

Five predictions your employees haven't shared with you *(yet)*



Shape your future:
The power of humanized workforce data

 **Culture Amp**

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The last two years have been a real eye-opener when it comes to shifting work habits.

We once focused on purely practical considerations — about how and where we work. That's since broadened to consider larger, philosophical questions: about purpose, work/life balance, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DE&I), and the shifting power dynamics of employer/employee relations.

Importantly, employees aren't passengers in this conversation. They're the ones driving it.

Employers — and the decision makers who represent them — are acutely aware that now is the time to act.

This story centers on a burning opportunity. Leaders can seize a new richness of workforce data and insights to shape a future of work that suits everyone: individuals, the workforce, and the company.

So far, so good, right?

Except most organizations remain at a crossroads. They see value in elevating the employee experience, but struggle to orchestrate that change into valuable outcomes. And it's action that matters most here — failure to translate intentions into actions can actively harm the employee experience. The result? Diminished productivity, workforce retention headaches and, ultimately, lower revenue.

At Culture Amp, we've worked with over 5,000 customers from across the globe — at different stages of growth - empowering them to translate their goals and values into meaningful action and outcomes.



Our expert People Scientists have analyzed extensive Culture Amp data, as well as broader research and trends, to identify 5 insightful predictions about the world of post-pandemic work. This ebook explores their findings:

1. Leaders must earn new levels of trust from employees
2. Companies need to communicate more empathetically with the workforce
3. Managers will face elevated levels of burnout without intervention
4. Employees value individual flexibility more than broad definitions of “hybrid work”
5. Rising generational diversity in the workforce will bring new challenges and opportunities

Read on to explore each of these predictions in detail — and to discover how to respond to them. Each represents a jumping-off point to elevate different aspects of your employee experience (EX). Collectively, they'll enhance your own company's performance, profitability and resilience. And not a year or five from today. Right now.

Let's get started.



PREDICTION 1

Leaders must earn new levels of trust from employees

What the prediction means:

Shifting power dynamics mean business leaders can't expect their workforce's trust. More than ever, they'll have to earn it.

Trust between employees and their leaders has always been important. Traditionally, HR teams have facilitated this trust — acting as a compassionate and logistical point of contact between both parties.

But the pandemic changed this dynamic — leaders had to step up and build employee trust throughout a period of intense uncertainty. As we emerge into a new working landscape, there's a clear imperative to continue leading from the front.



What the data says:

Culture Amp's data reveal interesting insights into what built trust between March 2019 and December 2021. The following statements are derived from over 2.2 million employee responses across this time period.



"There is open an honest two-way communication" rose 8% [from 59% to 67%].



"Leaders keep people informed about what is happening" rose 9% [from 63% to 72%].



"The leaders demonstrate that people are important to the company's success" rose 6% [from 64% to 70%].

This uptick in transparency makes sense given the time frame as companies worked hard to foster confidence during the pandemic. Professional trust is an exchange between trust givers and trust receivers — and we tend to incorrectly assume that trust receivers hold the power in this dynamic.

However, smart leaders recognize just how pivotal the former group is in determining healthy work environments.

Rachel Botsman, [a Culture Amp collaborator](#) and lecturer on trust in the modern world, points out just how much the 't' word has evolved in the context of work. The crux? Words and language hold less credence than before, having been outshined by greater demand for actions and outcomes.

Too many companies, she argues, have fixated on the customer-company relationship, and not enough on whether a company's own employees perceive them to be trustworthy.

The consequence — a rise in employee activism — has flipped the balance of power in employees' favor. By making their voices heard, teams now hold their organizations to account more than ever before.



What you can do:

Avoid psychological contract breaches.

The ability to earn employee trust remains a key engagement driver — and businesses are clearly attempting to foster a more open and transparent relationship with the workforce in response. Time and again, companies exploring their own dynamics realize the importance of what we call the “psychological contract.”

All employees are subject to social exchange with their employers. But how they perceive the conditions of this exchange (whether monetary or relational perks) will dictate their trust in their employer.



“When employees feel their leaders have failed to meet the obligations of a psychological contract, things can go downhill quickly. Research points to a spiral of negative behaviors: not just lower trust, but higher employee turnover and marked absenteeism.”

— Melissa Paris, Regional Director of
People Science, Culture Amp

Building that trust doesn’t need to be a slog. Acknowledging two obvious, but key pillars can make a real difference.

Listening to your teams will cast a light on the workforce’s current experiences and concerns. Launching regular feedback surveys, 1-on-1 conversations and team meetings will all help identify which aspects of your culture matter most to them.

The second part of the puzzle is **taking action** to improve on what you’ve learned. It’s a crucial step for establishing and building trust. After all, you need to show them you care about their feedback...and want to improve their overall experience.



Companies need to communicate more empathetically with the workforce

What the prediction means:

Leaders must tailor the frequency, volume and format of their updates to employees — without losing their compassion.

This prediction builds on the first. Fostering trust amongst your workforce isn't about the act of communicating, but rather the quality of the communication itself. You need to think about what you share with them, and how often. We know the pandemic saw leaders ramp up their announcements. But now, in a culture of relentless updates, shrewd leaders must be more selective. It's all about smarter, more deliberate communications.



What the data says:

Culture Amp's data suggests many employees feel overwhelmed after a rollercoaster two years. Communication overdrive only adds to this feeling.

This isn't a case of workers wanting their leaders' openness to decrease. But as the pandemic's initial uncertainty gave way to routine, engagement results show rising apathy toward non-essential updates. Check out the findings from March 2020 through December 2021:



Employees reported feeling more stressed than ever by their work [a decline of 8%].¹



At the same time, employees felt like they were asked to do more work than ever. According to Culture Amp data, one of the main reasons for employees leaving their role boiled down to mismatched expectations [those who left scored approximately 7% lower than colleagues who stayed].²



¹ Employees responded to the statement: "I feel rarely overstressed by my work."

² Employees responded to the statement: "I am happy with my role relative to what was described to me."



What you can do:

Empathetic communication hinges on being valuable to the recipient.

Employees want employers to earn their trust. But context is important. Every data point available points to a tension between intent and effect — that in trying to connect with a more distributed workforce, companies can unintentionally overwhelm the workforce with information overload.



“The key to effective transparency that builds trust is not volume but value — supported by a clear vision of who needs to know what, when and how best to deliver that information.”

— Dr. Arne Sjöström, Senior People Scientist at Culture Amp

Businesses need to make transparency intentional (rather than a default broadcast). That means thinking about the best forum and audience for the information at hand, considering how different employees like to consume information, and matching the content of the announcement with the most appropriate format. Is your quarterly update best delivered as a Slack message? Is feedback better saved for an in-person meeting vs. a video call? And how can you ensure your message is timely, and shared with vulnerability?

Everyone is juggling more demands than before. So question whether your communications strategy suits the post-pandemic world your employees have to navigate. Conduct tailored engagement surveys to pinpoint the right balance of transparency, frequency, and mix of channels.



Managers will face more *burnout* without intervention

What the prediction means:

Organizations rely on their managers to keep operations moving.

Keeping them supported will require an audit of existing company cultures. While employees at all levels are feeling stretched, supporting managers can prevent any burnout ripple effects across the company.

Much has been made of executive responses to uncertain times. Dive deeper though, and you'll see who's at the coalface of organizational change. (Hint: It isn't executives.)

Managers keep fractious workforces together. They've also seen [expectations of their own roles](#) rise. Why is that? Market shocks and tough economies have changed the shape of typical workforces.

As companies responded to the pandemic by cutting costs, it heaped more pressure on a shrunken workforce more stressed, uncertain and in need of support than ever before.

Managers have borne the brunt. And not just by navigating remote and hybrid teams, attrition, and cost and budget freezes. Getting it "right" has meant leading with empathy while also delivering on business needs.



What the data says:



According to a [global study](#) commissioned by Asana, 71% of workers reported burnout in 2020. In some countries, the numbers are even higher, including 75% in the U.K.



In the same study 86% of workers globally reported working overtime every day, up from 78% in 2019.



Findings from a global [ADP Research](#) amplify matters. The workers it surveyed logged, on average, 9.2 hours of unpaid overtime weekly, up from 7.3 hours just one year ago.



A [survey on the wellbeing of Austrian employees](#) (Scheibenbogen et al.) found 44% of participants to be affected by burnout.



Meanwhile, a similar study focused on Luxembourg shows that the [level of burnout experienced by workers has increased continually](#), affecting almost a third of respondents (32.1%) in 2017.

Contrary to what you might expect, Culture Amp data shows employees were *more* engaged at the height of the pandemic. But high engagement, paired with high workloads, can be a recipe for burnout. Two questions during the pandemic's peak — both related to work-life balance — put the resulting strain on managers into [sharp focus](#).

Our data shows that line managers doubled down on their efforts during 2020 and 2021. Managers who established regular 1-on-1s with their and created feelings of belonging — resulted in increased engagement across the board.

Put everything together, and the truth becomes clear. Managers aren't failing. They're *being* failed. When they take on too many roles (coach, listener, manager), burnout risk is inevitable. Cultures that encourage this precedent are doomed to lose talented individuals.



What you can do:

Fostering the right environment allows managers to “put on their oxygen mask” before attending to others.

How can we protect our managers better? Reaffirming the importance of development plays a major role. But the *manner* in which this happens can have very different outcomes. Top-down led, generic initiatives, for example, have less impact than prioritizing continuous, tailored development. Bespoke [L&D programs](#) provide multi-dimensional benefits.

Burnout happens because managers attend to their reports’ oxygen masks before their own. Grant them the time, resources and tools to develop themselves first, and they’ll be better placed to do the same for others.





Employees value individual *flexibility* more than broad definitions of “hybrid work”

What the prediction means:

Organizations of all shapes and sizes must balance the contrasting needs and expectations of their employees when it comes to flexible working.

All of our predictions are shaped by the dual dynamic of changing demands, and responses to those demands. Expectations around how and where employees work are a great example.

Most of us recognize that ways of working have changed. Far fewer have interrogated what those changes mean in relation to their company's values, mission, vision and identity.

Prior to Covid-19, [68% of British employees](#) had never worked from home. Post-pandemic, 57% of employees now *prefer* this setup.

Other European countries follow similar trends. According to the [IZA Institute of Labor Economics](#), working from home was reported as “feasible” for 56% of the German workforce. Less than half of this figure worked from home prior to the pandemic.



A similar trend can be observed in Australia: only 20% of companies had staff that worked from home prior to the pandemic, now that number is 44%.

Interestingly, a separate study suggests 22,500 Americans would even take an 8% pay cut to continue working “flexibly.” A recent study by Jabra surveyed over 5,000 knowledge workers across the UK, France, Germany, the US and Japan and comes to a similar conclusion. Fully 75 percent of workers want the flexibility to work anywhere in the future. And 59 percent said this flexibility was more important to them than salary or other benefits.

What was once of nominal importance has become a critical imperative.

What the data says:



From March 2019 (i.e. pre-pandemic) through June 2021, Culture Amp data shows a marked rise in favorability to the statement “We are genuinely supported if we choose to make use of flexible working arrangements” from 73% to 81%.



However, employer support for this arrangement diminishes over time...



Favorable responses to the statement “I would feel genuinely supported by my [manager/team] if I chose to continue working remotely” dropped 5% globally between June 2020 (83%) and December 2021 (78%).

What can be taken from the bigger picture? We know that as the pandemic hit, leaders ramped up efforts to keep their workforce as informed as possible. And remote working — initially endorsed by employers — evolved to a more general policy of “hybrid” working.

But the term “hybrid” can have a different meaning depending on who you ask. No two employers, or employees, will have an identical definition. What’s more, “hybrid working” isn’t an employee-centric term — it’s more a label for the mechanism of working partly in the office, and partly elsewhere.



What you can do:

True power for organizations comes from recognizing flexibility (which is an intended outcome of hybrid working).

In truth, companies get too hung up on the concept of hybrid work. Sure, it's a type of flexible working. But it still misses what we term the "flexibility factor."

Much has been made of the Great Resignation, where companies faced extra pressure to keep their best performers. However, an action plan shaped by pre-pandemic motivators misses the mark in a post-pandemic landscape. Workers value flexibility just as much, if not more, than increases in pay or benefits.





Just like “hybrid,” though, “flexibility” has a fluid definition. Making it work for *your* workforce becomes easier when guided by four words:

Communication

This one echoes our earlier predictions. Clear, selective leadership communication should be non-negotiable for establishing company preferences and two-way dialog with employees.

Values

How do your company (or team) values manifest in a hybrid environment? And what, if any, resets need to be made to reflect this new world?

Coffee Circle recognized the importance of employee input when shaping its hybrid work strategy. Deborah Moschioni, Head of HR, says “We wanted to strike a balance between understanding what might be stopping people from returning to the workplace, without making them feel pressured that they had to come back if they didn’t want to.”

Focus

It’s never been more important to focus on supporting employees to shut off from their work. Especially if they’re based from home, where the boundaries between personal and professional can be blurred.

Context

Context plays a key role in determining what flexibility looks like for your employees. Remember that there’s no one-size-fits-all approach. Industries and roles have major sway on decisions.

Remote work will look different for a manufacturing company vs. a tech start up. Certain roles will need to be prioritized for in-office work, while others won’t.





Whatever your circumstances, the psychological framework of organizational justice holds a major sway in offering clarity. This concept unlocks a better understanding of what drives employees' perceptions of fairness and value and how these influence employee attitudes and behaviors at work. As a scientific model for "high stakes" processes, you can break it into three, key factors:

Process

- Were decision-making rules clear and consistent?
- Were potential biases acknowledged and minimized?
- Did I have an opportunity to voice my input?

Interactions

- Was I treated with respect and compassion?
- Was I informed on how the process works?

Outcomes

- Did I get what I wanted?
- Was it appropriate and equitable?

To the company, employee experience may look like one, homogenous task. But to the workforce, it's a deeply individual and personal topic. Even the most mature companies will seek out quick wins before launching a personalized engagement strategy.

Eventually, however, long-term planning requires a method for optimizing the employee experience on an individual basis.



“Start by using feedback to understand what they’re looking for, and use it as the basis for making decisions. Remember, there is no one-size-fits-all approach. But clear communication and empathetic listening will go a long way.”

— Jess Brannigan, Lead People Scientist,
Culture Amp



Rising generational *diversity* in the workforce will bring new challenges and opportunities

What the prediction means:

Companies will seek to get the most from increasing generational diversity in the workforce.

This will require breaking down each demographic's natural silos in order to cross-pollinate different skill sets and foster cross-generational development.

Our fourth prediction proposed personalized engagement as a long-term, organizational goal. But this becomes even harder to aim for against the backdrop of an [unprecedented spike in generational diversity](#).

As far as shifting demographics go, nothing comes close to today's landscape. Companies have the widest spread of age groups ever employed at the same time.

Baby boomers. Gen X. Millennials. Gen Z. (And before long, Generation Alpha). All of them have different needs, demands and aspirations; and as this diversity rises, so will employer challenges around workforce engagement. You can get a taster of age-specific preferences, below.



What you can do:



The economy consists of more older workers than ever before. Before March 2020, 100% of the employment growth in the G7 countries came from people aged over 55.



Gen Z and gen Y respondents from countries including France, the UK, the US, and India cited high levels of stress as a barrier to leadership roles.



Gen X professionals from countries including Germany and Switzerland had major concerns about achieving work-life balance.



Fully eight in 10 millennials in the U.K. reject traditional office spaces.



Given the choice between an online course and an in-person one, **69% of Gen Z respondents chose an in-person program**. Only 13% chose an online one. However, 21% of Millennial professionals said they preferred online training over in-person teaching.

Each generation of workers has a unique perspective on what works for them, and what doesn't. It can be tempting to put this down to psychological "evolution." But the truth is much simpler: every demographic grows up in a distinct time frame, with different opportunities and challenges.

The trick is knowing that while each generation has its own commonalities, they aren't absolute, either. There'll always be variation within and across age groups: whether attitudes, interests, beliefs or experiences.



What you can do:

Collect data from all generations of employees to help make generational diversity an asset.

When it comes to diversity, the clue's in the name: differences are the things that stand out. With generational diversity, it's easy to focus your efforts on what separates your workforce.

Our most recent data on age in the workplace, [gathered from over 1,000 companies and over 500,000 employees](#), paints a different picture.

It's clear there's little variation in the workplace factors that drive emotional connection to the company (in terms of pride, commitment, motivation). Perceptions of leadership, learning, and development opportunities were viewed as consistently important across all ages.

Using this knowledge as a starting point, you can start thinking about how to break down potential silos, creating an environment in which *all* demographics can learn from each other.

“The more you understand what actually differentiates generations in your workforce (and what doesn’t), the better you’ll be able to improve the experience for everyone. Perhaps you’ll see that younger demographics want to see more career opportunities, and older generations want to see more innovation. Could you reward more tenured employees for mentoring younger ones, or create forums for employees to upskill in newer and more innovative tech or ways of working? The possibilities are endless.”

— Melissa Paris, Regional Director of People Science, Culture Amp

Companies that value DE&I tend to innovate more, see higher engagement, and enjoy greater productivity. Take [GoCardless](#). After prioritizing diversity among its growing employee base, the Fintech specialist saw more women join its engineering team (a 6% growth), and more employees of mixed ethnicity (9% growth). Furthermore, its employee engagement score rose three percentage points above industry benchmarks.

You're sitting on a goldmine of human insights. Make them count.

There's lots to unpack in these predictions. Our data points pose plenty of questions about how companies might adapt to the future of work. But how do those questions relate to your teams? Figuring out the answers may well feel more complex.

Certain attitudes to the issues we've raised may well strike a common note. However, no two companies can ever expect (or want) to react in an identical manner. They'll depend entirely on the unique people who make up your organization.

It doesn't matter where your employees fit in the company hierarchy, either. Success hinges on them choosing to take the same journey with you.

How you engage with, and develop, your workforce is key to making this happen. It's also easier said than done. Any number of companies can send out employee surveys and crunch the resulting numbers. Turning tailored insights into human-centered actions? Not so much.

From fresh-faced intern to boardroom behemoths, you're sitting on a goldmine of human insights that, when understood and connected in the right way, deliver more engaged, better performing colleagues.

To explore and enhance your own company's relationship with everything from flexible working to DE&I initiatives and company culture onwards, we can help.

Companies with engaged employees make up to 43% more revenue. Understand what matters to your people, and take action with Culture Amp.

As the global platform leader for employee experience, Culture Amp empowers companies of all sizes and industries to transform employee engagement, develop high performing teams, and retain talent via cutting-edge research, powerful technology, and the largest employee dataset in the world.

Learn how our one-stop platform better equips them to excel in a rapidly changing, uncertain landscape here.

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