

All-Island Research Culture Network Conference  
Belfast, May 13 2025

# Measuring research culture — getting to the heart of the people matters

Geraldine Fitzpatrick

[geri@geraldinefitzpatrick.com](mailto:geri@geraldinefitzpatrick.com)

<https://geraldinefitzpatrick.com>



Geraldine Fitzpatrick  
Developing People & Culture



# Counting 'culture' outputs

Attendance at courses

EDI measures

Inclusion initiatives

No bullying & harassment complaints

Career development roles

Open research practices

Research integrity

Cross-disciplinary collaborations

Mentor roles



# Experiencing 'culture' via everyday interactions

The background image shows two roosters in a grassy field. On the left is a brown rooster with a red comb, and on the right is a white rooster with a large, upright crest. They are standing on a patch of grass and dirt. The roosters are used as a metaphor for the academic culture being discussed in the text boxes.

Micromanagement

Sets up competition between students

Hyper-critical

Pressure to publish

Inconsistent

Can Germany rein in its  
academic bullying problem?

6 May 2025

<https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-025-01207-8>

Plays favourites

Yells at people ...

PhD students and post-docs

Stress leave

Burnt-out

Demands presence in the office  
Availability at all hours

Afraid to formally complain  
as funding tied to the Prof



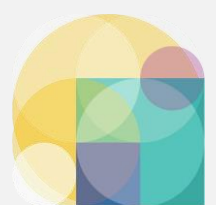
# Culture is more than policy statements and outputs

---

“Cultures are not set by policy statements or ...leaflet,  
but through the **people** with whom **we** meet in  
thousands of **seemingly insignificant interactions**  
on perfectly **ordinary days**.”

We should **all** ask ourselves whether **we display** the characteristics  
that we **value** and **want to see** ...” [[Professor Tom Welton OBE](#) Royal Society Report 2018]

--- People matters are at the heart of culture ---



# Research culture award nomination themes

## Features of a good research culture: [Norman & Bradley 2024]

Teamwork/collegiality

Expertise

Good listening skills

Role modelling

## Themes across nominations: [Danish Young Academy Research Environment Prize]

Belonging

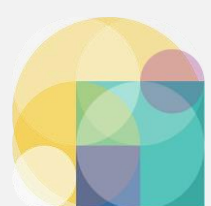
Collaboration

Focus on long-term development

Open communication

Psychological safety

Promoting mental health



Geraldine Fitzpatrick  
Developing People & Culture

## Key Features of a Positive Research Culture: A qualitative analysis of award nominations

Rachel Norman<sup>1</sup>, Claire Bradley<sup>2</sup>

University of Stirling, Stirling, UK

Correspondence: <sup>1</sup>[rachel.norman@stir.ac.uk](mailto:rachel.norman@stir.ac.uk), <sup>2</sup>[claire.bradley@stir.ac.uk](mailto:claire.bradley@stir.ac.uk)

### Abstract

*The Research Culture Awards were introduced as a way of celebrating people and groups who positively contribute towards enhancing the research environment at the University of Stirling. Colleagues can be nominated anonymously across multiple categories (including leadership, collaboration, mentoring), with nominees receiving their full nomination feedback: both this aspect, and the celebratory awards ceremony, seek to recognise the often-hidden contributions and efforts and create a shared understanding of what good research culture looks like for Stirling. First introduced in 2020, the awards have been held annually and have grown in popularity year on year. Exploring these nominations has allowed for an analysis of the key features of a positive research culture from a person-centric perspective, as felt at local level. The analysis was carried out using a manual frequency analysis of related words and phrases. The overarching results showed that teamwork/collegiality; sharing expertise; good role modelling and good listening skills were the attributes which were most appreciated in colleagues.*

**Keywords:** research environment; recognition; soft skills; hidden contributions, research culture at local level

<https://doi.org/10.31273/eirj.v11i3.1531>

[Norman & Bradley, Exchanges 2024 11\(3\), pp. 39-47](#)

## Creating better research cultures together



### Creating better research cultures together

Episode 4 • 16th October 2024 • Changing Academic Life • Geraldine Fitzpatrick



[NOTES](#) [TRANSCRIPT](#) [LINKS](#)

Podcast: <https://changingacademiclife.captivate.fm/episode/better-research-cultures>



A photograph of several chickens in a grassy field. In the foreground, a white chicken with a red comb stands on the left, looking towards the camera. To its right, a brown chicken is partially visible. In the background, another white chicken is lying down, and a brown chicken is standing on the right, looking down. The ground is covered in green grass with some scattered white debris.

Challenge: How can our measures capture & promote good people practices?

Draw from culture  
& positive organizational  
psychology (POP, PP), org  
research?

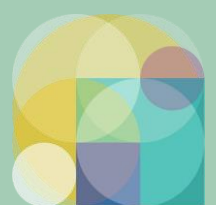
People matters are the heart

Research and culture is fundamentally human and social



# Unpacking culture

It matters how we conceptualise culture



# Unpacking culture – culture research lens

ME



Emotional culture

How we feel at work  
- emotions & **feelings**

Lived experience of values

[Sigale Barsade, Mandy O'Neill]

WE



Relational culture

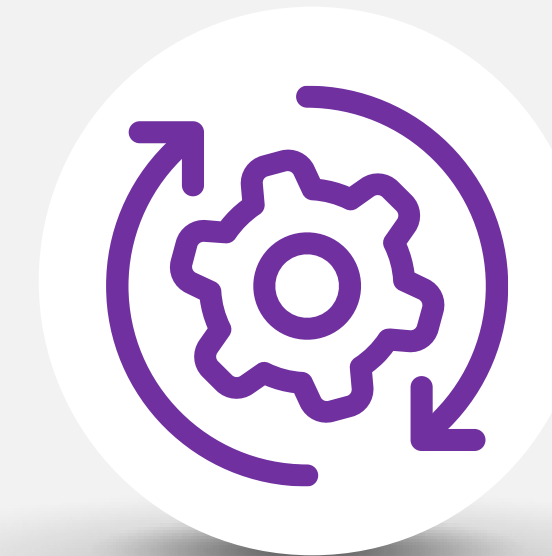
Growth-fostering **relationships**; Safe  
to speak up, be a learner

Collaboration, empathy, respect

Role of leaders - value & empower;  
culture of care; role model

[Jean Baker Miller,; Amy Edmondson; many others]

US



Cognitive culture~

The **stated** intellectual values,  
norms, artifacts, assumptions  
for how to think and behave  
at work

Policies, processes, systems...

[Sigal Barsade]



# Unpacking culture – positive (organisational) psychology lens

ME



Small daily practices that impact wellbeing

Positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, health and vitality

WE



Collegial supportive relationships

Psychologically safe  
Development/growth focused  
Leaders who express care, compassion, appreciation

US



Safe and healthy environments

Supportive policies, processes, systems...  
Underpinned by shared values



# Inspiration for re-thinking ‘measuring’ research culture?

	Me	We	Us
Redesigned system -collab, open, MD, creativity			
Dissemination & public good			
Research & recognition			
People & careers			

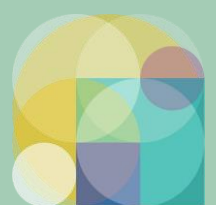


For each cell:  
What do we want to promote  
How can we ‘measure’ it?



# Measuring culture

From outward compliance to real people change?





# Engaging with complex social systems and programmes

**Issue:** Post-positivist measures of 'outputs' – easier to 'count', track compliance BUT...

**Challenge:** How to understand the 'heart' of culture & engage with complex change?



Person-centred

Empower 'who'

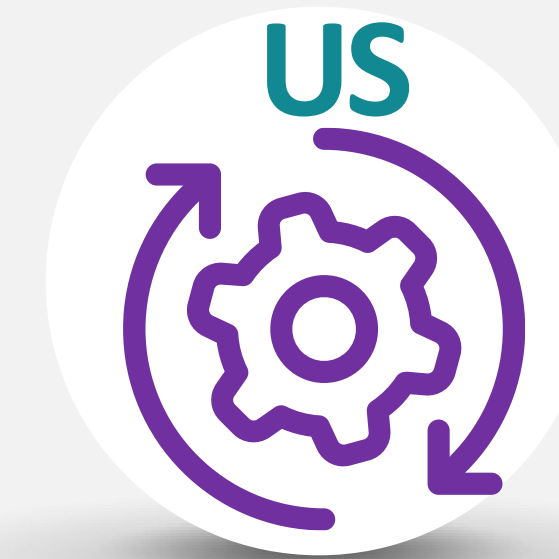
**Practices** around wellbeing,  
personal choices, etc



People-centred

Help 'how'

Experience of / prevalence of  
collegial **behaviours**  
Colleagues, collaborators;  
Important role of leaders



'Excellence' centred

Create (for) 'whats'

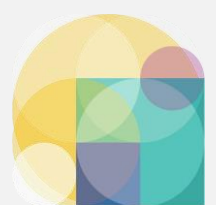
Environment,  
processes, systems,  
to enable **outputs**



# Example approaches - for complex social systems and programmes

Mixed methods – various at me, we us levels, and for ‘programme’ stage e.g.

- Realist Evaluation:  
Unpacking context, mechanisms, outcomes (e.g., used often in the health/policy sectors)  
*“what works, for whom, under what circumstances and how”* [Pawson and Tilley, 1997]
- Behaviour change/habit formation – whole systems view:  
From awareness to changed behaviours/experiences that enact culture
- Theory/Model based:  
Various from POP, PP, social-emotional skills, org research etc
- And many more...

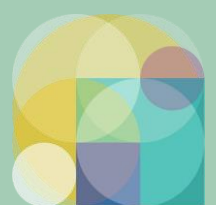




# Example: Australia WHS psychosocial safety laws

What could a version of this look like for 'measuring' research cultures?

<https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/system/files/documents/1705/psychosocial-safety-climate-and-better-productivity-in-australian-workplaces-nov-2016.pdf>





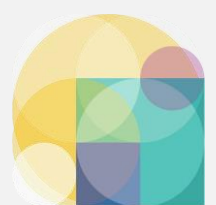
# Psychosocial hazards in the workplace

[p5] <https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/doc/model-code-practice-managing-psychosocial-hazards-work>



Psychosocial hazards that may arise at work

- Job demands
- Low job control
- Poor support
- Lack of role clarity
- Poor organisational change management
- Inadequate reward and recognition
- Poor organisational justice
- Traumatic events or material
- Remote or isolated work
- Poor physical environment
- Violence and aggression
- Bullying
- Harassment including sexual harassment
- Conflict or poor workplace relationships and interactions





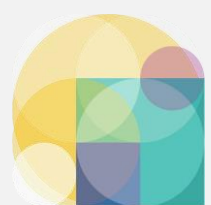
# Example reports: How to measure



[https://www.ahri.com.au/wp-content/uploads/wellbeinglab\\_workplace\\_report\\_australia\\_2019-2021.pdf](https://www.ahri.com.au/wp-content/uploads/wellbeinglab_workplace_report_australia_2019-2021.pdf)



[https://www.ahri.com.au/wp-content/uploads/mmcq\\_wellbeinglab\\_workplacesurvey2020.pdf](https://www.ahri.com.au/wp-content/uploads/mmcq_wellbeinglab_workplacesurvey2020.pdf)



Geraldine Fitzpatrick  
Developing People & Culture



# Example reports: Measures

Theory/Model based – Examples from POP/PP/org research

**PERMA(H)** [Seligmann et al, various]

Positive emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, Accomplishment, Health

**Self Determination Theory** [Deci & Ryan, various]

Autonomy, Relatedness, Competence

**Job-Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model**

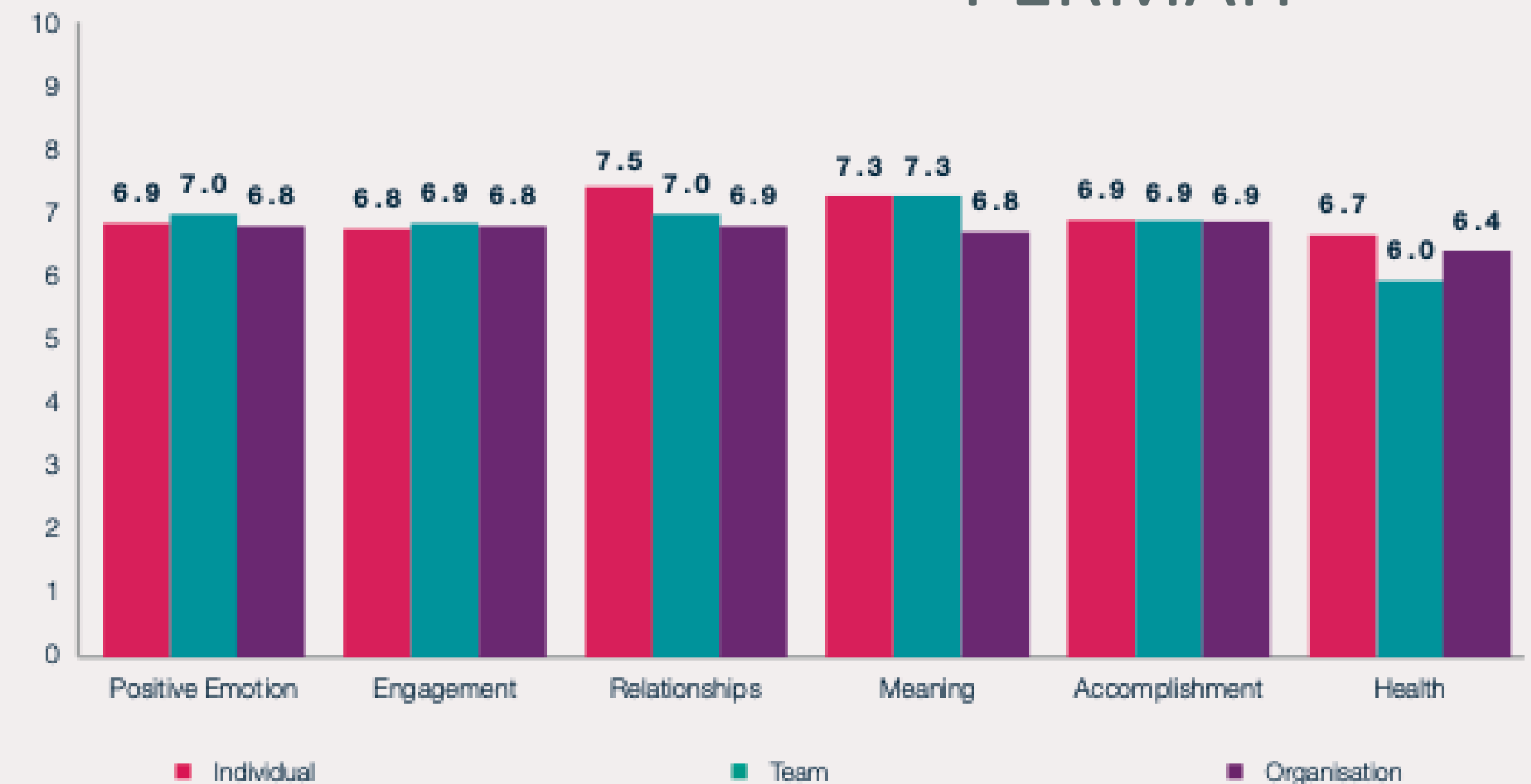
[Bakker & Demerouti, various]

**Psychological Safety** [Edmondson, various]

Etc

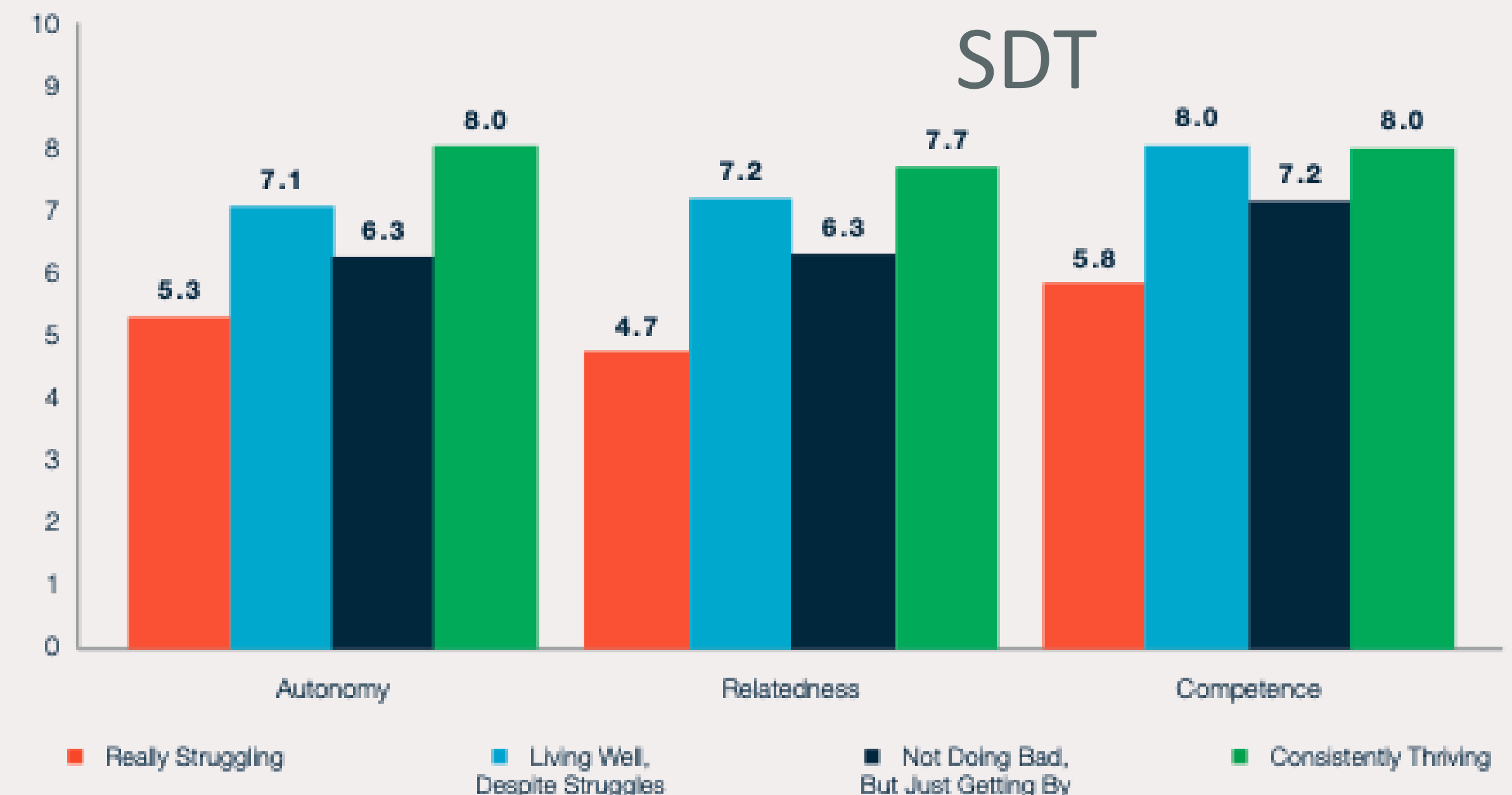
COLLECTIVE PERMAH WELLBEING FACTORS BY MEANS

PERMAH



WORKPLACE SELF-DETERMINATION WELLBEING NUTRIENTS MEANS BY STATE OF WELLBEING

SDT

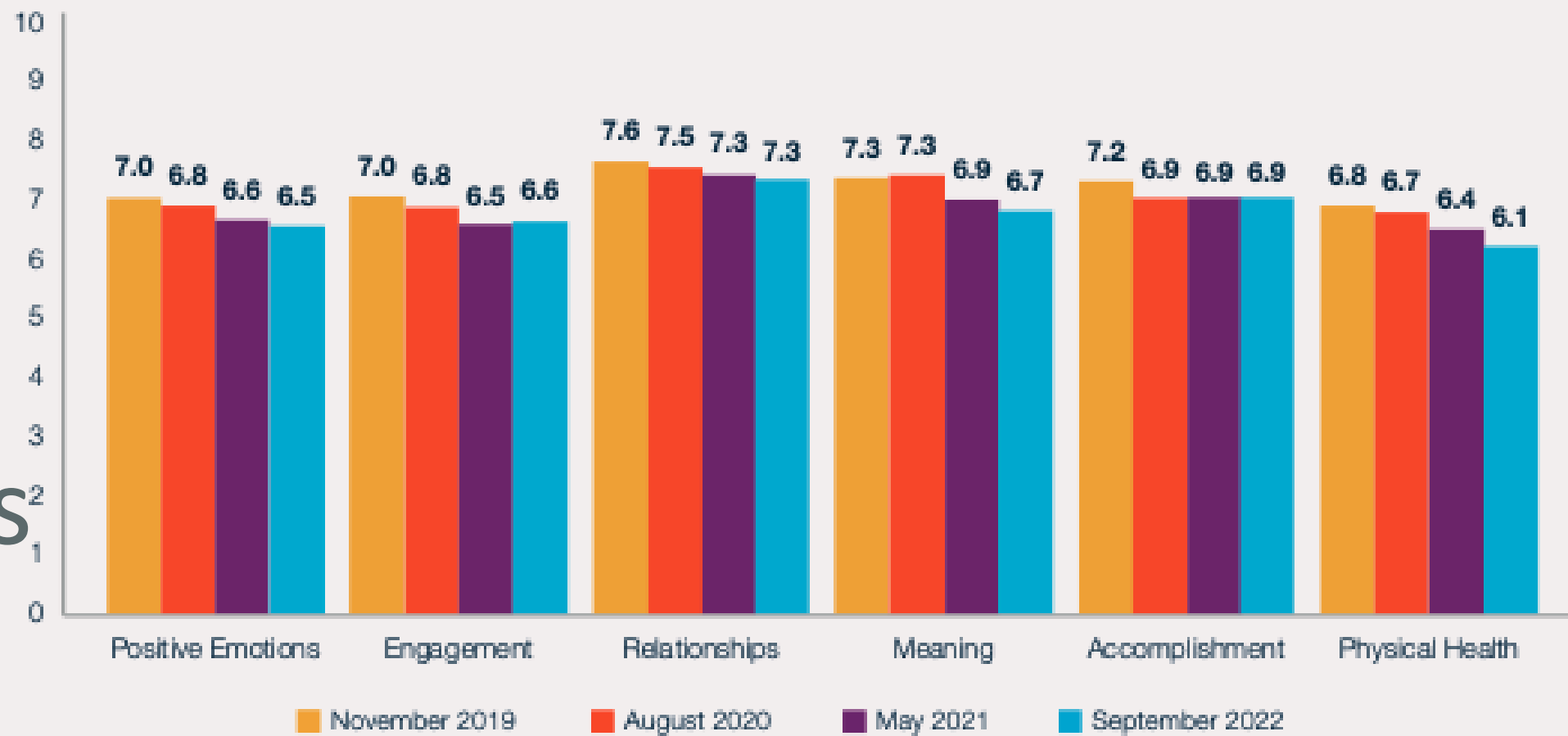




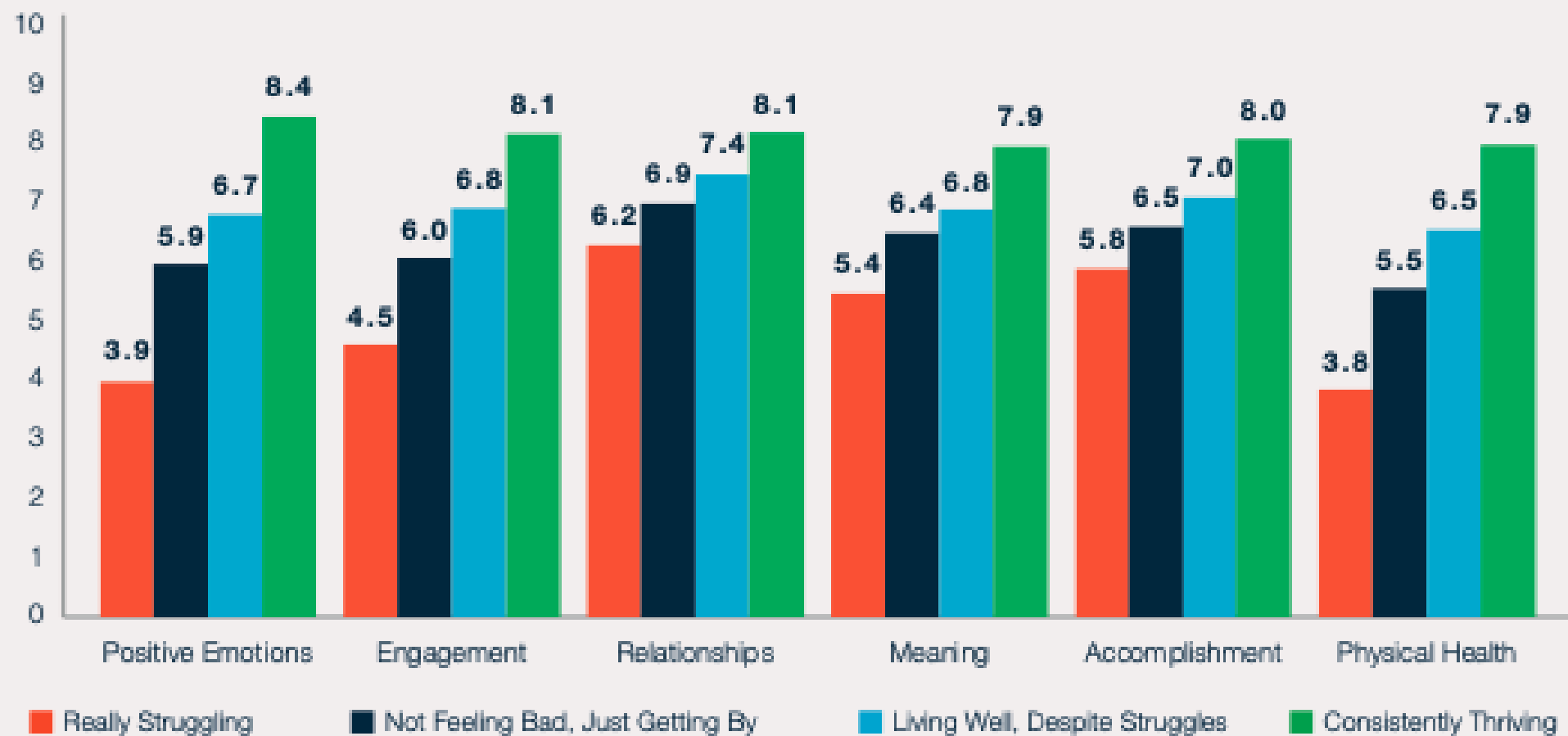
# Example reports: Measures - PERMAH

ME  
Across  
time

2019 – 2022 PERMAH INDIVIDUAL WORKER WELLBEING FACTORS (MEANS)

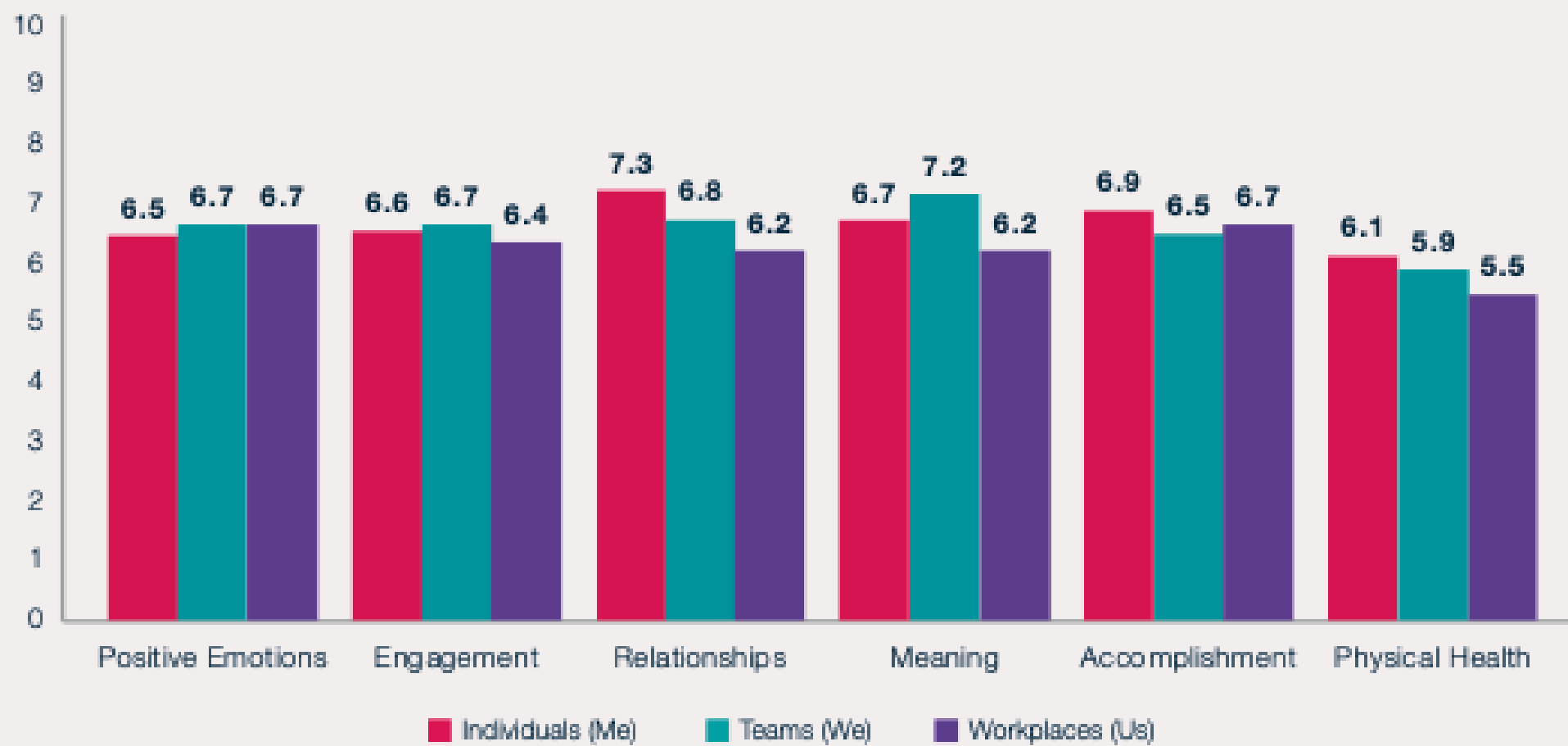


2022 STATE OF WELLBEING BY PERMAH WELLBEING FACTORS (MEANS)



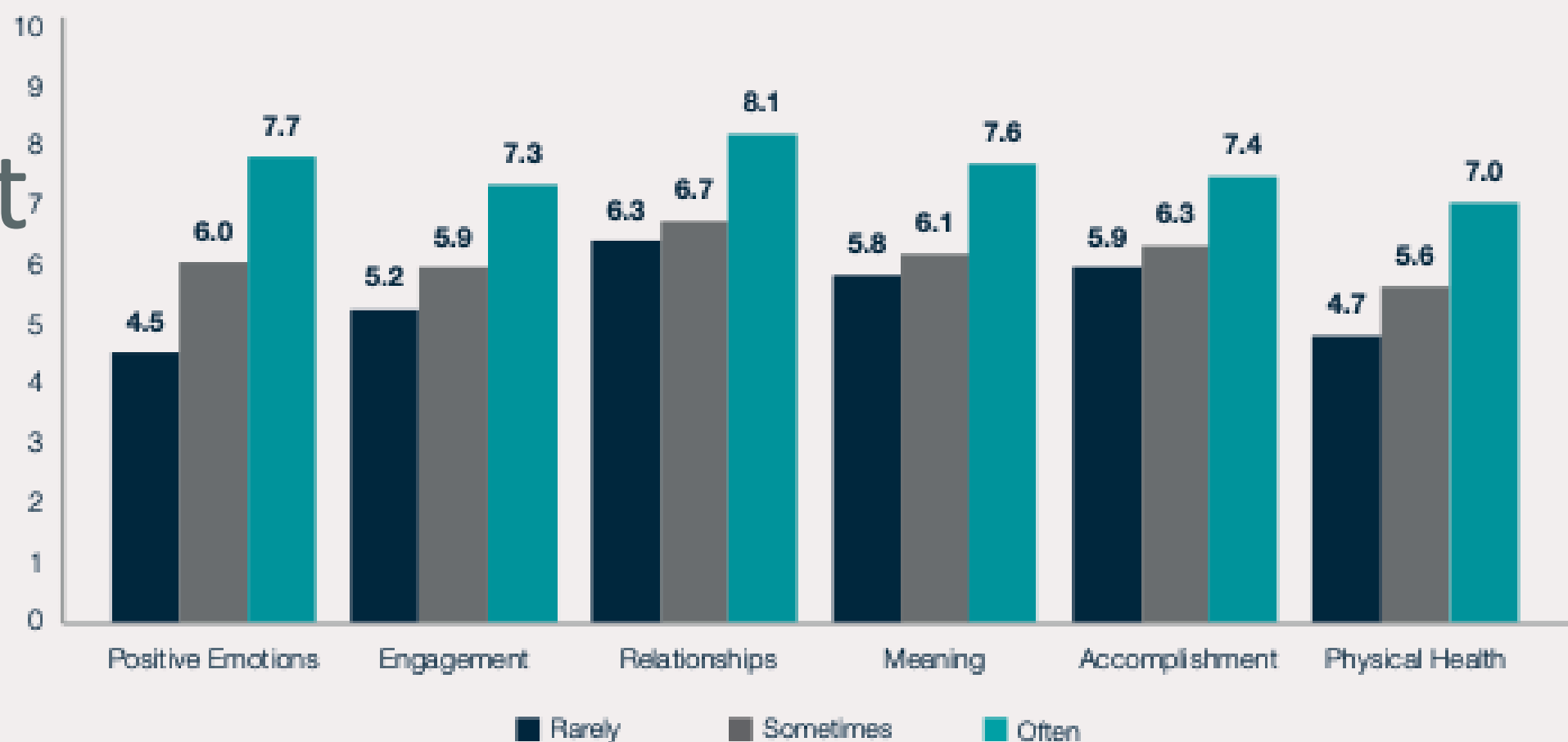
ME  
WE  
US

2022 INDIVIDUAL, TEAM, WORKPLACE PERMAH WELLBEING FACTORS (MEANS)



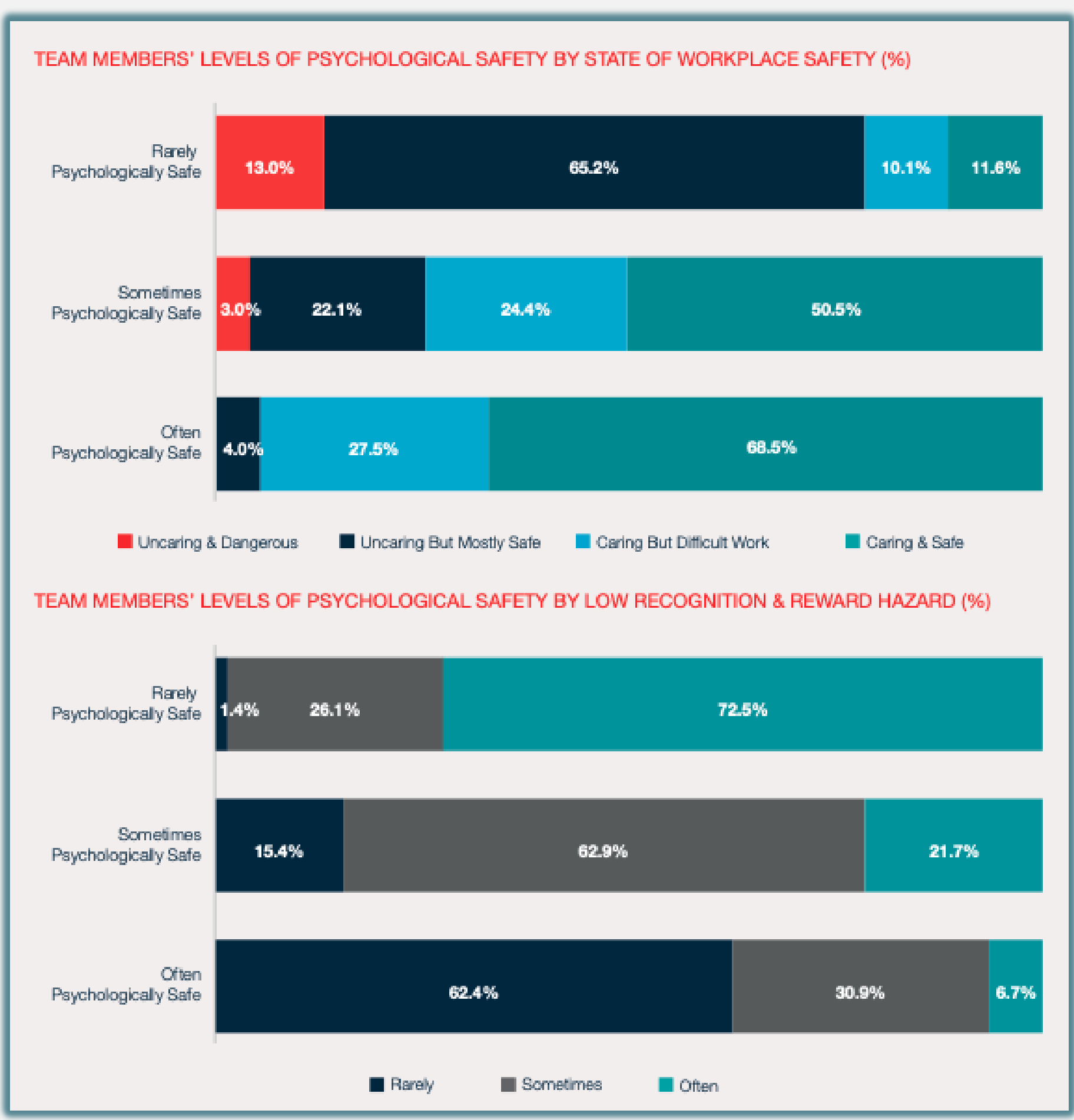
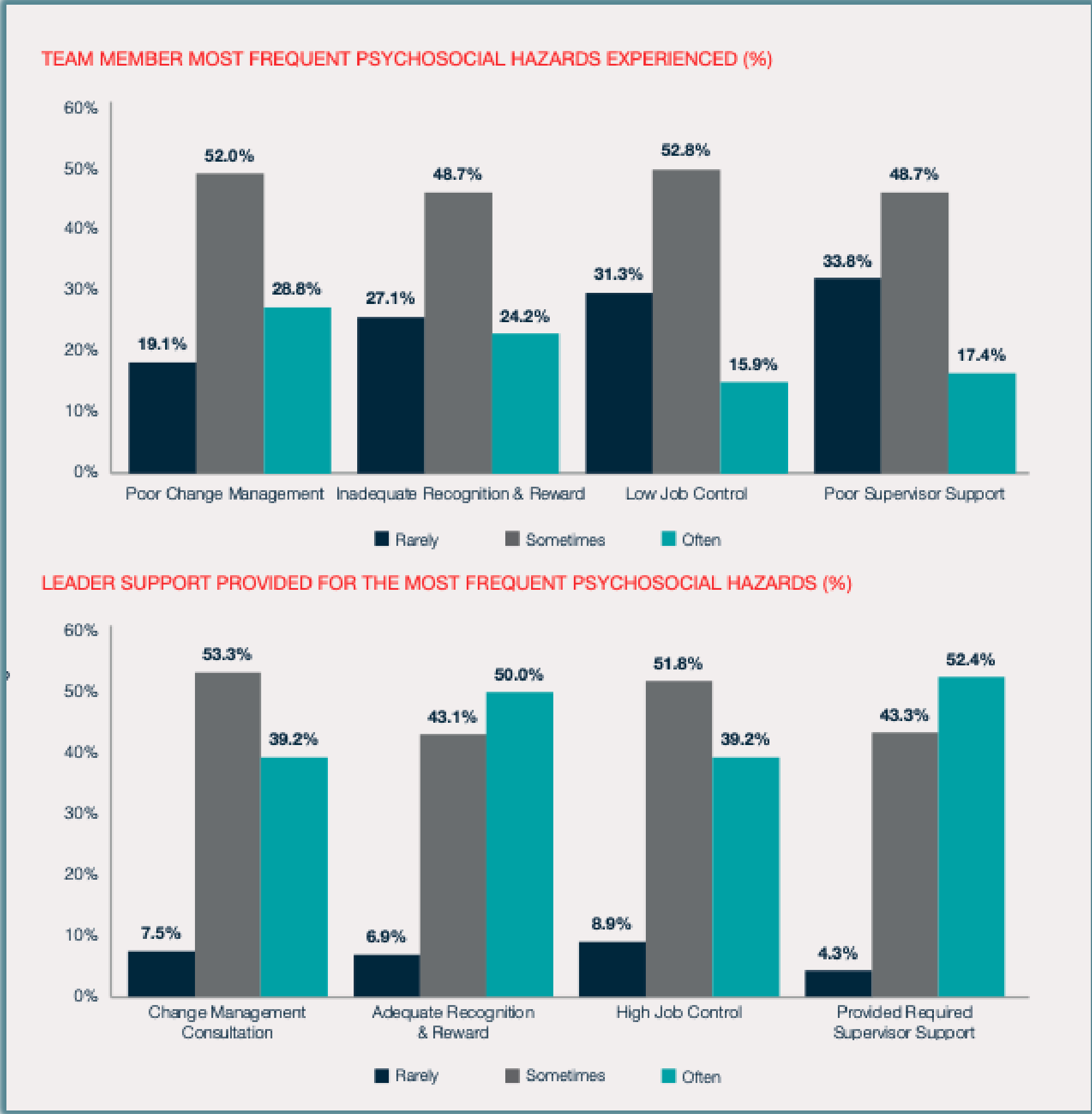
Leader  
support

2022 LEVEL OF DIRECT SUPERVISOR SUPPORT BY PERMAH (MEANS)





# Example reports: Measures

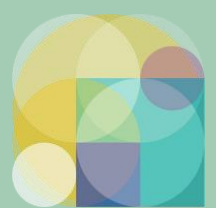


Change mgmt., Reward/recognition,  
Job control, Supervisor support

Psychological safety



# Final reflections





# Inspiration for re-thinking 'measuring' research culture?

What we measure matters – important signal of what/who matters

How to balance people-centred and excellence-centred aspects?

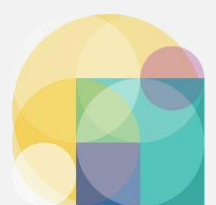
How can our measures capture & promote the good people practices that create the excellence?

What to consider at each of 'me, we, us' levels?

How to encourage the behaviours we want to see at all these levels?  
For people 'inputs' and excellence 'outputs'?

Put people first – create great environments for doing great work

*Care for the people and they will care for the research*





A photograph of four chickens in a grassy field. On the left, a white chicken with a red comb stands facing left. In the center, a brown chicken with a red comb stands facing left. To its right, another white chicken is partially visible. On the far right, a brown chicken with a red comb is seen from the side, facing right. The ground is covered in green grass with some dry leaves and small white debris.

Research and culture is fundamentally human and social

People matters are the heart

Improving people's lives will improve research excellence

How can our measures capture & promote the good people practices that create the excellence?