

WELL-BEING AT WORK

**FOSTERING A HEALTHY WORK
CLIMATE FOR ALL**

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SUMMARY

Many organizations have launched new efforts to address employee well-being, yet there are many factors and perceptions surrounding this topic. In this research brief, we note that many successful organizations have created a positive well-being climate. While individual employee needs may vary, fostering a healthy climate can make a significant impact. With a focus on the well-being climate in the U.S., our study highlights the rise and decline of employee well-being over the past five years along with demographic differences based on race, gender, and age. We find meaningful differences by industry and type of work, which suggests that employers may need to consider the unique context of the work climate and culture. We find several linkages with the climate of well-being that suggest that a more nuanced approach may be needed to address all population groups in the workforce. Based on the results of this analysis, we outline suggested management action steps to foster a healthy work climate for all.



CONTEXT OF WELL-BEING

In the years before the COVID-19 pandemic, attention to employee well-being was gaining traction in organizations around the world. Many employers have been focused on the health and well-being of their workforce with various programs and incentives over the past two decades (Grawitch, Gottschalk, & Munz, 2006). Following the stressful period of the pandemic, employers quickly recognized a dramatic shift and the need to support employee well-being and mental health.

Today, employee well-being is a top priority for human resource managers in organizations of all types. McKinsey's Health Institute's global report, studying workforce well-being across 30 countries, found that 22 percent of employees are experiencing burnout (Brassey, et al, 2023). Other research reports suggest that up to 35 percent of the workforce is experiencing concern about mental health or well-being. *The Economist* recently reported on Britain's mental health crisis, citing a rapid rise in mental health care demand along with prescription drug use (2023).

While there has been an ongoing campaign to reduce the stigma surrounding mental health and increase access to mental health services, the challenge has been growing. Between 2019 and 2022, the use of mental health services increased by almost 40%. Meanwhile, almost a third of Americans reported symptoms of anxiety and depression (Ducharme, 2023). The simultaneous increase in the use of services and decline in mental well-being suggests that part of the solution lies beyond the health care system.

The workplace has been identified as a key component in improving well-being. In 2022, U.S. Surgeon General Vivek Murthy identified the most pressing public health issues; workplace well-being was one of them. Workers are faced with

daily stressors, such as heavy workloads, long commutes, and toxic work cultures (Office of the Surgeon General, 2022). Most recently, workers have also been faced with uncertainty. The nature of work is rapidly changing, and workers are fearful of these changes and the possibility of displacement (Kellerman & Seligman, 2023). These stressors not only affect the well-being of workers but also their productivity and performance (Office of the Surgeon General, 2022).

In response to the well-being crisis among workers, a variety of programs and policies have been suggested. Workplaces have been encouraged to cover telemedicine for mental health support and offer time off for mental health reasons (Conway, 2023). In some countries, the concept of the four-day workweek has caught the attention of workers and bosses as a way to help address burnout. Additionally, unlimited vacation, shorter workweeks, and flexible work arrangements have been suggested as ways to improve work-life balance (Fonseca, 2023). While new programs are being introduced in many workplaces, it is often unclear which interventions have a positive impact and how employers might create a climate of well-being in their organization.



EMPLOYEE WELL-BEING

Once relegated to sporadic seminars and occasional office bulletins, the discourse surrounding well-being and mental health in the workplace has surged in recent years, with substantial interest in the topic among organizational leaders. Research exploring the link between employee well-being and performance has provided leaders with reasons to explore how maximizing these once-overlooked factors may be central to increasing productivity, engagement, and organizational success.

Historically, well-being and mental health support in the workplace were considered a personal issue that was channeled on a reactive basis to Employee Assistance Programs (EAP). This is akin to only providing workers with compensation when they are injured at work rather than working to ensure a safe work environment. **The good news is that many organizations are now taking a proactive view of well-being and mental health** as many organizations now recognize that well-being in the workplace starts with the work environment!

Proactively addressing employee well-being makes good business sense. Poor mental and physical health in a workforce can erode profits through higher turnover, decreased engagement, reduced customer service, and increased health care costs. Yet, equally important to the potential ROI of well-being programs are employee perceptions of these programs, which can only be effective to the extent that workers embrace them. Workplace climate must provide the foundation for initiatives and programs related to well-being since the success of these programs is dependent on the strength of workplace practices and norms.

ABOUT THIS RESEARCH

The Johns Hopkins University Human Capital Development Lab, in partnership with Great Place To Work® continues to track trends related to well-being, organization culture, and human capital factors around the world. In this report, we take aim at uncovering unique insights to advance our understanding of organizational climate factors that influence employee well-being.

This report builds on our prior research with a deeper focus on the United States over the last several years and leverages Great Place To Work® flagship data, gathered using a proprietary employee survey. The Trust Index™ Survey is administered to over 2,500 organizations and over 1.5 million survey respondents each year in the U.S. In this study, we analyze various organizational and individual factors that may be linked to the climate of employee well-being. Given the heightened awareness of well-being and mental health since the COVID-19 pandemic, we examine the trends and patterns related to well-being between individual demographic groups as well as organizations and industries over the last five years.



A CLIMATE OF WELL-BEING

A positive workplace climate for well-being has been identified as a significant factor associated with engagement and work outcomes. Research from a longitudinal study on workplace climate suggests that a positive work climate is linked to lower odds of diagnosed depression, increased overall well-being, mental health, physical health, social connectedness, and financial security (Weziak-Bialowolska, et. al., 2023). Moreover, researchers indicate that a positive climate can decrease distraction at work and increase productivity, potentially contributing to enhanced job satisfaction (Dollard & Bailey, 2021). These findings underscore the importance of fostering a positive organizational climate, which could be achieved through various initiatives aimed at building trust, recognition, and supportive relationships among employees. Such interventions not only benefit employee health and well-being but also contribute to improved work-related outcomes, aligning with the principles of humanistic management and ethical caring in the workplace.

Providing an organizational climate of well-being may sound like a relatively straightforward practice to implement, yet this involves several facets of work that are not easily controlled or manipulated in the short term. A climate of well-being is closely anchored to organizational culture, management practices, and HR processes since it relates to how a member of the workforce experiences their life at work.

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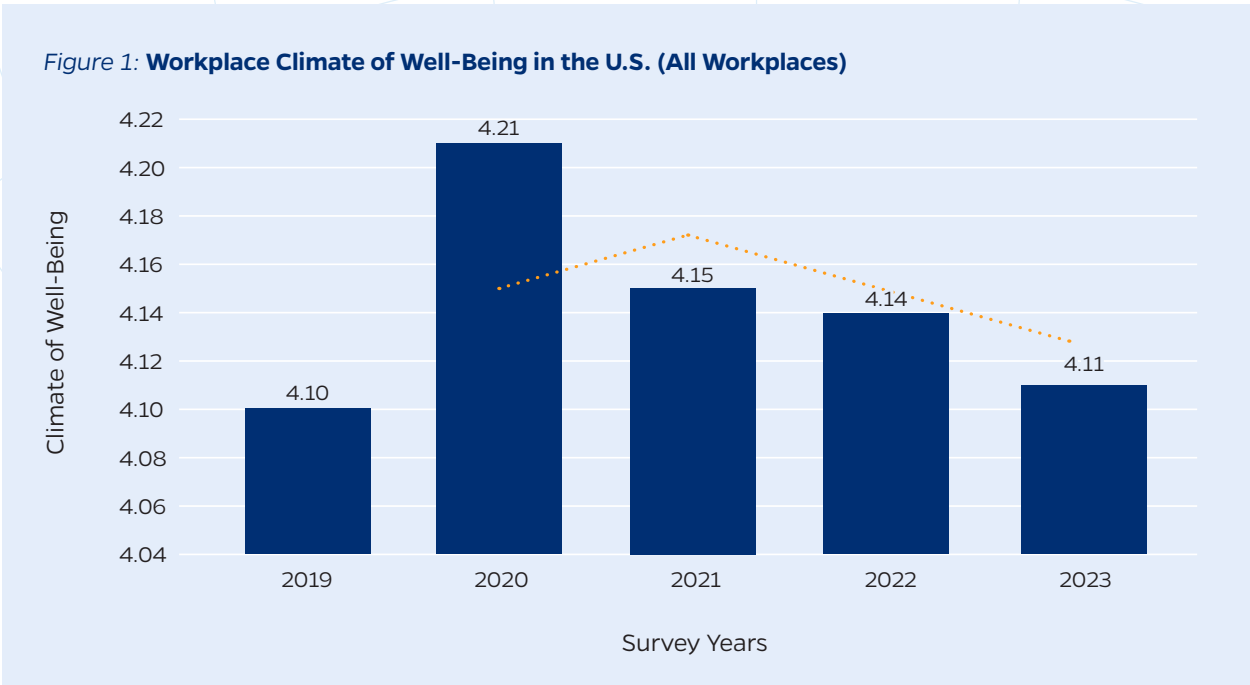


In our study, we measure several key dimensions that have been shown to contribute to a climate of well-being. These include:

- Mental and emotional support—when employees sense that they have the mental support of others, they are more likely to have a positive or optimistic attribution, which can build energy, hope, and confidence.
- Sense of purpose—when employees have a sense of meaning, progress, and fulfillment through their activities at work, they are more likely to have higher resilience and a positive view of their employer.
- Personal support—when employees have support from their manager regarding their unique personal situation, priorities, goals, and interests, they are more likely to have positive engagement and commitment to the employer.
- Financial health—when employees have adequate financial means to feel stable and there is equity in the compensation (and promotion) practices, they can avoid anxiety and fear.
- Meaningful connections—when employees are able to develop social relationships with others at work, they are more likely to feel a sense of teamwork and belonging, which can enhance the employment experience.

It is important to note that the actual well-being of an individual requires a precise method of targeted questions. To provide an indicator at scale, we use factors to measure the organizational climate that promotes positive employee well-being. This approach is supported by other research studies seeking to measure the climate of well-

being and thriving of individuals in the context of organizations (Su, Tay, Diener, 2014). We examine the climate of well-being in the U.S. over the last five years, which provides unique insight into the changes during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond. The climate of well-being over time is shown in Figure 1.

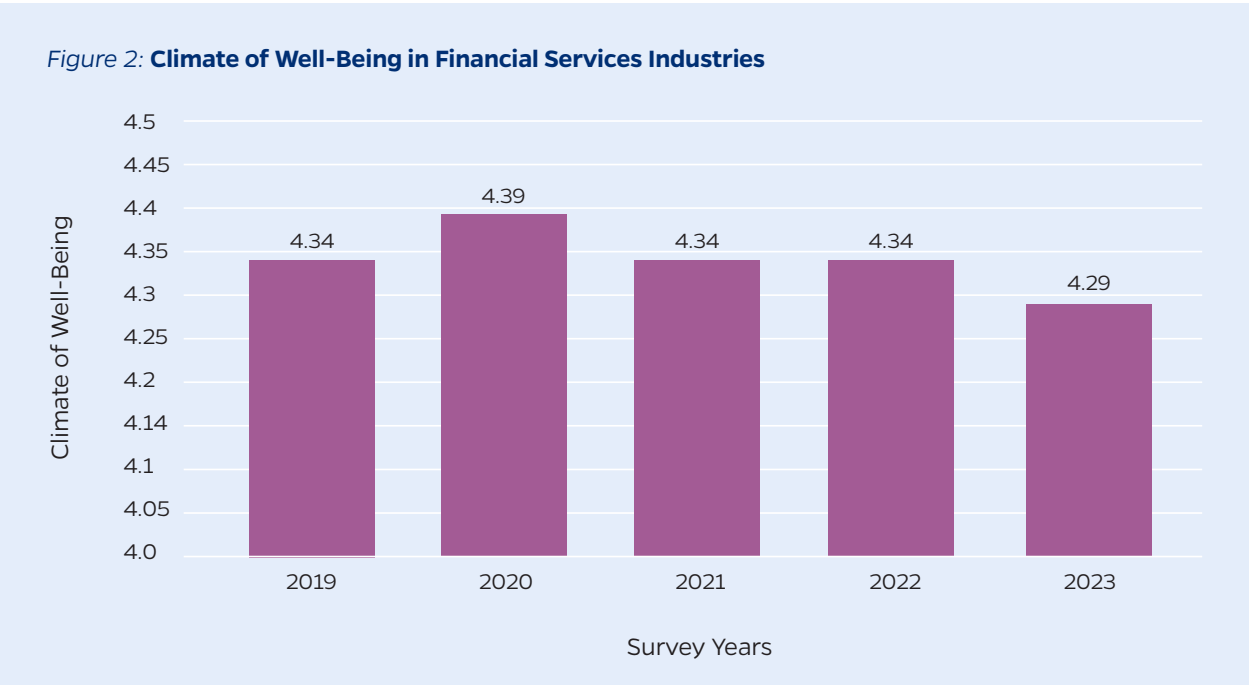


During the COVID-19 pandemic, various facets of employee well-being were adversely affected, including job security, mental health, and work-life balance. However, our research shows what many people experienced in the first year of the pandemic—employers rising up to address the global crisis—which created a temporary spike in employee well-being during this period. As workplaces transition back to pre-pandemic norms and more employees return to physical office spaces, well-being trends have regressed from their peak levels observed during the pandemic. In this report, we examine the factors that influence the climate of well-being as well as the impact on various sectors of the workforce.

CLIMATE OF WELL-BEING BY INDUSTRY

Due to the natural differences between major industry types, we note several variations in overall scores related to well-being. These differences are especially pronounced through the COVID-19 pandemic in those industries that rely on human-to-human interactions such as retail services and health care. Prior research studies have shown significant differences by industry when it comes to mental health and employee well-being. Analysis by The Standard, an insurance firm, showed higher mental distress in industries related to education and health care. They also noted that those industries that consist of manual labor or direct service roles are more likely to have workers with mental distress (Standard, 2020).

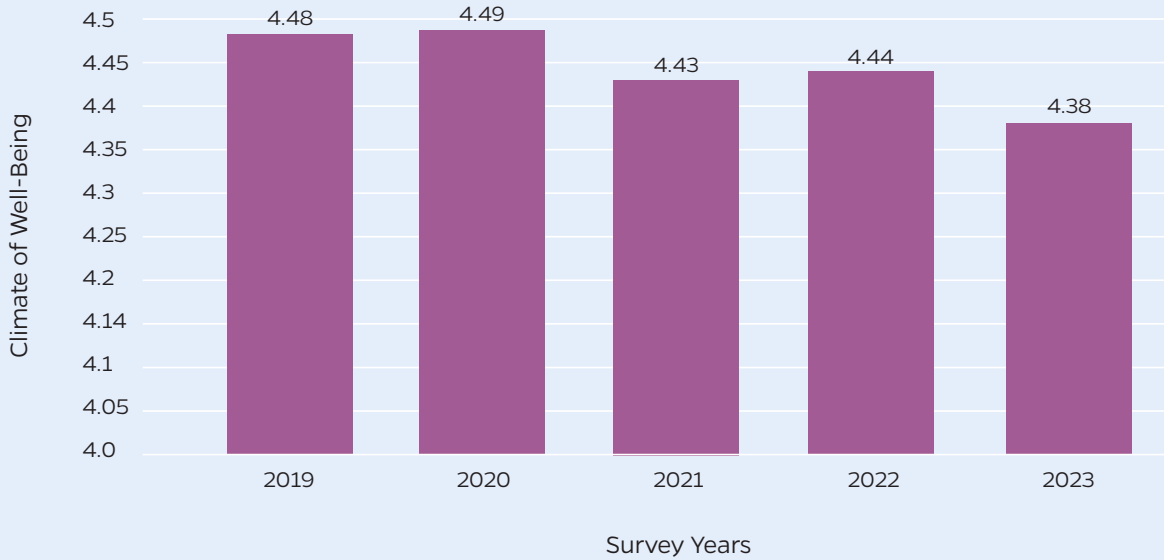
Although we see some similar patterns across major industry groups, we do highlight several differences. The financial services industries experienced an increase in scores in 2020, then returned to a similar level in the following years as shown in Figure 2. Our analysis includes more than 300 organizations in this group of industries which includes banking, insurance, and other associated businesses. In 2023, the scores in the financial services industries dipped lower than the pre-pandemic levels.



Unlike the financial services industries, the information and technology industries scores did not change much in 2020 and then began a downward trend. Our analysis of the information and technology sector includes more than 450 organizations in businesses related to software, hardware, and IT services. We note that the scores in this industry sector have declined from the pre-

pandemic levels as shown in Figure 3. Changes in the industry dynamics related to demand for services caused a significant surge in hiring in 2021 followed by workforce reductions in 2022–2023. These factors may have had an impact on the sense of well-being in these workplaces. We also note that the scores in this industry are quite high relative to other industry groups.

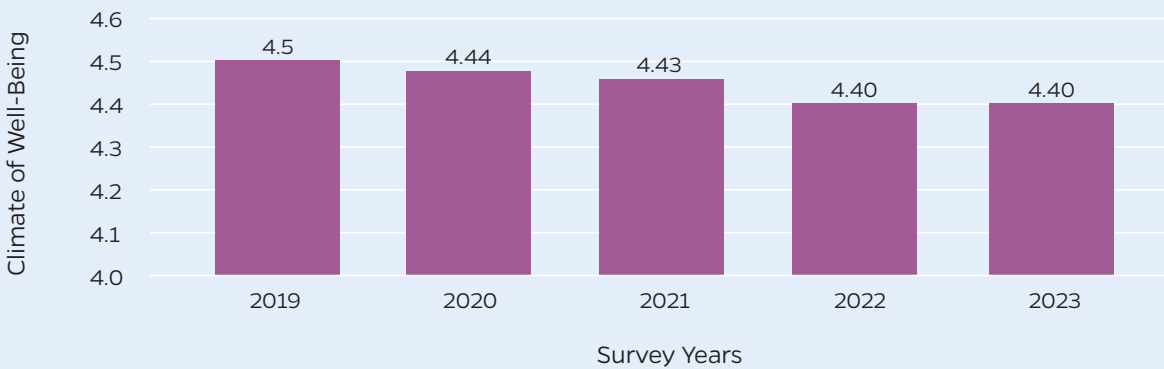
Figure 3: Climate of Well-Being in Information and Technology Industries



Closely linked to these industries, we examined the professional services sector to find a decline in well-being in 2020 with a slightly lower level in recent years as shown in Figure 4. Our analysis of

the professional services industry includes nearly 300 organizations with a focus on fields such as legal, accounting, consulting, and other services.

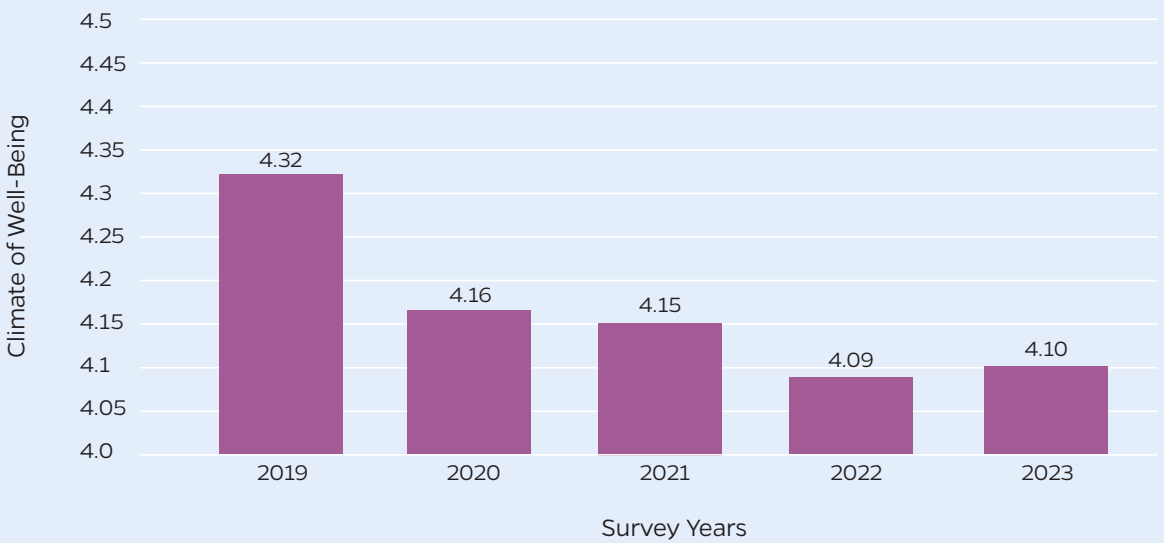
Figure 4: Climate of Well-Being in Professional Services Industries

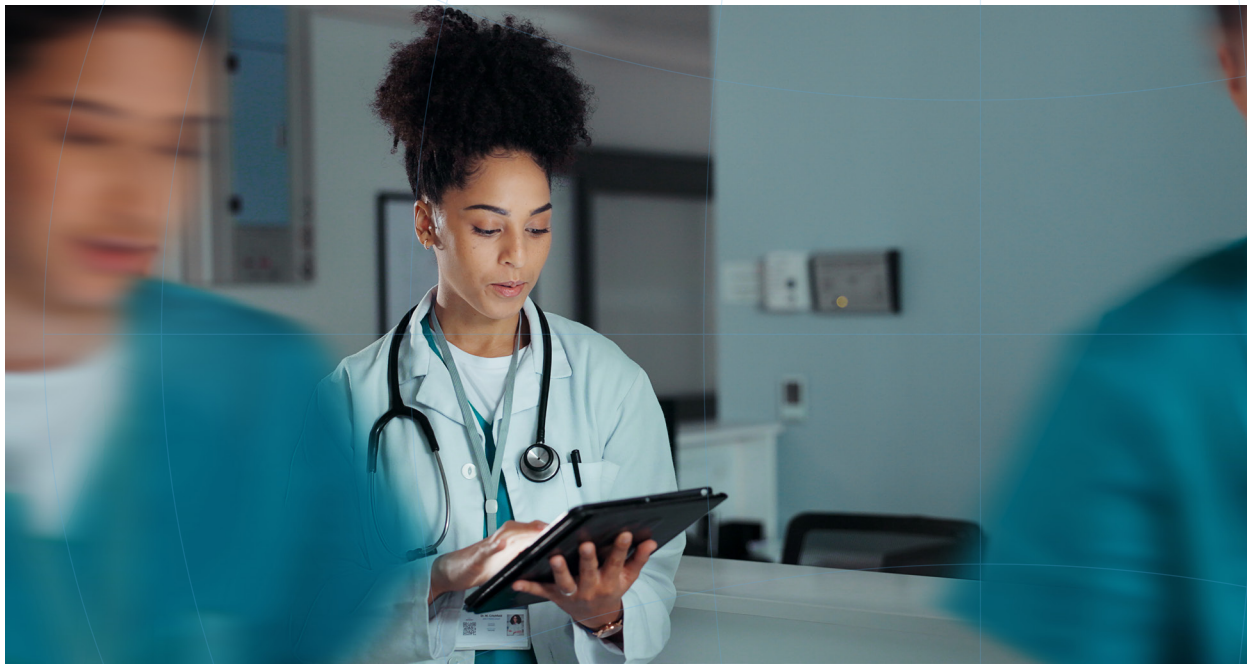


The retail and hospitality industries traditionally score lower in measures such as well-being and our analysis showed not only a lower score before the pandemic but also a lack of recovery in the following years. Figure 5 shows a significant decline in the scores in 2020 followed by continued lower levels. Our analysis includes over 130 organizations in businesses such as consumer retail, durable goods sales, restaurants, hotels, and other related retail services. These industries have been affected by changing consumer shopping and purchasing patterns with the rapid shift to online shopping during COVID-19.



Figure 5: Climate of Well-Being in Retail and Hospitality Services Industries

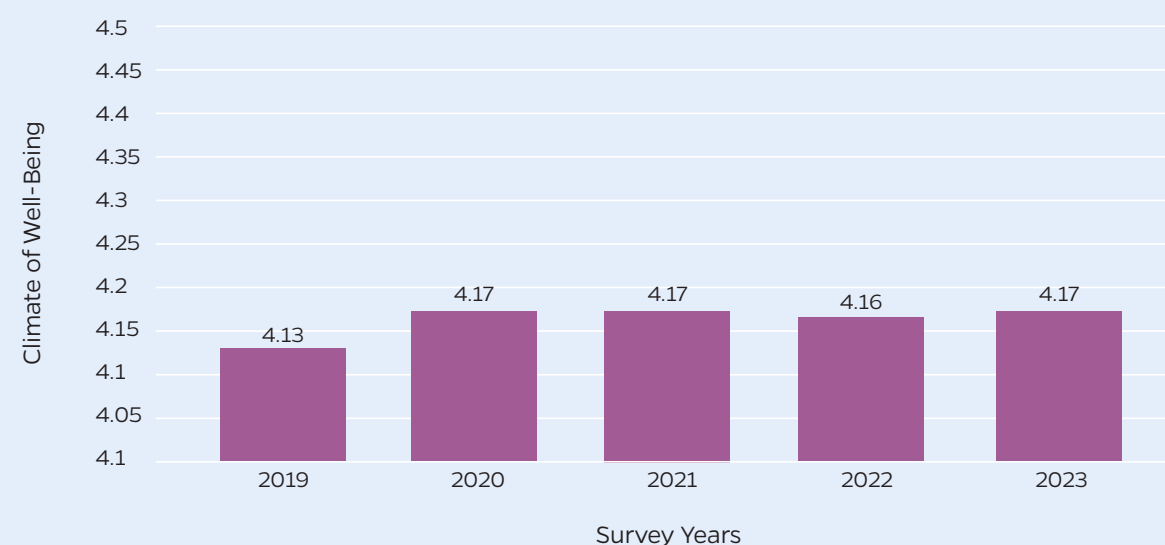




No industry was affected more directly by COVID-19 than the health care workforces around the world. While there was a rally behind first responders in the U.S. during the early days of the pandemic, the following years were often just as difficult given the ongoing challenges in battling COVID-19. Our analysis includes nearly 350 organizations in the health care and related

organizations including hospitals, clinics, elder care centers, and other related services. As shown in Figure 6, we see a slight rise in scores in 2020 with relatively consistent scores in recent years. It is important to note that both the retail, hospitality, and health care sectors score significantly lower than other industry groups.

Figure 6: Climate of Well-Being in Health Care Industries



THE UNIQUE CHALLENGE OF THE HEALTH CARE INDUSTRY

Given the acute nature of stress and burnout that may occur with front-line workers such as nurses and physicians, well-being has become a critical topic in this industry. The inherent stressors and emotional demands of health care work, compounded by resource limitations and irregular schedules, mean professionals in this industry face heightened susceptibility to mental health difficulties.

A recent study conducted by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) investigated the pre-pandemic mental health and well-being of various health care workers, including lower-wage health care support staff and ancillary workers such as janitors and housekeepers. Researchers analyzed data from the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) spanning 2017 to 2019, comparing the self-reported mental health and well-being of 37,685 health care industry workers with 219,871 workers from other industries. They assessed six health conditions, including poor self-rated health, frequent physical and mental distress, activity limitations, depression diagnosed by a health care provider, and insufficient sleep. The study found that among health care workers, insufficient sleep (41%) and diagnosed depression (19%) were the most commonly reported conditions, with higher prevalence rates compared to non-health care workers.

Consequently, the health care sector particularly requires robust initiatives aimed at improving well-being. Embracing this imperative, the Dr. Lorna Breen Heroes Foundation has dedicated itself to creating better workplace environments and advancing critical policies for health workers. The tragic story of Dr. Lorna Breen, who committed suicide during the COVID-19 pandemic has created a catalyst for change in the industry. Dr. Breen, like many others, experienced a combination of relentless demands of the job and fear of facing ostracism from colleagues for seeking mental health support. The foundation aims to reduce the stigma surrounding mental health issues in the health care profession and advise the health care industry to implement proactive measures to support workers.

Due to the organization's efforts, the Dr. Lorna Breen Health Care Provider Protection Act (HR 1667), signed into law in 2022, allocates \$103 million in federal funding for training in mental and substance use disorder strategies among medical professions, as well as establishing the National Health Workforce Well-being Day. Acts like these, which focus on systemic changes, provide a model for similar efforts in other industries.

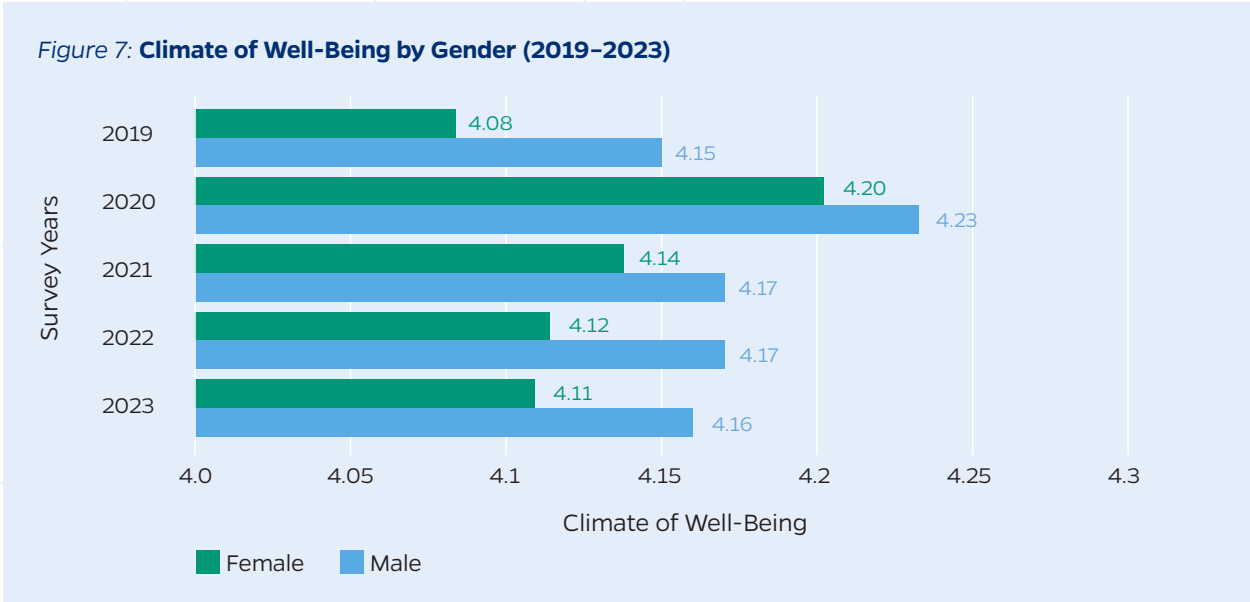
While the health care industry has some unique attributes, there are important lessons for others in considering the assumptions and culture that are shaped by industry practices, norms, and values. Our colleague, Dr. Rich Safeer has documented important suggestions in his book, *A Cure for the Common Company* (2023).



ANALYSIS BY GENDER AND ETHNICITY

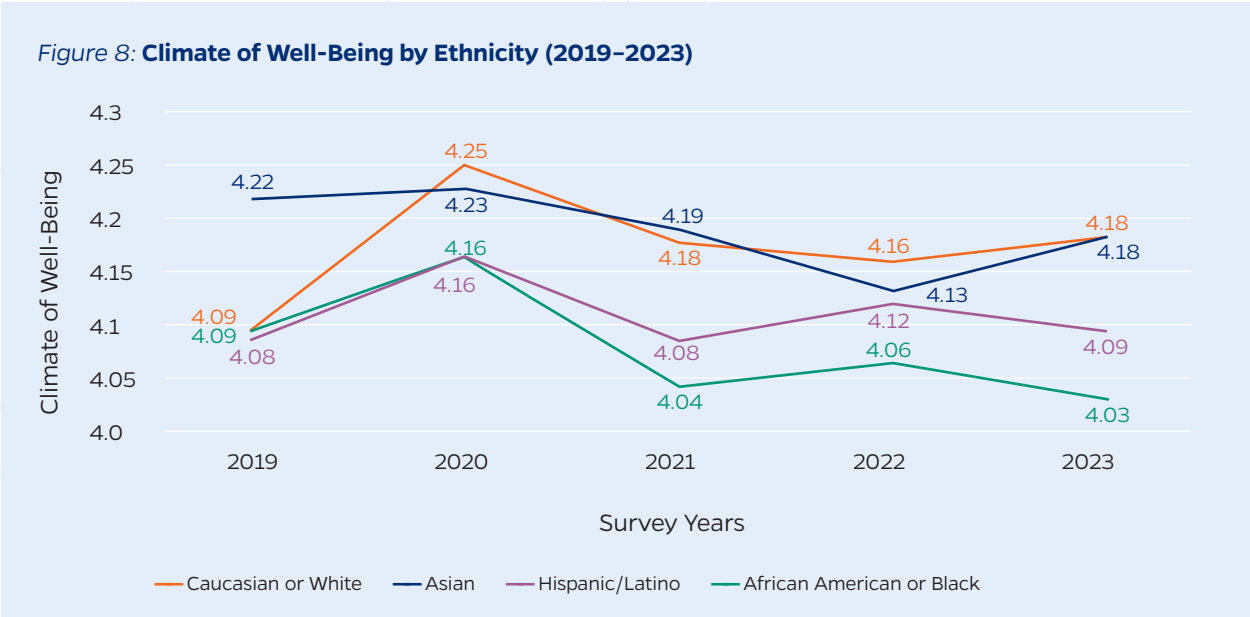
To understand the sense of well-being across the U.S., we took a closer look at the differences by gender. As shown in Figure 7, we find a similar pattern for males and females with a slight

narrowing gap between the genders in 2020. Unfortunately, we continue to see a decline in female scores since that time.



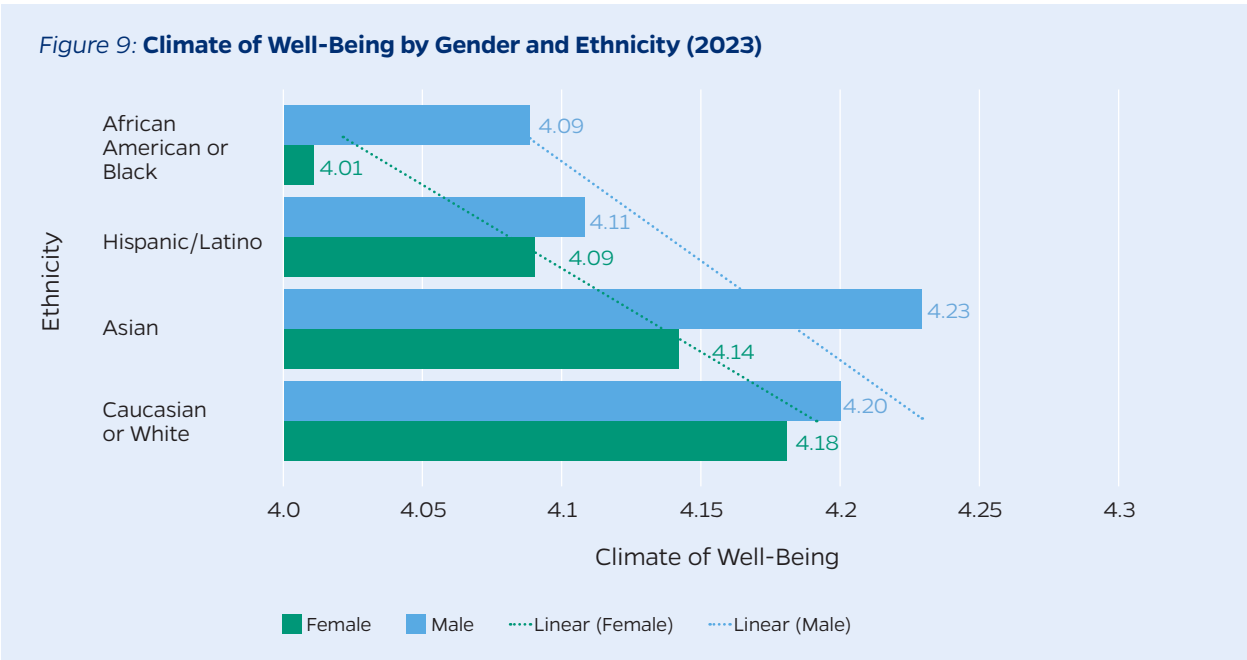
The gender trend aligns with the overall yearly trend, indicating consistently lower well-being scores among female participants compared to males. Similarly, the ethnic group trend mirrors the overall results, with participants who identify as African American or Black consistently reporting

lower well-being scores compared to other groups. As shown in Figure 8, those who identify as White and Hispanic exhibit relatively small fluctuations in well-being over time while those who identify as African American show a declining score over this period.



To further elaborate on the interaction between gender and ethnicity, the 2023 results were examined more closely to look for differences. Well-being scores for females and males were compared across the four ethnic groups as shown in Figure 9. The Asian and African American

groups showed the largest gaps in well-being scores between genders, with males significantly outscoring females. The contrasting differences between genders within ethnic groups highlight the importance of addressing the workplace climate for everyone.



When comparing groups with different sample sizes, it is important to note the size of each of the groups to ensure a valid analysis. Table 1 shows the number of respondents that self-identified with these categories.

Table 1: Sample Size by Gender and Ethnicity Groups (2023)

Ethnicity	Total	Female	Male	Other Identities
Caucasian or White	775,137	405,167	360,967	9,003
African American or Black	148,545	101,755	45,330	1,460
Hispanic/Latino	160,968	89,311	69,842	1,815
Asian	110,906	51,144	58,741	1,021

The contrasting differences between genders within ethnic groups highlight the importance of addressing the workplace climate for everyone.

The analysis and breakdown by ethnicity and gender highlight the ongoing gap between the ethnic groups in the U.S. These significant differences highlight the ongoing need for organizations to address equity, inclusion, and belonging for all employees.

Our findings are consistent with research by the American Psychological Association (APA) in their Work in America Survey 2023. The APA has found demographic discrepancies among indicators of well-being, with 23% of Black workers, 22% of Hispanic workers, and 14% of Asian workers disagreeing with the statement “When I’m at work, I feel like I belong.” Black and Hispanic workers were also more likely to report feeling a lack of support from their employers (39% and 34%) compared to 27% of White employees. More females (23%) reported a toxic workplace than males (15%). Additionally, those with disabilities more frequently reported toxic workplaces (26%) than those without (16%) (APA, 2023). Discrimination in the workplace, which also erodes a culture of well-being, was witnessed by over one in five employees, and 19% said they were targets of discrimination or identity-based insults. Alarming, close to 30% of workers said they do not feel supported because of an aspect of their identity, with younger workers reporting this more often than their older counterparts. These findings suggest that incorporating measures to address disparities between perceptions and experiences of well-being in the workplace is a crucial part of developing a positive climate of well-being for all employees.

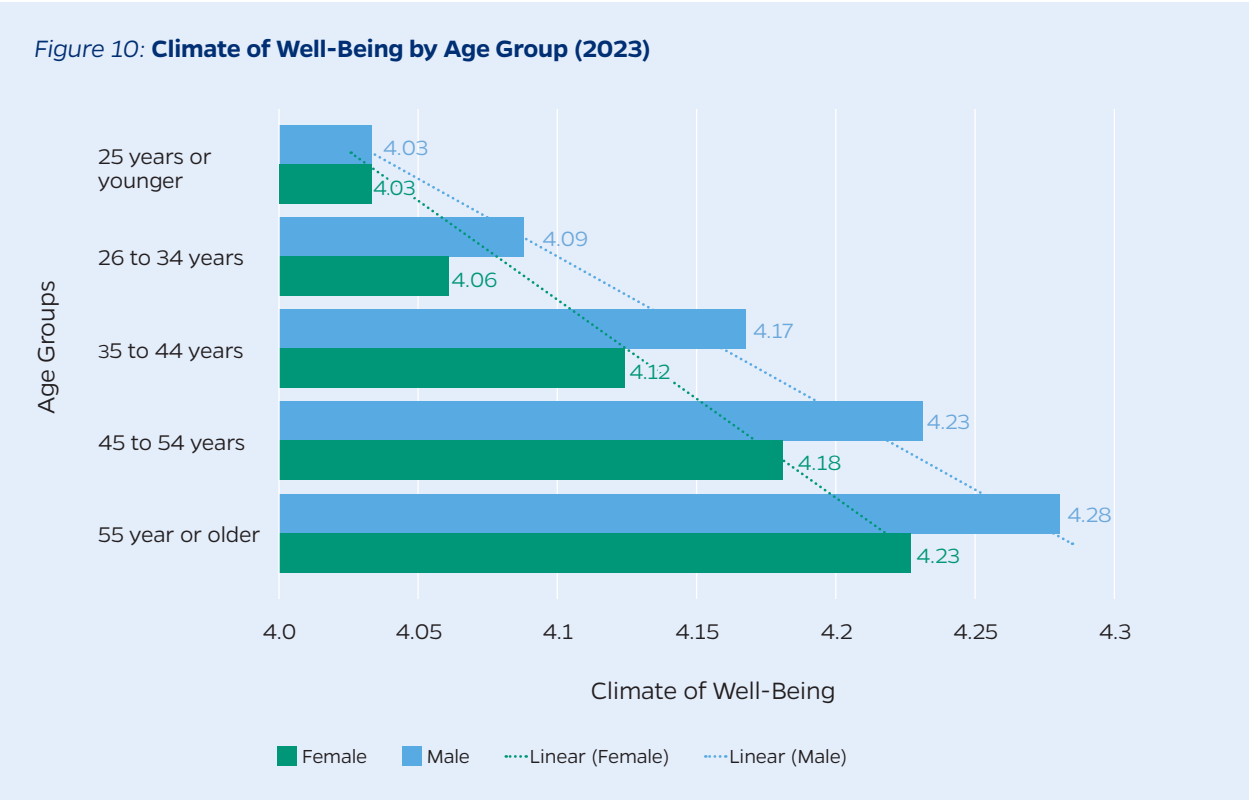


These significant differences highlight the ongoing need for organizations to address equity, inclusion, and belonging for all employees.

ANALYSIS BY AGE AND TENURE

Upon review of the data trends by age, we quickly noted the differences between younger and older employees. The analysis of well-being scores across various age cohorts revealed shifting trends over time. Historically, we would generally find a declining score in well-being scores with advancing age groups. However, between 2020 and 2023, this trend reversed, indicating an increase in well-being scores with age. Notably, younger age groups, such as those aged 25 and younger and 26 to 34 years, displayed more significant fluctuations in well-being scores over the years

compared to older age groups. Conversely, the well-being scores of older age groups, including those aged 55 years and older, 45 to 54 years, and 35 to 44 years showed more stability over time. Figure 10 highlights the pronounced differences and the nearly linear relationship between age and sense of well-being. These findings suggest a nuanced understanding of well-being trends across different age categories and underscore the importance of considering age-related variations in well-being assessments and analysis.



When considering scores for employee sentiment on things such as well-being, we often find similar scores for both age and tenure, since these are obviously correlated. However, we find a consistent pattern over the years, which highlights a higher score for employees with two years or less of experience with their employer followed

by a significant drop in the following years with a steady improvement over time as shown in Figure 11. The increase over time may reflect a similar pattern that we see by age group, yet the “honeymoon period” of the first two years may be experienced by people of any age group.

Figure 11: Climate of Well-Being by Tenure

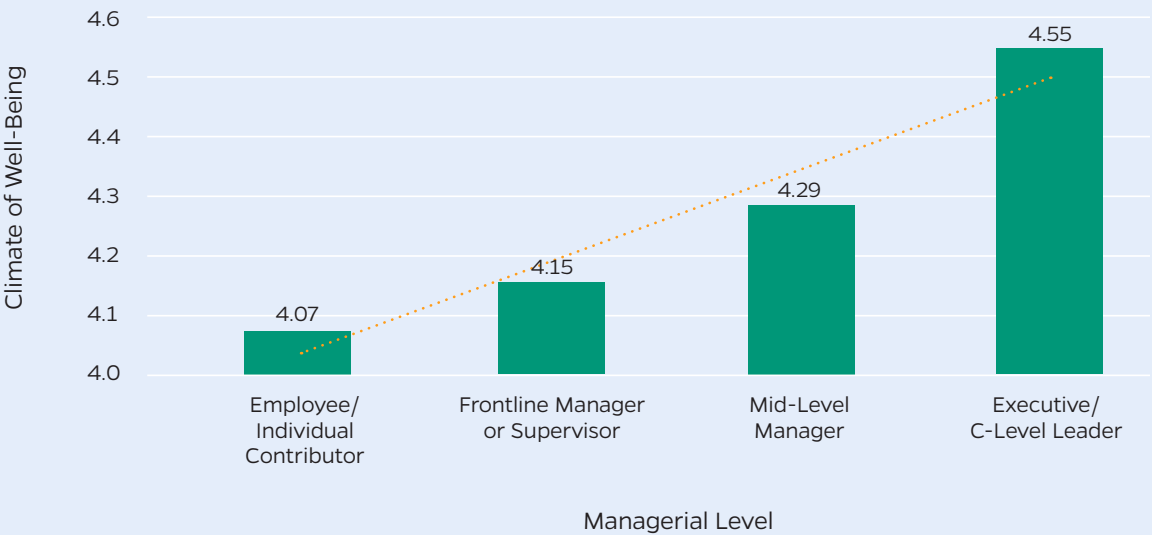


ANALYSIS BY MANAGEMENT LEVEL AND CONFIDENCE

We investigated variations in well-being across managerial tiers. Employees were classified into four categories: Individual Contributors, Front-line Managers, Mid-level managers, and Executive-

level Leaders, comprising 71%, 17%, 10%, and 1% of the sample, respectively. Increasing well-being scores corresponded to higher management levels as shown in Figure 12.

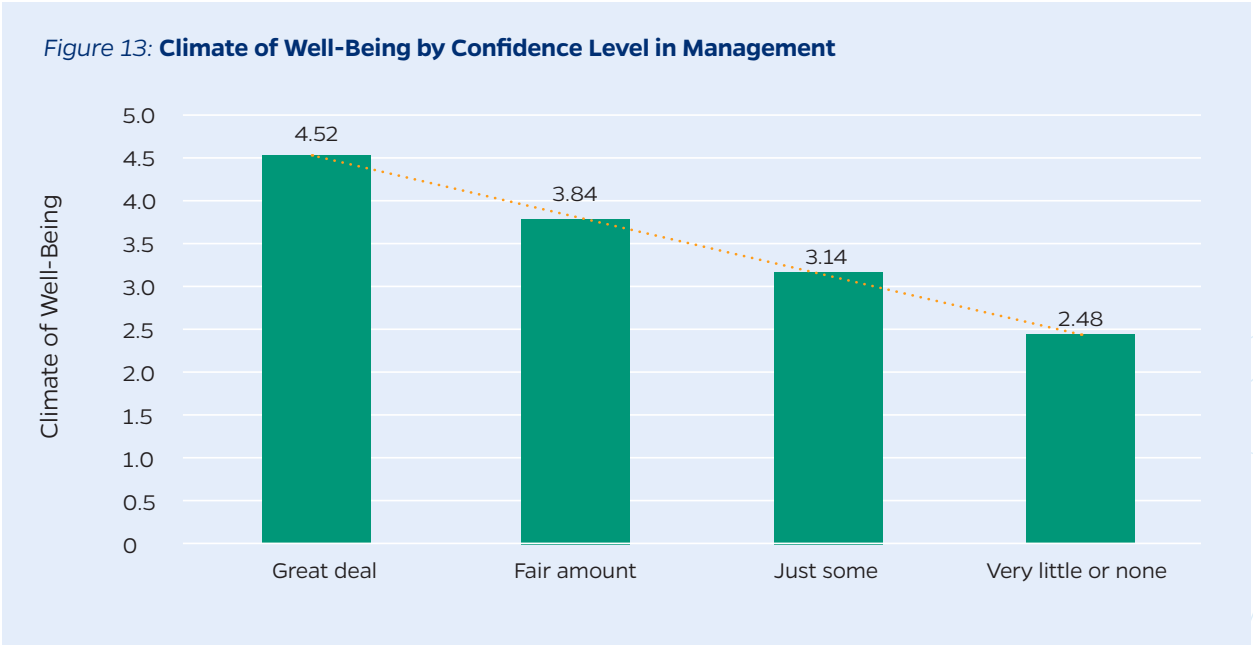
Figure 12: Climate of Well-Being by Managerial Level



Our analysis is consistent with prior research that shows that managers typically encounter lower stress levels than their subordinates (Skakon, et. al. 2011). While managers contend with heightened job demands and conflicts, they also benefit from increased autonomy, superior management quality, and more avenues for personal growth. These factors, alongside elements like social support, influence, and the significance attached to work, contribute to the diminished stress levels observed among managers. Our analysis highlights the potential risk of managers being out of touch with their employees. The managers that are able to continue to relate and earn trust with their

workforce, must do so by recognizing that their own experiences are not representative of those of their employees.

To illustrate the importance of earning trust with employees, respondents were asked to rate their confidence in management. We find that 57% of respondents indicate a ‘great deal’ of confidence, 32% indicate a ‘fair amount’ of confidence, and the others have ‘just some’ or ‘very little’ confidence in management. More importantly, we find a very clear linear relationship between the degree of confidence and well-being score as shown in Figure 13.



Our analysis highlights the potential risk of managers being out of touch with their employees.

ANALYSIS BY WORK ARRANGEMENTS AND LOCATION

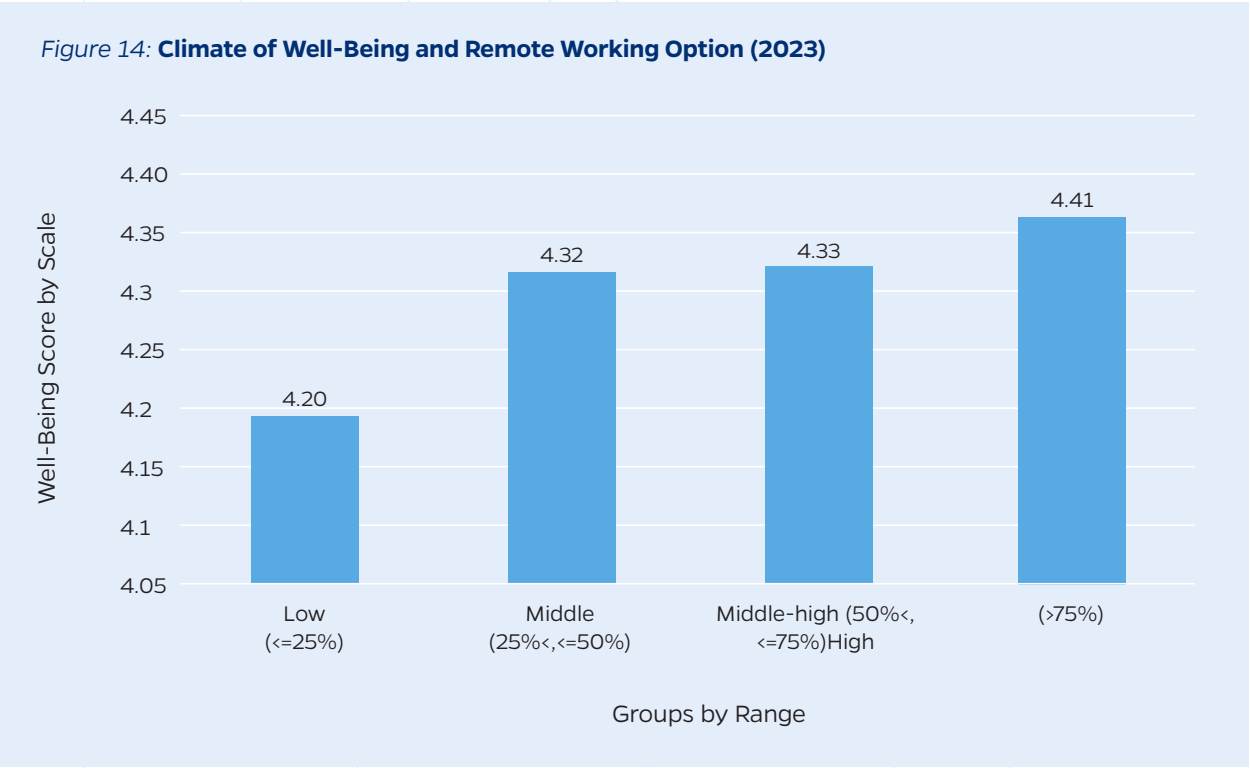
One of the areas that has caught recent attention is the ability for employees to work remotely or work flexible work hours. We decided to dive deeper into these topics to understand if firms that had adopted remote work and flexible work arrangements scored differently when it comes to creating a climate of well-being. Since these practices varied through the pandemic, we analyzed the 2023 survey data.

Of the 2300 organizations that reported this information, nearly 90% had a remote working policy in place for some portion of their workforce. The data shows that organizations with some type of remote work practice rated higher in well-being scores by their employees. To take a step further,

we analyzed the percentage of employees at each firm that utilize the remote working policy (percent of employees that are able to work remotely for some portion of the week). In this case, we found a striking link between remote work opportunities and a climate of well-being.

We reviewed the firms that report remote working and categorized them as high (over 75% of employees can work part of the time remotely), medium-high, medium, and low (less than 25% of employees can work part of the time remotely). We found a striking difference between these groups with those workforces that have more remote working flexibility scoring much higher on climate of well-being as shown in Figure 14.

We found a striking link between remote work opportunities and a climate of well-being.

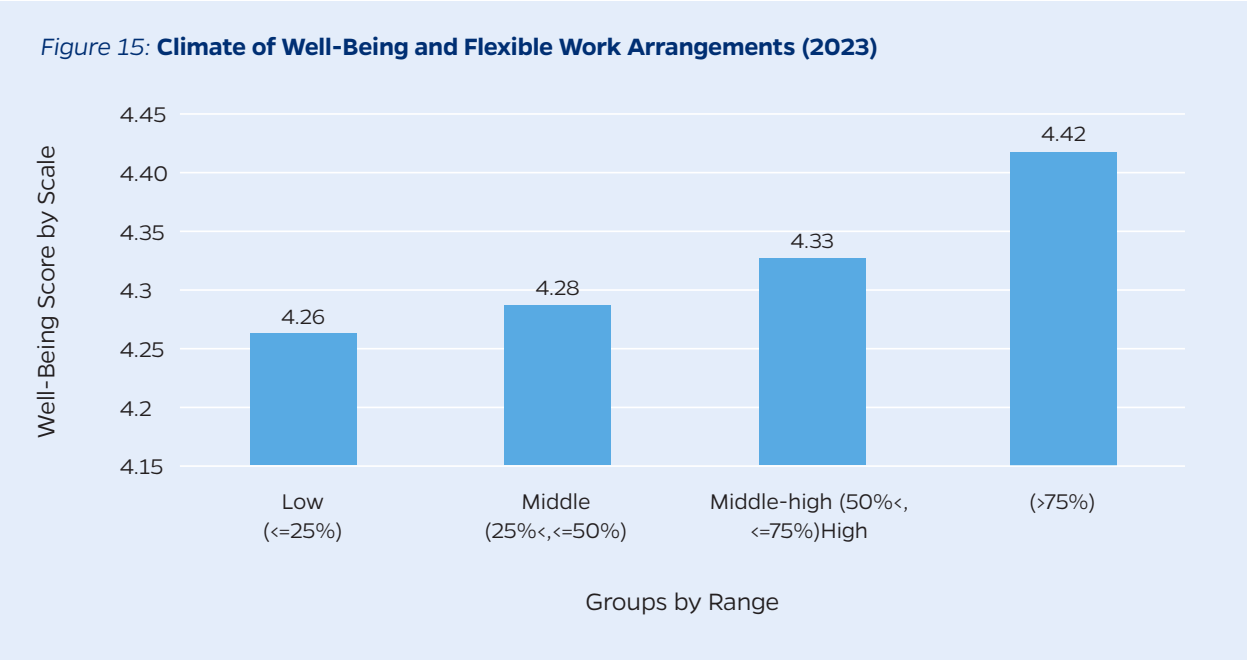


Flexible work arrangements (i.e. employees have some options to select their work hours in the office) have become a key element of modern work dynamics, adapting to the shifting needs of employees and employers alike. Over the last decade, the prevalence of work flexibility, including options like alternative work weeks, time off, and flexible schedules, has remained relatively steady. Prior research studies show a complex relationship between job stress and satisfaction related to flexibility and remote work (Ray & Pana-Cryan, 2021). For instance, working remotely from home may increase the likelihood of job stress, yet also boost job satisfaction. Yet, having a flexible office work schedule reduces the likelihood of job stress and significantly enhances job satisfaction.

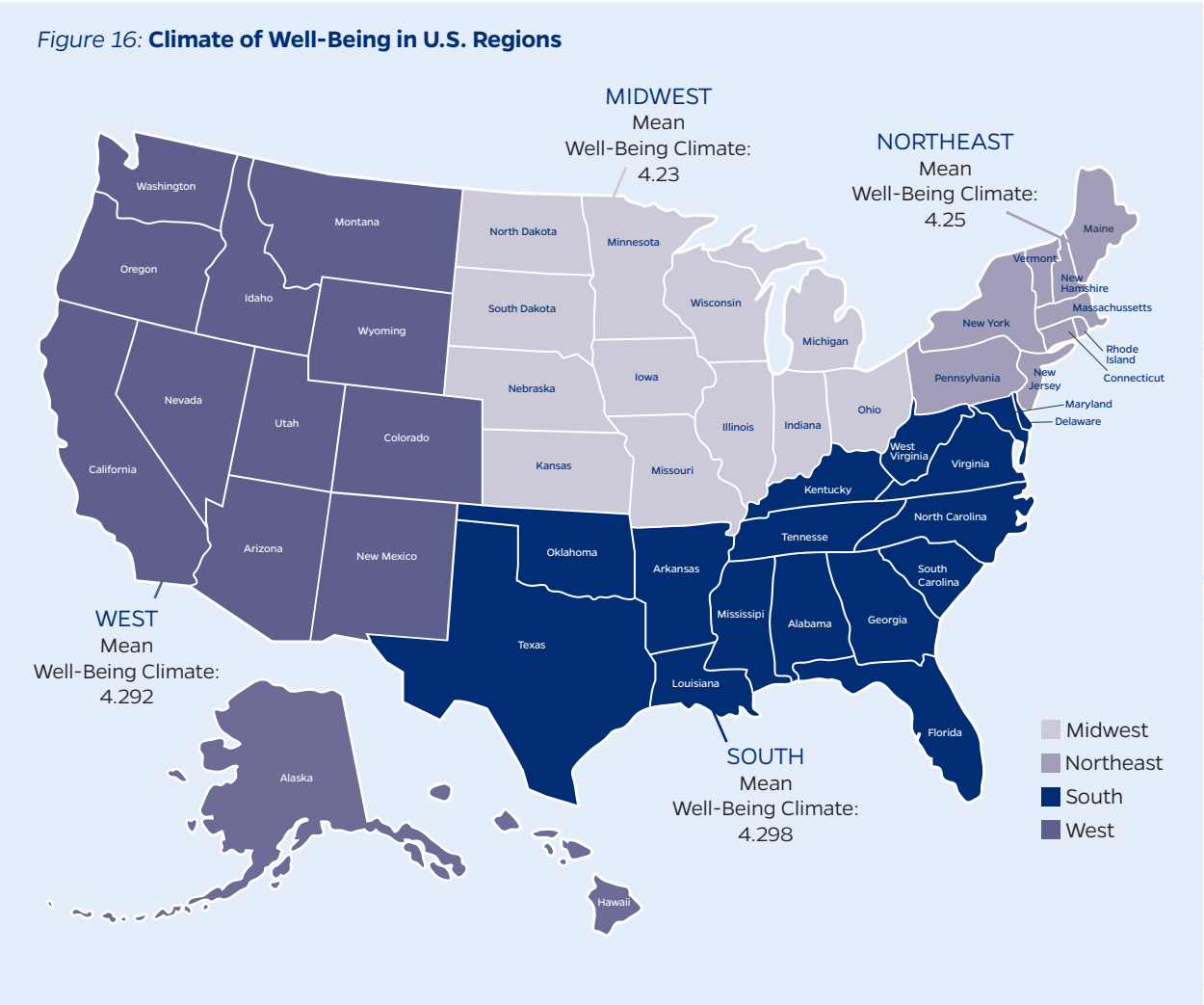
For workers, flexibility provides the means to effectively manage work-life balance, addressing personal and family needs such as childcare and eldercare. For employers, it may cultivate higher levels of engagement and productivity among employees while fostering a climate of well-being.

However, there are some types of work and organizational responsibilities (e.g., innovation and critical incidents) that are best accomplished when everyone is together.

We analyzed the reported data on the percentage of flexible work arrangements (i.e., the extent to which employees are allowed to work alternative hours). For those firms that offer flexibility in work hours, we also find higher scores when it comes to a climate of well-being. While many factors contribute to well-being scores, flexible work arrangements may influence the well-being climate. Of the 2300 firms that responded, 75% offered some portion of their employees flexible work arrangements. We then took a closer look to understand what percentage of the workforce was able to leverage the flexible scheduling option and categorized them as high (more than 75% of employees), medium, or low (less than 25% of employees). **Our analysis shows a signification positive correlation between climate of well-being and flexible work arrangements** as shown in Figure 15.



In addition to reviewing the sense of well-being by work arrangement, we also completed an analysis by location. To accomplish this, we mapped the zip code location of respondents to each state and created a regional score as shown in Figure 16. The regional scores are somewhat similar across the nation after controlling for industry variations.

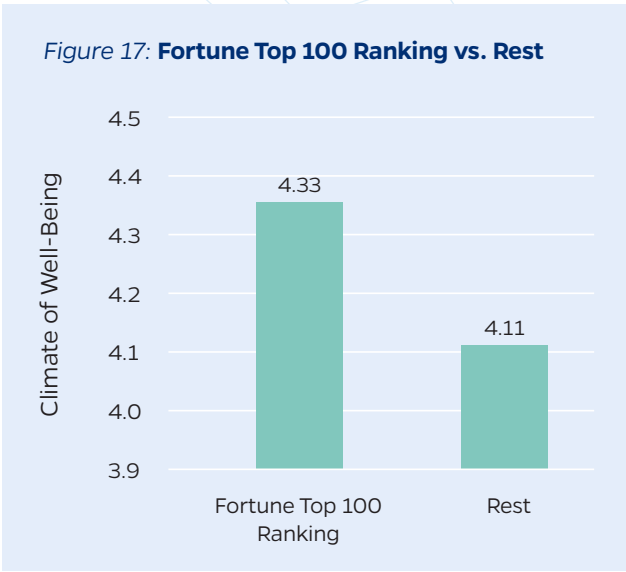


IMPACT OF HEALTHY CLIMATE OF WELL-BEING

Across our analysis the gaps associated with fostering a climate of well-being were clear. Creating a positive work environment that fosters a climate of well-being takes commitment, hard work, and leadership involvement. Yet, many business leaders might be asking for the ROI on the investment needed to address employee well-being. Others may find the effort discouraging and wonder if there is really a significant performance difference between firms that create a positive climate of well-being for their employees and those that don't.

To test these differences, we completed a comparison between the top 100 companies (listed in the Fortune 100 Best Companies as recognized by Great Place To Work and non-ranked companies in 2023. This analysis, across all industries, aimed to compare the scores associated with employee well-being. We found a significant difference in well-being scores between ranked and non-ranked firms, with ranked firms scoring an average of 4.33 compared to 4.11 for non-ranked firms as shown in Figure 17.

While this difference is not surprising, it illustrates the significant gap between organizations when it comes to facilitating a climate of well-being. Not only do the ranked firms do better with factors related to well-being, but also with financial results. Prior analyses show that the top-ranked workplaces also outperform their peers as measured by return on invested capital and total returns to shareholders over time. McCann Synergy (2022) investigated the annual Fortune 100 Best Companies to Work For and found that these companies excel in creating a positive workplace culture that emphasizes trust, inclusion, and fairness. They focus on strong leadership, clear communication, and opportunities for professional development, which contribute to high employee satisfaction and retention. Additionally, these companies often provide comprehensive benefits, competitive compensation, and supportive work environments that prioritize work-life balance. These factors collectively enhance organizational well-being, leading to higher scores in employee surveys and overall rankings.



Creating a positive work environment that fosters a climate of well-being takes commitment, hard work, and leadership involvement.

ORGANIZATIONS WITH POSITIVE CLIMATES OF WELL-BEING

Searching, for example, organizations that excel in fostering a culture of well-being, we noted 25 companies surpassing the typical workplace experience, with 90% of employees reporting a great workplace environment compared to just over half for most organizations. These companies prioritize elements such as trust in leadership, pride in work, and connections among colleagues, regardless of geographical location. For instance, Hilton ranked No. 1, launched “My Voice Matters” in Central and Latin America, ensuring leaders received feedback from over 5,000 team members, resulting in 84% of Hilton employees feeling involved in decisions affecting them. Cadence, ranked No. 9, focuses on fair management practices, with 79% of employees noting their managers avoid favoritism, achieved through comprehensive unconscious bias and allyship training. Atlassian, No. 16, encourages work-life balance with a distributed-first work environment, enabling employees to work remotely for up to 90 days annually. DHL Express, No. 2, emphasizes meaningful work, dedicating 1% of net profit annually to community support, fostering a sense of purpose among employees worldwide.

These case studies offer valuable insights applicable to other organizations striving to enhance employee well-being. By involving employees in decision-making processes, fostering fair management practices, encouraging work-life balance, and connecting employees to meaningful work, organizations can create a positive workplace culture conducive to employee satisfaction and productivity. Implementing programs like Hilton’s “My Voice Matters” campaign or Atlassian’s distributed work environment can enhance employee engagement and satisfaction, irrespective of geographic location. Additionally, investing in manager development programs, like Cadence’s unconscious bias training, can promote fairness and inclusivity within organizations. Ultimately, by prioritizing these elements, companies can cultivate environments where employees feel valued, supported, and motivated, leading to improved organizational performance and employee well-being across diverse global contexts.



SUMMARY AND MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

This research provides a comprehensive view of the trends in employee well-being observed during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite the adverse impacts of the pandemic on various facets of employee well-being, including job security and work-life balance, our analysis of organizational and employee data revealed a temporary spike in employee well-being during this unprecedented period. As this analysis has shown, when leaders make people a priority in the organization (such as during the pandemic), the results can be rather striking. Unfortunately, this focus on the employees and their well-being has not continued, which is evidenced by the data trends.

For managers of workforces, we find several important implications for the future. Rather than a prescription for success, we focus on the first steps toward building a trusting culture and a healthy climate of well-being in organizations.

1. **Boundary Spanning**—As we have noted, there are significant differences by industry due to the nature of occupations, industry dynamics, and assumptions. Understanding the workplaces of others in the same industry, along with suppliers and customers provides a sense of the current reality. Yet, changing the assumptions may require moving past these boundaries to embrace new perspectives from other industries which may be beneficial to your organization as well as to your industry.
2. **Level Skipping**—As we have seen, the sense of well-being is quite high as people move up the managerial ranks. It is important for senior managers to not only skip one level, but multiple levels to gain a clearer understanding of what the work life is like for others in the organization. The data shows that executives may have a distorted view if they rely on their own perceptions.

3. **Confidence Building**—A team is needed to address culture change and foster a positive climate of well-being. This requires everyone in management to work toward earning the confidence of the workforce. Direct discussions about the actions that both inspire confidence, as well as those that create distrust, are important to put on the table and address as a team.
4. **Active Listening**—Understanding and appreciating those who may be in the minority can be difficult across levels and organizational boundaries. Starting with active listening and thoughtful questions are the right first steps. Through empathetic listening and building trust, managers can learn more about what is important to groups that may be different from their own.
5. **Internal Reflecting**—Finally, the opportunity for fostering a positive climate of well-being in each organization rests with each leader. Seeking feedback from others and reflecting on personal experiences in engaging others may provide simple clues to the changes that each individual might make. By taking these first steps, managers can begin to create a stronger team with workforce members experiencing a healthy climate of well-being at work.

The COVID-19 pandemic was a worldwide crisis, yet organizational leaders proved to the world that they can do better in taking care of their workforces. While this focus has waned in recent years, the bar has been raised. As organizations navigate the evolving landscape of work, let these findings serve as a roadmap for fostering resilience, equity, and well-being in the workplace of tomorrow.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

This study is based on data gathered by Great Place To Work® as part of their work with organizations interested in certification and ranking. While our dataset is robust across industries and locations with more than 2,500 firms and 1.5 million surveys each year, there are limitations with this sample since organizations must choose to participate in the process. This self-selection likely provides a sample that has higher scores than the average employer in the U.S. In other words, we are likely showcasing small differences in already strong workplaces. As such, our sample may be skewed to include only those workplaces where managers have confidence in their HR practices, employee sentiment, and workforce relations. If we were to include other organizations not in this sample, we hypothesize

that the differences would be much greater between best workplaces and other workplaces. In the future, we hope to increase the balance of this sample to benchmark our findings.

As we consider future directions, we recognize that more work is needed to understand differences across gender and ethnicity in the workplace regarding perceptions and experiences. Also worthy of further exploration is the linkage between voluntary employee turnover with well-being, teamwork, and remote work arrangements. With more interest in work modalities, alternative work weeks, and flexible work arrangements, we wish to further test ideas and hypotheses related to future designs of work.

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