

HEALTH AND WELLBEING FOR THE REMOTE & HYBRID WORKFORCE

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted labor markets triggering a global experiment in flexible work arrangements. The definition of the workplace is rapidly changing, and those changes will likely have a lasting impact. Studies show that the number of employees who are choosing to work from home has sharply risen since 2020. To help employers better understand the challenges that American workers face in a hybrid/remote work environment, we analyzed data from The American Trends Panel (ATP) created by Pew Research Center.

The myriad of crises in recent years has taken a toll on many employees. With the coronavirus pandemic, racial injustice, supply chain disruptions, war in Ukraine, rising inflation, a possible recession, and global tensions rising, employees are susceptible to declining engagement and burnout. One of the things that employers can do to help mitigate burnout is to give employees as much schedule and location flexibility as possible.

The good news is, that employees who work remotely or in a hybrid environment indicate that they are **more productive** (21.8%), **more satisfied** (20.7%), and **more highly engaged** (50.8%). This does not mean that they don't face challenges. Some of those challenges are having what is needed to do the job and to do it safely, family responsibilities (i.e., caregiving), effective communication from supervisors, increased hours, and engagement.

Some highlights of the findings are:

- ▶ 83% of workers were remote or hybrid in Oct 2020
- ▶ **5% transitioned** from remote or hybrid **to in-person** (2020 to 2022)
- ▶ The remote worker is more likely to have increased **productivity, satisfaction, and higher engagement**
- ▶ **Work-life balance** is paramount to engagement
- ▶ **Many challenges** negatively affect productivity and engagement

Employers should carefully **consider resources** to support employees facing challenges. Some of the recommendations to support employees are:

- Train managers and supervisors
- Be flexible
- Respect boundaries
- Be cautious of workloads
- Cultivate personal resilience skills
- Don't disincentivize employee loyalty

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BACKGROUND

Studies show that the number of employees who are choosing to work from home has sharply risen since 2020 (Figure 1). Organizations are grappling with the future of work as hybrid enterprises while optimizing productivity, continuity, collaboration, connectedness, and community. These hybrid arrangements have challenged traditional employee-employer relationships, the work-life balance (WLB), worksites, work hours, and the overall relationship between individuals and their families to work.

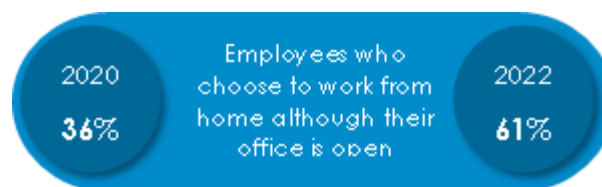


Figure 1: [American Trends Panel Wave 77 | Pew Research Center](#)

Striking Trends

LinkedIn, the world's largest professional network, reports that 1 in every 6 paid jobs in the US is now offering remote work (2022). That is up from 1 in every 67 at the beginning of the pandemic (March 2020). In addition, employees who advertise remote roles attract between 2 and 3 times the applications compared to in-person roles.¹

A review of the literature led to valuable lessons from unprecedented churn created by the coronavirus pandemic in what has been dubbed "The Great Resignation." Time has revealed that not only are industries seeing resignations but a migration or reshuffling of employees. Pew Research Center conducted a nationally representative survey of US employees who left their job by choice in 2021.²

Forty-three percent of U.S. employees cited a lack of good benefits as a reason for leaving their job, 57% said they felt disrespected at work, 48% cited childcare issues, and 45% cited poor benefits. Pew reports that the majority (78%) of those who quit a job are now employed, making the "Great Resignation" more of a "Strategic Migration" or a "Great Reshuffling" in search of a better work situation (Figure 2). Employees want to work for employers who prioritize their wholistic well-being (physical, mental, and financial), and one-size-fits-all is not likely to meet the moment.³

Although, many have made considerable adjustments since 2020, employers continue to struggle with redefining old norms, attracting, and retaining happy healthy workers, and controlling cost. IBI surveyed more than 1,300 supplier and employer members to understand their interests, concerns, and

¹ [Global Talent Trends 2022: The Reinvention of Company Culture | linkedin.com](#)

² [The Great Resignation: Why workers say they quit jobs in 2021 | Pew Research Center](#)

³ [Evaluating Workplace Health Programs: From Research to Practice | IBI](#)

LESSONS FROM THE GREAT RESIGNATION

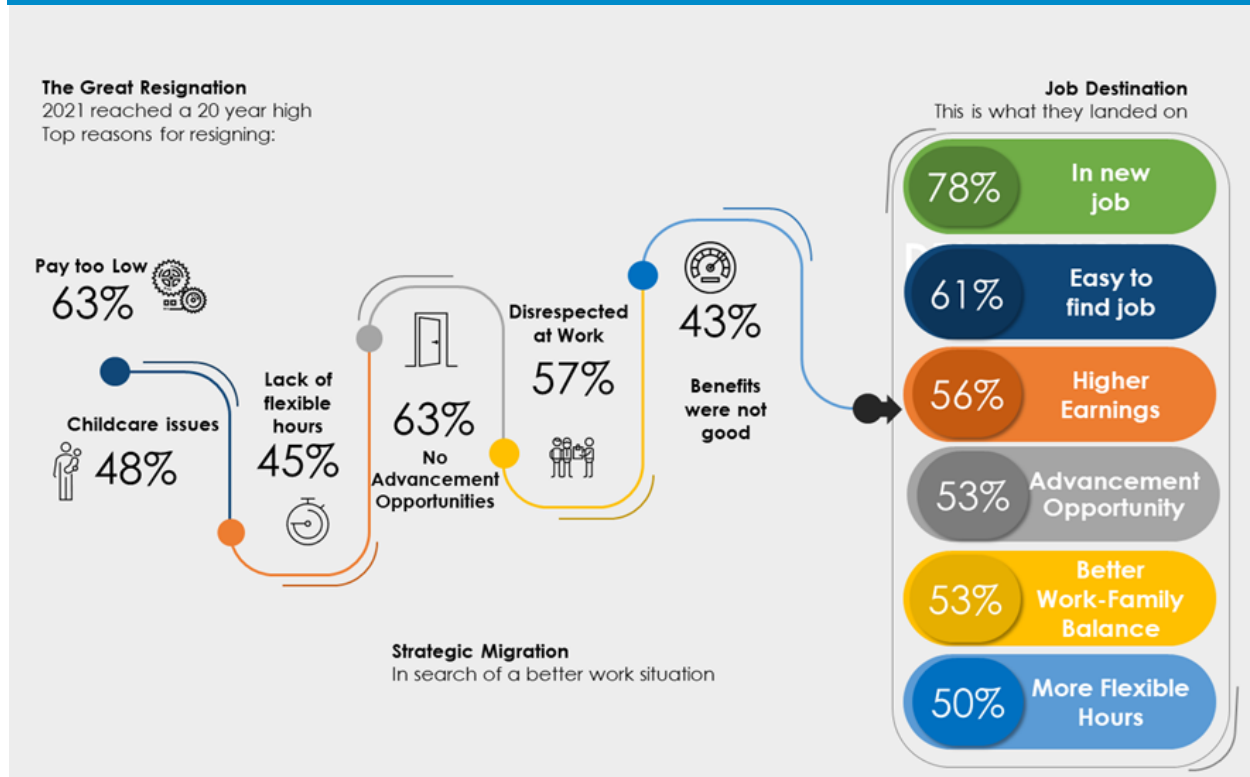


Figure 1: Adapted from [The Great Resignation: Why workers say they quit jobs in 2021 | Pew Research Center](#)

informational gaps. The respondents indicated that supporting the health and wellbeing for a remote/hybrid workforce was a priority.

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to identify the changes in demand on the employee because of the transition to hybrid or remote work environments, and to determine what pain points increase the risks of adverse effects of those changes. This analysis will identify the following:

- ▶ What are the differences in socio-demographics for the employees who work in-person, hybrid, and remotely?
- ▶ What are the challenges of working from home (e.g., staying motivated, having workspace)?
- ▶ How did productivity change from pre-pandemic for those who transitioned to remote during the pandemic?
- ▶ How do we define work engagement? How did hybrid/remote work affect engagement?

METHODS

To better understand the challenges that American workers face in a hybrid/remote work environment, we will analyze data from The American Trends Panel (ATP) created by Pew Research Center. This is a nationally representative panel of randomly selected U.S. adults. Panelists participate via self-administered web surveys. Data in this analysis is drawn from the panel wave conducted October 2020 with updates from a subsequent report of a follow-up survey conducted January 2022. The October 2020 survey included 10,332 responses, and this analysis is based upon 5,829 U.S. adults who were working full-time or part-time and consider one of their jobs to be their primary job. Assessment of differences in categories was analyzed using the Pearson's Chi-Square test with the statistical significance at an alpha level of .05.

RESULTS

The past two years have taken a toll on many employees. With the coronavirus pandemic, racial injustice, supply chain disruptions, war in Ukraine, and rising inflation, employees are feeling overwhelmed and burned out. The following sections will explore work environments, challenges, work-life balance, productivity, and work engagement as they relate to the research questions.

Work Environment

Among employed adults who can perform their job from home, in October 2020, 83% were working entirely remote or hybrid compared to 77% in January 2022. Only 5% transitioned back to in-person (Figure 2). In 2020, 54% of respondents indicated they would want to continue to work from home after the pandemic.

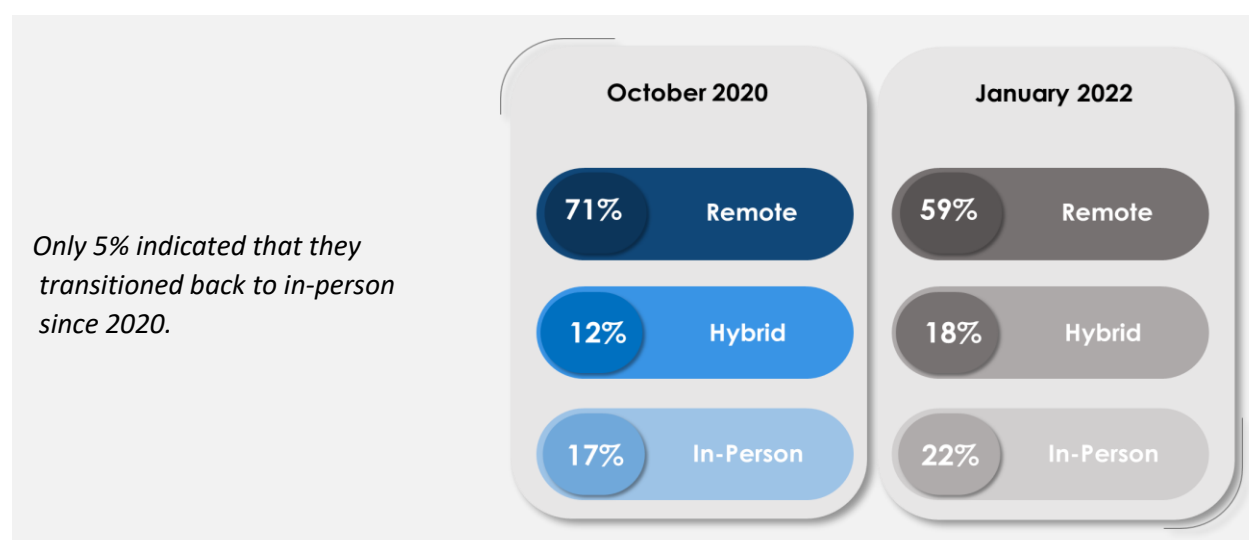


Figure 3: Trends in Work Environment from American Trends Panel Wave 77 and COVID-19 Pandemic Continues to Reshape Work in America | Pew Research Center

Nearly three out of four remote workers indicated that they work in metropolitan areas (73%) compared to one in two in non-metropolitan areas which did not change at all in the 2022 follow-up study. Seventy-four percent worked remotely for private organizations followed by non-profit (68%) and government (59%). The Midwest (67%) and South (66%) had fewer remote workers compared to Northeast (77%) and West (76%). The South had more hybrid work arrangements (14%). ([Appendix B: Table 2](#))

The more education an employee had attained, the more likely they were to work remotely. Employees with less than a high school education had a much higher prevalence of in-person work (35%) followed by high school graduates (22%) and those with college degrees (74%), but 2022 brought about a 10% decrease in the percentage of workers with bachelor's degrees or higher who work remotely (65%). The same was true for income; employees with a higher income more commonly worked in a remote work environment (79%).

There was not a significant difference in work environment by age, but there was a significant gap by gender. Twenty percent of women indicated that they work in person (33 million) compared to 14% of men (23 million). This is a difference of nearly 10 million employees.⁴

Pain Points

Integrating work and life was complicated prior to the pandemic. Employees were challenged to manage work-life boundaries. They had systems in place for the commute, taxiing children to and from school and childcare, blocking off time for doctor appointments, parent-teacher conferences, healthy meal preps, and mindfulness practices. These well-planned systems were upended by the pandemic and may never be the same.

The good news is, that employees who work remotely or in a hybrid environment indicate that they are more productive (22%), more satisfied (21%), and more highly engaged (51%). This does not mean that they don't face challenges.

⁴ [Women in the labor force: a databook : BLS Reports | U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics](#)

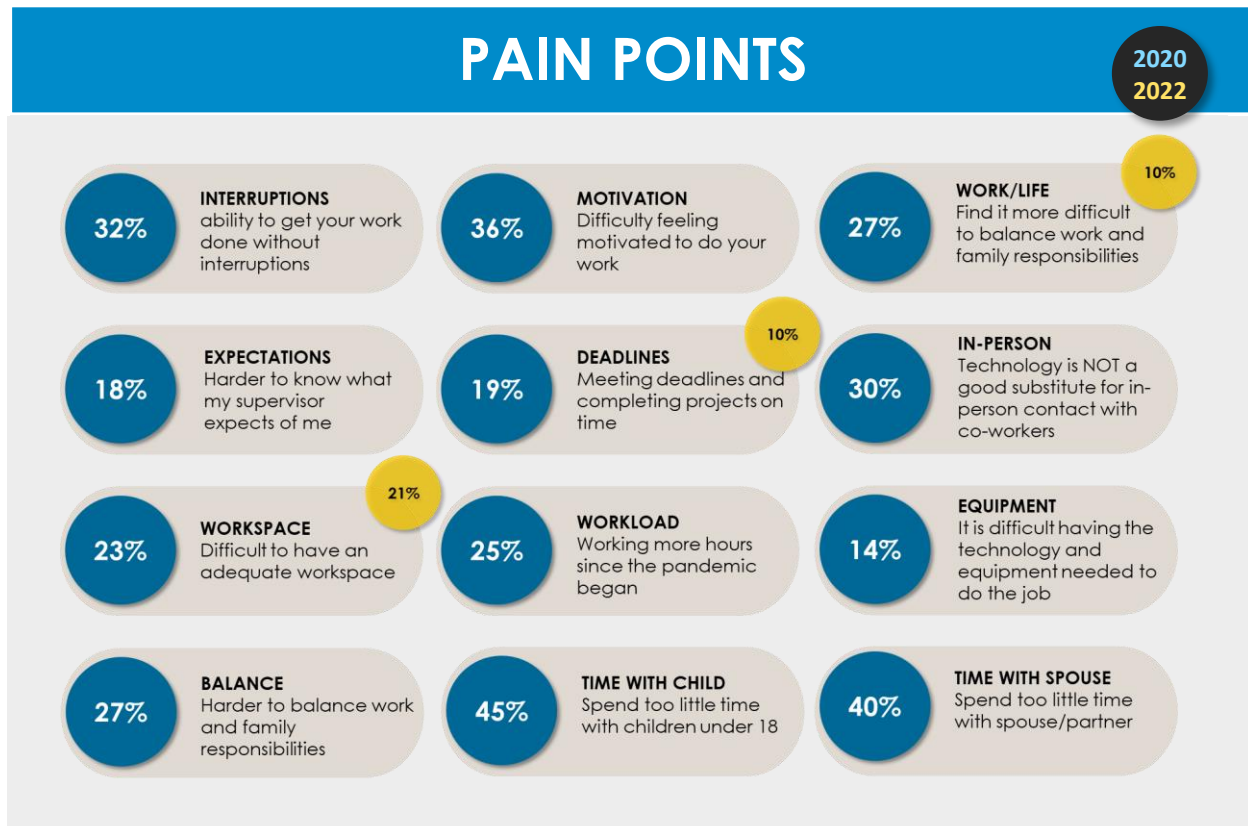


Figure 2: Pew Research Center American Trends Panel (ATP) October 2020 with January 2022 update

Many employees are battling for a home office space (23%), constant interruptions (43%), slow internet connections, isolation, a house in disarray, and a seemingly endless workday. The lines of work and life have been indelibly blurred and the healthy relationship between the two has crumbled. Twenty seven percent find it harder to balance work and family responsibilities, nearly half report spending too little time with their children under 18, and 40% indicate that they spend too little time with their spouse. Some remote workers feel disconnected from their colleagues (30%).

Two years into the pandemic (February 2022), 44% indicate that working from home has made it easier for them to get work done and meet deadlines, and only 10% say this has been more difficult. Unfortunately, personal connections have waned as 3 out of 5 individuals feel less connected to their co-workers while working remotely.⁵

Productivity After the Shift to Remote/Hybrid Work

More people who were accustomed to working from home (WFH) **retained the same productivity** than those who transitioned from in-person work to WFH since the coronavirus outbreak. Twenty seven percent of those who transitioned to WFH since the coronavirus outbreak became **more productive** compared to those who were accustomed to WFH prior to the outbreak (16%). **In Feb 2022**, 20% of

⁵ [COVID-19 Pandemic Continues to Reshape Work in America | Pew Research Center](#)

employees who transitioned to working from home say balancing work and their personal life is about the same, and 16% say it is harder.

Work-Life Balance and Productivity

Employers are often unaware how prevalent caregiving responsibilities are among their employees. In 2020, a study released by AARP & National Alliance for caregiving, reported that an estimated 53 million adults provided care in the previous year and 61% of those were employed.⁶ The coronavirus pandemic has only exacerbated this situation. More recent data shows that 71% of caregivers who are employed full-time face challenges with mental health, and more than half say they have trouble being productive at work. The struggle to balance work and family responsibilities such as caring for children, the sick, parents, and the disabled, can quickly lead to burnout.

27% of people who transitioned to WFH since the coronavirus outbreak became more productive compared to those who had WFH prior to the outbreak (16%).

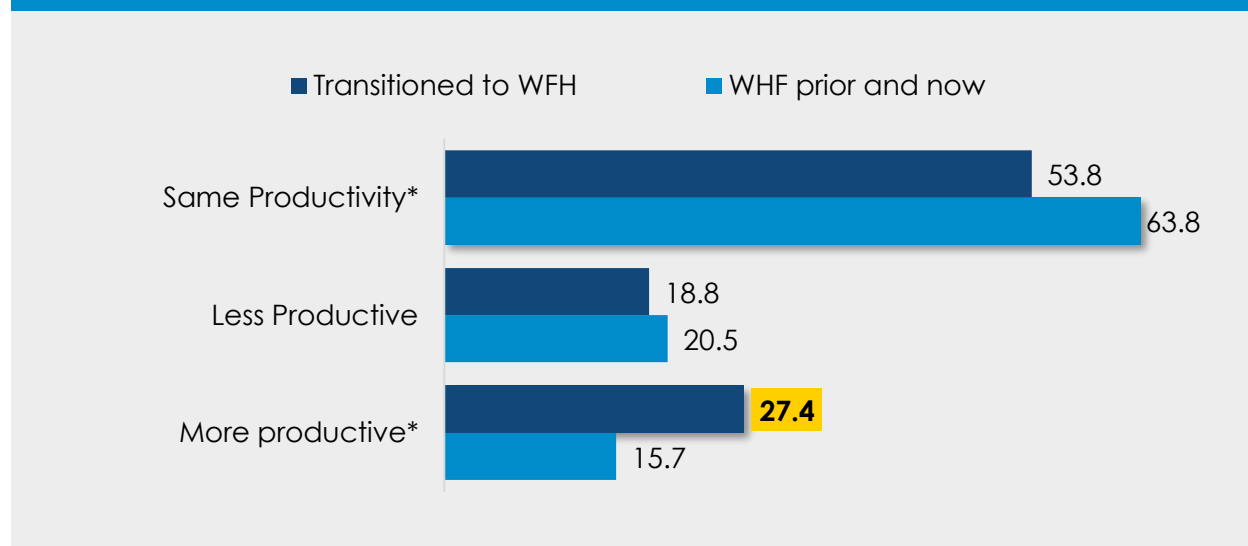


Figure 3: Transition to Remote/Hybrid Work Environment and shifts in productivity

As shown in Figure 5, when work-life balance doesn't change, productivity is less likely to change. If **balance drops** after changing to WFH or hybrid, the employee is more likely to be **less productive**. Employees who are more productive are less likely to have work-life balance.

⁶ [Invisible-Overtime-White-Paper.pdf](#) | rosalynncarter.org

PRODUCTIVITY & WORK LIFE BALANCE

Employees who find it more difficult to balance work and life are between 2 and 3 times more likely to be less productive.

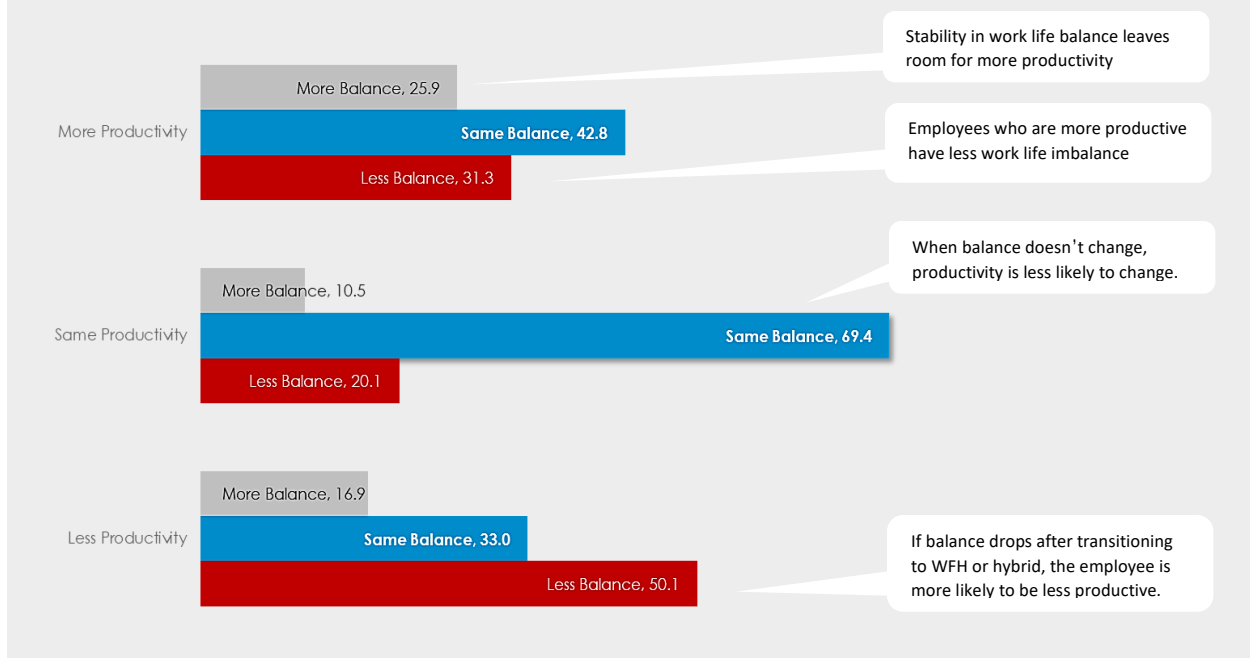


Figure 4: Work-Life Balance and shifts in productivity

Two years into the pandemic, Pew Research's 2022 follow-up survey reports that most (64%) of those who transitioned to a remote or hybrid work arrangement say it's easier now for them to balance work with their personal life.

Work Engagement

The academic narrative on **employee engagement** is rich and diverse with significant contributions ([See Appendix C](#)).

Engagement for the purposes of this study is based upon the Bakker JD-R Theory (Job Demand - Resources Theory) which says that

“Engagement refers to a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor (that is, high levels of energy and mental resilience while working), dedication (referring to a sense of significance, enthusiasm, and challenge), and absorption (being focused and happily engrossed in one’s work).”⁷

Brief Methodology for Engagement Scale

When individual survey items all draw on the same concept, a well-constructed scale will be more reliable than each item. For this study, the ATP survey items relating to work engagement were developed into a scale. The scores were divided into two groups – those who had children and those

⁷ Bakker, A. B., & Demerouti, E. (2008). Towards a model of work engagement. *Career development international*.

who did not. For ease of comparisons, the scales were standardized resulting in a 100-point measure of engagement. ([See Appendix D](#))

Engagement by Work Environment

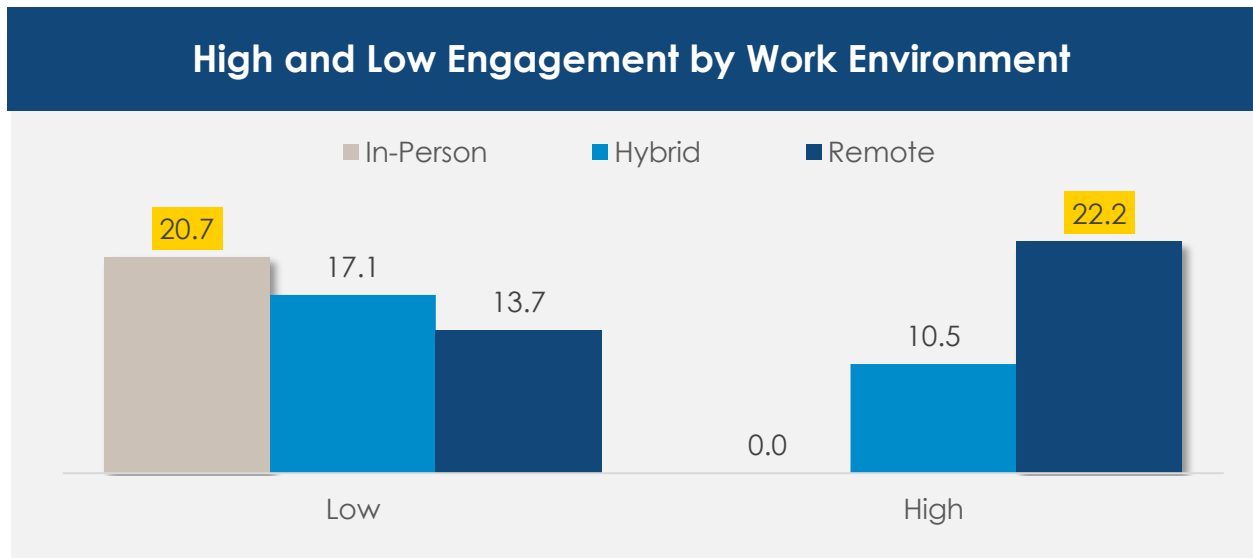


Figure 5: Engagement by Work Environment

More remote employees indicated that they were highly engaged (22%). This is twice the percentage of hybrid workers (11%) who are highly engaged. More in-person employees indicated that they were on the lower end of the scale.

Engagement by Age Group

- Eighteen to 29 years old had the largest proportion of low engagement regardless of whether they had children.
- The group with the largest share of low engagement is age 18 – 29 with children followed by the same age group without children.
- Employees 30 – 64 years old with children is the largest group that is highly engaged.

Engagement by Industry

Industries with above average high engagement are

- Banking, finance, accounting, real estate, and insurance (38%)
- Professional, scientific, and technical services (34%)

Industries with above average low engagement are

- Agriculture, forestry, fishing, and hunting (31%)
- Retail and trade (21%)

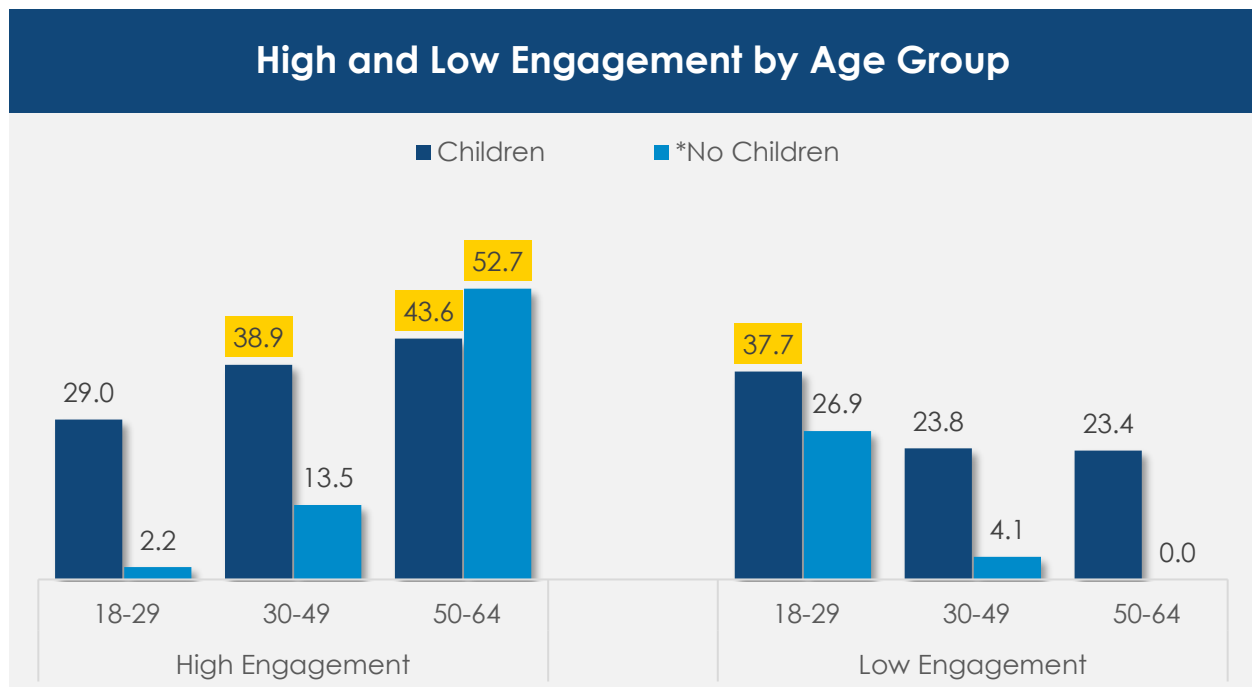


Figure 6: Engagement by Age Group

DISCUSSION AND GUIDANCE FOR EMPLOYERS

To gain optimal performance from their employees, it is critical for organizations to foster work engagement and motivation and to mitigate burnout. There are many intermingling systems that are factors in the complex relationship between work engagement and performance. According to Demerouti et. al. (2010), this relationship can be conceptualized using the dimensions of work engagement, which includes energy, motivation, and resource allocation components. Demerouti et. al. also found that the impact of the three components together is greater than each independently.⁸

SUMMARY OF EMPLOYER DISCUSSIONS

⁸ Demerouti, E., Cropanzano, R., Bakker, A., & Leiter, M. (2010). From thought to action: Employee work engagement and job performance. *Work engagement: A handbook of essential theory and research*, 65(1), 147-163.

Corporate health benefits professionals participated in a 60-minute focus group discussion, and subsequent half-hour interviews were conducted with two additional benefits specialists. Themes that emerged from the discussions are summarized below.

Train Managers and Supervisors

The people closest to the employees must be trained to recognize indicators of burnout and how to point them to resources that may help. This may be more difficult to identify in a hybrid/remote environment, so it is especially important to provide specific training for leadership to watch and act to protect their teams from these struggles.⁹

Employers indicated that managers should have a role in supporting their team for important life skills. Without the proper resources, tools, and training, managers can be reluctant to reach out to support employees. It is incumbent upon employers to establish relationships with professional organizations that offer training in mental health first aid and certification, then to locate volunteers within organizations who want to be more involved with the support employee wellbeing. It is very important to be intentional in the work to eliminate stigma around mental health.

Where possible, look to wellbeing programs with outside vendors who can provide and certify managers on how to talk to their people about mental health, work-life balance, self-care, and other important life skills to avoid/reduce burnout.

In addition, discussants recommended:

- **Training and retraining** all leaders and employees to develop skills on focus, pragmatic optimism, empathy, other skills that help individuals to remain healthy and productive in less-than-ideal circumstances. These **personal resilience skills** are invaluable to both employee and employer when experiencing crises.
- Including mental health assessments in routine **health risk assessments**.
- Focusing on **prevention**.
- Providing **practical resources** that managers can point employees to for help with general well-being (e.g., sleep hygiene, anxiety, physical activity, stress management, caregiving).

Finally, it is always important to follow and evaluate these programs to continuously make improvements and or adjustments according to the needs of the employee population.⁹

Employees Want Flexibility

Most employees have a preference of where and when they want to work. One of the things that employers can do to help mitigate burnout is to give employees as much schedule and location flexibility as possible. According to Pew Research Center, 45% of people surveyed say they left their job because of a lack of flexibility.¹⁰

The organization's ability to be flexible is largely driven by the attitude from top leadership. Managers should be prepared to get creative to find ways to retain and motivate employees to be productive if

⁹ [Evaluating Workplace Health Programs: From Research to Practice | ibiweb.org](https://www.ibiweb.org/evaluating-workplace-health-programs-from-research-to-practice)

¹⁰ The Great Resignation: Why workers say they quit jobs in 2021 | Pew Research Center

they are not given the level of flexibility that they personally desire. The changes resulting from the pandemic have forced a new social contract between employer and employee.

Respect Boundaries

*Regard for healthy boundaries should be baked into the culture. Employees need to be able to disconnect outside of working hours **guilt-free**. Encourage “no-work” vacation days.⁹*

Employers noted that their experience bore out that regimented control does not work; in fact, it is counterproductive. It may be better to establish norms and for **managers to model healthy work-life balance behaviors**.

One employer spoke of past experiences with “no-meeting Fridays,” no emails after 6pm, but that caused employees to feel pressured into early morning emails or too many meetings during the week. So, the efforts were discontinued. Again, managers must get **creative** and have **awareness** as to their teams’ efforts. Recognize, reward, compensate them, and ensure time off is taken. Positive communication and modeling healthy behaviors is key.

Be Aware Of Workloads

Managers should always be aware of workloads, especially if staffing has been reduced. Again, if there are signs of burnout, be proactive before the employee experiences negative health consequences.¹⁰

One employer cautioned that workload capacity is relative and can be linked to engagement and perception of overload. Another stated that having too much work was the culture of the organization and doing more with less resources is the norm. However, another employer commented that even the ‘rockstars’ get burned out.

One example of ways to stay on top of employees’ workloads is artificial intelligence to detect employee productivity and identify burnout and provide the help employees needs before it starts to affect their health. It is important to know your employees and how they work. Again, leadership must be trained to spot potential issues and point the employee to the appropriate resources when necessary.

A Caution on Disincentivizing Employee Loyalty

In many cases, employees who stay with the company longer, are paid less than new employees. Optimize your compensation strategy by keeping salaries competitive.¹¹

Some of the employers spoke of recalibrating pay across the board. Other employers spoke of limitations to salary increases. However, employers suggested creative ways to offset pay deficits by:

- Offering retention bonuses to equalize sign-on bonuses
- Ensure appreciation is shown all round
- Increasing net income without changing hourly rate with
 - Healthcare and insurance subsidies
 - Food allotments
 - Spot bonuses

¹¹ [Addressing Burnout - HRO Today](#)

APPENDICES

Appendix A: ATP Survey Demographics

Table 1: Weighted Demographics

		non-Hispanic			Hispanic	Other
		White	Black	Asian		
Metro Indicator	Metropolitan	61.5	11.8	6.7	17.4	2.6
	Non-metropolitan	78.1	8.3	2	8.2	3.4
Region	Northeast	71.8	8.4	7.2	10	2.6
	Midwest	75.6	9.5	5.2	7.3	2.5
	South	56.1	18.4	3.6	18.9	3
	West	58.7	4.4	10	24.5	2.5
Organization Type	Private	64.6	10.1	6.1	16.4	2.8
	Non-Profit	69.9	12.9	5.7	8.9	2.5
	Government	61.3	13.7	6.9	16.2	2
Age category	18-29	59	8.9	6.9	22	3.2
	30-49	59	12.9	7.6	17.3	3.2
	50-64	71	11.7	3.9	11.8	1.6
	65+	82.2	8.2	2	5.6	2
Gender	A man	63.9	8.9	7.7	16.8	2.8
	A woman	63.2	14.2	4.5	15.5	2.6
	In some other way	75.9	10.1	0	11.7	2.4
	Refused	31.6	0	0	65	3.4
Education level	Less than high school	32.4	14.6	0	50	3.1
	High school graduate	60.8	12.2	2.1	22.1	2.8
	Some college, no degree	64.1	14.7	3.7	14.4	3.1
	Associate's degree	64.6	10.7	5.5	17	2.3
	College grad/some postgrad	69.5	9.3	9	9.5	2.7
	Postgraduate	67.9	8.1	13.4	8.4	2.2
Marital status	Married/Living with Partner	66.8	8.2	6.7	15.9	2.5
	Divorced/Separated/Widowed	60.9	20.3	2.1	13.3	3.5
	Never Married	56.2	15.6	6.8	18.5	2.9
Income tier 3-way	Lower income	44.6	16.9	5	32.1	1.5
	Middle income	66.1	11.5	5.4	13.3	3.8
	Upper income	76.8	6.2	8	7.1	1.9

Appendix B: Work Environment Demographics

Table 2: Work Environment by Socio-Demographics

SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC		WORK ENVIRONMENT (%)		
		In-person	Remote	Hybrid
*Metro Indicator	Metropolitan	15.8	72.8	11.5
	Non-metropolitan	30.7	53.4	15.9
*Region	Northeast	12.5	77.1	10.3
	Midwest	20.5	67.3	12.2
	South	19.2	66.3	14.4
	West	15.0	75.8	9.2
*Org Type	Private	17.0	73.9	9.1
	Non-Profit	14.7	68.4	16.9
	Government	21.9	59.1	19.0
Age	18-29	21.0	21.5	18.2
	30-49	50.5	52.7	55.3
	50-64	28.5	25.8	26.5
*Gender	Male	13.8	74.0	12.2
	Female	20.0	68.4	11.5
*Education level	Some high school or less	35.0	30.1	34.9
	High school grad	21.9	69.5	8.6
	Some college	19.0	67.7	13.3
	Associate's	21.1	67.2	11.8
	College grad	15.5	73.5	11.0
	Postgraduate	13.2	75.2	11.6
*Marital Status	Married	15.6	73.7	10.8
	Living with a partner	14.1	71.4	14.5
	Divorced	17.6	67.2	15.2
	Separated	31.7	50.4	17.9
	Widowed	27.1	58.3	14.7
	Never been married	19.1	70.0	11.0
*Income	Lower income	20.6	66.1	13.4
	Middle income	20.3	67.2	12.6
	Upper income	10.9	79.0	10.0

Appendix C: Literature clearly defining work engagement

References for research on work engagement

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Appendix D: Brief Methodology for Engagement Scale

The American Trends Panel surveyed 10,332 participants. The scale for Work Engagement consisted of 10 items that were recoded from responses from the ATP agree or. All items are measured the same way, and all 10 measure a single underlying concept (Cronbach's Alpha = .71, average interitem covariance = .04) NOTE: A Cronbach's Alpha of .81 was attained by using 19 items, however for the sake of this investigation, we utilized the more parsimonious scale.

Table 3: Survey alignment with Engagement

	Survey Question	Possible Responses (Indicators in bold)
Timeliness	Since the beginning of the coronavirus outbreak, how easy or difficult has each of the following been for you when working from home? Meeting deadlines and completing projects on time	Very easy Somewhat easy Somewhat difficult Very difficult
Motivation	Since the beginning of the coronavirus outbreak, how easy or difficult has each of the following been for you when working from home? Feeling motivated to do your work	Very easy Somewhat easy Somewhat difficult Very difficult
Satisfaction	Compared with before the coronavirus outbreak, are you	More satisfied with your job Less satisfied with your job About the same
Optimism	How often, if ever, do you feel optimistic about your life	All or most of the time Sometimes Hardly ever Never
Productivity	Compared with before the coronavirus outbreak, are you	More productive at work Less productive at work About the same
Engrossed	Since the beginning of the coronavirus outbreak, have you personally experienced the following because you were balancing work and parenting responsibilities? Felt like you couldn't give 100% at work	Yes, have experienced this No, have not experienced this
Preference	Is each of the following a reason why you are currently working from home all or most of the time? Prefer working from home	Major reason Minor reason Not a reason
Stress and Anxiety	How often, if ever, do you feel stressed or anxious	All or most of the time Sometimes Hardly ever Never
Minimized Hours	Since the beginning of the coronavirus outbreak, have you personally experienced the following because you were balancing work and parenting responsibilities? Needed to reduce your work hours	Yes, have experienced this No, have not experienced this
Minimized Workload	Since the beginning of the coronavirus outbreak, have you personally experienced the following because you were balancing work and parenting responsibilities? Turned down an important assignment at work	Yes, have experienced this No, have not experienced this

Appendix E: Engagement by Industry

Engagement by Industry

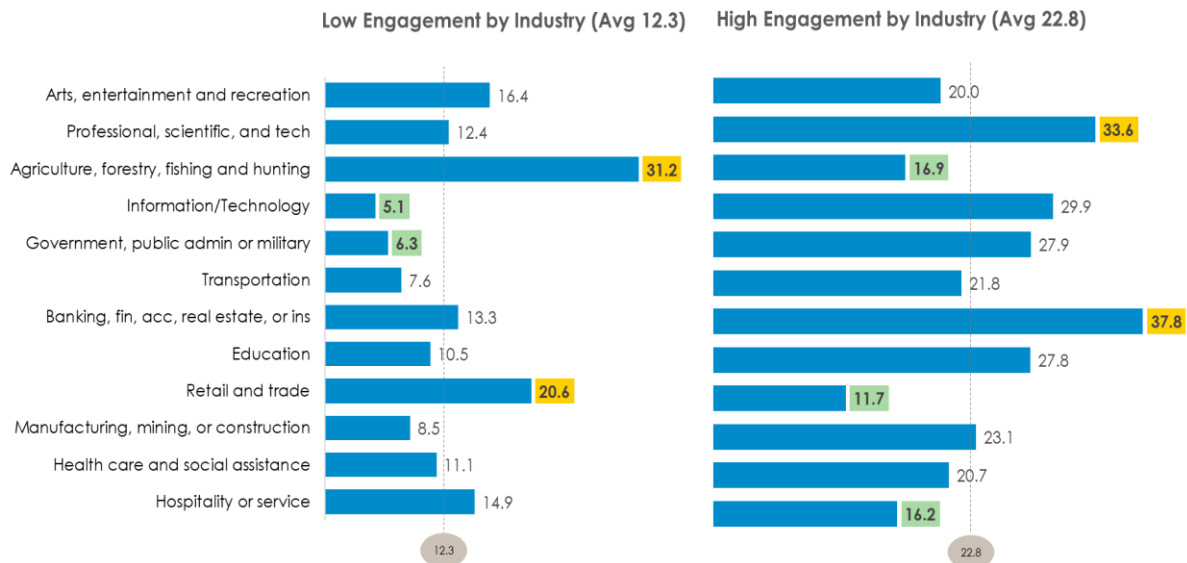


Figure 7: Low and High engagement by industry