



Who feels heard at work and why giving employees a voice is good for business

This report, which is based on a global survey of 4,000 employees, managers, and business leaders across 11 countries, examines how employees are — or aren't — feeling heard at their workplace, the opportunities that people leaders have to better listen to and act on feedback, and the business imperative to embrace the voice of the employee.

The connection between employee voice and business outcomes

Why organizations must transform employee feedback into actionable change



**A note from Dr. Chris Mullen, Ph.D.,
SPHR, SHRM-SCP, executive director
of The Workforce Institute at UKG**

There is troubling inequity in the feedback loop at organizations across the globe. Although most employees feel generally heard by their employer, recent research from The Workforce Institute at UKG reveals the barriers that exist between employees and their leaders when it comes to actionable change.

Perhaps this stems from the decades-long notion that employees are an organization's most valuable asset, when, in fact, they are so much more. They're tactical and strategic change-makers who see inefficiency firsthand and often seek to voice critical points of observation and ideas for improvement. However, more often than not, organizations don't have the right mechanisms in place to actively listen to their people — leaving many employees to feel like another cog in the machine rather than a crucial contributor to company success.

Through this research, we have discovered three core truths about the voice of the employee:

1. People leaders must ensure that all employee voices are heard equally and equitably.
2. Employees count on their managers to not just listen to their feedback, but embrace and meaningfully act upon it.
3. Investing in the voice of the employee isn't just good for culture — it's good for business.

These findings should create difficult but necessary dialogues among employees, managers, and teams and encourage people leaders to grapple with the realities of their unique employee voices. Do employees feel comfortable speaking up? When they do voice their concerns, are we using their feedback to innovate? Ultimately, do we instill transparency, trust, and care in communication across our organization?

I believe that the leaders who succeed at listening to their employees are the ones who recognize that their employees are the differentiators their organization needs to reach its goals. Instead of focusing squarely on the bottom line, these leaders recognize that employees who are given a voice are more highly engaged and have a higher sense of belonging. By harnessing this energy, leaders can ensure their entire workforce is working in harmony to energize their company culture, serve their customers, and, ultimately, protect and grow the bottom line.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Chris Mullen'.

The Current State of the Voice of the Employee

On average, around the globe, 4 in 5 employees feel heard — but which employees do not?

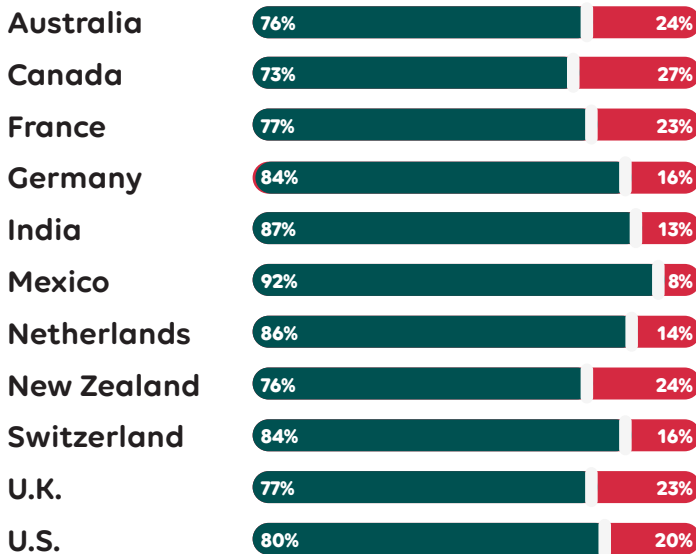
In spring 2021, we surveyed more than 4,000 employees across 11 countries to put a finger on the pulse of how employees feel their voice is making an impact at their organization, including asking the simple question: **Do you feel heard at your workplace?** Here's a snapshot of what they told us.

Global response

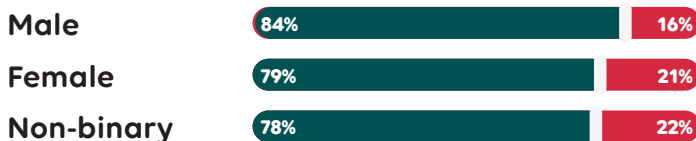
81% heard

not heard 19%

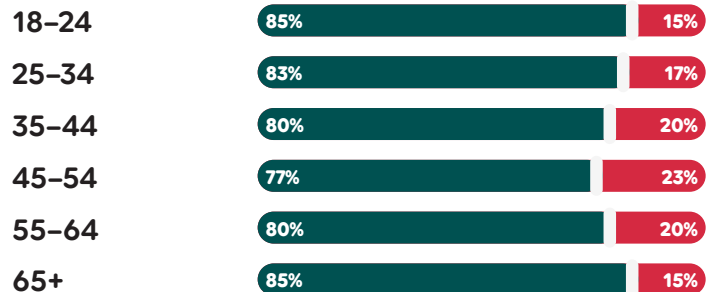
Country



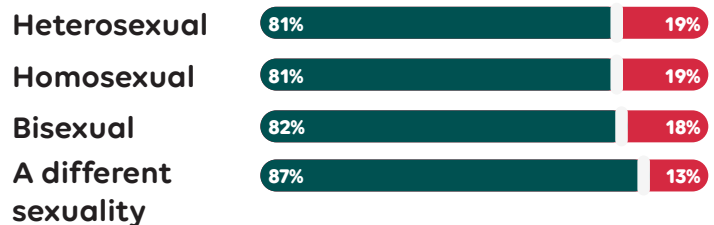
Gender



Age



Sexual orientation

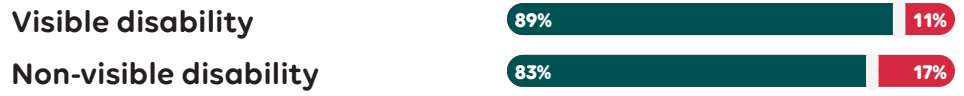


Veteran status

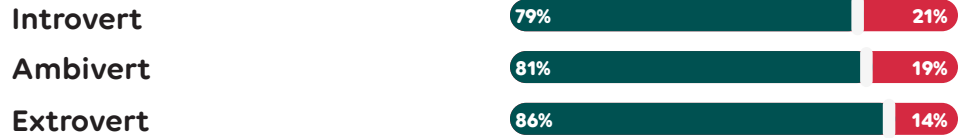




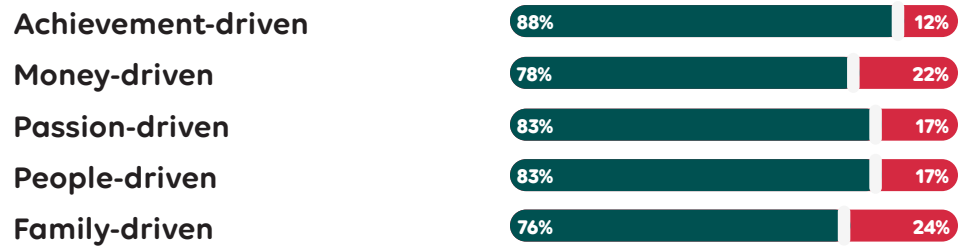
Disability status



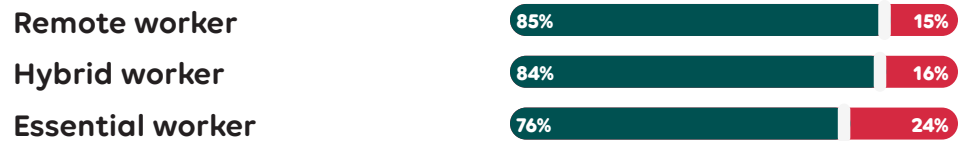
Personality



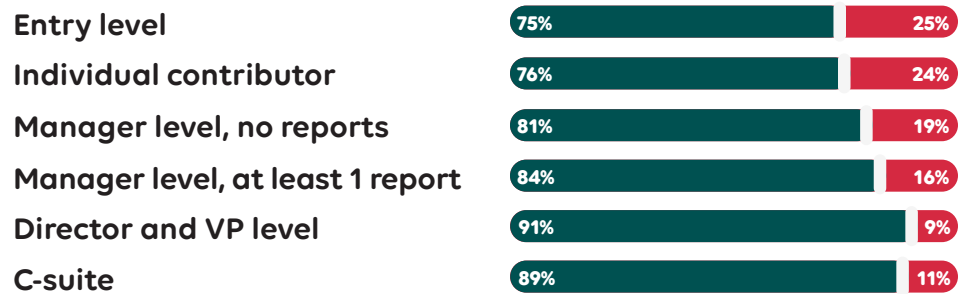
Motivation



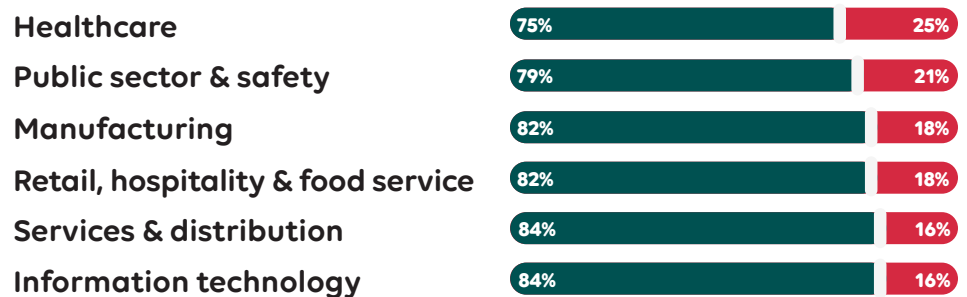
Work status



Level



Industry



Not all employee voices are heard equally

Diving into the demographic gaps between the heard and the heard-nots

86% of employees feel people at their workplace are **not heard** fairly or equally

47% of employees say that voices of underrepresented people in their workplace aren't being represented.

These voices are most underrepresented in Australia (53%), New Zealand (52%), Canada (51%), France (51%), and Germany (51%).

Even when employees feel their voice is heard, they don't see the tangible impact it makes on workplace processes or programs.

75%

of employees don't feel heard on important workplace topics like benefits, safety, and time-off requests.

40%

of employees don't feel their feedback leads to actionable change.

Have we already forgotten the essential worker?

Essential workers served an invaluable role in sustaining the global labor market and fostering the economic recovery through critical frontline jobs during the pandemic. Despite this monumental effort — and several campaigns to celebrate these employees in 2020 — essential workers are one of the least heard groups in today's workplace.

Essential workers, the backbone of the global economy, feel largely ignored by their workplace.



1 in 4 do not feel heard at their workplace.

Essential workers in Canada (32%), the U.K. (29%), and the U.S. (27%) feel the *least* heard across the globe.



1 in 3 feel they can freely express their views and suggestions with their manager.



1 in 3 feel more heard today than they did at the start of 2020.



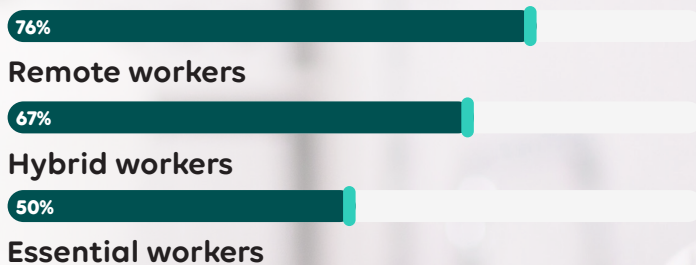
On workplace topics that impact them more the most, few essential workers feel heard.

30% Workplace safety

21% Post-COVID-19 workplace policies

18% Work-life balance and burnout

Essential workers feel they have less influence on company decision-making than any other worker segment.



50% of essential workers feel they have moderate or high influence on decision-making at their company — far fewer than remote workers (76%) and hybrid workers (67%).

Essential workers in New Zealand (35%), Canada (40%), and Switzerland (41%) feel that they have the least influence.



Are less experience and tenure negatively impacting younger workers?

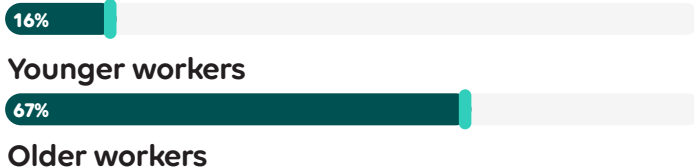
As the newest generation enters the workforce, young millennials and Gen Zers — despite feeling heard overall — are increasingly less confident that their voice matters in their workplace in specific areas. Employers should beware of the growing unconscious bias toward tenured and senior employees that may overshadow — or entirely negate — the ambitious up-and-comers in their organization.



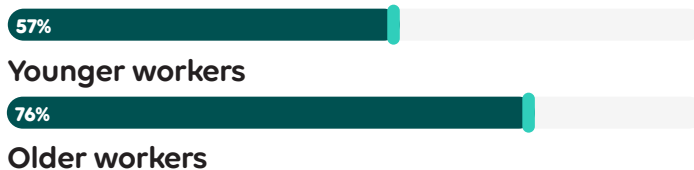
Where do the generational fault lines run deepest?

Only 9% of younger workers believe everyone at their workplace is being heard fairly and equally — making them more than 3x more pessimistic than older workers.

I can freely express my views and suggestions with my manager



I feel my manager takes my ideas and feedback seriously



I feel leaders at my workplace empower me to express my views without fear of negative consequence



I feel my voice has been ignored in some way by my manager or employer

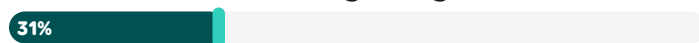


The three countries where most younger workers feel their voice has been ignored? India (93%), the U.S. (85%), and France (80%).

Is a growing caregiving divide further isolating child-free employees?

Over the course of the pandemic, many employers offered new benefits and programs to support their employees who care for children, partners, or parents. While caregiving employees have embraced the additional support, this may have had an adverse impact on employees with no children or caregiving responsibilities — today, they feel less heard by their manager or employer.

I feel more or much more heard at my workplace now than I did at the beginning of 2020



Non-caregiving employees



Caregiving employees

Non-caregivers in Canada (23%), the Netherlands (24%), and the U.K. (29%) feel least heard year over year.

I feel I have moderate or high influence on decision-making at my company

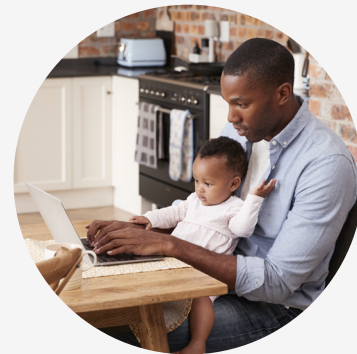


Non-caregiving employees



Caregiving employees

This imbalance of influence is felt most by non-caregivers in Canada (48%), France (51%), and the U.K. (51%) compared to caregivers in their country (66%, 72%, and 71%, respectively).



Despite employers' best efforts, many working parents still see opportunities for improvement.

69%

of parents feel their voice has been ignored by their manager or employer.

58%

of parents want to be *more heard* one year from now.



It is important to demonstrate an open mindset and deep curiosity about others. Leaders need to empower others, pay attention to diversity of thinking, and focus on team cohesion. We learned in the pandemic that emotional and physical security will be the new mantra to manage people. Share, as a leader, your personal weaknesses; when you share and openly ask information with your employee, you can demonstrate a humble, unpretentious work manner, putting others at ease and enabling them to speak out and voice their opinions.

— Ivonne Vargas Hernández, author, journalist, and speaker; global advisory board member of The Workforce Institute at UKG

Where Employers Are Missing the Feedback Mark

Breaking down the communication barriers will lead to a more empowering culture

Over the past year, many employers have taken strides to listen more to their people, and the vast majority of executives believe people across the organization are heard. However, most employees still struggle to feel heard by the stakeholders, on the topics, and through the platforms that matter most to them.

On average, only 1 in 5 employees (21%) feel heard on various workplace topics.

What do employees feel *most* heard on?

- 30% Work schedules
- 21% Workplace safety
- 18% Time-off requests

What do employees feel *least* heard on?

- 30% Diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging initiatives
- 21% The hiring process
- 18% Manager or leadership effectiveness

Employees in Switzerland (23%), France (24%), and Germany (25%) felt least heard on workplace safety.



Where do employees feel people leaders can better embrace and empower their voice?



My voice has been ignored in some way by my manager or employer

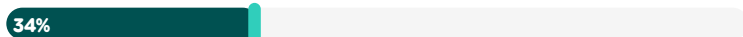


My coworkers care more about my views and concerns than my manager

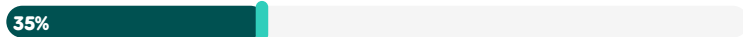


I'm more likely to tell leaders what I think they want to hear rather than how I truly feel

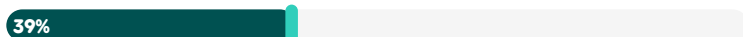
How do employees feel their voice isn't being heard by their manager?



My manager doesn't take my ideas and feedback seriously

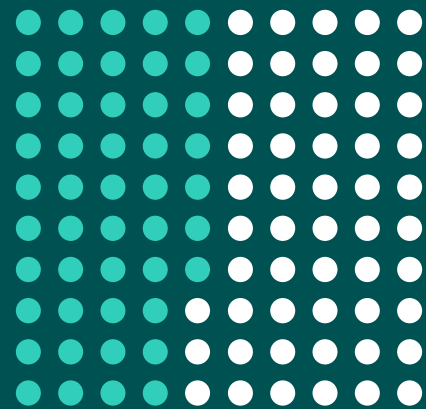


My manager doesn't care about me as a person




My manager doesn't proactively seek out my ideas or feedback

For half of employees, external anonymity trumps internal feedback.



47% of employees — and specifically 53% of younger workers — are more likely to share feedback anonymously via a third-party site, such as [Fairygodboss](#) or [Glassdoor](#), than they are via internal channels, such as employee engagement surveys.



Embracing employee feedback may mean the difference between retaining a high performer and recruiting someone to fill their vacancy.

34% of employees would rather look for a position on a different team or at a different company than share their views and concerns with management.

Employees in India (55%) as well as younger workers across the globe (40%) are more likely to make the switch than voice their concerns.



One of the worst things that organizations can do is ask for feedback and do nothing with it. The best way to show employees that you're listening to them is to do something with the feedback they provide — even if it's to consider it and then let the employee know that the organization will not be implementing their idea or proposal for a specific reason.

— Sharlyn Lauby, SHRM-SCP, author of *HR Bartender* and president of ITM Group Inc.; global advisory board member of The Workforce Institute at UKG

The Business Impact of Employee Feedback

Listening to employees isn't just good for culture — it's good for business

92% of highly engaged employees feel heard at their workplace compared to 30% of highly disengaged employees.

When more employees feel heard, key business outcomes — like optimized financial performance and increased engagement levels — are more likely to improve. This means that investing in the voice of the employee and creating a comprehensive feedback loop of communication and change is as much an investment in HR and culture as it is an investment in corporate strategy and growth.

Employee voice, engagement, and belonging are closely intertwined.

Highly engaged employees are

3x

more likely to say they feel heard than highly disengaged employees.

Employees with a very high level of belonging are

4x

more likely to say they feel heard than those with a very low level of belonging.



It's remarkable when you are truly listened to and are valued. You can see the difference that you've made. No one is ever as truly committed to an organization as when they feel they've made a positive difference or solved a problem for the organization.

— Kate Bischoff, employment attorney and HR consultant; global advisory board member of The Workforce Institute at UKG



When employees feel their voice is heard...



Feel more engaged at work



Feel more effective at their job



Feel more confident to share ideas and feedback in the future



Feel more confident to share ideas and feedback in the future

Investing in the voices of employees can have a meaningful impact on a business's bottom line.

88% of employees whose companies financially outperform others in their industry feel heard compared to just 62% of employees at financially underperforming companies.

The Workforce Institute at UKG

The Workforce Institute at UKG provides research and education on critical workplace issues facing organizations worldwide. By bringing together a global consortium of HR and workforce management thought leaders, the think tank is uniquely positioned to empower organizations with practical ideas for optimizing today's workplace while also providing an important voice for employees, including frontline and hourly workers. Founded in 2007, a hallmark of The Workforce Institute's research and education — including books, podcasts, surveys, blogs, and its annual list of workplace predictions — is balancing the needs and desires of diverse employee populations with the interests of organizations to manage absenteeism, fight burnout, develop equitable work schedules, and build strong leaders to drive inspired performance.

Survey Methodology

Research findings are based on a survey conducted by Savanta, Inc. across the U.S., the U.K., Canada, Mexico, India, Australia, New Zealand, France, Germany, the Netherlands, and Switzerland between May 7–11, 2021. For this survey, 4,049 full-time and part-time employees were asked general questions around how employees communicate their views to their managers and/or employer in an effort to influence matters, both large and small, that affect them at work. The study targeted full-time and part-time working employees who are 16+ years of age. Respondents were recruited through a number of different mechanisms, via different sources, to join the panels and participate in market research surveys. All

For additional information:

www.workforceinstitute.org

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panelists have passed a double opt-in process and complete on average 300 profiling data points prior to taking part in surveys. Respondents are invited to take part via email and are provided with a small monetary incentive for doing so. Results of any sample are subject to sampling variation. The magnitude of the variation is measurable and is affected by the number of interviews and the level of the percentages expressing the results. In this particular study, the chances are 95 in 100 that a survey result does not vary, plus or minus, by more than 1.5 percentage points from the result that would be obtained if interviews had been conducted with all persons in the universe represented by the sample.