THE WORKPLACE REALITY

A 32-Country Global Advisor Survey

October 2026



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The Workplace Reality: An Opportunity for Employers

The world of work continues to be shaped by uncertainty. Economic pressures, geopolitical instability, changing technologies and shifting expectations are influencing how people think about their futures, both professionally and personally.

Yet one of the clearest messages from this year's research is that employees have not disengaged from work. Rather, they have become more deliberate in what they expect from it.

Across 32 countries, we see a workforce that is making careful choices. Many people are opting for stability over disruption and continuity over risk. Employees continue to look for opportunities to grow, to contribute and to build fulfilling careers. At the same time, they are becoming more selective about where and how they invest their energy.

For organisations, this presents an important opportunity. The data throughout this report consistently points to a set of factors that remain firmly within an employer's control.

Employees who feel supported in their career ambitions are more likely to advocate for their organisation. Employees who experience management, culture and career opportunities as promised are more likely to stay committed. And those who see action taken on their feedback are more likely to believe their organisation genuinely cares about their experience.

These findings should be encouraging for HR leaders. At a time when external uncertainty can feel overwhelming, the strongest drivers of employee commitment are not dependent on wider economic conditions.

Organisations cannot control every external pressure facing their workforce, but they can create clarity where there is uncertainty, opportunity where there is stagnation and trust where there is scepticism.

Continued overleaf.

> *The workforce may be approaching the future with greater caution, but caution should not be mistaken for disengagement."*

The Workplace Reality: An Opportunity for Employers

The research also highlights an important challenge around leadership. Many employees remain interested in progressing their careers but are increasingly questioning whether management represents the right path.

This should not be viewed as a rejection of leadership. Instead, it is a prompt for organisations to rethink how leadership roles are designed, supported and rewarded, while creating a broader range of pathways for people to develop and succeed.

Similarly, the growing importance of career support should be viewed as an opportunity rather than a problem to solve. Employees are telling organisations, clearly and consistently, that **growth matters**. The challenge is not a lack of ambition among employees, but ensuring that development opportunities, sponsorship and career pathways are visible and accessible to everyone.

Perhaps most importantly, the findings remind us that trust is built through everyday experiences. It is shaped by whether managers have meaningful career conversations, whether organisations deliver on their promises, and whether employee feedback results in visible action. These may sound simple, but they are proving to be powerful differentiators of employee experience.

The organisations that thrive over the coming years will not necessarily be those with the most generous rewards or ambitious employer brands. They will be those that create environments where people can see a future for themselves, where leadership feels attainable and worthwhile, and where employees can trust that their voices matter.

The workforce may be approaching the future with greater caution, but caution should not be mistaken for disengagement. For employers willing to invest in growth, trust and meaningful employee experiences, the opportunity to strengthen commitment has never been clearer.



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Five Workplace Realities

Employees are staying but commitment is fragile

Retention remains resilient despite weaker confidence and advocacy. Be cautious of conflating retention with engagement. The research indicates that people are staying for safety and stability, rather than because of a deeper sense of commitment.



Career growth is the strongest lever for commitment

Career support is the single factor most consistently linked to advocacy, intent to stay or leave and management appetite. Yet fewer than half feel supported, with this thinning out sharply below management level.



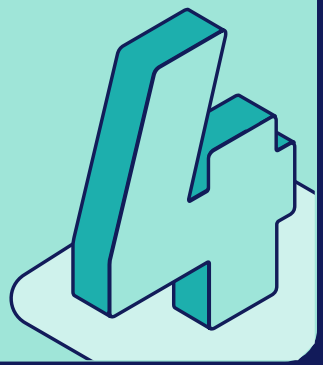
The role of management appeals to a minority

Management is increasingly viewed as a burden rather than a reward, particularly where career support is lacking. This risks the stability and quality of the succession pipeline.



Organisations deliver on contractual promises better than experiential ones

Workload, management quality, career and culture are where reality mostly falls short and has the greatest impact on intent to leave.



Listening without visible action is worse than not listening at all

Asking employees for feedback without visibly responding is associated with worse sentiment than not asking at all. 'Visible' starts with simply sharing what was heard.



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01

EMPLOYEES ARE STAYING, BUT COMMITMENT IS FRAGILE



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Only half are confident in where their organisation is heading

What the data says

Globally, just one in two people feel confident about their organisation's future direction, with wide variation by market.

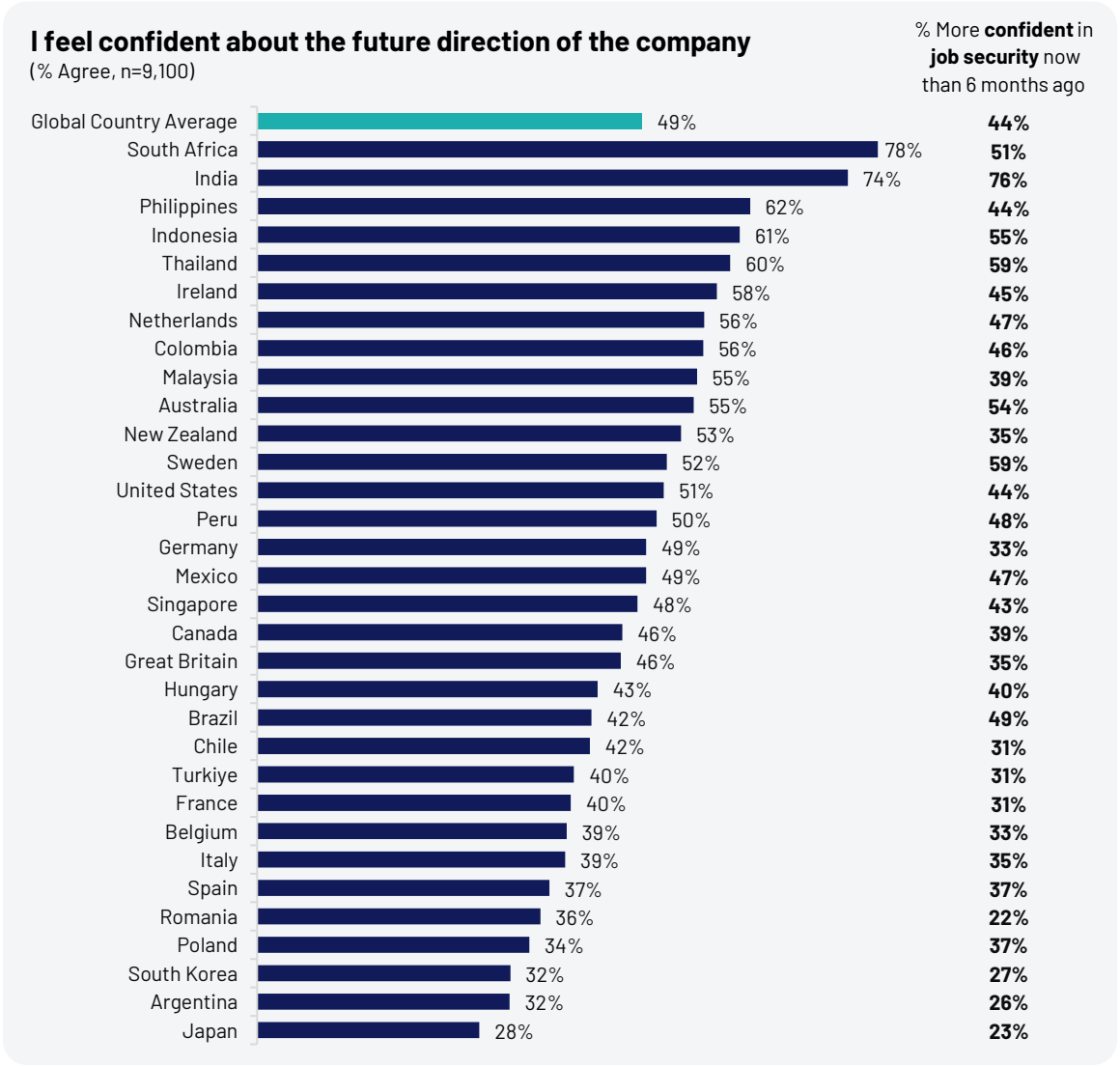
South Africa, India and the Philippines lead, while Japan sits at the bottom. Much of Western Europe and the English-speaking world clusters at, or below, average. Ireland and the Netherlands are notable exceptions. Latin America is split: Colombia and Peru sit at or above average, while Brazil and Chile and Argentina trail.

There is a strong association between confidence and job security. Where confidence is low, people are more likely to say job security has gotten worse over the last 6 months.

Why this matters

Confidence reflects both the external climate and how well leaders explain where the organisation is going. It is also closely associated with trust (see page 7).

In uncertain conditions, leaders shouldn't assume employees understand or believe the strategy. Visible leadership and honest, consistent communication becomes more important, not less.



Q. Compared to 6 months ago, are you NOW more or less confident about job security for yourself, your family and other people you know personally? Source: Ipsos Consumer Confidence September 2026

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Confidence reflects both the external climate and how well leaders explain where the organisation is going. This is strongly associated with trust."

Source: Ipsos Global Trends 2026
Base: 29,542 adults under the age of 75 across 38 countries, 22 May – 5 June 2026.

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Fewer than half would recommend their employer

What the data says

Mirroring confidence, only 48% would recommend their employer as a place to work.

However, while confidence is directed towards the organisation; its strategy, its leadership and its prospects, advocacy is an indicator of internal experience, and the two do not automatically follow the same trend.

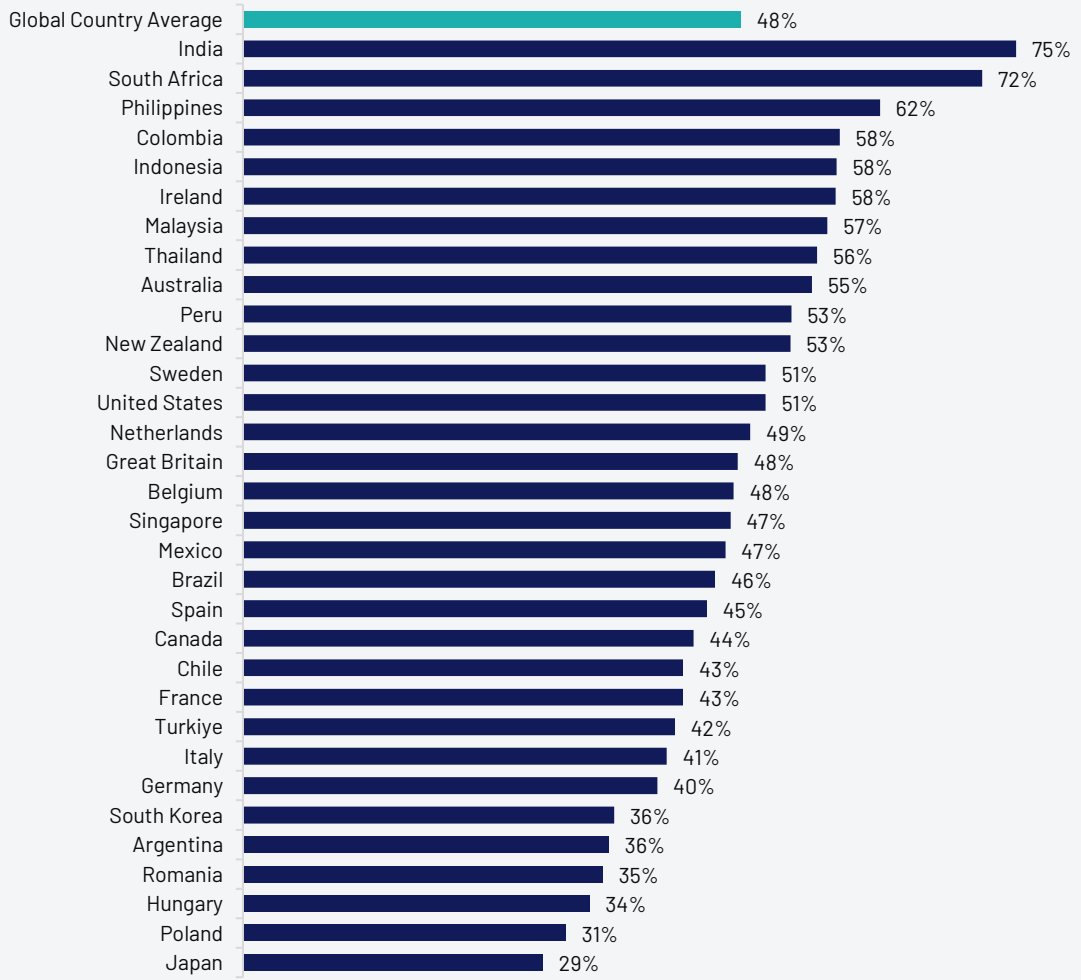
In Belgium and Spain, people rate their employer more highly than they feel confident in its future, while in Germany and Hungary, the reverse is true.

Why this matters

Advocacy is a more sensitive marker of commitment than retention alone. It responds sharply to when employee expectations, including career support, are unmet (see page 11).

Low advocacy may therefore be an early warning of reputational and talent risk, well before it shows up in attrition data.

I would recommend my company as a place to work
(% Agree, n=9,100)



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Yet only 2 in 5 plan to look for a new job

What the data says

Only 38% on average intend to look for a job with another employer in the next year despite lower confidence and advocacy scores.

This could be an indication of employees choosing to stay because changing jobs feels riskier in an already unstable world.

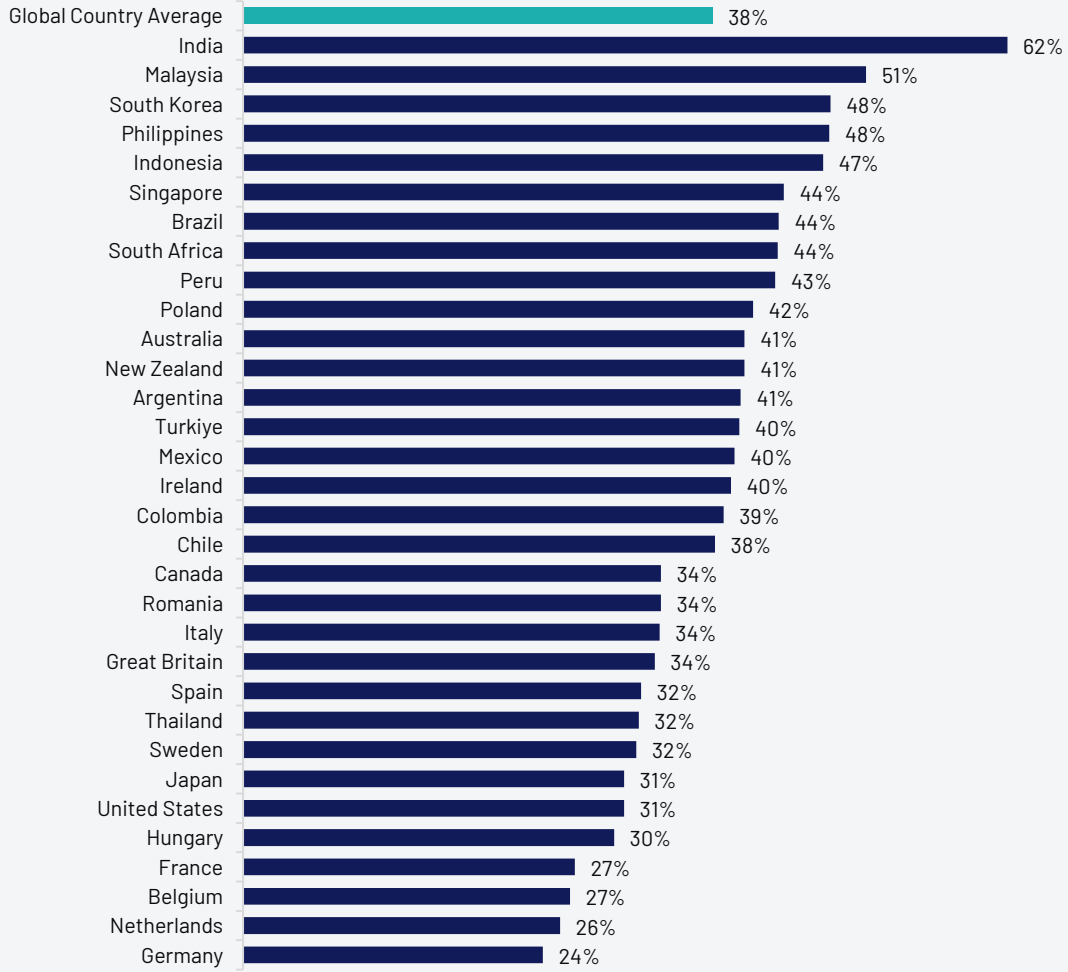
India, Philippines, Malaysia and several APAC markets show relatively strong confidence and advocacy alongside elevated intention to move, which may indicate they are driven more by opportunity than dissatisfaction.

Why this matters

Historically many organisations have used retention as a proxy for engagement. This research suggests relying on that could be risky.

Organisations should be cautious of conflating retention with engagement. Long-tenured employees may still be disengaged, disconnected or open to future opportunities.

Over the next year, how likely, if at all, are you to look for a new job with a different employer? (% Likely, n=9,100)



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02

CAREER GROWTH IS THE STRONGEST LEVER FOR COMMITMENT



Career support transforms how people feel

What the data says

Fewer than half feel supported to achieve their career aspirations, while one in five feel actively unsupported.

Those who feel supported are far more likely to recommend their employer (+43pp) and less likely to look for a job with a different employer (-14pp) than those who do not feel supported.

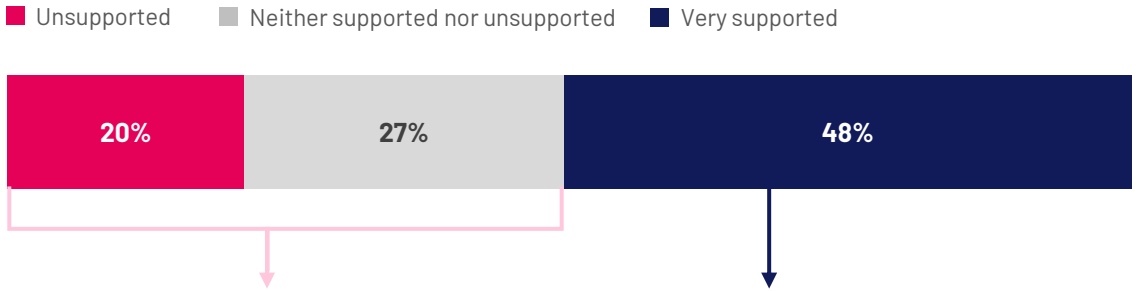
This implies that career support strongly shapes how employees feel about their organisation but may not be as strong in influencing their decision to leave during periods of instability.

Why this matters

A sense of mastery and growth are well-established differentiators of employee experience. Across much of Ipsos' research with its clients, career development often appears as a strong driver of engagement and a common reason people cite for leaving.

At a time when people are choosing stability over a move, organisations risk increasing a segment of their employees who are quietly disengaged, lacking support or a visible pathway forwards.

To what extent do you feel supported within your current organisation/ place of work to fulfil your career aspirations? (n=9,100)



Of those that say they are not supported or are unsure....

28% ...would recommend their employer

46% ...are likely to look for a new job

While for those that do feel supported....

71% ...would recommend their employer

32% ...are likely to look for a new job

Most still considering upwards development moves

What the data says

A combined majority of employees (33%) look upwards for their next step, with slightly more looking for a role with people management than without. These employees are also most likely to say they feel supported in their careers.

A notable proportion of employees see developing in their current role as a career step, reinforcing a desire for stability over change.

Around one in five prefer non-traditional moves, yet few organisations have clearly defined routes for these.

One in seven don't know their next step, and this group is least likely to feel supported. This is highest among over-50s, which may reflect a life-stage crossroads rather than disengagement: people who want to keep working but are unclear where they fit as work changes.

Why this matters

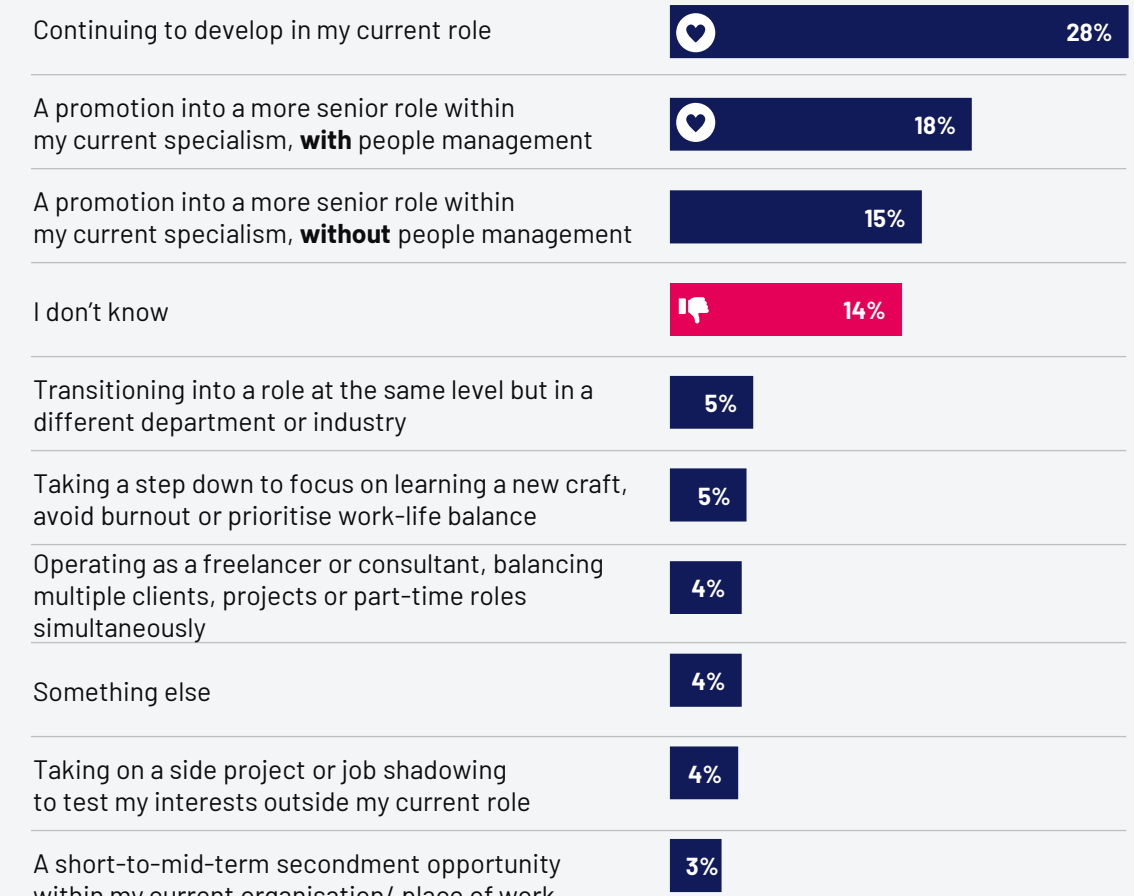
While it's positive to see a slight preference for people management, the challenge organisations face is converting that interest in the face of low general positivity (see page 16).

At the same time, organisations remain better at supporting traditional upwards moves, but not everyone wants, or can do, these.

As careers get longer, stronger support structures will be required to enable people to identify and pursue a greater variety of growth opportunities.

What would you like to be the next step in your career? (n=9,100)

Most likely to feel supported | Least likely to feel supported



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Is progression open equally to all?

What the data says

Employees with lower levels of educational attainment feel the least supported in their career, 16pp lower than those with high levels of education.

There is also a stark difference in how people see their future. People with higher levels of education are more likely to see progression into management as a realistic career step, while those with lower levels have less clarity.

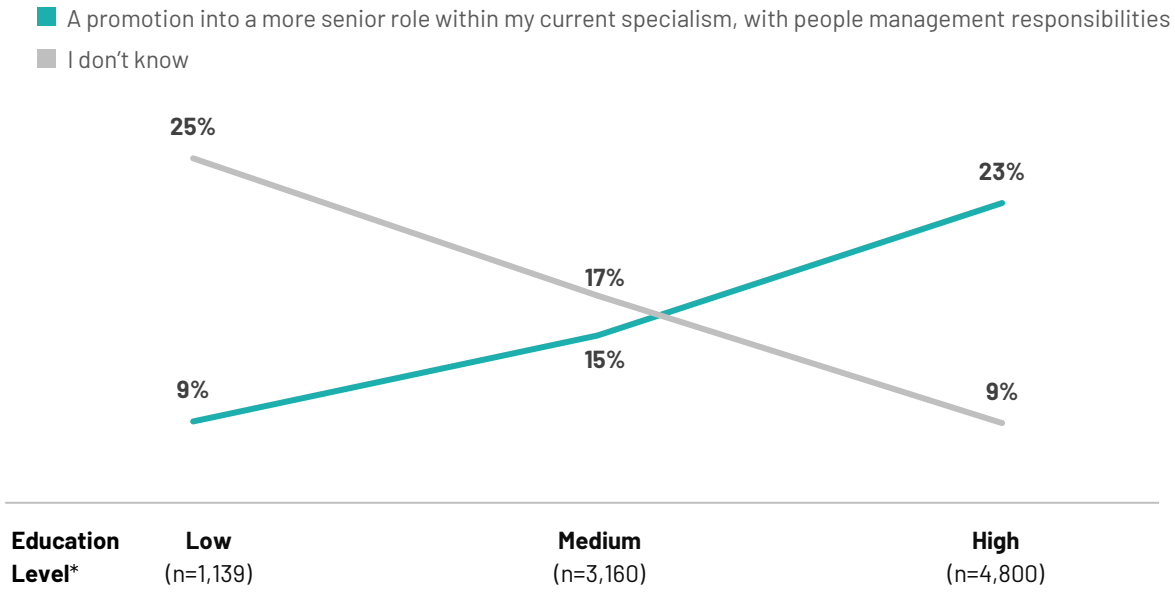
Why this matters

This points to a visibility problem as much as a support one. If routes to progression are unclear or appear closed, people stop picturing them.

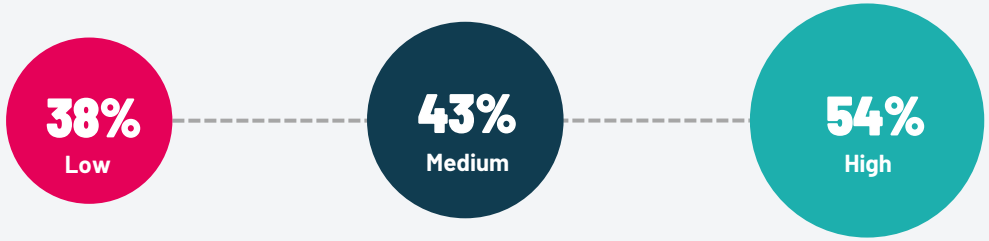
Social mobility efforts can't stop at recruitment. They need to extend to who is developed, sponsored and shown a path once they are inside.

People with lower levels of education are most likely to be unsure about their next step, while higher education workers see more progression opportunities

What would you like to be the next step in your career? (n=9,100)



Proportion that feel supported to achieve their career aspirations



*Respondents' highest level of educational attainment, mapped to broadly equivalent primary, secondary and tertiary education levels.

Senior leaders feel most supported in their careers

What the data says

Perceived career support increases notably with seniority, independent of age.

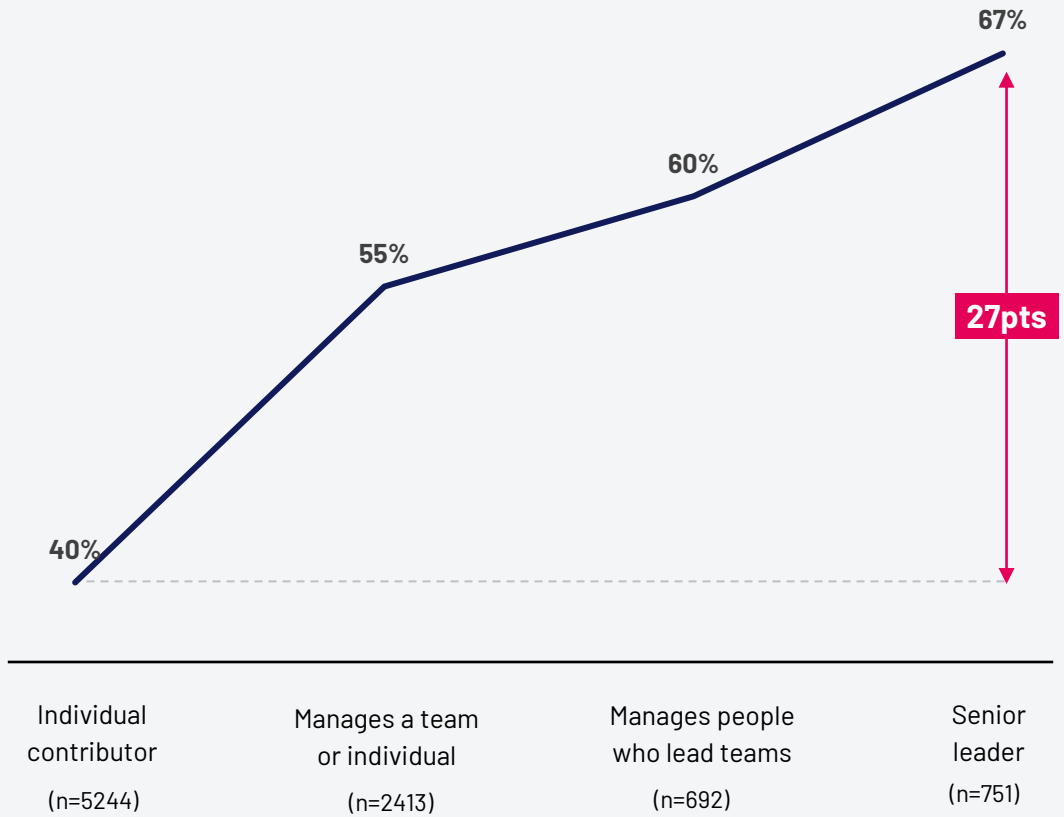
The largest single step is from individual contributor to first-line manager (+15pts), more than all the steps above it combined (+12pts). Managers are increasingly expected to provide career coaching for their teams. Given the workload and pressures they report, it is unsurprising this falls away for those they manage.

Why this matters

As targeted development is often reserved for senior leadership and high potential talent, the risk is that organisations invest most in those who have already succeeded and least in those who will deliver future success.

This also shapes how leaders read the organisation**. If senior leaders' own experience is markedly better, they may underestimate what most employees experience.**

To what extent do you feel supported within your current organisation/ place of work to fulfil your career aspirations?
(n=9,100)



03

THE ROLE OF MANAGEMENT APPEALS TO A MINORITY



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Only a quarter find management appealing

What the data says

Only a minority of employees say becoming a people manager looks attractive based on what they see in their organisation, while 12pp more say it looks unattractive. Appeal is lowest in North America and Europe, with some stark contrasts by market: Japan (8% attractive vs 55% unattractive), Sweden (12% vs 63%), Canada (15% vs 51%) and Germany (16% vs 47%).

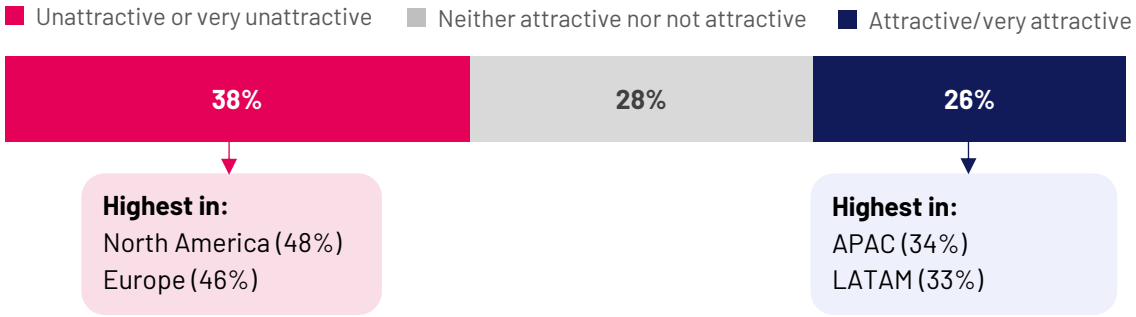
Employees under 35 find management most appealing, challenging the stereotype of a less committed younger generation. The pipeline isn't broken at entry. The challenge is what people see happening to the managers above them and deciding the cost outweighs the reward.

Why this matters

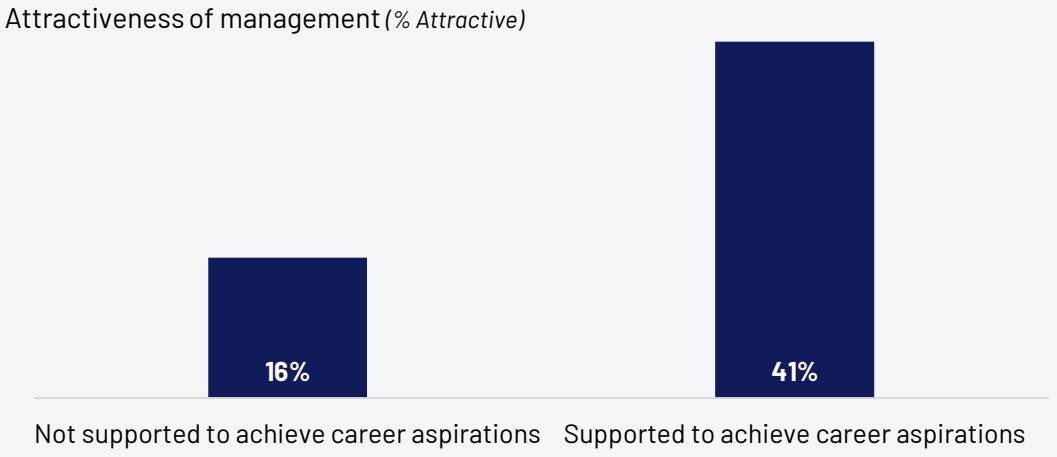
Appeal is 2.6x higher among those who feel supported in their careers (41% vs 16%). Pipeline problems may be less about management itself and more about whether people can see a future for themselves in it.

As well as focusing on supporting and developing the current leadership population, organisations must also consider how they make leadership roles more sustainable and appealing, whilst clearly defining alternative pathways for those not interested or equipped for people leadership.

Based on what you see of the experience of managers in your organisation/ place of work today, how attractive does becoming a people manager look? (n=5,244*)



Attractiveness of management is 2.6x higher when employees feel supported by their employer to achieve their career aspirations



*Asked only to those not currently in a people manager role

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The burden of management is holding people back

What the data says

When asked what stops employees viewing a people management role as appealing, the top reason given is merely contentment with employees' current position, another sign that people are prioritising stability.

Equally, a lack of ambition is not the reason for management being less desirable. Many are simply not convinced it is an attractive route to progression.

Among those not drawn to management, many mention the perceived demands of the role. Extra responsibility, protecting work-life balance and extra workload dominate, and show little differences by age.

Why this matters

Training people into an unappealing role risks producing capable but reluctant managers.

Organisations may need to redesign the manager role (spans, workload, admin, what is genuinely expected of managers) alongside developing the people in it.

Reviewing leadership structures to provide specialist and expert pathways enables talent to keep growing without forcing it into people leadership.

What is it about the role of a people manager that does not appeal to you?
(n=3,466)*



*Asked to those who responded 'neither' or 'unattractive' on manager attractiveness. Multiple options could be selected, so responses do not total 100%.

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04

EMPLOYERS DELIVER ON CONTRACTUAL PROMISES BETTER THAN EXPERIENTIAL ONES



The promises that matter most are also most unmet

What the data says

Most say their job broadly matches what they expected, but more say it is worse than described than better, across every factor.

Tangible, contractual elements are more likely to match expectations, while experiential elements are where reality most often falls short.

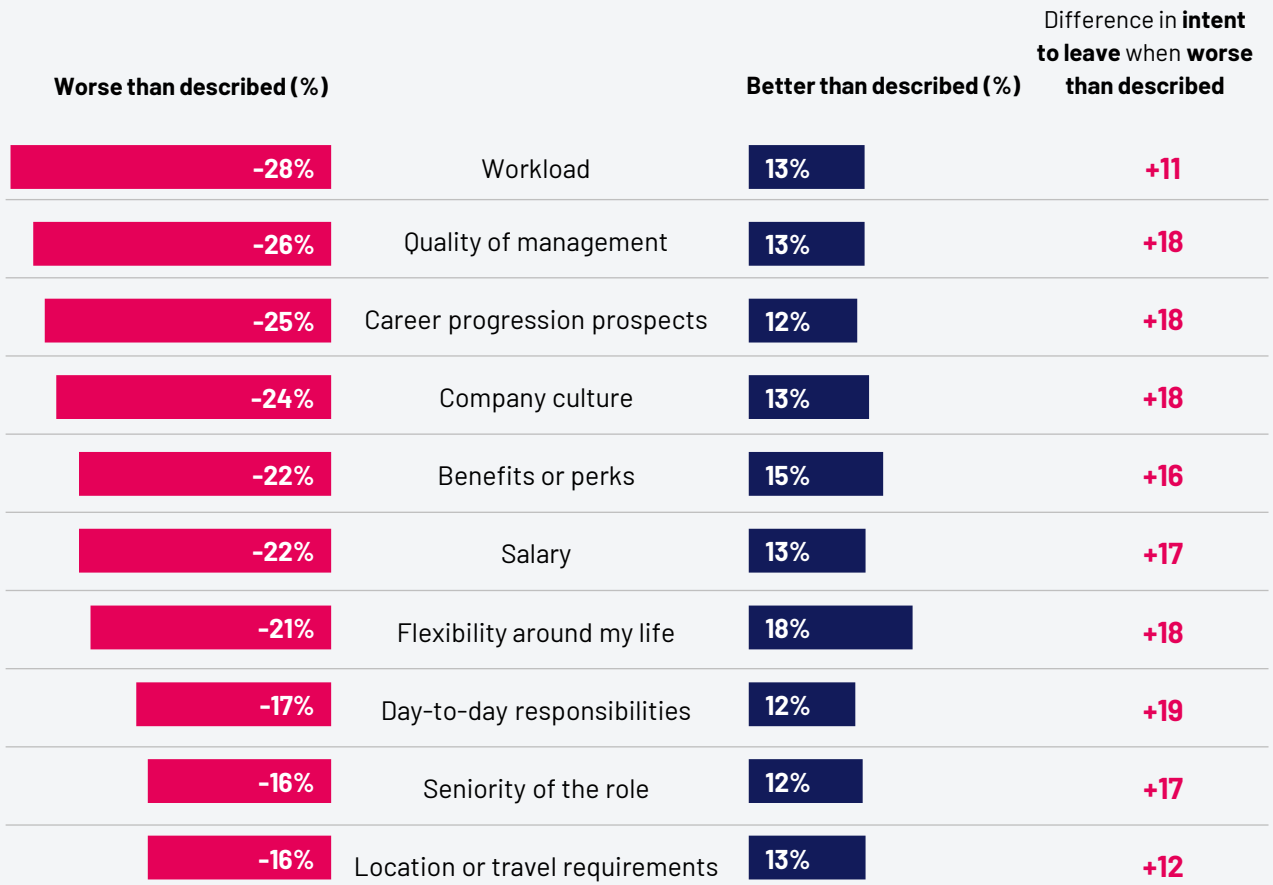
Unmet expectations increase intent to leave across all factors, though role seniority and responsibilities, management, career prospects and culture appear to have stronger bearing.

Comparatively, workload, the most broken promise, has the least impact on sentiment, which may imply that people have come to expect, and accept, being overstretched.

Why this matters

For employers, this underlines the importance of establishing an authentic employer brand that does not overstate the reality, and investing in management quality across the board, not just among high-potentials.

Thinking about what was said or implied during the recruitment process for your current role, how closely has each of the following aspects of your actual experience at this employer matched it?
(n=9,100)



The promise gap is widest in Europe and North America

Workload falling short of expectations is universal, but gaps around management, career and culture are concentrated in Europe and North America. Europe is weakest on almost every measure.

Latin America has a distinctive profile: the job itself often beats expectations, but management and pay fall short. APAC employees are most likely to say reality broadly matched what they were told.

These variances could be explained by differing expectations, organisations overselling certain aspects, or cultural differences in how people respond to surveys.

Across markets, organisations should consider assessing their employer value proposition against what employees actually experience to establish where there are unmet expectations or strengths that are understated.

Thinking about what was said or implied during the recruitment process for your current role, how closely has each of the following aspects of your actual experience at this employer matched it?

Chart displays net difference between those who said each item was better than expected vs. worse than expected. A larger negative number means a larger proportion say worse, relative to those saying better.

	North America	LATAM	Europe	APAC
Workload	**-18**	-4	**-24**	**-10**
Quality of management	**-15**	**-9**	**-23**	**-7**
Career progression prospects	**-16**	**-7**	**-22**	-8
Company culture	**-16**	-6	-19	-4
Benefits or perks	-8	-1	-18	-2
Salary	-10	-8	-14	-5
Flexibility around my life	-2	2	-9	**0**
Day-to-day responsibilities	-13	**4**	-13	-2
Seniority of the role	-5	**3**	-9	-3
Location or travel requirements	-3	-4	-7	**1**

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05

LISTENING WITHOUT VISIBLE ACTION IS WORSE THAN NOT LISTENING AT ALL



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Less than half have seen action following an employee survey

What the data says

Among the people who were invited to take part in an employee survey in the last year, 42% have seen evidence their employer acted on the results.

Visibility of action falls the further people are from the top, mirroring the gradient observed for career support.

This doesn't necessarily mean action isn't happening, but that it simply isn't cascading down through the organisation.

Why this matters

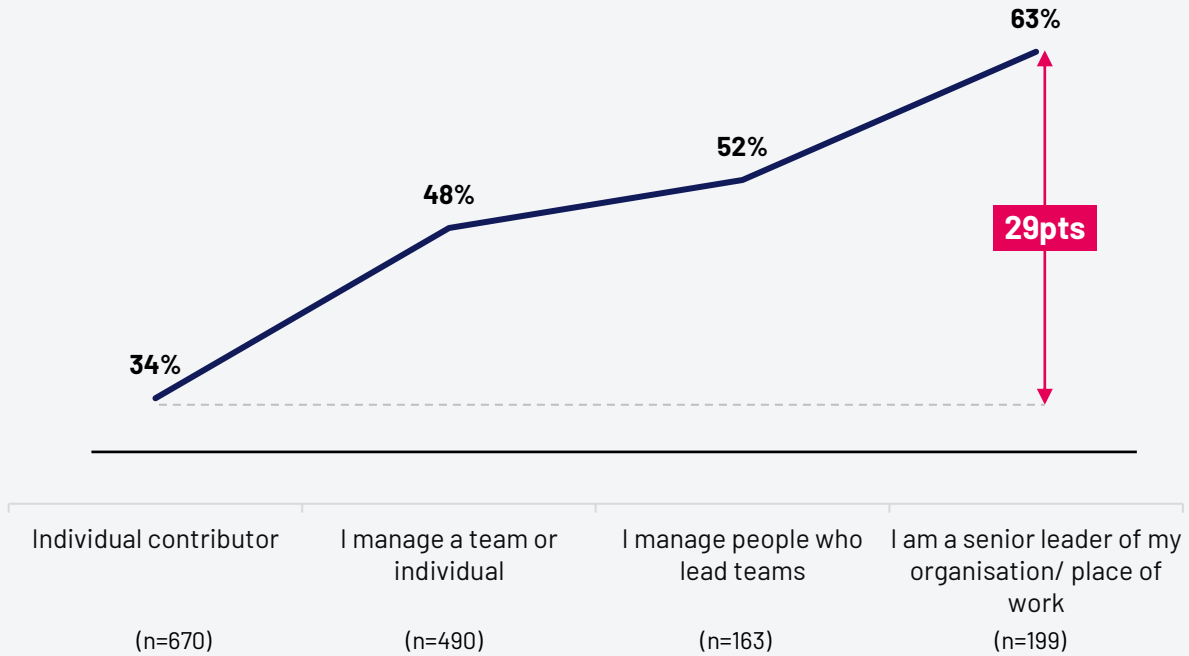
Previous research has established that senior leaders can overstate confidence, while those lower down feel differently. In 2025, 94%* of senior leaders said they had the skills needed to communicate effectively despite a lower proportion of employees rating communication highly.

By design, leaders are closer to decisions made and actions taken. The ones that judge the impact and visibility of follow through by their own experience will almost always overestimate it.

I have seen evidence that my organisation/ place of work acted on the results of the last employee survey they ran (n=3637)



Visibility of action declines with seniority



*Source: IC Index 2025

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Listening without action is worse than not listening at all

What the data says

For employees who have taken part in an employee survey and have seen action as a result, advocacy and feeling their employer cares about their happiness are roughly double the levels among those who see no action.

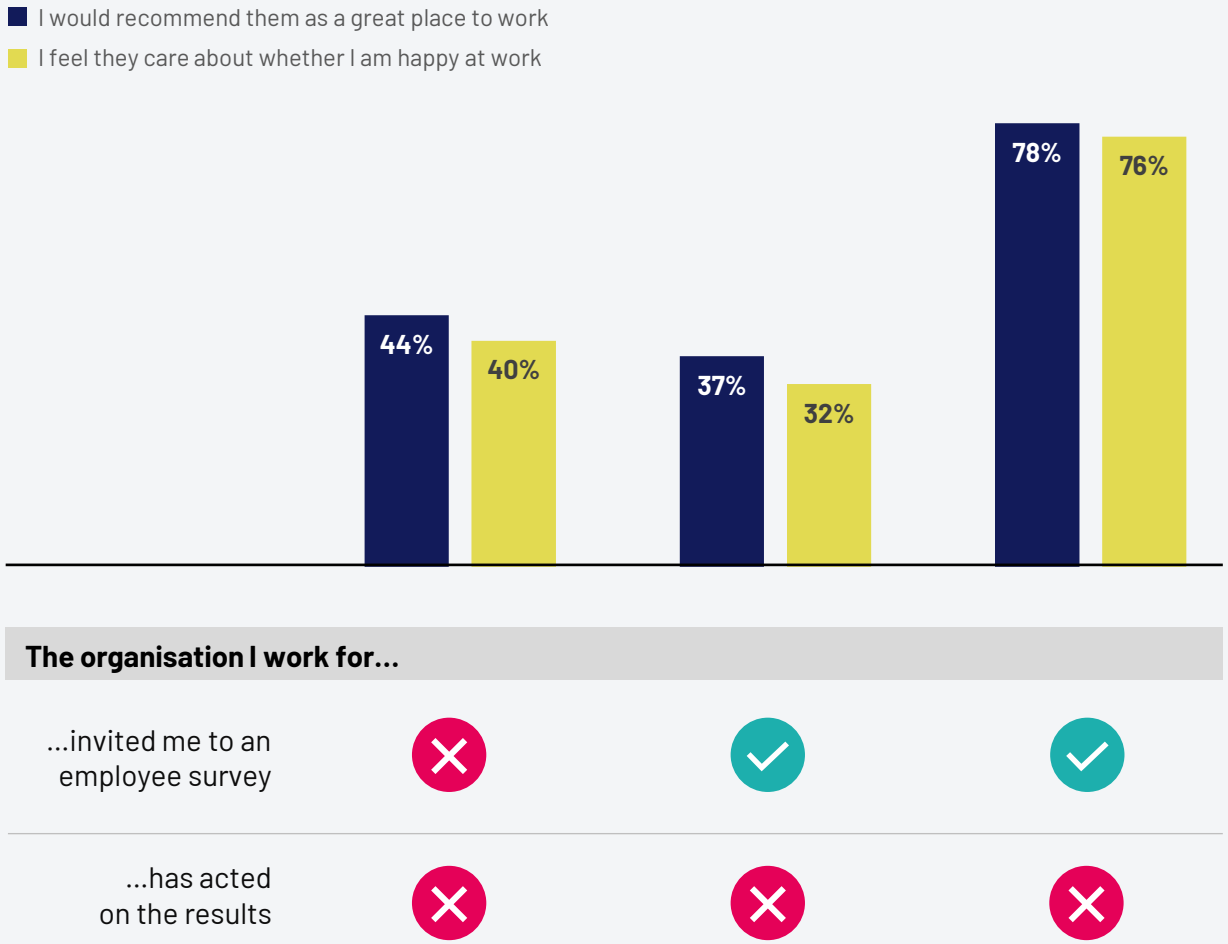
But employees invited to a survey who see no action score lower than those never invited at all.

Why this matters

Organisations that continue to invest in employee listening programmes without first ensuring their employees see the impact risk increasing indifference, disengagement and eventual attrition.

Asking raises expectations, but failing to visibly respond appears to do more damage than not asking.

Visible action on employee feedback is the key differentiator; simply listening is not enough



Visible action may be simpler than expected

What the data says

Among those who saw action, the most commonly cited examples were also the simplest; being told what the survey found and what the organisation planned to do. These were recalled more often than an actual visible change.

Openness about findings and intentions is itself experienced as action.

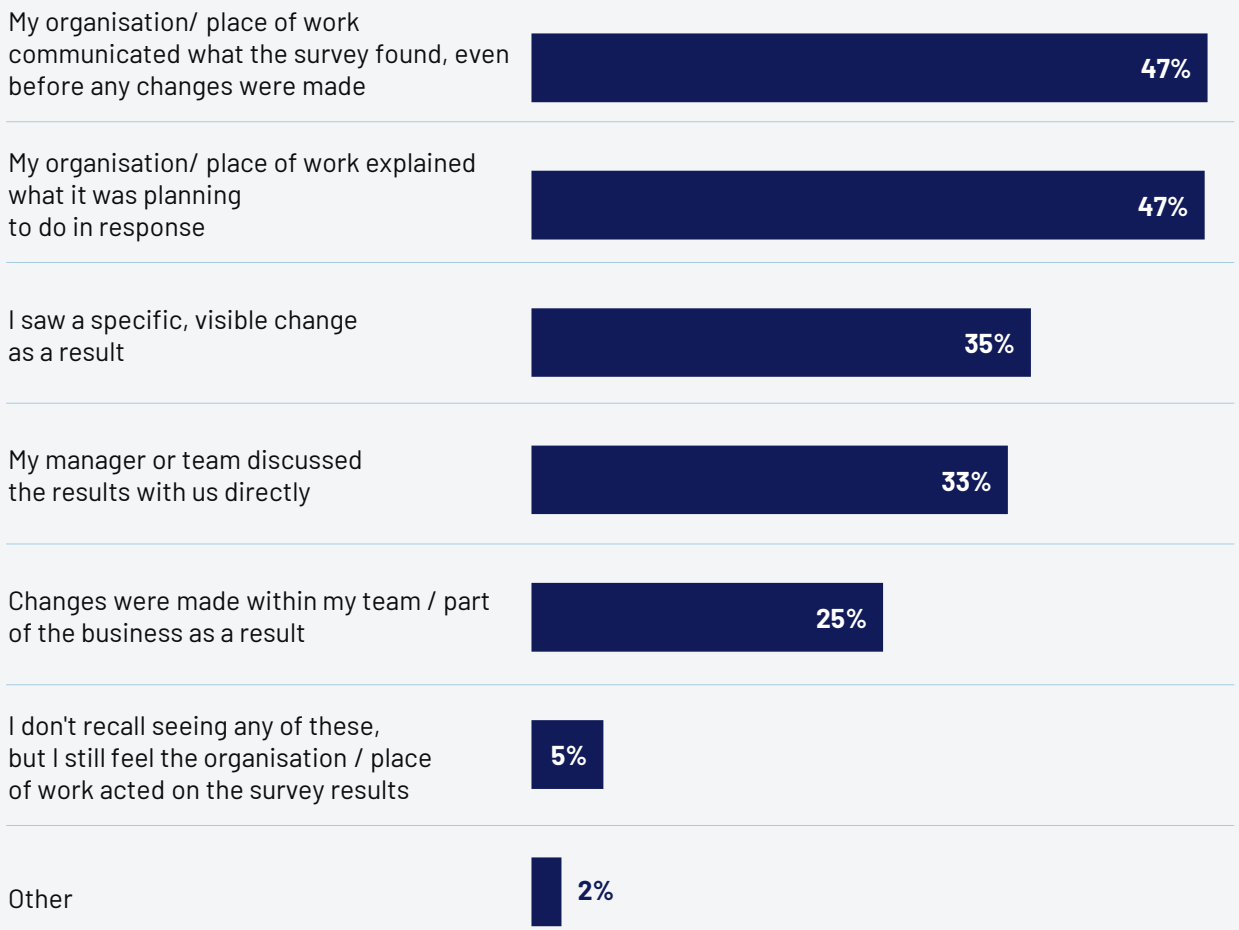
However, the manager, the most direct channel for showing that feedback matters, is often missing from the loop. Only a third say their manager discussed the results with them, and a quarter saw tangible change in their own team.

Why this matters

Employees don't expect performative action. Simply being open about feedback and plans to address it demonstrates care.

But this doesn't mean they don't expect change. There is clearly an opportunity for organisations to strengthen the connection between feedback and tangible shifts in experience at the team level.

Which of the following action(s) did you personally see or experience?
(n=1,522)



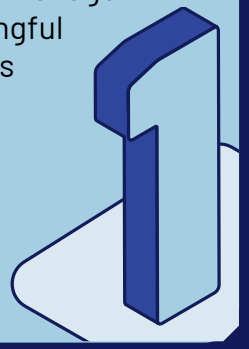
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What this means:
Four key shifts for organisations

Reassess career investment below management

The biggest career support gap sits between individual contributors and first-line managers.

Make development, sponsorship and non-linear pathways more visible and accessible to everyone, equipping managers to have more meaningful career conversations with employees at all stages.



Redesign management before developing people into it

Address workload, spans and expectations so management looks like a role worth stepping into. Consider offering non-people manager leadership routes and ensuring those with people management have adequate time to dedicate to the development of their own teams.



Identify and close employer brand-experience gaps

Critically assess your employer brand and the extent to which it authentically portrays the experience. Recruit with a realistic preview. Be open about your challenges, not just your strengths. Exceeding modest expectations will build more commitment than missing overstated ones.



Close the loop on listening efforts, visibly and locally

Start with the basics; be open about what you heard (the good and bad) and what you intend to do about it, including what you cannot do or is not a priority.

Equip managers to discuss feedback within their teams, empowering them to focus on things within their span of control.



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METHODOLOGY



Methodology

These are the results of a 32-country survey conducted by Ipsos on its Global Advisor online platform, between Friday, August 21, and Friday, September 4, 2026. For this survey, Ipsos interviewed a total of 13,586 adults aged 18 years and older in India, 18-74 in Canada, Republic of Ireland, Malaysia, New Zealand, South Africa, Türkiye, the United States, and Vietnam, 20-74 in Thailand, 21-74 in Indonesia and Singapore, and 16-74 in all other countries.

The sample consists of employed individuals (full-time, part-time, but not self-employed). The sample size ranges from 244 in Colombia and 697 in Spain with an average of 425 per country.

Samples in Argentina, Australia, Belgium, Canada, France, Germany, Great Britain, Hungary, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Poland, South Korea, Spain, Sweden, and the U.S. can be considered representative of their general adult populations under the age of 75. Samples in Brazil, Chile, Colombia, India, Indonesia, Ireland, Malaysia, Mexico, Peru, Philippines, Romania, Singapore, South Africa, Thailand, and Türkiye are more urban, more educated, and/or more affluent than the general population. The survey results for these countries should be viewed as reflecting the views of the more "connected" segment of their population.

The data is weighted so that the composition of each country's sample best reflects the demographic profile of the adult population according to the most recent census data. In Great Britain, the data was weighted by age, gender, and education. "The Global Country Average" reflects the average result for all the countries and markets in which the survey was conducted. It has not been adjusted to the population size of each country or market and is not intended to suggest a total result.

When percentages do not sum up to 100 or the 'difference' appears to be +/-1 percentage point more/less than the actual result, this may be due to rounding, multiple responses, or the exclusion of "don't know" or not stated responses.

The precision of Ipsos online polls is calculated using a credibility interval with a poll where N=1,000 being accurate to +/- 3.5 percentage points and of where N=500 being accurate to+/- 5.0 percentage points. For more information on Ipsos' use of credibility intervals, please visit the Ipsos website. The publication of these findings abides by local rules and regulations.

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