

workhuman*

3 Ways to Bridge the Generational Divide in the Evolution of Work





All employees experience work differently. That's especially true of employees of various ages who have a wide range of knowledge, skills, expectations, and backgrounds that shape how they view the world and the workplace.

Among the many goals of the latest Workhuman® iQ survey, "The Evolution of Work," was to understand how employees at different points in life are moving through the workplace. Some have become new parents in the last few years, some have hit their heads against the ceiling of advancement, some are winding down their careers, and some are just entering the workforce for the first time on the heels of a global pandemic and record-breaking turnover.

There are countless employee experiences in the workplace that employers must understand and support. Here we'll look at three main areas that are shaping the workplace right now: ways of working, job insecurity and, broadly speaking, the employee experience.

Ways of working

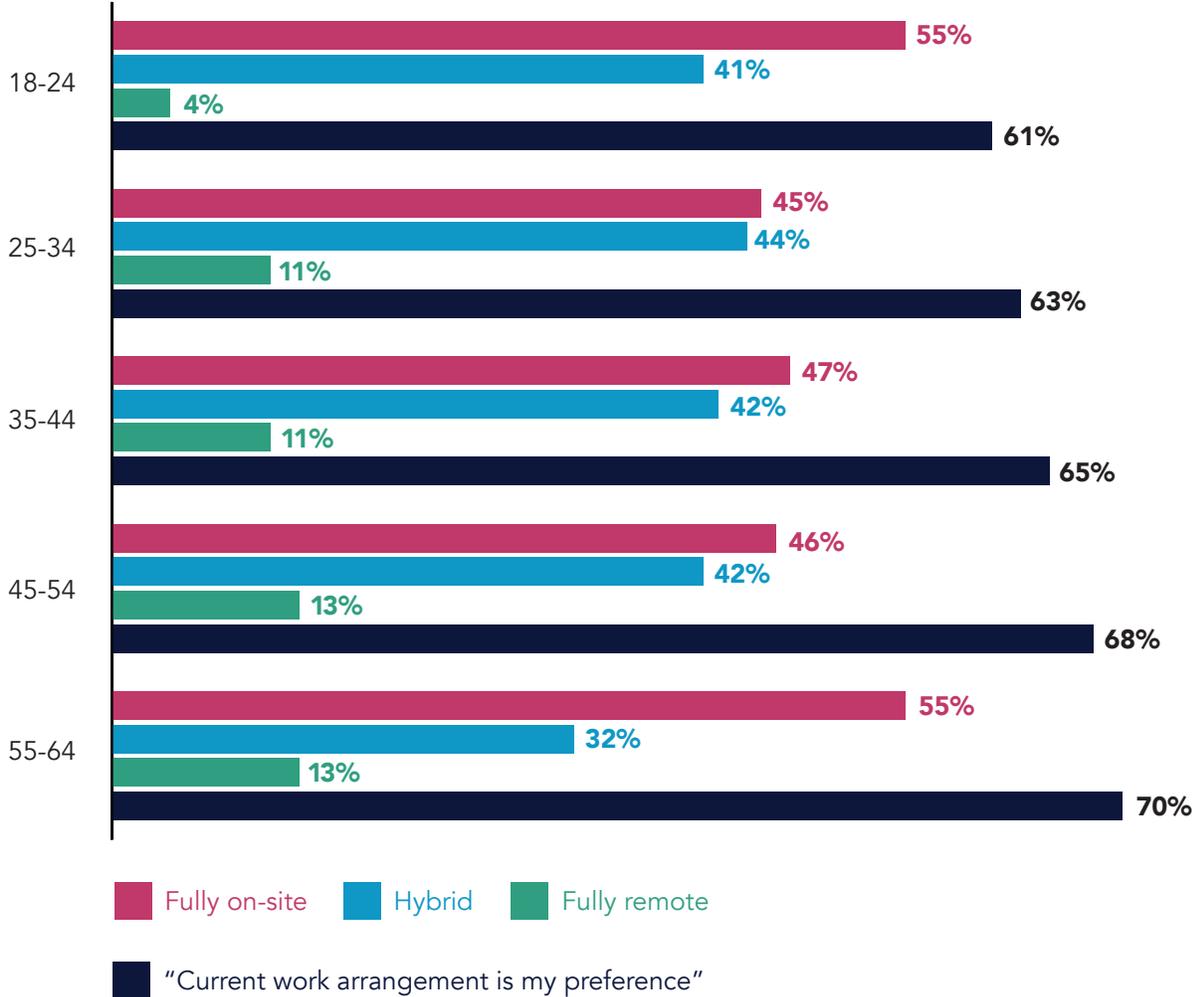
A few years ago, we wouldn't have thought to ask employees "where" they were working. It was assumed. But now, learning if they're on-site, at home, or some combination of the two is where we begin to understand the employee experience.

In general, the ways in which employees are working hasn't changed much from our survey a year ago.

But we find much more variance when we look at different age groups.



Preference versus reality. How does preferred work arrangement vary by age?



Employees 25-54 years old are most likely to be working in hybrid arrangements, while employees 18-24 and 55-64 are most likely to be working in the office. Most employees, regardless of age, are working in their preferred working arrangement. But preference appears to be more considered as employees progress in their career. Employees 55-64 are clearly more likely than their youngest peers to be working in their preferred working arrangement (70% vs. 61%).

Working preference should not be casually brushed aside.

The 20% of all respondents who said that their current work arrangement is not their preference scored lower on every single positive workplace outcome we studied.

Most notably, these employees scored lower on connection, productivity, and hope for career growth.

That preference is especially important for caretakers. Caretakers, some of the most stressed in our survey, almost evenly fall in the ages of 25-34 (30%), 35-44 (36%), and 45-54 (34%). They are less likely to agree they're satisfied with their work arrangement, and those on the job hunt prioritize work flexibility more than non-caretakers (25% vs. 17%).

Ways of working is the first instance of an employee-first approach proving to be the most effective way to get the best out of employees, but as we will see, it won't be the last.



Job insecurity

The last few years in the workplace have been defined, in large part, by the willingness of employees to leave their current role in search for one where they feel adequately paid and valued. The record rate at which they are doing so has yielded nicknames like the Great Resignation and quiet quitting to describe the phenomenon.

At the height of the Great Resignation (the summer and fall of 2021), our survey found 38% of respondents planned to look for a new job in the next 12 months. Our latest survey puts it at 37%. It is no longer a fluke, blip, or aberration. It's a trend.

And adding to that trend is the undercurrent of anxiety that employees could lose their jobs. Mass layoffs have dominated headlines this year. At the time of our survey, about one in five employees feared losing their jobs – a number that is almost assuredly higher now.

Employees 18-44 are far more likely than their older colleagues to be looking for a new job. This 18-44 group is looking for higher pay, more flexibility, and a better job title, and for employees 25-44, that's largely because there is a shared feeling that they don't see a path for growth in their organization.

For leaders of any organization, this should be disconcerting. These employees are the future of the workplace, and companies run the risk of pushing out would-be managers and leaders with institutional knowledge and creating a revolving-door environment that adversely affects morale and stability.



Employee experience

Our past surveys have been an ever-expanding exploration into the intricacies of the employee experience. One of the central measures of that experience is psychological safety. Comprising several factors regarding risk-taking and vulnerability at work, we were able to give each respondent a unique psychological safety score, ranging from 1-5.

By age groups, we didn't find much variance in the overall scores, but looking at each component of that score we were able to isolate scenarios that vary significantly.

Employees 18-24 are most likely to see a path for growth and among the most likely to believe they can safely take risks at work, but they are also the least likely to agree they can raise tough issues and least likely to agree their unique skills are utilized properly.

Employees 25-34 are often exhausted at the end of the day. The same goes for employees 18-24 who on top of that exhaustion feel themselves operating on autopilot more than other age groups. These two age groups scored the highest in feeling lonely at work.

While we can't say what exactly the driving factors of loneliness and exhaustion are, these employees are the most likely to be looking for a new job, most likely to have started a new job during COVID and, because of their age, have had the least amount of time to create connections at work compared to their older colleagues. All of these contribute to a sense of stress and loneliness, and it's up to organizations to see where they can provide support.

Employees 35-64 are least likely to agree they feel lonely at work, but they are also least likely to feel safe taking a risk at work, least likely to agree they see a path for growth at their organization, and most likely to feel discriminated against while at work.

Again, we are presented with major differences in how groups of employees feel about their workplace. What a 23-year-old just out of college needs, for example, is wildly different from what a 46-year-old caretaker needs.

The challenge for organizations is scaling a custom, employee-first approach across hundreds or even thousands of employees. To do that efficiently and effectively, they need a more human workplace.

The human workplace

On numerous occasions, our analysis discovered nuances and intersections within employee groups and demographics that punctured the possibility of one-size-fits-all solutions to workplace challenges.

But there are some common practices that prove effective across all ages. Three initiatives in particular – **recognition, check-ins, and life events** – quickly embed into an organization’s day-to-day and establish the cadence and connection needed for meaningful outcomes. Together, they combine to form the human workplace.

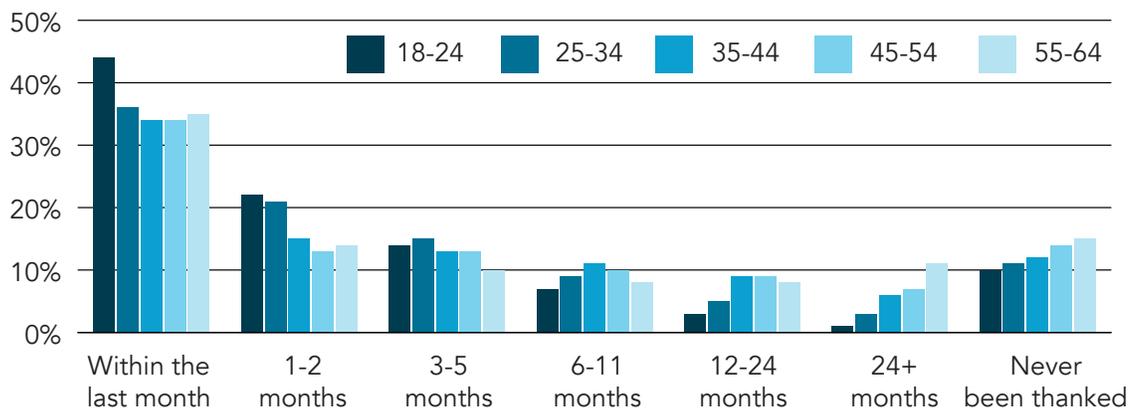
It’s not an out-of-the-box solution to every negative in the employee experience, but it nudges all employees to lead with humanity.



Recognition

Our research found once again that the more recently an employee has been recognized for their work, the more psychologically safe they feel. And while this is the case with or without a formal recognition program, we see significantly higher results for those employees who **do** take part in a recognition program.

However, frequent recognition is something that appears to decrease over time and that drop-off in frequent recognition has a ripple effect.



“When was the last time you were thanked for your contributions at work?”

The power of that recognition is in its ability to spread across the organization. It’s contagious. Without it, companies end up with results like employees 25-34 and 35-44 being the least likely to have thanked someone else. If they don’t feel the gratitude as often, it’s harder to share it with someone else.

Check-ins

Check-ins with a manager are one of the tentpoles of the human workplace. When done on at least a weekly basis, they have a profound impact on an employee's ability to problem-solve and collaborate. And the good news is, when asked about check-in cadence, the most frequent response across all ages was checking in "once a week" followed by "every day."

Check-ins are especially important for younger employees just starting out and likely looking for guidance and mentorship. More than half of employees 18-34 check in at least weekly with their manager. But for the youngest employees, less than half report feeling that time was "often" or "always" time well spent. It's a fixable area for any organization to make sure that check-ins are happening consistently and effectively.



Life events

Finally, there are life events. These are celebrations for moments and milestones that take place outside the confines of work. Weddings, newborns, new houses, and adopted pets are all cause for celebration with friends and family. Why shouldn't peers and colleagues celebrate those major moments too?

Employees across the board want **more** opportunities to celebrate personal milestones. In fact, of those who don't have a formal program for recognizing life events, 38% still reported celebrating with co-workers. The rates of these celebrations are lowest with employees 35-64, more than half of the age groups we surveyed.

Employers looking for ways to improve the employee experience would be wise to make celebrating life events a habit.

Employees who work in organizations that celebrate life events have higher psychological safety (3.68/5 vs. 3.27/5), they're more likely to recommend the organization to a friend (86% vs. 66%), and more likely to be highly engaged (43% vs. 28%).

Organizations can play a powerful role in facilitating these celebrations and, along with frequent recognition and check-ins, reap the benefits of a more connected and more human workplace.

Conclusion

For the first time in decades, wide swaths of the workforce are demanding more of their employers. More equity, more empathy, more humanity.

Employers answering the bell and building a human workplace through employee recognition, life events, and frequent check-ins have a clear leg up in creating the right conditions for employees of all ages to thrive.

To learn more about how Workhuman® can help build a more human workplace, visit workhuman.com/solutions.

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