



EMPLOYEE CONNECTIONS STUDY 2022



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How employees connect at work is critical to the success of any organization. In fact, we believe the depth of employee connections—to their work, coworkers, customers, and the organization—is the key to improving the employee experience and helping organizations thrive from the inside out.





We believe in the power of connection.

Based on our belief in the power of connection, earlier this year we conducted attitudinal research to determine the drivers of employee connections at work and the impact of those connections on the employee experience, engagement, and other outcomes. In partnership with research specialists **Audience Audit**, we surveyed over 400 US employees from large organizations (those with at least 1,000 employees) across a range of roles, industries, ages, and incomes.

This report discusses our research findings and key observations from our analysis of the results. We also offer guidance to help you better understand your workforce and how to ensure employees feel connected, engaged, and supported at work.

PART 1 INSIGHTS

WHY CONNECTION AT WORK MATTERS

To have a meaningful discussion about connection at work, it's worth reviewing why it matters in today's workplace. After all, with the rise in remote work and increasingly dispersed workforces, the idea of employee connection has evolved, with virtual connections sometimes replacing face-to-face interactions. And as the notion of employee connection has changed, there remain questions about how much it truly impacts employee performance and engagement.

Through our daily work with clients, we see that the many connections employees have at work not only matter, but they are the key to helping companies build a culture that supports high performance and engagement.

When employees are more connected to each other, their work, and the company's purpose, they naturally feel a strong sense of belonging and, therefore, commitment to the success of the company, their team, and themselves.



Other research about connections

- 1 Employees at companies that promote a connected culture, with frequent employee communication, achieve better emotional well-being.¹
- 2 Seventy-seven percent of respondents in a 2019 survey named “building close relationships with colleagues” as the most important factor affecting their job satisfaction.²
- 3 Employees who experience high levels of belonging have lower turnover risk, higher job performance, and fewer sick days.³



Based on the industry research and the countless success stories we've seen among our clients, we're convinced employee connections are essential to any company's success.

And as we've seen in our survey results, specific factors drive connection at work for different groups of employees.



WHAT DRIVES CONNECTION AT WORK?

Though we believe in the power of connection, our research aimed to determine what kinds of connections cause employees to feel a sense of belonging and engagement at work. We did not set out to predetermine how one employee demographic viewed connection vs. another, for example, whether younger employees tended to feel more connected to their coworkers than older employees. Instead, we wanted employee groups to be revealed through a statistical analysis of how respondents rated their level of agreement or disagreement with more than 40 statements we provided.

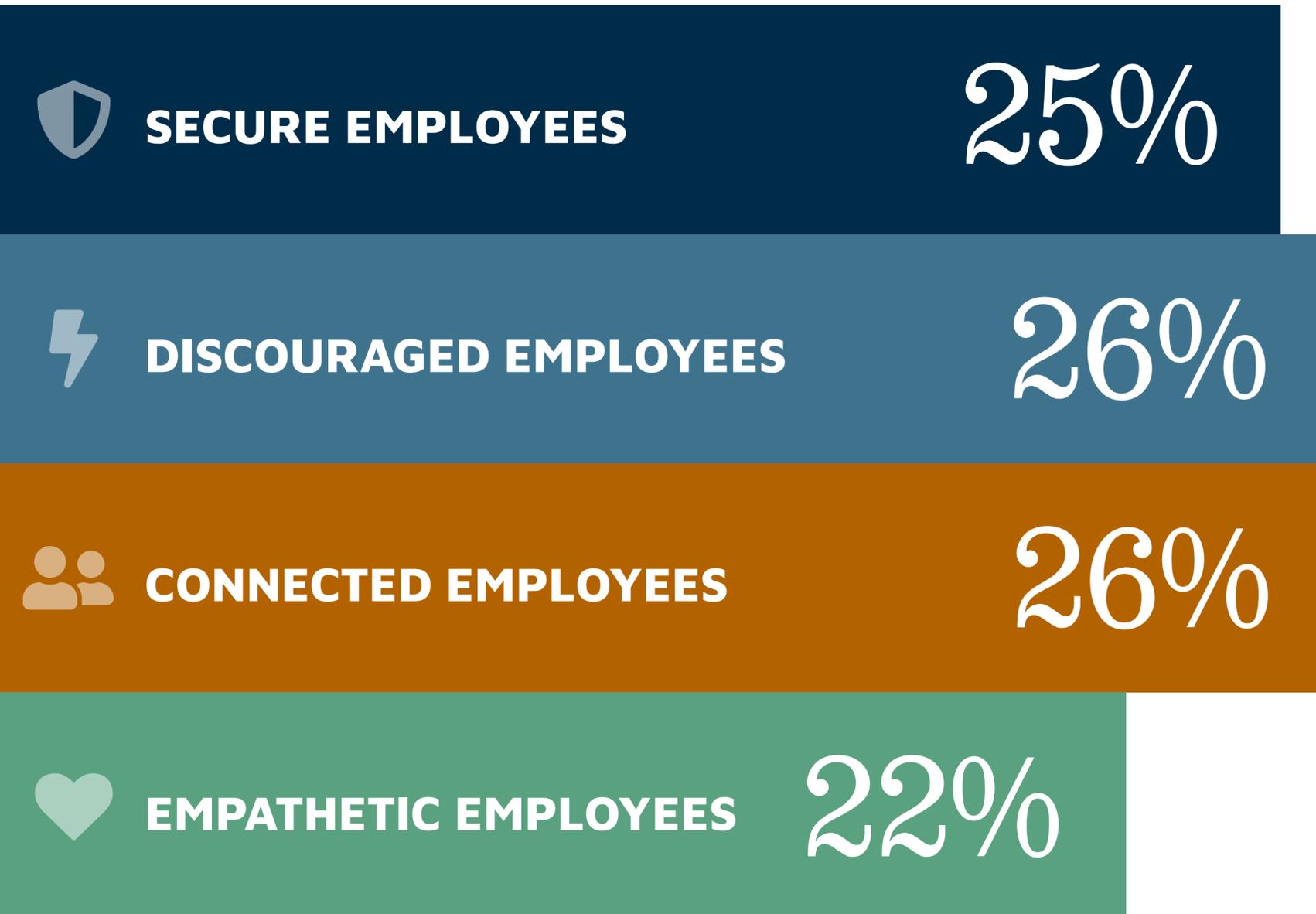
To our surprise, employee responses **did not** vary when we compared the following characteristics:

- Age
- Gender
- Race and ethnicity
- Full-time or part-time work status
- Work location (on-site, remote, or hybrid)
- Household income
- Job level (non-management, manager, Director, or VP)
- Industry
- Job function
- Tenure with current employer
- Tenure in current industry





FOUR MAIN CATEGORIES OF EMPLOYEE ATTITUDES ABOUT CONNECTION AT WORK



Through an analysis of our survey responses, we identified four distinct employee attitudinal segments represented somewhat equally across our 408 respondents.



SECURE EMPLOYEES 25%

Survey responses revealed that Secure Employees feel safe and respected at work, and secure in their job.

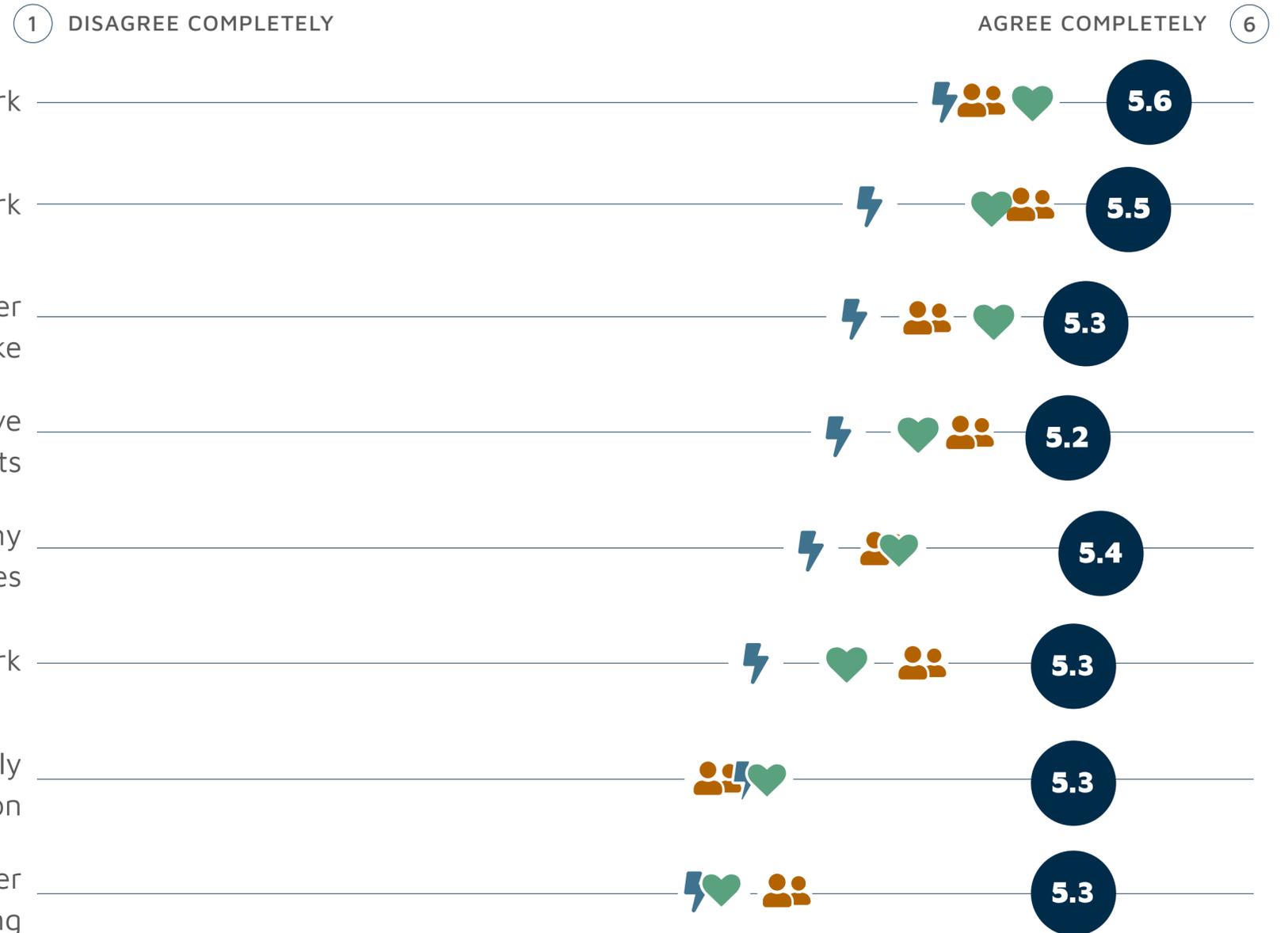
Compared to other segments, they feel a greater sense of pride in what they do and a stronger belief in the positive impact of their contributions on the company and its customers. These respondents value and trust their employers. They understand their organization's vision, mission, and goals, and they say it consistently behaves in alignment with their views. Secure Employees also trust their employer to do the right thing, and they are more likely to say their organization helps them understand the value of their work.



Secure respondents feel safe and respected at work. They value and trust their employer and feel a shared purpose.

Respondents in the Secure group have a unique sense of connection to their employer. They feel valued for who they are and say they can always tell their employer what they really think. They believe their organization tells its employees the truth and works hard to make employees feel valued.

How do you feel about the following statements?



Legend

-  Secure Employees
-  Discouraged Employees
-  Connected Employees
-  Empathetic Employees

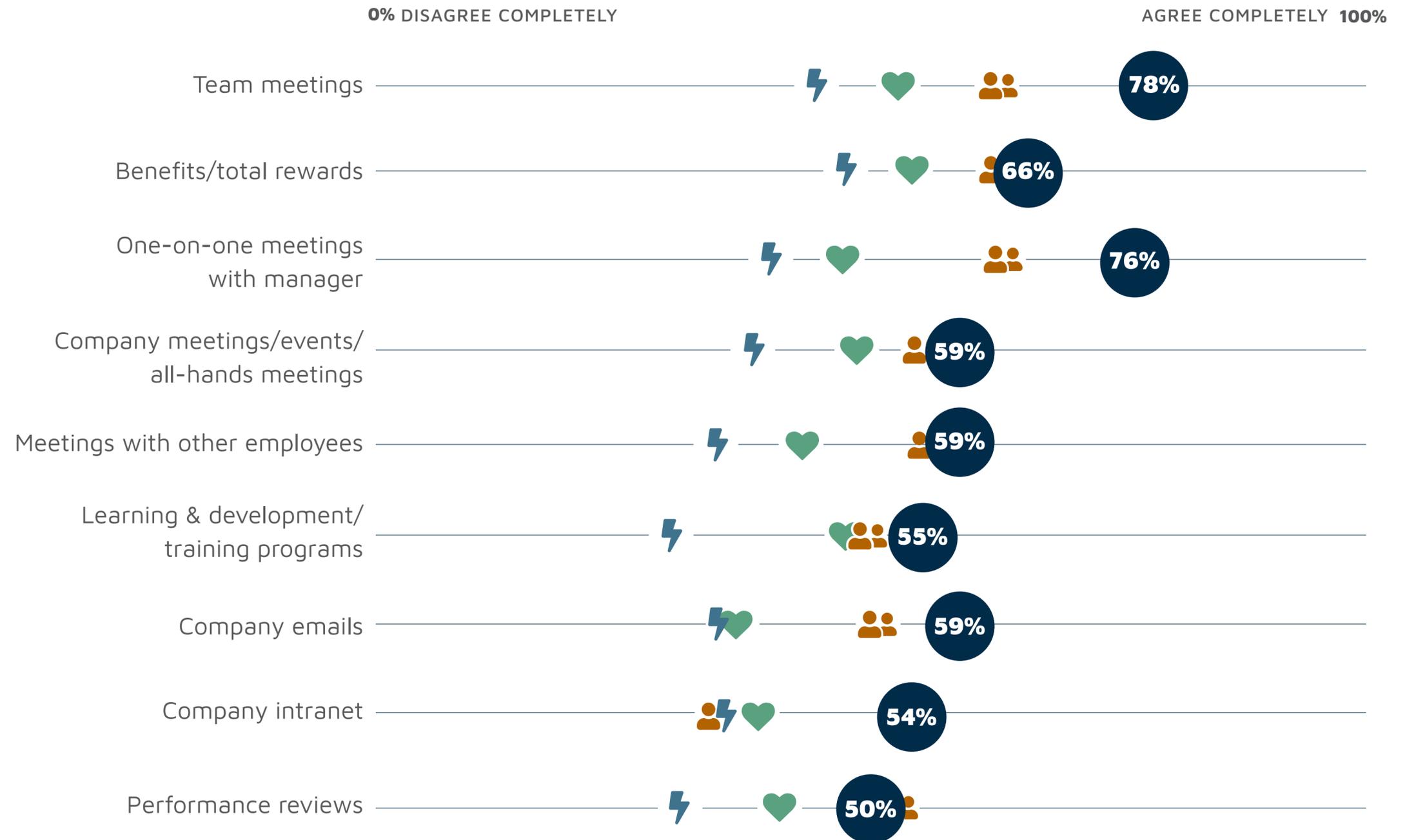
How **Secure** Employees connect

The survey results revealed that Secure Employees already feel respected and safe in their roles, but they also have specific attitudes about their preferred methods for making deeper connections at work. For example, 78% of Secure respondents named team meetings as a preferred method of making connections—a higher percentage than any other segment. And while Secure respondents also rated other methods of connection as important to them (but much less so), team meetings and one-on-one meetings with managers (76%) were the most popular.

Legend

-  Secure Employees
-  Discouraged Employees
-  Connected Employees
-  Empathetic Employees

To what extent do the following make you feel connected to your organization and/or your colleagues?





DISCOURAGED EMPLOYEES 26%

Survey responses revealed that Discouraged Employees don't feel connected or supported at work.

Compared to their Secure counterparts, Discouraged Employees could not feel more differently about their organizations or their jobs. They don't feel connected or supported at work, and this was especially true during the pandemic. Moreover, in great contrast to other segments, these employees say they often think about leaving their employer and finding a new job, and would leave their job if they could.



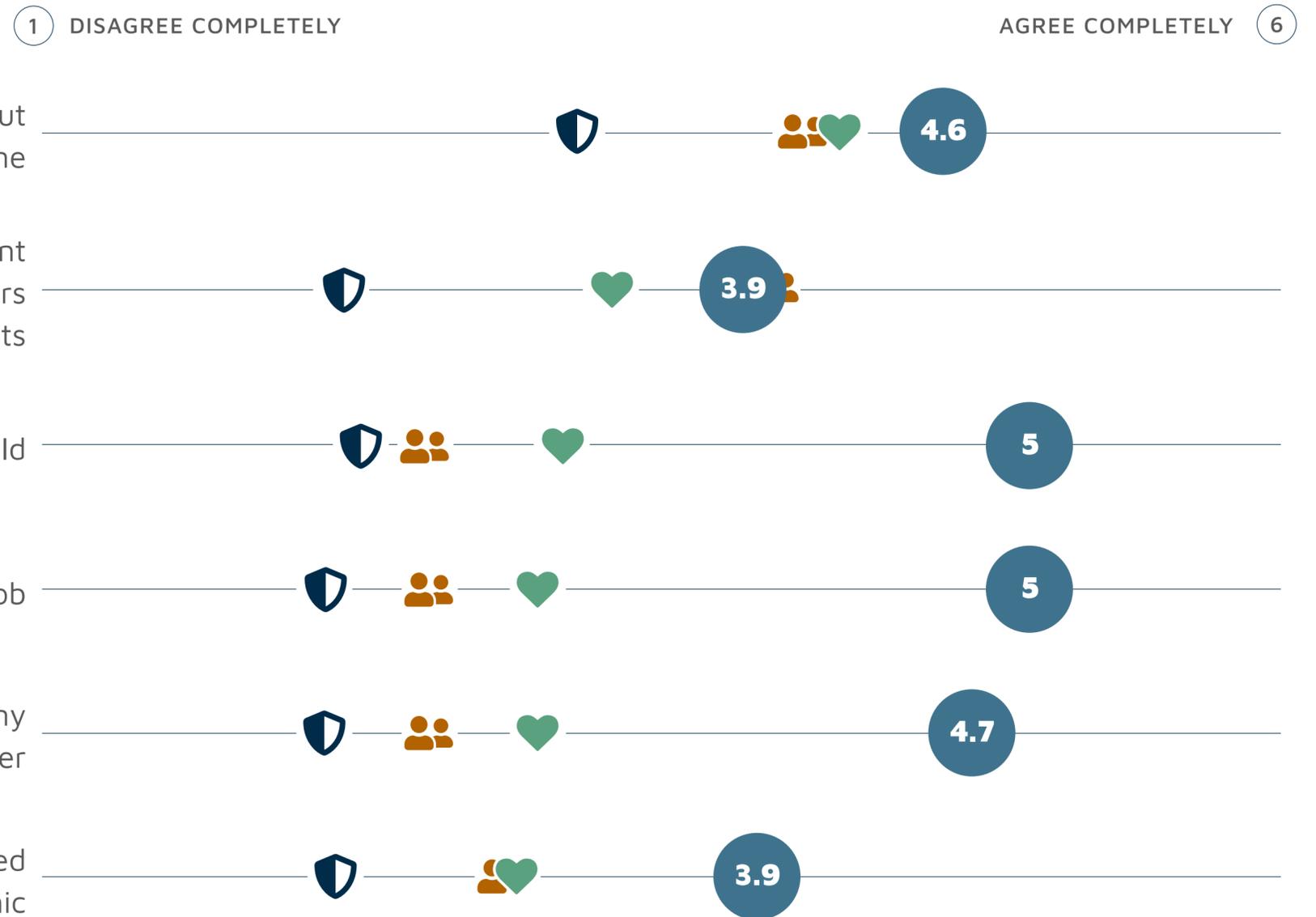
Discouraged Employees say they'd leave their job if they could. They don't feel connected or supported at work.

Discouraged Employees are concerned that their organization doesn't see them as individuals. They say their company projects one image internally and another to customers and other external stakeholders.

Legend

-  Secure Employees
-  Discouraged Employees
-  Connected Employees
-  Empathetic Employees

How do you feel about the following statements?



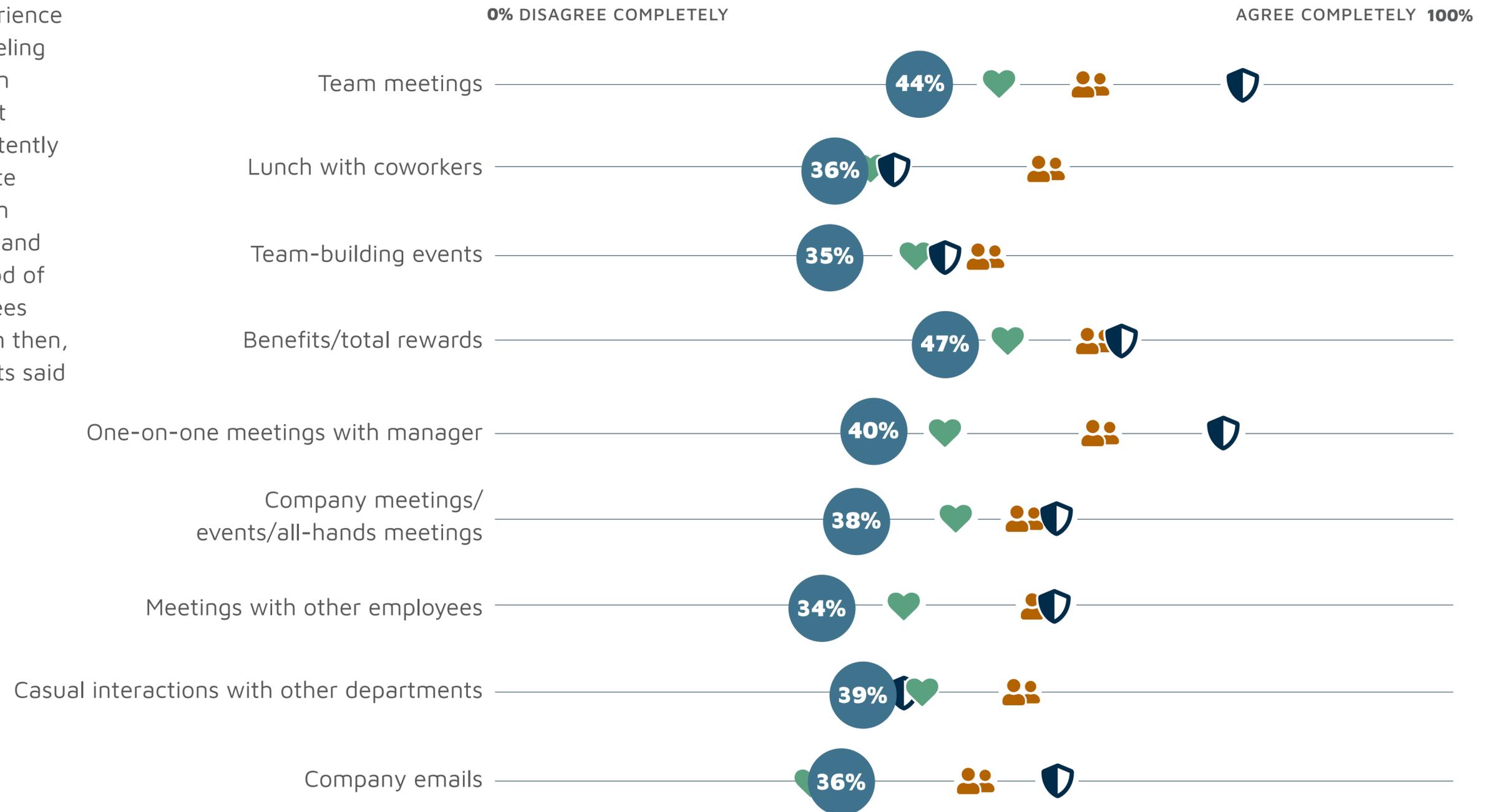
How Discouraged Employees connect

Many aspects of the employee experience have left Discouraged Employees feeling disillusioned and likely disengaged. In fact, our survey results revealed that Discouraged Employees were consistently less likely than other segments to cite the factors we listed as making them feel connected to their organization and colleagues. The most popular method of connection for Discouraged Employees was benefits/total rewards, but even then, only 47% of Discouraged respondents said it helped them feel connected.

Legend

-  Secure Employees
-  Discouraged Employees
-  Connected Employees
-  Empathetic Employees

To what extent do the following make you feel connected to your organization and/or your colleagues?





CONNECTED EMPLOYEES 26%

Connected Employees don't feel the same sense of connection to their employers as Secure Employees, but they are more deeply connected to their coworkers.

Connected Employees say they have people at work to talk to when they're struggling with personal challenges, and feel safe sharing personal difficulties with their coworkers.

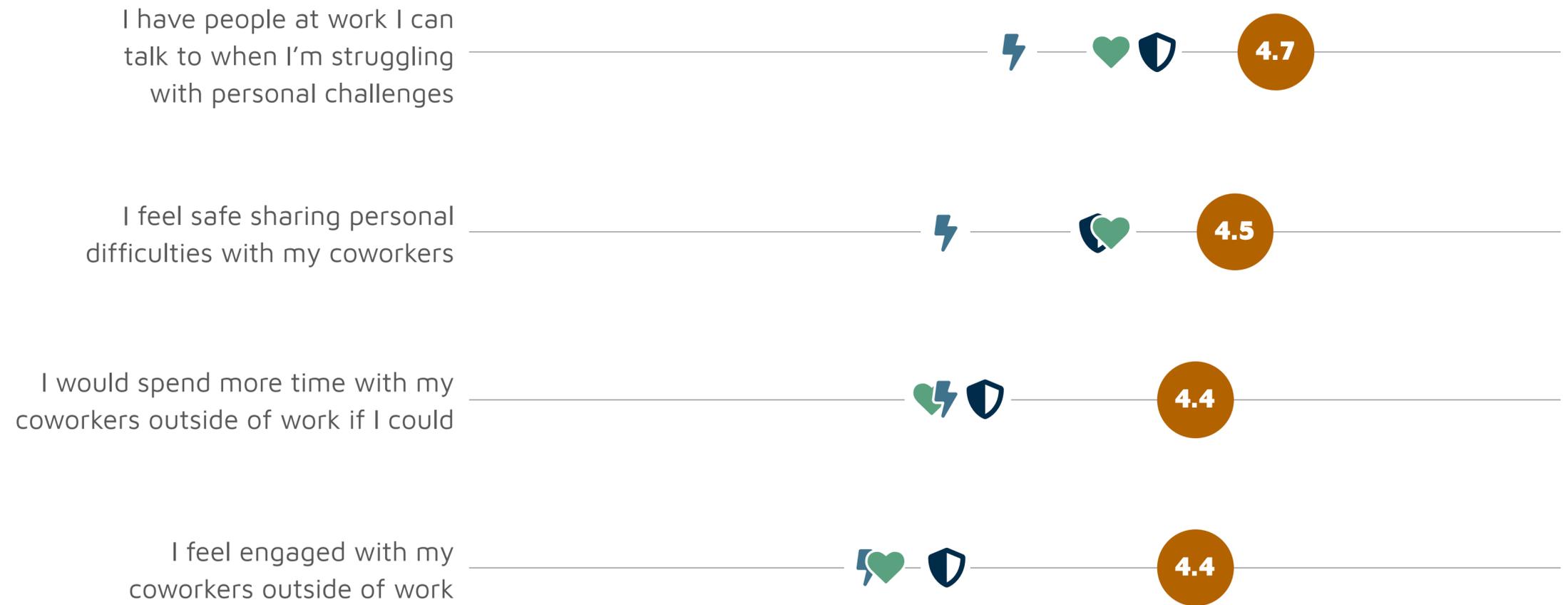


Connected Employees feel close to those they work with, both inside and outside of work.

For these respondents, engagement with coworkers extends beyond the boundaries of the workday. They feel engaged with their colleagues outside of work and say they'd spend more time with them outside of work if they could.

How do you feel about the following statements?

1 DISAGREE COMPLETELY AGREE COMPLETELY 6



Legend

-  Secure Employees
-  Discouraged Employees
-  Connected Employees
-  Empathetic Employees

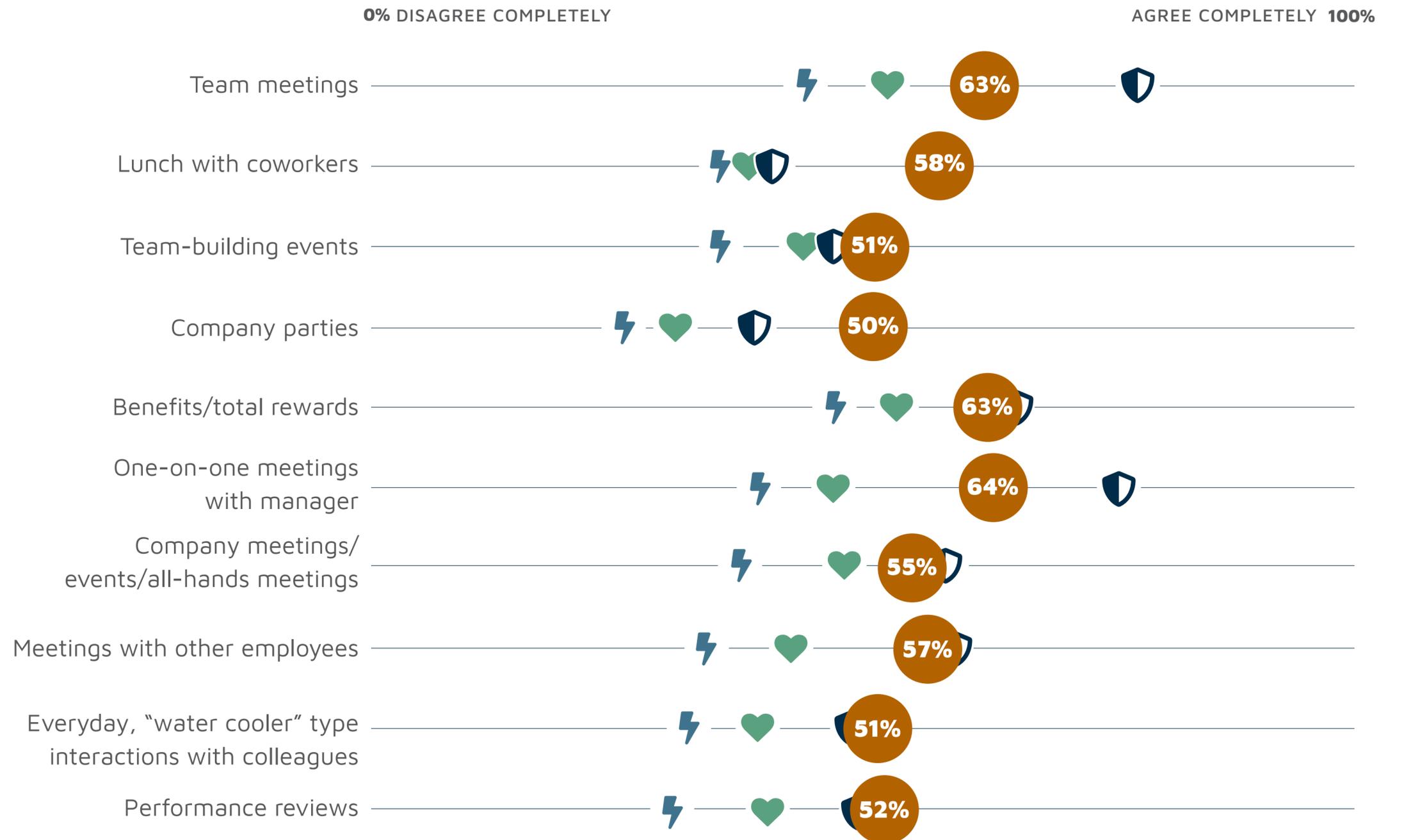
How **Connected** Employees connect

For Connected Employees, it's all about the coworkers. They thrive on a sense of closeness with their peers, both at and outside of work. Not surprisingly, this segment of respondents named lunch with coworkers, team building events, company parties, and casual interactions with other departments as contributing most to their connections at work, more than the three other segments.

Legend

-  Secure Employees
-  Discouraged Employees
-  Connected Employees
-  Empathetic Employees

To what extent do the following make you feel connected to your organization and/or your colleagues?





EMPATHETIC EMPLOYEES 22%

Empathetic respondents have very high expectations of how employers should support their employees. Their attitudes reflect a concern about how organizations should support all workers vs. select groups or individuals.



Empathetic Employees feel organizations need to respect and support their employees and help them achieve work/life balance.

Empathetic Employees believe organizational leaders are responsible for making sure employees feel happy at work, and that organizations should also care about employees even when they're not working. Ultimately, they believe organizations should respect the impact of personal challenges on an employee's work.

How do you feel about the following statements?

1 DISAGREE COMPLETELY

AGREE COMPLETELY 6

Everyone deserves to have good work/life balance



Organizations should respect the impact of personal challenges on an employee's work



I feel more connected to an employer if they are intentionally working to connect with me and understand my needs and goals



An organization's leaders are responsible for making sure employees feel happy at work



Organizations should care about employees even when they are not working



Legend

-  Secure Employees
-  Discouraged Employees
-  Connected Employees
-  Empathetic Employees

How Empathetic Employees connect

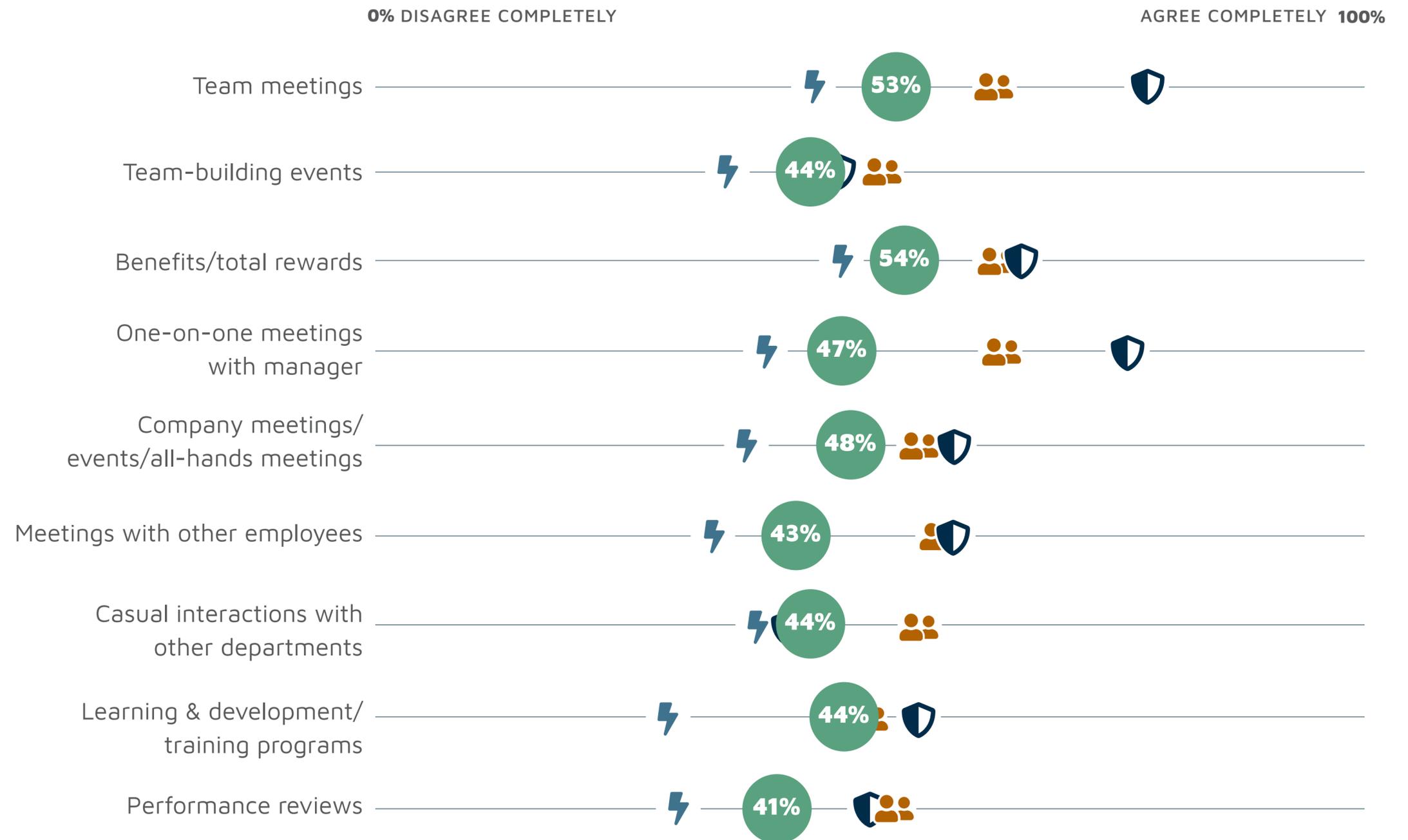
Since Empathetic Employees prioritize fairness, support, and mutual respect with their employer, they feel more connected to their organization when it is intentionally working to connect with them and understand their needs and goals.

For this attitudinal segment, the ability to connect is not linked to team events, benefits/total rewards, or opportunities to connect one-on-one, but rather their employer's ability to demonstrate fairness and empathy in the day-to-day of their employee experience.

Legend

-  Secure Employees
-  Discouraged Employees
-  Connected Employees
-  Empathetic Employees

To what extent do the following make you feel connected to your organization and/or your colleagues?





PART 2 RECOMMENDATIONS

HOW TO HELP YOUR EMPLOYEES HAVE MEANINGFUL CONNECTIONS AT WORK

There's no one-size-fits-all when it comes to the experiences that drive deeper connections in the workplace.

For instance, our research reveals that the after-hours get-togethers that energize employees in the Connected segment have only a modest impact on connection for individuals in the Secure, Discouraged, and Empathetic segments.



FOUR STEPS TO BUILDING TO A SUPER-CONNECTED WORKFORCE

To positively impact the employee experience for all, rather than just a few employee groups, it's critical to implement a combination of initiatives to drive engagement, belonging, and performance across your entire workforce.



Leverage multiple avenues for employees to connect

Connection is about much more than company parties, team events, and lunches. Only 39% of respondents agreed that company parties made them feel connected to their organization and/or colleagues. Somewhat surprisingly, company parties ranked even lower than performance reviews, suggesting that “fun” activities drive a lower sense of connection than opportunities for feedback.



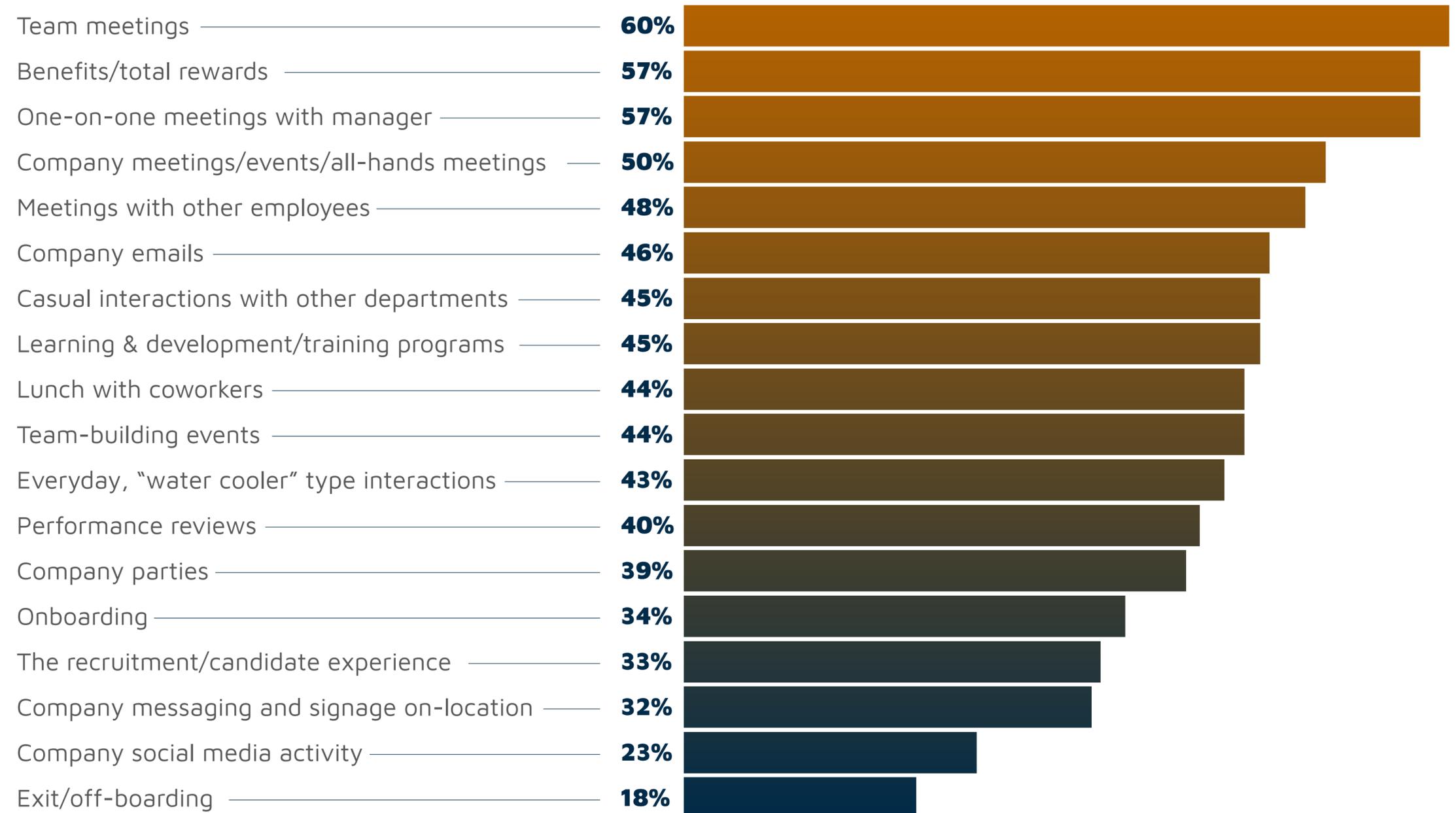


1 Leverage multiple avenues for employees to connect

The survey results also suggest that technology alone doesn't satisfy employee needs for connection—an important finding for companies with more remote workers than ever before. Survey respondents ranked company intranet, company messaging, and social media activity as quite low when it came to what employees said helped them feel connected.

Overall, employees value activities that help them feel part of a team. They also want to be recognized fairly through competitive benefits and rewards, and they desire connections that support their personal and professional growth.

To what extent do the following make you feel connected to your organization and/or your colleagues?





1

TAKEAWAY

Take a multi-tiered approach

Instead of a single activity, it takes a combination of interactions—at the organizational, team, and individual level—to help Secure, Empathetic, Connected, and Discouraged Employees feel connected at work. We often see our clients take this multi-tiered approach to their employee experience initiatives.



Know the elements of the employee experience that matter most

The employee experience is the culmination of all the many touchpoints and interactions employees have at work. It's not only about connections, but also the employment "basics"—fair and competitive pay, benefits, and recognition, among others. Our survey results support this idea and clearly outline the factors that respondents find most important to them at work.





2

What matters most

When asked which factors were most important to them at work, 80% of respondents said being paid appropriately for their skills and experience was the most important. Other top factors included health insurance and other benefits (70%), being valued for who I really am (65%), being paid comparably to others with similar responsibilities (65%), and feeling respected by coworkers (64%).

Noticeably, when it came to the relative importance of different kinds of connections at work, respondents rated connections with their work (51%), immediate supervisor (44%), and coworkers (42%) much higher than connections with senior leaders (22%). This reflects the importance of creating opportunities for employees to connect with the work and people they encounter most often during the workday.

Which of the following are most important to you? Choose all that apply.



2

Positive drivers

There is more evidence that employees have clear views about which individuals have the most impact on their employee experience. Across all segments, respondents said department coworkers and their direct manager had the greatest positive impact on their experience at work, with 63% naming coworkers and 53% naming their direct manager as most important.

Who has the greatest **POSITIVE** impact on your experience at work? Choose all that apply.



Legend

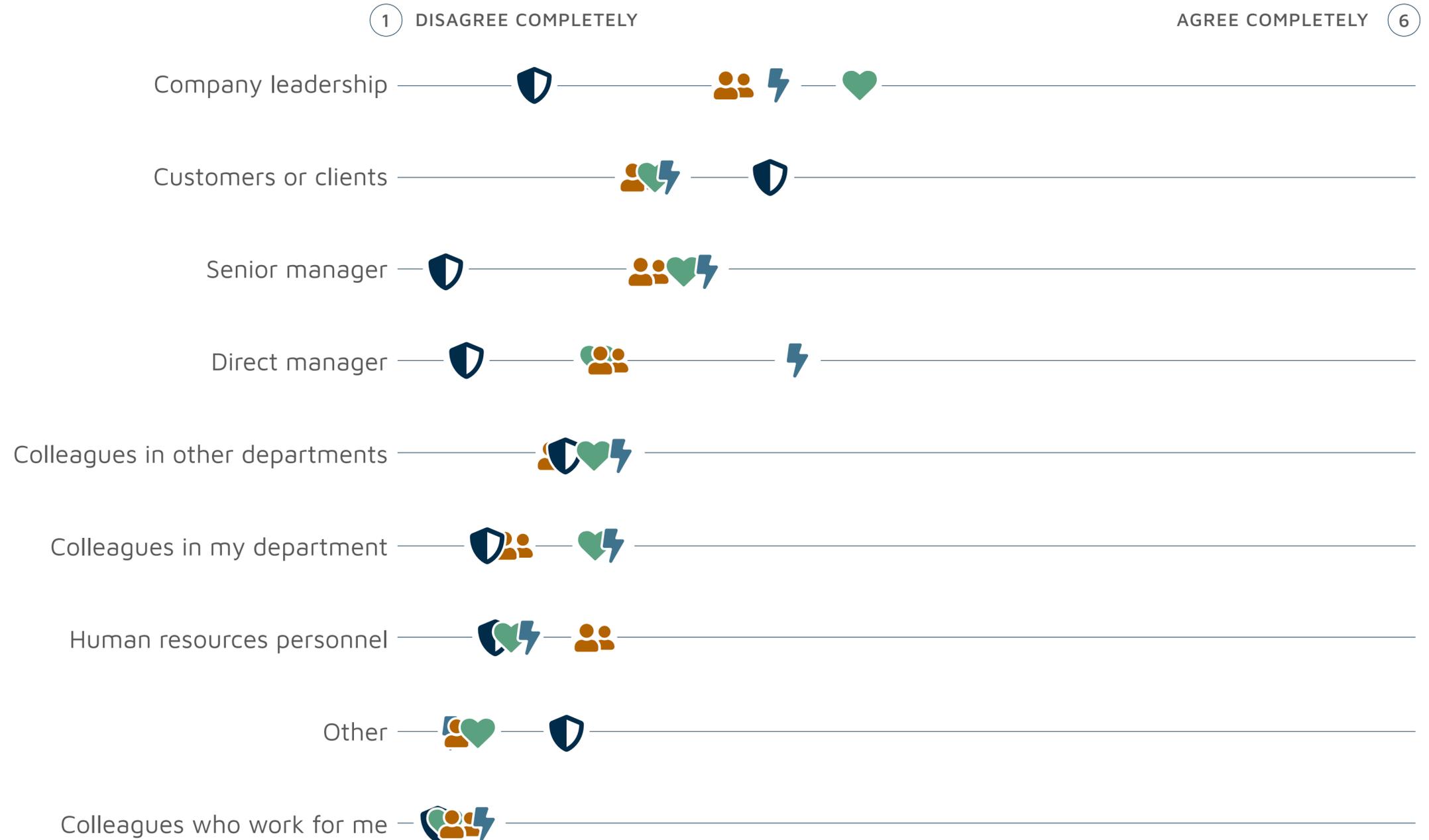
-  Secure Employees
-  Discouraged Employees
-  Connected Employees
-  Empathetic Employees

2

Negative drivers

When it came to the factors having the greatest negative impact on their employee experience, there was greater variation between the four segments. Secure Employees said customers had the greatest negative impact. Discouraged Employees said it was their direct manager. Connected and Empathetic Employees said it was company leadership.

Who has the greatest **NEGATIVE** impact on your experience at work? Choose all that apply.



Legend

-  Secure Employees
-  Discouraged Employees
-  Connected Employees
-  Empathetic Employees



TAKEAWAY

Go beyond the basics

Our research findings reinforce the idea that you must move beyond the basics to drive deeper employee connections at work. Yes, you have to get the basics right, for example, by offering a well-designed total rewards and benefits program. But you must also prioritize the activities and experiences that drive deeper connections between employees and their coworkers, managers, and work.



Train managers to teach and coach

Valuable workplace connections happen in myriad ways, including how employees connect with new processes, work tools, and ways of working. Survey respondents across all four segments said they learn the most at work from managers and others in their organization, more than company resources and traditional training programs.



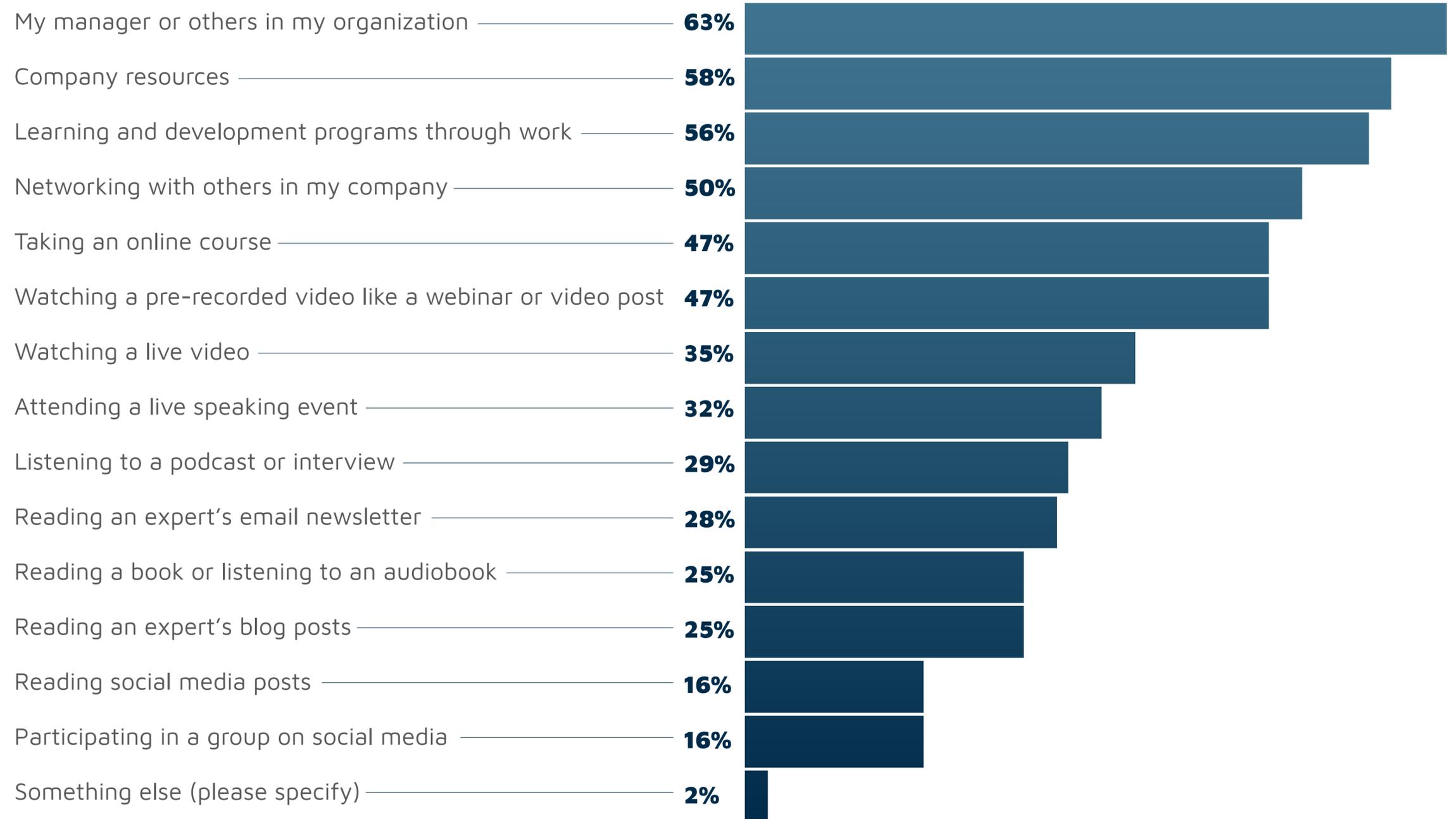


3

Train managers to teach and coach

Managers have a great impact on employees' connections at work. Therefore, it's critical to equip company managers with the necessary knowledge and skills to coach their direct reports and create experiences that drive deeper connections. Specifically, managers can learn effective techniques for leading effective team meetings, one-on-ones, and performance discussions.

Which of the following do you use to learn about things that affect your work or career? Choose all that apply.





TAKEAWAY

Invest in managers and employees with developmental activities

In addition to formal leadership training, which you may already offer to managers at different levels, the following development activities can also help your managers evolve into stronger leaders and skilled coaches:



360° feedback programs



Job experiences, such as rotations and task force leadership, that expose managers to managing different teams



Mentorship programs where managers can seek mentorship from proven leaders in your organization



Make work flexibility a mainstay of your culture

No conversation about employee connections at work would be complete without including work flexibility. For some time now, [remote and hybrid](#) working has been on the rise, and many companies have been sensitive to the effect of reduced face-to-face interactions on employees' ability to connect, learn, and perform. Even companies that have moved to a flexible working model still find opportunities to hold hybrid and/or on-site employee meetings and events. Others focus on the greater use of collaboration technology to support virtual teamwork and communication.



4

Work location preferences

Respondents in our survey are split with respect to how they would prefer to work in their current position (62% already work virtually to some degree). With no statistically significant difference between the four segments, 39% prefer a blend of remote and on-site work, 38% prefer to always work remotely, and 22% prefer to always work on-site.

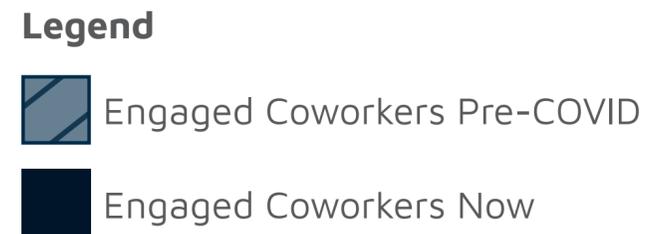
Which of the following are most important to you? Choose all that apply.



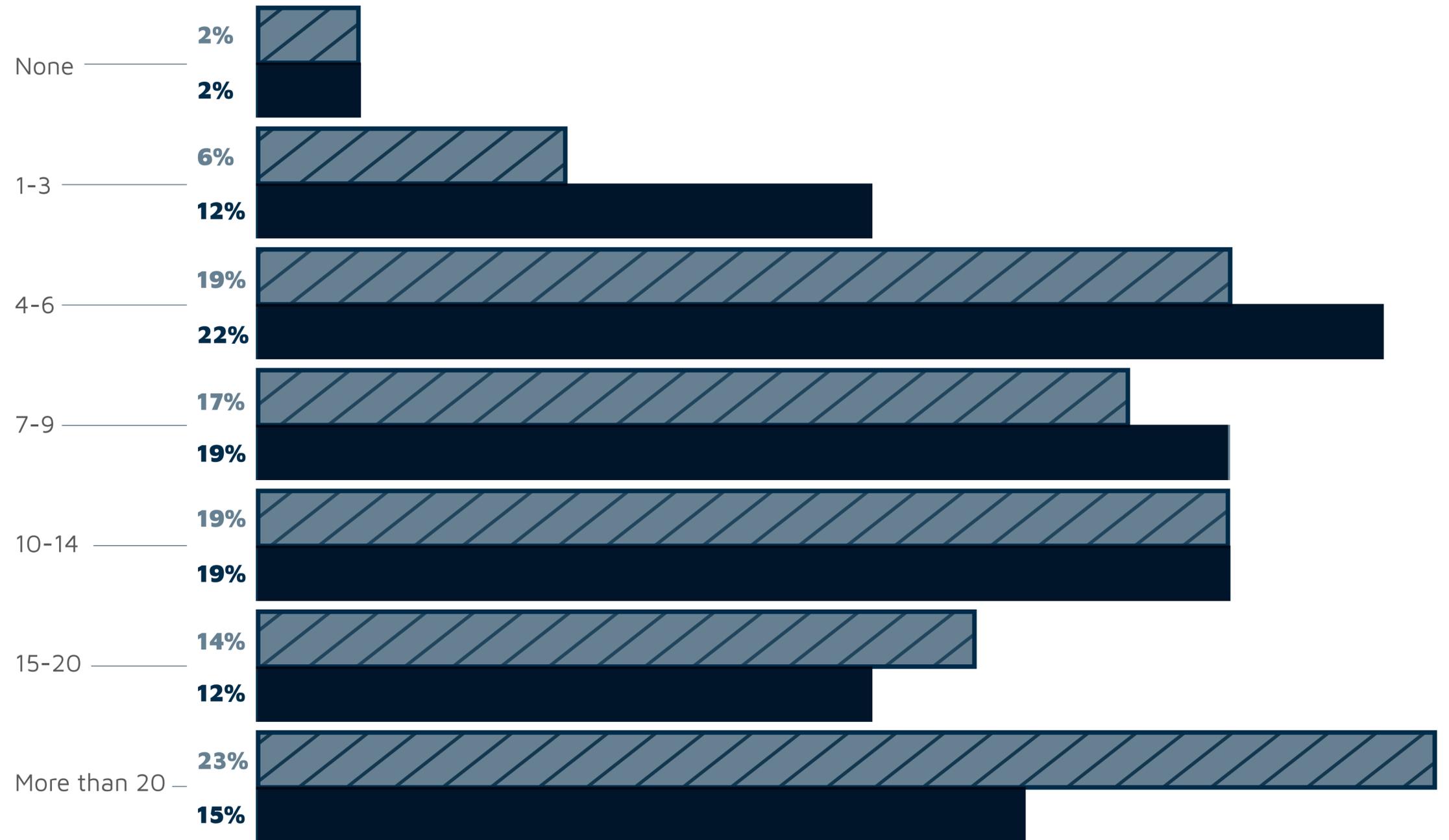
4

Connection not reduced by the pandemic

Employees have not lost out on opportunities to connect with their colleagues in the new work-from-home world. When we asked employees how many coworkers they regularly engaged with before the COVID-19 pandemic and now, there was no significant difference in the number.



How many coworkers did you regularly engage with before the COVID-19 pandemic vs. now when you're working?



4

TAKEAWAY

There are rich opportunities for connection

There are clearly many factors you must consider when deciding if remote or hybrid work should become the new normal in your organization. In addition to industry, customer, and other considerations, you'll also need to keep in mind employee preferences and the reality that remote and hybrid work can offer rich opportunities for employees to connect.



BEGIN YOUR JOURNEY TO A MORE CONNECTED WORKFORCE

Employees possess a range of preferences in how they want to connect with their work, coworkers, manager, and the broader organization. However, despite these differences, there are four specific actions you can take to drive deeper employee connections that will benefit employee engagement, well-being, and productivity:

- Take a multi-tiered approach to creating employee connections
- Understand the elements of the employee experience that matter most to your employees
- Equip managers with the tools they need to help employees connect
- Incorporate work flexibility into your culture

By taking these steps across your organization, you can build a culture that harnesses the power of employee connections and strengthens your business from the inside out.



Additional employee experience insights are on the way!

To get updates and read more about our research, subscribe to our [email list](#) and connect with us on [LinkedIn](#).





About the survey

- Working with Audience Audit, Inc., Ingenuity Design surveyed 408 US working adults in March 2022.
- Results have a margin of error of +/- 4.8 percentage points, at a 95% confidence level.
- Screening criteria included respondents who:
 - Were employed or seeking work after being employed within the last year (90% work full-time)
 - Did not hold any position as an owner, founder, C-suite member, or President
 - Respondents came from 47 of 50 US states, worked in over 30 industries, and represented a broad spectrum of age, race/ethnicity, gender/ gender identity, job function, and income level.

Endnotes

- 1 RingCentral. "Is Remote Work Sustainable?" 2020. https://netstorage.ringcentral.com/documents/connected_culture_report.pdf.
- 2 Institute of Leadership and Management. "New Year: Is it Time For a New Job?" 2019. <https://www.institutelm.com/resourceLibrary/new-decade-new-direction.html>.
- 3 Carr, Evan W., et al. "The Value of Belonging at Work." Harvard Business Review. December 19, 2019. <https://hbr.org/2019/12/the-value-of-belonging-at-work>.



About Ingenuity Design

We're an Employee Experience agency that strengthens companies from the inside out. We advise and create value-driven employee experiences across the employee lifecycle to help make companies great places to work.

We're proud to work/have worked with eBay, TD Bank, Splunk, Visa, Gap Inc, and Thumbtack, to name a few.

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About Audience Audit

Audience Audit is a research firm specializing in attitudinal segmentation audience research and strategy. Founded in 2009, the firm has conducted audience research for organizations including Gap, AT&T, Jayco, and others.

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