Zeus
Jones

# Rethinking Resilience at Work

A Qualitative
Research Study

At Zeus Jones we are inspired by change. It's the thing that drives our curiosity, imagination and determination to make the world better. And the pace of change in our world is exhilarating and inspiring. Every day there are new problems to solve and new opportunities to pursue.

As the work to be done in the world changes, so does the way we do it. The pandemic forced us all to re-evaluate our priorities and restructure our lives. We discovered new ways of working to overcome the challenges we faced. And now technologies like AI are poised to fundamentally change work again.

For us at Zeus Jones, work isn't just about getting things done. It's about doing bigger and more imaginative things, solving the important problems and creating the future we want to live in. So we do a lot of thinking about how to support that kind of work in our own company, and others.

Issue 04 of our editorial/experimental playground Athena is all about conceptualizing a new kind of resilience fueled by play and collective creativity. We call it joyful resilience, and it doesn't just fortify individuals, it builds more flexible businesses, more supportive communities, and more open-minded cultures.

We need a new kind of resilience more now than ever. For many people, the pandemic caused a shift in emphasis toward productivity and efficiency—dehumanizing people and burning them out rather than building on their passions and creativity. And when people suffer, the work suffers, too.

Certainly, we don't have it all figured out. Our work relies on deep collaboration, emotional investment and trust—all of which are hard to cultivate in a hybrid environment. We don't necessarily have the perfect solution for this (no solution is perfect, really). And while we are adopting new technologies into our processes, we're still learning about the best ways for humans and machines to work together in creative ways. But we're proud of where we are and the supportive-yet-flexible structures we've created for ourselves to work within.

The following research was conducted in the spirit of joyful resilience, because it's hard to change for a better future if you don't know where you stand in the present. We invite you to use this workbook to begin rethinking how play, collaboration, autonomy, and novelty exist in your workplace and how it might change.

— Christian Erickson, *CEO*

Rethinking Resilience at Work Report

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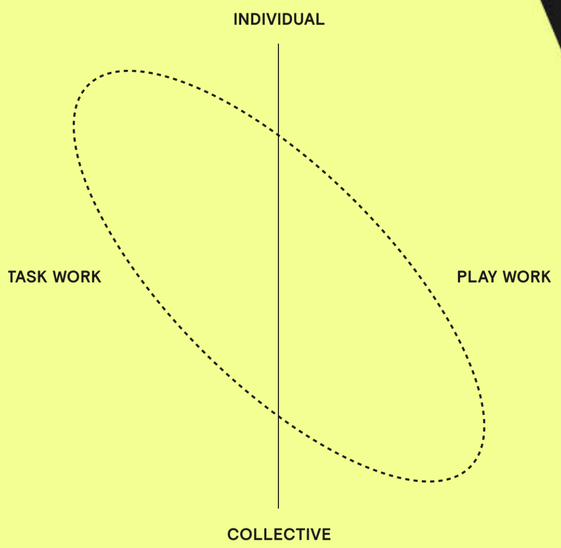



# SHIFTING THE WAY WE THINK ABOUT *R*ESILIENCE AT WORK.

In recent years, resilience has become a buzzword in the workplace. Companies are ramping up investments in programs and resources to help their employees develop resilience, hoping to mitigate burnout and improve employee retention.

Yet our most celebrated acts of resilience—gritting our teeth to perform under stress—rely on behaviors that put our human needs last and erode our wellbeing. In the relentless pursuit of resilience, are we compromising our wellbeing?

It's a sobering question made more urgent by a 2023 Gallup report revealing that a mere 32% of U.S. workers feel engaged at their workplaces. With this alarming trend of disengagement, there is a pressing need to re-evaluate and re-imagine resilience at the workplace.

We seek to turn a spotlight onto this dilemma and illuminate a more sustainable path forward.

What if we found ways to bring joy into work, rather than separate it? What if our workplaces helped us navigate what healthy collaboration, vulnerability and risk-taking might actually look like rather than modeling unhealthy competition and isolation?

## INSIGHT 1

### Trust-starved employees face an uphill battle.

When employees feel trusted to make their own decisions about how and where they work, they are more likely to feel a sense of ownership and pride. However, while trust from leadership to act autonomously is crucial—isolation or feeling siloed can be a significant source of stress. The key is balancing autonomy and collectivity. When people feel supported by their team, they are more likely to be confident in their abilities to overcome challenges.

## INSIGHT 2

### Meaningful collaboration emerges from an environment that values honesty and vulnerability.

When given the time and space to work collaboratively with a team, people are more likely to engage in deep thinking and meaningful discussions that lead to new insights and approaches. People want to collaborate with others, but these moments can create additional stress and anxiety when there's a lack of support or pressure to be perfect. The best collaboration comes from moments of vulnerability and radical honesty.

## INSIGHT 3

### Play as a tool is undervalued and often seen as separate from work itself.

Today, our notions of play are limited and often disconnected from the actual nature of work. Many organizations don't currently foster the necessary conditions for play—not enough time, not enough support, not enough models. When there's room to play and experiment within workflows, people can solve complex and challenging problems like never before.

## INSIGHT 4

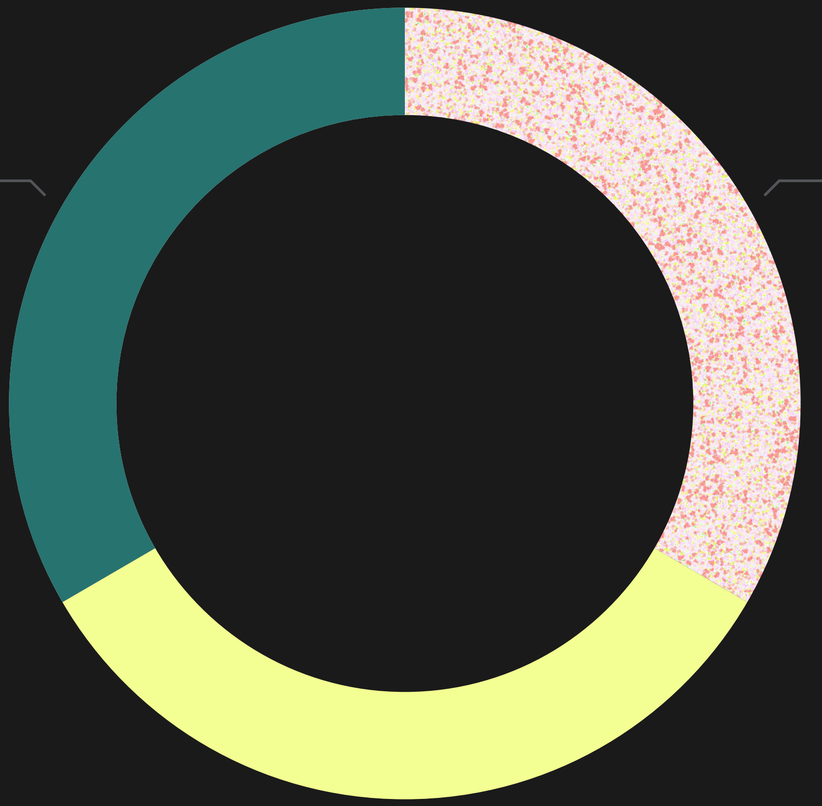
### The monotony of remote work underscores a need for novel experiences.

Working from home limits the range of experiences that people have access to on a daily basis. There is also a tension between the expectation to be constantly connected online and an ability to engage with the world around us. People want opportunities for both solo and shared experiences that expose them to new ideas, perspectives, and ways of thinking.

# METHODOLOGY

In January and February 2023 we conducted a study to examine the behaviors that erode our wellbeing and explore the policies, habits and rituals that could contribute to a more sustainable, joyful resilience at work.

We spoke with 225 full-time, salaried workers to gain an understanding of how they're feeling about their work—what gives them energy, what drains it—and what a more joyful future of work might look like. A third of the respondents work in office settings, a third work fully remote and a third are hybrid, working a blend of in-office and remote. We intentionally focused on white collar and knowledge workers, many of whom have access to remote work arrangements.

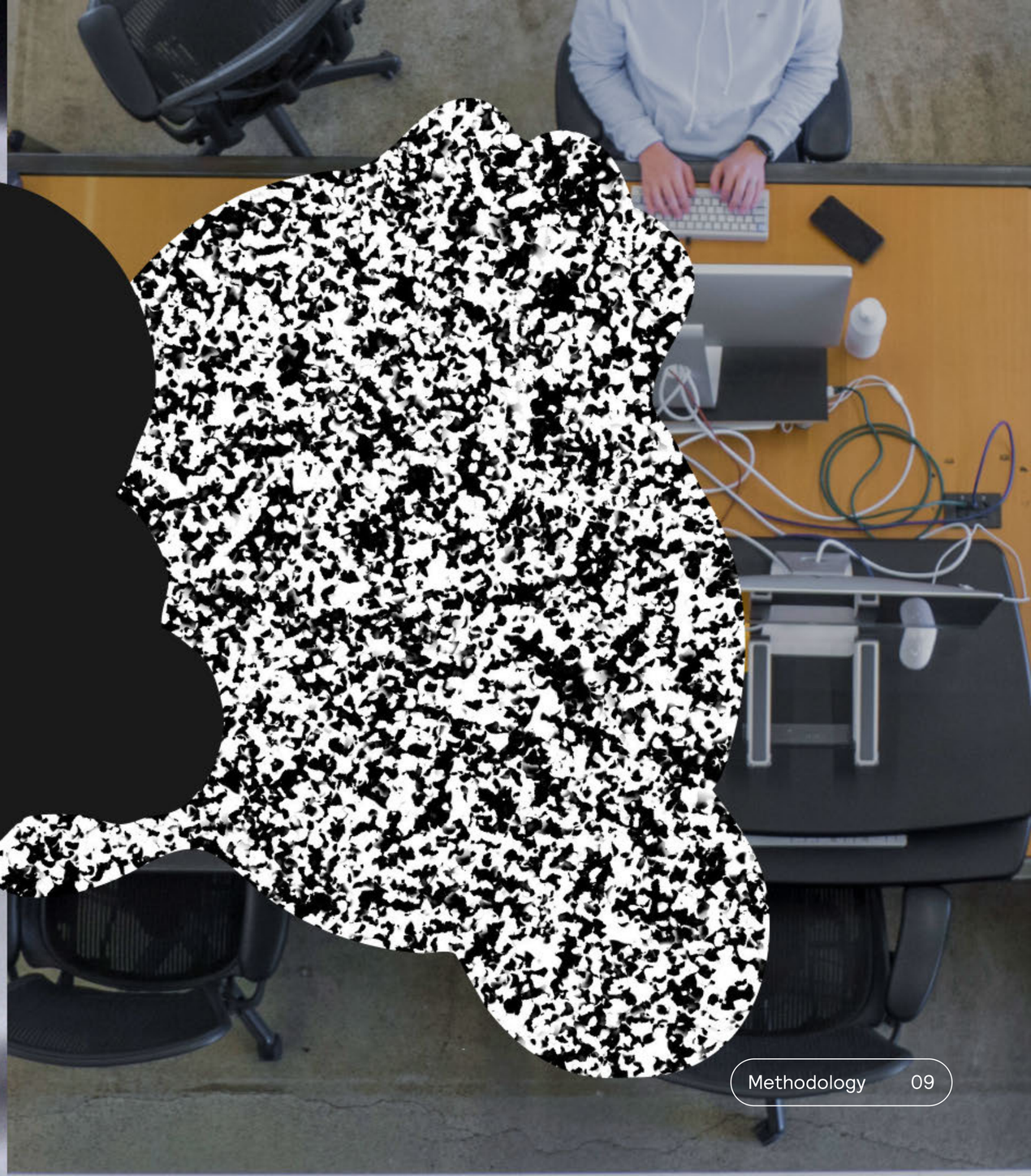


# The range of respondents we spoke to reflects a breadth of workplace experiences.

Clinical Lab Scientist, Teacher, Registered Nurse, College Administrator, Medical Scribe, Public Health Inspector, Operations Manager, Analyst, College Guidance Counselor, Artificial Intelligence Engineer, VP, Writer, Project Coordinator, IT Support Engineer, Project Controller, Recruiting Manager, Sales, Digital Literacy, Teacher, Researcher, Finance Manager, Graphic Designer, Immigration Case Assistant, Doctor, Social Worker, Human Resources, Therapist, Systems Admin, Laboratory Technician, Social Media Marketer, Operations Manager, Wellness Advisor, Business Analyst, Program Manager, Paralegal, Manufacturing Engineer, Merchandise Specialist, Virtual Assistant, Account Executive, Dentist, Compliance Officer, Consultant, Nursing Home Administrator, Professor, Accountant, Structural Engineer, Operations Strategist, Architect.

We also took a look at ourselves—turning the microscope on our own behaviors and practices at Zeus Jones. Through an internal survey of our own hybrid and fully-remote employees we aimed to get a sense of where we are living up to our ambitions to cultivate a more sustainable, joyful resilience at work and where we are not.

Throughout this report you'll hear perspectives from both the 225 respondents as well as anonymous Zeus Jones employees.



# INSIGHTS

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# INSIGHT 1

## Trust-starved employees face an uphill battle.

## WORKERS TODAY YEARN FOR A SWEET SPOT BETWEEN AUTONOMY AND COLLABORATION—AN EQUILIBRIUM THAT CAN OFTENTIMES SEEM ELUSIVE.

The results of our study reveal a growing affinity for autonomy, with most respondents feeling significantly more motivated when given the freedom to manage their work style and responsibilities. For instance, employees being allowed to manage their schedules, participate in decisions about working styles, and avoid micromanagement led to increased job satisfaction and ownership.

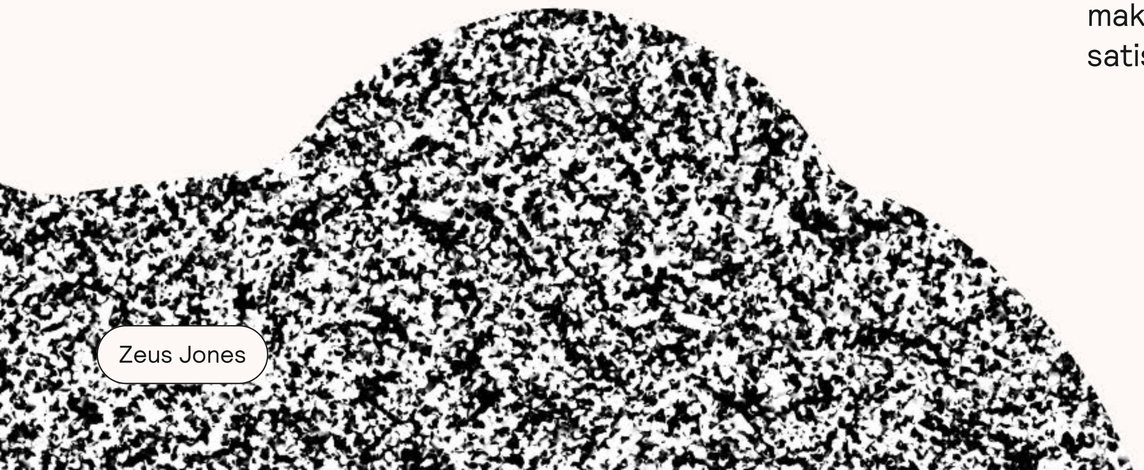
However, the coin has another side. Unrestricted autonomy can quickly devolve into a profound sense of isolation, leading to elevated stress levels. Respondents frequently recounted feelings of loneliness and frustration from the lack of team interaction or feedback. This was especially true for fully remote workers, indicating that—despite advances in technology—isolation and feeling siloed continue to be major obstacles for remote workers.

The work of Marylène Gagné and Edward L. Deci, both prominent figures in the field of psychology, has been integral in understanding the relationship between autonomy and motivation in the workplace.

In their 2005 paper titled "Self-Determination Theory and Work Motivation," they applied the tenets of Self-Determination Theory (SDT) to organizational behavior, discussing how workplace conditions can influence employees' motivation and overall job performance.

Self-Determination Theory suggests that when people's basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness are met, they achieve optimal motivation and wellbeing. In the context of the workplace, the need for autonomy refers to the desire to have control over one's work and to make choices freely.

Gagné and Deci's research found that when employees feel they have a degree of autonomy, they are likely to experience higher intrinsic motivation, job satisfaction and wellbeing. This supports the idea that trust-induced autonomy (i.e., when employers trust their employees to make their own decisions) can lead to increased job satisfaction and better overall work performance.



# WHEN EMPLOYEES FEEL TRUSTED TO MAKE THEIR OWN DECISIONS ABOUT HOW AND WHERE THEY WORK, THEY ARE MORE LIKELY TO FEEL A SENSE OF OWNERSHIP AND PRIDE.

“Autonomy is really important because that signals trust. I'm allowed to make decisions around how I went about research and how I connect with my partners and stakeholders. The ability to experiment as well. This could be choosing a new method without fear of kind of backlash or any sort of punishment for trying something new and potentially making mistakes.”

— Adrienne, *Design Researcher*

“My boss gave me the chance to set my own calendar and complete my work how I wanted. As long as the work was done well and on time, she was happy. This made me feel trusted and inspired to do my best.”

— Mark, *Teacher*

> “Working on projects with an intense deadline but having a team that is largely unavailable or unresponsive. You feel like you're talking to yourself.”
>
> — Lori, *Program Specialist*

IN OUR CONVERSATIONS WE HEARD ABOUT AN INCREASING DESIRE FOR AUTONOMY THAT GIVES EMPLOYEES A SENSE OF OWNERSHIP OVER THEIR WORK AND WORKING STYLE...

...YET, THE FEELING OF DISCONNECTION FROM A TEAM OR COMPANY THAT COMES FROM TOO MUCH AUTONOMY CAN BE A SIGNIFICANT SOURCE OF STRESS.

> “The most stressful part of my week is working by myself most of the time. It's lonely. Nobody to bounce ideas off. Everyone is busy. Nobody else does what I do.”
>
> — Anonymous, *Zeus Jones Employee*

BALANCING AUTONOMY AND COLLECTIVITY IS KEY. WHEN PEOPLE FEEL SUPPORTED BY THEIR TEAM, THEY ARE MORE LIKELY TO BE CONFIDENT IN THEIR ABILITIES TO OVERCOME CHALLENGES.

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“Having heads-down solo time to work, think, and tinker... alongside occasional moments to share, talk, and celebrate. When these two things feel somewhat balanced I find a lot of joy in my days.”

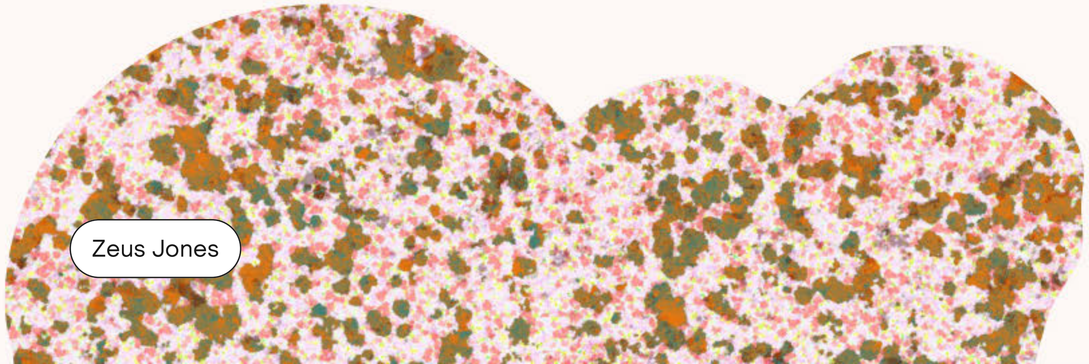
— Anonymous,
*Zeus Jones Employee*

“When working with my peers on planning a tricky project I suggested that the entire team comes together with ideas, regardless of how they good they may think are. We debated all of them, finally deciding to come up with a plan formed from variety of ideas moulded through discussion together. We presented it to our boss who was delighted and green lit the project.”

— Agie, *HR Business Partner*

“In my current role I was energized when working remotely with a coworker to refine and automate a task that was mostly mundane manual work. We shared ideas in a word document then worked on our parts independently to eventually review together at the end. The cooperation and feelings of empowerment and intelligence were great!”

— Travis, *Data Manager*



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# TO SUM IT UP...

There's a silver lining in this tumultuous balance. Our research suggests that robust resilience is cultivated in an environment that intertwines autonomy and collaboration. Imagine a supportive team that shares the load and empowers its members to own their roles. We need a new paradigm in our workplaces, one that balances autonomy with collective support—underscoring the importance of trust, inclusion and open communication.

# INSIGHT 2

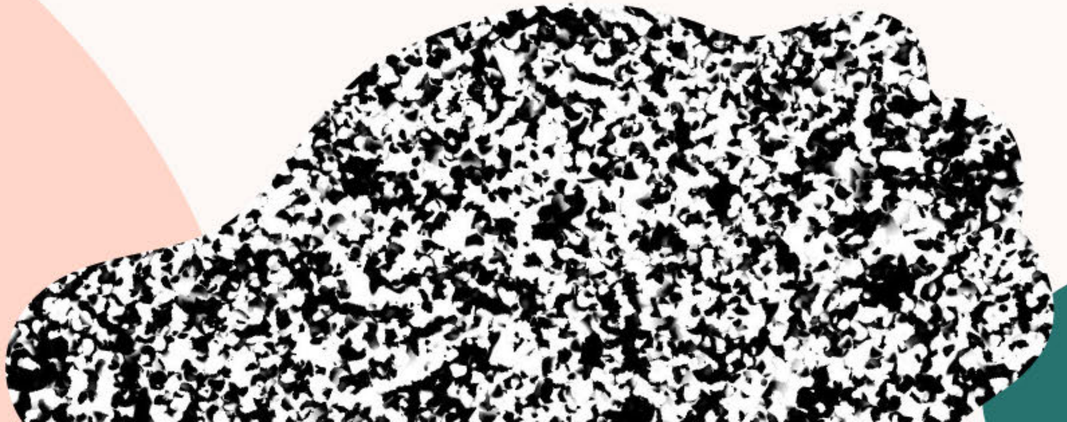
## Meaningful collaboration emerges from an environment that values honesty and vulnerability.

## WHEN PEOPLE HAVE THE ROOM TO COLLABORATE WITHOUT FEELING JUDGED, THAT'S WHEN THE MAGIC HAPPENS.

Our research suggests it's time for a shift in how we think about the ideal conditions for collaboration at work.

Respondents expressed being energized by meaningful collaboration within their teams, especially when met with equal enthusiasm from their peers. The people we spoke with told us that when they can dive deep into brainstorming sessions or project discussions, they not only come up with more creative ideas but are also happier.

However, they also reported feeling anxiety and stress when collaborating in unsupported or high-pressure environments—often due to high expectations and a lack of trust from leaders. The best kind of teamwork happens when people can let their guard down. There's magic in not being afraid to say, "I don't get this, can you help?" or "I have this idea, but it's not quite there yet."



OVER HALF OF THE WORKERS WE SPOKE WITH REPORTED FEELING EITHER STRESS, DREAD OR FEAR (SOMETIME ALL THREE) BEFORE STARTING WORK EACH DAY.

> “One of the most stressful parts of my week is meeting with specific coworkers who I always feel like have high expectations, aren’t approachable.”
>
> — Anonymous, *Zeus Jones Employee*

WHETHER IT’S MICROMANAGEMENT OR OVERLY CRITICAL COLLEAGUES, MANY RESPONDENTS REPORTED FEARING FEEDBACK AND ENVIRONMENTS WHERE THERE WAS LITTLE ROOM FOR EXPERIMENTATION AND FAILURE.

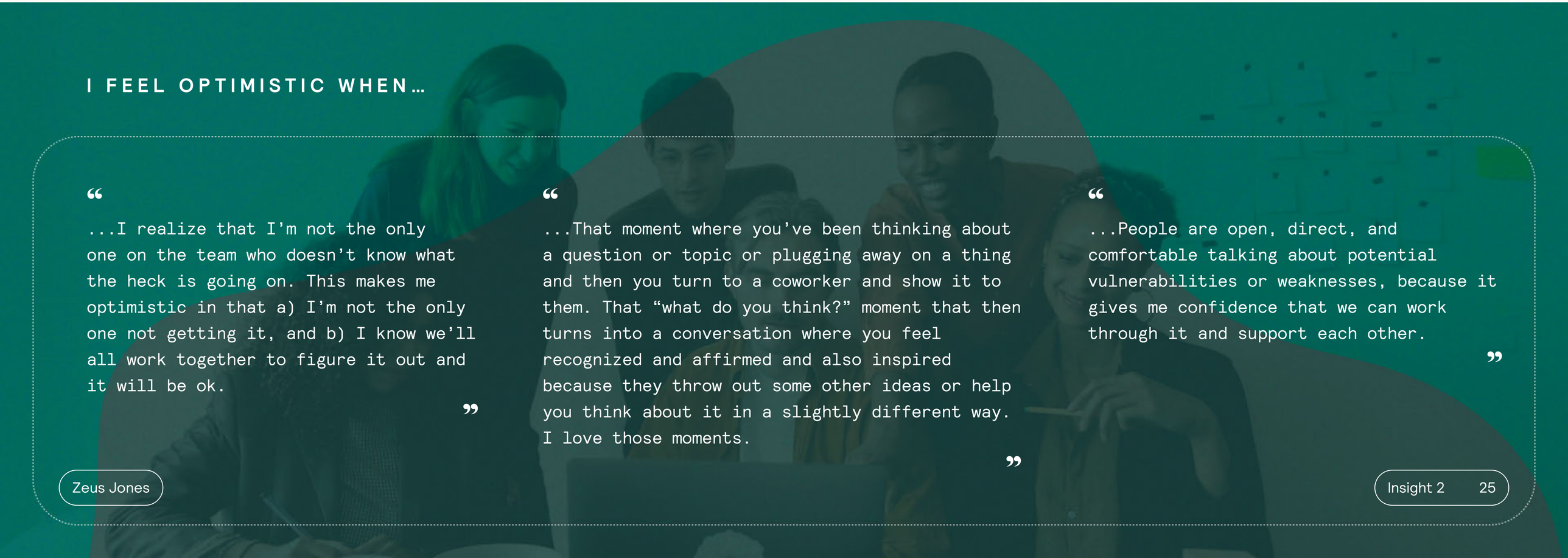
WHEN GIVEN THE TIME AND SPACE TO WORK COLLABORATIVELY WITH A TEAM, PEOPLE ARE MORE LIKELY TO ENGAGE IN DEEP THINKING AND MEANINGFUL DISCUSSIONS THAT LEAD TO NEW INSIGHTS AND APPROACHES.

— Anonymous,
*Zeus Jones Employee*

“One time we were working to solve a big problem, one which we didn’t know the output in advance. Having to explore a bunch of different angles, debate the pros and cons. Not everyone was on the same page, but it was a cool discussion, lots of mutual respect. It felt great to be solving this problem with these people, even if it wasn’t easy.”

# THE BEST COLLABORATION COMES FROM MOMENTS OF VULNERABILITY AND HONESTY.

Psychological safety ensures that individuals feel safe to take risks, be vulnerable and express themselves authentically. There is a shared understanding that not knowing the answers is an opportunity for growth, rather than a weakness. Team members understand that by supporting and uplifting one another they enhance the overall success of the team and the organization.



## I FEEL OPTIMISTIC WHEN…

> “...I realize that I’m not the only one on the team who doesn’t know what the heck is going on. This makes me optimistic in that a) I’m not the only one not getting it, and b) I know we’ll all work together to figure it out and it will be ok.”

> “...That moment where you’ve been thinking about a question or topic or plugging away on a thing and then you turn to a coworker and show it to them. That “what do you think?” moment that then turns into a conversation where you feel recognized and affirmed and also inspired because they throw out some other ideas or help you think about it in a slightly different way. I love those moments.”

> “...People are open, direct, and comfortable talking about potential vulnerabilities or weaknesses, because it gives me confidence that we can work through it and support each other.”

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# TO SUM IT UP...

We need to start building workplaces where everyone feels safe to be themselves, to speak up and to learn from each other. Only then can we unlock the true power of collaboration.

Workplaces that value honesty and vulnerability can ensure that individuals feel safe to take risks and express themselves authentically. It's in this realm of psychological safety, where imperfections are seen as opportunities for collective problem-solving, that the full potential of collaboration is realized.

# INSIGHT 3

## Play as a tool is undervalued and often seen as separate from work itself.

# MANY ORGANIZATIONS DON'T FOSTER THE NECESSARY CONDITIONS FOR PLAY—NOT ENOUGH TIME, NOT ENOUGH SUPPORT, NOT ENOUGH MODELS.

This disconnect is symptomatic of an enduring tension: while evidence points towards play as a significant catalyst for divergent thinking and imaginative exploration, it's still seen as a remote concept, disconnected from daily work routines. "Play" is often consigned to the periphery of work; relegated to coffee breaks and after-work hours, or under-appreciated as a mere distraction from 'real work'.

Embedded within this tension lies a tremendous opportunity. Our research hints at the potential of play, not as an afterthought, but as a central tool in our work lives. A deeper, more nuanced appreciation for play could have profound impacts on creativity and innovation within organizations.

> "We really have not prioritized play at my job or in my department. One time we gave a funny presentation at a team meeting to wrap up the year, but that's about it. Our approach was to show funny photos and joke around a bit. It was fairly successful I think, I felt a little uncomfortable during the process though."
>
> — Samuel, *Project Manager*

Today, our notions of play are limited and often disconnected from the actual nature of work. 43% of respondents say that they're often able to embrace a spirit of play at work—yet those current structures for play that they mention are often either workplace amenities or perks, or focused on rest and time away from work.

# 43%

## "OPTIONAL EVENTS"

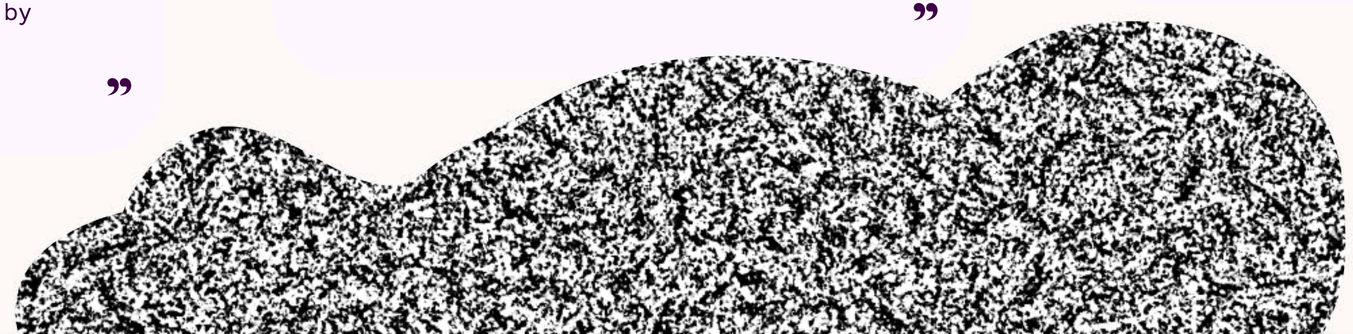
"I would absolutely love prioritizing play - but it's hard to figure out how to do so. I think that having events that we can optionally attend as an organization would be really nice. Activities such as journaling, group, meditating, yoga, or Zumba, or a fun game to play and that's facilitated by someone else."

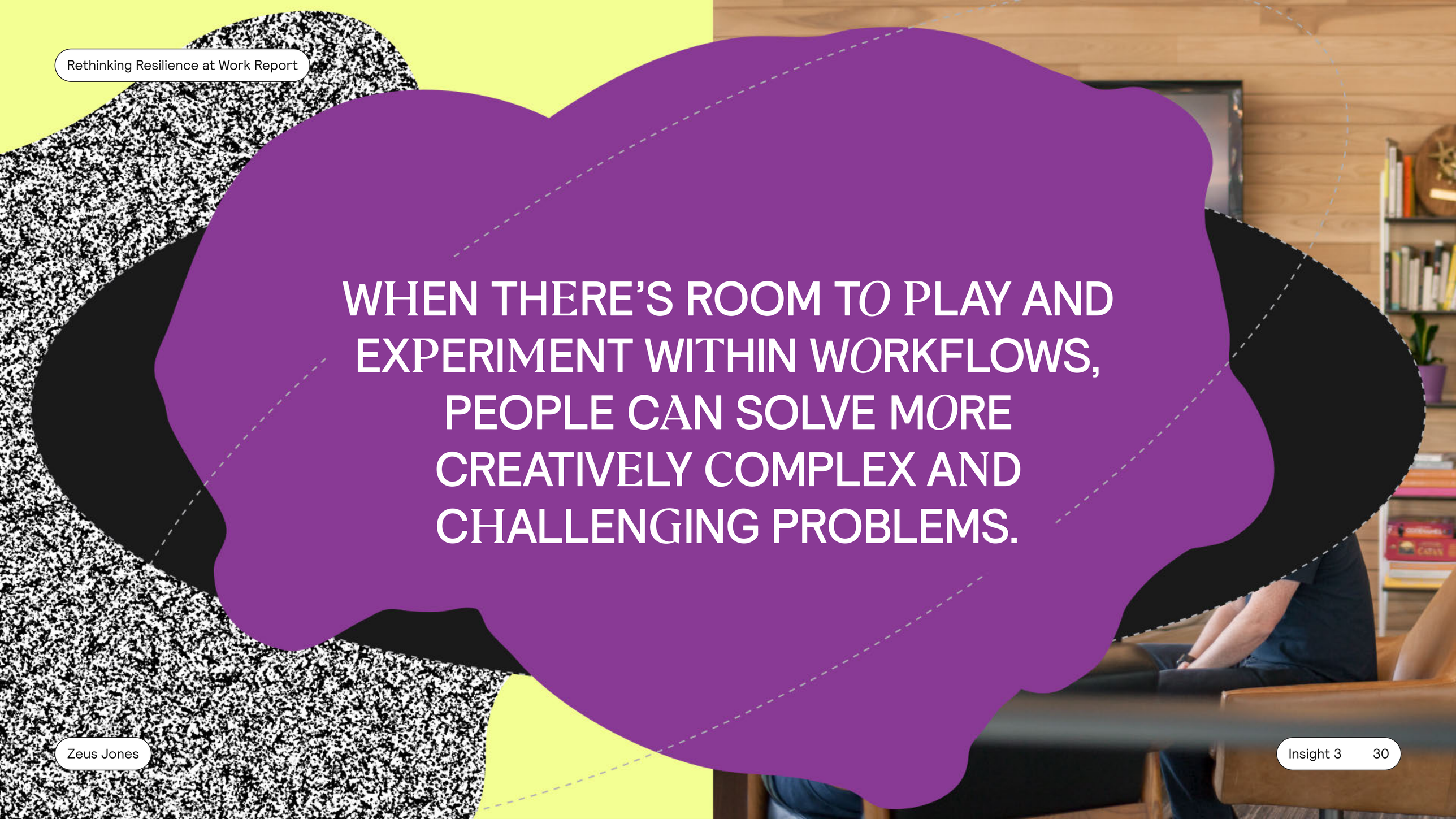
## "GAMES"

"An ideal experience would involve having a bunch of indoor games that people can play when they need to take a break from work. I would definitely love to play table tennis or chess or have some books that I can read and take my mind off work."

## "NAPS" AND "BREAKS"

"If my employer chose to prioritize joy and playful exploration, that ideal experience for me would be to get more naps and take more breaks and work on my own time."





# WHEN THERE'S ROOM TO PLAY AND EXPERIMENT WITHIN WORKFLOWS, PEOPLE CAN SOLVE MORE CREATIVELY COMPLEX AND CHALLENGING PROBLEMS.

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“I wish there were group play times–times when I can interact with my coworkers with a non-work task. This task could be something that helps open up our minds to innovation, but isn’t directly related to a work task so we can really let go, think outside the box while also enjoying each other’s company. I think it would infuse creativity into my team and make us feel less like hamsters on wheels.”

— Sharon, *Technical Writer*

“For me that would manifest in like a crazy design day where we have food and we just go ahead and take all the technical problems and design like 50 solutions, voting on our favorite one and then go ahead and try to build that one or more of an adventure style format. I honestly think that I would be much happier and significantly more productive than I am today, and wouldn’t be so eager to go home.”

— Ana, *Product Development Lead*

# TO SUM IT UP...

The time is ripe for a reconceptualization of play in our workplaces. Moving beyond traditional notions of play, there is a growing need to integrate it seamlessly into our daily routines and workflows. In doing so, we can unlock its potential as a catalyst for enhanced problem-solving and innovative thinking. It's not about adding more ping pong tables; it's about fundamentally reshaping how we think about—and engage in—the act of play at work.

# INSIGHT 4

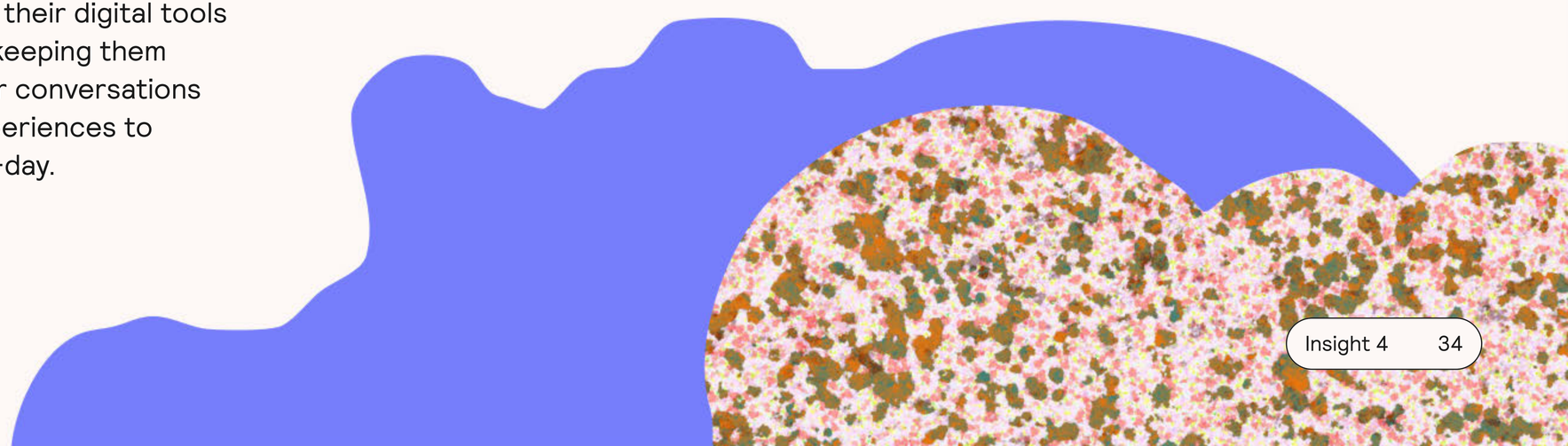
## The monotony of remote work underscores the need for novel experiences.

# AS THE NOVELTY OF REMOTE WORK FADES, WE FIND OURSELVES FACED WITH AN EMERGING CONCERN: THE MONOTONOUS NATURE OF OUR NEW WORK ROUTINES.

Working from home might mean no more stressful commutes, but it also limits the variety of experiences each workday. To quote one participant, “Since I work from home, I have to sit at my desk all day. Sometimes I go hours without really doing anything.”

Working from the comfort of home has come at the expense of day-to-day variety. In our increasingly digital and isolated world, it's all too easy to fall into a rut of sameness. Employees often find themselves in an ironic predicament where their digital tools that enable remote work are also the anchors keeping them moored in a repetitive cycle of sameness. In our conversations we discovered a profound longing for novel experiences to punctuate the mundane rhythms of the day-to-day.

> “I work from home, I’m very isolated and I’m home alone all day. So I like activities like work travel–it gives you new experiences and you get to be with people.”
>
> — Gloria, *Communication Specialist*



# The benefits of novel experiences are well-documented.

## Novelty often sparks creativity by providing fresh perspectives, ideas and inspirations.

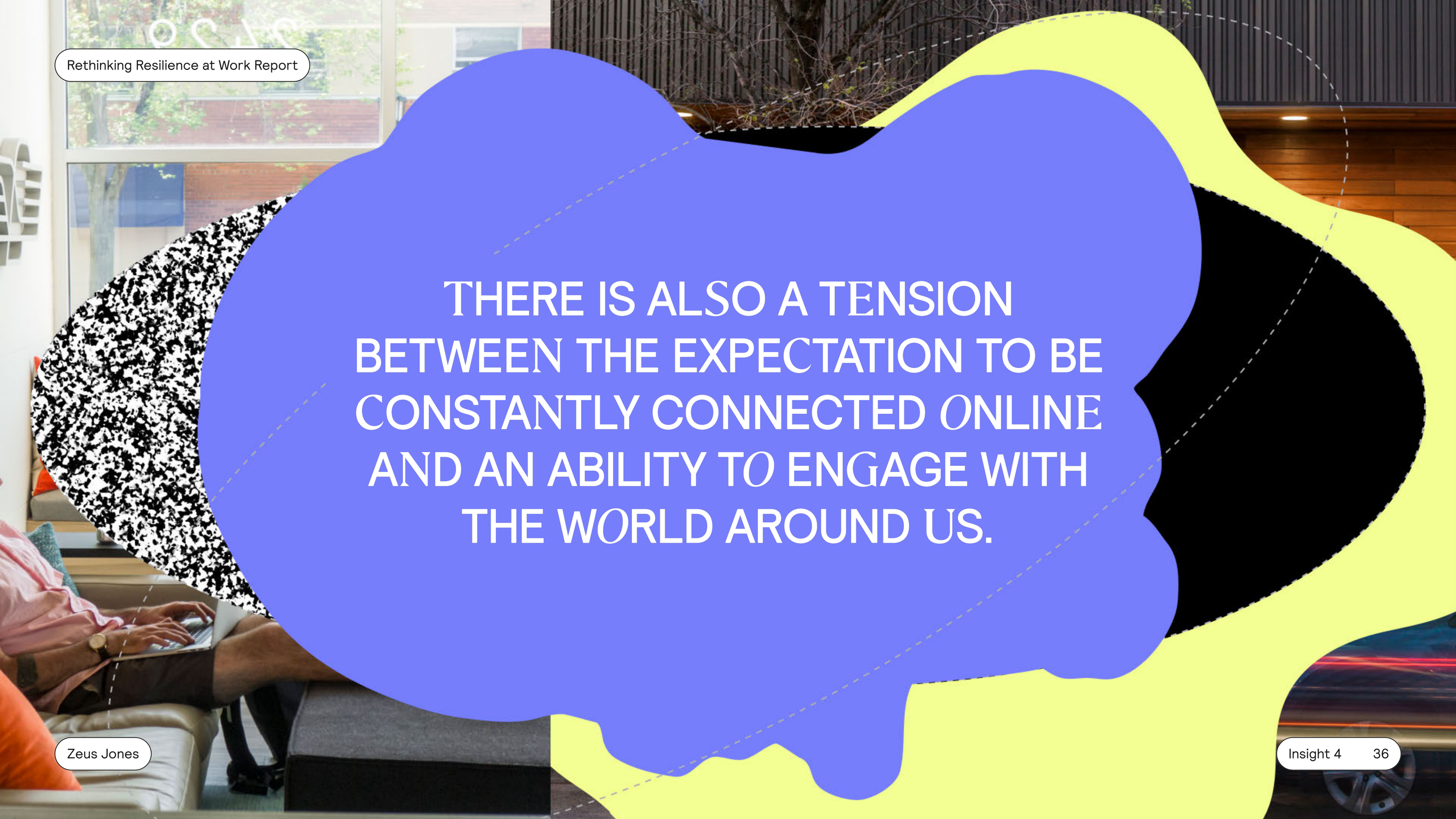
Engaging in diverse experiences exposes individuals to different cultures, viewpoints and ways of thinking, stimulating their imagination and helping them generate innovative solutions to challenges. In a 2005 article published in the Journal of Applied Psychology, authors Gilson, Mathieu, Shalley, and Ruddy investigate the impact of exposure to diverse experiences and ideas on creativity within standardized work environments. They argue that exposure to novelty and diverse experiences can actually enhance creativity. Their research highlights the need for organizations to create an environment that encourages the exploration of new ideas, fostering innovation and continuous improvement.

## Engaging in new experiences enhances cognitive flexibility: the ability to shift perspectives, adapt to changing circumstances and think in unconventional ways.

Novel experiences expose individuals to diverse situations, challenges and environments. This exposure helps them develop the capacity to adapt quickly and effectively to new circumstances. It broadens one's mental frameworks and encourages the exploration of alternative solutions. Cognitive flexibility allows individuals to connect seemingly unrelated concepts and ideas, leading to creative breakthroughs. A 2012 research study published in the Journal of Experimental Social Psychology found that unusual and unexpected experiences enhance cognitive flexibility, and ultimately creativity.

## Seeking novelty and new experiences can also reinvigorate passion and motivation for work. t injects a sense of excitement, curiosity and adventure, making work more fulfilling and enjoyable.

In the book "Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience", author Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi explores the concept of flow as a state of complete immersion and focus in an activity where individuals experience deep enjoyment, intense concentration and a sense of timelessness. He argues that new and novel experiences have the potential to increase the challenge and complexity of tasks, enhancing the likelihood of flow. By actively seeking novelty and embracing new experiences, individuals can introduce elements that stimulate curiosity and contribute to flow-inducing activities.



THERE IS ALSO A TENSION BETWEEN THE EXPECTATION TO BE CONSTANTLY CONNECTED ONLINE AND AN ABILITY TO ENGAGE WITH THE WORLD AROUND US.

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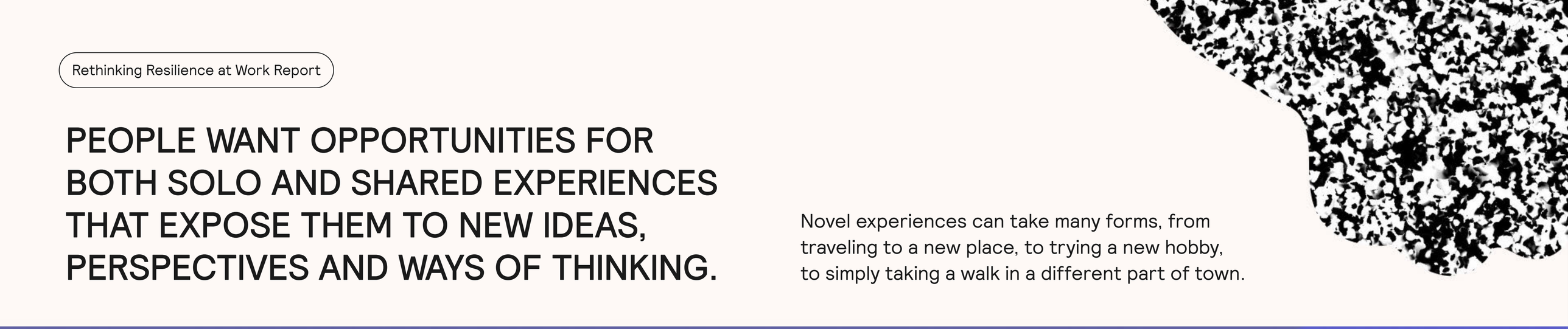
— Anonymous,
*Zeus Jones Employee*

“Our work relies on us being very online, and in my real life, I’m trying to be less online. It’s a hard balance feeling like I’m always on a device, when I want to be experiencing the world around me in a more natural manner.”

# PEOPLE WANT OPPORTUNITIES FOR BOTH SOLO AND SHARED EXPERIENCES THAT EXPOSE THEM TO NEW IDEAS, PERSPECTIVES AND WAYS OF THINKING.

Novel experiences can take many forms, from traveling to a new place, to trying a new hobby, to simply taking a walk in a different part of town.



## I WOULD LIKE TO HAVE MORE…

> “...Cultural tours–leaving my house and exploring the world for the benefit of finding meaning linked to my projects ... ability to interact with the world at large vs. just Keynote and my computer.”

> “...Loose structures that create space to actually play, tinker, and share. Then I'd have more time to learn new tools or try things out just for the sake of trying them, not doing them in service of a specific task/ deadline at hand. This would actually open us up to more novel ways of working because we wouldn't have to reach for the tools and methods that we already know and are comfortable with.”

> “...Dedicated days to prioritize play/ being offline and reporting back what we learn, IRL workshops and client engagements that are offline and in fun environments, Less distractions, more physical things, more dreaming”

# TO SUM IT UP...

We find ourselves at an inflection point: as the traditional boundaries of work continue to evolve, how can we ensure that the pursuit of innovation remains at the forefront? This question does not just bear implications for the wellbeing and creativity of our workforce, but it fundamentally underpins the future success and adaptability of our organizations.

It's not all doom and gloom. Our respondents displayed an eagerness for innovative solutions that cater to both solo and shared novel experiences. What they are calling for is a revolution in work design that carves out space for exploration, learning and play—a structural shift that might, as one respondent put it, "prioritize play/being offline and reporting back what we learn."

Conclusion —

# BUILDING A NEW VISION *OF RESILIENCE* AT WORK

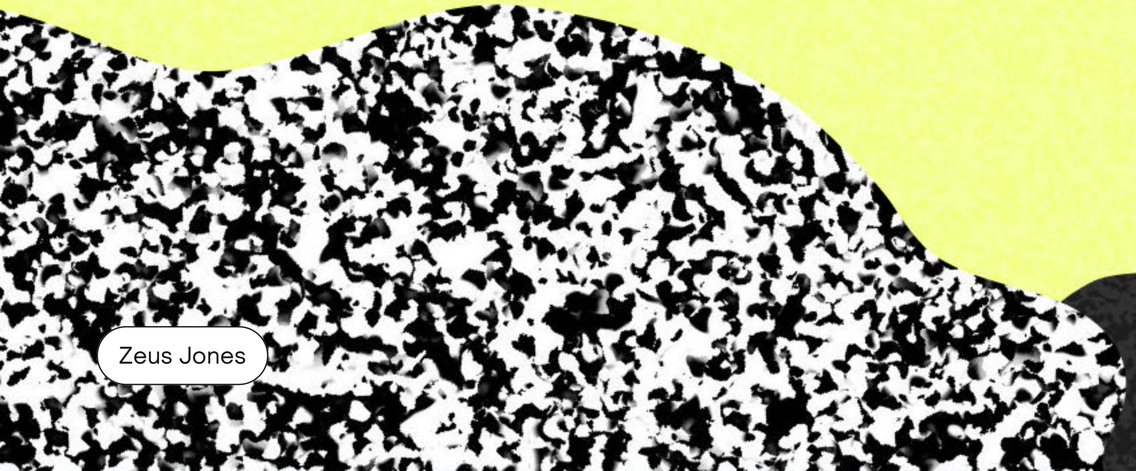
There are many ways to embody a healthy, sustainable resilience at work: Maybe one day it's maximizing our autonomy to explore, maybe another it's engaging in playful collaboration. But the expectation of sacrificing our joy for productivity still holds us back, and the models for a healthier relationship with work are still very much in formation. The responses of this survey show a need to re-conceptualize how trust, psychological safety, play and novelty become part of the work we do, not just sit alongside it.

Here's how we begin to move forward:

## EXPANDING WHAT WE SEE AS PRODUCTIVE.

This means understanding that some activities that may seem unproductive in terms of output are actually critical for unlocking our full productive energy. The best work happens when people feel trusted, psychologically safe, able to play and are encouraged to explore. And when people feel empowered to do their best work in an environment that acknowledges these realities, they're less likely to be drained by overcoming obstacles along the way.

Taken together, this research shows four principles for how we build a workplace that reconciles productivity with a more sustainable resilience.



Zeus Jones

# Four principles for moving forward:

1

## IGNITE CULTURES OF TRUST

When employees are granted autonomy, they are empowered to make decisions and take ownership of their work. Collaboration, on the other hand, brings individuals together to pool their knowledge, perspectives and talents. A culture of trust that supports both individual creativity and cross-team collaboration ignites ownership and can enhance innovation across the organization.

2

## EMBRACE RADICAL HONESTY

Genuine collaboration flourishes when individuals embrace vulnerability and practice radical honesty. But it also requires an organizational foundation of psychological safety. When employees feel safe enough to take on uncertain challenges and honestly express their thoughts, their potential for growth and innovation is unlocked. Without feeling safe to do so, someone may never voice their breakthrough idea.

3

## EMPOWER PLAY AS A CATALYST

Play encourages divergent thinking and imaginative exploration, allowing individuals to break free from conventional patterns and generate fresh ideas. But to unlock play as an engine for creative productivity, we can't be limited to ping pong tables and employer-sponsored Zumba classes. Moving away from play as something that is seen as separate from work to integrating playfulness into workflows will allow organizations to realize the potential of play as a tool for enhancing problem-solving skills and unlocking innovation.

4

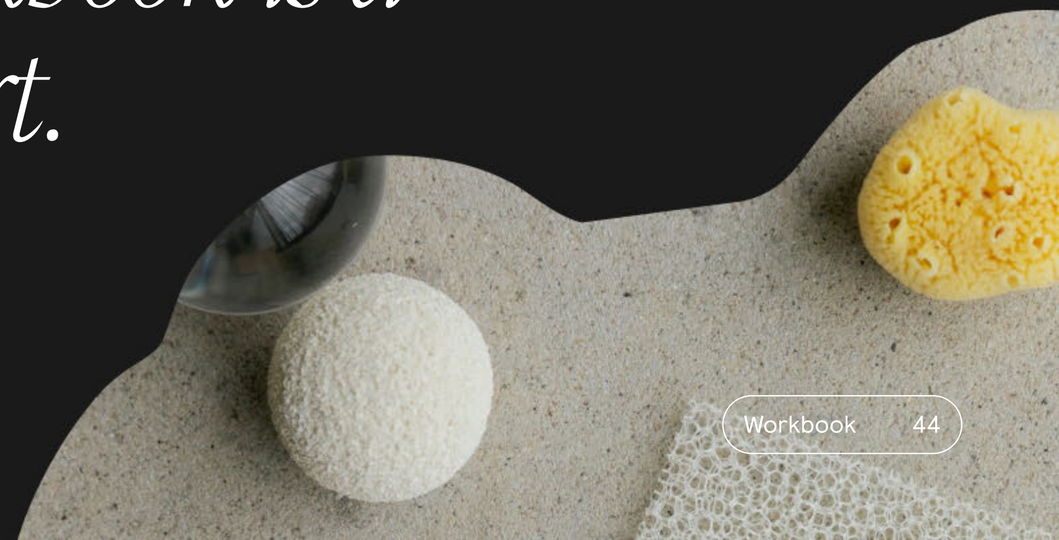
## PRIORITIZE NOVEL EXPERIENCES

People working from home crave a balance between online connectivity and real-world experiences to fuel creativity. Taking time to experience new environments, cultures, art forms or even leisure activities can inspire unconventional thinking and imagination when solving work problems. Promoting the productive value of breaking out of our routines might seem counterintuitive, but breaking feelings of isolation and the malaise of sameness day after day leads to new perspectives and a work culture that innovates rather than plods along.

Workbook —

# APPLYING THESE PRINCIPLES TO YOUR WORKPLACE

*Changing work culture is hard. But small efforts can have big impact. The key is to expand what we see as productive. This workbook is a place to start.*



The following exercises are designed to help you see new opportunities for your business across four principles that encourage productivity with a more sustainable resilience in the workplace. They'll help you to assess how your team or enterprise currently stacks up against these principles as well as encourage you to get creative with how you could apply these learnings to your organization in the future.

## As you go through these exercises:

### Dig deeper.

Don't look at the obvious thing holding you back, but critically evaluate what's underneath the symptoms and what the core issues are.

### Consider your org.

What works at Zeus Jones will not work for everyone, so carefully think about what principles your organization could embrace and how.

### Prepare to pitch.

To make any change, you'll want to craft a story to stakeholders. You'll likely need to consider the case for the business, for the people and the culture at large, and balance outcomes across them all.

# IGNITE CULTURES *OF* TRUST

1

## How could you help foster a culture of trust within your organization?

Workers today need freedom to work in a way that best suits their needs. However, the more autonomy there is in a workplace, the more support is required to counteract feelings of disconnection, overwhelm and stagnation.

People do their best when they feel secure in their individual ownership of work with a capable team they trust to have their back. Building a culture of trust between employee and employer, and between individuals on a team, is more than being open and friendly. It means proving an organizational mindset that values asking for help and prioritizes delivering it

Start with an assessment. Use the prompts to think about trust and your workplace.

This exercise can be done as an individual, team or enterprise assessment. Use any or all of the prompts that best fit your needs

## Reflecting on your self.

When have you embraced a culture of trust? Describe that moment and what it felt like.

## Observing those around you.

When has someone on your team or within your organization demonstrated trust? What did that feel like and what happened as a result?

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## Identifying barriers and allies.

Take an inventory of current cultural norms or workplace policies that may act as a barrier to igniting cultures of trust. Then, identify allies and advocates that could work as change agents.

## Projecting Outcomes.

What could igniting a culture of trust unlock for your team and organization if practiced more intentionally? Where should trust be most highly prioritized?

Time to get creative with how you could apply this principles within your own organization. To jumpstart your imagination, here's some practices that Zeus Jones has adopted.

## Unlimited PTO

Leaving how people need to use their time, and when, up to the individual.

## Autonomous teams

No reporting up to a single creative director or account lead who "approves" work. Teams make the decisions themselves about their work, and the direction it's headed. Instead, the focus is on support systems for individuals and teams who need help.

## Self-led growth and annual reflections

Provide tools to stimulate conversation with options for what works best for the employee. There are loose guard rails for what annual conversations should be, but not a specific format or expectation.

Using the ideas on the left as inspiration, brainstorm 9 ideas or actions for how you could **ignite cultures of trust** in your organization.

# EMBRACE *RADICAL HONESTY*

## How could you build spaces for radical honesty within your organization?

Working among ambitious and articulate people can be stressful. Whether from fear of embarrassment or criticism, if employees don't feel psychologically safe to voice their honest thoughts and feelings, productive collaboration withers.

Embracing radical honesty is about better innovation via more inclusive collaboration. It means admitting that all creative contributions deserve to exist and that a competition of ideas is inferior to an open, honest discussion. The more people feel comfortable sharing their unique perspectives, even uncomfortable truths, the more innovative a project outcome will be.

Start with an assessment. Use the prompts to think about radical honesty and your workplace.

This exercise can be done as a individual, team or enterprise assessment. Use any or all of the prompts that best fit your needs.

## Reflecting on your self.

When have you embraced radical honesty? Describe that moment and what it felt like.

## Identifying barriers and allies.

Take an inventory of current cultural norms or workplace policies that may act as a barrier to embracing radical honesty. Then, identify allies and advocates that could work as change agents.

## Observing those around you.

When has someone on your team or within your organization embraced radical honesty? What did that feel like and what happened as a result?

## Projecting Outcomes.

What could embracing radical honesty unlock for your team and organization if practiced more intentionally? What would be too radically honest? Is there a right time for radical honesty?

Time to get creative with how you could apply this principles within your own organization. To jumpstart your imagination, here's some practices that Zeus Jones has adopted.

## Transparent financial information

Every month, the top line financial information is shared openly with everyone. All employees have visibility into revenue numbers, the type of work we're doing and with what clients.

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## Transparent new biz pipeline

All potential new projects are posted in a shared Slack channel. We share what the opportunity is, potential timing and why we are excited about it. It also gives everyone a chance to weigh in and offer to help shape it, creating a feedback loop about what people are excited to work on.

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## Topical Ask Me Anythings

After an important share out about the state of the company or the vision and direction, optional AMAs (Ask Me Anything) are scheduled with the leadership team to create a safe space for employees to come forward with questions.

Using the ideas on the left as inspiration, brainstorm 9 ideas or actions for how you could **embrace radical honesty** in your organization.

# EMPOWER PLAY AS A CATALYST

## How could you harness the power of play in your organization?

Most people working today were taught from a young age that work and play are decidedly separate activities. This perspective is holding businesses and their employees back.

Play is a powerful productive force, especially for creative work. This doesn't mean more foosball in the break room. It means holding space for rapid ideation without restriction, hosting field trips to spur new mindsets, and providing unorthodox stimuli for creative brainstorming. When play is injected into work, it helps unlock a creativity within us that is usually confined by the rigidity of efficiency.

Start with an assessment. Use the prompts to think about play and your workplace.

This exercise can be done as a individual, team or enterprise assessment. Use any or all of the prompts that best fit your needs.

## Reflecting on your self.

When have you empowered play as a catalyst? Describe that moment and what it felt like.

## Identifying barriers and allies.

Take an inventory of current cultural norms or workplace policies that may act as a barrier to empowering play as a catalyst. Then, identify allies and advocates that could work as change agents.

## Observing those around you.

When has someone on your team or within your organization empowered play as a catalyst? What did that feel like and what happened as a result?

## Projecting Outcomes.

What could empowering play as a catalyst unlock for your team and organization, if practiced more intentionally? At what point would play become a distraction?

Time to get creative with how you could apply this principles within your own organization. To jumpstart your imagination, here's some practices that Zeus Jones has adopted.

## Recess Lab

Recess Lab is a new way for Zeus Jones to unlock creative thinking with client orgs. It's a break from the day-to-day; a time for us to tackle challenges head-on with creativity, playfulness and unexpected inputs. In these sessions we inspire  partners to trust creative intuition and build space for playfulness that unlocks permission to collaboratively explore.

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## Athena

Our playground for cultural imagination. In each issue we explore ideas that will be crucial for the future of business in a space that's free from some of the constraints that can come with client work. We launch a set of articles, experiments and actions led by a small nimble team that is empowered with editorial freedom to decide what they want to explore and create.

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## Miro as a Core Tool

Creating space for a less structured, more free form way to work and collaborate.

Using the ideas on the left as inspiration, brainstorm 9 ideas or actions for how you could **empower play as a catalyst** in your organization.

# PRIORITIZE NOVEL EXPERIENCES.

## Prioritize novel experiences.

Working from home offers a level of flexibility that is essential for many of us. However, there's a downside when we fall into repetitive patterns that blur the lines between home life and work life. In the absence of fresh perspectives or challenges, people are less likely to stretch their creativity.

Taking on a unique challenge or having a new experience with other people acts as both a bonding moment and reason to be mentally present at work. The goal is not to shock employees into frantically solving problems for the sake of novelty, but rather to provide opportunities and experiences that might unlock a new kind of thinking and a greater sense of community.

Start with an assessment. Use the prompts to think about novel experiences and your workplace.

This exercise can be done as a individual, team or enterprise assessment. Use any or all of the prompts that best fit your needs.

## Reflecting on your self.

When have you prioritized novel experiences at work? Describe that moment and what it felt like.

## Observing those around you.

When has someone on your team or within your organization prioritized newness? What did that feel like and what happened as a result?

Prioritize novel experiences

Zeus Jones

## Identifying barriers and allies.

Take an inventory of current cultural norms or workplace policies that may act as a barrier to prioritizing novel experiences. Then, identify allies and advocates that could work as change agents.

## Projecting Outcomes.

What could novel experiences unlock for your team and organization if practiced more intentionally? When are routines most helpful?

Prioritize novel experiences

Time to get creative with how you could apply this principles within your own organization. To jumpstart your imagination, here's some practices that Zeus Jones has adopted.

## ZJ Days

A reinvention of an annual offsite where all employees spend a few days in a new city together exploring a topic critical to the future of our business and work. We immerse ourselves in new experiences, trying on new ideas and mixing leisure, playfulness, experimentation and deep discussion.

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## Experiential discovery

A reinvention of traditional immersion where we orchestrate a set of real-life experiences around a learning agenda. Similar to ZJ Days, typically in a new city or setting, with a project team and our clients. The new experience, and hands on nature, inspire rich insights shared by all.

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## Project rotations

We keep ourselves mentally challenged and stimulated by staffing each project as it comes in. We check in with people weekly about what's feeling good, what they are craving, what is most rewarding and challenging. We encourage rotating projects, not staying on business for too long and embracing fresh thinking on existing clients.

Using the ideas on the left as inspiration, brainstorm 9 ideas or actions for how you could **prioritize novel experiences** in your organization.

# *Thank you –*

We hope this exercise gave you a taste of how we think about Resilience at Work—and more importantly, sparked some ideas on the future opportunities for your organization.

**Interested in learning more?**
Dig into our fourth issue of Athena for more on what it could look like to prioritize a more sustainable, joyful resilience.

**Interested in chatting more?**
Reach out to our team to start a conversation.
hello@zeusjones.com

*Zeus* Jones

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