The Digital Communication Crisis
And Steps To The Solution

Presented By: Erica Dhawan — Quester 2021

INTRODUCTION

This research was conducted to understand the landscape of needs and issues within digital communication in the workplace.

With this, the key objective was to segment the workplace by communication styles to inform digital communication best practices.
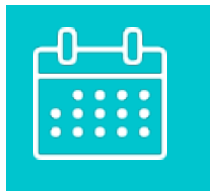
30 minute online interview

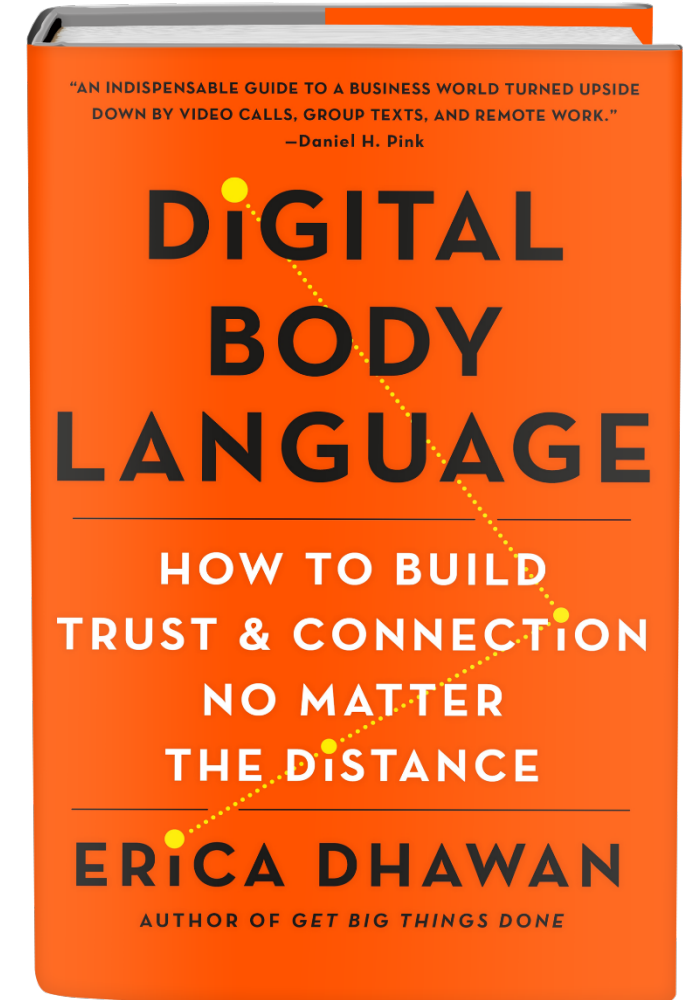Seamlessly integrated quantitative & qualitative design

1939 completed interviews

Must be 18+, work full-time in an industry that is likely to utilize digital communication, and spend more than 20% of their time at work on internal communication interaction

Field dates:

January 14 - 29, 2021

"AN INDISPENSABLE GUIDE TO A BUSINESS WORLD TURNED UPSIDE DOWN BY VIDEO CALLS, GROUP TEXTS, AND REMOTE WORK."
—Daniel H. Pink

DIGITAL BODY LANGUAGE

HOW TO BUILD TRUST & CONNECTION NO MATTER THE DISTANCE

ERICA DHAWAN

AUTHOR OF *GET BIG THINGS DONE*

Erica Dhawan, author of the new book *Digital Body Language*, partnered with **Quester** to study the current state of the digital communication crisis and steps to a long-term solution.

METHODOLOGY DETAILS

- The national survey was conducted online in January 2021 among 1,939 respondents aged 18 or older, currently employed full-time in an industry that is likely to utilize digital communication (see "Qualifying Industries" list), and who spend more than 20% of their time at work on internal professional communication or interaction
  - Of these, 978 are managers and 961 are employees
  - 322 are managers at a small company, 324 are managers at a medium company, and 332 are managers at a large company
  - 294 are employees at a small company, 332 are employees at a medium company, and 335 are employees at a large company
  - Small companies are defined as companies with 100 employees or less, medium companies are defined as companies with 101-999 employees, and large companies are defined as companies with 1,000+ employees

- Significance testing was conducted at the 95% confidence level

- Targeted sample from a B2B online sample panel was utilized

- This survey was conducted using Quester's proprietary software moderator backed by artificial intelligence to conduct one-on-one conversations online or via mobile, combining quantitative and qualitative questioning

Qualifying Industries

- Advertising/Public Relations
- Arts, Entertainment, Recreation
- Business Management & Advisory Services
- Consumer Services
- Design
- Finance and Insurance
- Healthcare & Social Assistance
- Hospitality and Food
- Life Sciences
- Manufacturing
- Real Estate
- Retail/Trade
- Sales/Sales Promotion
- Technology and Information
- Transportation
- Utilities and Energy
- Wholesale Trade & Supply

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We're facing a digital communication crisis.

About **44%** report experiencing **frequent digital anxiety**. Significantly more managers (48%) than employees (39%) claim this feeling.

Total	44%
Managers (a)	48% ▲
Employees (b)	39%

▲ *Arrow denotes that the group is significantly higher than its counterpart*

Drilling down further on Managers' anxiety, significantly more **parents** experience it than their **non-parent counterparts**, with no difference by parent **gender.**
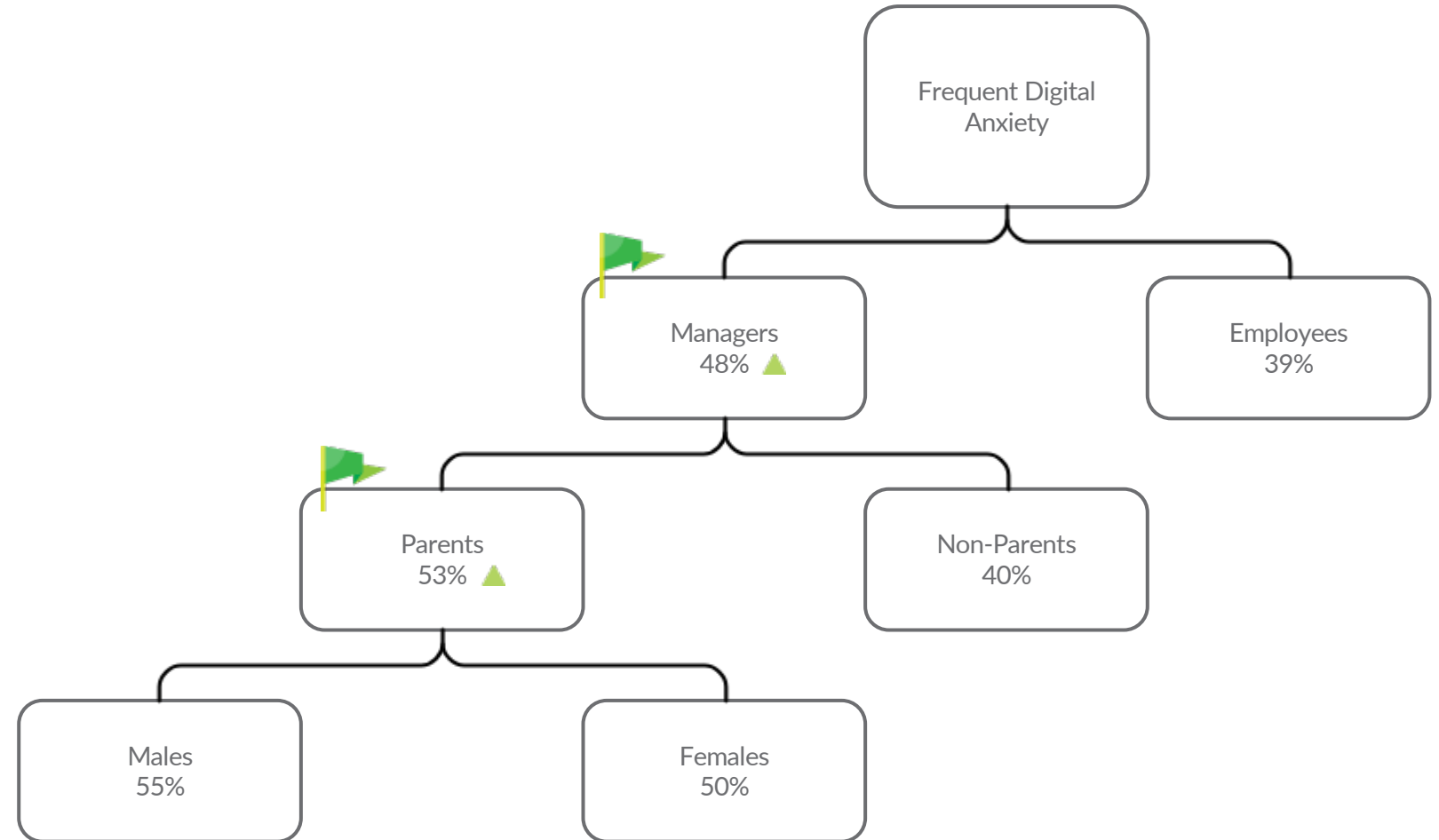
Perhaps **parent managers** have more digital anxiety because they are **managing children at home while simultaneously trying to do their jobs** and manage their employees across phone and internet lines.

Managers, younger generations, and parents have the worst cases of *Digital Anxiety.*
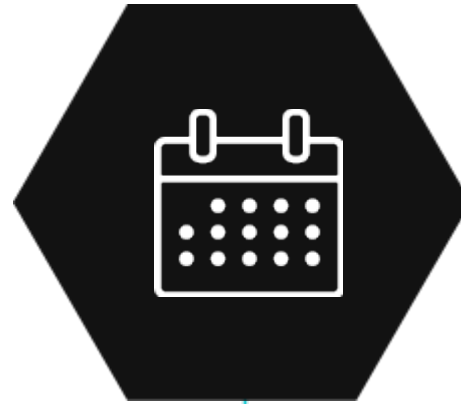
"Targeting" Higher Digital Anxiety

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Managers

48% experience digital anxiety

Gen Z or Millennials
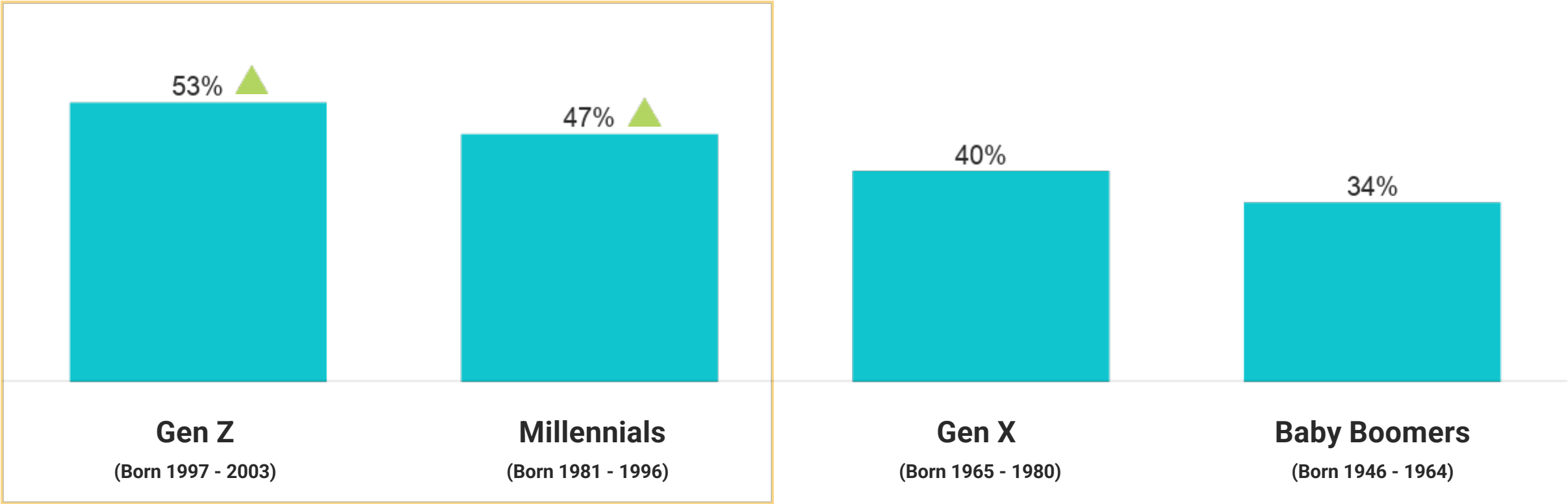
48% experience digital anxiety

Parents

47% experience digital anxiety

Because these are very identifiable groups, they can be specifically targeted for *Digital Anxiety* amelioration.

While Gen Zs are digital natives, they have the highest levels of *Digital Anxiety*.

Digital Communication Anxiety

Gen Z (Born 1997 - 2003)	Millennials (Born 1981 - 1996)	Gen X (Born 1965 - 1980)	Baby Boomers (Born 1946 - 1964)
53% ▲	47% ▲	40%	34%

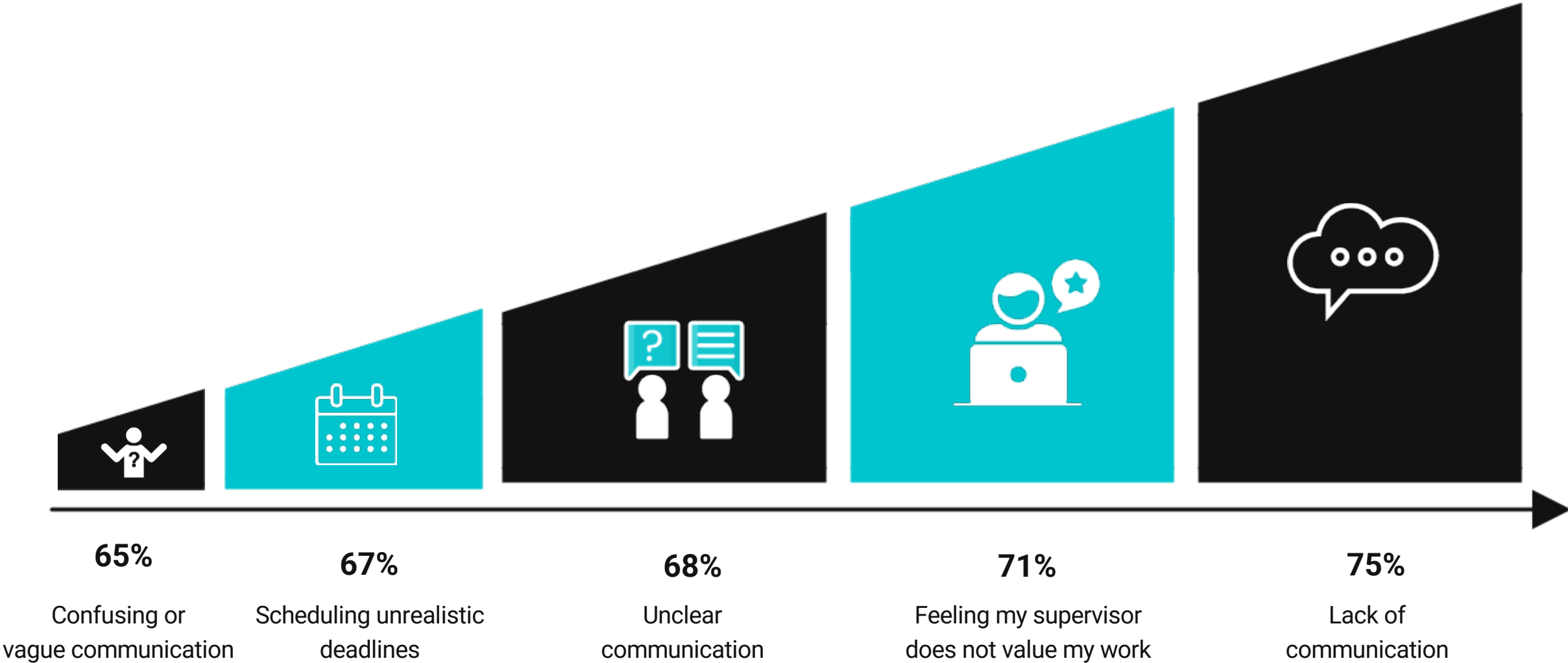|			
Gen Z Managers: 59% ▲	Millennial Managers: 52% ▲	Gen X Managers: 43%	Baby Boomer Managers: 38%
Gen Z Employees: 51% ▲	Millennial Employees: 41% ▲	Gen X Employees: 36%	Baby Boomer Employees: 30%

▲ *Arrow denotes that the group is significantly higher than Gen X or Baby Boomers*

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Unclear digital communication is detrimental, but a lack of communication is the biggest deal-breaker.

The Biggest Pain Points Impacting Teams

65%
Confusing or vague communication

67%
Scheduling unrealistic deadlines

68%
Unclear communication

71%
Feeling my supervisor does not value my work

75%
Lack of communication

Poor digital communication costs the average office worker **four hours per week**.
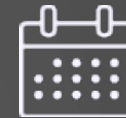
70% Have experienced some form of **poor digital communication** (monthly or more often)

Managers, in particular, are **more likely to encounter poor communication** than their employee counterparts

Time Lost Weekly Due to Poor Communication

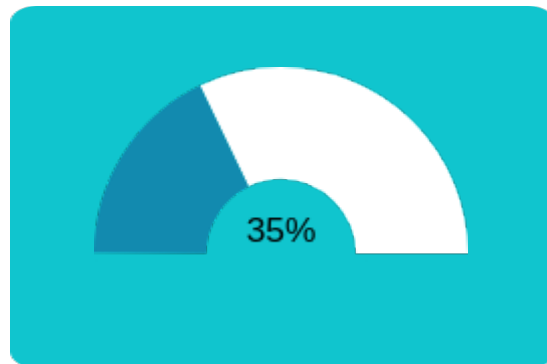## 4 hours

Over **one-third** of employees are dissatisfied with how their managers communicate.
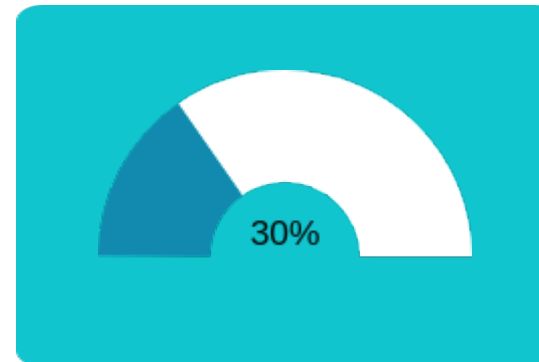
Satisfaction With Communication

| Less Than Satisfied (1-5) | Very Satisfied (6) | Extremely Satisfied (7) |

Employees

35%

30%

35%
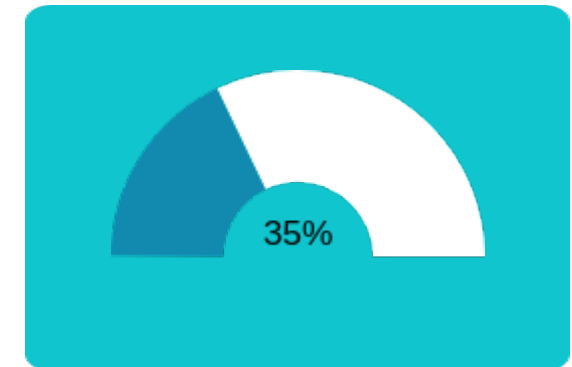
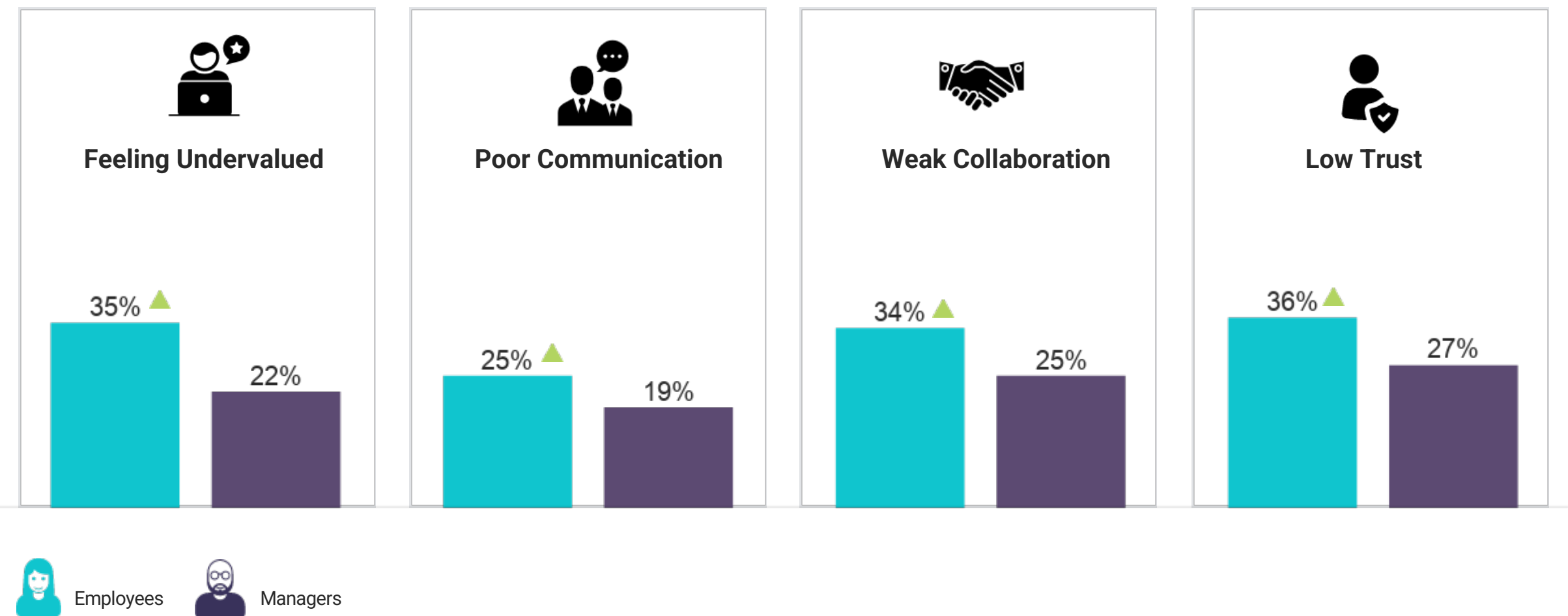**One-third** of employees struggle with company culture. These employees feel under-appreciated and struggle with collaboration and trust.

% Who Reported Problems With...

| Feeling Undervalued | Poor Communication | Weak Collaboration | Low Trust |

35% ▲   22%   25% ▲   19%   34% ▲   25%   36%▲   27%

Employees   Managers

Digital Anxiety causes fear and a sense of being overwhelmed – which can tie to a constant barrage of notifications or stressful technical issues.

45% Fear, Stress, Nervousness

A digital world comes with stressors and fears, especially from those fearful of technology or concerned (even scared) about living in a world with limited face-to-face interaction; some also feel 'overstimulated' or worry about missing out, or even failing, in their digital world

31% All The Notifications

A primary cause of concern or anxiety is all the notifications – most notably from a barrage of emails, but also too many distracting meetings or calls – leaving the feeling that attention is always being diverted from tasks
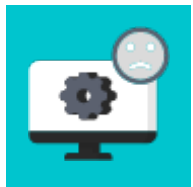
31% Technical Issues

Many are concerned about encountering technical issues (especially Boomers) – from their computer or program not working or having a slow internet connection – and they struggle with how to troubleshoot issues; also, some have unease with learning new programs and how they work
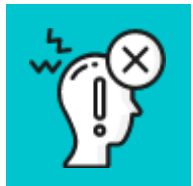
25% Feeling Overwhelmed

There is a sense that it's all just 'too much' – there is a constant stream of notifications, there is so much to do, and in a digital world you feel like you're always connected – the lines between work and home become blurred and you feel like you can never step away

Other Issues Mentioned

Issues with social media (such as bullying or too much politics); dislike of Zoom/video calls, especially with the camera on; younger people are especially worried about interactions with their boss or how their tone might be perceived; some have general security concerns

Most of my digital anxiety comes from a lack of work/life separation. Even when I'm off work, I'm almost afraid to not have my phone on hand in case something comes up. Even when I'm on duty, I hate this feeling. I wish I could use my phone less. (Gen Z)

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Digital Anxiety In Their Own Words

"The stress brought on by social media, online work, and time spent on your phone. Feeling overwhelmed by your workload when it comes to social media, answering emails and staying on top of the online work your job requires."

- Gen Z -

"When I get a lot of emails and I can't keep up. Or when I'm trying to get things done and my computer freezes or kicks me out. I currently work from home and my connection can be terrible, so I get very far behind when I get kicked off my programs."

- Millennial -

"The constant need to respond, whether it is your time off or while you are at work. I am on call 24 hours a day, seven days a week. I get contacted constantly, even when I should be left alone. The contact is often unnecessary. I am contacted because staff are either unwilling or incapable of figuring out non-emergency challenges on their own."
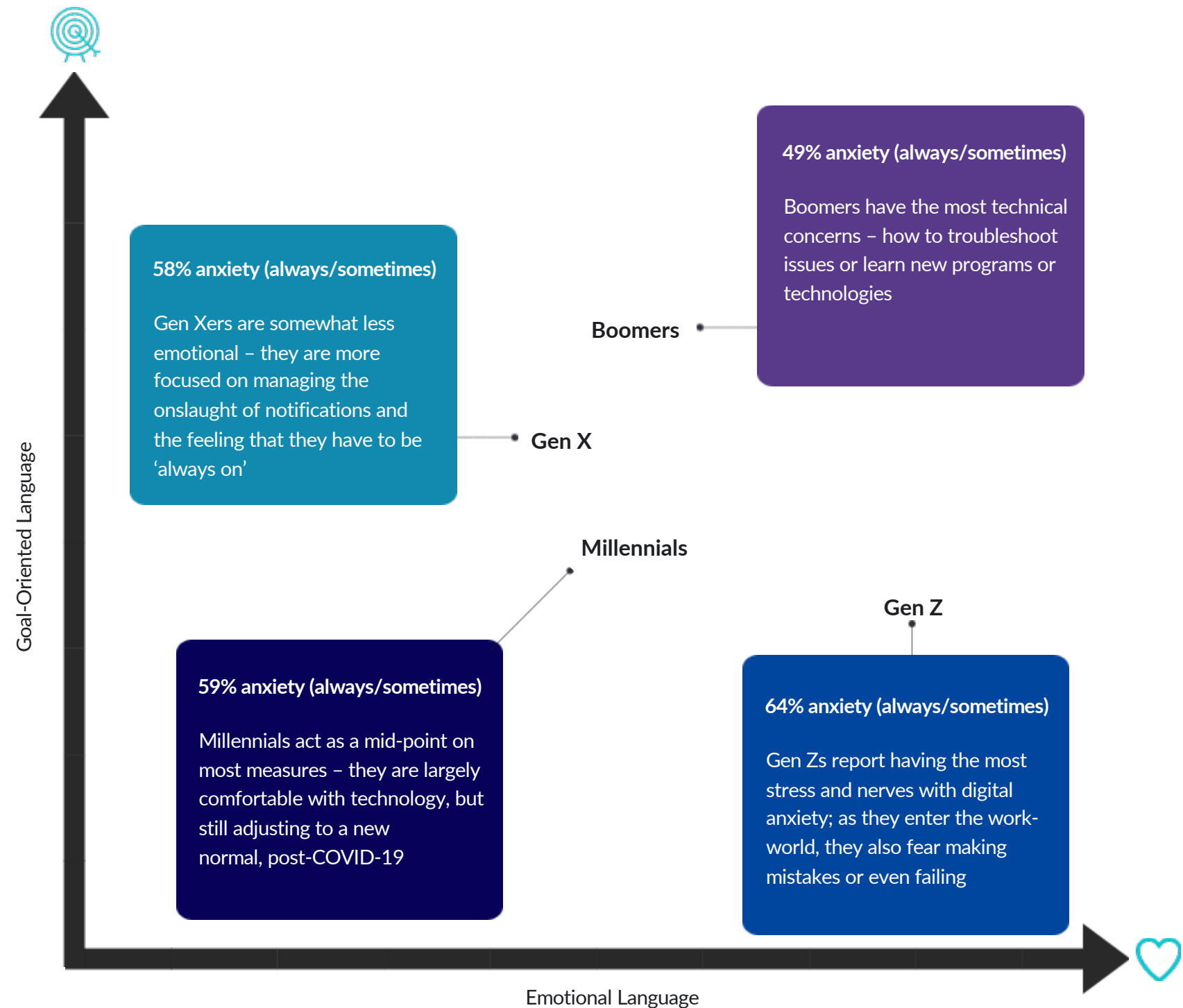
- Gen X -

"Zoom meetings. New technology. Online seminars. Anything that requires digital work connected at the same time with others. New computer software. Technology is always changing, updating. Could be software, could be learning a new program just when you have the current one down."

- Baby Boomer -

Digital Anxiety — Generational Differences

Leveraging the "center" or average of the language surrounding each generation, Quester mapped each group, based on goal-oriented and emotionally-oriented language, to further understand their unique orientations

Goal-Oriented Language (vertical axis)

Emotional Language (horizontal axis)

58% anxiety (always/sometimes)

Gen Xers are somewhat less emotional – they are more focused on managing the onslaught of notifications and the feeling that they have to be 'always on'

Gen X

49% anxiety (always/sometimes)

Boomers have the most technical concerns – how to troubleshoot issues or learn new programs or technologies

Boomers

Millennials

59% anxiety (always/sometimes)

Millennials act as a mid-point on most measures – they are largely comfortable with technology, but still adjusting to a new normal, post-COVID-19

Gen Z

64% anxiety (always/sometimes)

Gen Zs report having the most stress and nerves with digital anxiety; as they enter the work-world, they also fear making mistakes or even failing

In the future, workers most often want to be able to **flex** — they prefer a **mix of working at home and in the office**.

Preferred Working Scenario

42% Mix of Home/Office

It's the best of both worlds, and they like the idea of choosing which would work better on any given day – it gives them more flexibility. If their day is full of meetings or if they know they can concentrate better, they can stay at home. When they are missing interactions with co-workers or need to be face-to-face, they can go into the office.

This option is significantly more preferred by Gen Z, compared to other generations.

32% Home

Some feel that it's easier to work from the comfort of their home, in their own space (and in comfortable clothing). It's easier to take breaks when needed, and they can more easily balance work and life by doing little things around the house during breaks. And they aren't interrupted by co-workers or unnecessary conversations.

27% Office

It's easier to be productive at work – there aren't as many distractions, and it's also easier to speak to others in person. They enjoy – even need – the connection and interaction with co-workers. And some workers like to keep home and work separate – home is a place to relax and retreat.

Perhaps surprisingly, parents are more likely to say they want to be in the office in the future.

4 Key Steps For Solving The Digital Communication Crisis

1. Value Visibly

Show appreciation in everyday ways including being mindful of others' schedules, sharing public praise, and using digital body language signals of respect.

2. Communicate Carefully

Make a continuous effort to minimize the risk for misunderstanding despite the fast-paced nature of our world by prioritizing clear, unambiguous messages.

3. Collaborate Confidently

Create a working environment where each team member knows what is expected of them, why their work is important, and that they have the freedom to take conscious risks.

4. Trust Totally

Foster 360-degree total engagement where people tell the truth, keep their word, and deliver on internal and external commitments.
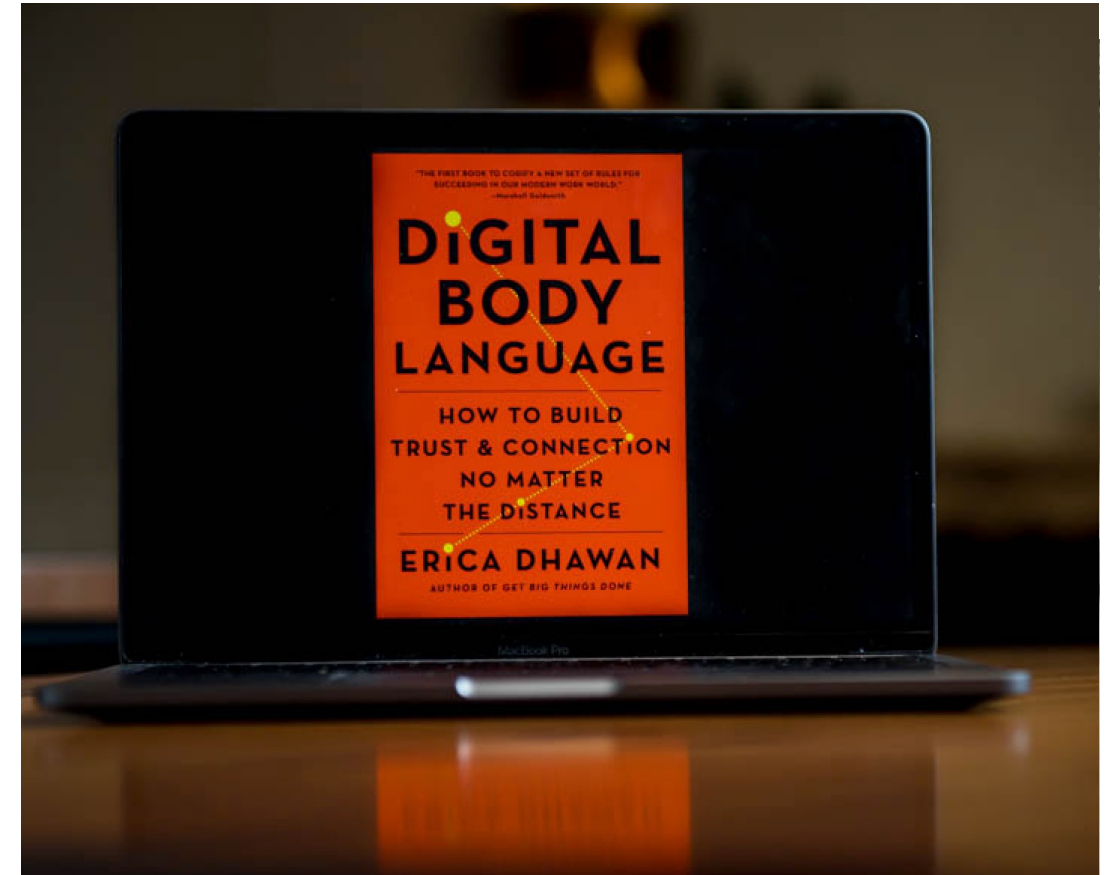
Digital Body Language, available May 11 (St. Martin's Press) by Erica Dhawan
Learn more at ericadhawan.com/digitalbodylanguage

About Erica Dhawan and Quester

Erica Dhawan

Erica Dhawan is an internationally recognized leading authority, speaker and advisor on 21st century teamwork, collaboration and innovation in a digital age. Named by Thinkers50 as the "Oprah of Management Thinkers", she is the author of two books Get Big Things Done: The Power of Connectional Intelligence and Digital Body Language: How to Build Trust and Connection, No Matter the Distance. Erica frequently appears in Harvard Business Review, Fast Company, and WSJ. She holds degrees from Harvard, Wharton and MIT.

To learn more visit www.ericadhawan.com

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