

# Mental Health at Work: Managers and Money

**Is your manager stressing you out, or do they have a positive impact on your mental health?**

For better or worse, managers have more impact on our mental health than doctors and therapists — and even equal to that of spouses and partners. The Workforce Institute at UKG surveyed 3,400 people across 10 countries to spotlight the critical role our jobs, leadership, and, most of all, our managers play in supporting mental health in and outside of work.



## Let's Get Real in 2023

# It's time to talk about the major impact managers and our jobs have on our mental health

A taboo subject for far too long, mental health and the struggles we all face from time to time has emerged as a major topic of discussion following years of off-and-on lockdowns around the world. Now that it's front and centre on social media, in conversation with friends, and, yes, at work, too, more people are finding comfort in unabashedly *owning* their mental health — the good and the bad — and advocating to have their emotional needs met across all aspects of their life.

Through this study, we have discovered the many ways in which work is impacting mental health on a global scale, the vital role leaders and managers play in supporting employees in and outside of work, and the trade-offs people are willing to make in exchange for greater peace of mind.

- Sixty percent of employees worldwide say their job is the biggest factor influencing their mental health.
- Managers have just as much of an impact on people's mental health as their spouse (both 69%) — and even more of an impact than their doctor (51%) or therapist (41%).
- Eighty-one percent of employees worldwide would prioritise good mental health over a high-paying job, and 64% say they would take a pay cut for a job that better supports their mental wellness.

At workplaces around the world and across the UK, leaders and managers may hold more influence over their people's mental health than they ever thought possible. Read on for insights and recommendations for building empathy, authenticity, active listening, and a growth mindset to create a sense of belonging, inclusion, and positive mental health at work.

## This Won't Work

# Workers are tired, stressed, and feeling overwhelmed

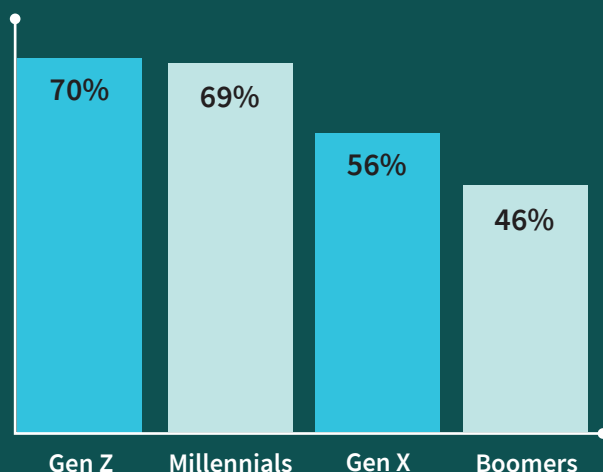
One in 5 employees worldwide (20%) say their job impacts their mental health in a negative way, and women seem to have it worse (23% vs. 16% of men). At the end of the workday, 56% of employees in the UK are “often” or “always” exhausted, and 30% say that stress negatively impacts their work performance.

That stress from work carries into our personal lives, too, as employees say work negatively impacts their home life (70%), wellbeing (62%), and relationships (60%).

But it's not just work. Negative news cycles headlining economic uncertainty, climate change, and social instability around the world also contribute to a spike in mental health issues. Employees are desperate to retake control of their emotional wellbeing, with close to two-thirds saying they would take a pay cut for a job that better supports their mental health.

## Who's most likely to trade in a high-paying job in support of mental health?

- Employees in India (88%) and the U.S. (70%). The UK is not far behind (61%)
- Caregivers, more so than noncaregivers (67% vs. 55%)
- Younger vs. older employees:



“

The chronic anxiety that comes from working through one global crisis after another is wearing on employees. Being overwhelmed consumes human energy and impacts retention, performance, innovation, and culture. Employers can be the anchor of stability for their people by giving them the support and resources they need — not just what we *think* they need.

— Dr. Jarik Conrad, SPHR, SHRM-SCP  
Executive Director of  
The Workforce Institute at UKG

## Rewriting the Rules

# It's OK not to be OK

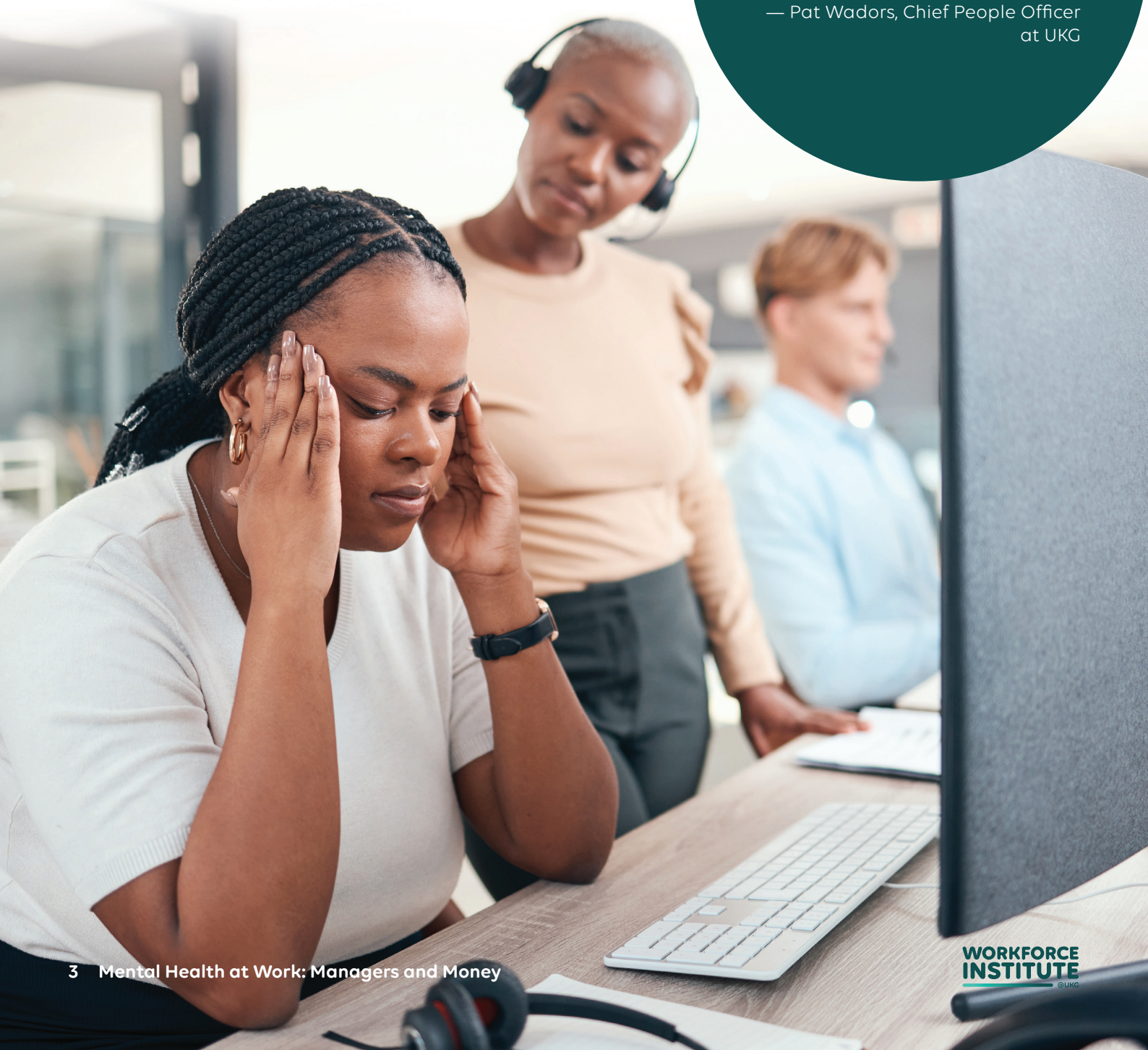
In the UK forty six percent of people are “often” or “always” stressed about work. But even when admitting their workload is a problem, 31% of employees say they’ve “rarely” or “never” talked with their manager about it.

Why not? Some say “my manager wouldn’t care” (21%) or “my manager is too busy” (12%), while others have a sense that they “should be able to figure it out” on their own (14%).

“

We talk a lot about mental health in terms of a medical diagnosis or burnout. While those are serious issues, the day-to-day stressors we live with — especially those caused by work — are what we should talk more about as leaders. Life isn’t all milk and honey, and when leaders open up about their own struggles, they acknowledge employees are not alone, and that it’s OK not to be OK.

— Pat Wadors, Chief People Officer  
at UKG





## Provide Better Support for Leaders

# Your manager is stressed, too!

Being a middle manager is the hardest job there is. These are the people responsible for driving results, implementing new policies, and inspiring their teams. According to employees, managers have more impact on their mental health than doctors and even therapists do, and a similar impact as spouses and partners.

With capable, passionate, and authentic leaders in high demand worldwide — and so much pressure on them to lead well, through any event — it only makes sense for organisations to invest in resources to support these leaders and *their* mental health.

- People managers are often the first line of defence for struggling employees.
- Around half of managers [wish someone had warned them not to take their current job](#) (57%) and also say it's likely they'll quit their job within the next 12 months because they're experiencing too much work-related stress (46%).
- Seventy percent of managers worldwide would take a pay cut right now for a job that better supports their mental wellness.

Companies also need to focus on building the emotional intelligence of their leaders at all levels of the organisations. Competencies such as stress management, impulse control, and empathy — more so than technical skills — will help the great managers emerge and better support their teams.



Asked, “What or who causes you the most work-related stress?”

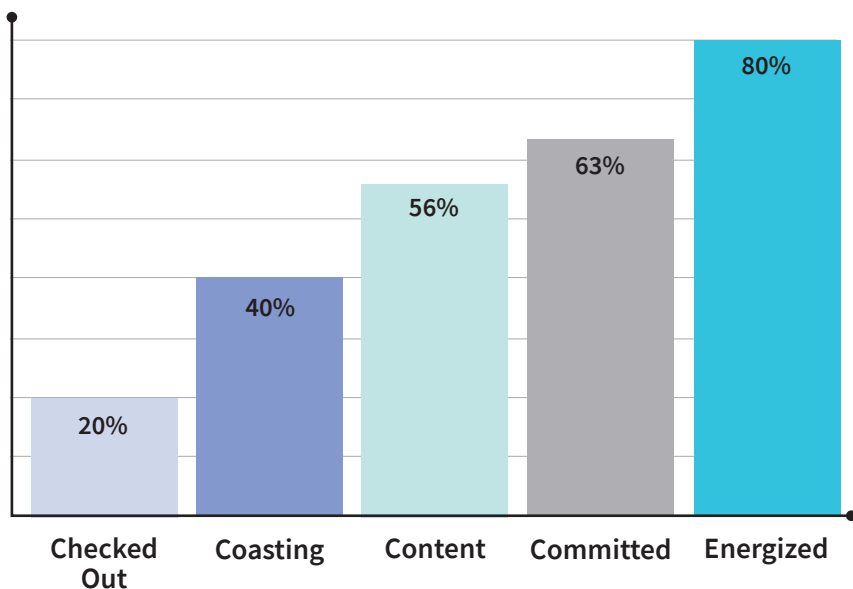


of UK employees *and* managers responded, “My boss.”



## Greater Engagement Leads to Better Mental Health

With higher engagement and a greater sense of purpose at work, people are more likely to be in “good” or “excellent” mental health.



Percentage of employees reporting “good” or “excellent” mental health

## Work-life balance and engagement are key to recharging and sustaining mental wellness

Despite the global narrative around quiet quitting, most employees in the UK (86%) are generally “energised,” “committed,” or at least “content” at work. That leaves just 14% who are merely “coasting” or “checked out” entirely.

Employees who feel unable to balance priorities at work and home are far more likely to report “poor” or “very poor” mental health (25% vs. 8% globally) and to think their job has a direct, negative impact on the status of their mental health (51% vs. 20% globally).

People who lack work-life balance are nearly **3x more likely** than their peers to identify as “coasting” or “checked out” at work.

## Let's Fix It

# Workers want authentic leaders

The research makes it clear that many people are suffering in silence. Leaders need to avoid burying their heads in the sand and instead make mental health a global topic of discussion within their teams.

Don't force a discussion, but make it ok for people to have one. Pause to check in with employees, even if you're uncomfortable asking how someone is. That's what leadership is.

## 3 Tips for Managers to Boost Belonging at Work, Bring Teams Closer Together

1. **Provide an empathetic voice.** If you're comfortable, be open about your own feelings, personal struggles, or experiences with mental health. By expressing vulnerability yourself, you create a safe space for employees to bring their whole selves to work. In turn, this will help you better understand how you can help.
2. **Enable and encourage time off.** In the UK, 30% of employees take off only one to four days at a time, and 23% of employees rarely, if ever, take time off. Management should always model good behaviour for their people by taking meaningful time off so everyone knows it's best practice to come back rested, refreshed, and focused.
3. **Treat employees like people.** Every organisation should provide support and care for employees, and managers *definitely* should do the same. [With purpose and trust, 88% of employees globally look forward to work](#) and are more likely to contribute to their company's success. It's why our purpose is people at UKG. We're here to help companies across the world and in every industry create great workplaces for all, so people enjoy going to work and find fulfilment and purpose in the work they do.

“

When we talk about mental health at work, we should be talking about belonging. Belonging is what feeds a healthy and productive workplace, and it empowers us to conserve mental energy for other pursuits, be it our personal passions, activities with our family and friends, or problem-solving at work.

Authentic, vulnerable leadership is the key to creating belonging at work and, in turn, the elixir to solve the mental health crisis in the workplace.

— Pat Wadors, Chief People Officer  
at UKG



## The Workforce Institute at UKG

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

### For additional information:

[www.workforceinstitute.org](http://www.workforceinstitute.org)

### Join the conversation:

@WF\_Institute

### For more on the research, please contact:

Tonya Eckert  
[tonya.eckert@ukg.com](mailto:tonya.eckert@ukg.com)

Domenic Locapo  
[domenic.locapo@ukg.com](mailto:domenic.locapo@ukg.com)

## Survey Methodology

Research findings are based on a survey conducted by Walr for Workplace Intelligence on behalf of The Workforce Institute at UKG between September 16 and October 1, 2022. In total, 2,200 employees (including managers) in 10 countries responded to questions about employment, work-related stress, mental health, four-day workweeks, engagement/purpose at work, workplace incentives, and how their feelings toward work may be expressed to others. Responses were gathered from 600 employees in the United States and 200 employees in each of the following countries: Australia/New Zealand, Canada, France, Germany, India, Mexico, the Netherlands, and the U.K. Additionally, in the United States, 600 C-Suite leaders and 600 human resources (HR) executives/directors responded to the same survey, which was customized to their roles to include questions focused on their workforces. All survey participants were adults who worked part- or full-time for at least one employer in an hourly or salaried role.

Respondents are recruited through a number of different mechanisms and via different sources to join the panels and participate in market research surveys. All panelists have passed a double opt-in process and completed on average 300 profiling data points prior to taking part in surveys. Respondents are invited to take part via email and are provided with a small monetary incentive for doing so. Results of any sample are subject to sampling variation. The magnitude of the variation is measurable and is affected by the number of interviews and the level of the percentages expressing the results. In this particular study, the chances are 95 in 100 that a survey result does not vary, plus or minus, by more than 0.8 percentage points from the result that would be obtained if interviews had been conducted with all persons in the universe represented by the sample.