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eBook

Employee Engagement: The Key to Better EHS

empower better performance

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Introduction

A guide to what organizations can do now to drive better EHS performance through a more engaged workforce.

Organizations have always known that engaged employees are better for business.

When someone is committed to their work and enthusiastic about their job, they're much more likely to see their interests as aligned with the values and goals of their employer. Engaged employees tend to make the kinds of decisions that ultimately improve a company's bottom line. And they don't jump ship when the going gets tough; they do what it takes to turn things around.

While for most organizations, this is where the benefits of employee engagement seem to end, a growing number are starting to find it's also a key driver of success in EHS.

What is “Employee Engagement?”

...relates to the level of an employee's commitment and connection to an organization.¹

Society for Human Resource Management

...concept that describes the level of enthusiasm and dedication a worker feels toward their job.²

Investopedia

...the involvement and enthusiasm of employees in their work and workplace.³

Gallup

Chapter 1

The Importance of Employee Engagement



Intuitively, we all resonate with the concept that employee engagement is important to an organization's success. It's easy to see, in both attitudes and output, that those who are invested in what they do and where they work tend to do a better job.

But what is the evidence supporting the relationship between stronger engagement and a company's success?

A 2020 Gallup report concluded that “the relationship between engagement and performance at the business/work unit level is substantial and highly generalizable across organizations.”⁴ Among other things, Gallup researchers found that organizations with the highest levels of engagement were 23 percent more profitable, experienced 64 percent fewer on-the-job accidents, and saw rates of employee absenteeism that were 81 percent lower than those with poor engagement. Gallup also revealed that “highly engaged teams” were, on average, 14 to 18 percent more productive than their low-engagement counterparts.

“Highly engaged employees make the customer experience. Disengaged employees break it.”

Timothy R. Clark

Author

The Employee Engagement Mindset

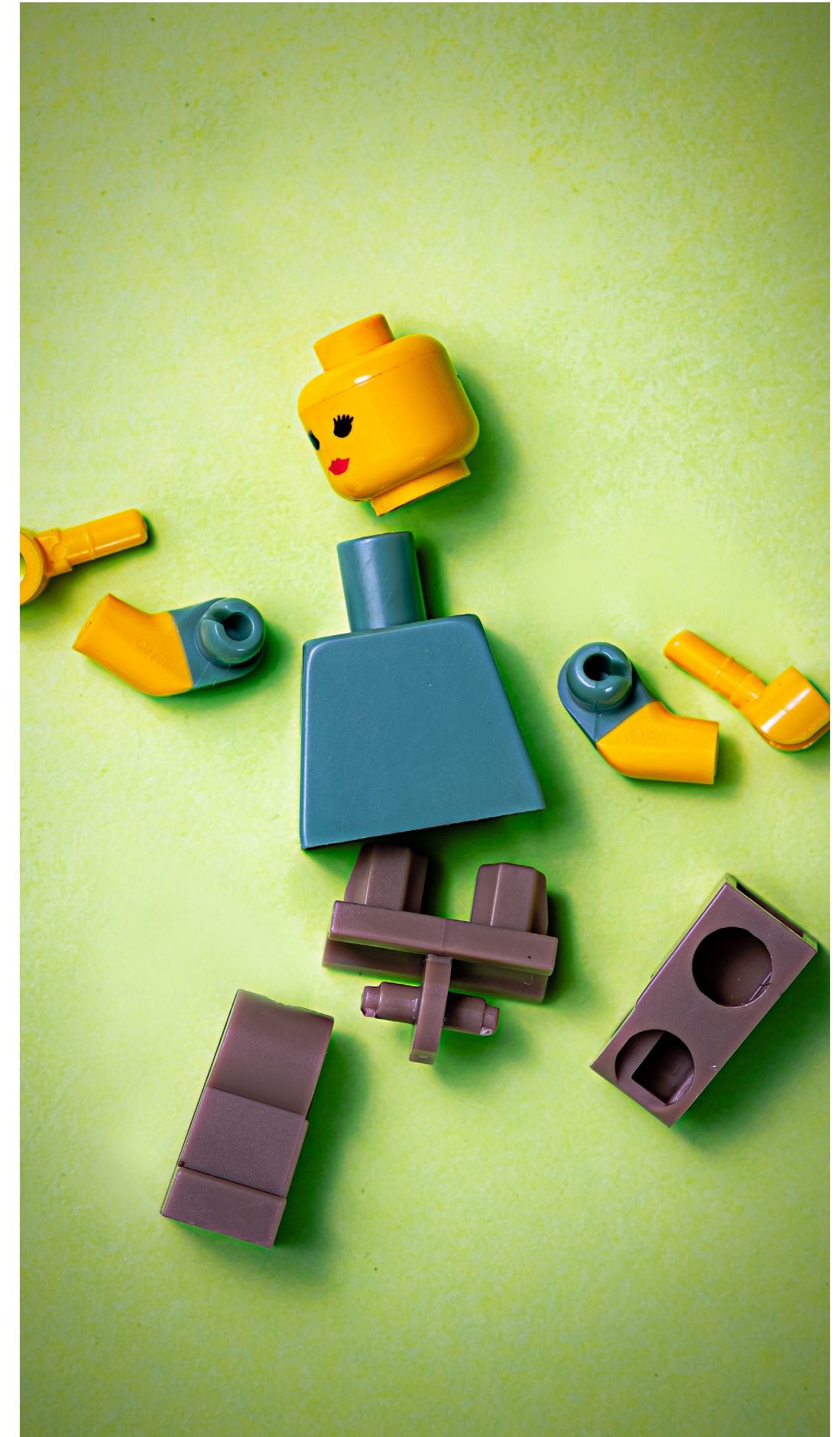


Figure 1

97%

of global enterprises report that increasing employee involvement in EHS is a “high” or “very high” priority⁶

Verdantix
Global Corporate Survey 2021

These findings are consistent with a 2013 study published in the Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine that found that publicly traded organizations with higher levels of EHS engagement realized stock return rates three times higher than the market average over a period of 14 years.⁵

Chapter 2

The EHS Employee Engagement Challenge



As any EHS professional will attest, environment, health, safety, and sustainability initiatives are not only required for compliance purposes, but they're also essential to getting a business to thrive. Organizations that encourage a culture where EHS is ingrained usually excel in other areas as well.

EHS professionals know that better EHS performance inevitably depends on the strength of the organization's connection to its workforce. Leadership can tout the organization's EHS and ESG goals. Managers can implore employees to follow rules and 'work safely'. But neither approach will succeed in rallying the workforce toward its EHS ambitions if the reasons why it's important are not clear.

The problem in many organizations is that employee engagement in EHS is a seemingly insurmountable challenge. A recent survey found that 7 in 10 companies indicated that while EHS engagement was a high priority, the current level of employee engagement in EHS was considered no better than 'moderate'.⁷

What is Employee Engagement in EHS?

Employee engagement in EHS occurs when employees understand and are personally invested in helping their organization achieve its EHS-related goals. Engaged employees take responsibility and actively drive their company's EHS objectives forward.



One strategy used by a growing number of companies involves looking at EHS through a broader lens.

While employee engagement in EHS has historically been synonymous with workplace safety, that's no longer the case. With interest growing in topics covering total worker health & wellbeing, environmental stewardship, as well as ESG & sustainability, the scope of EHS is much bigger than in years past.

Organizations are looking for ways to get their workforce involved in this broader scope of EHS, and consequently, individuals are now presented with new entry points to get involved in the company's EHS and sustainability initiatives in ways we hadn't before imagined.

As companies develop their sustainability agendas, many of the traditional avenues used for safety engagement now offer new opportunities for engagement in sustainability.

Employee Engagement Efforts



Source: *EHS Daily Advisor*

In essence, these organizations are striving to establish what could be described as an “engagement culture.” They’re increasing engagement by setting a wide range of EHS-related goals and showing employees what they can do to support that vision. They’re then giving them the freedom to act on EHS initiatives in ways that suit their personal preferences. In short, they’re putting their EHS processes and programs into their employees’ hands.

To get at what’s preventing organizations from employee engagement success, Cority recently polled a number of EHS leaders to share their thoughts on the subject. If employers know that engagement is important to EHS, and they’re spending significant time and money to drive engagement rates up, why are they still having such a hard time translating those actions into higher engagement scores?

Poll respondents listed several different reasons why they felt that their engagement efforts were stalling – everything from a lack

of time and resources to poorly perceived management commitment, to goal conflicts and even outright worker resistance to engagement initiatives.

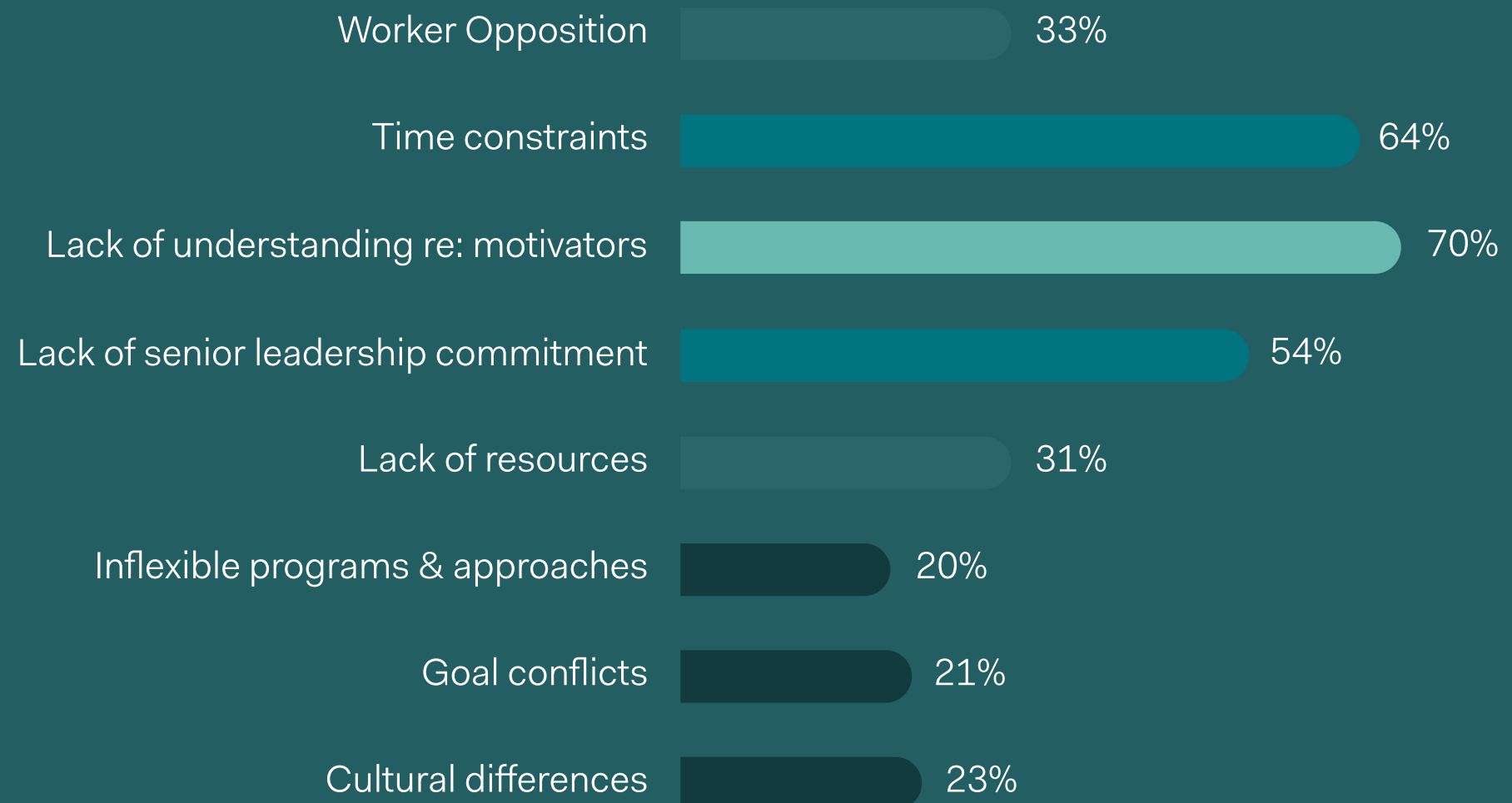
But the largest percentage of EHS professionals mentioned that their “lack of understanding of motivators” was the key barrier to better engagement. Essentially, they were seemingly admitting that they did not know if what they were doing was effective at boosting engagement levels. In other words, they were questioning whether they were **focused on the right things**.

Instead, their problems appeared to be less about strategy (knowing what to focus on) and more about execution – removing barriers that are preventing them from executing the strategies needed for better employee buy-in and delivery.



Barriers to Employee Engagement

In a recent Cority poll, participants were asked about the obstacles their organizations faced when it came to employee engagement in EHS.



Source: Cority, 2022

Chapter 3

The Pillars
of Employee
Engagement in EHS



Given these challenges, how can organizations change their approach to improve employee engagement and drive better EHS performance?

Organizations need to start by asking themselves whether their efforts will lead to meaningful and measurable improvement in engagement. Simply stated, companies need to ensure they're focused on the right things.

In his best-selling book 'Drive' author Daniel H. Pink proposes that organizations intent on boosting employee motivation and engagement should focus on three distinct elements: Purpose, Mastery, and Autonomy.

Purpose

Purpose is about helping employees understand why they are doing something. Most people want their work to have meaning—to know that they're actively contributing to something larger than themselves. To drive engagement, Pink suggests that it's the organization's responsibility to set a vision for employees

3 Pillars of Strong Engagement

"Drive" author Daniel Pink suggests that to build strong engagement in any endeavor, organizations should focus on three principles: **purpose, mastery, and autonomy.**

Purpose

helping employees understand why they are doing something

Mastery

helping employees get better at things that matter

Autonomy

allowing employees to make decisions and take action

to aspire to and show them how they actively contribute to helping the business reach those goals. To connect what they do every day to how that helps the business achieve that vision.

Once the vision is shared, and the employees understand how they contribute to that vision, the employer should create channels through which information can be freely shared between different organizational levels. To this end, the company should provide ways for managers to share key metrics and offer regular performance feedback, so employees know how they're doing in terms of meeting their responsibilities to support the business' key EHS goals and identify areas for improvement. This feedback should be bi-directional. Employees should have the opportunity to share information with management about any challenges or obstacles that may be preventing them from fulfilling their duties.

Mastery

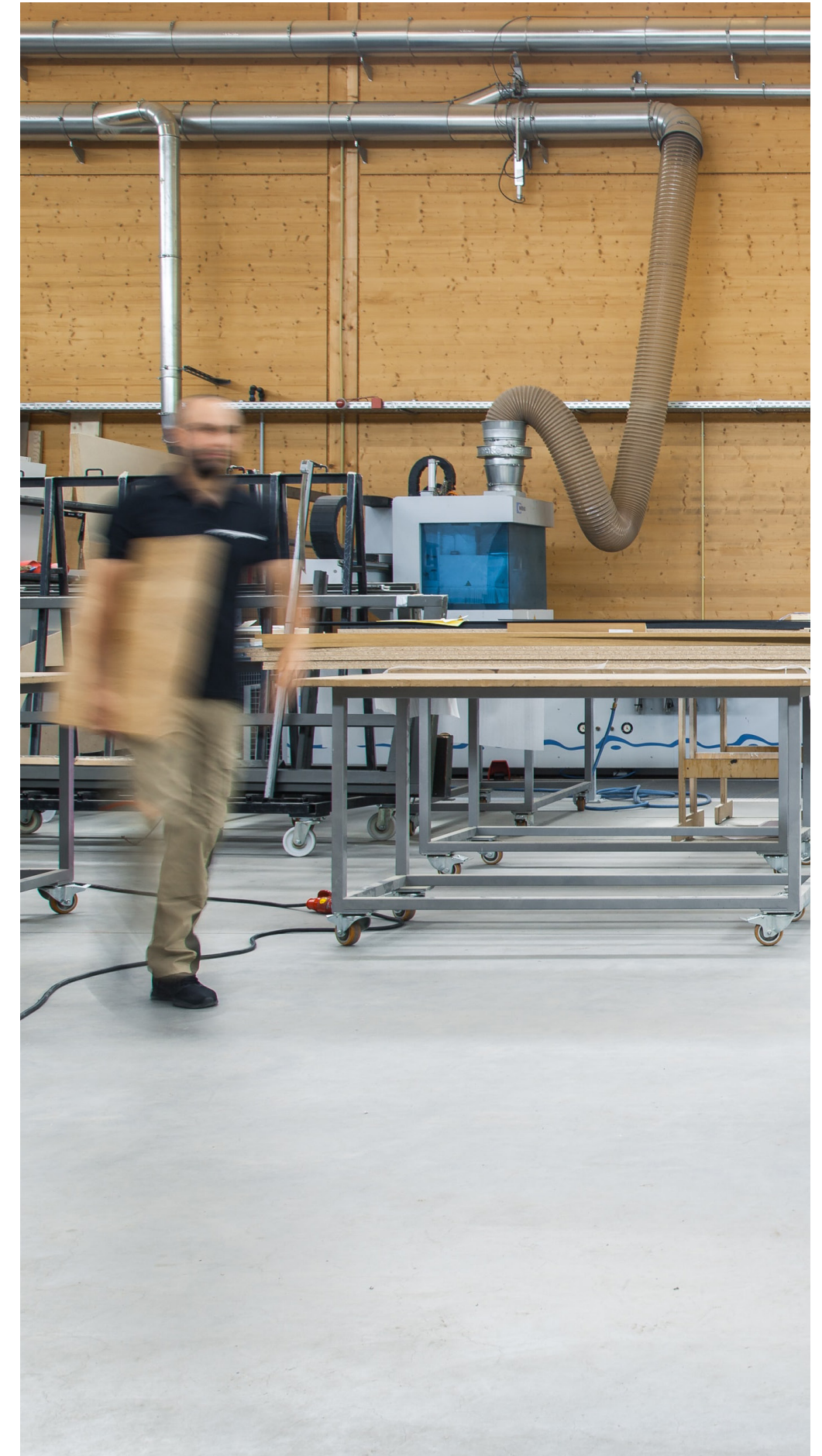
Mastery is about helping employees get better

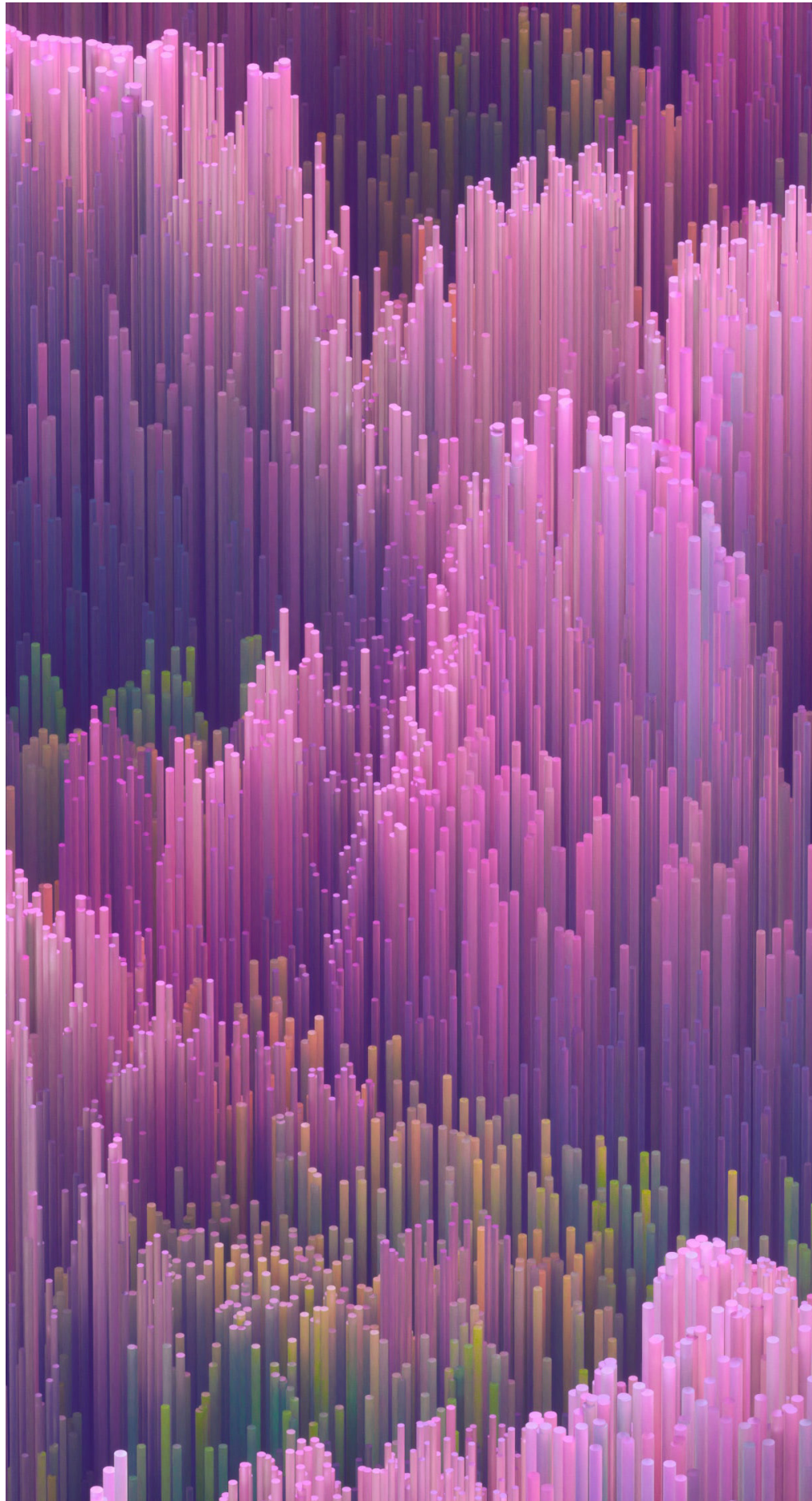
at the things that matter. In effect, Mastery is about providing people with the change to grow and develop through opportunities to develop and apply new skills and knowledge that will ultimately help them fulfill their responsibilities and support the business' EHS vision and goals.

While most companies might support mastery through traditional training approaches, it is important to recognize that affording employees opportunities to participate in events through which they can acquire and refine skills and knowledge supports the idea that mastery is necessary for better engagement.

Autonomy

Autonomy is about giving employees the freedom to make decisions and take action in whatever way they believe allow them to best meet their responsibilities and help the company. When people know what they need to do (their purpose) and are confident in their skills and ability to do it (have mastery), it follows that they should also know how to go





about getting it done. Autonomy is essential to developing accountability.

So, how might we apply the principles of Purpose, Mastery, and Autonomy to improve workforce engagement in EHS programs?

Companies can promote Purpose in their EHS engagement efforts by firstly developing and socializing their broader EHS vision and goals, including their sustainability agendas amongst their key stakeholders. Once the organization has established its vision, it then needs to show employees how their everyday work, from completing incidents reports and hazard observations, to conducting audits and inspections, to collecting and submitting field-level data for environmental compliance or sustainability reporting, contributes to that vision.

Management should give direct feedback to employees about their performance and its effect on EHS metrics, share EHS information in company meetings, and post and share EHS results as they become available. In

turn, employees should also be encouraged to share their ideas and concerns with management at meetings and via incident reporting and near-misses, along with sharing any lessons learned with their peers that can be applied to other EHS activities

Mastery in the context of EHS engagement involves helping employees develop the skills and competencies they need to get better at meeting their specific EHS accountabilities. Providing opportunities for EHS training is critical in this regard, but there are other approaches organizations can take as well. Job-shadowing should be encouraged while performance coaching can be offered to help with skills application and refinement. Employees should also be offered opportunities to participate in initiatives like EHS and sustainability committees, management of change reviews, or even regulatory audits to refine new skills that will give them new ways to contribute to EHS results. And they should be allowed to take part in incident investigations and regulatory inspections.



Organizations interested in developing autonomy should encourage employees to actively identify new or better ways to complete EHS tasks, as well as afford opportunities to lead initiatives through which they have the agency to apply their skills to achieve key EHS goals. This might involve:

- Supporting employees in making informed decisions on managing risk in the field, through risk assessments and post-task learning reviews; or
- Providing opportunities for employee-led improvement projects, like implementing an employee-led recycling program or sustainability initiative.

Chapter 4

What's Getting in the Way of Achieving Better EHS Engagement?



Even where engagement initiatives are focused on the right things (e.g. Purpose, Mastery, and Autonomy), these efforts are easily derailed by key obstacles in the workplace. Let's explore a few now:

Organizational Structures

Our workplaces are changing. Organizations are operating across larger global footprints, while flattening their organizational hierarchies, leading to more self-directed work and lower levels of direct supervisor-subordinate interaction. And those changes were happening well before the pandemic triggered the massive and likely long-lasting shift toward remote work. What these structural changes mean is that the traditional tools that employers have used to engage their workforce will no longer work.

With employees spread across multiple locations, it's increasingly difficult to schedule face-to-face meetings, while flatter organizations mean front-line workers have less face-time with their managers, making it more difficult to raise concerns or discuss

EHS issues that can undermine trust.

These structural barriers also make it difficult for organizations to easily communicate their EHS vision and keep the workforce aligned to that vision.

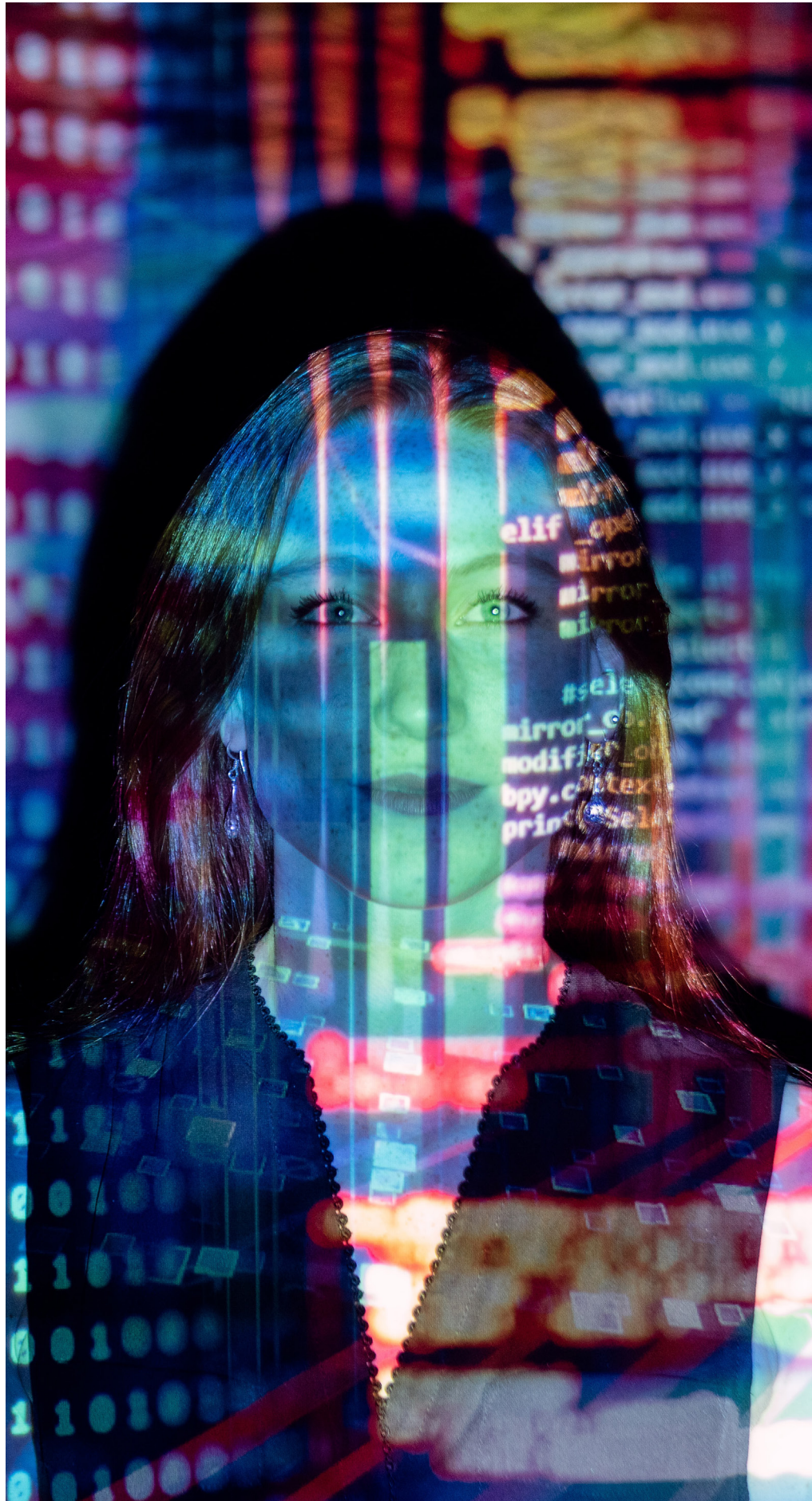
In 2021, [Cority engaged with independent research firm Verdantix](#) to better understand how organizations were progressing with their corporate sustainability initiatives. In that study, we found that less than 40% of firms reported that their sustainability agendas were understood by their workforce, and only 12% indicated that their employees understood how they influenced the firm's sustainability performance.

One-size-fits-all approach

Why does Starbucks write your name on your coffee cup?

Now, if it's to keep track of which customer ordered what, we could argue that there are alternatives. For instance – if you visit McDonald's, when you place your order, your





receipt includes a number to tell you where in the queue your order sits relative to other customers. When your order is ready, it's displayed on a monitor, and you pick up your food. Simple. Efficient.

Starbucks could easily have implemented a similar system. But they didn't.

And that's because Starbucks knows that the simple act of writing your name on your coffee cup is a way to personalize that customer experience - to help make that buying experience a little more memorable and create a lasting connection with that customer.

Why is this relevant in the world of EHS?

It's relevant because new research is showing that the degree to which employees are engaged at work is becoming increasingly tied to how well employers provide a 'personalized work experience'. In other words, how is the company tailoring the work and/or the work environment to address each individual's specific needs, preferences, challenges, and

requirements? By extension, how are we making our EHS programs and initiatives relevant to each individual, such that it creates new opportunities to engage those workers in EHS?

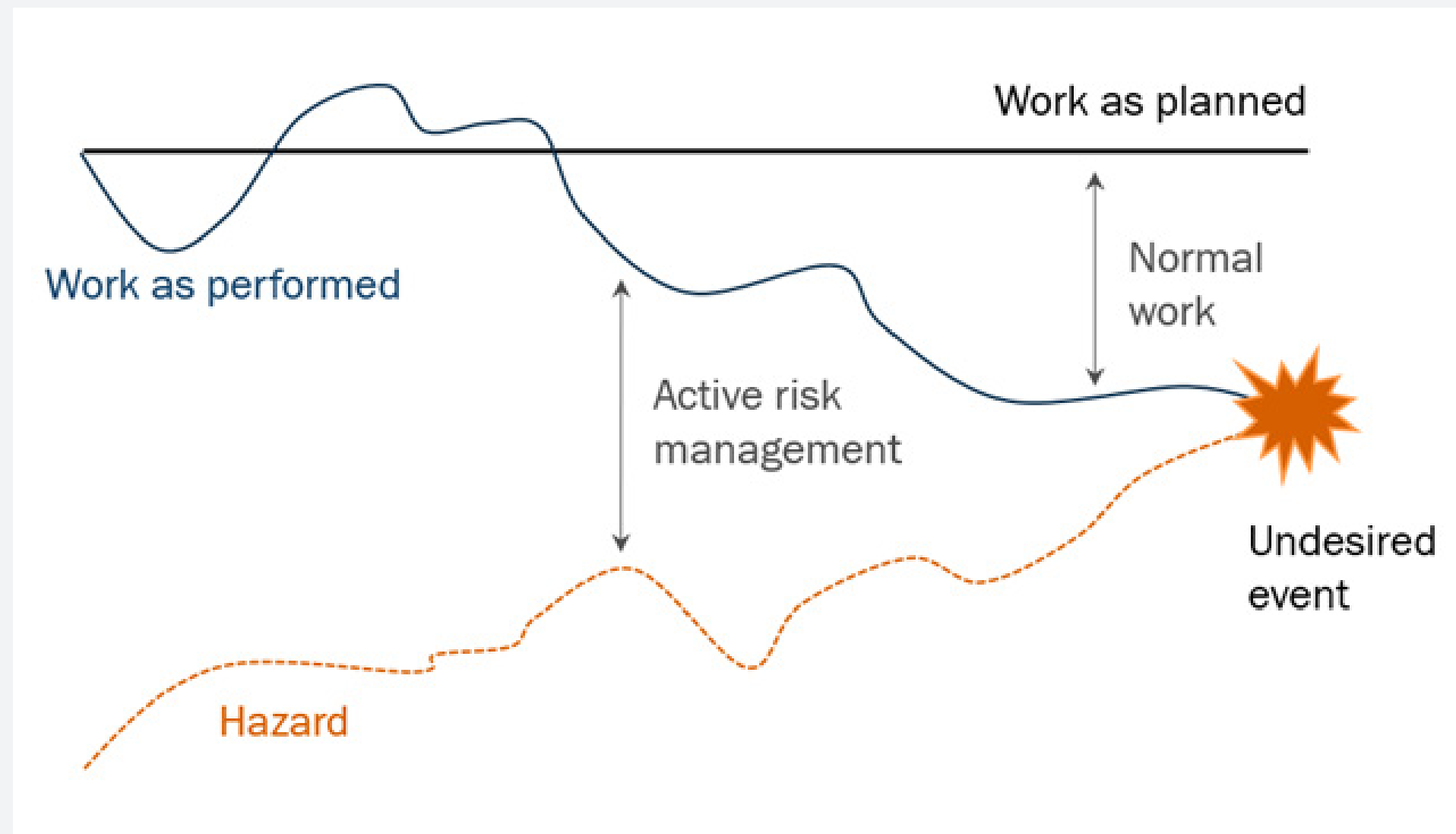
The problem is that most EHS programs are not inherently designed to offer a personalized experience. Instead of being tailored for real people, they tend to be asset-centric and created to meet compliance requirements. They're usually scalable and easy to implement, but how individual workers engage with the program—and whether the program content applies to their needs—is typically just a secondary consideration, if it's even considered at all.

Access to information

Earlier, we mentioned that Autonomy was an essential component of employee engagement. The reason autonomy is so critical is because *work rarely happens in the way we intend or imagine it to.*

While most organizations train employees

Pre-Accident Investigations



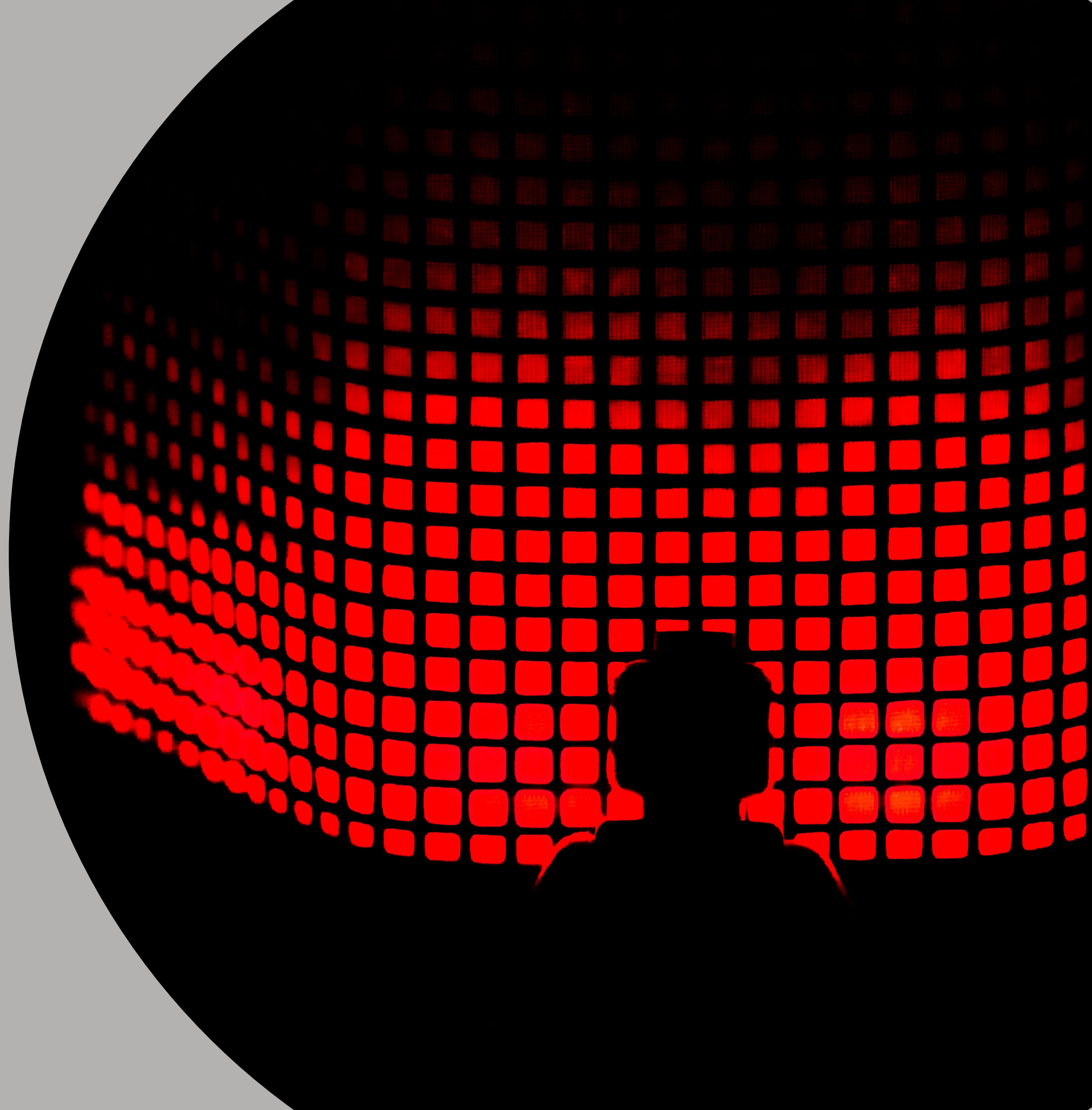
Source: Conklin, T. 2017 *Pre-Accident Investigations*

to complete tasks according to standard processes or set of rules, that standardization often bumps up against the natural variability inherent in everyday work. That variability – be that changing weather conditions, lack of tools, or last-minute changes, requires workers to constantly adapt their original plan to get work done. The ability of these employees to effectively manage EHS risk in such environments is heavily dependent on having access to information they need to make decisions as conditions change in real-time. But ask them where to find it, or who to ask to get it? Many workers will tell you they're entirely on their own. The information they need is nowhere to be found, shoved in a binder, and stuffed away in an office somewhere.

As a result, employees are often forced to make decisions and take action to manage this variability without the benefit of the information they need, which increases the risk of things going wrong.

Chapter 4

Everyone In: How
Technology Can
Make a Difference



So how can organizations incorporate the ideas of Purpose, Mastery, and Autonomy in their employee engagement efforts? And how do they design these efforts to navigate some of the organizational barriers that often undermine our ability to drive higher participation in our EHS programs?

The answer lies in an EHS digital transformation. Let's look at 3 ways in which leveraging a digital EHS platform can help drive better EHS performance through enhanced workforce engagement.

Mobility (sustaining Purpose)

In late 2021, the Pew Research Center released a report that detailed the change in social media activity by U.S. lawmakers during the 2020 election cycle. Activity by candidates on platforms like Facebook and Twitter skyrocketed in 2020. The COVID-19 pandemic certainly contributed – in part – to this increase, since politicians couldn't campaign as they once did. But the data points to a larger trend in how campaigning has been changing over the years.

Case Study: **Eramet**



Partnering with Cority, Eramet introduced a mobile app as a way to encourage its global workforce to elevate safety issues within its operations, helping it identify emerging areas of concern and align strategy and resources toward those issues. In just the first 3 months post-deployment, Eramet employees worldwide logged over 6,000 unique entries into their EHS platform. That's an average of 100 entries per day! These new data points not only elevate workers' concerns at scale but demonstrated how every employee's voice matters.

[Learn more](#)

Eramet is a French multinational mining and metallurgy company, headquartered in Paris, France, with operations spread across the Americas, Europe, Africa, and APAC.



What lawmakers have learned over the years is that by leveraging technology, they've been able to generate orders of magnitude more engagement with the electorate than they ever could have through traditional boots-on-the-ground campaigning. It enables them to connect with potential voters anywhere, at any time, allowing them to share their message while providing a medium for voters to funnel their concerns, grievances, or ideas to them.

Thinking back to the idea of 'Purpose', what we are describing are the bi-directional feedback channels needed to build greater engagement.

One of the clearest ways to drive better engagement is by making your program mobile-enabled. Mobility tools remove barriers to communication that are created as operational scale increases and helps employees feel connected to their business even where direct face-to-face interaction is more difficult. For leaders, mobility offers a means to share key information efficiently and consistently with the workforce, wherever

they are, and demonstrate a desire to receive feedback from all levels.

Organizations that digitize their EHS programs and make them accessible via mobile devices:

- **encourage** employee autonomy and engagement
- **ensure** information can be shared quickly
- **eliminate** the heavy paperwork that often hinders reporting
- **give** workers the tools they need for audits, inspections, and other key activities
- **simplify** data collection
- **reduce** lag time between problem discovery and resolution

Digital Learning (Building Mastery)

According to rev.com, 70% of Millennials report that they turn to YouTube or similar platforms if they want to learn something new. That's not surprising. In a recent report from Wainhouse Research, preference for traditional in-person learning is falling in preference amongst younger workers who

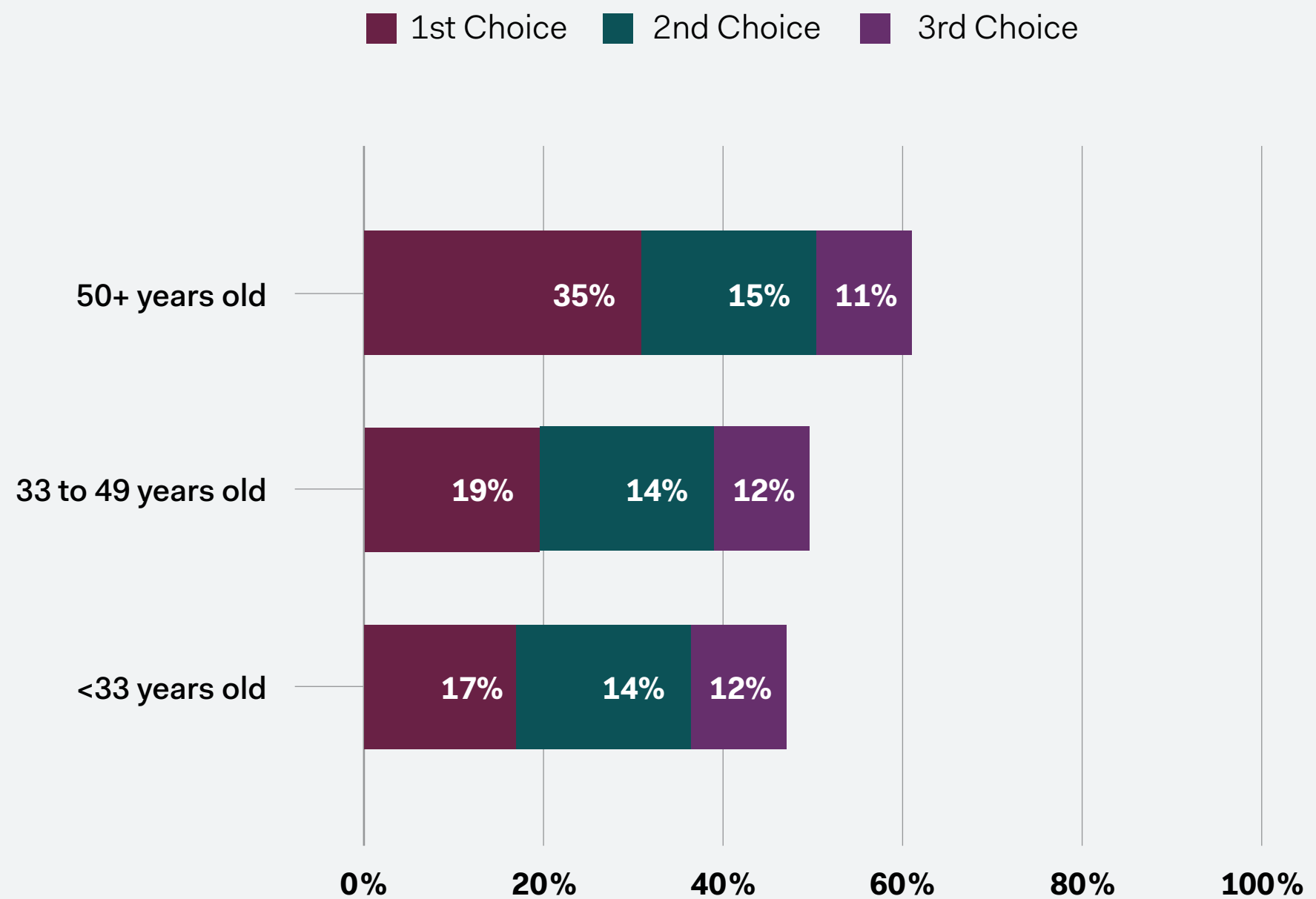
are making up a growing majority of the global workforce. So, what's driving the push toward digital learning? In short – it's all about control.

New data is emerging that suggests that employees who are given more control of their work tend to be more engaged at work. What this means is that employees want more control over how, when, where, and to what degree they fulfill their responsibilities and/or engage in programs and initiatives at the workplace, including EHS.

And [EHS learning](#) is a great way to not only offer employees more control over their work, but studies show that digital instruction tools have an outsized impact. Research has found that eLearning:

- **improves knowledge retention** by **25-60%** compared to in-person training
- requires **40-60% less time** than learning in-person
- **boosts worker engagement** by **~18%**⁹

% Citing Instructor-Led Training as Preferred for Learning New Material



Source: Wainhouse Research

Conclusion

Making EHS More Personal



A recent study out of NYU found that the use of mobile apps and wearables was associated with lower personal health risk factors, with respect to both short-term metrics like blood glucose levels, as well as longer-term measures such as number of hospital visits. What the team found was that making health data visible to individuals through technology, created the “push” needed to get people to seek preventive care before those issues grew into more chronic health concerns.

What this means is that we can create a more personalized EHS experience simply by giving workers better access to information about their risk exposure, and their personal health data. Giving workers more visibility into their risk data in a way that’s easy to understand can help stimulate changes in decisions and behaviors since the individual can see – in real-time – how their actions impact their risk exposure. This brings us back to the idea of autonomy – giving your people the information they need to manage risk by themselves, moment-by-moment.




Connect to Engage in EHS

Driving better worker engagement begins with understanding what your employees want. There needs to be a connection between management and the workforce—a window for communication, feedback, and collaboration.

Help your employees develop a sense of purpose, mastery, and autonomy, and you'll help your organization achieve its goals in EHS. Give them the tools they need to participate in EHS initiatives on terms that meet them where they are, that fit their personal preferences, and that offer them a greater sense of control, and you'll find that these goals suddenly start to seem more attainable than ever.

For more information on how cloud-based and mobile technologies can offer learning paths tailored to the individual in all aspects of EHS, [chat with a Cority representative today](#).



Cority gives every employee from the field to the board room the power to make a difference, reducing risks and creating a safer, healthier and more sustainable world. For over 35 years, Cority's people-first software solutions have been built by EHS and sustainability experts who know the pressures businesses face.

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