

meaningsphere®



STATE OF

Worklife Fulfillment

2026 STUDY



Background and approach

MeaningSphere exists to help individuals create deeper meaning and satisfaction in their worklives.

But what do we mean by “worklife,” and why now?

Worklife is the lived experience of being a working human. It’s where our skills, values, hopes, and energy meet the realities of our daily roles. It’s not just what we do for a living—it’s how we feel while doing it, how connected we are to the impact we make, and how aligned our work feels with who we are becoming.

In recent years, many people have felt work become heavier—more rushed, more draining, and less connected to what they care about. Burnout and disengagement are increasingly part of the everyday experience. And while employers may offer new perks, programs, and promises, many workers still find themselves waiting for fulfillment to arrive. Yet our belief is that fulfillment rarely works that way. It isn’t something an employer can hand over; it’s something each person shapes for themselves based on what matters most to them.

This is why we conducted our first study on worklife fulfillment. We wanted to understand how people across the U.S. are experiencing their worklives today: what gives them a sense of purpose, what gets in the way, and what they wish they had more of.

To that end, in August 2025, we partnered with **SSRS** to survey a total of 522 U.S. workers across a broad range of industries, incomes, geographies and backgrounds. The sample was then weighted to represent the U.S. population. The data contained in this report reflects the answers provided by the representative sample of our target population – adults ages 25-60 who were employed or temporarily unemployed.

Insights on the U.S. workforce

We invited U.S. workers to take a closer look at their worklife: How fulfilled they feel, what fulfillment means to them, what they long for, and the barriers and pressures that shape their day-to-day experience.



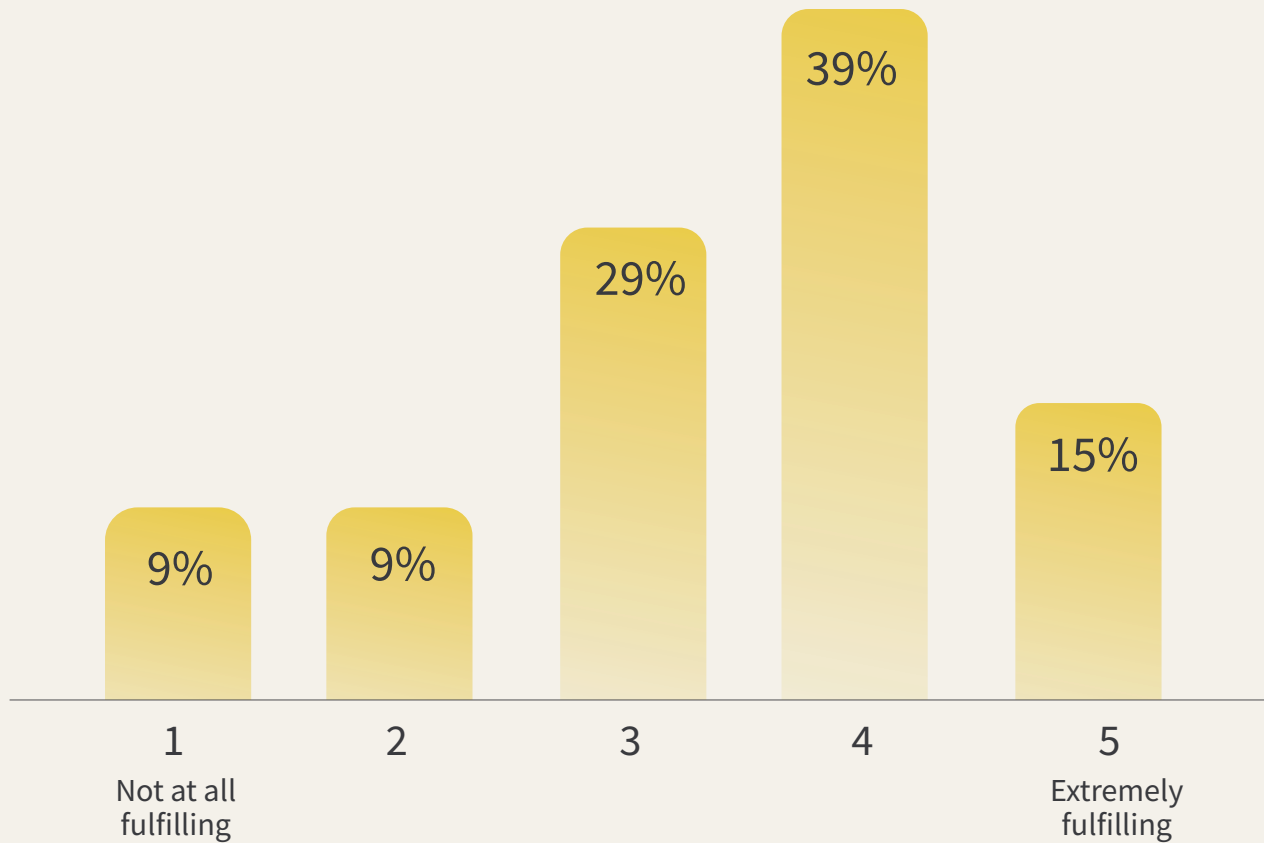
What we heard paints a revealing picture of the modern worklife, and the gap some people feel between the work they do and the fulfillment they desire.

Only 15% experience work as extremely fulfilling.

While many people report moderate to high levels of fulfillment, just 15% describe their work as “**extremely fulfilling**.” Most fall somewhere in the middle--engaged enough to function and contribute, but not fully connected to the deeper meaning or purpose their work could provide. At the same time, nearly one in five workers reports that their work is unfulfilling, describing themselves as largely disconnected from the impact or purpose of what they do.

Taken together, these findings suggest that work is not fundamentally broken for most people. Instead, they point to a significant opportunity for more individuals to move beyond adequacy toward a richer and more meaningful sense of fulfillment in their work.

U.S. workers' ratings of how fulfilling their work feels



Question: On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being not at all fulfilling, and 5 being extremely fulfilling, how fulfilling does your work feel right now?



What fulfillment means to workers

When workers defined “fulfilling work” in their own words, approximately 80% of responses included themes of personal satisfaction and making a positive impact on others.

However, the variation within those broad themes is indicative of the deep and individual nature of fulfillment, showing that this term isn’t one-size-fits-all.



How U.S. workers define meaningful work

9%

Engaged &
Challenging Work:

*Intellectually stimulating,
keeps me engaged*

12%

Worklife Balance:

*Not being stressed or under
pressure, manageable*

17%

Quality of Work:

*Completing tasks, alignment with
personal values*

19%

Work Enviroment:

*Pays well, fair compensation,
supportive setting*

32%

Meaningful Work:

Helping others, making a difference

46%

Personal Satisfaction:

Doing what I enjoy



Question: How do you personally define “fulfilling work?”

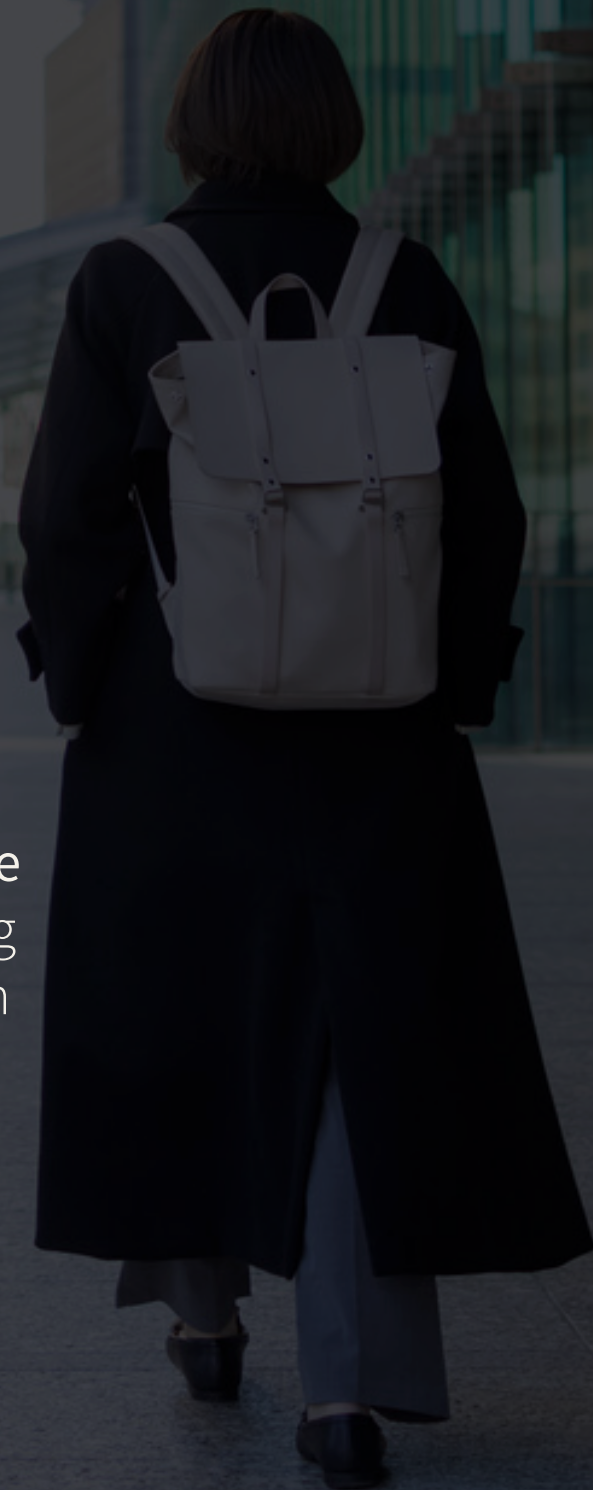
What matters most

Individuals were asked to choose from a list of fulfillment drivers associated with meaningful work. Across the workforce, the fulfillment drivers that matter most are:

Feeling appreciated and valued

Making a positive impact on others

Participants cited **flexibility** and **worklife harmony** as areas essential to sustaining energy and satisfaction, which they wish they had more of.



What matters most when it comes to fulfilling work?

42%

Feeling appreciated & valued

42%

Making a positive impact on others

27%

Experiencing harmony between work and life

24%

Having flexibility in how and when I work

20%

Having control and autonomy over my work

18%

Being inspired by the work that I do

16%

Growing and developing as a person

15%

Feeling a sense of connection and belonging

15%

Feeling energized and supported in my overall well-being

11%

Being deeply engaged and fully immersed



Question: *What matters most when it comes to fulfilling work? Select up to three.*

A black and white photograph of two men in business attire standing in a modern office with large windows. The man on the left is seen from the side, wearing a light-colored shirt and dark trousers. The man on the right is facing him, wearing a dark suit jacket over a striped shirt and dark trousers, holding a folder. They appear to be in a conversation. The background shows office furniture and large windows letting in natural light.

Barriers and pressures

Workers reported a mix of organizational and external challenges as having the biggest impact on their worklife

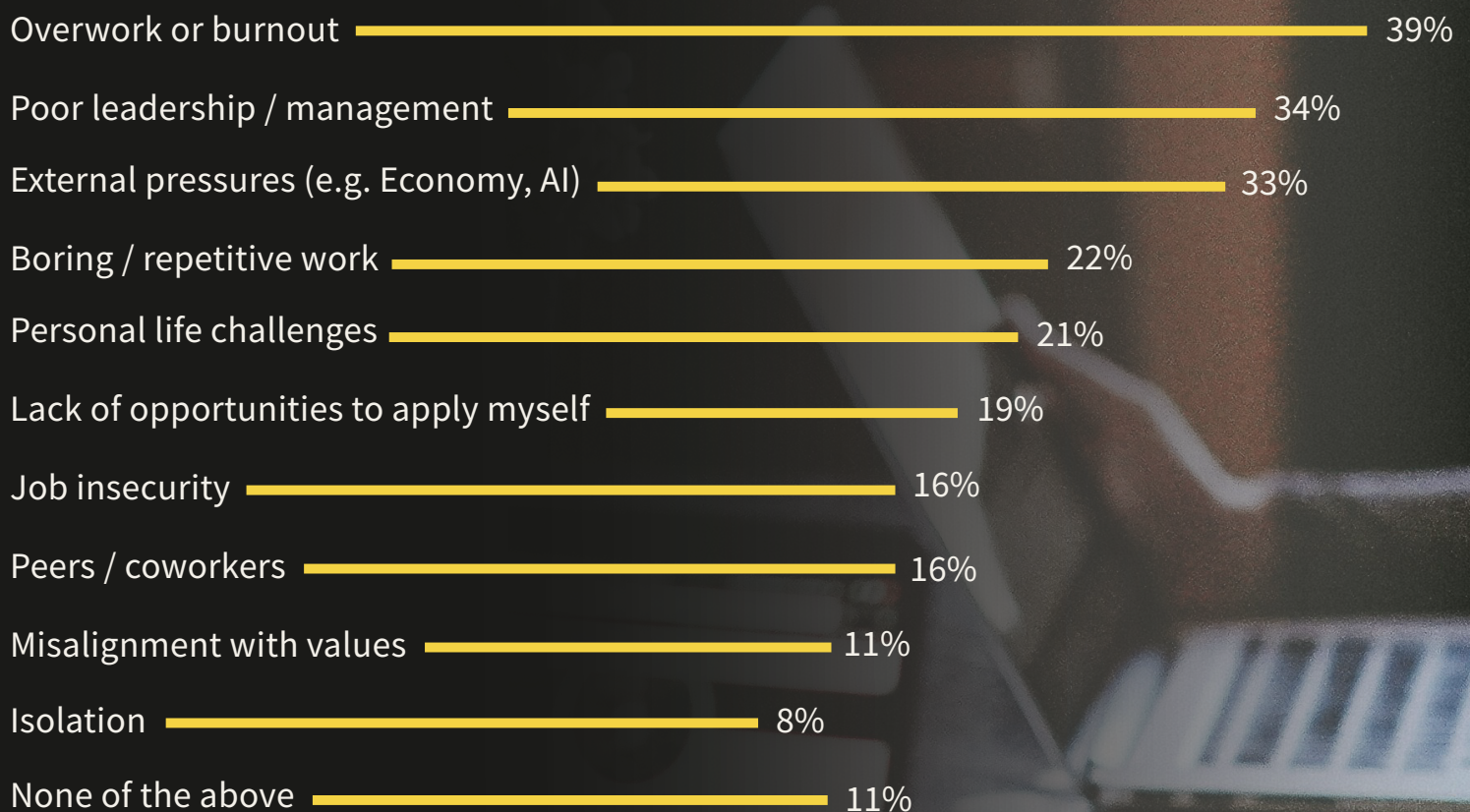
Organizational strain:

Overwork, burnout, poor leadership or management.

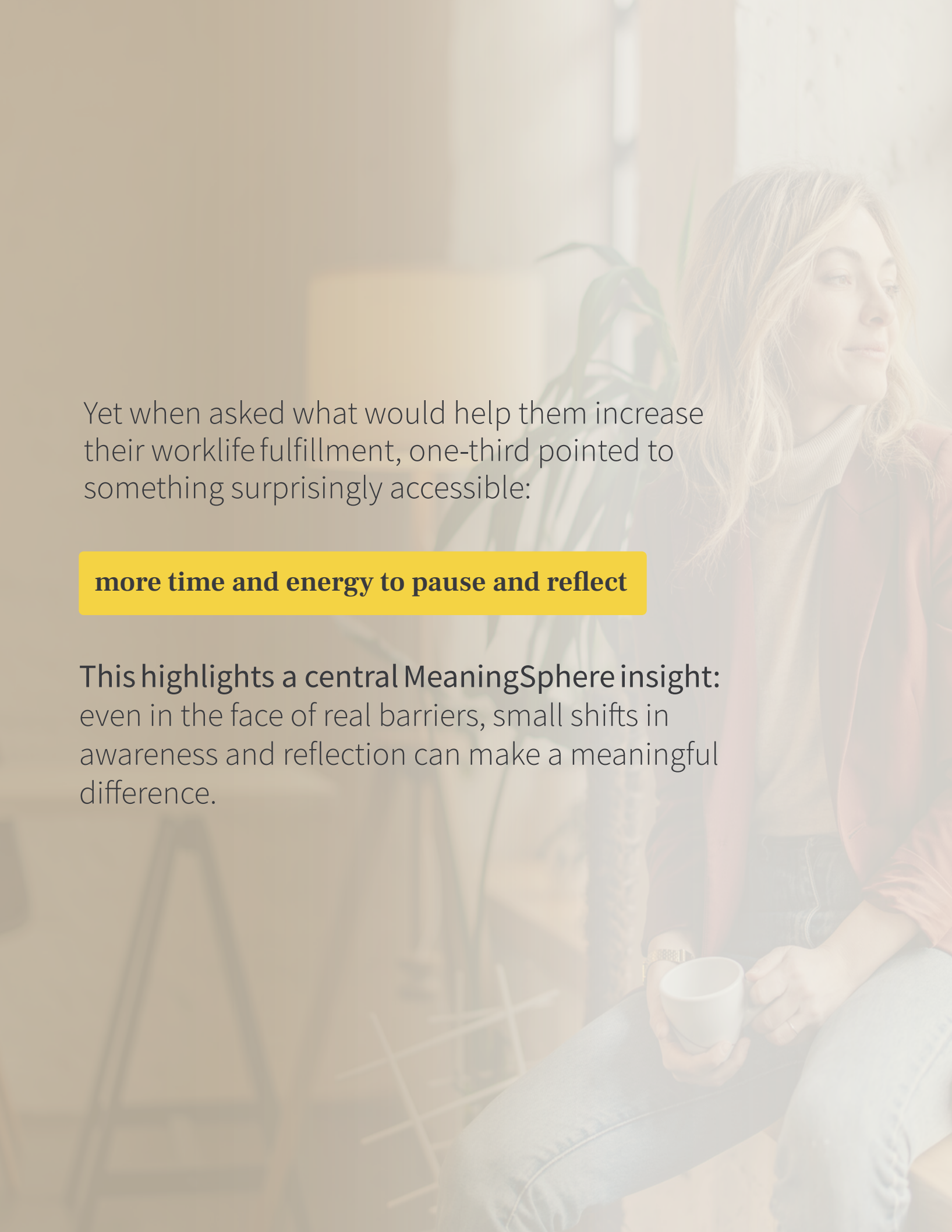
External pressures:

Economic uncertainty, AI and technology shifts, and broader social or environmental stressors.

Barriers to experiencing worklife fulfillment:



Question: What are the biggest barriers to experiencing fulfillment from your work in your current or most recent role?
Select all that apply.

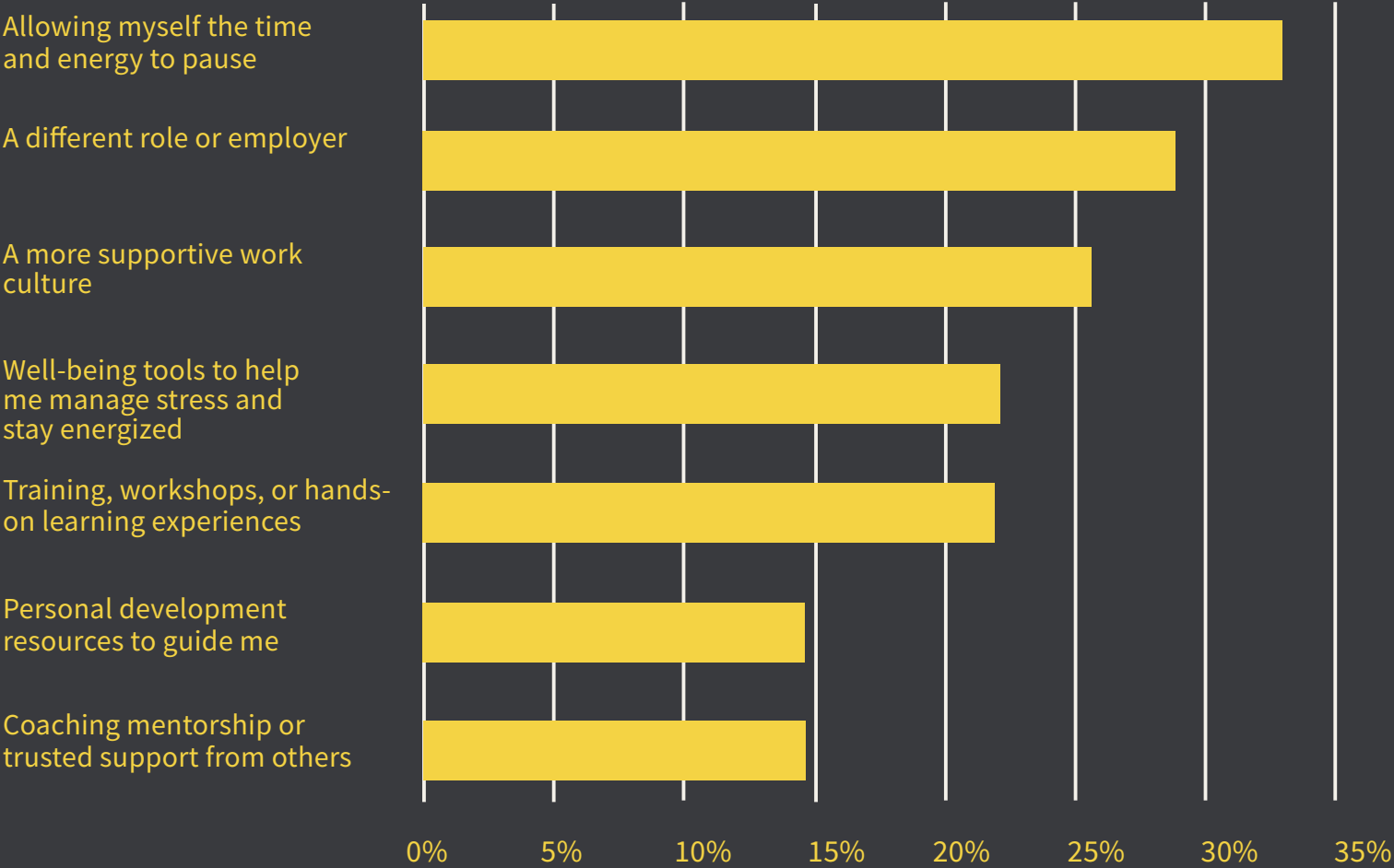


Yet when asked what would help them increase their worklife fulfillment, one-third pointed to something surprisingly accessible:

more time and energy to pause and reflect

This highlights a central MeaningSphere insight: even in the face of real barriers, small shifts in awareness and reflection can make a meaningful difference.

What would help most in increasing worklife fulfillment?



Note: Chart above excludes “none of the above” reported at 18%.



Question: What would help you most in increasing the fulfillment you receive from your work? Select up to three.

A key difference: Fulfilled vs unfulfilled workers¹

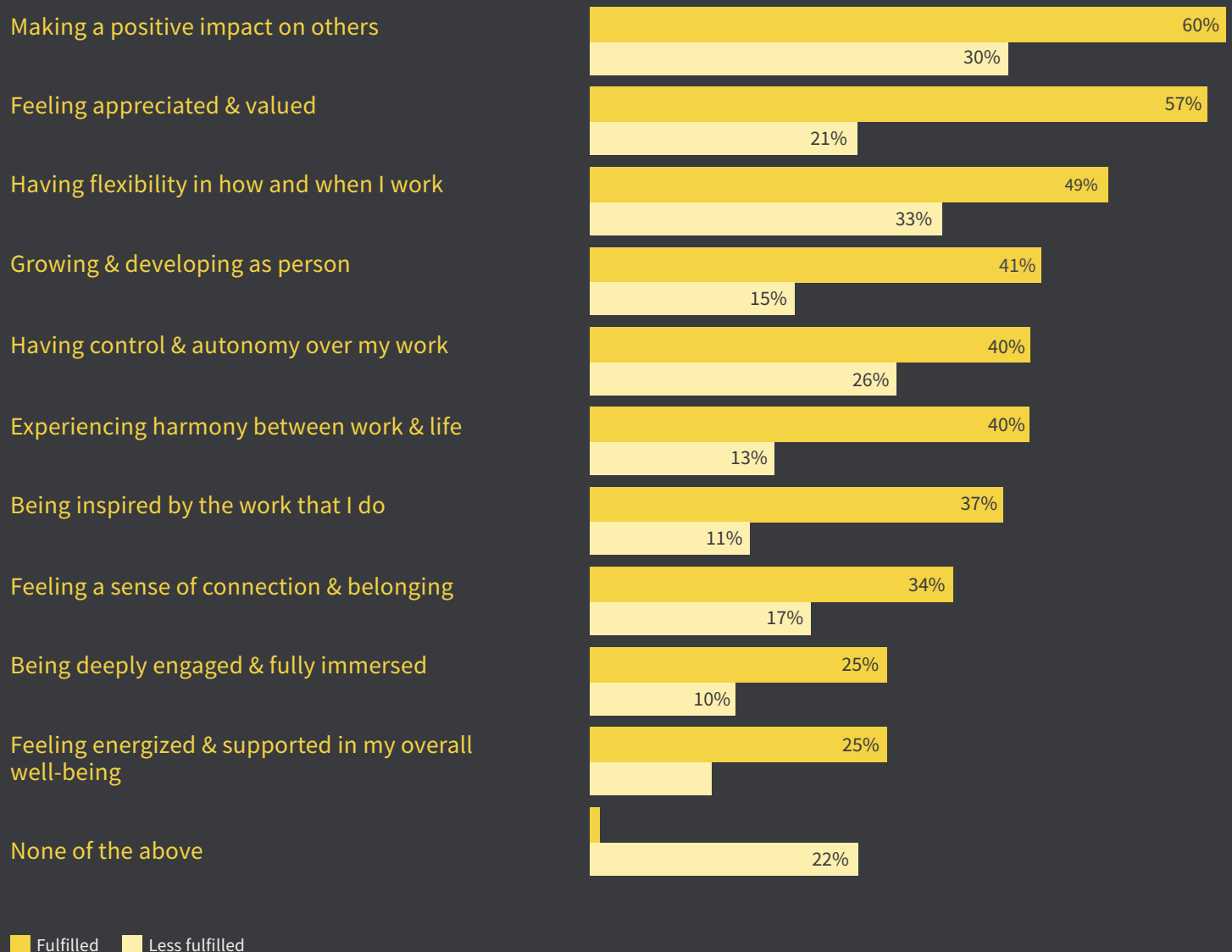
What people experience at work differs dramatically depending on their fulfillment level—and the patterns reveal more than just surface-level differences.

Fulfilled workers consistently report experiences centering on four core themes:

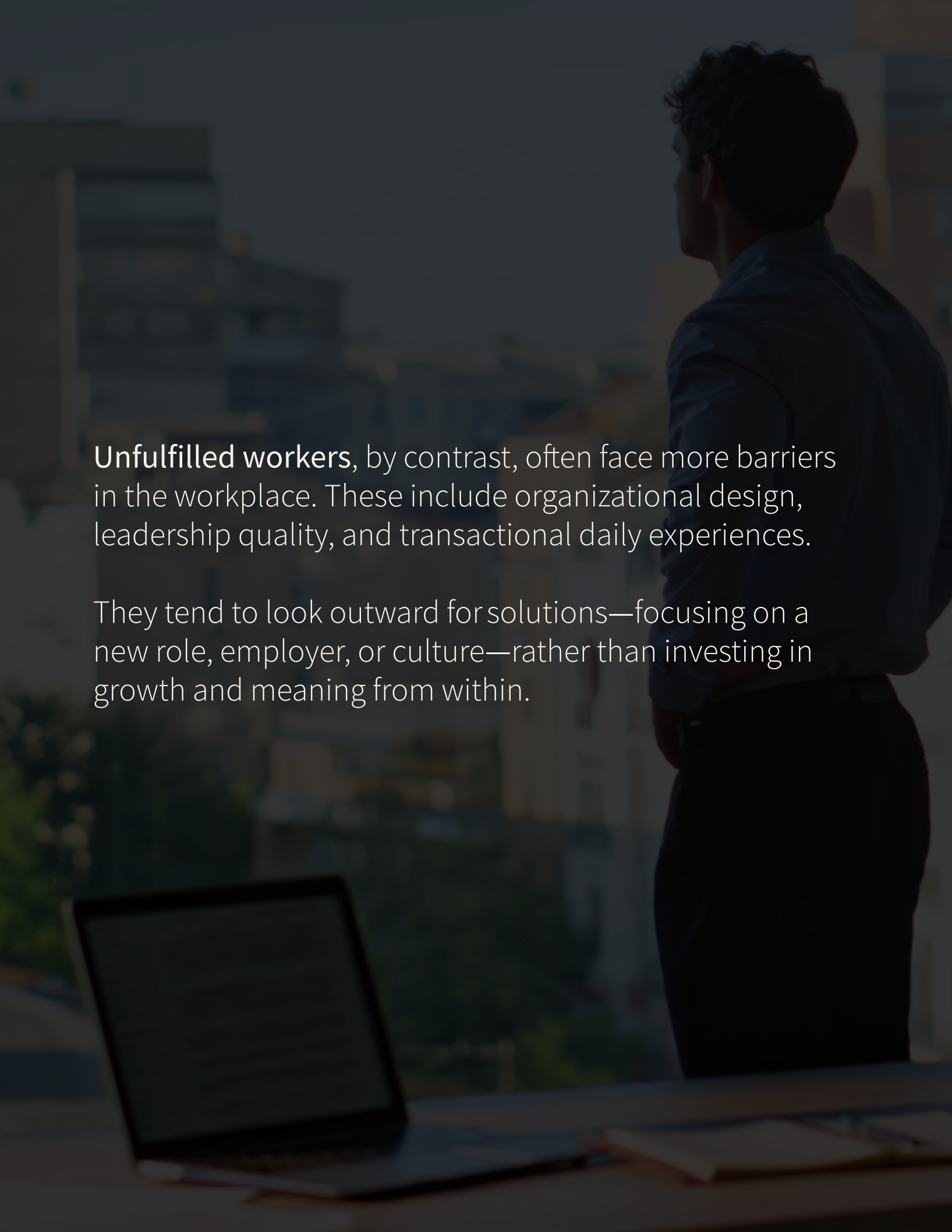


- ➔ **Impact:** They feel that their work makes a meaningful difference for others.
- ➔ **Appreciation:** They feel recognized, valued, and appreciated for their contributions.
- ➔ **Harmony:** They experience balance between work and life, feeling their energy is sustained rather than drained.
- ➔ **Growth:** Their environments provide opportunities for personal development, including leadership and skill growth, and allow space to shape meaning in their work.

What U.S. workers currently experience at work: fulfilled vs. less fulfilled



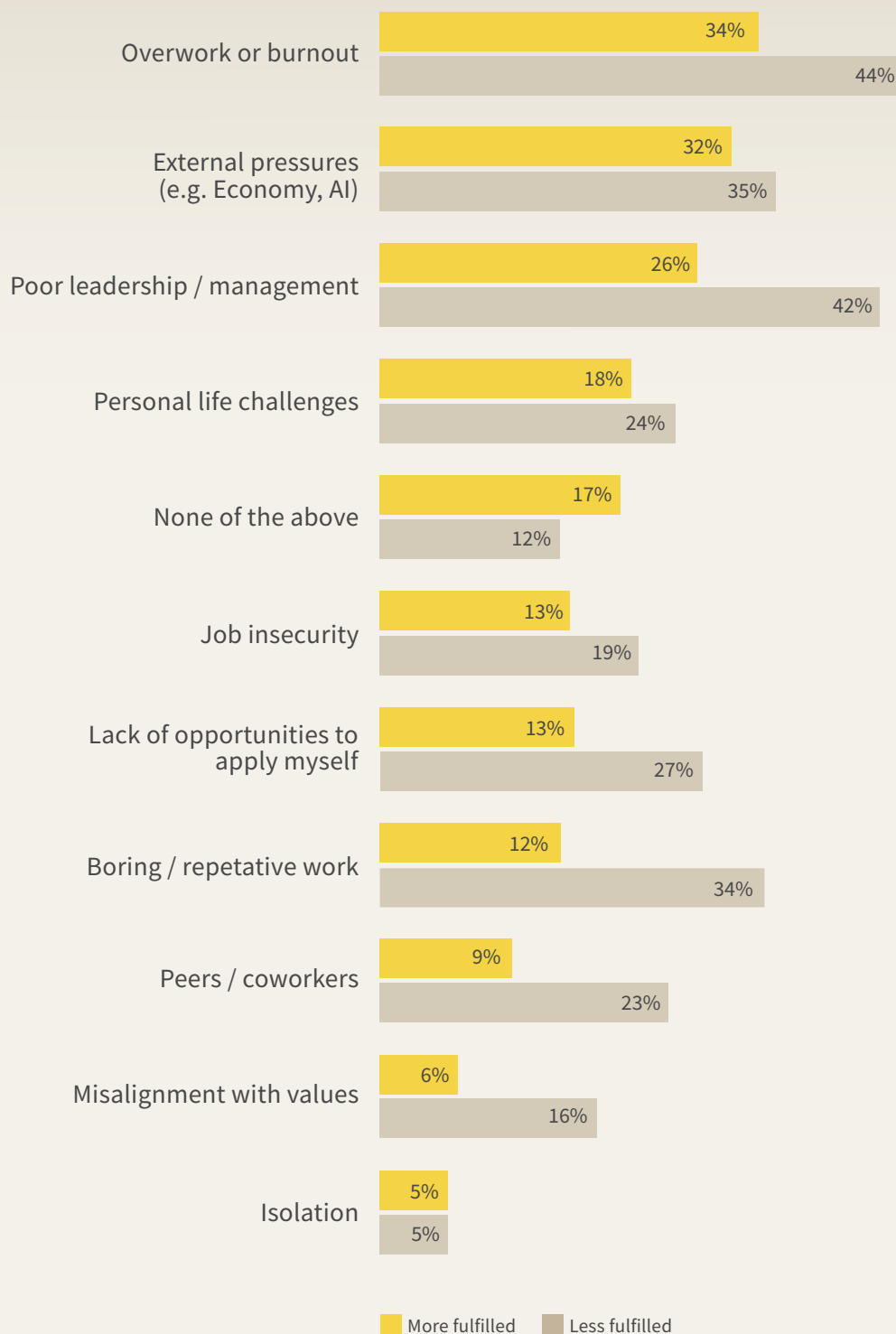
Question: Which of the following do you experience at work? Select all that apply.



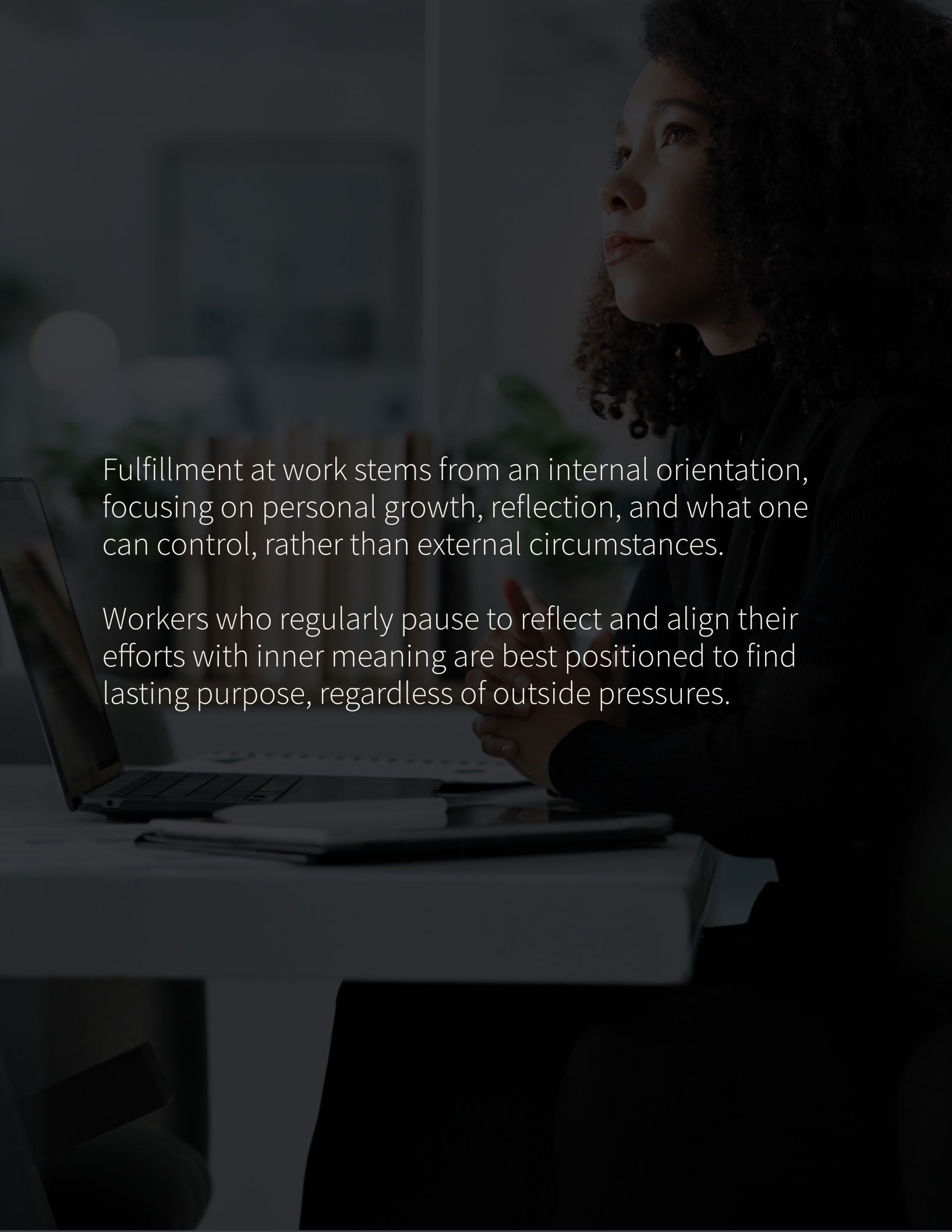
Unfulfilled workers, by contrast, often face more barriers in the workplace. These include organizational design, leadership quality, and transactional daily experiences.

They tend to look outward for solutions—focusing on a new role, employer, or culture—rather than investing in growth and meaning from within.

Barriers to experiencing worklife fulfillment, based on fulfillment level



Question: What are the biggest barriers to experiencing fulfillment from your work in your current or most recent role? Select all that apply.

A woman with curly hair is sitting at a desk, looking off to the side with a thoughtful expression. Her hands are clasped in front of her. A laptop is open on the desk to her left. The background is blurred, showing what appears to be a bookshelf and some indoor plants. The overall lighting is soft and focused on the woman.

Fulfillment at work stems from an internal orientation, focusing on personal growth, reflection, and what one can control, rather than external circumstances.

Workers who regularly pause to reflect and align their efforts with inner meaning are best positioned to find lasting purpose, regardless of outside pressures.

Perspective shapes experience:

Fulfilled workers focus on what they can influence; unfulfilled workers focus on what they cannot.

Energy matters:

Where workers direct their attention—internal growth versus external change—is closely tied to fulfillment.

Key insights from these differences:

Support enhances agency:

Even with supportive environments, fulfillment starts from within, with individuals recognizing their own capacity to create meaning.

Reflection drives change:

Making time to pause and reflect is consistently cited as the most impactful way to increase fulfillment.



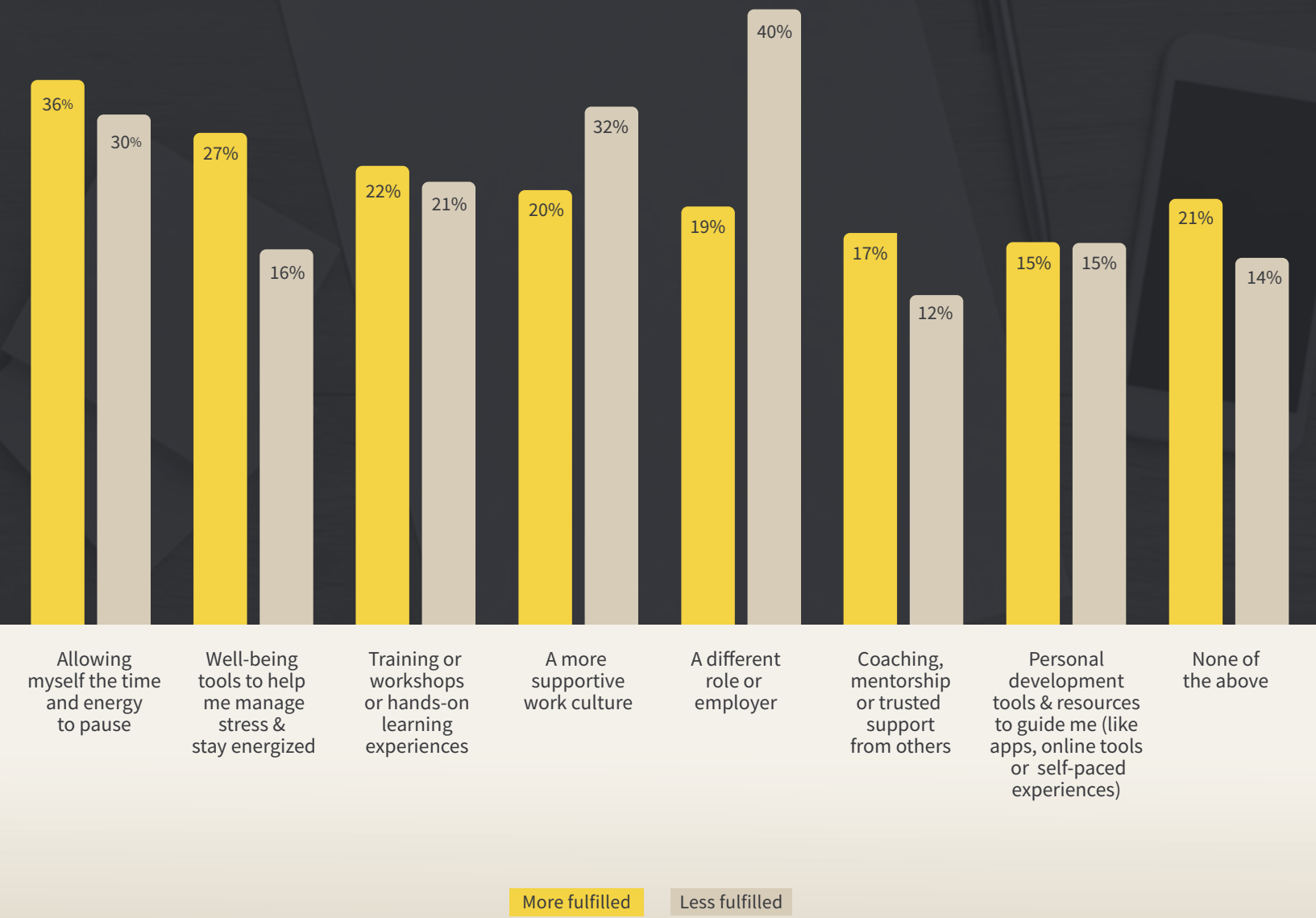


These findings reinforce a central MeaningSphere belief:

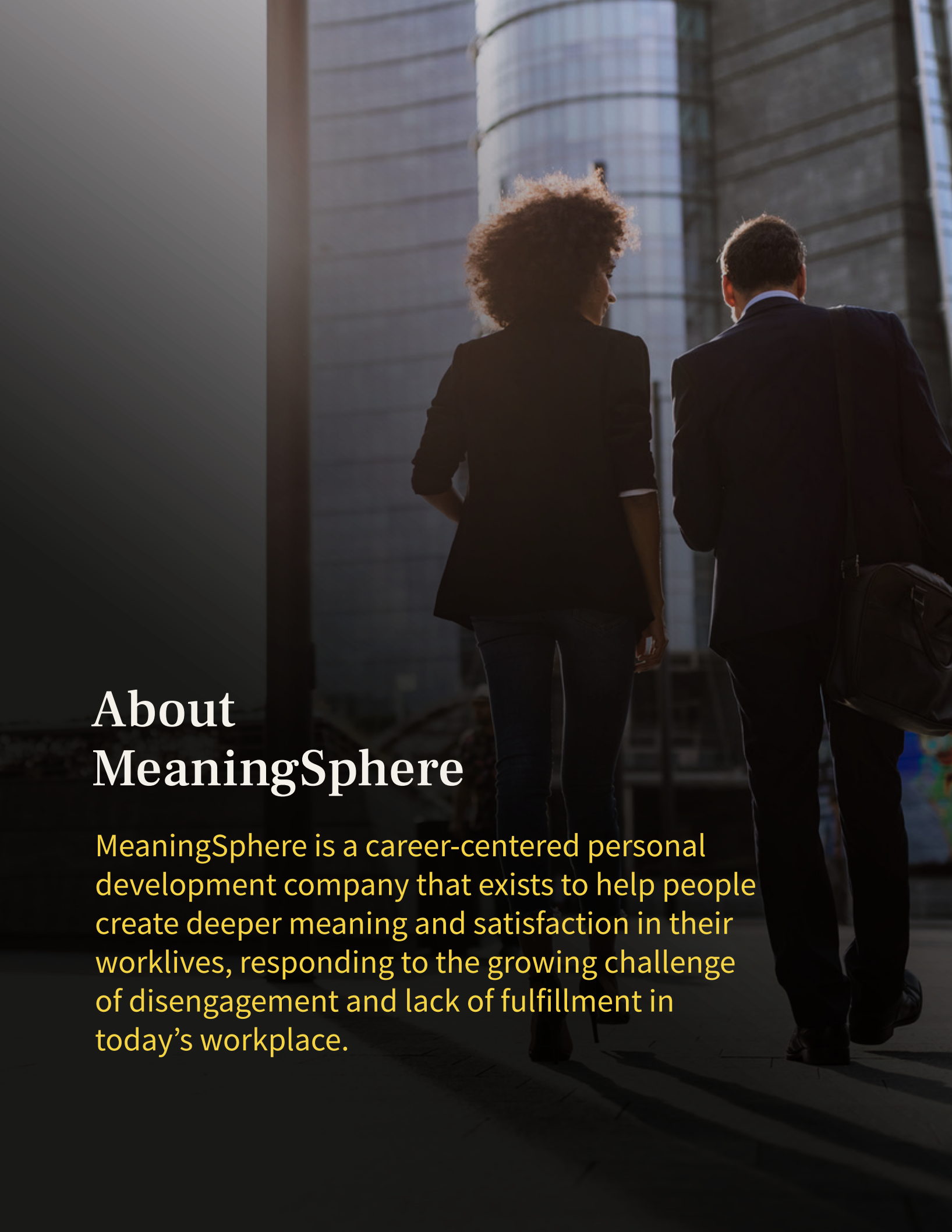
Lasting fulfillment isn't found through circumstances — it's cultivated from within.

Workers who prioritize reflection, growth, and alignment are better equipped to navigate barriers and create meaningful change, regardless of external pressures.

What would help most in increasing worklife fulfillment, based on fulfillment level?



Question: What would help you most in increasing the fulfillment you receive from your work? Select up to three.

A man and a woman are walking away from the camera on a city sidewalk. The woman, on the left, has voluminous curly hair and is wearing a dark blazer and jeans. The man, on the right, is wearing a dark suit and carrying a briefcase. They are walking towards a modern building with a curved glass facade. The scene is backlit by a bright light source, creating a silhouette effect and a warm glow.

About MeaningSphere

MeaningSphere is a career-centered personal development company that exists to help people create deeper meaning and satisfaction in their worklives, responding to the growing challenge of disengagement and lack of fulfillment in today's workplace.



Built on a proven process and created by experts in personal and professional development, the company's curated collection of learning experiences can help empower individuals to define what fulfillment means to them and take practical steps to build a worklife that truly matters to them.

MeaningSphere is dedicated to advancing research and understanding around meaningful work and its positive impact on both individuals and the organizations they serve.

Learn more at MeaningSphere.com.

"Fulfilled workers" are those who rated their level of worklife fulfillment as a four or five, while "unfulfilled workers" are those that rated their worklife fulfillment level as one, two, or three. These ratings were based on the question "On a scale of one to five, with one being not at all fulfilling, and five being extremely fulfilling, how fulfilling does your work feel right now?"



Stop dreading
Mondays.

Start designing them.

meaningsphere.