REPORT

Q3/4 2025 Trends

Insights and emerging trends connecting employee experience to business performance

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We're excited to share our latest Workplace Trends Report.

This year, one reality underpins nearly every workplace decision: tighter budgets. With inflation hovering around 3.4% and unemployment at 4.2%, leaders are operating with greater scrutiny and sharper pencils. The pressure is on to do more with less, and prove that every investment has impact. Still, momentum hasn't slowed. Companies are reimagining the office — not just to bring people back, but to make in-person work feel worthwhile. They're designing spaces and experiences that foster connection, community and purpose — recognising that empty desks are costly and a strong culture is a competitive asset.

As Gen Z's influence grows and Boomers exit, expectations around work are shifting fast. Employers are adapting by redesigning services and benefits that meet generational needs, while staying within constrained budgets. No more perks for perks' sake; it's all about value, usage and outcomes.

Well-being investments are also becoming more strategic. Gone are broad, feel-good initiatives with unclear ROI. In their place: targeted programs that support employee health and performance while aligning to business goals.
We're seeing companies double down on community-building as a retention play, especially when they can't compete on compensation alone. Employees want to stay where they feel they belong, and programs that strengthen internal connection are proving worth the spend.

AI tools are reshaping how leaders manage culture, personalise support and drive efficiency. But even here, companies are carefully balancing innovation with cost, rolling out only what adds measurable value.

And in a politically tense climate, companies are finding safe ground by investing in neutral community programs that emphasise shared values like service, sustainability and mental well-being — approaches that unite without dividing.

Let's dive into what's shaping the future of work.

Michael Fildes-Peace
Managing Director
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Trending topics

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Trending: employee experience

Making RTO appealing: reimagine the employee experience

(1)

People leaders charged with implementing return-to-office

(RTO) initiatives face acritical challenge: how to encourage employees to return to the office without relying on mandates. In a recent LinkedIn survey, 40% of Gen Z and Millennial workers said they would accept lower pay for more flexibility about *where* they work. Across all generations, the share was 32%.

This signals a challenge to employers: reimagine the workplace not as somewhere employees *have* to visit but as a destination they *want* to experience.

And, to be clear, RTO is happening. According to Remit Consulting, UK office occupancy reached 35.1% in late 2024, its highest level since the summer. London workers, on average, are now coming into the office nearly three days a week, up from just over two days a year ago.

The trend line is upward: employers are seeing steady increases in attendance compared to 2023, even if overall usage is still below pre-pandemic levels. This shows progress is being made, though challenges remain in making the office consistently attractive and valuable.

40%
of Gen Z and Millennials would trade lower pay for flexibility

Office visits are still
34%
below 2019 occupancy levels

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Creating destination workplaces

In our work with forward-thinking organisations, we've observed that successful workplace environments integrate physical, digital and cultural infrastructure. Together, these efforts enable work to happen effectively and comfortably.

People leaders should consider:

Modern, purposeful office design with collaborative spaces balanced by quiet zones.

On-site amenities that support daily needs and well-being.

Spaces designed for connection including communal areas for spontaneous interaction.

Welcome and workplace ambassadors with hospitality training who elevate daily experiences.

Technology and tools that work seamlessly, with data collection that drives continuous improvement.

Sustainable and healthy environments prioritising employee wellness through thoughtful design.

Workplace programming that builds community and provides value beyond individual work tasks.

Beyond the traditional office

We see leading organisations pivot their approach to workplace excellence by considering physical environment and employee experience as complementary. The most successful companies on Fortune's 100 Best Places to Work list — seven of which are Circles' clients — have moved well beyond traditional office concepts in an effort to appeal to employees.

Take Google's new King's Cross headquarters as a shining example. Set to fully open soon, the vast "landscraper" stretches across an entire city block and is designed to feel more like a living community than a conventional office. The building will feature everything from rooftop gardens and a running track to cafés, retail, and public spaces that connect seamlessly with the surrounding neighbourhood. By weaving wellbeing, leisure, and social spaces into the fabric of the workplace, Google is creating a destination that supports the whole person, not just the employee. For people leaders, this illustrates how reimagining office space can transform the workplace into somewhere employees actively want to be.

Case Study: *Transforming the Employee Experience*

We recently partnered with a global biopharma company to transform its employee experience during a headquarters relocation. Rather than mandating return-to-office, they created a culture prioritising well-being and community engagement to naturally encourage hybrid work. Leveraging Circles solutions, their strategy included a 24/7 concierge service for personal tasks, community management through farmers markets and team activities, and a personalised employee experience team enhancing daily interactions.

What made this initiative successful wasn't just the services themselves, *but their delivery* - executed with hospitality expertise specifically designed to make office attendance compelling rather than compulsory. As a result, the organisation saw employee satisfaction scores (eNPS) shoot up to 95, creating a headquarters that became both a talent attraction tool and community hub.

The differentiator: people-focused strategies

While exceptional physical spaces matter, we're finding that organisations getting the best results are those looking beyond the environment to prioritise employees' emotional, cultural and developmental journeys. For people and business leaders looking to differentiate their approach, we recommend these key focus areas:

- Culture of belonging and inclusion through intentional programs and community-building initiatives.
- Mental, physical, and financial well-being support through comprehensive programming.
- Flexibility and work-life integration that acknowledges individual needs
- Growth and career development opportunities that employees can't access remotely
- Strong manager relationships built on empathetic leadership practices
- Purpose-driven engagement connecting office presence to broader impact and meaning

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Shared accountability for employee experience

In our work with employers, we've found that creating exceptional workplaces requires more than executive directives. Successfully elevating employee experience can happen when responsibility is shared widely and baked into the culture. People leaders should cultivate this mindset across all organisational levels to maximise the impact.

We recommend encouraging team leaders to:

Champion flexible working arrangements while modeling in-office presence	Facilitate meaningful team connections during in-person time
Gather and implement feedback about office appeal factors	recognise and accommodate diverse needs within teams

The care factor: supporting parents to strengthen workplace experience

Recent findings from the UK's Modern Families Index highlight an urgent need for organisations to rethink the workplace experience with a sharper focus on working parents. In 2025, nearly one-third (29 %) of working parents in the UK report extreme stress - and of those, 80 % say it makes concentrating at work very difficult. What's more, perceptions of employer support are declining, with fewer parents feeling highly supported compared to previous years, and access to flexible working arrangements falling sharply.

These insights illustrate that early-career and lower-income caregivers face mounting emotional and logistical challenges. Yet, where organisations do offer meaningful support-through flexibility, understanding managers, and family-friendly policies - they see not only improved morale and optimism but also stronger retention among parent-employees.

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The path forward

For people leaders charting workplace strategy, we're observing that effective RTO approaches center on magnetism rather than mandates. organisations seeing the greatest success are investing in both exceptional environments and meaningful experiences, creating workplaces that naturally draw people back.

The most effective strategy embraces flexibility while creating compelling reasons for in- person collaboration. It's not about mandates; it's about creating a workplace so valuable employees *choose* to return.

Importantly, organisations need not let economic uncertainty or budget constraints impede progress in this area. Many of the most impactful, experience-driven strategies start with thoughtfulness and intentionality. With the right focus, building a more engaging workplace becomes a thoughtful balance of intention and investment.

Creating meaningful team rituals, reimagining meeting structures and cultivating connection opportunities often demand more creativity than capital. In this new landscape, leaders who position the office not as a requirement but as an experience worth choosing will find themselves leading organisations that thrive in the hybrid future.

Trending: generational shifts

(2) Addressing generational differences in the workplace

As Gen Z becomes a larger portion of the workforce and Boomers retire, workplace amenities and services are being redesigned to meet different expectations. Taking steps to better engage generations through services that offer value can also help reduce turnover – always important, but especially in an economic climate where companies are looking for ways to operate effectively within continually shrinking budgets.

21%
global employee engagement level is the lowest since 2021

The generational landscape

The UK workforce today spans across five generations, fostering unparalleled age diversity – a dynamic shaped by distinct values, experiences, and expectations. At the same time, organisations are grappling with a continuing slump in employee engagement.

According to Gallup's 2024 State of the Global Workplace report, global engagement dropped to 21%, down from 23% in 2023 – marking only the second such decline in over a decade.

In the U.S., engagement levels are slightly higher at 31%, yet this also reflects a dip from the previous year. **By contrast, UK engagement remains even more fragile** – just 10% of employees describe themselves as engaged – a figure that has stubbornly lagged behind in recent years. Notably, organisations considered "best practice" maintain engagement rates closer to 70%, illustrating the significant potential for improvement.

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Engagement preferences by generation

Engagement drivers vary across generations, with each group finding motivation and satisfaction through distinct preferences. (*Not shown: Generation Alpha, born ~ 2010 to 2024, are largely part-time workers.*)

Baby Boomers (born ~1946–1964)

- Engagement drivers: Job security, loyalty to the company, recognition of hard work, respect for authority.
- Trends: Often highly engaged if they feel respected and see that their experience is valued. They appreciate formal recognition and traditional rewards.
- Challenges: May feel disengaged if overlooked in favour of newer, younger employees or if rapid technological change isn't well supported.

Generation X (born ~1965–1980)

- Engagement drivers: Independence, work-life balance, opportunities for professional growth, flexible work arrangements.
- Trends: Engagement increases when they have autonomy and clear pathway for advancement. They are sceptical of authority and value transparency.
- Challenges: Often feel disengaged if micro-managed or if corporate cultures seem too rigid or "fake."

Millennials (born ~1981–1996)

- Engagement drivers: Purpose-driven work, continuous feedback, career development, an inclusive culture.
- Trends: They tend to seek meaning in their work and are more engaged when organisations show commitment to societal values. They expect rapid career progression and learning opportunities.
- Challenges: Disengagement rises quickly if they feel stagnant or if the company culture seems misaligned with their personal values.

Generation Z (born ~1997–2009)

- Engagement drivers: Authenticity, diversity and inclusion, mental health support, tech-savvy communication.
- Trends: They often prefer flexible work options (remote/hybrid), real-time feedback and a strong sense of belonging. They value emotional well-being and want to work for socially responsible companies.
- Challenges: Can disengage if organisations are slow to adapt to technology trends, lack authenticity, or fail to support mental health initiatives.

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Prioritising multigenerational management

Leaders in savvy organisations today are prioritising multigenerational management, recognising the differences that exist and wanting to maximise their investments in human capital to drive engagement, retention and productivity.

Patagonia and Qualtrics, for example, have placed a high priority on meeting the needs of workers with young families by offering on-site child care. Addressing another generation's needs, some companies are focusing on menopause benefits (see page seven) to help keep workers comfortable and on board. Mercer says that 18% of companies have or plan to provide menopause benefits; that's up from 15% in 2024.

The demographics of your workforce are continually shifting. And, as HR Executive notes: "strategising for the multigenerational workforce isn't a one-off task but rather requires continuous learning and improvement."

Knowing this, organisations have an opportunity to be well positioned for long-term success by tailoring hiring, retention and engagement strategies to address the needs of different generations.

18%
of companies plan to provide menopause benefits

We've found organisations with the highest engagement rates and lowest turnover rates focus on these key areas:

Skills development

Employees value development opportunities and organisations need to ensure that employee skills are aligned with current and future needs. Reskilling and upskilling are critical to ensure employees can meet new demands and remain up-to-date on new technologies, especially AI. Investing in diverse, continuous learning methods, including immersive technologies like the metaverse, will help organisations keep employees engaged while ensuring they have the talent they need to address evolving needs.

Flexible benefits

A one-size-fits-all approach doesn't work for today's multigenerational workforce. Employees expect benefits tailored to their life stage — like fertility support, retirement planning or student loan assistance. As WTW notes in their 2025 podcast on the employee benefits experience, they also want simplicity and clear guidance. customisable options, paired with easy-to-use digital tools support well-being, boost engagement, and improve retention by making benefits both relevant and accessible.

Technology adoption

HR leaders need to effectively bridge generational gaps in terms of tech usage and AI readiness. Employees have different levels of comfort with technology, not only based on generational differences, but on their level of exposure to technology in previous roles. Today virtually every role requires some level of comfort and awareness of how technology is impacting how work gets done. One big benefit: today's technology can bridge gaps based on generational differences and can be used as a unifier.

Addressing mental health

Mental health continues to be a concern for employers and is an issue that impacts every generation. For example, 40% of Gen Z employees surveyed report feeling anxious or depressed — 46% said that stigma prevents them from seeking care. As employers recognise that mental health issues impact all generations, 91% say they're increasing their investments in mental health offerings. The Society of Human Resource Management (SHRM) has an insightful podcast on this subject, worthy of a listen.

Faced with these challenges, organisations must take steps to ensure that they're engaging their entire workforce, at the same time. Employee engagement drives productivity and spurs retention — both of which have a significant impact on operational efficiencies and the bottom line.

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There are some important areas of focus that can help organisations ensure that they're engaging their employees in meaningful ways.

How to make it happen

Building and sustaining a strong environment and culture can help foster belonging by creating spaces and opportunities to embrace diverse workstyles, while balancing digital tools with human connections. It's not an either/or environment — it's both. A culture of connection, innovation and exploration can help engage employees across generations and give them the time and space they need to learn and explore.

Tailored communication through multiple channels and the use of different styles designed to reach different generations, keep employees informed and connected. Here it's important to understand and respect preferences in terms of how employees want to receive feedback and recognition. For instance, while Boomers tend to prefer formal challenges, Gen Z employees prefer quick digital interactions through channels like Slack, text, or short video updates.

Finally, it's important to offer inclusive career pathways to meet the preferences and needs of employees across generations. Flexible career development options — like lateral moves, gig work and phased retirement — provide flexibility and address varying employee ambitions and life stages.

Focusing on designing a workplace and services that can readily adapt to generational shifts is a win-win for both organisations and employees. Employees benefit from personal and professional development and the opportunity to learn new skills while employers benefit from workforce readiness, higher productivity and lower turnover.

When organisations are effective at designing workplaces and workplace services that meet generational expectations and drive engagement, they are able to maximise the impact of their investment in human resources. Even in a challenging economic climate, HR leaders and managers can build workplaces that address generational differences within budget — while strengthening their employer brand.

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Trending: justifying ROI

(3) Proving well-being ROI: protecting people and the bottom line

Persistent inflation, higher tariffs, elevated borrowing costs and concerns of a looming recession are the ear marks of today's challenging economic landscape. This isn't news to organisational leaders, who are facing mounting pressure to justify every expenditure — including investments in employee well-being programs.

The future demands a disciplined, strategic approach to well-being investments, ensuring initiatives deliver measurable outcomes.

Strategic well-being investments become best practice

Long gone are the days when companies could afford to offer an extensive array of benefits without measuring a tangible return on investment (ROI). Today's economic realities demand that organisations make more calculated decisions about their well-being investments, focusing resources where they will have the greatest impact on both employee health and business outcomes.

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Here's what we see top employers doing to improve ROI, support employee well-being and navigate economic pressures:

Prioritising Measurable Outcomes

Forward-thinking companies are now concentrating their resources on well-being initiatives that demonstrate clear, quantifiable results. Mental health support programs, financial wellness coaching and resilience training are gaining prominence as organisations recognise their direct impact on reducing absenteeism, improving engagement and enhancing productivity. These targeted efforts address critical employee needs while delivering tangible business benefits — creating the win-win scenario that today's fiscal environment demands.

Data-Driven Accountability

As budgets tighten, companies are demanding stronger evidence of return on investment from their well-being providers. It's no longer sufficient for vendors to promise results; they must deliver data-driven proof that their services create meaningful impact. This shift is revolutionising the vendor-client relationship, with providers now expected to offer real-time programmatic updates showing the evolution of ROI through metrics such as hours saved, improved NPS scores and enhanced employee experience measures.

Integration with Business Strategy

Leading organisations are moving beyond treating well-being as a separate initiative and instead embedding it directly into their talent management and performance strategies. Leadership development programs increasingly incorporate stress management and emotional intelligence training, simultaneously boosting leadership effectiveness and team resilience. Services that address real-life stressors — from travel planning to family logistics — are being aligned with broader organisational priorities including diversity, equity, and inclusion, sustainability goals and employee experience initiatives.

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Targeted Approaches for Maximum Impact

Rather than applying a one-size-fits-all approach to well-being, companies are implementing sophisticated segmentation strategies to identify where concentrating their efforts will yield the greatest returns. High-burnout industries like healthcare, finance, legal, and technology often receive tailored well-being initiatives designed to address their specific challenges and stressors, maximising the potential gains from these targeted investments.

Maximising Impact with Low-Cost Wins

As economic pressures mount, organisations are shifting toward cost-effective, high-impact initiatives rather than expensive amenities. Flexible work arrangements, manager training focused on psychological safety, and virtual wellness resources are replacing costly on-site facilities like gyms or elaborate wellness retreats. Concierge programs represent a prime example of this trend, delivering high perceived value across different locations and roles at a fraction of the cost of traditional perks.

Working with External Partners for Better Outcomes

In pursuit of optimisation, companies are carefully evaluating whether to build up their internal capabilities or partner with external well-being providers. Outsourcing services such as concierge support, financial wellness coaching, or mental health resources can provide access to specialized expertise and enable faster deployment without overburdening internal teams. This strategy allows organisations to concentrate on their core business while still delivering personalised employee support with measurable outcomes.

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Strategic Well-Being Investments

Google exemplifies this strategic shift in well-being investment. Once known for its lavish workplace perks, the tech giant has recently scaled back non-essential benefits such as on-site massages and certain campus amenities.

Instead, the company has redirected resources toward more impactful initiatives including mental health counselling, comprehensive manager training and flexible work policies.

By emphasising work-life balance and conducting data-driven reviews of how new policies affect team performance and employee sentiment, Google demonstrates the power of strategic well-being investment.

Investing in the future of work

As economic uncertainties persist, the fundamental question driving employee well-being investments has evolved from "What can we offer?" to "How does this initiative move the needle on business-critical outcomes?"

This shift represents a maturation of workplace well-being — transitioning from a collection of nice-to-have perks to a strategic business imperative aligned with organisational goals and supported by measurable results.

Trending: retention strategies

(4) **Building community** becomes **a powerful driver of retention**

Employee replacement costs can range from one-half to two times an employee's annual salary depending on the role — and leaders already know the importance of mitigating turnover costs. This puts a spotlight on retention strategies, which now must extend beyond traditional compensation packages.

Efforts to improve work culture have been part of retention initiatives for years and now we are seeing community building emerging as a critical factor in fostering employee loyalty, engagement and overall satisfaction.

A strong workplace community can help employees feel meaningfully connected to their organisations — feelings that motivate them to stay.

Community strengthens the workplace

As hybrid and remote work models became common practice, the spontaneous interactions that once naturally fostered workplace relationships have diminished. In 2024, Gallup reported that one in five employees worldwide feel lonely, with higher rates for hybrid and remote workers. This signals an urgent need for intentional community-building strategies at work.

We're already seeing signs that the companies that fail to address this gap face significant consequences: diminished productivity, erosion of trust and weakened cultural cohesion. Research consistently shows that employees who feel connected to a strong workplace community, report higher engagement levels, collaborate more effectively and are significantly less likely to seek employment elsewhere. In fact, SHRM reports that a positive employee experience makes people 68% less likely to consider leaving. For organisations struggling with retention challenges, community building represents not merely a "nice-to-have" initiative but a business-critical strategy with measurable impacts.

68%
of employees say a positive employee experience keeps them loyal

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Trending strategic approaches to workplace community building

1. Evolution of Employee Resource Groups

While ERGs traditionally focused on diversity and inclusion efforts, forward-thinking organisations are expanding their scope to encompass broader communities of interest. These peer-led groups now frequently include:

- Parenting networks providing support and resources for working parents
- Early-career communities helping new professionals navigate workplace dynamics
- Wellness circles promoting holistic health approaches and work-life balance

These expanded ERGs create organic connection points around shared experiences, interests and challenges that transcend departmental boundaries.

2. Purpose-Driven Initiatives

We're seeing UK businesses increasingly harness **shared purpose as a powerful way to build employee community – and the results are striking**. Research shows that over [78% of UK companies](#) now run formal workplace volunteering programmes, and [65% offer "Volunteering Time Off" policies](#) to encourage participation. Yet even with these allowances, more than [140 million volunteering hours went unused](#) by employees last year – a missed opportunity valued at an estimated **£32.5 billion** in potential economic and social impact.

To address this gap, many employers are innovating. One example is the "Netflix of volunteering" app, [OnHand](#), which makes it easier for employees to connect with local causes and has driven significantly higher engagement.

These programmes often include **on-site or easily accessible activations** - from match-making events to skill-based pro-bono projects - that bring shared values to life through direct experience. The outcome? A workforce united around common goals - professionally aligned, but motivated and connected by **collective purpose.**

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3. Connection-Driven Experiences

Modern community-building events transcend traditional corporate gatherings by prioritising authentic human connection. Innovative approaches include:

- Storytelling sessions where employees share personal or professional journeys
- Innovation jams bringing cross-functional teams together to solve challenges
- Wellness initiatives focusing on collective well-being and team bonding
- Recognition events that celebrate shared accomplishments

Many organisations now employ dedicated Community Managers to design and implement these experiences, recognising that meaningful connection requires intentional facilitation. In partnership with Circles, one American multinational energy corporation implemented a revitalised community management program that increased employee participation by an impressive 471%.

Without growth opportunities

74%

of Millennials and GenZers would quit

4. Structured Relationship Building

Formal mentorship and sponsorship initiatives create valuable cross-hierarchical relationships that strengthen organisational fabric as well as individual experiences. These programs accelerate professional development while simultaneously fostering loyalty that extends beyond immediate team boundaries. They also, quite simply, give employees what they want. A Workplace Intelligence survey revealed that 74% of Millennial and Gen Z employees are likely to quit if they don't have enough growth opportunities, and an intentional mentoring program can help address this gap directly.

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Measuring the impact of community initiatives

The business value of community-building efforts becomes evident through metrics like:

- Participation and attendance rates
- Employee engagement scores
- Workplace attendance during community events
- General employee feedback and event NPS

As organisations navigate increasingly complex talent landscapes, those that prioritise intentional community building likely gain a significant competitive advantage. What was once considered supplementary to business strategy now stands as an essential component of organisational resilience, employee satisfaction and sustainable growth.

5. Community-Centered Onboarding

Retention efforts start on Day 1, if not before. Onboarding is a critical opportunity to introduce new hires to the company's community ecosystem. Rather than focusing exclusively on paperwork and procedural training, onboarding programs that boost community and belonging should include:

- Welcome activations and new joiner socials
- Guided office tours featuring cultural storytelling
- Introduction to ERGs and internal communities
- Connection to mentors and peer support networks

The Art of "Mindful Maneuvering"
A compelling emerging concept in community building is what organisational psychologist Caitlin Collins terms "mindful maneuvering." This approach reframes traditional influence as the intentional, empathetic art of guiding others toward shared goals. Collins is careful to differentiate mindful maneuvering from the negative connotations of manipulation. "Manipulation sounds sinister," said Collins, who is program strategy director at performance management platform Betterworks, "but when it's rooted in generosity, clarity, and positive intent, it becomes a strength."

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Trending: employee expectations

(5) Shifting employee expectations are changing people management

To meet the demands of today's workforce, employers must understand how employee expectations have evolved.

Shaped by the pandemic and rapid technological change, today's employees seek flexible, autonomous work schedules, alignment with purpose, whole-person support and learning opportunities that are both accessible and personally relevant. A number of significant shifts in employee expectations are changing how organisations manage people — impacting both policies and practices, and the need for new methods of management and management skills.

84%
of employees rank schedule flexibility equal to location flexibility

Flexibility beyond location

The evolution of remote work spurred by the pandemic has transformed into "work sovereignty" — employees now increasingly expect to have control over not just where they work — but when and how.

In response, organisations are taking steps to implement:

- Results-based performance systems that move beyond tracking time to focus on output and outcomes.

- Asynchronous collaboration tools that can accommodate different working hours across time zones — or based on employee work preferences.

- "Core collaboration hours" policies which establish times where employees are expected to be available during the day — typically over 3–4-hour timeframes, rather than the traditional 8-hour synchronous schedule requirements that were common pre-pandemic.

Flexibility has become a "must-have" for most employees. Microsoft's 2024 Work Trend Index, for instance, reveals that 84% of employees rank schedule flexibility at the same level of importance as location flexibility.

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Purpose-aligned employment

Today's employees are looking for alignment between their personal values and the values and purpose of the organisations they work for.

In fact, research by Net Impact reveals that 72% of new entrants to the workforce are interested in roles where they can "make an impact."

Companies are responding to employees' desire to make an impact by offering more transparent impact reporting and opportunities to dedicate paid time to purpose-aligned activities of their choice. For example, Circles has partnered with clients to organise group volunteer events that support causes aligned with company values — and to host local farmers markets that both strengthen community ties and provide employees with fresh, healthy food.

Career development opportunities are also now frequently designed to incorporate purpose-matching elements. For example, Circles has worked with clients to sponsor networking on-site events, schedule workshops to improve skills and help support mentor programs.

The maturing GenZ workforce, in particular, is focused on purpose, according to Deloitte's 2024 research, which indicates that they value purpose nearly twice as much as they value compensation.

72%
of those entering the workforce seek roles where they can make an impact

Whole-person management approach

The once-clear line between 'work life' and 'personal life' has largely disappeared.

Organisations have responded by expanding well-being initiatives beyond traditional wellness programs to include a focus on financial wellness, relationship support, and life management resources, like those Circles provides.
To ensure managers are prepared to meet employees' evolving needs, organisations are providing more training on how to navigate life transitions like parenthood, elder care or healthcare challenges.

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Performance evaluation systems also now frequently factor in life context such as personal well-being, mental health and individual circumstances when evaluating employee performance. For instance, including personal development objectives in addition to professional goals, an approach that acknowledges employees' desire to be seen as whole individuals. Gartner research supports this, finding that 82% of employees want to be recognised beyond their work roles.

Embedding well-being

Well-being metrics are increasingly woven into performance evaluations, reflecting growing recognition of how mental health directly affects productivity. In the UK, most employers now acknowledge that mental health is a key business issue, and nearly all invest in support services. Yet only about one-third of companies set specific mental health objectives or disclose wellbeing-related KPIs.

A more proactive and impactful approach comes from using regular check-ins or pulse surveys – short, frequent questionnaires that surface issues before they escalate. These tools provide real-time insight into employee sentiment, enabling timely interventions. When paired with manager training and supported work design, they help foster a culture where conversations about wellbeing are routine, and responses are swift and effective.

This shift in focus reflects a broader understanding that personal factors significantly influence professional performance.

Personalising the employee experience

Today's organisations know that a one-size-fits-all approach to managing the employee experience simply doesn't work — if it ever did. Today personalised work arrangements, customised schedules and various work settings are common. This is especially true in industries and sectors where competition for talent remains fierce, like technology, healthcare and finance.

Employees increasingly have the opportunity to customise their benefits packages to meet their unique needs and life stages, including wellness programs that match personal goals and preferences, and financial and health guidance based on individual circumstances. In addition, organisations are personalising career pathways and offering employees an opportunity for self-directed learning, custom role creation, the selection of mentors and individual growth plans based on personal purpose and values.

82%
of employees want to be recognised beyond their work roles
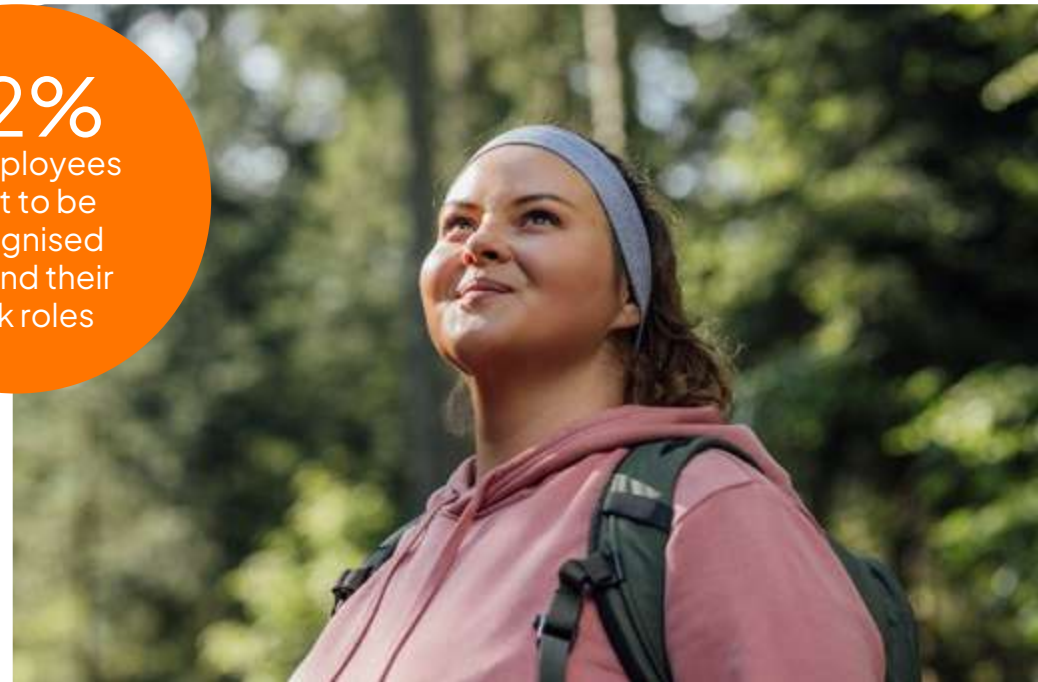
Personalisation is also extending into the physical workplace, where tailored hospitality experiences help employees feel seen, supported and valued.

Leading organisations are reimagining office environments to meet individual preferences- offering concierge-style services, curated events and thoughtfully designed on-site amenities that reflect employee interests and needs.

Whether it's arranging dry cleaning pick-up, organising lunch- and-learns based on team interests, or creating quiet zones for focused work, these personalised touches significantly enhance the on-site experience.

Unilever's Inclusive Employee Experience

Unilever has embedded inclusion at the heart of its culture, with more than 90 employee resource groups spanning race, gender, disability, LGBTQ+, and socio-economic diversity.

These groups create networks where employees can connect, mentor, and lead change across the business.

The company also runs leadership listening programmes, connecting senior leaders directly with diverse employee perspectives.

These initiatives have been credited with shaping policy changes, improving retention, and building a stronger sense of belonging across the organisation.

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Continuous learning integration

Employee learning today isn't an event but a process. Learning has shifted from something that is a separate activity from the work an employee does, to being integrated into everyday work. Learning has been embedded into workflows, taking advantage of technology to allow for real-time, on-demand access to information and support wherever employees may be.

Skill acquisition has become more democratised — not something that managers decide if an employee can take advantage of, but something employees can choose and access based on their own needs and interests.

Peer-based knowledge sharing platforms help employees share their experiences and expertise with each other. It's an environment where formal education benefits are being replaced by more flexible continuous learning stipends, allowing employees to create their own learning experiences that balance both personal and professional learning objectives.

Shifts in employee expectations are driving a fundamental rethinking of the employer-employee relationship. The shifts are driving a more balanced partnership model which raise significant implications for organisational structure, leadership approaches and talent retention strategies.

In a tight economy where many organisations are facing shrinking budgets, finding ways to address shifting employee expectations can have a direct and positive bottom line impact.

Attracting and retaining employees represents a significant cost for organisations that don't want to risk losing top talent — or failing to take full advantage of the talent they already have on board. Meeting expectations for more personalised and more flexible benefits, enhanced well-being and development opportunities will help employers not only retain, but also engage, their valued employees.

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Trending: improving culture

(6) Using AI tools to improve organisational culture

The emergence of generative AI (Gen AI) has radically transformed the workplace, and the final impact of its influence has yet to be realised. As organisations and employees learn more about these powerful tools and how they can be used to streamline work, optimise workflow and glean important insights into a wide range of business impacts, it's becoming clear that organisations that embrace AI and integrate it into business operations will keep pace. Those that don't, will fall behind quickly.

The technology is evolving rapidly, with astounding potential to impact every facet of the workplace — including organisational culture.

AI-powered culture tools have the potential to offer transformative insights, but only when implemented with clarity, care and inclusion. McKinsey reports that AI is transforming six major industries, including finance and life sciences. We've seen forward-thinking companies use AI not just for efficiency, but to support a healthier, more connected workplace. One example: using AI to monitor workloads and flag early signs of burnout by analysing calendar density, meeting frequency or after-hours email habits — enabling leaders to intervene with support before burnout takes hold.

Others leverage AI to personalise onboarding, accelerating new hire integration and boosting connection from day one. When selecting and adopting AI tools, leading organisations made sure they enhanced workplace culture rather than undermined it.

These considerations sat alongside costs, budget pressures, and the broader economic climate. While AI can boost productivity and deliver long-term savings, the short-term investments in adoption, training and change management are important pieces of the puzzle. Following we explore five key strategies modern organisations are using, along with strategic actions to implement.

1. Build trust through transparency

Why it matters: AI tools are only effective when employees trust the intent behind them. When perceived as surveillance, they can damage the very culture they aim to measure. While concerns have lessened over time, there are still employees who worry that AI technology may replace them or dramatically change their jobs in negative ways.

Communication is critical. Strategic actions: to help build trust

Use opt-in systems instead of default monitoring, empower employees with choice

Actively involve employees in decisions about how AI will be used to monitor work and productivity by educating them on its purpose, benefits - for both the organisation and the individual - and how they can choose to opt in. This fosters a sense of control in a time when many may feel they're losing it. Offer customisable settings for monitoring and data storage, along with a pilot period to test and refine the approach.

Clearly communicate what data is collected, how it's used, and who has access

Make it clear to employees what data is being collected about them and their work, how the data will be used, and who will have access to the data. For instance: calendar data showing the frequency, length and attendees at meetings; engagement metrics showing participation rates; action items generated and completed. Leaders can then evaluate the value of meetings and participant involvement.

Establish governance structures that include employee voices to ensure accountability

Creating formal systems and processes for how AI tools are selected, deployed and used that invites input from employees can help ensure accountability while also boosting buy-in. For example, you might establish a cross-functional team that meets regularly to review and evaluate AI adoption and make decisions related to continued use and process improvements.

It's worth focusing on transparency. A UKG study found that 75% of employees would be more accepting of AI use at their organisations if the company was more transparent about how it was being used to improve workflow (78%), and how the company was specifically using AI (75%).

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2. Design for cultural fairness and inclusion

Why it matters: AI systems of ten reflect the biases of the data they're trained on. Without intentional oversight, these tools can reinforce rather than challenge systemic inequalities. Ensuring broad representation and input can help minimise blind spots and boost fairness and inclusion.

Strategic actions: to ensure fairness and inclusion

Involve culturally diverse teams in tool development and training data reviews

Enable employee feedback loops to flag and correct biased interpretations

Combine AI insights with human interpretation, including generational and cultural perspectives

Diverse teams bring diverse perspectives that help identify and eliminate the biases that lead to systemic problems. Cross-functional teams that include members from varied culture backgrounds, genders, age groups, abilities and parts of the organisation can minimise these biases. Documenting design choices and intended impacts serve as important inputs to periodic audits that evaluate and detect potential bias.

Feedback loops should be continuous, easy to access, and integrated into daily workflows, not limited to occasional surveys. Anonymous input options and regular team discussions surface concerns early, especially from underrepresented voices. Just as important is transparency — letting employees know how their feedback leads to changes builds trust and keeps the loop active. These insights feed AI and help prevent future bias.

AI can surface patterns, but people provide the context. Involving employees from different cultural and generational backgrounds helps ensure interpretations reflect real-world nuance. This is crucial in areas like performance reviews or engagement scoring, where algorithms miss the subtleties of communication styles or lived experience. Structured review sessions that blend AI data with team input leads to fairer, more thoughtful outcomes.

Fairness requires continuous input, diverse perspectives and intentional design. Building inclusive systems today will lay the groundwork for more equitable workplaces tomorrow.

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3. Train AI to understand your context

Why it matters: Culture is complex. Inside jokes, industry jargon and team dynamics often fall outside AI's default comprehension. It's important for AI to be trained to understand these unique aspects of your organisation and its culture.

Strategic actions: to help AI understand your context.

Customise tools with industry and organisation-specific language training

Create human-in-the-loop systems where feedback continuously improves the model

Start with low-context domains before expanding to areas with higher nuance

Generic AI agents come with pre-existing biases based on the data they were trained on. They are not designed to capture the uniqueness of your organisation. Train these tools with your own industry and organisational culture-specific language and data. Include documentation from internal systems, messaging patterns and even customer interactions to give AI a fuller picture of your real-world context.

Humans play an important role in continually monitoring and improving the performance of AI tools. Make sure you build in opportunities for human/ AI collaboration across the tools you use and your processes. Employees should be empowered to flag issues and contribute examples, helping the system learn and adapt as language and norms evolve over time.

Pilots and experimentation on a small scale can help to identify issues and areas of potential bias before they become widespread. Insights from these experiments can be used to ensure continuous improvement and equity. Begin with operational or administrative tasks and only move into areas like performance or sentiment analysis once trust and reliability are established.

AI performs best when it understands the people and culture it supports. Contextual training and human oversight help ensure tools stay relevant, accurate, and aligned with your values.

4. Make metrics meaningful, not performative

Why it matters: Over-fixation on improving scores can lead to performative behaviour — when employees focus on looking engaged rather than actually being engaged. This masks real issues and stalls progress, while true culture change comes from using insights to drive meaningful action, not just measurement.

Strategic actions: to ensure that your metrics are meaningful and provide actionable insights

Define vision and culture goals before implementing metrics

Start with the end in mind. What are the outcomes you're looking for from your AI implementation? How do you define success? How can you put metrics in place to help you monitor, how the AI is performing and the impact it's having, on an ongoing basis? Aligning these goals with broader organisational values and communicating them clearly, connects metrics to purpose, not just performance.

Use balanced scorecards that integrate qualitative and quantitative data

Balanced scorecards provide a visual tool that balances qualitative and quantitative outcomes. They're a useful communication tool for groups ranging from senior leadership teams to frontline staff members, helping them see the impact and value of the tools and monitoring being used. Including employee stories, sentiment trends and lived experiences alongside hard numbers adds depth and drives more informed decision-making.

Train leaders to treat AI results as starting points for conversation, not endpoints

The use of AI should be iterative as your organisation learns, and as these tools continue to emerge and develop. Encourage ongoing conversations across the organisation to prompt increased participation and build trust. Equip leaders to ask thoughtful questions about what data is missing and to explore how AI insights connect with reality. This approach promotes transparency and more human-centered decisions.

Metrics should drive understanding, not just optics. When tied to real goals and supported by human insight, they become tools for change — not checkboxes.

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5. Measure what matters, together

Why it matters: Not everything that counts can be counted. And not everything that's counted, counts. Measurement should reflect what employees believe shapes their experience. When people see themselves in the process, they're more likely to trust it — and act on it.

Strategic actions: to ensure that the things you measure will have potential for impact

Start by measuring aspects of culture that employees care about most

Involve staff in co-defining what success looks like and what should be tracked

Use storytelling and narrative-based tools alongside metrics to capture what numbers miss

Understanding the drivers of a positive employee experience can be a good starting point for identifying measures that matter. Consider holding listening sessions across different levels and departments, and including diverse employee perspectives to ensure that measures are holistic and relevant. Pay attention to recurring themes around belonging, psychological safety, recognition and work-life balance — often overlooked but deeply felt.

When employees play an active role in defining metrics, they're more likely to buy in and trust the results. Include frontline workers and employees who are both tenured and new to the organisation. Co-creating metrics not only improves relevance, it also reinforces a sense of ownership, making data a shared tool for progress — not a top-down compliance exercise.

Effective communication requires a combination of logos (logic), ethos (credibility), pathos (emotion) — concepts initially put forth by the Greek philosopher, Aristotle, but still relevant today. Stories can help bring data to life, especially for employees who are more engaged through narrative than charts and data. Regularly capturing real experiences — through interviews, digital storyboards, or anonymous testimonials — can uncover patterns and moments that metrics alone can't surface.

Measurement is most powerful when it reflects what employees truly value. Co-creating metrics builds trust, relevance and shared accountability for progress.

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Organisations that approach AI tools with transparency, inclusion and humility see the greatest return, not just in metrics, but in their culture, morale and long-term engagement.

When AI becomes a support system rather than a surveillance tool, it becomes a true ally in building a stronger workplace culture.

Let's build a better workplace, together.

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