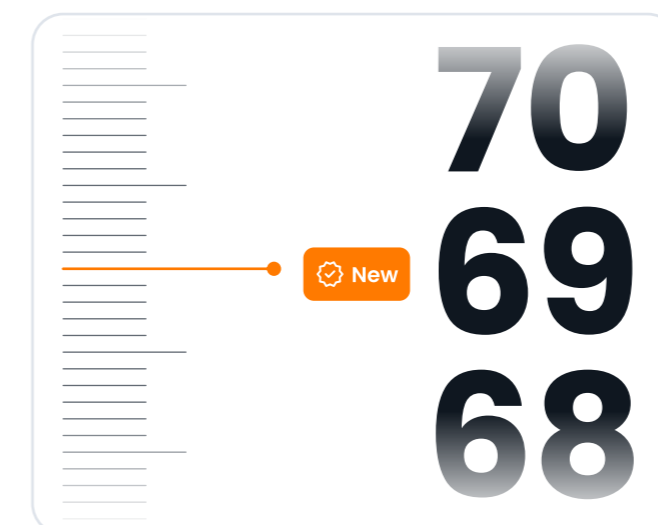
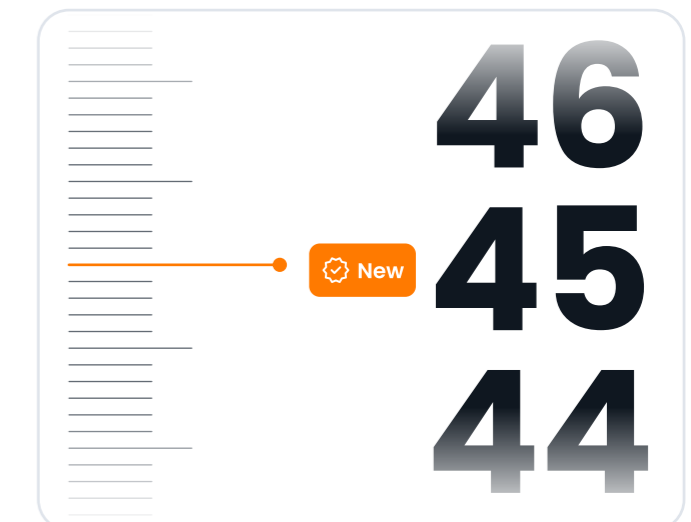


Financial scarcity mindset:

Unchanged from 2024. Employees still report persistent money pressures (e.g., “I worry about not having enough money”). This suggests financial stress undermines morale and wellbeing more than direct productivity.

Job insecurity:

A non-trivial portion feels unsure about keeping their jobs. Job insecurity had a negative effect on both job satisfaction and self-rated job performance so while the psychological impact of insecurity is small it shows employees who feel unsafe in their roles also report diminished focus and engagement.



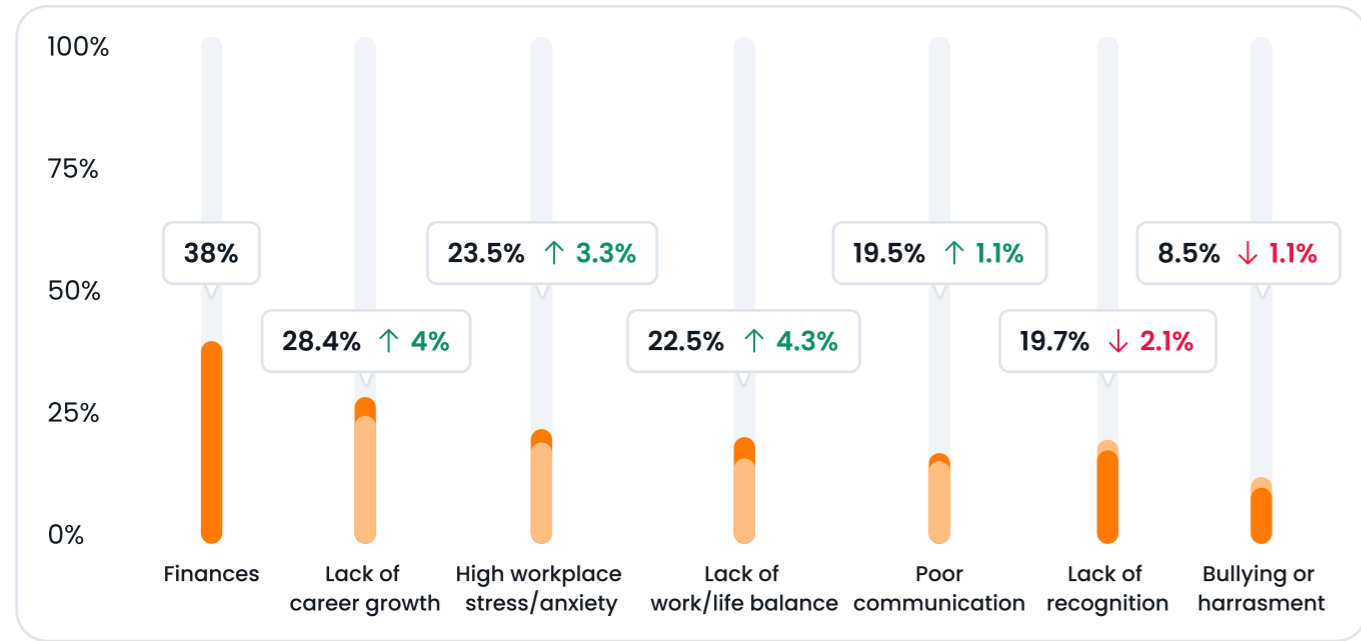
Psychological safety:

The psychological safety scale captures whether people feel safe to speak up, take risks, and admit mistakes without fear of punishment. Psychological safety had the strongest positive coefficient among all wellbeing dimensions for predicting self-rated performance and elevated psychological safety is associated with stronger self-rated job performance. Psychological safety operates as a mediator between cultural climate and performance. When employees perceive leadership empathy and role stability, they take initiative and rate themselves higher on output and innovation (See section 8).

7. What is hurting wellbeing most?

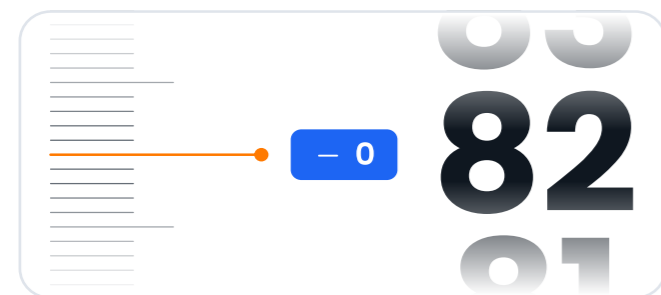
Top negative influences in 2025:

2025 2024

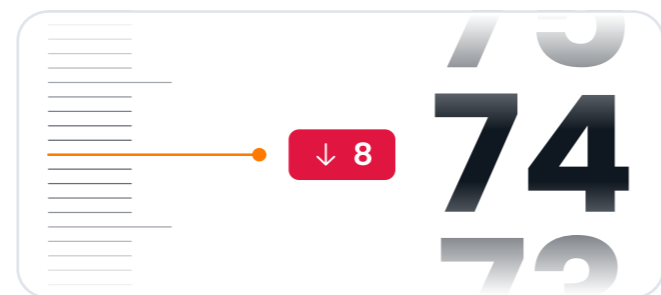


8. Performance, satisfaction & retention

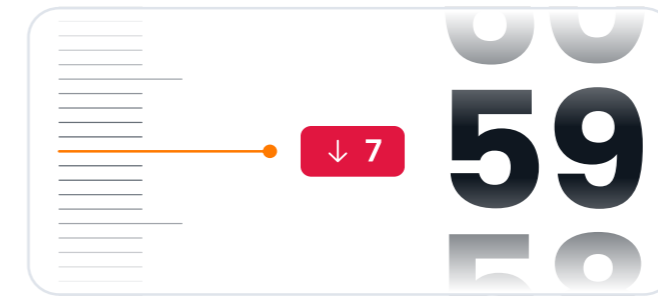
Self-rated in-role performance:



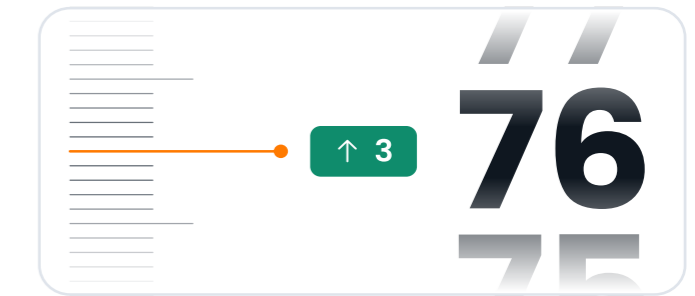
Job satisfaction:



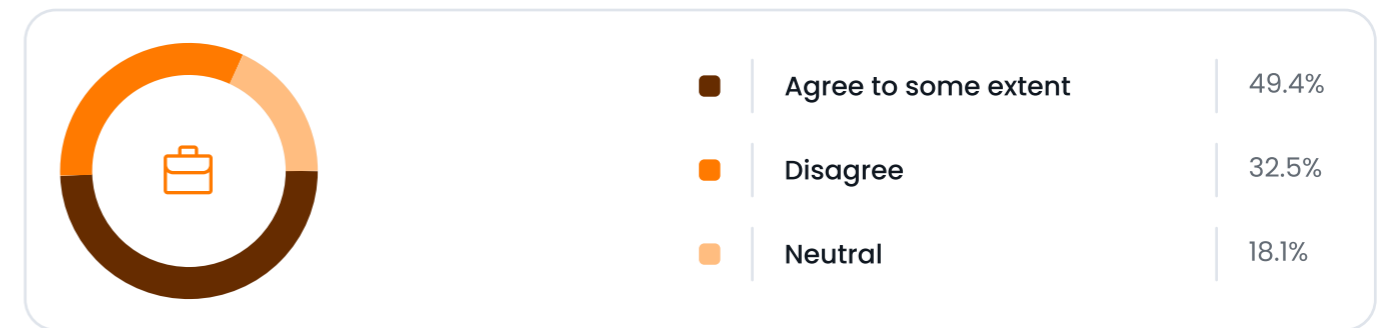
Intentions: Searching for a new role



Intentions: stay ≥2 years



Job involvement: "I live, eat and breathe my job"



What drives outcomes (regressions):

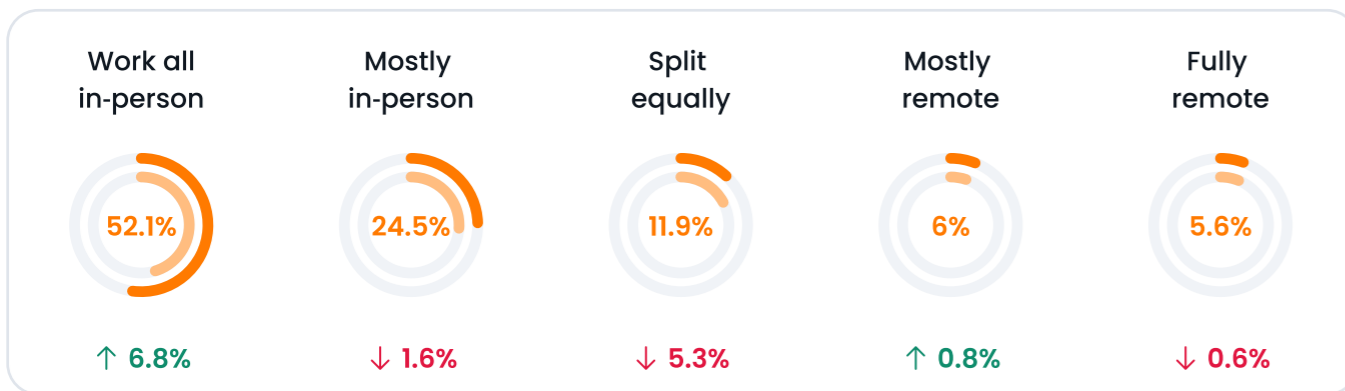
Model	Factor	Effect on job satisfaction	B-value	Significance (P)
Job Satisfaction	Perceived organisational support for wellbeing	↑ Positive	0.359	< .001
	Work wellbeing	↑ Positive	0.340	< .001
	Mental wellbeing	↑ Positive	0.182	.029
	Perceived healthy workplace	↑ Positive	0.117	.006
Self-rated performance	Intention to stay	↑ Positive	0.117	.001
	Financial scarcity	↓ Negative	-0.133	.045
	Intention to leave	↓ Negative	-0.116	< .001
	Psychological safety	↑ Positive	0.220	< .001
	Emotional wellbeing	↑ Positive	0.139	.024

Model	Factor	Effect on job satisfaction	B-value	Significance (P)
	Intention to stay	↑ Positive	0.062	.006
	Job involvement	↑ Positive	0.033	.028
	Financial wellbeing – likely reflecting respondents who rate “doing more with less”	↓ Negative	-0.143	.006
	Job insecurity – Workers report lower performance than all-office peers (B=-0.353, p=.002); “all remote” and “hybrid equal split” were not significant.	↓ Negative	.006	.040
Psychological Safety	Perceived support	↑ Positive	.040	< .01
	Healthy workplace	↑ Positive	0.067	< .05
	Financial wellbeing	↑ Positive	-	< .05
	Job insecurity	↓ Negative	-0.122	< .001
	Job over-identification	↓ Negative	-0.044	< .05
	Part-time vs full-time status	↓ Negative	-0.150	< .05

9. Ways of working

Where we work:

The modest rise in “mostly remote” alongside a larger rise in “all in-person” suggests hybrid was rationalised to clearer patterns in 2025.



10. The 2025 wellbeing blueprint

what employers should do next: 6 Moves for 2025

A. Fix the culture-programme mismatch

- Make “healthy, sustainable work” the product, not the perk. Embed breaks, respect for time-off, and manager role-modelling as explicit team norms. Use monthly check-ins; publish these norms team-wide. (Backed by the surge in cultural desires and the POSEWB link to satisfaction.)
- Translate conversations into actions. Where employees spoke up, they felt more supported, but fewer experienced workload adjustments or flexibility changes. Create a simple “conversation to action” protocol (eg, within 10 business days, managers confirm an agreed change or a clear reason why not).

B. Target psychological safety for performance

- Build speak-up safety: visible leader behaviours (“admit small mistakes”, “ask for dissent”), peer norms (“no-interrupt” in problem-solving), and anonymous pulse prompts. Given its strong tie to performance, treat **psych** safety as a KPI alongside output.

C. Shore up financial wellbeing without over-promising

- Expand budgeting tools, micro-savings, and debt navigation resources; consider emergency savings access and responsible early-wage access where feasible. Financial scarcity stayed stuck at 56/100 and remains the top negative factor on wellbeing.

D. Close the biggest demand gaps

- Flexible hours (+7.8 gap): publish core hours + staggered start/finish options.
- Caregiver support (+8.6 gap): offer referral networks, caregiver days, and manager latitude for care crises.
- Social connection (+9.0 gap): nudge frequent, low-pressure team social time; micro-budgets for teams.

E. Invest where it converts to satisfaction

- Double down on work design & clarity (work-wellbeing score 77, strong link to satisfaction), and equip managers with short, repeatable practices (eg, monthly load-balancing reviews, restoration breaks in projects).

F. Re-tune benefits portfolio

- Maintain momentum on screenings and team-building (both rising). Evaluate low-uptake, high-cost items (executive-only or app-only solutions). Shift budget toward manager enablement and culture delivery.

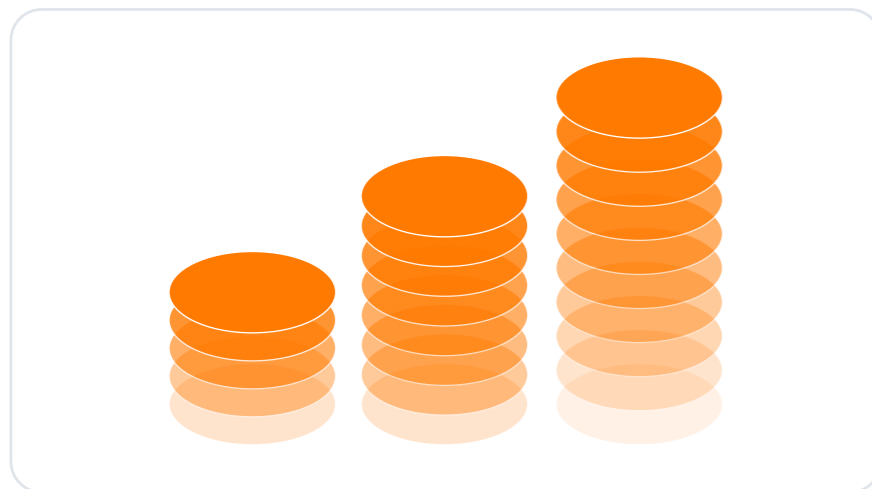
11. Sector & people insights

Selected Metrics:

1

Age:

18–24 and 25–34 report higher job satisfaction than 35–44 after controls ($p < .05$). Tailor retention paths early (growth + recognition).



2

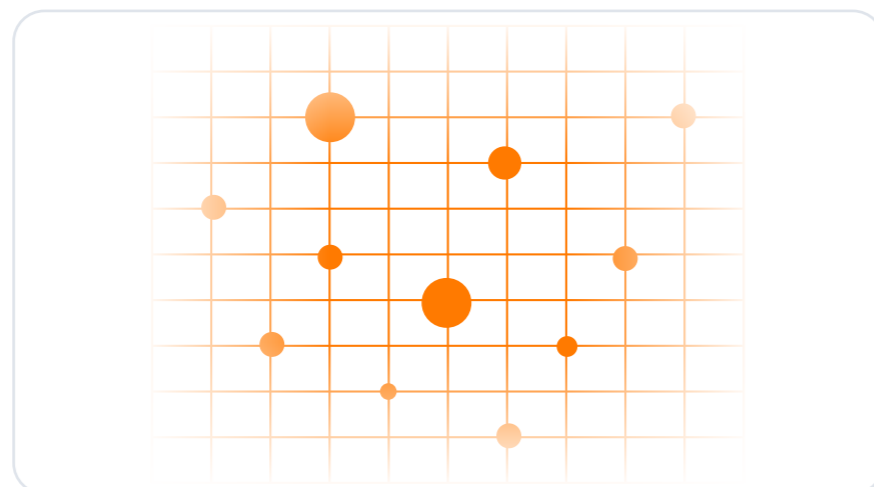
Income:

R30k–R49,999 band associates with higher satisfaction vs R15k–R19,999 ($B = 0.264$, $p = .049$), reflecting relief as income rises.

3

Work pattern:

“Mostly remote” associates with lower self-rated performance than “all-office” ($B = -0.353$, $p = .002$), while “all remote” is not significant—suggesting clarity and stability of the model may matter more than a specific model.

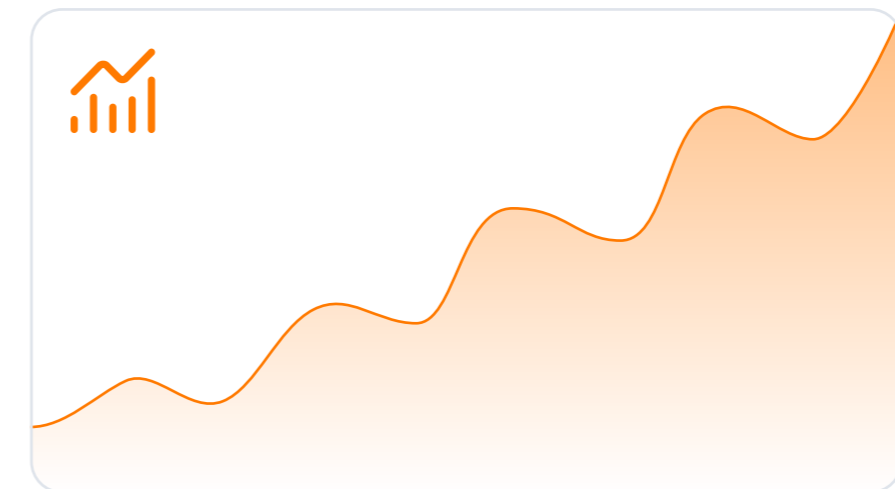
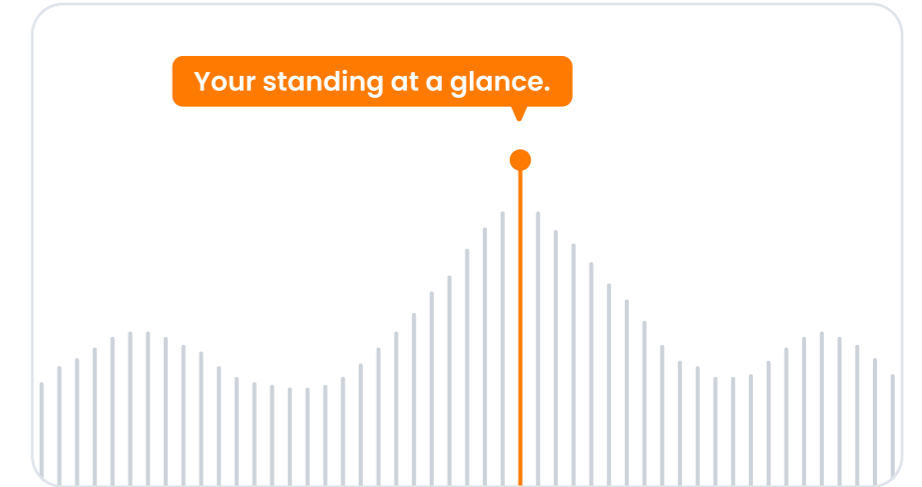


12. How to use this Index

1

Benchmark where your organisation sits:

Compare your internal pulse scorecards to the domain scores and indices herein.



2

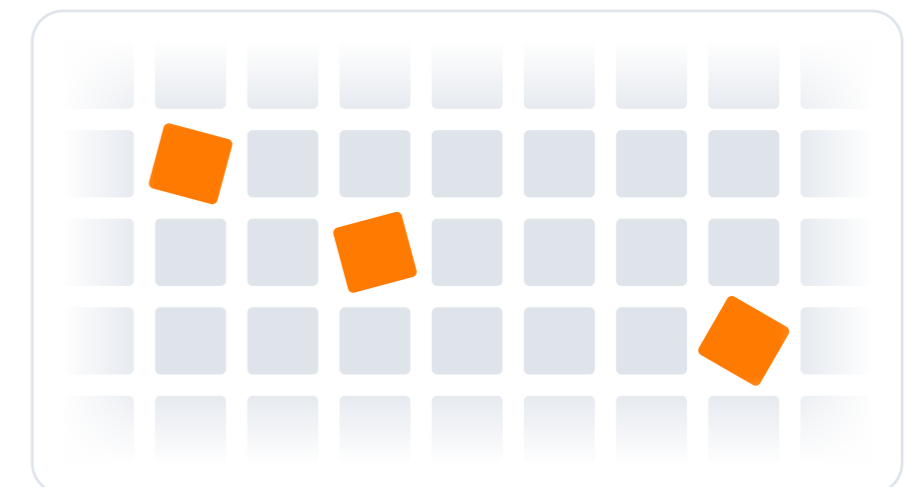
Prioritise interventions that the data show move outcomes:

POSEWB, work design, and psychological safety for satisfaction/performance; financial scaffolding to reduce scarcity-related drag.

3

Sequence changes:

Start with cultural norms (breaks, time-off, expectation clarity), then add benefits that close the biggest demand gaps.

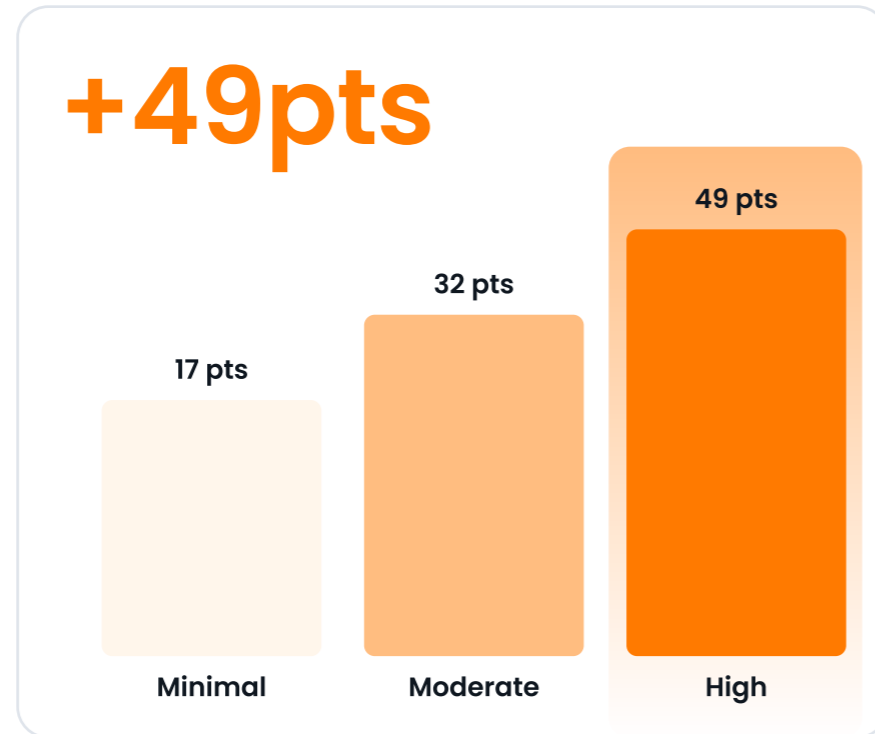


October Health Sets a New Standard in Clinical Outcomes

1

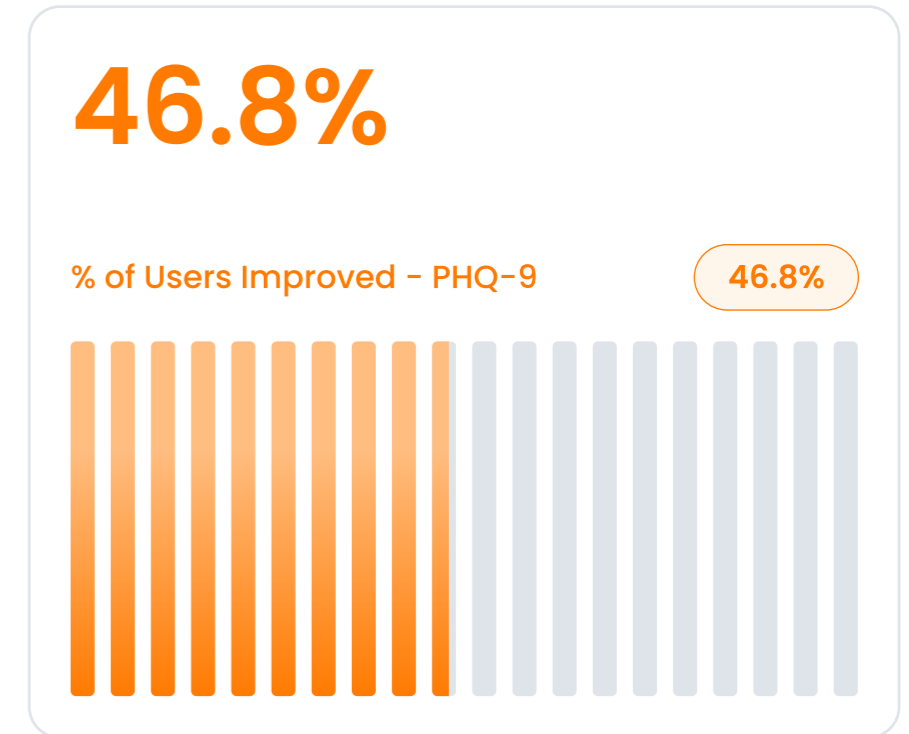
eNPS surges with high engagement

October turns participation into advocacy. High engagement cohorts drive outsized eNPS lifts.



3

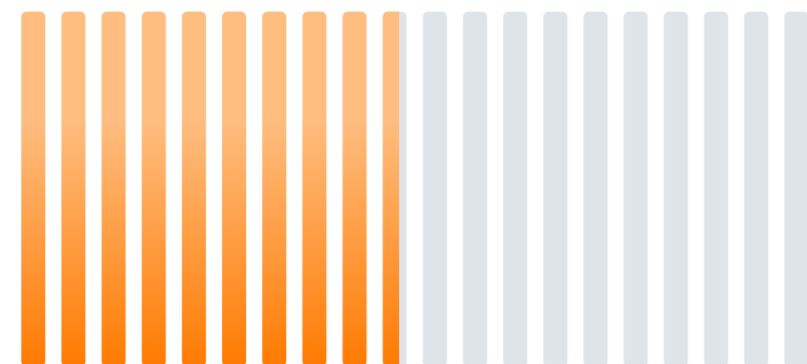
PHQ-9 improvement rate



46.8%

% of Users Improved - PHQ-9

46.8%

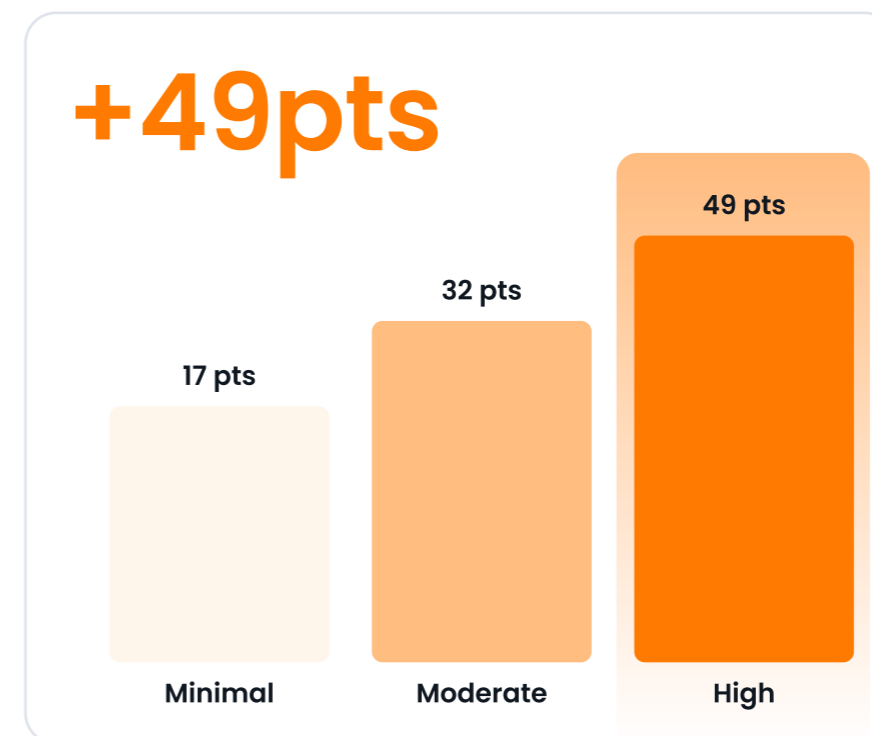


2

Performance improves across teams

Always-on care. AI guidance and manager actions accelerate execution and quality

+49pts



4

Clinical Impact that outpaces established interventions

Apendix

Key metrics table (public):

2025 vs 2024 at a glance

Metric	2025	2024	Δ
Overall Wellbeing	75	69	↑ 6
Mental	76	71	↑ 5
Physical	75	71	↑ 4
Social	78	73	↑ 5
Emotional	78	73	↑ 5
Work	77	72	↑ 5
Financial	64	56	↑ 8
Psychological Safety	69	-	New
POSEWB	75	74	↑ 1
Self-rated Performance	82	82	- 0
Job Satisfaction	74	82	↓ 8
Intend to Leave (mean, 1-5)	2.94	3.29	↓ 0.35
Intent to Stay (mean, 1-5)	3.80	3.67	↑ 0.13
Work pattern: all in-person	52.1%	45.3%	↑ 6.8

Source: October Health 2025 Workplace Wellbeing survey (South Africa), N=503. Scores out of 100 unless labelled otherwise.

Technical end notes

POSEWB factor analysis:

Single factor (eigenvalue 4.13, 59.1% variance explained), supporting use as a composite.

Regression specifications:

Satisfaction model includes wellbeing domains, perceptions (healthy workplace, POSEWB), scarcity/insecurity, psych safety, intentions, job involvement, and demographics (age, race, income; other controls not shown were non-significant). Performance model highlights psychological safety, emotional wellbeing, intent to stay, job involvement as positive; financial wellbeing and job insecurity as negative; mostly-remote work lower than all-office.

Acknowledgements & citation

This Index is derived from October Health and GIBS 2025 Workplace Wellbeing research dataset (South Africa).

Please cite as:

October Health and GIBS (2025). Workplace Wellbeing Index – South Africa.

Special Thanks:

- **Dr Frank Magwegwe Principal Researcher and GIBS faculty**
- **Dave Blakey - Data and Insights Lead, October Health**
- **Julian de Freitas - Design, October Health**
- **Sasha Jones - Design - October Health**



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