



The Employee Expectations

Report 2022



UNPACKING EMPLOYEE EXPECTATIONS IN THE WAKE OF THE GLOBAL COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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Introduction

When we first began developing our Employee Expectations survey and report, we sought to understand how the pandemic has impacted knowledge workers. During one of the most transformational periods in recent history, we wanted to get a sense of how employee expectations and attitudes around work had evolved in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

For many, remote work has evolved from a perk or COVID-19 policy, to an everyday reality, and norm. The ability to work in a remote or distributed setting did more than decentralize workers from singular locations. In many cases, it empowered employees to consider an entirely new way of working.

In response to evolving employee attitudes around work, many organizations have sought new ways to refine and improve their employee experience, particularly among knowledge workers. Aside from the growing competition to attract top talent, there are two key reasons companies are focused on building a better EX (Employee experience):

1. **Happy employees are more productive →, more creative →, and more successful →.**
2. **Workers are leaving organizations and jobs where they consider their conditions, benefits, or compensation to be “poor.” This is happening at an astonishing rate and has become known as “the Great Resignation.” →**

The phenomenon of “the Great Resignation” describes a record number of employees who quit their jobs between April and December 2021. In December 2021, 4.3 million Americans quit their jobs, with one Microsoft survey of more than 30,000 global workers finding that 41% of employees had either resigned, or were thinking about resigning. Other types of separations, such as dismissals, layoffs, or retirements, still aren’t factored into this movement. What we’re witnessing can broadly be considered as a workplace revolution.



Less “Great Resignation,” more “Great Revelation”

Increased flexibility and greater autonomy during the pandemic afforded workers more time to spend pursuing interests outside of work and even spend more time with their children and partners. Some people (understandably, given the added stresses of living through a pandemic) simply seized the opportunity to take more naps.

Remote vs. Distributed working

Remote companies are either fully or partially remote. Sometimes, they also require people to work from one of a set number of locations. However, central to most remote companies is that most team members have the main office they work at full-time or part-time.

Within a distributed company, employees work from wherever they are productive and comfortable. Employees are distributed across locations and often work asynchronously.

Learn more [here](#).

What our research points towards is that knowledge workers are realizing that work can and should be different. Remote and distributed working has unshackled employees from the office and eliminated the drudgery of the daily commute. It has also led to major shifts

in life priorities. For many, remote work has been a revelation, and as one survey respondent told us: “My eyes are opened.”

Open to what, exactly? Well, according to our research, knowledge workers who have been a part of “the Great Realization” say distributed working, work-life balance, and company culture are more important than before the pandemic. They say that supportive managers are a must, that salaries must continually improve, and that, given a choice, they simply won’t return to the previous status quo.

“Work-life has always been important to me but is sometimes difficult to manage. I think it is more important than ever, given the collective trauma we’ve all been through the last two years. As soon as it is safe to do so, I want to focus on spending a lot more time with family and friends, even if that involves traveling and spending more money than I might’ve wanted to previously. The people in our lives are so much more important than job titles, the size of your house, etc.”

– Anonymous respondent



The findings of our report are eye-opening. Not because they show a widespread change in workplace priorities following the pandemic (our previous Future of HR Report covered this in detail). What made this new data remarkable is the extent to which public perceptions have changed and how strongly these new feelings are held.

Standout findings

- ➔ **37.4% of respondents said they worked remotely full time, compared to just 18% before the pandemic**
- ➔ **59% of respondents expect the ability to work from anywhere from their employer**
- ➔ **81.07% of respondents said remote working had become more important since the pandemic**
- ➔ **79.9% of respondents said work-life balance had become more important since the pandemic**
- ➔ **44% of respondents said remote working was one of their top 3 factors when it came to their ideal company**



A word on methodology

This report is the result of research conducted by the team at Oyster. We invited a controlled group of 2,151 knowledge workers from North America (USA and Canada), the United Kingdom, and Europe (including France, Portugal, Italy, Spain, Germany, Belgium, Ireland, Netherlands and Denmark).

By “knowledge worker,” we refer to someone whose main work responsibilities involve sharing, researching, or creating value based on knowledge—such as lawyers, product managers, software developers, marketers, accountants, and so on.

Participants who took part in the study were compensated for their time. All data was collected anonymously to protect our respondents’ identities and will be deleted shortly after publication.

The data points throughout this report are both qualitative and quantitative, with snippets from survey statistics and quotations from our respondents themselves.



Chapter 1

A world gone remote

Like any major cultural shift, the rise of remote working has emerged in disparate forms. It has varied both in the amount of companies in each country and industry adopting remote working practices as well as in the ways they've adopted them.

In fact, we've seen a broad spectrum of "remoteness"—from those who work exclusively from the office to those who work on remote and distributed teams on a permanent basis. There are even "in-between" ways of working remotely, often known as 'the hybrid model'.

How remote are you?

- ➔ **37.4% of respondents said they already work remotely on a permanent basis**
- ➔ **19.1% work remotely 3-4 days per week**
- ➔ **16.6% work remotely 1 or 2 days per week**
- ➔ **27.2% work exclusively from the office**

One figure from our findings revealed that 73.1% of respondents in our survey currently work remotely in some capacity. This stands out for two reasons. First because this is a significantly higher percentage of workers than before the pandemic—previously at just 18%. Secondly, among knowledge workers, far more people work remotely today than from an office.

To put that into perspective, this would have been unthinkable even just a few years ago.

In 2013, Marissa Mayer, then CEO at Yahoo!, demanded all employees return to their desks in a memo that banned all remote work. Mayer claimed that "speed and quality are often sacrificed when we work from home." Around that time, several other high-profile companies agreed, including Best Buy, IBM, and Bank of America, who also decided to end their remote work policies.



Should I stay, or should I go (remote)?

In our survey, we asked our respondents to share their preferred way of working. Whether they preferred to work remotely on a permanent basis, semi-permanent, or if they had no interest in remote work.

Preference	% of respondents
I work remotely sometimes, but I'd prefer to work remotely on a permanent basis	22.5%
I've never worked remotely, but I'd like to	23.5%
I've never worked remotely, and I'm not interested in remote working	13.4%

37.4% of our survey respondents classified themselves as permanent remote workers. This was the highest percentage of our respondents—far more than hybrid workers or non-remote workers.

Not only that, but of those who classified themselves as 'hybrid' workers, 22.5% stated they would prefer to be permanently remote workers. And of those who had never experienced remote work, 23.5% wanted to try it. By contrast, only 13.4% of office-based employees were happy to remain in the office full time.

Remote working by geography

Region	Remote Status	% of respondents
North America	Permanently remote	35.72%
	Remote 3-4 days per week	17.55%
	Remote 1-2 days per week	16.07%
	Office based (never remote)	30.66%



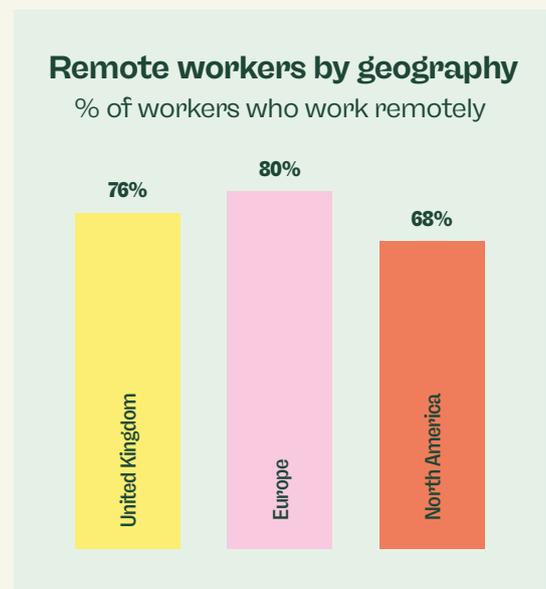
Region	Remote Status	% of respondents
Europe	Permanently remote	42.75%
	Remote 3-4 days per week	17.63%
	Remote 1-2 days per week	19.57%
	Office based (never remote)	20.05%

Region	Remote Status	% of respondents
United Kingdom	Permanently remote	36.79%
	Remote 3-4 days per week	17.55%
	Remote 1-2 days per week	16.07%
	Office based (never remote)	24.66%

Of our participants, Europe was home to the highest percentage of permanent remote workers at 42.75%, while North American respondents were most likely (30.66%) to work from the office.

Respondents across all geographies surveyed showed a clear preference for remote and distributed working. And along this spectrum of remoteness, with “full time at the office” at one end and “permanent remote working” at the other, employees leaned toward the latter.

Something about remote working is attracting a large proportion of knowledge workers to either take up remote work or to keep doing it. What is it exactly? From our data, we uncovered a few different reasons employees are turning their backs on the office. They fall into three major categories.



Ending the commute

Harvard University psychologist Daniel Gilbert once described commuting as “a different kind of hell every day.” Not just because the commute is a daily affair, but because its unpredictable nature makes it a stressful ordeal.

On average, the American commute lasts for [27 minutes](#), while Europeans commute for an [average 25 minutes](#) to get to work. That amounts to almost an hour of stressful commuting each day for the average worker.

These tiresome journeys may point to one reason so many respondents

quoted the end of the daily commute as one of the biggest benefits of remote working. The time, energy, and mental strain involved in commuting, whether by Europeans on busy trains or Americans on crowded highways, is something many reported they didn’t miss.

Aside from psychological factors, respondents expressed concerns about the financial costs and environmental impact of the daily commute. After working from the comfort of their homes, respondents highlighted the importance of saving precious time and money and reducing stress.

Enriched family life

For many, increased time with their families was an important benefit from remote work. As one survey respondent noted, “*You never know how long they’ll be around.*”

Sentiments highlighting this renewed focus on family life were widely echoed among the knowledge workers we surveyed.

But as our respondents told us, remote work hasn’t just opened the door to spending more time with family. It has sparked the realization that there are more important things in life than work. One respondent told us that “*COVID showed us how precious quality of life is*”—implying that many of us have reevaluated and re-ordered our priorities as a result of the pandemic.



Better work-life balance

By far the most important and most quoted factor in the desire to work remotely was better work-life balance. This was consistent with our findings on employee expectations and the perception of what makes an ideal company—more on that later.

Similar to the desire to spend more time with family and friends, respondents were clear that the COVID-19 pandemic had changed their life focus. For many, working remotely during the pandemic spurred an ‘aha’ moment

and a realization that a better balance between their work and personal lives was attainable.

It’s perhaps too simplistic to say that the disruptive influence of the pandemic forced employees to pause and reconsider what’s most important in life. But it’s not far from the truth. At least, according to the respondents in this survey. Some of the most poignant responses reflected a renewed mindfulness of how we spend what short time we have.

“[The pandemic led to] a new appreciation of the time we have, and the possibility to help move society forward.”

– **Anonymous respondent**



It's not all roses

It would be tempting for an organization like Oyster to paint a rosy picture of remote/distributed work without mentioning the other side of the story. “Remote work is the answer to all our problems,” might be our headline. However, that would be a disservice to our respondents who rightly pointed out some of the challenges of remote working.

Remote working has its benefits. But it can also feel disconnected, lonely, and lacking in the natural work-life boundaries that a physical office provides. The paradox of remote work is that it can both enable a better work-life balance or eliminate the balance altogether.

Whether intentionally or unintentionally, physical offices create a clear dividing line between work and personal life. This is now something knowledge workers must actively create for themselves.

“Work-life balance needs to be given more importance since, for many people, their new workplaces are their homes, and these people need to know how to manage this aspect. They need to learn how to effectively “disconnect” from work while at home, in order to help maintain good mental health and increase productivity among the workforce”

– Anonymous respondent

“Everything I have I owe to this job...this stupid, wonderful, boring, amazing job.”

– Jim Halpert, *The Office*
(TV Series)

A balanced perspective is in order when discussing the benefits of remote work. Yes, remote work can and has improved life for many knowledge workers. It can bring them closer to their families, grant them greater flexibility, and unlock more personal time.

Remote work can also subvert office/home boundaries and impact our [ability to build relationships and network with our colleagues](#).

The centralized office has been such a defining feature of the modern work experience. It's no wonder that some are reluctant to give it up. However, as knowledge workers' expectations evolve, so must the ways in which companies establish work-life boundaries and encourage networking and relationship-building in a remote world.



Chapter 2

The ideal working environment

As part of our efforts to understand employee expectations, we asked our survey respondents to rank a series of company factors from most important (position #1) to least important (position #8).

We aimed to discover what knowledge workers truly value when evaluating a company they would like to work for. We phrased this question around 'ideal company' factors to encourage our respondents to be aspirational. We hoped to elicit realistic answers while freeing respondents from the limitations of whatever their actual working conditions might be like.



Picturing the ideal company

In our question, we deliberately avoided phrases like “dream company.” In our view, this could lead to answers straying too far from current workplace realities. On the other hand, we also wanted to limit our list to attributes that we could realistically see a company today advertising to prospective employees.

For example, it might have been interesting to include a four-day workweek. But we ultimately felt that too few companies today have adopted this workweek structure (or similar, pioneering practices).

While this is not an exhaustive list of working conditions and factors, we hope these rankings offer a general sense of what employees value from a company. Here are the results in order of importance as highlighted by our survey respondents.

Which of these factors matter most when you picture the ideal company?

Rank	Ideal company factors	Av. Rank
1	Work-life balance	#1.71
2	Working culture	#3.265
3	Remote/distributed working policy	#4.145
4	Employee perks and discounts	#4.545
5	Diversity and inclusion	#4.785
6	Company reputation	#4.865
7	Social impact	#6.085
8	Environmental impact	#6.605

“The pandemic and working from home for almost two years has shown me I need a far better work-life balance, better support from upper management both were severely lacking before the pandemic.”

– Anonymous respondent



Flexibility matters most

From our results, we see three leading traits employees look for in their ideal company. First is work-life balance, which was ranked as the most important company factor. This is consistent with what respondents told us about their post-pandemic, remote

working experiences. A strong majority of our respondents (61%) voted this as their top factor—eclipsing all other factors by a wide margin. The second most popular factor was ranked #1 by only 14% of respondents.

“COVID has taught me that the culture of the company matters a lot. I value a company that listens to its employees and does what is right for them.”

– **Anonymous respondent**

In second place was working culture. If you’ll forgive the ambiguity, “working culture” refers to both the wider culture within a company and the collective experience of employees working there. This can take many forms. It can relate to how employees are treated and how communication flows within the organization. It can also refer to how supportive the working environment is (or isn’t), workplace flexibility, the collaborative nature of colleagues, and other qualities.

Ranked third was remote or distributed working. As we saw earlier, this is an important factor for many of our respondents, 73.1% of which work remotely in some capacity.

When picturing their ideal company, 44% of our respondents ranked remote or distributed working as one of their top three factors. Again, this matches up with what we’ve seen earlier, with 46% of participants expressing an interest in working remotely.

While the results themselves are not a surprise, it’s clear how much weight is placed on workplace culture and flexibility. The three winners: work-life balance, working culture, and remote working fall loosely into a category around flexibility and wellbeing at work. The pattern highlights, generally, a desire to work for companies that take care of their employees and provide an environment of safety and autonomy.



What this means for companies

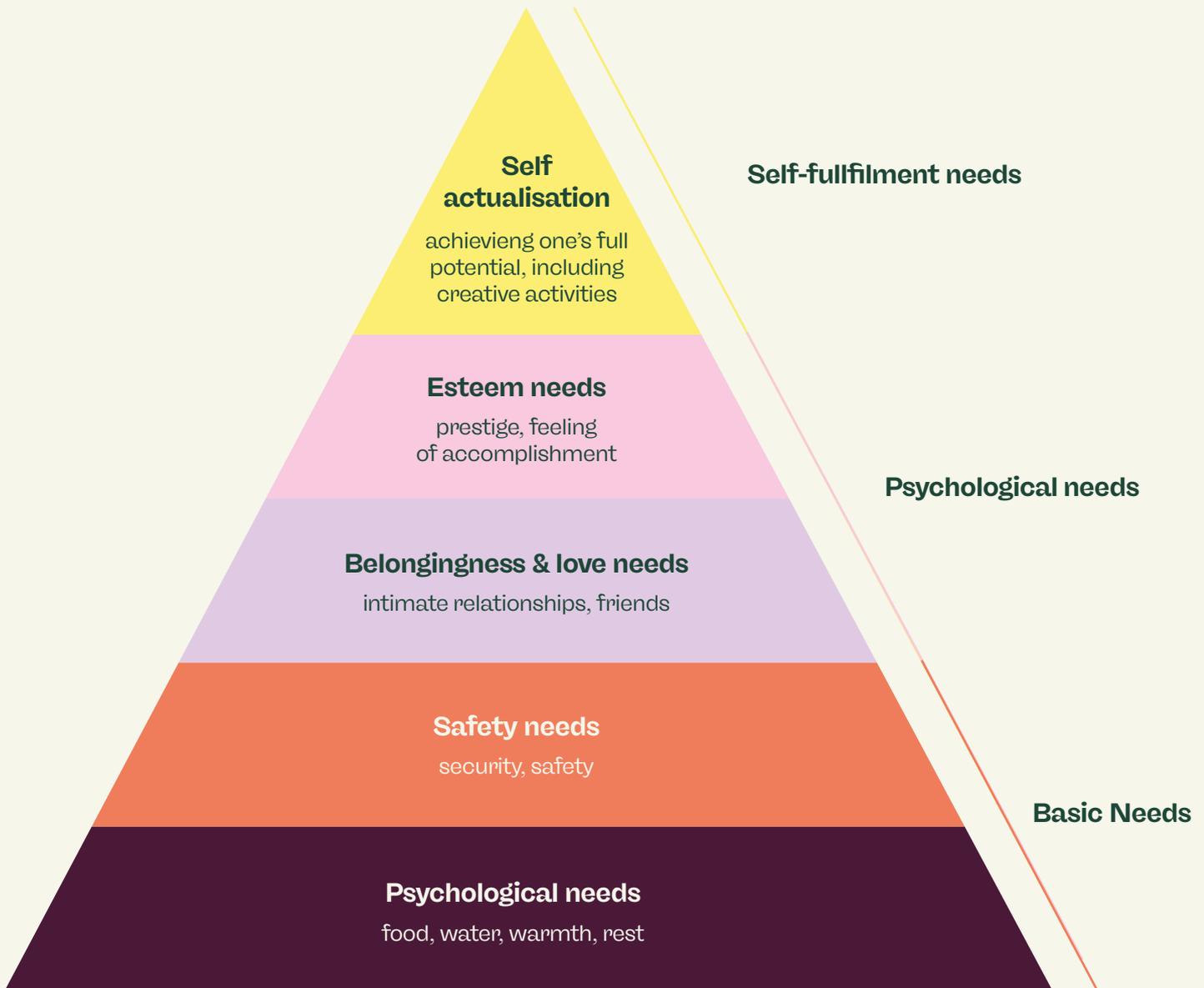
There are some caveats worth considering when exploring these findings. For example, diversity and inclusion, environmental impact, social impact, and company reputation ranked lower than other factors. But that does not mean that employees today don't value these factors. On the contrary, these are all important aspects in choosing a company to work for, as our respondents have explicitly told us.

“I feel I’m helping the planet more by using my car less and shopping more at local shops than in the city where I used to work. This is now my primary expectation for any future jobs I may go for”

– **Anonymous respondent**

The point is not that these factors became less important. Instead, it might be helpful to think of the top-ranking factors as the most urgent characteristics facing employees today. Front of mind for many of our respondents is to find a safe, flexible, and remote working environment. Once these higher-ranked priorities are taken care of, employees then begin to consider D&I, company reputation, and wider social impact.





Imagine a structure of workplace priorities, similar to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. At the bottom, if basic needs are met, you can move up the pyramid to less pressing needs. We could replace food and water with salary, leave policy, job role. Above that, a safe and secure environment where an employee can be themselves. And perhaps above those, the need to join a cohesive, thriving work culture, the need to be part of an important mission, and so on. All the levels are important. Some are foundational, others aspirational.

In short, companies competing for talented workers today would do well to identify which gaps they need to fill in their pyramid of needs. It's all very well to promote the reputation and mission of the company. But without establishing a strong foundation—a safe and flexible working environment, it will be hard for organizations to attract the most talented workers.



Chapter 3

The search for the ideal job

Finding the company is important. But it's just as crucial to select a job role that fits your skills, experience, and expectations. In our quest to understand what employees want from a job role, we asked them to rate a series of factors from most important (#1) to least important (#8). For our respondents, the process was identical to the previous question around the ideal company—only the factors had changed.

There is no perfect way to understand job expectations from a survey. The job market is incredibly complex, and there are myriad reasons why workers choose to apply for a particular job. It might be a strategic step in their career, a desire to earn more money, or even a decision to break into a particular field.

That said, we asked respondents to rank several job factors they felt were meaningful in today's job search. You might spot that remote/distributed working makes another appearance. This was deliberate. While

an organization might generally offer remote/distributed working, it might only be an option for certain teams or employees. By specifying remote working as part of the job itself, we wanted to distinguish between an all-company policy and the option to work remotely that comes with specific roles.

Some factors we considered foundational to any job. For example, a candidate would always want to know the job title, salary, and what sort of work and projects they'd be working on in a new role.

Other factors were supplementary. For instance, if the salary and job description are acceptable, a candidate may be curious about their boss' management style, what share options are available, their potential colleagues, and so on.

Still, we were struck by the rankings that came back. Here are the results.



Which of these factors matter most when you picture your ideal job?

Rank	Ideal job factors	Av. Rank
1	Salary and benefits	#1.53
2	Supportive management culture	#3.14
3	Remote/distributed working	#4.28
4	Learning and personal development	#4.71
5	Working with talented people	#5.14
6	Equity and share options	#5.21
7	Challenging or innovative projects	#5.64
8	Job title	#6.37

What this means for companies

As before, there are a few clear winners that stand out. First is salary and benefits, which is understandable—particularly as living costs are on the rise and wage stagnation remains a concern for the average worker.

It also makes sense from the position of a knowledge worker ‘triaging’ a potential job opportunity. At a time when job opportunities are relatively plentiful, candidates may find compensation the easiest criteria when vetting their options.

Salary and benefits were voted by far the most important aspect of the ideal

job. In total, 72% of respondents placed it as their number one priority. To put that into perspective, just 10% of respondents selected the second most popular factor—supportive management—as their top choice.

In third place came remote/distributed working. The position and the number of votes for this factor were remarkably similar to the previous question (about the ideal company). For this question, 7% of respondents put remote working as their most important job factor, while 41% had it as one of their top three priorities.



“It is time for companies to stop putting profits over people. The most important thing is taking care of the people so they will take care of the business. Be kind, understanding, flexible, helpful, and generous. Then you will get the same in return for your company.”

– Anonymous respondent

We expected to see salary listed as the most critical factor when considering the ideal job. What we didn't expect was the high placement of supportive management and remote working. Previously we mentioned a pattern emerging towards wellbeing, support, and flexibility at work. These responses validate that pattern.

More surprisingly, 38% of respondents identified job titles as the least important factor when considering a new job. “Forget the job title and the prestige,” they seem to be saying. “Instead, pay us fairly and take care of us.”

“Leaders are not responsible for the results, leaders are responsible for the people who are responsible for the results. And the best way to drive performance in an organization is to create an environment in which information can flow freely, mistakes can be lighted and help can be offered and received.”

– Simon Sinek, The Infinite Game



Chapter 4

Unpacking employee expectations

For most of us, work is a lifelong endeavor. The average person will spend somewhere between 85,000-90,000 hours at work. For knowledge workers, that amounts to spending a third of their lives at their desk.

It's no wonder, then, that many of us try to find work that's fulfilling, or at least bearable. Sadly, many workers say that is not their current reality. Although engagement levels increased overall in the US between 2000 and 2015, a recent survey found that only 34% of workers said they were engaged in their jobs. Unsurprisingly, burnout has peaked—affecting 40% of American adults.



“I expect my workplace to value a work-life balance and understand that I have a life outside of work. I often see the most successful companies value their employees’ differences and celebrate the little wins.”

– **Anonymous respondent**

The good news is that, over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic, the workplace has seen what is arguably the most dramatic transformation in living memory. If people want to see change (and the data suggests they do), now is an ideal time to investigate what employees want to see in a post-pandemic world. This is at the heart of what we set out to explore in our research.



Great expectations

You've probably noticed by now that we've framed this report around employee 'expectations'. Not employee desires, goals, wishes, or dreams. We settled on expectations because the word 'expectations' alludes to things we want without being unrealistic.

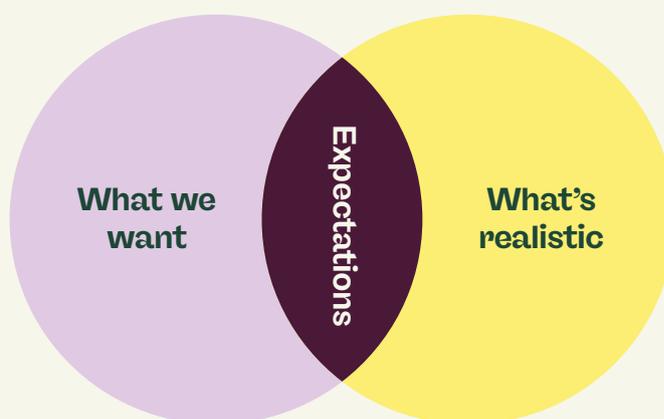
For example, we might set a goal to find a new job, offering a salary that triples what we currently earn. But for most of us, that's a target we're unlikely to attain. We might also dream of a job that pays well but only asks us to work two days a week, but we'd be living in fantasy.

On the other hand, expectations fall helpfully into the sweet spot between what we hope for from work and what is feasible. Of course, it's still possible to have unrealistic expectations, but 'expectations' are more likely to be grounded in reality than dreams or desires.

With that in mind, we asked our participants to tell us what they expected from their workplace based on a range of factors. Specifically, we asked them to rate (from 1 to 5) how strongly they *expected* certain factors in the workplace, with 1 being the least expected and 5 being the most expected.

We selected factors we felt would be meaningful but not ubiquitous to a knowledge worker today. Let's dive into the results.

Workplace Expectations



Expectations among all knowledge workers

Workplace factor	Expectation rating				
	1 (least expected)	2	3	4	5 (most expected)
Perks and rewards	2.99%	11.34%	23.67%	34.27%	27.73%
Equity and share options	8.06%	18.63%	27.16%	28.09%	18.07%
Home office stipend	7.34%	16.03%	30.87%	29.00%	16.76%
Dedicated budget for career development	2.76%	11.53%	26.52%	37.55%	21.63%
Flexible working hours	1.42%	4.72%	13.43%	32.52%	47.90%
Regular pay increases	0.62%	1.76%	7.39%	26.50%	63.73%
The ability to work from anywhere	2.34%	6.67%	16.39%	29.50%	45.10%

As with previous questions, we found three stand-out factors workers expected.

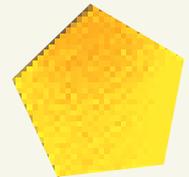
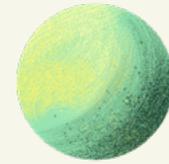
Regular pay rises came head and shoulders above the other factors in terms of employee expectations. 63.7% of employees expect regular pay increases, and overall, 90.2% of respondents rated it as “highly” or “most highly” expected. That’s 9.81% more than rated the second most expected factor: flexible working hours.

Some 47.9% of respondents told us they strongly expect flexible hours from their job, while 80.4% expect this factor on some level. This clear call for flexibility is consistent with what we learned about workers’ desire for better work-life balance and for more control over their working lives. The expectation for flexible working is strong.



“I never would have considered working from home even one day before the pandemic but now I want the freedom to work wherever I choose, whether that be office, home or even abroad.”

– Anonymous respondent



Thirdly, our respondents told us they expected to be able to work from anywhere. Specifically, 45.1% indicated they highly expect this option, but overall a massive 74.6% expect to be able to work from where they choose.

This surprised us, not just because so many respondents expressed this expectation, but because the desire to “work from anywhere” goes further than remote working or simply working from home. It suggests employees are not content merely to move their work from a central office to their home. They want the freedom to work from their location of choice.

By comparison, options like a budget for career development, perks and rewards, and equity options were far less expected, while the home office stipend fell by the wayside. It seems that employees deemed those factors less important than steady raises and flexibility by some margin.

Next, let’s break down our findings into a few segments and explore the data by age, gender, job seniority, and geography. Spoiler alert: while there are a few points of interest, the general trend outlined above persists across every cohort we examined. Let’s take a look.

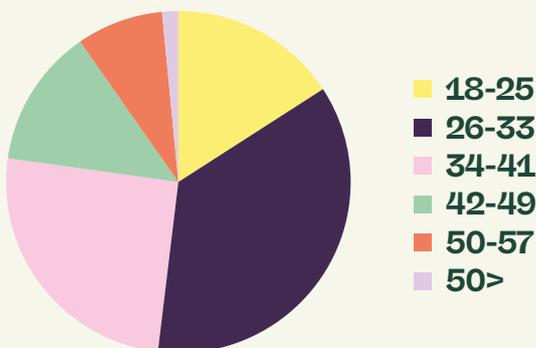


Expectations by age

“My hope is that the shift to hybrid and ideally remote working will continue as this works much better for me at this stage of life (50+). This is as important as salary and benefits to me.”

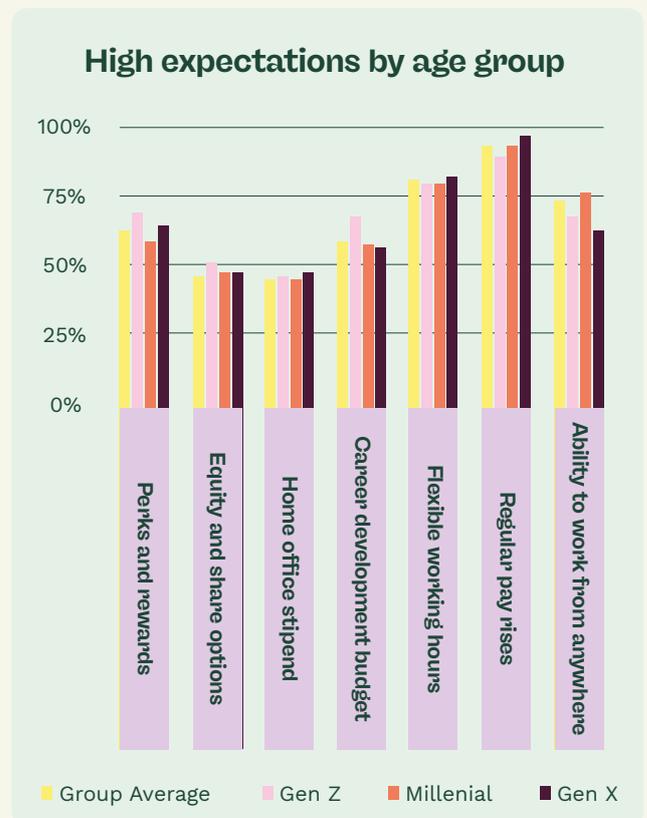
– Anonymous respondent

Before we dive into results by age: some context. We asked our respondents to select their age group based on the following ranges. All of our respondents were over the age of 18.

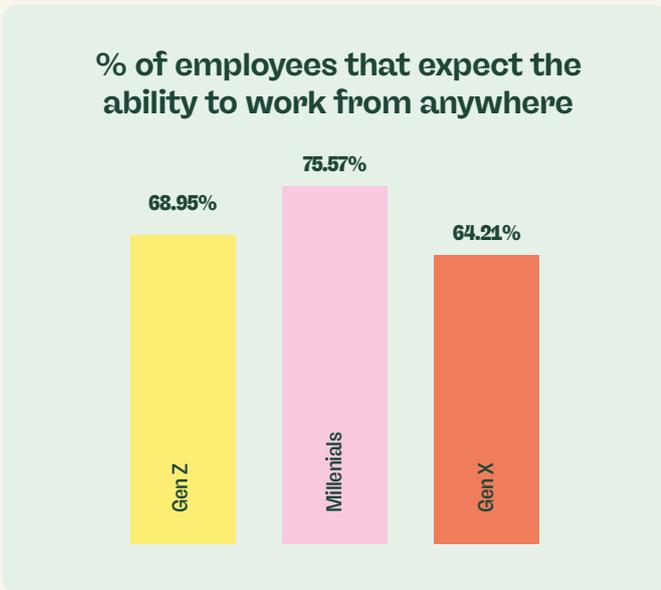


Although we didn’t set out to capture data from any specific age group (other than working age adults), millennials happened to make up the majority of our participants. Whether this was down to our data collection methods, the fact that millennials are now the largest working generation, or that millennials enjoy completing surveys more than other generations, we’re unsure.

Each age cohort gave us interesting insights into the nuances of their workplace expectations. Surprisingly, Gen Z had higher expectations than the median, millennial expectations trended below the median, and Gen X workers fell somewhere in the middle.

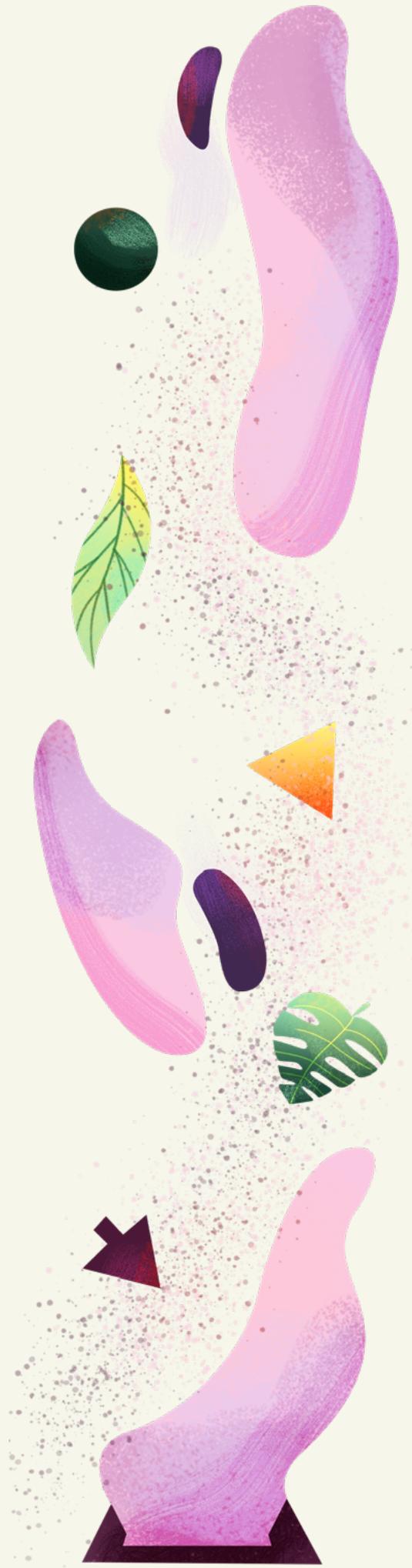


However, the results get more interesting when we isolate for certain factors. For instance, despite their generally low expectations, 75.6% of millennials highly expect to work from anywhere—significantly more than their younger and older counterparts. They were also the hungriest for flexible working hours, but had lower expectations across every other category.



Interestingly, Gen Xers showed the highest expectations for flexible hours, a home office stipend, and regular raises. 91.4% of our Gen X cohort expected regular pay increases, compared to 90.5% of millennials and just 87.2% of Gen Z. Do Gen Xers expect more raises because they're older and generally more senior at work? We'll look into that later.

Across each group, there were high expectations across age groups for pay increases, flexibility, and distributed working.

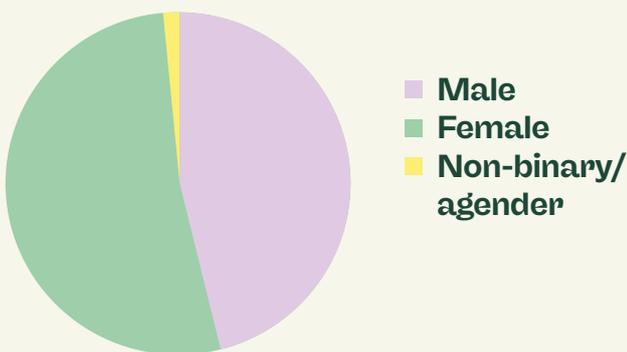


Expectations by gender

“I love being able to work for places that support working mothers as being equal to men. My current workplace supports working mothers but there is a lot of sexism in thinking that they really should be at home, when in reality they sometimes have to work and should be supported, not demoted to force them out of a company.”

– Anonymous respondent

In addition to age, we also gave our respondents the option to identify their gender, either as male, female, non-binary, or a gender they could self-describe.



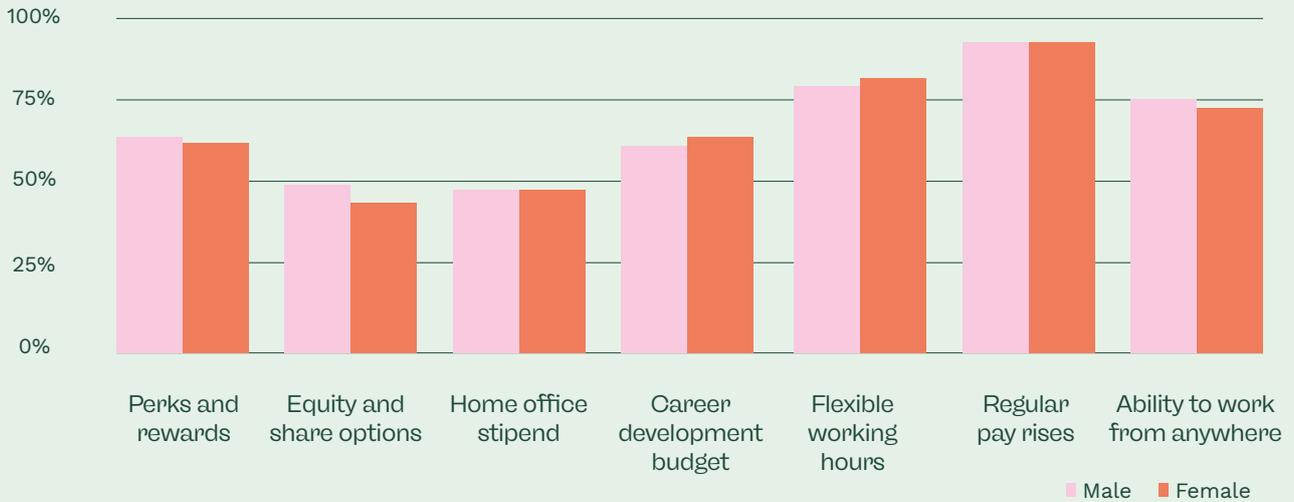
We reached a fairly even split between men and women. Unfortunately, we did not receive enough data from non-binary, agender, or unspecified gender respondents to derive meaningful insights. Therefore, we’ll focus on results from men and women for the purposes of this report.



What struck us most from the results in this cohort is that men’s and women’s expectation levels are remarkably close. In fact, there wasn’t much to tell them apart, and neither gender group swayed far from the median on any category. You can see from the graph below how little variation there seems to be between expectations among men and women at work.



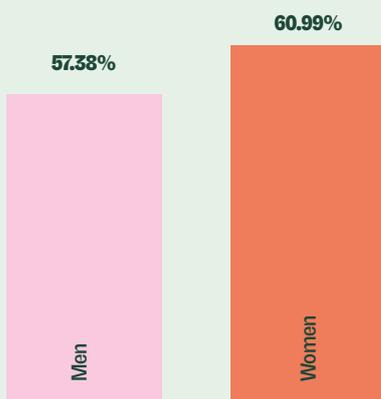
Men's vs. women's expectations



As we've seen before, expectations for regular pay rises, flexible hours, and the ability to work from anywhere trended high, at around 90%, 80%, and 74%, respectively.

Men had a higher expectation of receiving equity options than women (49.4% of men expected equity, versus 43% of women). At the same time, more women reported that they expect a budget towards their career development than men (61% of women expected this versus 57.4% of men).

Expectations towards career development



Otherwise, the defining feature of this group was how similar men's and women's expectations were across virtually all categories.



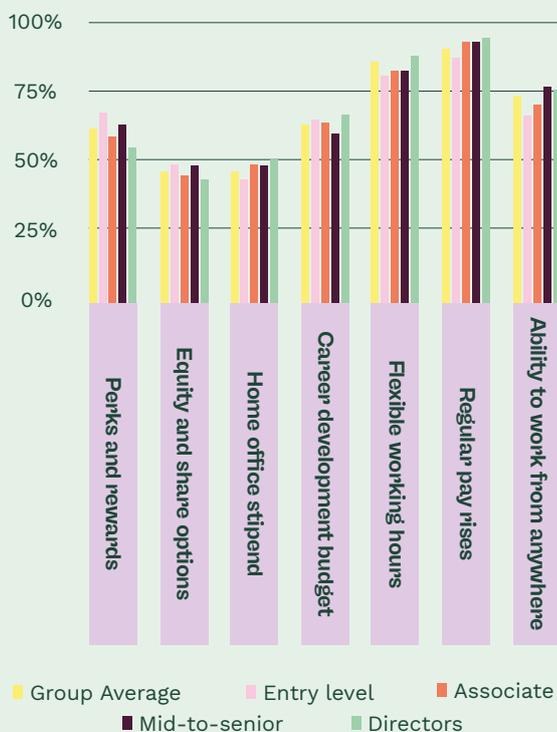
Expectations by seniority

Our survey invited participants to select a seniority level that best described their current position, ranging from entry-level employees to C-suite executives.

Seniority level	Number of respondents
Entry level	390
Associate	711
Mid-to-senior	786
Director	83
Executive	32

Most of our respondents fell into the middle area of seniority, with some at entry-level and a few directors and executives. While we were excited to hear from senior leaders, we didn't feel we had enough responses from executives to feature their data in our insights below, so we'll focus on the other seniority levels for now.

High expectations by age group

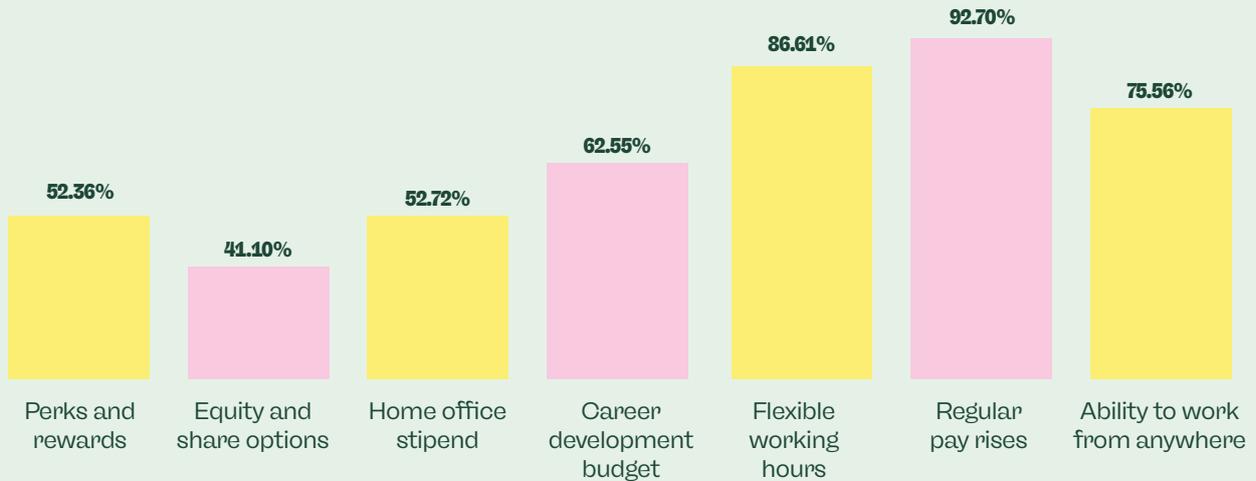


In each seniority level, from entry-level positions to director, we were surprised to see certain expectations were consistently high. For instance, at all seniority levels, at least 70% of respondents expected to work from anywhere.

Expectation towards career development was also fairly high (58% and above in each level expected this). And directors (perhaps to no one's surprise) had the highest workplace expectations across almost every category.



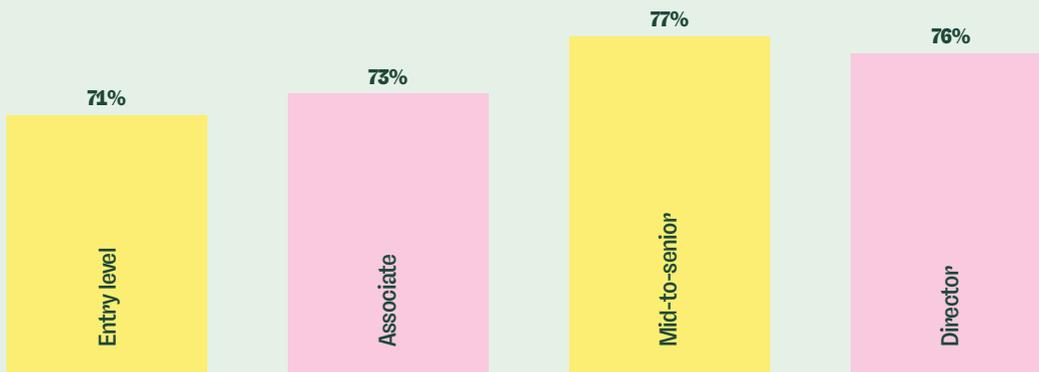
What directors expect



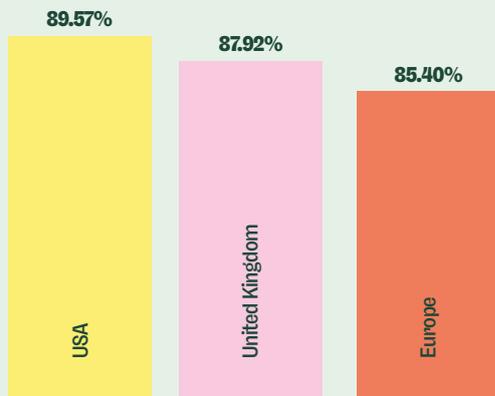
However, one statistic which contradicted this trend was the expectation to work from anywhere. Here, the mid-to-senior employees had the highest expectations. But thinking back to our age groups, this makes sense.

Remember our millennial cohorts who were most likely to expect the option for remote working? It fits that 26 to 41-year-olds would make up the bulk of mid-to-senior positions, and as middle managers, want the freedom to work from wherever they choose.

Expectations towards working from anywhere



Expectations towards pay increases



It's hard to explain why European respondents had the highest expectations, yet their expectations for regular pay rises fell 4.8% below the median. Perhaps generally, there is an expectation in Western Europe for excellent working conditions and workplace flexibility. While in North America, it's salary that matters most, and ensuring a regular pay increase is paramount. As one American respondent put it, *"Prices are going up and in order to break even each year you need to have the option to increase salary."*

This fits with data we have from previous surveys in 2017, where middle-class Americans were found to outearn Europeans comfortably. Then there are the broader cultural differences. Western European countries such as France, Germany, Finland, and others spend a high percentage of their GDP on welfare programs. In contrast, the US has a history of individualism and a tendency to connect effort and income: the "work hard and you'll make it" mentality.

For all their differences, North Americans, Brits, and Europeans all agreed that steady pay increases, flexibility, and the freedom to work from anywhere were important. It will be interesting to see if multinational workforces, with the rise of distributed working and globalized employment, begin to merge their thinking and share similar expectations as time goes on.



Chapter 5

The pandemic effect

It has become a cliché to say the COVID-19 pandemic changed everything. But clichés often have a grain of truth to them. Author Fareed Zakaria wrote that the [post-pandemic world](#) after COVID “is going to be, in many aspects, a sped-up version of the world we knew.” Out of the ashes of global turmoil, Zakaria forees a “path to a new world.” In this, he is not alone.

“I think with the ongoing pandemic, I value the above factors as more important because I think it helps manage the work-life balance of people. At the same time, the pandemic brought about ideas that companies can be more sustainable and environmentally friendly through remote work, which avoids the costs and usage of transportation.”

– **Anonymous respondent**

We asked our respondents to indicate what job factors had become more or less important in the wake of the pandemic. We strongly suspected the pandemic had changed perceptions of the workplace. But what changed exactly? And what things did workers deem more critical now than before the virus?

We asked respondents to rate each factor along a scale from far less important to far more important at the other. If there was no change, they could describe factors as equally important. Here are the results for company factors.



How company expectations changed

Company factor	Expectation changes post-pandemic				
	Far less important	Far more important	Equally important	More important	Far more important
Diversity and inclusion	6.40%	9.30%	63.95%	16.25%	4.05%
Work-life balance	1.30%	2.90%	15.95%	41.50%	38.49%
Company reputation	2.90%	13.30%	62.35%	17.20%	2.25%
Remote / distributed working policy	1.50%	2.70%	14.10%	32.65%	49.05%
Working culture	1.60%	5.05%	38.65%	38.70%	16.05%
Employee perks and discounts	5.45%	16.10%	52.80%	18.10%	7.60%
Company mission and values	3.60%	9.40%	59.95%	20.45%	6.50%
Environmental impact	5.75%	10.40%	56.55%	20.50%	6.80%

It's clear from our data that our respondents felt certain factors were significantly more important in the wake of the pandemic. The big three are work-life balance, remote working policies, and work culture. Remote working had become more important to 81.7% of respondents and 79.9% thought work-life balance became more significant. Lastly, working culture was more important to 54.8% of respondents.

Credit to our participants for their consistency: our data here matches up once more with previous answers. They

tell us yet again that the ability to work remotely, to have a better work-life balance, and be part of a nurturing working culture are all more important now, than before the pandemic.

As for D&I, company reputation, company mission, and so on—those values are no less important. They remain crucial to our respondents, and to a small portion of people, they have risen in significance.



How job expectations changed

Job factor	Expectation changes post-pandemic				
	Far less important	Far more important	Equally important	More important	Far more important
Salary and benefits	0.45%	2.95%	40.60%	38.60%	22.35%
Supportive management	0.60%	2.30%	29.30%	44.10%	23.70%
Equity and share options	7.15%	17.05%	61.05%	10.60%	4.15%
Working with talented people	3.45%	12.40%	64.10%	15.95%	4.15%
Remote / distributed working	1.50%	2.05%	13.85%	30.55%	52.05%
Job title	8.95%	19.60%	61.45%	8.00%	1.95%
Learning and personal development	1.85%	7.55%	51.65%	30.50%	8.40%
Challenging or innovative projects	2.60%	9.80%	60.45%	21.65%	5.55%

As for job factors, remote or distributed working, supportive management, and salary were the top categories that became more important. A substantial 82.6% of our respondents indicated that remote working jobs had become more critical after the pandemic, and 68% said the need for supportive managers had increased.

Interestingly, almost none of the other categories fell in importance. The majority indicated that factors like equity, working with talented people, job title,

and so on, stayed the same, although 29% of respondents felt job titles were less relevant.

Despite appearing as part of a wider pattern, it's still striking to see how many knowledge workers stressed the importance of remote working. In fact, 52% thought it had become far more important after the pandemic. A sign that this is perhaps the most important transformation in the world of work.



Employees have spoken—

It's time to listen

Throughout this project, we've been privileged to hear the thoughts and opinions from a diverse range of knowledge workers. They've shared their professional challenges, workplace expectations, and pandemic experiences.

Time and again, knowledge workers from this research group have called for greater flexibility, workplace support from management, and better work-life balance.

Our data, whichever way we slice it, consistently indicates that these priorities are top of mind for workers across North America and Europe. Knowledge workers expect to be paid fairly, treated with compassion, and trusted to do their jobs. They expect support from their leaders and a safe working environment that sets them up for success. Two years into the pandemic, workers say these factors matter more than ever.

It's not certain how expectations will further evolve as the pandemic continues to unfold. But the genie is out of the bottle, and it's unlikely we're ever going back.

