

RESEARCH REPORT

# Powering Profits and Prosperity

If organisations want to continue to be successful and achieve sustainable, long-term growth, they need to Power Profits *and* Prosperity. Working autonomously will help them achieve this.



# Foreword



Growth has become hardwired into our consciousness as a metaphor for prosperity and success. Partly, this is a result of the way we use growth metrics to gauge performance because they are easier to measure and comprehend. Revenue, profit margin and customer acquisition are all tangible, easily comparable numbers people understand.

However, customers, employees and investors are urging organisations to go beyond financial measurements of success. They are demanding organisations consider their impact on the prosperity of their stakeholders and to examine growth in broader terms; to measure, evaluate and prioritise social, psychological and ecological value creation as well as financial return. Being able to deliver upon and measure these factors is important to organisational longevity - we must power profits *and* prosperity.

“

***To prosper over time, every company must not only deliver financial performance, but also show how it makes a positive contribution to society.***

*Larry Fink, CEO of Blackrock*

”

We acknowledge the challenges.

Firstly, it can be difficult to understand where to spend your time and money. Secondly, measuring non-financial impact is hard, because it's not just about the numbers. And that leads to the final challenge. When we can't measure or report on the real impact of Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) programs, no one really understands their true value. These initiatives, created with the best of intentions, are often met with scepticism, and risk becoming wasted effort. Everyone knows they are important, but we struggle to put a value to it.

As Peter Drucker, management consultant and educator, whose writings contributed to the philosophical and practical foundations of the modern business corporation, so eloquently said: “What gets measured gets managed - even when it's pointless to measure and manage it, and even if it harms the purpose of the organisation to do so.”

So what is the purpose of this research? We aspire to contribute to the growing body of evidence showing how organisations' contributions to creating value beyond the bottom line are inextricably linked to their overall growth and longevity.

## **In other words, how do organisations power both profits *and* prosperity?**

We believe there's an answer, and it lies in how people approach their work. By implementing an autonomous working style, organisations can enable people to shape their work and work environment to not only achieve the goals they set, but to create deeper and more enduring value.

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# Executive summary

Achieving sustainable, long-term growth has always been a strategic consideration for organisations. Profits matter, but so does societal, environmental and personal well-being. So, to what degree do each of these combine to create a sum that is greater than its individual parts?



As a business dedicated to enabling better ways of working through our software solutions, we sought to understand how much factors beyond merely economic ones matter when it comes to business focus, and how well organisations were performing against these measurements. And ultimately, we sought to establish if there was a way in which organisations could better deliver on those elements in the name of profits and long-term prosperity.

To understand the importance of both profits *and* prosperity to people, we asked 637 respondents to rate 16 value statements (on a scale from 0-10) in respect of the organisation they work for. Each was aligned to a measure of business success: economic, ecological, psychological or societal outcomes. Additionally, each of the statements was aligned to a specific stakeholder group: employees, customers, partners and the community (see the methodology for a deeper explanation). Once respondents had rated the importance of each statement to them personally, they were also asked to rate the performance of their organisation in being able to meet that measure.

## What did we discover?

[Click here to learn more about the impact of autonomous working in our 2021 research paper: \*Autonomy to the people\*](#)



### People want more than just money

While economic factors understandably remain top of employees' concerns, societal and psychological factors are also important considerations for working Australians, across every generation.



### Organisations are not meeting expectations

There is an integrity gap between what organisations claim to be doing, and the reality of what their people are experiencing when it comes to economic, ecological, psychological and societal outcomes.



### Autonomous organisations do it better

Working in an autonomous environment leads to better business outcomes across customer loyalty, talent retention, community and environmental standing.

The findings highlight a clear disconnect between the way organisations operate and how people want them to. People feel their best when their organisation cares about their own personal well-being and has a strong standing within the immediate community. And people want to work in autonomous environments - not just because they prefer it, but because their organisation will be more successful across the full range of business outcomes if they embrace this way of working

So, if prosperity is desirable and good for business and its people, where and how can managers and organisations shift their priorities to create conditions for employees to flourish?

**These are the questions our study set out to answer.**

# What people want from their organisations

What makes a *good* organisation? And what makes a organisation *good*? It's no surprise to find salary and job security at the top of the list. These elements of a job remain absolutely core to an employee's perception of their organisation, and they are particularly important in the current economic climate.



Our research was carried out during a time of global volatility: economic conditions began to tighten, the war in Ukraine affected commodity and utility prices, and the cost of living became a major political issue in Australia.

However, that's not to say people are only motivated by their own self-interest. Our research shows a more nuanced picture. One where psychological and social factors are just as important, if not more so in some cases as economic ones; and where people want to work for organisations that have a wider social impact.

## There is more to life than money

Our research shows that factors labelled as 'employee experience' are vital to most people. However, it's equally clear that financial remuneration is not the only thing people look for. There are a diverse range of concerns at play, including psychological, social and environmental considerations.

More than two-thirds (69%) of respondents rated *'a good salary and job security as highly important'*<sup>1</sup>. Yet we found that the nature of the work and how organisations go about it was almost as important as the paycheck. A similar proportion of respondents (65%) placed great importance on *'having rewarding, meaningful work that offers opportunities for growth'*. On a related note, more than half of respondents (58%) felt it was important for businesses to *'produce a product or service which fulfils a genuine need,'* reiterating the close connection between the economic and psychological value of helping customers.

The way people work is also seen as important, with more respondents seeking to work with more autonomy (39%) than being subject to rigid processes and controls (23%).



<sup>1</sup>Scoring 8 or higher out of 10 when asked to rate the importance to them personally.

Many of these trends are even more pronounced when we examine by industry.

Respondents from education and healthcare, are more likely to prioritise psychological and societal factors than they do economic ones. They are also more likely to want to work in a more autonomous model than they do currently (47% vs 32%). Those in professional services, by comparison, prioritise economic factors far above everything else. Three-quarters (75%) rated 'a good salary and job security' as the most important factor, with a clear 14% gap to the second most important consideration, 'a fair and transparent employment process, providing opportunities for all'.



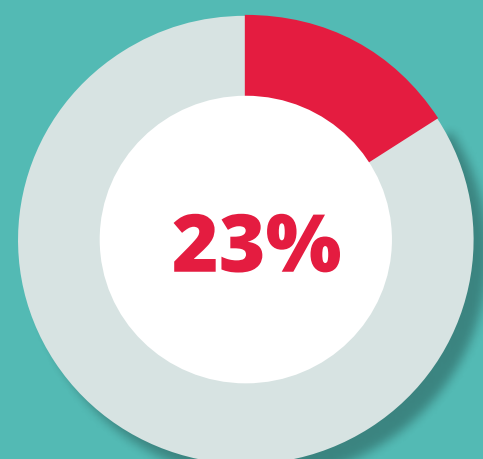
of respondents seek  
to work with more  
autonomy



**3 in 4**  
*professional service  
workers rated 'a good  
salary and job security'  
as most important*

**47%**

of education  
and healthcare  
workers want a  
more autonomous  
working model

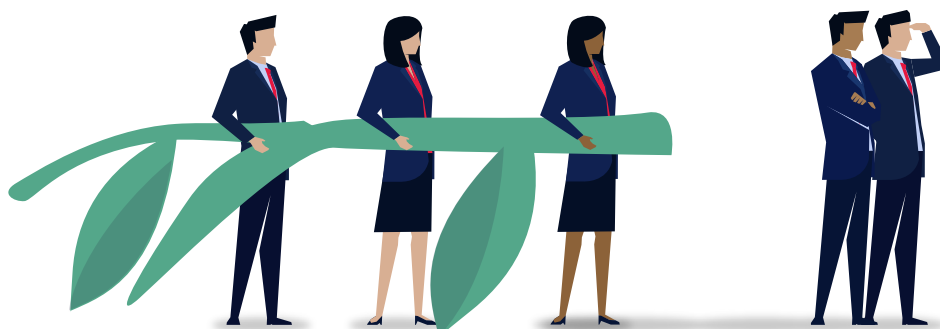
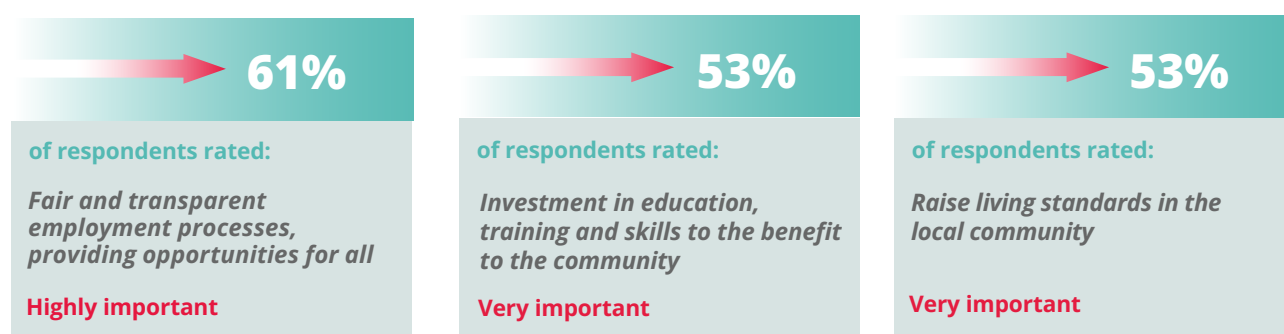


of respondents are  
subject to rigid processes  
and controls

## People want organisations to have a positive social impact

Our research also enabled us to evaluate importance in terms of theme (economic or societal for example) and by affected audience/stakeholders. While respondents' top three factors were all related to the employee experience, more than half (53%) rated '*investment in education, training and skills to the benefit of the community*' as very important to them personally. The same proportion (53%) also felt it was important organisations should help to '*raise living standards in the local community*'.

Respondents value diversity in the workplace, both in terms of people and thinking. It's no surprise that '*fair and transparent employment processes, providing opportunities for all*,' were perceived as highly important by a large majority (61%). It's especially pleasing to see that people want to ensure their organisations are making positive contributions to society.



## An organisation's purpose should go beyond the bottom line

In line with the prominence of social impact, it's fair to say that most businesses were founded on a central purpose, such as serving a community or a set of customers. And to an extent this remains true. Yet, some organisations risk losing sight of this purpose as they chase growth at all costs.

“*Wall Street and the capitalist culture celebrate—and demand—growth. Indeed, slow growth is regarded as something between a disease and a moral failing*”  
*Fisher, Gaur, and Kleinberger, Curing the Addiction to Growth*

<sup>2</sup>Stop Chasing the Wrong Kind of Growth, HBR, January–February 2017

However, according to our research, most people disagree with the Wall Street worldview. In fact, they say organisations should emphasise factors other than growth. Less than half of respondents (44%) strongly agreed that financial success and growth should exist in, or form part of, an organisation's purpose. More people want to see organisations prioritise a positive impact on its people and their experience (56%) and a positive impact on the wider community (53%).

Of course, without revenue, it's impossible to offer job security or rewarding work, invest in communities or raise living standards. Yet is the purpose of generating revenue simply to make more, or to do good while doing well? Organisations need to remember why they exist and ensure that they remain true to their purpose. People want profits *and* prosperity.

### Factors people believe should exist in, or form part of an organisation's purpose.





# Are organisations meeting expectations?

We have seen how people place importance on a range of factors well beyond their own financial wellbeing. But how successfully are Australian organisations responding to these demands? Our research shows they are falling short of their people's expectations across **all** factors.



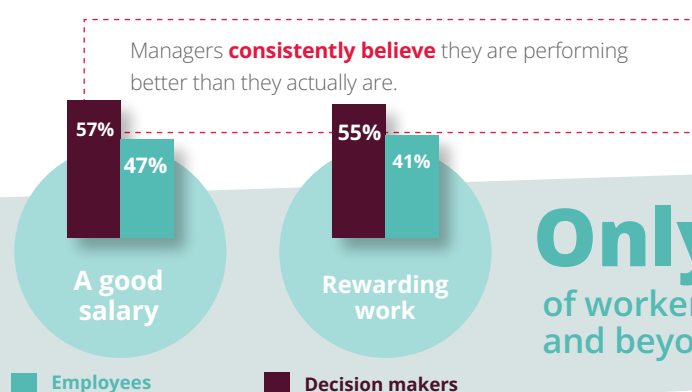
## A disconnect between employees and management

Recent studies<sup>3</sup> have shown how important the employee experience is to business success - and it's not just about the paycheck. The importance of psychological and social elements can't be overlooked, and this research gives organisations a starting point for deciding what to prioritise.

There is currently a disconnect in how senior decision makers perceive the performance of their organisations, compared to general employees. When we consider some of the most important factors such as *'a good salary and job security'*, 47% of general employees agreed their organisation performed well. In contrast, 57% of decision makers agree. Similarly, when analysing the results for *'rewarding work that has meaning, providing opportunities for growth'*, just 41% of general employees agreed performance was strong, compared to 55% of business decision-makers.

Perhaps some of the explanation for this disparity is the fact that people say they have very little impact in helping their organisations to drive initiatives that lead to specific outcomes.

**Most employees feel unable to affect the direction and focus of their organisation. Across a range of measures, just 36% said their organisation's 'financial success and growth' was driven by all people within the business. That drops to 28% when it comes to driving their organisation's 'positive impact on the environment', 36% for 'positive impact on their people' and 37% for 'positive impact on the wider community'. Having employees who feel disempowered to make a difference is a recipe for disengagement and should be considered a warning to organisations seeking to drive better engagement.**



**Only 32%**  
of workers are very willing to go above and beyond for their organisation

Our research highlights that employers need to refocus on what motivates their people. A lack of clarity around what an organisation stands for and how they support their employee's values is a key issue contributing to the gap in performance. Mainly attributed to a lack of direction between management, less than two thirds (32%) of workers are very willing to go above and beyond for their organisation. To address this problem, organisations need a more holistic understanding of what their employees value most and must ensure they have the right systems to support them. One of the ways this can be achieved is through the adoption of an autonomous approach to work and people management, which we explore in the next section.

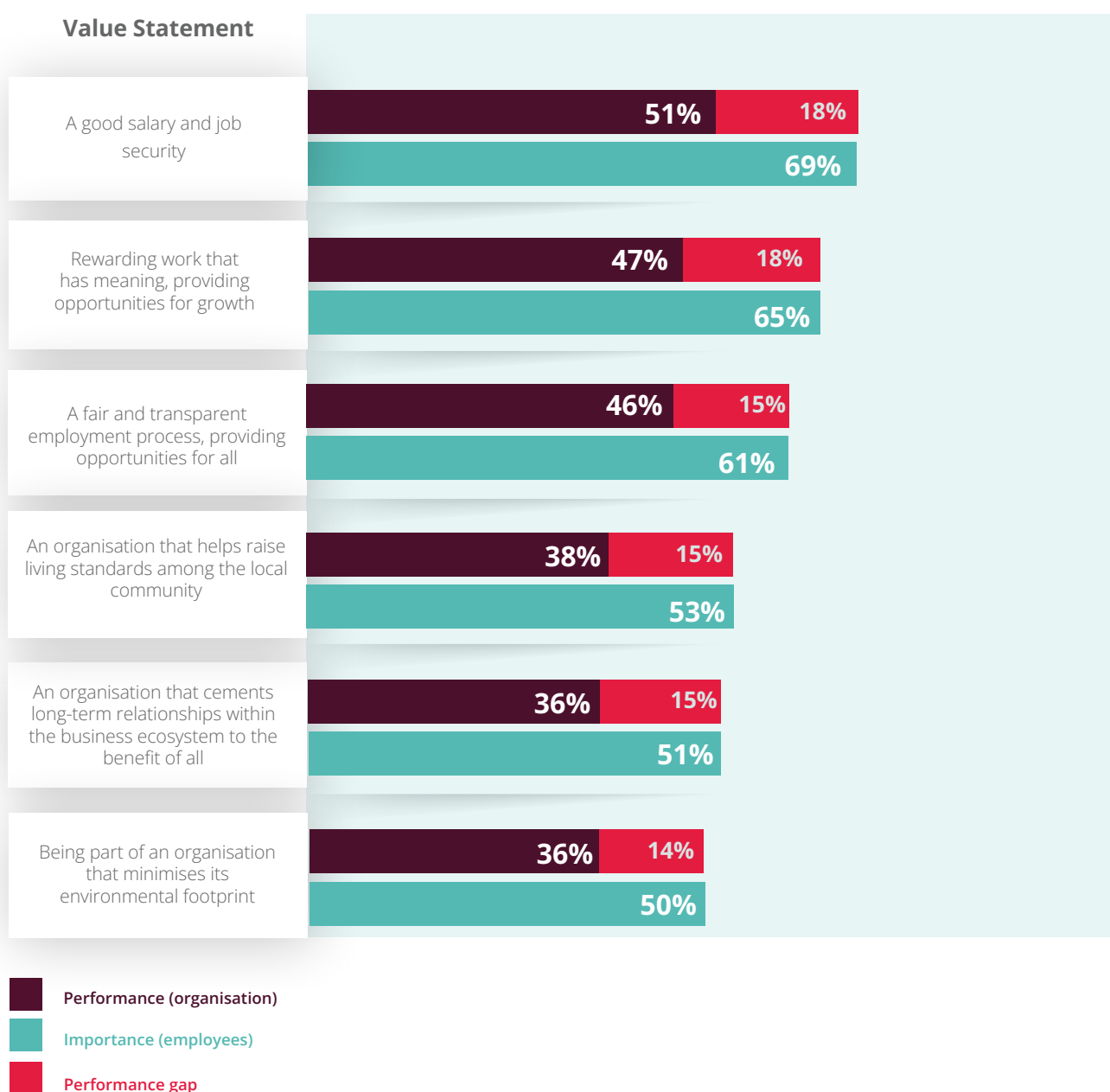
<sup>3</sup>Research: How Employees Experience Impacts your Bottom-Line, HBR, March 2022

## Closing the performance gap in employee experience

Employees want to be rewarded for their hard work - it helps them feel valued, leading to being more engaged at work. Additionally, insecure employment can cause stress and anxiety, ultimately affecting retention. A lack of fair pay can also impact an employee's self-esteem, sense of belonging and optimism about future prospects. Respondents reported that organisations are not meeting expectations in this regard. Nearly half (49%) said their organisations are underperforming in terms of salary and job security.

It's easy to focus on the numbers: sales, revenues, profits. But what's not so easy is managing employees in a way that makes them feel as though they are also helping to create value in their communities. Diversity and community benefit are a recurring theme in workers' ranking of importance, but represents one of the biggest gaps when it comes to how organisations are performing. To calculate what we term the 'expectation-to-performance' gap, we identified the difference in the scores between how important an employee rates a statement, versus how well they believe their organisation is performing against that statement. With an expectation-to-performance gap of 10%, workers want more 'diversity in thought and people' while desiring 'an organisation that invests in education, training and skills to benefit the community.'

### Expectation-to-performance - where are the biggest gaps?



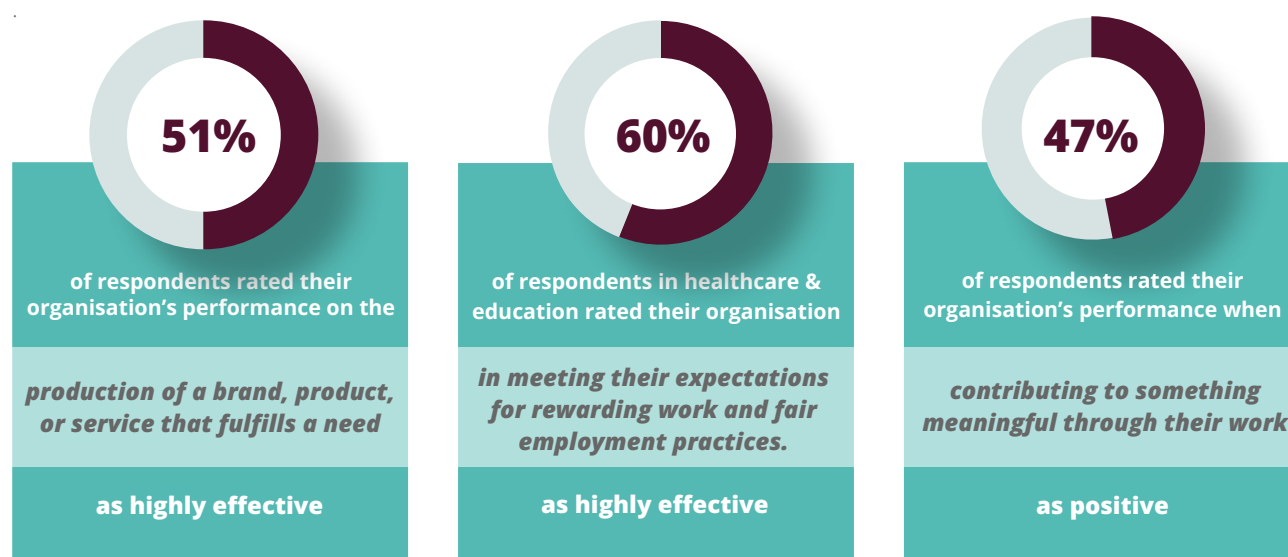
The data indicates people perceive organisations performing poorly overall on environmental and social factors. A large proportion of people were not convinced at their *'organisation's ability to minimise their environmental footprint'* (expectation-to-performance gap of 14%). While more people felt their organisation was not effective at *'raising living standards in the community'* (15% gap).

And when it comes to differences between industries, it's notable the research indicates the government sector consistently fails to meet expectations, with an expectation-to-performance gap average of 14%.

## Where organisations already shine

The factors where organisations perform best are in terms of product and/or service fit. Fifty-one percent of respondents rated their organisation's performance on the *'production of a brand, product, or service that fulfils a need'* as highly effective. This factor was where fewest respondents (26%) felt organisations were underperforming.

Organisations also tend to do better when it comes to *'offering rewarding work and opportunities for professional development'* and using fair employment practices. Australian workers want to feel like they are contributing to something meaningful through their work. Nearly half (47%) rated their organisation's performance on this factor positively, and it was also one of the few factors on which less than a third of respondents (28%) felt organisations were underperforming.



Organisations' employment practices are generally an area of strength: almost one-and-a-half times the number of respondents rated their organisation as highly effective on this measure versus those that are underperforming.

Some industries outperform the average on these factors. Sixty percent of respondents in healthcare and education said their organisation is effective in meeting their expectations for rewarding work and fair employment practices.

# Autonomous organisations do it best

The findings so far show how an organisation works and why it works are as vital to people as how it performs. To further understand the link between working models and our new, broad vision of growth, we examined how employee autonomy contributes to economic, social, psychological and ecological wellbeing.

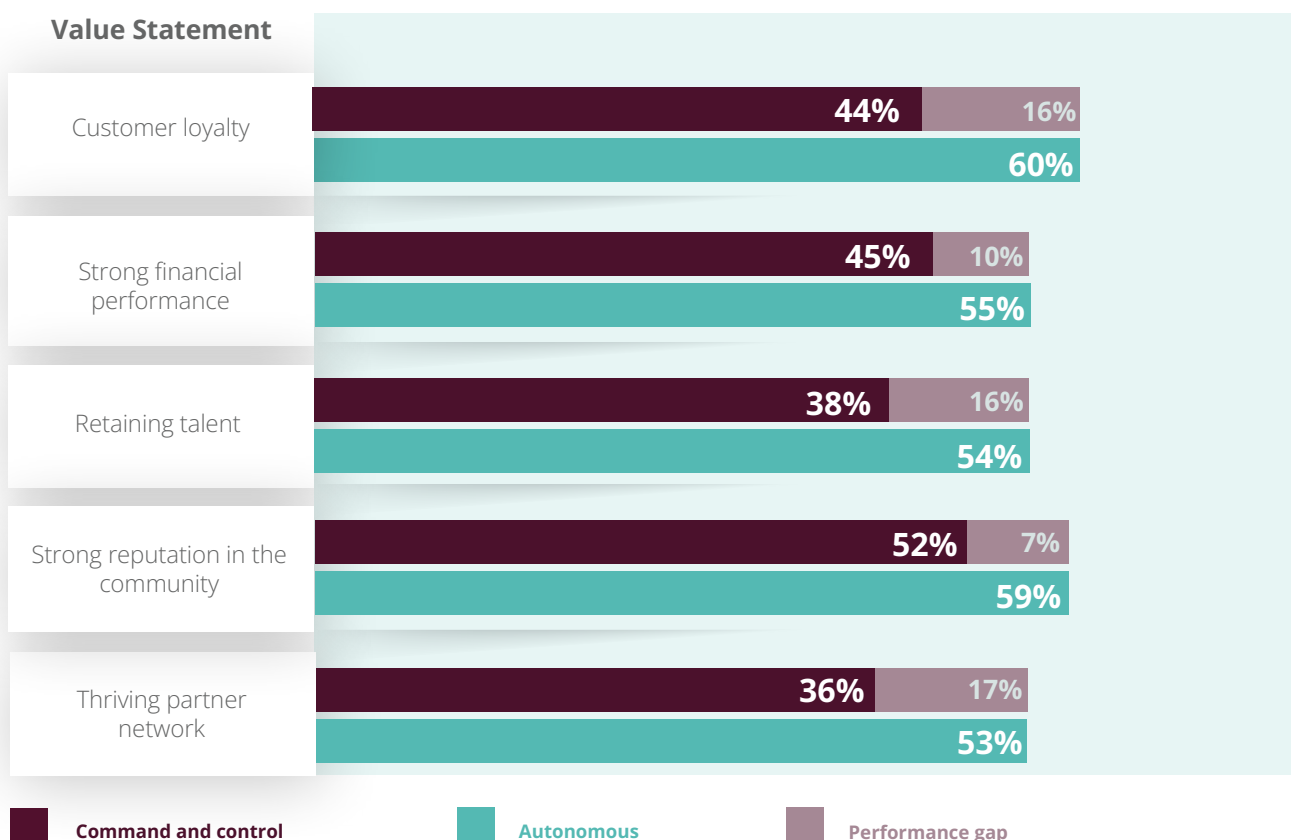


Last year, we conducted research that showed a clear disconnect between the way organisations operate, and the way people want them to. This year we found that greater autonomy is a powerful psychological lever for engaging employees and helping them grow as individuals, as well as delivering benefits to the organisation. And there's a good reason organisations should consider moving towards an autonomous style.

The benefits of being part of such an organisation aren't limited to the fact that people are able to shape their work and work environment. Our analysis shows organisations employing an autonomous approach experience better business outcomes across a range of measures.

## Better outcomes

The ability to deliver against a range of business outcomes is more evident in organisations employing an autonomous working style, compared to those who work in organisations that operate a more command and control environment. Across five measures, there was an average 13% gap between the two styles in terms of being able to meet the outcomes. The largest gaps occurred in 'creating a thriving partner network', 'customer loyalty' and 'retaining talent'.

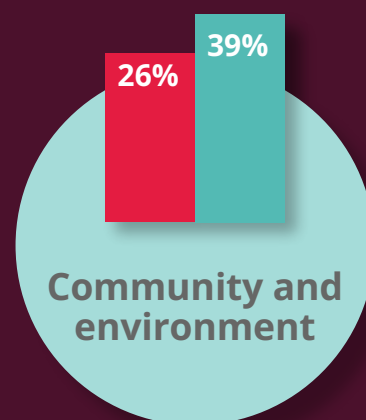
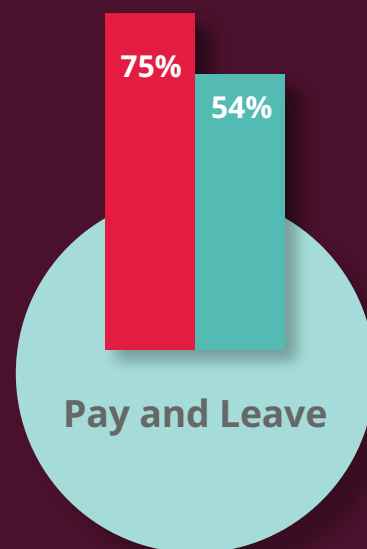
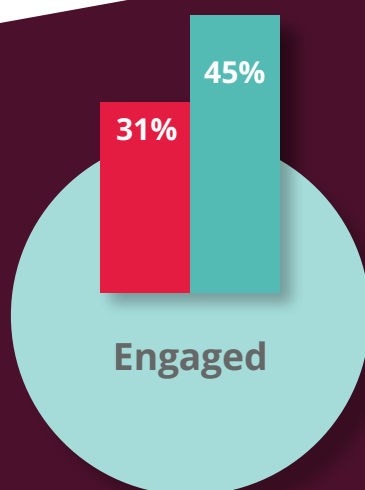


Perhaps part of the answer as to why people in autonomous working environments believe their organisation is more successful lies in their willingness to go above and beyond, and what motivates them.

**Respondents from organisations using autonomous models are more engaged (45%) and more willing to go above and beyond (37%) compared to those in command and control organisations - 31% and 30% respectively.**

In terms of what motivates people, those in command and control working environments are more driven by tangible benefits or perks such as more pay and leave (75%), compared to just 54% in autonomous organisations. For the latter, the ability to choose how and where they worked (57%) and strong leadership (56%) featured top of their motivations. Proving that once again, it's not always about the money.

There was also another significant difference. Thirty-nine percent of people working in autonomous organisations said that a 'workplace that prioritises efforts to help the local community and environment' would make them more willing to go above and beyond, compared to just 26% in command and control style businesses. Again this highlights the more rounded approach autonomous organisations have when it comes to motivations and a focus on societal responsibility.



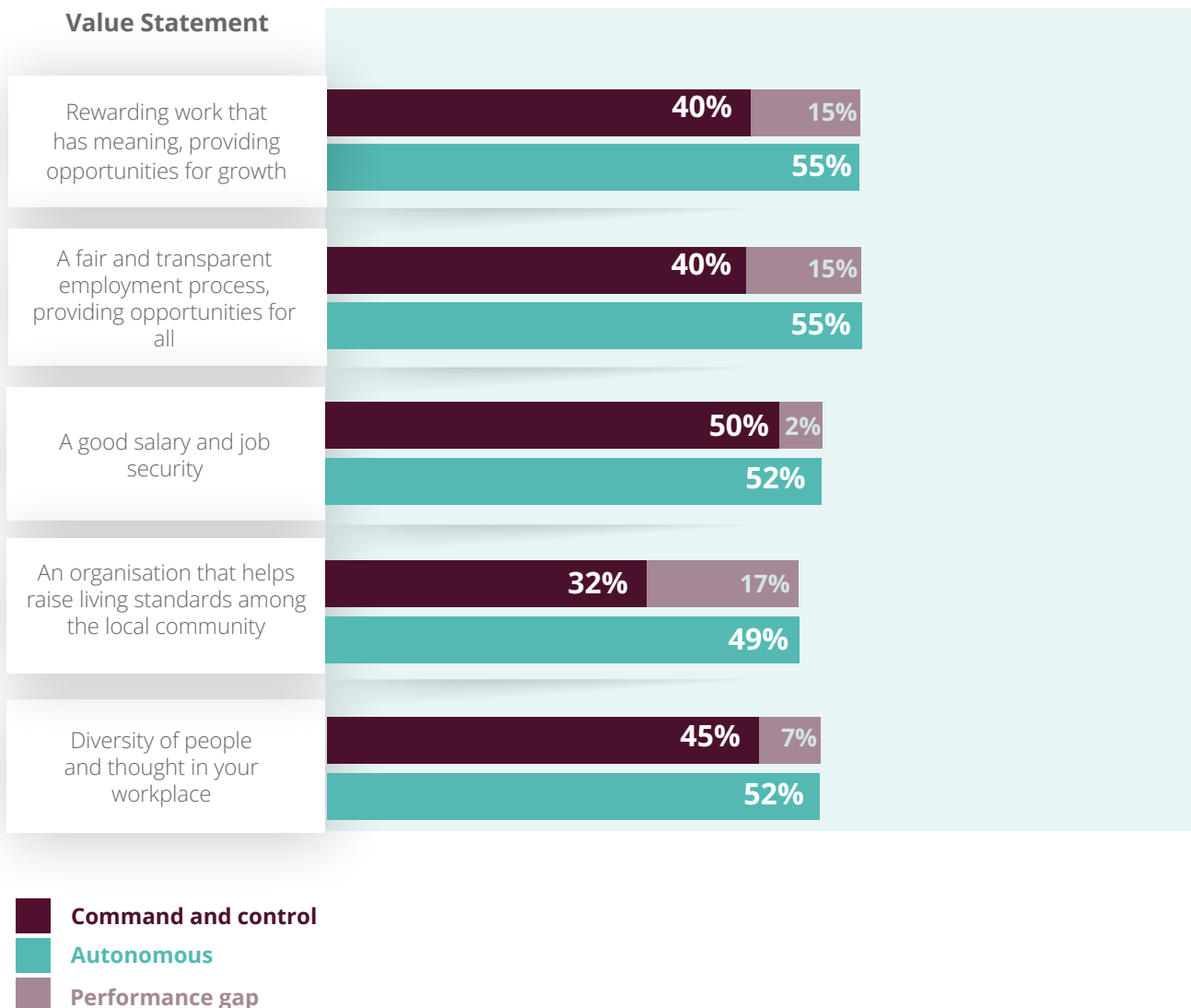
# 37%

of respondents from autonomous models are more willing to go above and beyond



## Autonomy supports a holistic approach to value creation

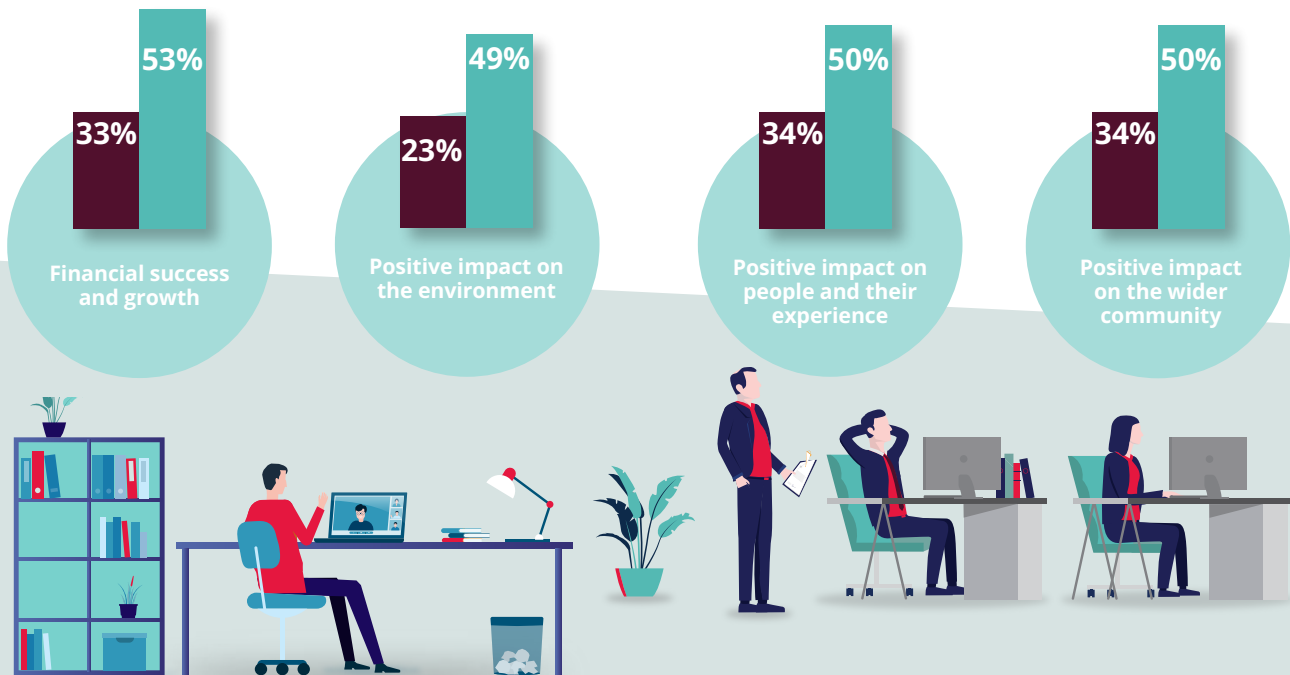
People working in autonomous environments believe their organisation performs better across all 16 value statements, when compared to those working in a command and control environment. Overall, a 14% average gap exists in performance between autonomous and command and control organisations. When it comes to some of the most important considerations:



So why do people working in organisations employing an autonomous working style say their organisation performs better across our 16 value statements, compared to those in command and control?

A lot of that answer may lie in the extent to which all people within an organisation help to drive economic, ecological, psychological and societal success. We've already seen how approximately only a third of respondents said that all people within their organisation help drive a range of successful outcomes. Yet for those working in autonomous environments, the story is very different. On average just over half of people say this to be the case and nearly 20% are more likely to say those outcomes are driven by all people in the business compared to those in command and control environments.

Across a range of measures, it's clear those people working in autonomous organisations feel more involved with, connected to, and positive about their business delivering not just for them, but for a variety of stakeholders.



This is a key point when we remember how top-down ESG strategies and initiatives are more prone to failure or ineffectiveness. *“Lofty ESG goals can be ‘pretty meaningless for staff’*, says Richard Collins, co-founder of CSR Accreditation, a training organisation. ESG measures, which can be manipulated, are imposed top-down, whereas genuine CSR activity is bottom-up, and involves people.

Collins recommends aligning social responsibility with what your business does. It follows that making grand claims about your ethical purpose while conducting business as usual can be doubly disheartening.

An autonomous working style clearly benefits organisations in being able to deliver not only financial outcomes, but environmental, societal and psychological factors too. Not only do these matter to their people, but their organisations are also performing well, and their people feel very much involved in helping to shape their direction too.

**Autonomous organisations really do it best.**

## Case Study

Each year every Access Group employee receives three fully-paid 'Giving Back' days to volunteer for any organisation or charity that is close to their hearts.

This is so that our societal impact can be made in ways that truly matter to our people. In 2022 one of our incredible New Zealand employees, Andie Wood, used her volunteer days to publish a collection of stories and poetry from 128 fellow authors called 'Stand For Ukraine'. Proceeds went to Save the Children Ukraine, a cause close to Andie having grown up in neighbouring Romania and watching the war unfold from afar. Andie raised almost \$15,000 for her cause, with more initiatives on the horizon to support Breast Cancer Research and Domestic Violence.

“

*It's fantastic to be a part of the Access Family and have the freedom to support causes close to my heart. The Giving Back Day from Access enabled me to coordinate a collection of poetry and prose featuring a group of international authors, with all proceeds going to Save the Children Ukraine. Without it, the launch of the anthology wouldn't have been nearly as impactful.*

”





# Conclusions

The research shows organisations achieve better outcomes in many areas when teams and individuals can act more autonomously. The desire for autonomy is shared by managers and employees alike.



As we've discovered, an autonomous working style really does help power profits *and* the prosperity of our people, communities and society - in fact, the entire business ecosystem. Operating in this way enables profits and prosperity to be built from the ground-up and become central to an organisation's strategy.

This ensures ecosystem initiatives are more believable, involved and of course valuable to performance. And this occurs because of the core fundamentals of operating in an autonomous environment; that is the ability to get the right data and information into the hands of people, who in turn can make informed decisions to drive optimal performance.

If organisations want to continue to be successful and achieve sustainable, long-term growth, they should consider exactly what Powering Profits and Prosperity means to their people and how they can deliver upon it.

**What we know from our research is that working autonomously goes a long way towards helping to achieve this goal.**



# Appendix - methodology

This research and the report was prepared and conducted for The Access Group by Meta Strategy.



The survey was designed to understand the importance and business performance of 16 value statements / considerations. Each statement was developed with two factors in mind:

1. An organisation's stakeholders, namely their employees, customers, partners and wider society / community.

2. A business measure:

- a. **Economic:** Creating monetary value / impact
- b. **Ecological:** Environmental concerns, impact and performance
- c. **Psychological:** Emotional connection and impact
- d. **Societal:** Impact on the wider community / society

Respondents were asked to consider how important they deemed each statement to be in respect of their role and position within their organisation, as well as their organisation's performance in successfully delivering on each of the value statements.

Economic				Ecological			
A good salary and job security. (E)	An organisation that helps raise living standards among the local community. (S)	The production of a brand, product, or service that fulfils a need. (C)	An organisation that creates value across the supply chain for partners. (P)	Being part of an organisation that minimises its environmental footprint. (E)	An organisation that minimises environmental footprint among the immediate community. (S)	The production of a brand, product, or service that minimises environmental footprint. (C)	An W that operates an ethical and minimal environmental footprint supply chain. (P)
Societal				Psychological			
A fair and transparent employee process, providing opportunities for all. (E)	Diversity of people and thought in your workplace. (S)	The production of a brand, product, or service that alters the life of customers and others around them. (C)	An organisation that implements and maintains co-development among partners. (P)	Rewarding work that has meaning, providing opportunities for growth. (E)	An organisation that invests in education, training and skills to the benefit of the community. (S)	The production of a brand, product or service that makes people feel a sense of connection. (C)	An organisation that cements long-term relationships with the business ecosystem to the benefit of all. (P)

E = Employees   S = Society   C = Customers   P = Partners

To understand how 'important', 'effective' or how well an organisation 'performed', respondents were asked to rate each value statement on a scale of 0-10. We then used methodology similar to that of Net Promoter Score (NPS) to ascertain how the importance, effectiveness and performance of that statement compared:

- A statement was deemed to be of 'high importance', 'highly effective' or 'highly performing' if that score was between 8-10.
- A statement was deemed to be of 'average importance', 'average effectiveness' or 'average performance' if that score was rated a 7.
- A statement was deemed to be 'not important', 'not effective' or of 'low performance' if that score was rated between 0-6.

## Definitions

**Autonomous working style:** Teams and individuals can shape their work and work environment to achieve the goals they are set.

**Command and Control working style:** Teams and individuals' work and work environments are governed by an organisation's standards, procedures, and output metrics.



## About The Access Group

The Access Group is one of the largest UK-headquartered providers of business management software to small and mid-sized organisations in the UK, Ireland, and Asia Pacific. It helps more than 60,000 customers across commercial and non-profit sectors become more productive and efficient. Its innovative Access Workspace cloud solutions transform the way business software is used, giving every employee the freedom to do more of what's important to them. Founded in 1991, The Access Group employs approximately 5,500 people.

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