

The Future of Connection at Work

Findings from Enboarder's 2023 global
employee connection survey

Workplace disruption – from layoffs to hybrid work and the talent shortage – is having a direct impact on the state of connection at work. So where is the future of work headed? What story can we glean from current data and trends?

In this year's employee connection survey, we wanted to understand how engaged and motivated employees feel at work. Do they feel like their workplace is collaborative and innovative? And what do they make of the engagement opportunities offered by their company – like peer learning, career development, mentor programs, wellness

programs, onboarding, and more? What could make these programs more effective?

In this report we'll share top trends for every HR and people leader, based on responses from 900 full-time employees in the U.S., Australia, and the U.K. We dug deep into the data and found some concerning trends about the state of the workplace. For example, did you know disconnected employees are 4x as likely to quit in the next 6 months? But there is also cause for optimism, and the tips in this report will help you put in place an HR strategy that builds a more resilient and productive workforce.



Overall, employees feel less connected than they did in 2022.

In the U.S., there was a 14 percentage point drop in the number of respondents who feel very connected to their co-workers (42% in 2023, down from 56% in 2022). And the story isn't any better in Australia and the U.K. Only 40% of employees in the U.K. and 37% of employees in Australia feel very connected to their co-workers

Figure 1: Connection by geography

	Very strong — I'm very connected to my co-workers	Somewhat strong — I'm somewhat connected to my co-workers	Strong — I'm somewhat/very connected to my co-workers (combined)	Weak — I'm somewhat/very disconnected from my co-workers (combined)
Australia	37%	51%	88%	11%
UK	40%	48%	88%	12%
US (2023 data)	49%	41%	90%	10%
US (2022 data)	56%	37%	93%	7%

Employee sentiment about the workplace is trending down.

The biggest drops in the U.S. are centered around collaboration, engagement, and feeling like your company is a great place to work.

- ✓ My workplace is collaborative: 41% strongly agree in 2023 vs. 51% in 2022
- ✓ My workplace keeps me engaged: 45% strongly agree in 2023 vs. 57% in 2022
- ✓ My workplace is a great place to work and I would recommend it to others: 44% strongly agree in 2023 vs. 54% in 2022

While the data snapshot from this year's findings is a bit bleak, there are plenty of reasons to be optimistic about the future of work. We'll dive into more actionable takeaways

in the rest of this report, but we found that just moving employees from feeling somewhat connected to very connected to their co-workers leads to:

3.8x

more likely to agree their workplace feels like a community

2.2x

more likely to agree their workplace is collaborative

2.5x

more likely to agree their workplace keeps them engaged

2.5x

more likely to be motivated to go above and beyond in their job responsibilities

2.8x

more likely to agree their workplace encourages innovation

2.4x

more likely to agree their workplace is a great place to work and they would recommend it to others

To move your people from feeling just somewhat to feeling very connected, you need a consistent and effective engagement strategy. It starts before your employees walk in the door on day one and continues throughout the employee lifecycle. Our hope is that the data and insights in this report will inspire you to create a culture of connection at your organization.

Let's dive in.

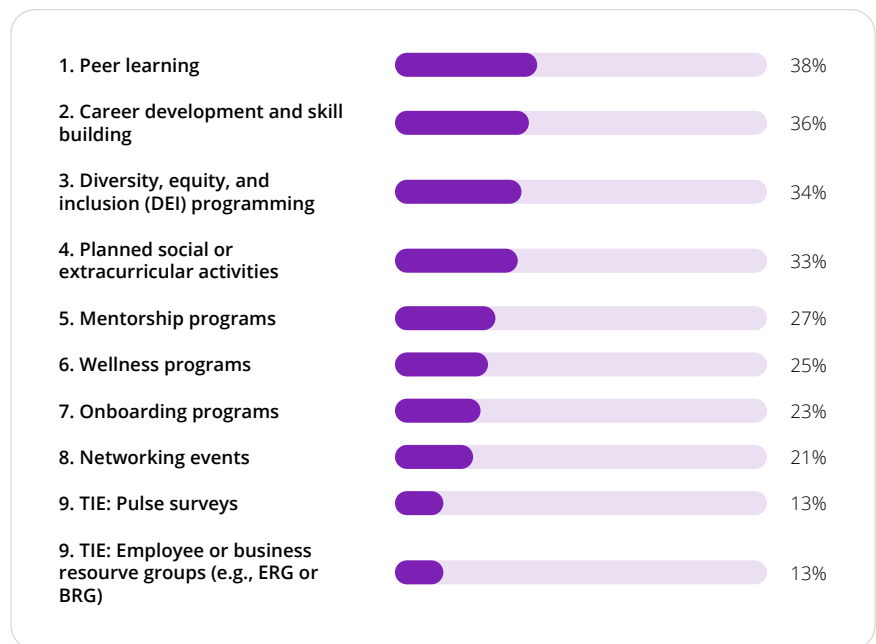


Not all engagement programs are created equal.

Depending on the size of your organization, there may be anywhere from five to 50 different engagement opportunities available to employees at any given time. Have you ever taken a step back and looked at how effective these programs are holistically?

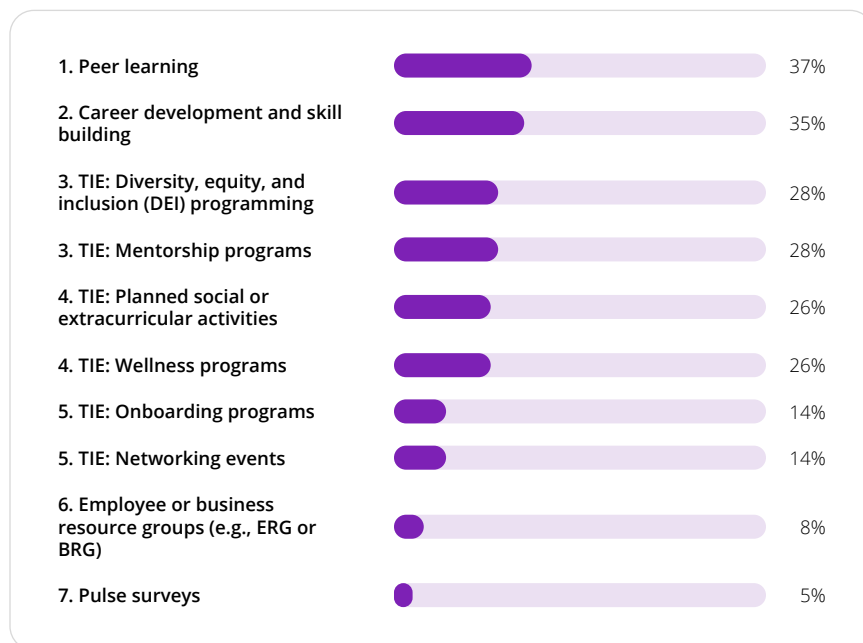
In this year's survey, we asked participants to tell us which programs they participated in regularly (at least once per quarter). Peer learning and career development and skill building top the list, whereas employee resource groups and pulse surveys round out the bottom of the list.

Figure 2: Top 10 employee engagement opportunities most regularly participated in (at least once per quarter)



Participants were then asked to select up to three opportunities from the same list that they found most beneficial. Take note that mentorship programs are tied as the third most beneficial, but only show up as the fifth most regularly participated in – a sign that employees are eager for more structure and consistency when it comes to mentoring.

Figure 3: Most beneficial employee engagement opportunities



Tip: Take a look at this list of engagement opportunities and assess where the gaps are in your organization. How are you facilitating peer learning, if at all? How are you helping your veteran employees with career development and skill building?

Did you know?

1 in 3 (36%) employees who are very unsatisfied with their company's people programs say they plan to quit in the next six months.





When asked the top reasons why these programs are most beneficial to them, “stronger relationships with co-workers” tops the list, proving that human connection should really be at the heart of any engagement strategy.

Figure 4: Top reasons why employees say the employee engagement opportunities they regularly participate in are most beneficial to them



Why don't more employees participate in these opportunities? Here are the top reasons from the survey:

#1 They aren't offered at convenient times (43%)

Tip: Gather feedback from employees about their availability before you put a date on the calendar for a training session or event. Where you can, offer self-paced journeys so employees can take advantage of opportunities on their own time. Try offering training in shorter sessions over longer periods of time.

#2 They feel inauthentic (27%)

Tip: Put employee relationships and connection at the center of every engagement opportunity. Employee-driven programs are far more authentic than top-down mandates that often feel like “forced fun.”

#3 They are irrelevant to my role at the company (21%)

Tip: Borrow some tactics from marketing and add elements of personalization wherever possible in your people programs. For example, take the time to learn what the training needs are by department and offer learning and development sessions around those needs.

Understanding generational differences can lead to more effective engagement programs.

Not only are organizations managing a diverse workforce in terms of where people are working – on-site, hybrid, and remote – but they’re also navigating the diverse needs of four distinct generations: baby boomers, Gen X, millennials, and Gen Z. While it’s important not to make broad assumptions about what employees want based solely on their age, the survey data does reveal interesting trends when it comes to how different generations perceive these programs.

Nearly one-third of baby boomers (28%) said they don’t participate in any of the engagement

activities offered at their workplace, and 1 in 4 (26%) said they don’t have strong friendships at work. If you’re struggling to get your most senior employees to engage, that could pose a risk when it comes to knowledge transfer and succession planning.

Interestingly, when asked which programs are most beneficial to baby boomers, wellness programs and planned social or extracurricular activities were at the top of the list. This underscores the idea that human connection is something every employee is looking for at work, no matter their age.

Figure 5: Top 3 most beneficial employee engagement opportunities by generation

Gen Z	Millennials	Gen X	Baby boomers
Peer learning — 43%	Peer learning — 41%	Career development and skill building — 33%	TIE — Wellness programs & Planned social or extracurricular activities — 28%
Career development and skill building — 32%	Career development and skill building — 38%	Peer learning — 30%	Peer learning — 26%
Planned social or extracurricular activities — 31%	Mentorship programs — 33%	Mentorship programs — 25%	TIE — DEI programming & Career development and skill building — 22%

You’ll notice that Gen X finds career development and skill building most beneficial, whereas younger workers (Gen Z and millennials) said peer learning was the most beneficial program.

As mentioned previously, all generations said the top reason they don’t participate in engagement opportunities is “they aren’t offered at convenient

times.” But this is true most strongly with Gen Z, with 52% citing this as the reason they don’t engage. Remember that younger workers want the freedom to participate on their own terms, and building self-paced, digestible journeys will increase the likelihood of your younger workers engaging.

Finally, we wanted to understand all the ways companies are encouraging participation in engagement opportunities.

Figure 6: Tools companies use to engage employees in HR-related opportunities (select all that apply)

Answer Choices	Responses
Reminders via email	63%
Reminders on a communication platform (e.g., Slack, Microsoft Teams)	39%
Reminders in team meetings	39%
Reminders from my manager	35%
Reminders via Intranet, desktop, or lock screen notifications	21%
Word of mouth	20%
Reminders via text/SMS	18%
Anonymous feedback surveys	18%
HR portal (e.g., Workday, BambooHR)	17%

We found a healthy mix of communication strategies being used, from e-mails to communication platforms, and reminders in team meetings and 1:1s. But each of these tactics resonates differently based on generation. As you can see in the chart

below, younger workers were more likely to say their employers engage them through platforms like Slack and Microsoft Teams, while older workers rely more heavily on word of mouth to learn what’s going on at their company.

Figure 7: Tools companies use to engage employees in HR-related opportunities, by generation

	Reminders on a communication platform	Word of mouth
Gen Z	50%	17%
Millennials	44%	17%
Gen X	32%	22%
Baby boomers	17%	33%

There's significant ROI if you can design employee programs effectively.

If you take into account learnings from the first two findings in this report, you'll design more effective people programs and be in a better position to attract and retain talent.

Because even in the midst of economic uncertainty, our data shows employee retention remains a significant challenge globally. **Seventy-one percent of all respondents agree with the statement: "It's been challenging for my company to retain employees over the past year."** That number is highest in the U.K., where 78% agree it's hard to retain talent.

Further, of the employees who are very unsatisfied with engagement opportunities at their company, 84% agree it's been challenging for their company to retain employees, which can feed a cycle of negativity and disengagement.

So what do you stand to gain from designing more human-centric programs that employees want to engage in? We found that employee satisfaction with engagement opportunities like peer learning, career development, skill building, DE&I, social activities, and mentoring is a key differentiator for several important outcomes.

Employer brand: Employees who are satisfied with engagement programs are 2x as likely to agree their workplace is a great place to work and recommend it to others.

Productivity: Employees who are satisfied with engagement programs are more than 2x as likely to agree their workplace encourages innovation and motivates them to go above and beyond their job responsibilities.

Retention: Forty-four percent of employees who are satisfied with their engagement programs say they plan to stay at their company for more than five years.

Revenue: Eighty percent of employees who are satisfied with their engagement programs say their organization has grown its revenue over the past year.

Connection: Ninety-seven percent of employees who are satisfied with their engagement programs say they feel connected to their co-workers and 95% have strong friendships at work.

Next steps

Globally, we see overall sentiment about the workplace and employees' sense of connectedness is trending down year over year. And the data tells us your biggest flight risks are your disconnected employees – they're 4x as likely to quit in the next six months.

So how can you craft an effective HR strategy in the midst of all this? The data in this report tells us it's time to go back to the basics. There's no need for an extravagant budget to get your people excited and engaged at work. Here are some next steps:

Authenticity: Take an inventory of your current people programs and understand how each program maps back to your company values. Are there steps where you can solicit employee feedback and bring your employees' voices into the conversation?

Flexibility: Information overload and overwhelm are very real issues. It's time to meet employees where they're at and offer self-paced programs that fit into the flow of work without setting them back.

Human connection: There's not one single HR initiative that's responsible for driving human connection. Every program and initiative should advance employees' connections within their team, across teams, or with your organization as a whole. How can you consistently and sustainably spark new connections and build on the social capital that already exists?

Learn how Enboarder can help you nurture a culture of connection and belonging.

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