



The Remote Workforce Becomes the *Empowered Workforce*

ULTIMATE SOFTWARE'S 2019 REPORT
ON THE STATE OF REMOTE WORK

Ultimate
SOFTWARE
People first.

A person is shown from the side, holding a smartphone in their hands. In the background, a laptop is open on a desk. The scene is brightly lit, possibly by natural light from a window. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent green banner that contains the title text.

The Remote Workforce Becomes the Empowered Workforce

Since the introduction of cloud-based workplace tools, the “remote workforce” has steadily moved from the experimentation phase to the new reality. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics finds that 23% of the U.S. workforce works remotely at least part of the time. Despite the fact that “telecommuting” is no longer the novelty it once was, the media narrative tends to still leave us thinking that our remote workforce is being left behind and struggling to stay connected.

At Ultimate Software, we focus on putting people first. All people—no matter where they work. Over the past few years, many of the companies we support have recognized the rise of the remote workforce, and we’ve seen some major shifts in terms of how employers are accommodating their ever-changing employee base. So, we wanted to know: Are remote workers, indeed, still being left behind, or have things changed? We surveyed 1,000 U.S. employees nationwide, all of whom work for companies that have a mix of remote and in-office employees. Is the new reality of remote work as bleak as once thought?

It turns out, thanks to tech tools and supportive managers, remote workers are not only being treated equally, they’re truly thriving. In fact, overall, remote workers report higher overall job satisfaction than in-office workers -- 88% of remote workers agree or strongly agree that are satisfied with their jobs, compared to 78% of in-office employees. Remote workers are more likely to be forging personal connections at work, more likely to leverage HR for help or proactive solutions, and more likely to feel like there’s room for career growth within their current roles. While cloud-based software made remote work possible, a new era of advanced workplace tools has turned the remote workforce into the empowered workforce.

METHODOLOGY

An online survey was conducted with a panel of potential respondents. The recruitment period was April 4–12, 2019.

A total of 1,000 respondents, 18 years of age and older, living in the United States, and working full time, completed the survey. All respondents work in offices that have a mix of remote and in-office workers; 500 respondents work primarily in-office and 500 respondents work primarily in a remote location (such as from home or in the field).

The sample was provided by Market Cube, a research-panel company. Panel respondents were invited to take the survey via an email invitation and were incentivized to participate via the panel’s established points program.

REMOTE WORKERS AREN'T JUST SURVIVING—they're thriving

Remote workers, in many ways, are not just keeping up. They're thriving. While we tend to think the grass is always greener on the other side, remote workers and in-office workers are almost equally likely to report that the benefits of their respective work locations include better work-life balance and better productivity—proving that we're really adaptable to any situation we're in.

IN FACT, THERE ARE A FEW WAYS IN WHICH REMOTE WORKERS SEEM TO BE PULLING AHEAD:

Less Stress

Remote workers report a key advantage of their locations is feeling less stressed.

"ADVANTAGE OF MY WORKING LOCATION IS LESS STRESS"

50%

REMOTE WORKERS

19%

IN-OFFICE

More Recognition Compared with in-office workers, remote workers are:

40%

MORE LIKELY TO HAVE BEEN PROMOTED IN THE PAST YEAR

27%

MORE LIKELY FEEL THERE IS OPPORTUNITY FOR GROWTH IN THEIR CURRENT JOB

More Support

Remote workers are more likely to report feeling that their companies are invested in their career growth than in-office employees.

"STRONGLY OR SOMEWHAT AGREE THAT MY COMPANY IS INVESTED IN MY CAREER GROWTH"

74%

REMOTE WORKERS

65%

IN-OFFICE

WHERE THEY WOULD RATHER BE: Of those who have had the chance to work both remotely and in the office across the span of their careers, 54% prefer working remotely vs. only 32% prefer working in-office.

WHAT WOULD HELP MANAGERS, WORK BETTER WITH THEIR REMOTE EMPLOYEES?

70%

ANONYMIZED SOFTWARE THAT WOULD ALLOW ME TO BETTER UNDERSTAND THEIR FEELINGS

57%

MORE REGULAR COMMUNICATION CHANNELS

32%

MORE INTERVENTION FROM OTHER TEAM MEMBERS/HR

Remote workers feel less stressed and see more opportunity for growth. As the employee experience becomes increasingly important and increasingly complicated, we found that managers are giving the same amount of feedback to their remote and in-office direct reports.

75% of managers offer feedback at least once per week to in-office employee and 73% of managers offer feedback at least once per week to remote employees.

Face time doesn't seem to make or break the manager/employee relationship. In fact, some in-office managers reported having more trouble delivering feedback. When asked what would help them better manage their remote employees, nearly half of in-office workers said a software platform through which they could offer aggregated, anonymous feedback. In fact, all managers agree tech is the solution: 70% of managers think they'd work better with their direct reports if they had software that would help them better understand reports' feelings and deliver regular, anonymized feedback.

Dress for the job you want?

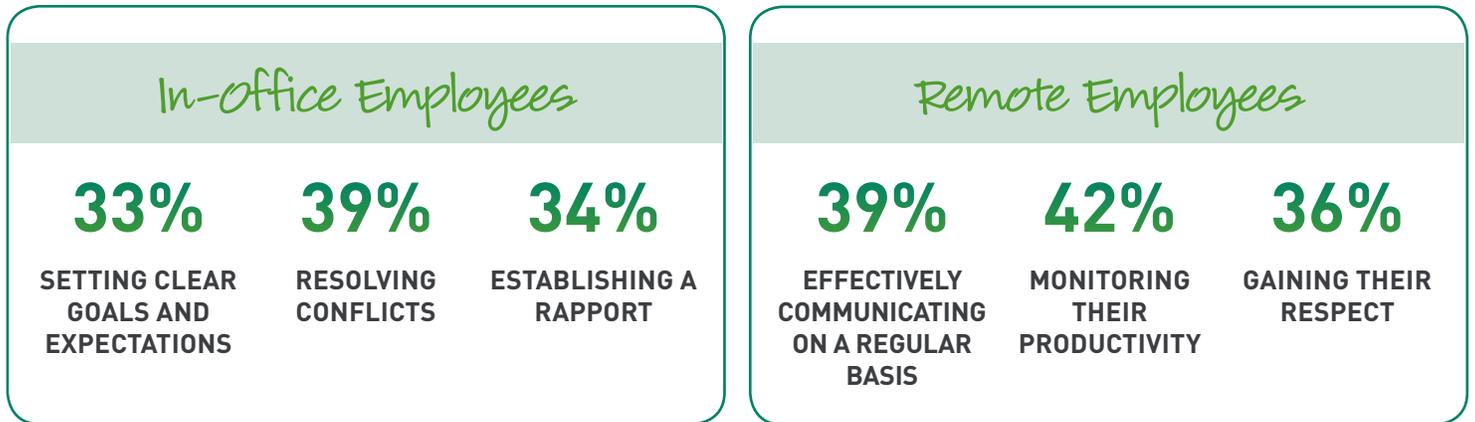
One perk of remote work: Over half (56%) of remote workers report wearing casual attire all or most of the time (including athletic attire, t-shirts, and shorts). Only 27% of in-office employees can say the same.

Remote women are rocking the most athleisure (37% said they dress casually all the time), while in-office women are least likely to dress down (with only 24% saying they will dress casually most or all of the time, and 35% reporting they NEVER do).

Challenges

Managing people is never easy, but managing both remote employees and in-office employees presents two different sets of challenges. Managers are most concerned about communication and monitoring the productivity of their remote employees, while interpersonal concerns rank higher among in-office employees.

TOP CHALLENGES OF MANAGING IN-OFFICE VS. REMOTE EMPLOYEES



Despite “monitoring productivity” being a top concern, remote workers themselves still report feeling high levels of productivity on a given day. The challenge lies in helping remote workers translate that productivity back to their managers. Tech tools can play a key role in continuing to increase the ease of communication and tracking productivity between remote teams and their managers, so leaders can focus on more personal challenges.

Nearly half of managers’ report that their top challenge is monitoring their remote workers productivity while 90% of remote workers feel very productive.



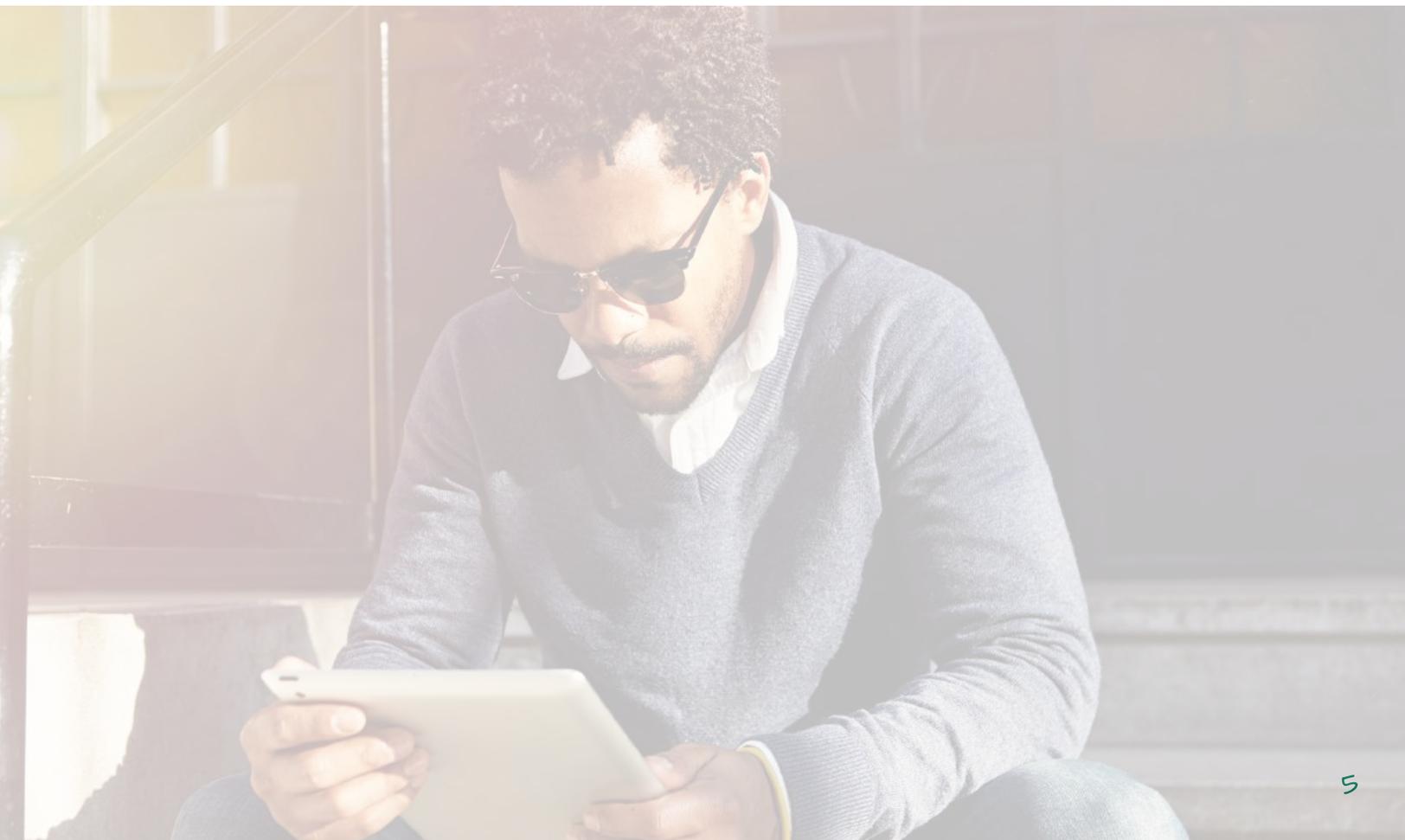
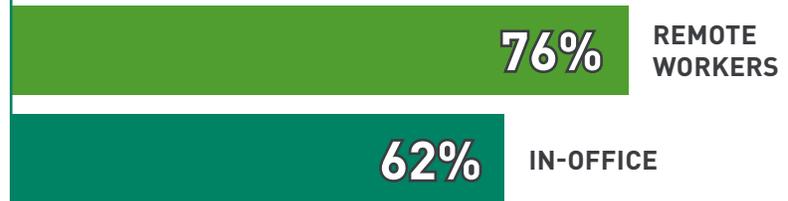
While the experiences of remote workers seem to have vastly improved, they're not quite perfect.

Remote workers are nearly twice as likely as in-office employees to feel “frequently” misunderstood or misinterpreted by their colleagues, and one-third (33%) of remote workers say this happens often.

And, while remote workers report that work-life balance is a top perk of their jobs, the reality is that remote workers may be at a higher risk of burnout.



RESPONDED YES TO:
*DO YOU WORK BEYOND YOUR
SET WORKING HOURS ON A
WEEKLY BASIS?*



Beyond the Cloud: HOW EMERGING TECHNOLOGIES ARE ENABLING REMOTE WORKERS

Technology is adapting quickly to accommodate the new reality of remote work, and savvy employees are taking advantage of it:

REMOTE WORKERS ARE **3X** MORE LIKELY TO PRIMARILY ACCESS DOCUMENTS ON THEIR MOBILE DEVICES

68% OF REMOTE WORKERS ARE USING CHAT OR COLLABORATION PLATFORMS AND VIDEO CONFERENCING ON A WEEKLY BASIS

Nearly a third (30%) of all employees are using technology platforms for giving and receiving feedback.

Remote workers are slightly more likely to be engaging with these online employee-feedback forums than their in-office counterparts.



1 IN 3 REMOTE WORKERS USES TECH FOR FEEDBACK WEEKLY



1 IN 4 IN-OFFICE WORKERS USES TECH FOR FEEDBACK WEEKLY

Both in-office and remote employees agree they **want** this technology.

Nearly half of office employees think online employee-feedback forums would help them better understand remote employees.

TECHNOLOGY IS ALSO HELPING REMOTE WORKERS BUILD BETTER RELATIONSHIPS

75%

of remote workers say technology helps them maintain personal connections with their in-office counterparts,

59% attribute it to regular communication via tech-like chat platforms, and

37% attribute it to the “face time” provided by video conferencing.

HR IS ADAPTING TO A REMOTE WORKFORCE, BUT WITH SOME *Growing Pains*

Our survey indicates that overall, HR is doing a good job keeping employees engaged and growing—whether they work in the office or remotely. Despite sweeping changes brought on by emerging technologies and shifting demographic trends in the modern workplace, virtual and in-office employees alike report feeling empowered to speak up, grow their careers, and foster connections—crucial categories in which HR likely plays a large role.

But the survey also indicates that, despite the new influx of tech and tools available to modern HR departments, employees are not always seeing HR as a go-to resource.

Perhaps most worrisome, roughly half of in-office employees say they never or almost never seek out the help of HR when problems arise or they need resources.

Nearly 40% of remote workers say the same.

Some demographics of workers may be having a tougher time in the modern workplace than others. One group consistently indicated room for improvement, from feeling misunderstood by their HR departments to seeing fewer opportunities for growth and advancement within their organization



The Concerns of Women in the Modern Workplace

HR LEADERS, PAY ATTENTION: IN-OFFICE WOMEN NEED YOUR SUPPORT.

Ultimate's survey shows that women are feeling disconnected and disadvantaged in traditional office settings, when compared with their male colleagues and women working primarily in remote locations.

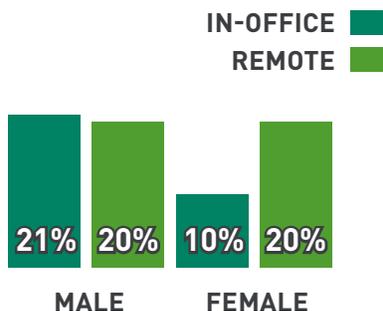
HERE ARE JUST A FEW AREAS FROM THE SURVEY THAT STOOD OUT.



In-office women aren't actively seeking help when they're running into issues.

They are **half as likely** as other groups to proactively leverage HR to resolve issues very often.

EMPLOYEES REPORTING THEY LEVERAGE HR TO ADDRESS CONCERNS "VERY OFTEN"



While, overall, employees are feeling understood and plugged in to their HR departments, in-office women are falling behind in their confidence that HR understands their needs and concerns.

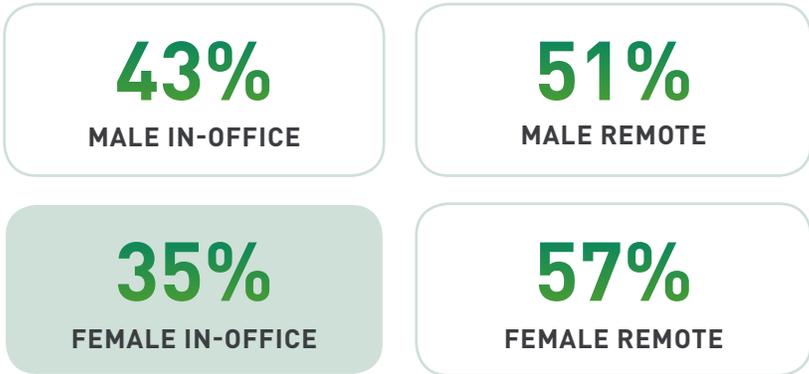
PERCENTAGE OF EMPLOYEES WHO "AGREE" OR "STRONGLY AGREE" THAT HR IS AWARE OF THEIR NEEDS AND CONCERNS AS AN EMPLOYEE



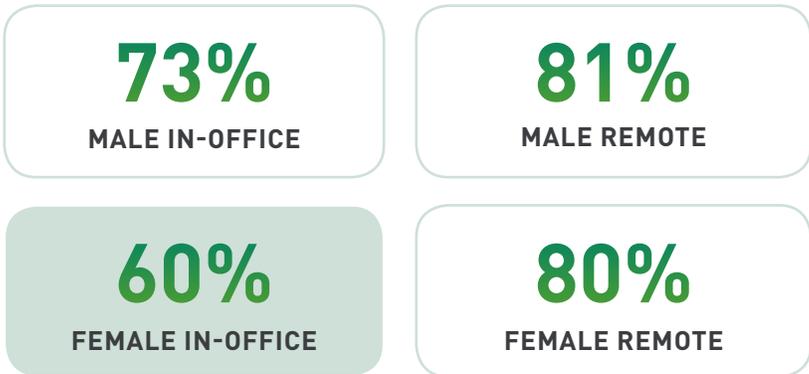
There is evidence these disconnects between in-office women and HR support are impacting their career growth and access to training opportunities.

WOMEN WORKING IN TRADITIONAL OFFICE ENVIRONMENTS ARE LEAST LIKELY TO REPORT A PROMOTION IN THE LAST YEAR

PERCENTAGE OF EMPLOYEES REPORTING A PROMOTION IN THE LAST YEAR



AND—LEAST LIKELY TO FEEL THERE IS ROOM FOR GROWTH IN THEIR CURRENT ROLES



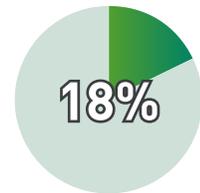
There is also a discrepancy when it comes to access to training and development—73% of women agree or strongly agree that they have access to these opportunities, but that falls below the 83% of men, both in-office and remote, who say the same.

The Importance of R&R

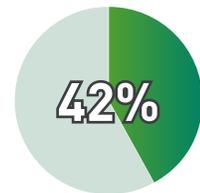
SOS! Our data found that in-office women **feel overwhelmingly more guilty** about taking time off than any other group.



MALE IN-OFFICE



MALE REMOTE



FEMALE IN-OFFICE



FEMALE REMOTE

While we've certainly made strides toward a more comfortable, inclusive workplace, there is still some ground to cover to make sure all employees feel supported and thriving—whether they work in offices or from their living rooms.



Sexual Harassment in the Workplace: Progress, but room to improve.

11% of in-office employees and 12% of remote workers reported experiencing sexual harassment at work. Nearly 70% of all employees reported feeling empowered to report sexual harassment, about 25% of employees do NOT feel like they had the tools/process to report sexual harassment.

There's work to do to ensure HR channels are clear and available to all employees who experience harassment in the workplace.

Remote workers are just as likely to have experienced sexual harassment at work as in-office, and the results are fairly consistent across genders. Of note, remote men were twice as likely to have reported sexual harassment than in-office men.

Overall, Gen Z/Millennials were both the most likely to experience sexual harassment, and the least likely to say they felt empowered to report it to HR.

HAVE YOU EXPERIENCED SEXUAL HARASSMENT AT WORK?

6% MALE IN-OFFICE
11% MALE REMOTE

13% FEMALE IN-OFFICE
14% FEMALE REMOTE

REMOTE WORK'S *Impact* ACROSS FIVE GENERATIONS

For the first time in history, the current workforce is composed of five different generations. How are these generations interacting with each other, adapting to remote work, and leveraging their HR teams? Ultimate took a look and found some surprising (and not-so-surprising!) insights.

Mixed Messages

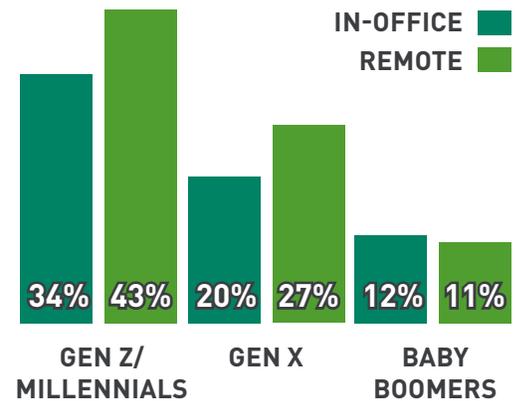
Younger generations are more likely to report feeling that their remote or in-office counterparts misunderstand them. As communication—both how we communicate and the channels we use to do so—continues to evolve, the HR leaders best equipped to help their organizations thrive will be those who crack the code of intergenerational interaction.

With a little help from our friends

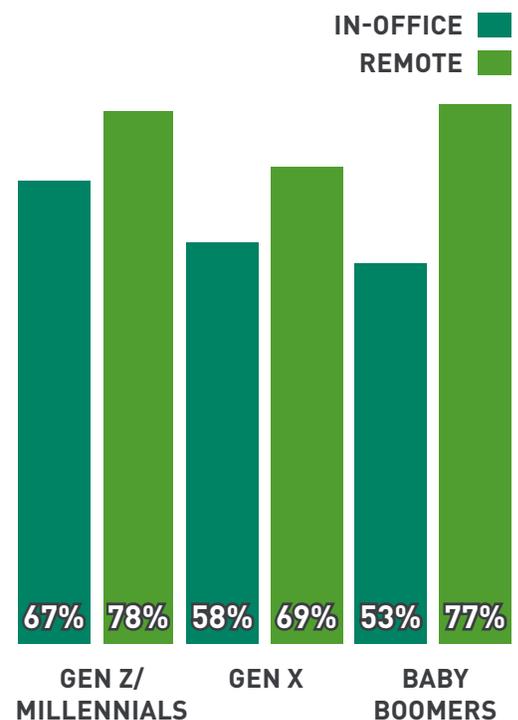
Proving again that face time isn't everything, remote workers are more likely than in-office counterparts to report having close friends or personal connections at the workplace.

And, despite Millennials' reputation for being better at technology-based connections, remote Baby Boomers are just as likely to have work friends as their Millennial counterparts.

SAY FREQUENTLY OR OFTEN MISUNDERSTOOD



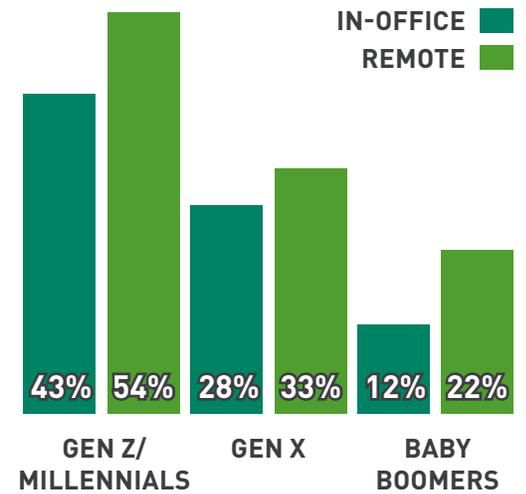
EMPLOYEES WHO STRONGLY OR SOMEWHAT AGREE THAT THEY HAVE PERSONAL CONNECTIONS AT WORK



How are the generations interacting with HR?

While Baby Boomers may be successfully building relationships electronically, they are not proactively reaching out to their HR teams when they have issues. Baby Boomers are the least likely generation, both remote and in-office, to proactively leverage HR. They may require more active outreach from their HR departments to ensure they are seeing all the benefits.

EMPLOYEES WHO REPORT PROACTIVELY LEVERAGING HR TO RESOLVE AN ISSUE



Passing the Baton

Our data shows that Gen Z and Millennial employees are more likely to be managers than Baby Boomers and Gen X'ers.

CURRENTLY MANAGING EMPLOYEES

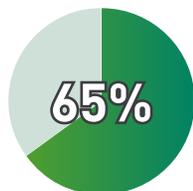


Millennial Burnout

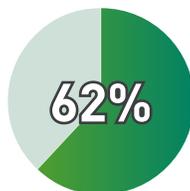
Despite “monitoring productivity” being a top concern, remote workers themselves still report feeling high levels of productivity on a given day. The challenge lies in helping remote workers translate that productivity back to their managers. Tech tools can play a key role in continuing to increase the ease of communication and tracking productivity between remote teams and their managers, so leaders can focus on more personal challenges.

GENERALLY, HOW OFTEN DO YOU WORK BEYOND YOUR SET WORKING HOURS? (EXAMPLE: IF YOUR FORMAL DAY IS SUPPOSED TO BE FROM 8AM TO 5PM, HOW OFTEN DO YOU WORK BEYOND THOSE SET HOURS?)

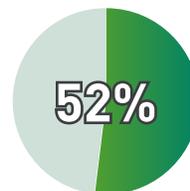
IN-OFFICE POTENTIAL TO WORK OUTSIDE OF BUSINESS HOURS



**GEN Z/
MILLENNIALS**



GEN X

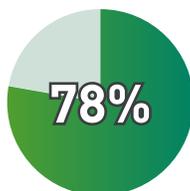


**BABY
BOOMERS**

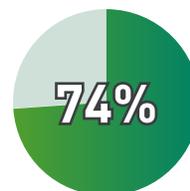
REMOTE REMOTE POTENTIAL TO WORK OUTSIDE OF BUSINESS HOURS



**GEN Z/
MILLENNIALS**



GEN X



**BABY
BOOMERS**

What do we all have in common, regardless of gender, working location, or generation?

As a technology company powering the human side of work, we're keenly aware of how important it is to consider when and where tech enters the workforce. As the survey demonstrates, technology tools have made remote work a new normal, and have also created a newly empowered generation of workers. But we also see that employees still need to feel connected and understood by their colleagues—virtual and in-office—in order to grow as professionals and do their best work.

We encourage HR leaders to leverage smart tech tools, such as solutions for HR service delivery and employee feedback solutions, in a way that still puts the human element first, regardless of an employee's location, and pay attention to the areas where extra human investment is needed.

THE FUTURE OF WORK RELIES ON A DELICATE BALANCE BETWEEN SMART TECHNOLOGY AND A PERSONAL TOUCH, AND WE'RE PROUD TO BE A PART OF IT.

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