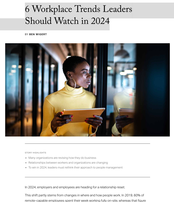
BY ERIN WALSH

6 Workplace Trends Leaders Should Watch in 2024



IN THIS ARTICLE
- Where organizations are leaning into flexibility for business
- Relationships between workers and organizations are changing
- To plan in 2024, leaders must balance their approach to management

In 2024, employees and employers are heading for a relationship reset.

The shift partly stems from changes in where and how people work. In 2019, 60% of remote-capable employees spent their week working fully on-site; the share that has fallen to just 29% in 2023.

But there's more to the complex story. Nearly five in 10 U.S. employees actively look at jobs that can be hybrid or remote. And Gallup's research indicates that low employees are managed less about the amount of time they spend at work, which has implications for leadership as their work evolves.

Organizational leaders and people workers have — with their coworkers, managers, leaders and organizations — that are significantly evolving. Many organizations are radically rebuilding the ways they do business, learning new employee expectations, including managers, stressed and disconnected.

For example, when Gallup asked managers what changes their organization made in 2023:

- 64% said employees were given additional job responsibilities
- 51% cited the restructuring of teams
- 42% reported budget cuts

To see in 2024, there is ample opportunity for looking their management strategies to ensure they're meeting the needs of their workforce and organizations. Gallup has recommend starting with a plan for assessing and addressing the following six trends that leaders should be paying attention to within their own organizations.

1. Global Worker Stress Remains at a Record High

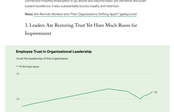
Gallup's recent State of the Global Workplace report revealed that employee engagement is rising worldwide. That's good news. However, worker stress has remained at record high levels since the pandemic.

In the U.S. and Canada, employee stress is even higher with 52% of employees reporting they experienced a lot of stress the previous day. This trend rails implications for employees' wellbeing at work and home, as well as their productivity and their growth.

As we move into 2024, which trend will set the ongoing rise in stress or the disappointment in employee engagement?

Read: Steady Engagement, But Worry Suggests Trouble Ahead

2. Engagement Is Slowly Recovering, With Some Area for Improvement



Employee engagement levels in the U.S. started a slow crawl back in 2023 after a steep decline in 2022. Nonetheless, the percentage of employees who are actively disengaged at work has continued to their organization's mission and purpose. This sense of connection inspires employees to go above and beyond basic job demands and push toward excellence. It also substantially boosts loyalty and retention.

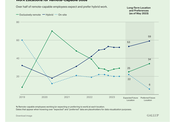
Read: Are Remote Workers and Their Organizations Drifting Apart? (gallup.com)

3. Leaders Are Restoring Trust Yet Have Much Room for Improvement

Trust in organizational leadership significantly declined since the onset of the pandemic until it started to recover in 2023. Yet, today only 23% of U.S. employees strongly agree that they trust the leadership of their organization. Nonetheless, the trendline will continue to rise if the leaders of organizations continue to prioritize relationships with their leaders. Research shows when leaders communicate clearly, lead and support change, and inspire confidence in the future, 80% of employees say they fully trust their leaders.

Read: Why Trust in Leaders Is Faltering and How to Start It Back (gallup.com)

4. Managers Are Getting Squeezed



Changes to the workplace have hit managers especially hard. In 2023, managers were more likely than non-managers to be disengaged, burnt out and looking. They were also more likely to feel like their organization doesn't care about their wellbeing and to say that they're struggling with work-life balance.

These manager struggles are bad news for organizations. Research shows that managers are responsible for 70% of the variance for team engagement and they have a significant influence on the overall culture of their organization.

Overall, the "manager squeeze" Gallup confirms has increased responsibilities and navigating numerous organizational changes. Gallup research shows that many managers now have more work to do on a tighter budget with nine teams. And from a relationship standpoint, they often find themselves caught between aligning with new directives from leaders and meeting the changing expectations of their employees.

Gallup's advice is that managers will need more training and support to lead effectively in today's new work environment fielded with new expectations for managers.

Read: The Manager Squeeze: How the New Workplace Is Testing Your Leaders (gallup.com)

5. Organizations Need a Long-Term Hybrid Work Strategy

Since mid-2022, work location trends for the U.S. workforce have largely stabilized and implies that most employees are currently hybrid or remote-capable and expect to working for the foreseeable future, based on employer communications. A separate survey of 2,800+ from Fortune 500 leaders in 2023 found that organizations are likely to decrease remote work flexibility in the next 12 months.

Gallup's research shows that hybrid work is the preferred model for remote-capable workers and people managers are in the middle, 51% in favor of hybrid vs. 49% who want to return to workplace. That shares doing things like creating a compelling workplace value proposition, empowering teams to collaborate more effectively, improving performance management systems, and training managers to be great hybrid coaches.

Read: The Future of the Office Has Arrived (Its Hybrid)

6. Hybrid Culture Can Be Great — If Done Right

Hybrid work offers the advantages of a more flexible work environment while also posing some unique challenges. In terms of advantages, hybrid workers have higher engagement than remote or on-site workers. Hybrid workers are also 1.4 times as likely to be thriving in their overall wellbeing. Challenges for organizations include being prepared to recognize these benefits and report that hybrid work helps them attract, retain, improved retention and expanded talent pools in their organization.

At the same time, working apart more often and on different schedules creates some new obstacles. Organizations that plan to move forward with hybrid for the long term must thoughtfully create and fully commit to a strategy for how they best communicate, collaborate, build relationships and sustain culture.

Read: The Future of the Office Has Arrived (Its Hybrid)

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BY RACHEL FI

6 Worrying Workplace Numbers — And What You Can Do About Them

Are the latest changes in the world of work keeping you up at night? From flattening trust in managers to the potential of robots replacing jobs, employees and organizations alike may be concerned about what the future holds for the workplace.

While it's tempting to alter the bad news, the truth is that organizations can manage this year's worrisome workplace trends by knowing and acting on them.

Here are some of the most concerning insights Gallup has discovered this year — and how to turn them around in your organization.

1. Only 23% of U.S. employees strongly agree that they trust the leadership of their organization.

Few employees trust the people in charge. This raises a serious question about morale in American businesses and corporates with a historic decline in employee engagement. Simply put, organizations have reason to be concerned — employees' trust in leadership is dismal.

But there is some good news. When employees strongly agree that their leaders implemented their specific actions, 80% of them can agree that trust leads.

2. Only 23% of employees strongly agree that they get the right amount of recognition for the work they do.

Employees rarely receive as much recognition as they'd like, and only 10% strongly agree they have been asked how they prefer to be recognized and appreciated in the first place. A great manager's most important task is providing meaningful feedback, and Gallup's research suggests that each employee can make the process of giving recognition that easy.

Employees are less than half the gap the right amount of recognition are four times more likely to be engaged at work, but that's only one of the critical steps in empowering managers to act as coaches.

3. More than half of employees (53%) say they don't feel prepared to work with AI, robotics or other advanced technologies.

Most employees don't feel ready for AI. But among CHROs, 73% see AI replacing jobs at their organization in the next three years, and 65% believe AI can be used to improve performance in new roles.

These perspectives reflect a concerning disconnect between employees and organizations. Companies need to provide AI skills training and reassure workers that upskilling their workers.

4. Fifty-one percent of currently employed workers around the world say they are watching for or actively seeking a new job.

Percent your top talent people — now think about what it would take to replace one of them if they left your organization tomorrow. Resignations are coming after your employees, and leaders need to be ready.

More than half of workers are thinking about leaving their organization, and 53% believe their organization doesn't care about their wellbeing. Employees want to feel connected to your organization, leaders need to deepen relationships with their team and have more meaningful conversations, among other strategies.

5. Only two in 10 employees feel connected to their organization's culture.

The symptoms of a broken organizational culture are clear as day. Gallup's research shows that employees who don't feel feedback are clear signs employees don't connected to their company's culture. And when an organization's culture is in crisis, everything becomes harder to accomplish.

It's time for leaders to recognize that there's no quick fix for culture building — it must be executed in four clear steps.

6. Only four in 10 employees report unethical behavior at work if they have firsthand knowledge of it.

Despite nine out of 10 workers saying they would report unethical behavior, few do. Good spotting is challenging in workplaces, and with it comes the widespread feeling that the only way to report unacceptable behavior is through the hotline.

Fortunately, there are more accessible ways that employers can detect bad behavior, and organizations need to change to make the silence.

Gallup's numbers tell a story — there's work to do in the modern workplace. While your organization might seem like it's doing well, there's often more happening than meets the eye.

Solutions often begin by asking the right questions. Are your employees engaged, connected to your culture and invested in leadership's goals? If you know, find out. Belong equipping managers to employees and the changing workplace ensures your organization won't have to grapple with latent hopes and broken minds.

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BY DENISE WILLIAM AND RYAN PENDELL

Why Trust in Leaders Is Faltering and How to Gain It Back

STORY HIGHLIGHTS

- Employee trust in leadership has declined, as has employee engagement
- Clear communication from leaders helps set expectations and priorities
- Manager development is key to communicating and navigating change

The red lights are flashing on America's business leadership dashboard. Leaders are losing trust with their employees.

Three key leadership measures tracking behaviors that drive alignment and execution for organizations have declined since the start of the pandemic. Most notable is a drop in trust in leadership. **Only 21% of U.S. employees strongly agree that they trust the leadership of their organization.** This marks a noteworthy decline from its 2019 peak (24%) and raises a serious question about morale in American businesses.

Trust begins to build when employees feel inspired by senior leaders and see strategic actions leading to business success. As such, the declines in employees' confidence in the financial future of their organization and feeling inspired by their leadership further indicate that employees' trust in leadership is evaporating. And all of this coincides with a historic decline in employee engagement.

Building trust in leadership is necessary to drive the performance that companies seek. When change is clearly defined and successfully managed, performance goals are met, and a strong, positive corporate culture is in place, trust follows. These are not simple outcomes to accomplish, nor are they quick and easy fixes. But they lead people to begin to build trust with leaders.

Gallup finds that when employees strongly agree that their leaders implement three specific actions, **95% fully trust their leaders**.

Here's what the best leaders do to earn (or build) trust:

1. Trusted Leaders Communicate Clearly

In 2020, at the start of the pandemic, employee engagement in the U.S. reached a record high. This coincided with a radical new way of seeing our leaders and hearing their thoughts. We saw executives on video town halls, in their homes, wearing baseball caps, with kids or barking dogs in the background. The suit and tie were gone. The perfectly polished speech was gone. And leaders were honest about what they didn't know. They became vulnerable: They were open about admitting they didn't have answers yet. And they were actively listening to their front-line and essential workers. They said, "Tell me what's going on and what you need to do your job."

In the early stages of the pandemic, an *astonishing* 55% of employees strongly agreed that their leaders communicated a clear plan of action in response to COVID-19. By the middle of 2022, only 22% strongly agreed that their leaders communicated a clear plan of action for how they would move forward *post*-pandemic. Clearly, communication had lessened — and it was affecting employees' understanding of the envisioned future state of their workplace.

Notably, the percentage of employees saying they know what's expected of them at work dropped to a record low in 2022. Great leaders provide a clear vision for their people. They explain where the company is coming from and where it's going. They also explain what the company will always do (setting clear expectations and creating stability for the organization) and what it needs to do *now* (establishing priorities to help employees move forward). When leaders clearly articulate their vision and the approach needed to achieve it, they offer their employees a road map for where to focus their energy.

Many leaders have been eager to get back to the office and back to business as usual. But there is no longer "usual business." The best leaders have taken a lesson from the pandemic playbook. Instead of going back to pre-2020 communication methods, they've given thought to what they learned during lockdowns. They have identified the best ways to communicate with their employees and kept to those rhythms. They understand that communication is at the heart of leadership. Even though the crisis is over, they've found that increased two-way communication pays off in higher productivity and performance.

> When leaders clearly articulate their vision and the approach needed to achieve it, they offer their employees a road map for where to focus their energy.

2. Trusted Leaders Inspire Confidence in the Future

At the beginning of the pandemic, leaders didn't know what was up ahead — but that didn't stop employees from trusting them. Leaders proved that they were aware of the challenges and risks, and they approached those challenges thoughtfully, with company values (and empathy) in mind.

Leading change is much harder when your team can't make sense of it. *Only 18% of employees strongly agree that their leaders help them see how changes made today will affect their organization. And just two in 10 feel highly confident in their leaders to manage emerging challenges.*

Followers don't need the entire plan in detail. They need a broad sense of the primary goal and the next steps to get there. By giving information in digestible chunks, leaders communicate that they have a plan and know how to get there. They also highlight big (and small) successes or progress along the way. This reminds employees that the plan is working and helps build confidence in their strategic direction.

Some leaders get one of these things right, but not others. They provide the big picture but miss the practical next steps or acknowledgment of progress. Or they focus on the next steps without giving their teams the main objective. But projecting trustworthy leadership means communicating all of it: *I know where we're going; here is what we need to do to get us there, and here is where we are making progress.*

3. Trusted Leaders Lead and Support Change

When employees don't trust leadership, the breakdown is often at the manager level. To successfully navigate change, leaders need to make every effort to provide their managers with training and development. When the pandemic presented them with a disrupted work environment, for example, 57% of hybrid managers indicated they were left out in the cold without training to help them work in this new way.

So, as leaders seek to build trust, they must first give their managers the tools to communicate: Articulate the vision, explain the why, answer questions, and help their people believe in the change.

This intentional communication will build trust and confidence throughout the organization. *When managers actively support change, employees are 11 times as likely to believe their leaders provide a clear vision of how today's changes will affect their organization.*

Gallup has established seven guiding principles of change management that should be applied when leaders plan their communication with managers. These principles help managers to become ambassadors of change and drive that change within their own teams.

1. Clearly articulate the vision for change.
2. Involve the right people: limited vs. broad involvement.
3. Communicate the right information at the right time.
4. Always account for resistance to change.
5. Celebrate short-term wins without declaring premature victory.
6. Effectively anchor the change to the organization.
7. Always plan for change to be "the only constant."

One simple action is for leaders to have *regular* manager-only meetings to understand the questions they are hearing and help them provide answers for their teams. *Here's what needs to happen. Let's talk about what this means for your teams, processes and routines.*

Next, leaders must set the expectation that every manager discusses with their team how change will impact them. Only about three in 10 leaders and managers say they have discussed with each team member how changes in their organization will affect them specifically. As mentioned above, this requires more than one-way communication. It's a *two-way conversation* that makes employees believe in their leadership, and that happens at the team level with the manager.

Trust Starts by Listening Today

All leaders can agree that business runs on communication. But it's those invaluable two-way conversations, especially during times of disruption, that are essential to building confidence and trust. *When employees strongly agree that they have had opportunities to provide honest feedback about organizational changes, they are 7.4 times as likely to have confidence in their leaders to successfully manage emerging challenges.*

Many leaders have had to implement major organizational changes — from hybrid work policies to new strategic initiatives — and they've missed a big opportunity to build trust by not including their teams in the process.

This should be a wake-up call to leaders and an invitation to pursue more successful change efforts in the future. We know that trust in leadership impacts engagement, performance, retention and much more. And that trust begins with having effective and supportive two-way conversations with followers, not with having all the answers.

Clearly, the pandemic put trust to the test for a lot of companies. And many leaders likely feel this ebbing of connection, of bonding, within their organization. It can be a little scary! But the good news is that employee trust can be regained. When leaders communicate clearly, inspire confidence in the future and support their people during times of change, they build the trust necessary to reach higher levels of productivity and performance.

Begin rebuilding employee trust today.

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