



# The State of Culture: IMEA Findings for 2026

Regional insights from the 2026 Global Culture Report



**The 2026 Global Culture Report by O.C. Tanner uncovers the most important trends shaping workplace culture worldwide. This regional edition focuses on India, the Middle East, and Africa (IMEA), highlighting how employees across the region are experiencing work and where culture is evolving most.**

Drawing on insights from 6,934 participants across India, the Middle East, and Africa, representing 17.8% of the global study sample, this white paper explores:

- The most relevant cultural themes shaping IMEA workplaces in 2026.
- Key shifts across core cultural and engagement metrics.
- How IMEA compares with other global regions on critical culture indicators.

Together, these findings provide HR and business leaders in IMEA with a focused, data-backed view of what is driving engagement, retention, and performance locally and where leaders should pay closer attention in the year ahead.

## Regional outlook: culture in context

Workplace culture is shaped not only by global trends, but by the social and economic forces unique to each region. In IMEA, organizations are operating in an environment defined by rapid transformation and sustained growth. Expanding markets and rising employee expectations are reshaping how work is experienced and how culture must be intentionally designed.

As organizations scale and compete for talent, leaders are being challenged to balance performance, wellbeing and inclusion, often simultaneously. Several regional dynamics are having a direct impact on employee engagement, leadership effectiveness, and long-term cultural sustainability:

### **1. Rapid economic growth alongside persistent talent shortages**

Fast-paced expansion across industries continues to intensify competition for skilled talent, increasing pressure on organizations to retain, engage, and develop their people.

### **2. A diverse, multi-generational workforce with rising expectations**

Employees across age groups and backgrounds are seeking meaningful work, equitable recognition, career growth, and inclusive cultures that reflect fairness and belonging.

### **3. Growing demand for people-centric leadership and wellbeing support**

As work becomes more complex, employees expect leaders to be empathetic and intentional about supporting wellbeing without compromising performance.

These dynamics are reshaping how employees experience work, how leaders show up, and how organizations design culture to sustain long-term success.

**“Across IMEA, workplace culture is being reshaped by very different but equally powerful forces. India’s scale and digital momentum, the Middle East’s rapid diversification and investment in future industries, and Africa’s young, fast-growing workforce are all accelerating expectations around growth, opportunity, and performance. As organizations across these markets scale and modernize, the leadership challenge is no longer just about driving results, but about sustaining human connection, ensuring that wellbeing, inclusion, and hope keep pace with ambition and innovation.”**

**—ZUBIN ZACK, MANAGING DIRECTOR, IMEA, O.C. TANNER**

## **IMEA at a glance: where the region leads and where it lags**

IMEA performs strongly on several culture indicators, including Inspiration, where the region ranks #1 globally, outperforming the global average and all other regions. This reflects the optimism and growth mindset present across many IMEA organizations.

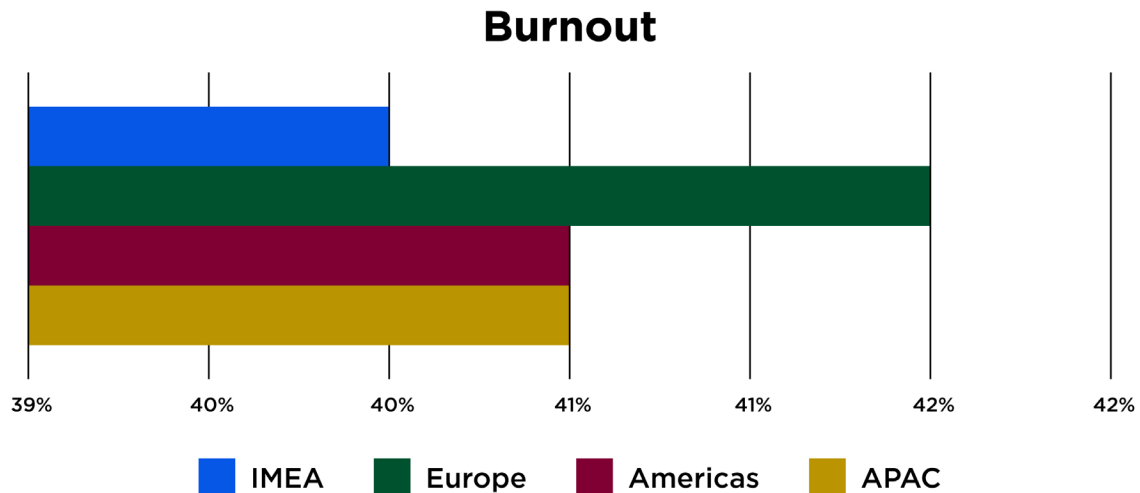
However, the data also reveals clear pressure points, particularly around burnout, hope, and inclusive teams. These metrics signal emerging risks for sustained performance if left unaddressed. The following sections dive deeper into these critical themes and what they mean for IMEA leaders in 2026.

## Theme 1: burnout

Burnout is no longer an isolated wellbeing concern; it is a systemic signal of how work is experienced. It reflects prolonged pressure and a growing mismatch between expectations and support. In many organizations, burnout is used as a catch-all term, obscuring deeper mental health challenges that often go unaddressed until engagement and performance begin to decline.

### IMEA performance snapshot

IMEA reported a burnout score of 40%, ranking #4 out of four regions.



This places IMEA below Europe (42%) and slightly behind the Americas and APAC (both 41%), indicating that employees in the region are experiencing comparatively higher levels of burnout.

## Why this matters

In IMEA, conversations around mental health are still evolving, and workplace strain is often described using surface-level terms such as burnout or quiet quitting. While familiar, these labels can obscure deeper challenges related to anxiety and emotional exhaustion.

When mental health is not openly discussed, employees are less likely to seek support, and organizations miss early warning signs. Cultures that normalize dialogue, provide access to support, and reinforce care through meaningful recognition help employees feel valued—reducing long-term strain and strengthening resilience.

Burnout can lead to disengagement and attrition. In a region defined by rapid growth and high expectations, sustained pressure without adequate recovery is beginning to take its toll.

Compared to global peers, IMEA’s lower burnout score suggests that while employees remain committed and motivated, they may be operating in environments where workloads, pace, and expectations are not always matched by sufficient support.



This shift is significant because IMEA organizations are scaling quickly, often faster than leadership models and wellbeing strategies can evolve. Employees are being asked to do more and deliver consistently, increasing the risk of exhaustion over time. Without intentional intervention, burnout threatens to undermine the very performance and resilience organizations are trying to build.

## Theme 2: hope

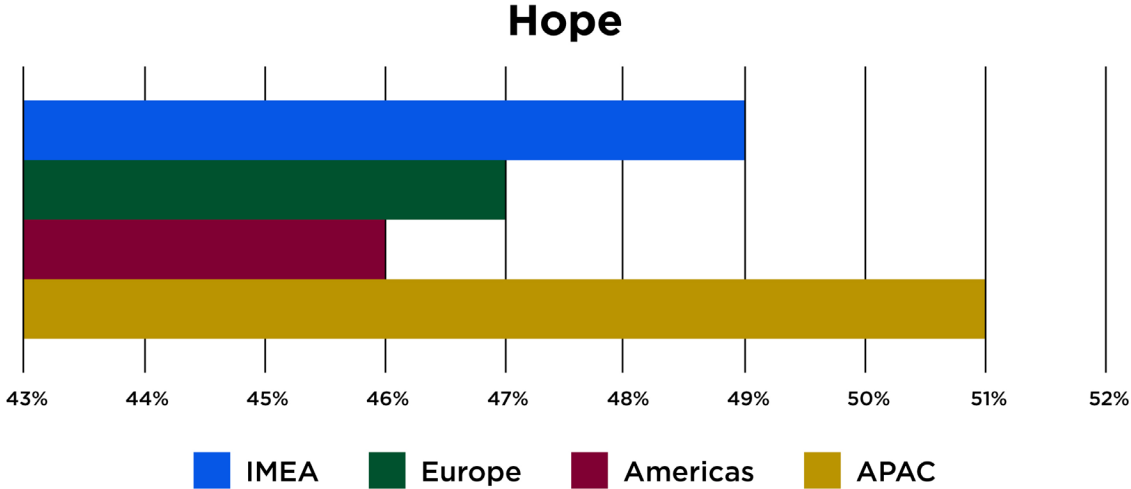
In the workplace, hope reflects an employee’s belief that their efforts matter and that progress is achievable. It is shaped by clarity of direction and confidence that today’s work will contribute to something better tomorrow.

At work, hope becomes tangible when employees see achievable goals and feel supported along the way. Without this visibility, optimism can remain aspirational rather than lived.

### IMEA performance snapshot

IMEA reported a Hope score of 49%, ranking #2 out of four regions.

While this is higher than the Americas (46%) and Europe (47%), it trails APAC (51%), indicating cautious optimism rather than strong confidence in the future.



## **Why this matters**

In many IMEA organizations, employees are meeting targets and adapting to constant change, but quietly wondering what comes next. They are delivering in the present, yet uncertain about how today's effort connects to tomorrow's opportunity.

The data reflects this tension. While hope levels in IMEA are stronger than in the Americas and Europe, they stop short of strong confidence. Employees believe improvement is possible, but they are not always convinced it is achievable.

This gap often emerges when vision is communicated without clear pathways, or when progress goes unrecognized. Employees may hear about future growth or purpose, but without visible milestones, shared wins, or reinforcement from leaders, hope remains aspirational rather than lived.

Why this matters is simple: when employees can see progress by experiencing recognition along the way and feel part of a community, hope becomes a sustaining force. When they cannot, motivation becomes transactional, and organizations risk losing the energy and commitment needed to move forward.

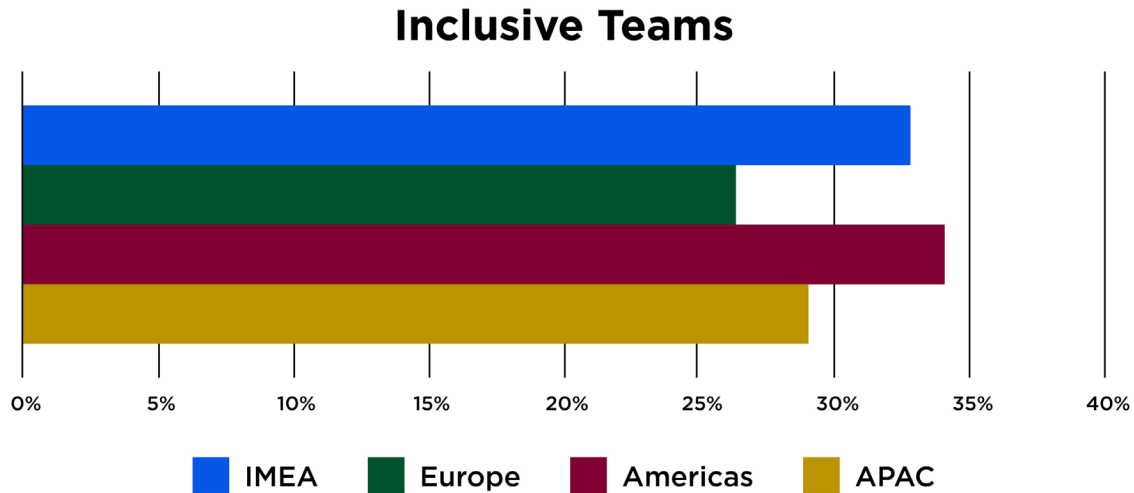
## **Theme 3: inclusive teams**

Inclusive teams are those where employees feel respected, heard, and valued for who they are and what they contribute. Beyond representation, Inclusion is experienced in everyday interactions, where all employees are invited into conversations and people feel safe bringing their full selves to work.

In fast-growing, diverse regions like IMEA, inclusion plays a critical role in enabling collaboration, innovation, and trust. When teams operate inclusively, differences in background, perspective, and experience become strengths. When they do not, those same differences can quietly limit engagement and belonging.

## IMEA performance snapshot

IMEA reported an Inclusive Teams score of 33%, ranking #2 out of four regions.



While slightly behind the Americas (34%), IMEA outperforms Europe (26%) and APAC (29%).

### Why this matters

Across IMEA, organizations are bringing together employees from different cultures, languages, generations, and lived experiences—often within fast-growing, matrixed environments. On paper, diversity is visible. In day-to-day work, however, inclusion is shaped by whether people feel genuinely heard and feel respected on their teams.

The data suggests that while IMEA performs relatively better than some global peers, inclusion is not yet consistently experienced. Employees may be present in the room, but not always confident that their voices carry equal weight; that decisions are made equitably, or that recognition is distributed fairly across roles and backgrounds.

This matters because inclusion directly influences collaboration and trust. In high-growth organizations, where cross-functional teamwork is essential, gaps in inclusive behavior can quietly undermine engagement, making recognition feel uneven and leadership messages less likely to resonate across the workforce.

**“In a region as vibrant and diverse as IMEA, recognition isn’t just a gesture—it’s a catalyst. When we intentionally celebrate people for who they are and the impact they create, we fuel a deeper sense of belonging across cultures, generations, and geographies. Everyday recognition reminds our people that their contributions matter, their voices matter, and they matter. When employees feel truly seen and valued, they don’t just perform better—they rise, they thrive, and they lift our entire organization with them. Together, these findings point to a clear leadership opportunity, one that requires intentional action to sustain performance while strengthening the employee’s experience.”**

**—CANDY FERNANDEZ, DIRECTOR P&GW, IMEA O.C. TANNER**

## **Recommendations: what this means for IMEA leaders in 2026**

### **1. Turn inspiration into enduring performance**

IMEA leads globally on inspiration, indicating that employees feel connected to purpose and motivated by the work they do. However, inspiration alone is not self-sustaining. To preserve this advantage, organizations must reinforce inspiration through everyday experiences, not just moments of vision or communication.

Leaders play a critical role by reinforcing purpose in day-to-day decisions and recognizing progress—not just outcomes. When employees see their contributions acknowledged and linked to broader goals, inspiration translates into sustained performance rather than short-term motivation.

## 2. Strengthen hope through achievable progress

IMEA's Hope scores point to cautious optimism; employees believe improvement is possible but may not always see a clear or achievable path forward. This presents an opportunity for leaders to build confidence by turning ambition into action.

Organizations can strengthen hope by setting realistic goals, celebrating incremental progress, and fostering a sense of shared success across teams. Recognition that highlights progress and collective achievement helps employees feel that the future is not only aspirational, but attainable.



## 3. Protect employee mental health through culture and recognition

IMEA's elevated burnout levels underscore the growing strain placed on employees as organizations scale rapidly, and expectations continue to rise. Addressing burnout requires more than reactive wellbeing programs; it requires cultural reinforcement.

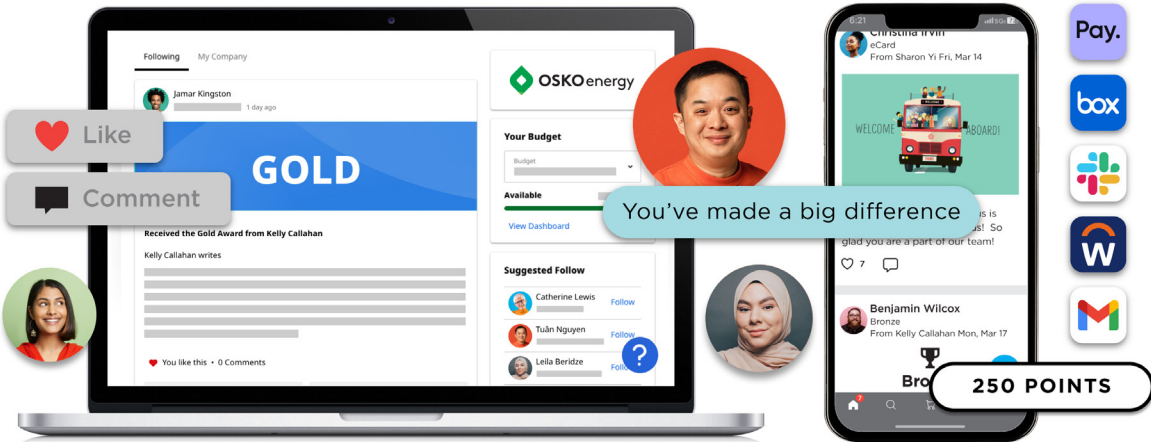
Leaders must normalize conversations around mental health, provide access to support, and use recognition intentionally to show care and appreciation. When employees feel valued and supported, recognition becomes a protective factor helping sustain resilience and long-term performance.

## 4. Embed inclusive behaviors at the team level

IMEA’s Inclusive Teams scores suggest that while diversity is present, inclusion is not always consistently experienced. Closing this gap requires leaders and teams to move beyond intent and embed inclusive behaviors into everyday interactions.

This includes inviting diverse perspectives, ensuring fairness in recognition, and creating environments where all employees feel heard and respected. When inclusion is practiced consistently at the team level, trust strengthens, collaboration improves, and recognition resonates more equitably across the organization.

Together, these actions help organizations move from insight to impact, creating cultures that balance performance with care and growth with sustainability.



## Conclusion: leading culture forward in IMEA

The 2026 Global Culture Report highlights a defining moment for organizations across IMEA. Employees remain driven and inspired by opportunity, yet the data reveals growing pressure beneath the surface, where burnout, cautious hope, and uneven inclusion intersect.

Burnout signals the cost of sustained intensity without adequate recovery. Hope reflects whether employees believe their effort today will lead to meaningful progress tomorrow. Inclusion determines whether people feel seen and supported along the way. Together, these three themes tell a single story: performance in IMEA is strong, but its sustainability depends on how intentionally culture is led.

When inclusion is inconsistent, recognition feels uneven. When progress is unclear, hope becomes fragile. And when care is absent, burnout quietly accelerates. The findings show that these experiences are deeply connected and that addressing one without the others limits long-term impact.

For leaders, the opportunity is clear. By building inclusive teams and translating vision into achievable goals reinforced through meaningful recognition, leaders can strengthen trust and resilience at scale.

In 2026 and beyond, the organisations that thrive in IMEA will be those that treat culture not as an initiative, but as a leadership discipline, one that balances support and care with high performance.

For further insights and recommendations on these topics, please refer to our [Global Culture Report](#) page.



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## SUPPORTING REFERENCES

[GCR 2025](#), [GCR 2026](#)