

Keep Your People:

How to Navigate The Great Resignation



WILEY

Work is very different than it was at the optimistic onset of 2020.

Our lives turned upside down and for many of us, our workday went from cubicles and commutes to pajama pants, homeschooling, and trying to meet deadlines with the constant background noise of home life. For those who were not able to stay home, work suddenly included masks, sanitizer, and social distancing – giving “work stress” a whole new meaning. From a talent perspective, some businesses weathered the pandemic storm better than others, adapting quickly to respond to the needs of their people.

Conversely, coming out of the pandemic, others have lost top talent because they didn't emphasize a people-centered approach, which leverages the unique needs, insights, and capabilities of your people and weaves them into the fabric of your organization to build a foundation of trust, openness, and resilience. *This isn't a new concept:*

In fact, 44% of people think employees have the greatest impact on their organization's success—more so than leadership, reputation, and products/services.



What is new is that employee expectations have fundamentally shifted.

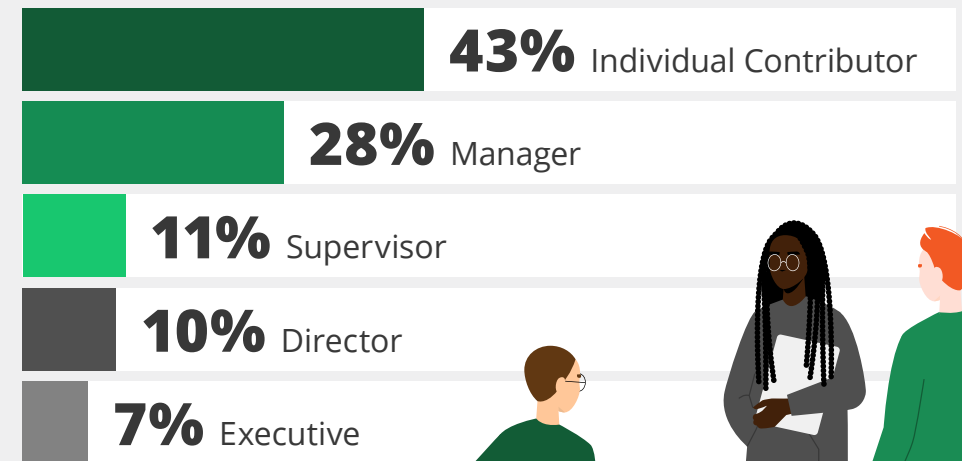
Not only are employees reviewing how their organization handled the pandemic from a people-perspective, but they're also deciding if their organization's future of work policies match their needs. In fact, a recent study by Microsoft indicated that over 40% of the global workforce would be willing to leave their job this year¹.

This mass exodus is driven by many factors, including new job opportunities (that aren't limited by location) and the emphasis on flexibility and work/life balance. As a result, keeping your top talent will become even more difficult and implementing people-first policies will become a necessity.

There are a lot of benefits to a people-centered culture, especially during times of change. But what can you do to help your employees maintain a healthy work/life balance and keep stress at bay to avoid losing your top talent? To find out, **we surveyed 4,500 working professionals from a variety of industries in July 2021.**

¹ Microsoft (March 2021)

Survey Respondents by Organizational Level



First, Some Context:

Before the pandemic, 74% of respondents worked primarily in an office. Now, almost half of those people (48%) who used to work in the office are working primarily from home. Although the transition to working from home should help with work/life balance in theory (i.e. eliminating the commute or making it easier to manage household responsibilities) that's not exactly how it's played out.

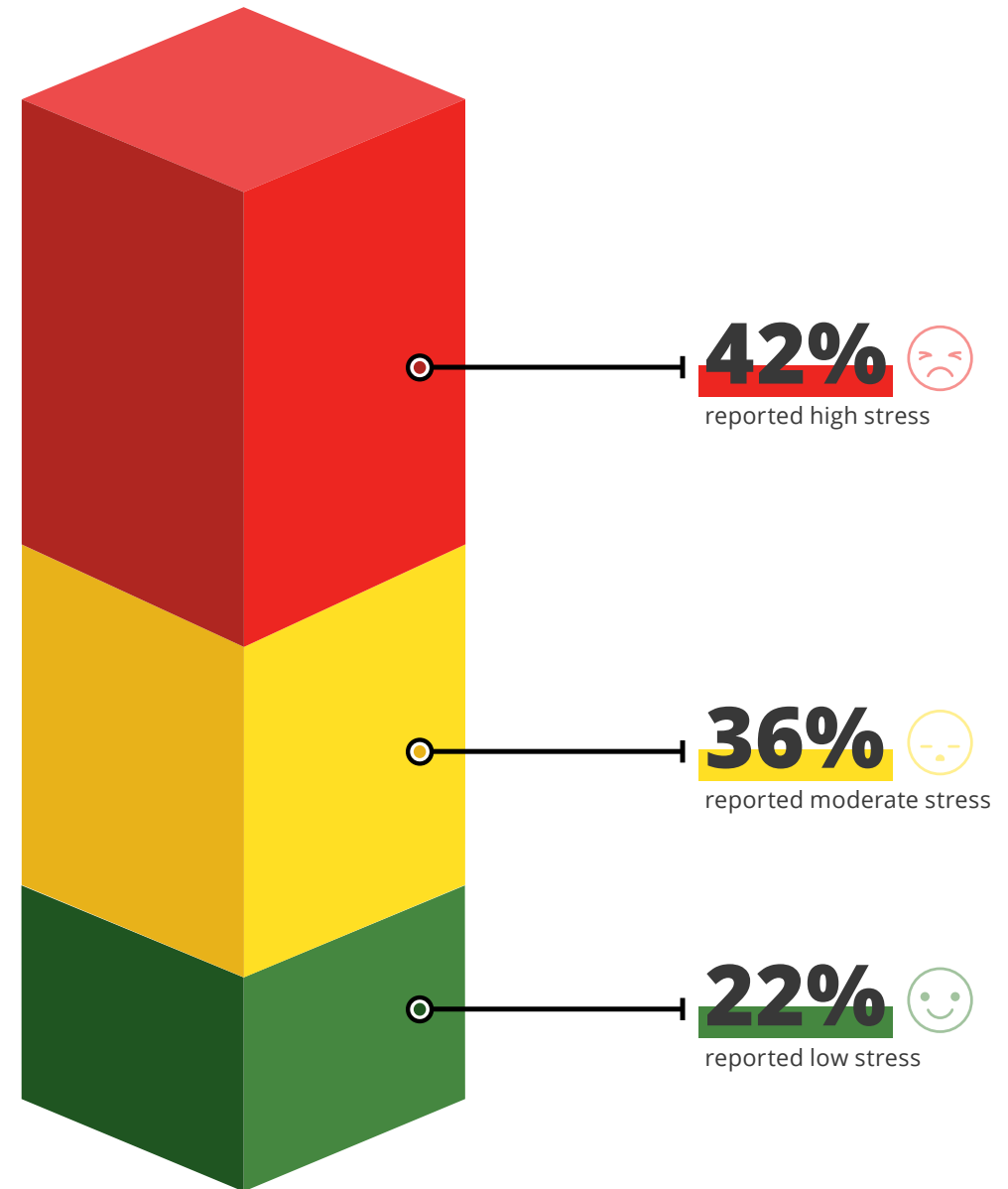
Only 18% of respondents are very satisfied with their work/life balance.

A whopping 38% report feeling neutral, dissatisfied, or very dissatisfied about their work/life balance.



As you might have guessed, most people are ***stressed***.

78% of people are experiencing elevated stress levels, with 42% of those people reporting *high stress*.



Most people have experienced a grand shift in their work/life balance over the last year, and this shift is likely to continue.

Whether that's a full-on return to the office (Does anyone own real pants anymore? We'll come back to this), a hybrid approach, or something entirely different, these constant changes, paired alongside the extreme stress of the last year, have caused most people to feel a little out of balance. As you can imagine, having a bunch of employees who feel like their work/life balance is off means that your organization is likely suffering the consequences. It goes without saying that people who feel happy with their work/life balance are more inclined to stay with their organization.

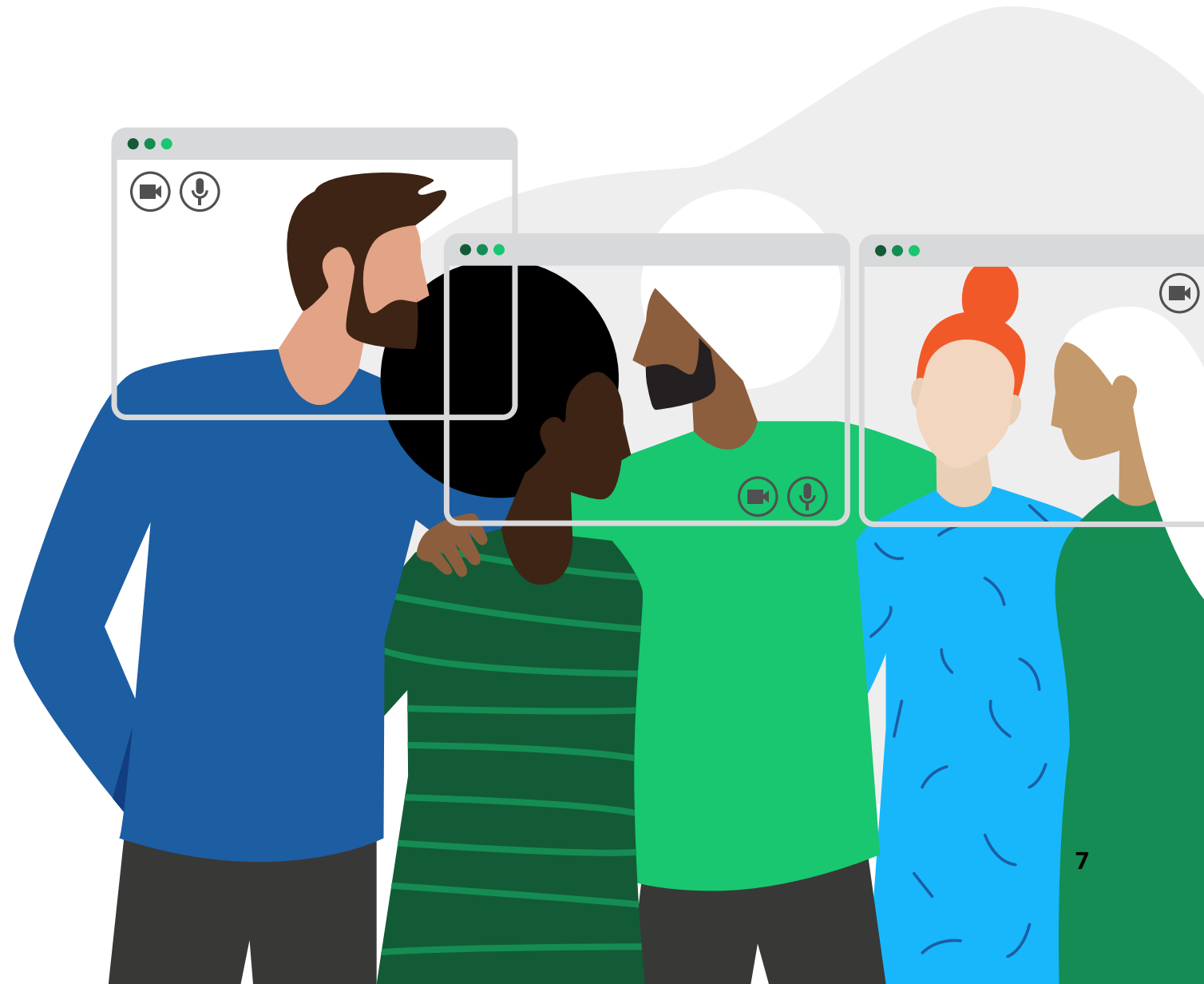
Our research found a strong correlation between satisfaction with work/life balance and stress level. The more satisfied you are with your work/life balance, the less stress you feel and vice versa.



By now you're probably thinking "Okay, well what exactly should I do to create a more people-centered culture, so my employees want to stay?"

.....▶ **Here's the good news, we know where you can start.**

We asked respondents a bunch of questions about what policies their organizations have in place and examined the impact that those policies have on reported stress levels. We discovered some compelling insights that illuminate which organizational policies have the biggest impact on lowering employee stress levels. As you read the top five, look at the percentage of respondents who reported they **currently have** these benefits in place and reflect on if your organization implemented or updated any of these policies in the last year.



The Top 5 Policies Correlated to Lower Employee Stress

01

Additional PTO & Mental Health Days

32% of people surveyed currently experience this benefit

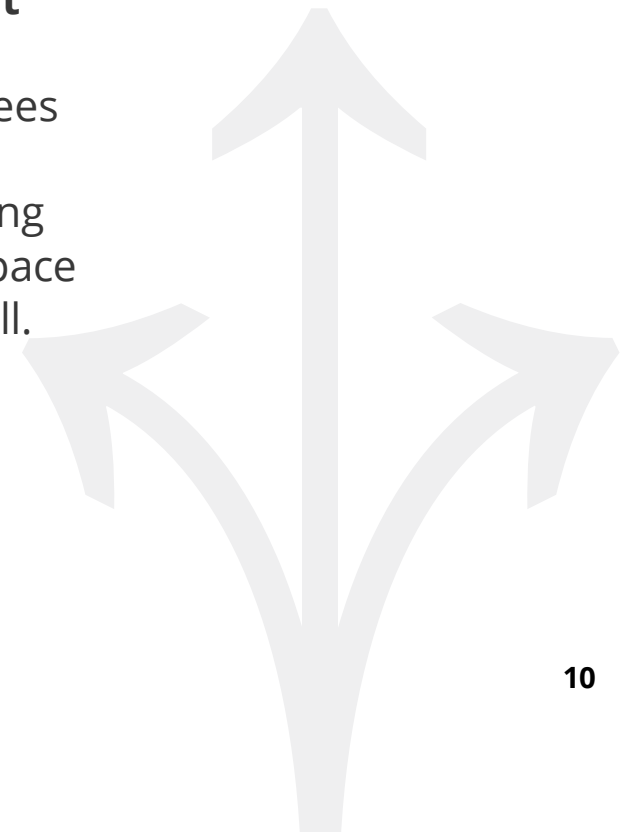
The pandemic highlighted mental health in the workforce in a way we've never seen before. According to our research, providing additional PTO and mental health days had the strongest impact on lowering stress levels for employees at the height of the pandemic and continues to play an important role in lowering stress moving forward, so it's surprising that only 32% of respondents said their company modified this policy. This means **organizations that actively prioritize, discuss, and cater to its employees' mental health moving forward will be in a better position to retain and attract top talent.**

02

Greater Flexibility

66% of people surveyed currently experience this benefit

If the shift in remote work taught us anything, it's that **flexibility doesn't come at the cost of productivity**. As we move forward into the new world of work, organizations will need to build policies that help employees maintain a work/life balance that prioritizes their health, wellbeing, and life outside of the workplace which, in turn, supports a productive working environment. And flexibility means more than just continuing to allow space for remote or hybrid work, it means addressing *when* people work as well.



03

Non-Work Time to Connect with Colleagues

59% of people surveyed currently experience this benefit

There's a lot more to work than the work itself. The employee experience rests heavily on an organization's ability to build strong, healthy working relationships. Although the past year has made it difficult to connect with coworkers, many organizations have found virtual ways to keep culture at the core and fuel employee relationships from afar. Investing in employee relationships could include virtual talent shows, lunch dates, and coffee chats. As the hybrid work environment becomes increasingly prevalent, **don't forget to purposefully build in optional, fun, non-work interactions so you can ensure that people stay connected, wherever they are.**

04

Listening Sessions with Leaders

58% of people surveyed currently experience this benefit

This one is interesting. **People have lower stress levels when leaders reach out and listen.** They want to feel heard and acknowledged for their unique needs and contributions and will, in turn, be more committed to their work. We can all agree it makes a big difference when we feel the leaders in our organization care about what happens to us and invest time into making our work life better. **Although listening sessions can be time consuming, they send a clear signal to your employees that you value them.**

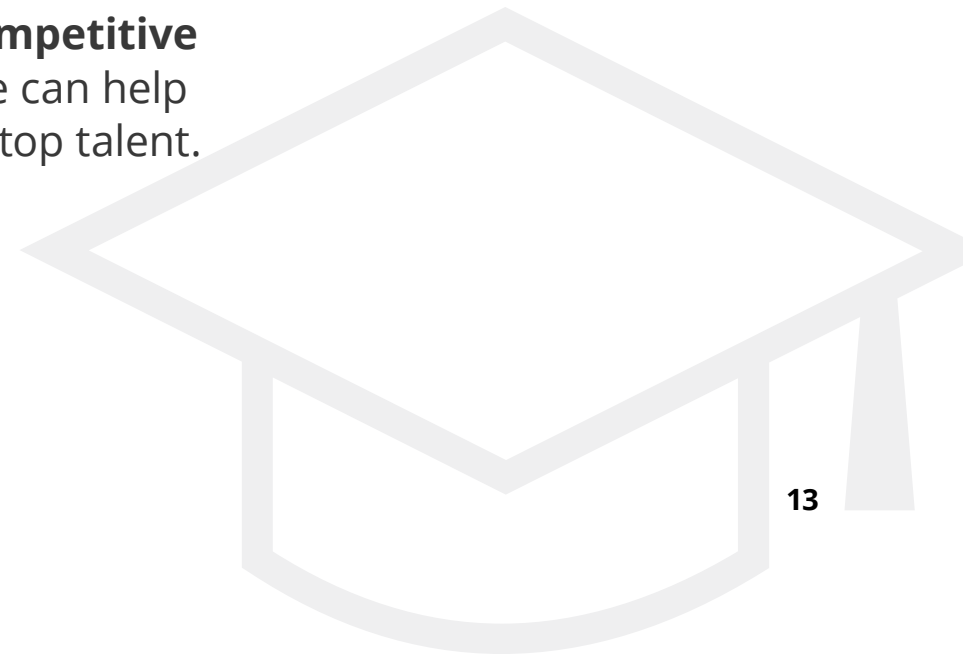
05

Training Opportunities

82% of people surveyed currently experience this benefit

The terms **upskilling and reskilling** are showing up all over the place in business literature right now. As Forbes notes, many companies think that during times of uncertainty, they should hold off on upskilling their employees. But this is a misconception. In fact, **it's critical to invest in your workforce to ensure they have the most up-to-date skills to stay competitive in their respective fields**². A culture that emphasizes people can help reduce employee stress, thereby helping you hire and retain top talent.

² Forbes (December 2020)





By examining where your organization stands regarding these five benefits, you can assess how well-positioned you are to navigate this move towards a more people-centered culture. If you know where you currently stand, you can better determine how to move forward to reduce employee stress, while hiring and retaining top talent.

**Things have changed.
Your organization has changed.**

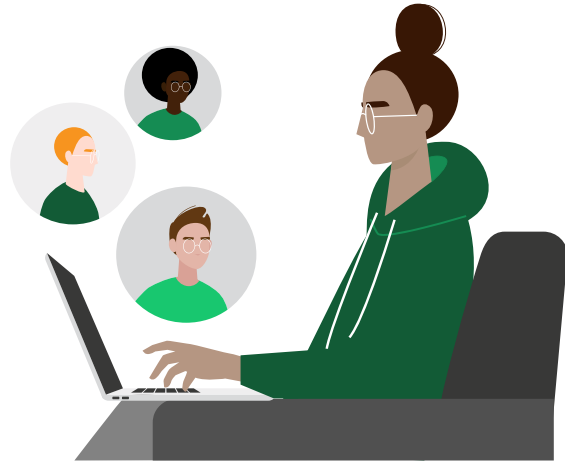
.....▶ **You've changed.**

The old you that protected your privacy and considered carefully what to share at work is now being interrupted in the middle of meetings by one of your kids that just wants a hug (they're probably pretty stressed too).

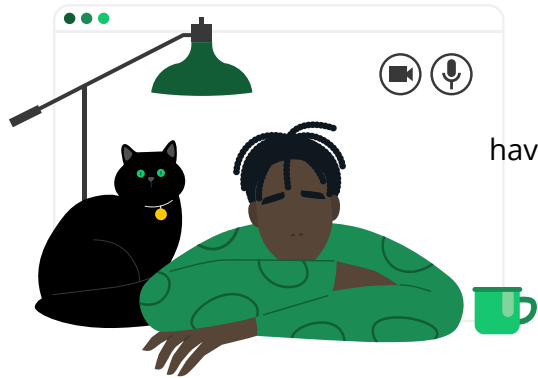
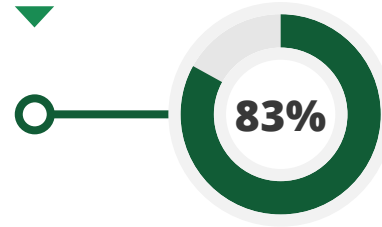
The old you that spent one hour getting ready in the morning is now rolling out of bed with five minutes to spare, only to throw on a quick top, keeping your pajama bottoms firmly intact.

If you're doing this, it's likely that many in your organization are doing it as well.

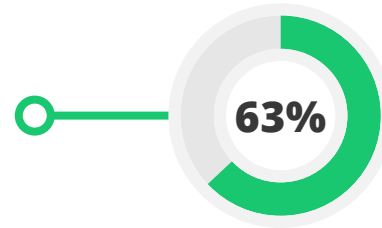




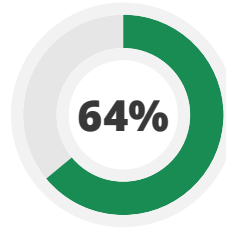
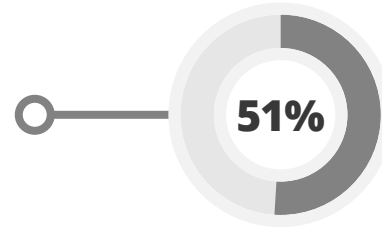
83%
have embraced more casual hair, makeup, or clothing



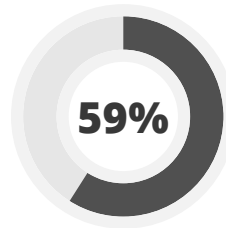
63%
have had a **colleague's** kid, spouse, or pet interrupt a work meeting



51%
have learned something unique/quirky about their colleagues



64%
have worn sweatpants/pajama pants with a nice top



59%
have had **their** kid, spouse, or pet interrupt a work meeting



But even though we've all changed, change can be good.

.....▶ **Especially if it means moving towards a kinder and more empathic workplace where we all care a little more about the people behind the screens.**

We expect this mutual understanding of the importance of putting people first is the difference between the way things were and the way things will be in the new normal.

So, if you're a **leader**, we urge you to put your people first. Not just because it's the right thing to do, but because keeping your people and reducing turnover is better for your bottom line. And if you're a **people**, consider sharing this information with your leaders so they have the insight they need to take a people-centered approach to business, ensuring you (and other amazing talent like you) stay on board. Whatever the future brings, we know that people are going to be at the core.



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