The New Hybrid Workplace:
Built on Resilience, Transparency, & Trust
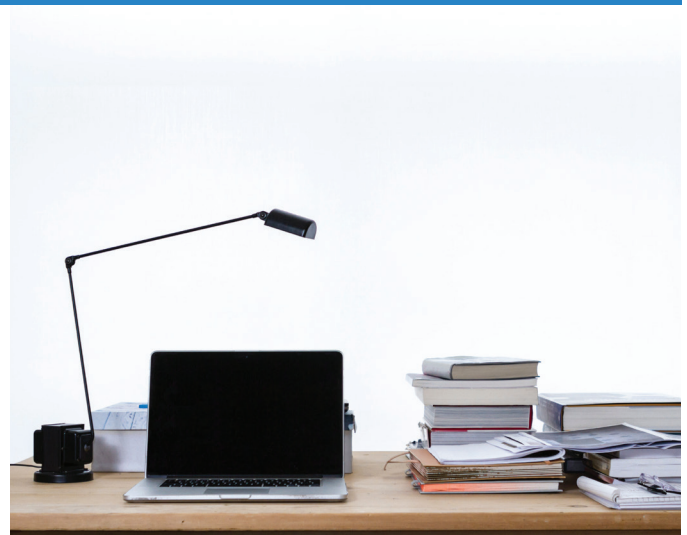
executive networks

meQuilibrium

Table of Contents

SECTIONS

Executive Summary

The global pandemic has upended business as usual, including the environment in which work is done. With no other choice, organizations embraced new ways of working, such as fully remote and hybrid systems.

But what at first seemed to be a short-term fix has turned into a more permanent part of the landscape as pandemic surges continually disrupt the workplace and many employees express a desire to turn those temporary solutions into the new normal.

It's no wonder that resilience, along with digital fluency, was the number one power skill cited by more than 1,000 global learning and development professionals, 800 learners, and 3,000 managers in a survey conducted by LinkedIn Learning.

Our research, however, shows that organizations have not yet fully grasped the complex dynamics underpinning the move to hybrid work environments. To enable greater resilience among employees and create a productive and engaged workforce, employers need to understand the critical factors at play. That includes everything from disconnects among employee segments regarding preferred work environments to Leaders' faulty assumptions about how effectively they're helping their workforce to adapt.

Armed with this information, employers can form new policies and practices shaped to fit current realities and a transformed organization. Using a scattershot approach, the move to hybrid work can lead to lower morale, greater stress and uncertainty, and even weak retention. With a well-informed methodology, employers can build more resilient and productive enterprises.

Five Key Insights

What follows are insights into the critical trends driving successful hybrid work and how organizations can build an adaptable workforce ready to tackle the challenges of today's fast-changing and unpredictable environment.

We've identified five key findings from our research that focus on how organizations can build resilience, transparency, and trust to attract and retain talented employees more effectively:

#1 A mismatch between employees' actual and desired work environments threatens their wellbeing.

#2 In an uncertain world, clarity and transparency are critical when communicating hybrid work guidelines.

#3 Conflicting views of the best work environment for career, culture, and performance exist across generations and job levels.

#4 After two years of constant crisis and social upheaval, positivity ranks as a key attribute needed to adapt to a changing environment.

#5 Organizations that fail to provide adequate support for all work environments risk damaging employee morale and retention.

Fortunately, there is a lot organizations can do to address these issues. Perhaps most important, they must understand the urgent role they play in today's fraught environment in supporting the wellbeing of not only employees, but their families, as well.

By taking these, and many other steps, organizations can create adaptable, engaged workforces well-equipped to thrive in the new hybrid workplace.

- Apply empathy as a core cultural value in the hybrid workplace

- Engage in deep listening with all employee segments to understand preferences for their optimal work environment

- Ensure equitable access to career development opportunities for on-site, remote, and hybrid workers

Key Findings

Key Insights into Building the New Hybrid Workplace

Our research findings are based on a survey conducted in fall 2021 of 912 HR Leaders, Business Leaders, and Individual Contributors across U.S. based organizations of various sizes in a cross section of industry sectors. Respondents were asked a series of questions probing their attitudes towards different work environments—hybrid, remote, and on-site—and their level of job satisfaction, overall wellbeing, and resilience.

These findings revealed five powerful currents driving the move to create successful hybrid and remote work environments.

#1 A mismatch between employees' actual and desired work environments threatens their wellbeing.

More than 2 in 5 employees do not currently work in their preferred setting.

We are experiencing a mental health pandemic, in addition to one caused by the coronavirus and emerging variants. This crisis of wellbeing is exacerbated when employees do not work in their preferred work setting. But our research finds a significant portion—42%—of our survey sample is unable to work in an ideal environment, whether that is fully in person, hybrid, or fully remote. When a mismatch exists, employees are more likely to feel burned out and are more likely to quit. *(Figure 1, next page)*
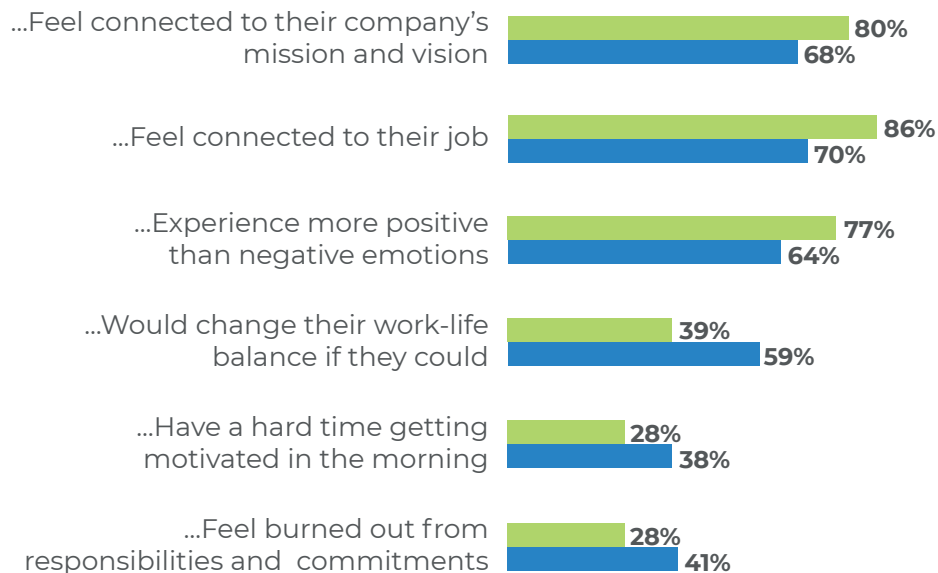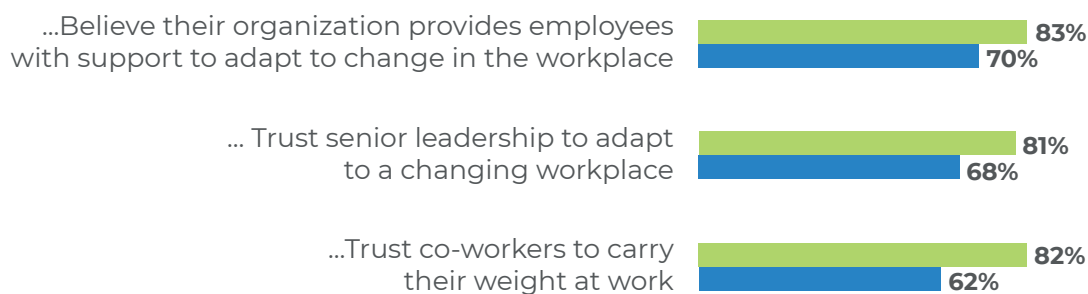
A work environment mismatch spells trouble for employees and organizations.

🟩 Working in ideal work environment
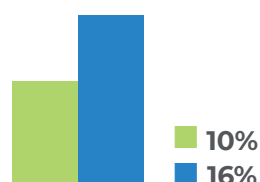🟦 Not working in Ideal work environment

% who Agree/Strongly Agree that they...

...Feel connected to their company's mission and vision
🟩 **80%**
🟦 **68%**

...Feel connected to their job
🟩 **86%**
🟦 **70%**

...Experience more positive than negative emotions
🟩 **77%**
🟦 **64%**

...Would change their work-life balance if they could
🟩 **39%**
🟦 **59%**

...Have a hard time getting motivated in the morning
🟩 **28%**
🟦 **38%**

...Feel burned out from responsibilities and commitments
🟩 **28%**
🟦 **41%**

% who Agree/Strongly Agree that they...

...Believe their organization provides employees with support to adapt to change in the workplace
🟩 **83%**
🟦 **70%**

... Trust senior leadership to adapt to a changing workplace
🟩 **81%**
🟦 **68%**

...Trust co-workers to carry their weight at work
🟩 **82%**
🟦 **62%**

% likely to look for a new job in the next 12 months:

🟩 **10%**
🟦 **16%**

Those assigned to their preferred work situation have a more positive employee experience.

They are more likely to feel connected to their company's mission and vision (80%) vs. those not working in their preferred environment (68%) and to feel positive emotions at work (77% vs. 64%).

Workers who are not in their ideal work environment are:

· More likely to feel burned out (41% vs. 28%)
· More likely to look for a new job in the next 12 months (16% vs. 10%)

Who is feeling the most and least amount of burnout, by generation and work environment?

	By generation	By work environment
Most Burnout	Gen Z, 46%	Fully on-site / in-person, 36%
Least Burnout	Boomers, 17%	Hybrid, 29%

The generation gap observed here is consistent with the findings of meQuilibrium's four bi-annual Self-Check surveys that have been conducted since July 2020, each with a sample of over 7,000 respondents who are employed full-time and based in North America.
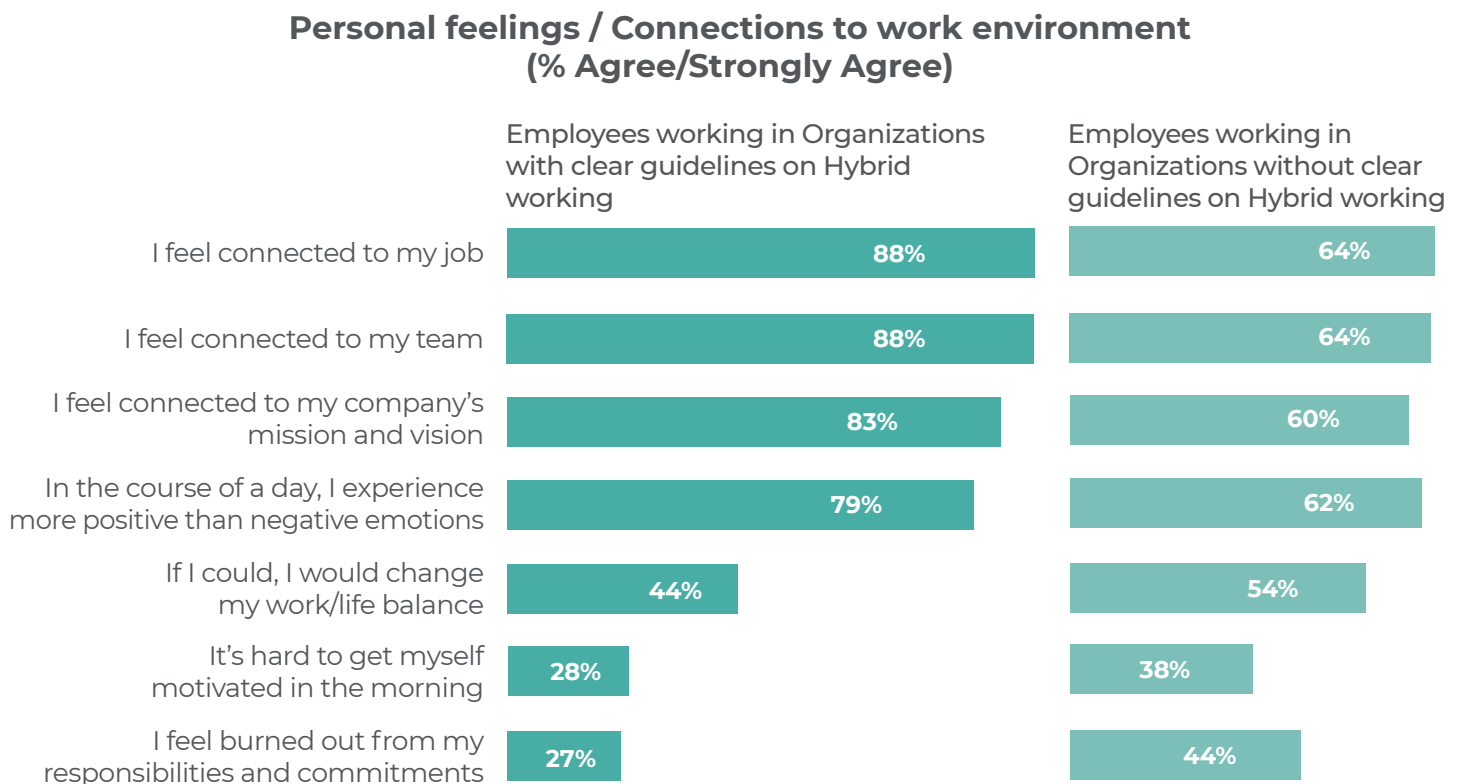
#2　In an uncertain world, clarity and transparency are critical when communicating hybrid work guidelines.

At organizations lacking a clear roadmap for hybrid work, employees are more likely to struggle with engagement.

HR policies largely focus on supporting on-site workers, because they traditionally have comprised the majority of the workforce. But as more employees experience the flexibility of hybrid work, the model is likely to become the dominant environment for workers in situations where it is an appropriate option.
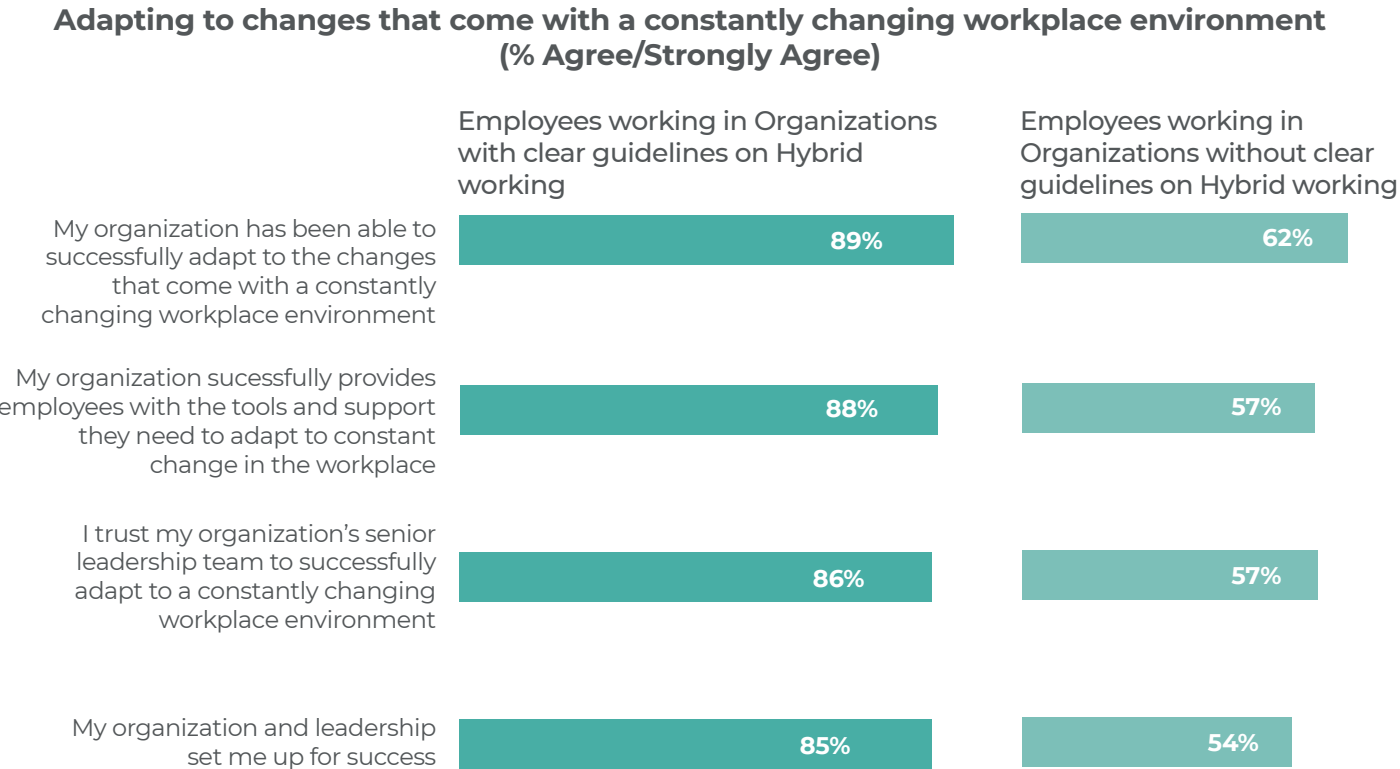
This development leaves organizations with a new imperative: create a clear roadmap for hybrid work, one that all workers understand, ensuring they feel strong ties to their employer and their team. Our research shows that 88% of employees at organizations with clear hybrid working guidelines feel connected to their job and their team vs. 64% of employees working in organizations without such guidelines. These findings, plus additional benefits of having clear hybrid work expectations, are shown in Figure 2.

FIGURE 2:
Employees fare better when organizations spell out hybrid work expectations.

Personal feelings / Connections to work environment
(% Agree/Strongly Agree)

	Employees working in Organizations with clear guidelines on Hybrid working	Employees working in Organizations without clear guidelines on Hybrid working
I feel connected to my job	88%	64%
I feel connected to my team	88%	64%
I feel connected to my company's mission and vision	83%	60%
In the course of a day, I experience more positive than negative emotions	79%	62%
If I could, I would change my work/life balance	44%	54%
It's hard to get myself motivated in the morning	28%	38%
I feel burned out from my responsibilities and commitments	27%	44%

Clear hybrid work guidelines also have strong implications for employee perceptions of support and the ability to adapt to change. (Figure 3)

FIGURE 3:

Employees feel more supported and adaptable to change with clear hybrid guidelines.

Adapting to changes that come with a constantly changing workplace environment (% Agree/Strongly Agree)

	Employees working in Organizations with clear guidelines on Hybrid working	Employees working in Organizations without clear guidelines on Hybrid working
My organization has been able to successfully adapt to the changes that come with a constantly changing workplace environment	89%	62%
My organization sucessfully provides employees with the tools and support they need to adapt to constant change in the workplace	88%	57%
I trust my organization's senior leadership team to successfully adapt to a constantly changing workplace environment	86%	57%
My organization and leadership set me up for success	85%	54%

Resilience Matters: Today's #1 Power Skill

Some companies are clearly at the top of their game when it comes to resilience. Their employees give them high marks for everything from how they've adapted to change to their success in providing the right tools needed to perform well under trying circumstances. Such mastery also extends to their approach to hybrid workplaces.

Resilience is defined as the capacity to bounce back and recover quickly from difficult situations, and come out in a better place.

> **There is a disconnect between Leaders' and Individual Contributors' perceptions.**
>
> *This disconnect is leading to greater uncertainty and anxiety among Individual Contributors who report a lack of clear guidelines about their work,* with 66% of Leaders saying their organization has clearly defined and communicated hybrid work guidelines vs. 47% of Individual Contributors.

#3 Conflicting views of the best work environment for career, culture, and performance exist across generations and job levels.

But everyone perceives a career conundrum involving hybrid vs. onsite work

Our findings reveal a paradox:
Even as they increasingly embrace remote and hybrid work, employees at all levels of the organization and across many segments point to in-person environments as the optimal choice for career advancement. For example, while 48% of Business Leaders and 45% of Individual Contributors prefer hybrid work, 47% and 43%, respectively, consider on-site work to be the surest route to receiving a promotion. (Figure 4, next page)
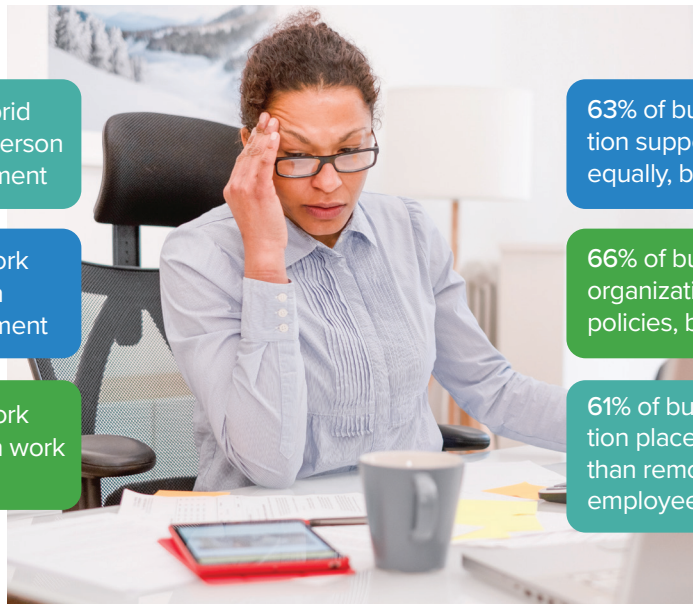
Such views may not be surprising, given the long-standing expectation at most organizations for employees to work on-site. As a result, opportunities for career advancement have typically depended on being physically present. For those working all or partly remote, the avenues for networking and increasing their visibility within the organization are less clear-cut.

The Career Conundrum: While many prefer remote or hybrid alternatives, they see on-site work as best for career advancement.

The Career Conundrum of Hybrid Work

48% of business leaders prefer a hybrid work environment, but **47%** view in-person work as the best for career advancement

53% of HR leaders prefer a hybrid work environment, but **44%** view in-person work as the best for career advancement

32% of employees prefer a hybrid work environment, but **43%** view in-person work as the best for career advancement

63% of business leaders say their organization supports all types of work environments equally, but only **55%** of employees agree

66% of business leaders say their organization has clearly defined hybrid work policies, but only **47%** of employees agree

61% of business leaders say their organization places more value on in-person work than remote or hybrid work, with **56%** of employees agreeing

Which work environments have the best outcomes?

Different work settings are perceived as being more or less conducive to producing positive results, with 43% citing hybrid work as the most effectivefor organizational performance and only 17% saying fully remote is best. Additionally, 41% point to a fully remote work environment as the least stressful, while only 14% say on-site/in-person work is the least stressful.
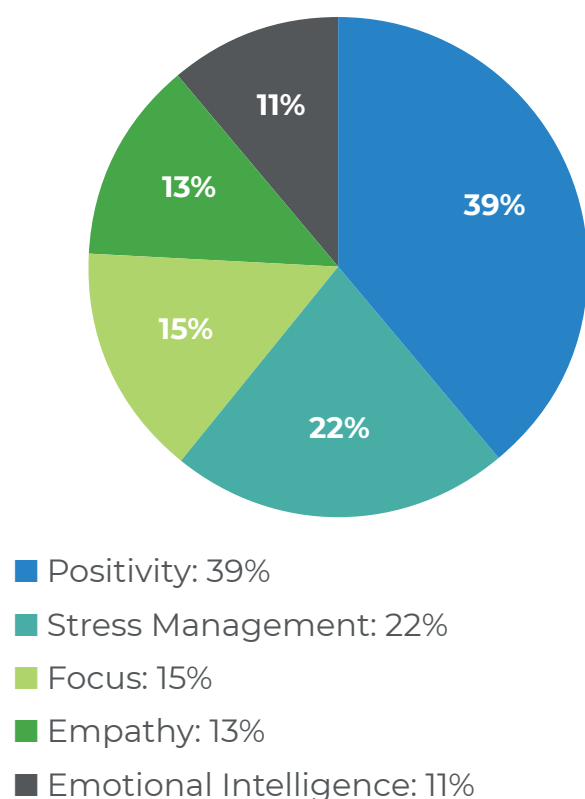
Leaders and Individual Contributors have varying views on the optimal workplace environment.

HR Leaders say fully remote (35%) and hybrid workplaces (35%) are the least stressful, while Individual Contributors say remote (50%) is the least stressful.

#4 After two years of constant crisis and social upheaval, positivity ranks as a key attribute needed to adapt to a changing environment.

Research shows that high levels of resilience help workers and organizations adapt and thrive, even in times of acute crisis. But realistic optimism, defined as the ability to maintain a positive outlook without denying reality, and positive emotions lie at the root of resilience and the ability to adapt successfully to difficult circumstances. So, it is no wonder that 39% of respondents cite this attribute as vital to helping employees respond with agility in tumultuous times. (Figure 5)

FIGURE 5:
Overall, survey participants ranked positivity as the most important attribute for adapting to change in the workplace, followed by stress management, focus, empathy, and emotional intelligence.

■ Positivity: 39%
■ Stress Management: 22%
■ Focus: 15%
■ Empathy: 13%
■ Emotional Intelligence: 11%

However, there's disagreement among different employee segments about which qualities are most essential.

Individual Contributors are more likely to rank "Empathy" as #1 or #2 (36%) compared to Leaders (20%), while employees currently working fully on-site (45%) are more likely to rank "Positivity" as first than fully remote employees (32%).

Businesses with resilient employees outperform the market. Among meQuilibrium's largest publicly traded customers, those companies with the highest resilience at baseline outperformed the Dow Jones Industrial Index (DJIA) by 116% from December 2018 - December 2020.

#5   Organizations that fail to provide adequate support for all work environments risk damaging employee morale and retention.

It's important that employees feel strongly valued, regardless of where they work.

Employees who perceive that their employers consistently treat them fairly are likely to experience higher morale and feelings of connection to their jobs. But organizations, especially those new to fully remote or hybrid work models, may not be doing enough to ensure all their employees feel equally supported. One result is that Leaders and Individual Contributors alike report that their organizations value on-site work more than other work environments. (Figure 6)

FIGURE 6:
Different employee groups agree: Their organizations value on-site work the most.

56%

56% of our **total sample** says their organization places more value on on-site work.

61%

61% of **Business Leaders** say their organization places more value on on-site work.

54%

54% of **HR Leaders** say their organization places more value on on-site work.

53%

53% of **Individual Contributors** say their organization places more value on on-site work.

Remote/hybrid workers who perceive they're receiving less support than on-site employees struggle more with burnout and lower morale.

Just 47% of such employees feel connected to their job compared to everyone else (76%) and more (55%) report feeling burned out than others (32%). *This dissatisfaction is also leading to a higher likelihood of resignation,* with 23% saying they're likely to look for another job in the next 12 months compared to 12% of other respondents.

Business Leaders and Individual Contributors have different views on the level of organizational support being given to all work environments.

Business Leaders (63%) are more likely than Individual Contributors (55%) to believe their organization supports remote, hybrid, and on-site work models equally.

We've identified steps that organizations can take to act on our findings and create a more resilient workforce, able to embrace the realities of the new hybrid workplace.

Actions and Recommendations for Leaders

#1 Address Mismatches in Actual and Desired Work Environments Head-On

Disconnects between one's actual and desired work environment lead to uncertainty and an unsettling feeling by employees that they are not in control of important decisions affecting their work lives. This lack of certainty is especially undermining during a time of heightened insecurity surrounding where, when, and how work gets done.

Specific actions Leaders can take include:

- *Engage in deep listening with all employee segments to understand preferences for their optimal work environment.*

- *Reach consensus on which job roles are ripe for remote, hybrid, and fully on-site work.*

- *Encourage team Leaders to lead with empathy as they talk with employees about their work environment preferences.*

- *Find positive ways to improve morale, work/life balance, and other issues if work environments are unable to align to an employee's preferences.*

#2 Set Guardrails for Hybrid Work

Uncertainty in the workplace leads to heightened feelings of stress, along with a lack of connection to the organization and reduced motivation. To enable greater resilience among employees in hybrid work environments, Leaders need to create a clear road map defining expectations, tailored to the organization's particular culture. For optimal success, Leaders should go further by modeling desired behavior for their employees. In addition, while specific guardrails might differ from one organization to another, there are certain must-have elements.

Specific actions Leaders can take include:

- *Apply empathy, a focal point of resilience, as a core cultural value in the hybrid workplace.*

- *Provide team level autonomy for achieving flexibility rather than top-down direction.*

- *Define core working hours during the day that accommodate varying time zones and work environments*

- *Discuss and agree on policies for communicating transparently with team members after work hours to build trust.*

#3 Understand the conflicting perceptions of optimal work environments and promote career advancement in all settings.

There has been a long-standing expectation at most organizations for employees to work on-site. In fact, before the pandemic, only 6% of those employed worked primarily remotely and about three quarters of workers had never worked remotely, according to a report by NCCI.

The pandemic continues to turn work and the workplace upside down, with a majority of employees preferring a hybrid work environment aligned to their day-to-day job responsibilities. Leaders must re-imagine how the post pandemic business landscape will operate for their organization and communicate these changes clearly to every worker.

Specific actions Leaders can take include:

· *Confirm your organization is providing the right set of technology tools for on-site, remote, and hybrid workers, so they can easily collaborate and participate in synchronous brainstorming.*

· *Ensure equitable access to career development opportunities for on-site, remote, and hybrid workers.*

· *Define core team hours (in person and remote) that align to time zones rather than physical locations.*

· *Train leaders in how to manage employees they rarely see in-person.*

#4 Probe levels of satisfaction and positivity among your workforce.

Positivity is a crucial factor in an employee's ability to be resilient. With that in mind, Leaders should examine how they can nurture the characteristic among all workers, regardless of where they work.

Specific actions Leaders can take include:

· *Demonstrate resilience and develop this skillset within others to build trust and transparency.*

· *Exhibit, recognize, and reward positivity in the workplace.*

· *Understand the concept of realistic optimism and how this can drive greater levels of positivity among employees.*

· *Examine how employee recognition programs can be re-imagined to nurture employee positivity*
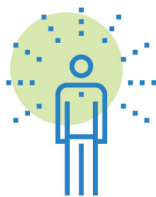
#5 Identify the level of support your organization needs to provide for all workers in all work environments.

Employee wellbeing is no longer an employee benefit. Rather, it is now an employer's opportunity to support employees in all aspects of their personal and work lives. Since the pandemic, wellbeing has expanded beyond focusing on the individual employee to the entire family unit. Employees are part of a larger family ecosystem that also needs to benefit from employer support.
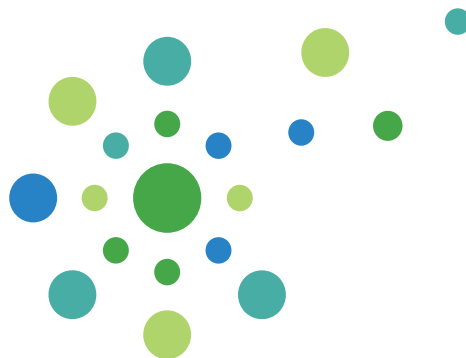
Specific actions Leaders can take include:

- *Elevate wellbeing as a core component of employee experience that all Leaders must support.*

- *Consider expanding wellbeing beyond the individual employee to that person's family unit.*

- *Find creative ways to communicate the holistic importance of employee wellbeing on a regular basis.*

- *Be creative in exploring tech-enabled wellbeing tools for all employees, regardless of where they work.*

Recap of Findings and Recommendations:

FINDING	RECOMMENDATION
A mismatch between employees' actual and desired work environments threatens their wellbeing.	Address mismatches in actual and desired work environments head-on.
Clarity and transparency are critical when communicating hybrid work guidelines.	Set guardrails for hybrid work.
Conflicting views of the best work environment for career, culture, and performance exist across generations and job levels.	Understand conflicting perceptions of optimal work environments and promote career advancement in all settings.
Positivity ranks as a key attribute needed to adapt to a changing environment.	Probe levels of satisfaction and positivity among your workforce.
Organizations that fail to provide adequate support for work environments risk damaging employee morale and retention.	Identify the type of support your organization needs to provide for all workers in all work environments.

Conclusion

Two years into the pandemic, a majority of employees now prefer working in a hybrid work environment. The widely held view is that hybrid work is about owning results, regardless of where or when work happens.

Our research revealed the importance of establishing clear expectations for how to work in a hybrid workplace, as well as how to lead employees who work fully in-person, remote or in a hybrid environment. It also uncovered critical disconnects across job levels and generations about everything from the clarity of hybrid work guidelines to which environments are the most beneficial to one's career and cause the greatest stress, as well as the implications for employee engagement when individuals do not work in their preferred setting.

Clear lessons also emerged regarding the urgent importance of employee wellbeing and the crucial role leaders play in supporting the wellbeing of not only employees, but also their families. Wellbeing has become a core component of employee experience that leaders must embrace.
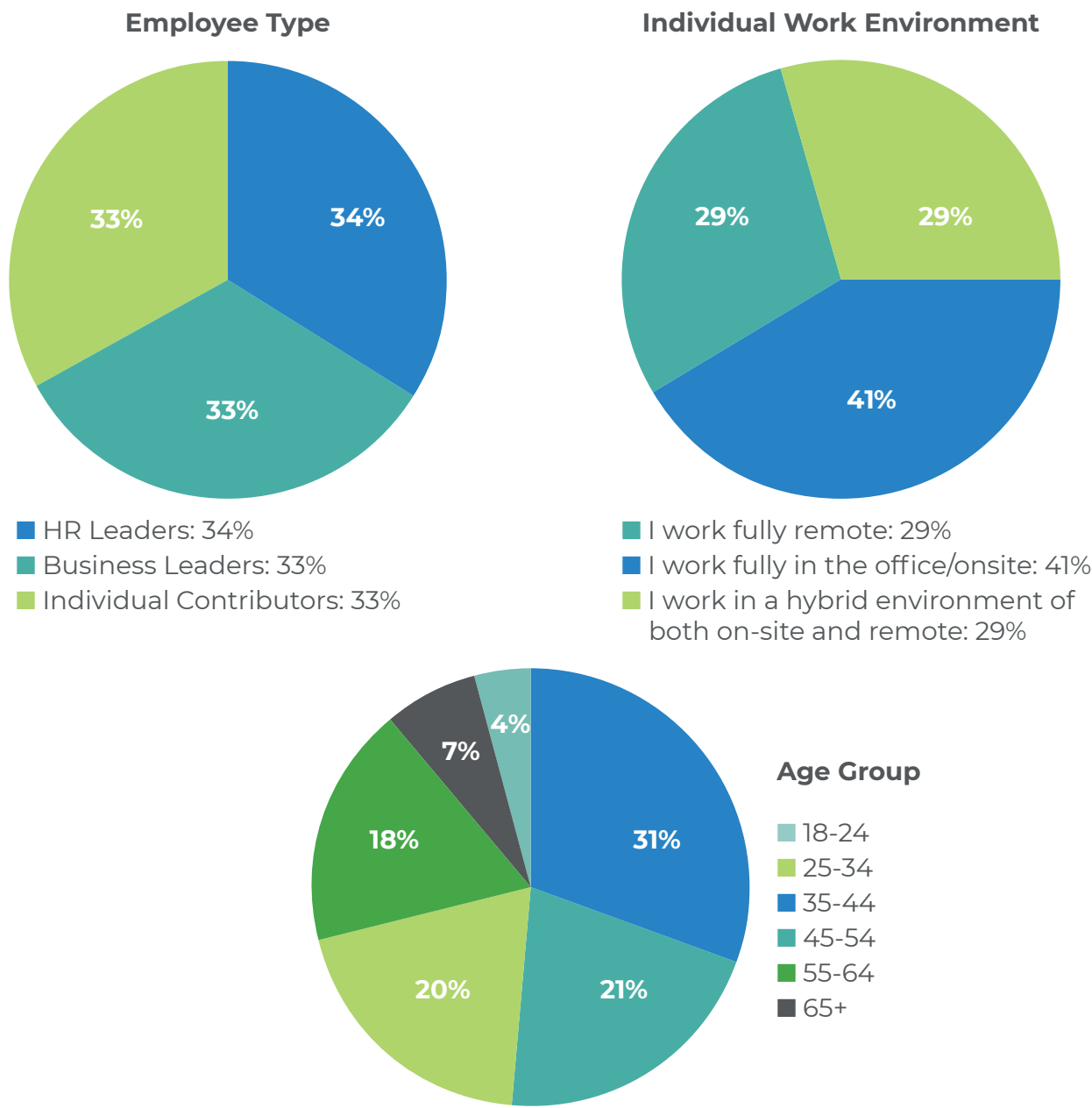
Dealing with ambiguity and uncertainty in different work environments requires leaders to lead with empathy, gratitude, and kindness, while building resilience. To ensure an organization's workforce is resilient, engaged, and productive, leaders need to understand the complexity of their current hybrid work environment and adapt workplace practices to ensure the organization thrives amid the uncertainty and volatility that is sure to continue.

Survey Methodology

We surveyed 912 full-time workers across U.S. based organizations of various sizes in a variety of sectors, including 309 HR Leaders, 301 Business Leaders, and 302 Individual Contributors. The research was conducted between October 25 and November 9, 2021. Respondents answered questions aimed at assessing their attitudes towards hybrid, remote, and on-site work environments and their connection to job satisfaction, overall wellbeing, resilience, and other factors. (Figure 7)

FIGURE 7: **SURVEY SAMPLE DEMOGRAPHICS**

Employee Type

- HR Leaders: 34%
- Business Leaders: 33%
- Individual Contributors: 33%

Individual Work Environment

- I work fully remote: 29%
- I work fully in the office/onsite: 41%
- I work in a hybrid environment of both on-site and remote: 29%

Age Group

- 18-24
- 25-34
- 35-44
- 45-54
- 55-64
- 65+

About the Authors

Jeanne Meister

Jeanne Meister is Founder, Future Workplace, and Executive Vice President, Executive Networks, the leading HR Peer Network company for the Global 1000.

Jeanne is a regular contributor to *Forbes* and *Harvard Business Review* and writes on topics related to the Future of Work and Future of Human Resources. Jeanne is leading a multi-client research program for Executive Networks on the Future Role of the CHRO, the Future of Working, and Learning and Employee Wellbeing.

Jeanne is the best-selling author of three books, *Corporate Universities: Lessons in Building a World-Class Work Force, The 2020 Workplace: How Innovative Companies Attract, Develop and Keep Tomorrow's Employees Today,* and *The Future Workplace Experience: 10 Rules for Mastering Disruption in Recruiting and Engaging Employees.*

Jeanne was named **21 HR People To Follow in 2021, 100 Most Influential People in HR, HR Tech Influencer for 2019, 2020 and 2021** and one of the **Top HR Experts to Watch by People Managing People Magazine.**

Jan Bruce

Jan Bruce is the CEO and Co-Founder of meQuilibrium, the leading digital resilience solution to help people and organizations deal with the stress of change, uncertainty and adversity. Jan has always been a ground-breaker, pushing the boundaries of human potential. Jan's greatest innovation was her early identification that workforce emotional wellbeing and adaptive capacity, in a transforming business world, were going to be two of the defining workplace issues of our time. At the same time, Jan recognized that the science of resilience, integrated with advanced technology, made possible the ability to predict problems and prescribe personalized solutions at global scale. This insight led Jan to found meQuilibrium, the first SaaS-based cognitive performance platform, based on proprietary, clinically validated science in the field of resilience.

Jan has led the meQuilibrium to exponential business growth in recent years. The company currently has over 60 enterprise customers, many in the Fortune 100, is available to 5 million+ employees globally, and has gathered billions of population data points enabling the use of machine learning to deliver enhanced personalization and predictive insights.

She is the co-author of *meQuilibrium: 14 Days to Cooler, Calmer, and Happier,* and a regular contributor to *Forbes.*

About Executive Networks

Global 1000 Human Resources Leaders trust **Executive Networks** to facilitate safe, meaningful, and innovative peer conversations that deliver accelerated, relevant insights and solutions. Heads of Human Resources and their teams will find networks that apply directly to their role and support their company's strategy and growth plans. Leaders who are looking for authentic peer connections and the assurance of confidentiality while adding value for their organization through sharing industry-agnostic insights appreciate the support and research Executive Networks can provide.
To learn more, visit **www.ExecutiveNetworks.com.**

About Future Workplace

Future Workplace is a leading global HR research and membership firm focused on educating HR leaders on "what's next" in working and learning. Through research, peer networks, and online courses via the award-winning **Future Workplace Academy**, the recipient of four Brandon Hall awards for excellence, Future Workplace provides continuing professional development opportunities for global HR, learning, and talent professionals. To learn more, visit **www.futureworkplace.com** and **futureworkplace.com/academy.**

About meQuilibrium

meQuilibrium is the only clinically-validated digital resilience solution that addresses burnout, stress, purpose, performance, and wellbeing holistically for individuals and entire organizations. We provide a personalized experience to inoculate people against limiting mindsets and behaviors. We deliver valuable workforce intelligence to run your business better. We positively engage entire organizations, one person at a time.
Learn more at **www.meQuilibrium.com**