Deskless
Not Voiceless

workplace

from ∞ Meta

Contents

Foreword

Frontline workers are at the heart of their organizations.

These are the 80% of employees that don't work behind a desk.[1] They deliver critical services and represent the business to customers and partners.

This is often at the expense of their own mental and physical wellbeing; during the pandemic, frontline workers tended to be the most exposed to the virus – and the least protected and connected to their organizations.

Without engaged, committed frontline staff, businesses will struggle to function – as leaders know all too well. However, frontline workers are at great risk of disconnection from their leaders and the rest of their organization, due to physical distance, as well as processes and technologies that have historically prioritized office workers.

Since 2019, Workplace has surveyed frontline workers about their experiences, as well as their line managers and C-suite leaders, to compare HQ's perceptions of the frontline to the reality on the ground.

According to our **Deskless Not Voiceless report**, in 2019, just 14% of frontline workers felt connected to their business headquarters – and only 3% to the C-suite.[2] And worryingly, many frontline workers seem just as disconnected from business leaders today.
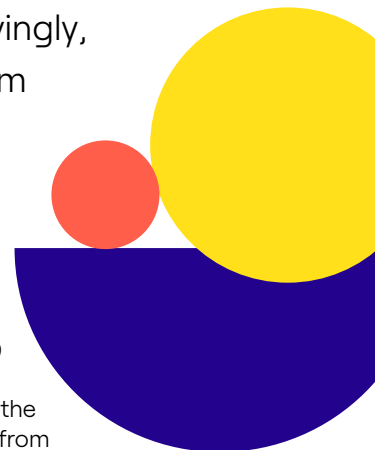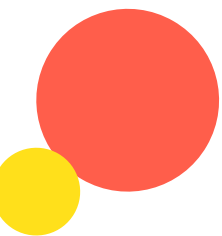
The issue is a fundamental bias throughout the world of work. Business leaders tend to relate employee experience exclusively to the lives of office workers. But while frontline workers typically don't have a desk, their experiences are just as crucial to how well the organization runs.

The frontline has changed dramatically over this tumultuous period, and that change is here to stay.

Now, we are establishing the annual **Deskless Not Voiceless: Frontline Barometer** to track four key pillars of frontline life:

1. **Fulfillment and empowerment:** How happy frontline workers are within their current role: whether their individual contribution supports the organization's purpose and the extent to which they have autonomy to make decisions and recommend new ideas or ways of working.

2. **Trust in leadership:** The degree to which frontline workers feel their leadership teams listen to and respect them and the trust the frontline has in leadership in return.

3. **Learning and growth:** The training and career development opportunities provided to frontline workers and whether the education and skills provided by employers within the job are relevant and sufficient.

4. **Wellbeing and safety:** A holistic view of frontline employees' wellbeing, including how employers consider and support their physical and mental health.

It's clear that frontline workers matter to their leaders, especially after the experiences of the pandemic; this year, according to the C-suite, the frontline is a strategic priority at every organization surveyed (100%). Compared to our survey of HQ managers in 2019[3], this is 20 percentage points higher.

But there are warning signs that a dissatisfied workforce is more than ready to vote with its feet. Most workers are planning to leave for a better paid role, either next year or beyond, while 45% are considering leaving the frontline altogether.

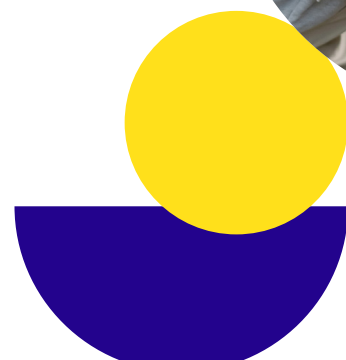And the divide between the frontline and headquarters is still causing tension.

The Great Frontline Resignation is a very real threat. It's not enough to pay lip service to these employees' experiences.

Without truly understanding the day-to-day reality, leaders will struggle to create an inclusive culture, ensure frontline workers are represented and crucially foster trust and loyalty – putting organizations at risk.

There are ways to change. Read on to find out more.

Christine Trodella,
Director, Workplace from Meta

Key Findings

The impact of the pandemic

The pandemic was a watershed moment for everyone. For businesses, it meant prioritizing and valuing frontline workers more than ever before.

While only 27% of C-suite think frontline workers have always been a big priority, today every one of the C-suite executives surveyed says frontline workers are a strategic priority for their business for the year ahead.

And positively, frontline workers have felt their rising profile: since the pandemic, 29% report feeling as important to the organization as their HQ colleagues, while 55% report have always felt so. Compare that to just two years ago – with our 2019 survey[4] – when only 48% of frontline employees believed their head office understood their role and value.

[4] Deskless Not Voiceless: Communication Works, Workplace from Facebook, 2019
2019 Deskless not Voiceless Research Methodology
This survey comprised 2,000 frontline managers and 2,000 HQ managers across the UK and US and was conducted by Censuswide and commissioned by Workplace from Facebook. The survey was conducted during April and May 2019.

The frontline employee experience

Despite frontline workers reporting relatively high levels of satisfaction and being onboard with their companies' vision, there are rumbling concerns across the spectrum of employee experience:

Fulfillment and empowerment:
Only 57% of frontline workers have the autonomy to share ideas and new ways of working.

Trust in leadership:
75% of frontline workers don't completely trust their organization to be transparent in their communication around company news and updates.

Learning and growth:
43% of frontline workers say they have reached the limit of what they can learn at their organization.

Wellbeing and safety:
Over the last 12 months, 70% of frontline workers have either suffered from burnout or felt at risk of burning out.

And overall, we're seeing a lingering gap between the frontline and head office, with just 55% of workers feeling connected to HQ.
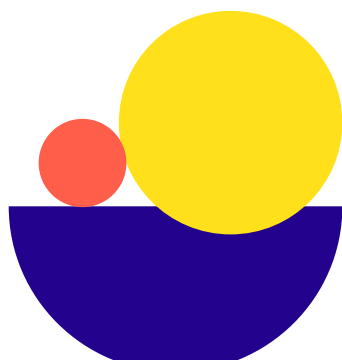
The Great Frontline Resignation

These factors have left employees preparing to vote with their feet. Amidst global worker shortages, almost half of frontline workers plan on leaving the frontline altogether (45%) – with 57% ready to move to another role with a better salary.

But while leaders are anticipating the Great Frontline Resignation, few plan to increase wages (25%) or investment in learning and development (26%) – and may be missing out on opportunities to retain staff as a result.

Technology for better experiences

There is rising awareness of how workplace technology can help transform frontline worker experiences, just as it influences desk-based roles. Almost all of the leaders surveyed plan to prioritize frontline tech in the way they have historically prioritized office and desk-based technology (94%).

Three quarters of frontline workers (77%) believe that good communications technology should be treated as standard for their role. In fact, access to better tools and technology is a reason that 52% of employees would move to another position – making technology a competitive differentiator.
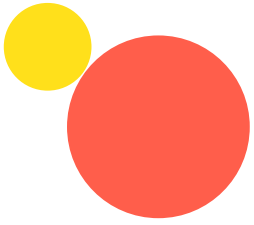
The Great Frontline Resignation

Preparedness to leave an organization – or an entire profession – is one of the most extreme indicators of an employee's experience at work. And there are alarming signs that organizations around the world will soon be facing a huge loss of staff, which will be especially acute on the frontline.

The EU reports that job vacancy rates are escalating following the pandemic, particularly in areas like construction and retail.[5] In the US, the turnover rate in hospitality reached 130.7% in 2020[6], while in the UK, 8.2% of care worker roles were vacant in 2021.[7]
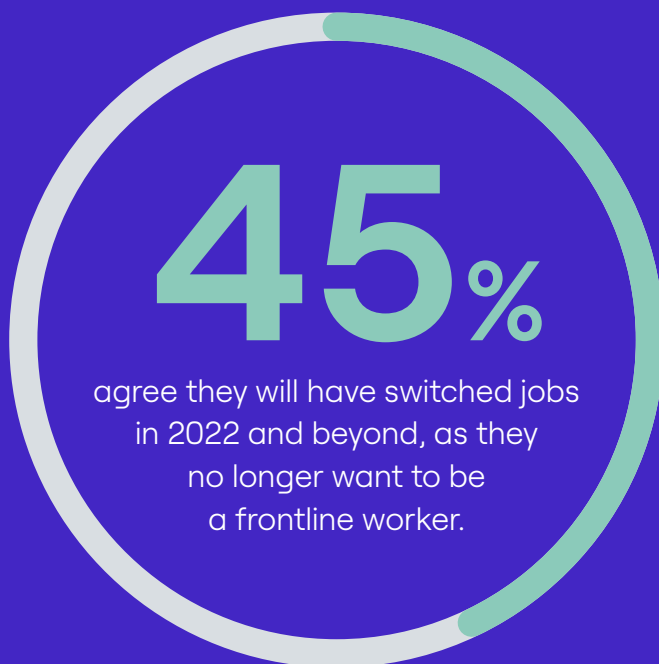
According to the frontline workers surveyed, these shortages are only going to get worse. Of the employees planning to stay on the frontline, 57% are planning to move to a better paid role in 2022 and beyond.

Even more worryingly, nearly half (45%) of those surveyed plan to change careers entirely, because they no longer want to be a frontline employee. Clearly, challenges with the frontline experience are leaving many workers ready to change their career path entirely.
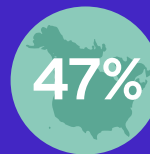
[5] The pandemic aggravated labour shortages in some sectors; the problem is now emerging in others, European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, July 2021
[6] Job Openings and Labor Turnover August 2021, Bureau of Labor Statistics, October 2021
[7] The state of the adult social care sector and workforce in England, Skills for Care, reported in BBC, October 2021
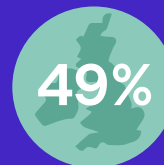
45%

agree they will have switched jobs in 2022 and beyond, as they no longer want to be a frontline worker.

USA and Canada 47%

UK 49%

France 40%

Brazil 45%

Mexico 38%

Australia 46%

USA and Canada 59%

UK 53%

France 49%

Brazil 62%

Mexico 65%

Australia 55%

57%

agree that in 2022 and beyond, they will have moved to another frontline role for a better salary.
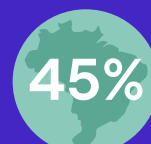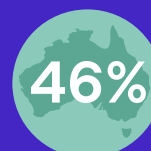
The engagement issue

Leaders appear to be aware of the escalating Great Frontline Resignation, but are reluctant to act. Two thirds (68%) are either experiencing high rates of frontline worker attrition or are expecting them soon – and yet just 25% of C-suite executives plan to increase staff wages. As we'll see, very few leaders have plans to invest in workers with more funds for learning and development (26%), with one in five organizations worryingly set to decrease funding for training over the next year.

Creating a real dialogue with frontline workers to understand their experiences will be key. Back in 2019, 62% of managers worried that frontline workers would quit if they were not listened to within the workplace. Two years on, workers really are preparing to leave the business as their needs have not been met.
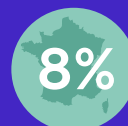
14%

of the C-suite are currently experiencing high rates of frontline worker attrition

USA and Canada
16%

UK
12%

France
8%

Brazil
17%

Mexico
16%

Australia
13%

USA and Canada
45%

UK
57%

France
60%

Mexico
55%

Brazil
52%

Australia
54%

54%

are expecting high attrition rates soon.

38% of leaders agree there is a shortage of frontline workers in their industry right now
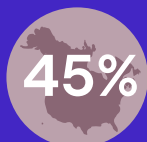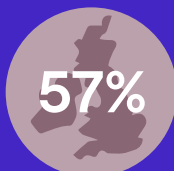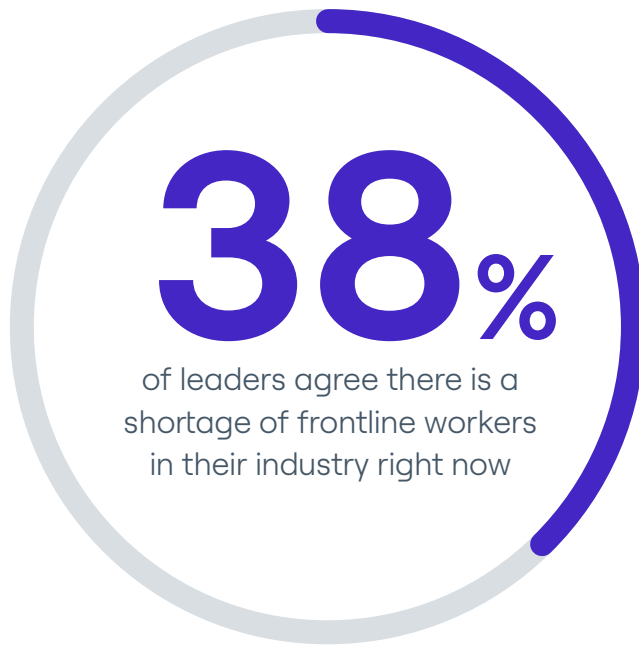
while

42% disagree.
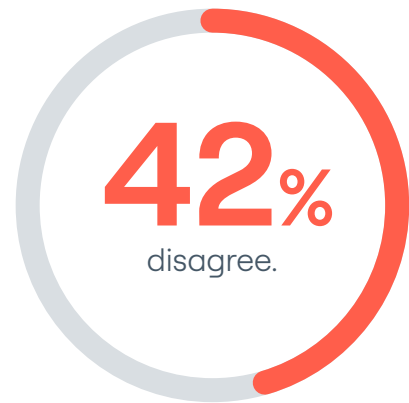
Of the leaders who say there's a frontline worker shortage,

72%	say this is due to geopolitical and visa issues.
72%	say this is because there is a lack of jobs with reasonable shifts.
71%	say this is due to a lack of jobs with tools to make their day-to-day easier.
69%	say this is due to a lack of jobs with good benefits.
64%	say this is due to a lack of jobs with good pay.
62%	say this is because there are better opportunities in non-frontline roles.
48%	say this is because they no longer want to work in frontline roles.

Poor frontline benefits

In part, the Great Frontline Resignation appears to be prompted by the poorer conditions and progression available to frontline workers compared to those in other jobs. Indeed, this is a fear for six in ten of the leaders we surveyed, who link the frontline worker shortage to better pay (64%), benefits (69%) and opportunities (62%) in non-frontline roles.

Both employees and C-suite executives acknowledge a disparity between the benefits available to those on the frontline and those at company HQ.

Nearly half of frontline workers believe their HQ colleagues get better benefits than them – and only 41% of leaders believe frontline workers are happy with their perks and benefits.

41% are not happy with the perks and benefits (like healthcare, travel stipend, etc.) they currently get at work.

48% believe that HQ colleagues get better perks and benefits.

Frontline workers would like to receive the following benefits and perks in addition to what they already have:
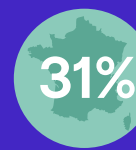
42% more training and education.

USA and Canada
38%

UK
39%

France
31%

Brazil
50%

Mexico
51%

Australia
43%

USA and Canada
46%

UK
38%

France
24%

Brazil
43%

Mexico
34%

Australia
45%

39% healthcare benefits, or more healthcare benefits.

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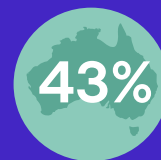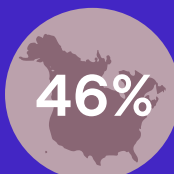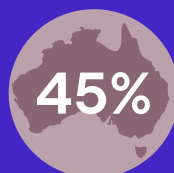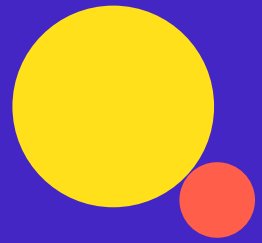
Workplace has truly been one of the best tools that we've used as an organization to help with connection, collaboration and building a community of healthcare leaders. We use Workplace as a way to highlight the moments that matter along the journey of each of our team members, and bring them to light so everyone can see our teams' successes. It's brought everyone in the company together – from the frontline to the C-suite -- and allows us to align on the mission and values of our organization, no matter where we are working from."

VP of HR, Royal Ambulance
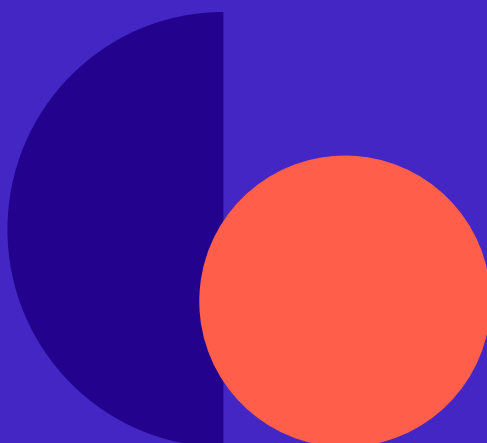
Lessons from the frontline:
The Great Frontline Resignation demands action

C-suite leaders acknowledge there are shortcomings in frontline roles – and right now, better opportunities available elsewhere. Attrition has been a consistent concern for leaders, and yet little has changed.

There are clear signs of the need for action to improve employees' experiences and offer comparable opportunities with HQ roles. Focusing on frontline workers' job fulfillment, trust in leadership, growth prospects and overall wellbeing – the four pillars explored in this report – will help leaders deliver meaningful improvements.

Increasing salaries may become necessary to avoid worker shortages and hefty recruitment and training fees. Otherwise, in the next year or so, organizations dependent on frontline workers could be contending with a staffing crisis.
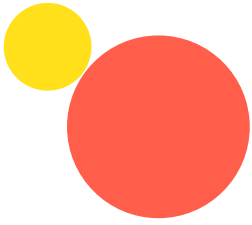
1: Fulfillment and empowerment

Feeling fulfilled is a core part of the employee experience. Meaningful work is now more important for job satisfaction than ever before,[8] and that depends on a sense of connection to the firm's overall purpose. This can be especially important in the highly pressurized roles common on the frontline.

Positively, frontline employees overwhelmingly support their organization's mission and recognize their own contribution to it. Three quarters (76%) of workers now understand how their role supports the organization's overall mission. In 2020, 69% of the frontline managers we surveyed said there was a clear and shared mission and purpose across the company.[9]

76% understand how their role supports the organization's overall mission.

75% understand their organization's mission.

74% completely support their organization in its mission.

[8] Help your employees find purpose—or watch them leave, McKinsey, 2021
[9] Deskless Not Voiceless 2020 Global Frontline Research Report, Workplace from Facebook, 2020
2020 Deskless not Voiceless Research Methodology
This survey comprises 4,500 frontline managers and 4,500 head office leaders across eight countries (UK, US, France, Norway, Brazil, Mexico, Australia and Japan) and was conducted by Coleman Parkes and commissioned by Workplace from Facebook. The research was carried out in two waves. The first wave in February 2020, and again in August 2020 to better understand the reality for business leaders in frontline organizations today.
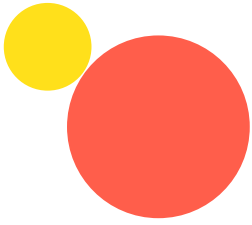
The importance of autonomy

However, organizations are less successful when it comes to empowering workers with the autonomy to make decisions or share suggestions. Only around half of the frontline workers surveyed feel able to share ideas and new ways of working (57%).

Line managers appear to be more encouraging to employees than the organization at large, which may explain why only 55% of frontline workers feel connected to their company headquarters. Although, in our 2019 survey of frontline workers, only 14% said they felt connected to their business HQ[10]. There's still a long way to go to bridge the gap between head office and the frontline.

62% say their line manager encourages them to exercise full control over decisions in their role.

57% say they have autonomy in their role: they're empowered to suggest new ideas or launch new processes.

67% of the C-suite say their organization grants frontline workers autonomy to manage their day-to-day work.

58% say they've always felt valued and recognized by their line manager.

58% say they've always felt valued and recognized by the organization they work for.

55%

say they feel connected to their organization's HQ.

USA and Canada
46%

UK
54%

France
48%

Brazil
63%

Mexico
62%

Australia
61%

Appreciation post-pandemic

Appreciation of frontline workers – in the wider organization and the public at large – is at an all-time high. The pandemic has played a pivotal role, as many workers recognize; in fact, a quarter of frontline workers say they have only started to feel valued by their organization and line manager since the pandemic hit.

51% of frontline workers say that hasn't been the case.

27% of frontline workers say they've only started to feel valued and recognized by the organization they work for since the pandemic hit.

54%

say that hasn't been the case.

26%

say they've only started to feel valued and recognized by their line manager since the pandemic hit.
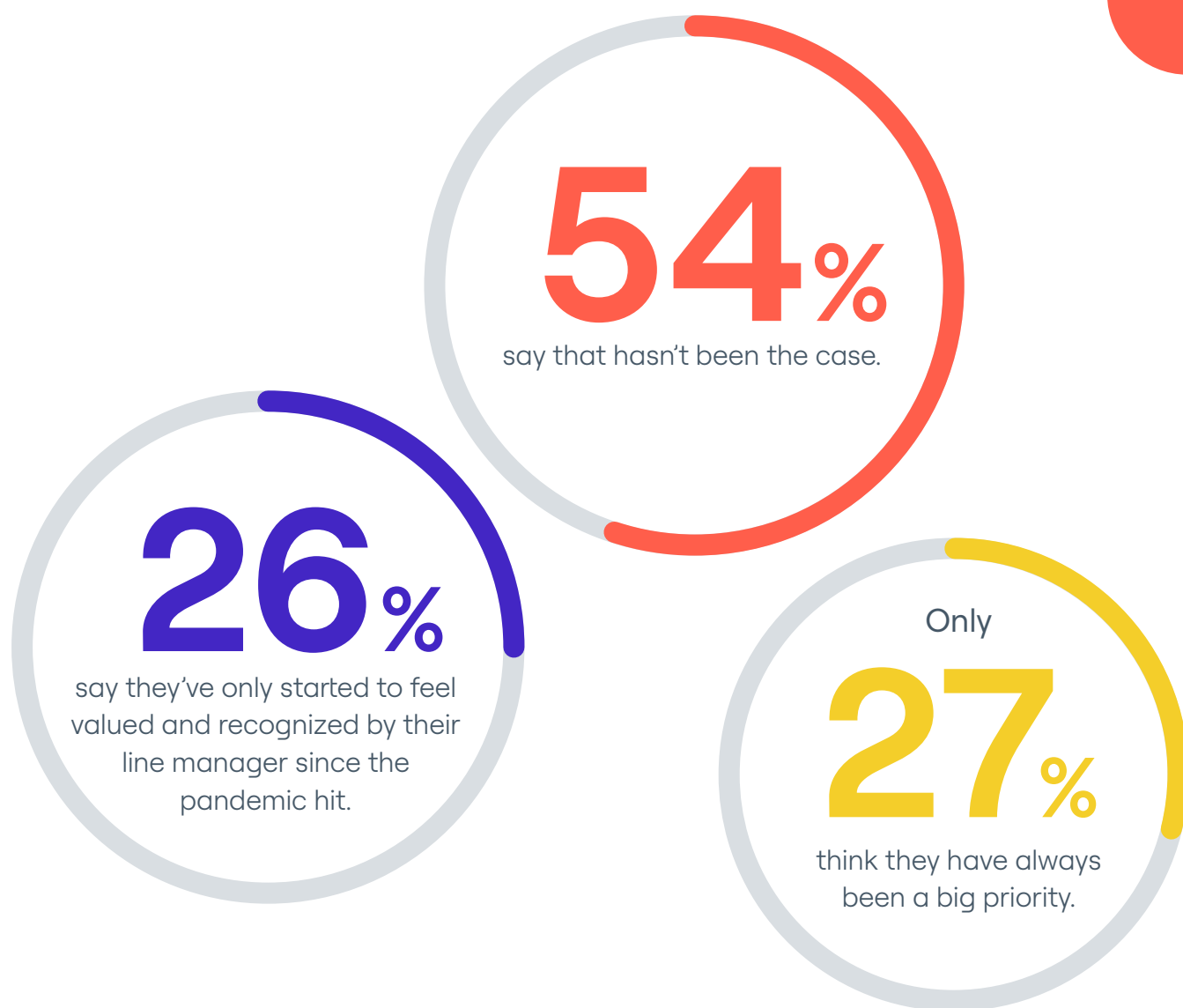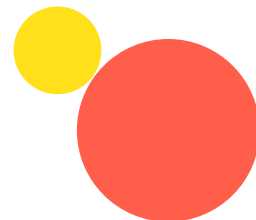
Only

27%

think they have always been a big priority.

Job satisfaction amongst frontline workers has actually risen over the course of the pandemic, with 74% currently satisfied in their role compared to 47% who say they are satisfied in the 12 months prior.

However, job satisfaction is highly changeable – and as we've seen, doesn't translate directly into long-term loyalty and retention. Despite frontline workers claiming to be content in their current role, 57% are still preparing to leave their organization, so clearly there's much more to be done on the side of businesses.

74%

of frontline workers say they are satisfied in their job currently, compared to 47% in the last 12 months.
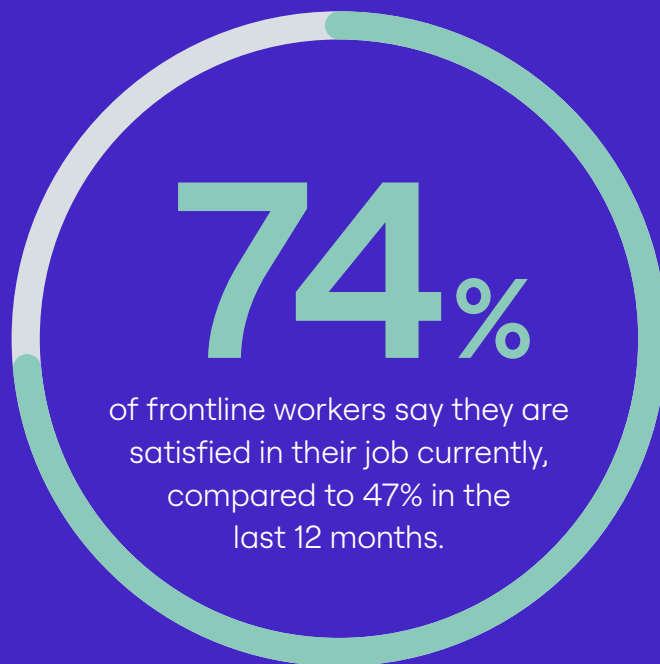
In the last 12 months:

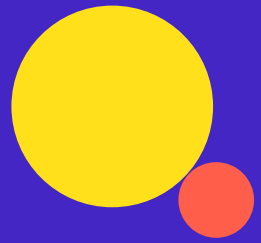|		
USA and Canada		**73%** are satisfied, up from **46%**
UK		**71%** are satisfied, up from **46%**
France		**73%** are satisfied, up from **49%**
Brazil		**77%** are satisfied, up from **47%**
Mexico		**82%** are satisfied, up from **52%**
Australia		**72%** are satisfied, up from **47%**

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As a people and purpose-driven organization, communicating openly and transparently with colleagues is paramount. Our frontline teams – whether on the ground or in the skies – are constantly on the move; Workplace allows them to remain connected to Virgin Atlantic, wherever they are in the world and whenever suits them. We use it as an internal news channel, where everyone comes together to share information, ideas and values in a uniquely Virgin way. Our differentiator is our people and vital human connection, and Workplace helps us make that a reality."

CEO, Virgin Atlantic
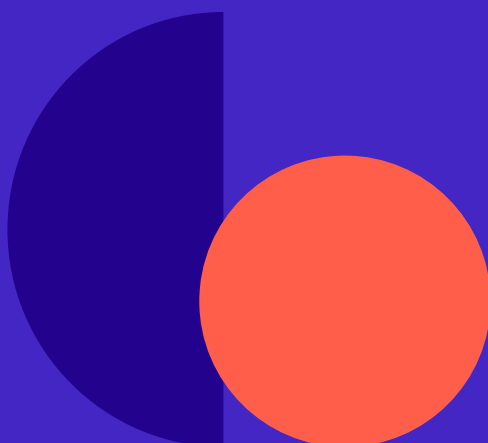
Lessons from the frontline: A crossroads for employee satisfaction

Organizations are at a crossroads. The pandemic has increased the profile of frontline workers, but while the ramifications are still being felt there's a risk that this sense of appreciation from the C-suite will waver. Meanwhile, no matter how satisfied they might seem, frontline employees are more than ready to vote with their feet and leave organizations and their professions.

Business leaders must make drastic changes now to build a long-term connection with employees on the ground and mitigate the pending resignations. Empowering workers with the information and tools to make decisions on the frontline can support the fulfillment and autonomy central to the employee experience.

Listening to employees' needs and regularly voicing appreciation can create a more representative and inclusive culture. And critically, leaders shouldn't underestimate the power of community for connecting like minded frontline employees with their colleagues and cementing their sense of purpose.

2: Trust in leadership

Leadership is key to how many people view their organization and a core part of their experience at work. But since our surveys began, we've seen a chasm between business leaders and frontline employees that's still a serious problem.
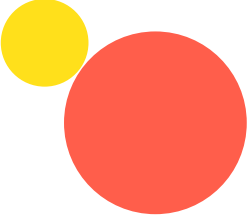
The physical distance between the HQ-based C-suite and frontline workers – as well as the differences in their working lives – can make it more challenging for leaders to connect and earn employees' trust.

While C-suite executives overwhelmingly believe employees trust them (99%), frontline employees have serious doubts about the leadership team.

Three quarters of workers on the frontline (75%) don't completely trust their organization to be transparent about company news. This problem was also an issue among the frontline managers we surveyed in 2020, 60% of whom agreed there was a disconnect in communication between them and senior leaders at head office.[11]
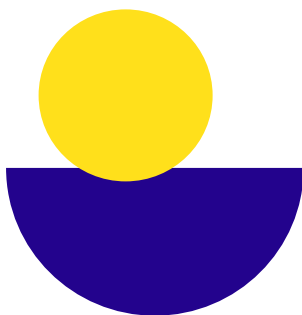
[11] Deskless Not Voiceless 2020 Global Frontline Research Report, Workplace from Facebook, 2020
2020 Deskless not Voiceless Research Methodology
This survey comprises 4,500 frontline managers and 4,500 head office leaders across eight countries (UK, US, France, Norway, Brazil, Mexico, Australia and Japan) and was conducted by Coleman Parkes and commissioned by Workplace from Facebook. The research was carried out in two waves. The first wave in February 2020, and again in August 2020 to better understand the reality for business leaders in frontline organizations today.

Meanwhile, one in four wouldn't trust the senior leadership team (25%) or their line manager (24%) respectively to protect their happiness and wellbeing. Given that trust has been shown to reduce employee stress and turnover, while improving productivity,[12] this disconnect is likely to significantly dent business performance, all while compromising retention.

99%
of the C-suite think their frontline workers trust them.

75%
don't completely trust their organization to be transparent in their communication around company news and updates.
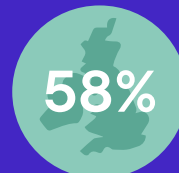
[12] The Neuroscience of Organizational Trust and Business Performance: Findings From United States Working Adults and an Intervention at an Online Retailer, Frontiers in Psychology, 2021

56%

of frontline workers trust their organization's senior leadership to look out for their happiness and wellbeing

USA and Canada
52%

UK
58%

France
52%

Brazil
62%

Mexico
52%

Australia
64%

56%

trust their line manager to look out for their happiness and wellbeing.
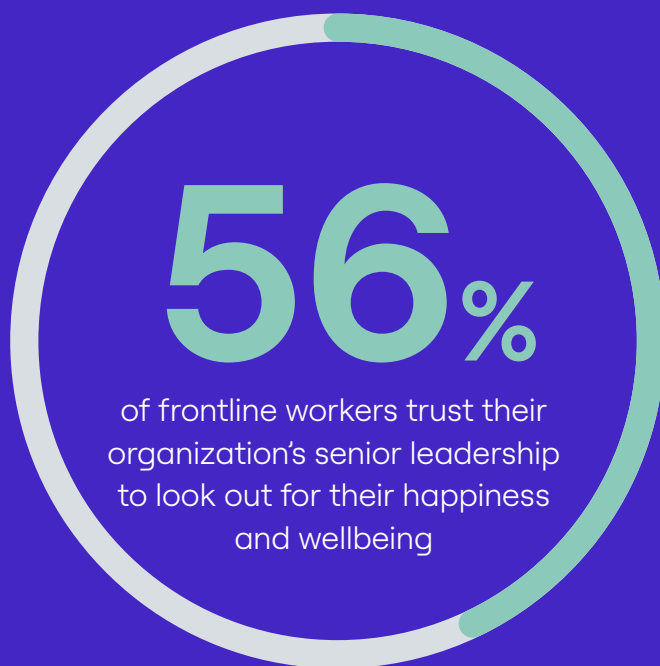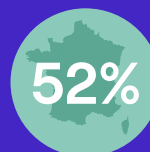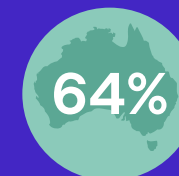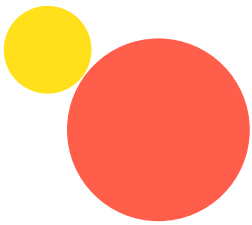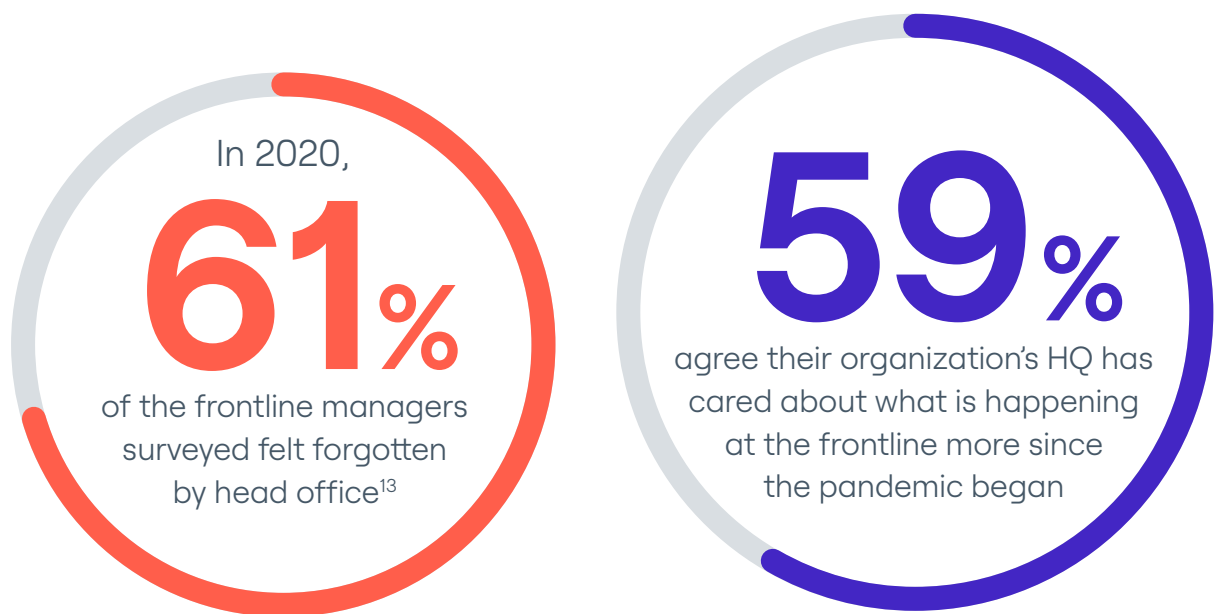
Ongoing HQ skepticism

Frontline workers remain skeptical about the level of interest – and value – that their headquarters places in them.

While the majority believe the frontline has received more attention due to the pandemic, 51% believe frontline workers are still not as important to the overall organization as their HQ colleagues.

In 2020,

61%

of the frontline managers surveyed felt forgotten by head office[13]

59%

agree their organization's HQ has cared about what is happening at the frontline more since the pandemic began

58% agree their organization's HQ has paid more attention to major developments at the frontline since the pandemic began.

55% say they and their teammates have always been as much of a priority for their organization as HQ colleagues.

29% say they and their teammates have become equally important to their organization as HQ colleagues since the pandemic began.

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Our number one priority has always been our people; making sure they feel connected and supported whether they are in a head office, retail shop or back of house operation.

We feel our Workplace tool allows us the best opportunity to provide this connection in a timely and authentic way.

Not only can we disseminate critical comms and wellbeing resources, but it's a great platform to have fun and think outside the box to foster connection and collaboration. Chat bots have provided some welcome relief for our people, because while we take our business seriously, we want our people to come to work happy and fulfilled."

People & Culture Leader,
Flight Centre Travel Group

Lessons from the frontline: Trust depends on two-way dialogue

An employee's view of the leadership team is often core to their view of a company. But all too often, leaders are distant, unfamiliar and only communicate to workers, rather than with them, making it very difficult to build trust.

This is a critical time for leaders to show their interest in the frontline extends beyond 18 months of crisis. That means delivering open and empathetic leadership, in a way that's visible to workers at the forefront of delivering services.

Connecting with employees doesn't mean disseminating top-down information; it's about a two-way dialogue that gives workers an opportunity to be heard. This can build the trust that not only improves day-to-day performance, but plays a key role when employees are considering key career decisions – like staying in the organization or leaving.
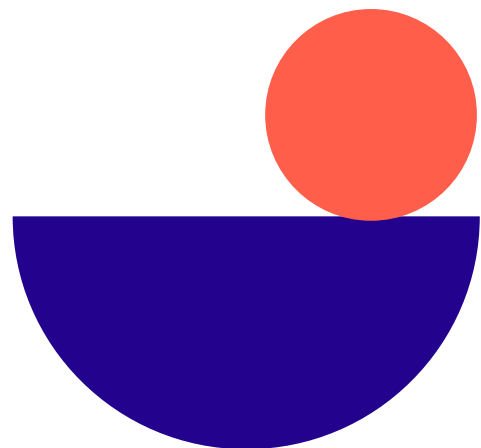
3: Learning and growth

For employees on the frontline, knowing they can develop new skills – and progress within the business – can be an important motivator. Not only that, but the opportunity to grow might determine whether frontline workers remain in their role or go elsewhere.

In previous years, this has been a major shortcoming in frontline roles; in 2020, just 38% of frontline managers felt their career ambitions were well nurtured by head office.[14]

Today, the majority of frontline workers acknowledge training opportunities where they work. Likewise, three quarters of C-suite leaders (73%) believe their organization offers a clear path for frontline workers to progress – and the majority of frontline workers agree (60%).

There might be opportunities on offer, but many frontline workers don't feel able or willing to take them. Over two in five believe they have reached the limits of what they can learn in their current role, while 42% no longer feel motivated to grow as a result of the pandemic.
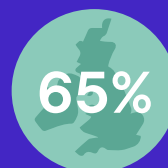
63%

agree their organization provides learning and training opportunities to support their career growth.

USA and Canada 60%

UK 65%

France 58%

Brazil 68%

Mexico 66%

Australia 61%

60% trust their leadership to help them progress at their organization.

73% of the C-suite believe their organization provides a clear career path for frontline workers.

60% of frontline workers say they have a clear path to progress at their organization.

43% of frontline workers say they have reached the limit of what they can learn at their organization. **40%** disagree with this.

42% of frontline workers feel less motivated to grow and progress as a result of the pandemic. **40%** disagree with this.

The frontline reckoning

Simply put: the majority of frontline workers want more. In fact, the majority of employees surveyed plan to move to another frontline role in 2022 or beyond – for quicker promotion or more training.

Many leaders recognize that frontline workers receive fewer growth opportunities than knowledge workers – and 58% believe this in itself is contributing to talent shortages.

Nonetheless, very few of the C-suite have plans to increase L&D investment (26%), with one in five organizations worryingly set to decrease funding for training over the next year.

With many frontline workers prepared to leave for better training, these organizations will see themselves losing staff – and lacking the resources to train replacements.
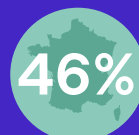
54%

say they agree they will have moved to another frontline role for quicker growth and promotion in 2022 and beyond.

USA and Canada
55%

UK
53%

France
46%

Brazil
58%

Mexico
61%

Australia
55%

54%	say they agree they will have moved to another frontline role for more training and learning opportunities in 2022 and beyond.
66%	of the C-suite believe that frontline workers get as many opportunities for career growth as knowledge worker teams.
58%	of leaders who say there's a frontline worker shortage say this is due to a lack of jobs with adequate training and education opportunities.

Only

26%

of the C-suite have plans to increase investment in training/education

21%

have plans to decrease their investment in training and education compared to 2021

USA and Canada
29%

UK
25%

France
24%

Brazil
27%

Mexico
26%

Australia
26%

"

With a large part-time workforce that doesn't have access to traditional company emails, Workplace bridges the communication gap between our support office and our cinema-based team. The health, safety and wellbeing of our team members is our greatest priority. Managing our cinemas as health and safety advice continues to evolve means we need to be able to share important updates with our frontline workers affected almost immediately, but it's important that this communication also runs two-way.

We ask our team for feedback around health, safety and wellbeing on a regular basis. Workplace provides a channel to ask questions, seek resources through the Knowledge Library, and provide feedback. With our frontline rapidly rebuilding as our business recovers, it's a great comfort to know that we have the right communication tool to connect everyone, no matter what 2022 brings."

Chief People Officer, The HOYTS Group

Lessons from the frontline: Organizations are contributing to their own talent challenges

Frontline employees want meaningful opportunities to grow and progress, just like their peers in other parts of the business. But what's on offer in most organizations simply isn't enough – and leaders may be contributing to their own talent challenges by failing to offer enough education and development.

Investing in training is much more cost-effective than replacing staff, particularly with the shortages right now. What's more, protecting retention will help to retain the sense of community that can and should be a core part of frontline organizations.

The frontline is facing an avalanche of resignations, if organizations aren't prepared to invest in their staff. It's critical that leaders prioritize, rather than cut, L&D programmes – and put employee growth at the core of their culture.
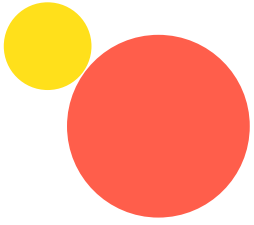
4: Wellbeing and safety

The pandemic has posed severe strains on frontline workers, who were often the most exposed to the virus while being the least physically protected and emotionally connected to their wider organization.

Many are facing burnout: a state of physical and emotional exhaustion caused by long-term stress at work. Now more than ever, employees are focused on their wellbeing and safety at work.

But while 71% of C-suite executives believe their organization takes care of mental health on the frontline, the reality is very different.

Over the last 12 months, 70% of frontline workers have either suffered from burnout or felt at risk of burning out. Working conditions have played a key role; as well as facing longer hours and greater demands, many frontline workers had to adopt new processes to protect themselves and others against the virus, while worrying about possible furlough or redundancy.

These conditions have taken their toll. Half of frontline workers (51%) would like to receive more paid leave and time off, in addition to their current benefits – a figure which is, if anything, surprisingly low.
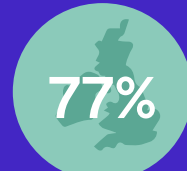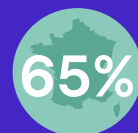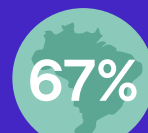
70%

say either they've suffered burnout or feel at risk of burning out

USA and Canada 74%

UK 77%
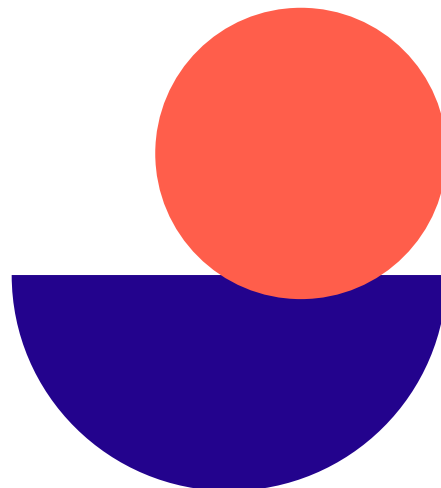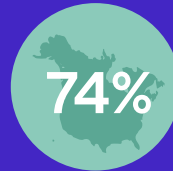
France 65%

Brazil 67%

Mexico 69%

Australia 68%

Of those who have suffered burnout or feel at risk of burning out, the top contributors were:

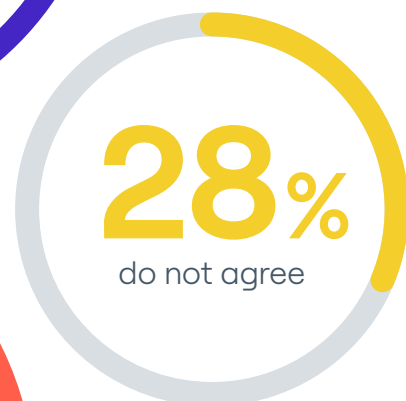|	
56%	Increased workload
52%	Long working hours
48%	Lack of pay rise
44%	Lack of staff to help distribution of workload
38%	Fear of losing financial income

Technology and wellbeing

Frontline employees are clear that more could be done to protect their wellbeing. Leaders must prioritize mental health, putting the right policies, resources and processes in place – and tech can play a helping hand.

Nearly two thirds of workers (62%) believe that employers should prioritize additional tools and processes to help them manage their mental health. That is, in part, because most say keeping in touch with colleagues through communication tools helps improve their mental wellbeing at work (57%).

However, right now many leaders aren't recognizing the mental health imperative. Only 45% of executives say mental health is one of their top three priorities, with just 12% naming it as their first priority.

47%

agree they have the right tools (benefits, technology, etc.) to manage their mental health* at work.

28%

do not agree

57%

agree that keeping in touch with their colleagues via communication and collaboration tools helps to improve their mental health at work.

*Here, good mental health is defined as your emotional and psychological well-being that may take the form of low levels of stress, good sleep, lack of anxiety, etc.
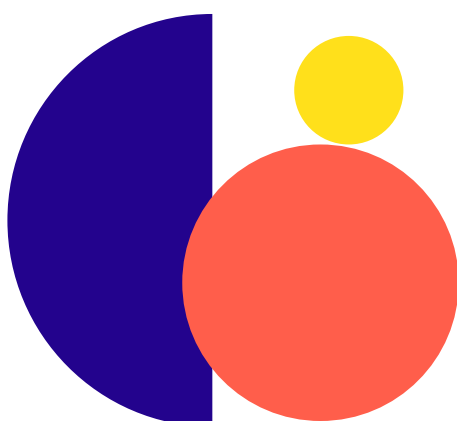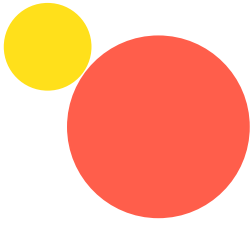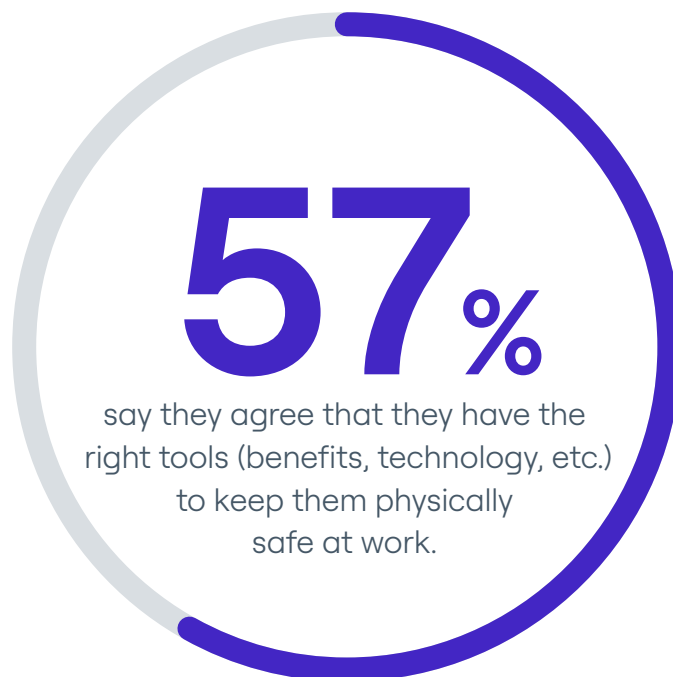
Physical safety

When it comes to physical safety, C-suite leaders are more positive about how the organization cares for workers (93%) than the workers themselves (83%). Crucially, only 54% believe they have the means of reporting health and safety concerns back to the business – which is worryingly low in the context of Covid-19 especially.

This means workers not only lack the physical and psychological safety to perform well, but are likely to have increased absences for self-isolation and recovery, further compounding staff shortages.

Frontline employees would like to see more tools to manage their safety at work, particularly when it comes to communicating concerns with head office.
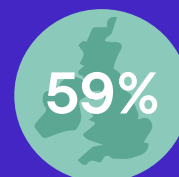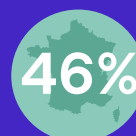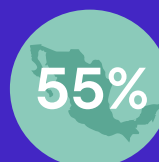
57%

say they agree that they have the right tools (benefits, technology, etc.) to keep them physically safe at work.

54%

agree they have the tools and processes with which to communicate concerns over their health and safety to their organization's HQ.

USA and Canada
52%

UK
59%

France
46%

Brazil
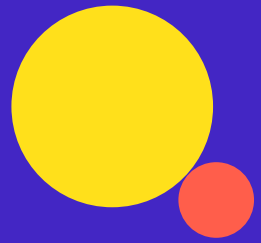**55%**

Mexico
55%

Australia
59%

37% agree their HQ leadership team and line manager cares about their health and safety at work, and they have always cared about their health and safety.

**85%** agree their line manager cares about their health and safety at work.

15% disagree and say both their HQ leadership team and line manager do not care about their health and safety at work.

"

With Workplace, Miniso Mexico achieved connection capabilities it never had before. Connecting corporate headquarters with stores and the company's distribution center, the platform is available on mobile devices for 90% of employees who don't have computers at their workplace, which makes two-way communication intuitive and easily accessible."

Vice Principal, Talent and Culture, Miniso
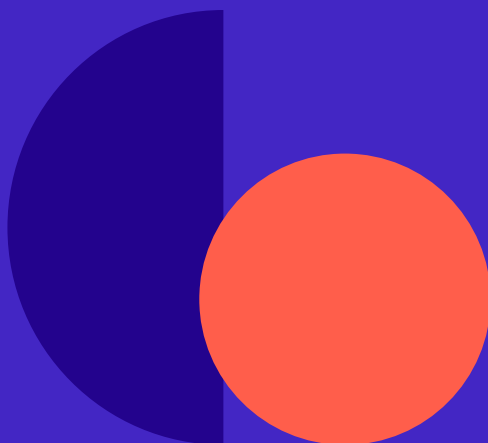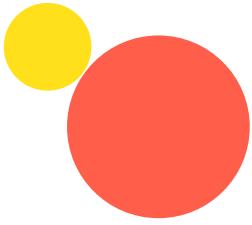
Lessons from the frontline: Battling the burnout taking its toll on the frontline

Frontline workers have clearly experienced huge physical and emotional strain over the last 18 months. It's particularly worrying that so many workers are feeling burned out, but nonetheless reporting relatively high levels of job satisfaction.

This suggests that many frontline workers have come to accept mental and physical exhaustion as an inevitable and normal part of their role. But clearly, with so many prepared to leave the frontline altogether, it's a situation that's wholly unsustainable.

Many leaders seem to be taking a passive approach to the issue of mental health, despite the fact that it impacts productivity, retention and of course is a core part of being a responsible business. Organizations must have policies, processes and resources to protect their staff. Providing frontline workers with tools to connect with colleagues, access support and report issues would be a concrete step to improving wellbeing.
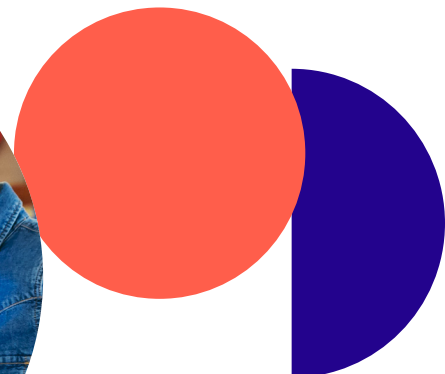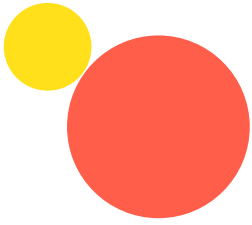
Technology For Better Frontline Experiences

Today, there is a rising awareness of how workplace technology can transform frontline worker experiences, just as it influences desk-based roles.

The pandemic acted as a wake-up call in 2020, when having a way to communicate with employees instantly became a health and safety imperative. In fact, 59% of HQ managers said the Covid-19 crisis had highlighted how 'office-biased' their communication approach was in the past.

Depending on the tools used, technology can empower staff and create a stronger connection to the business, as C-suite leaders know. Almost all of the leaders surveyed say they need to start prioritizing frontline tech in the way they have historically prioritized office and desk-based technology (94%).

In fact, 80% are convinced frontline employee experiences will be dictated by the quality of the workplace technology they have access to.

In 2022, the top 3 investment priorities for C-suite regarding the frontline are:

Day-to-day employee experience (73%)
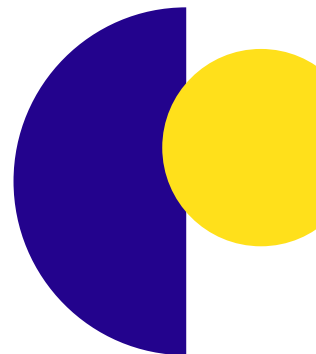UK ranked highest at **80%**

Employee safety (67%)
Australia ranked highest at **72%**

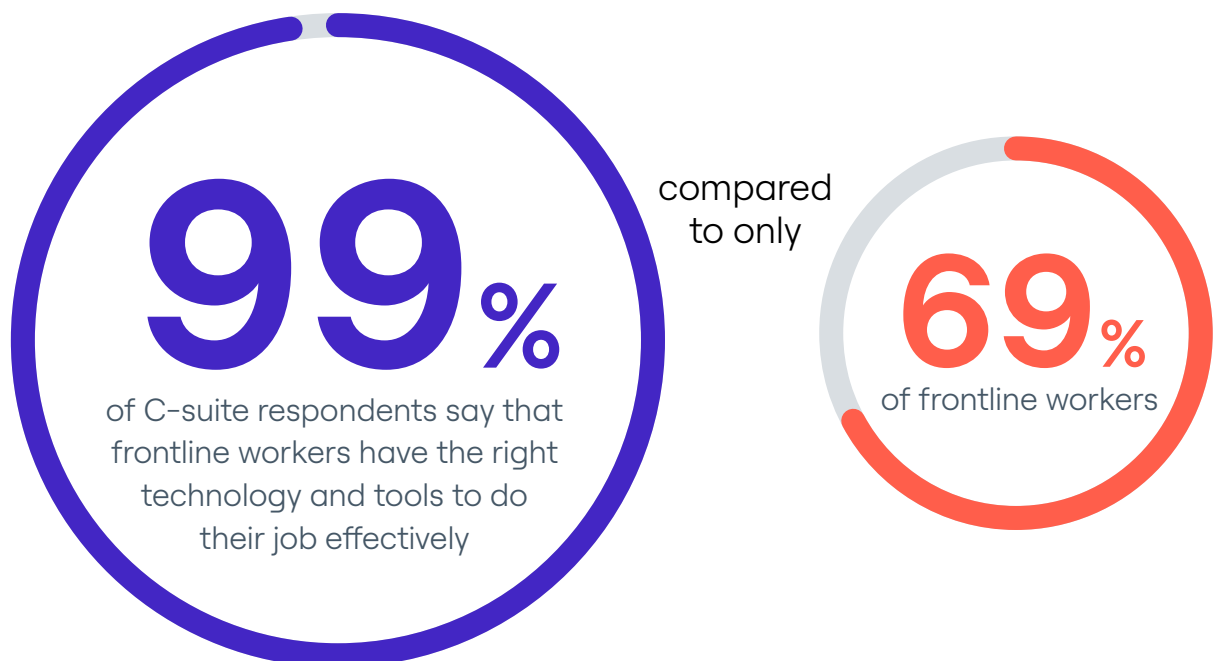**Productivity (66%)**
UK ranked highest **70%**

A new technology standard

Frontline workers are hungry to be better connected to their organizations, but they need C-suite leaders to make the investment. Three quarters of frontline workers (77%) believe that good communications technology should be treated as standard for their role.

Although many frontline workers say they have the right technology to do their job effectively in their current organization (69%), employees clearly know there are better tools out there. In fact, access to better tools and technology is a reason that 52% of employees would move to another position – making technology a competitive advantage.

Again, there's a perception that the frontline comes second to HQ, with 44% stating that their desk-based peers get better technology than them.

99%
of C-suite respondents say that frontline workers have the right technology and tools to do their job effectively

compared to only

69%
of frontline workers

77% believe that good communications technology (tech tools to share updates, keep in touch with the team, get updates from HQ, etc.) should be standard.

67% say they are happy with the technology tools they currently get at work.

22% feel that HQ colleagues get better technology tools.

33% say they are not happy with the technology tools they currently get at work.

22% feel that HQ colleagues get better technology tools.

More effective frontline tools

The technology currently on offer for the frontline is largely split between personal, consumer tools and those designed for the office. When contacting frontline workers directly, texting and calling remain the norm, across work (68%) and personal devices (61%).

Many frontline employees are keen to access tools that would make them better connected to the rest of the organization (61%). This could mean channels that offer more enriching content, are easily accessible from frontline locations and don't rely on workers being instantly available, to fit around changeable frontline schedules.

Texting and calling are the most commonly used means of communicating with frontline workers via work devices (68%) and personal devices (61%).
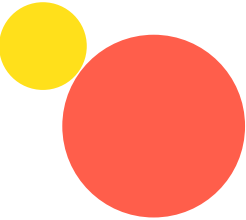
Messaging apps such as WhatsApp, Signal and Telegram are the next most frequent communication method (54%).

Collaboration platforms such as Slack, Teams and Workplace are used by 46%.

Video conferencing is used by just 30% and email by just 20%.

When asked which additional tools and processes are important for employers to provide frontline workers with, 61% said tools and processes to keep them better connected to the rest of the organization to share information and data.
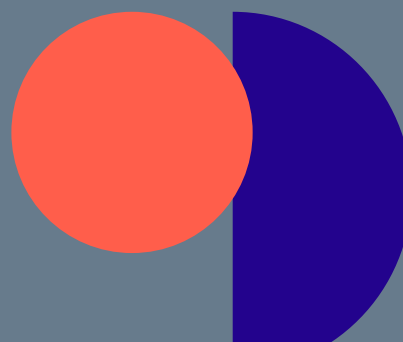
Lessons from the frontline: Technology can help to democratize company culture

It's positive that few leaders depend on email to connect with frontline employees. But texting and calling isn't a scalable, accountable or credible means of communicating with staff.

There's a risk that key information might be missed – and without asynchronous channels, it's difficult to include frontline employees in the meaningful interactions needed for a strong workplace culture.

Organizations should evaluate technologies built with the frontline in mind. That means utilizing popular platforms already available and optimized for mobile, available at times to suit the frontline schedule, and full of richer formats like videos and polls. Adding enterprise muscle to these channels can help to democratize company culture across frontline and HQ staff – and build better connections throughout the business.
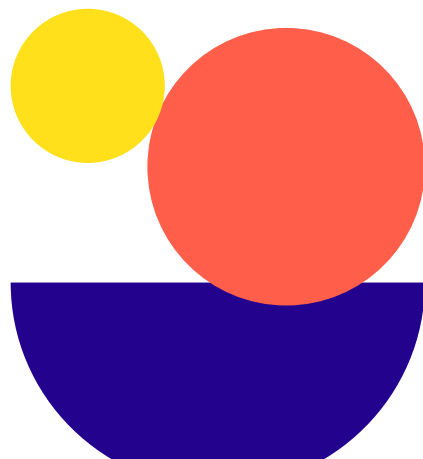
Conclusion

With the Great Frontline Resignation already beginning, it has never been more important for leaders to ensure frontline workers feel valued and prioritized.
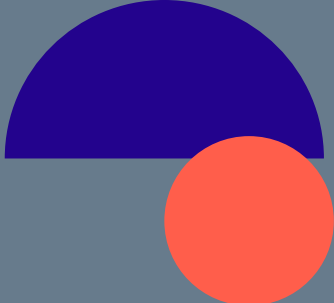
But to have a genuine impact on attrition rates, this must go beyond surface-level gestures. Organizations will need to make investments in workers' futures and show – rather than simply promise – that they will be treated equally to their HQ counterparts.

We believe frontline employers should focus their attention on three key areas to most effectively improve the employee experience and keep people in the business:

1. Deliver inclusive employee engagement

While frontline workers are, in the main part, on board with their company's vision for the future, organizations are still biased towards the office – and prioritizing these workers' needs. Leaders should commit to building a consistent employee experience that engages frontline workers as well as their peers in head office with a consistent employee experience.
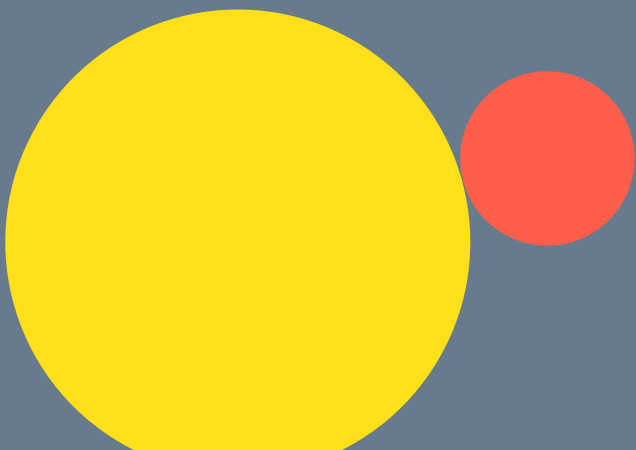
Digital workplace tools can help to illuminate the talent and culture that are the real magic of every business, in consistent and accessible formats. The organizations that get this right will emerge from the pandemic with inclusive cultures and communication channels that attract and retain an empowered workforce. These businesses will also gain the competitive advantage of frontline staff that are closer to the company mission and a HQ that's closer to the views of customers.

2. Put the right tools and communications in place

If organizations are to deliver the best possible employee experience for frontline workers, they must provide solutions to their unique challenges and ways of working. That means using technology that's designed for frontline workers. Communicating through asynchronous channels that include, rather than exclude, these employees is key.

Emphasis must be placed on implementing practices and channels that strengthen employee representation and workplace democracy, as well as empowering every worker with the capabilities to innovate in their role. Connecting employees with one another can create a stronger sense of community too, improving job satisfaction across the frontline. This might not mean starting again, but adding business process and accountability to the channels already in use.
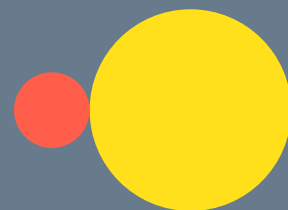
3. Build trust in leadership

If leaders truly want to earn the trust of their frontline workers, more must be done to demonstrate that their support for the frontline is enduring – that they see them as critical to the business moving forward and not just when they have needed them over the past 18 months.

Empathetic and open leadership is key in the post-Covid era, leaders must find ways to be metaphorically 'on the ground' with their people, so they can engage and connect with them effectively.

Frontline workers really are fundamental to organizations. For any hope of success in 2022 and beyond, leaders must prioritize this chronically overlooked and undervalued section of their workforce.

It's time to show the same commitment and dedication to frontline employees that they bring to work and their customers every day.
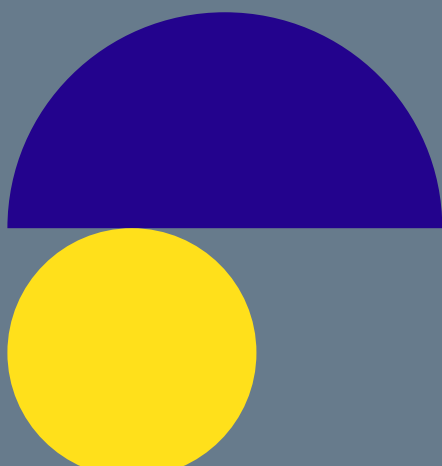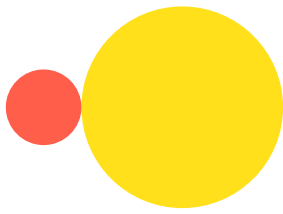
Methodology

This survey comprises **7,000 frontline workers and 1,350 C-suite leaders across seven countries (UK, USA, Canada, France, Brazil, Mexico and Australia)** and was conducted by Coleman Parkes and commissioned by Workplace from Facebook. The survey was conducted during September and October 2021.