



Negotiating worker data

Organizations and workers vie for control of worker data when they should focus on mutual benefits

Coauthored by Martin Kamen, Tara Mahoutchian, and Nate Paynter.

As organizations continue to expand the worker data they collect—data about behavior, communications, social connections, and even keystrokes and mouse clicks—a negotiation is emerging over who controls that data and how it gets used. The key to success is finding ways to use worker data, which benefits organizations and workers alike, even as regulations continue to evolve.

ALTHOUGH ORGANIZATIONS HAVE long sought to tap into the value of worker data, many continue on their journey to make the most of the information they are collecting. Meanwhile, many workers still don't have a holistic understanding of what data is being collected and how it is being used—and receive little benefit from its usage. These challenges have only increased as technologies more easily collect and analyze vast and growing amounts of worker data, and the required skill sets and capabilities needed to leverage this data evolve just as quickly.

In addition to traditional information such as demographic data, survey results, and performance metrics, organizations are now collecting data on worker skills, behaviors, and interactions (both inside and outside the workplace). This expanding data set is becoming more valuable as organizations increasingly view it as a strategic asset to inform key business and workforce decisions and enhance their analytics capabilities accordingly to harvest its value. Christopher Westcott, a people experience leader in finance, highlighted the power of worker data to transform

the business when he said: “We don’t have to do guesswork anymore. We have opportunities to collect information about individual aspirations, skills and capabilities, and where we need help most in the organization. New tools and technologies put that data at our fingertips, and we’ll use it to create more effective workforce plans. More importantly, we’ll use this data to help people see meaningful career paths in a way we never could before.”¹

In an era of rising agency where workers have more choice, power, and influence than ever before, workers are starting to fight for a higher degree of control over their data—as well as mutual benefits from its use. Much like their personal lives, workers choose to share data where it provides them value—e.g., wearable tech that guides their workouts—and choose not to share data when they’re worried about how it’s being used—e.g., customers declining cookies on sites they don’t trust. This mentality is increasingly evident in their professional lives as well. According to a recent study published in *Harvard Business Review*, 90% of employees are willing to let their employers collect and use data about them and their work, but only if it benefits them in some way.²

Used appropriately, worker data can produce major benefits for organizations and workers. However, workers and executives alike still have concerns about surveillance in the workplace and the responsible use of worker data. The same *Harvard Business Review* study noted that only 30% of the executives whose companies use workforce data reported being highly confident about using the data responsibly.³

The regulatory landscape makes this discussion complicated across the globe. In Europe, it’s good news for workers, as the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) protects EU workers by setting strict legal requirements for processing data. It restricts the types of worker data that can be collected and how such data is used. In the United States, companies often have wider latitude under relevant laws to collect and use worker data. In the Asia-Pacific region, examples indicate that governing bodies are the arbiters of worker data. Singapore’s Ministry of Manpower collects and owns all data on Singapore’s labor market, leveraging it to enhance organizational access to workers and improve employment practices and workplace experience.⁴

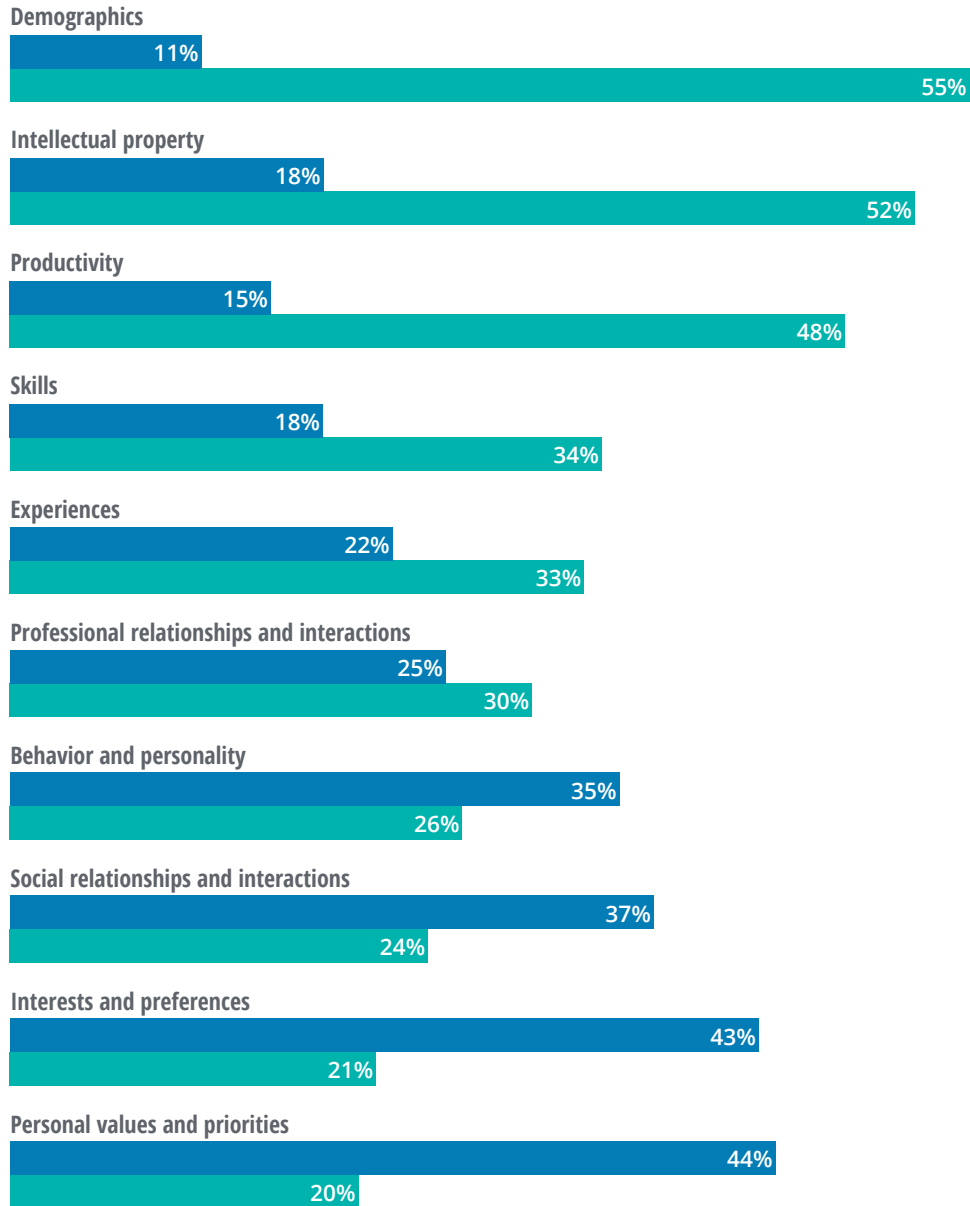
SIGNALS: THIS TREND APPLIES TO YOU IF ...

- Your workers feel as if their every move is being monitored, increasing stress, job dissatisfaction, and turnover, and leading to a lack of trust.
- Conversations about worker data usage and value are increasing in labor union negotiations, worker listening and engagement forums, and other decision-making forums.
- Workers are sharing data more readily outside of the organization (e.g., LinkedIn, Glassdoor) but are reticent to provide it through organizational channels due to a perceived lack of benefit to them.
- Your organization faces increased challenges and pressure from regulators related to data reporting, privacy, and maintenance.

FIGURE 1

Perspectives on worker data ownership by organization vs. workers

■ Worker-owned ■ Organization-owned



Source: Deloitte 2023 Global Human Capital Trends survey.

As more governments start requiring companies to report environmental, social, and governance (ESG) data (such as workplace health and pay equity), this level of sensitive data requirements will intensify the negotiation over data control, specifically regarding collection and usage of worker data and mutual benefit. Organizations can help alleviate worker fears by proactively initiating conversations about worker data and benefits with their workforce.

The readiness gap

According to data from the Deloitte 2023 Global Human Capital Trends survey, the vast majority of business leaders (83%) believe that leveraging worker data to create benefits for both the organization and its workers (while building trust and confidence in how worker data is used) is important or very important to their organizations' success. Yet only 19% believe they are very ready to do so.

FIGURE 2

The readiness gap for negotiating worker data

Leveraging worker data to both organization's and employees' benefit while building trust and confidence in how that data is used is important or very important to my organization's success

83%

My organization is very ready to leverage worker data to both the organization's and employees' benefit while building trust and confidence in how that data is used

19%

Source: Deloitte 2023 Global Human Capital Trends survey.

When asked to identify top barriers to realizing value from worker data, 27% of respondents cited culture, making it the most common barrier. However, "culture" may be a broad proxy for

misaligned values or disagreements over if, how, or when worker data should be used.

The new fundamentals

Build trust and seek mutual benefits. Success will require building a relationship of trust between workers and their organization, government, or third party to use data in mutually beneficial ways. We are seeing signs that organizations are beginning to make decisions that are mutually beneficial. When asked in the Deloitte 2023 Global Human Capital Trends survey to identify the top benefits from their organization's approach to using worker data, the top response was increased worker engagement and well-being of the workforce. While organizations might want to control their worker data, many are ultimately using that data for their workers' benefit—as well as the organization's. For example, as the major impacts of the pandemic subsided, some organizations used worker interaction data to conduct network analysis and inform development of hybrid work practices.⁵ Additionally, several startups are leveraging artificial intelligence (AI) to identify patterns based on worker interactions and communications and advise organizations on burnout risks.⁶

Data can also help workers improve their performance, as we discuss in more detail in our "[Powering human impact with technology](#)" trend. A global technology company is using cognitive AI tools to analyze worker data generated by their global sales teams to determine why some sellers do better than others and to make recommendations to improve the knowledge and win rates of their sales force.⁷ By identifying patterns of behavior missed by humans, AI can recommend the next best course of action or even quick learning modules that improve the success of their sellers.

Embrace workers' desire to control their data. As workers recognize the value of their personal data, they are expecting more control of that data and influence over how it's being used. According to the Deloitte 2023 Global Human Capital Trends survey, a significant majority of organizations (61%) describe their existing data ownership structure as either *shared* or *worker-owned*. This represents a significant departure from the traditional model of full control by the organization. Organizations must accept this new reality instead of clinging to their old model of controlling all the worker data that they collect.

Use expanded worker data to create more, and mutual, value. Fortunately, expanded availability of worker data opens up new opportunities to create business value for everyone involved. Learnings can be taken from the trajectory of customer data, where, as expanded customer data became available, organizations developed sophisticated strategies and analytics to generate deep and valuable business insights from that data. Currently, leaders who responded to the Deloitte 2023 Global Human Capital Trends survey say the worker data that is most valuable to their organization is basic productivity data (i.e., data to make people work harder and/or smarter). However, over the next 2–4 years, more advanced data is expected to become valuable, including behavior data, personality data, and data about professional relationships and interactions. Along the way, rising worker agency will prompt organizations to hone their methods and balance business-oriented insights with insights that benefit the workforce.

From a technology and operations perspective, organizations must build on their current focus on establishing clean, accurate data to find ways to derive new insights by asking different questions, such as “How do we assess risk and reward and decide what data to gather?” and “Are we using our data to its fullest potential to serve our business and our workers alike?”

To achieve any degree of worker trust and control over data, organizations need to design the overarching data architecture, including workforce data policies that are transparent, accessible, and ethical (i.e., biometric data). Also, they need to recognize and reward teams (i.e., leveraging blockchain) for using data in ways that enhance individual and team performance. This helps reinforce data analysis as a core competency.

Current experiments: What leading organizations are exploring

- **Schlumberger** is using AI to help manufacturing workers improve performance and reduce worker fatigue.⁸ Its Center for Reliability & Efficiency in Denton, Texas, collects, aggregates, and anonymizes video data and then uses AI to look for patterns. The data is never used to monitor how individuals work; however, any worker can privately opt in to see their own performance data. The data creates valuable benefits for workers and the organization—for instance, the company has used it to give workers more frequent but shorter breaks to combat productivity-sapping fatigue.
- **Telstra**, Australia's largest telecommunications company, has given its workers the ability to edit their own career data.⁹ The company maintains an internal site called MyCareer, which is used to store career and skills data, and enable the organization to more effectively match talent to work. Workers are able to manage their own data and are given the ability to challenge any incorrect or incomplete inputs.
- **ABN AMRO** is on a journey to bring together all HR and enterprise data to create an integrated IT and data landscape, which will enable machine learning and nudges for employees on career-related topics like

development or open roles.¹⁰ The Netherlands-based global bank is also rewriting its privacy statement to ensure more transparency for employees. A dashboard that includes data on employee experience, diversity, workforce,

talent acquisition, and learning is accessible to all employees; this dashboard is also used by business leaders to make decisions regarding their workforce.

The path forward

FIGURE 3

Survive. Thrive. Drive.

Survive	Thrive	Drive
<i>Remain viable in the marketplace</i>	<i>Differentiate to gain competitive advantage</i>	<i>Lead the market by radically innovating and transforming</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proactively understand your compliance requirements • Before capturing data, clearly define the intent of the organization and perform a risk analysis • Capture and organize worker data into logical categories to make data actionable • Secure worker data 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluate how worker data benefits both the workforce and organization • Build trust by being consistently transparent with your workforce about what data you have and how you're using it • Enhance worker data protection through new approaches such as limiting data storage time and providing clear data notices for internal data sharing, remote data access, and disclosures to external entities/agencies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expand worker data to be inclusive of the full workforce ecosystem • Explore worker data elements that could be portable (goes with the worker) in order to drive value for the worker (e.g., skill profile) • Use advanced technology (i.e., blockchain) to store and protect data • Utilize AI to access worker data sets that unlock adjacent information and value

Source: Deloitte analysis.

Looking ahead

Earlier, we highlighted negative signals that suggest your existing approach to worker data might not be working. In contrast, here are some positive signals to help you sense if your organization's new approach to managing worker data is a success:

- Worker data is being used responsibly and workers widely consent to the use of their data for internal and commercial purposes and feel they are benefiting from it

- Your organization can use worker data with ease—and valuable insights are being generated from it
- There is a growing diversity of data to leverage across your workforce ecosystem
- As a business leader, you increasingly rely on worker data to guide the purpose and direction of your organization and workforce strategies

Ultimately, organizations, workers, unions, and government organizations will all need to become vested partners to gain tangible benefits from collecting and sharing worker data—not just

business-focused benefits from tracking performance (such as increased productivity and reduced rule-breaking), but broader benefits that promote mutual well-being.

With the volume and scope of worker data increasing every day, the issue of control is not going to go away. Organizations that tackle the issue sooner rather than later—finding ways to create mutual benefits both for themselves and their workers—will have a clear advantage when it

comes to creating value and generating breakthrough insights from worker data.

Deloitte's 2023 Global Human Capital Trends survey polled 10,000 business and HR leaders across every industry, with 105 countries participating. The survey data is complemented by interviews with executives from some of today's leading organizations. These insights gathered shaped the trends in this report.

Endnotes

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