

2022 Alight international workforce and wellbeing mindset report



Alight's Mindset Research

Our research seeks to help companies understand how to optimize the wellbeing and overall experiences of their employees to drive more effective engagement, productivity and performance. Improvement is needed as, according to our study, too few employees (only 31%) say their work experiences are 'great' or 'awesome.' Employers must lean into the changes brought by the pandemic and other global disruptions and understand the real needs of their employees in order to create more effective cultures that foster better retention.

The 2022 *Alight international workforce and wellbeing mindset study* (2022 Mindset Study) marks the 12th annual U.S. study. It is also the first time we have studied international employees' wellbeing attitudes and needs, overall employee experiences, culture, total rewards and workplace technology.

During February and March 2022, we collected responses in five countries (see details below) among those employed full-time or part-time at companies with at least 1,000 employees. Included in the sample were respondents across multiple age groups, from a broad array of industries and in a variety of working situations (including at home, in the office and hybrids of the two).

Location	Participants
United States	2,000
United Kingdom	2,002
France	2,000
Germany	2,001
The Netherlands	2,001
Total	10,004

Emerging from the COVID-19 pandemic and facing an uncertain economic, social and political climate, employees want to improve their wellbeing and increase flexibility in their lives. Employees are looking to employers for help with timely, connected, personalized health, wealth and wellbeing solutions. This is so that they can better engage with their benefits and ensure they feel seen, known, supported, protected and valued.

The competition for workers is fierce. Too few employees consider their current work experience to be 'great' or 'awesome' (31%) and as a result, too many employers are failing to attract, retain and engage their people in ways that inspire real loyalty.

Employees have never been a monolith. Each brings their own ideas, values and attitudes with them to work, as well as their own unique pressures and concerns. And while employees around the world are more alike than not, there are some important differences when looking at employees in the U.S. and those outside the U.S.

This report summarizes the results of our 2022 Mindset Study. It highlights the differences and similarities among employee opinions across the U.S., U.K., Germany, France and The Netherlands. It suggests improvements that employers could make amidst a backdrop of economic uncertainty and social unrest driving change, anxiety and disruption. To create experiences that meet employees' changing needs, organizations today must improve benefits, wellbeing and communications strategies that reach and engage employees wherever they are.

Key themes from our 2022 look at the entire dataset of 10,000 employees:

- **Employee experience:** More than half (55%) of employees think about leaving their current employer.
- **Productivity:** Fewer than one in four (24%) employees say they are always or almost always able to be fully productive while working.
- **Wellbeing:** Fewer than half (44%) rate their overall wellbeing positively.
- **Stress:** 73% report moderate to high stress levels.
- **Financial matters:** Only 38% of employees rate their financial wellbeing positively.
- **Flexibility:** More than half of employees (54%) say a flexible work environment really differentiates one employer from another.
- **Wellbeing programs:** More than one-in-three (35%) say employer wellbeing benefits and programs make the company more attractive to potential employees.
- **HR Technology:** About one in three (34%) employees today say their HR systems are effective.

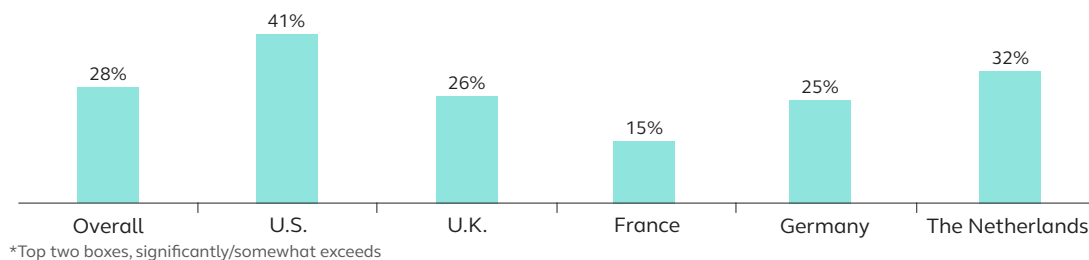
Employee experience

Our study found accelerated feelings of loneliness, mental strain and disheartenment among many of today’s workers. Many issues like the COVID-19 pandemic, the war in Ukraine and rising global inflation are still causing heightened anxiety for people and the future feels uncertain.

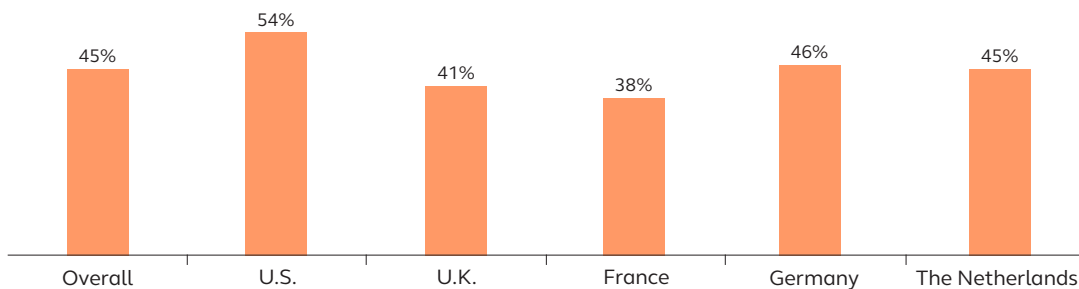
“Employee Experience” is a measure to gauge employees’ satisfaction with their jobs and their employers. Across the five countries included in this year’s study, only about one in four (28%) say their employee experience somewhat or significantly exceeds their expectations.

Though the situation is not so bad, the survey showed that 23% of employees still dread going to work every day. Most feel a variety of elements of their work experience are lacking, including technology, effective managers (or leaders) and their company’s values to which they feel connected. Only about half (45%) of employees today say they “hardly ever” think about leaving their employer.

How well does the employee experience at your company meet your expectations?*



I “hardly ever” think about leaving this organization to work somewhere else

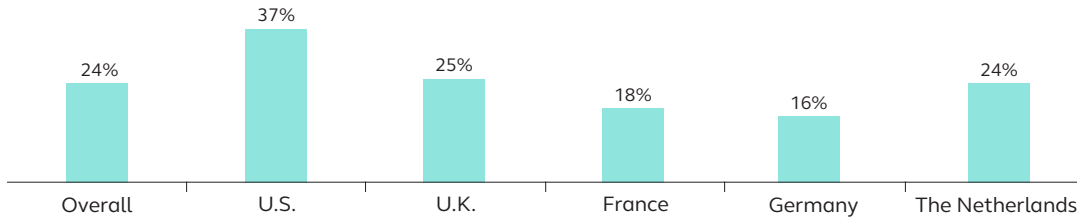


Certainly, varying cultural norms in each market at least partly explain differences in attitudes toward work. But cultural differences aside, understanding the parts of the employee experience that need improvement and rectifying are critical in ensuring benefits programs are positioned for success and improving employee engagement, wellbeing and productivity.

Productivity: Improvements are needed but drivers differ across markets

Though most employees in our survey say they are able to be productive while working (65%), relatively few say they are “always” or “almost always” able to be fully productive (24%).

How often would you say you are able to be always or almost always fully productive while working?



Certainly, different markets have different expectations for the type of relationship they have with their employers and this can be seen in our results. Being informed and understanding where to go to get the information they need are important drivers of productivity for employees across all five markets.

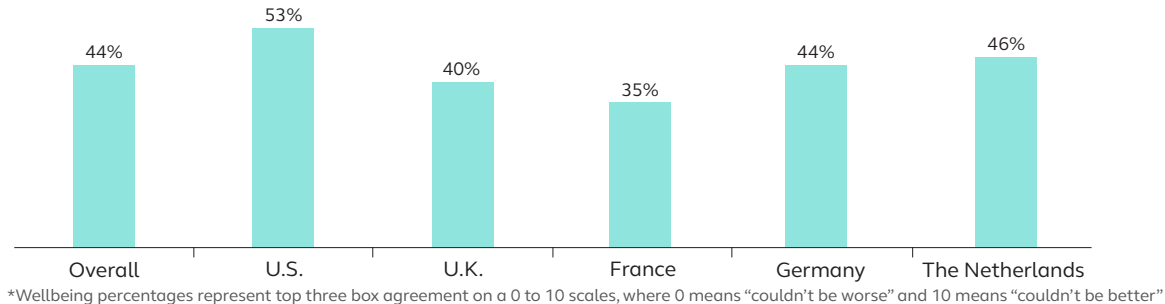
In the United States, the majority of employees feel they already have the tools, technology and resources to work effectively (65%). Given the high percentage of employees indicating they have the tools available (especially in the U.S.), the opportunity to improve productivity lies more in focusing on defining/aligning values and creating a sense of belonging.

In European markets, less than half say they have the resources they need to work effectively. While tools and technology are a driver in Europe too, elements of culture such as ‘being able to be yourself at work’ rank higher. As are perceptions of an employer’s authenticity and how employees feel they are being treated.

Wellbeing: Employees need time and space to focus

Less than half of employees across the five markets (44%) rate their overall wellbeing positively today. Though, culturally, employees in the U.S. (53%) tend to answer questions of this type slightly more positively than those in other markets, it is concerning nonetheless that only 40% of employees in the U.K. and only 35% of those in France rate their overall wellbeing positively right now.

Overall, how would you rate your overall wellbeing*



The specific aspects of wellbeing that are most worrisome for employees are finances and careers. Less than half of employees across these five countries rate their physical (41%) and social (43%) wellbeing positively today. But, after two years of lockdowns and COVID-19 induced isolation, close to half feel they have control of these aspects of their lives.

Eating healthy, reducing stress and focusing on self-care are priorities for employees and represent important areas of opportunity in which employers can support their people. To connect with employees, employers should focus on empowering their employees through personalized health offerings tailored to their needs. In addition, they should provide the necessary tools, training and resources so that employees can exert more control and ownership over improving their financial and career wellbeing, in particular.

Level of agreement with the following statement: "Living a truly healthy life requires more..."



However, one size does not fit all. Solutions must be tailored to the specific needs of each employee in order for them to feel empowered and a real sense of control to be instilled.

Wellbeing support: Employees looking for support

While in general most employees feel personally responsible for their own health and wellbeing, there is a role for employers to play in supporting the health of their workers. With the investments companies are making in the wellbeing space and the emphasis on it as a HR and business priority, it's surprising that only one in three (34%) of our respondents feel their company cares about their wellbeing.

According to employees in our survey, the real barriers to better wellbeing are time and money. Employers can deliver real value to their employees by helping them find the time, space and financial resources to exert more control over their wellbeing. Our survey found that giving employees time and space to focus on their wellbeing is more important than adding wellbeing programs. The effectiveness of these programs is limited if employees don't have the time to engage with them in the first place.

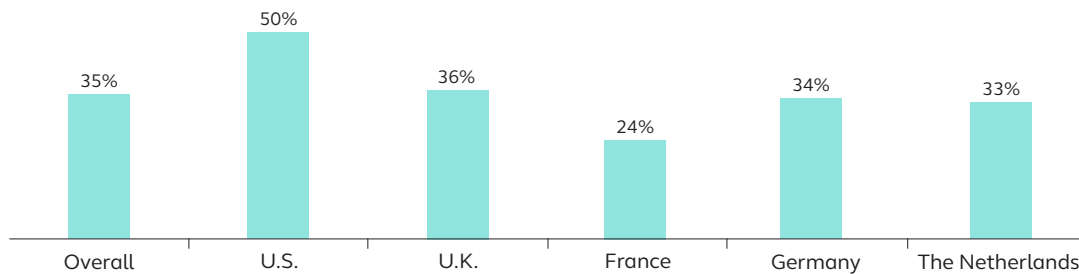
By giving employees the time to focus and connecting the dots on how the policies and programs can help them, employers can reap the ROI of employees feeling cared for and supported. However, no investment in wellbeing will deliver results if the company culture doesn't make wellbeing a priority.



Wellbeing programs: Perceptions of value and access differ across markets

Over a third (35%) of employees say wellbeing programs make a company more attractive to potential new hires, including almost 50% of those in the U.S. Also, half (50%) of U.S. employees say wellbeing programs are easy to access. The imperative for employers is ensuring employees are aware of the wellbeing programs on offer, can access them easily and understand how to use them.

The wellbeing benefits and programs offered by my employer... make the company more attractive to potential employees



While employers have a large choice of wellbeing programs they could offer, our analysis shows that there are a critical few that enable employers to reach the most number of employees. Considering the significant increase in people working remotely, it is not surprising that this type of benefit is most desired.

Beyond that, countries differ in terms of what matters to them: Higher education support (64%) and more frequent pay periods (60%) are important to U.S. employees, while sleep improvement (49%) and the opportunity to buy more holidays (46%) are more important to those in the U.K.. In France, time savings accounts (62%) and mortgage assistance (50%) matter more, while in Germany and the Netherlands, physical therapy and fitness reimbursements are important.

It is critical that HR teams transition from displaying their wellbeing programs to promoting them and encouraging active engagement in order to demonstrate their value. European employers in particular have a unique opportunity to use their wellbeing programs to create differentiation and change the overall experience for their employees.

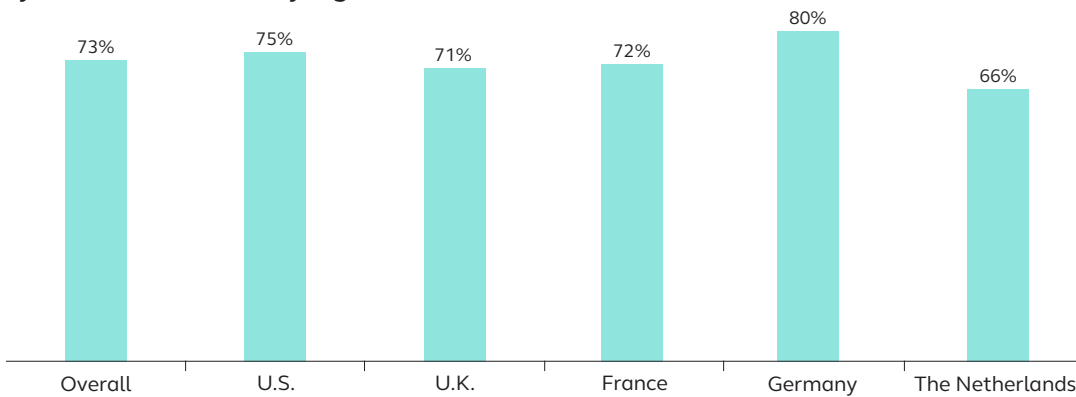
Stress: On the rise

The pandemic, geopolitical tensions, social unrest and historically high inflation have contributed to a mental health crisis across the globe. The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, for instance, have not just been physical. Mental and emotional health though improving, have been severely affected in recent years and its impacts on employees' lifestyles.

Across all countries included in our survey, almost three in four (73%) respondents report high or moderate levels of stress and 34% say they are suffering symptoms of burnout. While all employees are feeling it, stress seems to be a particular problem for employees who are women, parents or caretakers/caregivers, employees of color, young and working remotely or in hybrid arrangements.

What's more, even though stress is an issue for employees in all industries, those in the healthcare industry in particular say they are suffering the most from stress.

My stress level is usually high/moderate



Employer-sponsored stress management programs deliver value when employees are aware of them and use them. In fact, 32% of employees wanted their employer to offer more mental health resources.

As only 37% of employees report they feel in control of their stress, employers have an opportunity to support their people. Currently, only 15% of employees in the U.S. and U.K. report that they have stress management programs available to them. When asked how valuable such a program would be, 52% said it would be valuable (amongst the highest ratings for any wellbeing program).

In spite of this, only 23% have actually utilized a stress management program in the last 12 months. This potentially indicates either a lack of awareness or one of the other barriers to usage mentioned earlier. It is also seen that if employees use the program, 93% rate it valuable, the highest rating of all programs. It is therefore essential for employers to not just offer stress management program but also create a culture that encourages use. Employers must do better at raising awareness and encouraging adoption of their stress management programs for meaningful change to occur.

Ultimately, stress and mental health are important areas on which employers should focus resources to improve the wellbeing of their employees — in fact, our regression analyses found that mental wellbeing is the #1 driver of employee overall wellbeing. That said, it is necessary to create programs that employees feel comfortable talking about, engaging with and using and that meaningfully impact stress levels for employees across a wide range of demographic types and work lifestyles.

A culture of openness, acceptance and encouragement must be fostered. Also, solutions that are personalized for each employee will attract their attention and be more impactful.

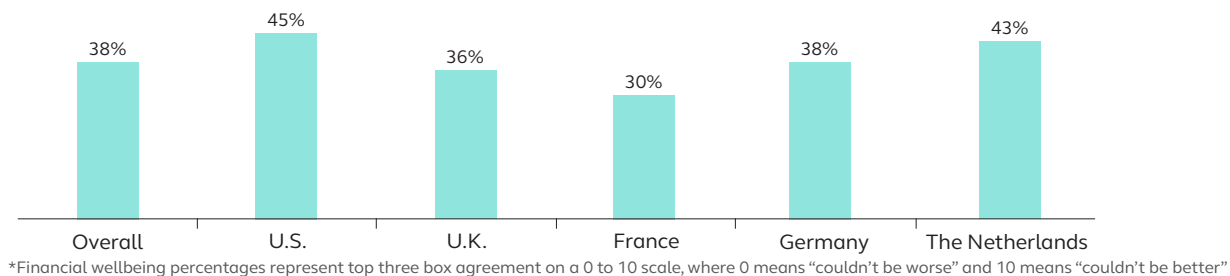


Financial matters: Comfort and control are lacking

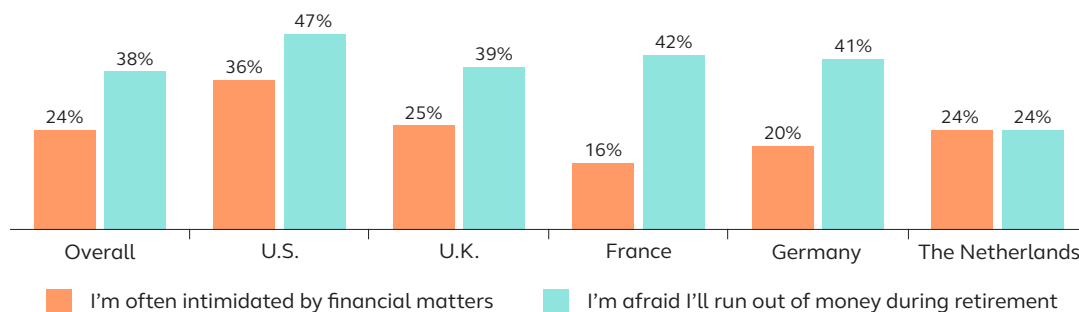
For many employees today, financial matters are a source of great stress and therefore financial wellbeing is a challenge. With inflation increasing rapidly, these concerns are likely to be exacerbated in the coming months, making pay and salaries an even more critical near-term driver of employee turnover.

Employees want to regain more control over their finances and could use some help in this area given their discomfort with financial matters and the fact that many find these issues intimidating (including one-third of U.S. employees).

Overall how would you rate your financial wellbeing?*



How intimidated are you by financial matters and are you afraid of running out of money in retirement?



Long-term financial planning is, in particular, a source of stress for employees and an area in which they need guidance and support. However, employers are not seen as the answer given the fact that trust in the financial help that employers provide is low (only 24% across the five markets).

But the need for help here is rising, presenting a new opportunity for employers to step in, build trust and more effectively deliver the kind of financial planning help workers need. What employees are looking for is long-term financial control built upon a foundation of smart steps they can take today, including reducing their debt levels, sticking to a budget and saving for more immediate financial needs.

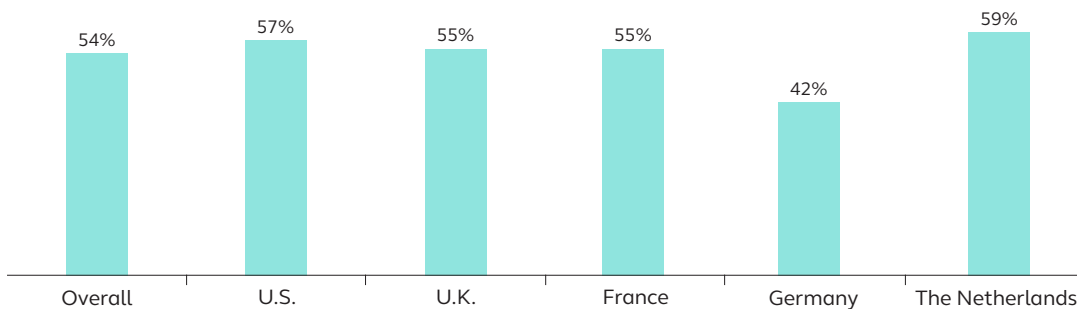
Employers can help by supporting behavior change while, at the same time, remaining mindful of the difficult financial pressure employees are under. Timely and accurate guidance can help employees make informed decisions. Ultimately, thinking creatively about the solutions employers can provide will help them stand apart.

Flexibility: Flexible ways of working are needed

Over the last two years employees around the world have had to adjust to the uncertainties of the COVID-19 pandemic and the myriad of disruptions to their daily routines. To cope, many have adopted more flexible work styles and these changes are likely to stick. 62% say working remotely has more benefits than drawbacks for me, higher in the U.S. at 75%. This has brought fundamental changes not just in the way people work, but in their personal lives as well, including differences in how people exercise, shop, communicate and spend time with others.

Moving forward, employees (and consumers in general) will continue to live more flexibly and fluidly. Employers should not expect employees to revert willingly to rigid or inflexible work styles once again. Instead, more than half of employees in our survey (54%) say a flexible work environment differentiates one employer from another.

Level of agreement with the statement: A flexible work environment really differentiates one employer from another



*Percentages represent top two box agreement on a 1 to 4 scale, where 1 means "I expect this from just about any employer" and 4 means "This can really differentiate one employer from another"

More than half of our respondents (59%) say working remotely positively impacts their overall wellbeing and 81% say they'd be interested in continuing to work remotely if given the opportunity moving forward and 79% would be interested in hybrid working.

Though there is room for improvement in the experience of remote work, assessments of this work style by those who are working remotely are generally positive. Offering flexibility in where and how employees work has become a key differentiator for employers. It contributes to the ultimate decision of whether to stay at a company or not. Employers may also want to consider providing flexibility in when employees work as well — as is being done by companies trialing the new four-day work week in Europe

That said, employees in Europe report less positive experiences while working remotely and don't feel as supported and trusted in their remote or hybrid work. French employees are the least likely to feel supported and trusted.

For benefits teams, coordination with those HR areas that control how flexible work styles are and how supported remote workers feel will be key. Companies must accept that their employees' preferences and lifestyles are all different.

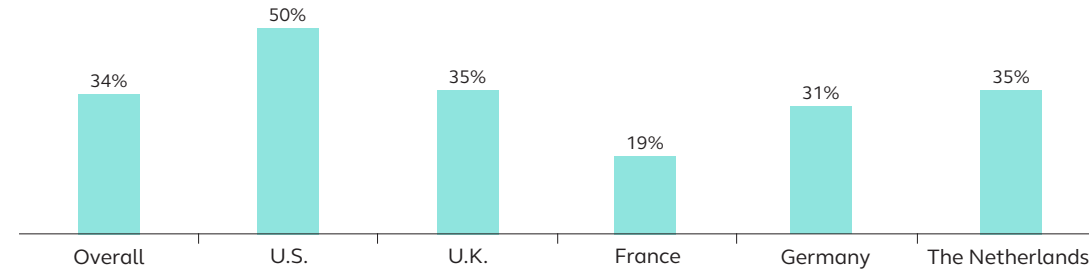
To deliver a positive, flexible working environment requires trust and understanding. If employers can develop this trust, deepen their understanding and provide more flexibility on a personalized basis, better employee productivity, engagement and retention will result.



HR technology: Not yet hitting the mark

Most employees today (particularly those in Europe) believe their HR systems could be improved. Only one-in-three (34%) say their HR systems are effective.

Our human resource systems are effective*

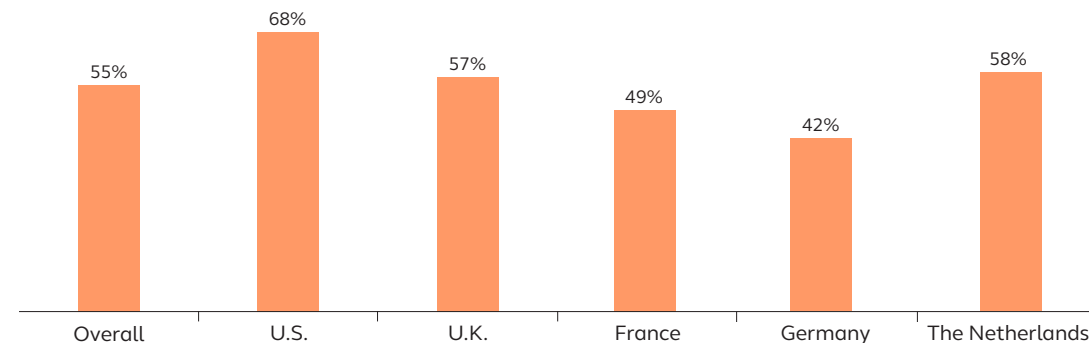


*Percentages represent a summary of top two boxes

What employees appear to be looking for are HR technology systems and solutions that provide one-stop-shops for all of their benefits, as well as mobile access and personalized health benefit navigation and information. And, most importantly, the technology must save time and offer timely and trusted insights.

Employees are willing to share their personal information if it results in more customized recommendations or guidance. Just over half (55%) say they would be comfortable sharing personal financial information with their employer in order to receive more personalized advice. U.S. employees are the most comfortable (68%).

How comfortable would you be with sharing personal financial information with your employer to allow them to provide personalized recommendations?*



*Percentages represent a summary of top two boxes

HR technology must change if it is to meet employees' expectations. Mobile sites and access, personalized messaging and information based on individual employee data and one-stop technology that summarizes all of an employee's benefits information are necessary requirements today, but too often undelivered. In Europe in particular, such technology improvements have the potential to set new standards of service and massively differentiate one employer from another.

Conclusion

While employers are looking for new ways to retain their workforce in today's marketplace, employee wellbeing is under pressure and many are looking for better overall experiences at work. Therefore, while the data varies by country, five trends have emerged.

1. Providing personalized experiences powered by technology and AI that use individual data to help employees make better decisions.
2. Foster a culture that supports the use of existing wellbeing programs available and communicates clearly to raise awareness and increase usage.
3. Continuing to offer flexible ways of working that align with employee needs and preferences.
4. Delivering mobile-based apps and technologies that are personalized for individual employees.
5. Adapting global solutions to meet the needs and preferences of employees in different markets.



About Alight

Alight is a leading cloud-based human capital technology and services provider that powers confident health, wealth and wellbeing decisions for 36 million people and dependents. Our Alight Worklife® platform combines data and analytics with a simple, seamless user experience. Supported by our global delivery capabilities, Alight Worklife is transforming the employee experience for people around the world. With personalized, data-driven health, wealth, pay and wellbeing insights, Alight brings people the security of better outcomes and peace of mind throughout life's big moments and most important decisions. Learn how Alight unlocks growth for organizations of all sizes at alight.com.

Research partners

This year's survey was led by Alight Solutions with support from the Business Group on Health and conducted by Kantar with the strategic guidance of the Age of Human.

About Business Group on Health

Business Group on Health is the leading non-profit organization representing large employers' perspectives on optimizing workforce strategy through innovative health, benefits and wellbeing solutions and on health policy issues. The Business Group keeps its membership informed of leading-edge thinking and action on health care cost and delivery, financing, affordability and experience with the health care system. Business Group members include 72 Fortune 100 companies as well as large public-sector employers, who collectively provide health and wellbeing programs for more than 60 million individuals in 200 countries. For more information, visit www.businessgrouphealth.org.

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