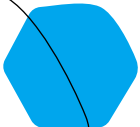


TALENT TRENDS 2024

THE EXPECTATION GAP

What **our** exclusive survey insights mean for
your hiring and retention strategies in 2024

UK Edition





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About PageGroup

An Expectation Gap has opened in the workplace. How can we bridge the divide?

Last year, our flagship Talent Trends survey revealed a significant change in the workplace, highlighting how employee priorities had fundamentally changed coming out of the pandemic.

Twelve months on, our brand-new research demonstrates how the post-pandemic landscape has evolved yet again as the misalignment of employee and employer workplace expectations continues. As a result, finding people strategies that work for all is becoming a bigger challenge than ever before. A phenomenon we are calling 'The Expectation Gap'.

Our recruitment experts are continuing to witness candidates coming to the table with a growing list of expectations, stretching far beyond salary and flexibility. By comparison, clients are facing significant pressures in a rapidly evolving business environment, making it harder for both sides to find a middle ground.

To explore this further, our new data from 2,400 UK respondents uncovered their greatest desires for either a current or potential new job and, in an ever-changing landscape, how

employers can implement best practices to bridge the gap.

Some key findings from the report include:

- **Salary remains king in job searches**, as workers continue to search for roles with higher wages to manage the rising cost of living.
- **Flexibility has become a flashpoint**, as employers grapple with implementing working models that meet both business needs and employee preferences.
- **AI is no longer a futuristic face**, but instead is impacting people's working lives and career decisions, adding yet another layer of complexity to the workplace.
- **Maintaining a dynamic and inclusive culture** where everyone can be their authentic selves is more complex, and important, than ever.

'The Expectation Gap' applies to almost all elements of the modern workplace, emphasising the importance of adopting best

practices to align expectations and foster a cohesive work environment for all.

Within the following pages, we aim to equip you with insights and recommendations on how to bridge the expectation gap, cultivate inclusive cultures, and confidently navigate the evolving recruitment landscape.

Armed with valuable expertise, specialist knowledge, and years of experience, our dedicated team of specialist consultants are ready to guide your efforts in navigating the workforce. As your trusted partner, we are confident that together, we can help you bridge the gap and achieve the best results for everyone.

Best,



Doug Rode
Managing Director –
UK and Ireland
at Michael Page



Mind the gap

Key expectations uncovered in our Talent Trends survey

1. Autonomy and flexibility

People-first, flexible workplaces that preserve work-life balance.

2. Respect and trust

Where people feel valued, listened to, and understood at work.

3. Proactive response to change

Support as work continues to evolve around new technologies.

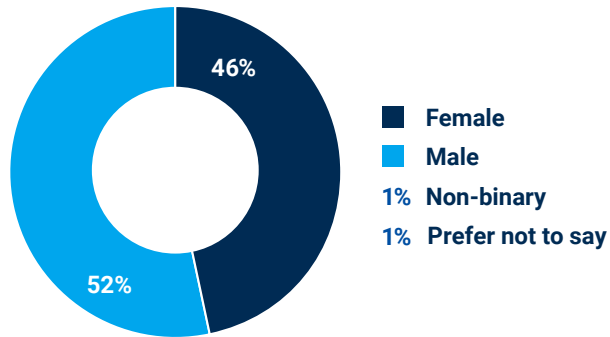


2,400
survey participants
across the UK

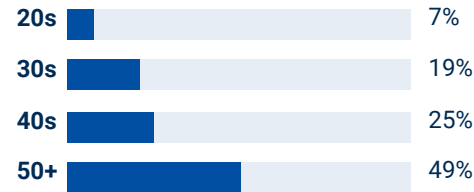
Talent Trends is the most robust and comprehensive workplace survey of its kind in the world today

Who took our survey?

GENDER



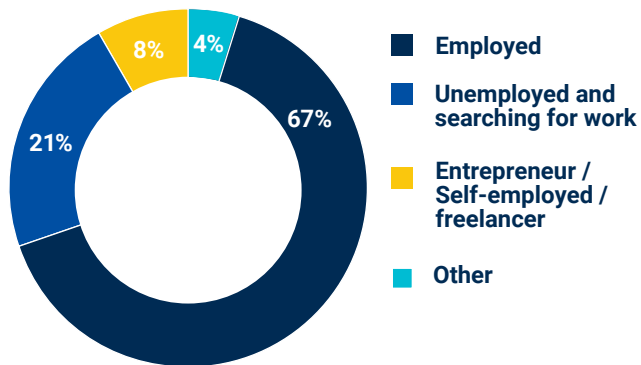
AGE



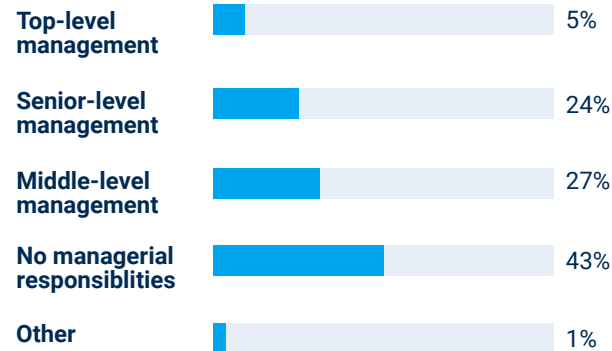
LGBTQIA+



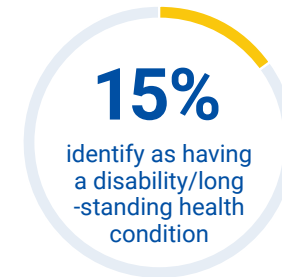
EMPLOYMENT STATUS



MANAGEMENT RESPONSIBILITIES



PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES





The Expectation Gap on... Salary

Demands are rising as
wage growth slows



Salary is (still) king

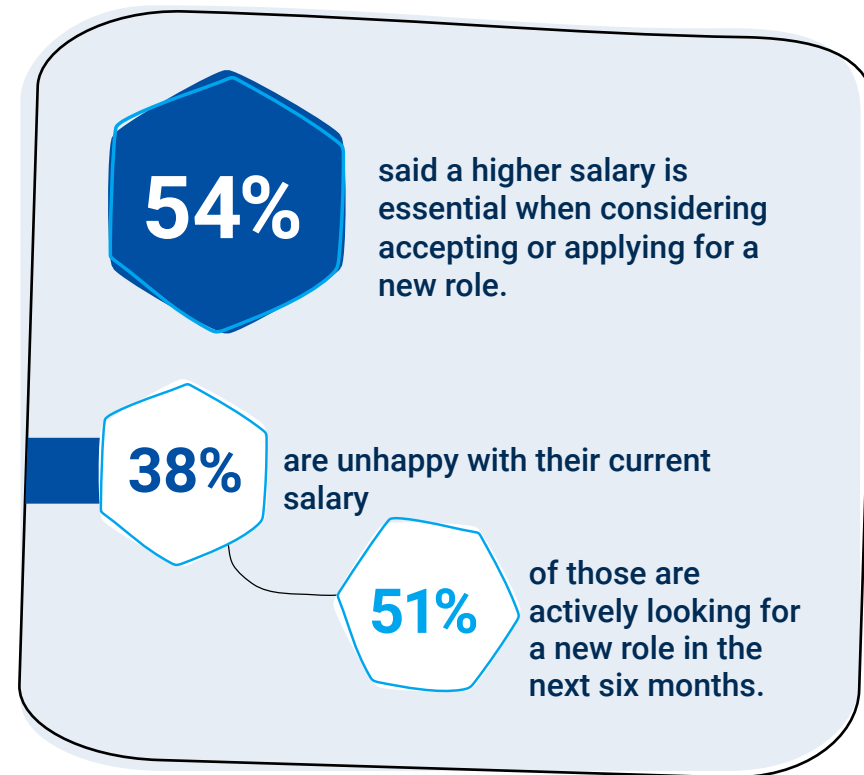
But are demands for higher wages rooted in reality?

In an economic state of uncertainty, one thing that remains a constant is the number of people actively seeking new roles.

Our research revealed just under half (46%) of UK workers are actively looking for, or planning on applying to, new roles within the next six months. Moreover, despite the economic uncertainty the UK has faced – and continues to face – and wage growth slowing, workers are not deterred in their quest for higher salaries. This is where our first mismatch of expectations comes into play, with wage demands increasingly out of sync with the challenges many employer’s face.

Where we once saw workers stay loyal to a firm for decades, today this is not the case. Rather than settle for stability, employees who are unhappy with their current salary are willing to change roles in order to earn more. It’s not a small fraction of the workforce, either.

Over half of those seeking a new role consider a higher salary to be the most essential motivating factor behind the move.



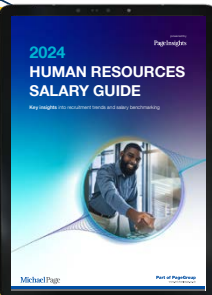
Employers acknowledge demands for higher wages

Even if there's a gap in what they're able to offer, employers still recognise salary as a key factor for talent attraction

Workers are not alone in this salary struggle, however. Employers recognise the challenge, with over half revealing they had found it difficult to hire in the last 12 months and a further 44% found it hard to retain talent, all citing matching salary expectations as the main barrier.

Struggling to match salary expectations?

Download our latest salary guide to benchmark your offer against the industry average.



Biggest challenges organisations face when recruiting new talent:





The Expectation Gap on... Flexibility

Navigating the conflicting priorities employees and employers have around work-life balance





Satisfaction over salary

Higher salaries get people through the door, but the most important factors to their workplace satisfaction change once they are settled.

Businesses emerged from the pandemic with new cultures and ways of working. Now, many employers are struggling to find a workplace model that works for all sides as work-life balance becomes a need, rather than a nice-to-have.

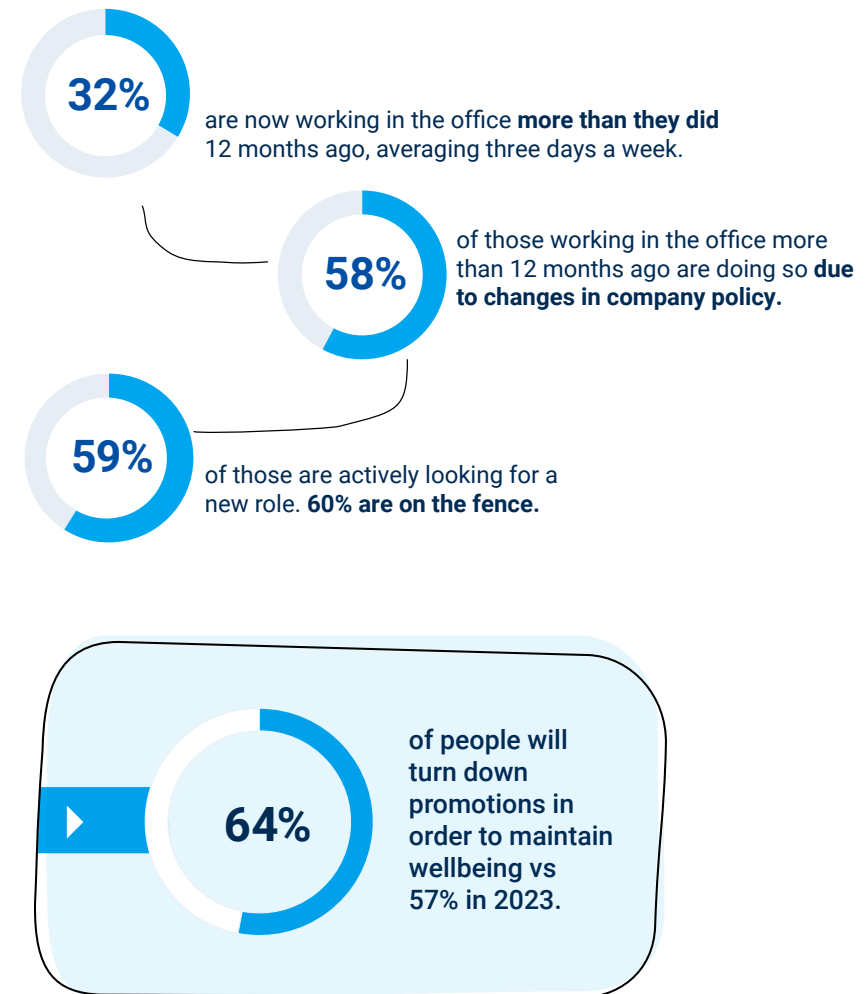
Over half (56%) said work-life balance was most important to job satisfaction. A further, **52%** rank flexibility as most essential when applying for or accepting a role – up 8% year-over-year.

As flexibility takes second place in importance when accepting or applying for a job, it demonstrates a change in desire for workers. This shift in expectations we are witnessing may present challenges for employers struggling to get workers back in the office more regularly.

Our research suggests it is no longer enough to only offer a flexible or hybrid work arrangement, as employees increasingly desire the ability to control their own working patterns to a certain extent. Forcing such behavioural changes on workers could backfire more than benefit businesses. Those who don't could see detrimental effects on their success – as some businesses are already witnessing.

Thus, businesses must pay attention to this changing behaviour and be agile in their offers to employees if they want to retain staff as work-life balance and flexibility become a priority. Nothing exemplifies this more than half of employees saying they would refuse a promotion to maintain their wellbeing.

This is just the tip of the iceberg, and this shift in expectation signifies what employees really want: **more autonomy over their working pattern and work-life balance.**



Empowering employees

The what, where, when, and how of flexibility

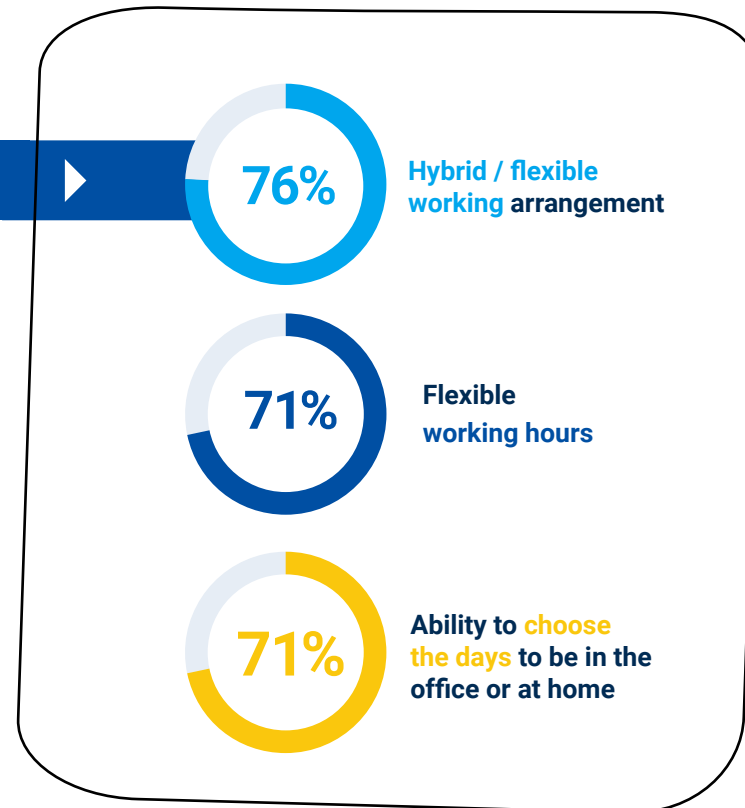
As flexibility takes priority across the board, it is important to remember hybrid working, work-life balance, and flexibility are not linear. What flexibility means and looks like to everyone is different – employees and employers alike – and the secret to success is finding the middle ground that benefits both parties.

Aspects of flexibility that are important

No specific industry is seeing this change in behaviour, either, as our research reveals the growing need for flexibility and work-life balance spans almost every sector. Even in industries where flexible working can be more difficult to adopt due to the nature of work, employees have similar expectations. For example, flexible working hours are desired by a significant portion of employees across Manufacturing (72%), Property & Construction (54%), and Logistics (69%).

Our research demonstrates the need for business leaders to be agile in their negotiations with employees as work-life balance becomes a priority, listening to individual needs on a case-by-case basis rather than trying to cater for the masses.

This approach not only responds to the evolving priorities of the workforce, but also builds a positive culture of success to drive better business outcomes for both employers and employees.





KEY TAKEAWAYS

Employees became accustomed to flexible working over the pandemic years. These expectations shifted to accommodate the freedoms they experienced, and a significant portion of the workforce will view prescribed changes to their working patterns as a loss of autonomy.

Thus, the meaning of flexibility goes beyond a hybrid working arrangement and so businesses must look to adopt new best practices to bridge this gap.

Most importantly, businesses must strike a balance between setting the standard of working pattern that works for them but remain open and listen to what employees want to some extent to achieve a harmonious workplace.

TIPS FOR SUCCESS

Establish clear communication channels for employees to express their preferences and needs regarding work arrangements. An emphasis on the wellbeing benefits of working policies could help maintain job retention amongst those now required to attend the office more regularly.

Consider implementing flexible scheduling policies, such as staggered start times or compressed work weeks, to accommodate varying personal obligations and work preferences and empower employees with the ability to have flex in their working pattern.

Understand the needs of each employee by regularly seeking feedback to assess the effectiveness of flexible work arrangements and adjust as needed to ensure continued satisfaction and success.

Salary



Flexibility



DE&I





The Expectation Gap on... Gen AI

Keeping pace when careers are changing





The future is now

AI: Shaping careers today and tomorrow

AI has evolved significantly since its first appearance over half a century ago, expanding far beyond the ability to analyse data sets and evolving to take on tasks such as content development and machinery automation.

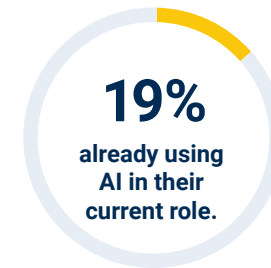
While the conversation around AI is not new nor surprising to most workers and employers, what is becoming the new conversation is the way in which AI will impact industries. In fact, we are in an age of technology where AI can and will help to transform and enhance roles and sectors.

For some, this is already being felt in their day-to-day jobs.

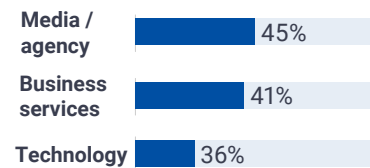
The technology will inevitably continue to grow and develop at pace, and workers know this as our research revealed there is a growing awareness of the impact AI could have on future careers, with four in ten respondents believing AI will impact their long-term career plans.

However, this impact is not deemed all negative. In fact, some 61% of those who think AI will replace jobs “to some extent” believe this will mostly be done through automating repetitive tasks – leaving employees with more time to do the tasks AI is not ready to do. **What’s more, a fifth of UK workers don’t think AI will replace jobs at all.**

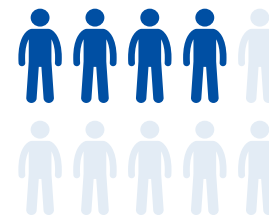
With a large proportion of respondents feeling the impact of AI long-term – positive or negative – **how can employers bridge the expectation gap AI presents in today’s workplace?**



TOP INDUSTRIES USING AI:



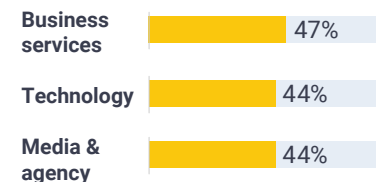
HOW IT IS BEING USED:



4 in 10

respondents believe that AI will impact their long-term career plans.

SECTORS WORKERS BELIEVE AI IS IMPACTING CAREERS:



Are employers leading the way on AI?

Education is just as, if not more, important as adoption

Despite over half of survey respondents stating they believe AI could replace jobs to an extent, it is clear AI maturity has not evolved enough to leave humans completely redundant in their roles.

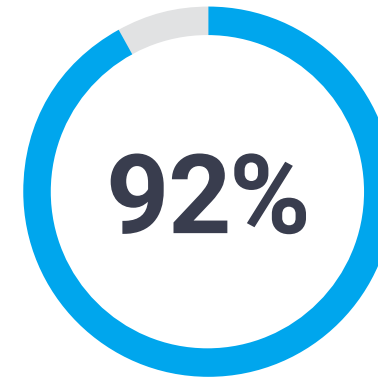
This was further confirmed by our research, revealing **the biggest concerns employees have around AI are the lack of human judgement (69%) and data privacy (52%).**

As such, employees and employers must remember AI is not ready to takeover, and instead workplaces should be embracing the technology – in various forms – to enhance the way they work to drive larger and longer-term success. The first step to this is through education.

Research revealed that despite the expectation that AI will impact their careers in some form in the future, this anticipation comes with a willingness to adopt new technologies and grow with the changing currents. And it's not a small portion of the workforce, either.

Employers could benefit from taking control of the narrative, increasing their AI literacy, and defining a strategy that focuses on the potential benefits of these innovative technologies.

This, coupled with the increased investment organisations plan to plough into the technology, can help bridge the gap in knowledge, skills, and application. As a result, ensuring employees and the business benefits from the adoption and implementation and drive joint success.



are willing to learn more about AI and how to use it effectively for the following two reasons:



Adapt to new roles



Improve their efficiency and productivity



KEY TAKEAWAYS

Despite some feeling a sense of ambiguity around the future of work as a result of the development of AI, there is still a growing willingness from employees to learn and adopt new technologies to enhance job roles and careers long-term.

Organisations that will find success from AI are those who are already adopting, or looking to adopt, AI now or in the near future.

Having a clear company vision on the role of AI in the future – prioritising the human skills that technology may never be able to replicate – can have a positive impact, turning something that could drive anxiety into an element that helps companies to hire and retain top talent.

TIPS FOR SUCCESS

Upskilling and reskilling employees to prepare them for the change workplaces anticipate will prove crucial to business success.

Clearly communicate your roadmap and vision for AI, demonstrating the impact this will have on your organisation and more importantly what that means for your workers. Doing so will bridge the gap of ambiguity and anxiety some may feel in the face of change.

Salary



Flexibility



DE&I





The Expectation Gap on... DE&I

The difference between
intent and impact



Some stark stats on DE&I...

Is company culture suffering at the hands of flexibility?

Modern work culture doesn't begin and end with flexibility. Diversity, Equity & Inclusion (DE&I) also plays an important part in the new dynamic.

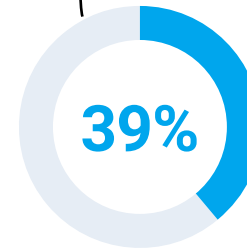
As employee expectations around DE&I come to the fore, and we witness five generations active in the workforce for the first time, employers are facing the challenge of catering to more complex needs than ever before.

This is increasingly affecting workplace dynamics, even only in terms of how to fairly cater for different needs at different stages of people's lives. The pressure to navigate these expectations is having a visible impact on attitudes within workplaces, with overall trust in DE&I initiatives low across a range of areas.

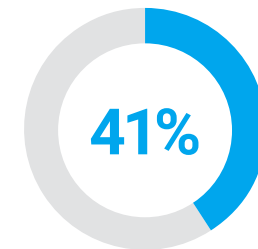
However, with less than a fifth believing their leadership is diverse it is unsurprising to find employees feel this way. If employees cannot see diversity among their peers or leaders, it makes it increasingly difficult for them to feel they can raise their concerns, and it becomes more challenging for them to believe these will be duly addressed.

Building a culture which allows everyone to be their authentic self and perform at their best, is the first step to take. To do so, organisations must first understand the diverse perspectives, expectations, and concerns of their workforce.

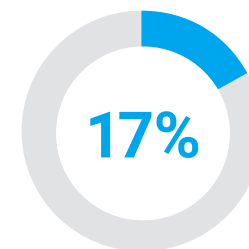
Only...



believe their workplace is inclusive



feel they can be their authentic self at work



think their senior leadership team is diverse

Discrimination: A difficult discussion

An appetite for positive change has never been stronger – but is reality matching intention?

The statistics on the topic of DE&I are stark as over three in ten respondents said they have been discriminated against at some point during their career, with 11% of those stating this was within their current role.

Discrimination based on age was most frequently experienced, according to almost half of respondents. What's more, our survey revealed this sentiment was prominent across the spectrum, with those over 50 and in their 30s most likely to be subjected to age discrimination.

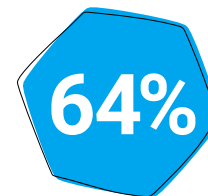
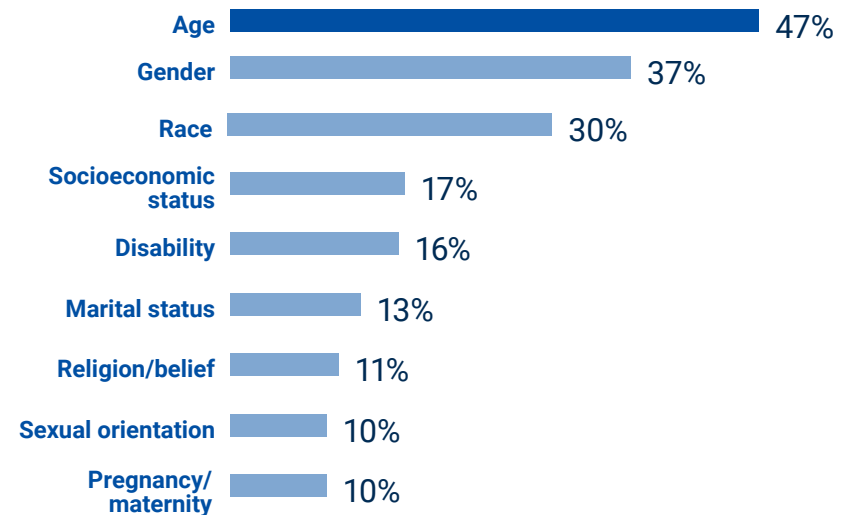
Even if employers have reporting frameworks in place as part of their DE&I agendas, these are not often utilised by those in need. Conclusions span to potential fear of reprisal because of their whistleblowing or a lack of trust that any meaningful change will come as a result. However, the answer may be simpler than we think.

Fostering an environment where employees not only feel comfortable reporting incidents of discrimination but also witness meaningful responses is pivotal in cultivating a workplace culture anchored in safety and respect. This in turn helps to generate job loyalty and boost employee retention, leading to overall higher levels of happiness and satisfaction in the workplace.

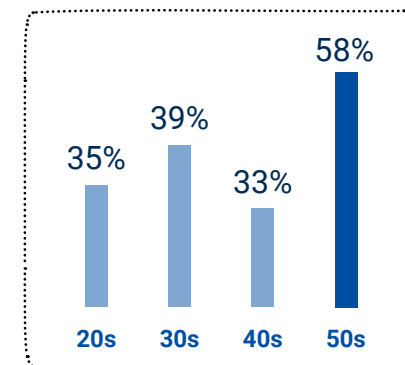
The pressure to navigate these expectations is increasing, and so **it's up to employers to take the first step to build trust in DE&I initiatives.**



What types of discrimination have workers faced?



of those discriminated against didn't report it.



Building an inclusive culture based on trust

Listening to what workers want could be the golden ticket to inclusion success

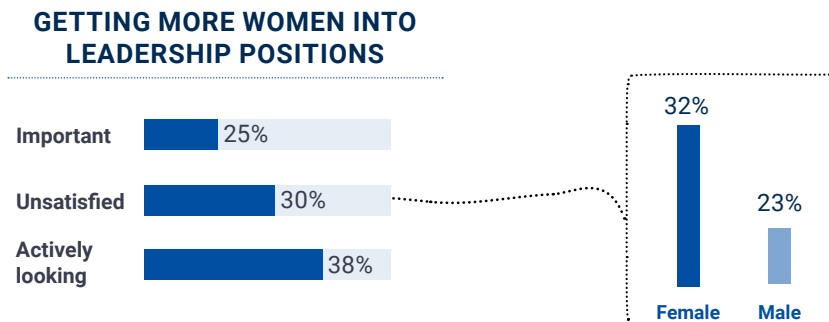
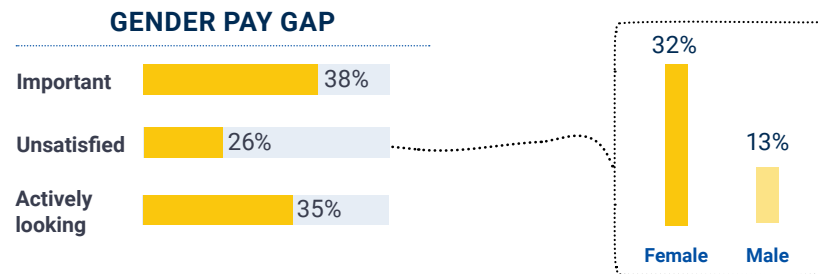
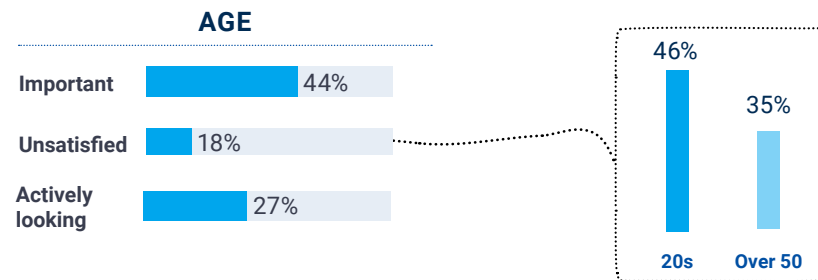
Employers are starting to recalibrate their focus on DE&I initiatives, but the question around whether organisations' efforts are placed on the areas workers feel they are needed remains.

This is clearly a complex issue for employers, but some of the problems may lie in effective communication and implementation of DE&I initiatives. This is underlined by the fact that those who should benefit from such programs are often the least satisfied by their outcomes, according to our data.

Without addressing what workers deem as important DE&I initiatives, it begs the question: how can you successfully achieve a cohesive company culture powered by happy employees? Thus, raising the importance for businesses and leaders to think about the initiatives most important to those who shape their culture.

Those who succeed in DE&I initiatives take responsibility for fostering and creating an inclusive culture. This involves not only acknowledging areas for improvement but also actively seeking feedback from employees and stakeholders, listening to their experiences, and integrating their perspectives into decision-making processes.

DE&I initiatives most important to workers compared to those satisfied, and those who are actively looking for a new role as a result:





KEY TAKEAWAYS

Five generations are now active in the workforce and whilst there are many commonalities between them, different demographics naturally want and need different things from work, causing complexities in building an inclusive company culture.

The amount of employees who feel they can report discrimination or marginalisation is significantly high, bringing to the fore the need to do more within the workplace to make those affected feel they can make themselves heard.

TIPS FOR SUCCESS

Educate leaders and remain open to learning from others, remembering that DE&I is an ongoing journey, not a destination. Those with influence must remain accountable and authentic to themselves and the organisation to foster a positive environment.

To do so, leaders must acknowledge existing disparities and commit to addressing them. This involves a willingness to confront uncomfortable truths, acknowledging where the organisation falls short in promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Demonstrate intent with impact by building a positive workplace with visible steps towards inclusivity and equity that go beyond tokenistic displays.

Salary



Flexibility



AI



DE&I



How will you bridge The Expectation Gap?

Matching employee aspirations with organisational vision

The expectation gap we have explored in this report is visible across all elements of the modern workplace – from salaries to DE&I initiatives, AI strategies to hybrid policies. Bringing expectations back into alignment will be vital for employers as they create a new dynamic.

Our study suggests a solution: acknowledging the diversity in attitudes towards work, therefore approaching any issues with open communication and mutual respect. Clearly stating expectations around issues such as workplace attendance, technology strategies and inclusion initiatives will reassure many employees, who may subsequently feel more engaged in ongoing conversations.

When hiring, you need to authentically build an image that fits with a potential employee's vision of their future. There's no one-size-fits-all solution – it's about nurturing trust between employees and employers so that open communication can take place and expectations can be recognised and met.

Expectations might be out of alignment now. But we believe that now more than ever, knowledge is power when it comes to finding solutions to these challenges and ultimately bridging the expectation gap to forge a future that works for all.





CONCLUSION

KEY TAKEAWAYS AND TIPS

The three-step process to realigning expectations and creating a modern workplace dynamic

1 Build trust

Create a culture of open communication and clear expectation setting

Building trust isn't about delivering on every ask from workers and goes both ways - people have work to do to convince employers their version of flexibility and hybrid working is viable.

It's important to communicate openly and honestly about decisions, even if they are not going to be universally popular.

2 Become resilient

Manage workplace anxieties and demonstrate a preparedness for future transitions

It's fine to not have all the answers to conundrums around culture, flexibility and technology immediately – but acknowledging where approaches will need to evolve can build confidence and help people to prepare for what's coming next.

3 Be people-first

Human capital is any organisation's greatest asset - and requires continuous investment

As we've explored, there are more varied expectations for employers to navigate than ever. It's important to understand that there is no universal solution. It's about balancing individual needs - and recognising that it's impossible to deliver on all of them - with those of the collective workforce.



PageInsights

Explore our data your way

What we've detailed in this report is a mere fraction of the insights from our Talent Trends 2024 survey.

When it comes to finding the talent you need in this ever more competitive hiring landscape, we know that knowledge is power.

That's why we've also launched **our interactive tool**, which puts all the information you need on what's driving the talent market right at your finger tips.

You can explore our data your way - by choosing any two filters across countries, industries or job functions - and the tool is an easy point of reference to come back to as many times as you need.

Give the tool a try



About PageGroup

Are you hiring?

Whatever your recruitment needs look like, our specialist teams at PageGroup are ready to help you find the right talent for your business.

PageExecutive

Executive search

Page Executive – the executive search division of PageGroup – offers a fresh approach to search, selection and advisory solutions for leadership talent. Recognised for the expertise and global reach of our consultants, as well as our powerful in-house research function, our tailored services, speed of delivery and high success rates are why organisations worldwide choose Page Executive to secure their leaders of tomorrow.



MichaelPage

Qualified professionals

Michael Page provides specialised recruitment services for professionals at middle management to leadership levels, along with highly specialised technical positions.



PagePersonnel

Clerical professionals

Page Personnel specialises in recruitment services for quality professionals within the professional support space through to middle management.



PageOutsourcing

Flexible recruitment outsourcing

Page Outsourcing specialises in delivering high volume talent acquisition solutions for permanent and temporary workforces. With the ability to meet ongoing or outcome based hiring needs, Page Outsourcing's support covers recruitment process outsourcing (RPO), managed service programs (MSP) and talent acquisition advisory services.



PageConsulting

Talent strategy consulting

Page Consulting work with you to help enable talent sustainability and optimisation, to help achieve your strategic goals. Our people & chane advisory solutions can support you with talent data and analytics, talent acquisition, developing talent, and DE&I.



Scan or click on the relevant QR code to get in touch with one of our consultants.

