

# 2022 Annual Workplace Predictions

from The Workforce Institute at UKG



Annual workplace predictions from The Workforce Institute at UKG are informed by our global advisory board of HR, workforce management, and payroll practitioners, thought leaders, and visionaries.

# Predictions That Will Define the Workplace in 2022



**A note from Dr. Chris Mullen, Ph.D.,  
executive director, The Workforce  
Institute at UKG**

It's hard to believe that we've been grappling with the COVID-19 pandemic for two years now — and even harder to believe that we've withstood the immense frustration, grief, and turbulence that came along with it. [Last year](#), we predicted that trust, inclusion, and empathy would be foundational in 2021 — and across the globe, we watched as organizations stepped up to the challenge and found new, creative, and necessary ways to support their people, their customers, and their communities alike.

However, our collective investment in care and compassion has only just begun.

Months of talking about the importance of resilience, engagement, and leaning in to succeed despite the struggles have led to an overflow of workplace burnout and emotional apathy that we must work to rectify in 2022. And as COVID-era policies — from the regulatory impact of hybrid work and safety mandates, to renewed workplace expectations and a shift in the employee-employer power dynamic — catch up to us in the new year and create a new layer of business disruption, we must be prepared to learn from our experiences in 2021 and foster workplace continuity and stability that will bolster us throughout the pandemic and beyond.

As we move away from the Great Reset, amid the Great Resignation, and into the great unknown, let us take time to reflect on what has and hasn't worked, respect our unique boundaries and balance of life and work, and reimagine a truly employee-centric future of work.

Wishing you a happy and healthy New Year,

A handwritten signature in white ink, appearing to read 'Chris Mullen', written in a cursive style.



## Employee expectations challenge employer capabilities as the shifting labor market creates ripples across the talent pool.

Between March and April 2020, [one third of shifts worked](#) at U.S. businesses evaporated almost overnight, and the International Labour Organization estimated an [18.7% drop in hours worked](#) worldwide from April–June 2020. Over the course of 2021, employers worked hard to resume pre-pandemic levels of business operations — yet the global labor market shift is far from over. 2022 will bring continued uncertainty and fluctuation in light of increased retirements, changing career paths, and a plateauing labor force participation rate.

As employees leverage the power of choice, employers need to be even more creative with the benefits and programs they offer in order to win the war for talent. Higher wages, schedule flexibility, hybrid working opportunities, competitive time-off plans, and family-related leave and care benefits

will be necessary to attract and engage office and frontline workers alike. This means business leaders and HR departments will need to have honest and transparent conversations about what they can feasibly afford to offer in order to meet — and ideally exceed — employee expectations.

New labor resourcing strategies, such as deploying employees across several locations or upskilling workers to do different types of jobs, will also emerge to retain, maximize, and inspire the current workforce. Mobile technology that gives frontline employees more schedule autonomy, workplace independence, and access to relevant business information will be key to unlocking an empowering employee experience that keeps workers throughout the year and beyond.





## Increasing employee apathy motivates business leaders to invest even more in a people-centric experience.

People aren't built to be resilient for years on end — yet the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has forced us all to grapple with continuously interrupted personal lives, career pathing, and planning for the future. Constant resilience gives way to apathy as employees prioritize personal preservation and self-care over professional passions and performance.

As this workplace apathy will impact millions of people and fuel continued job-hopping, the frontline workforce reaches its breaking point as everchanging business operations and inflated consumer expectations and poor behavior clash with prolonged health concerns and burnout.

The importance of [listening to employees](#) and acting on their feedback will take center stage as business leaders and people managers work to grow

engagement, respect personal and professional lives, and ultimately boost brand loyalty. By establishing necessary support mechanisms, employers will be better poised to build a caring culture where people can enjoy meaningful work.

This means the life component of [life-work balance](#) will take precedent. Employers will foster a culture of compassion and respect to support employees through their uniquely challenging circumstances. More than ever before, people leaders will value and enable the holistic health and wellbeing of the whole employee, including physical health, mental and emotional support, and financial wellness.



## Manager training — including emotional support — and mentorship programs become critical in the fight to retain great talent.

If 2021 was the year of the HR department, attracting and hiring top talent to meet growing consumer demand, then 2022 is the year of the people leader, retaining and training a rearranged workforce to bolster business growth. Employee movement amid pandemic-related business closures, reopenings, and the ongoing Great Resignation will drive a renewed focus on retaining great leaders — so they can retain great people — resulting in more comprehensive and applicable training programs to better educate and empower people managers.

Strong, people-oriented managers who prioritize intentional leadership — and the productivity and performance it brings — will be an invaluable piece of the post-pandemic workplace puzzle. Winning organizations will improve support systems for

people managers, empower people-first decision-making skills, and find new ways to cultivate a manager experience built on trust, transparency, and care.

This emphasis on training and development must also extend beyond managers to the entire workforce, particularly [entry-level workers](#). Gen Z — the most at risk for getting lost in the shuffle of hybrid and remote environments — will crave mentorship programs, skip-level meetings, and other opportunities to learn critical workplace lessons and career pathing advice. As part of this effort, people leaders will devote time and resources to connect with, educate, and engage the newest generation of workers.



## Navigating a steep compliance curve: Organizations that proactively stay ahead of the pending legislative “catch-up” come out on top as employers of choice.

Remote work. Minimum wage. Family leave. Vaccination mandates. Workers’ rights. Data protection. AI usage. The list of disparate rules and regulations for employers to know, track, and account for is ever-growing and constantly changing across country and county lines. The challenge of compliance has only been exacerbated as compensation plans, tax codes, family leave policies, and more are up in the air as employees have switched companies, moved fully remote, or physically relocated due to changes in work.

Legislation will catch up with pandemic-driven organizational and business changes and the hybrid desires of workers, steepening the compliance curve around workforce practices and workplace regulations. In 2022, employers across the globe must reconcile these international regulatory

challenges to support the choices of their employees, meet continued customer demand, and ensure compliance throughout their organization. Unified and AI-powered workplace technology platforms will become a strategic priority for employers, particularly global corporate entities, looking to automate the process of compliance adherence.

And regulatory change is far from over. Political fluctuation, ongoing healthcare mandates, and the fight to curb global climate change will continue to impact business operations. Employers must anticipate these changes and stay ahead of the curve. Organizations that move more quickly than the government and proactively respond to regulatory and compliance-related situations will be better prepared to manage the global workplace challenges that inevitably come their way.





## ESG emerges as a make-or-break asset for business stability and growth.

In a world that seems to be increasingly politicized and divisive, employers continue to navigate difficult and highly nuanced — but extremely important — discussions in the workplace on everything from vaccination mandates and safety protocols to racial justice and gender equity. Many employers made important commitments relating to diversity, equity, and social justice over the past two years. 2022 will bring [revitalized employee expectations](#) and public accountability for chief executives and business leaders to take firm action on the issues most meaningful and relevant to them, their people, and their business.

People leaders and HR departments will use surveys, team newsletters, and other feedback channels to gauge internal alignment and perspectives on key focus areas. This will drive corporate social responsibility (CSR) and environmental, social, and governance (ESG) efforts of employers to evolve from a nice-to-have to business necessity. In the face of global social activism, growing concerns around environmental impact, and fair and equitable business practices, corporate stakeholders — including employees, customers, and investors — will expect organizations to publicly set goals, track, and report on annual progress.

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## The Workforce Institute at UKG

The Workforce Institute at UKG provides research and education on critical workplace issues facing organizations around the world. By bringing together a global consortium of HR and workforce management thought leaders, the think tank is uniquely positioned to empower organizations with practical ideas for optimizing the 21st-century workplace while also providing an important voice for employees, including frontline and hourly workers. Founded in 2007, a hallmark of The Workforce Institute's research and education — including books, podcasts, surveys, blogs, and its annual list of workplace predictions — is balancing the needs and desires of diverse employee populations with the interests of organizations in order to manage absenteeism, fight burnout, develop equitable work schedules, and build strong leaders all to drive inspired performance.

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