

THE HEARTBEAT SERIES

Employee Expectations 2022



The year 2021 was another transformative year for organizations and employees around the world. To understand the impact of these events and how organizations can support higher levels of employee engagement, it's essential to understand what employees have been saying.

While the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted many areas of the employee experience directly, such as flexible working and growth, it has also raised awareness around societal issues including inequality, climate change, and corporate governance.

Employees were much more likely to comment about external events when responding to engagement surveys, highlighting the interwoven nature of business and the impact these events have on the workforce. In order to attract and retain talent, organizations will

need to demonstrate how they incorporate belonging and diversity into their culture, and what they are doing to tackle challenges related to environmental, social, and governance (ESG) practices.

The year 2021 also marked the start of the “Great Resignation,” which has led many employees to reevaluate their professional lives, including where and when they work. According to a recent [Future Forum survey](#), 78% of employees want location flexibility, while 95% want schedule flexibility.

With redefined priorities and a cautious sense of optimism about the future, many employees have started to rekindle conversations about professional growth and development. Growth scores of employees who remain with an organization are 13% higher than the average score of those who decide to leave, which makes employee development another key focus area for 2022.

Keep reading for a deep-dive into each of these areas, plus recommendations on specific actions you can take in 2022 that will contribute to higher levels of employee engagement.

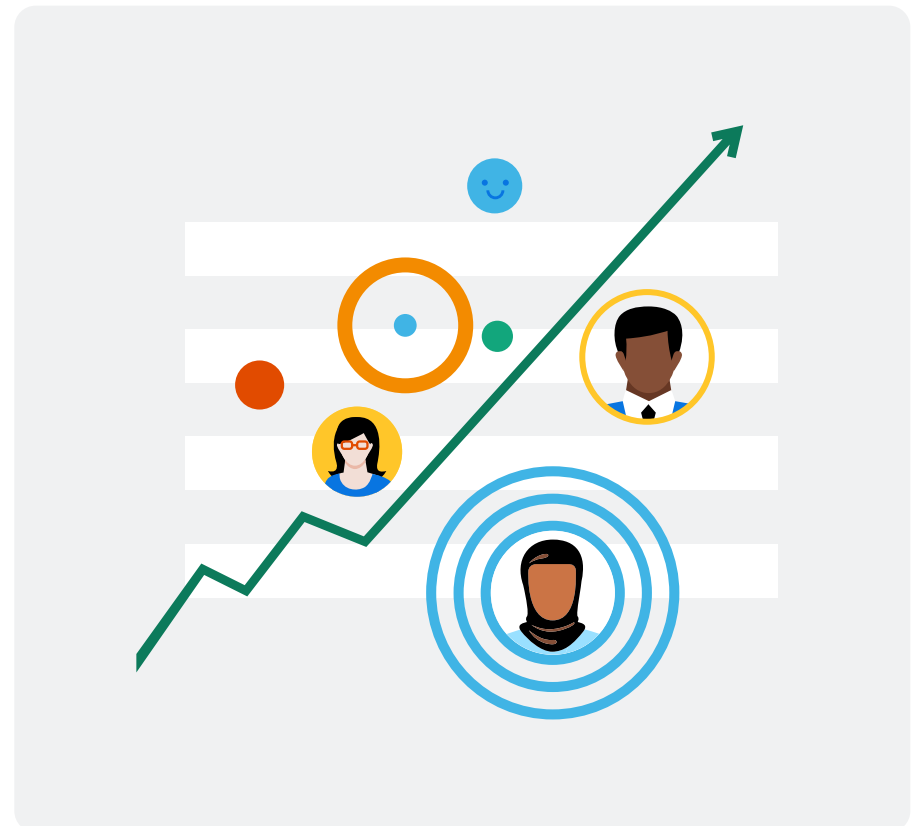
Methodology

The [Workday Peakon Employee Voice](#) database consists of over 210 million employee survey responses and nearly 40 million employee comments from across 160 countries.

This year's report is based on an analysis of 19 million comments submitted throughout 2021 by nearly 1.8 million employees across more than 1,000 companies. Regional breakdowns of the data are also available in the appendix, covering the U.S., the UK, Australia, France, and Germany.

Generational breakdowns in this report are based on those used by the Pew Research Center and U.S. Census Bureau, which are defined in the table to the top right:

| | Born | Ages |
|-------------|-----------|----------|
| Gen Z | 1997–2007 | 16 to 25 |
| Millennial | 1981–1996 | 26 to 41 |
| Gen X | 1965–1980 | 42 to 57 |
| Baby Boomer | 1955–1964 | 58 to 67 |

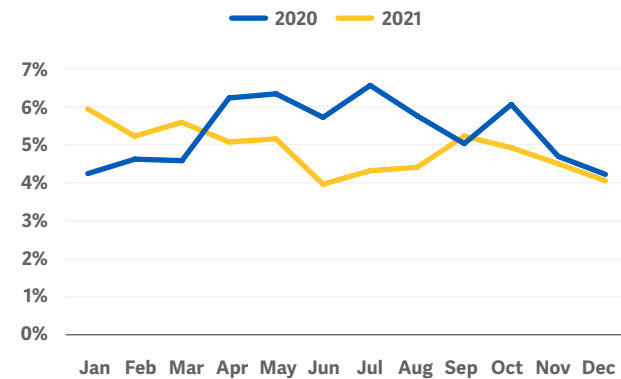


Flexible Working

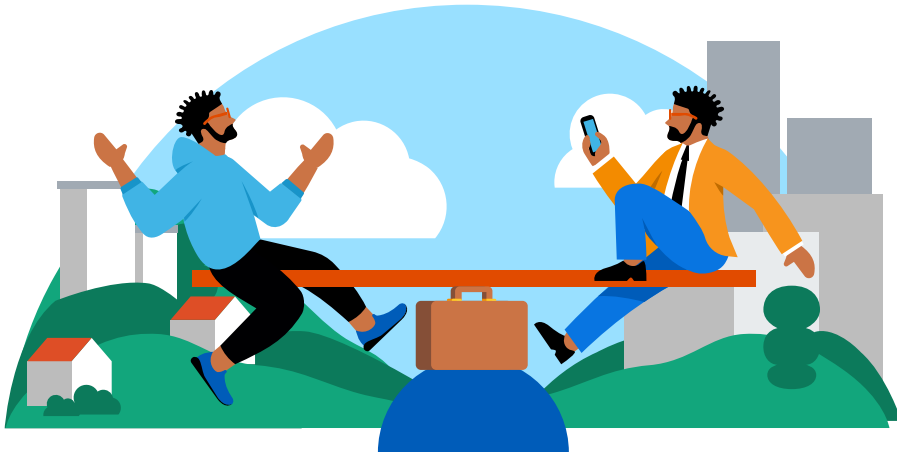
As a proportion of all comments left by employees in 2021, 5% were related to the theme of flexible working, which includes terminology such as *remote working*, *work-life balance*, *mental well-being*, *caregiving responsibilities*, *home office*, and *commute*.

That's almost unchanged (down 0.5%) from 2020, which highlights that flexible working is still a primary concern for employees—especially when taking into consideration the 125% increase in comment activity between 2019 and 2020.

Flexible working as a proportion of all comments in 2020/2021



Unlike previous years, when spikes in employee comments reflected the introduction of global lockdown measures, 2021 followed a more seasonal pattern, especially in relation to school holidays over the summer months, and the holiday period toward the end of the year.

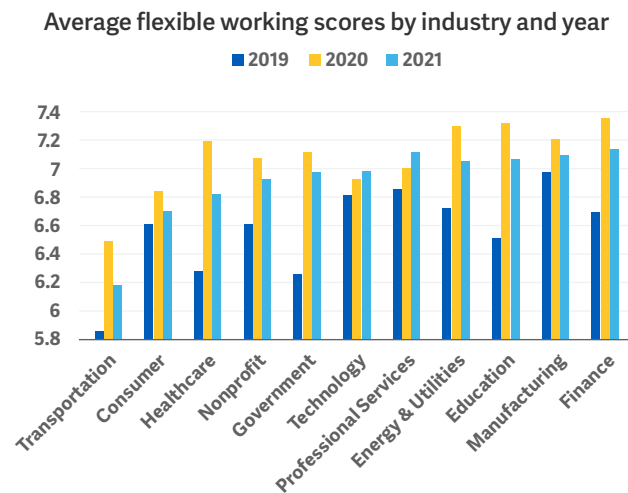


Flexible working scores across different industries.

“Flexible working” can mean different things depending on who you ask. For office-based employees, it normally refers to some form of hybrid or remote working; for frontline workers, for example, it refers to condensed hours and [shift flexibility](#).

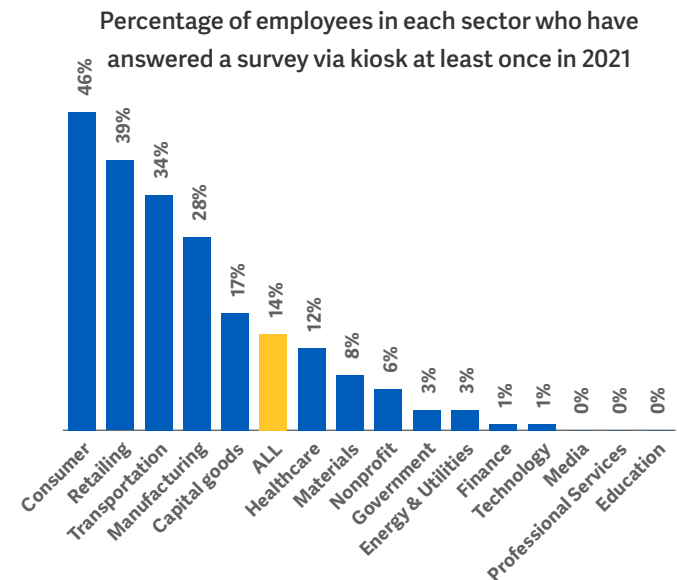
Overall, flexible working scores declined across all industries—except technology—between 2020 and 2021. One possible explanation is the disconnect between employees and employers on what the future of work looks like. Executives are nearly 3x more likely than employees to prefer returning to the office full-time, whereas 76% of employees do not want to return to full-time office work, according to [Future Forum](#).

The drop coincides with a year when many organizations announced their plans for an eventual return to the office, despite employees expressing their preference for more flexibility. There were also a number of companies that incorporated employee feedback into the design of their flexible working policies—striking a balance between remote and in-person collaboration.



Even though the current dataset has a larger proportion of office-based employees, it's clear that industries with more frontline workers have lower overall flexible working scores, which are based on responses to the statement: “I’m satisfied with the amount of flexibility I have in my work schedule.” These industries include transportation, consumer, and healthcare.

The analysis of frontline worker trends is based on the percentage of users in each sector who have answered a survey using kiosk mode at least once in 2021. Kiosk is an alternative way to roll out engagement surveys to employees who don't have a business email address by enabling access to the survey via a communal tablet or computer using a code or login unique to them.

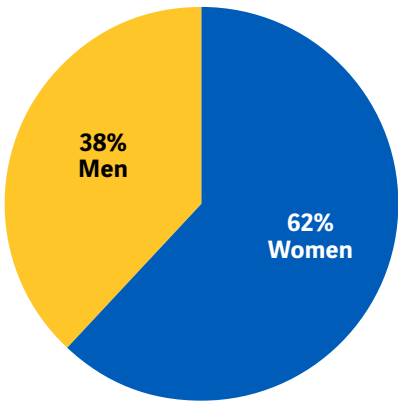


Remote working is not an option for all employees, but flexible working is. Providing employees with more control over when they work—especially in industries such as transportation, manufacturing, consumer, and healthcare—can help alleviate some of the current workload pressures and improve the overall employee experience through a greater sense of autonomy.

Among comments, 1 in 4 mention caring responsibilities.

Overall, women raised a comment about flexible working 25% more often than men in 2021, and when looking at comments that mention “caring responsibilities” specifically (which account for 23% of all comments about flexible working), women represent 62% of the total.

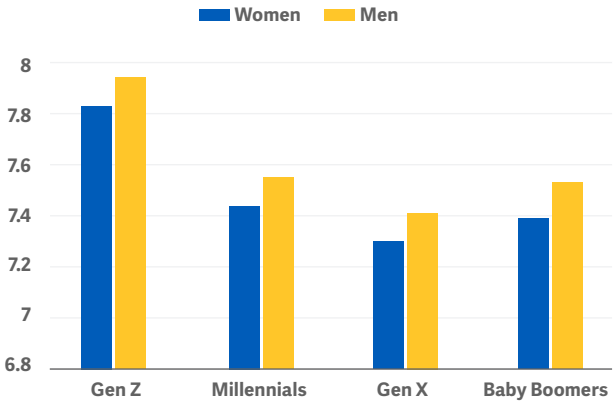
Distribution of comments that mention “caring responsibilities”



According to one [United Nations report](#), women do 2.5x more unpaid household and care work than men—valued between 10% and 39% of global gross domestic product.

The impact of “invisible labor,” which includes tasks such as cooking, cleaning, and caring for children and the elderly, can be seen in the lower workload scores provided by women across all generations.

Comparison of workload scores across gender and generation



While the distribution of invisible labor can vary dramatically across different households and parts of the world, it’s clear from employee survey responses that a gap still exists between men and women—amplifying the day-to-day pressures that exist during normal working hours.

flexible working in 2022.

Autonomy is key.

Take the time to understand each individual's unique needs. That includes things such as additional caregiving responsibilities, as well as the best environment for productivity. Give employees more control and choice where possible around when, how, and where they work. If it's not possible for employees to have location flexibility, then make sure they have control over when and/or how the job gets done.

Treat employees fairly.

Ensure employees do not feel they are being treated differently with hybrid work policies or have less opportunity based on their working environment. Additionally, make sure all employees have the right resources for their environment.

Support career development and training.

This needs to become even more important with hybrid working to ensure employees are feeling happy, fulfilled, and developed. Increasing competence is a core need to boost motivation and growth is key.

Communicate often and openly.

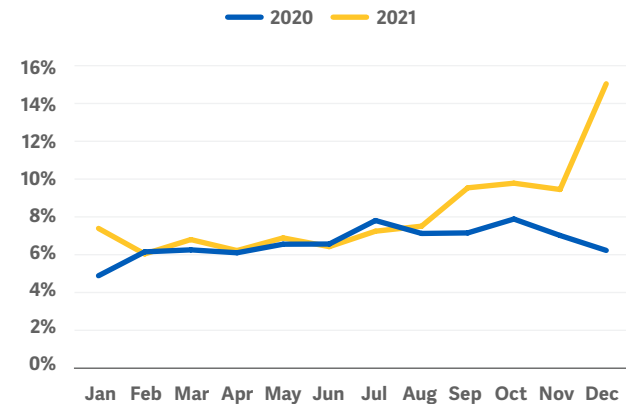
Provide information about what's happening at the organization, what leaders are planning, and resources for support, working arrangements, local team goals, activities, and progress.

Growth



Growth-related comments, which include terminology such as *career path*, *development*, *growth*, *promotion*, and *training*, represented 8% of all employee comments in 2021—a 2% increase compared to 2020. There was also a sharp increase in the number of growth-related comments toward the end of the year, making up 15% of all employee comments by December.

Growth as a proportion of all comments in 2020/2021



The increase in comments related to growth corresponds with the number of employees leaving their jobs in 2021 as part of the “Great Resignation,” which reached a [record 4.5 million Americans](#) in November of last year, and 4.3 million in December.

With many people leaving their organizations to find new opportunities, it appears that those who decided to stay showed a renewed interest in discussing their own growth plans. The increase in comments also coincides with the time of year when many people are reflecting on the past 12 months, and starting to outline goals for the year ahead.

Women are more likely to comment about growth than men.

When it comes to talking about growth, which relates to the opportunities employees perceive they have in terms of personal and career development, women are 18% more likely to share a comment than men. Growth includes a path to advance within the organization, the opportunity to develop new skills, and support from managers and mentors.

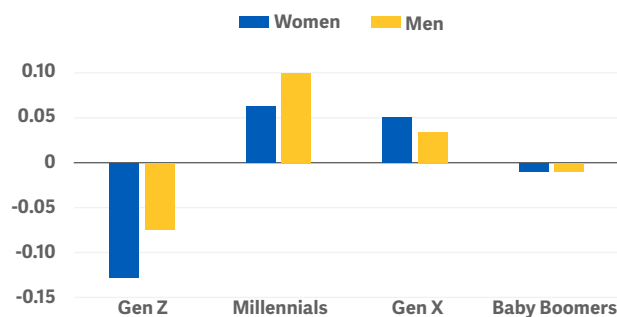
By comparison, men were 30% more likely to make a comment about reward, which relates to how satisfied employees are with their total compensation. This includes the perception that an employee is fairly rewarded for their contributions, the process for determining pay is fair and unbiased, and there is the possibility of having constructive reward conversations with managers.

These findings suggest that men are more likely to discuss compensation than women, which is also supported by a large body of research. However, according to one Glassdoor study, when given the opportunity [women are just as likely as men to negotiate their salary](#). As part of the same study, 49% of men indicated that they have the opportunity to negotiate pay, compared to only 35% of women.

Gen Z growth scores are lower compared to other generations.

Looking at growth responses across different genders and generations in 2021, we see an increase in scores for millennials and Gen X, while those for Gen Z decreased compared to 2020. Scores from baby boomers remained flat year on year.

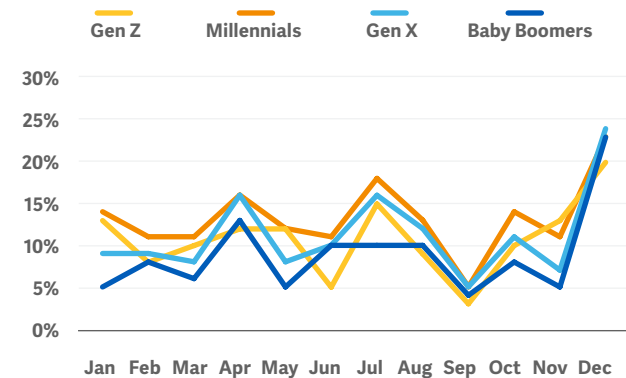
Change in growth scores across gender and generation for 2020/2021



Unlike other generations, Gen Z are only at the beginning of their career journey, occupying entry-level roles and internships that may offer fewer growth opportunities. They are also overrepresented in sectors such as hospitality and retail, which bore the brunt of job losses as a result of the global pandemic—especially within the U.S., according to [Pew Research Center](#).

Despite the decline in growth scores observed for Gen Z, the overall proportion of growth-related comments remained high across all generations throughout 2021. There are noticeable spikes in July and December, which corresponds with the times of year when many organizations schedule career or growth discussions and performance reviews.

Proportion of comments about growth in 2021 by generation



The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on organizations is likely to remain for many years, but as some of the immediate pressures begin to ease, employees are starting to ask questions about their future. Considering that the average growth score of employees who remain with a business is 13% higher than that of departing employees, organizations should pay attention.

growth in 2022.

Provide training for managers.

Upskill managers to be able to have regular development conversations with their team members as part of business as usual, and outside of more standardized performance management or one-to-one conversations. In an increasingly virtual work environment, skills such as coaching, using open questions appropriately, and truly listening to employee needs and ambitions are critical for managers to master and utilize.

Ask employees what growth means to them.

Growth and development aren't one size fits all. Make sure employees have the opportunity to discuss and map out what "growth" actually means to them, and what they would value. This could be anything from carving out time to reflect on their learnings, to external training around something more specific. Tailoring growth to the individual doesn't need to be complex and/or expensive—as we've seen in many instances since the pandemic began, it's often simple ideas and solutions that employees value the most.

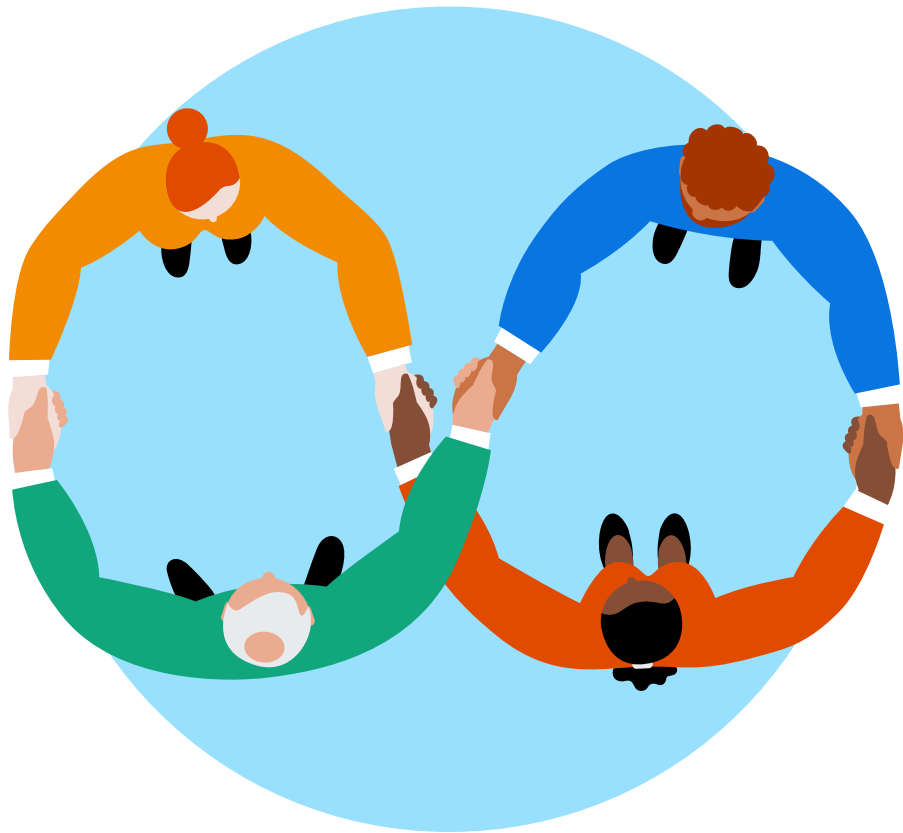
Encourage more cohesion within and across teams.

Focus not only on individual development, but broader team development too. Fostering a sense of team collaboration and cohesion drives levels of satisfaction and motivation in employees, which is particularly important where teams may not have been able to spend a great deal of time together during the past couple of years. Consider taking teams through regular, diverse development sessions focused on areas that are relevant for everyone; for example, building resilience, emotional intelligence, social styles, or influencing.

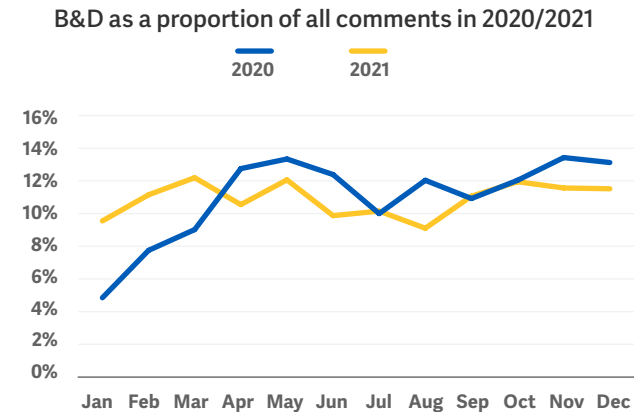
Be transparent about growth and reward opportunities.

Communicate clearly and openly about internal opportunities for growth and progression to facilitate internal mobility. Make sure employees across the business have the opportunity to apply, and that the requirements are well defined and easy to access. Encourage managers to have regular conversations with employees about how compensation is decided, when it is reviewed, and anything else that will allow them to have an informed conversation about pay. Some companies share salary information openly, or at least how salaries are calculated and what other factors go into a total compensation package.

Belonging and Diversity



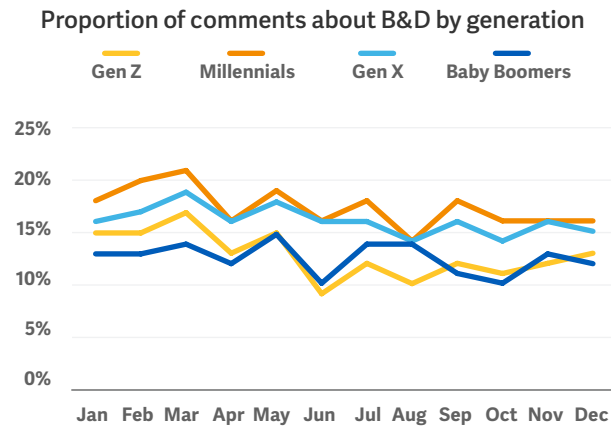
Belonging and diversity (B&D) has been a consistent and growing theme within employee comments for the past three years, increasing by 19% in 2019, and almost doubling in 2020 following the death of George Floyd and subsequent Black Lives Matter movements.



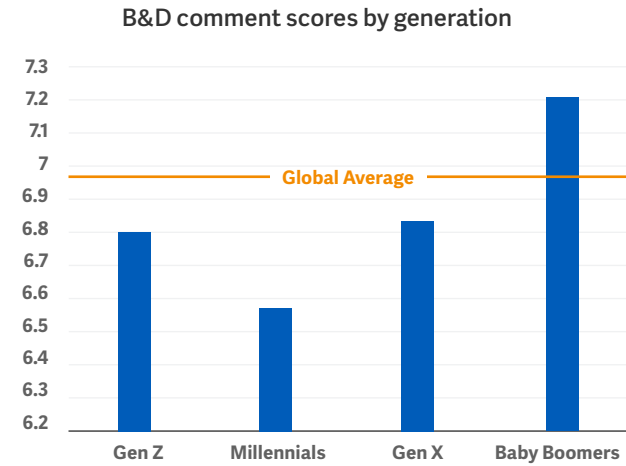
In 2021, 11% of all employee comments were related to the theme of B&D, which includes words such as *diversity*, *inclusion*, *representation*, *equity*, *race*, *gender*, *sexuality*, *disability*, *discrimination*, and *identity*. This matches the levels seen in the previous year, demonstrating that 2020 was a catalyst for conversations about increasing equality and diversity—which is likely to remain an area of focus for the foreseeable future.

Generational differences regarding belonging and diversity.

Breaking down employee comments by generation reveals that millennials were most likely to leave a comment about B&D throughout 2021. This reflects [research from Gallup](#) that millennials and Gen Z expect leadership to support a diverse and inclusive workplace.



Looking more closely at how different generations respond to statements including, “I’m satisfied with [company]’s efforts to support diversity and inclusion,” it’s clear that younger generations feel there is still work to be done, often responding with a score well below the global average.



B&D remains a key aspect of attracting and retaining top talent, with 76% of employees considering it an important factor when evaluating companies and job offers, according to one [Glassdoor survey](#). Organizations that prioritize B&D are also much more likely to innovate and adapt in the face of change and experience [higher financial returns](#).

belonging and diversity in 2022.

Create more psychological safety.

A [psychologically safe environment](#) makes it easier for people to share their experiences and feedback, which in turn provides data to understand gaps in experience at the intersections. For example, are there differences in sentiment around career development at the intersection of gender and race?

Embed B&D in all aspects of the organization.

B&D practices should be pervasive, from the way you recruit to the way you think about development. This means reexamining processes, programs, and “norms” for unconscious bias that are preventing inclusion at all levels—and then taking action to change them.

Support internal networks.

Employee resource groups can help bring people together and break down barriers. Recognize that leaders of these groups are taking on extra responsibilities to help support organizational goals and reward them.

Hold yourself accountable.

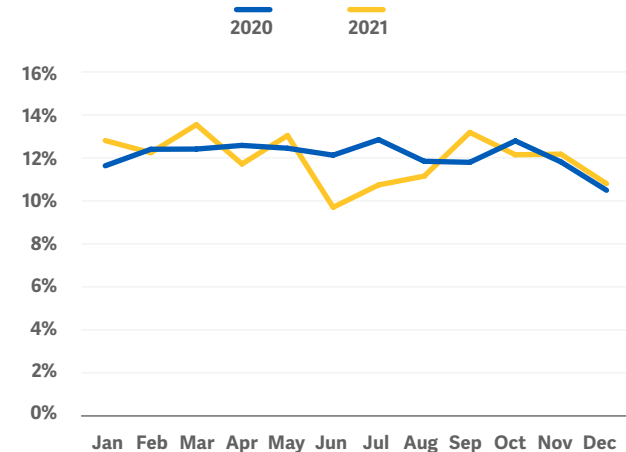
Make your commitments to B&D visible to the organization. Be honest about where you are today and clear on what steps you are taking. Communicate progress often.

Environmental, Social, and Governance Practices



Environmental, social, and governance (ESG) practices emerged as one of the most prominent themes in 2021, appearing in 12% of all employee comments. ESG plays an important role in attracting employees, with over 50% evaluating an organization's ESG commitments and keeping them engaged, with [employees at purpose-driven organizations 3x more likely to stay](#).

ESG theme as a proportion of all comments in 2020/2021

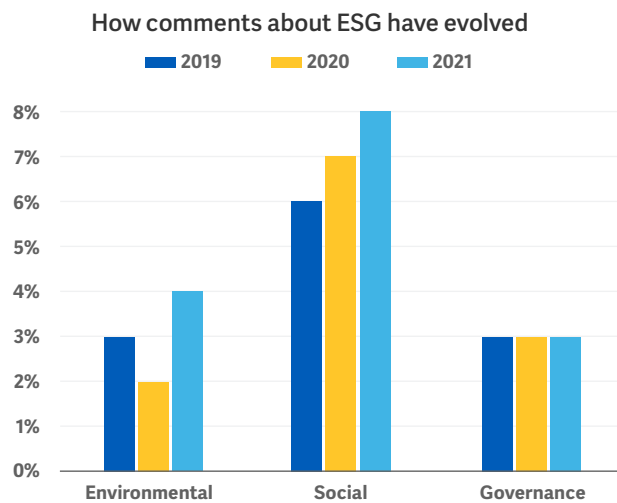


Words that commonly appear as part of comments related to ESG are shown in the table below:

| Environmental | Social | Governance |
|--|--|---|
| Carbon footprint, climate change, environmental impact, fossil fuels, renewable energy, recycling, subsidies, sustainability | Community, corporate responsibility, trust, integrity, poverty, product, purpose | Bottom line, brand, ethics, governance, investor, leadership, revenue stream, rights, shareholders, stock |

Growing employee concern for social and environmental issues.

Breaking down employee comments over the past three years into three distinct categories reveals a clearer picture of what employees are talking about. Comments concerning social issues have been growing consistently year on year, while those related to the environment took a dip during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, before rebounding in 2021.



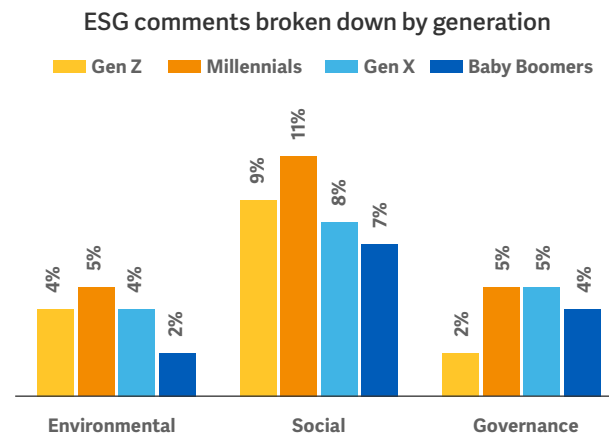
The increase of employee awareness around ESG topics mirrors the growing importance of an organization's societal impact for various stakeholders. Among consumers, [75% are more likely to buy from a company that supports ESG](#), while investors put a record \$649 billion into funds that focus on ESG during 2021—accounting for [10% of worldwide fund assets](#).

Millennials are most likely to leave a comment about ESG.

A clear pattern also emerges when looking at the proportion of ESG-related comments across different generations. Millennials appear to be driving the conversation across all three areas, and are much more likely to voice their opinion when it comes to social issues.

Gen Z are also well-represented when it comes to comments about ESG, but they have a much smaller share of voice regarding governance. This may be due to more Gen Z employees occupying junior positions that have less exposure to board and shareholder activity.

By comparison, Gen X are more likely to comment than baby boomers, but less likely than their younger cohorts.



The importance of ESG will continue to grow over coming years, especially as [millennials already represent one-third of the global workforce](#), with [Gen Z predicted to reach 27% by 2025](#).

In addition to attracting and retaining top talent, there are a number of [organizational benefits](#) that come from taking ESG commitments seriously, including a stronger brand proposition, lower operating costs, fewer regulatory hurdles, and higher returns on investment.

ESG in 2022.

Make ESG commitments visible to the organization.

Be honest with where you are today and clear on what steps you are taking. Communicate progress on a regular basis; for example, create an ESG quarterly newsletter.

Ask employees for their ideas.

Gather feedback from employees about how the organization can contribute to local communities and socially important causes. Create a feedback loop where ideas are considered, discussed, and where viable, acted upon and communicated to the organization.

Similarly, give employees the opportunity to provide their ideas on how the organization can operate more sustainably. This could cover a broad range of areas including recycling, pollution, energy usage, waste disposal, or technologies to support a greener approach. Where these are already in place, make sure to clearly communicate to employees what they are, how they work, and their impact.

Offer volunteering as a benefit.

Provide employees with the opportunity to complete volunteer work within their local communities as an employee benefit. This type of scheme can help to differentiate your employer value proposition and attract more talent in 2022.

Embed ESG into your organizational values.

How often do your senior leaders talk about the organization's relationship with ethics, social responsibility, tackling climate change, or other broader purpose? Consider how any of this can be discussed more openly in forums such as town halls, and weaved through the narrative of the organization's mission, purpose, and values.

Conclusion

While the most severe impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic are hopefully behind us, it has surfaced a number of socioeconomic issues that organizations will have to face in 2022. As younger generations continue to enter the workforce, it's essential for organizations to establish a clear strategy for addressing issues related to ESG, and cultivating a more diverse and inclusive workplace.

In particular, organizations need to ensure that employees from all backgrounds have access to the same opportunities. This can constitute part of a larger strategy around growth, with the aim of helping employees to develop the skills necessary to thrive in an increasingly uncertain world.

At the same time, it's important for organizations to do all that they can to offer employees flexible working options. Employees have made it abundantly clear that they expect flexible working to become part of the “new normal,” and are willing to part ways in order to get it.

The recommendations in this report are just a starting point. In order to effectively meet the expectations of your employees, you need an ongoing two-way dialogue based on honest and open feedback. To learn more about how Workday can help, [contact us today](#).



Appendix

| | Total number of comments analyzed | % of Flexible Working* | % of ESG* | % of B&D* | % of Growth* |
|-----------------|--------------------------------------|---------------------------|-----------|-----------|--------------|
| Globally | 19,382,644 | 5 | 12 | 11 | 8 |
| U.S. | 1,822,866 | 12 | 16 | 11 | 9 |
| UK | 2,257,142 | 11 | 12 | 11 | 8 |
| AUS | 499,962 | 8 | 17 | 11 | 11 |
| France | 622,339 | 5 | 8 | 10 | 8 |
| Germany | 594,907 | 16 | 10 | 8 | 7 |

*Related comments as a proportion of all comments



U.S.

Analysis conducted on 1,822,866 comments from 333,235 employees across 800+ companies in 2021.

Flexible Working

- 5% of all comments mentioned a theme about flexible working
- This is down 0.5% from 2020
- Women raised a comment about flexible working 20% more often than men

ESG

- 16% of all comments mentioned a theme about ESG
- This matches 2020 levels

B&D

- 11% of all comments mentioned a theme about B&D
- This matches 2020 levels

Growth

- 9% of all comments mentioned a theme about growth
- This is up 2% from 2020
- Women are 26% more likely to raise a comment about growth than men



UK

Analysis conducted on 2,257,142 comments from 354,590 employees across 1,000+ companies in 2021.

Flexible Working

- 3.5% of all comments mentioned a theme about flexible working
- This is up 1% from 2020
- Women raised a comment about flexible working 15% more often than men
- Peaks in conversation in August—reflects traditional school holiday cycles

ESG

- 12% of all comments mentioned a theme about ESG
- This matches 2020 levels
- Women raised a comment about ESG 17% more than men
- There were no notable peaks in comments around COP26

B&D

- 11% of all comments mentioned a theme about B&D
- This matches 2020 levels
- Women are 20% more likely to raise a comment about B&D than men

Growth

- 8% of all comments mentioned a theme about growth
- This is up 2% from 2020
- Women are 18% more likely to raise a comment about growth than men
- Men raised a comment about reward 30% more than women



AUS

Analysis conducted on 499,962 comments from 75,897 employees across 400+ companies in 2021.

Flexible Working

- 4% of all comments mentioned a theme about flexible working
- This is up 1.5% from 2020
- Women raised a comment about flexible working 8% more often than men

ESG

- 17% of all comments mentioned a theme about ESG
- This matches 2020 levels

B&D

- 11% of all comments mentioned a theme about B&D
- This matches 2020 levels

Growth

- 11% of all comments mentioned a theme about growth
- This is up 2% from 2020
- Women are 11% more likely to raise a comment about growth than men



France

Appendix

Analysis conducted on 622,339 comments from 116,882 employees across 650+ companies in 2021.

Flexible Working

- 5% of all comments mentioned a theme about flexible working
- This is down 0.5% from 2020
- Women raised a comment about flexible working 27% more often than men

ESG

- 8% of all comments mentioned a theme about ESG
- This is up 3% from 2020

B&D

- 10% of all comments mentioned a theme about B&D
- This matches 2020 levels

Growth

- 8% of all comments mentioned a theme about growth
- This is up 2% from 2020
- Women are 15% more likely to raise a comment about growth than men



Germany

Appendix

Analysis conducted on 594,907 comments from 140,182 employees across 750+ companies in 2021.

Flexible Working

- 5% of all comments mentioned a theme about flexible working
- This is down 0.5% from 2020
- Women raised a comment about flexible working 27% more often than men in 2021

ESG

- 10% of all comments mentioned a theme about ESG
- Down 3% from 2020

B&D

- 8% of all comments mentioned a theme about B&D
- Down 2% from 2020 levels

Growth

- 7% of all comments mentioned a theme about growth
- This is up 1% from 2020
- Women are 16% more likely to raise a comment about growth than men



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