America’s Workforce: A revealing account of what employees really think about today’s workplace

Leading the charge

In recent years, tough economic times and an unsteady job market have made most people with jobs try to make the best of their current positions due to necessity. However, the America’s Workforce survey finds it may be harder than companies think to hang on to many of their employees. This may be linked to employees’ weak relationships with their supervisors, skepticism of the company’s leaders, a fuzzy picture of the organization’s vision and their contributing role in the outcome, challenging accountability relationships with other teams or functions, and a limited amount of job-applicable training. This could lead to tough times at organizations considering major strategic changes that impact engagement, culture, productivity, and operations.

The survey’s insights can help leaders and organizations retain their best employees as the economy continues to improve and more successfully drive strategic outcomes to positively impact the business.

About the survey

The America’s Workforce: A Revealing Account of What U.S. Employees Really Think About Today’s Workplace study was conducted to help organizational leaders gain a firsthand understanding of what America’s employees think and feel about their jobs, the companies they work for, and the leaders who manage them. The study analyzed more than 1,000 U.S.-based employees across a variety of industries, companies, and positions. The results provide information on key areas of importance:

- Leadership
- Manager/Employee Relationships
- Communication
- Strategic Change
- Teamwork
- Employee Training

The findings are designed to serve as a resource for organizational leaders to take action where appropriate to attract, engage, and retain top talent.
Employee passion could improve in many areas, perhaps by strengthening relationships with managers and increasing trust.

**Waning interest**
Less than half of employees today can assert that they have felt committed (46%), fulfilled (28%), or excited (26%) about work in the last month.

- Fewer 18–34-year-olds than those who are 45+ could describe themselves as committed (40% vs. 50%) or fulfilled (23% vs. 31%) in relation to their jobs in the past four weeks.

**Less than positive**
Furthermore, a quarter (25%) even admit they have experienced job-related anger in the past four weeks.

Which have you felt about work in the last month?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feeling</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Frustrated</td>
<td>54%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Committed</td>
<td>46%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Happy</td>
<td>43%</td>
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<td>Overwhelmed</td>
<td>36%</td>
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<td>Calm</td>
<td>31%</td>
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<td>Fulfilled</td>
<td>28%</td>
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<td>Excited</td>
<td>26%</td>
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<td>Bored</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Angry</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Confused</td>
<td>13%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lonely</td>
<td>9%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2%</td>
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Not from the top
Many workers seem to doubt the ability of leaders to make workplaces run smoothly, drive accountability, and inspire risk-taking. More than two in five (43%) believe that individual employees, not leaders, have the biggest impact on a company’s culture.

Far from their strong suit
This disconnect between employees and leadership might be because more than two in three (68%) workers feel that most of their company’s leaders are better at their own jobs than inspiring others to excel.

- More men than women (71% vs. 65%) feel this way about the senior executives at their companies.

Not taking chances
Also troubling is the fact that nearly two in three (67%) American workers can name at least one thing that would prevent them from taking any kind of risk at work. Topping this list for 46% of these employees is not having enough support from supervisors.

Low in faith
What’s more, fewer than a quarter (22%) of workers feel that upper management truly has the best interests of most of their employees at heart. And less than half think that these executives are committed to the company’s vision (48%) or have the organization’s best interests at heart too (46%).

68% of workers think their company’s leaders are better at their own jobs than inspiring others to succeed.
Hard to believe
Almost half (49%) of the nation’s workforce feel that their leaders are genuine or authentic in their actions only sometimes, at best, if not less often.

Executives falling short
Fewer than half of employed Americans would be able to describe their company’s leaders as having the organization’s best interests at heart (46%), being intelligent (37%), or being honest (30%). And just 22% think they have most employees’ best interests on their minds.

- Fewer 18–34-year-olds than those who are 35+ feel that their organization’s leadership has the company’s best interests at heart (36% vs. 48%) and could be classified as intelligent (31% vs. 39%).

How often do you think your company’s leaders are being genuine or authentic when they communicate with the rest of the company?

- Frequently 33%
- Sometimes 32%
- Rarely 14%
- Always 18%
- Never 3%
Not leading by example
Furthermore, just 26% of workers can strongly agree that most of the managers in their organization embody the values or behaviors that they would like their employees to have. Even fewer (14%) believe that their company’s leaders are generally willing to change their ways.

Lack of clarity
Fewer than two in five (39%) strongly believe that their managers understand their roles at the company.

Could be better
This issue often leads to poor working relationships with managers and the people under them. Fewer than four in ten (38%) workers can strongly state that their managers have established effective working relationships with them.

Low priority
Perhaps this is why a minority of employees who feel accountable for something at work tend to place the success (36%) or happiness (32%) of their supervisors on this list of responsibilities.
There’s also a need for clearer and stronger communication between senior executives, managers, and the rest of the organization about the company’s vision.

**Not invested**

Just under half (48%) of the nation’s workers believe that senior executives at their company are committed to the organization’s overall vision or mission.

**Lack of comprehension**

Even less (40%) strongly feel that their managers understand the company’s strategy or goals.

**No connection**

This is likely why 40% also confess that they don’t completely understand their company’s vision – some of these folks haven’t even been exposed to it at all.

**Not part of the business**

Almost six in ten (57%) employed Americans feel accountable for something at work, and do not count their company’s revenue, profit, or growth among those items.

**Tying it all together**

Additionally, only 29% strongly agree that their managers have the ability to make the company’s mission relevant to their own specific job responsibilities.

**Not coming through**

While many senior executives should be able to help workers understand the organization’s vision, fewer than one in five (16%) employees think that’s what these folks do best.
They’re in this together

Perhaps because they don’t always get the support they need from senior executives, numerous employees have built strong relationships with their teams. Among the 84% of workers who feel at least somewhat accountable at work, the two items they feel most accountable for are the success (69%) and the happiness (46%) of their departments.

As part of my current position, I feel at least somewhat accountable for...

* Among respondents who feel at least somewhat accountable for something as part of their current position.

- Success of team/department: 69%
- Happiness of team/department: 46%
- Company’s revenue/profit/growth: 43%
- Success of managers/leaders: 36%
- Happiness of managers/leaders: 32%
- Other: 1%
Fractured faith
This system breaks down a bit, however, when other teams are involved. Fewer than three in ten (27%) strongly agree that when they work with other groups, they can confidently depend on these outsiders to fulfill their specific duties.

Lack of definition
Around the same number (30%) can strongly assert that when they collaborate with other teams, each individual’s responsibilities are clear.

- This sentiment is even weaker among workers who don’t manage others at all than those who do (27% vs. 33%).

Disconnect among peers
This is likely why more than four in ten (43%) employees concur that “managing across” to empower colleagues in other departments is harder to do than managing up or down.

Separation of responsibility
What’s more, over three quarters (76%) of workers would prefer that each team was held accountable for their own tasks in situations that involve cross-team collaboration.

- More workers who are 45 and older than those in the 18-44 age group (82% vs. 70%) feel this way.
If it isn’t broken...
More than half (54%) of employed Americans feel that their company is better at identifying what works well in order to mirror these approaches elsewhere than trying to fix processes that aren’t working.

The best way to go
Similarly, 56% believe that companies tend to be more successful when they take this tactic.

- This fact is clearer to more 18–34-year-olds than their 35+ elders (65% vs. 53%).

Lack of transparency
However, there may be little information along these lines available to employees as a whole. Less than a third (32%) strongly agree that they know about or understand which departments or processes aren’t working as well as they should be.

Companies are more successful when they identify what is...
Important Improvements

In order to implement best practices, employees are in need of relevant on-the-job training.

Missing a key benefit
More than a quarter (26%) of workers report that they don’t have any training available to them at work right now.

Waste of resources
What’s worse, more than six in ten (62%) of those who do have training available believe that it is either only somewhat relevant to their jobs or not applicable at all.

Cause for concern
This could be why 14% have worried at least once in the last six months that they don’t have the skills they need for advancement.

Workplace needs
Clearly, there’s a demand for more on-the-job training opportunities. A great deal of employed Americans would prefer to gain knowledge or skills for their jobs in the workplace, either in-person (62%) or online (41%).

- More women than men (65% vs. 58%) would opt for in-person training at work to get better at their jobs.

Positive impacts
This may go a long way toward boosting employee engagement. More workers who have training available to them at work than those who don’t have felt committed (48% vs. 39%), happy (45% vs. 37%), fulfilled (31% vs. 21%), and excited (30% vs. 14%) about work in the past four weeks.

I would like to gain knowledge or skills for my job via...

- In-person training at work: 62%
- Online training at work: 41%
- Major events: 30%
- Webinars: 21%
- News articles: 14%
- Social media: 10%
- Mobile applications: 7%
- Other: 5%
Agents of Change

This need for better leadership especially comes into play as companies undergo major culture shifts or significant organizational transformation.

Less than confident

Fewer than one in three (30%) workers strongly believe that if their company was going through a major organizational shift, they’d trust their managers to tell them everything they needed to know.

Potentially troubling times

This is likely why close to half (49%) feel that most of their colleagues would be either worried, nervous, or skeptical if their companies were undergoing a big change.

Worries on the rise

In fact, 13% of workers even confess that, at least once in the past six months, they’ve been concerned that significant changes in their companies might negatively impact their performance.

If my company was undergoing a major change, I would trust my manager(s) to provide me with all the information I needed to know.

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About the America’s Workforce survey

Survey was conducted between December 20, 2012 and January 2, 2013 among 1,061 Americans who work full time or part time using an email invitation and an online survey.

Results of any sample are subject to sampling variation. The magnitude of the variation is measurable and is affected by the number of interviews and the level of the percentages expressing the results.

In this particular study, the chances are 95 in 100 that a survey result does not vary, plus or minus, by more than 3 percentage points from the result that would be obtained if interviews had been conducted with all persons in the universe represented by the sample. The margin of error for any subgroups will be slightly higher.

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