

WHO GIVES A SHUCK?

An Oyster report on employee disillusionment



WIP



Oyster

welcome

WWR*

4/day week

plumm



Kona

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If you're reading this slumped over a desk with emails piled high in your inbox and caffeine levels dangerously low...

If you have an unhealthy number of tabs open in your browser and a suite of software tools binging and buzzing and otherwise prodding you for attention...

If you're on your third conference call of the day and it's not even 10 a.m....

Read on. Because you're one of us.

You've made it into the illustrious club of modern-day knowledge workers. Your years of education, hard work, and workplace training have gotten you here: the coveted world of desk-based employment. (Maybe you're even lucky enough to work from home?) And now, equipped with your laptop, WiFi connection, and carefully selected Zoom background, you're ready to take on the world.

Only one problem: that world you're ready to take on? Yeah, it's in a bit of a state right now. You've lived through a pandemic (which is ongoing, by the way). You've experienced a turbulent economy, the outbreak of war in Europe, worsening climate crises, civil unrest,¹ the "Great Resignation," surging costs of living, and most recently, a **wave of layoffs** at companies that might just look like yours.

In the context of these extraordinary changes and pressures, suddenly that Slack message can wait. That meeting hardly feels important. Those emails aren't going anywhere. We're living through unprecedentedly unprecedented times.

And we're *still* trying to show up to work! Isn't that absurd? Don't you feel like the meme dog who stoically quips "This is fine," while sitting in a room engulfed in flames?

If any of this resonates with you, you're not alone. That club you're a part of—**over a billion knowledge workers** across the globe who are doing our utmost to keep going in a broken world—is experiencing the same thing. We know because we asked 2,500 knowledge workers to share their thoughts and experiences to build this report.

This report is not about throwing up our hands in despair. In a similar vein to our **2022 Employee Expectations Report**, it's about giving a voice to those workers. To the employees who keep moving, even when the world seems to be against us.



¹ Most notably in Iran and China, but also in the United States and elsewhere.

Despite everything, we knowledge workers are doing our best to give a shuck² about work. And that can be tough, especially when there are so many other external factors vying for our headspace, our finite number of shucks to give. In fact, sometimes we give up. We can't give or do any more. Recall, for instance, the Great Resignation of 2021 and the phenomenon of "quiet quitting" in 2022, which is perhaps more accurately a rejection of the hustle-and-grind culture that inevitably leads to burnout. While employers are concerned about productivity tanking, employees (especially the younger generation of workers) are increasingly disillusioned and questioning the meaning and purpose of work as it's currently structured.

“ I worry too much because of war, Covid, inflation, rent increase. I am too anxious. ”

– Survey respondent

So how far does this sense of disillusionment go? More to the point, what can we do about it? The research we carried out to inform this report attempts to get to the bottom of this. We set out to uncover the state of employee disillusionment today, understand what's causing it, and learn how companies can relieve the pressure we're all feeling in the face of a changing world.

² Don't mind us casually replacing a curse word with an Oyster-related, phonetic pun. We want this to be "safe for work," after all!

Disillusionment

The condition of being disenchanted: the condition of being dissatisfied or defeated in expectation or hope.

Merriam-Webster

We're not here to be harbingers of doom and gloom. Far from it. In fact, we're coming to this research with a strong sense of hope. Because (as you'll discover), there's plenty of cause for hope, both for us knowledge workers and our workplaces.

Top findings

- A large plurality (**49.7%**) of participants said their **#1** priority in life was their mental health, while career advancement was ranked **#5**.
- **74.6%** of people said they find it hard to focus on work because of the cost-of-living crisis.
- Rising costs of living, economic downturn, and COVID-19 were top stressors for our survey participants.
- **75.2%** of respondents said taking time off was very important to their well-being, while only **13.5%** said the same about access to well-being benefits.
- Workers say they want to feel safe at work, to be paid fairly, and to be trusted to get their work done.
- Four-day workweeks and remote work were chosen as top aspirational workplace benefits.

What do we give a shuck about?

Let's talk priorities. It makes sense to start here to learn what everyday knowledge workers care about and understand where work fits into the mix. Based on data from our **Employee Expectations Report**, we knew that expectations have shifted for employees in the

wake of the pandemic and the events of the last three years. For example, we learned that 79.9% of employees said work-life balance had become more important since the pandemic, and 81.1% said the same was true about remote working.

“ We can't overstate the dramatic reset of employee expectations we've seen over the last three years. ”

- Jack Mardack, Co-founder at Oyster

To learn more, we asked respondents to rank the following³ in order of importance in their lives.



Mental well-being

Physical well-being

Relationships with friends

Hobbies and activities

Career advancement

Religious beliefs/spirituality

³ “Family” is an obvious omission from this list, but in this case we felt including this choice might skew our data too heavily because too many people would select this as their top priority.

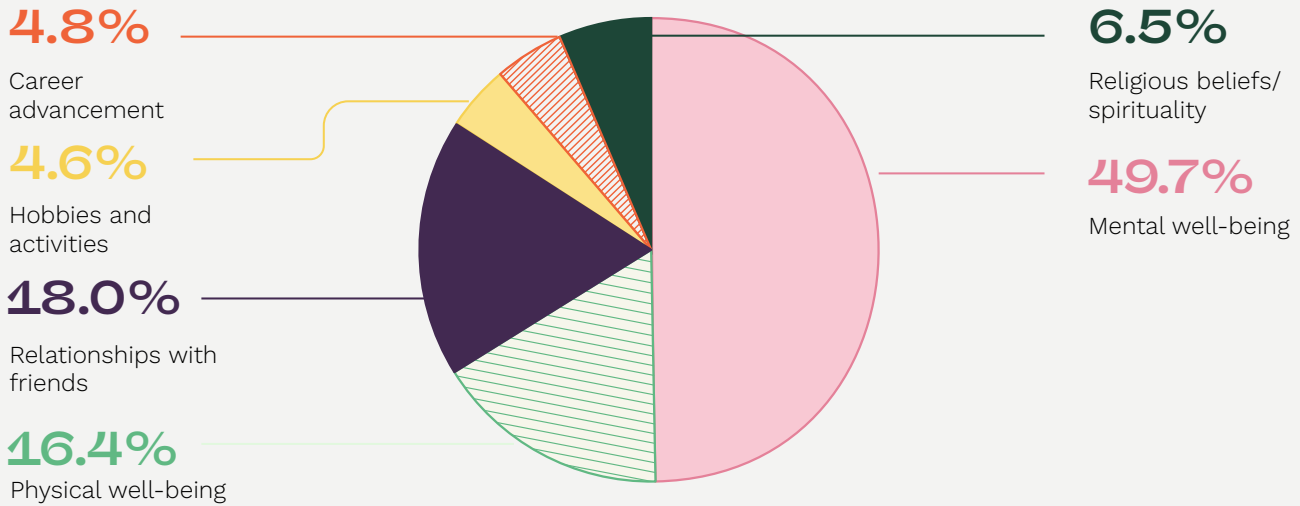
Here's what we learned

49.7%

of knowledge workers chose mental well-being as their top priority

A large plurality of participants told us that their mental well-being was their top priority. Next came relationships with friends, then physical well-being, religious beliefs, career advancement, and hobbies and activities.

Top-ranked priorities for knowledge workers



It's no contest: mental well-being is the dramatic winner from this group, way ahead of the second choice, relationships with friends, by a massive 31.7 percentage points. Meanwhile, career advancement sits pretty low on the list at #5. Career even falls behind religious beliefs, at a time when belief in God has reached an all-time low (especially **in the U.S.** and **the U.K.**)

While physical well-being was seen as important (particularly among older workers), the bottom three (religious beliefs, career, and hobbies) are massively overshadowed. Knowledge workers care about their careers, sure. But in the order of things workers give a shuck about, work isn't up there. Not even close.

Data point: A word from Plumm



“Good mental health is key to having healthy relationships, to maintaining our interest in our hobbies and our focus at work, and to helping us focus on our growth objectives. Prevention is high on the agenda of the employers we speak to. Easy access to mental health support is now a hygiene factor for today's emerging workforce. We believe it's not a matter of if, but a matter of when, providing access to mental well-being support becomes the norm.”

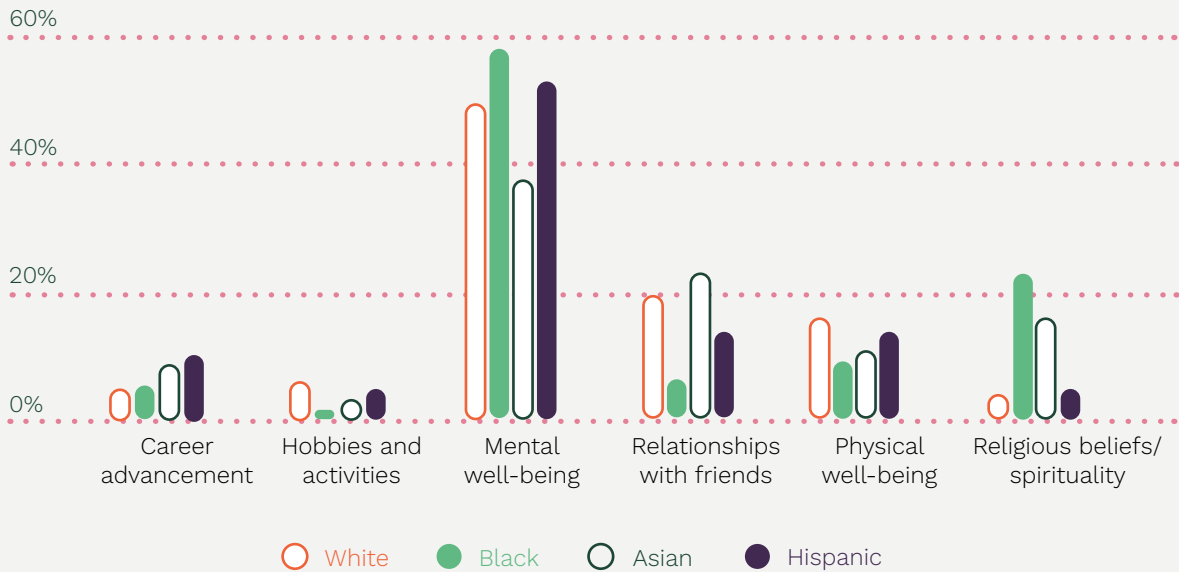


Asim Amin, Founder and CEO at Plumm

58%

of Black workers prioritize their mental well-being ahead of everything else (much more than other racial groups)

Top-ranked life priorities (by race)



Broken down by race, we see a striking picture. Black workers prioritized their mental well-being more than any other racial group (58.4% compared to a low of 37.7% of Asian respondents).

This data could indicate how Black employees place more emphasis on their mental health than others because, well, they have to.

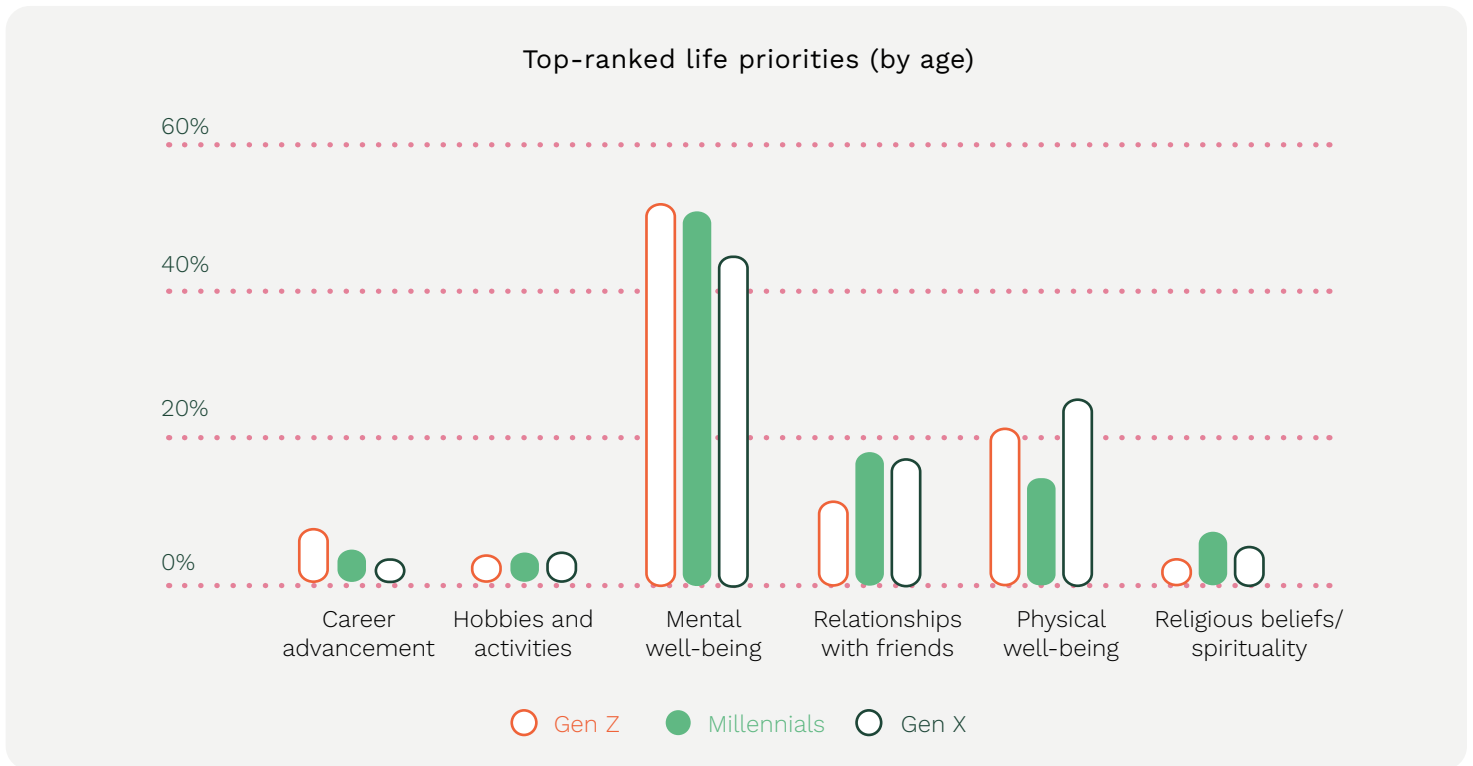
Bearing the brunt of systemic racism, prejudice, and societal injustice,⁴ perhaps Black knowledge workers must put more energy into protecting their mental health and can less afford to spend it elsewhere (say, on hobbies, where only 0.4% of Black workers rated this as a priority, compared to 5.3% of white workers). We will learn more about specific challenges facing Black workers later.

“ I started caring more about my mental and physical state. I thought that career would be the most important for me but that turned out to be less important. ”

– Survey respondent

⁴ Particularly in the countries where the majority of our respondents reside, i.e., the U.S., Western Europe, and Canada.

Gen Z take their mental health more seriously than any other generation



Is it any surprise that Gen Z, the **generation worst afflicted by burnout** and who **suffered greatly during the pandemic**, has placed the most importance on their mental health? It turns out that **51.6%** of Gen Z respondents chose mental health as their top priority, compared to just **44.8%** of Gen X.

But as far as priorities go, generational groups generally tend to fall into agreement with each other. But once again, career advancement does not appear to be high on the priority list.

“After the pandemic I realized so much more was important to life than just working ourselves to death. So yes, work is less important and family, hobbies, and mental health are my main priorities now.”

- Survey respondent

Work isn't everything

It seems that for knowledge workers, work just isn't as important as other aspects of their lives. With burnout on the rise and a host of other pressures bearing down on us, it doesn't come as a huge shock that mental health has risen to the top of the priority list.

But it's interesting that career advancement featured so low on the knowledge worker agenda. Whether it's a sign of **disillusionment with work in general** or an adjustment to major world events that put everything into perspective, employees value almost everything in their lives more than their day jobs.

Chapter 2

Hell of a year

Time for a litmus test. A chance for us to check in with our workers and see how they've coped with work in 2022. After all, a lot happened last year. The COVID-19 pandemic hit new heights, with **its new Omicron variant** affecting millions of people around the world. **Russia invaded Ukraine** in a shocking act of unprovoked aggression. We learned for the first time that many aspects of climate change were **becoming irreversible**. **Monkeypox broke** out in London. The U.K. gained a new prime minister (for **just over a month**) and **lost its queen**. The U.S. Supreme Court decided to **overturn Roe vs. Wade**, a landmark decision that withdrew protections for abortion. Pakistan was **devastated by destructive floods**. And a **recession loomed** over an economy weighed down by inflation,

conflict in Europe, and worsening market conditions.

So much happened that even the most sanguine employee might have felt the impact of wave after wave of era-defining world events. We wanted to get to the bottom of this and understand how much the events of 2022 affected knowledge workers today.

“ Mainly, please raise our pay. Inflation is killing us. ”

– Survey respondent

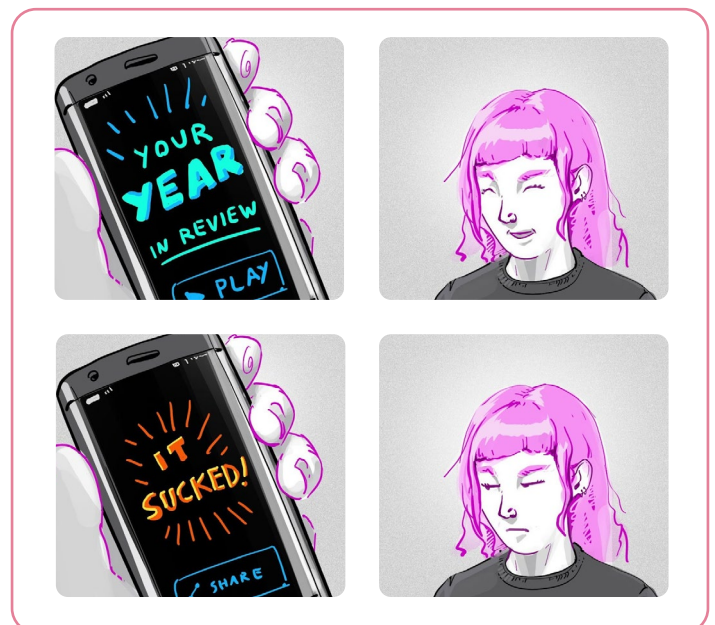


Image used with permission from High_Ping_Comics on Reddit

Our intent was to investigate whether things had gotten so bad that they got in the way of people's focus at work. Could workers shrug off external pressures and carry on? Or was it all becoming too much to ignore?

We asked knowledge workers how much (if at all) their ability to focus on work had been affected over the course of 2022⁵ and if so, why.

Here's what we learned

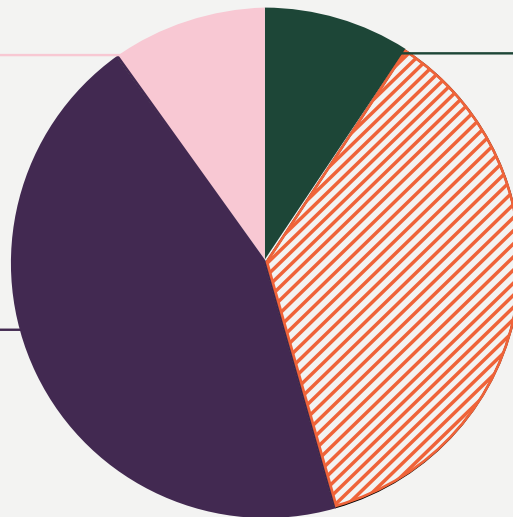
54.4%

of workers said their focus at work had been affected over the last 12 months

How much knowledge workers' ability to focus at work was affected over the last 12 months

9.9%
Very much

44.5%
Somewhat



9.3%
Not at all

36.3%
Not very much

We don't know about you, but for us, this picture set off alarm bells. Seeing that the majority of our respondents tell us that their work has been affected (at least somewhat) over the last 12 months—and that 9.9% report their work is very much affected—is a concern. Imagine at your place of work that at any given time, over

half the organization is struggling to get their work done. When you think of it like that, we're looking at a crisis of employee engagement. It's no wonder we've heard so much about **quiet quitting** and employees doing the bare minimum. For the most affected, perhaps the bare minimum is all they can muster.

⁵ Our research was conducted in December 2022, so within the context of this report, "the last 12 months" primarily refers to the year 2022.

“ I care about my career only if it allows me to enjoy my hobbies, my relationships, and to have a good mental and physical state. ”

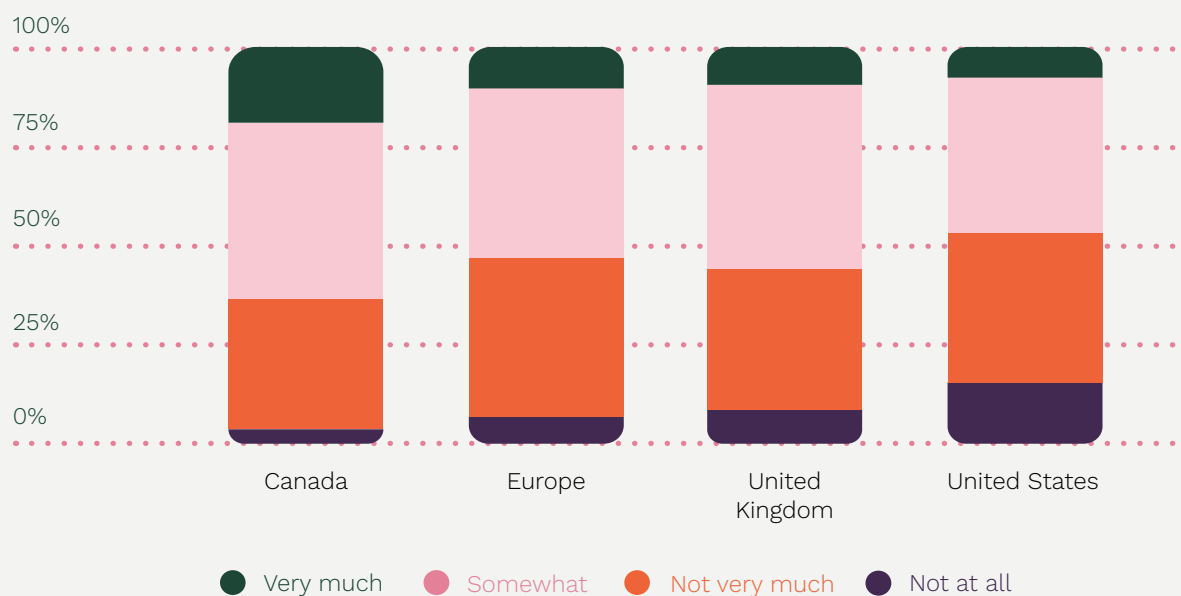
– Survey respondent

Although there’s still a lot to unpack, this is one of the most important data stories in this report. It shows that a large proportion of the workforce has felt the effects of our troubling world. With things so messed up, it’s inhibiting our ability to concentrate at work.

18.9%

of Canadians said they found it very hard to focus at work over the last year

How much knowledge workers’ ability to focus at work was affected over the last 12 months (by geography)



Looking at our data from a geographic perspective, things are looking rough for Canadian workers. 18.9% of Canadians say they’ve struggled to focus on work—double their European, British, and American counterparts.

What’s going on in Canada? It could be that concerns over the **struggling Canadian healthcare system** have contributed to worker woes. We don’t know exactly what’s behind this data, but **Canada’s housing crisis, spiraling costs of living**, and **civil unrest** in 2022 might have something to do with these responses.

Across the board, though, things are bleak. The majority of respondents across geographies reported that their focus at work had been

affected—including some countries not shown here, such as Mexico and South Africa. Wherever you are in the world, it seems, you've likely had a challenging year.

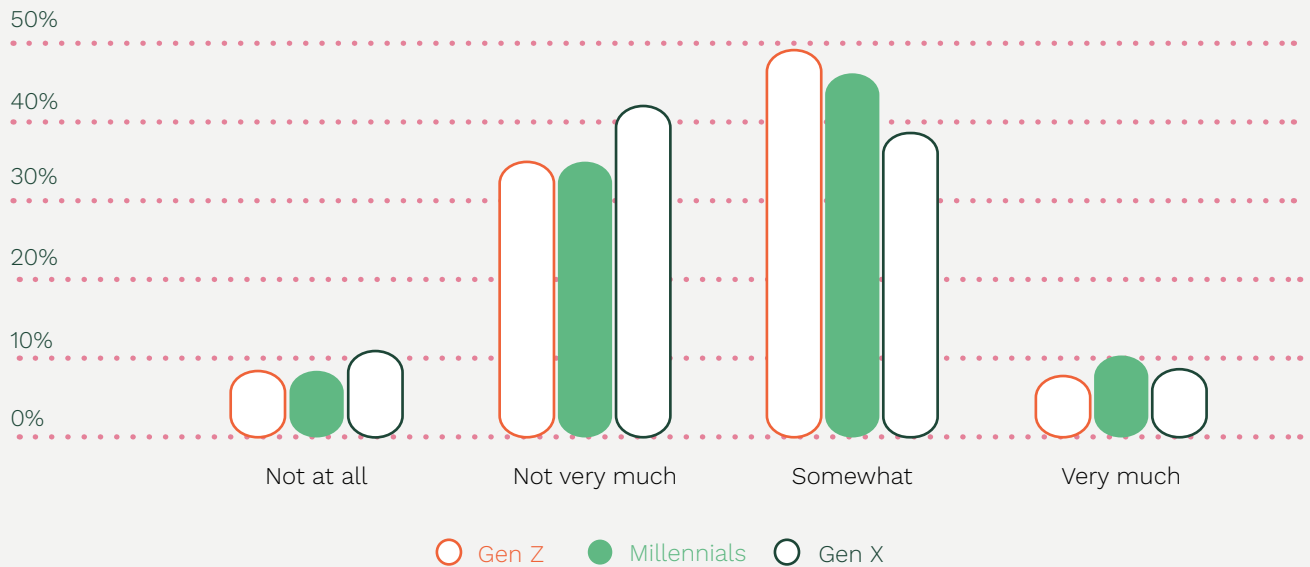
48.9%

of **Gen Z** found it very hard to focus at work

38.4%

of **Gen X** found it very hard to focus at work

How much knowledge workers' ability to focus at work was affected over the last 12 month (by age)



Looking at this data across age groups, one pattern is clear. The older you are, the better you're able to concentrate on work. 48.9% of

Gen Z told us their focus at work was somewhat affected, compared to 45.9% of Millennials and just 38.4% of Gen X.

“ I have placed more importance on my mental health and physical health. I used to think that once I joined the workforce and found a position I felt comfortable in, I would have felt some spark to further advance my career, but not so much. ”

– Survey respondent

Gen Xers are struggling less than their younger colleagues, it seems. This could be for all kinds of reasons, from their seniority at work to **greater financial stability**, or perhaps their accumulated life experience enables them to be more settled amid uncertainty. It's also possible that older generations underreported this metric and were less forthcoming about the effects of recent events on their focus at work due to learned stigmas and different socialization. We're not sure.

Either way, it seems like we should look out for our Gen Z and Millennial coworkers, and bear in mind that they're more likely affected by external pressures than older generations.

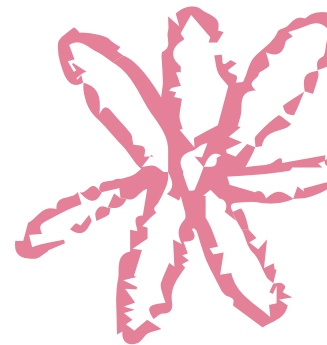
What year is it?

It's not just that we're still reeling from the effects of the last 12 months. **Time itself is messing with our heads**. The act of recalling what happened last year is a mindshuck, because so much happened that our concept of what a "year" even means has become distorted.

“ There are decades where nothing happens; and there are weeks where decades happen. ”

– Vladimir Ilyich Lenin

It's understandable and even expected, then, that employees have had challenges staying focused at work while the world decided to be a total disaster. But what exactly affected employees the most during this time? That's what we'll look at next, as we break down the most challenging conditions workers faced in this 12-month period⁶ (and beyond).



⁶ Meaning: the 12 months of the year in 2022.

My world's on fire, how 'bout yours?

We learned that over half our knowledge workers felt that external stressors had disrupted their ability to work. What stressors, exactly? That was our next mission: an attempt to get to the heart of what affected knowledge workers' ability to do their jobs and to what extent.



We had to start somewhere, so we decided to ask our survey respondents to assess a list of factors, telling us how much each affected their ability to focus at work. This list comprises some of the major world events we've lived through over the last year. And to balance things out, we also listed "personal worries" as an option, since challenges in our personal lives can be just as disruptive to our daily work.

Economic downturn

Political instability

Climate change

War and conflict

Global health concerns

Rising cost of living

Personal worries or concerns

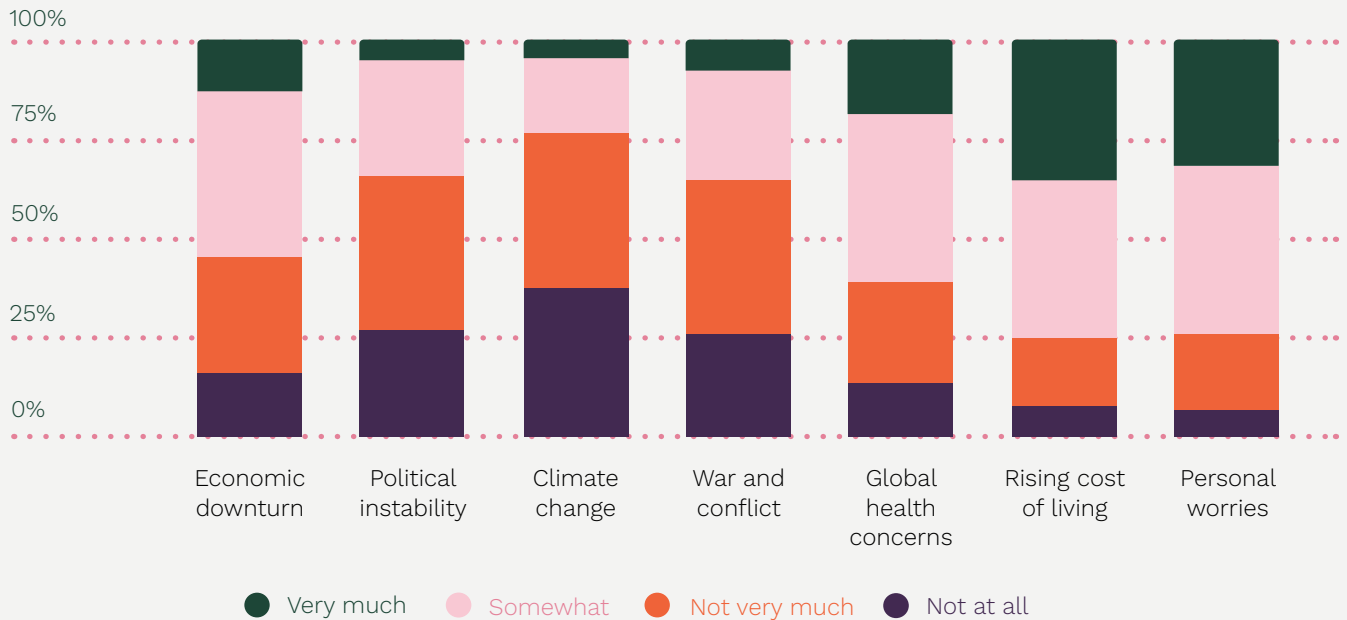


Here's what we learned

74.6%

of employees are concerned about rising costs of living

Top factors that impact knowledge workers' ability to focus at work



Turns out we've got money on our minds. The rising cost of living affects 74.6% of employees' ability to focus at work, and personal worries affect 73.8% of us. These categories were the two standouts, but every external factor (with the exception of climate change) made a significant impact on our respondents at work.

“ I think my main concern now is just how drastically the cost of living has gone up, and how that affects my stress level. ”

– Survey respondent

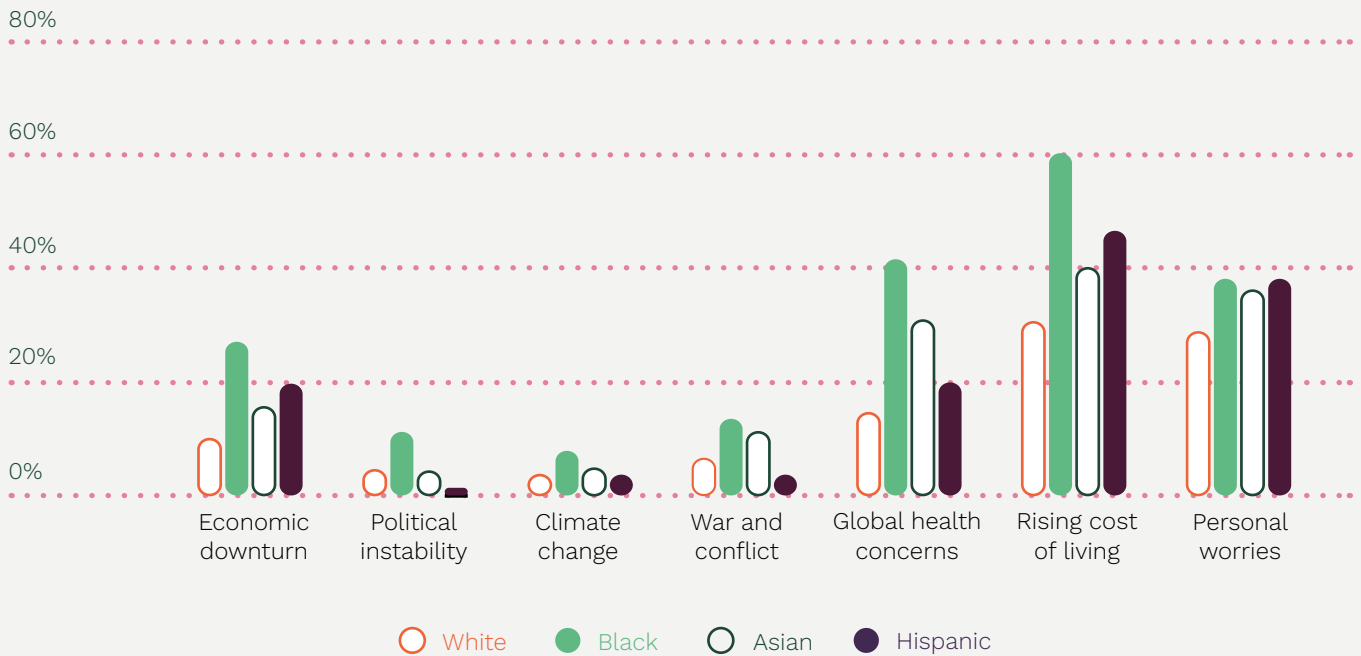
It's worth noting that global health concerns including COVID-19 are also top of mind. This affects 60.6% of knowledge workers despite COVID measures becoming relaxed and employers ushering their staff back to the

office (in many cases, **against their will**). But nothing came close to spiraling living costs and personal concerns when it came to top external stressors, and this was true across genders and geographies.

60.4%

of Black workers struggle with rising costs of living

Top factors that impact knowledge workers' ability to focus at work (by race)



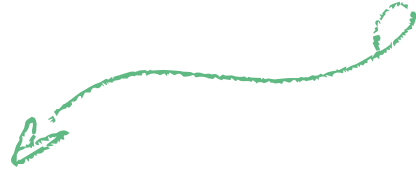
Around 9.5% of our respondents were Black knowledge workers, and it's disheartening to see that they're disproportionately affected by rising costs of living. In fact, Black workers are more affected by pretty much every category than other racial groups, notably by global health concerns (41.6% of Black workers were very concerned about this, compared

to just 14.8% of white workers) and were significantly more affected by the threat of economic downturn.

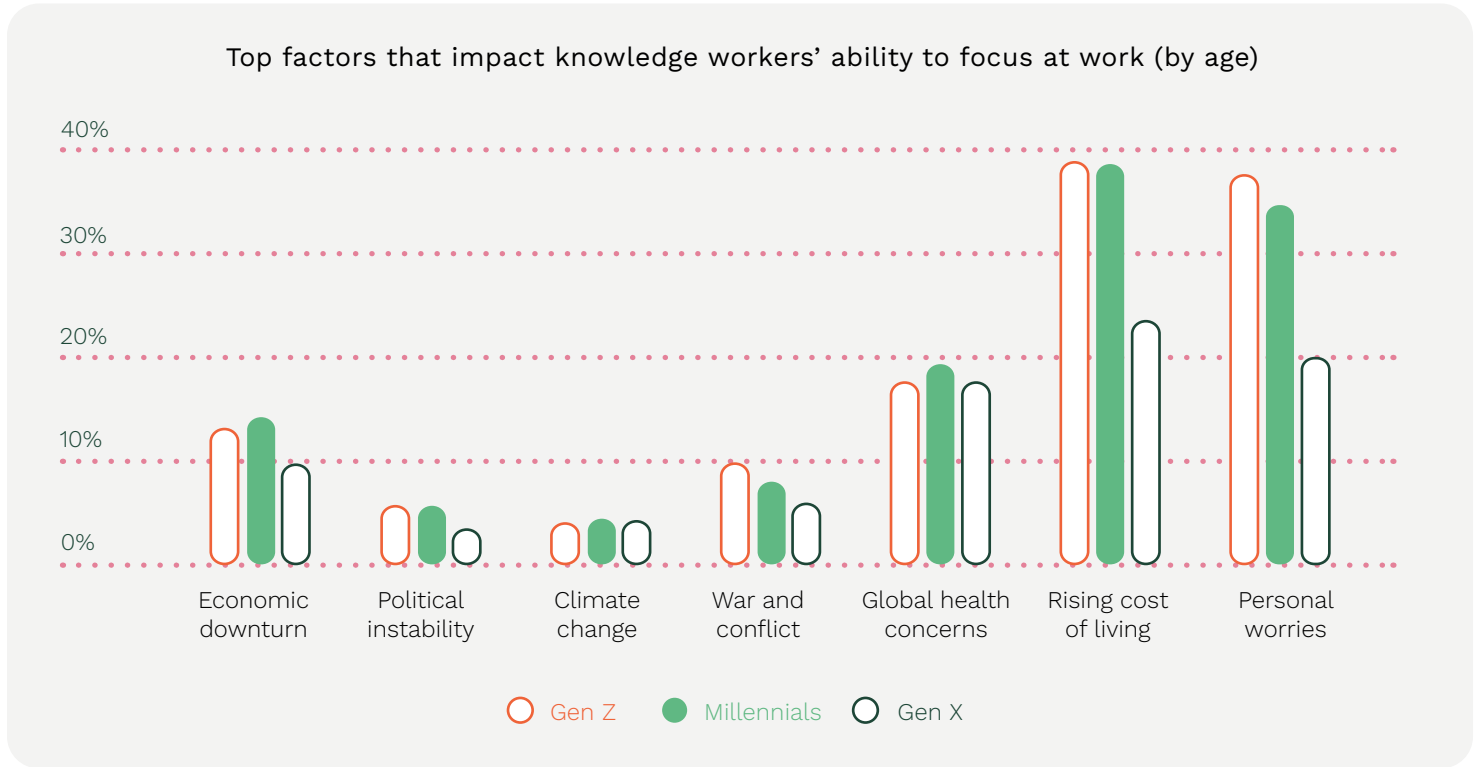
In contrast, white workers report being least affected by nearly every category—an example of privilege in practice. Privilege of any sort doesn't exempt individuals

from hardship and shouldn't be used to minimize the pain of those who suffer. But what privilege does do is protect certain populations from being as negatively affected when taken as a group. **The racial wage disparity** present in many companies (and in society in general) means it's logical that

Black workers are more affected by rising costs of living. **Systemic racism in healthcare and legislative** environments means it's logical that Black workers are more affected by health concerns and political instability.



Younger generations are almost twice as affected by rising living costs and personal concerns



Financial struggles impact 38.7% of Gen Z workers and 38.6% of Millennials, a lot more than their Gen X colleagues (just 23.6%). It looks like younger workers are finding it much harder to get by as inflation hits and are similarly more concerned about the fallout of a recession.

“ My company doesn’t give a damn about our increasing costs of living. We got no raises since the decline began. ”

– Survey respondent

It makes sense that more experienced workers have more wealth to fall back on than junior employees. They’re also more **likely than younger workers to be able to lean on their spouse**, given a disparity in marriage rates across generations. But this is still an alarming picture. It shows that salaries for Gen Z and Millennials are not enough to cushion them against recent financial turbulence, and this is contributing to stress, distraction, and deprioritization of work among younger workers.

Economic shifts are hurting our wallets (and our spirits)

The correlation between financial hardship and personal strife is not surprising, but it is a big concern. Our data suggests that companies are currently not doing enough to stem the tide of economic difficulties. And if organizations don’t address these issues head on, they’ll lose younger workers to job hopping and resignations as they seek better pay elsewhere.

It’s not all bad news for employers, though. And as our next set of data will reveal, some of them have even earned themselves a pat on the back.



Data point: A word from Kona



“We’ve studied 1,000 remote managers. The best have one thing in common. They ask, ‘How are you?’ and actually mean it. These leaders want to know how you’re feeling, how your kid was up all night with a fever, or how excited you are about buying a new house. If COVID-19 taught us anything, it’s that we can’t keep pretending that life stays completely separate from work.”



Yen Tan, Co-founder at Kona

Thank goodness for good bosses

Many employees are struggling. Their bank accounts and their morale are worryingly low. Anxiety levels are high. And in our increasingly chaotic world, personal worries are making it difficult to focus at work.

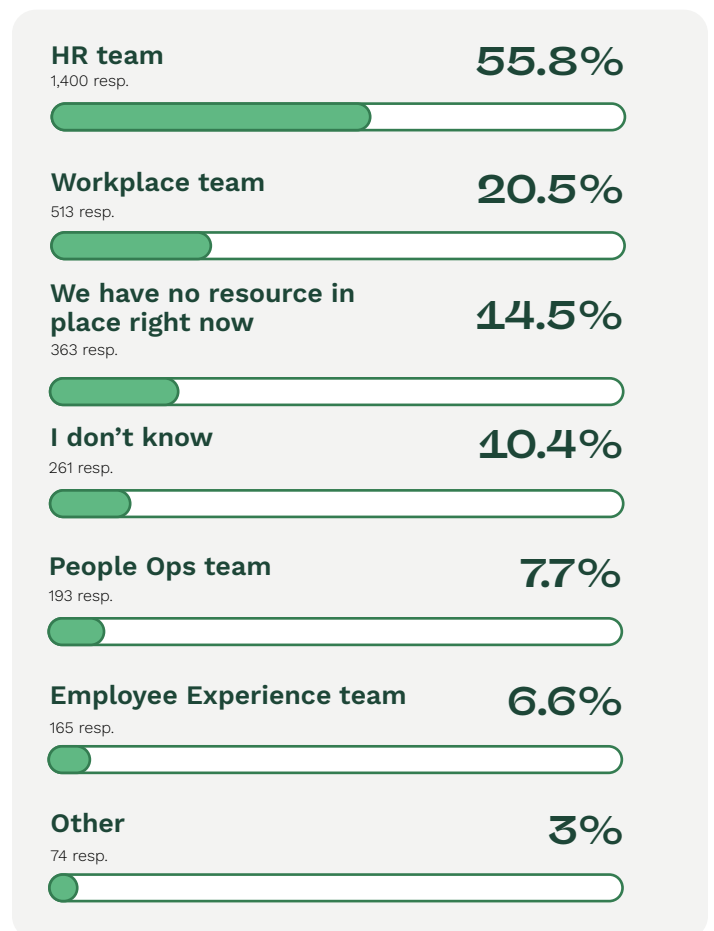
Something's gotta give. Or maybe someone's gotta give. But who? Struggling under the

“ A person can't get enough sleep and exercise and have time to prepare healthy meals and have meaningful relationships with others if the employer forces them to work extremely long hours, answer work phone calls and emails when at home in the evening and on weekends, and doesn't give much vacation time. ”

– Survey respondent

weight of the world (and your overflowing to-do list), who do you turn to for support? We decided to find out who takes care of employees and how good a job they were doing at looking after their workforces. We started by asking our knowledge workers which team, department, or resource, if any, is responsible for taking care of them in their organization.

Which team, department, or resource, if any, is responsible for taking care of you in your organization?



Most organizations have some sort of HR team in place, and it makes sense that some semblance of that function would be employees' first port of call for support. But if we look closer at our question, we didn't specifically ask about support. We asked our respondents *who is responsible for taking care of them*. There's a subtle difference, because the question is not just about a place employees can ask for help when they need it, but about who exactly does the little things to keep employees feeling happy and well in their workplace.

It's worrying, then, to see that 14.5% of employees said they have nothing in place

for that, and a further 10.4% saying they didn't know if they had such a resource. Put another way, that's pretty much a quarter of our respondents signaling that they're not aware of any team or resource in place to look after them.

If we weigh this against how stressed and distracted our employees are at work, it paints a grim picture. But it's not all bad—many employers are working hard to take care of their workers. Let's look at some rosier data to cheer us up. To get there, we asked our respondents to rate their company's ability to take care of them at work. Here comes the good news.

42.4%

of employees say their company is doing a good job of taking care of them at work



If you've been doomscrolling through this troubling report, rest awhile by this calm oasis. Employers are, for the most part, taking good care of their workers. Many of our

respondents rate their organization as a 4 out of 5 for taking care of them, and 12.4% give their company a perfect grade. Hats off to you, kind companies!

“ They make sure we have the support we need in our work. They check in frequently and give us help when needed. There's a great team atmosphere. We are kind to one another. ”

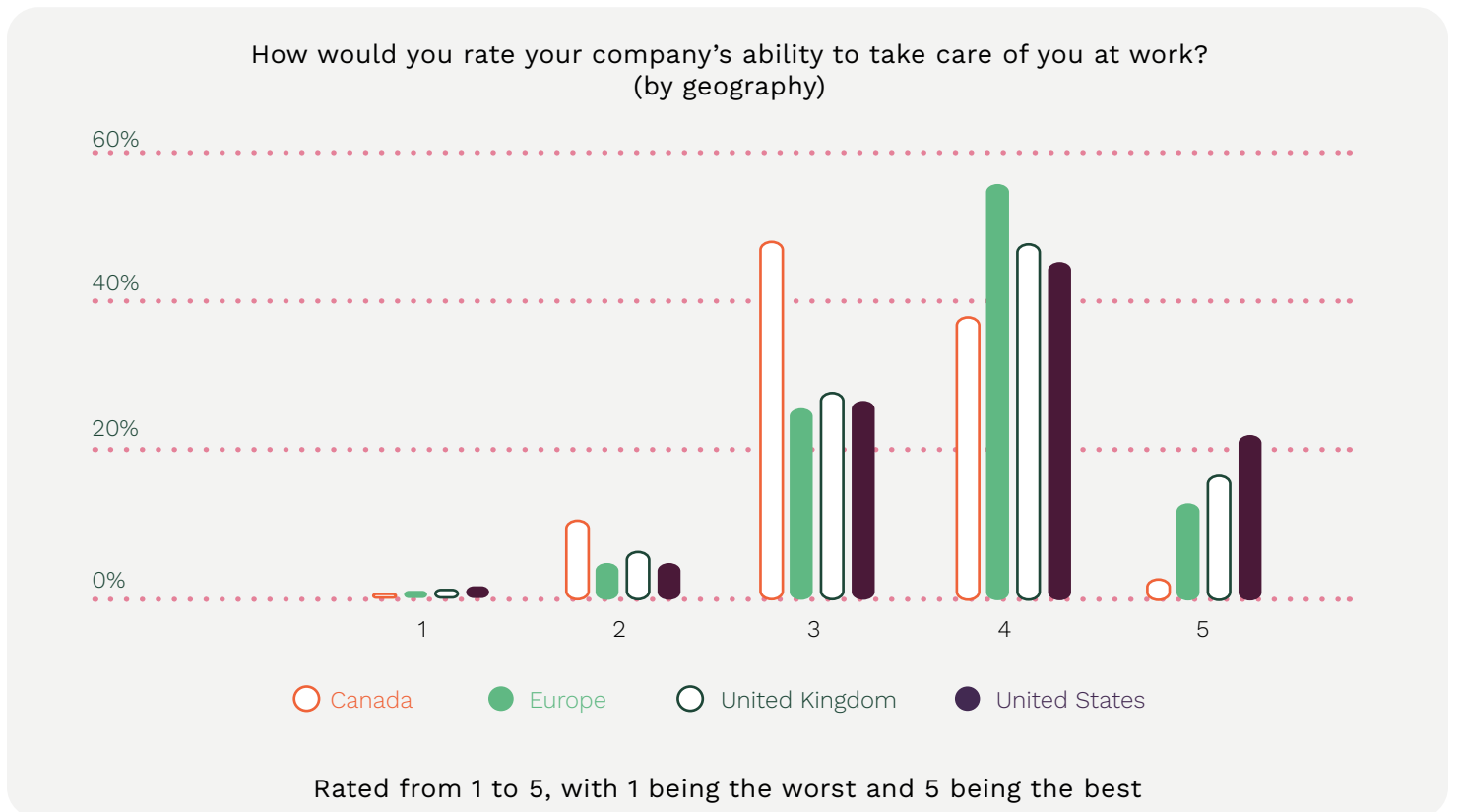
- Survey respondent

But let's not get too carried away. While there's plenty of A and B grades out there, a lot of companies fall unglamorously into the "meh" bucket when it comes to looking after their staff. 31.2% of companies scored a 3 out

of 5, and 14.0% got a 2 or lower, which in our opinion is far too many. Still, there's reason for hope in this scenario overall, and we take it as a massive win that a lot of companies have delivered well-being resources for their team.

47.9%

of Canadians are unimpressed by their workplace's ability to take care of them



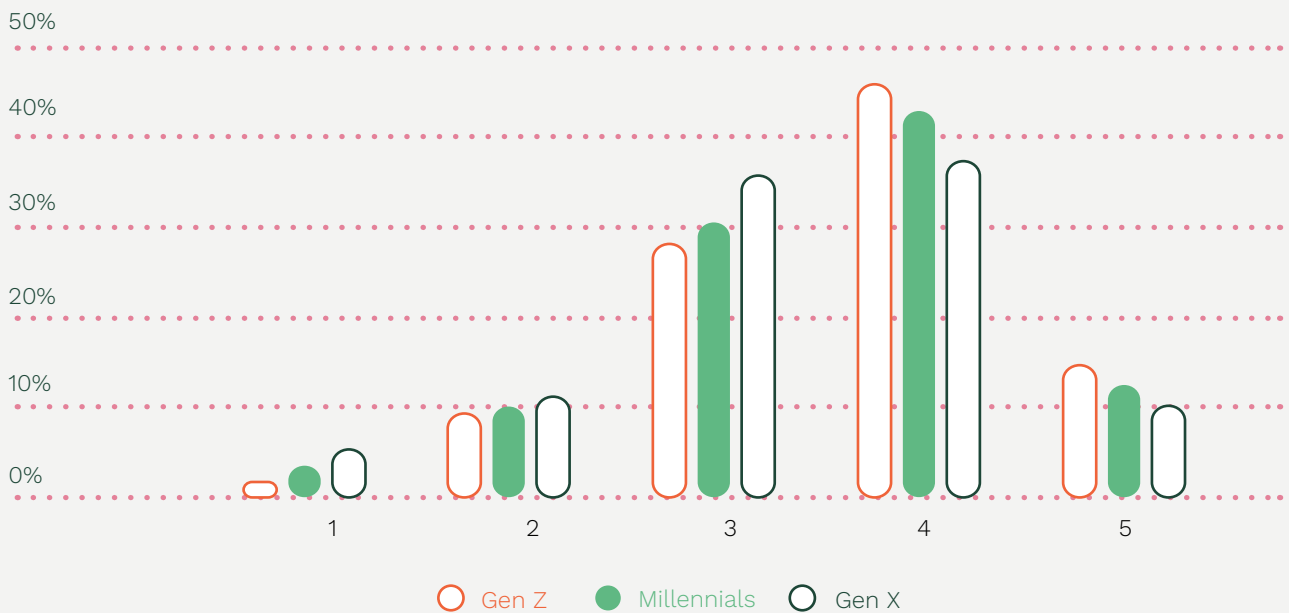
What's up with the poor Canadians? They're clearly having a bad time, and their employers are pretty average at taking care of them. Europeans, on the other hand, were most likely (55.5%) to award their company a 4, while Brits and Americans fell somewhere in between.

Americans were more likely than anyone else to give out top marks, with 22.1% of them rating their company a 5. Thankfully there weren't many terrible workplaces out there, as 1s were low across the board.

35.8%

of Gen X found their workplaces to be mediocre at taking care of them

How would you rate your company's ability to take care of you at work? (by age)



Rated from 1 to 5, with 1 being the worst and 5 being the best

“ I do not consider that my company takes care of me or the other employees personally, since we do not have greater incentives or a more competitive salary. It leads us to look for better jobs or better options elsewhere. ”

- Survey respondent

Interestingly, Gen X were the least enthusiastic about their workplaces in regard to employee well-being compared to Gen Z and Millennials. They were most likely to give their employers a low score, and least likely to score them highly. In contrast, among Gen Z, 60.7% said they were either well or very well taken care of, which is great to see, especially given how this generation signaled they needed more support at work than any other.

Good managers make the difference

Throughout our research, respondents called out their bosses time and again for making a positive difference to their working lives. It was heartwarming to see how impactful managers are when it comes to employee well-being. They truly make the difference between a good job and an intolerable one.

“ My manager regularly checks in with me and genuinely cares about my well-being. She wants to know the good and bad, and does not punish me in any way when I have a bad week or am struggling with something...I feel really cared for as a person – she sees the importance of viewing me as a whole, that I have a life that is valuable both at work and at home. ”

– Survey respondent

Overall, it's a big thumbs-up from us to the employers and managers who look after the workers in this survey. They're doing the heavy lifting, getting into the nitty-gritty with their employees to take care of them in meaningful ways. Bravo.

Managers can only do so much, though. Next up, we'll look at how structural changes and company culture are playing a role in employee well-being, and how organizations are succeeding (or not) at keeping their people happy at work

It's a cultural thing

An attractive job offer can entice you to join a company, but it takes a healthy, fulfilling culture to keep you there. As working conditions become more challenging and external pressures rise, culture becomes even more important. With this in mind, we decided to investigate which aspects of the workplace environment keep knowledge workers happy, well, and satisfied with their place of work.

To do that, we asked respondents to tell us how much the following aspects of work culture affect their well-being and happiness at work.

Safe, inclusive culture

Ability to work from anywhere

Flexible working hours

Manager check-ins

Recognition and praise

Workplace friendships

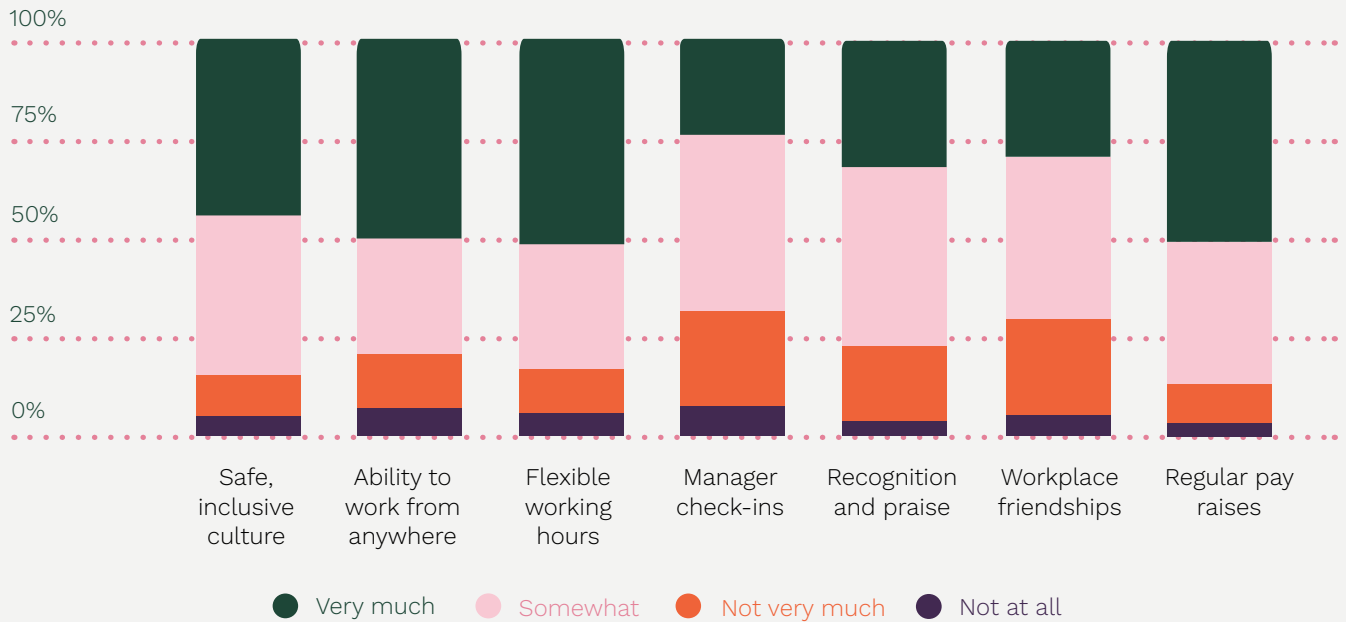
Regular pay raises



Here's what we learned

Psychological safety, flexible work, and good pay are top ingredients of workplace culture

To what extent do these aspects of workplace culture affect your well-being at work?

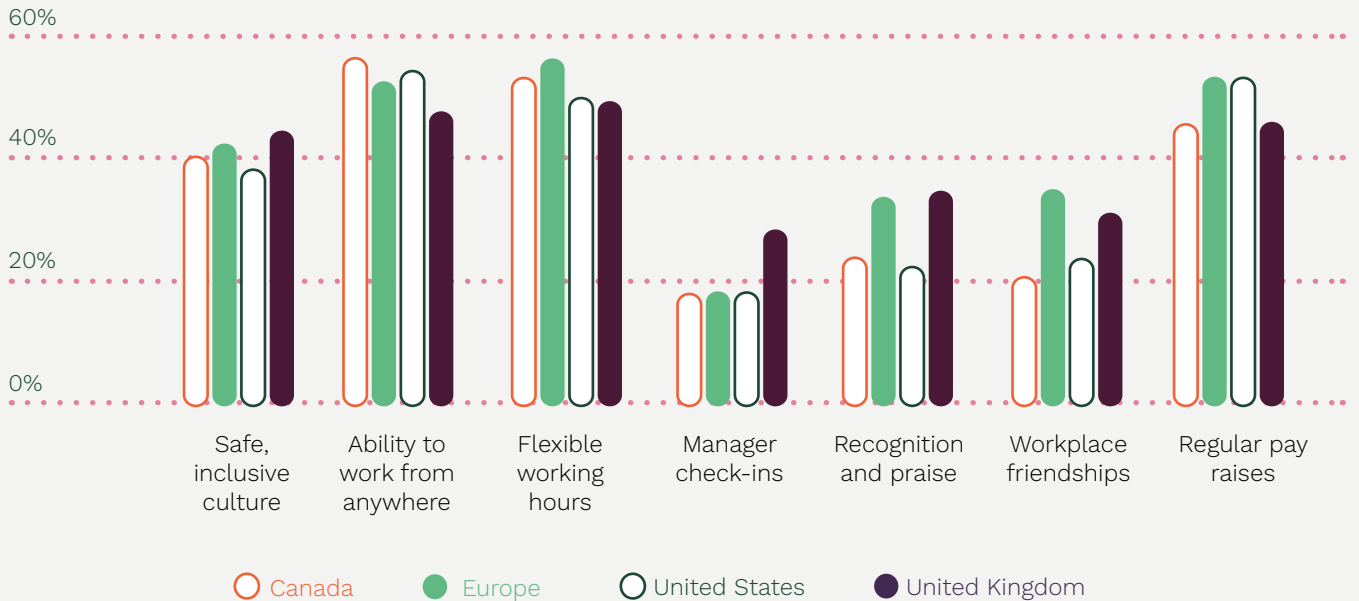


Our respondents by far chose regular pay increases, time and location flexibility, and a safe working environment as the most important aspects of a positive workplace culture. It's common sense, right? We want to feel safe at work, to be paid fairly, and to be trusted to get our work done at whatever time and place suits us best.

Interestingly, flexibility at work is equally important to our respondents as pay raises, even as inflation hits household budgets (51.6% see it as very important, compared to 50.7%). Check-ins with managers, workplace friendships, and recognition at work fell behind, but are still important to happiness at work.

Brits are consistent champions of workplace culture

To what extent do these aspects of workplace culture affect your well-being at work?
(by geography)



Knowledge workers from around the world seem to dig these aspects of workplace culture. But none more so than the British. For example, 29.1% of Brits say checking in

with their manager is very important, roughly 10 percentage points more than Americans, Europeans, and Canadians.

“ I have a flexible schedule, can mix up hours as long as my weekly work gets done, can swap days, etc... Basically I am allotted a lot of flexibility and independence. I also work remotely several days a week. ”

– Survey respondent

Europeans are the friendliest workers among our respondents—35.6% of them said workplace friendships are very important, more than workers in any other geography.

Overall, though, everyone agrees that the basics—good pay, flexibility, and workplace safety—are where it's at.

Data point: A word from Welcome



“We know that workplace friendships are incredibly important, especially for our fully remote team. We value the power of asynchronous communication, but there is magic in also gathering people together physically and breaking bread. We recently had an all-company retreat in Colorado where our whole team spent three days together in the mountains. This helped build trust, deeper awareness, and business insights that ultimately empowered team members to work better together. Workplace friendships are a strong currency for productivity and retention.”



Roberto Ortiz, CEO and Co-founder at Welcome

52.9%

of **women** value a safe, inclusive workplace

34.3%

of **men** value a safe, inclusive workplace

To what extent do these aspects of workplace culture affect your well-being at work? (by gender)



Up until now, we haven't shown results broken down by gender, mainly because men and women have tended to agree. But when it comes to company culture, the picture looks totally different. Women place much more value by far on psychological safety, check-ins with their managers, recognition at work, and workplace friendships than men do.

In the same way that our earlier breakdowns about priorities by race reveal privilege, so too does this gender breakdown. Industries like tech—where many knowledge workers reside—**are still dominated by men**, and

women globally **are paid 20% less than men**. While demographic and financial inequities are often easier to spot, office culture has long been dictated by patriarchal norms, holdovers from a primarily male workforce until relatively recently in history. These **default-masculine norms** systemically favor stereotypically “male” attributes such as assertiveness, authoritarianism, and even aggression. Given all of that, it makes sense that women place more emphasis on safety, recognition, and relationships at work—all of these are measures of belonging.

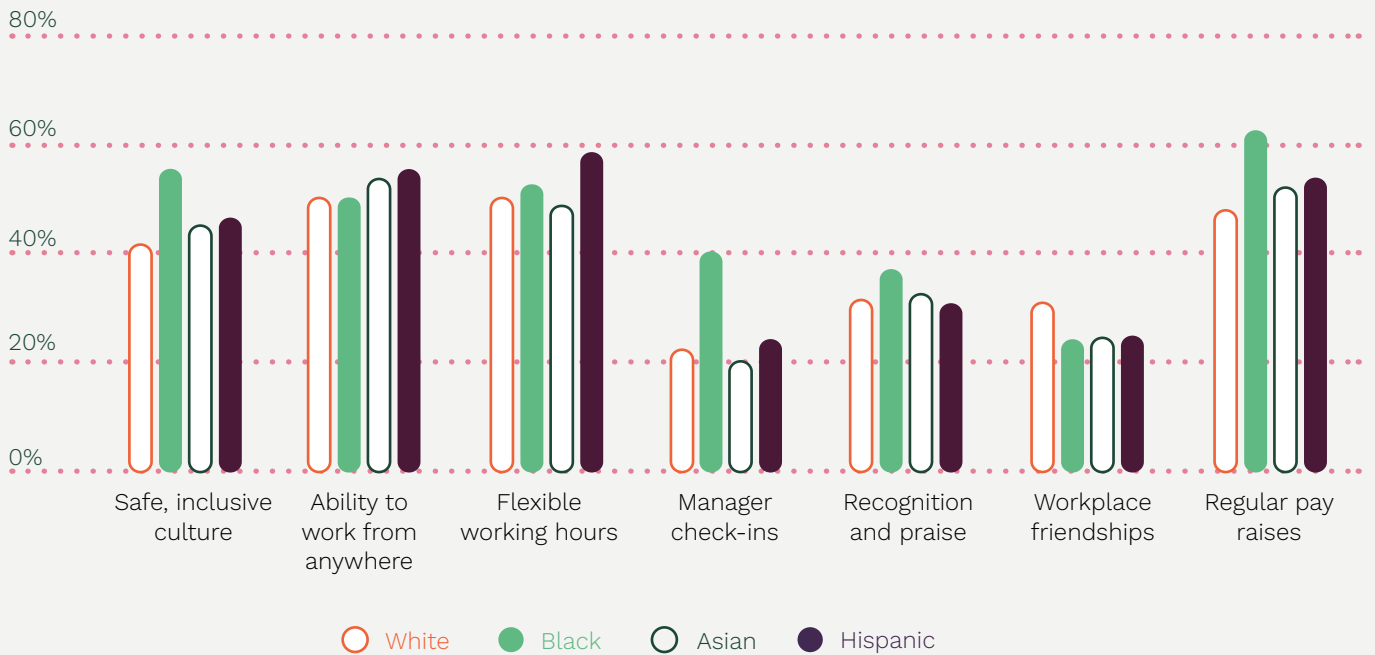
55.5% →

of **Black workers** see a safe, inclusive culture as very important

41.6%

of **white workers** see a safe, inclusive culture as very important

To what extent do these aspects of workplace culture affect your well-being at work? (by race)



Our data broken down by race was also very revealing. Black employees valued a safe working environment almost 14 percentage points more than their white colleagues, and were 20 percentage points more in favor of

check-ins with their manager. These employees also placed far more emphasis on regular raises (63.0% compared to 48.3% of white workers), which tracks given that our data also found Black workers were the most concerned with rising costs of living.

“ It’s a shame that most working people have to decide between well-being and being competitive in the workplace. ”

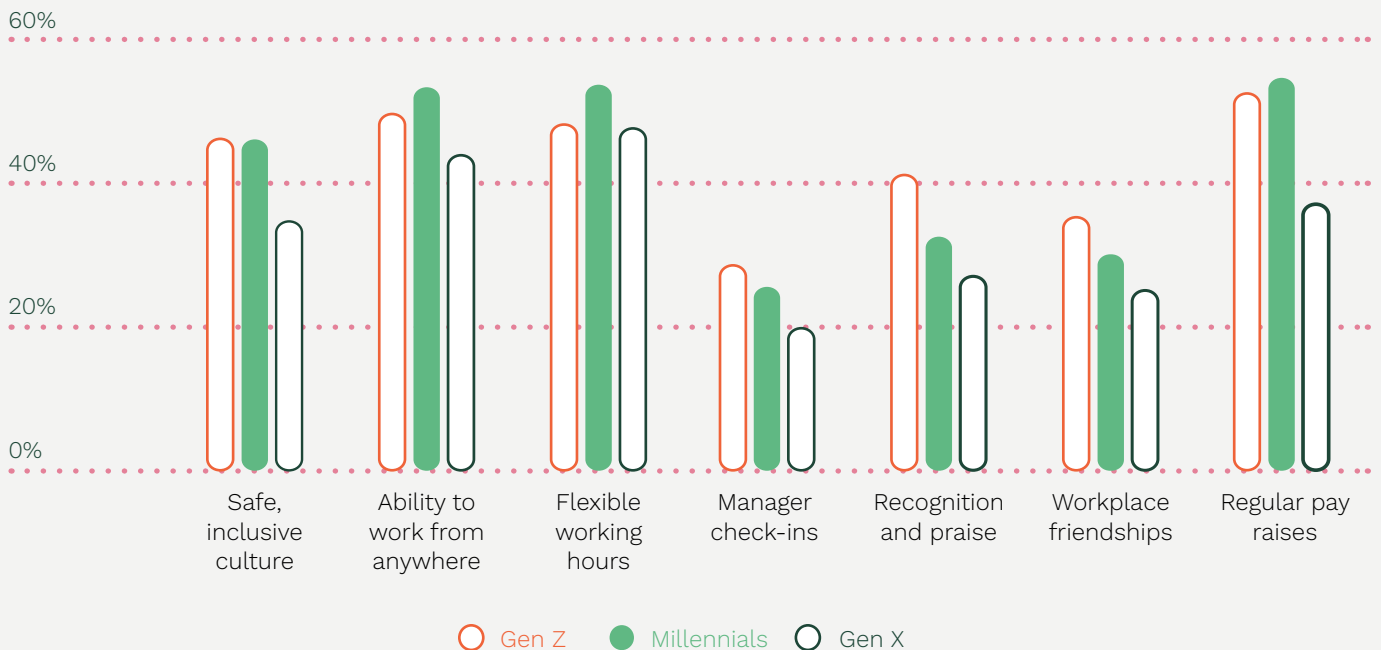
– Survey respondent

What we’re seeing is a greater need to support, include, and create equitable work environments so all employees can thrive. At the very least, managers should

be aware that Black employees on their team may appreciate more face time and encouragement, and be ready to provide this support as needed.

Younger workers are more clued in to work culture

To what extent do the following aspects of workplace culture affect your well-being at work? (by age)



The picture looks totally different when it comes to Gen X. As far as we can tell, Gen X has not prioritized these aspects of workplace culture to the same degree as their younger colleagues.

“ As long as I’m paid appropriately and have a good work/life balance, I’m happy. ”

– Survey respondent

What’s going on here? Well, it might just be that Gen Xers are less enthusiastic about workplace culture than younger workers. They’re less eager for raises (just 37.2% said these were important), for praise, and they’re so-so on workplace friendships. What they do want is flexibility, which is understandable for an age group more likely to have children. Overall, this data suggests that Gen Z and Millennials care much more about these aspects of workplace culture than their older peers.

Culture is a mixed bag

If one thing is clear from our data about workplace culture, it’s that no one thing stands out as the “cure-all” for knowledge workers. You can’t throw everyone into a bucket and say “Here’s your culture, enjoy!”

Ultimately, workplace culture is much more nuanced and complex than that, with different requirements coming from different workers. If you want to build a culture where your

employees thrive, you’re best off building it together with your team, listening to their ideas, and performing that delicate balancing act between everyone’s wishes.

One employee summed it up nicely:

“Companies need to listen to employees more in order to make changes according to employee needs.”

But remember: culture can’t do it all, and it certainly isn’t possible to keep everyone happy all of the time. While culture can serve to meet the needs of many employees, it’s not the whole story when it comes to supporting employees to be their best selves. Next we’ll dive into the most impactful benefits when it comes to employee happiness, and which perks make the biggest difference to today’s workers.

Benefit(s) of the doubt

Work-related benefits won't make up for a terrible job or workplace. But as we'll find out, they can help to improve the working lives of employees and reward them for their hard work. To gauge the impact of benefits on our workers, we asked our respondents to tell us how important these workplace benefits are for their well-being at work.

Access to mental health support

Competitive private healthcare options

Time off/vacation

A monthly well-being budget

Reimbursed exercise classes/gym membership

Well-being-related benefits (such as a subscription to a meditation app)

Here's what they told us

75.2%

of employees say taking time off is essential to their well-being

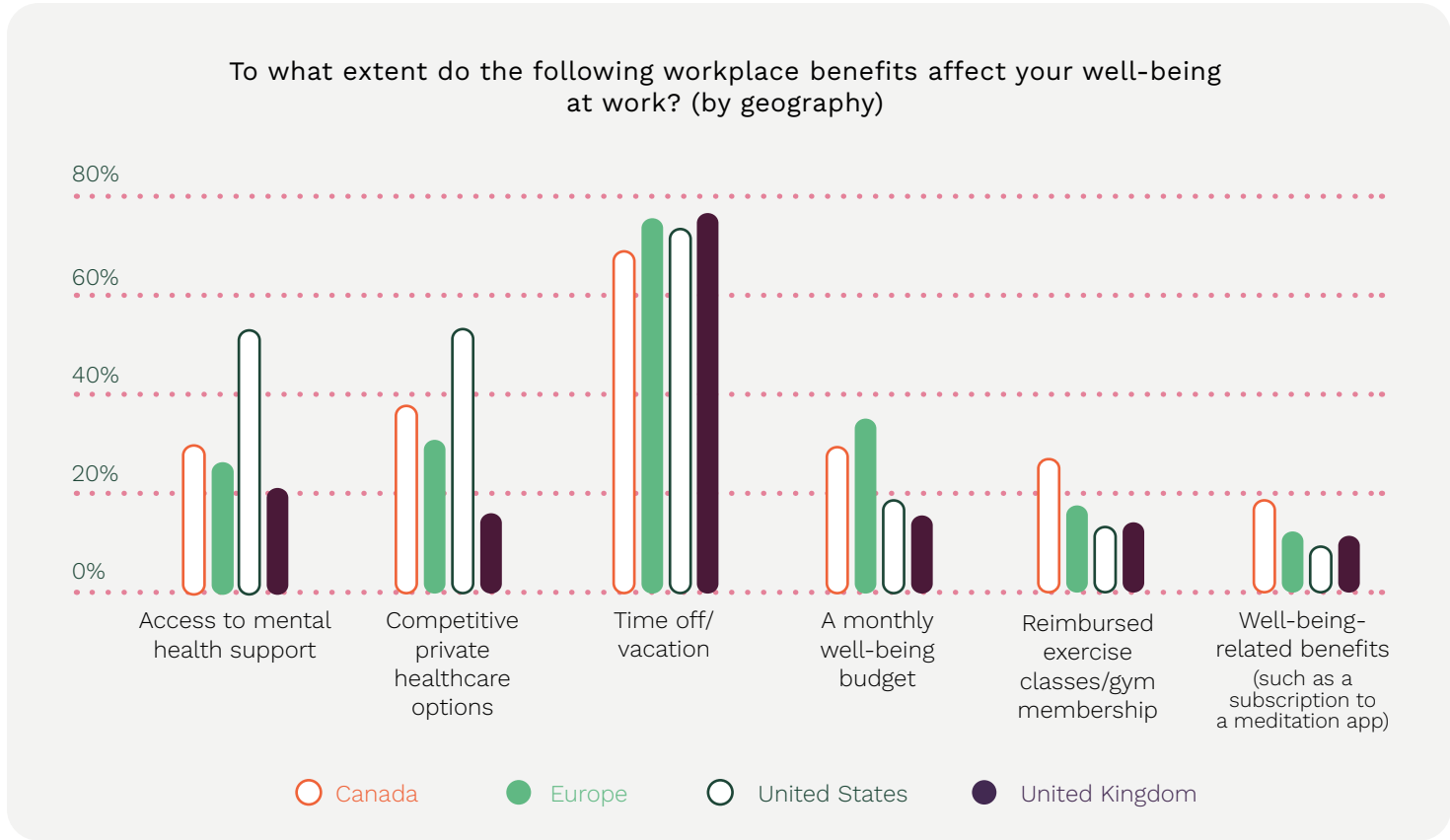
To what extent do the following workplace benefits affect your well-being at work?



Ok, so this one wasn't even close. According to our knowledge workers, vacay is king. A whopping 75.2% said it was very important, compared to our next most popular benefit, competitive healthcare (at just 31.6%). When it comes to well-being, nothing beats getting away from our desks and putting our feet up.

It's no surprise that vacation time is so high up on the priority list for employee well-being. But it's eye-opening to see it knock the other options out of the park. We can take this as a lesson for companies who can't necessarily invest in lucrative job perks: offering ample vacation time could be an affordable way to deliver a solid employee experience without breaking the bank.

Americans see access to mental health support as equally important as private healthcare



Workers from the United States are the most enthusiastic about private healthcare compared to other regions (*quelle surprise*, given the lack of socialized medicine in the U.S.) The real story here is that Americans place equal value (53.0%) on access to mental health support as they do on physical

healthcare. That's revealing, because in most U.S. workplaces, employees are much more likely to get access to general healthcare benefits than mental health support, even though many private healthcare options don't include robust mental health care. Is there a major gap here that isn't getting filled?

“ We get private healthcare and many company perks and benefits. Our mental health is also looked after. ”

- Survey respondent

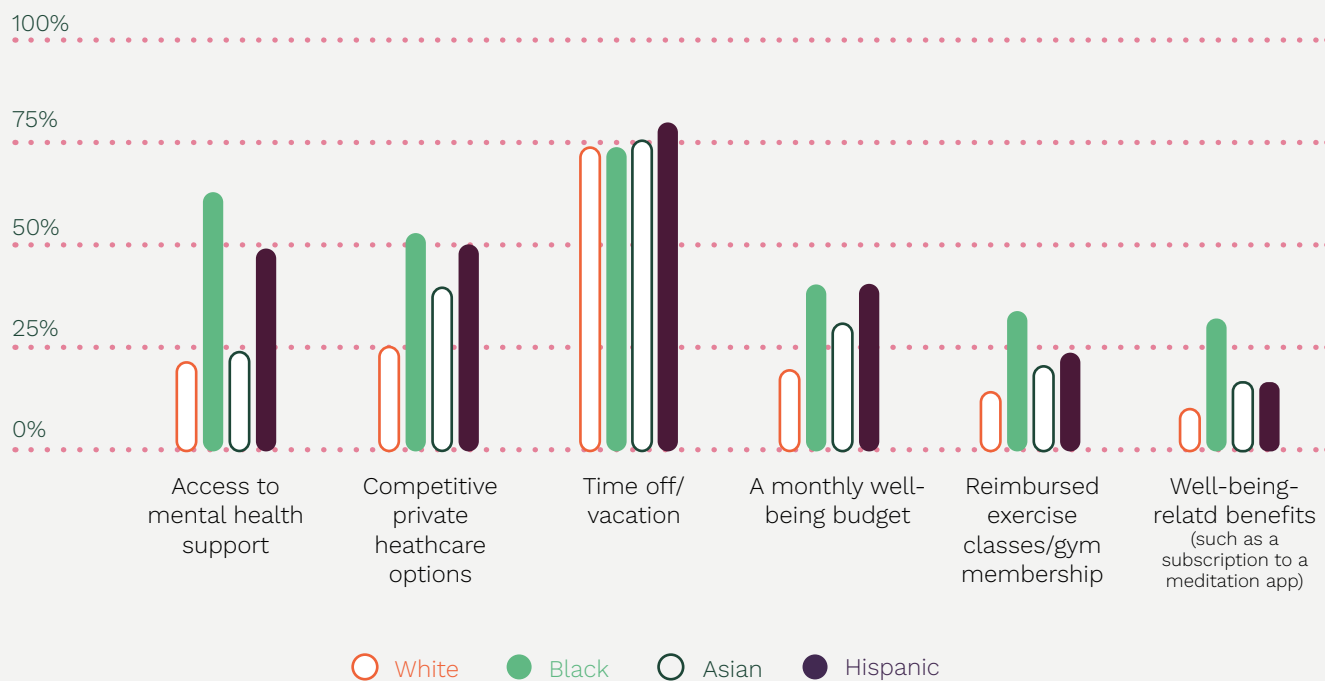
Some of our respondents told us they have access to great mental health support *and* private medical options. But many don't, and given that mental health is far and away

the top priority for the knowledge workers we surveyed, this represents a huge missed opportunity for companies today.

63.5%

of Black workers say access to mental health support is very important to their well-being

To what extent do the following workplace benefits affect your well-being at work? (by race)



Across our racial groups, vacation time remains at the top in terms of benefits. But what struck us is how much more Black workers value access to mental health support than their colleagues (63.5% compared to just 22.1% of white workers). Black workers were also much more in favor of a monthly well-being stipend

and related benefits like a subscription to a meditation app.

This data once again paints a worrying picture. We've already seen Black employees being disproportionately impacted by the rising costs

of living and saying they prioritize a safe working environment more than their peers. We're now also seeing a majority of Black workers indicating a greater interest in mental health support in the workplace.

Unfortunately, this is not surprising. We know that Black professionals **continue to be underpaid** (even more so for **Black**

Benefits are nice, but not the whole story

It's good to get a sense check for what benefits can make a positive impact for employees. But what we learned is that, aside from vacation (and in some instances, healthcare), benefits are not going to be the difference between a disillusioned workforce and a happy one.

“ My org wants me to begin coming into the office, and this is causing me a lot of stress and anxiety. I was much better when I could work from home full-time. ”

– Survey respondent

The real difference, as we've discovered, comes from supportive managers, flexible working, and leadership that trusts their

women) and have to deal with workplace **microaggressions and biases** that negatively impact their mental health and well-being. In fact, a McKinsey study on race in the workplace found a significant **“trust deficit” among Black workers**: they don't feel equally valued, fairly evaluated or promoted, or able to fully be themselves at work. Providing mental health benefits would be a start, but more fundamentally, our workplaces need to be more inclusive and equitable.

employees to get the job done. According to our data, companies don't always have to bother with nice-to-have benefits like access to a meditation app or a gym membership.

At least not until they get the basics right, like flexible work, good pay, and solid vacation time. In fact, administering the aforementioned niche benefits in place of real support can have the opposite effect, where employees become more disillusioned with a “show of care” that feels superficial and misguided—even ignorant. As one respondent told us, these small extras can be used deviously as “well-being washing”: performatively addressing employee well-being while not actually covering any basics that would make a bigger difference.

But we're not here just to advocate for the basics. We wanted to see what organizations could do to truly move the needle for their people, beyond foundational systems or nice benefits. In other words, what game-changing shifts could a company make to really walk the walk and make working there not just tolerable, but a joy.

Back to the future of work

It feels like we're constantly returning to this idea of the "future of work" and what it could be. If we had to sum it up, it's this: in the future, work will no longer suck.

What does that mean? It means our work will be a whole lot more human. It means access to fulfilling work opportunities, where work is a source of joy. And it means a global shift in our thinking towards work, from something we forcefully rearrange our lives around to something we can plan for and accommodate in our everyday reality.

If we get this right, the Sunday Scaries will be well behind us. We'll get as much rest and support as we need. And when Monday rolls around, we'll relish the chance to make meaningful connections with our colleagues rather than dreading wave after wave of Zoom calls.

We're not there yet, but certain changes we're seeing from some companies are filling us with hope. Truly human-centric workplaces are popping up all the time, with futuristic approaches to working life that pave the way for the rest of us.

We wanted to know which of the boldest changes to the workplace would be most valued by our knowledge workers. So we asked which of the following factors, if implemented in their company tomorrow, would have the greatest impact on their well-being and happiness at work.

Company off-sites

Four-day workweeks

Reimbursed therapy

The ability to work from anywhere

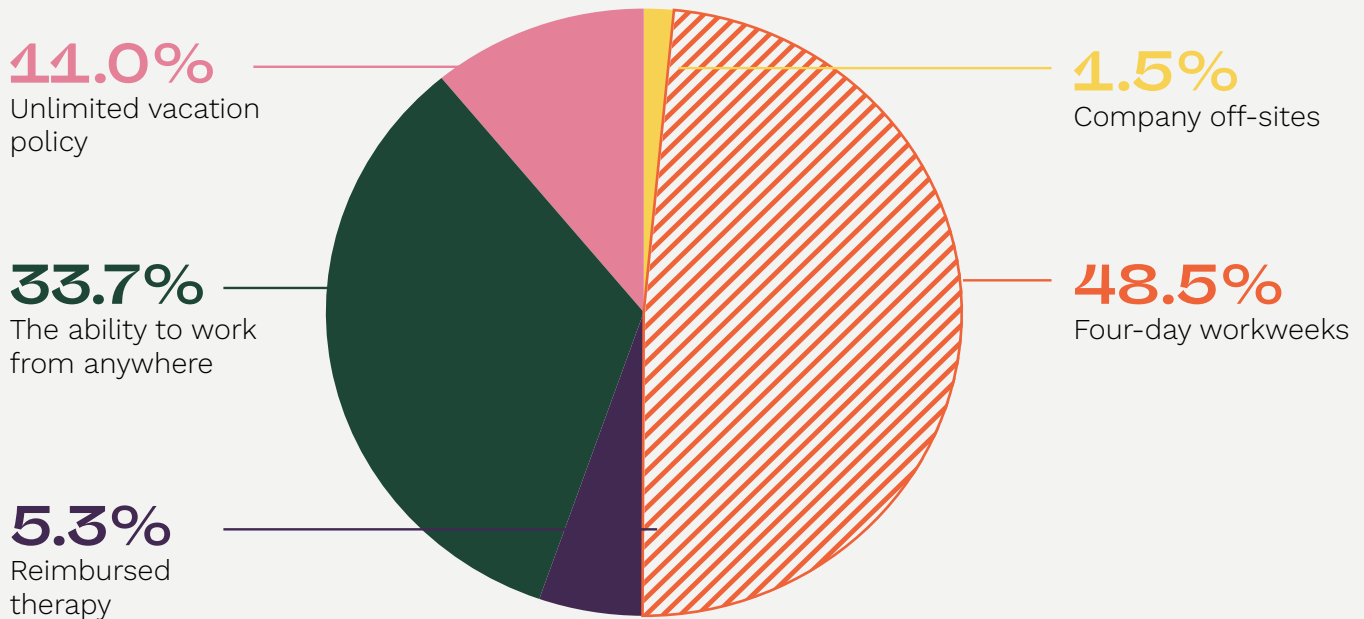
Unlimited vacation policy

Here's what we learned

48.5%

of knowledge workers say a four-day workweek would make the biggest difference to their happiness at work

Which of the following factors, if implemented in your company tomorrow, would have the greatest impact on your well-being and happiness at work?



The people have spoken. We want a four-day workweek. Nearly half our respondents told us that this change would make the biggest impact to their working lives, eclipsing every other option. Unlimited vacation and reimbursed therapy get a handful of votes, but no one seems too excited for company off-sites or retreats. Our second most popular option, the ability to work from anywhere,

is also hugely important (with 33.7% of the vote). But when it comes down to it, our biggest game changer is the four-day week.

It seems workers are crying out for more flexibility, not just on how long we work, but where we work. As we see from sites like [WeWorkRemotely](#), the appetite for remote work has continued to grow from employees and companies alike.

“The remote ecosystem has rapidly evolved over the last two years, and ushered in a new status quo for workers. Remote work is not only the primary form of work for many companies, it’s a major competitive advantage. Companies have experienced major strides in productivity and efficiency, while empowering employees to better integrate their work with their lives. Ultimately, companies will need to create more flexible, human places for work if they want to attract the best talent.”



Kevin Kirkpatrick, CEO at WeWorkRemotely

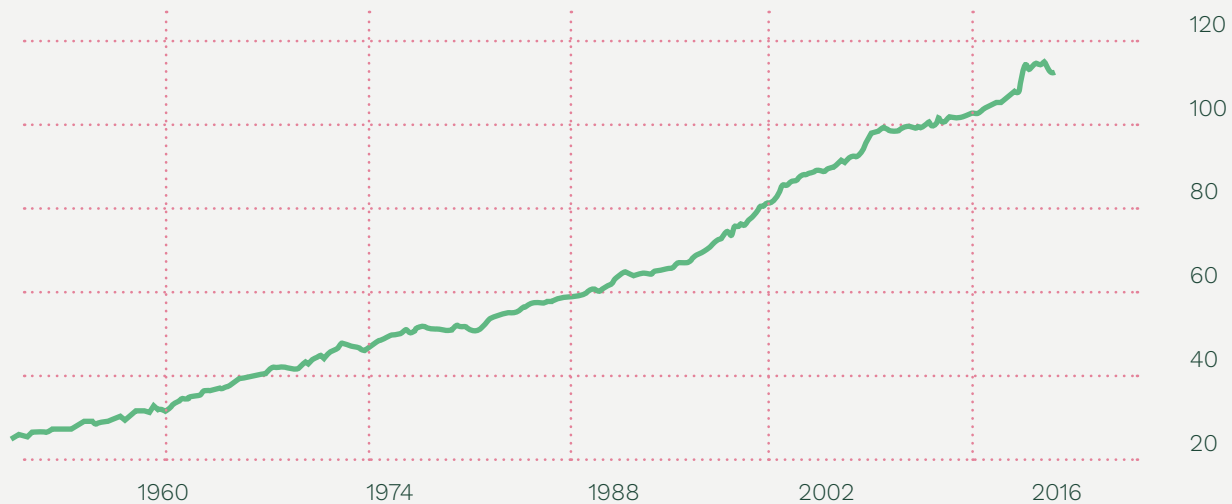
“ Being able to work from home has made a huge difference. I think a move to a four-day workweek would be the next thing that would have a major impact on people’s well-being. ”

– Survey respondent

We want flexibility. And haven’t we earned it by now? In the modern era of knowledge work, with more tools, technology, and

streamlined workflows than before, we can get more done in less time.

Productivity over time



Tradingeconomics.com | U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

Not to nerd out on productivity or anything, because humans were put on this planet to do more than be work-robots, but our output has steadily increased over the past 80 years

at least. It stands to reason that the same working model we've used from the 1920s might be up for review.

Data point: A word from 4dayweek.io

4/day week

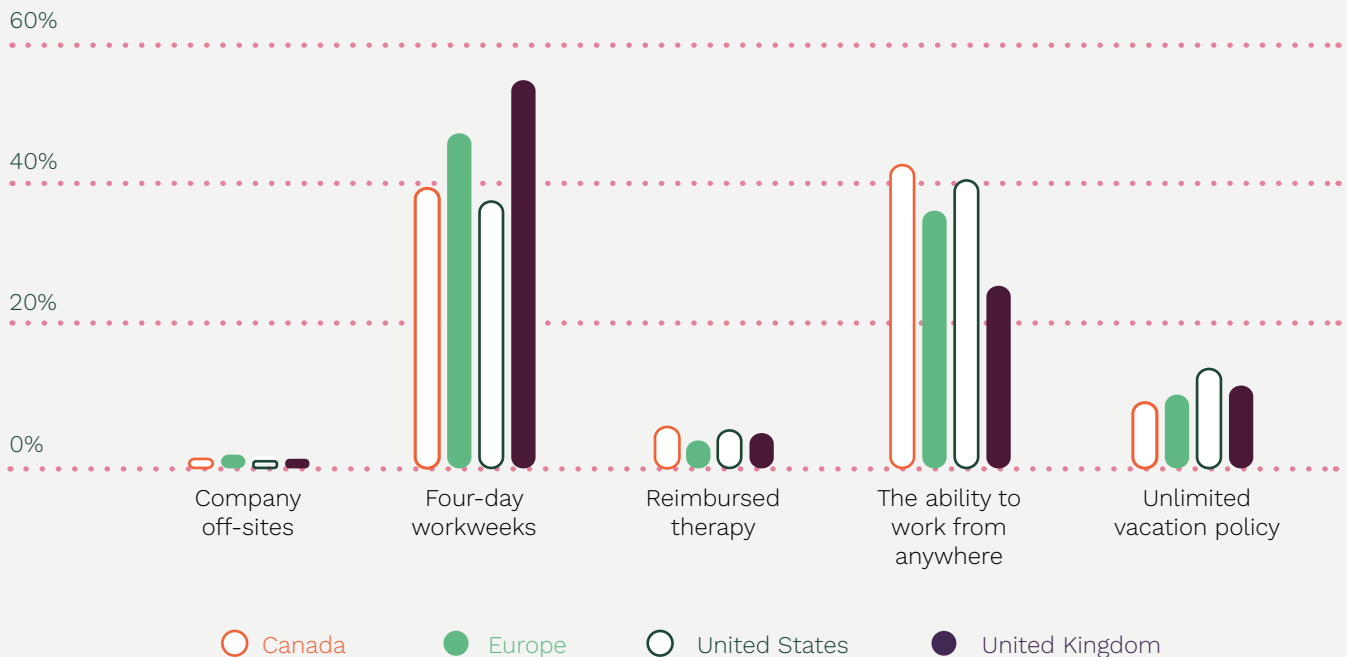
“The four-day work week movement has been bubbling for decades, but it’s really seen an explosion in popularity since the pandemic. With companies switching to remote work for the first time, many of these companies have reconsidered their working arrangements more broadly—and of these changes, the four-day work week (32-hour weeks at 100% salary) is an increasingly popular choice. This has been further boosted by positive results seen in recent four-day work week pilots where productivity increased by 40% or more. Combined with an increasing public demand for a shorter work week, it’s becoming difficult to ignore.”



Phil McParlane, CEO and Founder at 4dayweek.io

British workers are the least excited about remote work

Which of the following factors, if implemented in your company tomorrow, would have the greatest impact on your well-being and happiness at work? (by geography)



Looking at our data across geographies, we learned that only 26% of British workers are enthusiastic about working from anywhere, compared to the average of around 38%.

What's going on, Brits? Have you missed office banter so much that you're raring to jump back onto the tube and start chatting by the communal kettle?

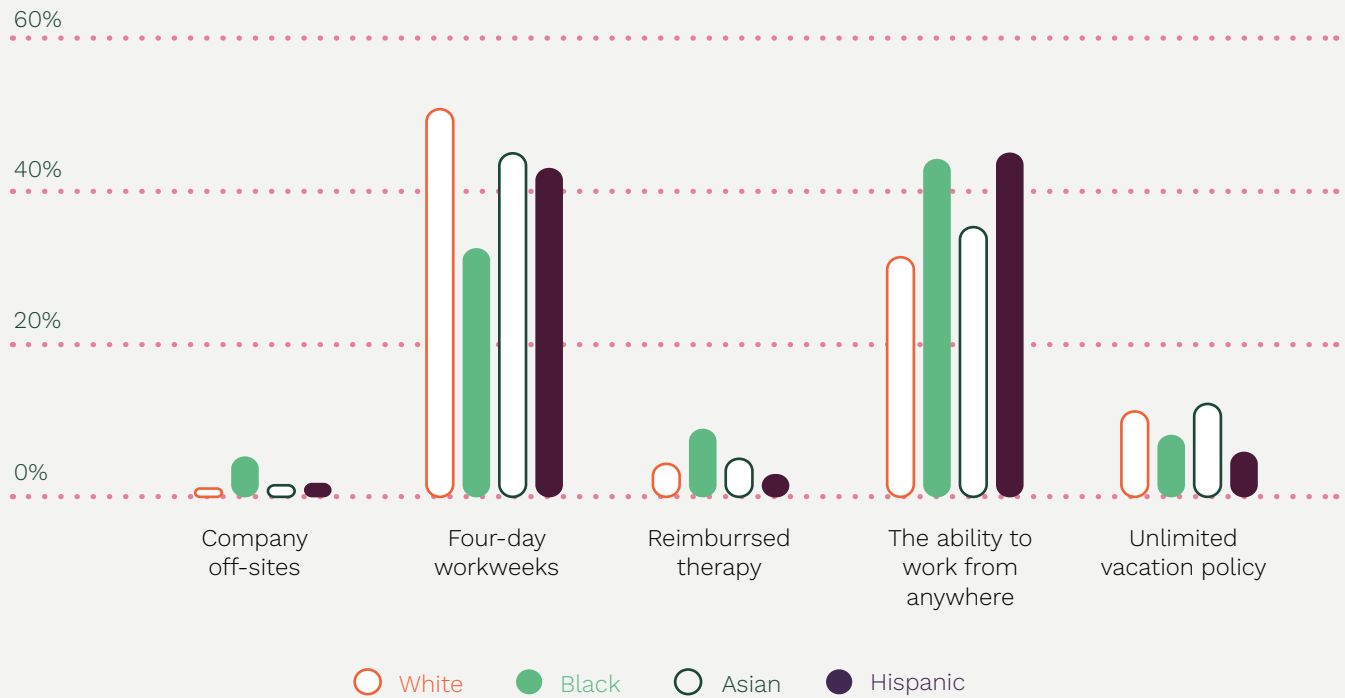
“ I used to work remote, then the company changed to 3 days in-office (hybrid). I'm being priced out of being able to live near to work, and can't afford to commute in, if I move further away. I'm having to look for another job now that allows for fully remote working, so I can rent somewhere cheaper outside the city. This stress has ruined a job which I love. ”

- Survey respondent

By contrast, 43.2% of Canadians were itching for remote work, which is potentially related to their increased housing costs and a mass exodus to the suburbs. Brits were the most in favor of the four-day week, and some workers in the U.K. have been **lucky enough to experience this change already** in a trial rolled out recently. So far it has been a huge success, with 86% of those surveyed saying they would keep the four-day week policy going after the trial ends. Here's hoping that other countries will get their chance to trial it soon, too.

Black and Hispanic workers are the most in favor of remote work

Which of the following factors, if implemented in your company tomorrow, would have the greatest impact on your well-being and happiness at work? (by race)



Intriguingly, white workers show up as far less in favor of remote work than Black and Hispanic employees. Only 31.4% say it's impactful for their well-being and happiness at work. Why is that? There are a few possibilities here.

- White workers *do* want to work remotely, but the four-day workweek trumps this perk;
- White workers are already working remotely, so it's no longer a "special" benefit for them;

- White workers are less enthused about remote work, in favor of other working models, like hybrid.

Whatever's happening here, it's interesting that for white and Asian workers, remote work really isn't extraordinary anymore. Whether because it's become the new normal, or some were missing the office environment, remote work has lost some of its glamor.

“ A four-day workweek should NOT be a 40-hour workweek. It should be 4 x 8-hr days. More can be done in less time. ”

– Survey respondent

All four working less

Forgive us for stating the obvious here. But from what we've seen in our data, the biggest antidote to employee disillusionment is not to work differently, but to work less. Especially since working for less time does not necessarily mean less productivity overall.

Workers are crying out for a break. Ample vacation time, flexibility to work a non-linear workday, and ideally a shorter working week would all be music to employees' ears. We're more productive than ever, so can we just take our foot off the gas a little?

“ Work is not everything; you can literally kill yourself at work while ruining your family. I prefer a balanced schedule with plenty of free time to do things I need. ”

– Survey respondent

We also learned that remote working occupies a peculiar space when it comes to its impact on employee happiness. Perhaps it's wrong to even consider remote work as a “perk” when it's more of a personal choice. You either prefer to work remotely or you don't, or you fall somewhere in between. So it's not a good idea to dangle remote work as

a carrot or a reward. It's just a working model, one that can be a good fit for a company and its staff, or not. And that's ok.

Work doesn't have to suck

If you only take one thing away from this report, it should be this: work doesn't have to

suck. Unfortunately, right now, there are far too many unhappy workplaces.

“Them days are over when you can treat people like scum and expect loyalty in return.”

– Ada Harris (from *Mrs. Harris Goes to Paris*)

Throughout our data, we've learned that many workers are unquestionably disillusioned. They're struggling to focus on work in this shucked up world, they've had enough of the

lack of support they get in the workplace, of half-baked benefits, “well-being washing,” and leadership either not caring or pretending to care about their well-being.

“Working seems less and less worthwhile with the cost of living skyrocketing. I barely make enough money to cover my bills and expenses, and the chance of saving any significant money at the end of the month is basically zero. Inflation is drastically outpacing my wages. What am I working for? What's the point?”

– Survey respondent

After all, what is the point of work? What are we working for? In an increasingly global society that has adopted Western values of capitalism, growth, and achievement, have we lost sight of what role work is actually supposed to play in our lives? In other words, how many of us don't recall that work—the

money we make from work—is intended to enable us to lead full, meaningful lives?

Enough is enough. There is simply too much at stake and not enough talent to go around for this to continue. Companies must foster more human-centric workplaces, or be outshined by those who do.

We will soon reach a point of no return where our **global population** growth will peak, economic growth will grind to a halt,⁷ and organizations will have to battle to attract whatever talent remains in the market (if they aren't already). Sucky workplaces are a dying breed. But let's not end on a downer. There's

still plenty of hope for a future where work can be joyful, meaningful, and fun. Where workers don't just give a shuck about their jobs, but enjoy them. Through incremental changes, brave choices, and above all, listening to employees, companies that care can make it happen.

The "I don't actually hate my job" Starterpack

Employees choose where to work



Cost of living Net salary

Having lots of time for non-work activities



Income allows you to buy one of these...



None of this nonsense



Fair wages, safe working environment, paid sick leave, paid parental leave, job security, and comprehensive benefits

...and pay for stuff like this



4-day or less working week



Image used with permission from super_corndog on Reddit

⁷ In his paper "The End of Economic Growth? Unintended Consequences of a Declining Population," Professor Charles Jones predicts a downward spiral of economic growth as the world population peaks and eventually declines.

A word of thanks

This report wouldn't have been possible without the input of 2,500 knowledge workers who opened up about their experiences. They are the ones who continue to persevere at work, despite challenges in the workplace or the gravity of global pressures. Our deep thanks goes to them, the voices of this report, for sharing with us.