

The Power of Workplace Culture on Performance and Wellbeing

**Insights and Opportunities
from the 2024 APEX Executive
Work and Health Study and
Beyond**

August 2026

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Many thanks for their ongoing collaboration and support.

Executive Summary

As we look to our strengths to drive an agenda of change, the Clerk, Michael Sabia, sees the federal public service as one of the country's greatest institutions.¹ The Clerk has called on executives and the federal public service to: focus on priorities to help them become realities faster, simplify processes to increase speed, such as reducing inefficient bureaucracy, and be personally accountable, committed and take initiative to succeed.² The Clerk says that, "We have a chance to make a meaningful difference for the country, for Canadians and for the public service itself."³

To realize this ambition, executives will need to draw on their many talents. The World Economic Forum (WEF) recommends we will need to "...train and nurture talent with the critical skills to drive innovation - human centric skills."⁴ Although many today still consider these as "soft", the WEF refers to human-centric skills as the "...core differentiators for thriving individuals, high performing organizations and agile economies. ... At a macro level, they are engines of resilience and growth, boosting productivity, sparking innovation and supporting economies to adapt in the face of disruption."⁵

Federal public service executives from coast-to-coast-to-coast and internationally are at the heart of achieving Canada's ambitions and they will need to cultivate high performing organizations and teams to realize this endeavor. High performing organizations and individuals are the product of positive health outcomes ([refer to Appendix A](#)).



APEX 2024 EWHS Engagements reached over 1900 executives from February 2025 – June 2026.

2024 Executive Work and Health Study (2024 EWHS)

The Association of Professional Executives for the Public Service of Canada (APEX) in partnership with the University of Ottawa conducted the 7th APEX Executive Work and Health Study (2024 EWHS). The survey portion was in-field from May 2024 to July 2024 and over 4700 executives responded - nearly a 51% response rate. The EWHS uses methodologies based in research and literature to better understand the factors that influence health outcomes of both organizations, such as performance, and individuals, such as wellbeing. Three top line observations emerged in the 2024 EWHS. Refer to Figure 1 for an illustrative

¹ [Thirty-Third Annual Report to the Prime Minister on the Public Service of Canada.](#)

² [Message from Michael Sabia, Clerk of the Privy Council and Secretary to the Cabinet - Canada.ca](#)

³ [Thirty-Third Annual Report to the Prime Minister on the Public Service of Canada.](#)

⁴ [World Economic Forum, New Economy Skills: Unlocking the Human Advantage](#)

⁵ Ibid.

example and [refer to Appendix B for an overview of the methodology used](#). It is important to note that health outcomes vary:

- i. **Across levels.** Consistent with previous iterations of the APEX EWHS, executives at EX-04 and above (EX-04+) reported more positive health outcomes overall, while executives at the EX-01 and EX-02 levels (EX-01/02) reported worse health outcomes more frequently.
- ii. **Across genders.** Although women make up about 55% of the executive ranks, women reported worse results for many health outcomes compared to men.
- iii. **Across equity-deserving groups.** New to the Study, the 2024 EWHS disaggregated results across various equity-deserving groups. Executives within these groups often reported worse health outcomes, notably respondents identifying as persons with disabilities or neurodivergent.

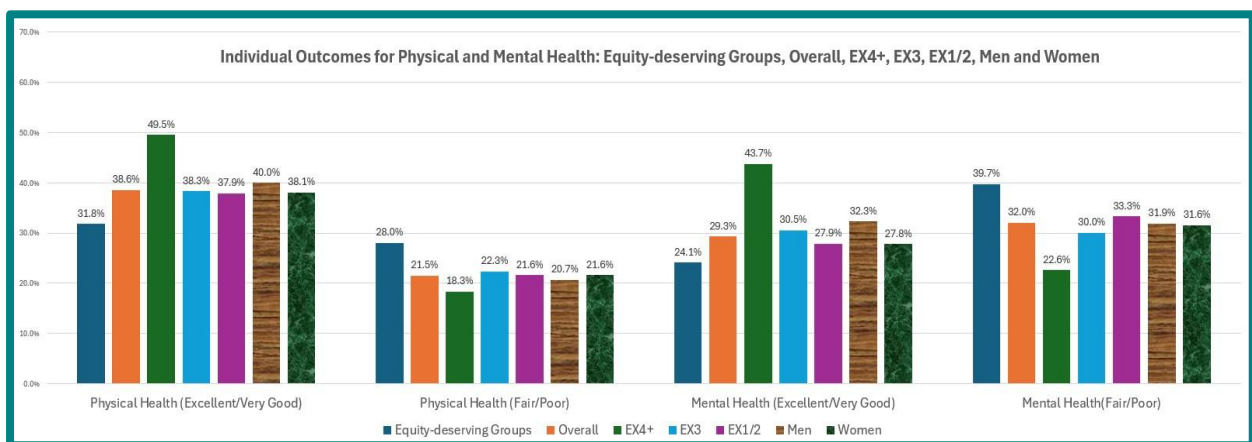


Figure 1 Illustrative example of the individual health outcomes reported across: Equity-deserving Groups, Overall Respondents, EX-04+, EX-03, EX-01/02, Men, and Women.

Strengths

In addition, two areas of strength are of particular importance to both performance as well as organizational and individual health outcomes. As the public service continues to operate in a volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) environment at an unprecedented pace, maintaining these strengths will be essential:⁶

- **Meaning and importance of work:** Ensuring meaning and importance found in work remains strong for executives as this impacts nine out of ten health outcomes for both organizations and individuals.
- **Role clarity and role conflict:** Maintaining strong role clarity and reducing role conflict are top drivers for job performance in the 2024 EWHS. Role conflict can arise

⁶ [Laker, B., Ogbonnaya, C., Rofcanin, Y., Gorny, T., & Mariani, M. \(2025, August 25\). To change company culture, focus on systems, not communication. Harvard Business Review.](#)

when an executive does not have a clear sense of expectations of them from superiors, their work objectives, or the scope and responsibilities of the job.

Three Cultural Drivers

Finally, three cultural drivers emerged from the 2024 EWHS that can significantly influence organizational and individual health outcomes for the better. These areas provide every executive with practical opportunities to make a difference. They do not require a new policy framework, government wide initiative or a dedicated budget line. The 3 cultural drivers include:

- **Strengthening psychological safety** which is the ability to: raise concerns without fear of reprisal, make mistakes without it being held against the person⁷, and call out inappropriate behaviour in the workplace. Amy Edmondson's states that **psychological safety does not equal "anything goes"**. and her two by two grid (represented in Figure 2) shows the mapping of psychological safety against performance standards and illustrates its importance and interdependence.⁸

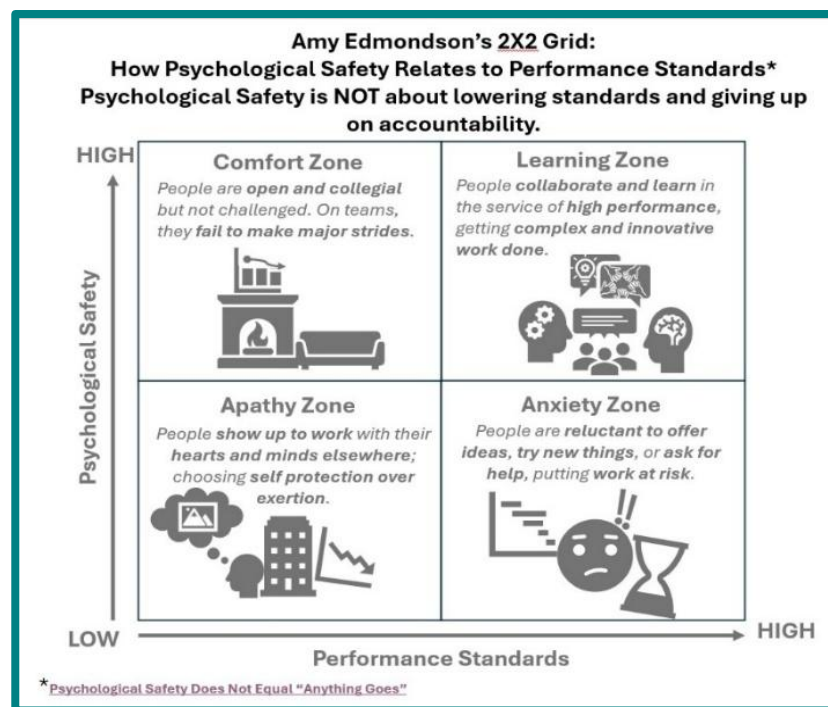


Figure 2 Amy Edmondson's: How Psychological Safety Relates to Performance

- **Increasing psychosocial safety climate** which ensures **senior leadership values psychological wellbeing as much as productivity.**

⁷ Where the stakes are low to medium if a mistake is made while also appreciating accountabilities are still upheld ([Edmondson A. \(2024\) It doesn't matter if you fail. It matters *how* you fail. Big Think +](#))

⁸ [*Psychological Safety Does Not Equal "Anything Goes"](#)

- Reinforcing **supervisor support** on the fundamentals of management and leadership – **increasing positive and constructive feedback, and recognition.**

There is an added benefit when psychological safety and supervisor support are high; they increase the sense of Belonging+⁹ which is a potent factor of influence on both organizational and individual health outcomes like performance, commitment, engagement, job satisfaction and wellbeing.

Moving Forward

Strengthening organizational and individual health outcomes by investing in these three cultural drivers with a human-centered approach will support the executive community across the federal public service in achieving greater innovation and successes for Canada.

Over the next few years, the culture change objective is to build:

“A public service that acts with speed and resolve, focussed on outcomes that matter most to Canadians and powered by high-performing, diverse, inclusive teams that innovate, simplify, and take personal accountability for delivering results.”

[Thirty-Third Annual Report to the Prime Minister on the Public Service of Canada](#)

⁹ APEX considers Belonging+ to include 4 aspects: a sense of belonging on the part of the executive, a voice at the table, a role in decision making, and concrete investment in the executive on the part of the organization.

¹⁰ [Laker, B., Ogbonnaya, C., Rofcanin, Y., & Gorny, T. \(2025, October 9\). To change company culture, focus on systems—not communication. AAPL Publication.](#)

Background

The Association of Professional Executives for the Public Service of Canada (APEX) established the Executive Work and Health Study (EWHS) in 1997. The EWHS was in part a response to the concerns expressed by physicians in the National Capital Region given an increase in visits from senior officials for stress-related health complaints. It also addressed the need for an evidence-based approach to understand the common challenges and opportunities related to the work and health of federal public service executives (the population-base) which has since become a valid, reliable and comparable longitudinal study.

The goal of the Study is to better understand the drivers that influence health outcomes of both organizations, such as performance, and individuals, such as wellbeing, using methodologies based in research and literature. For the seventh iteration of the EWHS (2024 EWHS), APEX partnered with the University of Ottawa which included project approval by the University of Ottawa Research Ethics Review Board to ensure the highest standards for confidentiality, anonymity, and integrity. Further information on the methodology is provided in [Appendix B](#).



APEX 2024 EWHS Sessions

1900+ executives

70 engagements

17 months

As part of the 2024 EWHS, over 4700 executives were surveyed, from May 27, 2024, to July 25, 2024, which was the largest response of executives in the history of the Study. This equated to a nearly 51% response rate.

In early 2025, APEX took a multipronged approach to engaging executives and organizations on the findings and opportunities identified in the 2024 EWHS through small focus group conversations as well as broader discussions based on tailored organizational results. From March to June 2025, various sessions, presentations, and small group discussions were held with executives, including EX-01/02, EX-03, EX-04/05 and deputy ministers. APEX also invited executives to join any of the ten equity-deserving group¹¹ sessions.

By the end of July 2025, participating organizations¹² were invited to request tailored presentations and discussions on their results and the overall findings. To protect anonymity and confidentiality, smaller organizations were invited to specific sessions according to their respective cluster: economic, science, government operations, cultural, social and justice,

¹¹ 2024 EWHS was designed to provide disaggregated data on various equity-deserving groups

¹² Organizations with respondents

and security. APEX also held six regional engagements and one international engagement to share key findings and overall comparatives and hear directly from executives in those regions.

From February 2025 to June 2026, a 17-month period, APEX interacted with more than 1,900 executives across 70 sessions discussing the challenges, opportunities, and relationships between workplace culture, wellbeing and performance.

Context

Executives and their teams from coast to coast to coast and internationally are central to delivering on the Clerk's call to action to, "To meet this moment, the public service must focus, simplify, be accountable and draw on our strengths of diversity."¹³

More than ever, the context in which we lead, work, and live are more volatile, complex, uncertain, and ambiguous (VUCA), and the pace of change continues to accelerate. And yet, mobilizing teams in this environment will be essential to delivering government priorities and shaping Canada's future.

As the Clerk reminds us, this is a rare moment in time in public service¹⁴. Although the world is changing at an accelerated rate that makes it difficult to anticipate, including technological change, "strength of purpose will transform our ability to deliver at the level and speed that the country needs of us."¹⁵

The World Economic Forum's New Economy Skills report of 2025 notes that "human centric skills drive innovation, collaboration, and long-term productivity"¹⁶ and "in an age of artificial intelligence (AI) and disruption, the true competitive edge is being human."¹⁷

At the core of being human is our wellbeing. Although we often don't think of it until we are impacted directly or indirectly. Research shows that even healthy individuals cannot sustain wellbeing within unhealthy organizations. Further research from Oxford illustrates the whole organization has an impact on employee's workplace wellbeing with 47% allocated to the employee and 51% attributed to various parts of the organization including nearly 20% of the responsibility being allocated to top management and 8% allocated to the head of the organization.¹⁸ This further underscores the need for systematic and not solely individual approaches to workplace wellbeing.

¹³ [33rd Annual Report to the Prime Minister on the Public Service of Canada](#)

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ [World Economic Forum, New Economy Skills: Unlocking the Human Advantage](#)

¹⁷ [World Economic Forum, New Economy Skills: Unlocking the Human Advantage](#)

¹⁸ de Neve, J.-E., & Ward, G. (2025). *Why workplace wellbeing matters: The science behind employee happiness and organizational performance*. Harvard Business School Publishing. FIGURE 5-1.

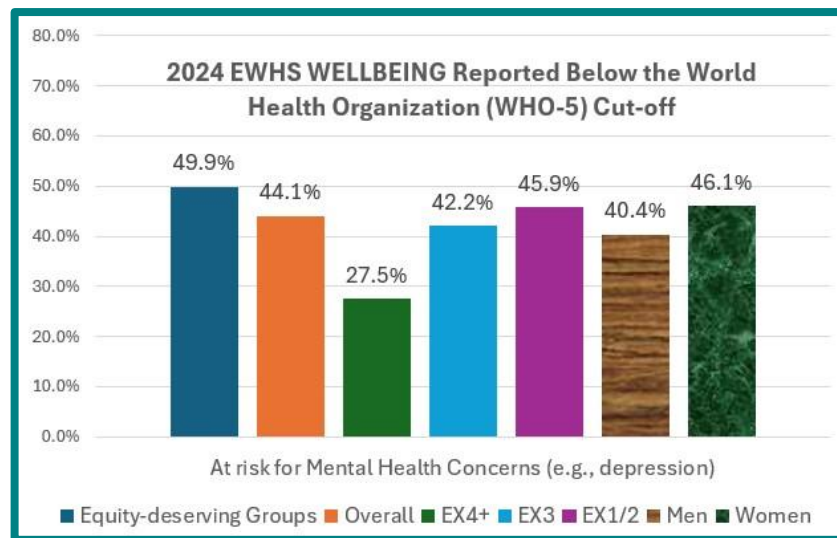


Figure 3: 2024 EWS Respondents Below the WHO-5 cutoff indicating risk for mental health concerns, such as depression.

In fact, wellbeing is no longer a peripheral concern. It is a strategic priority tied to organizational outcomes and workforce sustainability given its impact on performance.

New to the 2024 EWS, wellbeing was measured according to the World Health Organization (WHO) instrument (WHO-5). Figure 3 illustrates respondents who reported below the WHO-5 cutoff and are at risk of mental health concerns such as depression. Notably:

- EX-04+ reported much better than other levels of executives at nearly fifteen percentage points below EX-03 and over eighteen percentage points below EX-01/02.
- Men reported better than women with a five-percentage points difference.
- Overall, more than two in five executives report below the WHO-5 cutoff and this rises to nearly one in two for equity-deserving groups.

Moving forward, wellbeing is anticipated to be a growing area of both interest and concern within workplaces. It has already been noted as a top concern for Millennials and Gen Z, who are projected to make up 74% of the workforce by 2030.¹⁹ In addition, Deloitte's Recent survey in 2026 found, "for both Gen Zs and millennials, wellbeing is increasingly treated as infrastructure; it is the foundation that determines what they can take on."²⁰ Other research by the employment agency Indeed points to workplace wellbeing as "a prerequisite for tech adoption and future readiness and are calling for all Executives to rethink culture and leadership."²¹

¹⁹ [Deloitte Global Gen Z and Millennial Survey 2025](#)

²⁰ [2026 Gen Z and Millennial Survey](#)

²¹ [Work Wellbeing Report](#) conducted by Forrester in 2025

Beyond the Individual

An individual worker's health is affected by their own choices and activities, and the organizational environment also plays a very large and often overlooked role. However, there is no single solution for improving organizational and individual health outcomes. Too often, workplace wellbeing is framed as something individuals must manage on their own through practices such as yoga, meditation or time management. Research from Oxford University found that individual-level interventions did not provide additional or appropriate resources in response to job demands.²²

Improving organizational health and wellbeing is a shared responsibility that goes beyond human resources or the ombuds function or individual self-care. Executives play an important role in shaping today's work culture through their daily behaviors which build the culture needed to meet future demands.

As organizations' contexts evolve, two strengths identified in the 2024 EWHS should be sustained given their impact on performance and wellbeing:

- **Meaning and importance of work impacted 9 out of 10 health outcomes for both organizations and individuals** and 80% of executives reported having high levels of meaning and/or importance of work.
- **Role clarity and reduced role conflict** were the top drivers of job performance and over 70% of executives reported high levels. Especially in times of change, executives need a clear understanding of their work objectives, superiors' expectations, and scope of responsibility.

What can be Done

Steps forward do not require a new policy framework, a government-wide initiative, or a new budget line. Executives can make practical changes every day that have an impact and when these actions are taken as a community, executives and the teams they lead will be best positioned to deliver on the current or any future government agenda – no matter how ambitious

APEX has met with organizations and executives discussing the three core cultural drivers from the 2024 EWHS that could significantly increase the likelihood of achieving strong organizational and individual health outcomes. They are psychological safety, psychosocial safety climate and supervisor support.

²² Fleming, W. J. (2024). *Employee well-being outcomes from individual-level mental health interventions: Cross-sectional evidence from the United Kingdom*. *Industrial Relations Journal*, 55(2), 162–182. <https://doi.org/10.1111/irj.12418>

Cultural Driver #1 - Psychological Safety

Psychological safety has been defined as “the general belief that one is comfortable being oneself—being open, authentic, and direct—in a particular setting or role”.²³ When psychological safety is low, teams will be less likely to take risks, question assumptions, or engage in productive debate, and performance often suffers. But when we understand psychological safety and nurture it—and it can indeed be developed like any other leadership competency—then we can develop it as a key driver of team collaboration, performance, and innovation.

Harvard Business Review²⁴ explains that psychological safety is not about being nice. It is about creating an environment that is respectful, caring, and honest. It means engaging in conversations with curiosity, listening, and being open to hearing other perspectives. Psychological safety does not mean our idea has to be taken. Psychological Safety does allow for good debates to happen when they are needed. But it doesn't mean that participants find debates comfortable or that they “get their way”. Investing in psychological safety as leaders improves the quality of team conversations – and conversations are how results are achieved. As leaders, fostering psychological safety is also essential to improve team performance and learning.²⁵

Google through their extensive research project Aristotle found effective teams were less about who was on the team, and more about how the team worked together. They identified that the most important dynamic associated with team effectiveness was psychological safety.²⁶ When the environment is psychologically safe, team members know that:

- if mistakes²⁷ are made, they aren't going to be held against them,
- they are encouraged to speak up when they identify a serious policy or delivery risks,
- they are trusted to do their work effectively,
- they can try a new idea – even if it may not work, and
- they can challenge inappropriate behaviors in the workplace.

²³ Nembhard, I. M., & Edmondson, A. C. (2011, August 22). *Psychological Safety*. The Oxford Handbook of Positive Organizational Scholarship. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199734610.013.0037>

²⁴ [What People Get Wrong About Psychological Safety. Amy C Edmondson and Michaela Kerrissey. Harvard Business Review, May-June 2025 Magazine Edition](#)

²⁵ [What People Get Wrong About Psychological Safety. Amy C Edmondson and Michaela Kerrissey. Harvard Business Review, May-June 2025 Magazine Edition](#)

²⁶ [Understand team effectiveness](#)

²⁷ Where the stakes are low to medium if a mistake is made while appreciating accountabilities are still upheld ([Edmondson A. \(2024\) It doesn't matter if you fail. It matters *how* you fail. Big Think +](#))

Amy Edmondson's emphasizes that psychological safety does not mean "anything goes" and her framework²⁸ which maps out psychological safety against performance standards illustrates its importance and interdependence.²⁹

Similar³⁰ to what was seen in 2021 EWHS, 59% of respondents in the 2024 EWHS reported relatively high levels of psychological safety. However, care must be taken to look at detailed results at both the overall level of respondents across the federal public service as well as at the individual organizational level. Considering the overall results, important differences emerge, notably:

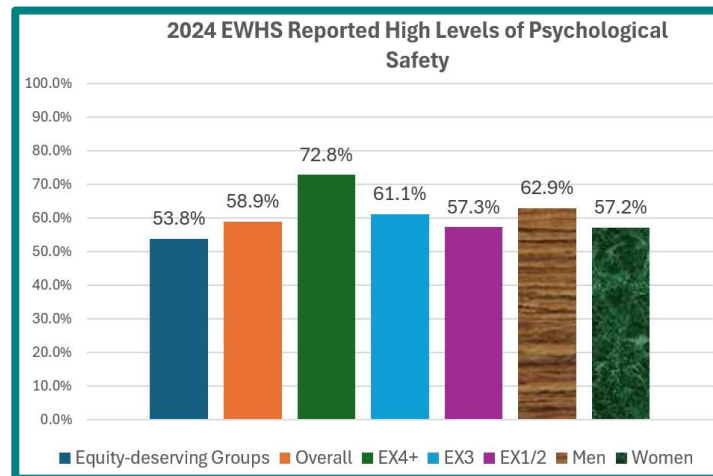


Figure 4: 2024 EWHS Reported High Levels of Psychological Safety

- EX-04+ reported high levels of psychological safety that were nearly 16 percentage points higher than EX-01/02 and 12 percentage points higher than EX-03 respondents.
- A new finding in the 2024 EWHS saw men report six percentage points better than women for psychological safety.
- Respondents identifying as persons with disabilities as well as those identifying as neurodivergent reported the lowest levels of psychological safety, with fewer than 1 in 2 reporting high levels of psychological safety – the lowest rate amongst the equity-deserving groups surveyed.

There are numerous resources available to support leaders to better understand and foster more psychologically safe workplaces. Resources such as Ted Talks³¹ and books³² along with a number of freely available resources provide by Canada Life through Workplace Strategies

²⁸ Figure 2

²⁹ * [Psychological Safety Does Not Equal "Anything Goes"](#)

³⁰ For the 2024 EWHS similar is considered +/- 2%

³¹ [Edmondson, A. C. \(2014\). TEDxHGSE. Building a psychologically safe workplace.](#)

³² Edmondson, A. C. (2018). *The Fearless Organization: Creating Psychological Safety in the Workplace for Learning, Innovation, and Growth*. John Wiley & Sons.

for Mental Health³³ such as Psychologically Safe Communication and Collaboration³⁴ and Psychological Health and Safety Awareness³⁵ amongst others. Further suggestions are also listed below in Appendix C: Additional Resources.

Cultural Driver #2 - Psychosocial Safety Climate

Psychosocial Safety Climate (PSC) is a new addition to the 2024 EWHS. Whereas psychological safety is a measure of individual respondents' feelings of safety, psychosocial safety climate is the operationalization of policies practices and procedures within an organization that safeguards psychological wellbeing. Psychosocial safety climate conceptually reflects workers' perceptions that senior management values psychological health and considers it to be as important as productivity.³⁶

High psychosocial safety climate is associated with many positive organizational and individual health outcomes such as increased levels of commitment, engagement, job satisfaction and lower levels of burnout. Individuals working in organizations with high levels of psychosocial safety climate are more likely to report higher levels of mental health and wellbeing. Organizations also benefit as they are more likely to experience higher levels of performance outcomes.

Overall, 40% of executives reported high levels of psychosocial safety climate. However, as with psychological safety, it is important to look at detailed results for both the overall level as well as the organizational level where available. Considering the overall results for psychosocial safety climate, key findings include:

- 60% of EX-04+ reported high levels of psychosocial safety climate which was 20 percentage points higher than EX-03 and 21 percentage points higher than responses from EX-01/02.
- Men reported 9 percentage points better than women and just over 1 in 3 women reported high levels of psychosocial safety climate.

³³ [Leadership skills - approaches for people leaders - Workplace Strategies for Mental Health](#)

³⁴ Canada Life, Workplace Strategies for Mental Health. Psychologically Safe Communication and Collaboration

³⁵ Canada Life, Workplace Strategies for Mental Health. Psychological Health and Safety Awareness

³⁶ Dollard, M. F. (2019). The PSC-4; A Short PSC Tool. In M. F. Dollard, C. Dormann, & M. Awang Idris (Eds.), *Psychosocial Safety Climate* (pp. 385–409). Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-20319-1_16

- Psychosocial safety climate also increased with age, just over one-half of respondents aged 60 years and older reported high levels of psychosocial safety climate, compared with just under one-third of respondents aged 30-39.

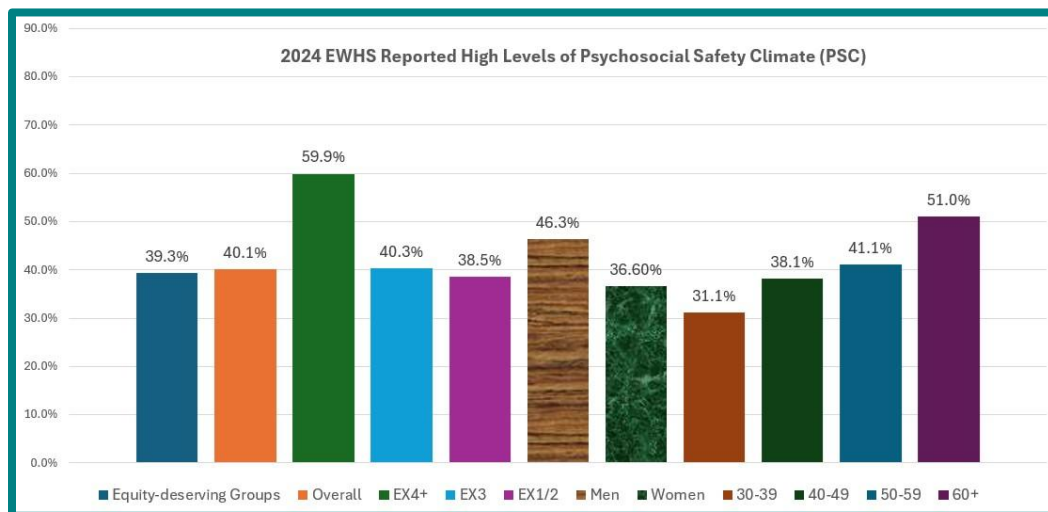


Figure 5: 2024 EWHS Reported High Levels of Psychosocial Safety Climate

Additional Resources - Psychological Safety and Psychosocial Safety Climate

When executives invest in creating higher levels of psychological safety and psychosocial safety climate, it is more likely organizations will see higher levels of commitment, performance, innovation, and employee wellbeing. In addition to the resources referenced throughout this report, consider assessing the current levels of psychological safety, psychosocial safety climate, and trust using the self-reflection questions below to take stock or use other available resources.

Self-reflection

To help assess where your team currently stands, reflect on these four questions from Success³⁷ which notes that you are not looking for a perfect score, and they suggest that one or two no responses “point to a specific gap you can address directly. All four are signals that something more systemic needs your attention, and your behavior is the most likely place to start.”³⁸

1. **Reflection:** *When was the last time someone on your team openly disagreed with you in a meeting?*

³⁷ [What Most Leaders Get Wrong About Psychological Safety, June 19, 2026.](#)

³⁸ [What Most Leaders Get Wrong About Psychological Safety, June 19, 2026.](#)

Consideration: *If you're struggling to remember, that's your answer.*

2. **Reflection:** *When someone makes a mistake, what's the first thing they do—report it or manage it?*

Consideration: *Teams with psychological safety surface problems early. Teams without it surface only when they've grown too large to hide.*

3. **Reflection:** *Do your team members ask clarifying questions in group settings or only in private?*

Consideration: *Questions whispered after the meeting are a reliable sign that people don't feel safe not knowing in front of each other.*

4. **Reflection:** *When was the last time someone brought you a problem that genuinely surprised you?*

Consideration: *If bad news reaches you only after it's already escalated, your team has learned not to give you the early warning.³⁹*

Additional resources are available through Workplace strategies for Mental Health, including practical guidance on psychosocial safety as well as free assessments for a [Psychologically Safe Leader Assessment](#) and the [Psychologically Safe Team Assessment](#).

Further, you may also want to reflect on the quality of conversations within your team using the simple framework published in Harvard Business Review. High-quality conversations are the cornerstone to producing high quality team results and performance.⁴⁰

Finally, our approaches to leadership, and the behaviours we demonstrate each day, shape the dynamics of the teams we lead and because of this we should build the reflex to reflect often on how we are leading. As we reflect, consider one or all of the six pillars form the [APEX Positive Leadership](#) framework which includes self-awareness, respect, humility, strengths-based leadership, values-based leadership, and empathy.

"The six pillars are powerful on their own. They are even more powerful when seen as one system. Together they form three movements of positive leadership — a progression from leading yourself, to connecting with others, to anchoring the work in what matters most."⁴¹

³⁹ [What Most Leaders Get Wrong About Psychological Safety, June 19, 2026.](#)

⁴⁰ [What People Get Wrong About Psychological Safety, Amy C Edmondson and Michaela Kerrissey, Harvard Business Review, May-June 2025 Magazine Edition](#)

⁴¹ Dr. Craig Dowden (2026).



Figure 6 Craig Dowden (PhD), The Positive Leadership Architecture

Strengthen Trust – Remembering it is Built Slowly Over Time

Trust is key to psychological safety. Building trust in relationships at work with direct reports, colleagues and superiors - as in life - takes time. Considering the speed of both the workplace and society, taking intentional time and effort to build, maintain and strengthen trust will be key to success.

Many know the analogy from Brené Brown where she explains how trust is built based on an analogy of marbles in a jar.⁴² To recap this analogy, based on her research, she reveals that trust is built in very small moments. How and when we make those connections with others is important. To illustrate, when we ask how someone is doing as they support a loved one going through a treatment – that’s a marble moment. These and other little moments are where a marble is earned and stored in the jar. Brené Brown states that another huge marble jar moment is when we can trust someone to ask for help when they need it – again another marble in the jar. All of these moments build trust.

Brené Brown emphasizes the importance for us, as leaders, to make sure that at a pivotal moment we don’t say to our team, ‘trust me’. Rather before that moment arrives, we have already invested in and built the social equity and authenticity into the relationship to build trust.⁴³ There are a number of resources available to support this leadership competence such as Brené Brown’s frame for building and mending trust found in chapter 7 of her latest book, *Strong Ground* ⁴⁴. In addition, Workplace Strategies for Mental Health also has resources for Building Trust for Leaders⁴⁵.

⁴² [This is how to earn trust, The diary of a CEO, December 2025.](#)

⁴³ [Ibid.](#)

⁴⁴ Brown, B. (2025). *Strong Ground*. Random House.

⁴⁵ [Building trust for leaders - Workplace Strategies for Mental Health](#)

Cultural Driver #3 - Supervisor Support

When it comes to performance and wellbeing, executives have a significant opportunity to make a positive impact through their relationships with their direct reports. The 2024 EWHS highlights that high levels of supervisor support increase the odds of having higher levels of performance, commitment, engagement, and job satisfaction for the organization as well as better individual health outcomes including mental health, physical health and wellbeing.

In addition, every direct supervisor holds tremendous potential for impact. Research shows that a direct supervisor has as much influence on the wellbeing of their direct employee as that person's spouse or partner, and more influence on their wellbeing than their medical doctor or therapist.

In the 2024 EWHS, several observations were made between levels, age, and equity-deserving groups. Considering the overall results for reportedly high levels of supervisor support, key findings include:

- Executives reported a “sandwich effect” visible across all job levels, where those at the EX-03 level feel significantly less supported by their supervisors than those at the EX-01/02 levels and those at the EX-04+ levels.
- High levels of supervisor support also declined with age from 57% reported by the 30-39 age bracket down 9 percentage points reported by respondents in the 50-59 age bracket.
- Just over one-half of executives overall reported high levels of supervisor support while persons with disabilities, religious minority, and neurodivergent equity-deserving groups reported nearly five percentage points lower than the overall population.

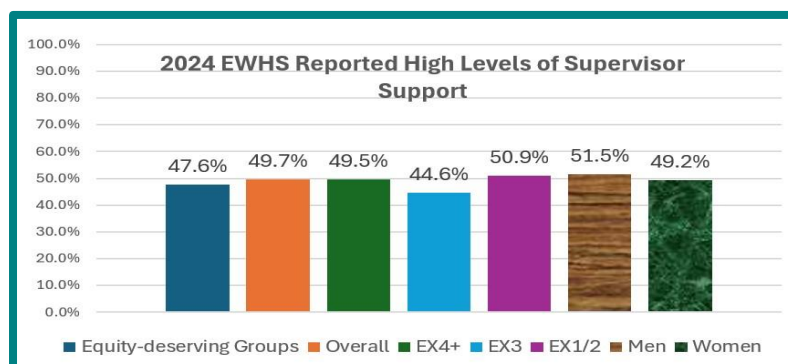


Figure 7: 2024 EWHS Reported High Levels of Supervisor Support

Going Back to the Fundamentals

Through conversations with executives, we heard that for many, formal performance reviews remain the primary – if not the only – opportunity to receive feedback. Others noted that even these conversations do not always provide meaningful or valuable feedback.

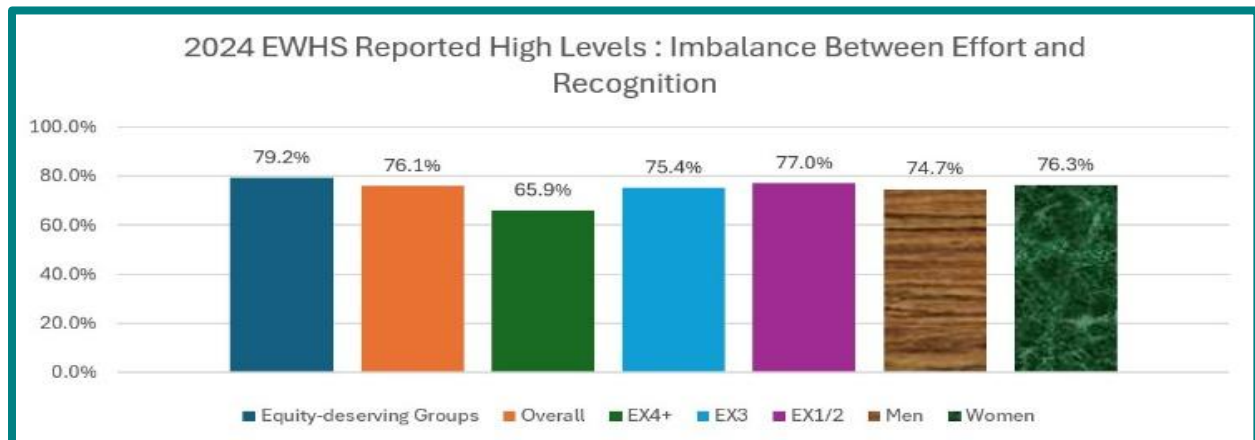


Figure 8: 2024 EWHS Reported High Levels of Imbalance Between Effort and Recognition

Gallup's research reinforces this challenge, finding that among approximately "15,000 employees, only 16% said the last conversation with their direct supervisor was extremely meaningful. According to employees, meaningful manager feedback includes recognition or appreciation for recent work, collaboration and relationships, discussion of current goals and priorities, and a focus on employees' strengths."⁴⁶

In his November 2025 address to newly appointed executives, the Secretary of the Treasury Board highlighted the value and importance of feedback, encouraging executives to intentionally build feedback into their leadership approach and ensure it occurs regularly.

The 2024 EWHS highlights the importance for all executives to carry out this fundamental management practice given just under 1 in 2 executives reported having high levels of supervisor support. Given its importance on organizational performance and individual wellbeing, strengthening it in times of uncertainty will be even more important.

⁴⁶ Gallup, [Span of Control: What's the Optimal Team Size for Managers?](#) Workplace January 14, 2026.

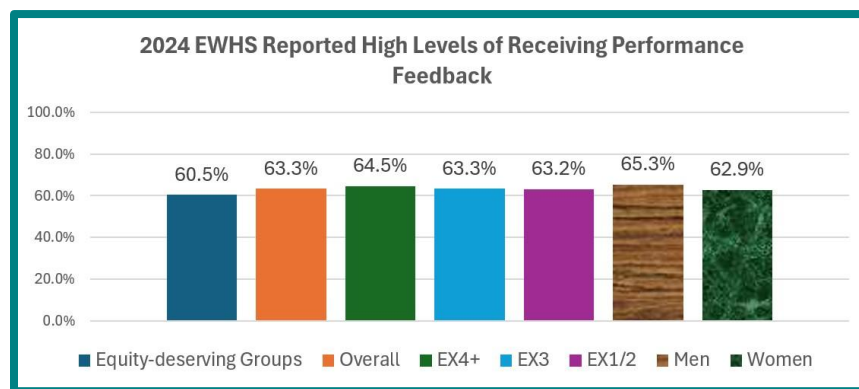


Figure 9: 2024 EWHS Reported High Levels of Receiving Performance Feedback

In 2026, Gallup reported, “...one habit a manager in today’s workplace matters more than most others: **providing meaningful feedback to each employee at least once per week**. This practice nearly triples the percentage of engaged employees, which then influences many other performance outcomes”⁴⁷ In addition, Gallup reported meaningful conversations build trust and inspiration when they hold these top five characteristics⁴⁸:

1. **Recognition and appreciation for recent work** – understand how direct reports like to be recognized and appreciated.⁴⁹ Appreciating that various culture and equity-deserving groups have various preferences and approaches.
 - Workplace Strategies for Mental Health⁵⁰ has resources on how to express respect and appreciation to employees through recognition strategies and resources to support a short engagement session to identify what types of recognition matters to the team when it comes to expressing respect and appreciation.
2. **Collaboration and relationship** – Gallup also found that managers play a key role in connecting the right team partners.⁵¹
 - Various resources can support the strengthening of these abilities such as Workplace Strategies for Mental Health: Putting engagement on the agenda and Listening to understand for leaders
3. **Current goals and priorities at work** – Gallup found that clarity of work expectations has been slipping, especially for younger workers.⁵²
 - Consider leveraging resources such as Workplace Strategies for Mental Health: Putting clear leadership and expectations on the agenda.
4. **Length of conversations** – Gallup suggests that 15-30 min conversations have greater impact than 30-60 min conversations if they occur regularly. However, if

⁴⁷ Gallup, [Span of Control: What's the Optimal Team Size for Managers?](#) Workplace January 14, 2026.

⁴⁸ Gallup, [A Great Manager's Most Important Habit](#), Workplace, May 30, 2023. Updated Feb 16, 2026.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ [Putting recognition and reward on the agenda - Workplace Strategies for Mental Health](#)

⁵¹ Gallup, [A Great Manager's Most Important Habit](#), Workplace, May 30, 2023. Updated Feb 16, 2026.

⁵² Gallup, [A Great Manager's Most Important Habit](#), Workplace, May 30, 2023. Updated Feb 16, 2026.

managers don't give feedback regularly, they will need to catch up over longer conversations.⁵³

- As we have all experienced, people have different preferences when it comes to feedback and the form⁵⁴ gives structure to a conversation around understanding others' preferences. In addition, other resources⁵⁵ focus on the importance of receiving feedback which is another key aspect of executive leadership.
5. **Employee strengths or the things they do well** – Look to focus on deepening the meaning of conversations by focusing on the strengths.⁵⁶
- To deepen your conversation and focus on what each person does best, draw on the insights from APEX Positive Leadership: Chapter 4. When a conversation calls for negative/constructive feedback, you can also turn to resources such as Constructive criticism - Workplace Strategies for Mental Health.

Benefits of Cultural Driver #1 and Cultural Driver #3 on Belonging+

When psychological safety and supervisor support are at high levels, there is an additional benefit: they have a positive effect on Belonging+. Feelings of Belonging+ are potent factors influencing both organizational and individual health outcomes like performance, commitment, engagement, job satisfaction and wellbeing. APEX considers Belonging+ to include 4 aspects:

1. A sense of belonging on the part of the executive,
2. A voice at the table,
3. A role in decision making, and
4. Concrete investment in the executive on the part of the organization.

The 2024 EWHS response rates showed just over one-half of executives reported high levels of Belonging+. In the 2024 EWHS, several observations were made between levels, age, and equity-deserving groups. Considering the overall results for Belonging+, key findings include:

- Three out of four EX-04+ reported high levels of Belonging+ which was 21 percentage points higher than EX-03 respondents and 27 percentage points higher than EX-01/02 respondents.
- Men reported high levels of Belonging+ that was six percentage points higher than women.

⁵³ Gallup, [A Great Manager's Most Important Habit](#), Workplace, May 30, 2023. Updated Feb 16, 2026.

⁵⁴ [Evidence-based actions for clear leadership and expectations - Workplace Strategies for Mental Health](#)

⁵⁵ Stone, D., & Heen, S. (2015). *Thanks for the feedback*. Portfolio Penguin.

⁵⁶ Gallup, [A Great Manager's Most Important Habit](#), Workplace, May 30, 2023. Updated Feb 16, 2026.

- Executives identifying as a member of an equity-deserving groups reported varied results from slightly higher, similar to, or lower than the overall. Notably executives identifying as persons with disabilities or as neurodivergent reported respectively 9 and 13 percentage points lower than the overall and lowest amongst the equity-deserving groups.

By increasing levels of psychological safety and supervisor support – particularly through meaningful feedback and recognition – the executive community can create the conditions needed to increase Belonging+ for all.

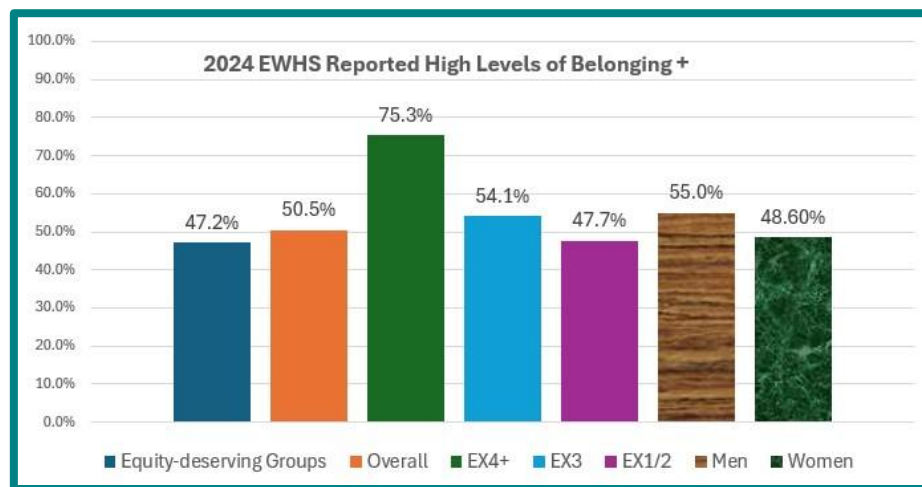


Figure 8: 2024 EWHS Reported High Levels of Belonging+

Conclusion

The three cultural drivers discussed above - psychological safety, a psychosocial safety climate, and supervisor support - are all key elements of organizational culture that each executive can influence. By strengthening these areas, executives can help improve health outcomes for organizations and individuals, which will result in better performance, greater innovation, Belonging+⁵⁷ and increased well-being.

“The stakes for Canada are high. This is a consequential moment that calls for focus, urgency, and a clear commitment to deliver results. It also offers the opportunity to build the public service that Canadians will need in the years ahead.”

Thirty-Third Annual Report to the Prime Minister
on the Public Service of Canada

As the Clerk emphasized, “This is a moment that requires clarity about how we work in the public service, not just what we aim to achieve.”⁵⁹ In this context, continued efforts are required *to build a representative workforce rooted in our values, where people feel safe, equipped and empowered to do their best work in workplaces where creativity, innovation, and pride can thrive.*⁶⁰ Investing in these leadership fundamentals, both individually and as an executive community, will strengthen organizational performance, support individual wellbeing and position the public service for long-term success.

Through our conversations, hundreds of executives have highlighted the need for culture change. We create culture and we can change culture. Each of us impacts the culture of our teams daily. Using resources such as the framework for Positive Leadership, we can strengthen our leadership, form stronger and more meaningful connections with others, and anchor our work in our strengths and our values. We are best positioned to make progress and realize extraordinary successes when we bring all this together as individual leaders, organizations and the executive community at large.

We offer you a challenge: take 2 actions to improve one of these areas shared above over the next two months. ⁶¹Once those are implemented, add two more actions and continue

⁵⁷ APEX considers Belonging+ to include 4 aspects: a sense of belonging on the part of the executive, a voice at the table, a role in decision making, and concrete investment in the executive on the part of the organization.

⁵⁸ [Beer, M. \(2021\). *To Change Your Company's Culture, Don't Start by Trying to Change the Culture*. Harvard Business School.](#)

⁵⁹ [Thirty-Third Annual Report to the Prime Minister on the Public Service of Canada, p 7.](#)

⁶⁰ [Thirty-Third Annual Report to the Prime Minister on the Public Service of Canada, p 15.](#)

⁶¹ Inspired by the “Rule of Two” from Nerurkar, A. (2024). *The 5 resets: Rewire your brain and body for less stress and more resilience*. HarperOne.

the process. This will support the creation of a stepwise and dynamic approach that will respond to what you and your teams need.

APEX welcomes the opportunity to support the executive community with additional resources and to hear about your experiences and successes. Contact us at ewhs-etscs@apex.gc.ca to continue the conversation.

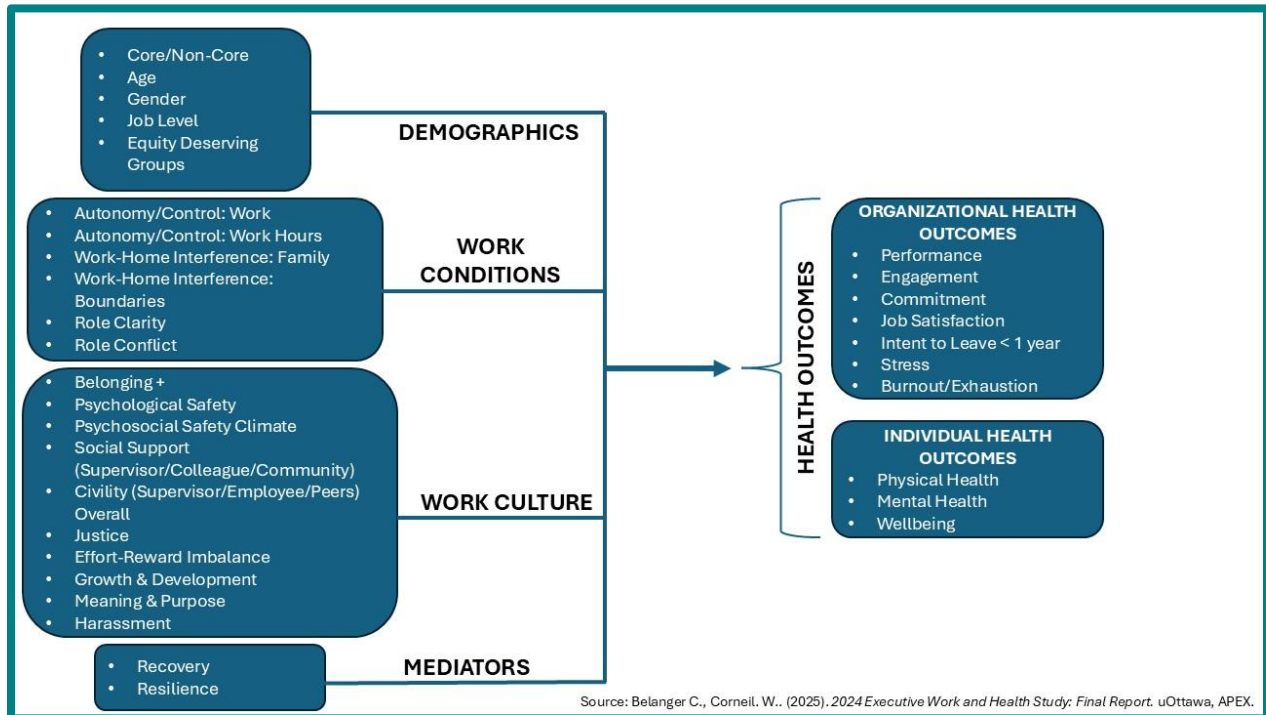
Hope is a powerful motivator; it gives followers something better to look forward to, enabling them to navigate challenges and work toward a brighter future. Without hope, people can disengage, lose confidence and become less resilient. ⁵⁵

- Gallup, World Governments Summit 2025 Global Leadership Report: What Followers Want*

* [Global Leadership Report: What Followers Want](#)

Appendices

Appendix A: 2024 Executive Work and Health Study Model: Main Components and Outcomes



Appendix B: 2024 Executive Work and Health Study Methodology⁶³

Overview

The 2024 EWHS is based on a model of executive work and health derived from a synthesis of scientific literature, including the core elements of individual and organizational health. The 2024 EWHS model's main input is executives' organizational environment and has expanded to include the more recent factors from the most current literature reviewed.

The organizational environment is characterized by components including work conditions (workload, control, work hours) work culture (psychological safety, civility, harassment, effort, and rewards). Each component's impact is affected by social moderators, including social support from supervisors and colleagues and inclusion.

The model also includes the mediation effects of recovery time and resilience. The downstream outcomes include individual health, physical and mental well-being, and organizational health outcomes. Over the past 27 years, various components and relationships making up the model have been tested and validated with the APEX data from multiple cycles.

Since the work of Karasek and Theorell (1990)⁶⁴, workload and control are central to organizational health epidemiology. Additional research has shown that workplace social support has a strong moderating or protective effect decreasing the relative risk of illnesses arising from these factors. Management practices, organizational structures and work processes are all created or designed social environments.

The executive leadership in an organization both creates and maintains these structures, and it has been argued that the health of senior executives impacts not only on their wellbeing, but also the health of the entire organization (Quick et al. 2000)⁶⁵.

The core of the EWHS is based on the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) and the American Psychological Association (APA) Work-Stress model. This model combines the Job Demands – Control – Social Support (JDSS) with the Effort Reward – Imbalance (ERI) frameworks.

⁶³ Belanger C., Corneil. W.. (2025). *2024 Executive Work and Health Study: Final Report*. uOttawa, APEX.

⁶⁴ Karasek, R., and T. Theorell. 1990. *Healthy Work: Stress, Productivity, and the Reconstruction of Working Life*. New York: Basic Books.

⁶⁵ Quick, James Campbell, Joanne H. Gavin, Cary L. Cooper, and Jonathan D. Quick. 2000. "Executive Health: Building Strength, Managing Risks." *Academy of Management Perspectives* 14 (2): 34–44. <https://doi.org/10.5465/ame.2000.3819304>.

These frameworks suggest that too much demand coupled with too little job control, and too much effort coupled with too little reward, are stressors that contribute to many negative individual and organizational outcomes. The theoretical and empirical development of the original EWHs 2002 instrument has been fully documented and validated (Hurrell et. al. 1998)⁶⁶.

The Study was built on the foundation of two well-known models:

1. Demand – Control – Social Support (Karasek and Theorell)⁶⁷
 - People experiencing high demands in conjunction with low control are more likely than others to experience poor health outcomes.
 - When these factors are present in workplaces characterized by low social support from supervisors and co-workers, the effects are exacerbated.
2. Effort – Reward (Siegrist)⁶⁸
 - Balance between what is being invested by the worker, and the benefits gained, whether they may be material or abstract.
 - People who get little reward in return for high levels of effort experience more health problems than others.

The essence of these models is the empirically verified proposition that too much demand coupled with too little job control, and too much effort coupled with too little reward, are stressors complicit in the production of numerous types of negative individual and organizational outcomes.

Scale and Score Computation

Concepts were operationalized using multi-item measures drawn from the existing research literature on work and health. A sound psychometric approach requires individual items to be grouped into the various sub-scales contained in each instrument, assessing their internal consistency. A total score, based on the appropriate sub-scale, was calculated for each investigated factor. Where sub-scale scores could be combined for an overall score, these were calculated as well. Certain analyses used the mean value for comparing groups; others (e.g., logistic regression) required creating groupings of the appropriate constructs using

⁶⁶ Hurrell, J.J., and M.A. McLaney. 1988. "Exposure to Job Stress—a New Psychometric Instrument." *Scandinavian Journal of Work, Environment & Health* 14 Suppl 1: 27–28.

⁶⁷ Karasek, R., and T. Theorell. 1990. *Healthy Work: Stress, Productivity, and the Reconstruction of Working Life*. New York: Basic Books.

⁶⁸ Siegrist et al. (Biological and Psychological Factors in Cardiovascular Disease, Springer, Berlin, 1986, pp. 104–126; *Social Science & Medicine* 22 (1986) 247)

various methods to divide scores into two or three groups according to thresholds or published norms.

Tested factors were operationalized using multi-item measures drawn from the existing research literature on work and health. Standard methodology was used to determine the number of missing items and if these exceeded acceptable norms, the respondent was dropped from the sample.

Several alternate methods were used to divide scores into two or three groups. The overall scores were first calculated using the summed average of scale items. In some instances, population norms were used to divide the sample into either two or three groups (high scores, moderate scores or low scores on the variable of interest) in line with standard research practice.

In other instances, level of exposure was determined by dichotomizing at the mean or median to create high/low score groupings. Respondents scoring above the mean or median were deemed exposed whereas those below the mean or median were considered unexposed. Lastly, high, medium and low score groupings (or dichotomies) were created using published scale reference levels.

Appendix C: Resources List

- **New Economy Skills: Unlocking the Human Advantage 2025 | World Economic Forum**
- **Workplace Strategies for Mental Health:** guide for building trust.
- Brené Brown, **Strong Ground**, Chapter 7, Trust Framework
- What People Get Wrong About Psychological Safety, Amy C Edmondson and Michaela Kerrissey, **Harvard Business Review**, May-June 2025 Magazine Edition
- What Most Leaders Get Wrong About Psychological Safety | SUCCESS
- **Workplace Strategies for Mental Health:** What is the Psychologically Safe Leader Assessment?
- **Workplace Strategies for Mental Health - Psychologically Safe Leader:** Psychologically Safe Leader Assessment and the Psychologically Safe Team Assessment
- **APEX** Toolkit on Positive Leadership
- ***Thanks For The Feedback – The Science And Art Of Receiving Feedback Well*** BY Douglas Stone, Sheila Heen
- **Workplace Strategies for Mental Health:** Facilitation guide for **providing negative feedback**
- **Workplace Strategies for Mental Health:** Resources on **recognition strategies**
- **Workplace Strategies for Mental Health:** Resources for Recognition - A team discussion
- The 5 Resets: Rewire Your Brain and Body for Less Stress and More Resilience by Aditi Nerurkar, (Paperback) | Indigo
- The Fearless Organization: Creating Psychological Safety in the Workplace for Learning, Innovation, and Growth by Amy C. Edmondson, (Paperback) | Indigo