



9th edition  
**2026**

# **Workplace Emotional Intelligence & Mental Health Survey**

*What do we do with  
what we feel in the  
workplace?*



# *Reflections we want to share with you*

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# What do we do with what we feel in the workplace?

## About the survey

Year launched: 2021 | Frequency: twice a year (since 2024) | Objective: to understand how emotions, thoughts, and behaviors influence everyday corporate life | Conducted by: The School of Life Brasil & Robert Half | Respondents: 774 professionals in Brazil, aged 25+ with a university degree (387 leaders and 387 team members) | Online data collection period for the 9th edition: July 1–31, 2026.



*Unpleasant emotions are not necessarily enemies.* Anger, anxiety, frustration, sadness, boredom, and uncertainty can work as warning signals. They indicate that something important is happening in our relationship with ourselves, others, or the world, including work. When ignored, they can shape relationships and work environments with striking precision.

Almost no one wakes up wanting to be this way or to create a professional space along these lines. What usually exists, more often, is a difficulty in dealing with discomfort. And, without realizing it, we start to long for places where everything seems under control, even though, deep down, we know that this is only an illusion.

Perhaps psychological safety is not, as is sometimes imagined, a space where everything is light and comfortable. It may be a place where we can say difficult things without putting our place there at risk. Where tension can be held with maturity. Where we are not forced to choose between being accepted and being honest.

This research, however, does not seek to assign blame for this context. Its aim, in fact, is to present data, encourage reflection, and support team leaders and HR managers in understanding and improving their realities.

It is time to transform our relationship with discomfort. Instead of letting it limit us, we should use it to expand our capacity to think, say, and do.



# *Happiness at Work: the numbers call for attention to context*

*The survey found that 54% of leaders and 47% of team members are “often” or “always” happy at work. That percentage may seem encouraging, but the data need to be read with attention to context. This is because a significant number of people (just over 30% of the total) feel happy only “sometimes.” And what organizations really need is for an entire team to feel motivated and energized about the work being done.*

## **But what is happiness?**

Psychology and philosophy explain that happiness should not be understood as a permanent state of enthusiasm or absence of difficulties. At work, it depends on finding meaning in what we do, feeling that we can be who we are, building meaningful relationships, and perceiving a certain alignment between our values and those of the organization. When this combination weakens, work can keep functioning, but not necessarily as an experience of flourishing.

## **New solutions start with new questions**

- **REPLACE:** “How can we make people happier?”
- **WITH:** “What, in the everyday experience of work, is making it hard for employees to find meaning, good relationships, and space to be who they are?”

**[!] If a company manages to move a key person from “rarely happy” to a deeper connection, this can represent an enormous boost to productivity for the business.**





*Overall, do you  
feel happy working  
at your current  
organization?*

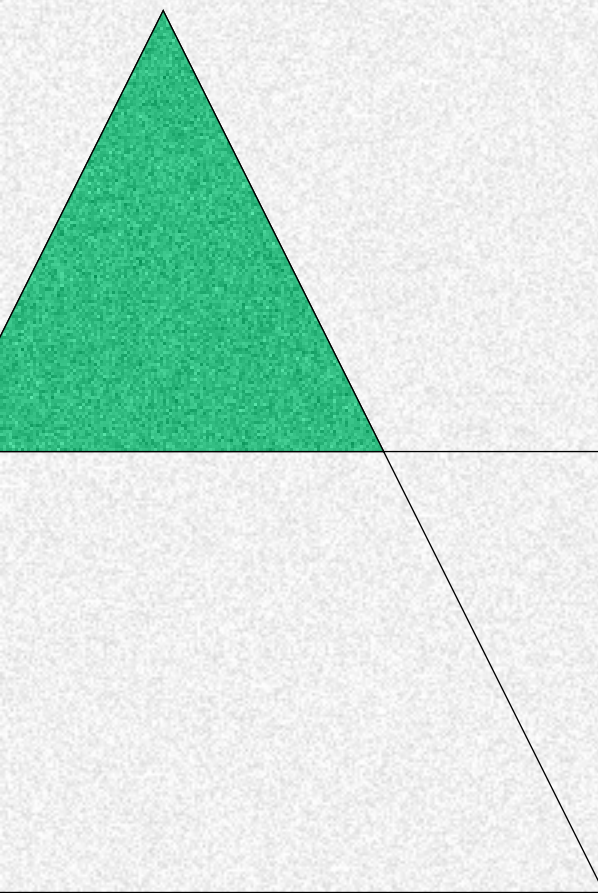
|                        | 9th edition (Jul/26) |           | 8th edition (Feb/26) |           |
|------------------------|----------------------|-----------|----------------------|-----------|
|                        | Leaders              | Employees | Leaders              | Employees |
| <b>Never</b> _____     | 2%                   | 4%        | 2%                   | 4%        |
| <b>Rarely</b> _____    | 10%                  | 16%       | 9%                   | 10%       |
| <b>Sometimes</b> _____ | 34%                  | 33%       | 27%                  | 33%       |
| <b>Often</b> _____     | 41%                  | 34%       | 45%                  | 44%       |
| <b>Always</b> _____    | 13%                  | 13%       | 17%                  | 9%        |

## What does this mean for companies and leaders?

Engagement depends not only on satisfaction, but also on purpose, healthy relationships, and aligned expectations. Leaders who track these factors tend to spot signs of demotivation before they affect performance and retention.



# Social media use as experiential avoidance



**[?] That social media can be used all the time is obvious. Whether they are being put to good use is still an open question.**

*It is significant that about a third of respondents acknowledge they would use social media less if they felt better about themselves. Adding up “definitely yes” and “probably yes,” we find 35% of leaders and 30% of team members in this situation. These data suggest that, for a relevant share of people, social media use can work as a form of experiential avoidance. Faced with boredom, anxiety, loneliness, or insecurity, they automatically turn to the screen to reduce or interrupt, even if only momentarily, contact with these experiences. This reinforces the importance of self-awareness about when, why, and what for we turn to screens.*



## What does psychology say?

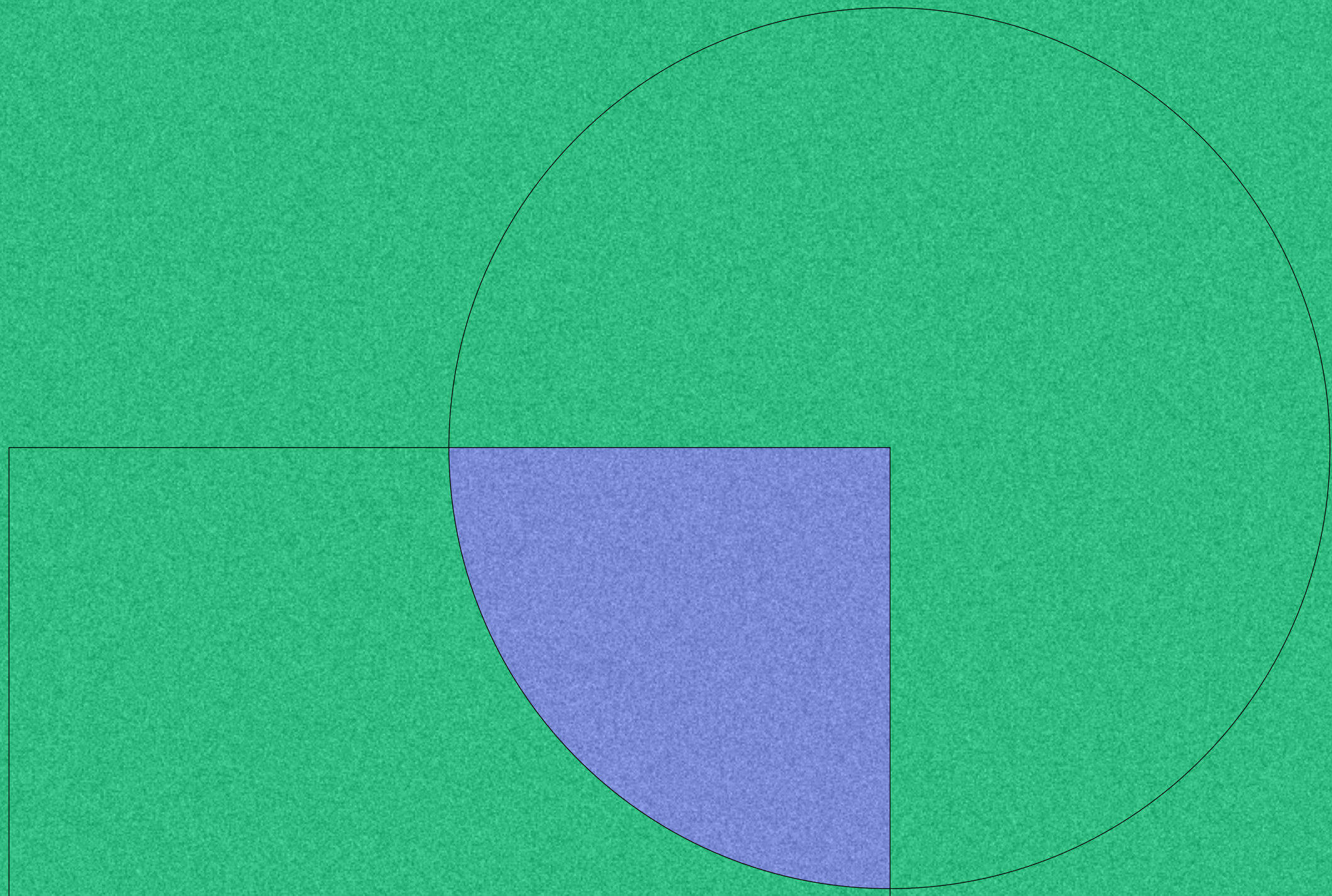
Short-term relief can reinforce this behavior, making reaching for the phone an increasingly automatic response to discomfort. Keep in mind that seeking distraction occasionally is not bad. The problem is when this “pastime” reduces our willingness to get in touch with what we feel, understand our needs, and consciously choose how we want to act.



What we need is experiences of value

Today, people don't realize how harmful excessive social media use actually is, because this behavior is common and socially acceptable. The big question is how to use social media in a way that truly enriches someone's life. The reflection should be less about "how much you use" and more about "how much valuable experience you are actually having."

*If you felt better about yourself, would you use social media less?*



|                                                | Leaders | Employees |
|------------------------------------------------|---------|-----------|
| Definitely yes _____                           | 13%     | 9%        |
| Probably yes _____                             | 22%     | 21%       |
| Probably not _____                             | 9%      | 8%        |
| Definitely not _____                           | 3%      | 4%        |
| My social media use is unrelated to this _____ | 37%     | 40%       |
| I can't say _____                              | 9%      | 8%        |
| I don't use social media _____                 | 7%      | 10%       |



# The value of genuine relationships at work

*Most respondents (70% of leaders and 64% of team members) describe their relationships at work as “exclusively” or “mostly” functional. These are necessary relationships, but the risk appears when they become the only kind of relationship available. And, in this sense, it is especially striking that 5% of leaders and 9% of team members say they feel quite lonely at work. This shows that it is possible to be surrounded by people, interact all day, and still experience loneliness.*

## What is a good relationship at work?

Psychology explains that good relationships also depend on the possibility of being seen beyond our professional role. It is when we can share doubts and vulnerabilities and build trust over time. This doesn't mean that coworkers need to become close friends, but that some degree of genuine connection is essential to create belonging, psychological safety, and collaboration.

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**[!] In general, professionals enter into functional relationships because the existing corporate structure pushes them there. However, with the right stimulus, these relationships can be deepened.**



*Do you feel you have  
genuine connections  
or functional  
relationships at work?*

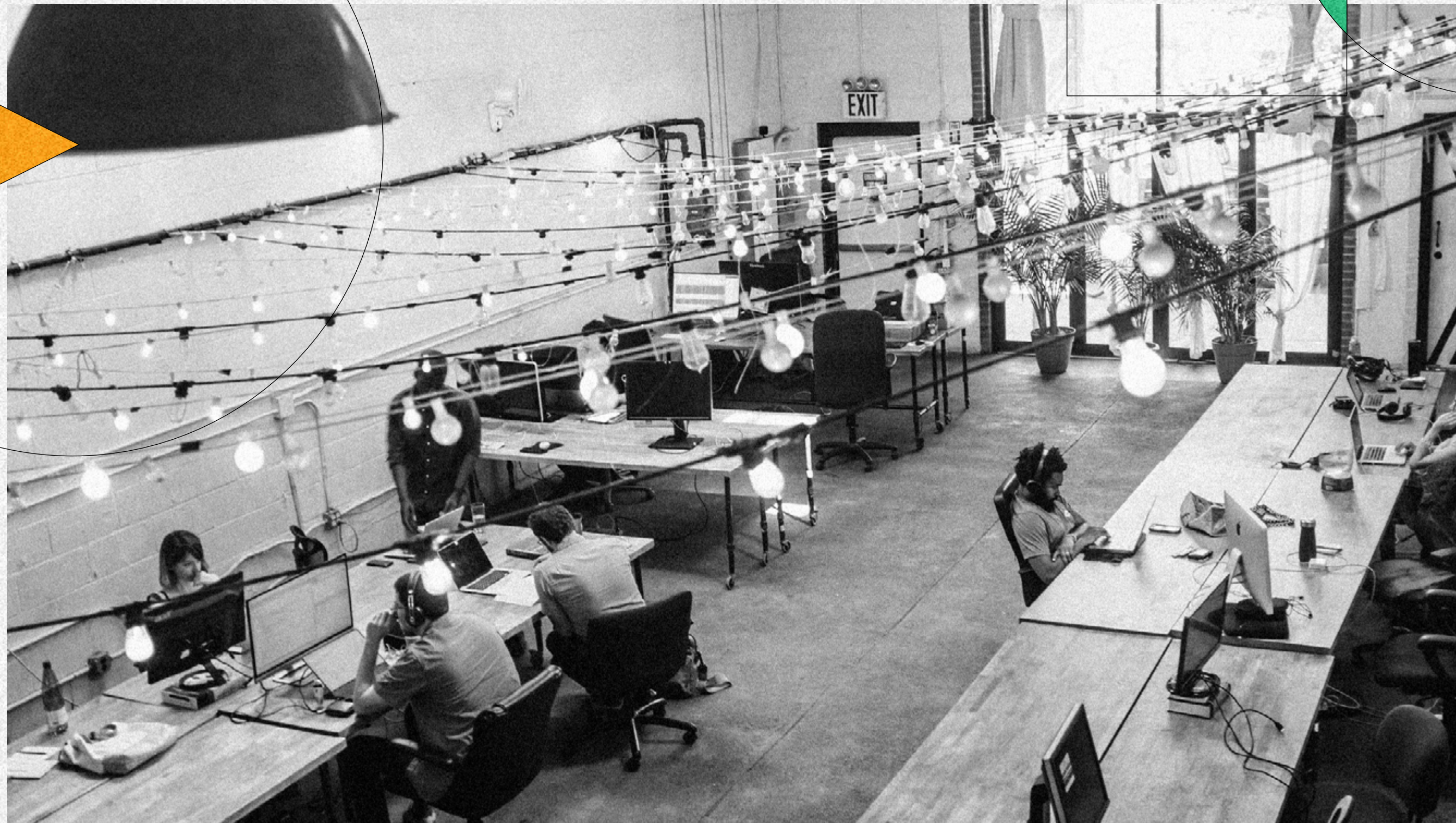
|                                                  | Leaders | Employees |
|--------------------------------------------------|---------|-----------|
| <b>I have only genuine connections</b>           | 1%      | 3%        |
| <b>I have only functional relationships</b>      | 21%     | 15%       |
| <b>I have a mix of both types</b>                | 0%      | 1%        |
| <b>Mostly genuine relationships</b>              | 24%     | 23%       |
| <b>Mostly functional relationships</b>           | 49%     | 49%       |
| <b>Actually, I feel quite<br/>lonely at work</b> | 5%      | 9%        |

## What does this mean for companies and leaders?

Environments where only functional relationships predominate can limit collaboration, trust, and the exchange of ideas. Creating opportunities for genuine connections strengthens the sense of belonging and teamwork.



# Many professionals don't know what they want



*When asked what they truly want professionally, 24% of team members reported some or great difficulty finding an answer, more than double the percentage observed among leaders (11%). Keep in mind that knowing what we want professionally requires the ability to tell our own desires apart from the expectations we absorb from our environment.*

## **What does psychology say?**

Family, company, job market, and socially accepted ideas about success can work as scripts that we follow without noticing. The more uncertain the outside world is, the more important it becomes to develop internal references that help us make decisions with intention and flexibility. This clarity is especially important at a time when transformations such as AI make professional trajectories less predictable.

## **The importance of professional self-knowledge**

From The School of Life's perspective, professional self-knowledge doesn't mean having a perfectly defined career plan, but better understanding what moves us, which experiences give us meaning, what kind of work we want to do, and which trade-offs we are or aren't willing to make.

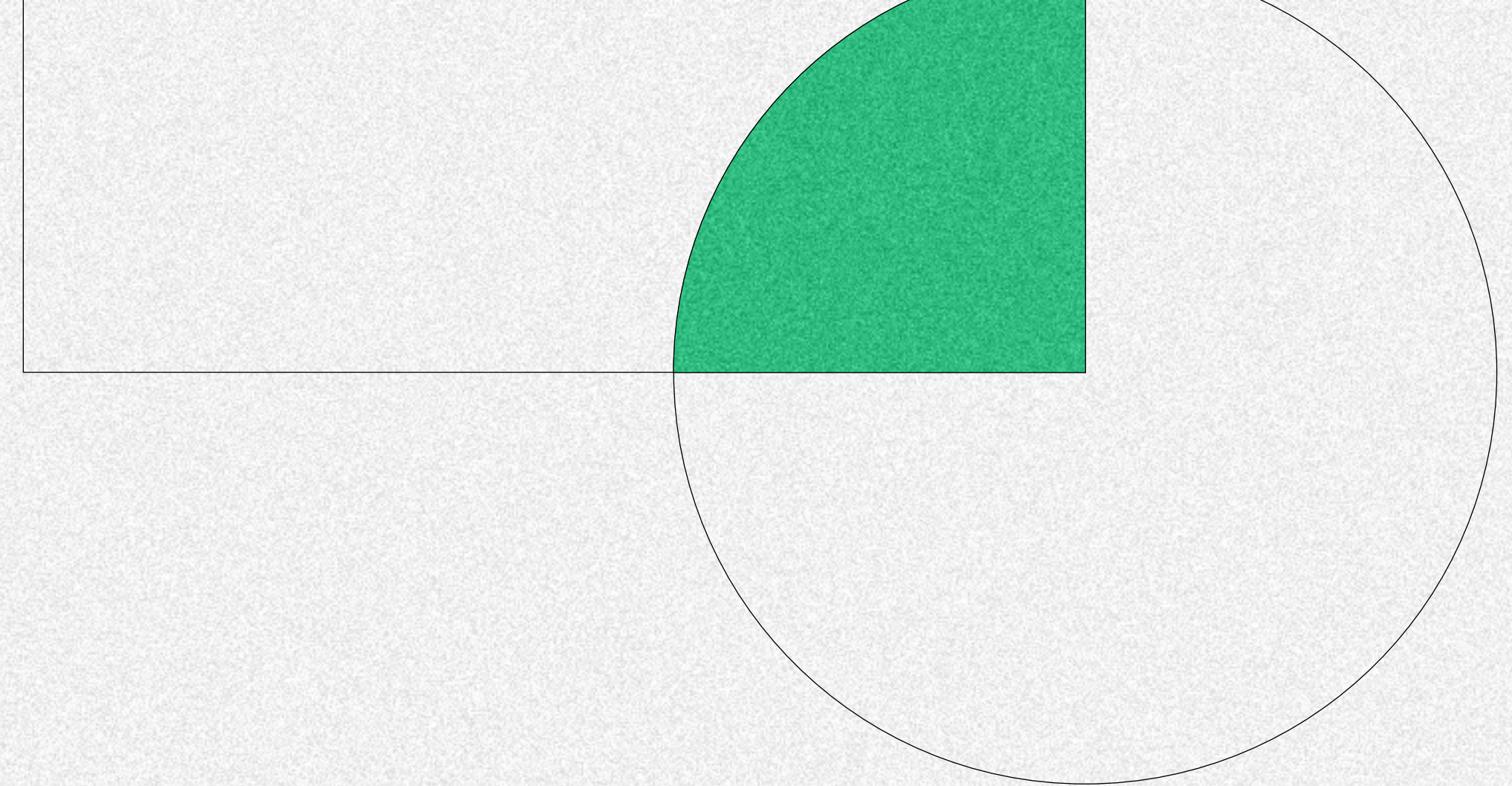


*In your professional life,  
do you find it hard to know  
what you really want, beyond  
what is expected of you?*

|                                                         | Leaders | Employees |
|---------------------------------------------------------|---------|-----------|
| I know very well what I want professionally             | 49%     | 38%       |
| I'm fairly clear on what I want                         | 40%     | 38%       |
| I have a little difficulty                              | 10%     | 19%       |
| I find it very hard and rarely ask myself this question | 1%      | 5%        |



# *Differences in personal values should be a source of dialogue and learning*



*“This is a sensitive issue. However, when a problem is buried, it ends up becoming yet another problem. The key is to allow honesty and then explore it.”*

**John Armstrong,**  
philosopher and head of  
ideas at The School of Life  
Global



*For more than half of respondents (56% of leaders and 55% of team members), living with people whose personal values are very different requires conscious effort. From a psychological standpoint, this can be seen as a positive sign. After all, mature relationships don't depend on absolute affinity, but on the ability to regulate our reactions, try to understand the other person's perspective, and keep collaborating even when we disagree deeply. Part of emotional maturity lies precisely in recognizing that reasonable people can see the world in very different ways from ours. Empathy, in this context, doesn't mean agreeing or giving up our own values, but developing enough curiosity to understand where the other person's perspective comes from.*

**[!] The challenge for organizations is to create a culture in which differences can generate dialogue and learning, rather than distancing, hostility, or rupture. The fact that 15% of respondents reported that these differences already lead to distancing or affect their performance shows that this is still an important skill to be developed.**





*Can you get along well  
at work with people whose  
personal values are  
radically different  
from yours?*

|                                                 | Leaders | Employees |
|-------------------------------------------------|---------|-----------|
| Yes, no problem _____                           | 28%     | 30%       |
| Yes, but it takes conscious effort _____        | 56%     | 55%       |
| It's hard; I prefer to keep distance _____      | 13%     | 12%       |
| I can't, and it affects<br>my performance _____ | 3%      | 3%        |



# AI: a technology that sparks both curiosity and insecurity

[!] A situation seen as a threat can turn into an opportunity for learning and discovering new possibilities, when there is curiosity, flexibility, and willingness to experiment.



*When it comes to Artificial Intelligence in the daily work routine, 45% of leaders and 40% of team members point to curiosity as their predominant reaction. However, 40% of managers and 45% of team members report a mix of apprehension, anxiety, or concern about their job. Faced with a profound transformation that is still hard to predict, it is perfectly possible to want to try the new technology and, at the same time, feel insecure about its impacts. The challenge is not to eliminate this anxiety, but to learn to deal better with uncertainty and ambiguity.*

## What does psychology say?

Change almost always brings gains and losses, opportunities and discomforts at the same time. The problem is that we tend to interpret it in extremes: as a catastrophe or as the solution to everything. Developing adaptability involves tolerating this ambiguity and recognizing that, most of the time, reality lies somewhere between these two extremes.



*“AI is strangely easy and hard to use. That’s because using it is not a matter of having more technological awareness or learning a few special protocols. It has to do with what we bring to the tool, with our ability to explore what it can offer us, to dive deeper in a creative and intelligent way.”*

**John Armstrong,**  
philosopher and head of ideas at The School  
of Life Global

# *When it comes to AI in your field, what predominates in you?*

|                                                                              | Leaders | Employees |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------|-----------|
| Curiosity — I want to be ahead                                               | 45%     | 40%       |
| A mix of curiosity and apprehension                                          | 28%     | 30%       |
| Anxiety — I feel pressure to keep up with AI’s evolution and not fall behind | 11%     | 11%       |
| Real concern about keeping my job                                            | 1%      | 4%        |
| Indifference, as replacing people with machines still seems distant          | 15%     | 15%       |

## What does this mean for companies and leaders?

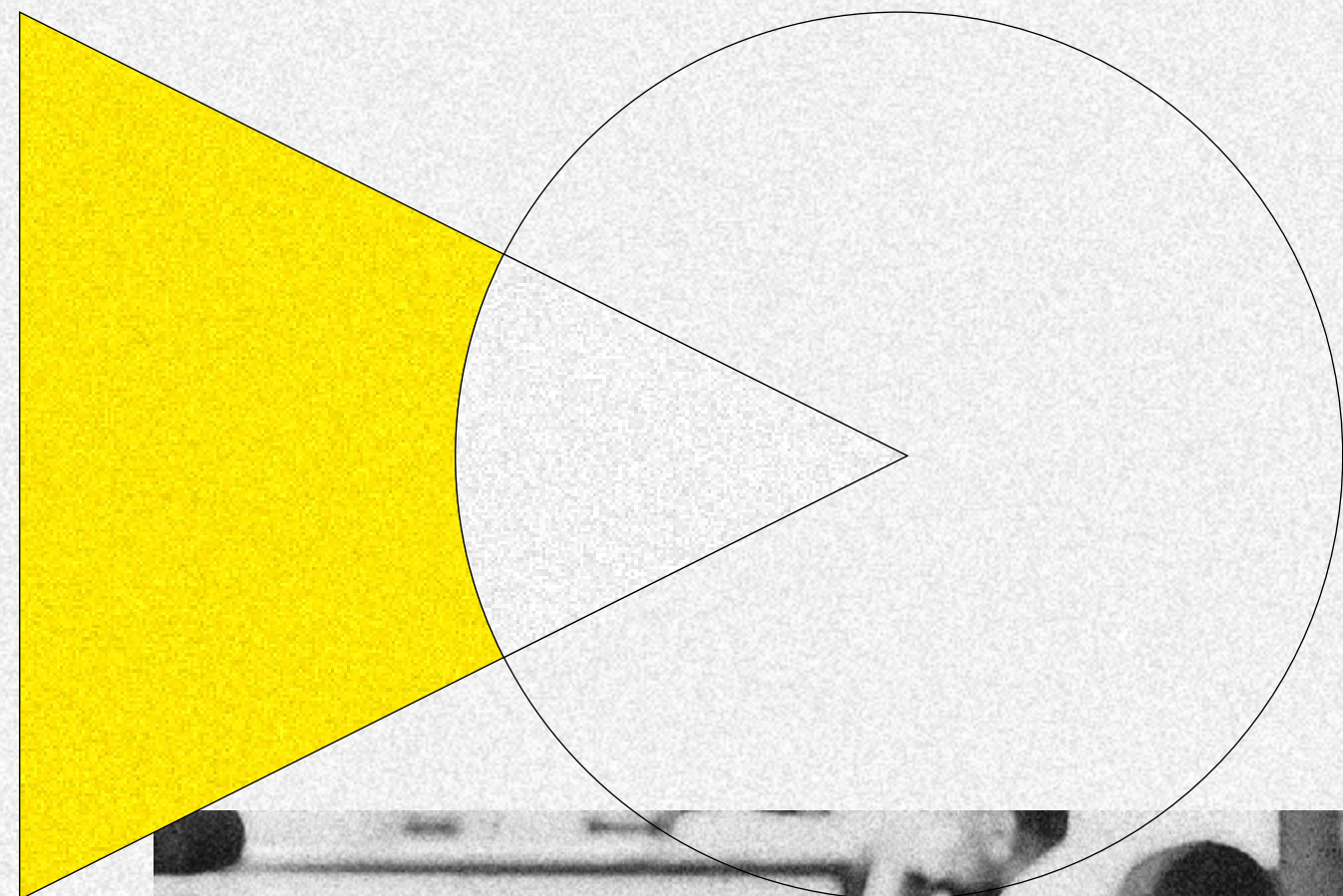
AI adoption involves not only technology, but also human adaptation. Companies that invest in training, transparent communication, and development of new skills tend to reduce insecurities and accelerate the responsible adoption of the technology.



# *Difficult emotions are information to be understood*

*The survey reveals an interesting contrast between “emotional self-awareness” and “emotional self-regulation.” Although 57% of leaders and 50% of team members say they “notice when they are not okay and know what to do,” almost a third recognize discomfort but don’t quite know how to deal with it. Psychology explains that identifying anxiety, irritation, exhaustion, or sadness is an important step, but may not be enough to respond to these emotions in the healthiest way. For that, it is essential to recognize that difficult emotions are not flaws that need to be eliminated, but valuable information about what is happening within us and about what we need to change. The sooner we manage to recognize them, the greater our ability to make choices, ask for help, set boundaries, rest, talk, or make some change. The goal is not to immediately eliminate discomfort, but to respond to it consciously before it turns into exhaustion.*

**[!] Everyone is, in some way, struggling alone and only shows it when they are already exhausted. And, in general, work is not a place where you feel you can reasonably say you have a problem.**





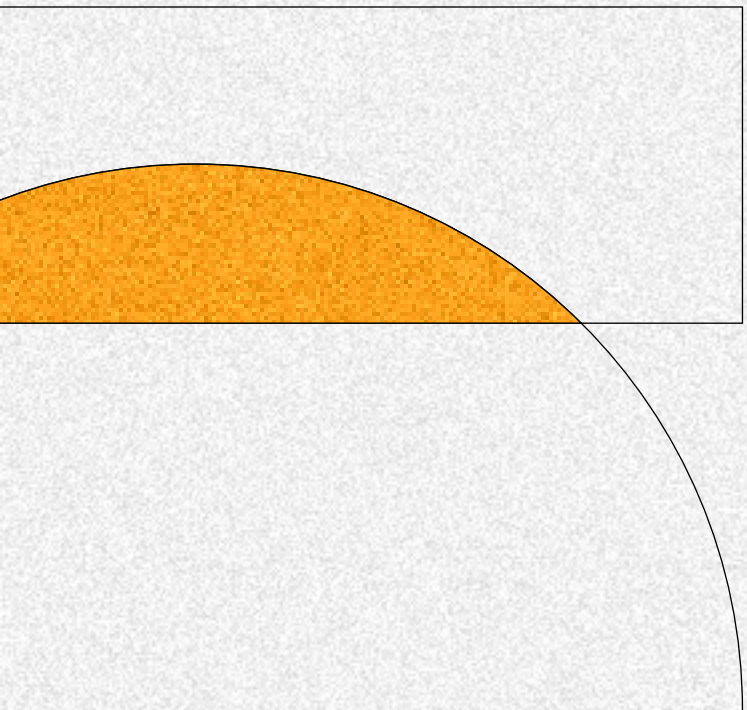


*Can you recognize when  
you're not well emotionally,  
or only when you've  
already passed your limits?*

|                                                      | Leaders | Employees |
|------------------------------------------------------|---------|-----------|
| I notice early and know what to do                   | 57%     | 50%       |
| I notice, but I don't quite know how to deal with it | 29%     | 30%       |
| I usually only notice when I'm already at my limit   | 10%     | 15%       |
| I rarely allow myself to think about it              | 4%      | 5%        |



# Disagreeing is still a risk in many companies



*Only a small share of respondents (20% of leaders and 16% of team members) feel they can express a dissenting opinion at work without worrying about the possible consequences. We know, however, that good teams are not those in which everyone agrees. They are those in which it is possible to disagree without putting the bond, respect, or sense of belonging at risk. That is the essence of psychological safety.*

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## What does psychology say?

Disagreeing can naturally be uncomfortable. We are social animals, we need belonging and approval and, for that reason, we often avoid conflict or soften what we think so as not to displease.

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## Risk to companies

When people need to protect themselves excessively, the organization doesn't lose just opinions. It may lose warnings about problems, new ideas, important questions, and information that would help make better decisions.

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## How do we transform this scenario?

It is essential that organizations build environments of listening, support, and psychological safety. The goal is for the emotional cost of speaking up to be lower, so that people can express differences without fearing rejection, punishment, or ruptured relationships.

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## The role of managers

In this scenario, leadership behavior plays a decisive role. People closely watch what happens to those who question, admit a mistake, or present a different perspective. In other words, psychological safety is not built through the empty statement that everyone can speak up, but through the reactions when someone says what nobody wants to hear.





*In your work environment, do you feel comfortable disagreeing without calculating the cost before you speak?*

|                                                               | Leaders | Employees |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|---------|-----------|
| Yes, I feel free to disagree _____                            | 20%     | 16%       |
| It depends on who I'm talking to and about what _____         | 49%     | 47%       |
| I usually filter what I say _____                             | 25%     | 22%       |
| I prefer not to risk it, as the environment is not safe _____ | 6%      | 15%       |



# *Saying no is also caring for the quality of work and relationships*



*Saying “no” can be uncomfortable for the same reasons that make it hard to disagree: we are social animals, we want to preserve bonds and avoid disappointing others.* This helps explain why 39% of leaders and 31% of team members say they are “able to decline demands, but at an emotional cost.” Meanwhile, 24% of managers and 34% of team members rarely say no, as they feel obliged to accept the requested task. The central problem in this mapping is the feeling of not being able to have a frank conversation.

## **The “positive no”**

At The School of Life, the belief is that the best way to say “no” starts and ends with a “yes.” First, we say “yes” to our priorities and make clear what needs to be preserved. Then, we say “no” respectfully but firmly. Finally, we end with another “yes”: offering an alternative or showing willingness to contribute. In this context, instead of simply refusing a request, we can say: “I can’t do this right now, but I can help if the deadline is different”; or “If I take this on now, the critical report will be late. What would you prefer to prioritize?”





*Can you say no to a work demand when you are already at your limit, or do you only refuse when your body makes you stop?*

|                                                       | Leaders | Employees |
|-------------------------------------------------------|---------|-----------|
| I can say no without guilt _____                      | 29%     | 28%       |
| I can, but always with some emotional cost _____      | 39%     | 31%       |
| I rarely say no, as I feel obliged to accept _____    | 24%     | 34%       |
| I only refuse when I've already passed my limit _____ | 8%      | 7%        |

## What does this mean for companies and leaders?

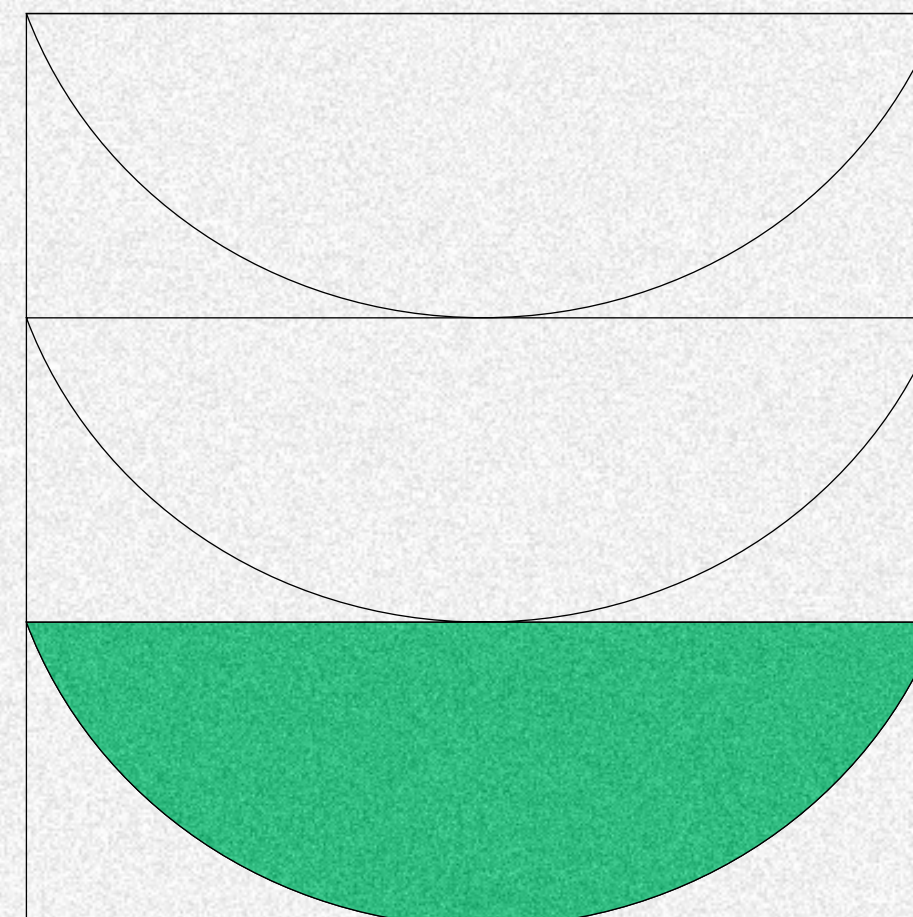
Difficulty in setting boundaries can lead to overload, lower quality, and a higher risk of burnout. Leaders play a fundamental role in defining clear priorities and in the balanced management of demands.



# Difficult conversations should combine honesty and care



*The data show that difficult conversations are avoided by a significant share of professionals. Most manage to speak up, but do so with great caution: 63% of leaders and 56% of team members say they choose their timing and words very carefully. At the same time, 19% of managers and 29% of team members tend to “drop hints hoping the other person understands” or simply “swallow what bothers them.” Situations that only increase the risk of latent conflicts.*



## What does psychology say?

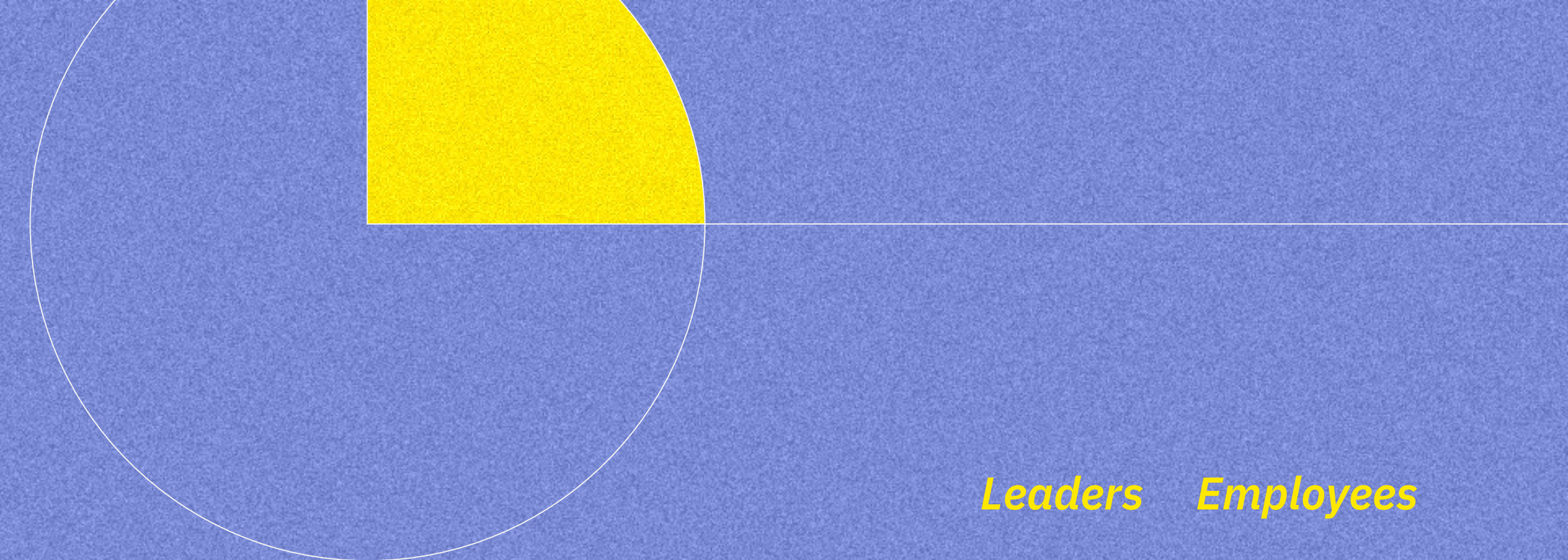
Often, we expect the other person to notice on their own what bothers us, because speaking directly can generate anxiety and fear of harming the relationship. Situations that follow the same mechanisms that make it hard to “disagree” and “say no.” The problem is that what is not talked about tends to resurface over the course of the relationship in the form of resentment or disconnection.

## How to have difficult conversations?

At The School of Life, we learn that having a difficult conversation doesn’t mean being harsh or saying everything we think without a filter. It means being able to combine honesty with care. This involves choosing a good moment and describing clearly and objectively what happened, without criticism or judgment. It requires explaining the impact of that situation, avoiding assuming the other person’s intentions, and asking questions before reaching conclusions. It also demands genuinely listening to the other perspective. Instead of waiting for someone to guess our needs, we need to learn to put them into words, sincerely and respectfully.



*When something bothers you at work, can you say it directly or do you wait for the other person to notice on their own?*



|                                                           | Leaders | Employees |
|-----------------------------------------------------------|---------|-----------|
| I speak directly, no detours                              | 18%     | 15%       |
| I speak up, but choose my timing and words very carefully | 63%     | 56%       |
| I drop hints and hope they understand                     | 14%     | 15%       |
| I prefer to swallow it and move on                        | 5%      | 14%       |

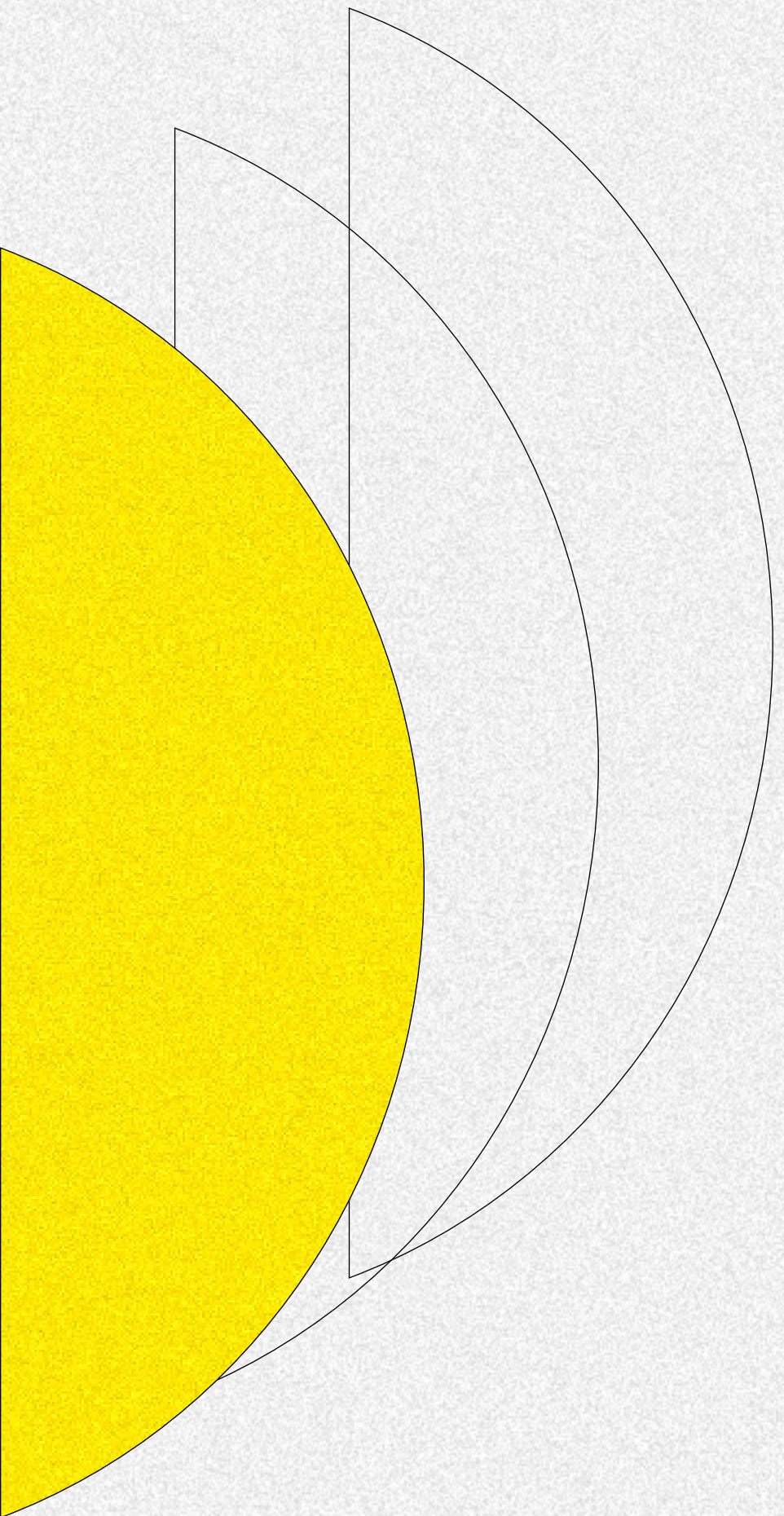


## What does this mean for companies and leaders?

Feedback, alignment, and delicate conversations are part of the routine of high-performing teams. Developing the ability to conduct them with honesty and respect contributes to healthier relationships and greater trust among professionals.



# What is behind these statistics?



*A large part of emotional maturity consists of recognizing that professional life inevitably involves frustrations, uncertainties, differences, boundaries, and uncomfortable conversations. The problem arises when we systematically try to avoid these experiences: we escape into distraction, silence a disagreement, accept a demand we can't fulfill, or expect the other person to guess what we need.*

A better experience at work also depends on the perception that we are making a relevant contribution, that our intelligence and skills are being put to use. The question is to observe to what extent discomforts are taking away from professionals the ability to offer their best version in the role they perform.

In the workplace, the ability to face discomfort also has to do with the level of psychological safety perceived within the organization. A topic that is even more relevant at a time when Brazil's NR-1 is putting a spotlight on psychosocial risks.

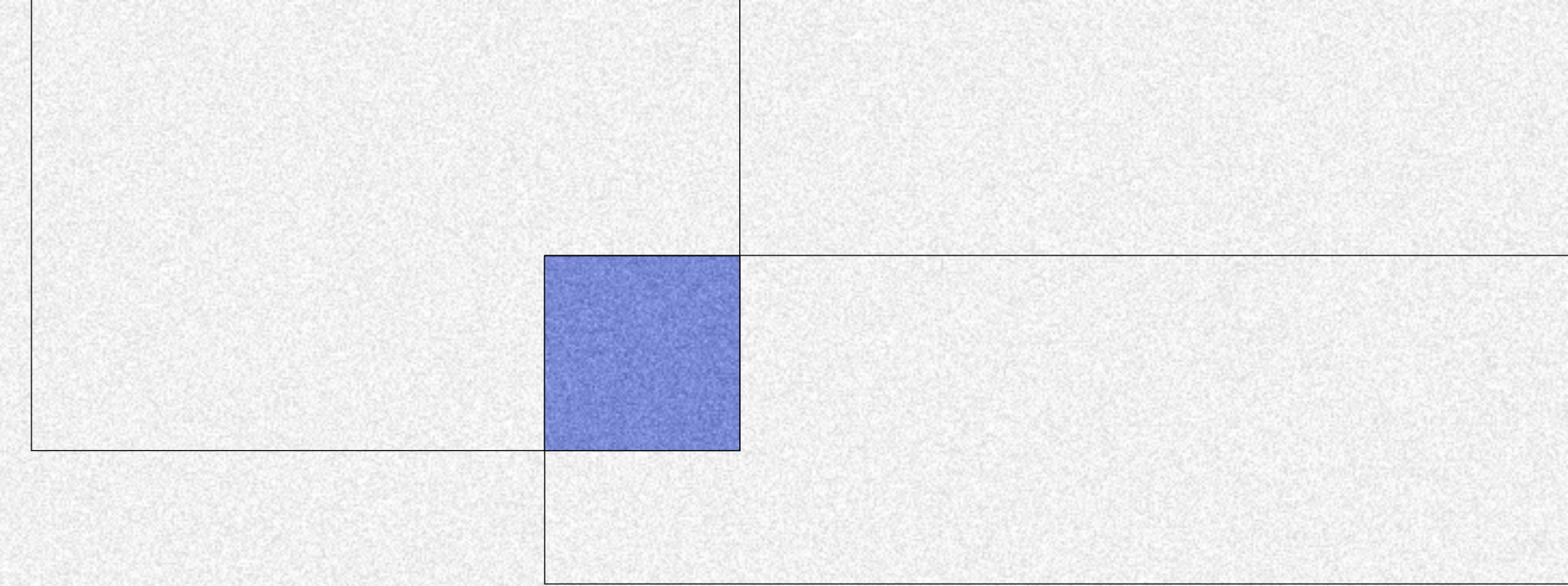
The data from this survey are an invitation to look beyond the statistics. For people, it means recognizing how they deal with discomfort, boundaries, and relationships at work. For organizations, it means creating conditions for these challenges to be faced with more safety, awareness, and maturity.

Because emotional intelligence is not about eliminating discomfort. It is about developing resources to transform it and move through it, without losing the ability to think, dialogue, decide, and contribute.

What do these data say about your reality?

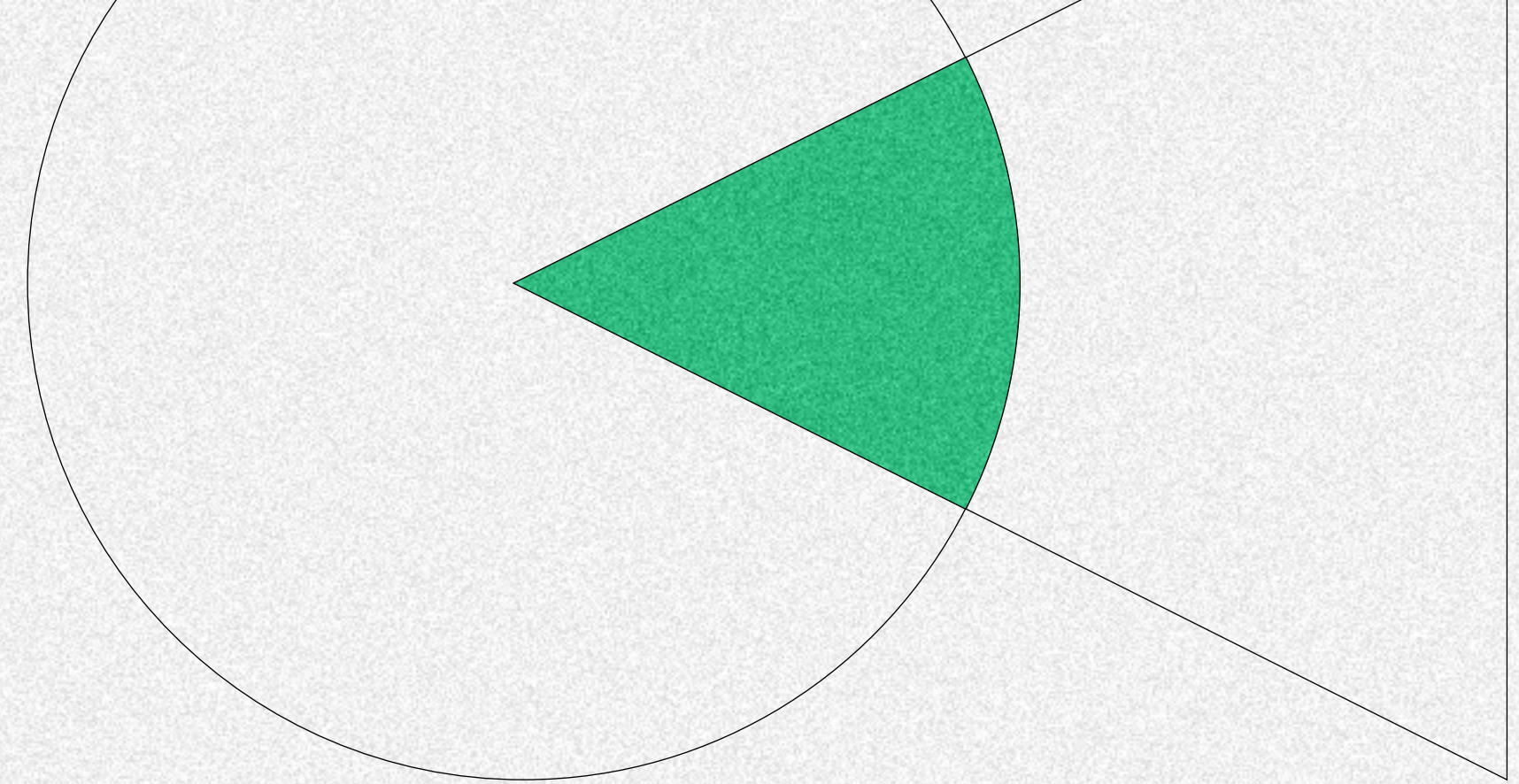
What can be done to turn these reflections into better practices?

The School of Life and Robert Half are available to support your company on this journey.





# FINAL THOUGHTS



**Diana Gabanyi,**  
co-founder and CEO  
of The School of Life  
Brasil

***“We don’t leave our emotions outside when we enter the office. We bring with us our insecurities, frustrations, expectations, and desires. Emotional intelligence is learning to recognize all of this, understand the other person better, and choose how to respond. When we do this, we don’t just build emotionally healthier people, but more mature relationships, more honest conversations, and better organizations.”***



**Maria Sartori,**  
Market Director  
at Robert Half

***“The mapping shows that challenges such as hesitation to disagree, difficulty setting boundaries, and wear and tear in professional relationships are not isolated issues. In a market competing for qualified talent, environments where people feel safe to express themselves, collaborate, and deal with challenges constructively tend to strengthen engagement, retention, and productivity. Therefore, creating conditions for open conversations and trusting relationships has ceased to be merely a cultural matter and has become part of people management strategy.”***



## ABOUT THE ORGANIZATIONS BEHIND THE STUDY

### *The School of Life*

The School of Life is a global organization dedicated to developing emotional intelligence and applying philosophy in everyday life. Founded in 2008 by Alain de Botton, it emerged to fill a gap in traditional education by addressing topics such as relationships, work, purpose, and mental health. With locations in London, São Paulo, Berlin, Amsterdam, Melbourne, and Paris, it offers workshops, talks, books, online courses, and corporate programs. In Brazil, it was founded in 2013 by Diana Gabanyi and Jackie de Botton. Its São Paulo branch is the only one in the Americas and has become a reference in emotional education for individuals and companies. In August 2026, it won the *British Training Awards 2026* in two categories: Best T&D Company and Best Learning Culture Initiative.

### *Robert Half*

The world's first and largest talent solutions company. Founded in 1948, the company operates in Brazil placing permanent and specialized project-based professionals in the areas of finance, accounting, financial markets, insurance, engineering, technology, legal, human resources, marketing and sales, and senior management roles. With a global presence and operations in North America, Europe, Asia, South America, and Oceania, Robert Half appears on lists of the world's most admired companies and is also recognized for its commitment to promoting equality and fostering an inclusive culture.





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