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the commitment and connection that they feel to their work.

Oct. 19, 2022



A new survey reveals that nearly a third of workers report decreased engagement—the commitment and connection that they feel to their work.

Could the shift to remote work spurred by the pandemic be at fault? The Conference Board survey says no. Work location—whether on-site, remote, or a hybrid blend of the two—has no impact on self-reported engagement levels. But some people do feel decreased engagement more than others: Women, Millennials, and individual

contributors report lower engagement than men, older generations, and executives.

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workers (56 percent) and remote workers (50 percent) more than those in the physical workplace (44 percent), perhaps a reminder to leaders to be more intentional and inclusive for those who are remote at least some of the time.

The latest workforce survey from The Conference Board polled more than 1,600 individuals—predominantly office workers—from September 1-8. Respondents weighed in on workplace culture, work location, compensation, and benefits.

Key findings include:

**Many employees are less committed, but they're working hard anyway.**

*How do you feel now about your engagement and level of effort compared to how you felt 6 months ago?*

- 30 percent say their level of engagement at work—the commitment and connection that employees feel to their work—is lower than six months ago.
- Lower engagement isn't necessarily affecting effort: Only 18 percent say their level of effort has decreased in the last six months. 50 percent say it's the same; 31 percent say it's increased.
- More women, Millennials, and individual contributors report lower engagement and effort than their counterparts.

**Engagement levels decreased for all workers regardless of work location/schedule.**

*How do you feel now about your engagement compared to how you felt 6 months ago?*

- Engagement decreased for 30 percent of fully remote workers, 31 percent of workers with a hybrid work location, and 30 percent for fully in-office workers.

## Self-reported mental health levels and sense of belonging are both decreasing.

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### More workers *want* to quit...

*How do you feel now about your intent to stay compared to how you felt 6 months ago?*

- 37 percent say their intent to stay has decreased in the last six months.
- More women and individual contributors say their intent to stay has decreased than their counterparts.
- Decreases in intent to stay were similar among generations.

### ...but few have firm plans to leave any time soon.

*Have you voluntarily left your organization for another job since the pandemic began?*

- Only 12 percent are actively planning to leave in the next six months.

### A looming recession has some workers thinking twice before quitting.

*Given the economic slowdown, are you more or less likely to leave your current organization in the next six months?*

- 29 percent say the economic slowdown makes them less likely to leave their job.

“While these results show that a likely recession may slow *some* of the high turnover we’ve been seeing, engagement is eroding for many of those who remain,” said Rebecca Ray, PhD, Executive Vice President of Human Capital at The Conference Board. “For businesses to truly thrive, they should focus on improving employee engagement, no matter the employee’s work location or schedule. Especially during challenging times, previous research from The Conference Board has shown that it is important for leaders to reconnect all workers to the mission and purpose of the organization, as well as to lead with compassion. For workers who are remote or hybrid, this may mean being more intentional about making time for connection.”

**A majority of workers now work a hybrid schedule—some days in the office, some**

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- More women work remotely than men (33 percent vs. 27 percent).

**Few businesses are requiring staff to return to the office full time.**

*How has your organization addressed the shift to remote work and the return to the workplace?*

- Only 6 percent say their companies required all employees to return to the workplace full-time.
- 35 percent say their companies made working remotely full-time an option.
- 32 percent of workers surveyed say their companies allow flexible work hours.

**Flexibility is one of the most important factors for workers, especially women.**

*Beyond a competitive salary, which of these are most important to you now?*

- 70 percent say options for workplace flexibility (location, hours) are among the most important job factors aside from salary—the top response.
- 65 percent say company contribution to a retirement plan and 61 percent say generous paid time off are among the most important factors.
- More women than men say workplace flexibility is among the most important things (78 percent vs. 61 percent).
- The desire for workplace flexibility was similar among generations.

**Workers will quit for a more flexible job.**

*If you left your organization, or intend to leave in the next 6 months, what most influenced/influences your decision?*

- 16 percent of workers left their job or intend to leave for the ability to work from anywhere.

- More women than men say they left their job or intend to leave for the ability to

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- 19 percent say they left or intend to leave because they were disappointed with their company—more than the 16 percent who left for the ability to work from anywhere.
- 11 percent of workers say they left their job or intend to leave because of their supervisor/manager.

**Disappointment with their company and a desire to connect to mission and purpose impacted self-reported levels of employee engagement.**

*How do you feel now about your engagement compared to how you felt 6 months ago? If you left your organization, or intend to leave in the next 6 months, what most influenced/influences your decision?*

- Among those who report decreasing engagement levels, 36 percent say they left or intend to leave because they are disappointed with their company.
- Among those who report decreasing engagement, 20 percent say they left or intend to leave because of a stronger connection to the mission and purpose of new organization.

**Having caring, empathetic leaders has grown in importance, especially for women and Millennials.**

*How have your priorities changed compared to before the pandemic?*

- 52 percent of workers say having a caring, empathetic leader is more important now than before the pandemic.
- More women than men say having a caring, empathetic leader is more important now than before the pandemic (55 percent vs. 49 percent)
- More Millennials than Baby Boomers say having a caring, empathetic leader is more important now (60 percent vs. 50 percent).

- Having a caring, empathetic leader increased in importance to hybrid workers (56

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- More women than men think pay is not the most important factor (55 percent vs. 43 percent).
- But fewer individual contributors and Millennials than their counterparts believe that to be true.

### **Pay does still matter, though.**

*If you left your organization, or intend to leave in the next 6 months, what most influenced/influences your decision?*

- 25 percent say they left their job or intend to leave for better pay—the top response.

“Many workers have reevaluated their priorities since the beginning of 2020 at the outset of COVID,” says Robin Erickson, PhD, Vice President of Human Capital at The Conference Board. “Employees are not only demanding to retain the flexibility they gained from being required to work remotely, but they expect genuine and transparent communications to continue from their leaders as well. That’s not to say that pay no longer matters—it’s just not the only thing that matters, or even the most important thing. Now, when looking for a job, workers are weighing a variety of factors unique to them and their needs.”

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