

Advancing workforce well-being

As workforce well-being dips, leaders ask: What will it take to move the needle? Deloitte's second Well-being at Work Survey reveals why human sustainability is the way forward.



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Introduction

As organizations look ahead to the remainder of 2023 and beyond, one thing is certain: Workforce well-being will remain firmly on the agenda of the C-suite—and for good reason. Deloitte’s second [Well-being at Work Survey](#) uncovered that many employees are still struggling with unacceptably low levels of well-being. What’s more, most reported that their health worsened or stayed the same last year.

With a renewed focus on improving workforce well-being, why haven’t organizations made more progress? And where should leaders devote their efforts to finally move the needle on this important issue? To investigate these questions, Deloitte collaborated with the independent research firm Workplace Intelligence to survey 3,150 C-suite executives, managers, and employees across four countries—the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, and Australia.

The survey revealed several ways in which employers are falling short, as well as insights into potential solutions. Like last year, we found that the C-suite doesn’t realize how poorly its workers are doing, although executives are also struggling with their well-being. In addition, many companies are failing to empower the people who are in a position to have a direct impact on workforce well-being: managers.

The survey also found that while many leaders are taking accountability for workforce well-being, workers simply aren’t seeing their efforts. Finally, the survey uncovered a bigger shift that’s taking place as the concept of workforce well-being grows beyond an organization’s current employees and prioritizes human sustainability (defined as the long-term, collective well-being of individuals, organizations, climate, and society).

For leaders who are willing to reimagine how their company delivers value, there’s an opportunity to measurably improve workforce well-being—for employees, families, communities, and society as a whole. With the right support and the right mindset, real change is possible.

Organizations continue to struggle with workforce well-being

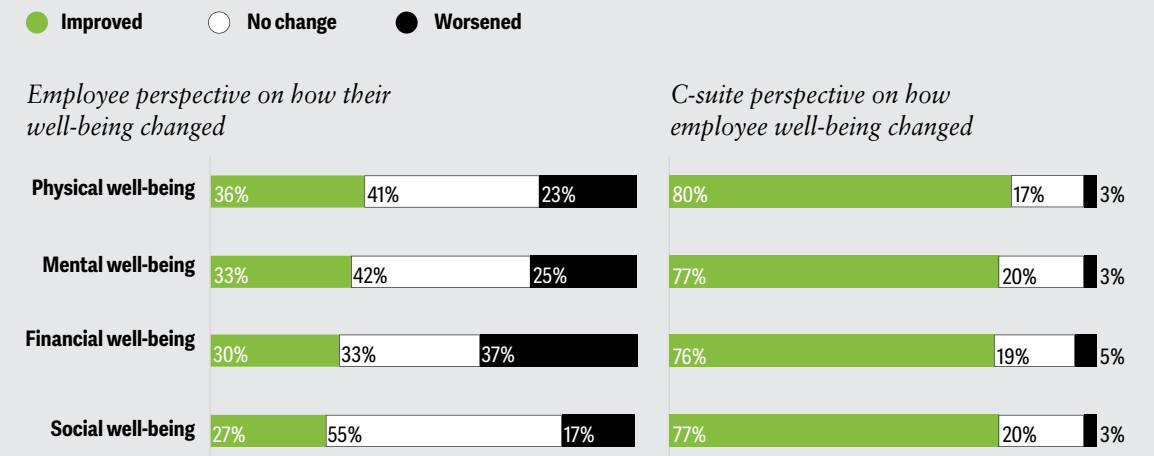
Despite employees’ best efforts, workforce well-being worsened last year

Although last year’s survey respondents reported a high level of motivation to improve their well-being, it’s clear that they’ve struggled to make progress. Employees’ self-reported well-being remains suboptimal and has slightly declined across all dimensions since last year. Less than two-thirds of workers say their physical and mental well-being are “excellent” or “good” (63% and 58%, respectively), and an even lower percentage rate their social (45%) and financial (35%) well-being positively.

In fact, most employees say their well-being either worsened or stayed the same last year, and only around one-third say their health improved (figure 1). However, the C-suite indicated a much different perspective: More than three out of four executives inaccurately believe that their workforce’s well-being improved, illustrating that leaders don’t have a firm grasp on how their teams are really doing.

Figure 1

Most employees say their health worsened or stayed the same last year, but more than 3 out of 4 executives believe their workforce’s health improved



Source: Deloitte 2023 Well-being at work survey.



Sixty percent of employees, 64% of managers, and 75% of the C-suite are seriously considering quitting for a job that would better support their well-being.

The poor state of employees' mental and physical well-being should be especially concerning for leaders. Many workers say they frequently feel negative emotions and fatigue. For example, around half "always" or "often" feel exhausted (52%) or stressed (49%), and others report feeling overwhelmed (43%), irritable (34%), lonely (33%), depressed (32%), and even angry (27%). These issues aren't limited to workers, however. Managers and executives are struggling too, and they are about as likely as employees (or in some cases, more likely) to report these sentiments.

Work remains a significant obstacle to well-being

For respondents to this year's survey, motivation to achieve well-being doesn't seem to be a challenge: Eighty-four percent say that improving their well-being is a top priority this year, and 74% say it's more important than advancing their career. However, 80% are facing obstacles—and most of these obstacles center around work. In fact, a heavy workload, stressful job, and long work hours topped the list of obstacles people say are getting in the way of improving their well-being.

As a result, many employees are finding it difficult to prioritize their health and engage in positive well-being behaviors—especially those tied to their job. Nearly three-quarters (74%) say they struggle to take time off or disconnect from work, with only around half (or less) reporting that they "always" or "often" use all of their vacation time each year (52%), move/exercise each day (48%), take micro breaks during the workday (47%), get at least seven hours of sleep (45%), and have enough time for friends and family (42%).

Given these findings, it's not surprising that, like last year, only around one out of three employees feel their job has a positive impact on their physical (33%), mental (32%), and social (31%) well-being. Even more alarmingly, a significant percentage of employees say their job negatively affects their physical (33%), mental (40%), and social (21%) well-being.

Other key findings include a notable increase in the percentage of respondents reporting that they're considering taking a job with another company that would better support their well-being. This year, 60% of employees and 75% of the C-suite say they're seriously considering quitting, versus 57% and 69% last year, respectively. Nearly two-thirds of managers (64%) are also contemplating changing jobs in search of better well-being.

The path to progress: Three keys to unlocking workforce well-being

These statistics were alarming last year, and they are still trending in the wrong direction. The path forward will require leaders to prioritize immediate impact, but ultimately, they will need to shift toward a more long-term view. This year's survey

helped identify three keys to delivering on the promise to improve workforce well-being (figure 2).

Figure 2

The path to progress: Three keys to unlocking workforce well-being



Source: Deloitte 2023 Well-being at work survey.

Seventy percent of managers say organizational obstacles prevent them from doing more to support their team members' well-being.

Managers play a pivotal role in employee well-being, but they're struggling to provide the support their team members need

Having established the role of the C-suite in workforce well-being in last year's survey, this year, we explored the important role that managers can play. These key team members are the lynchpin to employee engagement and well-being, but they are often not given the tools, support, and empowerment they need to make an impact.

Nearly all employees (94%) feel their manager should have at least some responsibility for their well-being, and 96% of managers agree. However, a relatively low percentage of managers' report that they support their staff in the following ways:

- 54% check in with employees about how they're doing.
- 48% ensure that people's workloads are reasonable.
- 47% make sure employees take breaks during the day.
- 38% encourage employees to use their company's well-being benefits.
- 37% make sure employees use their paid time-off/ take time off.
- 35% are open about their own well-being with their staff.
- 30% model healthy behaviors.
- 26% lead team well-being activities or challenges.

This could help explain why nearly a third of employees (32%) don't feel their manager cares about their well-being. Additionally, just 35% of employees say they have a clear picture of how well their manager takes care of their own well-being—even though 73% of managers agree they *should* be modeling healthy behaviors for their team members.

However, managers may be finding it difficult to support their staff due to factors outside of their control. In fact, 70% cite organizational barriers such as company policies (e.g., rigid scheduling requirements), a heavy workload, an unsupportive workplace culture, and not being equipped with the right skills. As a result, only 42% of managers say they feel "completely" empowered and capable of helping their company achieve its well-being commitments.

By offering the right tools and training, helping ensure that policies and workloads align with well-being behaviors, and shifting toward a culture of greater transparency, companies can help managers deliver the impact they're capable of. Organizations should also help ensure that managers have a clear window into workforce well-being metrics, so they know when to intervene on behalf of their team members.

Accountability for workforce well-being starts and ends with the C-suite, but requires greater transparency and public commitment

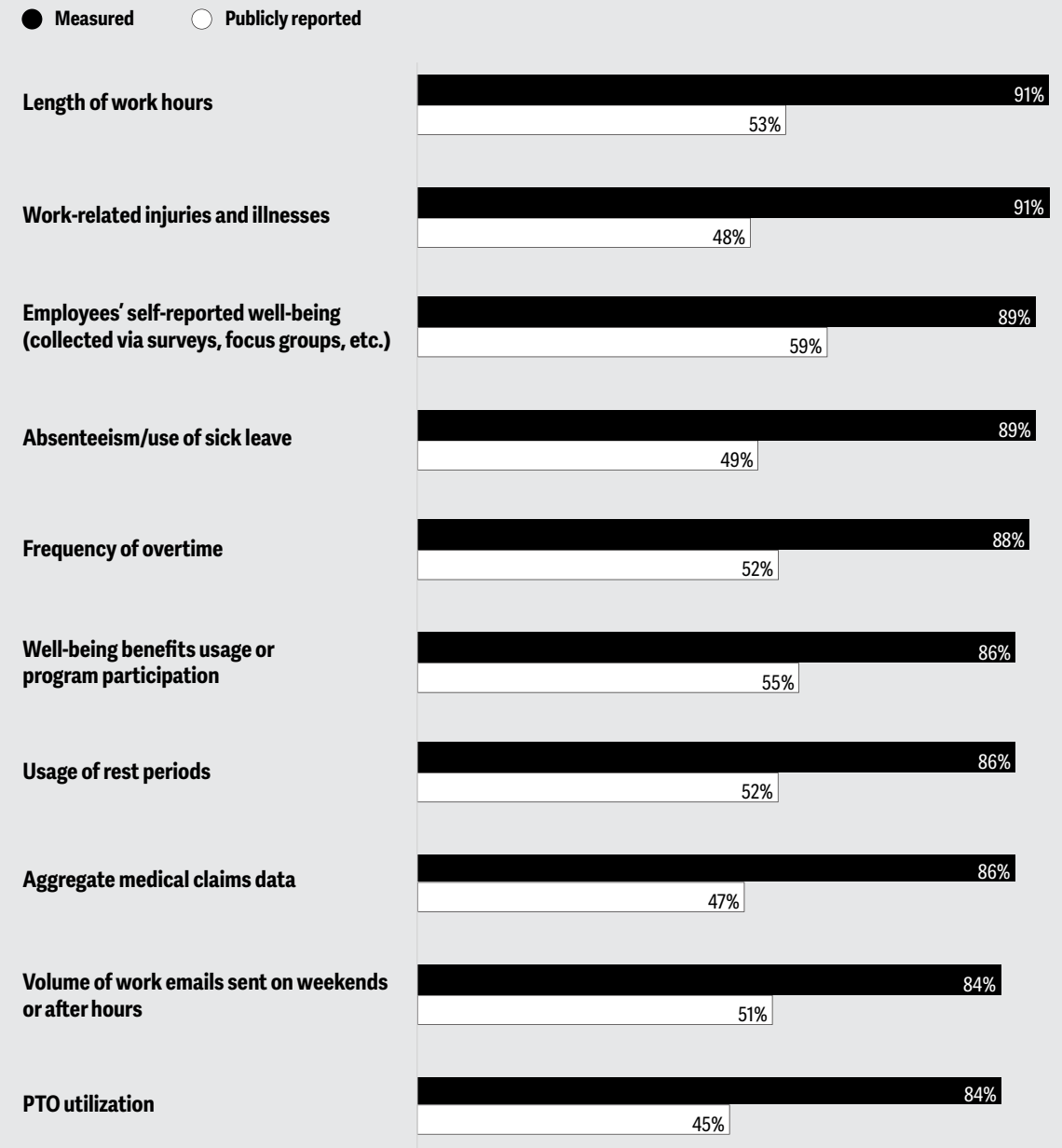
While managers play an important role in workforce well-being, the imperative ultimately needs to come from the top. Fortunately, executives agree that more work needs to be done, and 85% say they intend to become more responsible for workforce well-being over the next one to two years.

Leaders also agree that they should be held directly accountable for the health of their people. Nearly three-quarters (72%) believe executives' bonuses should be tied to workforce well-being metrics. The good news is that many report that their organizations are already practicing this level of accountability (66%) or are planning to do so in the future (23%). Even more notable is the fact that 78% of executives feel that if their company can't maintain an acceptable level of workforce well-being, then the leadership of the organization should change.

To make progress on accountability, 76% of the C-suite agree that workforce well-being should be measured and monitored and 83% say it should be discussed at the board level. In addition, 85% of executives believe organizations should be required to publicly report their

Figure 3

While only around half of companies are publicly reporting workforce well-being metrics, 85% of executives believe public reporting should be a requirement



Source: Deloitte 2023 Well-being at work survey.

Seventy-eight percent of the C-suite say the leadership should change if their company can't maintain an acceptable level of workforce well-being.

Eighty-four percent of the C-suite say their company has made public commitments around workforce well-being, but only 39% of employees agree.

workforce well-being metrics—and not just because doing so could lead to better health outcomes for their people. Most leaders (83%) feel that publicly reporting metrics could build trust between employees and organizations, and 82% think sharing this information would help them attract talent.

Despite these benefits and leaders being on-board with a more transparent approach, it's clear that their organizations haven't caught up yet. Only around half of the leaders we surveyed say their company publicly reports their well-being metrics (figure 3).

However, publicly reporting workforce well-being information is just one part of the solution. Organizations should also set goals for these metrics and, for maximum impact, make these intentions public. Our findings show that executives understand this distinction, with 82% agreeing that companies that make public commitments around workforce well-being have healthier employees and 81% reporting that their company is feeling pressure to make these commitments.

At first glance, it appears that most organizations have already made good progress. Eighty-four percent of the C-suite say their company has made public commitments around workforce well-being, and another 4% plan to do so within the next one to two years. In addition, 77% say their company has joined a coalition/community (59%) or signed a pledge (39%) related to workforce well-being.

But if companies are, in fact, making these commitments, most employees aren't aware of it. Only 39% of workers say their employer has made public well-being commitments, 44% are certain their company has *not* done this, and 17% aren't sure.

This points to a pressing need for leaders to be more forthcoming about the goals they've set for workforce well-being. Reporting well-being metrics will help, as will communicating with employees via social platforms, through internal channels, or in meetings and forums. Closing this awareness gap could have a notable impact on the talent pipeline, since 87% of executives agree potential employees would be more likely to take a job with a company if its leaders have made public commitments around workforce well-being.

It's also important for leaders to recognize that greater clarity around these commitments should go hand in hand with increased transparency about their own well-being. Eighty-four percent of the C-suite agree that employees are more likely to be healthy if their executives are healthy, and 72% say they "always" or "often" share information about their own well-being with their employees. However, just 16% of workers say they see this level of transparency from their leaders.

Executives will need to examine why their efforts to be transparent aren't being seen by their employees, and some will need to address what might be holding them back from making a greater number of public well-being commitments. Over half (53%) of organizations could be making more of these commitments, with leaders citing a variety of reasons for their hesitation:

- 34% are awaiting government advice/frameworks to guide their commitments.
- 30% believe the goals they could realistically accomplish are trivial, and it would be embarrassing to make public commitments around them.
- 23% are afraid their company's reputation would suffer if they don't achieve their goals.
- 21% say they don't have the right team members to monitor commitments.
- 20% report that they don't see other organizations doing this.
- 19% don't have buy-in from all of their leaders or managers.

Executives who feel apprehensive can take steps to overcome these obstacles, including addressing personal concerns about risk and reputation. They could also look to other companies that are setting a strong example, especially those with younger leaders at the helm. In fact, our survey revealed that 91% of Generation Z and millennial executives have made public well-being commitments for their organizations, versus 74% of Generation X leaders and just 31% of baby boomer leaders.

The future of workforce well-being depends on a significant mindset shift and a long-term approach—one that extends beyond the walls of the organization

Finally, the survey uncovered a bigger shift that's taking place as the concept of workforce well-being grows beyond an organization's current employees and prioritizes long-term human sustainability.

Human sustainability is the creation of value for current and future workers and, more broadly, human beings and society. Organizations that are embracing this

concept are helping their employees become healthier, more skilled, and more connected to a sense of purpose and belonging, and they're also supporting the suppliers and communities where they operate.

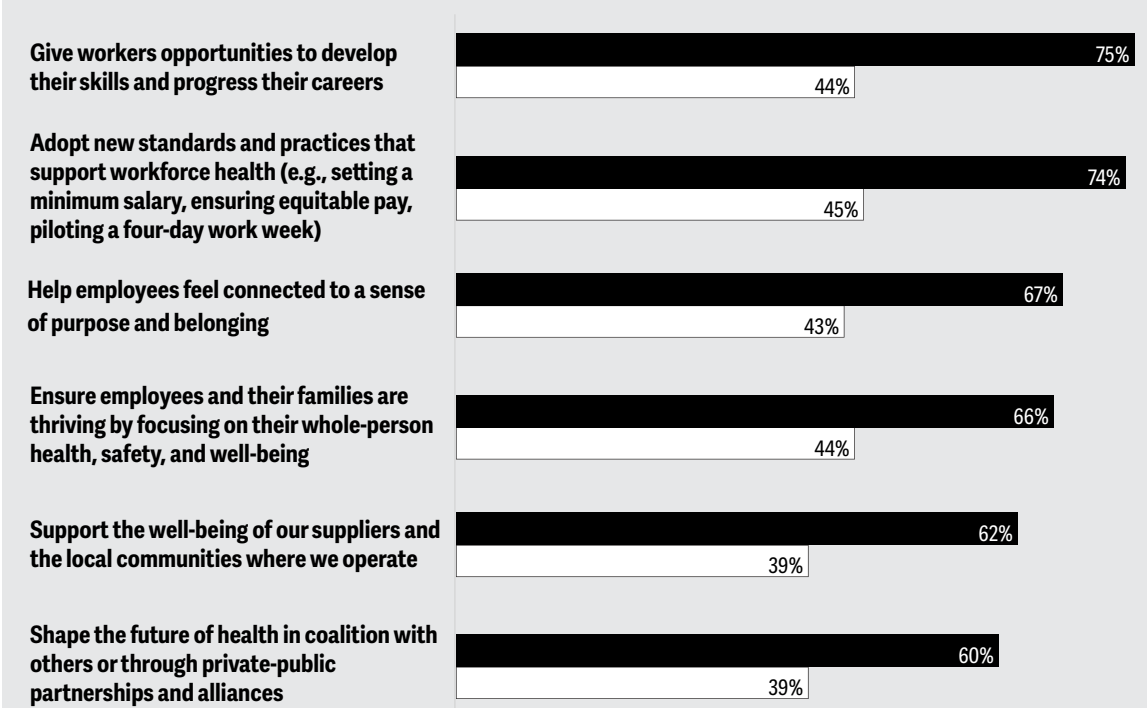
A majority of the executives surveyed (89%) say their company is advancing human sustainability in some capacity. However, just 41% of employees agree, again revealing a significant disconnect in perceptions. The survey also found that many workers expect their organization to take specific actions around human sustainability, but companies need to pick up the pace with their efforts (figure 4).

Eighty-nine percent of the C-suite—but just 41% of employees—say their company is advancing human sustainability.

Figure 4

Most workers expect their employer to advance human sustainability, but companies are falling short

● Employees who expect this ○ C-suite executives who do this



Source: Deloitte 2023 Well-being at work survey.



Rewriting the story for a better tomorrow

Fortunately, a vast majority (94%) of the C-suite admit they could use help. Around half (51%) say it would be beneficial if they could align their efforts with the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals or Environmental, Social, and Governance standards, and 45% would welcome an executive training program focused on human sustainability. Others note that support from internal and external experts would be helpful (41% and 39%, respectively), and 38% would like to see examples of how other companies are focusing on human sustainability.

But while company-led efforts are essential in progressing societal well-being, achieving long-term human sustainability will require an approach that goes beyond the walls of an organization. To explore this, we asked respondents for their perspective on the concept of

“**well-being economies.**” Countries that are building these economies are abandoning the idea that gross domestic product is a good indicator of progress and are instead reframing their economic policies to deliver quality of life for citizens in harmony with the environment.

Over three-quarters of respondents (77%) believe that more countries should embrace this concept. What’s more, a majority of C-suite respondents say that a focus on human sustainability and well-being may define their next career move or even the country where they live. Eighty-two percent would be more likely to take a job with a company that is advancing human sustainability, and 73% would accept a pay cut to do so. Similarly, 84% would prefer to live in a country that has embraced a well-being economy, and 75% would accept lower pay to do so.

After two years of concerning workforce well-being statistics, organizations are at a turning point. Employers should take action to improve the health of their workforce, or another year will likely go by without measurable improvement. And that means organizations may see more of their best talent—including their leaders—disengage or choose to leave for companies (or countries) that are putting people ahead of profit.

Executives have an opportunity to rewrite this story—for their employees, for their managers, and also for themselves. Work shouldn’t be the reason people feel

exhausted, stressed, and isolated from friends and family. Employees should feel that they’re able to take time off and disconnect, and managers should feel capable of providing the support their team members need.

Progress can happen, especially among organizations with leaders who are willing to take accountability for the health and well-being of their workforce. But there’s a broader view executives can explore around well-being that focuses on advancing human sustainability. This approach is truly the way forward, and it’s the only way we’ll achieve meaningful, lasting change for both workforce and societal well-being.

SURVEY METHODOLOGY AND DEMOGRAPHICS

Research findings are based on a survey conducted by Deloitte and Workplace Intelligence in four countries: the United States (57% of respondents), the United Kingdom (14%), Canada (14%), and Australia (14%). The survey was fielded between March 3 and March 14, 2023,

and it targeted executives, managers, and employees who were working full-time and were between 18 and 76 years of age. In total, 3,150 people were surveyed: 1,050 C-suite leaders, 1,050 managers, and 1,050 employees.

Respondents were invited to participate via email and were provided with a small monetary incentive for doing so. All respondents passed a double opt-in process and completed an average of 300 profiling data points prior to taking part in this survey.

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