2026 EDITION

Tech Workforce Survey Report

Four Years of Insight into Technology Workers' Experiences in Southwest Missouri

A research report prepared by Habitat Communication & Culture in partnership with Springfield Women in Technology.

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SPRINGFIELD women IN tech

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Executive Summary

Now in its fourth year, the Tech Workforce Survey continues to explore the experiences of technology workers living in Southwest Missouri. The 2026 findings reveal a workforce that remains largely engaged in its work, even as questions about career opportunities, workplace expectations, and the future of the industry become more complicated.

Key Insights from 2026

Job satisfaction remains relatively strong, but growth opportunities are less certain.

Two-thirds of respondents (67%) are satisfied with their jobs, and 75% feel motivated to give their best effort. However, only 52% report good opportunities for professional growth.

Changing workplace expectations are associated with different employee experiences.

Among respondents whose employers increased onsite work requirements, just 43% report job satisfaction, compared to 77% among those reporting no major policy changes.

Confidence in the job market is limited, particularly among early-career workers.

Only half of respondents believe they could find a comparable tech role within three months. Among entry-level respondents, that figure falls to 18%.

Compensation remains a top priority, but perceptions of fairness are mixed.

Salary continues to lead employment decisions, yet fewer than half of respondents (48%) believe they are paid fairly compared to professionals in similar roles across the industry.

Key Insights from 2026, Continued

Many workplace experiences are similar across genders, but important disparities persist.

Men and women report comparable levels of job satisfaction and work-life balance. However, meaningful gaps persist in this year's research when we explored issues of discrimination and what it looks like to address discrimination at work.

AI adoption is widespread, but employer support and expectations vary.

Eighty-three percent use AI tools at work daily or weekly, and 57% report increased employer expectations for AI use. Yet 39% have received no formal employer-provided AI training.

When Taken Together...

The findings describe a tech workforce that largely values its work but faces uneven opportunities and growing uncertainty about what comes next. Four years of research reveals persistent challenges alongside emerging changes, offering an increasingly nuanced picture of what it means to build a career in technology in Southwest Missouri.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Tech workers can feel good about the work they do while remaining uncertain about the opportunities ahead.



CHAPTER 02

About the Research

Four Years of Listening

A regional question with a broader audience

Technology work in Southwest Missouri extends well beyond companies traditionally described as technology businesses. People build software, maintain infrastructure, manage projects, secure information, analyze data, develop digital products, and support technology across a variety of organizations and industries. Some work for employers with offices in the Springfield or Joplin areas. Others live in the region while working remotely for organizations that are based elsewhere.

Understanding such a multifaceted workforce requires asking about more than career level or annual compensation. It requires an understanding of what work feels like, whether they have access to the resources they need to grow in their role, and how they are preparing for changes in their industry.

Springfield Women in Technology began this annual research effort in 2023 with particular attention paid to the professional experiences of women and gender minorities. That focus remains important. The survey also welcomes men and people across career stages and technical disciplines, enabling the research to capture shared experiences as well as meaningful differences. As the project has matured, its central question has become broader: **what shapes the professional lives and prospects of people who work in technology while living in Southwest Missouri?**

What the 2026 Study Covers

This year's survey revisits many of the topics we've examined over the years: job satisfaction, professional development, compensation, working arrangements, career commitment, workplace discrimination, and self-doubt. It also examines employee preferences for benefits, the ability to speak up at work, expectations around onsite work, and confidence in finding another technology role.

This year's survey also featured an expanded focus on AI. These questions helped uncover how local AI usage, policies, and training stack up against national benchmarks. Open-ended questions provided a glimpse into how these tools are changing the way tech pros work, along with an opportunity to learn how practitioners believe artificial intelligence will impact their career in the coming months and years.

How to read this report

The findings are drawn from an online survey conducted between July and September 2026. Individual participants are not identified in this report.

This was a voluntary survey rather than a probability sample of every technology worker in Southwest Missouri. Results describe the people who participated; they should not be taken as precise estimates for the whole regional workforce. The research offers valuable insight into patterns and contrasts, but it cannot establish that one workplace condition caused another.



CHAPTER 03

Who We Heard From

A Changing Mix of Tech Professionals

A workforce with varied roles and experience

The 2026 survey reached people at different stages of technology careers, from those just starting out to executives with decades of experience. Wherever they are in their career journey, 91% of respondents described themselves as employed full-time in tech. Additional respondents reported contracting, part-time work, internships, or unemployment.

Among respondents providing age information, the most common age group was 35 to 44 (37%), followed by 25 to 34 (26%) and 45 to 54 (25%). The survey thus includes a substantial midcareer population. This is relevant when interpreting findings about compensation, advancement, organizational responsibility, and AI's impact on work.

Respondents also represent a variety of career levels. Senior employees account for 31% of those answering the job-level question, intermediate employees for 26%, and middle management for 13%. Entry-level employees make up 10%, with the remainder represented by senior managers, owners and executives, and a small number selecting another role description. The distribution of career levels matters because opportunities, compensation, and labor-market confidence do not look identical across them.

Gender, Education, and Other Characteristics

When asked, 57% of this year's survey participants indicated they identify as men and 39% indicated they identify as women. Four respondents identify as non-binary, one selected a gender not listed, and five preferred not to answer. These small gender-minority groups are part of the study's intended audience, but their counts do not support stable standalone quantitative comparisons.

Most respondents reported some college education or more, with 54% saying they had graduated from college and another 13% reporting completed graduate school. The respondent pool also includes people whose path into technology came through other forms of education or training. This diversity of pathways provides useful context for the discussion of career entry and professional development later in the report.

Gender

Men	57%
Women	39%
Non-binary	4 respondents
Gender not listed	1 respondent
Prefer not to answer	5 respondents

Education

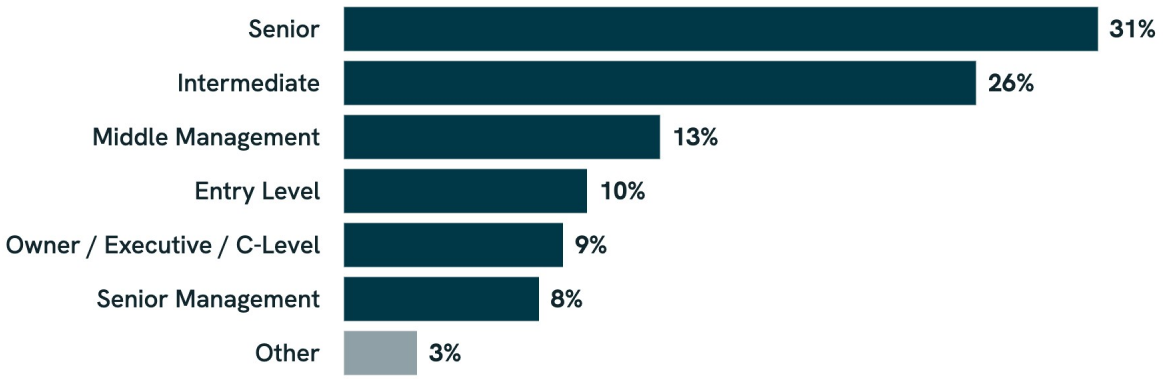
Graduated from college	54%
Completed graduate school	13%

Other education categories not shown.

Career levels

Respondents span every career stage. Senior employees make up the largest group, followed by intermediate employees and middle managers. Those differences matter because opportunity, pay, and job-market confidence vary considerably by level.

Current Job Level, 2026

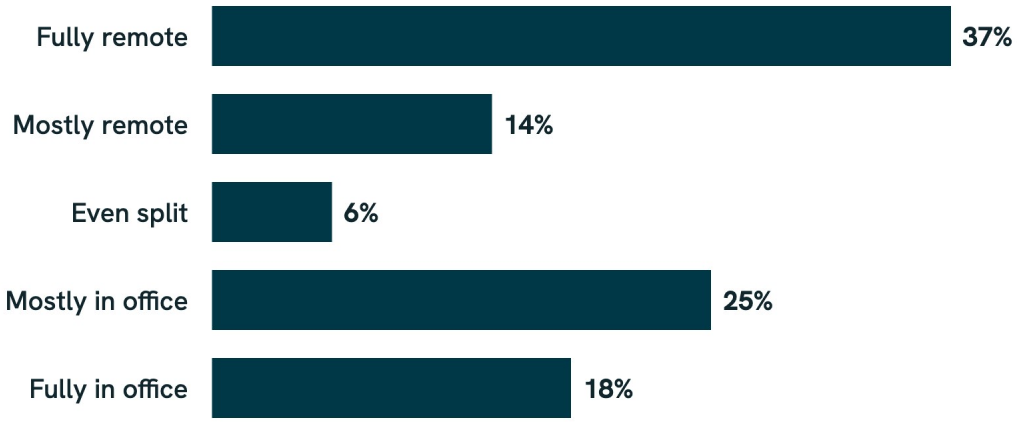


Working Arrangements

Remote work remains an important part of the regional picture

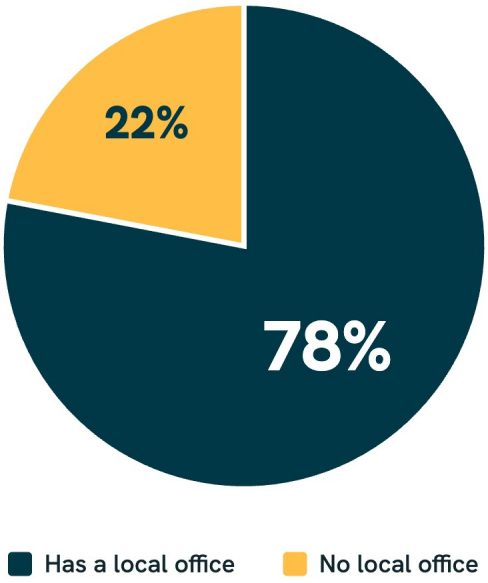
Fifty-one percent of respondents indicated they work remotely all or most of the time. This data is fairly in line with the 2026 Stack Overflow Developer Survey, a national study of tech workers that found 59% are remote all or most of the time. [1]

Current Working Arrangement



Remote work doesn't necessarily mean a remote employer.

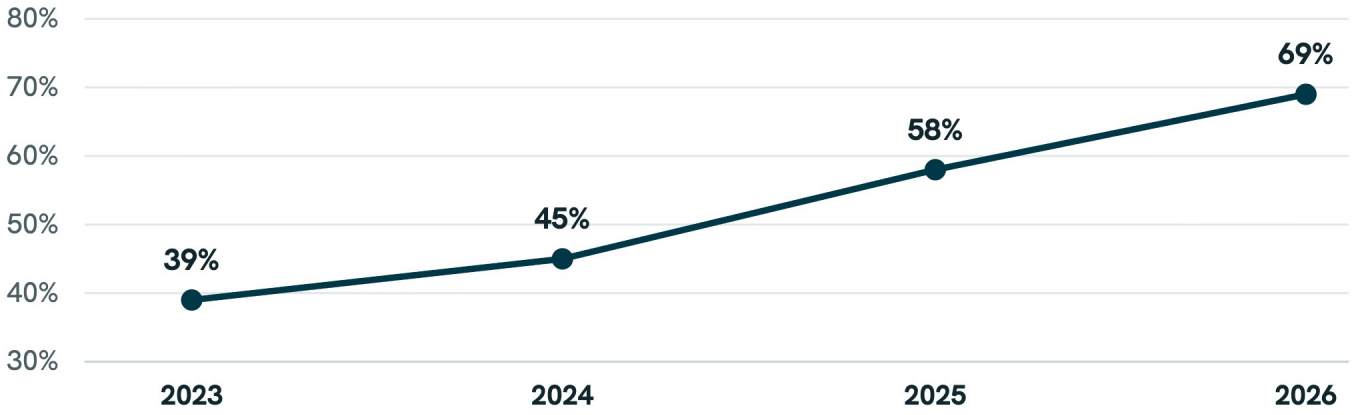
While remote work is common among Southwest Missouri tech workers, that doesn't necessarily mean they're working for companies outside the region. Most respondents report that their employer maintains a physical office in the Springfield or Joplin area, even if they rarely work onsite.



A Sample Weighted toward Large Employers

Share of Survey Respondents Employed by Enterprise Organizations

Respondents in the largest employer-size category, by survey year



Describes who answered each annual survey, not a regional employment trend.

The single biggest change to this year's respondent pool as compared to previous years shows up when tech workers are asked about their employer's size. This number has grown each year, with 69% percent of respondents now reporting that they work inside an enterprise organization with more than 500 employees. Another 16% work at organizations with 1 to 50 employees. The remaining respondents are divided between medium and large organizations.

The 2026 sample should not be read as a representative cross-section of employer sizes in the regional technology economy. A larger share of enterprise employees may influence the overall results because organizational policies, career structures, benefits, and training programs often differ by size. It also means that some seemingly favorable or unfavorable changes across years could reflect the types of workplaces represented rather than changing conditions across the region.

Employer Size, 2026

50 or fewer employees	16%
51 to 200 employees	7%
201 to 500 employees	8%
500+ employees	69%



CHAPTER 04

The Experience of Work

Satisfaction, Flexibility, and Organizational Commitment

Today's jobs are generally viewed positively

Most 2026 survey respondents describe a reasonably positive relationship with their current role and employer. Sixty-seven percent agree or strongly agree that they are satisfied with their jobs. Seventy-five percent are motivated to give their best effort, 70% feel valued and appreciated by their supervisors and colleagues, and 62% find their work fulfilling.

These positive responses are meaningful, especially in a period of change in technology. They suggest that many respondents continue to find value in their day-to-day work even when they are uncertain about other parts of their professional futures. A person can enjoy the work they do while still questioning where their career is headed.

At the same time, sentiment weakens when tech pros are asked about receiving regular feedback and opportunities for growth. Only 52% believe they have good opportunities for professional growth inside their current organization. This dip in enthusiasm reflects different dimensions of employment: enjoying the work, feeling recognized, and seeing an attainable next step.

Workplace Sentiment in 2026

How Respondents Describe Their Current Jobs

Percent selecting Agree or Strongly Agree, 2026

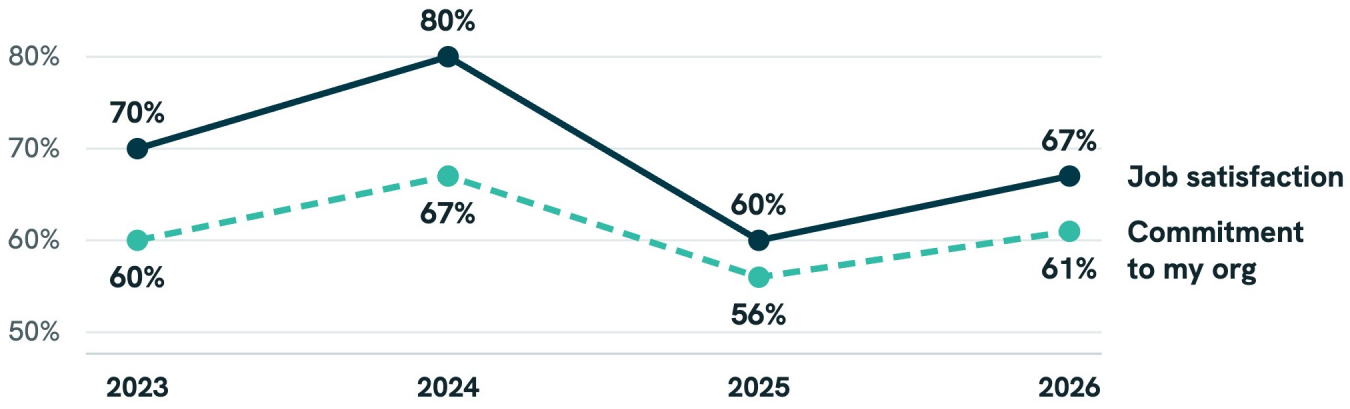


Satisfaction and commitment have not followed a straight line

Across four years of research, responses to common employee engagement questions have fluctuated rather than followed a steady trend. Job satisfaction and organizational commitment both peaked in 2024 before reaching their lowest reported levels in 2025. Both measures rebounded somewhat in 2026, suggesting a return toward earlier levels of sentiment among survey respondents.

Satisfaction and Commitment Over Time

Percent agreeing or strongly agreeing



Separate annual, voluntary samples.

Where Someone Works Is Not the Clearest Division

It would be easy to assume that fully remote employees are uniformly more satisfied than office-based employees, or that office-based workers have a stronger sense of connection to their organizations. The 2026 findings are more complicated.

About 66% of fully remote respondents agree or strongly agree that they are satisfied with their jobs. The same is true of approximately 67% of fully office-based respondents. Satisfaction among the other working arrangements is also broadly similar. These figures do not point to one universally superior working location.

Work-life balance shows a somewhat different picture. Three-quarters of fully remote respondents report good work-life balance (75%), compared with 64% of fully office-based respondents and 56% of those who work mostly in an office. Yet current work location still tells only part of the story. People may be responding not only to how often they are onsite, but also to their preferences, the degree of control they have, and the expectations surrounding their work.

Satisfaction and Work-Life Balance by Work Arrangement

Percent agreeing or strongly agreeing, 2026



The experience of changing expectations is more sharply divided

A much clearer pattern appears when the survey asks whether employers changed their onsite work requirements over the past twelve months. Among those who answered, 60% reported no major change. Twenty-eight percent reported that expectations to work onsite had increased.

When Onsite Expectations Increased

Percent agreeing or strongly agreeing, by change in onsite expectations

MEASURE	NO CHANGE	INCREASED	GAP
Job satisfaction	77%	43%	34 pts
Organizational commitment	71%	36%	35 pts
Work-life balance	71%	54%	18 pts

When Onsite Expectations Increase

77%

satisfied when onsite expectations did not change.

43%

satisfied when onsite expectations increased.

Association among respondents; not proof that the policy change itself caused dissatisfaction.

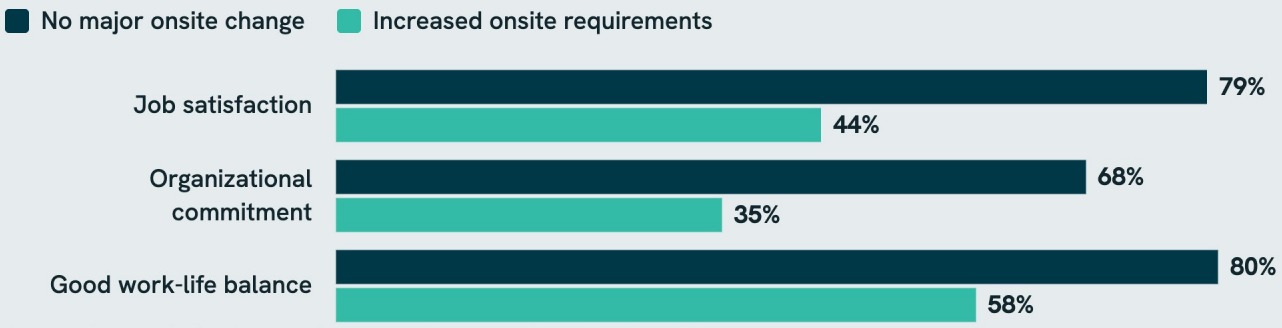
The relationship is visible even when considering employer size. Among enterprise employees, job satisfaction is reported by 79% of those with no major onsite policy change, compared with 44% of those who report increased onsite expectations. Organizational commitment shows a similar contrast, 68% versus 35%.

The survey does not explain why this gap exists. Some respondents may have experienced a loss of flexibility or predictability. Others may already have had concerns about management or working conditions that also shaped their responses to onsite requirements. The cross-sectional data cannot separate those explanations. What it does establish is that increased onsite requirements coincide with meaningfully less positive employee sentiment among this respondent group.

SECONDARY ANALYSIS · ENTERPRISE EMPLOYERS ONLY

Within Enterprise-Size Employers (500+)

Percent agreeing or strongly agreeing, by change in onsite expectations



A secondary analysis of enterprise respondents, not the regional workforce average.

Employer Size and Forms of Attachment

Another difference appears in organizational commitment. Eighty-two percent of respondents working at small organizations (1 to 50 employees) feel committed to their organizations, compared with 56% of enterprise employees. Job satisfaction is more similar across these two groups, at 72% and 67%, respectively.

This is an important distinction. Feeling satisfied with one's job and feeling committed to the organization that provides it are not identical judgments. Smaller workplaces may offer a different sense of connection, while large organizations may offer resources or opportunities that are harder to find elsewhere. The survey does not test those explanations. It does, however, identify a pattern that is not adequately captured by a single overall satisfaction figure.

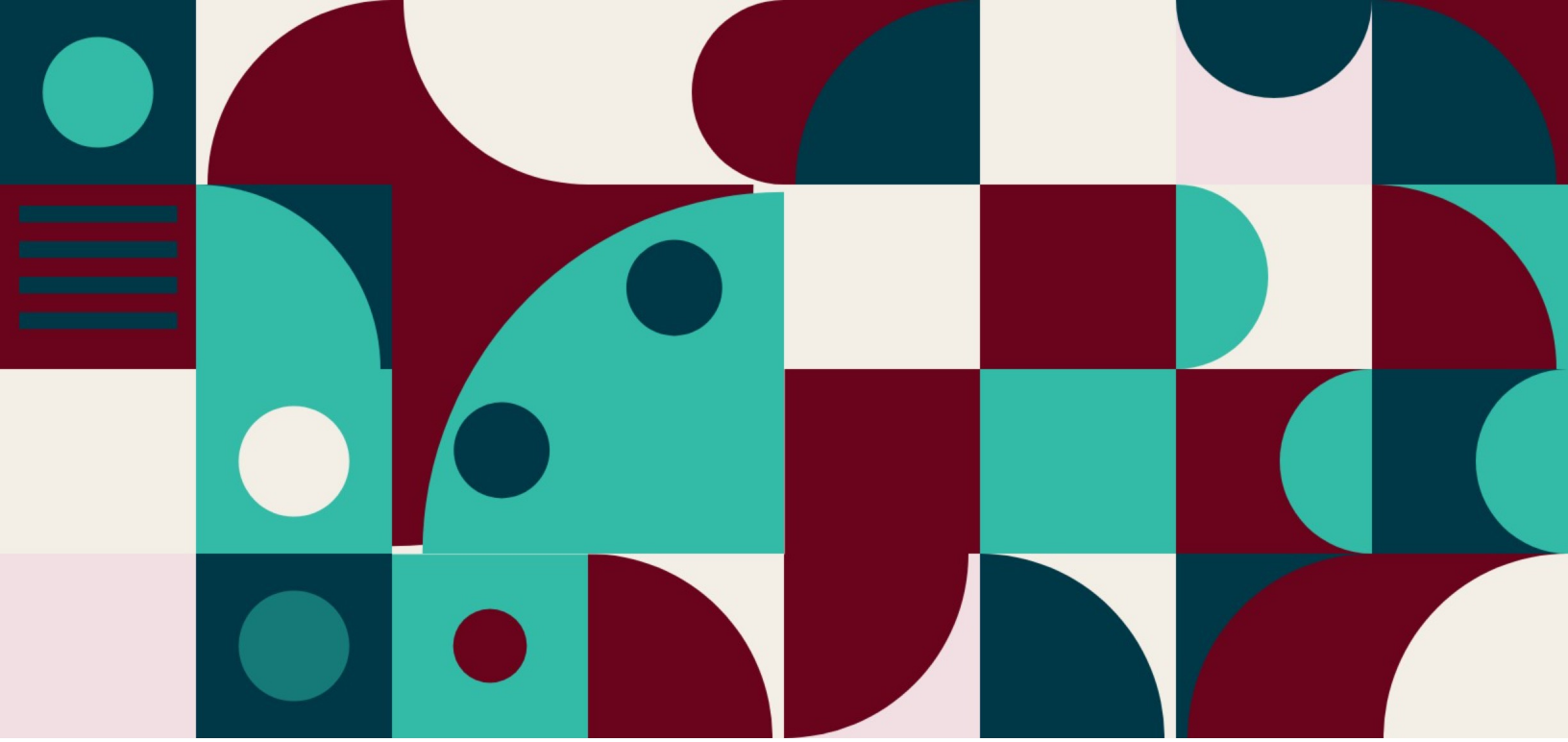
Satisfaction and Commitment by Employer Size

Percent agreeing or strongly agreeing, 2026



TAKEN TOGETHER

These findings suggest that the lived experience of work is best understood through more than a choice between home and office. Where a person works, what their employer expects, how those expectations change, and how they relate to their organization are connected but distinct parts of the employee experience.



CHAPTER 05

The Employment Exchange

Compensation, Benefits, and What Workers Value

Compensation remains the starting point for employment decisions

People enter technology for different reasons, but compensation remains central to the employment decisions of many respondents. When asked to rank the reasons they chose their current job, 54% placed salary, including bonuses and other compensation, first. Benefits were the most frequently second-ranked reason, selected in second place by 37% of respondents. Work flexibility, organizational culture, job security, and advancement opportunities played varying roles in the rankings.

The importance of compensation also appears in a separate question asking respondents to imagine looking for a new job. Here, 48% said salary would be the single most important factor if or when they considered a new role. Company culture (17%) and the ability to work remotely or with a flexible schedule (16%) followed, with smaller shares choosing benefits, job security, advancement, and other considerations.

These questions ask different things: why a person chose an existing job and what they would prioritize in a hypothetical search today. Together, they suggest that salary remains the most common first consideration even as workplace culture and flexibility play a substantial role in how people think about attractive employment.

Salary Leads, But Isn't the Whole Story

54%

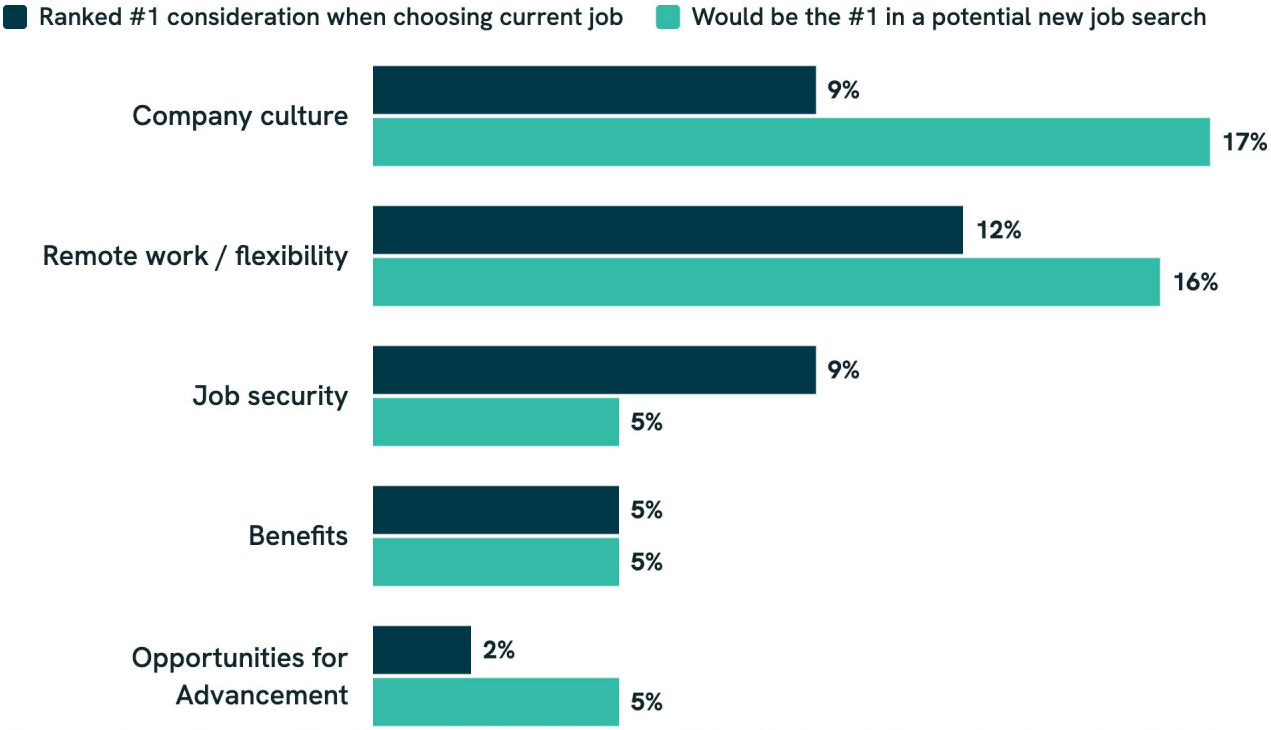
ranked salary first when choosing their current job.

48%

say salary would matter most in a new job search.

Salary remains the leading consideration, both in the decisions that brought respondents to their current jobs and in what they would prioritize if searching again. But compensation is only part of the employment equation.

Beyond salary, what matters most?



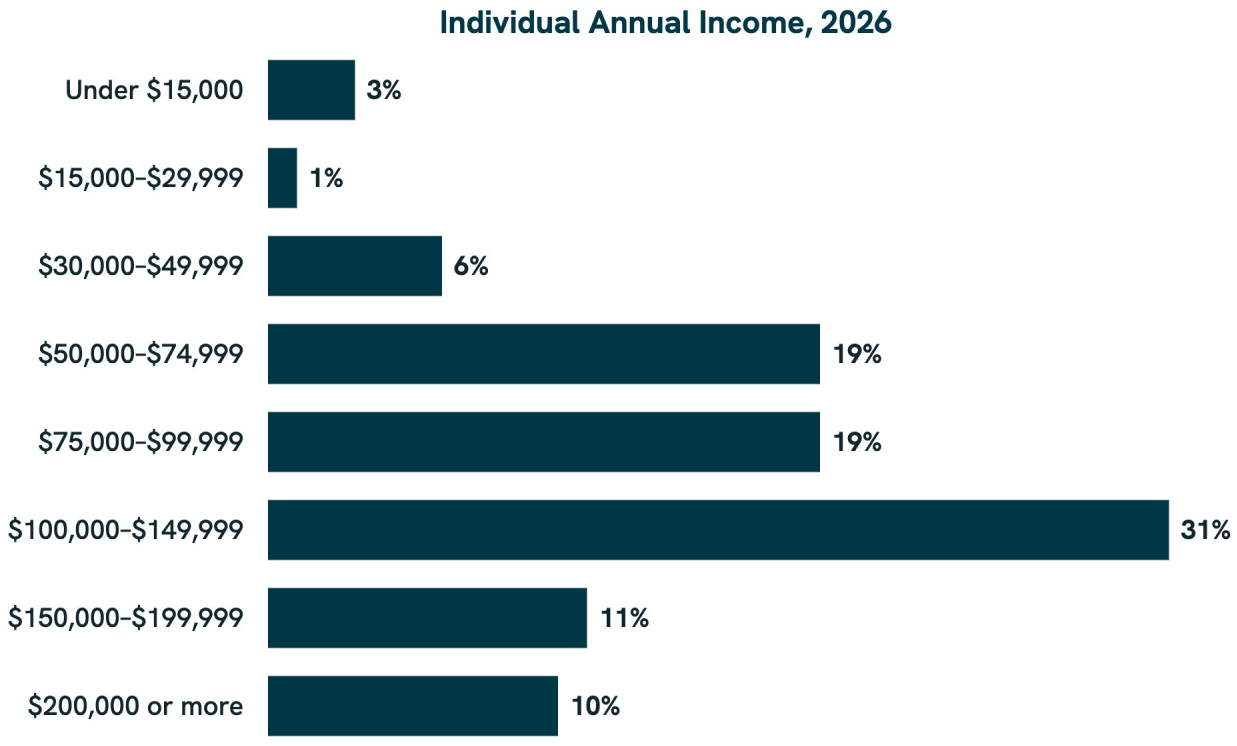
Two separate questions: a ranking of reasons for choosing the current job and a single-choice question about a hypothetical new search.

What Respondents Earn

Earnings among Southwest Missouri tech workers continue to reflect the strong compensation opportunities available in the industry. For the first time in four years of research, more than half of survey respondents report earning $100,000 or more annually. These findings reinforce one of the industry's longstanding attractions: the potential to build a financially rewarding career. But compensation is only one part of the employee experience. As this year's research illustrates, strong earning potential can coexist with concerns about career advancement, workplace fairness, and future job security. And while the overall income distribution is encouraging, opportunities to earn and advance are not necessarily shared equally across the workforce.

52%

For the first time in this research's history, more than half of respondents report earning $100,000 or more.



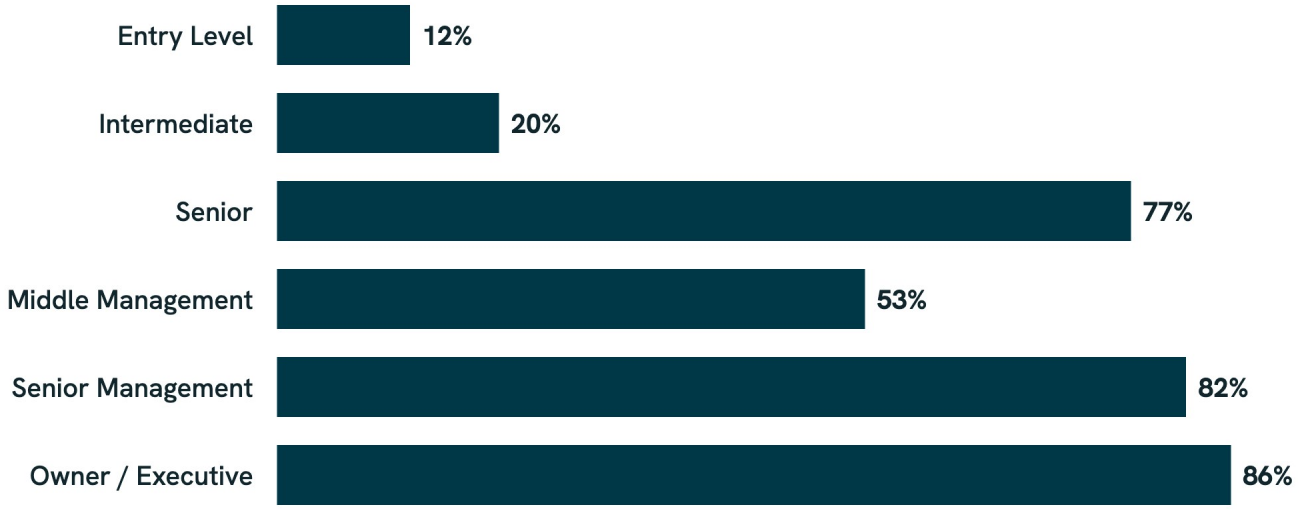
Earnings Differ by Career Level and Gender

Earnings data varies greatly by both career level and gender. About 12% of entry-level respondents report earning at least $100,000, compared with 82% of senior managers, and 86% of owners or executives.

Sixty-one percent of men and 42% of women answering the income item report earning $100,000 or more. This is a difference in reported annual earnings across the sampled groups, not a calculation of the pay gap for equivalent positions. Specific role, experience, and employer size could contribute to these differences.

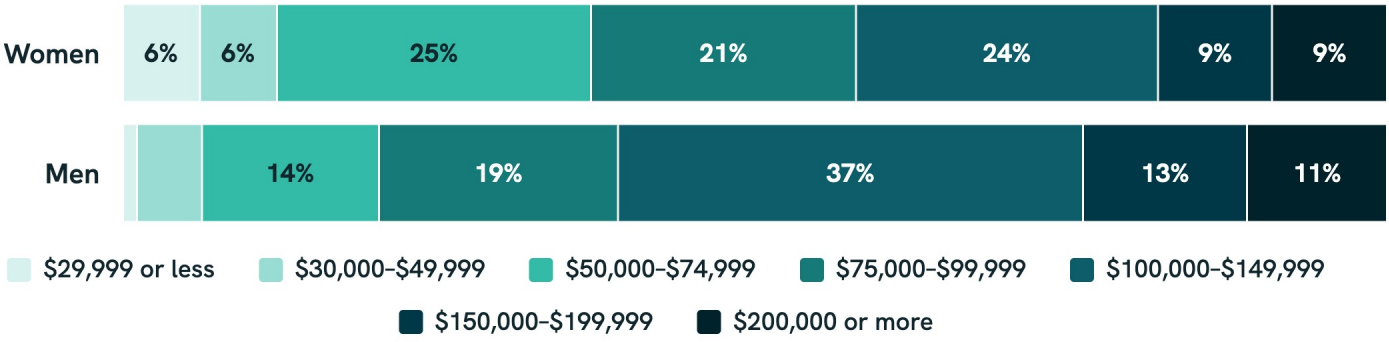
Earning $100,000 or More, by Career Level

Share of each career level reporting annual income of $100,000+



Individual Annual Income, by Gender

Share of each group in each income band, 2026



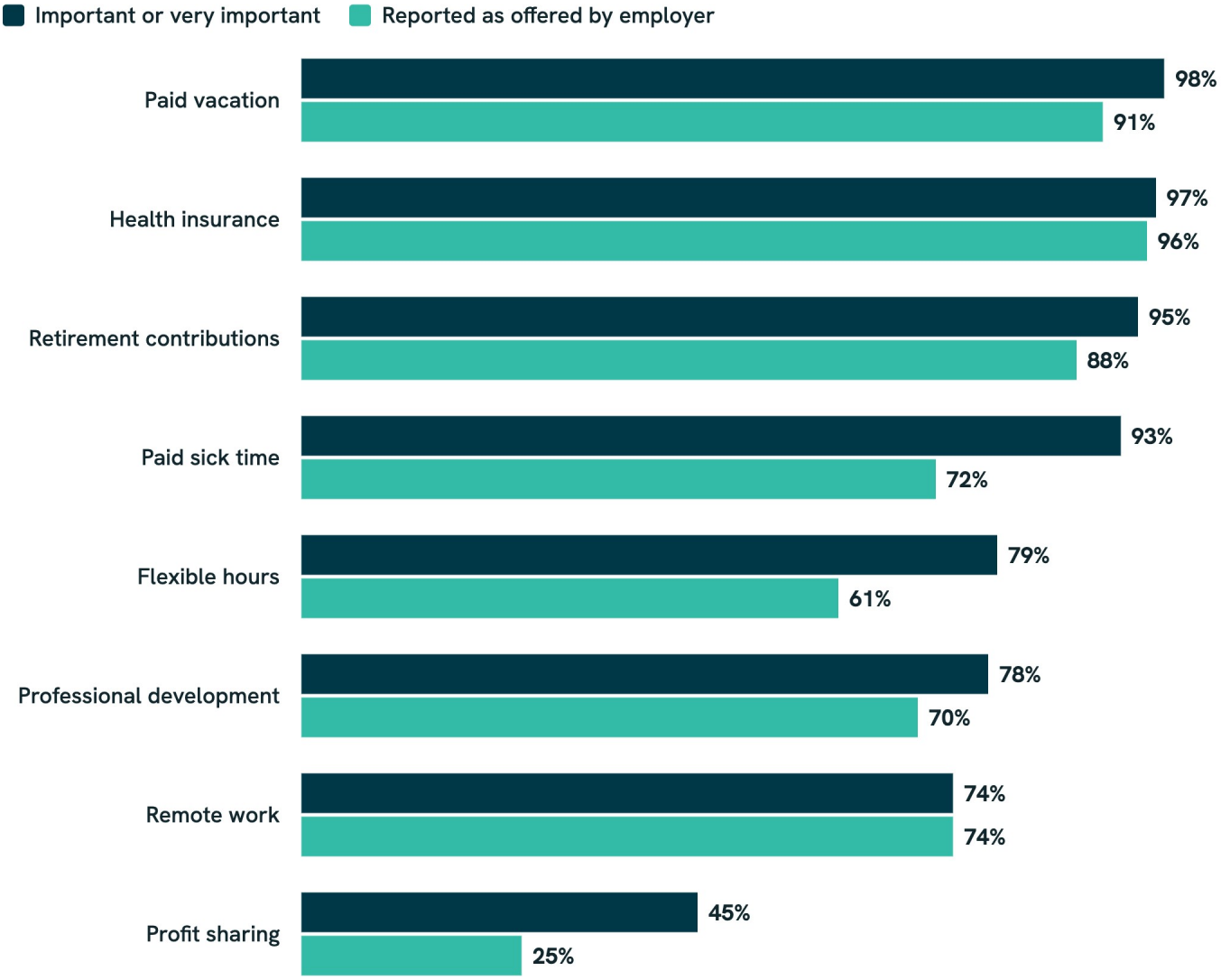
Segments under 6% are unlabelled (men: 1% at $29,999 or less, 5% at $30,000–$49,999).

Benefits Valued and Benefits Offered

Respondents broadly agree on which benefits matter most. Nearly everyone who rated the options considers paid vacation (98%) and health insurance (97%) important or very important, followed closely by retirement contributions (95%), paid sick time (93%), and dental insurance (87%). Flexible hours (79%), professional development (78%), and remote work (74%) also matter to large majorities.

Most core benefits are also widely offered: health insurance (96%), dental (94%), vision (92%), paid vacation (91%), and retirement contributions (88%). The clearest gaps between what people value and what they report receiving involve paid sick time (93% important versus 72% offered), flexible hours (79% versus 61%), and profit sharing (45% versus 25%).

Benefit Importance and Reported Availability



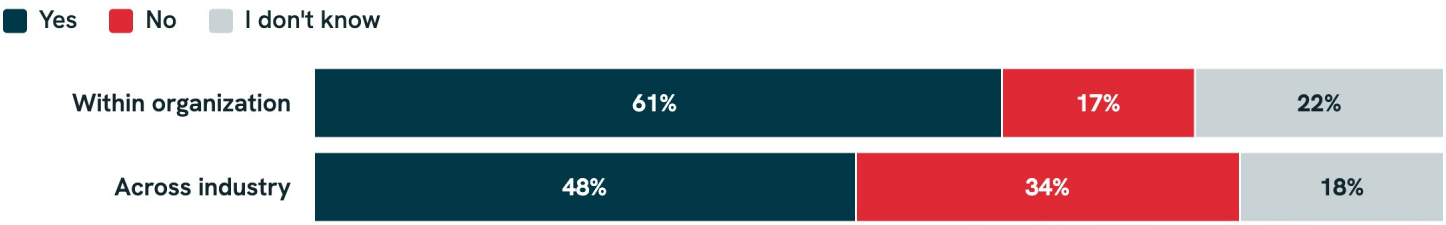
Perceptions of Pay Fairness

The survey asks respondents whether they believe they are paid fairly compared with others in similar positions with similar experience, first within their current organization and then again across their industry. Sixty-one percent answer yes when considering comparable colleagues within their organization, while 48% say yes when considering similar professionals in the broader industry.

Notably, 22% of respondents say they don't know whether they're paid fairly compared to others in similar roles within their organization, the highest share recorded in four years of research. While uncertainty doesn't necessarily indicate unfair compensation, it raises important questions about pay transparency. Employees who cannot assess whether they're compensated fairly may lack access to the information needed to make that judgment, highlighting a potential gap in how organizations communicate about compensation.

Pay Seems Fairer inside the Organization than across the Industry

Do you believe you are paid fairly compared with others in similar positions with similar experience?



Perceptions of fairness, not verified wage equity.

Open-ended comments help clarify why pay fairness can be difficult to assess. Some respondents describe defined salary structures, market comparisons, and visible pay ranges as reasons for confidence. Others point to incomplete information, differences between new-hire and long-tenured pay, or uncertainty about how their responsibilities compare with those of peers.

> *I just have to assume I am paid fairly since we are not allowed to discuss salary.*

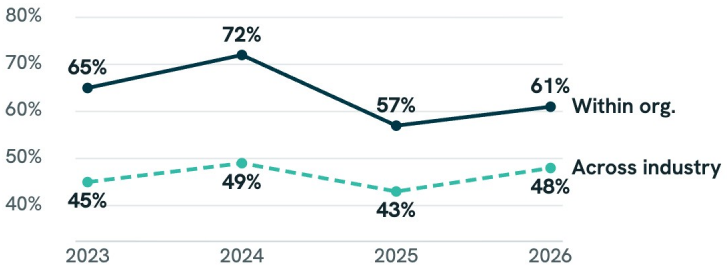
> *I negotiated for higher pay...and also they use pay bands so I can see I was treated fairly.*

Quotes are anonymous responses, not a representative claim about employers.

Pay Fairness over Time and by Gender

Across the annual respondent groups, positive assessments of internal pay fairness have varied: 65% in 2023, 72% in 2024, 57% in 2025, and 61% in 2026. Assessments of fairness against the broader industry have been lower every year: 45%, 49%, 43%, and 48%, respectively. The persistent difference between internal and industry comparisons is more consistent than the year-to-year movement in either measure.

Believe They Are Paid Fairly, 2023–2026



Pay fairness is another area of divergence

While perceptions of pay fairness are mixed overall, gender differences remain evident, particularly when workers compare their compensation to others across the industry. Men are somewhat more likely than women to believe they're paid fairly relative to colleagues within their own organizations. But that divide grows considerably when respondents consider what professionals in comparable roles earn elsewhere. Just 38% of women believe they're fairly compensated relative to the broader industry, compared with 56% of men.

These findings add another layer to the earnings differences highlighted earlier in this chapter. While technology careers offer substantial earning potential, men and women don't necessarily share the same confidence that they're being compensated fairly. The survey cannot establish whether these differences reflect actual pay inequities, differences in roles or experience, or varying access to compensation information. What is clear, however, is that women are considerably less likely to feel their earnings measure up to those of their peers across the industry.

Believe They Are Paid Fairly, by Gender

Share answering "Yes," 2026



Remaining respondents answered "No" or "I don't know"; uncertainty is not the same as reported unfairness.

Negotiation Remains Part of the Career Experience

Fifty-nine percent of 2026 respondents say they have negotiated salary at least once during their time in technology. This is somewhat lower than among the 2024 and 2025 respondent groups, when the same question yielded 64% and 61%, respectively. Like other annual differences, these results do not demonstrate that the same workers have become less likely to negotiate.

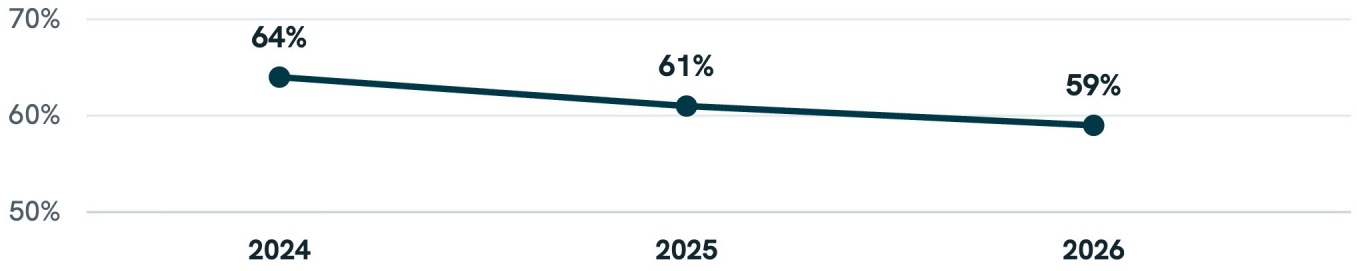
Men are more likely than women in this year's respondent group to report having negotiated salary: 63% versus 55%. The difference is notable but smaller than several other disparities discussed later in the report. Negotiation experience also depends on opportunity, career stage, and whether a person has had reason to negotiate; the survey does not directly measure willingness to negotiate or the outcomes of those conversations.

63% vs. 55%

In 2026, men were more likely than women to report having negotiated salary at least once during their time in tech.

Ever Engaged in Salary Negotiations?

Share answering "Yes," by survey year



Separate annual samples; not asked in 2023.

THE RECURRING PICTURE

Across these topics, the recurring picture is that compensation remains central but cannot be reduced to an annual salary number. Respondents weigh benefits, flexibility, and culture. Their sense of pay fairness also reflects the information available to them and the standards against which they compare themselves.

CHAPTER 06

Career Opportunity

Growth, Experience, and Confidence

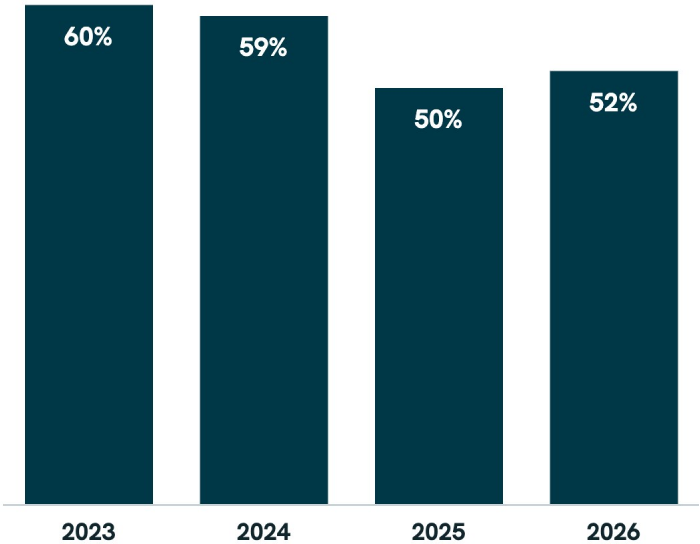
People do not necessarily see a clear next step simply because they like their job

Career opportunity is one of the weaker items in an otherwise generally positive workplace scorecard. Only 52% of 2026 respondents agree or strongly agree that their organization offers good opportunities for professional growth and development. That is slightly higher than the 2025 respondent group (50%), but below the 2023 and 2024 results (60% and 59%).

The difference between growth and other workplace measures is revealing. Seventy-five percent feel motivated to do their best work; 70% feel valued. Fewer are equally positive about development prospects. An employee can be engaged and appreciated without seeing a compelling path forward.

Good Opportunities for Professional Growth

"I have good opportunities for professional growth and development in my organization." Agree or strongly agree



Separate annual samples.

Career Level Makes a Meaningful Difference

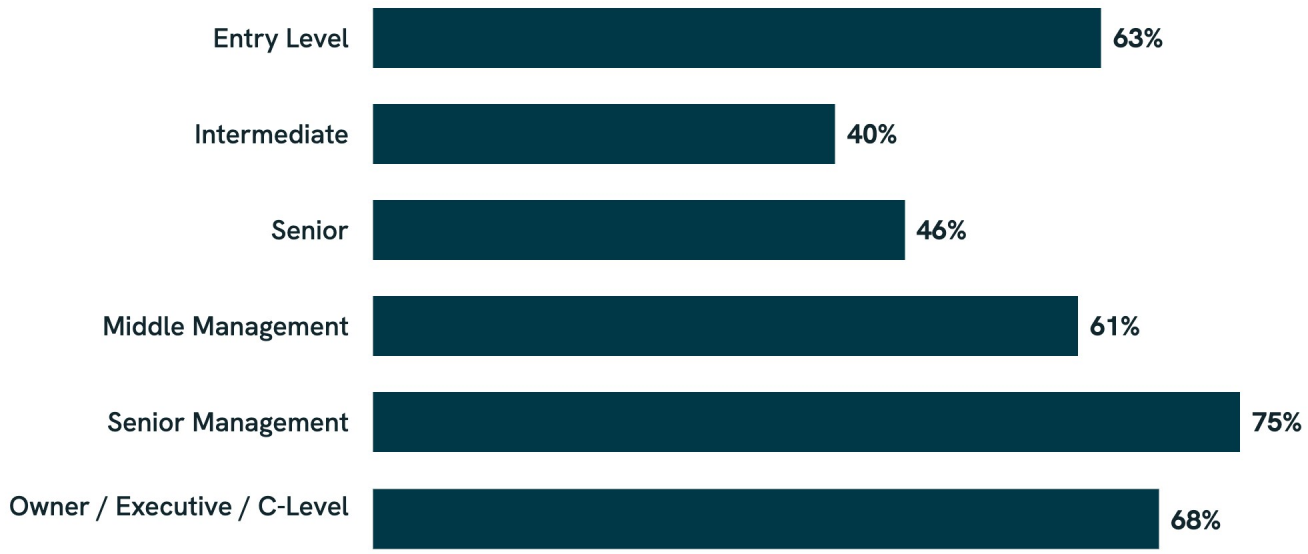
The clearest 2026 divide around internal growth is not between men and women. It is between different career levels. Seventy-five percent of senior managers and 68% of owners or executives report good growth opportunities. Among senior individual contributors, the figure falls to 46%; among intermediate employees, it is 40%. Entry-level respondents report a more favorable 63%, although that group is small.

There is no simple upward progression in the responses. Some respondents at entry level may see many potential paths, while those at intermediate and senior levels may be assessing more constrained promotion or specialist career tracks. People in senior leadership may have broader responsibility, greater influence over their development, or more visibility into opportunities. These are plausible interpretations, not conclusions that the survey has established.

The immediate finding is simpler: perceptions of growth vary by career position, and the intermediate and senior individual-contributor groups are less positive than the leadership groups in this sample.

Good Opportunities for Professional Growth, by Job Level

Percent agreeing or strongly agreeing, 2026



Technical Skills and Leadership Development Top the List for Tech Pros

Professional development remains an important part of building a successful career in technology. But growth can take many forms, from developing new technical skills and earning certifications to preparing for leadership responsibilities and building professional networks.

When asked to rank six types of professional development opportunities, respondents placed the greatest emphasis on technical training and management or leadership development. Together, these two categories accounted for 58% of all first-place rankings, suggesting that respondents are particularly focused on strengthening their technical expertise and expanding their capabilities as leaders.

58% | **of respondents ranked either technical training or management/leadership development as their top professional development priority.**

Which professional development opportunities did respondents rank as their highest priority?

DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITY	RANKED FIRST
Technical training	**33%**
Management or leadership training	**25%**
Financial support for conferences or association events	15%
Certifications	11%
Tuition or degree assistance	10%
Mentorship	6%

Employer Support for Professional Growth

Many respondents also report that their employers provide opportunities aligned with these priorities. Among those who completed the ranking question, 57% selected technical training as an employer-provided offering, while 51% selected management or leadership training.

However, neither offering is reported by all respondents, raising questions about how consistently workers can access the types of development they value most. The findings reinforce the importance of recognizing that career growth takes different forms, and that supporting professional development requires more than a single approach.

Confidence in Finding Another Job Is Closely Related to Career Level

The 2026 survey asks respondents to consider how confident they would feel if they suddenly needed to find a comparable or suitable job in the tech industry within the next 90 days. Exactly half report being very or somewhat confident, but the more interesting data is revealed when responses are compared by the respondent's career level.

Just 18% of entry-level respondents express confidence in the ability to find a new role within 90 days. This number sits in stark contrast to the 61% of middle managers, 70% of senior managers, and 79% of owners and executives who believe they could do the same.

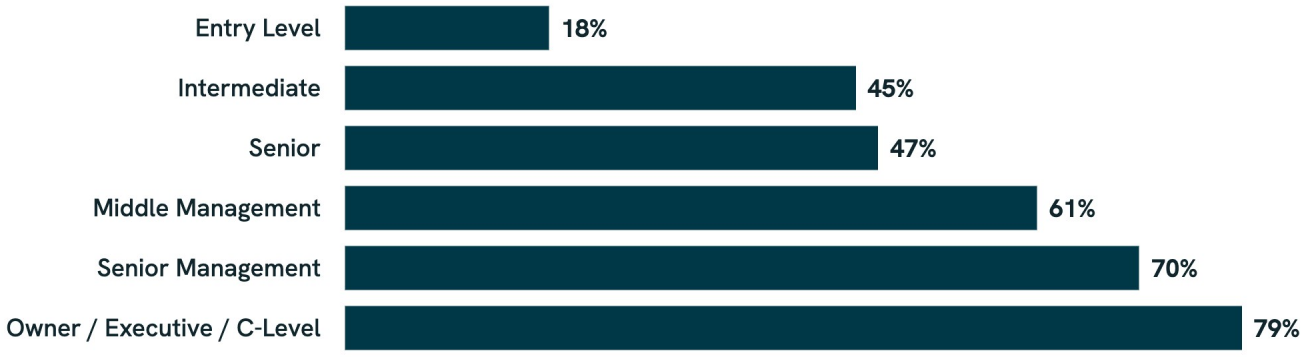
This creates one of the most interesting tensions in the survey: early-career workers reported having strong growth potential inside their current organization but do not feel well positioned to secure a comparable role elsewhere.

18% vs. 70%

Just 18% of entry-level workers feel confident they could find a new role within 90 days, compared with 70% of senior managers.

Confident of Finding a Suitable Tech Role within Three Months

Very or somewhat confident, by career level. A hypothetical search starting tomorrow.





CHAPTER 07

Similar Sentiments, Different Experiences

Where Meaningful Differences Remain

On many traditional measures of employee engagement, men and women in this year's survey report remarkably similar experiences. Job satisfaction, work-life balance, and perceived opportunities for professional growth differ by only a handful of percentage points.

But these similarities don't tell the entire story. When respondents reflect on their experiences with workplace discrimination, more substantial differences emerge. Meanwhile, feelings of professional self-doubt remain widespread, affecting men and women across different stages of their careers.

Together, these findings reinforce an important distinction: workers can feel similarly satisfied with their jobs while experiencing the technology industry in meaningfully different ways.

Discrimination Remains a Persistent Divide

Workplace discrimination remains one of the clearest and most persistent differences between men and women in this research. In 2026, 40% of women report having experienced discrimination during their time in tech, compared with 18% of men.

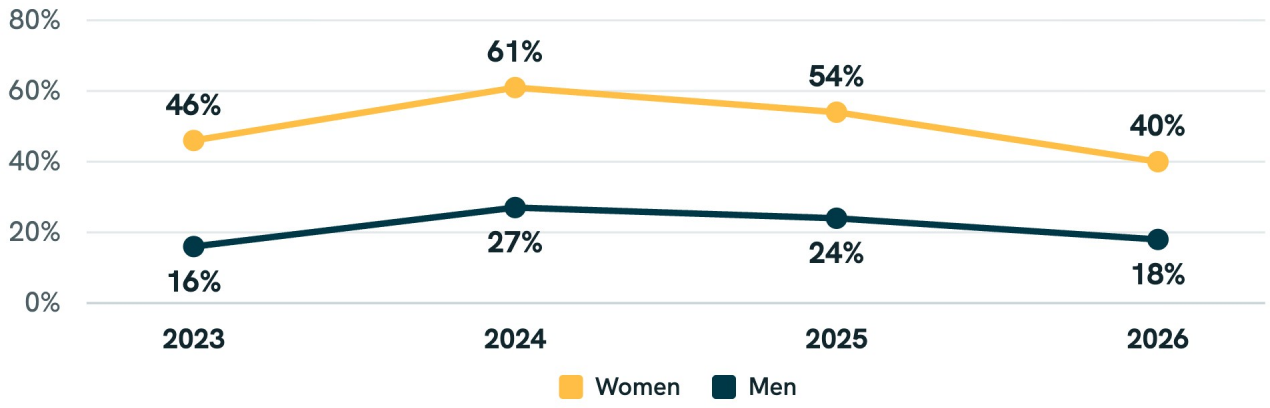
Although reported experiences are less common in this year's sample than in 2024 or 2025, the gender gap remains substantial. Across all four years of research, women have consistently been more than twice as likely as men to report discrimination. This pattern is particularly noteworthy given the similarities in how men and women assess many other aspects of their professional lives.

63%

of women who experienced discrimination also reported encountering barriers when seeking support or addressing workplace concerns related to discrimination.

Ever Experienced Discrimination in Tech, by Gender

Percent selecting "Yes" among each group



Separate annual samples.

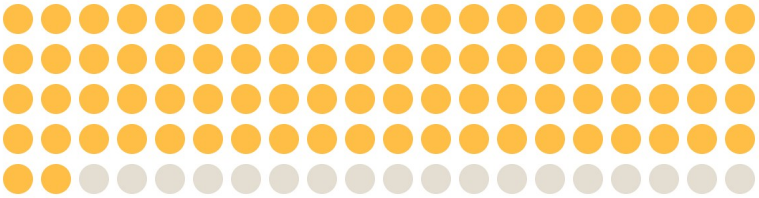
Experiencing discrimination is only part of the challenge. Among women who report having experienced discrimination, nearly two-thirds also say they've encountered barriers when seeking support or addressing discrimination-related workplace concerns. These findings raise important questions not only about the prevalence of discrimination, but also about the systems and workplace environments people encounter when attempting to address it.

Self-Doubt Crosses Many Boundaries

One of the most enduring findings in this research is the prevalence of feelings commonly referred to as imposter syndrome. In 2026, 82% report having experienced feelings of self-doubt or inadequacy during their time in technology. The rates have remained high across all four annual respondent groups: approximately 78% in 2023, 78% in 2024, 84% in 2025, and 82% in 2026.

The question concerns whether respondents have ever experienced these feelings, not how frequently they occur or whether they are experiencing them today. Nevertheless, the consistency of the results suggests that self-doubt is a common experience among the respondents, rather than one confined to newcomers or to a particular gender.

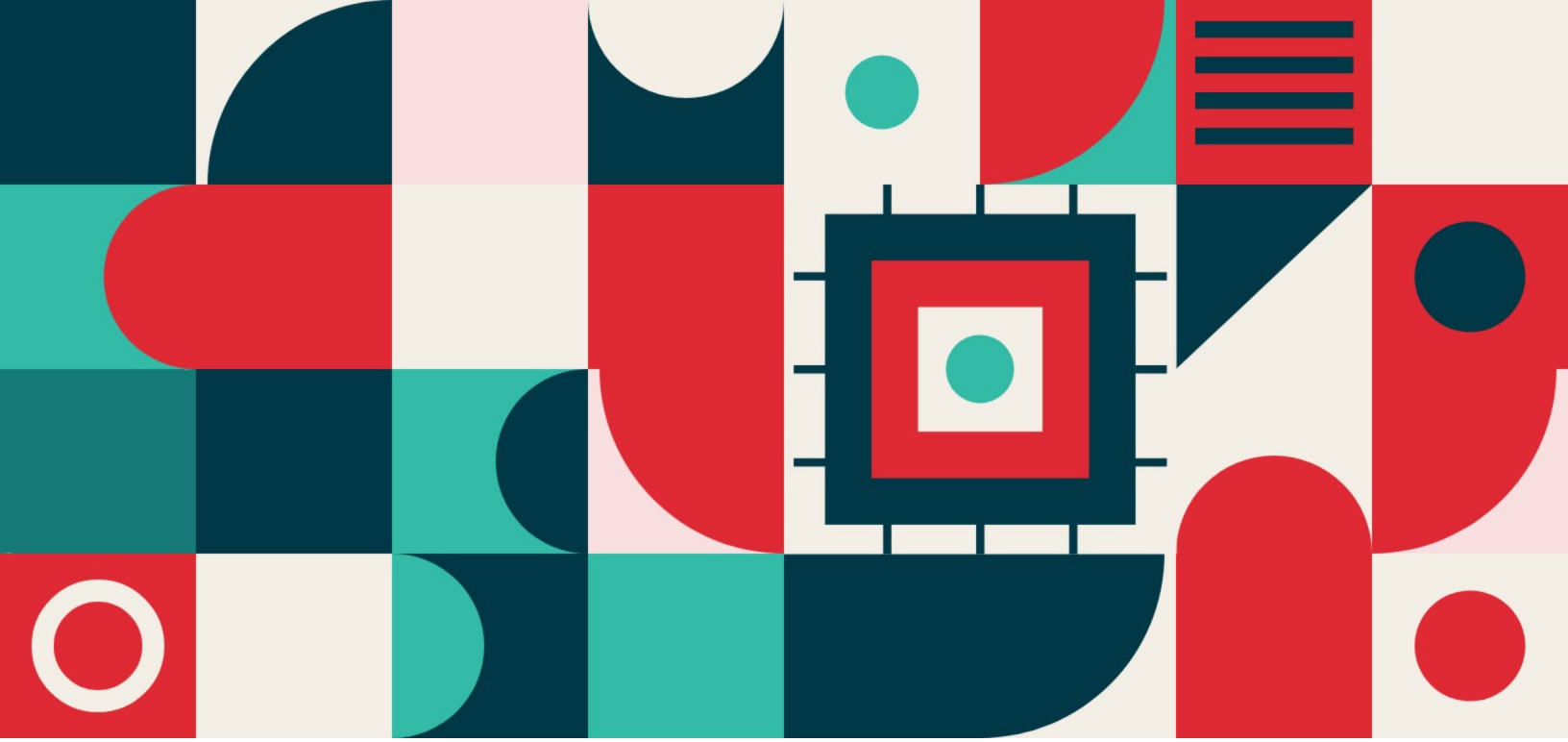
Women report experiencing self-doubt somewhat more frequently than men in 2026, but these feelings remain widespread across both groups. Importantly, self-doubt is not limited to those who are new to the industry. Even respondents with decades of experience in tech, including those who have advanced into senior leadership and executive positions, report having questioned their professional abilities. These findings reinforce that experience, tenure, and career advancement do not necessarily eliminate feelings of inadequacy, nor should those feelings be interpreted as evidence of limited competence.



82%

report having experienced self-doubt or inadequacy during their time in tech.

RESPONDENT GROUP	PORTION HAVING EXPERIENCED IMPOSTER SYNDROME IN TECH
All respondents	82%
Men	78%
Women	86%
Managers and executives	89%



CHAPTER 08

AI in the Workplace

From New Tool to New Expectation

What once was "new" is now regular practice

In the first year of the WIT study, artificial intelligence was not yet a central element of the survey. By 2026, AI had become one of its most substantial areas of inquiry, reflecting how quickly the technology has entered everyday work.

The following pages examine how often Southwest Missouri technology professionals are using AI tools, what types of adoption support they've received from their employer, and the sometimes conflicting opinions about the productivity gains we can reasonably expect or experience.

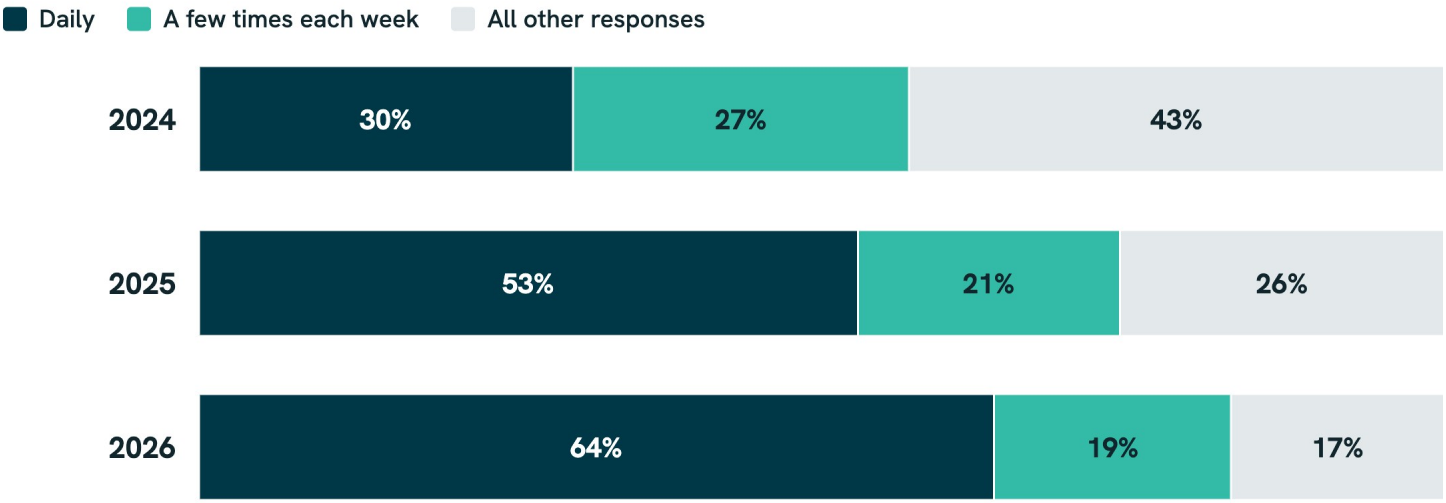
Three Years of Rising AI Use

Earlier survey waves indicate rapid adoption, with an important qualification about response wording. In 2024, 57% (129 of 226) reported using AI daily or a few times each week. In 2025, that share was 74% (143 of 193). In 2026, with the weekly category labeled simply “Weekly,” the share was 83%. Daily usage alone rose from 30% of respondents in 2024 to 53% in 2025 and 64% in 2026. These figures describe different annual samples, and the answer labels were not identical, but the pattern is consistent with AI becoming a routine element of work among respondents.

The 2026 Stack Overflow Developer Survey also documents extensive use of AI across developer workflows. Its respondents are global developers and technically oriented practitioners, not the same occupational mix as WIT's regional sample, and its questions emphasize specific AI tools rather than one overall frequency measure. It is useful industry context, not a direct statistical benchmark for Southwest Missouri. [1]

57% | **report their employer's expectations around AI use have increased in the last twelve months.**

How Often Respondents Use AI Tools at Work, 2024–2026

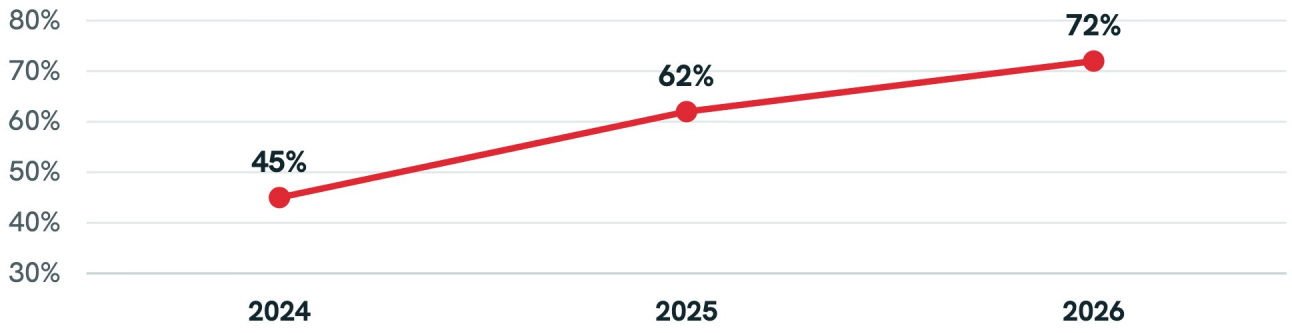


AI Policies and Training

Some of the largest differences in the 2026 survey appear when AI policy and training are examined by employer size. Among respondents working for enterprises with more than 500 employees, nearly 90% said a formal AI policy existed. Among respondents at employers with 1 to 50 employees, only 16% said the same.

Employer Has a Formal AI Use Policy, 2024–2026

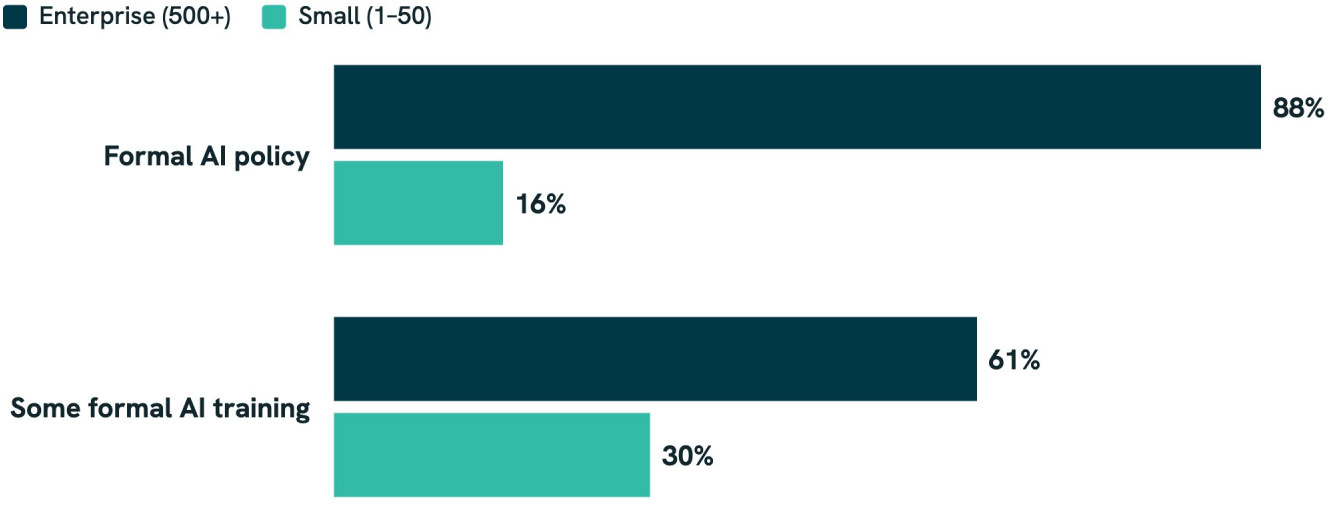
Share of respondents answering "Yes"



Separate annual samples. Not asked in 2023.

AI Policy and Training by Employer Size

Share reporting each, 2026

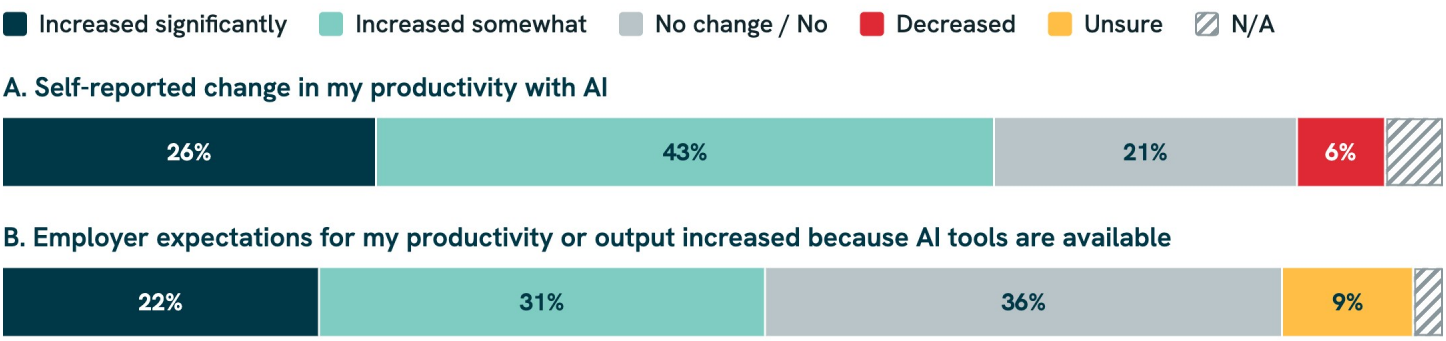


Productivity Gains and Productivity Pressure

AI is changing not only how tech professionals work, but also how much they're expected to accomplish. Many respondents report meaningful improvements in their productivity as a result of AI tools, but at the same time, more than half indicate that their employers have increased expectations for productivity or output because AI tools are available. This suggests that AI is reshaping both what tech pros can accomplish and what organizations believe they should be able to deliver.

However, these changes aren't being experienced equally. Some tech professionals report substantial productivity gains, while others see more modest improvements or no meaningful change at all. Employer expectations are similarly uneven, with some workers facing significantly greater demands while others report little or no change. The usefulness of AI can vary considerably depending on the nature of someone's work, the tools available to them, and how effectively those tools can be incorporated into their daily responsibilities.

Two Related but Different Measures



N/A (not applicable): 4% of respondents for A and 2% for B.

This raises an important question about whether workplace expectations are keeping pace with the realities of AI adoption. When new tools genuinely reduce the time and effort required to complete work, increased productivity can benefit both employees and employers. But when organizations assume that AI should make everyone substantially more productive, those expectations may create additional pressure, particularly for workers whose responsibilities are less easily accelerated by technology. The challenge moving forward may be ensuring that expectations for greater output reflect what AI actually enables, rather than what employers assume it should make possible.

"The expectation is that I do more work than ever, and do it faster, which is leading to major burnout."

Anonymous response to the 2026 question about AI's impact over the last 12 months.

Looking Two to Three Years Ahead: Opportunity, Risk, or Both?

A multiple-selection question asked how respondents believed AI would affect their careers over the following two to three years. Sixty-one percent chose at least one opportunity-related option, and 49% chose at least one career-risk option. Because respondents could select multiple answers, those groups overlap: 22% selected at least one opportunity option and at least one risk option.

Expected Effect of AI on Respondents' Careers, Next Two to Three Years

Groups constructed from a multiple-select question



Categories were built from respondents' combinations of answers; they are not mutually exclusive answer choices on the original question.

The overlap matters. It challenges the assumption that optimism and anxiety are opposing camps. Some workers believe AI will improve their productivity, create new opportunities, and make their skills more valuable while simultaneously creating uncertainty about their jobs or the wider industry.

> *I see opportunities for growth in tech, but I am concerned that AI use is becoming an expectation rather than a choice. AI can improve productivity, but it should be used thoughtfully and should not replace the human skills that are important to doing quality work.*

Anonymous response to the 2026 future-of-career question.

AI is no longer simply a question of whether technology workers are willing to try new tools. For many respondents, it is becoming a question of how work itself is organized, how output is evaluated, and what skills will matter in the next stage of their careers.



CHAPTER 09

Looking Ahead

Commitment to Tech in an Uncertain Market

A good job today does not guarantee confidence about the next one

The technology industry has long been associated with opportunity, innovation, and the promise of rewarding careers. But rapid technological change, evolving employer expectations, and uncertainty in the labor market are complicating how workers think about their professional futures. Even those who find satisfaction and fulfillment in their current roles may have questions about what comes next.

This final chapter explores how Southwest Missouri tech workers view their long-term prospects, from their confidence in finding new opportunities to their intentions to remain in the industry. It also examines the advice they would offer someone considering a career in technology, revealing a mix of optimism, caution, and recognition that adaptability will be essential to navigating the years ahead.

Market Confidence and Career Commitment

This helps explain why some workers stay with an employer despite uncertainty about advancement or changing expectations. Satisfaction, in other words, should not be treated as a stand-in for market confidence.

Dice's 2026 *Tech Sentiment Report* offers national context: 41% of U.S. technology professionals were confident they could find a *favorable* new role, while WIT asked about a *comparable or suitable* role within three months. The questions and samples differ, so the figures are not directly comparable, but both point to uncertainty about the next move. [2]

Commitment to a career in tech remains relatively strong

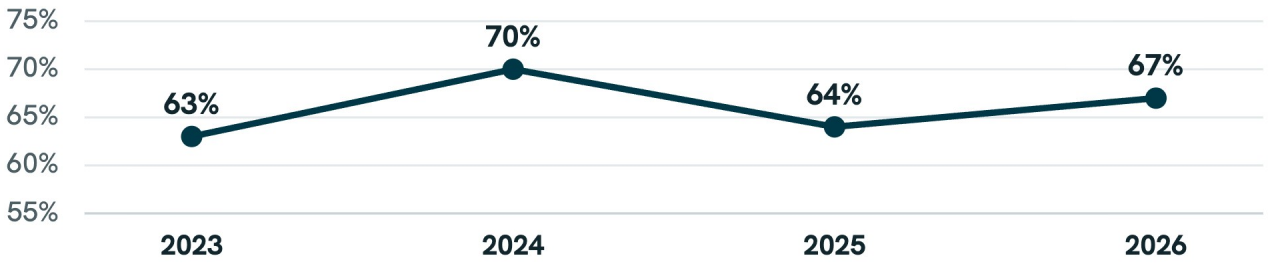
Concern about finding another position does not mean workers plan to leave technology. Most intend to stay, and that share has held between 63% and 70% since 2023.

67%
plan to stay in tech for the rest of their careers.

30%
plan to stay for now, but not necessarily forever.

3%
are actively looking to leave the tech industry.

Intent to Stay in Tech for Remainder of Career, 2023–2026



Separate annual samples.

Adaptability, Optimism, and Concern

Advice to future tech workers: possibility with conditions

Asked what they would tell a friend or family member considering a career in tech, respondents gave answers that resist a simple positive-or-negative label. Some emphasized rewarding work, pay, and the range of roles available; others warned about instability, competition for entry-level jobs, and rapid changes in how employers use AI.

One theme recurred throughout: adaptability. Respondents spoke about continuing to learn, staying curious, and expecting tools to change. Some found that prospect energizing; others described it as exhausting or unsettling.

> *Be ready for continuous learning throughout your career.*

Anonymous response to the advice question.

> *I love my career in tech, but I fear the future.*

Anonymous response to the open-ended future-of-career question.

The responses also show how broad the term *tech* is. People in software development, cybersecurity, product management, support, and infrastructure may face different labor markets and different forms of AI-driven change, so no single confidence figure can represent every path into, through, or out of the field.

Confidence about the future is not a single sentiment

The report began with an apparent tension: many respondents value their work, yet many are unsure about their next opportunity. The findings show why both can be true. Career level is related to confidence, workplace conditions are linked to satisfaction and commitment, and AI brings both new possibilities and new expectations.

The 2026 survey presents neither an unqualified success story nor a uniformly pessimistic account of regional tech work. It depicts people who often find meaning and opportunity in their roles, while recognizing that their future depends on conditions they do not entirely control.



CHAPTER 10

Takeaways

What This Year's Research Adds to the Picture

What the 2026 survey reveals

Four years of research have produced a more layered understanding of technology work in Southwest Missouri. The clearest lesson is that the experience depends on more than whether someone likes working in tech. Respondents' workplace conditions, positions in their careers, and expectations about change all shape the picture.

67% | **plan to stay in tech for the rest of their careers, even though only half feel confident they could find a comparable role within three months.**

Five Takeaways from the 2026 Survey

The work itself remains a source of value for many respondents.

Most describe their jobs as satisfying, fulfilling, and motivating. Pay leads job decisions, but culture, flexibility, and benefits remain important parts of the package.

Workplace decisions are closely related to satisfaction and commitment.

Satisfaction differs little between fully remote and fully office-based respondents. The bigger gap is between those whose onsite expectations held steady and those whose requirements increased.

Shared attitudes in some areas do not erase persistent inequities in others.

Men and women report similar workplace attitudes, yet women remain far more likely to report discrimination, and many who experienced it also faced barriers when seeking support.

AI is transforming expectations as well as tasks.

AI use is widespread and many report productivity gains, but many also see rising employer expectations. Policies are more common than ever, while training lags, especially at small employers.

Confidence about the future is more complicated than commitment to the industry.

Most plan to stay in tech for their entire careers, yet only half are confident they could find a suitable new role within three months.

APPENDIX A

Four-Year Research Scorecard

The table below provides a four-year reference for several recurring survey items. The figures should be read as comparisons between separate voluntary respondent groups, not repeated measurements of the same people. Some questions were added after the first research year and cannot support a complete four-year trend.

MEASURE	DEFINITION	2023	2024	2025	2026
Job satisfaction	Agree/strongly agree	70%	80%	60%	**67%**
Motivation to give best effort	Agree/strongly agree	73%	79%	72%	**75%**
Work is fulfilling	Agree/strongly agree	59%	73%	63%	**62%**
Strong organizational commitment	Agree/strongly agree	60%	67%	56%	**61%**
Good work-life balance	Agree/strongly agree	65%	68%	61%	**66%**
Has resources/support to do job well	Agree/strongly agree	69%	74%	66%	**69%**
Feels valued and appreciated	Agree/strongly agree	72%	70%	66%	**70%**
Receives regular feedback	Agree/strongly agree	57%	59%	54%	**58%**
Good professional growth opportunities	Agree/strongly agree	60%	59%	50%	**52%**
Paid fairly versus peers within organization	Answered yes	65%	72%	57%	**61%**
Paid fairly versus peers across industry	Answered yes	45%	49%	43%	**48%**
Ever experienced discrimination in tech	Answered yes	30%	44%	39%	**28%**
Ever experienced professional self-doubt or inadequacy	Answered yes	78%	78%	84%	**82%**
Plans to stay in tech for entire career	Selected this intention	63%	70%	64%	**67%**
NEWER MEASURES					
Uses AI daily for work	Selected daily	*Not asked*	30%	53%	**64%**
Uses AI at least weekly	Daily or weekly*	*Not asked*	57%	74%	**83%**
Employer has formal AI policy	Answered yes	*Not asked*	45%	62%	**72%**
Ever engaged in salary negotiations	Answered yes	*Not asked*	64%	61%	**59%**
Confident of finding a comparable or suitable tech role within three months	Very/somewhat confident	*Not asked*	*Not asked*	59%	**50%**

APPENDIX B

References and Research Sources

WIT survey research

Springfield Women in Technology and Habitat Communication & Culture. *Tech Workforce Survey*, annual respondent data, 2023, 2024, 2025, and 2026. All local percentages in this report were recalculated from the respective survey records; raw individual-level responses are confidential and are not part of the public report.

Springfield Women in Technology and Habitat Communication & Culture. *Tech Workforce Survey Report*, 2023 and 2025. Prior publications provide background on the research program; figures in the four-year scorecard were independently calculated from the annual responses for consistent definitions.

External research used for context

1. Stack Overflow. (2026). *2026 Developer Survey*.https://survey.stackoverflow.co/2026/
2. Dice. (2026). *Tech Sentiment in 2026: The Defensive Job Market*.https://www.dice.com/hiring/recruitment/reports/tech-sentiment-report

APPENDIX C

About the Research Partners

SPRINGFIELD women IN tech

Learn more at springfieldwomenintech.com

Springfield Women in Technology supports an inclusive regional technology community, with a particular commitment to the experiences and opportunities of women and other underrepresented people.

Its annual Tech Workforce Survey contributes local evidence to conversations about careers, workplaces, and the future of the region's technology workforce.

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Habitat Communication & Culture partners with organizations on research, strategic planning, leadership development, and organizational effectiveness.

Habitat has supported the WIT research program since its beginning in 2023, designing the research, analyzing responses, and communicating findings to the community.

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