KPMG friends at work survey

Full-time professional perspectives

Results
—
November 2024

Objectives & methodology

Objectives

To understand full-time professionals' attitudes toward and perspectives on workplace friendships.

Specifically, this survey assesses the:

- Importance and benefits of friends at work

- Presence and formation of workplace friendships

- Challenges of establishing friendships at work

- Expectations vs. reality of employers' role in facilitating friendships

- Impact of friendships on workplace dynamics

Survey methodology

- **Online survey** among **full-time, professional employees** in the U.S., fielded August 9-19, 2024

- The sample includes 1000 **professionals,** meeting the following criteria:

Employed **full-time** in an **office-based role** that requires specific skillsets and/or higher education

Job titles range from **entry level to Senior Vice President.** The C-Suite was not included.

Organizations with **at least 100 employees** and **range of annual revenue**

Organizations from a mix of industries

Key takeaways

Work friends are very important to nearly all, especially for mental health benefits and external and internal advancement opportunities. Most work friendships are formed through social events inside and outside the office.

Work friends are also important for engagement, job satisfaction and feeling connected (8 in 10 or more) and have a positive impact on job performance (68%).

One-fourth of professionals experience isolation and loneliness at least some of the time. Women are more likely than men to say they have loneliness at least some of the time at work.

Most expect employers to facilitate work friendships via extracurricular activities and Employee Resource Groups. Although employees feel that employers value work friendships, they're less convinced employers are taking action to foster friendship.

Virtually is the least common way to have met a work friend – and professionals tend to feel technology and an over-reliance on digital channels hinders close work friendships by reducing interactions that build relationships. Remote employees are slightly more likely to see technology as a challenge to friendship.

Those with work friends put in the effort to build those relationships. Work challenges/interactions are more likely to foster relationships among those in-office, while personal interests drive friendships among hybrid workers.

While most feel their managers regularly provide job-related support, fewer feel their managers know them outside of work. One third of professionals say their group leader has the biggest impact on their happiness and satisfaction at work – this is especially true for those with no work friends.
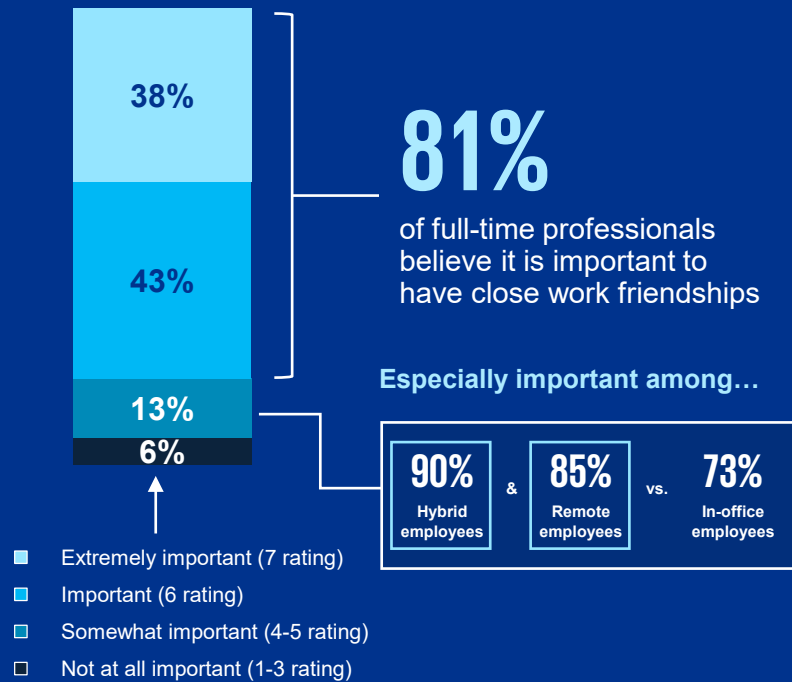
Detailed findings

Personal views on the value of close work friends

While four out of five say work friendships are very important, hybrid and remote workers place greater significance on work friends
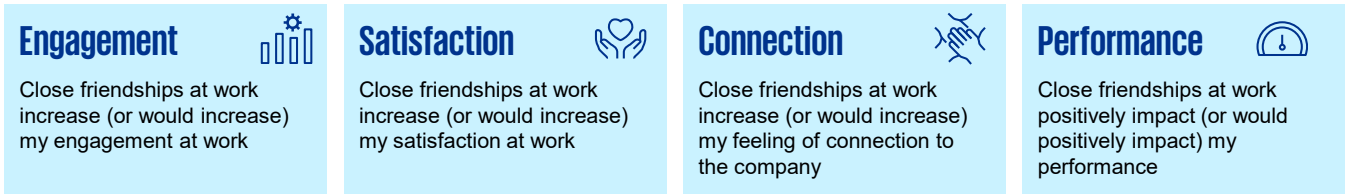
Importance of close work friends

38% — Extremely important (7 rating)

43% — Important (6 rating)

13% — Somewhat important (4-5 rating)

6% — Not at all important (1-3 rating)

81%
of full-time professionals believe it is important to have close work friendships

Especially important among…

| **90%** Hybrid employees | & | **85%** Remote employees | vs. | **73%** In-office employees |

- ◻ Extremely important (7 rating)
- ◻ Important (6 rating)
- ◻ Somewhat important (4-5 rating)
- ◻ Not at all important (1-3 rating)

How important is it for you to be able to have close work friendships?
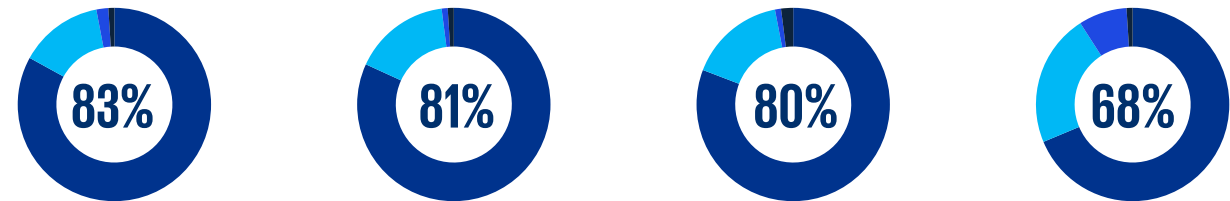*See Notes for 'close work friend' definition. (Base: Total, n=1019)*

Most agree work friends increase engagement, satisfaction and connection. They also have a positive impact on performance

While all groups agree close work friends have the potential to increase engagement at work, those in office or hybrid environments are much more likely to see the other benefits of workplace friends than their remote counterparts.

Impact of close work friendships

Engagement
Close friendships at work increase (or would increase) my engagement at work

Satisfaction
Close friendships at work increase (or would increase) my satisfaction at work

Connection
Close friendships at work increase (or would increase) my feeling of connection to the company

Performance
Close friendships at work positively impact (or would positively impact) my performance

% Completely/Agree with statement
(among Total Professionals)

83%   81%   80%   68%

% Completely/Agree with statement
(by Key Subgroups)

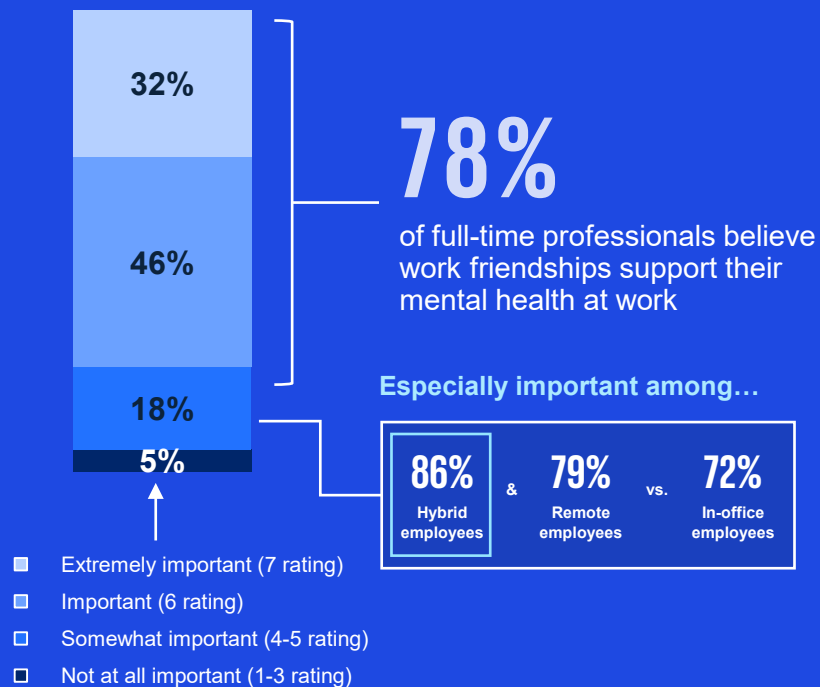| In-office \| 82% | **In-office \| 85%** | **In-office \| 84%** | **In-office \| 78%** |
| Hybrid \| 86% | **Hybrid \| 82%** | **Hybrid \| 81%** | Hybrid \| 62% |
| Remote \| 81% | Remote \| 75% | Remote \| 73% | Remote \| 59% |

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? (Base: Total, n=1019)

- ■ Completely agree/ Agree
- ■ Somewhat agree
- ■ Completely disagree/ Disagree
- ■ Don't know/Unsure

Four out of five feel work friends benefit their mental health at work, with hybrid workers seeing even greater value

Almost half say work friends provide someone to talk to in times of need. Other key mental health benefits include resilience and connection

Those in remote or hybrid environments are even more likely to appreciate the listening ear of a work friend, while those in office settings are more likely to say work friends increase their joy at work.

Importance of work friendships for mental health at work

32%

46%

18%

5%

78%
of full-time professionals believe work friendships support their mental health at work

Especially important among…

86%	&	79%	vs.	72%
Hybrid employees		Remote employees		In-office employees

- ☐ Extremely important (7 rating)
- ☐ Important (6 rating)
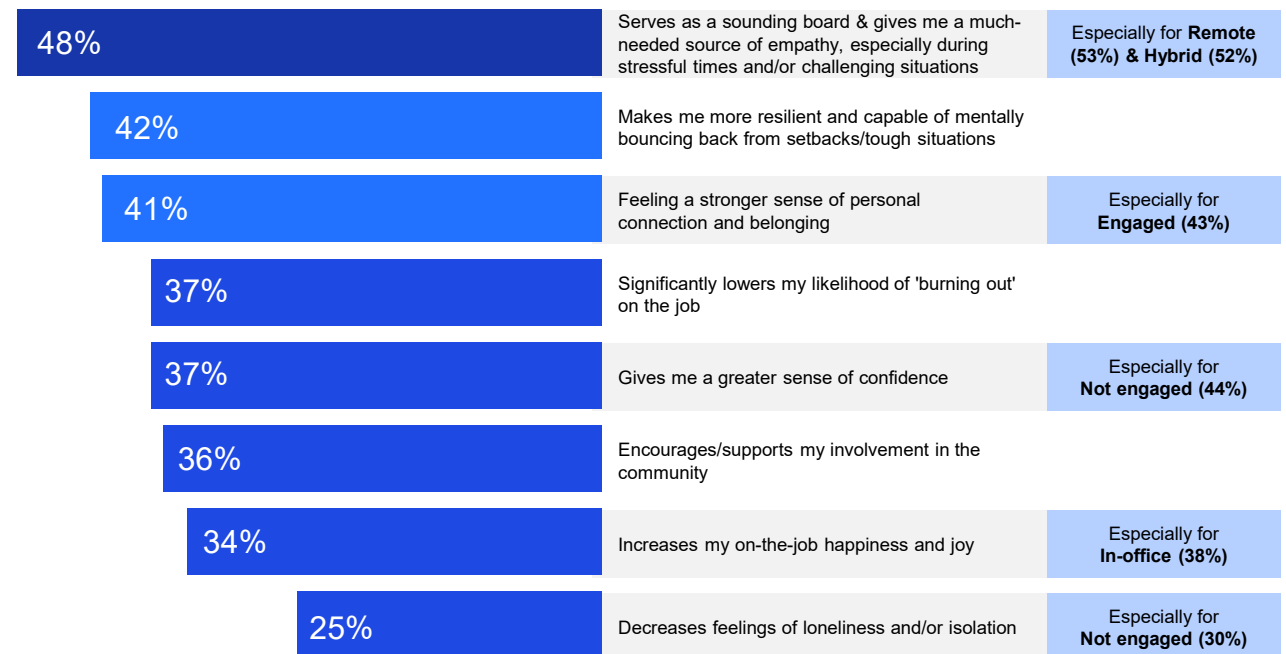- ☐ Somewhat important (4-5 rating)
- ☐ Not at all important (1-3 rating)

Overall, how important are close work friendships to your own mental health at work? (Base: Total, n=1019)

Emotional or mental health benefits of close work friendships

% selected as one of up to three benefits

48% Serves as a sounding board & gives me a much-needed source of empathy, especially during stressful times and/or challenging situations — Especially for **Remote (53%) & Hybrid (52%)**

42% Makes me more resilient and capable of mentally bouncing back from setbacks/tough situations

41% Feeling a stronger sense of personal connection and belonging — Especially for **Engaged (43%)**

37% Significantly lowers my likelihood of 'burning out' on the job

37% Gives me a greater sense of confidence — Especially for **Not engaged (44%)**

36% Encourages/supports my involvement in the community

34% Increases my on-the-job happiness and joy — Especially for **In-office (38%)**

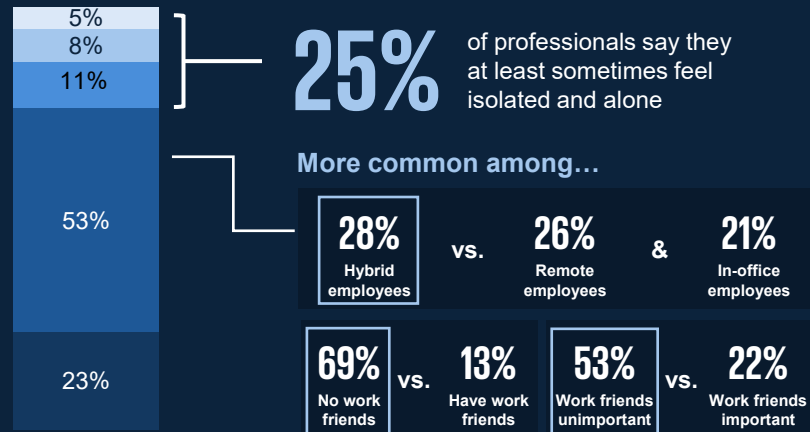**25%** Decreases feelings of loneliness and/or isolation — Especially for **Not engaged (30%)**

What are the biggest emotional or mental health benefits to you in forming close work friendships? Select your top three. (Base: Total, n=1019)

Isolation and loneliness is not common, but one-fourth of professionals experience it at least some of the time

Hybrid workers are somewhat more likely than those in the office to feel lonely. Those with work friends and those who feel work friends are important are much less likely to experience isolation and loneliness than their counterparts, highlighting a benefit of work friendships.

Isolation and loneliness at work

Feelings of loneliness and isolation at work

5%
8%
11%
53%
23%

25% of professionals say they at least sometimes feel isolated and alone

More common among…

| **28%** Hybrid employees | vs. | **26%** Remote employees | & | **21%** In-office employees |

| **69%** No work friends | vs. | **13%** Have work friends | **53%** Work friends unimportant | vs. | **22%** Work friends important |

- All the time
- Most of the time
- Some of the time
- Rarely
- Never

Which of the following statements best describes your typical level of loneliness and isolation at work? Select one. (Base: Total, n=1019)

Women are more likely than men to say they have feelings of loneliness at least some of the time at work

White and Hispanic workers are also more likely than Black workers to have these feelings at work.

Isolation and loneliness at work

	Total	**Gender**		**Ethnicity**			
		Male	**Female**	**White**	**Black**	**Hispanic**	**Other**
Any Isolated & Alone (all, most and some of the time)	25%	19%	**30%**	**27%**	17%	**24%**	7%
All the time	5%	4%	7%	6%	1%	4%	2%
Most of the time	8%	5%	10%	9%	2%	8%	-
Some of the time	11%	10%	13%	11%	14%	13%	5%
Rarely	53%	55%	50%	51%	59%	56%	60%
Never	23%	26%	20%	22%	23%	19%	33%

Indicates statistical differences (Other: Asian/Native American/ Alaska Native)

of the following statements best describes your typical level of loneliness and isolation at work? Select one. (Base: Total, n=1019)
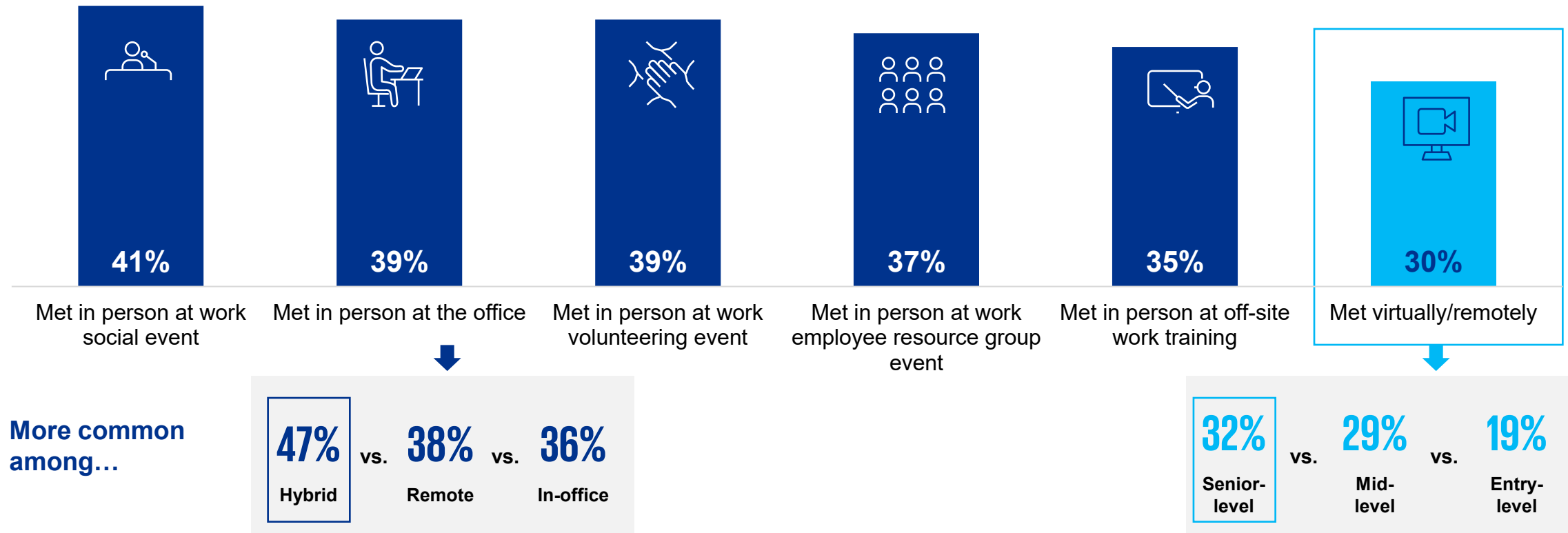
Detailed findings

Forming close friendships at work

Virtually is the least common way to have met a workplace friend

Despite working in an office setting, meeting specifically in the office is more common among hybrid or remote workers than office workers.

Settings for making close work friendships (among professionals with 1+ work friend)

41%	39%	39%	37%	35%	30%
Met in person at work social event	Met in person at the office	Met in person at work volunteering event	Met in person at work employee resource group event	Met in person at off-site work training	Met virtually/remotely

More common among…

47% Hybrid	vs.	38% Remote	vs.	36% In-office

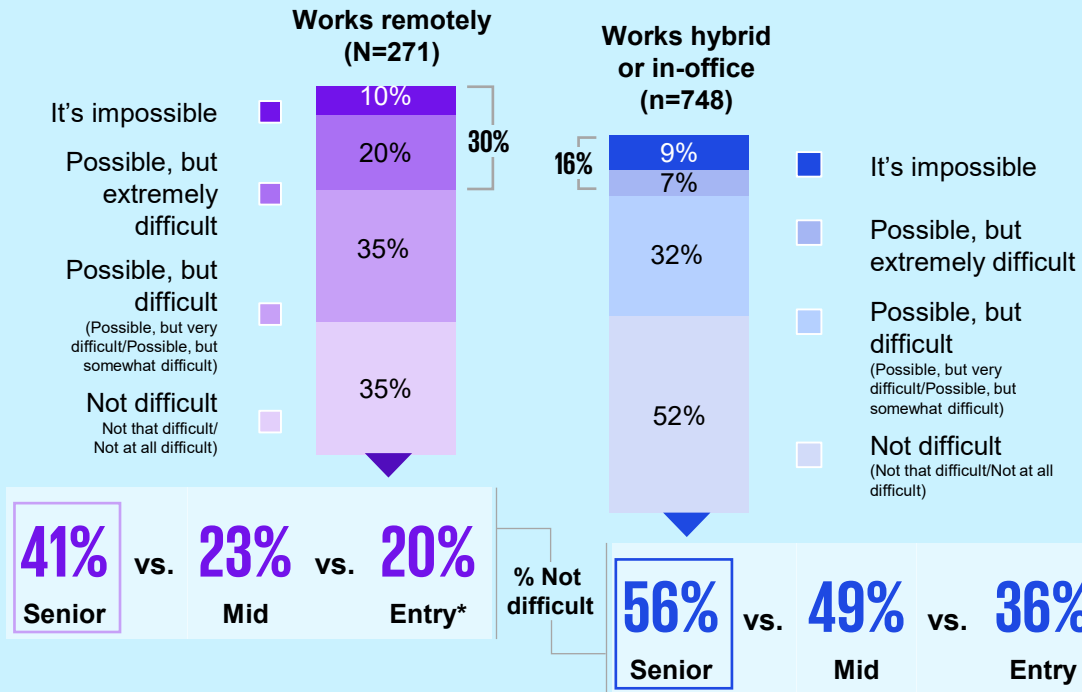| 32% Senior-level	vs.	29% Mid-level	vs.	19% Entry-level

Q11. When thinking about your close work friends, in what setting(s) did you first meet them? Select all that apply. (Base: Total Have Close Work Friends, n=808)

Remote workers feel their work setting makes it harder to make friends, a difficulty not as prevalent among hybrid or in-office professionals

Senior-level professionals who work remotely have less difficulty making work friends regardless of where they or others work.

Difficulty of forming close work friendships with remote colleagues

Works remotely (N=271)

- It's impossible: 10%
- Possible, but extremely difficult: 20%
- Possible, but difficult (Possible, but very difficult/Possible, but somewhat difficult): 35%
- Not difficult (Not that difficult/Not at all difficult): 35%

30% (It's impossible + Possible, but extremely difficult)

Works hybrid or in-office (n=748)

- It's impossible: 9%
- Possible, but extremely difficult: 7%
- Possible, but difficult (Possible, but very difficult/Possible, but somewhat difficult): 32%
- Not difficult (Not that difficult/Not at all difficult): 52%

16% (It's impossible + Possible, but extremely difficult)

41% Senior vs. **23%** Mid vs. **20%** Entry*

% Not difficult

56% Senior vs. **49%** Mid vs. **36%** Entry

*How difficult is it for you to form close work friendships given that you work remotely full time? (Base: Remote, n=271)/How difficult is it for you to form close work friendships with others who are working remotely full time? (Base: Hybrid or In-office, n=748) *Small base (Gen Z, n=38)*

White professionals in hybrid or in full-time settings find it less difficult to establish close work friendships with remote colleagues

Black and Hispanic professionals find it harder to form close friendships with their remote colleagues.

Difficulty of forming close work friendships with remote colleagues – for hybrid or in-office

		Gender		Ethnicity			
	Total	Male	Female	White	Black	Hispanic	Other*
It's impossible	9%	11%	8%	9%	10%	6%	20%
Possible, but extremely difficult	7%	5%	9%	7%	10%	6%	6%
Possible, but difficult (Possible, but very difficult/Possible, but somewhat difficult)	32%	34%	29%	28%	46%	46%	31%
Not difficult (Not that difficult/ Not at all difficult)	52%	51%	54%	56%	34%	42%	43%

Indicates statistical differences

(Other: Asian/Native American/ Alaska Native)
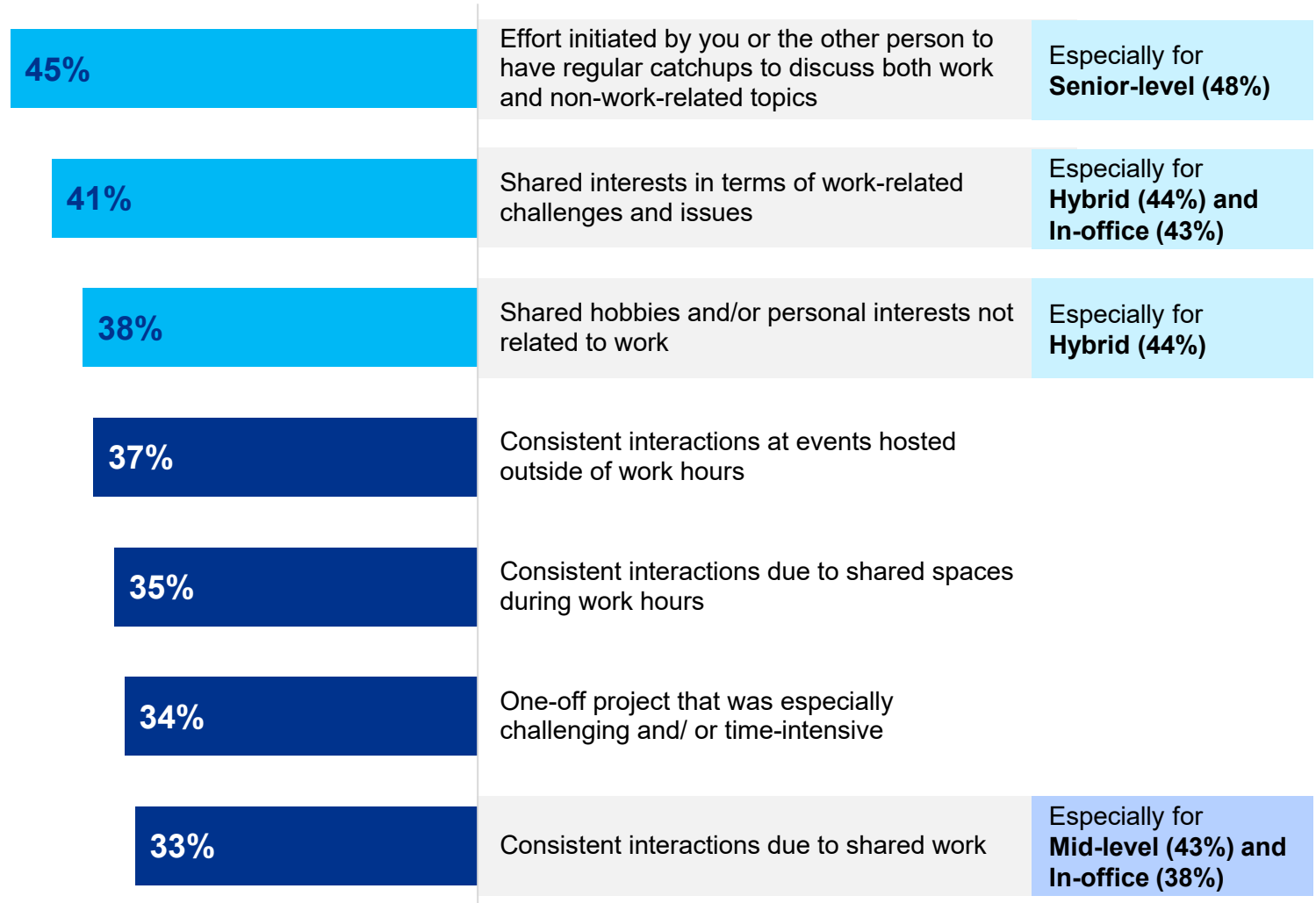*Use caution, small base (n=35)

How difficult is it for you to form close work friendships with others who are working remotely full time? (Base: Hybrid or In-office, n=748)

Those with work friends put in the effort to build those relationships, which are often based on shared work or personal interests

Work challenges or interactions are more likely to foster relationships among those in the office, while personal interests contribute more to friendships among hybrid workers.

When thinking about your closest friend at work, what were the biggest contributing factors to establishing/growing your friendship? Select all that apply. (Base: Total Have Close Work Friends, n=808)

Factors contributing to establishing/growing close work friendships (among professionals with 1+ work friend)

%	Factor	Especially for
45%	Effort initiated by you or the other person to have regular catchups to discuss both work and non-work-related topics	Especially for **Senior-level (48%)**
41%	Shared interests in terms of work-related challenges and issues	Especially for **Hybrid (44%) and In-office (43%)**
38%	Shared hobbies and/or personal interests not related to work	Especially for **Hybrid (44%)**
37%	Consistent interactions at events hosted outside of work hours	
35%	Consistent interactions due to shared spaces during work hours	
34%	One-off project that was especially challenging and/ or time-intensive	
33%	Consistent interactions due to shared work	Especially for **Mid-level (43%) and In-office (38%)**

Detailed findings

Challenges of making close friends at work

Professionals tend to feel technology hinders close work friendships by reducing interactions that build relationships

Remote employees are slightly more likely to see technology as a challenge to work friendships.

Perspective on technology in facilitating close work friendships

42%

of professionals say technologies **help employees connect with each other** to share ideas, socialize and build relationships to form stronger close work friendships
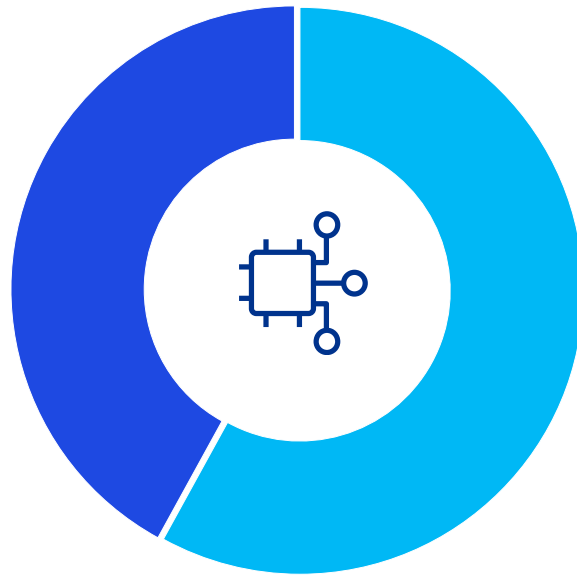
58%

of professionals say technologies are **driving an over-reliance** on digital channels and replacing the need for personal, face-to-face interactions that help form stronger close work friendships

Especially among…

62%	VS.	57%	VS.	56%
Remote employees		Hybrid employees		In-office employees

When it comes to technologies that enable collaboration and communication (e.g., video conferencing, instant messaging, Slack, Trello, etc.), which of the following best represents your own view? (Base: Total, n=1019)

More than half of professionals feel their financial situation or the economy limits socializing with colleagues outside work
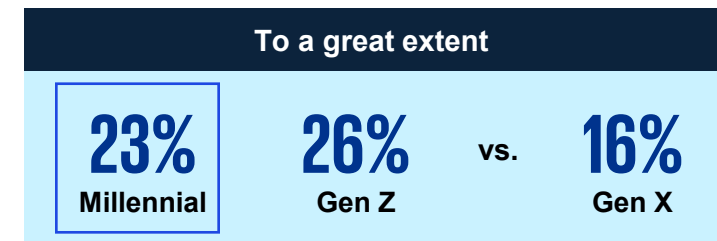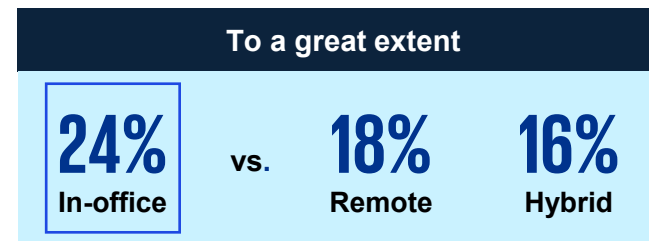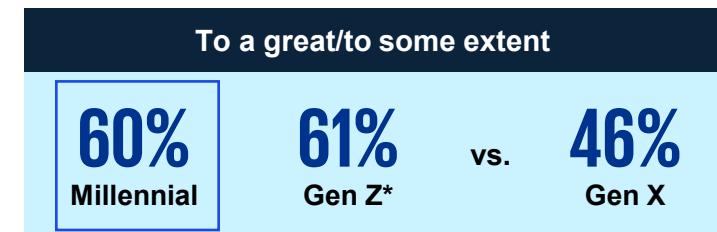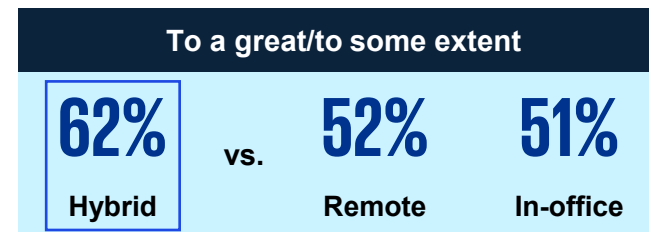
While hybrid employees are more likely to say these factors are impactful generally, in-office employees are more adamant that they have been affected to a greater extent. Millennials are also more likely to feel the effects of the economy on their ability to socialize.

Impact of current economy and individual finances on social activities

20%	
34%	
33%	
13%	

- To a great extent ■
- To some extent ■
- Not that much ■
- Not at all ■
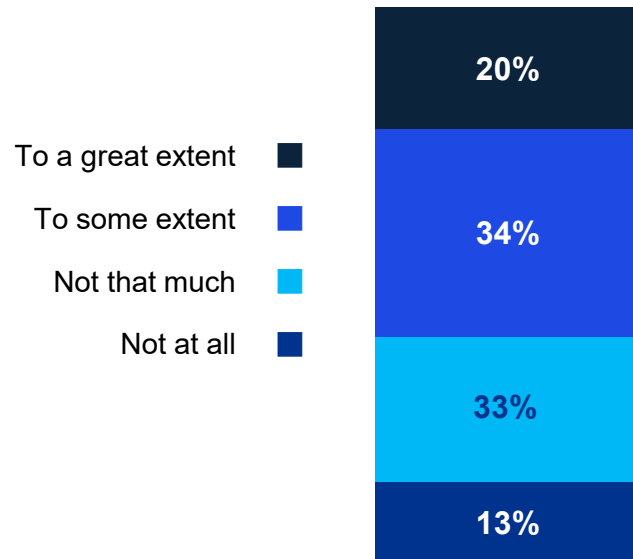
54%

of professionals say their current financial situation and/or the current economy prevents them from meeting up with colleagues socially to eat out, grab drinks, go to an event, etc.

Especially impactful among…

To a great/to some extent

62% Hybrid	vs.	52% Remote	51% In-office

To a great/to some extent

60% Millennial	61% Gen Z*	vs.	46% Gen X

To a great extent

24% In-office	vs.	18% Remote	16% Hybrid

To a great extent

23% Millennial	26% Gen Z	vs.	16% Gen X

*To what extent is the current economy and/or your own financial situation preventing you from meeting up with your colleagues socially to eat out, grab drinks, go to an event, etc.? (Base: Total, n=1019) *Small base (Gen Z, n=38)*

Personal finances and the economy are limiting more Female, White and Hispanic professionals from socializing outside of work

Fewer Black professionals say their outside of work socialization has been limited by these economic factors.

Impact of current economy and individual finances on social activities

	Total	Gender		Ethnicity			
		Male	Female	White	Black	Hispanic	Other
A great extent/some extent	54%	47%	**61%**	**58%**	25%	**68%**	33%
To a great extent	20%	20%	21%	21%	17%	21%	14%
To some extent	34%	28%	**40%**	**37%**	8%	**47%**	19%
Not that much	33%	**36%**	30%	30%	**59%**	19%	**60%**
Not at all	13%	16%	9%	13%	16%	13%	7%

Q16: To what extent is the current economy and/or your own financial situation preventing you from meeting up with your colleagues socially to eat out, grab drinks, go to an event, etc.?

Indicates statistical differences

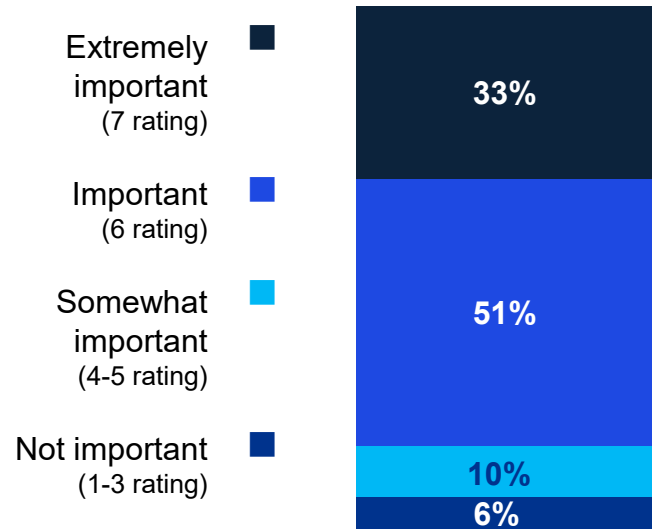(Other: Asian/Native American/ Alaska Native)

Detailed findings

Employers' role in facilitating work friendships

Most believe it is very important for companies to facilitate personal interactions that develop close work friendships

While all agree, those in remote situations feel more strongly that companies should contribute to developing friendships than those in hybrid and in-office work settings.

Importance of company-facilitated interactions to support development of close work friendships

Extremely important (7 rating): **33%**

Important (6 rating): **51%**

Somewhat important (4-5 rating): **10%**

Not important (1-3 rating): **6%**

84% of professionals believe it's important companies facilitate personal interactions to help develop work friendships

Especially important among…

	Remote	Hybrid	In-office
Extremely important/ Important (6-7)	**86%**	**93%**	**78%**
Extremely important (7)	**45%**	**35%**	**26%**
Important (6)	**41%**	**58%**	**53%**

To what extent do you think it is important for your company to facilitate some level of personal interactions to support the development of close work friendships? (Base: Total, n=1019)

Professionals strongly believe companies value work friends, but do not as adamantly believe companies take action to foster friendships

Compared to hybrid and remote employees, those in the office are more likely to feel their employers are taking action to support the company views on the value of work friendships.

Perceptions of company attitudes toward work friendships

■ Agree ■ Completely agree Net Agree

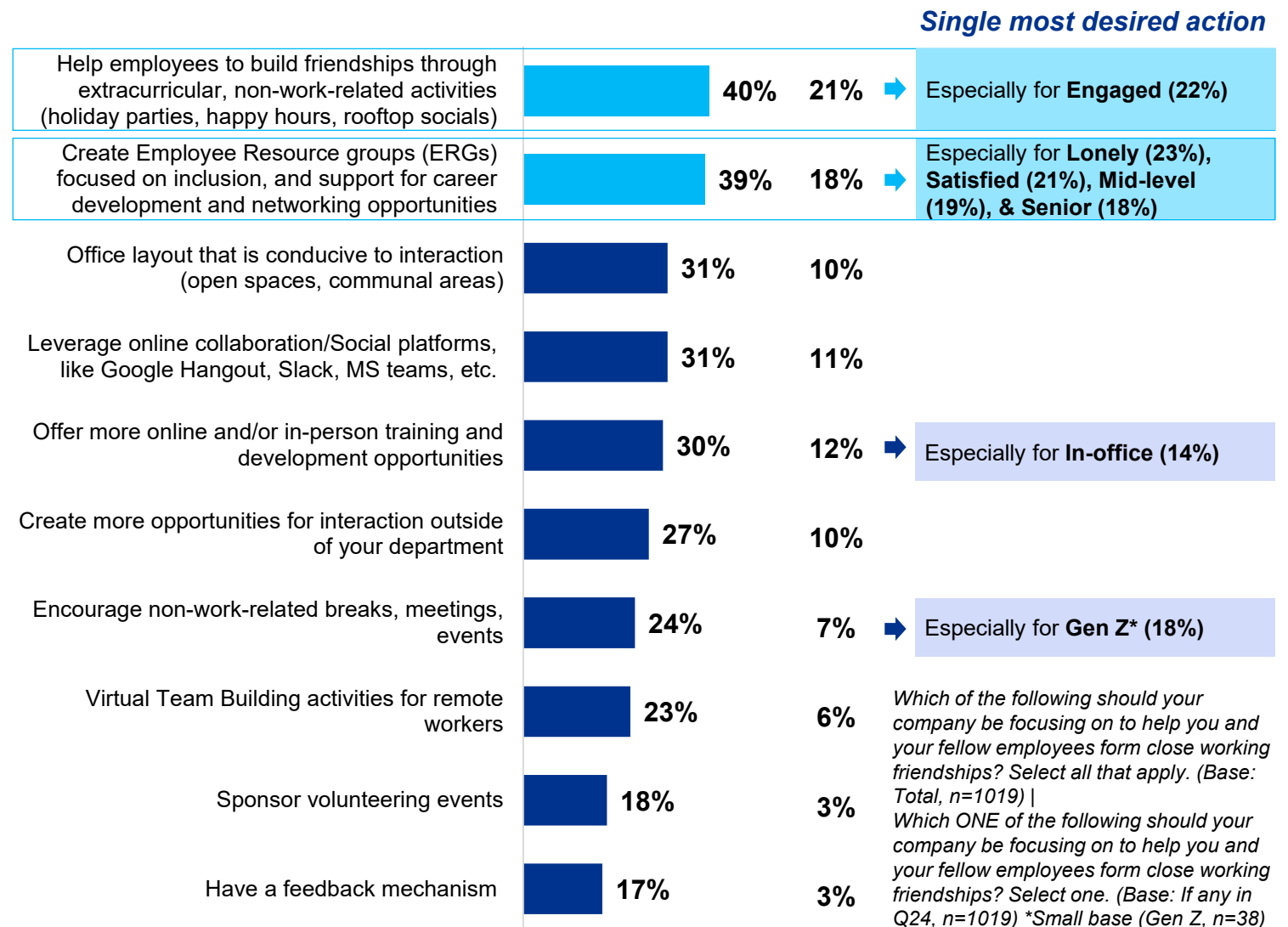|	Agree	Completely agree	Net Agree	Remote	Hybrid	In-Office
My company believes that close work friendships improve employee happiness and job satisfaction.	46%	36%	82%	76%	82%	84%
My company believes that close work friendships increase productivity.	43%	38%	81%	77%	83%	83%
My company thinks it is important to provide an environment that encourages close work friendships.	48%	32%	80%	76%	77%	83%
My company is highly focused on activities and events that lead to the development of close work friendships, like sponsoring social events, team building workshops and recreational activities.	45%	27%	72%	72%	70%	73%
My company provides flexibility for employees to interact, socialize, volunteer and collaborate – for work and non-work-related purposes.	43%	24%	67%	60%	66%	73%
My company leaders are very vocal about the importance of developing close work friendships.	40%	25%	65%	58%	65%	68%

When thinking about your current company, please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements. (Base: Total, n=1019)

Professionals believe companies should facilitate work friendships through non-work-related activities and Employee Resource Groups

Employee Resource Groups are more popular among mid- and senior-level professionals, while younger Gen Z employees are more likely to wish their company would encourage non-work-related activities.

Desired company actions to facilitate close work friendships

Single most desired action

Action	%	Single most desired	
Help employees to build friendships through extracurricular, non-work-related activities (holiday parties, happy hours, rooftop socials)	40%	21% ➡	Especially for **Engaged (22%)**
Create Employee Resource groups (ERGs) focused on inclusion, and support for career development and networking opportunities	39%	18% ➡	Especially for **Lonely (23%), Satisfied (21%), Mid-level (19%), & Senior (18%)**
Office layout that is conducive to interaction (open spaces, communal areas)	31%	10%	
Leverage online collaboration/Social platforms, like Google Hangout, Slack, MS teams, etc.	31%	11%	
Offer more online and/or in-person training and development opportunities	30%	12% ➡	Especially for **In-office (14%)**
Create more opportunities for interaction outside of your department	27%	10%	
Encourage non-work-related breaks, meetings, events	24%	7% ➡	Especially for **Gen Z* (18%)**
Virtual Team Building activities for remote workers	23%	6%	
Sponsor volunteering events	18%	3%	
Have a feedback mechanism	17%	3%	

Which of the following should your company be focusing on to help you and your fellow employees form close working friendships? Select all that apply. (Base: Total, n=1019) |
Which ONE of the following should your company be focusing on to help you and your fellow employees form close working friendships? Select one. (Base: If any in Q24, n=1019) *Small base (Gen Z, n=38)
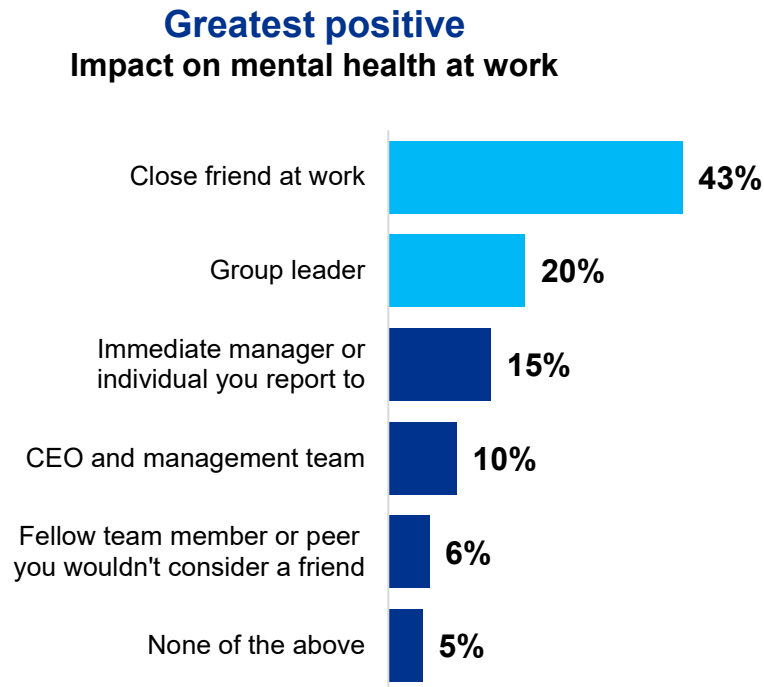
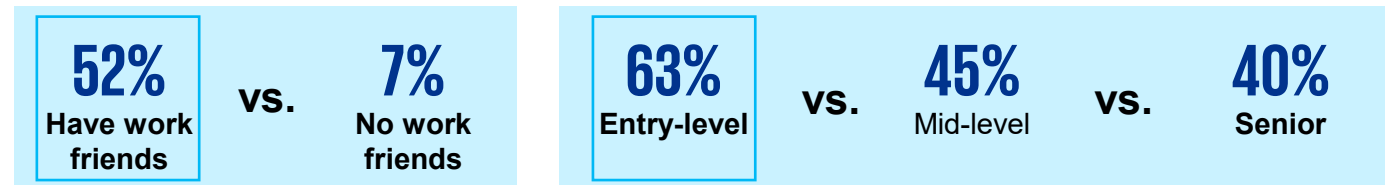# Detailed findings

Organizational dynamics

Close friends at work have the greatest positive impact on mental health, especially among those with friends and entry-level workers

However, those without a close friend at work most often look to their Group Leader for support.
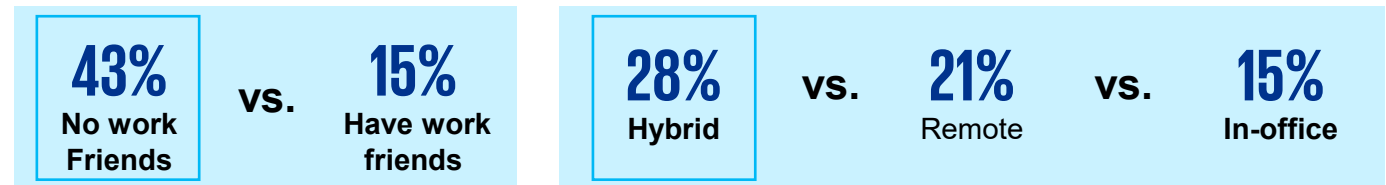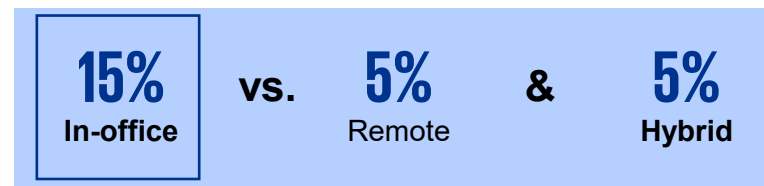
impact of key individuals at work

Greatest positive
Impact on mental health at work

Category	%
Close friend at work	43%
Group leader	20%
Immediate manager or individual you report to	15%
CEO and management team	10%
Fellow team member or peer you wouldn't consider a friend	6%
None of the above	5%

Close friend especially impactful among…

52% Have work friends	vs.	7% No work friends

63% Entry-level	vs.	45% Mid-level	vs.	40% Senior

Group leader especially impactful among…

43% No work Friends	vs.	15% Have work friends

28% Hybrid	vs.	21% Remote	vs.	15% In-office

CEO and management especially impactful among…

15% In-office	vs.	5% Remote	&	5% Hybrid

*Which person, if any, in your company has the greatest **positive impact** on your mental health at work? (Base: Total, n=1019)*
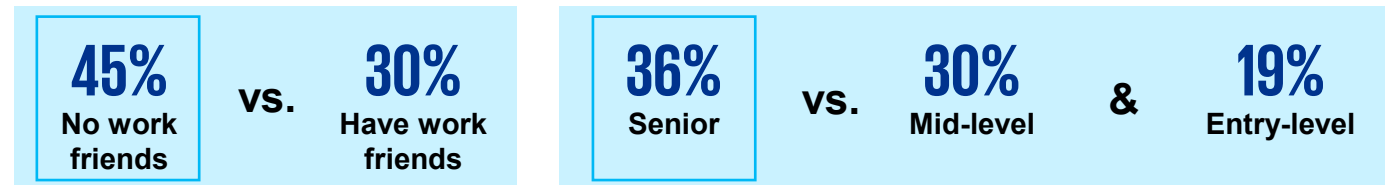
A third of professionals say their Group Leader has the biggest effect on happiness and satisfaction at work

Those with work friends are equally likely to select their Group Leader or a close work friend. However, entry-level employees prioritize work friends while senior-level say Group Leaders are more impactful.
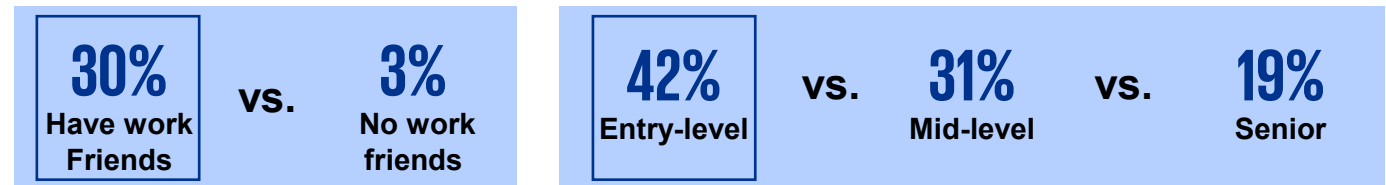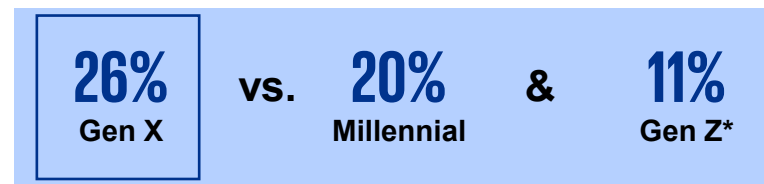
Impact of key individuals at work

Greatest impact
Happiness & Satisfaction at Work

- Group leader — **33%**
- Close friend at work — **24%**
- Immediate manager or individual you report to — **22%**
- CEO and management team — **8%**
- Fellow team member or peer you wouldn't consider a friend — **7%**
- None of the above — **6%**

Group leader especially impactful among…

45% No work friends VS. **30%** Have work friends

36% Senior VS. **30%** Mid-level & **19%** Entry-level

Close friend at work especially impactful among…

30% Have work Friends VS. **3%** No work friends

42% Entry-level VS. **31%** Mid-level VS. **19%** Senior

Immediate manager or individual you report to especially impactful among…

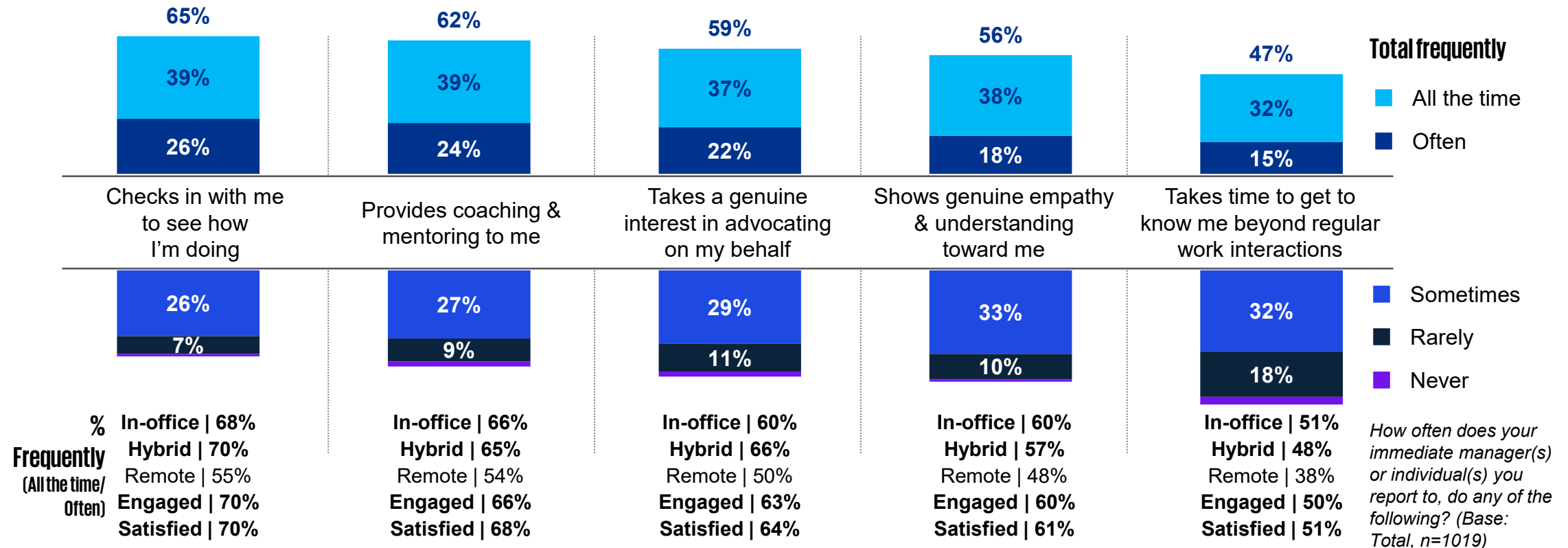**26%** Gen X VS. **20%** Millennial & **11%** Gen Z*

*Which person, if any, in your company has the greatest impact on your happiness or satisfaction at work? Select one. (Base: Total, n=1019) *Small base (Gen Z, n=38)*

While most feel their managers regularly provide job-related support, fewer feel their managers know them outside of work

Remote employees are much less likely than their hybrid or in-office counterparts to say their managers engaged in any of the actions. However, those engaged and satisfied in their roles receive this feedback and guidance from their managers regularly.

Manager engagement

	Checks in with me to see how I'm doing	Provides coaching & mentoring to me	Takes a genuine interest in advocating on my behalf	Shows genuine empathy & understanding toward me	Takes time to get to know me beyond regular work interactions
Total frequently	65%	62%	59%	56%	47%
All the time	39%	39%	37%	38%	32%
Often	26%	24%	22%	18%	15%
Sometimes	26%	27%	29%	33%	32%
Rarely	7%	9%	11%	10%	18%
Never					

% Frequently (All the time/ Often)

Checks in with me to see how I'm doing	Provides coaching & mentoring to me	Takes a genuine interest in advocating on my behalf	Shows genuine empathy & understanding toward me	Takes time to get to know me beyond regular work interactions
In-office | 68%	**In-office | 66%**	**In-office | 60%**	**In-office | 60%**	**In-office | 51%**
Hybrid | 70%	**Hybrid | 65%**	**Hybrid | 66%**	**Hybrid | 57%**	**Hybrid | 48%**
Remote | 55%	Remote | 54%	Remote | 50%	Remote | 48%	Remote | 38%
Engaged | 70%	**Engaged | 66%**	**Engaged | 63%**	**Engaged | 60%**	**Engaged | 50%**
Satisfied | 70%	**Satisfied | 68%**	**Satisfied | 64%**	**Satisfied | 61%**	**Satisfied | 51%**

How often does your immediate manager(s) or individual(s) you report to, do any of the following? (Base: Total, n=1019)

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