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The State of Learning and Readiness

Building a Future-Ready Workforce

Insights and trends from Instructure's national workforce and higher education readiness survey





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Introduction

In a constantly shifting world, being ready isn't optional; it's essential. **Readiness means having the tools, the mindset, and the support to keep moving forward, whether learning happens in classrooms, at work, or throughout life.**

At Instructure, we believe readiness is more than skills or technology alone. It's about having clarity, trusted ways to grow, and learning environments that fuel genuine growth: wherever people are on their journey.

This report reminds us that readiness is a journey we create together. By connecting people with clear, flexible, and meaningful learning experiences, we can close the confidence gap and build a future where everyone has the chance to thrive.



Melissa Loble

Chief Academic Officer,
Instructure



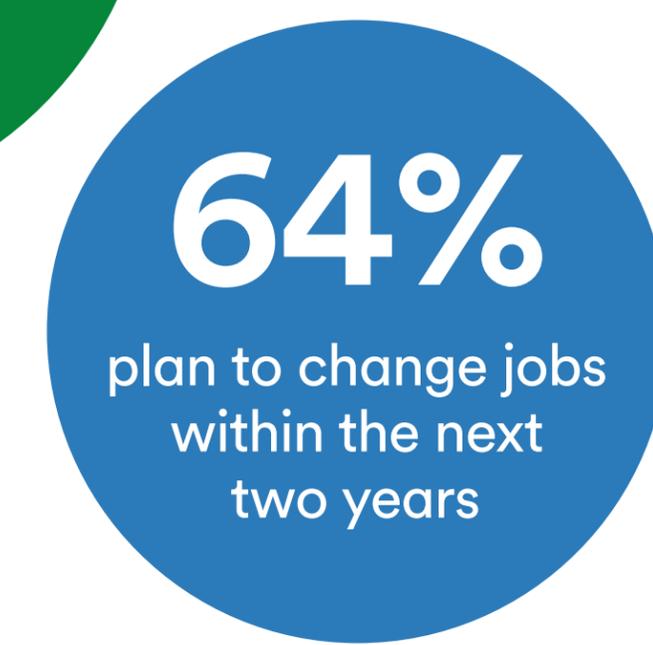
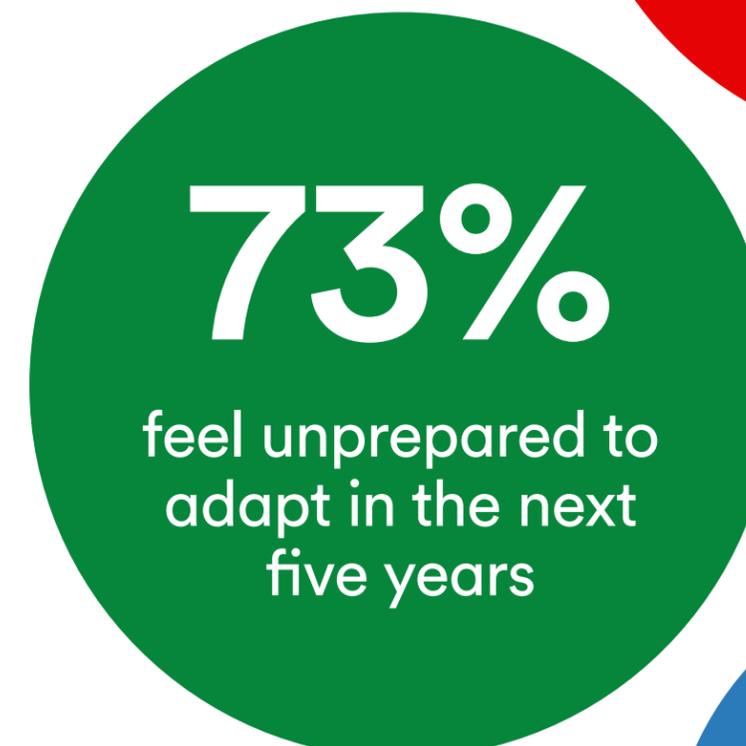
Readiness means having the tools, the mindset, and the support to keep moving forward, whether learning happens in classrooms, at work, or throughout life.

Workforce at a Crossroads

Economic uncertainty and rapid advances in technology are reshaping entire industries, creating new opportunities but also deepening anxiety about how to keep up. The path from classroom to career is no longer straightforward, and many learners are left questioning which skills, credentials, or experiences will truly help them advance and stay resilient.

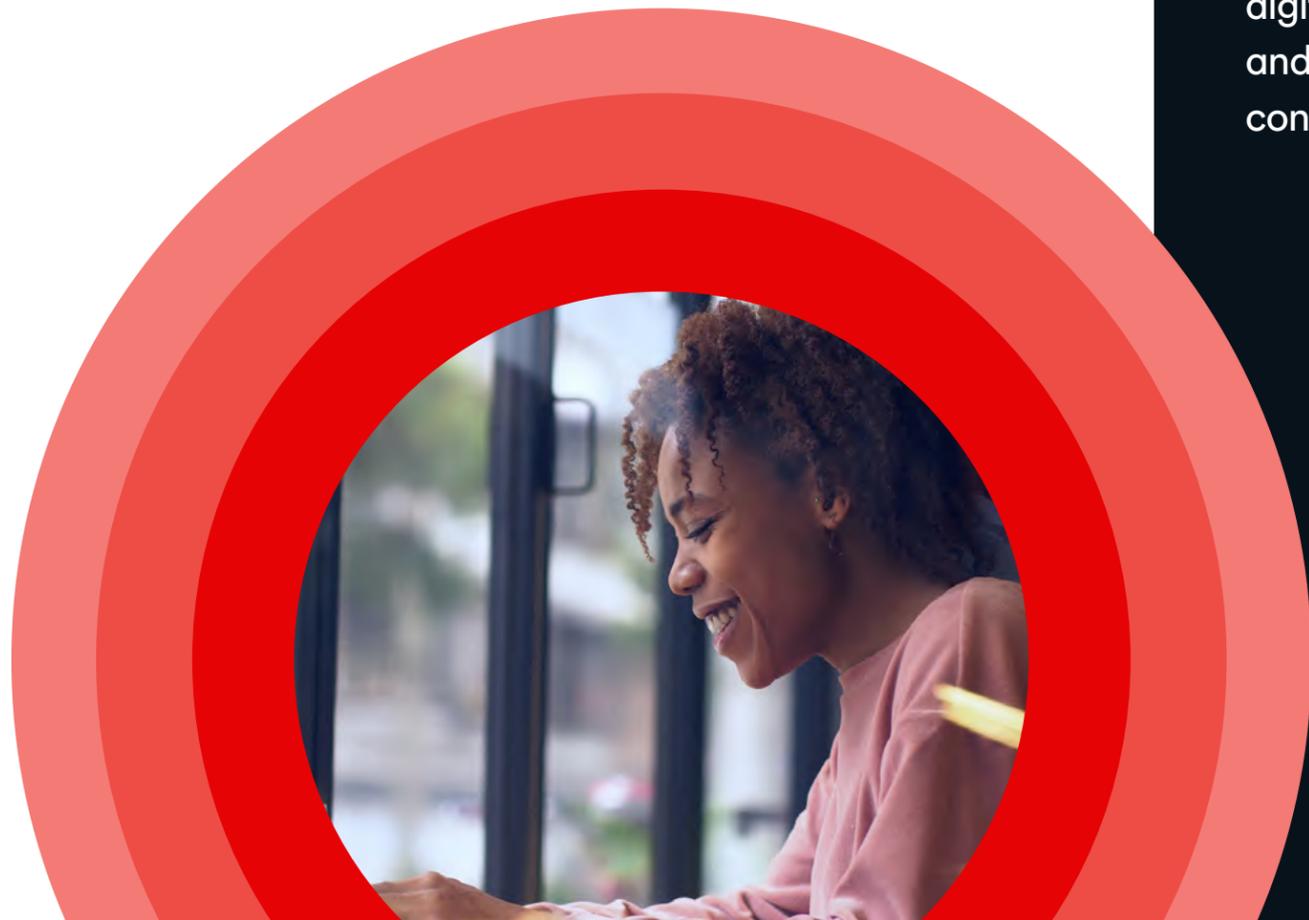
At the same time, people are eager to grow. Most say they would benefit from additional training and upskilling, yet many believe they'll need to change jobs or return to school to reach their goals. This readiness gap drives turnover for employers and highlights an opening for colleges and universities to work more closely with industry to help people translate skills into meaningful opportunities.

Workers are telling us they're ready to learn, but the systems around them haven't caught up. Education, training, and employment are still too often disconnected. Closing those gaps will shape how prepared people feel for whatever comes next.



Readiness Pillars: What It Takes to Be Ready

Across every industry and learning environment, true readiness rests on four key pillars - Digital Literacy & Technological Agility, Continuous Skills Development, Adaptability & Career Mobility, and a Growth Mindset & Future-Ready Thinking. Together, they shape how people learn, grow, and adapt in a world of change.



Digital Literacy & Technological Agility

26%

cite lack of digital skills as a barrier

50%

are actually using AI on the job

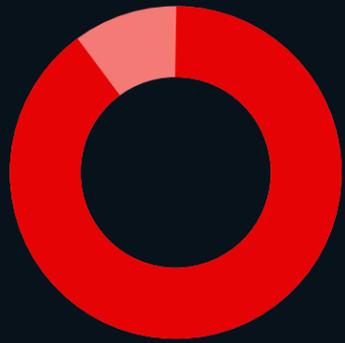
Gen Z

are most likely to feel overwhelmed by tech

In an increasingly digital workplace, comfort with technology is no longer optional; it's fundamental. **Yet, 26% of workers say a lack of digital skills holds them back, and only about half are currently using AI on the job.**

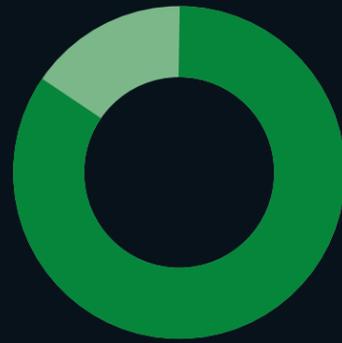
Gen Z and other younger employees are more likely to say the flood of new technology feels overwhelming. What helps is steady digital literacy training, from everyday tech skills to knowing when and how to use AI responsibly. Those investments give people confidence and make organizations stronger.

Continuous Skills Development



88%

say more training would help career advancement



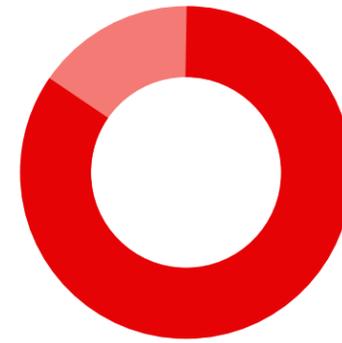
60%

want to upskill to switch careers, but don't know which credentials matter

Learning shouldn't stop once someone lands a job. Most employees agree: **88% say that more training would help them grow, and 60% are eager to upskill to switch careers; yet, many don't know which credentials matter most.**

Ongoing development, trusted certifications, and flexible learning can turn uncertainty into confidence and help people stay ready for whatever comes next.

Adaptability & Career Mobility



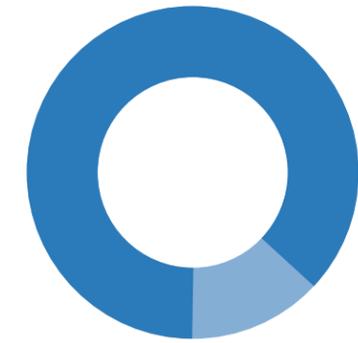
73%

worry they can't adapt to career changes



64%

are planning a career change soon



32%

worry their skills won't survive economic shifts

Rapid change is the reality, and workers know it. **73% worry they can't adapt to shifts in their career, and 64% are planning a career change soon, often to find better opportunities for growth.**

Economic uncertainty adds another layer: **nearly one-third worry their current skills might not hold up in an economic downturn.** When people have clear opportunities to pivot, reskill or move into new roles, they can meet change with confidence.

Growth Mindset & Future-Ready Thinking

72%

workers trust credentials, but need a clearer path

Real readiness

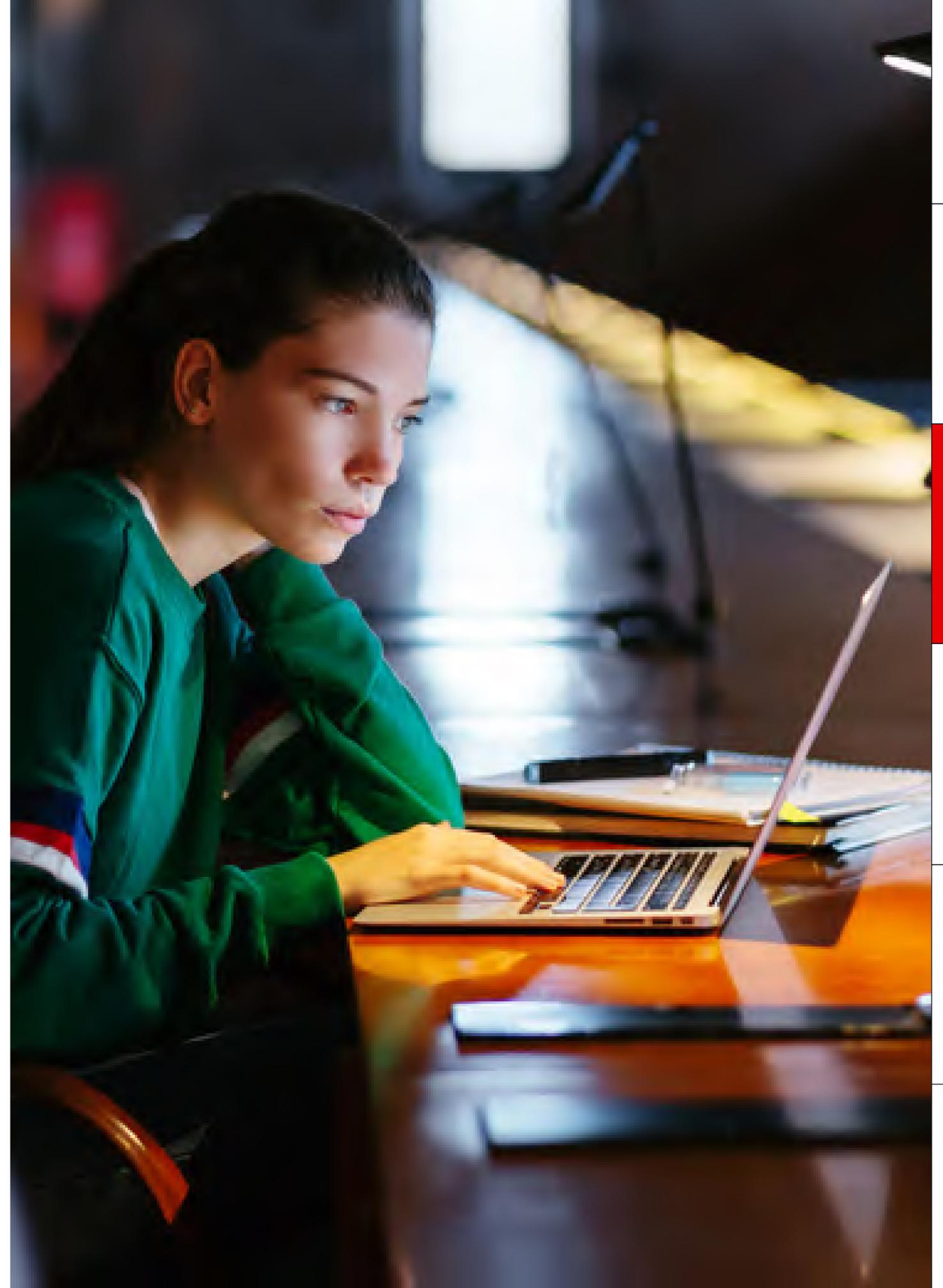
= learning, unlearning, and resilience.

Skills matter, but so does mindset. **72% of people trust that earning credentials will unlock real career opportunities, but many want better guidance on how to make sure their learning aligns with their goals.**

Readiness means more than just gaining new knowledge; it's about staying curious, embracing change, and seeing each challenge as an opportunity to grow and become more adaptable. While change is inevitable, helping learners understand the options available to them can provide a sense of direction and stability in uncertain times.

They may not be able to predict exactly where their journey will lead, but with trusted credentials and trusted paths, they'll know where to turn and how to keep moving forward.

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Generational Readiness: A Wake-Up Call

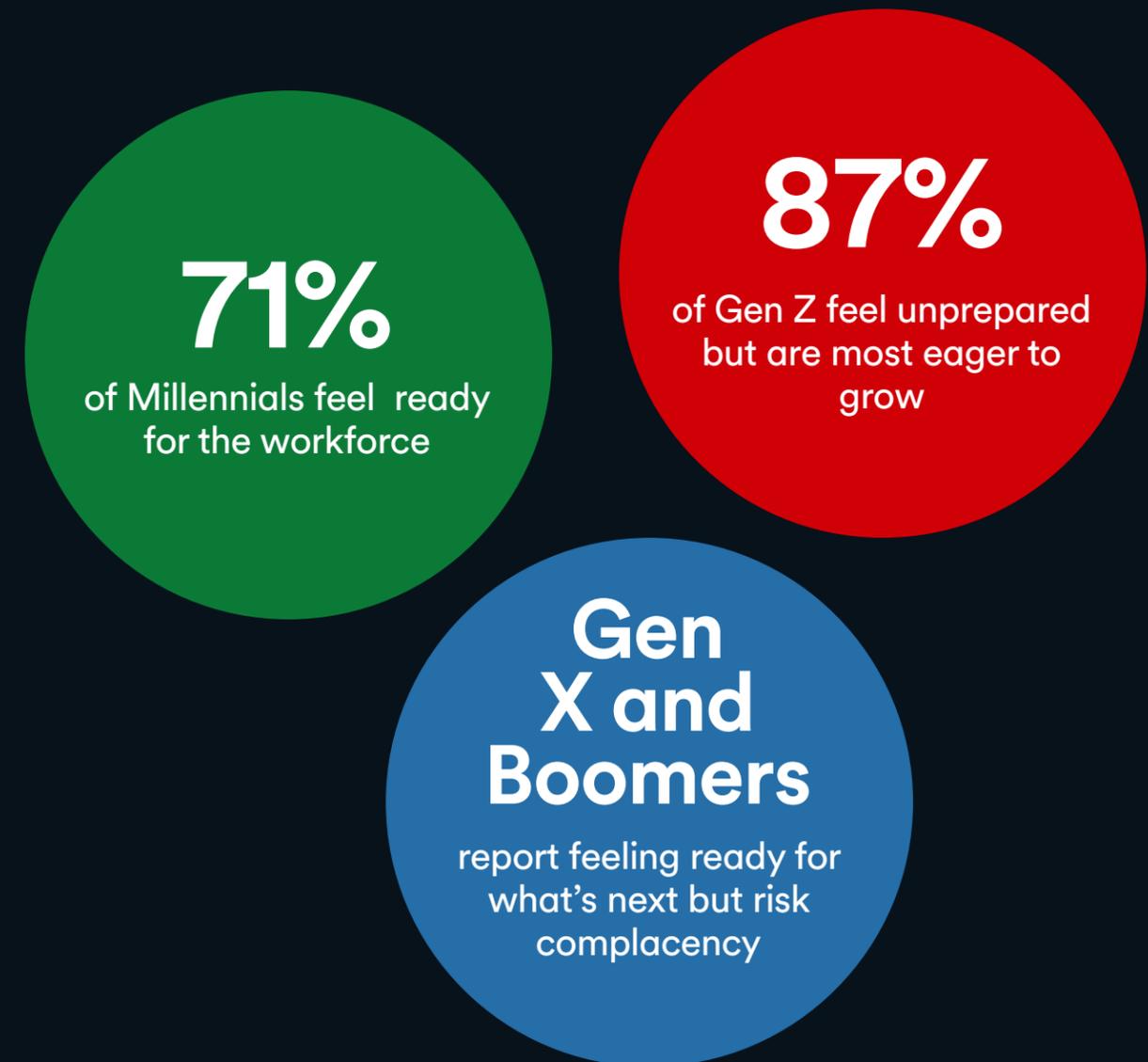
Readiness looks different for every generation, and today's learners and youngest workers are sending a clear signal: they want help connecting their learning to real opportunities.

Gen Z, the newest generation in the workforce, feels the least prepared, with **87% stating they feel unprepared to succeed at work**. Many point to limited guidance, unclear paths from school to career, and uncertainty about which skills and credentials matter most.

Learners today will become the leaders of tomorrow. Supporting this generation isn't just about meeting today's expectations; it's an investment in the workforce, innovation, and leadership of the future. Now is the time to shape not only their success, but ours.

By contrast, Millennials, Gen X, and Boomers report higher levels of confidence, but this shouldn't mean readiness can be taken for granted. Change affects everyone, and staying future-ready means continually refreshing skills and mindsets at every stage of life.

These generational differences remind us that a one-size-fits-all approach won't close the readiness gap. Flexible learning options, recognized credentials, and clear paths from education to employment can help every generation move forward with confidence.



Shared Path to Success

TL;DR: Readiness is the new currency of work.

Building a future-ready workforce is a responsibility, but it's also a chance to create something better together. People want to grow, adapt, and feel ready for what's next. Organizations and educators can help turn that readiness into reality in ways that benefit everyone.

The data shows that many people feel unprepared, but it also shows hope: most believe that training and upskilling can help them succeed. When individuals have access to learning experiences and meaningful credentials, they gain the confidence to navigate change. Employers gain teams who are resilient, engaged, and ready for what's next.

Shaping a future-ready workforce is a collective effort.



Readiness happens when everyone plays a part:

Individuals

bring curiosity and a willingness to grow.

Organizations

provide tools, guidance, and opportunities to upskill and reskill.

Educators

deliver flexible learning and credentials that align with real-world goals.

Together, we can close the readiness gap and build a culture where learning is continuous, progress is clear, and everyone has the chance to thrive.



Harris Poll Method

This survey was conducted online within the United States by The Harris Poll on behalf of Instructure and from April 23 - 25, 2025, among 1,210 employed U.S. adults ages 18 and older.

Data were weighted where necessary by age, gender, race/ethnicity, region, education, marital status, household size, household income, and political party affiliation, to bring them in line with their actual proportions in the population.

Respondents are selected among those who have agreed to participate in our surveys. The sampling precision of Harris online polls is measured by using a Bayesian credible interval. The sample data is accurate to within +/- 3.4 percentage points using a 95% confidence level. This credible interval will be wider among subsets of the surveyed population of interest.

All sample surveys and polls, whether or not they use probability sampling, are subject to other multiple sources of error which are most often not possible to quantify or estimate, including, but not limited to coverage error, error associated with nonresponse, error associated with question wording and response options, and post-survey weighting and adjustments.

Lyra

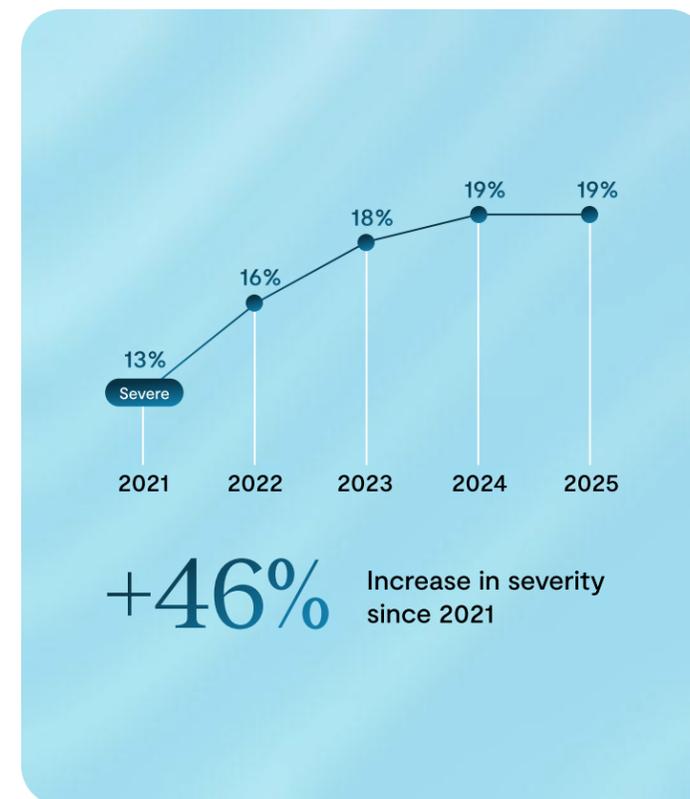
Workforce Mental Health

TRENDS FORECAST

2026

Workforce mental health has reached a critical turning point. After years of progress expanding access and reducing stigma, new pressures are testing the limits of today’s strategies—from surging mental health leaves to the disruptive rise of AI.

Lyra Health’s 2026 Workforce Mental Health Trends Forecast reveals six forces reshaping how organizations care for their people, and what it will take to turn today’s pressures into lasting progress.

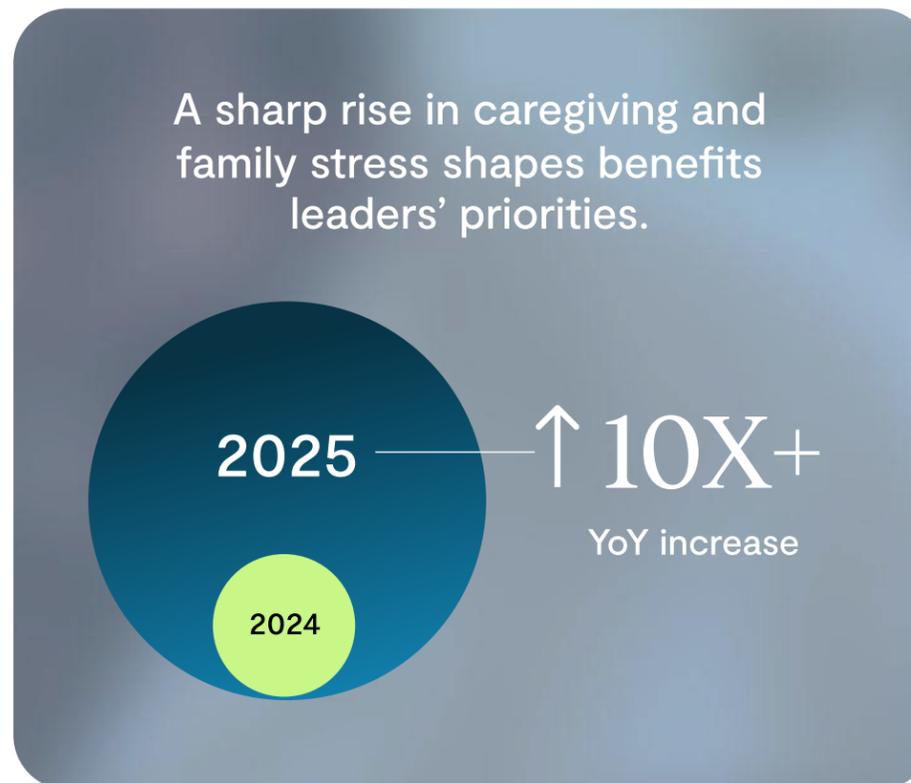
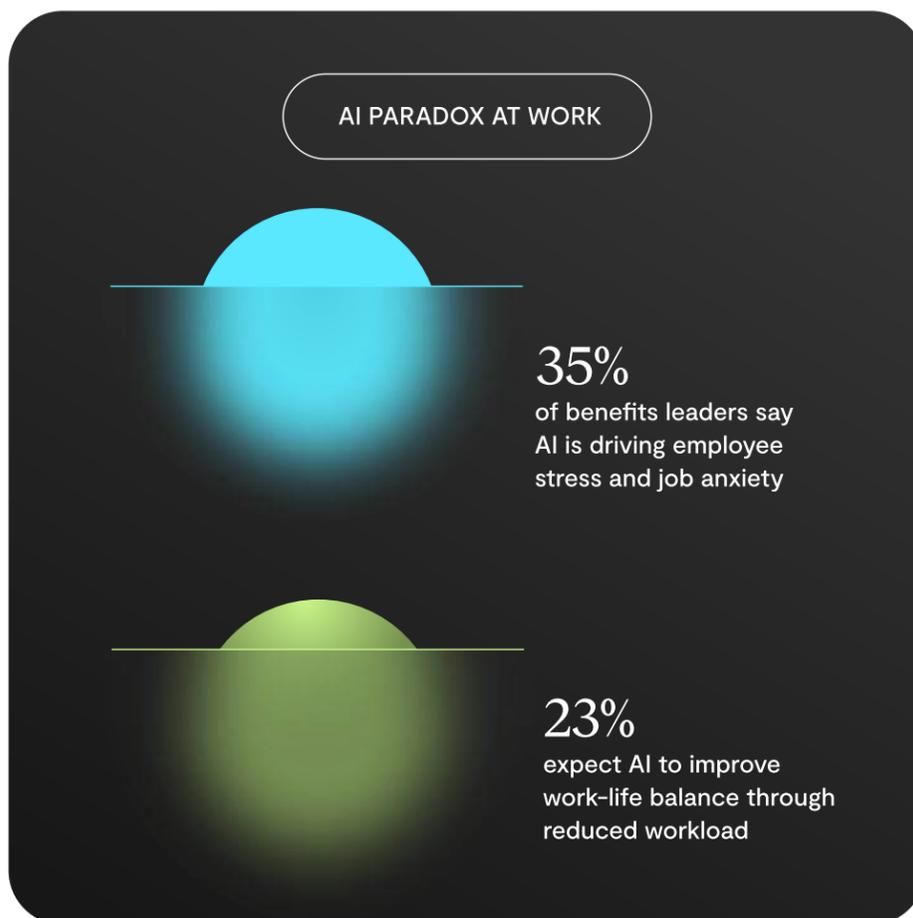


1. Resilience wears thin as mental health leaves and complex needs rise

After steady progress, new cracks are emerging: 65% of benefits leaders report drastic increases in mental health-related leaves, and both mild and complex conditions like substance use have climbed sharply. Leaders are responding with early intervention, workload redesign, and expanded access to specialized care.

2. AI is the *double-edged sword* of progress

AI is reshaping how people work—and how they feel about work. More than a third of benefits leaders say it’s fueling stress and job anxiety, even as others see it improving efficiency and work-life balance. In mental health, benefits leaders view AI as both a risk and an opportunity, valuing its potential to expand access and streamline care, but warning that it must never come at the expense of human connection.



3. Caregiving stress is the *invisible load* breaking your workforce

Employees are balancing full-time work with care for children, teens, and aging parents—and it’s taking a toll. Nearly half of benefits leaders now rank family stress as a top workforce issue, yet most employees still struggle to find quality care for loved ones. Leading organizations are closing this gap by expanding family mental health benefits and giving caregivers the flexibility and support they need to stay engaged at work.

4. Neurodiversity is the *next frontier* in mental health investment

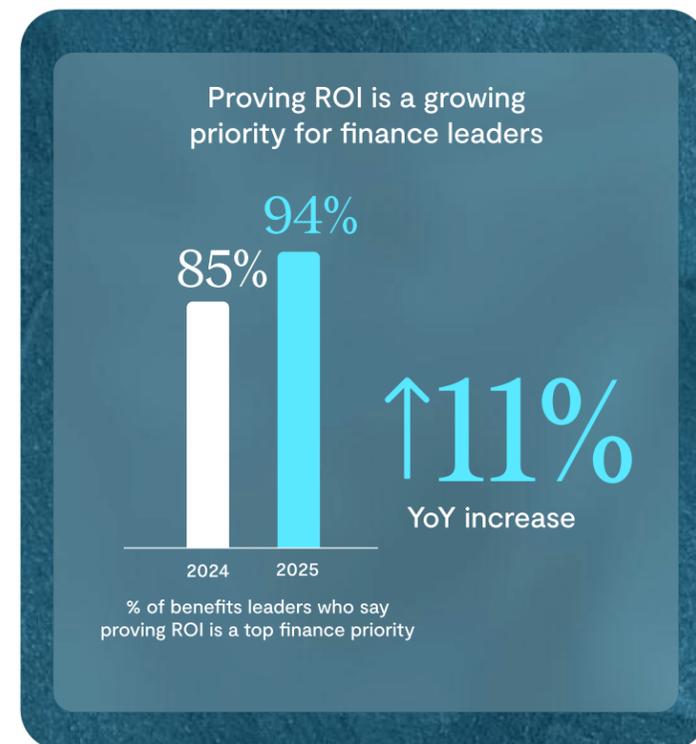
Nearly all benefits leaders are concerned about how to effectively support neurodivergent employees and families, including those navigating ADHD, autism, and other cognitive differences, but they remain unsure how to do so. The next step is pairing access to specialized care with inclusive workplaces, manager training, and coaching tailored to neurodivergent needs.





6. ROI now *balances* cost containment with workforce performance

With health care costs climbing, leaders are under pressure to cut spending without compromising employee health. Financial leaders continue to emphasize cost savings and measurable returns. Many organizations are also expanding how they define ROI to balance cost containment and cost avoidance with outcomes like productivity, retention, and engagement—measures that lower expenses today while strengthening long-term business performance.



5. Managers are *burning out* while holding their teams together

The average manager now supports triple the number of employees they once did, while managing rising workloads, leaves, and emotional strain. Although most companies provide training, nearly all leaders agree it's not enough to meet today's demands. Leading organizations are responding by reducing systemic pressures and giving managers access to expert consultations and peer support so they're not carrying the load alone.

Get the full story

Download the 2026 Trends Forecast to see where the ground is shifting and how leading organizations are staying ahead.

[Download the full report →](#)

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The American Job Quality Study

2025 STATE OF THE U.S. LABOR FORCE



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WORKERS**
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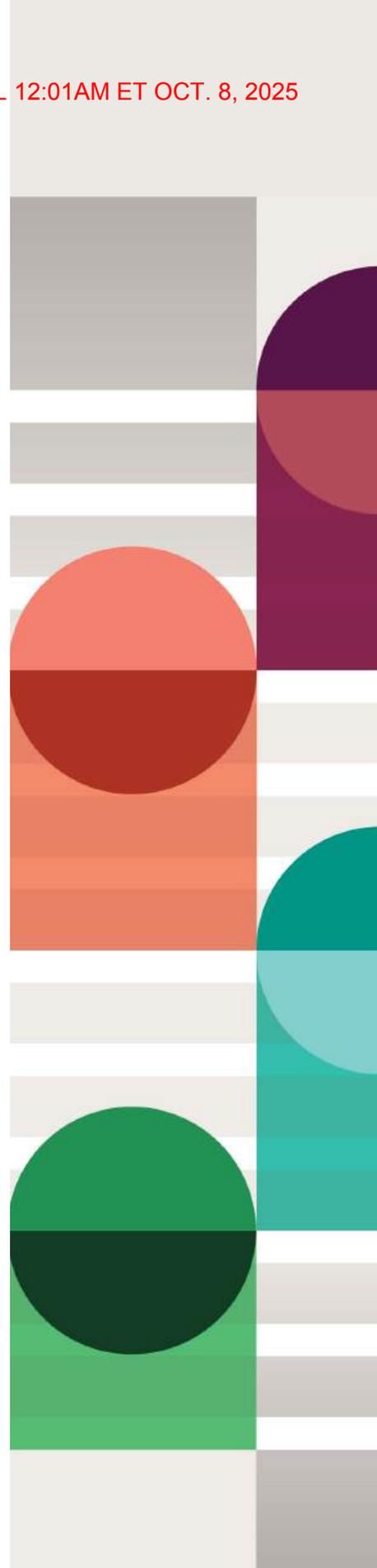


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Introduction

Anyone who has held a job knows that work is often about more than just a paycheck. Our experiences on the job shape the decisions we make, the companies we trust and how we show up each day — at work and at home.^{1,2} And yet, too often, conversations about the economy focus on job quantity, not quality. Every month, the government reports how many people are employed and how much they earn. Business leaders, policymakers, researchers, investors and workforce practitioners have relied on these data for decades as the primary indicators of economic progress. But these numbers tell only part of the story. They miss whether jobs actually allow workers, their families — and businesses — to thrive.

The American Job Quality Study (AJQS) was launched to fill that gap. Led by Jobs for the Future, the Families & Workers Fund, the W.E. Upjohn Institute and Gallup, it is the first nationally representative survey designed to measure job quality across the entire U.S. workforce. In 2025, the study surveyed more than 18,000 workers — spanning industries, occupations and types of employment, from traditional jobs for an employer to independent, gig and informal work.

- 1 Gallup, Inc. (2024). State of the global workplace: The voice of the world's employees [Research report]. Gallup. <https://www.gallup.com/workplace/349484/state-of-the-global-workplace.aspx>
- 2 Tonti, J. (2023). JUST Capital's 2023 Americans' Views on Business Survey: Americans want more action from corporate America as talk dwindles following ESG and 'woke business' backlash. JUST Capital. <https://justcapital.com/reports/2023-americans-views-on-business-survey/>

The study defines job quality across **five dimensions** that research^{3,4} shows matter most to both workers and businesses:



01 | Financial Well-Being

Fair pay, stable employment and benefits that meet basic needs and reduce financial stress.



02 | Workplace Culture and Safety

A safe, respectful environment free from discrimination or harassment.



03 | Growth and Development Opportunities

A clear path to build skills, gain experience and advance in one's career.



04 | Agency and Voice

Influence over decisions that shape one's job, such as pay, working conditions and implementation of technology.



05 | Work Structure and Autonomy

A stable, predictable schedule, a manageable workload, and meaningful control over when and how work gets done.

These dimensions were developed through extensive research and consensus-building among workers, field leaders, employers, academics and policymakers. Taken together, they provide a comprehensive picture of what makes jobs “work” — for people, for businesses and for the economy.

This report offers an initial look at the findings. Deeper analyses are on the way, and the full data set will be made publicly available to inform future research, policy and practice.

This first report sets the baseline: how many Americans have quality jobs, who holds them and why it matters. For employers, policymakers and community leaders, it offers a clear picture of the state of job quality in America today — highlighting both the challenges and the opportunities to create jobs that better support workers and fuel growth.

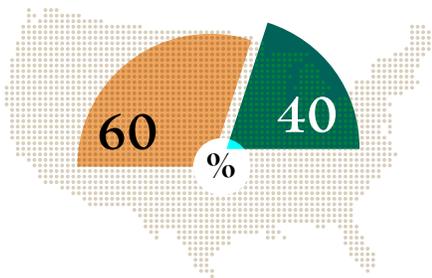
By showing what workers are experiencing, the AJQS provides a tool for helping communities, organizations and policymakers identify areas for improvement and put effective solutions into practice. With this knowledge, leaders can shape a labor market where jobs truly work for everyone.

3 Coy, P. (2022, April 22). What makes a good job good? The New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/22/opinion/good-job-wages.html>

4 Edmondson, A. (1999). Psychological safety and learning behavior in work teams. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 44(2), 350–383. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2666999>

Key Findings

Results from the AJQS are based on self-administered web and mail surveys conducted Jan. 13-Feb. 25, 2025, with a random sample of 18,429 U.S. adults, aged 18 to 75, who worked for pay in the prior seven days.



Most (60%) U.S. workers lack quality jobs.

Only 40% of workers in the U.S. hold positions that provide financial well-being, safe and respectful workplaces, some control over their work, a voice in decisions that affect their job, and opportunities to build skills and advance.

Quality jobs are linked to better outcomes at work and in life.

Employees in quality jobs report substantially better outcomes across nearly every aspect of their well-being, including life satisfaction, happiness, health and job satisfaction. The majority (58%) are highly satisfied at work, compared with just 23% of people not in quality jobs.



A quarter (25%) of employees do not see opportunities for advancement in their current role.

One in four employees report that their organizations do not offer promotion or advancement opportunities. Access to mentorship and training is also uneven, with just over half of employees reporting on-the-job training in the past year — most often at larger firms and among employees with more formal education.



Just over half (55%) of employees feel left out of important workplace decisions.

More than half (55%) report limited input on decisions involving technology, and about half (48%) say they lack the voice they should have in shaping their working conditions. These voice gaps are widespread across employee roles and backgrounds.



Nearly a quarter (24%) of employees report being treated unfairly at their job because of their identity.

A total of 24% of employees report discrimination or unfair treatment at work based on their identity. Rates are highest among nonbinary (52%), neurodivergent (47%), Middle Eastern/North African (41%) and LGBTQ+ (36%) employees.



More than half (62%) of employees have unstable, unpredictable work schedules.

Most employees (71%) report having the freedom to decide how they perform their tasks. Yet 62% lack schedules that provide predictability or stability, and 54% often or sometimes work longer than planned.



Nearly one in three (29%) U.S. employees are struggling financially.

Twenty-nine percent of employees say they are "just getting by" or "finding it difficult to get by." Another 43% say they are "doing okay," and just 27% describe their financial situation as "living comfortably."

Job Quality in the U.S.

What Is a Quality Job?

A quality job is one that allows workers to meet their basic financial needs, feel safe and respected, grow their skills, have a voice in decisions that affect them, and exercise some control over their time and work.

The AJQS builds on decades of research examining individual aspects of work — from physical demands and workplace safety to autonomy and work-life balance — and translates them into five dimensions: financial well-being, workplace culture and safety, growth and development opportunities, agency and voice, and work structure and autonomy.^{5,6}

How Do You Measure Job Quality?

Measuring job quality is complex. Clear, agreed-upon metrics of job quality have been scarce until now, and a “quality job” means different things to different workers. For example, a young adult entering the workforce might prioritize opportunities to learn and grow, while a single parent with four children might prioritize pay and schedule predictability.

To account for such differences, this study establishes minimum thresholds for each of the five dimensions of job quality without dictating what an ideal job looks like for every worker or workplace.

The study defines a “quality job” as one that achieves minimum thresholds across at least three of the dimensions. Each survey respondent’s job receives a score on each dimension based on their answers to multiple survey items. Their overall job quality score is calculated as the average of their scores.^{7,8}

5 Maestas, N., Mullen, K. J., Powell, D., von Wachter, T., & Wenger, J. B. (2017). Working conditions in the United States: Results of the 2015 American Working Conditions Survey. RAND Corporation. https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR2014.html

6 Rothwell, J., & Crabtree, S. (2019). Not just a job: New evidence on the quality of work in the United States [PDF]. Lumina Foundation. <https://www.luminafoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/not-just-a-job-new-evidence-on-the-quality-of-work-in-the-united-states.pdf>

7 Respondents are assigned a job quality score if they answered a sufficient number of questions to receive dimension-specific scores in three or more dimensions. A small number of survey respondents, 177 (less than 1%), provided insufficient information across all dimensions to fully assess their overall job quality and are thus excluded from the resulting job quality metrics.

8 See appendix for more detailed information about how dimension-level scores are calculated.

How Do You Measure Job Quality?

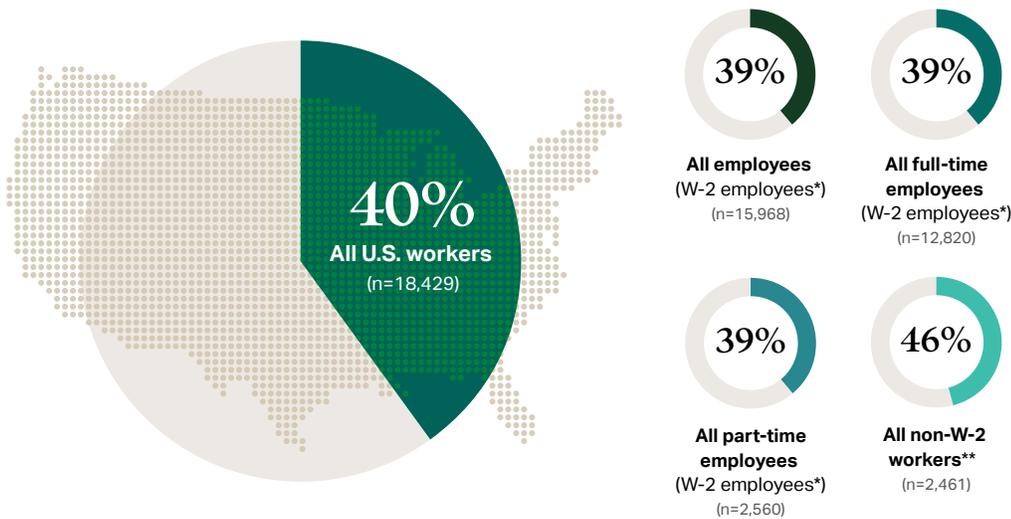
Dimension	Definition	Thresholds for Achieving Quality in This Dimension
 Financial Well-Being	<p><i>Fair pay, stable employment, and benefits that meet basic needs and reduce financial stress</i></p>	<p>Full-time workers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Workers earn $\geq 300\%$ of the federal poverty level (FPL) for a family of two (\$5,287.50/month). Workers have access to some form of paid time off (PTO), for those who are employees. Workers report job security (confidence they can stay in their role if performance and economic conditions remain stable). <p>Part-time workers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Workers earn $\geq 300\%$ FPL for a family of two (\$5,287.50/month) or do not report financial distress and do not want more hours to make ends meet, or do not rely on a second job to get by. Workers have access to some form of PTO, for those who are employees. Workers report job security (confidence they can stay in their role if performance is adequate and economic conditions remain stable).
 Workplace Culture and Safety	<p><i>A safe, respectful environment free from discrimination or harassment</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Workers did not experience a serious work-related injury or illness in the past year and report feeling safe at work. If workers experienced a serious work-related illness or injury in the past year, they report currently feeling physically safe at work. Workers report feeling respected, supported and like they belong. Workers are not subject to discrimination, harassment or bullying.
 Growth and Development Opportunities	<p><i>A clear path to build skills, gain experience and advance in one's career</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When applicable, workers see opportunities for career advancement at their organization. Workers have participated in work-related training, mentorship or education in the past 12 months. Workers believe their job allows them to learn new things.
 Agency and Voice	<p><i>Influence over decisions that shape one's job, such as pay, working conditions and technology</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The AJQS uses a "voice gap" metric which quantifies the difference between the influence workers currently have and the influence they believe they should have. Workers' influence matches — or nearly matches — the level of influence they believe they should have across three areas: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> compensation, including pay and benefits working conditions, such as physical safety and the ability to take breaks technology adoption, such as new software, artificial intelligence tools or robotics
 Work Structure and Autonomy	<p><i>A stable, predictable schedule, a manageable workload, and meaningful control over when and how work gets done</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Workers know their schedules at least two weeks in advance, unless they set their own hours. Workers' number of work hours do not fluctuate by more than 25% in a month unless they choose that schedule. Workers report having the freedom to decide how they do their work. Workers perform a variety of tasks, have sufficient time to complete them and are not typically required to work at an unsustainable pace.

How Many Americans Have Quality Jobs?

Quality jobs remain the exception, not the norm, in the U.S. Overall, 40% of U.S. workers are in jobs that meet the AJQS minimum threshold for quality, with important differences across key worker types.

FIGURE 1

Percentage of U.S. Workers in Quality Jobs, by Worker/Employee Type



*W-2 employees are those whose employer deducts taxes and may offer benefits

**Those working as independent contractors, the self-employed and informal workers

The AJQS study found that a higher percentage of non-W-2 workers have a quality job (46%) than W-2 employees (39%). This finding may be counterintuitive, given that many independent contractors and informal workers (who often work for cash) face financial instability, lack benefits and work irregular hours.

Understanding job quality among the non-W-2 worker population is essential to capturing the full picture of today's labor force. **Given the complexity and diversity of the non-W-2 workforce, the findings presented in this report focus on W-2 employees only, and future publications will explore the experiences of non-W-2 workers in depth.**

Who Has Quality Jobs?

Job quality varies widely across employee gender, race, education, age, industry and region of the country.

GENDER

Men (45%) are more likely than women (34%) to be in quality jobs.



AGE

The **youngest employees**, those 18 to 24, are the least likely age group to have quality jobs (29% are in quality jobs, which is about 10 points lower than most other age groups).



RACE AND ETHNICITY

Asian⁹ (46%) and **White** employees (42%) are most likely to hold quality jobs.

Thirty-three percent (33%) or fewer **Black, multiracial, Hispanic or Middle Eastern/ North African** employees hold quality jobs.

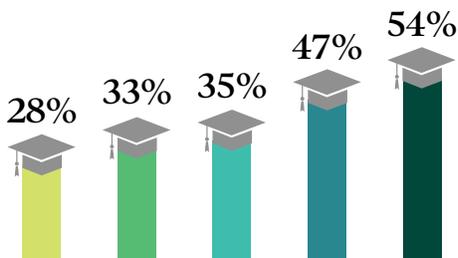
INDUSTRY

Professional services, financial activities and wholesale trade lead in overall job quality — with 53%, 48% and 49% employees in quality jobs, respectively.

Only 29% of employees in **leisure and hospitality**, 26% in **retail trade** and 26% in **warehousing** are in quality jobs.

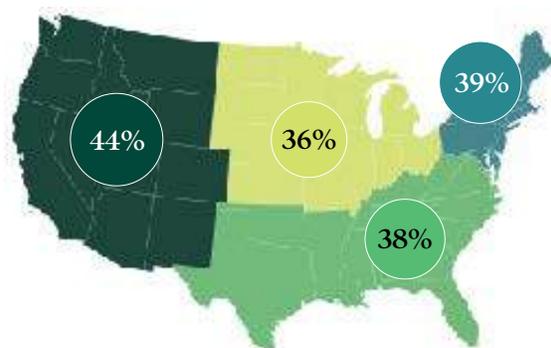
EDUCATION

Employees with a **bachelor's** (47%) or **graduate** (54%) degree are significantly more likely to have quality jobs than those with an **associate degree** (35%), **some college** (33%) or a **high school education or less** (28%).



REGION

Quality jobs exist throughout the U.S. but are more common in the **West** (44%) than the **Northeast** (39%), **South** (38%) and **Midwest** (36%) Census regions.



⁹ The "Asian" category used throughout this report includes all respondents who selected "Asian" in the race/ethnicity questions included in the survey and thus reflects a broad and diverse group of Asian employees with many different ethnicities, experiences and economic outcomes such as Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Indian, Pakistani and Vietnamese individuals, among others.

Why Do Quality Jobs Matter?

Employees with quality jobs describe their lives differently. They are more likely than those not in quality jobs to report higher life satisfaction, greater happiness and better physical health.

But the potential benefits of a quality job are not limited to employees. The AJQS finds that job quality is strongly associated with job satisfaction and worker well-being — outcomes consistently linked in prior research to lower turnover, higher productivity and stronger business performance.¹⁰ In short, quality jobs may not only be tied to better lives for employees but also to stronger outcomes for businesses.

Employees in quality jobs ...

LIFE AND JOB SATISFACTION

Are more satisfied with their lives:

52% rate their lives an 8 to 10,* compared with 26% of those not in quality jobs.



Are more satisfied with their jobs:

58% rate their jobs an 8 to 10,* compared with 23% not in quality jobs.



HAPPINESS AND SENSE OF PURPOSE

Are more likely to feel happy regularly:

47% rate their happiness an 8 to 10,* compared with 26% not in quality jobs.



Are more likely to see the things they do in their lives as worthwhile:

60% rate these things as highly worthwhile, compared with 34% of those not in quality jobs.



HEALTH AND EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING

Are healthier:

49% report their health as excellent or good, compared with 33% not in quality jobs.



Experience greater emotional well-being:

34% rate their level of "feeling at ease" an 8 to 10,* compared with 19% of those not in quality jobs.



*On a scale of 0 to 10

10 Krekel, C., Ward, G., & de Neve, J.-E. (2019). Employee well-being, productivity, and firm performance: Evidence and case studies (Chapter 5). In *Global Happiness and Well-Being Policy Report*. Harvard Business School. https://www.hbs.edu/ris/Publication%20Files/gh19_ch5_9e171d71-db54-4e08-a2eb-3cf1587daf4a.pdf

DIMENSION 1

Financial Well-Being

What It Is and Why It Matters



Financial well-being captures the extent to which a job supports workers' economic security through fair pay, stable employment and benefits that help reduce financial stress.

When employees feel financially secure, they are healthier, more engaged and more productive — benefits that ripple across organizations and the broader economy. Yet, many U.S. employees experience financial difficulty, which is linked to lower job satisfaction, poorer mental health, higher turnover, reduced productivity and workforce instability.^{11,12}



Living with my mother-in-law is the biggest help. If I had to live in an apartment, just being the only one, or living in a house, I know that I would not be able to afford it. There's no way. After taxes and health insurance and all, I get about \$1,200 every two weeks after everything comes out. I'm married, but my husband is on disability. It would be nice to make more money, to feel like I was able to buy a house."

– LISA
Public school teacher

11 PwC. (2023). PwC's 2023 employee financial wellness survey. <https://www.pwc.com/us/en/services/consulting/business-transformation/library/employee-financial-wellness-survey.html>

12 Krekel, C., Ward, J., & de Neve, J.-E. (2019, March 3). Employee well-being, productivity, and firm performance (Saïd Business School Working Paper No. 2019-04). SSRN. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3356581>



Financial Well-Being Key Findings

Financial well-being cannot be captured by a single number. While earnings are essential, they do not tell the whole story. Benefits and job security are also important. And what counts as a “quality wage” varies depending on regional cost of living. It’s also important to recognize that, depending on factors such as their family size or debt they may have previously incurred, two workers earning the same wage may experience different financial realities. To assess overall job quality, the AJQS applies a conservative, nationally comparable earnings threshold using the federal poverty threshold.

The earnings threshold used in the overall AJQS job quality analysis was chosen to represent a minimum level that could support basic needs while providing a consistent, nationally comparable standard for tracking progress over time. However, many workers require higher earnings to feel financially secure depending on factors such as regional cost of living and household composition. Fifty percent of all employees earn at or below 300% of the FPL for a family of two — the threshold used in the AJQS to identify quality jobs.

TABLE 1

Percentage of Full-Time Employees at Various FPL Thresholds

Earning above 300% FPL (\$5,287.50 monthly)	48%
Earning between 200% and 300% FPL (\$3,525 and \$5,287.50 monthly)	23%
Earning below 200% FPL (\$3,525 monthly)	27%

*Note: Uses FPL calculations for family of two in 2025
Percentage of respondents missing data is not included in the table*

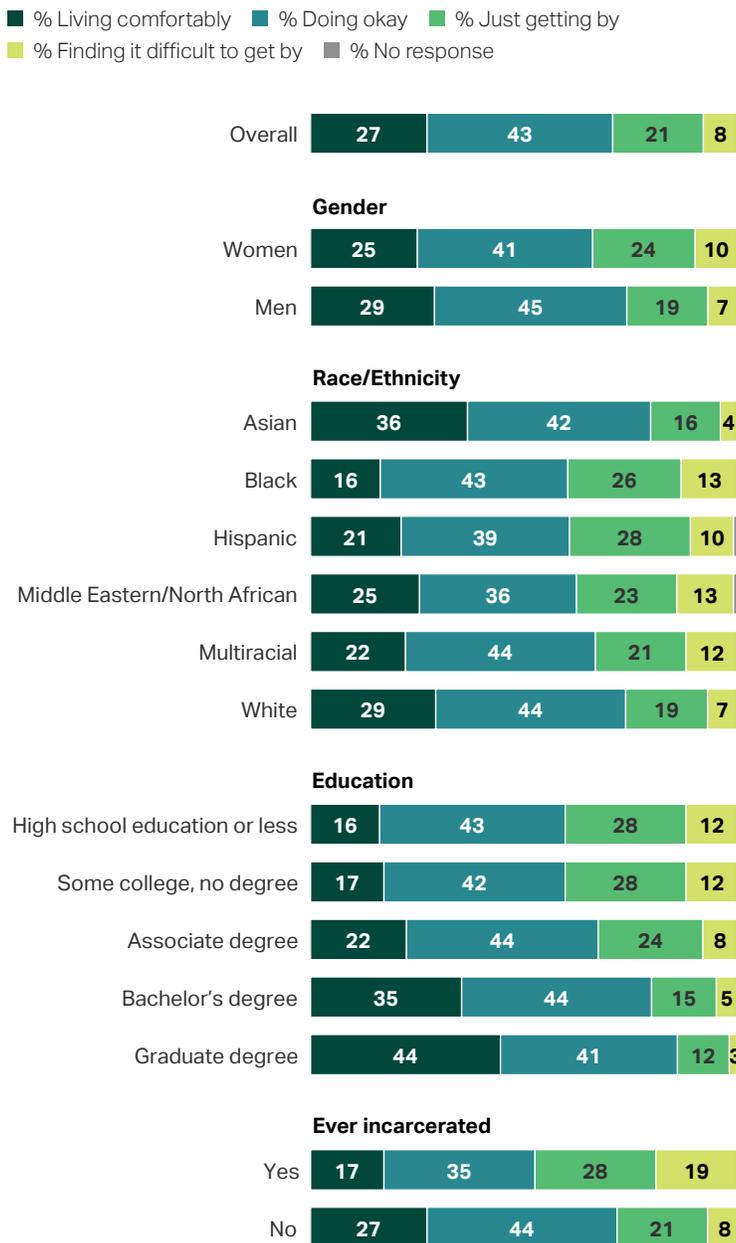


1 About a third of U.S. employees report struggling financially.

Twenty-nine percent of employees are struggling financially (“just getting by” or “finding it difficult to get by”). Another 43% say they are “doing okay,” while only 27% of employees say they are “living comfortably.” Rates of financial comfort vary across demographic and occupational groups.

FIGURE 2

Overall, which one of the following best describes how well you are managing financially these days?



INSIGHTS

- Financial comfort is highest among **Asian**¹³ (36%) and **White** (29%) employees.
- Employees with a **bachelor's degree or higher** are more likely to describe themselves as living comfortably than those with less formal education.
- Only 17% of **previously incarcerated employees** indicate they are living comfortably.

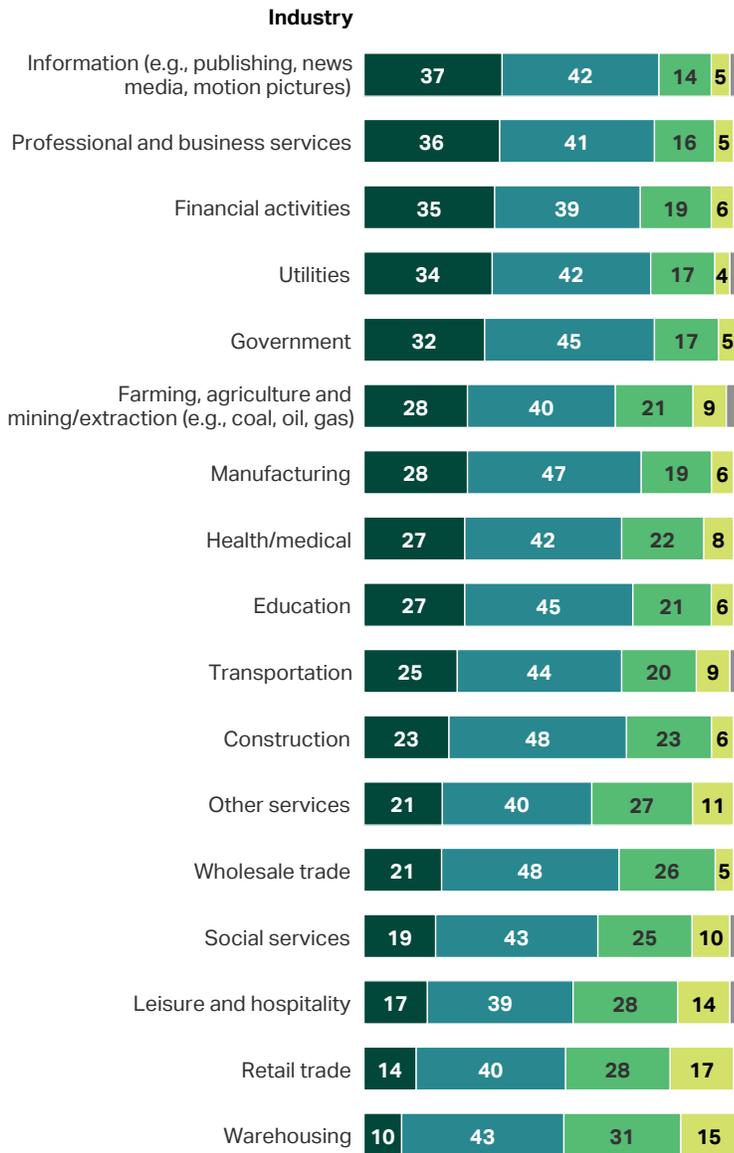
¹³ The "Asian" category used throughout this report includes all respondents who selected "Asian" in the race/ethnicity questions included in the survey and thus reflects a broad and diverse group of Asian employees with many different ethnicities, experiences and economic outcomes such as Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Indian, Pakistani and Vietnamese individuals, among others.

Note: Among those who are employees
Values less than 4% not labeled

FIGURE 3

Overall, which one of the following best describes how well you are managing financially these days?

■ % Living comfortably ■ % Doing okay ■ % Just getting by
 ■ % Finding it difficult to get by ■ % No response



Note: Among those who are employees
 Values less than 4% not labeled

INSIGHTS

Employees in the **information, professional and business services, financial and utilities** sectors are the most likely to say they are living comfortably, while those in **retail trade and warehousing** are the least likely.



2 About one in 10 employees have no paid time off (PTO).

Access to benefits like PTO plays a crucial role in helping employees manage their day-to-day responsibilities and overall well-being. PTO allows employees to address health, caregiving responsibilities and personal needs without losing income. While PTO is widespread, it is not universal, as about one in 10 employees (11%) report having no paid time off at all.

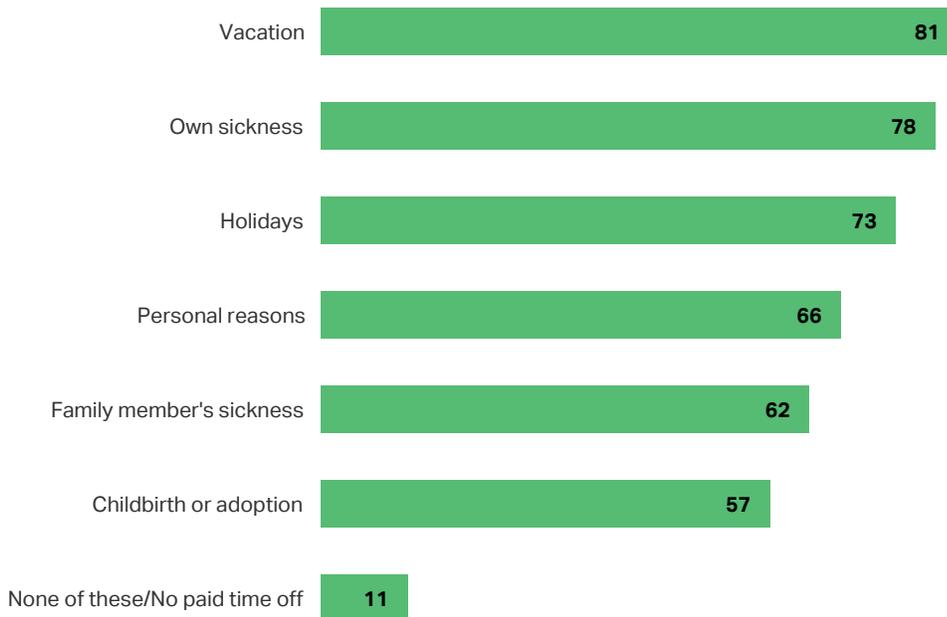
There are clear divides in PTO access among full-time and part-time employees. Only 5% of full-time employees lack any form of PTO, compared with 36% of part-time employees, highlighting that part-time work continues to involve trade-offs in benefits.

Among leave types, PTO for childbirth or adoption is the least commonly reported, whereas vacation and sick leave for one’s own illness are the most widely available.

FIGURE 4

Which of the following, if any, can you take paid time off for? Select all that apply.

% Selected



Note: Among those who are employees

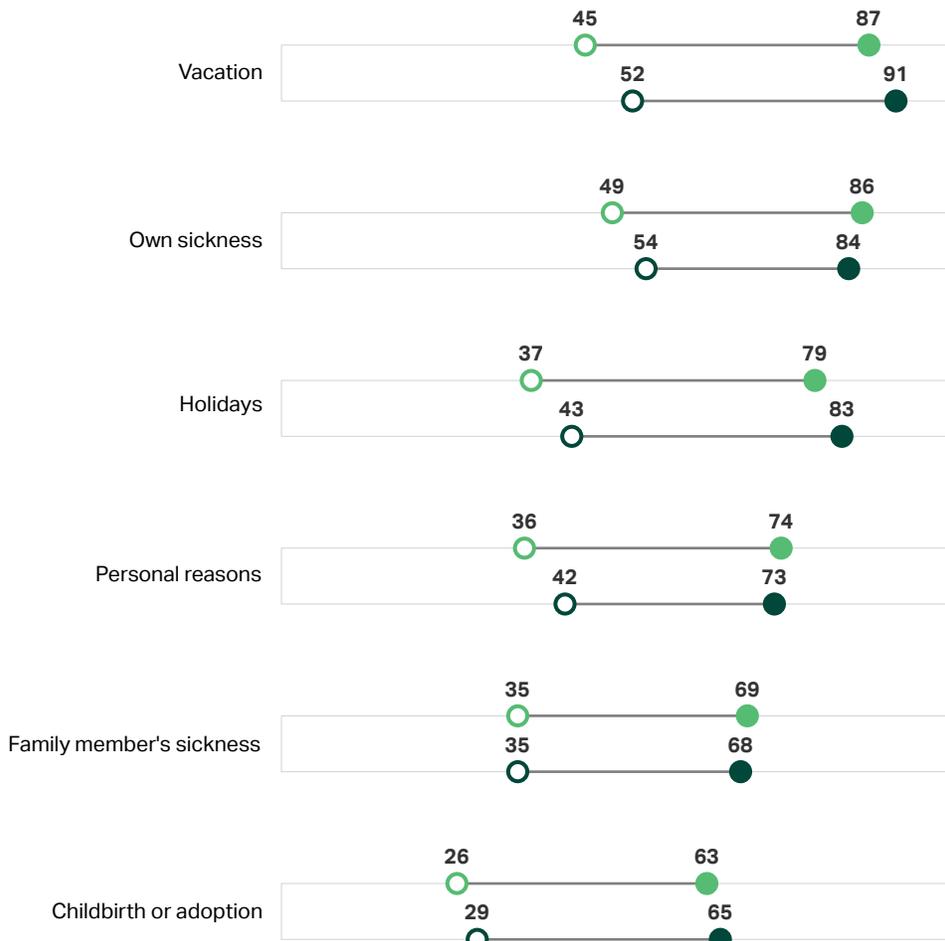


Differences in PTO access across demographic groups are partially explained by employment patterns: Women, younger and older employees, and those with a high school diploma or less are more likely to work part-time jobs, where PTO and other benefits are less commonly offered.^{14,15}

FIGURE 5

**Which of the following, if any can you take paid time off for?
Select all that apply.**

- % Female full-time employees ○ % Female part-time employees
- % Male full-time employees ○ % Male part-time employees



Note: Among those who are employees

14 Kaiser Family Foundation. (2021, December 17). Paid leave in the U.S. KFF. <https://www.kff.org/womens-health-policy/paid-leave-in-u-s/>

15 Golden, L. (2016, December 5). Still falling short on hours and pay: Part-time work becoming new normal. Economic Policy Institute. <https://www.epi.org/publication/still-falling-short-on-hours-and-pay-part-time-work-becoming-new-normal/>



DIMENSION 2

Workplace Culture and Safety

What It Is and Why It Matters



Workplace culture and safety captures whether a job provides a respectful, safe environment free from discrimination, harassment or bullying. A respectful, safe and supportive work environment is essential to employee well-being and organizational success.

Research shows that psychological safety, equitable treatment and meeting basic needs — like respect, inclusion and fairness — can boost productivity, improve retention and strengthen business performance.¹⁶

¹⁶ McKinsey & Company. (2023, July 17). What is psychological safety? McKinsey & Company. <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/mckinsey-explainers/what-is-psychological-safety>



I was a young female in a kitchen full of older men. The first person to harass me was an older man who would come up to me every day asking to see pictures on my phone. They fired him for sexual harassment. I wasn't comfortable doing anything about it at the time, but I told my coworker what happened, and he got that taken care of for me. And then the person they hired was worse."

– ERIN
Chef

Workplace Culture and Safety Key Findings

1 Most employees agree that they are treated with respect at work, but meaningful gaps persist.

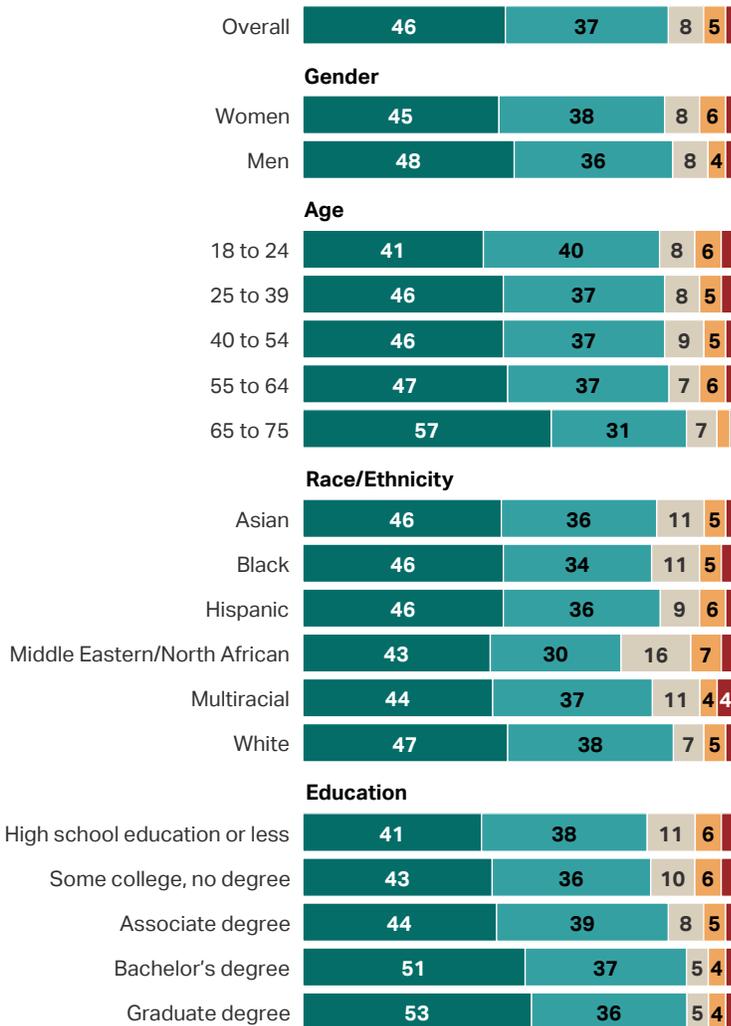
Most (83%) employees strongly (46%) or somewhat agree (37%) that they are treated with respect in their main job, while only 7% somewhat or strongly disagree. Still, gaps remain for many employee subgroups:

FIGURE 6

Please think about all of the people you interact with in your main job, including coworkers and customers.

You are treated with respect in this main job.

■ % Strongly agree ■ % Somewhat agree ■ % Neither agree nor disagree
 ■ % Somewhat disagree ■ % Strongly disagree



INSIGHTS

- Experiences of respect vary when gender and race intersect. For example, 40% of Asian women strongly agree they are treated with respect, compared with 52% of Asian men. Among multiracial employees, 37% of women strongly agree they are treated with respect versus 52% of men.
- Employees with a bachelor's degree (51%) or graduate degree (53%) are most likely to strongly agree they feel respected on the job.

Only 35% of self-identified neurodivergent employees¹⁷ strongly agree they are treated with respect in their main job, compared with 50% of employees with no reported diagnoses.

¹⁷ Respondents were asked whether they had any of five conditions or diagnoses, including autism or another form of neurodiversity. They could select all that applied or select that none applied.

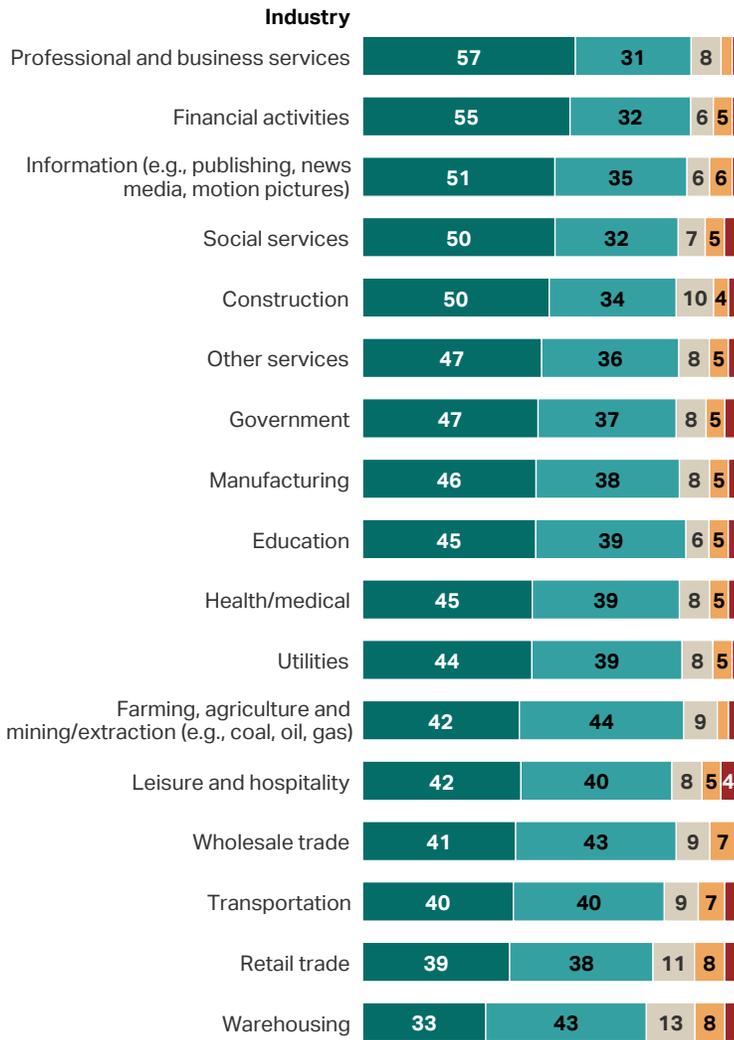
Note: Among those who are employees
 Values less than 4% not labeled
 Not sure, not applicable and no response are not displayed but included in the calculations

FIGURE 7

Please think about all of the people you interact with in your main job, including coworkers and customers.

You are treated with respect in this main job.

■ % Strongly agree ■ % Somewhat agree ■ % Neither agree nor disagree
 ■ % Somewhat disagree ■ % Strongly disagree



Note: Among those who are employees
 Values less than 4% not labeled
 Not sure, not applicable and no response are not displayed but included in the calculations

INSIGHTS

- **Respect levels vary significantly by industry**, indicating culture may be shaped not only by individual company policies but also by broader industry norms, demographics and other factors.
- For example, more than half of employees in **professional and business services** (57%), **financial activities** (55%) and **information** (51%) strongly agree they are treated with respect, compared with fewer than four in 10 in **retail trade** (39%) and **warehousing** (33%).

2 About one in four employees report being treated unfairly or discriminated against because of their identity.

A fair and inclusive workplace is central to both employee well-being and organizational effectiveness. Employees who feel respected and treated fairly are more engaged, productive and likely to stay in their jobs.¹⁸

Yet nearly one in four employees report experiencing discrimination or unfair treatment at work based on identity. Discrimination rates and unfair treatment levels are highest among nonbinary (52%), neurodivergent (47%), Middle Eastern/North African (41%) and LGBTQ+ (36%) employees.



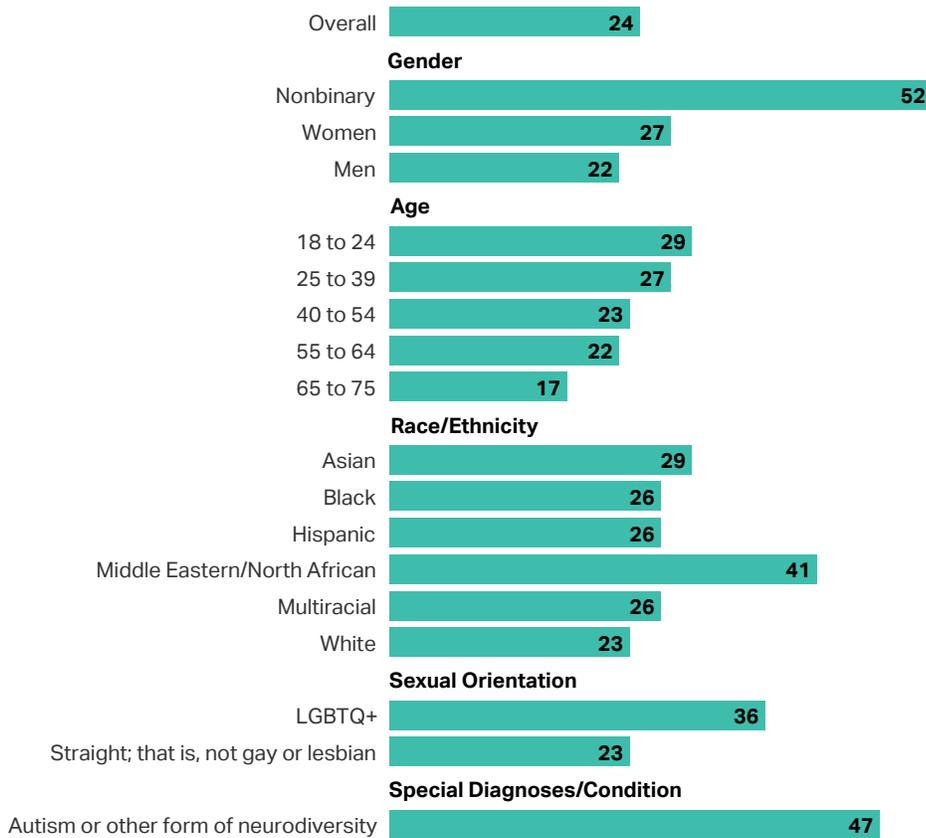
FIGURE 8

Do you feel in any way discriminated against or treated unfairly in your main job because of any of the following?

Respondents said "yes" to at least one: race or ethnic origin, gender or gender identity, sexual orientation, age, some aspect of your physical appearance, physical disability, autism or neurodiversity, religious identity, political views

Employees by demographic

■ % Yes to at least one



Note: Among those who are employees
The LGBTQ+ category includes lesbian/gay, bisexual and transgender

18 Pendell, R. (2025, January 12). Respect at work returns to a record low. Gallup. <https://www.gallup.com/workplace/655040/respect-work-returns-record-low.aspx>



3 More than half of employees feel they are paid fairly, but just 22% strongly agree.

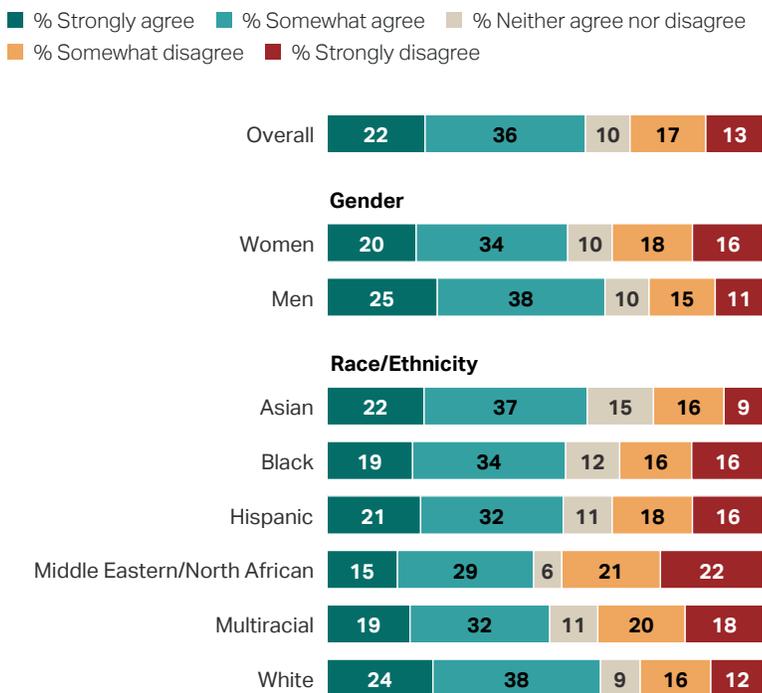
Feeling underpaid or undervalued can erode employee motivation and loyalty. Previous Gallup research finds that employees who strongly agree that they are often treated unfairly at work are **2.3 times more likely** to experience high levels of burnout.¹⁹

Over half of U.S. employees say they strongly or somewhat agree that they are paid fairly for the work they do. However, only 22% strongly agree, suggesting that many workers still feel undercompensated or uncertain about their pay. Pay perceptions vary across employee subgroups.

FIGURE 9

Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements.

You are paid fairly for the work that you do.

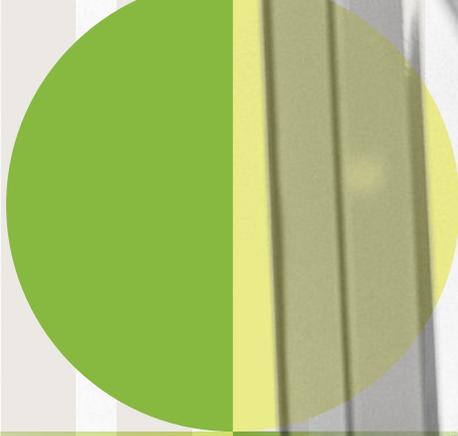


INSIGHTS

- **34% of women strongly or somewhat disagree** that they are paid fairly, compared with 26% of men.
- **Middle Eastern/North African employees are the most likely** of all racial/ethnic groups to feel underpaid, with 43% strongly or somewhat disagreeing.

Note: Among those who are employees
Not sure, not applicable and no response are not displayed but included in the calculations

19 Gallup. (2020). Gallup's perspective on employee burnout: Causes and cures. Gallup, Inc. <https://www.vanede.nl/media/2669/gallup-iii-employee-burnout.pdf>



DIMENSION 3

Growth and Development Opportunities

What It Is and Why It Matters



This dimension captures whether a job provides workers opportunities to learn and build and refine their skills, whether they are aiming for advancement or focused on excelling in their current role.

Jobs that support growth and skill development benefit both workers and organizations. In today's rapidly changing labor market, opportunities to learn, build skills and gain experience help employees stay competitive. At the same time, organizations that invest in employee development report higher productivity, better retention and stronger innovation pipelines.²⁰



Once I'm in my position for a year, I can move to another department. I can reach out to my supervisor and let her know that I'm interested in another position. Someone will talk with me and go over the skills I have versus the ones they're looking for and see if I can do some online training or job shadowing to get those qualifications. I feel that is the best way to be in management — if you've done the job that the people under you are doing — because you understand the difficulties they may face."

– JASMINE

Insurance administrator

²⁰ Gallup. (2023). State of the global workplace: 2023 report. Gallup, Inc. <https://www.gallup.com/workplace/349484/state-of-the-global-workplace.aspx>

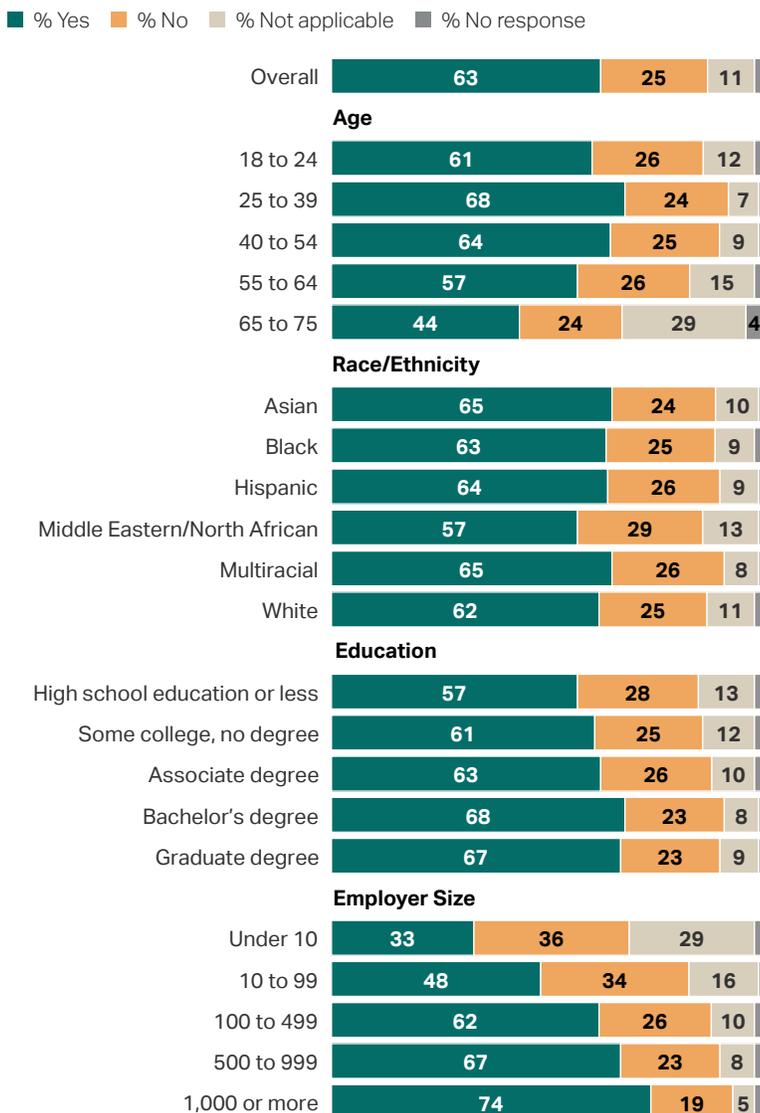
Growth and Development Opportunities Key Findings

1 One in four employees lack opportunities for promotion and advancement.

One in four employees (25%) report having no opportunities for promotion or advancement in their current roles. Access to these opportunities differs by employee subgroups.

FIGURE 10

Does your organization provide you with opportunities for promotion and career advancement?



Note: Among those who are employees
Values less than 4% not labeled



INSIGHTS

- **Middle Eastern/North African employees** report the lowest access to advancement opportunities among all racial and ethnic groups, at 57%.
- **Employees with a bachelor's degree or higher and younger employees** are more likely to report opportunities for advancement, though access declines noticeably after age 55.
- **These opportunities are more common among larger employers**, particularly those with 1,000 or more employees, where 74% say they have access. Differences by industry are generally small, but utilities employees (76%) are the most likely to say they have advancement opportunities.



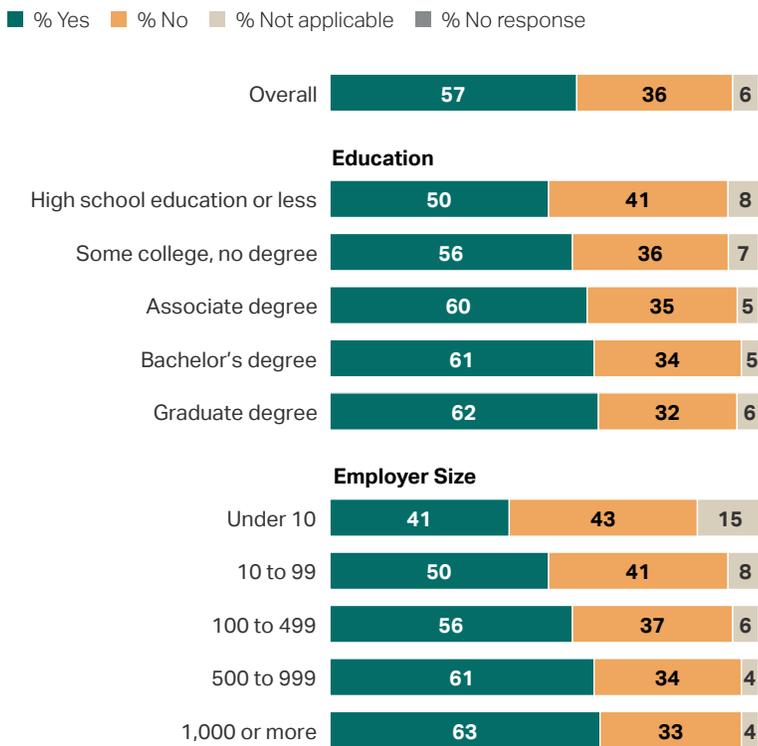
2 Just over half of employees have participated in on-the-job training in the past 12 months.

While more than half of employees report participating in training, which is consistent with other research,²¹ access is uneven among employee subgroups.

FIGURE 11

Over the last 12 months, have you participated in any of the following types of work-related training or education?

On-the-job training on how to perform job tasks



INSIGHTS

Participation is higher among employees with **more formal education** and those working for **large organizations**, which often have more resources and structured development programs.

Note: Among those who are employees
Values less than 4% not labeled

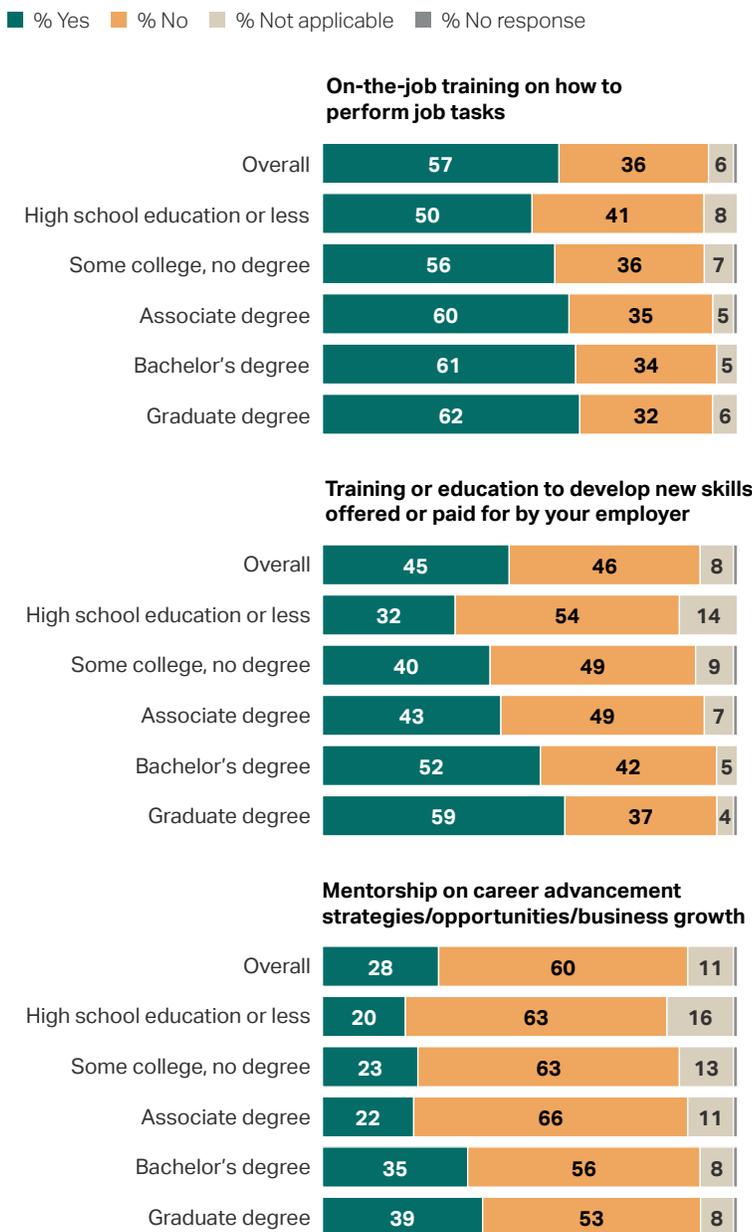
21 Osterman, P. (2021). How American adults obtain work skills: Results of a new national survey. *ILR Review*, 75(3), 578-607. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00197939211018191> (Original work published 2022)



These patterns raise important questions about who has access to opportunities for growth, skill development and career advancement. Those who stand to benefit most — employees with less formal education or those working in smaller firms — are often the least likely to receive them.

FIGURE 12

Over the last 12 months, have you participated in any of the following types of work-related training or education?



INSIGHTS

Workers with a bachelor's degree or higher are also more likely to participate in mentorship programs for career advancement, though mentorship remains the least commonly accessed form of training.

Note: Among those who are employees
Values less than 4% not labeled



3 Job training and mentorship are linked to higher job satisfaction.

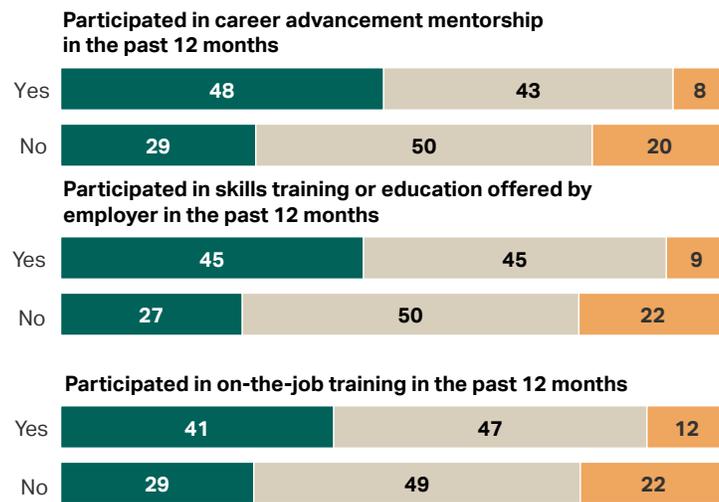
Employees who participate in job-related training or education report higher satisfaction at work.

FIGURE 13

Job Satisfaction Linked to Job Training

Job satisfaction on a scale of 0 (not at all satisfied) to 10 (completely satisfied)

■ % Highly satisfied (8-10) ■ % Neutral (5-7) ■ % Unsatisfied (0-4)



Note: Among those who are employees

INSIGHTS

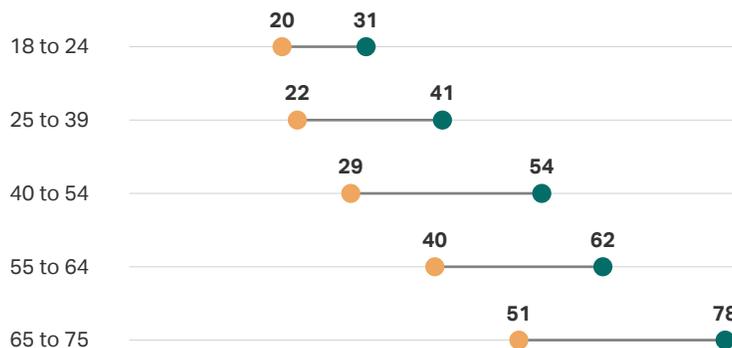
Nearly half (45%) of employees who participated in employer-provided skills training and education are highly satisfied with their job, compared with just 27% of those who did not.

FIGURE 14

Job Satisfaction by Mentorship Participation, Age Group

% of employees satisfied (8-10) with their job

● Employees who did NOT participate in mentorship
● Employees who did participate in mentorship



Note: Among those who are employees

INSIGHTS

Participation in mentorship programs (as a mentor or mentee) is also associated with higher satisfaction across all age groups. Among employees who participated in mentorship programs focused on career advancement, 48% report being satisfied with their job, compared with 29% of those who did not participate.

DIMENSION 4

Agency and Voice

What It Is and Why It Matters



This dimension captures the degree to which jobs give workers influence over key decisions that affect their work. Having a voice at work is both a defining feature of job quality and a tool workers use to secure other key attributes such as fair pay, safe conditions and reliable schedules.

Large “voice gaps” are linked to lower job satisfaction and well-being, higher burnout, increased intention to leave the organization and greater interest in joining a union.²²

²² Diaz-Linhardt, Y., Kochan, T., Minster, A., Park, D., & Yang, D. (2024, December). Does voice gap influence workers' job attitudes and well-being? Measuring voice as a dimension of job quality. *The British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 63(3), 429-444. <https://doi.org/10.1111/bjir.12866>



It's like a big computer that tracks everything everybody does. We call it 'the numbers.' Every little keystroke you make is micromanaged. [If I could change one thing], I would throw out the entire number system. ... It just makes us jump through hoops that we shouldn't have to jump through.”

– GREG

Telecom technician

Agency and Voice Key Findings



1 Employees' voices are missing from compensation, tech adoption and work conditions.

Employees report gaps between the influence they currently have and the influence they want across all three areas measured.



FIGURE 15

"Worker Voice Gaps" in Different Work Domains

How much influence do you, or you and your coworkers collectively, have on the following issues — a lot, some, a little or none?

And how much influence should you, or you and your coworkers collectively, have on the following issues — a lot, some, a little or none?

■ % Less influence than wanted ■ % Have the influence they want

Compensation (pay and benefits)



New technologies used in your job (new software, artificial intelligence tools, robotics)



Working conditions (physical safety, ability to take breaks)



Note: Among those who are employees

Figures summarize differences between employee responses for current influence versus desired influence. The "have the influence they want" group includes those who indicate they have more influence than they want.

INSIGHTS

- **Pay:** The largest gap is in pay and benefits, where 69% of employees say they have less influence than they should.
- **Technology adoption:** 55% of employees report a voice gap when it comes to decisions about new software, artificial intelligence tools or robotics.
- **Working conditions:** Nearly half (48%) of employees say they lack the influence they should have over safety, breaks and other working conditions. Working conditions is the area where employees most want input, and the area in which they are most likely to report having it.



2 Voice gaps in pay, technology adoption and working conditions are widespread across employee roles and backgrounds.

Employees with more formal levels of education report slightly larger voice gaps in compensation and working conditions than employees with a high school diploma or less.

FIGURE 16

Worker Voice Gaps by Educational Attainment

Figures are the percentage of U.S. employees who have less influence on compensation, working conditions or new technology adoption than they think they should have.

	% Compensation (pay and benefits)	% New technology adoption	% Working conditions
High school or less	62	53	42
Some college, no degree	67	55	47
Associate degree	70	57	48
Bachelor's degree	74	55	50
Graduate degree	73	55	52

Note: Among those who are employees

- **Employees in the education field** have the largest voice gap in working conditions (59%) — seven points higher than any other industry. They also have one of the largest voice gaps in pay (75%), alongside employees in social services (77%) and information industries, such as publishing and media (75%) .
- **In technology adoption, government employees** are most likely to have voice gaps (60%), followed closely by retail, leisure and hospitality, social services and healthcare (all 59%).



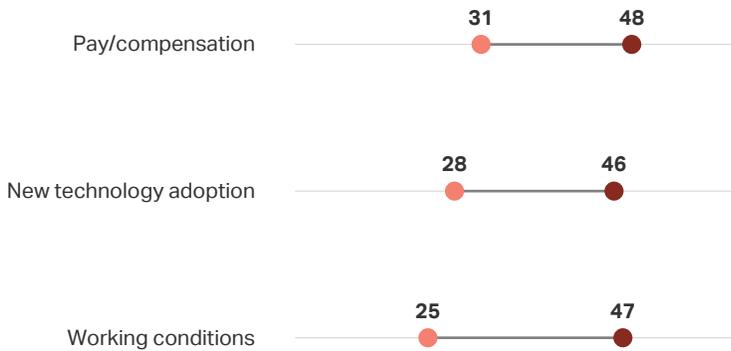
3 Employees with more say at work are more satisfied with their jobs.

FIGURE 17

U.S. Employee Job Satisfaction Based on the Amount of Influence They Have on Key Job Aspects

Figures are the percentage who are highly satisfied with their job (rate their job satisfaction an 8 to 10 on a 0-10 scale where 10 is completely satisfied).

● % Less influence than wanted ● % Have the influence they want



Note: Among those who are employees

INSIGHTS

- **Pay:** Satisfaction is higher among employees with the influence they want over compensation (48% vs. 31%).
- **Technology Adoption:** A similar pattern holds for technology adoption: 46% of those with the amount of influence they want are satisfied with work, compared with 28% who have less than ideal influence.
- **Working conditions:** Employees who have their desired level of input are nearly twice as likely to report high job satisfaction compared with those who do not (47% vs. 25%).



DIMENSION 5

Work Structure and Autonomy

What It Is and Why It Matters



This dimension captures whether jobs provide stable, predictable schedules, manageable workloads, and meaningful control over when and how work gets done. How work is structured shapes employees' daily experience, work-life balance and well-being.²³

Research shows that better scheduling practices lower turnover in both service-sector and white-collar jobs, and in retail, they can also boost sales while reducing labor costs.^{24,25,26} Providing autonomy and reasonable workloads further reduces stress and burnout, increases job satisfaction and improves retention — benefiting both employees and employers.^{27,28}



Being able to participate in after-school activities with the kids or if they need a volunteer for school or something like that and not to have such a demanding job where I can't do something like that. It's something I've always wanted. It's cool that I have it now. I think that's what is impacting the decision whether I stay or whether I go."

– MARTIN

College program manager

23 Pfeffer, J. (2018). *Dying for a paycheck: how modern management harms employee health and company performance and what we can do about it*. First edition. HarperBusiness, an imprint of HarperCollins Publishers.

24 Choper, J., Schneider, D., & Harknett, K. (2021). Uncertain time: Precarious schedules and job turnover in the US service sector. *JLR Review*, 75(5), 1099-1132. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00197939211048484>

25 Kesavan, S., Lambert, S. J., Williams, J. C., & Pendem, P. K. (2022). Doing well by doing good: Improving retail store performance with responsible scheduling practices at the Gap, Inc. *Management Science*, 68(11), 7818-7836. <https://doi.org/10.1287/mnsc.2021.4291>

26 Kelly, E. L., & Moen, P. (2021). *Overload: how good jobs went bad and what we can do about it*. First paperback. Princeton University Press.

27 Karasek, R., & Theorell, T. (1990). *Healthy Work: Stress, Productivity, and the Reconstruction of Working Life*. New York: Basic Books.

28 Spector, P. E. (1986). Perceived control by employees: A meta-analysis of studies concerning autonomy and participation at work. *Human Relations*, 39(11), 1005-1016. <https://doi.org/10.1177/001872678603901104>

Work Structure and Autonomy Key Findings

1 Over seven in 10 employees have the freedom to decide how they work.

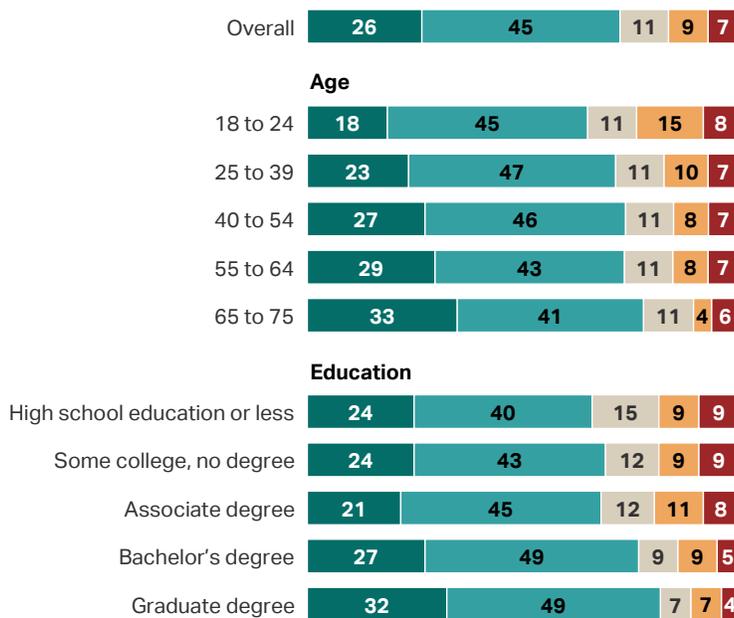
Autonomy is common in U.S. workplaces: 71% of employees strongly (26%) or somewhat (45%) agree that they can decide how to carry out their work. Decades of workplace research show that this type of autonomy is linked to higher job satisfaction, better well-being and lower risk of burnout.²⁹

FIGURE 18

Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements.

You have the freedom to decide how you do your work.

■ % Strongly agree ■ % Somewhat agree ■ % Neither agree nor disagree
 ■ % Somewhat disagree ■ % Strongly disagree



Note: Among those who are employees
 Not sure, not applicable and no response are not displayed but included in the calculations

INSIGHTS

Autonomy is widespread across education levels, though employees with college degrees are most likely to report it: 76% of workers with a **bachelor's degree** and 81% of those with a **graduate degree** strongly or somewhat agree.

Across industries, the majority of employees report similar levels of freedom.



In most sectors, about **three in four workers** say they have this type of autonomy.

Proportions are smaller in health and medical (66%), retail trade (63%), transportation (63%) and warehousing (55%).

²⁹ Spector, P. E. (1986). Perceived control by employees: A meta-analysis of studies concerning autonomy and participation at work. *Human Relations*, 39(11), 1005–1016. <https://doi.org/10.1177/001872678603901104>

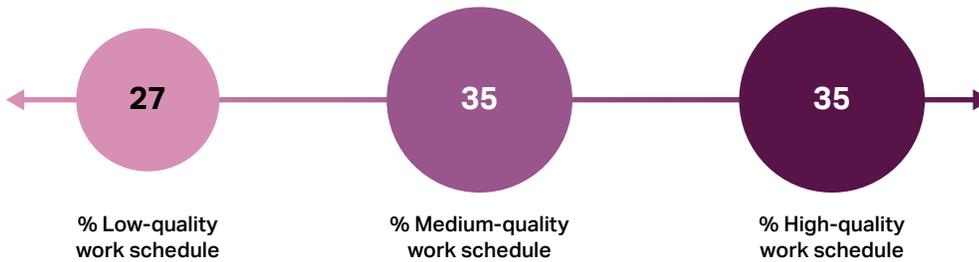


2 Most U.S. employees do not have high-quality work schedules.

While many employees feel they can decide how they do their work, far fewer have the same level of control over when they do it.

FIGURE 19

Most U.S. Employees Do Not Have High-Quality Work Schedules



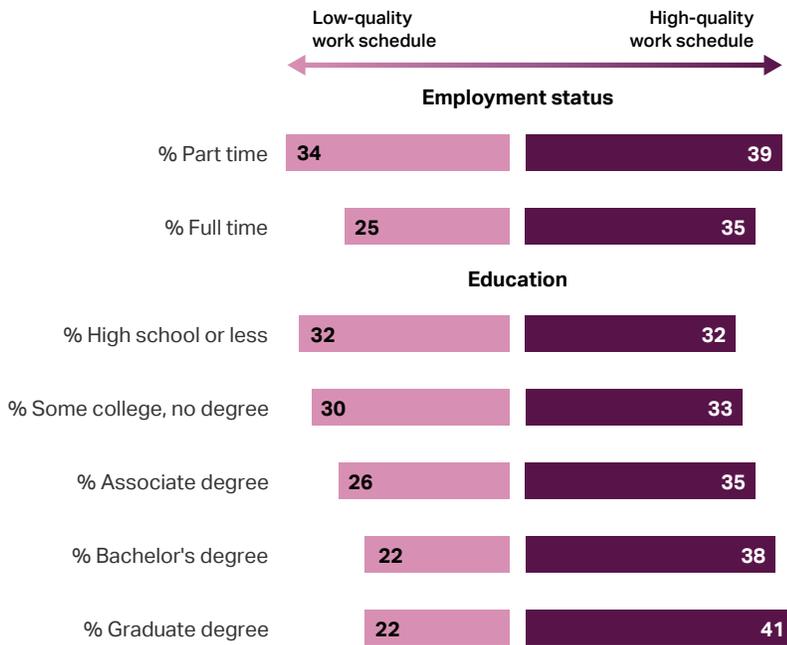
*Note: Among those who are employees
Totals may not add to 100% because "no opinion" responses are not included*

Overall, more than six in 10 employees (62%) lack schedules that are predictable, stable and over which they have some control. About one in four U.S. employees experience schedule unpredictability (27%) and instability (28%), and roughly four in 10 (41%) have little or no control over their hours.



FIGURE 20

Part-Time Employees, Those Without College Degrees More Likely to Have Low-Quality Work Schedules



Note: Among those who are employees

Scheduling challenges affect all types of employees, but part-time employees and those with less than an associate degree are especially likely to have low-quality schedules.³⁰ Among part-time employees (those working fewer than 35 hours per week), 34% have low-quality schedules, compared with 25% of full-time employees (those working 35 hours or more per week).

At the same time, part-time employees (39%) are slightly more likely than full-time employees (35%) to have high-quality schedules. This mix reflects the varied nature of part-time work, which can provide valuable flexibility for some but can also mean unpredictable or unstable hours for others.

³⁰ A job is considered to have a low-quality schedule if the employee has no control over their schedule and it lacks predictability or stability.

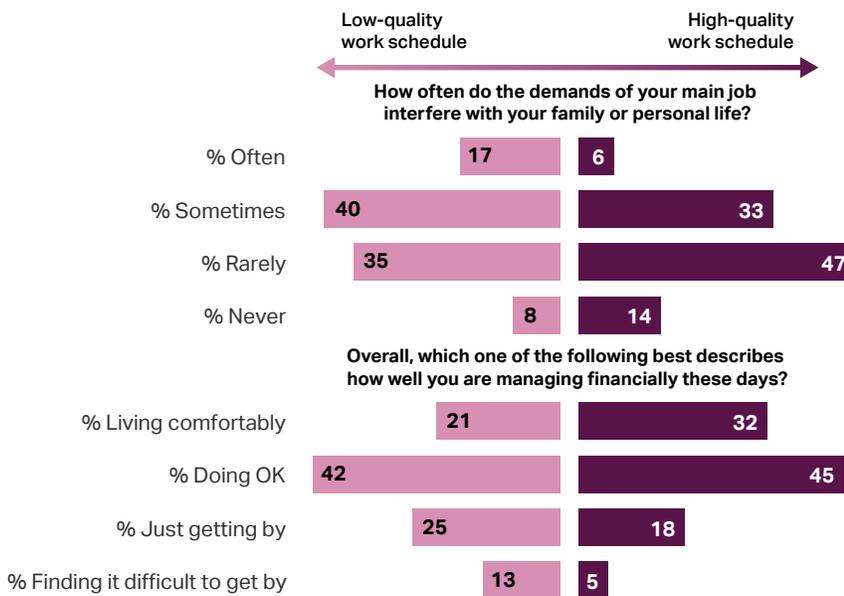


3 High-quality schedules are linked to higher well-being and job satisfaction.

Employees who have predictable, stable schedules and some control over their hours report feeling more financially secure, having a better work-life balance and being happier at work. Employees without these schedule characteristics rate their job satisfaction a full point lower on a zero-to-10 scale than employees who do. Differences in overall life satisfaction and general happiness are smaller but still meaningful.

FIGURE 21

Scheduling Quality, Work-Life Balance and Financial Stability



Note: Among those who are employees

Scheduling Quality and Well-Being

Overall, how satisfied are you with your job?

Overall, how satisfied are you with your life as a whole these days?

In general, how happy or unhappy do you usually feel?

● Low-quality work schedule ● High-quality work schedule



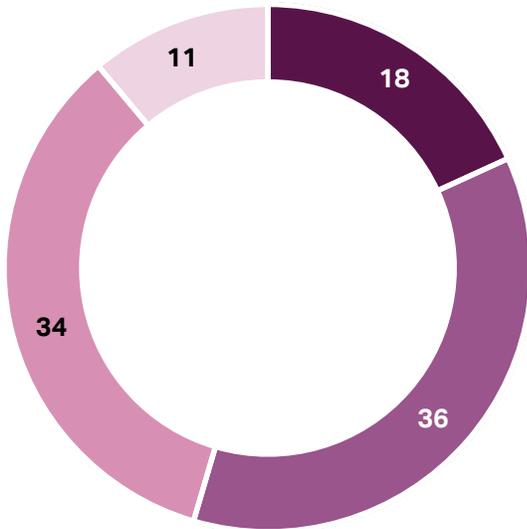
Note: Among those who are employees

4 Over half (54%) of employees say they often or sometimes work longer than originally scheduled.

FIGURE 22

Thinking of your main job, how often do you have to work longer than originally scheduled or planned?

■ % Often ■ % Sometimes ■ % Rarely ■ % Never



Note: Among those who are employees

INSIGHTS

Fifty-four percent of employees report often or sometimes working beyond their scheduled or planned hours.

Working extra hours — particularly when employees lack control over when that work occurs — is linked to higher stress and burnout, increased risk of health problems, and lower overall well-being and job satisfaction.^{31,32,33} This widespread reality adds unpredictability and potential strain to employees' daily work lives.

31 World Health Organization & International Labour Organization. (2021). Long working hours increasing deaths from heart disease and stroke. <https://www.who.int/news/item/17-05-2021-long-working-hours-increasing-deaths-from-heart-disease-and-stroke-who-ilo>

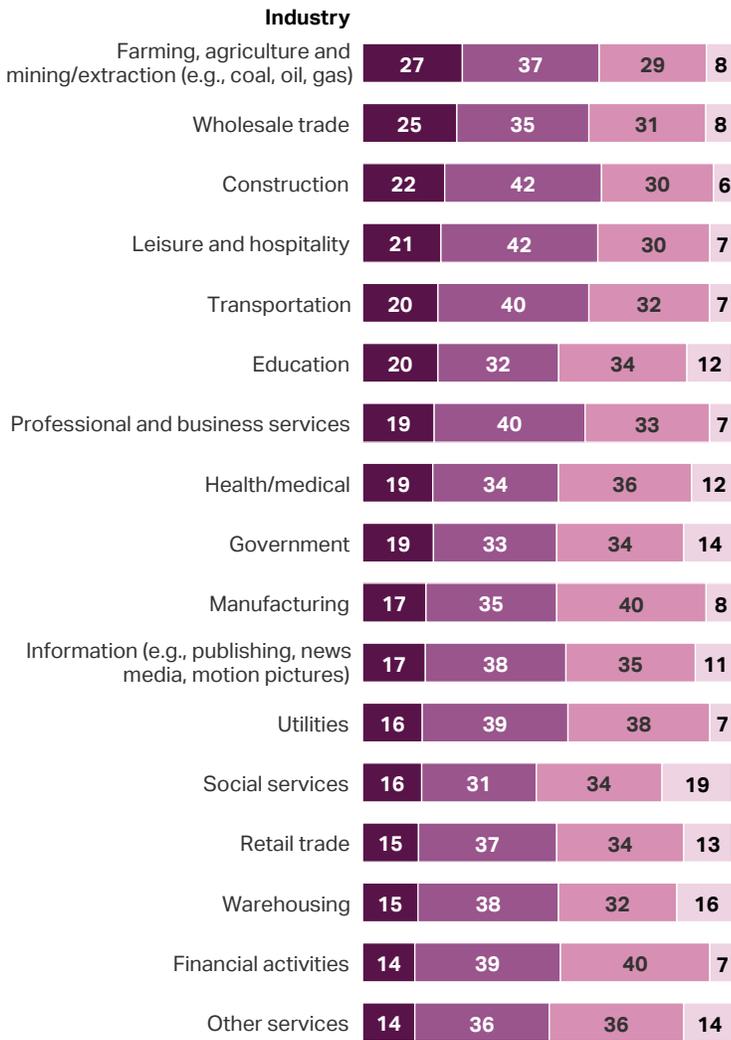
32 Institute for Work & Health. (2024). Working unpaid overtime linked with high stress and burnout. <https://www.iwh.on.ca/plain-language-summaries/working-unpaid-overtime-linked-with-high-stress-and-burnout-iwh-study>

33 Schneider, D., Harknett, K., & Collins, M. (2019). Consequences of routine work schedule instability for worker health and well-being. Harvard Kennedy School Shift Project. <https://shift.hks.harvard.edu/consequences-of-routine-work-schedule-instability-for-worker-health-and-wellbeing>

FIGURE 23

Thinking of your main job, how often do you have to work longer than originally scheduled or planned?

■ % Often ■ % Sometimes ■ % Rarely ■ % Never ■ % No response



*Note: Among those who are employees
Values less than 4% not labeled*

INSIGHTS

Employees in the **leisure and hospitality, construction, wholesale trade and agricultural sectors** are the most likely to work beyond their scheduled hours, with at least six in 10 saying they sometimes or often do. In most other industries, this figure is closer to half.

Implications

The 2025 AJQS paints a clear picture: Quality jobs are still the exception in the U.S. workforce.

Just over one in three U.S. workers have a job that meets the study's criteria for a quality job, leaving nearly two-thirds in roles that fall short — creating financial strain, unfair treatment, limited opportunities, reduced voice and unsustainable schedules, all of which affect worker satisfaction and well-being. By examining multiple dimensions of job quality, from compensation and benefits to growth opportunities and employee voice, the study highlights gaps that affect millions of workers.

These gaps matter. The AJQS finds that employees without quality jobs tend to report greater financial stress and lower well-being. They also report lower job satisfaction — an indicator linked by previous research to lower engagement, reduced productivity and higher turnover.³⁴ In short, job quality can affect workers' lives and organizational performance.

These early findings point to opportunities for action:

- 1 Employers looking to boost satisfaction can consider expanding mentorship and training, improving scheduling practices and providing additional avenues for employee input — factors the AJQS finds are linked to higher job satisfaction.
- 2 Policymakers aiming to strengthen local economies and workforce well-being can focus on structural gaps highlighted by the study, such as predictable scheduling, access to paid leave and workplace protections, which are associated with better worker outcomes.
- 3 Worker advocates, including unions, can use AJQS data and a variety of approaches — such as collaborative initiatives with employers or collective bargaining — to strengthen worker voice, expand access to skills training and advancement opportunities, and support both workers' and organizations' goals.

Attention to these areas — and other dimensions of job quality — can help enhance workers' experiences, strengthen workplaces and create a more productive economy.

The 2025 AJQS is both a baseline for future research and a tool for driving progress. This report offers a first look at a comprehensive data set that will be made publicly available, helping communities, organizations and policymakers identify areas for improvement, implement effective solutions and track progress over time.

³⁴ Harter, J. K., Schmidt, F. L., & Keyes, C. L. M. (2003). Well-being in the workplace and its relationship to business outcomes: A review of the Gallup studies. In C. L. M. Keyes & J. Haidt (Eds.), *Flourishing: Positive psychology and the life well-lived* (pp. 205–224). American Psychological Association. <https://doi.org/10.1037/10594-009>

About the American Job Quality Study

Methodology

The study results are based on self-administered web and mail surveys conducted Jan. 13-Feb. 25, 2025, with a random sample of 18,429 U.S. adults, aged 18 to 75, who worked for pay in the prior seven days. The sample was drawn from two sources — the Gallup Panel™ and a separate address-based sample (ABS). Gallup uses probability-based, random sampling methods to recruit its Panel members. The Gallup Panel is a probability-based panel that primarily uses ABS to select U.S. households. Panelists can be surveyed online using a web-based survey or offline using a paper-based survey or telephone interviews. For the purposes of this study Gallup included both online and offline Gallup Panelists, relying upon web and paper-based surveys to collect data from these U.S. adults.

For findings based upon the total sample of 18,429 U.S. workers, the margin of sampling error is ± 1 percentage point at the 95% confidence level.

For findings based upon the 15,968 U.S. workers who are employees, the margin of sampling error is ± 1 percentage point at the 95% confidence level.

For findings based upon the 12,820 U.S. workers who work full time for an employer, the margin of sampling error is ± 1.1 percentage points at the 95% confidence level.

For findings based upon the 2,560 U.S. workers who work part time for an employer, the margin of sampling error is ± 2.7 percentage points at the 95% confidence level.

For findings based upon the 7,661 U.S. male employees and 8,087 U.S. female employees, the margin of sampling error is ± 1.5 and ± 1.5 percentage points, respectively, at the 95% confidence level.

For findings based upon the 1,792 Black U.S. employees, 2,176 Hispanic U.S. employees, 703 Asian U.S. employees and 10,389 White U.S. employees, the margin of sampling error is ± 3.3 , ± 3.0 , ± 4.6 and ± 1.2 , percentage points, respectively, at the 95% confidence level.

Gallup weighted the obtained sample to correct for nonresponse. Nonresponse adjustments were made by adjusting the sample to match the national demographics of U.S. workers aged 18 to 75 on gender, age, race, Hispanic ethnicity, education and region. Demographic weighting targets were based on the 2023 American Community Survey figures for the aged 18 and older U.S. working population.

In addition to sampling error, question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of surveys.



The American Job Quality Study team would like these data, and the approach used to conduct this research, to be accessible to policymakers and leaders nationally. Accordingly, if you would like to learn more about how the study was conducted for the purposes of doing something similar in your community, please contact AJQS@jff.org.

Appendix

Calculating Job Quality

The AJQS builds on a broad body of research that examines multiple dimensions of job quality and aspects that matter most to workers, from physical demands and workplace hazards to autonomy and work-life balance.^{35,36}

The study defines a quality job as one that performs well across five core dimensions: financial well-being, workplace culture and safety, growth and development opportunities, agency and voice, and work structure and autonomy. Each of these dimensions reflects a different element of the work experience and together they provide a comprehensive picture of job quality.

Each respondent receives a score based on how they answer questions in every dimension, with scores ranging from High (1) to Medium (2) to Low (3). Dimensions without valid responses may also be marked as missing or not applicable. The job quality score is then calculated as the unweighted average of these five values. This average can fall anywhere between 1 and 3, with lower scores reflecting higher quality.

Based on the average, each job is classified into one of three categories:

- **Quality:** 1.00 to < 1.67
- **Non-Quality:** 1.67 to ≤ 3.00
- **Not Classified:** If a respondent does not have a valid score for three or more dimensions, their job quality is not classified.

Note: If a respondent's overall average initially places them in the quality job category but they have a "low" score on the financial well-being dimension, they are recoded into the non-quality job category given the importance of financial well-being to overall job quality.

35 Maestas, N., Mullen, K. J., Powell, D., von Wachter, T., & Wenger, J. B. (2017). The American Working Conditions Survey: Results from the 2015 RAND American Life Panel. RAND Corporation. https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR2014.html

36 Rothwell, J., & Crabtree, S. (2019). Not just a job: New evidence on the quality of work in the United States [PDF]. Lumina Foundation. <https://www.luminafoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/not-just-a-job-new-evidence-on-the-quality-of-work-in-the-united-states.pdf>

Job Quality Dimensions



Financial Well-Being

A quality job in this dimension offers fair pay, stable employment and benefits that meet basic needs and reduce financial stress.

Minimum Threshold for Achieving Quality in This Dimension	Survey Items
<p>Full-time workers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • earn $\geq 300\%$ FPL for a family of two (\$5,287.50/month) • have access to some form of paid time off (PTO), for those who are employees • report job security (confidence they can stay in their role if their performance is adequate and economic conditions remain stable) <p>Part-time workers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • earn $\geq 300\%$ FPL for a family of two (\$5,287.50/month) or do not report financial distress and do not want more hours to make ends meet, or do not rely on a second job to get by • have access to some form of PTO, for those who are employees • report job security (confidence they can stay in their role if their performance is adequate and economic conditions remain stable) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>What are your usual monthly earnings on your main job?</i> • <i>If you had to choose among the following work situations, which of the following would you prefer?</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>work more hours and earn more money, work the same number of hours and earn the same money, work fewer hours and earn less money</i> • <i>Which of the following, if any, can you take paid time off for? Select all that apply.</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>vacation, holidays, own sickness, family member's sickness, childbirth or adoption, personal reasons, none of these/no paid time off</i> • <i>Provided the economy does not change and your job performance is adequate, you could continue to work for your current employer as long as you like. (Strongly agree to strongly disagree)</i> • <i>Overall, which one of the following best describes how well you are managing financially these days? (Living comfortably, doing ok, just getting by, finding it difficult to get by)</i> • <i>Please think of the number of hours you work and the money you earn in your main job, including any regular overtime. If you had to choose among the following work situations, which of the following would you prefer?</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>work more hours and earn more money, work the same number of hours and earn the same money, work fewer hours and earn less money</i>



Workplace Culture and Safety

A quality job in this dimension offers a safe, respectful environment free from discrimination or harassment.

Minimum Threshold for Achieving Quality in This Dimension

Generally, workers did not experience a serious work-related injury or illness in the past year and feel safe at work. If they did experience a serious illness or injury at work, they strongly agree that they feel physically safe at work. These workers feel like they belong, are supported, treated with respect at work and are not discriminated against, bullied or harassed at work.

Survey Items

- *In the last 12 months, on your current main job, did you experience any work-related injuries or illnesses that required medical treatment, change in job activities, or lost time from work?*
- *Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements. (Strongly agree to strongly disagree)*
 - *You feel supported at work.*
 - *You feel like you belong at work.*
 - *You feel physically safe at work.*
- *You are treated with respect in this main job. (Strongly agree to strongly disagree)*
- *Do you feel in any way discriminated against or treated unfairly in your main job because of any of the following?*
 - *race or ethnic origin, gender or gender identity, sexual orientation, age, some aspect of your physical appearance, physical disability, autism or neurodiversity, religious identity, political views*
- *In the past 12 months on your main job, were you bullied, threatened or harassed in any way by any of the following people?*
 - *a supervisor, a coworker, a customer*



Growth and Development Opportunities

A quality job in this dimension provides a clear path to build skills, gain experience and advance in one’s career.

Minimum Threshold for Achieving Quality in This Dimension

Generally, workers see opportunities for advancement at their organization. They have engaged in some form of work-related training or education in the past 12 months and believe their job allows them to learn new things.

Survey Items

- *Does your organization provide you with opportunities for promotion and career advancement?*
- *Over the last 12 months, have you participated in any of the following types of work-related training or education?*
 - *on-the-job training on how to perform job tasks, mentorship on career advancement strategies/ opportunities/business growth, training or education to develop new skills offered or paid for by your employer*
- *Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements.*
 - *Your job allows you to learn new things.*



Agency and Voice

A quality job in this dimension offers the ability to influence decisions that affect the job.

Minimum Threshold for Achieving Quality in This Dimension

AJQS measures agency and voice through a “voice gap” metric — the difference between the influence workers currently have and the influence they want or expect over three key aspects of their jobs: compensation, including pay and benefits; working conditions, including physical safety and the ability to take breaks; and the adoption of new technology, including new software, AI tools or robotics.

Survey Items

- *How much influence **do** you, or your coworkers collectively, have on the following issues? (A lot to none)*
 - *compensation (pay and benefits), working conditions (e.g., physical safety, ability to take breaks), new technologies used in your job (e.g., new software, artificial intelligence tools, robotics)*
- *How much influence **should** you, or your coworkers collectively, have on the following issues? (A lot to none)*
 - *compensation (pay and benefits), working conditions (e.g., physical safety, ability to take breaks), new technologies used in your job (e.g., new software, artificial intelligence tools, robotics)*



Work Structure and Autonomy

A quality job in this dimension offers a predictable, stable work schedule and a sense of control over how work gets done.

Minimum Threshold for Achieving Quality in This Dimension

Workers know their schedule at least two weeks in advance, unless they set their own hours. Stability and control mean their hours don't fluctuate more than 25% or the difference between the fewest and greatest hours worked in a month is at most four without their choice, and they have input on when and how much they work. Workers also generally believe they have the freedom to decide how they do their work, get to do a lot of different things and have enough time to get everything done, while reporting that the job does not typically require them to work very fast.

Survey Items

- *How far in advance do you usually know what days and hours you will need to work on your main job? (24 hours or less to always the same schedule)*
- *Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements. (Strongly agree to strongly disagree)*
 - *You have the freedom to decide how you do your work.*
 - *You get to do a lot of different things on your job.*
 - *Your job requires that you work very fast.*
 - *You have enough time to get everything done at work.*
- *In general, how much input do you have into the following at your main job? (A lot to no input)*
 - *the number of hours you work each week, the days you work each week, when you work each day, whether you can take off a few hours (for personal reasons)*
- *How many hours do you usually work PER WEEK on your main job?*
- *In the last month, what is the greatest number of hours you worked in a week on your main job?*
- *In the last month, what is the fewest number of hours you worked in a week on your main job?*

About the Research Partners



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