

# FUTURE OF WORK

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## FUTURE OF WORK

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## PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

# What Elon Musk gets wrong about employee productivity

Although quantitative measures of input and output will always have their uses, these are not the best indicators of how people are performing. Instead, a far more holistic approach is required

Cath Everett

When Elon Musk took over Twitter in October 2022, he raised eyebrows by demanding that employees commit to making the business “extremely hardcore”. This directive included a stark ultimatum: either work “long hours at high intensity” or leave. There was even talk of programmers being asked to print out everything they had worked on recently, with the number of lines of code they’d written serving as a measure of their value to the company.

Musk is an extreme example of the ‘cult of productivity’ that still pervades many organisations. See also Amazon, which has attracted much criticism for having adopted an automated monitoring system to track the time warehouse workers aren’t spending on their allotted tasks.

The rights and wrongs of workplace surveillance aside, many behavioural experts don’t believe that gauging performance using such coldly mathematical measurements is the way to get the best out of people. Kim-Adele Randall, CEO of change management consultancy Authentic Achievements, is one of them.

“Productivity does have its place as a measure,” she says. “But, if it’s the only one you’re using, it will fail eventually. It’s too constraining.”

One problem with measuring an individual’s performance in purely quantitative terms, such as the number of hours they worked or the number of widgets they produce, is that it ignores quality. A second is that it can create perverse incentives, prompting people to focus on the wrong outputs.

“In a call centre, for instance, rating employees by the number of calls they complete will drive them to get through those calls as quickly as possible. It means that they won’t focus on ‘first contact’ resolution, as that takes too long,” Randall says.

As a result, a customer is more likely to be left unsatisfied by a perfunctory interaction that fails to resolve their query on the first call.

A third downside of using quantitative metrics alone is the negative impact this will often have on the people being measured, she adds. “Measuring the wrong thing – that is, just how busy employees are – causes massive problems, because people don’t feel valued. Heaven forbid they miss their performance targets. And at best, all they ever get to be under that system is ‘not wrong’. There is no upside.”



Anadolu Agency/Contributor via Getty

The longer-term result of this practice is that people will tend to burn out under the stress it imposes and, eventually, quit. The organisation’s staff retention rate then declines, as does its performance as experienced workers leave in their droves. In turn, it must spend more on recruiting replacements – and it may find attracting new talent harder if the exodus has harmed its reputation as an employer.

The solution seems straightforward enough: use an appropriate mix of quantitative and qualitative metrics, which should be reviewed regularly to ensure that they are not incentivising dysfunctional behaviour. Managers at the call centre, for example, could assess customer

feedback in surveys or online reviews, or listen in on calls to gauge the quality of the service their staff are providing.

A firm’s choice of qualitative measures will send employees an important message about the outputs that really matter to it, says Jeremy Campbell, CEO of business improvement consultancy Black Isle Group.

“Daniel Pink’s 2009 book, *Drive: the surprising truth about what motivates us*, discusses how mastery, purpose and autonomy are the three intrinsic drivers of productivity and engagement,” he explains.

With these principles in mind, it’s particularly valuable to assess how engaged employees are with their organisation’s purpose. Retention

rates may be a good indicator of that, but more meaningful insights are likely to come from how they act – for instance, call-centre staff taking the time to listen carefully to customers rather than getting them off the line as quickly as possible.

Campbell also advocates taking more of a “performance coaching” tack. To this end, he recommends breaking down the business year, or big projects, into 10-week sprints, the success of which is based on achieving well-defined aims that dovetail with annual goals. Daily activities should contribute to these aims. Performance should be reviewed weekly to identify how the business can best help people to improve – for instance, by offering training where skills gaps exist.

Competency frameworks offer an alternative method, which has been used to great effect by Edinburgh-based software developer xDesign. Indeed, it helped the firm to clinch top spot in its size category in Great Place To Work’s rankings of the UK’s Best Workplaces in Tech 2022.

These frameworks, which the company created itself, set out the skills required, and outputs expected, of junior, midweight and senior employees across the business. It ensures that staff at all levels know how best to contribute towards the firm’s goals. They must also set aside time to establish key performance indicators with their line managers.

Timesheets are among the quantitative measures that xDesign uses, although these serve exclusively as resource-planning tools for billable projects. The harder metrics are recorded in a performance management system alongside qualitative measures such as 360-degree feedback and are reviewed regularly to check their ongoing effectiveness. Personal development plans are also an important part of the mix.

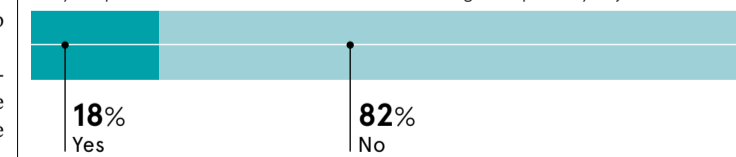
“If someone isn’t performing, the competency framework is the thing we go back to,” says the firm’s chief people officer, Ciji Duncan. “It’s how we can see if someone is doing their job effectively – and it enables us to have the necessary conversations.”

Ultimately, though, ensuring that employees perform effectively calls for a “holistic approach”, she says. “This is an amalgam of several things, but much of it is about setting clear expectations and ensuring an open dialogue,” Duncan explains. “Data is a powerful strand, but it’s not the only one. You need to treat each employee like a whole person, not just a ‘productive unit.’”

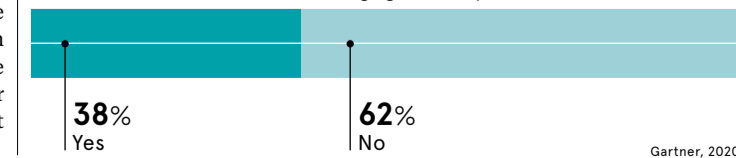
### MOST HR CHIEFS ARE DISSATISFIED WITH THEIR PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT METHODS

Survey responses from HR leaders worldwide to the following questions

Are your performance metrics effective at achieving their primary objective?



Are these metrics in tune with the changing needs of your business?



Gartner, 2020



SDI Productions via Getty

## EMPLOYMENT RIGHTS

# Is the tide turning on paid leave for pregnancy loss?

Enlightened firms have been introducing policies offering time off to employees who suffer a miscarriage, but equality campaigners hope that Parliament will soon make such arrangements statutory

Megan Tatum

Over the past three years, Keeley Lengthorn has suffered three lost pregnancies. Most recently, she had a late miscarriage in March 2022, losing George after 22 weeks of gestation. Her employer, Taylor Rose, where she's a partner specialising in family law, was "brilliant" throughout each ordeal, allowing her all the time off she needed. But these experiences opened her eyes to the lack of statutory protection for the thousands of other people who suffer pregnancy losses in the UK every year.

"Until it happens to you, you don't give it much thought," Lengthorn says. "The law as it stands states that, when I left George at the mortuary on Thursday night, I should have returned to work at 9am on the Friday. How can that be right?"

In the UK, employees (and their partners) who lose a baby before the end of the 24th week of gestation have no statutory right to paid time off. From the 25th week onwards – the point from which the NHS classifies a foetal death as a stillbirth – they would be entitled to all the

benefits of paid parental bereavement leave, but any time off before that watershed is granted at the employer's discretion.

As a result, only a quarter of employees who suffer a pregnancy loss are offered paid time off, according to the Miscarriage Association. The other three-quarters have the choice of going straight back to work in physical and emotional pain, asking their employer for unpaid compassionate leave or claiming sick leave, the first three days of which don't come with statutory sick pay.

But campaigners are seeing encouraging signs that change is finally afoot, as high-profile employers take the initiative without any statutory obligation. Over the past two years, companies such as Monzo Bank, Virgin Media O2 and Diageo have committed to introducing paid miscarriage leave.

But legislation may not be too far away in any case. In the House of Commons, a private members' bill proposing a legal right to three days' leave after a pregnancy loss is due for a second reading in March.

So is UK plc at a tipping point when it comes to supporting employees recovering from miscarriages?

"It felt to us like the right thing to do," says Tara Ryan, people experience director at Monzo, of the bank's 2021 decision to offer two weeks' paid leave to any employee suffering a pregnancy loss (whether they were pregnant themselves or the partner to someone who was).

She adds: "While that seems like a simplistic answer, the fact is that, when it comes to our people policies, we are always trying to anticipate the different needs our people will have. We were also introducing support for time away for fertility treatments, so this seemed like a natural thing to bring in."

As well as being the right thing to do, establishing such policies can also aid recruitment and retention, argues Nisha Marwaha, director of people relations and diversity, equality and inclusion at Virgin Media O2. The company introduced a similar two-week leave entitlement in October 2022.

"Simply showing up in such a way for your employees demonstrates what your company truly stands for – to your staff, your customers, the communities you serve and other stakeholders, such as the government," Marwaha says. "It can be a win-win for everyone."

The Miscarriage Association's deputy director, Vicki Robinson, welcomes such initiatives. But she stresses that the matter is too important to leave to the discretion of individual employers.

"We're seeing many more firms doing really good things, establishing policies that recognise the impact of pregnancy loss," she says. "But this still isn't the norm, unfortunately. We spoke to about 700 people when we were compiling our workplace resources. About half of them said that they hadn't felt able to take off the time they needed."

That's why the charity is backing the private members' bill, which was brought to Parliament by the SNP's Angela Crawley in July 2022. It proposes that the UK should emulate

1 in 4  
pregnancies in the UK end in a loss

That equates to

500  
miscarriages every day on average

Tommy's, 2020

regulations that New Zealand enacted in March 2021. These entitle both the person who has suffered a pregnancy loss and their partner to three days' paid leave.

"I do understand the difficulties of getting this bill passed, but I'm hopeful that ministers will see its importance and the positive impact it could have on so many people," Robinson says.

Whether such leave is provided by law or at an employer's discretion, it's vital that it's accompanied by broader efforts to address the stigma that pregnant employees suffer. So says Katie Wood, senior legal officer at Maternity Action UK.

According to 2015 research by the Equality and Human Rights Commission, 54,000 women in the UK are pushed out of their jobs each year because of pregnancy- and maternity-related discrimination. Many women would therefore feel unable to tell their employer that they were pregnant in order to claim leave after a loss, she argues.

"We'd have to tackle pregnancy discrimination first and provide robust protection before women would ever feel confident to take up this type of leave," Wood says.

Employers can do their bit here, she suggests, accompanying policies on miscarriage leave with training about pregnancy discrimination, plus robust rules covering privacy and confidentiality. That's why the pregnancy loss framework introduced by Diageo in September 2022 included not only two weeks' paid leave but also educational resources.

"We issued our pregnancy loss guidelines to improve awareness and knowledge of an issue that is poorly understood, with silence and stigma often surrounding it," says the company's chief HR officer, Louise Prasad.

The bottom line, Lengthorn argues, is that employers shouldn't wait for the law to force their hand. Any tardiness on their part presents a reputational risk, because "no employer can claim to support equality and diversity if it doesn't have a baby loss policy in place".

“We’d have to tackle pregnancy discrimination first and provide robust protection before women would ever feel confident to take up this type of leave



Commercial feature

## Hybrid working and the trust challenge

Some of the hurdles around identity and productivity have been cleared, but no one has the perfect solution, according to a roundtable of experts

In early 2023, three years since the start of the coronavirus pandemic that spurred work trends already trotting along, the pace of change continues at a frightening gallop. It's been a bumpy ride for both employer and employee.

The hurdles of trust and security still loom large and must be cleared to improve Britain's productivity growth, which has lagged behind G7 peers since the last financial crash.

The most recent Office for National Statistics, corrected in late January, calculated Britain's average output per hour or per worker – a vital metric to gauge living standards and future wages – contracted 0.3% between 2020 and 2021 when the economy struggled under pandemic restrictions. Only France's 0.5% decline was worse during the same period.

Last September, a Microsoft report, which surveyed 20,000 people across 11 countries, discerned a "productivity paranoia" suffered by leaders who worried their workers were underperforming despite increasing hours and meetings. While 87% of employees felt they were productive, 85% of senior leaders said the shift to hybrid work made it challenging to have confidence in staff performance.

However, a new study suggests a corner has been turned on trust, at least in the UK. The research, launched in late January by global identity and

access management company Okta, found that of the 500-plus business leaders quizzed, 85% believed remote or hybrid working is not causing disappointing workforce output.

As encouraging as these results are for hybrid working evangelists, doubts linger, says Rachel Phillips, Okta's vice president in the UK and Ireland. She points out that while 61% of the business leaders surveyed believe that remote workers are more productive, 15% still think that they are less so.

## Measuring success

Karen Jacks, chief technology officer at Bird & Bird, whose 1,400 lawyers operate in 31 countries, identifies two critical problems with hybrid working, trust and productivity. She notes that measuring hybrid working output and performance in some industries is tricky, given there are intangible factors, such as brainstorming sessions or virtual check-in meetings.

"Because we are a professional services organisation, and lawyers record what they are working on, it's straightforward to monitor productivity," she says. Notably, throughout the pandemic, Bird & Bird's productivity level increased. "It continues to be at a high level, with people encouraged to come into the office around 50% of their time."

Chanuka Weerasinghe, chief technology officer at Hawes & Curtis and

engyin.com, agrees that determining either employee engagement or output for a hybrid workforce is complex for many reasons. "There are certain things we can't measure, or they are hard to measure," he concedes. "Also, we could use monitoring software, but it is intrusive, and we don't want to come across like we are spying on employees."

Nefarious actors might be snooping, though. From a security perspective, hybrid working has multiplied attack vectors, says Andrew Tsonchev, cybersecurity firm Darktrace's vice president of technology. But most organisations have responded to limited potential cyber threats. "It feels like we are now in a more stable era of hybrid working, and all of the significant changes that needed to happen have been made," he says.

Regarding identity, Tsonchev is pleased that many businesses have, finally, embraced a zero trust model

“The conditions of hybrid work make concepts like zero trust non-optional, which is good

– "never trust, always verify" – to cybersecurity. "The conditions of hybrid work make concepts like zero trust non-optional, which is good," he adds.

## Cultural change

Another trust-related issue could be cultural for some organisations, says Jacks. If some leaders are sniffy about people working away from the office, more fool them. "We make sure our people know we trust them," she says. "People used to say 'oh, you're working from home' with quotation marks, but I think that attitude is changing."

This insight chimes with Becky Wender, global head of culture, talent and learning at global cosmetics firm Avon. "At times, we have tried to legislate for everyone being bad as opposed to trusting people to do the right thing and then dealing with those who don't," she says.

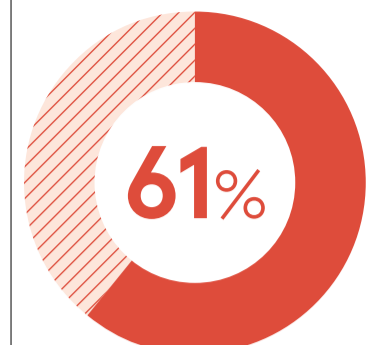
Key to a culture of trust is connection and communication. Wender began her role in April 2020, at the start of the first lockdown. She turned to the company's learning experience platform, Fuse, to ensure the workforce stayed connected. "Leaders ran events, and we had things like making hand sanitiser with our kids," she says.

Buoyed by that early triumph, Wender created a "two-day virtual career festival" attended by 3,400 associates from the 39 markets in which Avon operates. "There were 69 learning sessions, and a huge success," she says. "Now we are back in the office more, the question is: how do we use technology to help all our markets stay connected?"

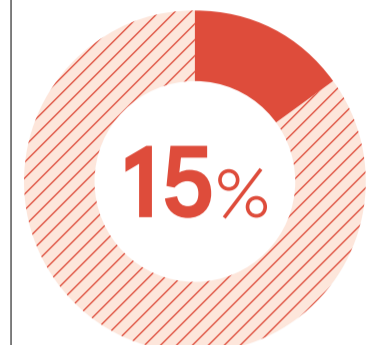
## Connection problem

Andy Hepworth, future of work transformation director at consulting and digital services company Sopra Steria, argues that flipping things around and asking employees what's working, and what's not, helps reconnect and reinvigorate a hybrid workforce.

"We invited everyone within the UK business to participate in workshops, one-to-one meetings, questionnaires,



of business leaders believe that remote workers are more productive



of business leaders think that they are less productive

Okta, 2023

or just to drop suggestions through," he says. "We collated and meticulously catalogued it all to assess where we were as a company. We looked at where the hotspots were and what we needed to prioritise to improve the lives of our colleagues because a one-size-fits-all approach to hybrid doesn't work."

Hepworth points out that those earlier on in their careers are often especially keen to be in the office to learn "through osmosis" from more experienced colleagues. But he stresses that managers and leaders have an essential role to play here. "There is a dependency on reciprocity; otherwise, people coming in to learn will be stuck in a vacuum," he warns.

Again, the solution lies in reframing the potential issue. Hence, lots of in-person events are organised at the Sopra Steria offices around what Hepworth neatly calls the "three Cs". He explains: "We get together to connect, collaborate or congratulate."

Similarly, Okta's Phillips makes herself available to her team members for ask-me-anything sessions and encourages in-office get-togethers for "moments that matter". She is conscious of how some young or vulnerable employees might struggle without physical interaction with colleagues.

Additionally, Phillips references Gartner data that reveals the bonds between remote-working teams have strengthened, but relationships outside that bubble are weaker due to infrequent contact. "We are siloed by video-conferencing and tend to engage with the same people daily."

Phillips adds: "Hybrid working is not going away, so how do we enable people within that environment to be as impactful as possible?"

No one has the perfect answer, yet.

For more information, visit [okta.com/uk](https://okta.com/uk)

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BENEFITS

# The ROI of wellbeing: putting a price on happiness

Businesses have spent heavily on wellbeing programmes in recent years, but such investments are coming under scrutiny in the UK as the economy falters. Will they prove their worth to increasingly cost-conscious employers?

Alec Fenn

The seeds of employee wellbeing first sprouted in the mind of George Pullman. The US engineer and industrialist was the owner of the Pullman Company, which made luxury railway coaches. In 1880, he built a housing estate for employees on the southern outskirts of Chicago, with the aim of creating a superior working-class community that would attract skilled employees and make them even more productive. His so-called company town – Pullman, Illinois – would inspire the likes of Port Sunlight and Bournville in the UK. The 1,600ha site on the shores of Lake Calumet offered comparatively luxurious dwellings, with gas and water supplies, full sanitary facilities and even private gardens. Extensive parkland provided ample shared recreation space. Refuse collections and home maintenance services were included in the rent.

Residents were also given access to a wide range of sporting facilities through the Pullman Athletic Club. The idea was that the firm would attract and retain high-calibre working men, who'd keep strong and fit through their exertions on the sports field. The ultimate goal: to have a healthy, contented and highly productive workforce powering a thriving business.

Pullman's investment was lauded nationwide, with the community receiving several awards as its population swelled to 12,000. But his concern for employee wellbeing was eventually trumped by the need for profitability and the whole utopian vision collapsed in a spectacularly awful way. During an economic downturn in 1894, the firm slashed workers' wages but refused

to reduce their rents. Pullman's impoverished residents went on strike in protest, which ended only after federal troops were sent in, ostensibly to prevent acts of sabotage and protect strike-breakers. Scores of workers were killed in the violence that ensued.

Employee wellbeing remains a tricky subject for business leaders to this day. Millions of pounds have been spent on schemes to attract and retain talent and develop a happy, healthy workforce. A 2022 survey by Vitality found that 82% of UK office workers thought their employers had a responsibility to support their physical and mental health, while 45% said that they'd consider quitting their current firm for one that would give their wellbeing a high priority.

With budgets tightening as the UK's economic outlook worsens, it's understandable that employers want to know what, if any, returns their wellbeing investments are gen-

“Wellbeing is about gut feel, not spreadsheet management. Does what you're doing feel good and make employees smile? Does it make them want to stay?”



erating. But how do they go about making an accurate evaluation?

“Businesses should start by assessing their programmes and the health and wellbeing of their workforce,” advises Vitality UK's director of corporate business, Pippa Andrews. “Some businesses have more than 50 initiatives, but are people using these? And are they addressing employees' specific needs? If not, they are wasting money and they aren't helping their people.”

To employers either reviewing their schemes or taking their first steps in wellbeing, Vitality recommends using surveys to establish a data-led approach. This will create a detailed benchmark of employee health and related risks that could cost the business. These insights can inform decision-makers when they're choosing the interventions that should best meet people's needs. Metrics can also be agreed upon to assess outcomes – for instance, the change in the number of sick days taken for stress-related reasons each year.

Before funding a whole suite of wellness offerings, firms should first target a single problem to ensure that such interventions will be effective. Hints Performance, a company that helps elite athletes and business leaders to optimise their physical and mental health, used this approach when it worked with a manufacturer last year.

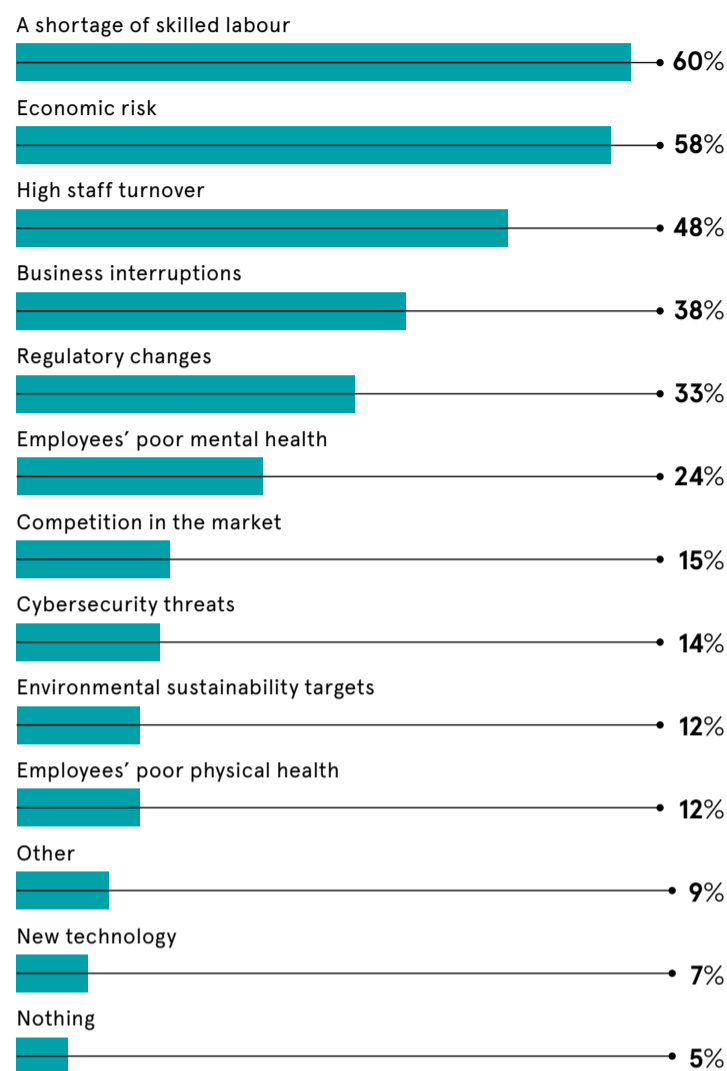
After learning that 20% of workers at its client's factory were experiencing lower-back pain, Hints implemented a four-week exercise plan. Using the Oswestry Disability Index to measure the participants' lower-back capacities before and after that intervention, it found significant improvements across the board. With its success proved, the programme could then be rolled out across the organisation, with realistic and achievable cost-related key performance indicators attached to it.

“We have three categories for business-related KPIs: lowering cost (for instance, those of sickness absence and health insurance), improving output and reducing risk,” says Hints's COO, Nora Rosendahl. “A simple formula to measure the return on investment in this type of intervention would be: the sum of the output increases and cost reductions divided by the cost of the programme.”

But, while the ROI is straightforward enough to measure where a scheme has clear and direct links to business outcomes, how can it be assessed for the less tangible, indirect improvements it leads

## POOR MENTAL HEALTH AMONG EMPLOYEES IS CAUSING DISRUPTION IN NEARLY A QUARTER OF UK WORKPLACES

Percentage of C-suite members citing the following problems as disruptive to their businesses



CBI Economics, Vitality, 2022

to, which cannot be assigned a single, simple metric?

Last year, Rosendahl wrote a white paper that recommended using value on investment (VOI) as well as ROI. The former is a broader measure of all the benefits of health and wellness programmes. It goes beyond ROI by tracking aspects such as morale, satisfaction and retention, all of which can boost the bottom line indirectly.

Qualitative surveys – for instance, the Employee Satisfaction Index – can be a useful source of data, because people tend to work more efficiently when they are feeling upbeat. A six-month study of BT call-centre staff by researchers from the University of Oxford in 2019 concluded that the workers were 13% more productive when they were happy than when they weren't, for instance.

A similar approach to VOI underpins the wellbeing strategy adopted by Moneypenny, a company that manages phone calls and live chats for firms in the UK and the US.

“I am not looking for a specific financial return on wellbeing,” stresses its group CEO, Joanna Swash. “I want to attract and retain the best employees locally. Our staff turnover is low because we look after people and create a family culture. If you want to scale up a business, you need your best

employees to grow with you. They'll do that only if they're invested in an employer that looks after their physical and mental health.”

The US Society for Human Resource Management estimates that the average cost of replacing a departing worker roughly equates to paying their salary for another 30 weeks. Although Moneypenny isn't preoccupied with ROI, its low employee churn rate, which can be attributed to at least partly to its wellbeing efforts, saves the firm significant sums and indicates that using VOI to gauge the return on wellbeing schemes is worthwhile.

But there are certain wellbeing initiatives that cannot be assessed using conventional yardsticks. In December 2022, Moneypenny created a festive market to provide employees with everything they needed for Christmas dinner.

“This is about making the effort so that people feel special and wanted,” Swash says. “Wellbeing is about gut feel, not spreadsheet management. Does what you're doing feel good and make employees smile? Does it make them want to stay?”

The message for employers is clear: tailored wellbeing schemes that meet people's specific needs lead to healthy, happy employees and, in turn, a healthy, profitable business. And that must surely be a worthwhile investment. ●



# Revolution brings forth the organic organisation

The future of work is organic. Companies are looking for flexible freelance talent to help achieve their goals, but success will depend on integrating them into existing workflows

The past decade has seen a revolution in how we work, accelerated by a sudden, once-in-a-generation global pandemic which forced companies to confront and adapt their traditional workforce structures in order to survive. Successful companies are now defined by their agility. They are organic organisations, able to draw on the best talent in a flexible, scalable way.

The sheer pace of today's dynamic, hyper-evolving business environment means that change must be embraced quickly. When Henry Ford transformed industrial production more than a century ago – the last comparable workplace revolution – business moved a little slower. Still, the organisations which adapted to the new innovation the fastest proved the most successful.

The hierarchical, structured workplace model, fine-tuned to underpin Ford's revolution, has endured, and it still largely shapes the employer-employee relationship to this day. Yet these formulaic, rigid structures which helped businesses thrive in the 20th century are now colliding with what organisations want to become: fluid, amorphous and hyper-responsive.

“A new generation of workers has never worked in a traditional structured and hierarchical model, and attracting them to work for you is crucial to filling skills gaps and winning the war for talent,” says Shai-Lee Spigelman, general manager of Fiverr Business. “They are expert freelancers, they can fit into any organisation, and they are skilled and empowered.”

“Most of all, they want to work in a flexible way. 2020 brought not just a global pandemic but a global reckoning about what work should look like in the future. Businesses need to address this notion that people don't want to work in the same way as the generations which preceded them.

They must adapt and reimagine their workforce structure.”

The freelance workforce already represents some 46.5% of the global working population, according to the World Bank – a number which continues to grow. That's not just because many millennials and Gen Z workers prefer flexible freelance working. In a recent study by Fiverr Business, 78% of companies said they are more likely to hire freelance talent than full-time employees while economic conditions remain uncertain, and this has been reflected in the growing demand for Fiverr's platform, which connects organisations with on-demand freelancers.

The organic organisation is made up of a more fluid workforce, which enables businesses to scale up, down or pivot quickly when conditions change – an adaptive, dynamic organism staffed with a combination of driven and independent freelance workers and a core of full-time staff. Freelancers adeptly support existing full-time staff and bring diversity, specific skills and new perspectives to projects.

“The pool of full-time workers that employers can hire is shrinking, and the idea that a business owns its talent because it employs that talent full-time is a myth, especially when you see that the average tenure in hi-tech is now just 1.8 years. Businesses must look to an organic structure not just to reduce fixed costs and scale when they need to, but to be able to quickly and effectively adapt to new innovations, economics and behaviours. That's how they'll win the war for talent.”

46.5% of the global working population are already freelance  
World Bank, 2021

78% of companies say they are more likely to hire freelance talent than full-time employees  
Fiverr Business, 2022

Nine in 10 companies surveyed by Harvard Business School and Boston Consulting Group confirmed that they see a future competitive advantage in shifting their talent model to a blend of full-time and freelance employees. To integrate this blended structure in the most effective way, many businesses are introducing a new kind of CFO, the chief freelance officer, to ensure this talent group remains engaged and productive. Platforms like Fiverr Business, meanwhile, will be the driving force that supports the blended workplace.

“As the operating system that patches freelancers in to existing talent structures in the most intuitive way, Fiverr Business is at the epicenter of the future of work conversation,” says Spigelman. “Think about it as a talent platform that large businesses can tap into. By matching you with vetted talent, facilitating team collaboration, providing white-glove onboarding, flexible payment and communication options, and greatly simplifying the move to a more agile workforce for every participant, we can make great things happen.”

“The pool of full-time workers that employers can hire is shrinking, and the idea that a business owns its talent because it employs that talent full-time is a myth, especially when you see that the average tenure in hi-tech is now just 1.8 years. Businesses must look to an organic structure not just to reduce fixed costs and scale when they need to, but to be able to quickly and effectively adapt to new innovations, economics and behaviours. That's how they'll win the war for talent.”

For more information, visit [business.fiverr.com](https://business.fiverr.com)

fiverr business.



## EMPLOYER REVIEW SITES

## Sweet clarity – Glassdoor’s effect on the workplace

Glassdoor has been publishing reviews of employers for 15 years, inspiring numerous imitators. What impact have they had on employment practices – and what can firms take from the transparency trend?

Oliver Balch

Applying for a job was, for many decades, an opaque affair. A typical recruitment ad would offer few details about the role on offer, while information about the salary would be restricted to a decidedly unhelpful “competitive”. And the culture of the hiring organisation was anyone’s guess.

That started changing 15 years ago, when the arrival of Glassdoor gave this murky world a level of transparency that jobseekers had long yearned for. The US-based business (acquired in 2018 by Japanese group Recruit Holdings for nearly £1bn) carries more than 150 million reviews of employers in 20 countries, written by employees past and

present. It attracts about 50 million unique users each month. Its success has spawned a competitive market of platforms offering comparable services. Some of the better known of these include Blind, CareerBliss, Comparably, Jobcase Kununu and Ratelyemployer. All have their nuances, but the basic formula is much the same: anyone can sign up and leave anonymous evaluations of their employer, rate its leadership and share salary information.

In Glassdoor’s early years, most users were concerned with one key detail: the money. Their list of questions has since grown significantly, especially after the pandemic revolutionised working practices. Culture

and values, work/life balance and career opportunities, for instance, are three of the top six categories on the site’s dashboard.

Another top-six category – diversity and inclusion (D&I) – is particularly important to people from groups that often face discrimination. It’s unsurprising, then, that review sites Fairygodboss and InHerSight have been set up with female users specifically in mind.

“People increasingly want to know that where they’re going to work has D&I that’s respected by its leadership,” says Jill Cotton, an expert in career trends at Glassdoor.

The ability of review sites to give such detailed information to jobseekers is turning interviews into more of a “two-way street”. So says Yvonne Smyth, director of the HR and legal recruitment practices at Hays in the UK and Ireland.

“Professionals have become much more likely to challenge prospective employers on why they should join their organisation, what’s in it for them and how they’ll be able to further their career,” she explains.

Such sites are also altering existing employees’ relationships with their bosses. The most significant change concerns salary secrecy. According to Glassdoor’s research, 85% of UK employers don’t disclose their pay ranges internally.

“Anonymity empowers people to discuss culturally taboo topics and express their opinions freely

“The biggest thing we’ve done is give people a tool that lets them know what they’re worth,” Cotton says.

Review sites are also enabling employees to communicate frankly without fear of being identified by their company. An early provider of such anonymised platforms was Blind, which is used by workers in the tech sector to sound off about problems in their organisations and the wider industry.

Part of Blind’s appeal is the fact that all comments from its 8 million-plus users are anonymised, explains Rick Chen, a senior director at the firm. “This empowers people to discuss culturally taboo topics and express their opinions freely,” he says.

People also visit the site in search of reassurance, adds Chen, who notes that activity increases at times of uncertainty in the industry. Blind’s user numbers more than doubled during the depths of the Covid crisis.

Transparency advocates argue that, while the upsides for employers may not be immediately clear, they do exist. In a nutshell, employers with bad ratings receive a useful appraisal that they can learn from, while employers with good ratings find it easier to attract talent.

That said, the system can be manipulated. Despite the precautions that these platforms have put in place – for instance, community guidelines, compliance algorithms and manual checks – fake reviews inevitably slip through.

Most employers accept that the trend towards transparency is not only irreversible; it also offers them information that could prove crucial.

Quick to capitalise on the latter factor was Phillip Chambers, who in 2015 co-founded Peakon (since rebranded as Workday Peakon Employee Voice) as a way for firms to assess their levels of employee engagement. The online service uses so-called intelligent listening techniques to source anonymous information continually from employees.

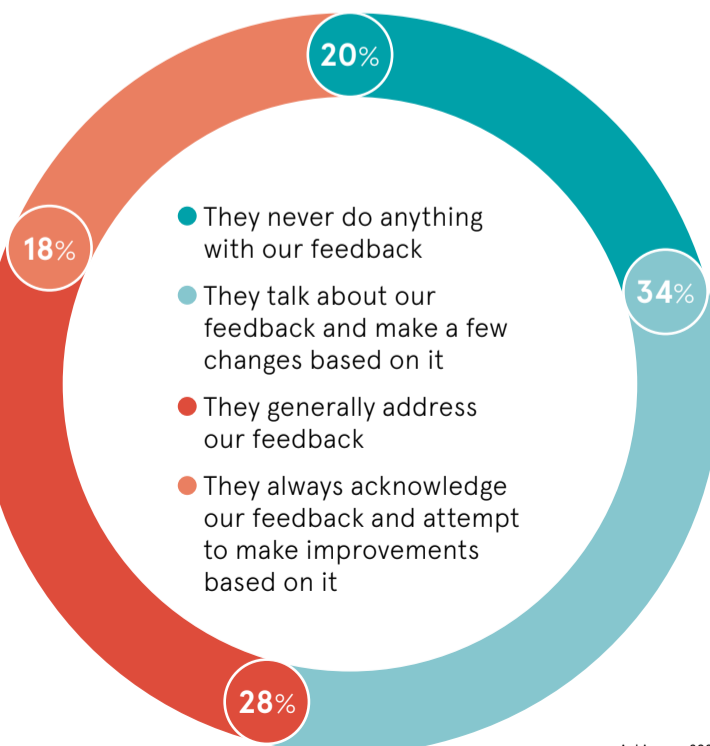
“Anything that sheds more light on employer practices is a step forward,” says Paul Nowak, general secretary of the Trades Union Congress. “But we don’t want a situation where such transparency helps some people to avoid getting stuck with a bad employer while others are less lucky.”

On the employers’ side, just a few bad reviews can harm a small firm’s reputation “significantly”, observes David D’Souza, membership director at the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development.

D’Souza’s advice to business leaders on how to avoid such an outcome? Worry less about the reviews, he says, and “focus on the substance of being a good employer”. ●

## GETTING FEEDBACK FROM EMPLOYEES IS ONLY THE FIRST STEP

Survey responses from employees worldwide to the question: how good is your manager/company at acting on the feedback you provide?



Achievers, 2022

It was conceived as an alternative to the annual staff survey, which, in Chambers’ words, is a “very arduous process” that typically delivers few actionable results. Instead, companies can use the Peakon platform to ask employees short, personalised questions in manageable batches throughout the year.

“We’ll look back to the time when employers asked their people what they thought only once a year and think that doing it so infrequently was crazy,” Chambers says. “Getting real-time data really enables companies to be more agile.”

For the Peakon service to work to maximum effect, employees must feel that it’s worthwhile answering the questions put to them, which first requires them to feel listened to by their bosses. This is why it provides a shareable dashboard showing what the employer plans to do in response to any issues raised.

Managers can also respond directly to comments via the platform, which gives employees the sense that they are “not just putting this stuff in the ether”, Chambers says.

Most users of Glassdoor and its ilk tend to be in white-collar occupations. For lower-skilled workers with less bargaining power, the beneficial effects of these sites are less clear.

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## Workforce upskilling creates value in a recession

Businesses typically cut back in multiple areas when times are tough. But with lean investments in scalable, contextualised learning technology, they can develop and retain excellent staff, and be well-positioned for future growth

The ability of companies to develop and retain the right skills is critical to their success. But in a fast-changing world, the necessary capabilities stretch far beyond the completion of particular tasks. In short, companies need a range of deeper “power skills”.

For instance, while robotics and artificial intelligence increasingly automate routine operations, leadership skills must also improve if companies are to deliver successful adaptation to the current times. This means leaders must develop power skills such as data-driven decision-making, strategy and alignment, and intentional learning. Equally, by using these skills they can empower proper diversity and inclusion.

Yet for many businesses, learning and development efforts are stuck in the past, and as much as 80% of the \$400bn annual training expenditure by organisations is ineffective. Typical approaches include sending teams

to lengthy workshops or distant conferences. “It’s an expensive, broken model that focuses on content only, when instead today’s workforce needs to be able to interact with, practise and internalise the new skills,” explains René Janssen, chief executive and founder of the training company Lepaya.

Somewhat more modern approaches include massive open online courses (MOOCs). But these have inherent problems, Janssen explains: “While they can be rolled out across an organisation, they are essentially knowledge repositories – and reading or watching a video about a skill is not how people learn. In the average organisation, only 1 in 10 employees will use these resources. Learning is achieved by forming habits and repeating the practice.”

These analogue and digital knowledge methods are leaving companies with an uphill struggle to ensure impactful learning. “When it comes to

training at work, people have multiple pressures, so their attitude is: ‘Do I have time?’ ‘Is it fun?’ ‘Is there a purpose to it?’ Organisations have to think seriously about how they deliver their training and what the incentives are,” Janssen explains. “By making learning enjoyable, relevant, and practical to career growth, you increase the level of participation.”

Success here means introducing dynamic learning, using technology to augment human experiences. “In order to master a skill, you must first understand its importance, then practise on the job. That’s why it’s essential to train and use the skills directly within a fully contextualised workflow. This way we bridge the gap between the skills trained and the direct business impact,” Janssen notes. “Such practice can be done digitally with other people, including through the use of intelligent and engaging avatars.”

With upwards of three billion individuals making up the global workforce,

Commercial feature

“L&D are becoming more strategic purchases, as organisations think more about the big challenges they face

simulating real tasks. For example, for an important team meeting or a presentation, a practice conversation or speech can be assessed for focus and relevance, and for eye contact and variations in spoken pitch. We can give instant feedback, which users then immediately use to improve their skills in more virtual sessions, all in preparation for the real-life scenarios.”

Lepaya has helped thousands of companies make significant steps forward, including the professional services giant Accenture, which uses a customised learning programme to develop new hires into consultants within just nine days. Meanwhile, Picnic, the tech-based grocery delivery startup, works with Lepaya to implement a bespoke learning pathway to develop its employees towards leadership roles. And the consultancy KPMG is working with Lepaya to give staff personalised learning, resulting in 86% of them registering for courses, and increasing talent retention.

Looking ahead, Janssen expects artificial intelligence and virtual reality to be critical in upskilling workforces, and in strongly advancing equality and diversity. “So many job appointments are made by someone looking at an applicant’s education or the previous jobs they’ve done. This ignores the unique range of skills a person may have, and potentially overlooks swathes of individuals with essential capabilities and valuable attributes,” he says. “The new technology means companies can focus completely on actual skills, taking into account the totality of talent available, bringing the best on board, then developing and retaining it.”

Today, facing a recession, businesses can make a huge difference in their profitability and talent retention by investing in efficient skills development. “In tough times like these, businesses have less money and have to be extremely strategic in where they assign their budgets and time. As they look to staff to do things differently, it’s essential to adjust and grow skill sets in the smartest ways,” Janssen concludes. “By getting upskilling right, and training staff efficiently and effectively using intelligent technology, businesses can ensure they are strongly positioned for growth.”

Companies globally are already working with Lepaya to develop their teams’ power skills. They start by looking beyond nice-to-have capabilities and focusing on more fundamental aspects of leadership, management, and team capabilities. From there, they can think about how to optimise learning interventions, so that people have the incentive to participate and can learn more rapidly on the job. Using Lepaya, users can prepare for upcoming meetings, brainstorming or presentations, and have relevant skills automatically honed multiple times in advance, ultimately building better habits that become entirely natural.

“Change typically begins with the business’ leaders, then permeates the rest of their organisation,” Janssen explains. “Participants can practice key skills in VR goggles, in a mock situation

To find out about scalable talent upskilling and retention, visit [lepaya.com](https://lepaya.com)

**Lepaya**

# STICK OR TWIST?

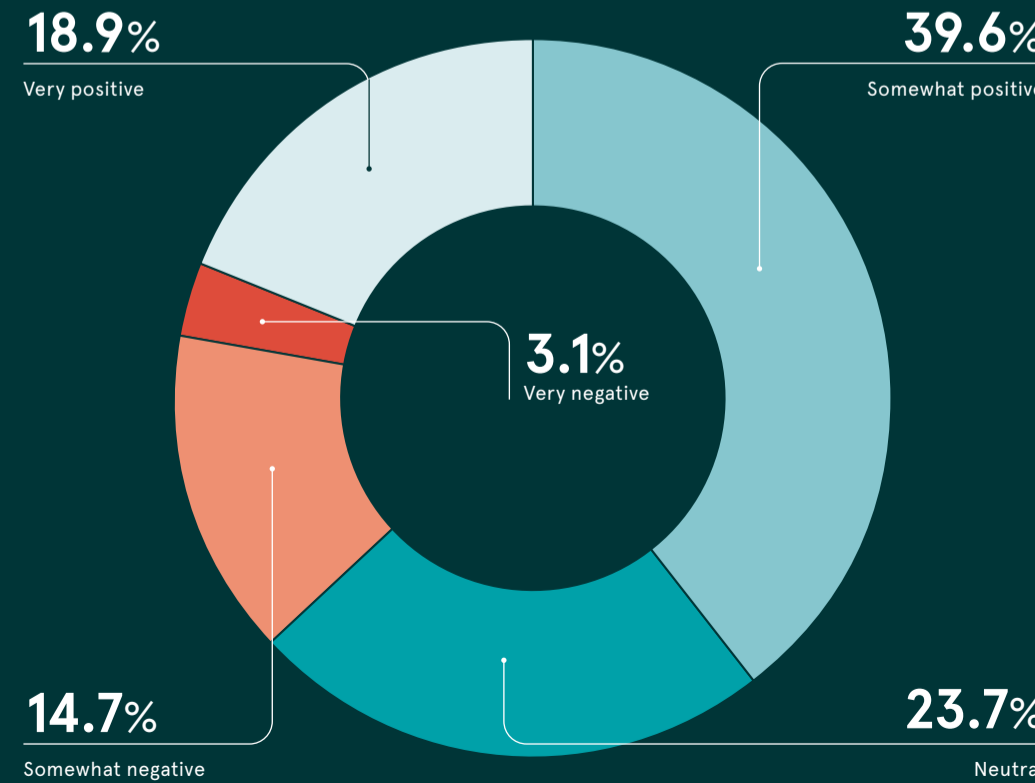
The Covid crisis prompted an unprecedented shift of power in the UK labour market in 2020-22. Empowered by a combination of factors, millions of people felt free to reflect on their careers, renegotiate their terms and, if necessary, relocate and retrain. But the economic outlook has worsened in recent months and, as a recession beckons, recruiters may no longer be as able or willing to meet candidates' demands. This exclusive research, commissioned by Raconteur, looks at how UK adults feel about their job prospects; how inclined they are to seek a new employer; and which benefits and perks have the most pulling power



## MOST WORKERS STILL FEEL SECURE IN THEIR JOBS...

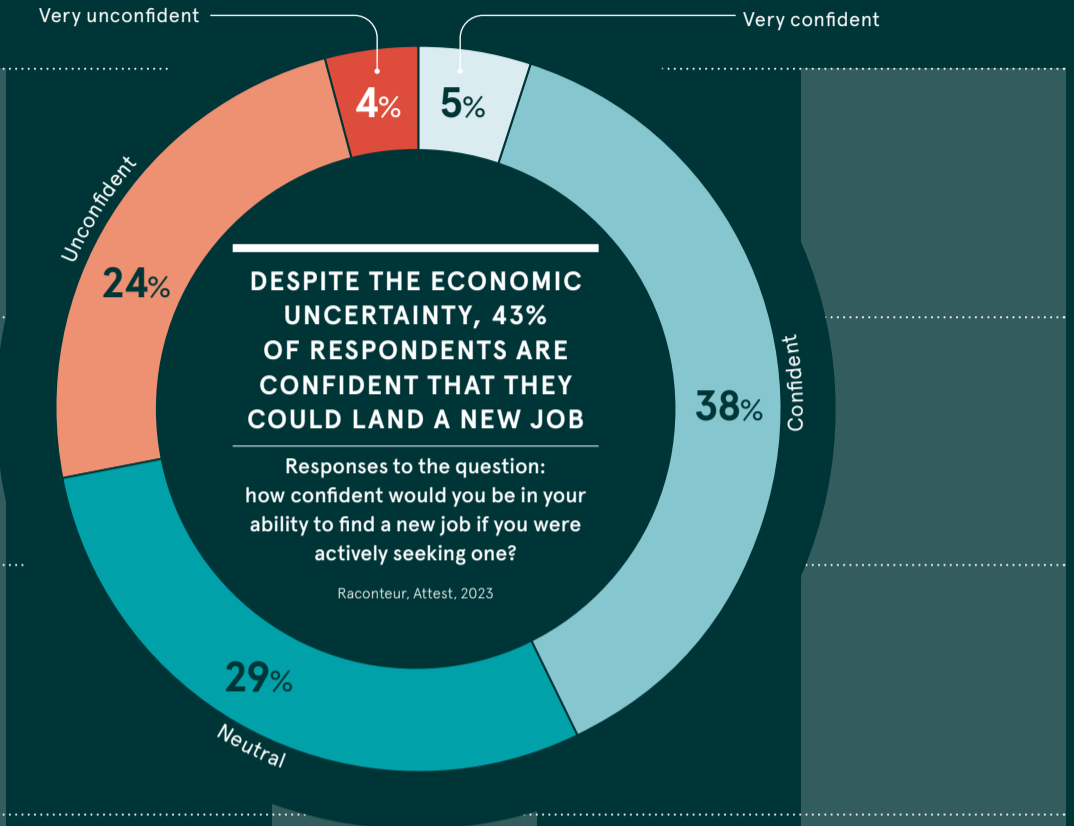
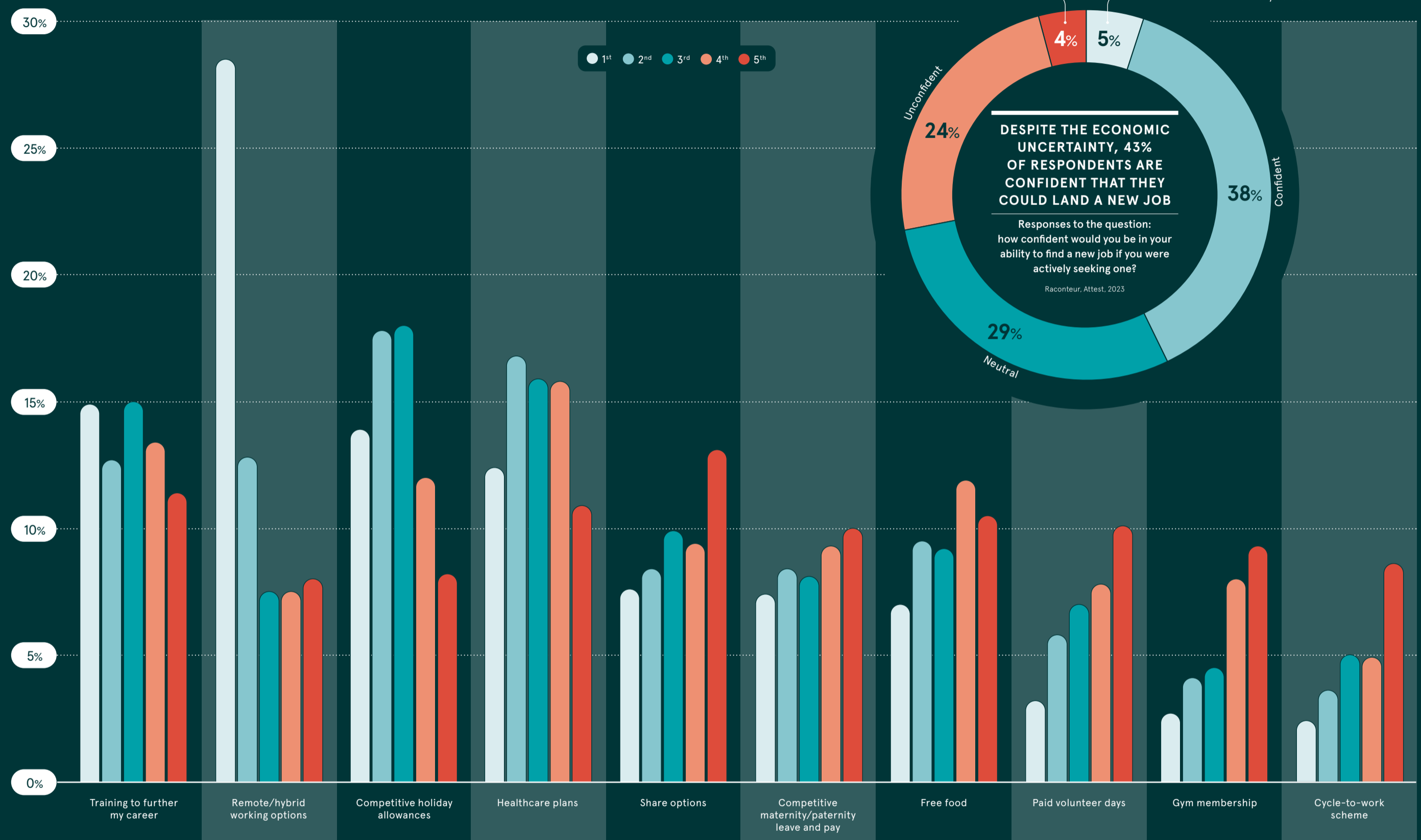
Responses to the question: how are you feeling about your job security?

Raconteur, Attest, 2023



## REMOTE/HYBRID WORKING ARRANGEMENTS RANK HIGHLY AMONG JOBSEEKERS' CRITERIA FOR A POTENTIAL EMPLOYER

Share of respondents ranking the following workplace benefits and perks among the top five that they'd want an employer to offer



## ... BUT, AS BUDGETS TIGHTEN, THEY COULD BE FEELING THE PRESSURE

Responses to the question: has your employer made any redundancies in the past year?



## INTERVIEW

# ‘If we use these tools correctly, there will be positive disruption’

ChatGPT and its ilk represent a welcome quantum leap for productivity, according to eminent AI expert **Professor Erik Brynjolfsson**. But he adds that such rapid developments also present a material risk

## Oliver Pickup

**E**rik Brynjolfsson is an academic in demand. The US professor whose research focuses on the relationship between digital tech and human productivity is nearing the end of a European speaking tour that’s lasted nearly a month. Despite this, he’s showing no signs of fatigue – quite the opposite, in fact.

Speaking via Zoom as he prepares for his imminent lecture in Oxford, the director of the Digital Economy Lab at the Stanford Institute for Human-Centered AI is enthused by recent “seminal breakthroughs” in the field.

Brynjolfsson’s tour – which has included appearances at the World Economic Forum in Davos and the Institute for the Future of Work in London – is neatly timed, because the recent arrival of ChatGPT on the scene has been capturing human minds, if not yet hearts.

The large-scale language model, fed 300 billion words by developer OpenAI, caused a sensation with its powerful capabilities, attracting 1 million users within five days of its release in late November 2022. At the end of January, Microsoft’s announcement of a substantial investment in OpenAI “to accelerate AI breakthroughs” generated yet more headlines.

ChatGPT’s popularity is likely to trigger an avalanche of similarly extraordinary AI tools, Brynjolfsson predicts, with a possible economic

value extending to “trillions of dollars”. But he adds that proper safeguards and a better understanding of how AI can augment – not replace – jobs are urgently required. “There have been some amazing, seminal breakthroughs in AI lately that are advancing the frontier rapidly,” Brynjolfsson says. “Everyone’s playing with ChatGPT, but this is just part of a larger class of ‘foundation models’ that is becoming very important.”

He points to the image generator DALL-E (another OpenAI creation) and lists similar tools designed for music, coding and more. Such advances are comparable to that of deep learning, which enabled significant leaps in object recognition a decade ago.

“There has been a quantum improvement in the past couple of years as these foundational models have been introduced more widely. And this is merely the first wave,”



“As much as I’m blown away by these technologies, the bottleneck is our human response



Brynjolfsson says. “The folks working on them tell me that there’s far more in the pipeline that we’ll be hearing about in the coming weeks.”

When pushed for examples of advances that could shape the future of work, he reveals that Generative Pre-trained Transformer 3 (GPT-3) – the language model that uses deep learning to emulate human writing – will be superseded by GPT-4 “within weeks. This is a ‘phased change of improvement’ compared with the last one, but it’ll be even more capable of solving all sorts of problems.”

Elsewhere, great strides are being made with “multi-agent systems” designed to enable more effective interactions between AI and humans. In effect, the technology will gain the social skills required to cooperate and negotiate with other systems and their users.

“This development is opening up a whole space of new capabilities,” Brynjolfsson declares.

As thrilling as these pioneering tools may sound, the seemingly exponential rate of innovation presents some dangers, he warns.

“AI is no longer a laboratory curiosity or something that you see in sci-fi movies,” Brynjolfsson says. “It can benefit almost every company. But governments and other organisations haven’t been keeping up with developments – and our skills haven’t either. The gap between our capabilities and what the technology enables and demands has widened. I think that gap will be where most of the big challenges – and opportunities – for society lie over the next decade or so.”

Brynjolfsson, who studied applied maths and decision sciences at Harvard in the 1980s, started in his role at Stanford in July 2020 with the express aim of tackling some of these challenges.

“We created the Digital Economy Lab because, as much as I’m blown away by these technologies, the bottleneck is our human response,” he says. “What will we do about the economy, jobs and ethics? How will we transform organisations that aren’t changing nearly fast enough? I want to speed up our response.”

Brynjolfsson spoke passionately about this subject at Davos in a session entitled “AI and white-collar jobs”. In it, he advised companies to adopt technology in a controlled manner. Offering a historical analogy, he pointed out that, when electricity infrastructure became available about a century ago, it took at least three decades for most firms to fully realise the productivity gain it offered, because they first needed to revamp their workplaces to make the best use of it.

“We’re in a similar period with AI,” Brynjolfsson told delegates. “What



AI can benefit almost every company. But governments and other organisations haven’t been keeping up with developments – and our skills haven’t either

**175 billion**  
parameters shape ChatGPT’s conversational output

**10 million**  
questions each day are being answered by ChatGPT

**\$100k**  
estimated daily operating cost of ChatGPT

OpenAI, 2023

AI is doing is affecting job quality and how we do the work. So we must address to what extent we keep humans in the loop rather than focusing on driving down wages.”

The risk of technology racing too far ahead of humanity for comfort is a familiar topic for Brynjolfsson. In both *Race Against the Machine* (2011) and *The Second Machine Age* (2014), he and his co-author, MIT scientist Andrew McAfee, called for greater efforts to update organisations, processes and skills.

How would he assess the current situation? “When we wrote those books, we were optimistic about the pace of technological change and pessimistic about our ability to adapt,” Brynjolfsson says. “But it turns out that we weren’t optimistic enough about the technology or pessimistic enough about our institutions and skills.”

In fact, the surprising acceleration of AI means that the “timeline for when we’ll have artificial general intelligence” should be shortened by decades, he argues. “AGI will be able to do most of the things that humans can. Some predicted that this would be achieved by the 2060s, but now people are talking about the 2030s or even earlier.”

Given the breakneck speed of developments, how many occupations are at risk of obsolescence through automation? Brynjolfsson concedes that the range of roles affected is looking “much broader than earlier

thought. There will be winners and losers. Jobs will be enhanced in many cases, but some will be eliminated. Routine work will become increasingly automated – and there will also be a flourishing of fantastic creativity. If we use these tools correctly, there will be positive disruption. But if we don’t, inequality could deepen, further concentrating wealth and political power.”

How, then, should businesses integrate AI into their operations? First, they must avoid what Brynjolfsson has labelled the Turing trap.

“One of the biggest misconceptions about AI – especially among AI researchers, by the way – is that it needs to do everything that humans do and replace them to be effective,” he explains, arguing that the famous test for machine intelligence, proposed by Alan Turing in 1950, is “an inspiring but misguided vision”.

Brynjolfsson thinks that a “mind-set shift” at all levels – from scientists and policy-makers to employers and workers – is required to harness AI’s power to shape society for good.

“We should ask: ‘What do we want these powerful tools for – how can we use them to achieve our goals?’ The tools don’t decide; we decide.”

He adds that many business leaders have the wrong attitude to applying new tech in general and AI in particular. This amounts to a “pernicious problem”. To illustrate it, he cites Waymo’s experiments with self-driving vehicles: “These work 99.9% of the time, but there is a human safety driver overseeing the system and a second safety driver in case the first one falls asleep. People watching each other is not the right path to driverless cars.”

Brynjolfsson commends an alternative route, which has been taken by the Toyota Research Institute, among others. When he was in Davos, the institute’s CEO, Dr Gill Pratt “told me how his team had flipped things around so that the autonomous system is the guardian angel. Creating a self-driving car that works in all possible conditions is tough, but humans can handle those exceptions.”

With a person making most choices in the driving seat, the AI intervenes “occasionally – for instance, when there’s a looming accident. I think this is a good model, not only for self-driving cars, but for many other applications where humans and machines work together.”

For similar reasons, Brynjolfsson lauds Cresta, a provider of AI systems for customer contact centres. Its products keep humans “at the forefront” of operations instead of chatbots, whose apparent Turing test failures continue to frustrate most people who deal with them.

“The AI gives them suggestions about what to mention to customers,” he says. “This system does dramatically better in terms of both productivity and customer satisfaction. It closes the skills gap too.”

Does Brynjolfsson have a final message for business leaders before he heads off to give his next lecture?

“We need to catch up and keep control of these technologies,” he says. “If we do that, I think the next 10 years will be the best decade we’ve ever had on this planet.” ●

## INSIGHT

## ‘Getting the interaction right between humans and technology will be paramount’

**A**s we enter a period of profound economic uncertainty, presaged by recent high-profile layoffs and a culture of ‘quiet quitting’, thinking about the future of work might well seem a daunting prospect.

Indeed, to take just one of the challenges facing the UK as it navigates these unprecedented headwinds, an ever-increasing digital skills gap threatens to stop businesses adopting the game-changing technologies that will help to power growth in the months and years ahead.

For instance, as we’ve seen with some AI developments already this year, with each exciting new technology comes a growing concern about whether we have a digitally savvy workforce ready to take advantage of it. After all, keeping the workforce up to speed with the latest advances is a key element of the digital transformation process, which will prove crucial if we hope to improve business productivity and efficiency alongside our efforts to achieve sustained growth.

Likewise, at the World Economic Forum’s annual meeting in Davos in January, the cybersecurity skills gap was named as one particular area of concern. There’s good reason for this focus: if businesses can’t protect themselves against external threats, they risk going backwards. And that’s before they even start thinking about achieving growth. This is why we need to address the digital skills gap urgently.

Well, we should start by changing the narrative to help us recruit and retain from a more diverse pool of talent, giving businesses a far better chance of finding the up-to-date digital skills they need.

And, when it comes to engaging and empowering the current workforce, learning and development opportunities will be key, helping employees to improve their skills for the benefit of both themselves and their employers.

To make this all happen, leaders and employers must demonstrate a commitment to teaching their workforces digital skills by setting clear expectations and providing all the resources required. One approach, for example, would be to focus on the potential in the existing talent pool by identifying those already skilled in digital capabilities and supporting them to upskill their colleagues. Creating a culture of learning, with an emphasis on personal

growth, can be an impressive motivator in the workplace.

Personal and professional growth also boosts employee satisfaction. For instance, leaders who provide a wealth of opportunities for employees to develop their skills in an engaging environment – and who also listen to feedback and criticism – empower their workers to contribute to the organisation in the best possible way. A culture of belonging and purpose will also then encourage employees to take up those opportunities to learn and develop their careers, in turn increasing their likelihood of staying within the organisation.

Of course, it’s all well and good saying that digital skills are vital, but a workforce with purely ‘hard’ tech skills will not future-proof a business. There’s a need for skills that support the broader goal, so as not to neglect the other competencies required in a digital transformation: communication, critical thinking, creative design skills and leadership. To exploit the technology to its full potential, such qualities are equally important.

Fundamentally, getting the interaction right between humans and technology will be paramount if businesses are to succeed. As a result, human skills must not be underestimated. Every business will need a range of people with a variety of skills – not only those well versed in maths, engineering and science, but also those with creative minds and leadership qualities.

Likewise, as technology develops and cybersecurity threats advance, we need fresh perspectives to address and solve such challenges. An inclusive approach is crucial to harnessing talent and ensuring that we have the best workforce to prepare for the future. ●



**Elspeth Garratt**  
Head of content  
London Tech Week

REGULATION

# Under pressure: where next for the UK's gig economy?

Gig companies face growing scrutiny from regulators around the world, but the unsettled economic outlook favours their business model. Can reform revive the gig economy's flagging fortunes?

Daniel Thomas

The gig economy was once described as the future of work – a way to liberate workers from the 9 to 5 and provide employers with a more flexible labour pool. But, while consumers flocked to gig-style apps and services, concerns about the fairness of this business model have tarnished the sector in recent years.

Firms have been accused of using self-employed contractors to avoid having to offer basics such as the minimum wage and holiday pay. Workers have responded robustly, bringing hundreds of lawsuits over their employment status and scoring wins against Uber and Hermes.

Regulatory scrutiny is intensifying too, but it is unclear whether plans to reform the gig economy will succeed. After all, with many countries facing a recession, access to flexible freelance labour is set to be a priority for many businesses this year. What does the future hold for the gig economy? Can its reputation be repaired at a time when this model could prove most valuable, or are the utopian visions of a flexible working future fading away?

Part of the challenge of assessing the gig economy's prospects stems from a patchy understanding of how big it is. About 4.5 million people were regularly using online platforms to access this type of work in England and Wales in 2021, according to research published by the Trades Union Congress. That figure

has trebled over the previous five years and it's likely to have grown further since the study.

The Resolution Foundation think-tank, which focuses on improving living standards for those on low to middle incomes, expects the total to rise this year because of the downturn. Its senior economist, Hannah Slaughter, says that employers tend to shift towards flexible forms of employment in recessions to better manage their costs.

"The cost-of-living crisis, coming on top of 15 years of poor productivity growth, has pushed firms' costs up substantially. That is likely to have increased the proportion of workers in the gig economy," she says.

Technically, gig workers can be anywhere on the income spectrum, but the concern has centred on the large number who do poorly paid, low-skilled work. Critics say this cohort face job insecurity and will find it much harder to negotiate change collectively, such as via a union.

Yet gig employers – and some of their workers – argue that such jobs offer freedom, enabling people to tap in and out when it suits them.

"It's important that we don't lose some of the positives of the gig economy model to deal with some of the more negative issues that arise in low-paid roles," says Dr Anne Sammon, an employment partner at law firm Pinsent Masons.

The pressure on gig employers has, though, been increasing. In 2021,

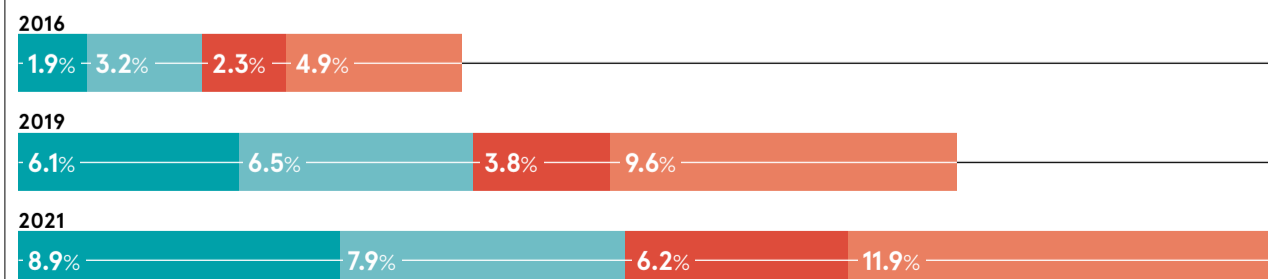
Uber lost a long-running legal battle when the High Court ruled that its drivers should be treated as workers, entitling them to benefits such as the minimum wage and holiday pay. The Californian company – which had already introduced new protections for workers, such as free sick-

**“It's important that we don't lose some of the positives of the gig economy model to deal with some of the more negative issues that arise in low-paid roles**

THE PROPORTION OF WORKERS JOINING THE GIG ECONOMY HAS RISEN CONSIDERABLY IN RECENT YEARS

Percentage of the UK's working population engaging in gig work

● Deliveries/driving ● Household services ● Errand-running ● Online work



Trades Union Congress, 2021

ness insurance – has since had to change the way it operates in the UK and has put up fares as a result.

Such legal challenges have not been restricted to the UK, with some firms facing upsets in other jurisdictions. Deliveroo, for instance, won a legal battle over the status of its riders in the UK in 2021. But that year it announced plans to quit Spain after the country's government became the first in the EU to force food delivery platforms to recognise their gig workers as staff. At the time, the company said that Spain accounted for only a small part of its business and that it would require a "disproportionate level" of investment to remain competitive there.

The regulatory net has been tightening ever since. The EU has just approved draft rules requiring all member states to recognise the employee rights of gig workers, in effect

stopping "bogus self-employment". The rules, which states are expected to adopt by 2025, will put the onus on digital platforms to prove their contention that workers hired through them are not employees. Companies such as Deliveroo and Uber have hit back, saying that this could lead to job cuts, reduced access to flexible working and yet more litigation over employment status.

Yet, when it comes to the EU's plans, some experts warn that the rules don't go far enough and could be circumvented. And, although the UK government published guidance last year to help gig workers determine whether they're being treated fairly, Slaughter believes that the same goes for the UK.

"It's clear that big improvements for gig workers require more radical policy changes, such as changing tax incentives to crack down on the excessive use of self-employment status," she argues.

That said, many gig companies do seem to be aware that change is afoot and have shown a willingness to compromise. For example, in the UK, Deliveroo signed a voluntary partnership deal with the GMB union last year, giving riders bargaining rights on pay and consultation rights on several other matters. It is also offering them earnings and sickness insurance, along with pay-outs when they have children.

Deliveroo adds that it wants to go further with such benefits but sees that as legally risky. Under UK employment law, it says, as soon as a firm provides "employee-like" benefits to staff – depending on the precise benefit and structuring – there's a risk that those individuals could be reclassified as employees in court. The company warns that such a change would nullify the trade-off between flexibility and security that most of its riders are happy to make.

Law-makers must therefore strike a delicate balance between protecting workers' rights and maintaining a vital engine of economic growth.

Dr Alessio Bertolini is researching gig work in Germany and the UK at the Oxford Internet Institute. Commenting on the EU's plans, he says that policy-makers have been reaching for a "holy-grail compromise". While noting that it's too early to say whether this can be achieved, he adds that the new rules are definitely "an improvement".

Challenges remain, of course. But, with law-makers catching up, there may well be hope that reform for the gig economy is on the horizon. ●



Liba Alvarez via Getty

## Q&A

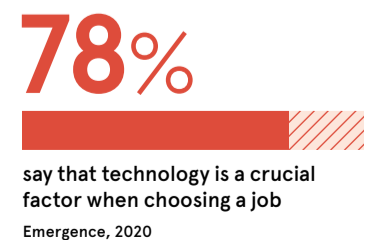
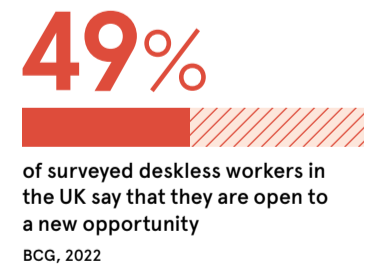
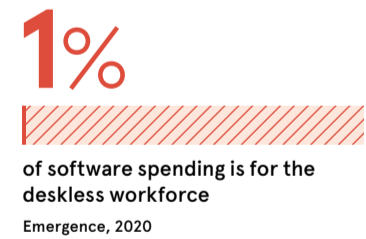
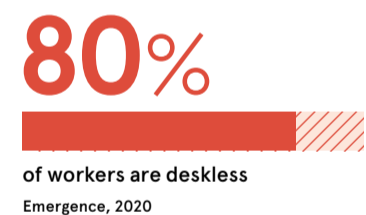
# Empowering deskless workers with technology

The world of work has changed significantly since the Covid-19 pandemic – but it has only changed for a minority. Around 80% of workers are deskless and aren't benefiting from the flexibility afforded to desk-based workers. Flip CEO **Benedikt Ilg** is seeking to change that



**Q How can businesses digitise the deskless workforce and give them the same flexibility as desk-based workers?**

**A** Desktop workers are on video calls throughout their working day and are very well connected to their corporate IT. When we consider deskless workers, they've never done a corporate video call nor written or received an official



work email. They are simply not connected to the communications channels of their company. Therefore, deskless workers need a very simple tech solution which gives them a voice and provides them with the flexibility they deserve.

Flexibility for deskless workers could be as simple as providing digital shift plans so they don't need to travel to their place of work to check their shift times. It could also mean allowing deskless and desktop employees to communicate with each other digitally and having the flexibility to swap shifts, or hand in absence requests in a digital form. These simple changes provide more flexibility to deskless employees and improve their work experiences.

**Q What are the risks for businesses if they do not properly engage with their deskless workforce?**

**A** The risks are that you lose those people that are essential to the success of your business. A recent Boston Consulting Group study found that 49% of all deskless workers in the UK said they are open to new opportunities, and almost one in ten are actively looking for a new job. Having those employees at risk is a serious problem.

If you think of a retail company, a logistics company or a manufacturing company, deskless employees are part of the whole value chain and, particularly in retail, they also own the entire customer journey. In many cases, the reason people want to leave is not because of compensation, it's usually because they want to feel more valued, respected and appreciated.

Given the current scale of labour shortages, talented workers are becoming scarce. You can no longer replace employees quickly. The threat is not only the time and money it takes to replace deskless workers, but the strategic impact of

**“Employee retention in the frontline has become a real competitive advantage and unless employers adopt the right technologies, their workers will leave**

losing top talent from the frontline, particularly their customer expertise and deep knowledge of important workflows.

Talent shortages are also impacting our wider society. We've already seen the consequences at airports, in restaurants and in healthcare. We need a fundamental change in mindset to provide desirable work environments for all employees. Employee retention in the frontline has become a real competitive advantage and unless employers adopt the right technologies, their workers will leave.

**Q What can businesses do to better engage with deskless workers?**

**A** The first and most basic step is to communicate with your frontline workers, and it must be a two-way conversation, no longer just top-down. Digital tools like Flip enable employees to give feedback directly to management about how their company can be improved, and how those changes can be implemented faster. This drives value for the company and acknowledges the talent and contribution of these employees.

It is also the first time management and frontline employees in deskless working environments have been able to properly connect. Having

closer connections with employees is more important than ever in times of economic crisis, as this reassures them and reduces uncertainty.

**Q How should the future of work be designed to take into account both deskless and desk-based workers?**

**A** These cohorts have very different needs, and when we think about the future of work we believe it should be better work for all, regardless of whether they are a deskless worker or a desktop worker. The connection between technology and people is key. Digitisation can connect blue-collar and white-collar workers, young and old, and really bring those groups together.

With dedicated technology and digitalisation of the front line, we can make the lives of both deskless and desktop workers better. Employees are craving it too. If a young employee starts at McDonald's today, they don't understand why they need to look at a noticeboard at work to check their shifts. They simply don't get it. They believe they should be able to check an app on their phone and instantly see their shifts.

**Q What are some of the benefits of using tech for deskless workers?**

**A** Employees use technology in their private lives and they are demanding the same technology experience from their employers. With Flip, we bring digitalisation to these employees who have been underserved for way too long. When deskless workers are using technology like Flip, the whole workforce is instantly connected.

If you consider a manufacturing company like Bosch, workers traditionally felt they were just working in their specific factory. By connecting with workers in different locations, the company starts working together

for the first time, employees can exchange ideas on how to solve problems and that knowledge is shared globally across the company.

**Q How is Flip helping businesses transform the deskless worker experience?**

**A** Flip is building the operating system for the frontline through really owning and digitising all the touchpoints that a frontline worker has with their organisation. In the case of Bosch for instance, we offer their deskless workers one app to manage their payroll data, shift planning and task management.

The Flip platform allows companies to connect with the whole workforce in just two clicks. Everyone can use the application and can access it from their own private smartphones. With our app, the information doesn't drip down through five layers of hierarchy. Instead, information can be sent directly from management to employees, and can be targeted to certain groups. As a result, deskless workers feel more included.

Europart noticed a 25% increase in employer identification within the first 6 months of using the Flip App. By helping companies connect directly with their workforce, we help every single worker understand their role in the company's strategy. This ultimately leads to more meaningful work and increases employee engagement and retention which is highly needed to solve HR's biggest challenges of today.

For more information, please visit [getflip.com](https://getflip.com)





# Breaking down global language barriers

Globalisation has given companies distributed teams, new opportunities to expand or sell abroad, and access to the best talent anywhere. Is it about time the C-suite embraced language learning?

Collaboration today isn't blocked by borders. Work has become increasingly international, with the best talent taking on tasks remotely from anywhere in the world.

When language barriers exist between employees, suppliers, and contractors, many companies may see new problems emerge. Opportunities can become stifled, preventing them from selling into new markets, widening their supply chains, finding more cost-effective manufacturing methods, or attracting new employees to their distributed teams.

If you look at the average list of employee benefits and perks, it might include gym membership, lunch vouchers, and loans to buy season tickets for train travel. But C-suites are waking up to the possibilities of introducing language learning to their employees' benefits packages, widening their personal horizons, and opening up new avenues professionally.

Mait Müntel, co-founder of AI-driven language learning platform Lingvist, believes empowering colleagues to communicate more effectively with each other, no matter where they are based, will significantly impact productivity and profit.

"Having a little bit more language fluency removes a lot of friction," says Müntel. "It's really important if you're working collaboratively. It removes friction inside the company, but it also removes it in the market. If someone does not speak the language, they might appear impolite. How people behave has a huge impact on revenue."

He adds: "If a company's employees can speak another language, even in very basic terms, this can foster better working relationships and friendships."

## Harnessing targeted teaching

Müntel advocates for a different approach to language upskilling. Instead of teaching a generalised set of words and phrases, Lingvist harnesses artificial intelligence and machine learning to focus on the sector-specific vocabulary needed in a particular job role or industry.

Companies or external partners can provide documents, reports, manuals, whitepapers, and other written materials available to explain what they do and how they do it. The platform then processes these to create bespoke lessons featuring the most useful language.

Getting up to a conversational standard can take many years for those who learned French, Spanish, or German in school. What is usually taught to teenagers covers various scenarios - holidays, small talk about the weather, directions to the local library. But Müntel's technology prioritises a streamlined approach for professional conversations, giving people precisely the language skills they need in a matter of months.

"The way we teach languages is extraordinarily fast because our lessons are highly personalised," he says. "We use smart algorithms that actually make the learning more efficient. The goal of building this technology was to learn languages in months rather than years and to make them accessible to everyone."

The platform, which started as a direct-to-consumer offering, now has more than six million app downloads across Apple's App Store and Google Play. Each language has a series of pairings, for example, English to German, English to Estonian, or English to Russian. Müntel describes this as "a journey from one language to another."

## Making the brain comfortable

Different industries each use very different - and often highly specific - words and phrases. Diving into languages for professional purposes can be a frightening prospect to many would-be learners, especially given the prevalence of jargon and buzzwords. But machine learning reduces that fear. It crawls the internet, news sources, and any documents provided to identify helpful information quickly.

Al also addresses the need for individuals to learn at their own pace, watching how they react to personalise a



programme based on someone's habits, needs, and circumstances.

To get the best out of everyone, the learning must work at a level their brain is comfortable with, says Müntel. He explains: "I struggled with languages at school. I counted that it took me 10,000 hours to learn English. So, I began to question whether the traditional method was the best and whether I was actually learning the right stuff."

Having previously worked as a post-doctoral researcher at CERN in Switzerland, where he was part of the Higgs boson discovery team, Müntel grappled with learning the local language while balancing a heavy workload. This led him to develop a mathematical framework to prove how learning a new language in just 200 hours would be possible.

**"I struggled with languages at school. I counted that it took me 10,000 hours to learn English. So, I began to question whether the traditional method was the best**

"Some words are just a million times more frequent," he says. "Statistically, we look at what you need as a learner.

A retail company has one vocabulary set, and a football club has another. It's different again for transportation, medicine, or law. By using artificial intelligence and defining fields of interest with your own texts, books, and keywords, the computer can find other similar words in similar fields. This happens pretty quickly."

## Driving collective value

One issue Müntel noticed when working at CERN was that while scientists could work in English, their partners and children often became isolated, living in a new place without the words and phrases to integrate successfully in their new environment. He believes companies can also utilise new ways of digital learning to help employees' families bed in when they are transferred to a new country.

Although Lingvist is currently focused on intermediate users and those wanting to advance their language capabilities quickly, the company has plans to scale its platform towards beginners later this year.

Age is no barrier either, Müntel insists, especially when there is a push to get over-50s back into the UK workforce post-Covid. Lingvist data shows that while older people often think

they can't pick up new languages as fast as younger colleagues, this is not the case.

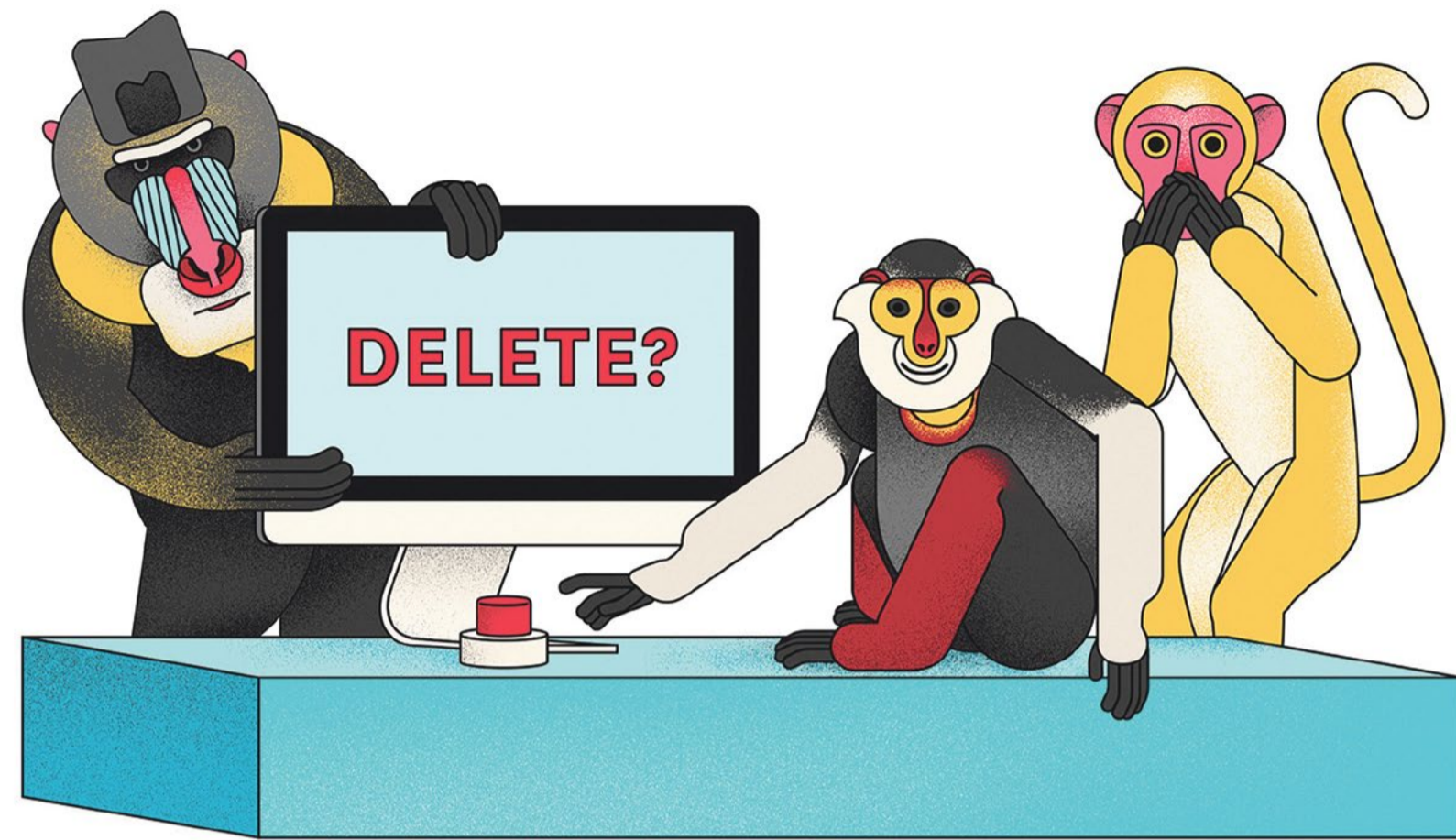
For Müntel, each new language a person learns brings new opportunities to grow personally and professionally. "When English-speaking people learn the language of their key markets, they are more appreciated and valued. Knowing even a little bit will make working much better," he says.

Thanks to current natural language processing technology, Müntel believes the possibilities are endless: "In English, there are maybe a million words. If you speak conversationally, you need maybe 3000. When working, you probably need 1000, maybe 2000 professional words on top of common vocabulary. It's not a huge number if you let technology identify those words you have to learn."

As the workforce becomes increasingly international, language learning becomes a gateway to cross-border collaboration, new markets and new horizons. The technology is now here to make it attainable to all.

For more information visit [lingvist.com/business](https://lingvist.com/business)

**LINGVIST**



## CHANGE MANAGEMENT

# Macaque attack

Ecommerce giant Shopify has been imposing organisational changes using a deliberately abrupt approach that it calls 'chaos monkey'. This is a dangerous gambit, warn experts in organisational behaviour and employment law

Clara Murray

Thousands of Shopify employees returned to work after the festive break in January to find their calendars stripped of recurring meetings. Staff who took to messaging platform Slack to discuss the change found that their conversational options had been curtailed there too, with group chats deleted or restricted.

This was not a technical glitch, but a new company-wide policy. Justifying its precipitous move, the firm's leadership team argued that group meetings and "bloated" discussions on Slack had been harming both productivity and morale.

Whatever people think about the merits of a low-meeting culture, what's striking in this case is how the changes were implemented: imposed on the whole company without warning, let alone consultation. "Chaos monkey" is the term that the Ottawa-based firm has used to describe its unconventional approach.

The phrase is well known in software engineering. It refers to the practice of randomly breaking parts of a system to test its resilience. For instance, Netflix has created a program that turns off its production

Can this approach ever be an effective way to bring about lasting cultural changes in organisations?

It's a dangerous game, warns Dr Alexandra Dobra-Kiel, innovation and strategy director at the Behave consultancy. She argues that chaotic transitions can trigger unnecessary stress among the people affected. "This can be particularly acute if such changes have an impact on habitual behaviour, such as their daily chats on Slack.

The irony is that, when we're put under stress, our brains want us to default back to familiar habits to compensate for all the energy they're expending on figuring out what to do, Dobra-Kiel says. "In this case, because you can't revert to those habits, the stress is prolonged. That affects your cognitive capacity and memory, so you become less productive."

Fern Miller, executive strategy director at advertising agency R/GA, agrees. "Research into workplace stress has repeatedly found that the biggest driver is the amount of control that employees feel they have over their day-to-day practice," she says.

Finding that a core working practice has been removed overnight will increase that pressure, according to Miller, who adds: "I can only imagine that the fact that this is all part of a publicity-friendly social experiment won't make that any easier."

Indeed, several Shopify employees have said that the changes will make their jobs more difficult. One told [businessinsider.com](https://www.businessinsider.com) that adjusting to working without a group Slack channel could take them months, for instance. Other staff members are worried about the negative cultural impact on the company and have raised concerns about potential disruption to product launches.

Employers considering sowing some chaos of their own should also consider the potential legal ramifications. Katie Hodson, partner and head of employment at law firm SAS

Daniels, notes that imposing sudden blanket changes to people's working conditions without consultation could leave companies open to discrimination claims.

"As this policy was implemented across the board, it would potentially affect disabled people or those with mental health issues in a stronger way than anyone else," she explains. "This could result in claims of constructive unfair dismissal."

But Professor Nick Kemsley, director of the centre for HR development at Henley Business School, believes that the application of "managed chaos" to enact change can be beneficial. "We tend to walk blindfolded into a new culture without realising," he argues. "You need to give employees a sense of permission to change habits they've got stuck in, because these will simply continue otherwise. People cannot unilaterally decide to clear their diaries."

"It's much easier to implement radical change if you have a good base of psychological safety and trust at a team level. It creates a mindset of being excited about change and embracing it, not dreading it. It is possible to create new habits through fear, but is that the right sort of culture for your company? Probably not." ●

This is exactly the attitude shift that Shopify's leaders were hoping to encourage. Although the experiment lasted only two weeks, staff have been urged to be more protective of their time and decline as many calendar invitations as they see fit.

Kemsley adds that the fact the message comes from the top is constructive. It prevents different parts of the business from adopting different solutions to problems such as meeting overload - a situation that can itself become chaotic.

"It's fine to say to certain layers of the organisation: 'It's up to you to decide how you work.' But there are parts of the organisation where that level of ambiguity will create capability or even anxiety issues," he says. "Some people just want to be told what they need to do."

Kemsley believes that this issue highlights the catch-22 that's affecting many employers with respect to hybrid and remote working. Workers in white-collar industries have developed strong and often opposing preferences over the past three years: some want to work at home without interruptions forever, whereas others are champing at the bit to return to HQ five days a week.

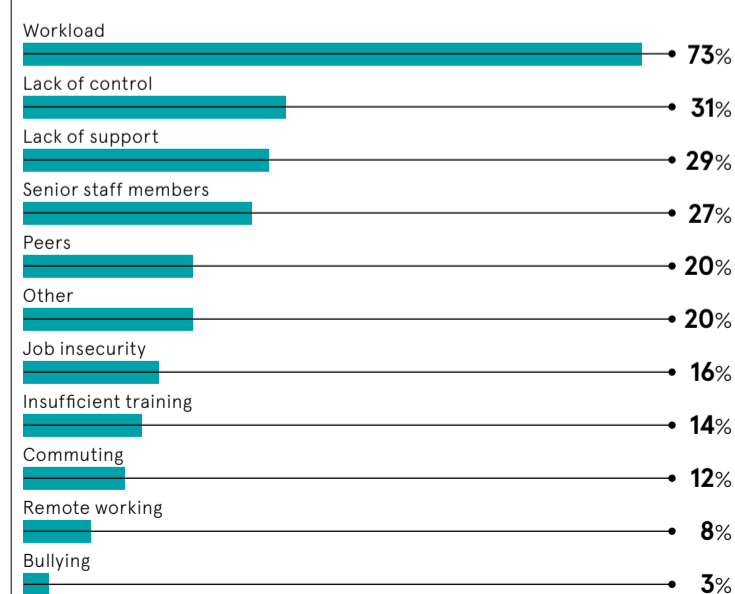
The decisions their employers take on working arrangements will have an impact on recruitment and retention, he says. "It's hard to find any kind of organisation-wide solution that doesn't have a dark side. Whatever policy an organisation adopts, some people aren't going to like it and might vote with their feet."

What, then, is the best way for a company to execute a significant change without alienating a significant proportion of its workforce? For Dobra-Kiel, effective communication and transparency are the keys here, helping to build a positive company culture characterised by "psychological safety," she says.

"It's much easier to implement radical change if you have a good base of psychological safety and trust at a team level. It creates a mindset of being excited about change and embracing it, not dreading it. It is possible to create new habits through fear, but is that the right sort of culture for your company? Probably not." ●

## A LACK OF CONTROL CAN EXACERBATE WORKPLACE STRESS

Share of employees worldwide citing the following as key sources of stress at work

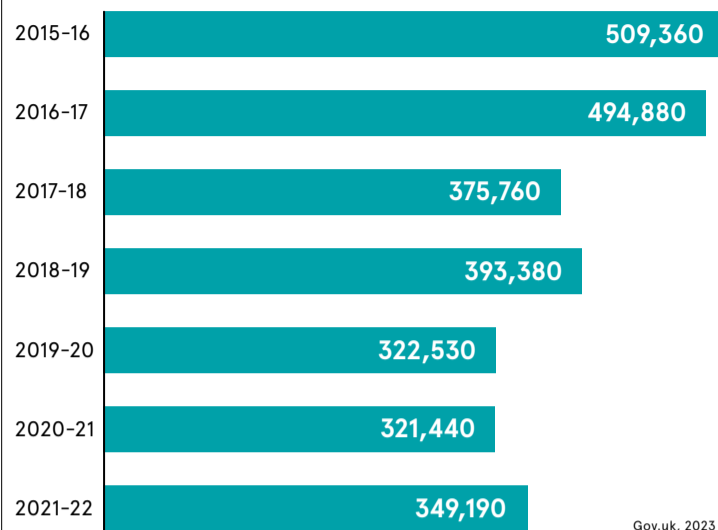




Hony Rakusan via Getty

**THE NUMBER OF PEOPLE STARTING APPRENTICESHIPS HAS YET TO RETURN TO PRE-PANDEMIC LEVELS**

Total full-year apprenticeship starts, 2015-16 to 2021-22



Gov.uk, 2023

TRAINING

# Why UK plc must shatter the apprenticeship stigma

Employers urgently need to dispel the outdated perception that qualifications earned on the job are a poor relation to university degrees, argues the manager of Mars UK's apprenticeship programmes

Sam Forsdick

**A**t the start of this month, National Apprenticeship Week, an annual event established by the Brown government in 2008, once again highlighted the numerous benefits such schemes can offer both apprentices and their employers. Yet, for many, "the A-word can still be a bit of a dirty word", reports Vikki Marriott, apprenticeship programme manager at Mars.

A 2022 survey of more than 5,000 young people by careers service Prospects found that 60% of students at schools and sixth-form colleges were hoping to attend university, whereas only 12% were interested in pursuing apprenticeships. Of the former group, 40% said that they didn't see an apprenticeship as a viable path into their career of choice, while a similar percentage said they thought that degrees were more respected by employers.

Marriott believes that too many young people "still don't understand

the true value of apprenticeships" – especially the ability to "earn while you learn". This should have considerably more appeal than the prospect of completing a degree course saddled with a student debt averaging £45,800 in England.

The number of people starting on an apprenticeship programme in England last academic year (August 2021 to July 2022) was 8.6% up on the previous year's total. But in Q1 of the current academic year (August to October 2022), the number of new starts was 6.1% down on the previous year's Q1 total.

"There remains a lack of knowledge about what can be achieved with an apprenticeship," Marriott says. "It has very much been considered a low-level vocational qualification, with that stigma attached to it."

In an effort to change perceptions, some providers have rebadged their offerings. The Marshall Centre in Cambridge, which specialises in training people as maintenance

engineers, has become Marshall Skills Academy, for instance, while Rolls-Royce has named its newest apprenticeship training centre the Nuclear Skills Academy.

"Many employers are looking to change the title of some programmes. We've seen many skills academies come through," says Marriott, who believes that providers are becoming "more creative" with the language they use to promote their apprenticeships.

Mars has so far only explored the idea of repackaging any of its schemes, but the confectionery giant does "champion" them on social media, according to Marriott, who adds: "I'm delighted that we're able to spread that message."

Mars has provided apprenticeships in manufacturing and engineering for decades, but it has recently increased the number of disciplines in which trainees can start their careers. Last year, the firm introduced two programmes: one focusing on sales; the other on health and safety. The year before, it piloted an apprenticeship for internal candidates seeking to learn digital skills.

"Apprenticeships are an effective way to meet the evolving skills needs of our business," Marriott says. "We have a continual supply of talent coming through, as we take in potentially unskilled people and put them through a development programme to help plug any gaps."

Expanding the range of specialisms available to apprentices also serves the firm's efforts to become a more inclusive employer. Marriott reports seeing "increased diversity across the business since broadening the portfolio".

But only a fifth of Mars's manufacturing and engineering apprentices are women – a proportion she describes as "a lot lower than we'd like". To remedy this and "make the industry more appealing to the female population", the firm has started collaborating with schools and colleges specialising in STEM subjects.

Almost 80% of Mars apprentices stay with the business after graduation, which demonstrates the positive effect that such programmes can have on employee retention.

Moreover, a growing number of the firm's longer-serving employees are taking up apprenticeships to learn new skills. This chimes with the findings of a new survey commissioned by Virgin Media O2, which indicate that 20% of UK workers want to retrain and find better-paid jobs in response to the cost-of-living

**“There remains a lack of knowledge about what can be achieved through an apprenticeship**

crisis. Despite this, 47% of respondents said they would avoid apprenticeships because they thought that such qualifications would lead only to temporary roles, while 46% said they thought such schemes were primarily for younger people.

That last statistic highlights another part of the image problem that Marriott is keen to solve. "What I'm really excited about is that our apprenticeships are fully inclusive," she says. "It's not only your typical school- or college-leavers – we're seeing applications from a more diverse mix."

Marriott cites one colleague, aged 59, who has applied for a level-six apprenticeship in digital technology, which is the equivalent of a degree.

"This offers an added opportunity to develop into a new area. He feels that he may extend his career as a result," she says.

Equipping older employees to change direction this way is likely to become more important, given the expected increases in the state pension age. Marriott explains that doing so "allows people to refresh their skills. They then feel able to contribute more to the business, which can in turn benefit from the efficiency gains." ●

# Levelling up access to workspaces that work

With research showing that 73% of office-based employees are interested in a more localised approach to where they can work, Clockwise is breathing new life into old buildings across the UK and on the continent

**T**echnology is undoubtedly reshaping the future of work. But no matter what comes next in terms of tech, for the leaders, employees, freelancers and contractors of today and tomorrow, it will still be critical to have a productive, comfortable and enjoyable environment to work in, where their wellbeing is supported.

Of course, the C-suite's struggles with office ownership or leasing post-Covid have been well-documented. That's part of the reason why there has been a noticeable shift since 2021 to allow colleagues a chance to work closer to home – rather than from home. This has fuelled a boom in co-working openings, providing space for single entrepreneurs, SMEs and also larger companies searching for a smaller presence in new areas.

And now a new survey, commissioned by Clockwise through Censuswide, has found that three-quarters of office workers (73%) would be interested in a more localised, satellite-based approach to office space, minimising time spent commuting.

Alexandra Livesey, Clockwise's chief operating officer, believes this trend is also reflected in business leaders' attitudes; they are actively reconsidering where their employees are based and thinking beyond central London. "You can provide all the technology in the world for remote working, but without offering people the right environment to use it in, you won't support their productivity or their physical and mental health," she argues.

In 2019, Clockwise had three locations: Glasgow, Belfast and Liverpool. Just before the pandemic struck, an Edinburgh location opened. Fast forward three years and it now has 14 sites. That amounts to over 500,000 square feet, 87 full-time employees and a 200% increase in demand.

Clockwise also recently opened its first location in mainland Europe – one of its largest spaces to-date – with more than 600 desks across eight floors in Brussels. Later this year, it will expand further in The Hague and Antwerp, as well as opening its first spaces in Germany.

Livesey adds that office design has also come a long way in recent years. Where people were once boxed into rooms or thrown into open-plan designs, since Covid-19 offices have moved towards "zoning". "We offer more than a desk and a chair, with different environments to work in according to the level of focus or collaboration required for a task," she says.

Clockwise's approach also includes sound-proofed, glass-walled phone booths for making private calls, smaller single-desk areas, and long tables and lounge-style seating for collaborating or networking. The more traditional meeting rooms all have the latest technology for video-calling on a big screen.

The addition of private offices works well for companies which need a space of their own with access to all the shared facilities. Some bosses are increasingly happy to cover the costs of membership for individual employees to use these spaces.

Clockwise's research also showed the need to diversify the locations where people can work. Just 31% of the 18- to 24-year-olds surveyed intended to move back to a city after the pandemic, with the rest staying put in suburban and rural locations. UK businesses are also using the European spaces to establish a presence on EU soil post-Brexit.

Livesey explains: "Our model is based on understating what businesses want and need to grow. The best talent is not only in big cities. This hybrid way of working suits people for the future of work."

**The science of space**

Speaking to people's senses has become another design priority for the working environments of the future. Clockwise has a soundtrack partner, for instance, which uses science to plan what music is played at different times and in different areas of their spaces.

"Our music might be quite upbeat when you come in on Monday morning and then a little gentler during the day," Livesey explains. "By Friday afternoon, the vibe is very different."

The business has also developed a signature smell to reduce stress. "We want to appeal to all the senses, helping to regulate peoples emotions and responses. We create a safe space where people are not distracted and can focus on what needs to get done," she adds.

Harnessing the power of natural light is another important factor for the company. It enhances the amount of light available as a way to regulate people's circadian rhythm. Greenery and water are also used to purify the air and help with memory. Buildings with outdoor spaces are particularly highly prized, as these can be transformed into terraces or rooftops with seating.

"No longer can you have one large room with hot-desking," Livesey says. "Design has to be much more



01



02

01 Clockwise Bromley Club Lounge

02 Clockwise Cheltenham

considered, and you have to invest in the right materials."

And given the changing nature of people's commutes, cycle racks, showers, changing facilities and a limited amount of car-parking (with electric vehicle charging options) are offered too. An on-site café sells freshly-made, healthy food, plus barista-style coffee.

Being part of a community is another positive by-product, helped by layouts designed to encourage people to connect. "You're immediately part of a network filled with all sorts of talent," Livesey adds. "The design of the spaces

encourage people to gather, and our on-site teams know everyone and facilitate great connections. We're bringing back that watercooler moment, whether you're a solopreneur, digital nomad or part of an SME."

**Shining the light on sustainability**

Environmental impact is another big consideration for companies of all shapes and sizes. Clockwise's Positive Impact Strategy and sustainability commitments benefit members, especially those aiming for B Corp accreditation. "We can make an investment in

people and the planet that goes much deeper than an SME can do on its own," Livesey says.

This mission also includes the aim of being climate-positive by 2030, and Clockwise's local and regional strategy supports the UK government's levelling-up agenda. There is a push to convert old buildings too, such as the iconic Grade II listed Generator Building in Bristol, the Grade I listed Edward Pavilion in the heart of Liverpool's Albert Dock, and Bromley Old Town Hall, a Grade II listed building previously added to Historic England's Heritage at Risk Register.

Wellbeing is also a key part of the future of work, Livesey says, and that means creating spaces that are personal, purposeful and productive.

But wellness goes beyond cleverly-designed workspaces, argues Livesey: "We are investing in other people's teams in our spaces, and we do the same for our own people. The idea requires a more holistic approach. Through programming, design and championing connections, you can improve wellbeing for all."

For more information please visit [work-clockwise.com](http://work-clockwise.com)

**CLOCKWISE**

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