Employee Experience 3.0

A Look Into the Future of Work

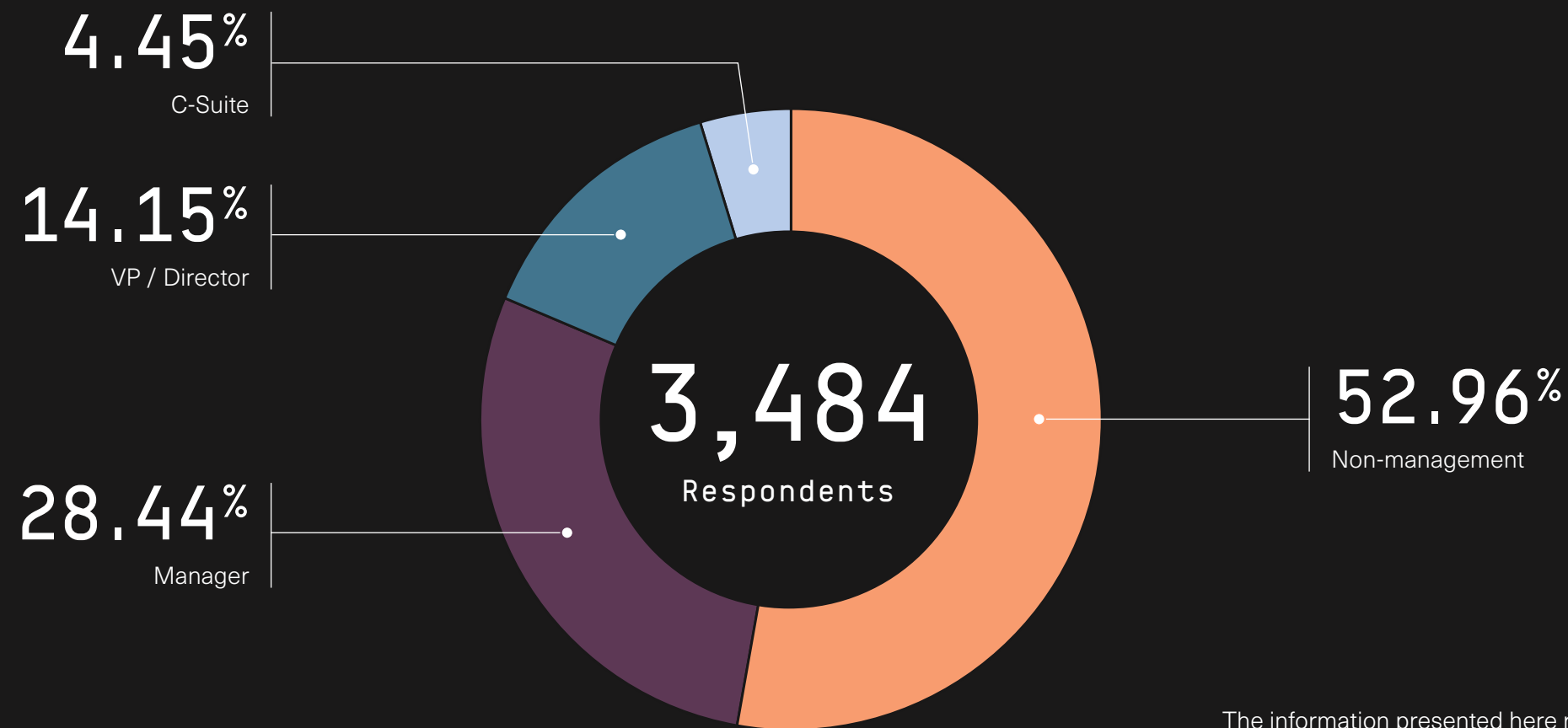AQUENT

Part 01

Creating a Workplace That Works

Take location out of the equation.

Employees have different needs and are in different places physically, mentally, and in their stage of life. To access the full potential of the talent markets, employers need to embrace not just one but the entire spectrum of options—from fully remote to hybrid to fully on-site.

Hybrid may sound like the solution, but it still limits organizations to talent that are within commuting distance of offices. Today's top talent want the ability to work remotely, whether that's from their home or an entirely new location halfway across the globe. Organizations need to build the internal support and culture alongside the infrastructure, systems, and processes to not only normalize hybrid and remote work but also facilitate the experiential aspirations of the workforce.

Today, the organizations that will attract and retain the best staff will have a culture without location bias, where employees can be confident they can enjoy rich life experiences while achieving their full potential and career aspirations.

The details on our data.

4.45%
C-Suite

14.15%
VP / Director

28.44%
Manager

3,484
Respondents

52.96%
Non-management

The information presented here reflects the results of a global survey conducted by Aquent and Vitamin T from June to July 2022 with 3,484 respondents. Additional data was also collected through LinkedIn polls on the Vitamin T and Aquent company pages. We engaged Dr. Terri Horton, MBA, MA, a recognized thought leader on the Future of Work, to help craft the survey questions and provide insights on the results.

Where are your employees? All over the map.
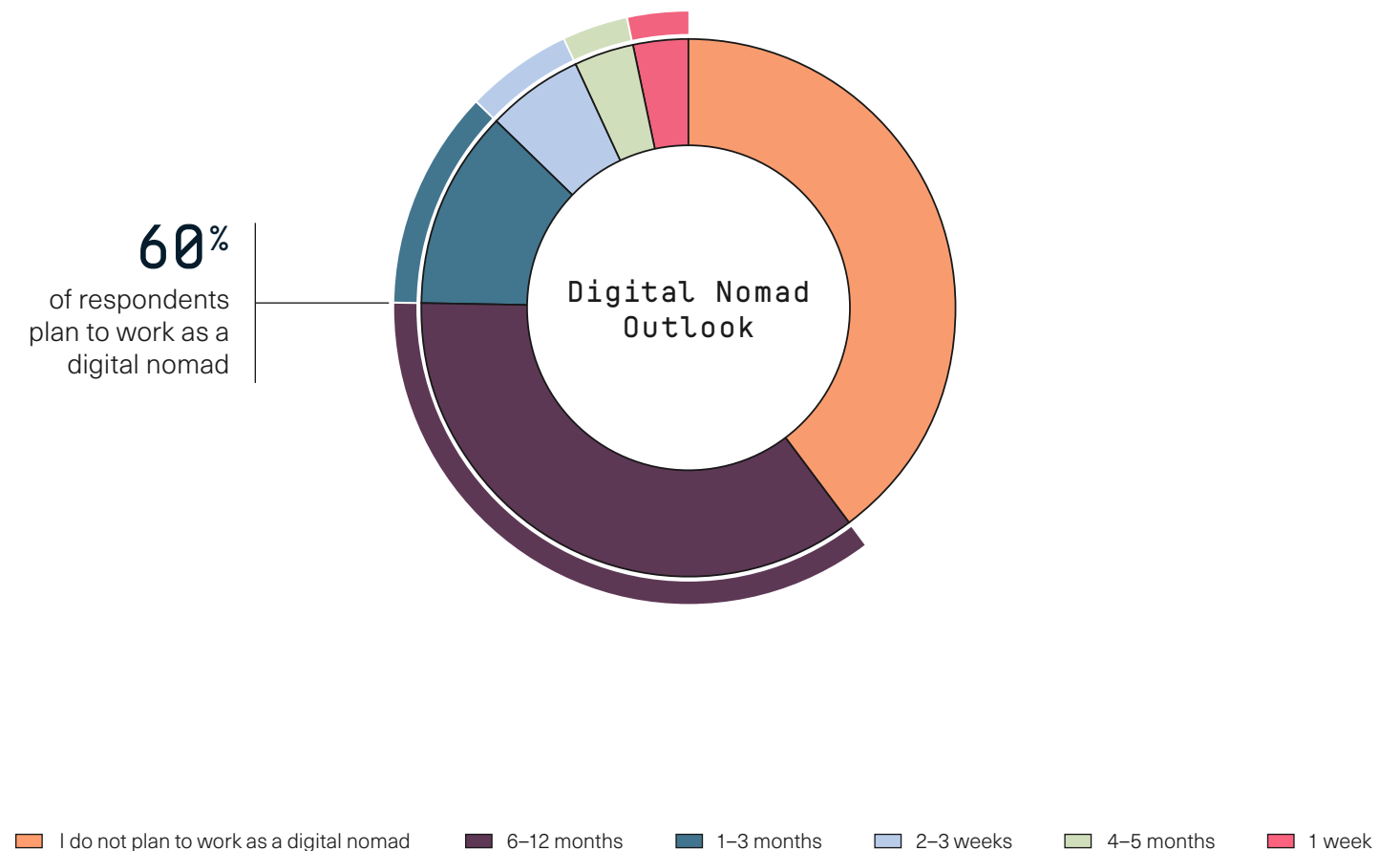
Get up to speed with the digital nomad.

Just when you were getting a handle on work-from-home, employees now want to work-from-anywhere. Our survey revealed that at least 60% of employees of all ages and levels want to work remotely as a "digital nomad" within the next 1–3 years. Of those, over 50% prefer a 6–12 month timeframe—70% for the 56+ age group. The results from our LinkedIn polls indicated the intent to become a digital nomad was even higher, at 72%.

A location-independent, work-anywhere model is a competitive advantage that has already been harnessed by the most forward-thinking companies. Spotify's "Working From Anywhere" manifesto states: "Work isn't somewhere you go, it's something you do." According to a Qualtrics report, 80% of employees looking for a new job said it was important that their next job allows them to live anywhere, which underscores why companies need to consider this approach.

Fifty countries from Portugal to Bali to Iceland now offer virtual nomad visas allowing workers of foreign companies to stay for six months to five years. Yes, this is happening. Now is the time to build the infrastructure, systems, and processes to facilitate this movement or risk increased turnover and a reduced talent pool.

Digital nomad: A location-independent, technology-enabled lifestyle allowing one to travel and work remotely.

Q: Do you plan to work as a digital nomad within the next one to three years for at least:

60% of respondents plan to work as a digital nomad

Digital Nomad Outlook

- ☐ I do not plan to work as a digital nomad
- ☐ 6–12 months
- ☐ 1–3 months
- ☐ 2–3 weeks
- ☐ 4–5 months
- ☐ 1 week

"Any senior role now transcends locations, and needs people to work with teams across the world. I think the most important requirements for global working would be data security, a good video calling service, collaborative tools, insurance, and a formal contract."

Kelly M.

Global Program Manager, Fortune 500 Tech Firm
Digital nomad working in Dubai

Give employees freedom while having their back.

When given a choice of what matters most as a digital nomad, global location flexibility reigns number one. But despite the desire to work untethered, employees want their organization to support them in various ways. Next on the list of importance, employees wanted the security of a formal contract, followed by health insurance, and workers' compensation coverage. More than 25% wanted their organization to enable integrated workflows and establish core working hours. Nearly one-third would rely on their company for data security and tax guidance.

To meet employees' expectations, companies need to be prepared with digital nomad-friendly policies and procedures in place, along with the infrastructure to allow work to be done anywhere. The youngest cohort had the highest expectations, desiring more of nearly every type of assistance listed in the survey. Older generations had less interest in tax guidance and co-working memberships, but more interest in data security.
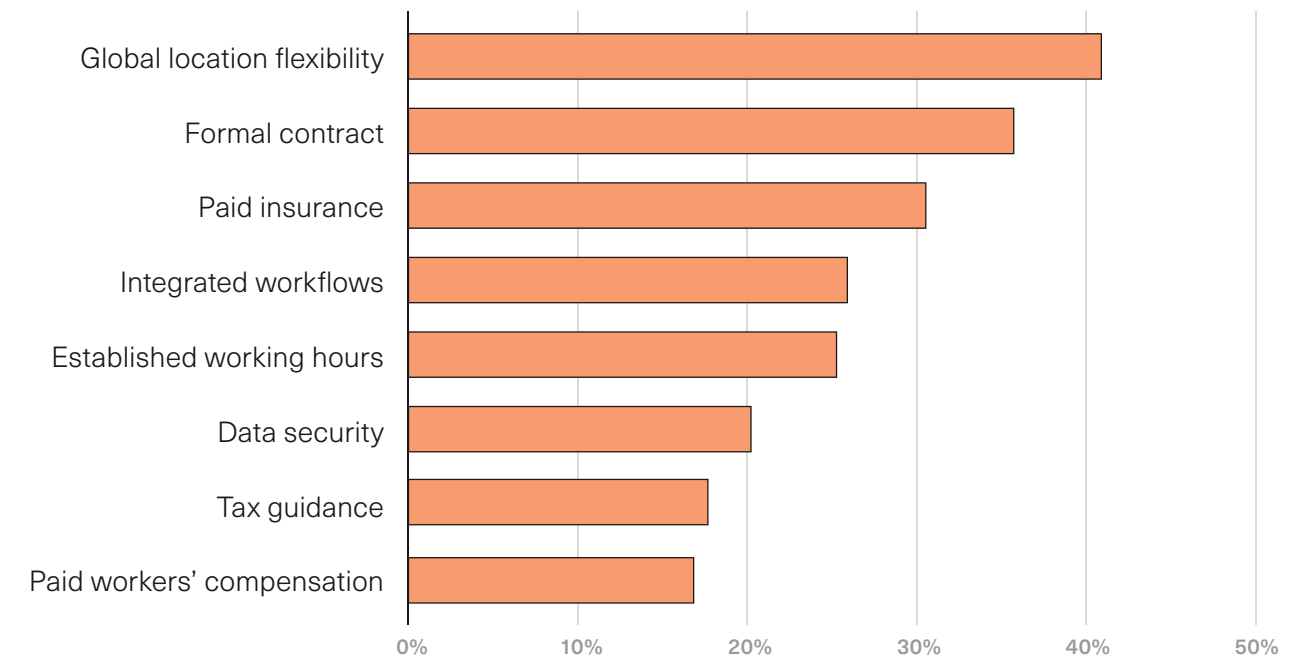
"We are on the cusp of a major employee-driven transformation to a whole new way of working. The opportunity for employers to embrace this future is equally profound. To do so, we need to reset our idea of normal work to be flexible work."

Dr. Sean Gallagher

Director, Centre for the New Workforce at
Swinburne University of Technology, Australia

Source: Reset, Restore, Reframe – Making Fair Work
FlexWork - A Deloitte and Swinburne Edge Report

For employees, it's all about the where and when.

Instead of how much they work, today's talent clearly place more importance on deciding where and when they work. Globally, more than 73% gave full flexibility the highest importance, that is, the ability to choose on-site, remote, or hybrid work. And flexible hours came second, the ability to work when they were able to be most productive. A study showed that employees worked fewer hours when at home but increased hours on the weekend and evenings, highlighting how the structure of the working week is changing.

In North America, the difference is even more striking. Three years ago, unlimited vacation or leave was a promising new retention strategy, with 72% of U.S. employees expressing interest. But according to our latest findings, it has lost its status as a trendy perk to attract the best talent. Turns out, unlimited vacation has not been an easy sell in the U.S. Americans take just 14 days off per year on average, versus 24 days for Europeans, with much of the paid time off going unused.
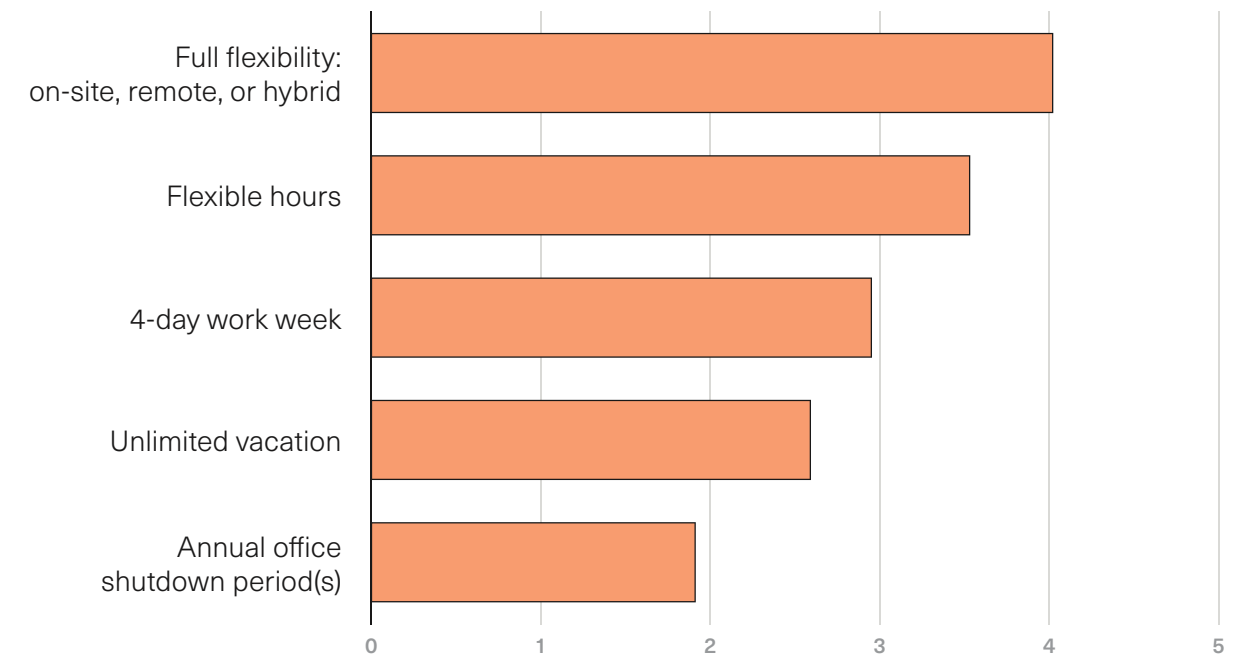
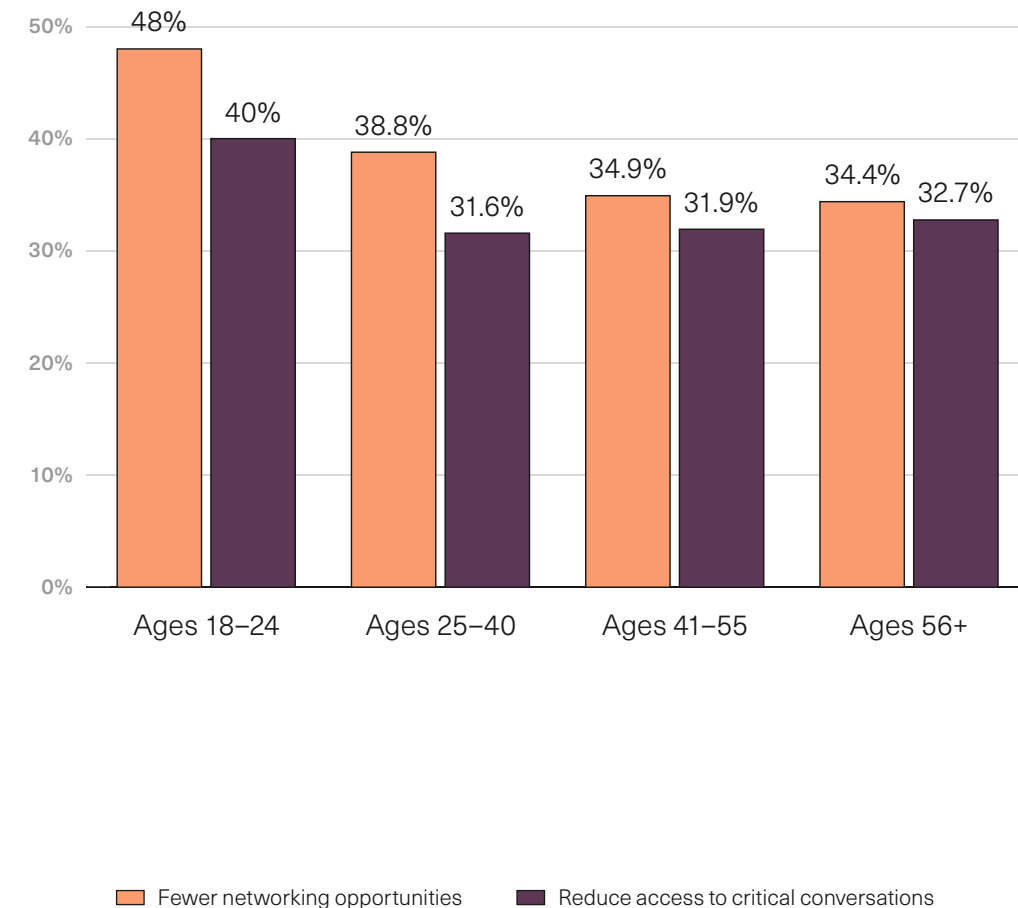# Workplace preferences are a generational thing.

For less tenured staff, falling behind is front of mind.

While young millennial and Gen Z employees favor hybrid work, they are more concerned than their tenured colleagues that flexible work will impact their career progression. Both groups fear that with less time in the office, they will miss out on opportunities to network and be mentored and that these informal personal interactions could be career-making—or breaking. This concern falls with age but is still high, as 54% of the 56+ group fear that hybrid work will impact their career.

Organizations need to meet this challenge head-on by creating innovative ways to give younger staff members the opportunity to follow their career aspirations without "fear of missing out" if they choose remote work. Leaders need to articulate strategies clearly and develop ways specifically for remote talent to get the networking and mentoring connections that will support their career advancement.

Fear of Missing Out (FOMO): A feeling of anxiety or insecurity over the possibility of missing out on something, such as an event or an opportunity.

Legend: Fewer networking opportunities — Reduce access to critical conversations

	Ages 18–24	Ages 25–40	Ages 41–55	Ages 56+
Fewer networking opportunities	48%	38.8%	34.9%	34.4%
Reduce access to critical conversations	40%	31.6%	31.9%	32.7%

"While they may have desired perceptions or personal needs, employees need to first be met where they are, and in the context of their particular work. Some blended accommodations and choices should be created and with the combined participation of all worker types."
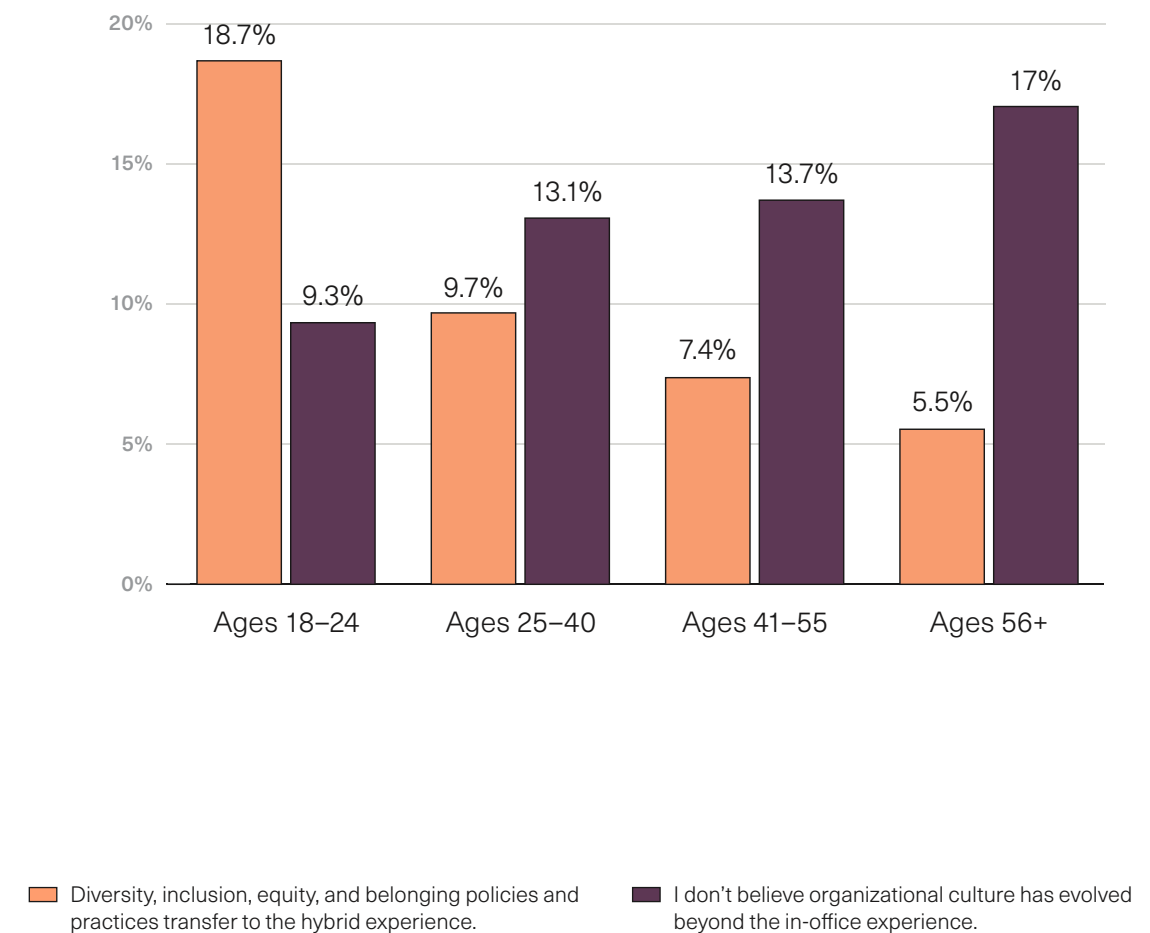
Bob Schwartz

Dean, Schools of Arts, Design & Business at Mount Mary University, Member of Aquent InsideOut Community

Younger workers are game for change.

Nearly everyone agrees that workflows, processes, policies, and collaboration tools have enabled employees to work from home effectively. But what about its impact on employees' well-being? According to our survey, younger workers are more optimistic about the success of remote opportunities from the standpoint of diversity, inclusion, equity, and belonging. Perhaps due to being fully immersed in digital platforms from a young age, they are more comfortable building relationships virtually. At the same time, their older colleagues place more value on in-person interactions and find it more difficult to experience belonging and inclusion in a remote or virtual setting.

Our survey also revealed that with age comes skepticism about workplace change. Although the opinion is overwhelmingly positive, those aged 56+ were less convinced than their younger counterparts that organizational culture had indeed evolved beyond the in-office experience. Could it be that they are feeling protective of the status quo, or feeling vulnerable as the world changes around them? The Great Resignation or Reflection has shown us that talent are clearly willing to walk away from the status quo and the organizations that refuse to evolve.

Q: I believe the culture of organizations has evolved to accommodate hybrid or remote working employees because:

Legend:
- ▢ Diversity, inclusion, equity, and belonging policies and practices transfer to the hybrid experience.
- ▢ I don't believe organizational culture has evolved beyond the in-office experience.

Chart data:
- Ages 18–24: 18.7%, 9.3%
- Ages 25–40: 9.7%, 13.1%
- Ages 41–55: 7.4%, 13.7%
- Ages 56+: 5.5%, 17%

Where do we go from here?

Key takeaways and solutions.

So, what should your organization do to create an employee experience that meets the needs of your staff whether they want to work remote, hybrid, or in another country? Working with Dr. Terri Horton, we've created some recommendations to help you take the next step to create an employee experience that serves your organization today and in the future.

01.

Normalize hybrid work

Leaders must continue to build a culture that normalizes remote and hybrid work. That means mitigating proximity bias and alleviating guilt and fear that may be felt by remote workers. They need to create more opportunities that bring employees together to facilitate collaboration, creativity, innovation, and promote a sense of belonging. Additionally, organizations need to develop associated metrics and embed them into engagement and performance management practices.

Recommended Action: Just as many organizations have prioritized unconscious bias training, it is also critically important to prioritize proximity bias training. Organizations should reimagine leadership development programs that align with the realities of leading remote and hybrid teams, illuminate blind spots, provide modeling for coaching, and inspire remote employees to thrive.

02.

Win at employee experience

Employee experience is the new competitive advantage to hedge against resignations and quiet quitting, as well as navigating ever-changing employee perspectives about the role of work in their lives. Leaders should prioritize the employee experience as fervently as the customer experience, by frequently collecting data to uncover sentiment, unmet needs, and emerging / shifting preferences across employee segments. Additionally, they should use these insights to develop innovative strategies that foster remote and hybrid work, DEIB (Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging), engagement, and retention.

Recommended Action: Employee attitudes about work are evolving and continue to be influenced by what's happening in their lives in response to increased external volatility, uncertainty, and complexity. Organizations should increase the frequency of pulse surveys to collect employee sentiment and experience data. These surveys should specifically explore how the external environment impacts employees' personal lives and intersects with their work and experiences.

Key takeaways and solutions cont.

03.

Build infrastructure for talent mobility

While younger millennials and Gen Z employees favor hybrid and remote work, they are concerned about its impact on career trajectory. This concern will likely increase as they grapple with economic pressures over the next 12–18 months. Now is the time for leaders to clearly articulate strategies and develop the digital infrastructure that will support talent career advancement. This will help younger employees feel confident that geographic flexibility will not come at the expense of their career aspirations.

Recommended Action: Research suggests that a disconnect exists between how employers and employees perceive the impact of internal career development opportunities. Companies can normalize conducting intentional quarterly individual development plan discussions and structured mentoring sessions with leaders. This serves as a natural iteration of the role of the remote leader to coach, inspire, and connect with employees.

04.

Prioritize outcomes more than office hours

With the continued demand and momentum for flexible work, leaders should focus on putting into place practices, processes, and systems that align with the realities of remote work. For example, empower employees to work during the hours when they can be most productive, not necessarily Monday through Friday, 9 to 5. Leadership styles need to adapt to prioritize performance outcomes more than what time the work was done.

Recommended Action: Timing and frequency around when employees are most productive can be fluid. Organizations should collect survey data about employee preferences regarding flexible work that includes preferred hours, location(s), and in-person requirements. Quarterly employee check-ins can provide additional insights on what makes work satisfying. Finally, companies can align these findings with business continuity needs and use them to make flexible work better.

AQUENT

Aquent LLC is a global workforce services company that runs the largest staffing firm specializing in marketing, creative, and experience design. Since its founding in a dorm room in 1986, Aquent has transformed the staffing industry by going above and beyond for clients, investing in talent, and pioneering new technologies and services. In addition to the Aquent Staffing brand, the company has several other business units, including Vitamin T, Aquent Studios, Aquent Scout, Aquent Gymnasium, and RoboHead.

Learn more at **aquent.com**.

Guest contributor:

Dr. Terri Horton MBA, MA

Dr. Horton is a widely recognized thought leader on the future of work, an international speaker, and a subject-matter expert with two global research consultancies. She was included in the Onalytica 2022 Who's Who in the Future of Work report as a key opinion leader and expert with high credibility and authority. She is a TEDx speaker and the author of "Force Majeure: A Futurist's Guide to Boldly Thriving on Your Terms in Future of Work."