



State of the UK Frontline Workforce 2023

INTRODUCTION



The New Rules of Frontline Engagement: Looking at the Wider Picture

Frontline, or deskless, workers are often unsung heroes who 'keep the wheels turning' – the delivery drivers, bartenders, pickers and packers, front-of-house, shop staff and more, playing an essential role within organisations across the UK. Thankfully, business leaders are increasingly aware that an engaged, focused and dedicated frontline workforce is crucial to success.

But with ongoing economic uncertainty, the initiatives that achieve long-term progress, motivate staff and encourage them to stay are often relegated to 'nice to haves' rather than essentials. And any focus on employee reward and recognition is often centred solely on pay.

Remuneration has arguably never been more significant for employees, of course, and our study of 3,000 UK frontline staff reveals the massive impact of the cost-of-living crisis and the severe challenges faced by many.

Yet forward-thinking business leaders know that pay is only part of the wider picture.

Setting apart the trailblazers from organisations that flounder, is the ability to recognise all essential elements that will inspire the highest efforts, loyalty and creativity of their workforce.

What do frontline employees really want? Well, around a third want more flexibility and better communication with management, and 60% say that opportunities for career development would make them stick around for longer. They want easy access to their own schedules, and to feel able to speak up – whether face-to-face or virtually – on issues affecting them.

What they don't want is mounting work stress on top of external pressures, and being forced to use multiple apps to do their jobs, when one or two streamlined tech solutions would be much more effective.

Those who recognise the value of their employees and take the necessary steps to support and empower them—beyond simply providing higher pay—will be well-positioned to reap the rewards of a happier, more engaged team.

And in today's unpredictable, tech-driven landscape, it's more important than ever to put your people first – to ensure your business doesn't come last.

The risk of tech overwhelm

More tech, more problems?

The vast majority (72%) of frontline workplace interactions now happen digitally rather than in person. But are work apps and other digital tools always helpful, or – if implemented ‘for the sake of it’, rather than strategically – do they actually create more stress?

One in three

frontline workers (37%) use 5 or more apps and digital tools each day to carry out their jobs. BUT.....



39%

say apps don't help them in their work, with 27% frustrated by the sheer number of apps and lack of 'user-friendliness'

80%

are still without the tech at work to be able to easily swap shifts



Cluttered (mis)communication

Of course, technology can solve many problems, with apps now available for anything and everything. Yet even with an abundance of tech at their fingertips, today's frontline employees still don't always have access to the tools they need. Often there's no connecting virtual 'hubs' where workers can view schedules and communicate with managers quickly to make adjustments, adding to frustration, confusion - and missed shifts.



49%

have to call, email or text a manager to change shifts



70%

have missed a shift due to miscommunication, being unable to cancel or personal circumstances



68%

of frontline workers are unable to access their own schedules



A streamlined approach

Employers must strive for the right tech balance, avoiding overload for their workforce – and the digital fatigue, inefficiency and disillusionment that comes with it – while providing effective, streamlined apps that are going to reduce staff stress levels and increase productivity.

And let's not forget face-to-face interaction altogether! Workers need to feel motivated, valued and encouraged to progress – and increasingly so. More on that to follow...

See it in action

Since HMV implemented a scheduling app, it has seen a 'vast' reduction in scheduling planning time and a boost in employee engagement.

"Using Quinyx has helped bring head office closer to store colleagues. Its value in increasing employee engagement cannot be underestimated."

Rupert Banning-Lover, Central Operations Manager

[Read the full story](#)

Stress and the frontline worker

The cost-of-living crisis has created an unprecedented amount of stress for frontline staff, affecting life outside of work while being inextricably linked to their jobs. Should they stay where they are for financial security, or look elsewhere for better pay? Should they take a second job?

While the number of deskless staff thinking about quitting their roles has decreased slightly from 2022, our study shows that 49% of employees are still thinking of jumping ship, for the following reasons:

Reasons for wanting to quit



33%



want a higher salary

33%



feel stressed at work

31%



feel undervalued

29%



have no work-life balance

29%



have no career progression

The impact of the cost-of-living crisis

A 40-hour work week is the norm, yet we found that over half (54%) of frontline workers are regularly clocking up more than this each week, with a fifth (22%) working 50 hours or more.

Despite this, our stats show:



27%

have taken on a second job due to the rising cost of living



25%

have used a food bank as their wages can't stretch over increasing costs



24%

have taken out a payday loan to cover outgoings

The causes of work-related stress

53%

of deskless staff feel stressed while on-the-job, citing a variety of reasons for feeling under pressure



39%



the cost of living/
not being paid
enough

37%



under-staffing
at work

34%



lack of
flexibility

33%



working too
many hours

31%



fear of losing
their job



Reducing the load

In many cases, not only are workers increasingly stressed, but they also feel unable to talk to their managers about the issues that are affecting them.

Less than a third of workers feel comfortable talking about pay, scheduling problems, issues with co-workers, understaffing, increasing/decreasing hours, or how stress is impacting on their health.

Concerningly, around one in seven workers (16%) say their employer offers no opportunity to provide feedback on how they're feeling at work and issues that are affecting them.

Managers can't be expected to solve every problem, but demonstrating a willingness to listen, and providing feedback opportunities for staff on key issues – which can be facilitated via an app like Quinyx – can go a long way.



Why a payrise isn't enough

Despite the severe economic hardship facing many deskless staff, the reality is that job satisfaction and happiness at work isn't just about higher pay. Today's frontline workers want more flexibility, more communication and more recognition.

What makes employees feel more engaged?

While 'higher pay' was given as the biggest motivator (40%), other top factors affecting engagement are:

- A more flexible schedule (32%)
- Better work-life balance (32%)
- More recognition (31%)
- Improved communication with bosses (30%)
- Less stress (29%)
- Sharing the same values as their company (24%)

Moving on up - or out?

As many as two in five UK frontline workers (41%) don't think their employer values the work they do, and a similar number don't feel supported in their career development.

It's time for change - employers who want to hang on to valued team members must nurture them. If opportunities for progression do exist, are they being communicated effectively? It's vital that workers know what paths are available to them and the steps required to achieve their goals.

Career Development = Retention

Providing progression opportunities - through promotions, education and training to improve skills - demonstrates to workers that their goals are being taken seriously. Plus, the chance to grow within their organisation not only encourages retention but benefits businesses via experienced, knowledgeable employees (who know all there is to know about their business's products/services).

With streamlined apps offering task-based capabilities alongside scheduling functions, deskless staff are now becoming product experts or brand ambassadors via the phones in their pockets - meaning nurturing top talent is even more vital.





41%

of frontline workers feel they don't have opportunities for career development



60%

reported they would stay longer with their company if they had more development opportunities

Finding the balance

Flexible working and 'work life balance' aren't just buzzterms – post-pandemic, they've become part of life, for desk-based staff at least. Yet still we find that many deskless employees struggle to gain any ounce of flex from their employers, to help them manage other responsibilities and enjoy some 'downtime'.

When we have tech at our fingertips and the tools to manage scheduling at the touch of a button, there's really no excuse for employers not to offer a little more 'give and take'. Without it, they risk losing their best people (remember 31% have considered quitting due to no work-life balance) and increasing staffing headaches.



45%

reported they don't have any say over their work schedule



37%

say their work schedule caused them to miss social events or holiday celebrations



30%

have missed major family and friend milestones, such as births, weddings and funerals



See it in action:

After choosing to manage its teams through cloud and on mobile, London City Airport received a flood of positive feedback about the flexibility it provided its workforce.

"I haven't missed a birthday, an anniversary, or family time. It's impossible to put a price on how valuable that is."

-Belynda Maquis-Mondesir, Aviation Security Officer

[Read the full story](#)

Who's getting it right?

Retail sector is a step ahead when it comes to recognition and development

Almost two thirds of UK shop staff (64%) said they feel appreciated by management, while 53% of employees in logistics-focused roles and 60% of hospitality staff consider themselves valued.

Retail staff are also more likely than other sectors to believe their job offers career development opportunities – 65% credited their organisations for offering room for progression, compared to 55% of those in logistics and 57% in hospitality roles.



61%

of UK shop staff would recommend a retail career to others, with 'variety of the job' the main reason for a recommendation

53%

of retail workers plan to stay in their role for three years or more



In summary



The bottom line? It's time for organisations to look beyond the basics, and understand what really matters to their frontline teams – the people who keep businesses moving.

An important point for managers to keep top of mind is that 'frontline staff' isn't really a collective, but is of course made up of individuals, each with their own goals and markers of success. Sure, there are tried-and-tested, overarching methods of boosting engagement and job satisfaction, but people strategies shouldn't ever be 'one-size-fits-all'. A great way to kickstart the creation of a happy workforce is to open the door and encourage two-way communication.

It's tricky for businesses to get everything right for everyone, all the time, but small steps create big change – showing goodwill, listening and investing in initiatives that address workers' desire to grow within their careers. Streamlined tools can provide smart scheduling automation and task management, while avoiding tech overload, reducing stress and providing a far greater work-life balance.

And the 'reward' for implementing a strategy that puts frontliners at the heart of business strategy? A team of reinvigorated workers, happy to be on the shop floor (and not solely for the paycheck). If you're ready to make it happen, we're here to help.

*The Quinyx State of the Frontline Workforce poll was undertaken in spring 2023, surveying 3000 UK workers and 13,100 workers globally.



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