



# How to motivate your workforce

**Covid-19 has had a  
dramatic impact on  
societies around the world**

From the education of our children to the way in which we exercised, socialised and shopped. In a post-pandemic world, many of the changes made due to lockdowns continue to shape our lives – and nowhere more significantly than in the workplace.



## During the pandemic, many businesses were forced to restructure and lay off staff.

As the economy recovered, so the number of jobs available grew. At the same time, however, and as a direct result of the pandemic, many people started to re-evaluate their lives and their life choices. One of the first things they looked to change was their working life. This led to the phenomenon commonly known as *The Great Resignation* - waves of employees quitting their jobs in search of something more fulfilling.



Over 47 million Americans voluntarily left their jobs in 2021, yet unemployment remains low, meaning they aren't leaving the workforce. Job seekers have plenty of options when it comes to choosing a new role. The market is skewed heavily in favor of the worker.



- Employee fulfilment: The Future of Workplace Culture

This phenomenon, also known as The Great Reshuffle (since employees are not actually leaving the workforce, but simply moving to different roles and companies that better meet their won personal goals) continues to impact recruitment today. In the ManpowerGroup Employment Outlook Survey for Q2 2023, **77%** of employers said they were having difficulties in finding talent with the skills they need.



Despite economic pressures, hiring outlooks remain resilient and employers across every industry continue to look for in-demand roles. At the same time, tight labor markets mean many face challenges finding people who have the soft and technical skills they need. Investment in upskilling, reskilling, and a focus on preparing people for tomorrow's jobs has never been more important and should be at the top of every business leader's agenda.



– Jonas Prising, Chairman & CEO

### So what is it that is motivating the jobseekers of today? What do companies need to do to attract the right candidates?

In 2022, Deloitte ran a survey with Gen Z and Millennials to answer just that question. The results may surprise many. After a good work/life balance, the highest factor in considering an employer for both groups was learning and development opportunities. A good salary and financial incentives came in at number 3.

Similarly, in the 2023 Workplace Learning Report (carried out by LinkedIn), 3 of the top 5 reasons given by jobseekers when considering a new job are related to personal development and growth: learning new skills, being challenged by the role and seeing opportunities for career development. In the same survey, **93%** of organisations expressed concerns about employee retention. C-suite executives' top priority, the report says, is **"keeping employees motivated and engaged"**. In addition to creating a better working environment, a motivated team is also a more productive team:

- ▶ **Higher engagement rates** are linked to **21%** higher profitability (Gallup, 2013)
- ▶ **Low engagement rates** cost companies over **\$400B** annually due to poor productivity (HR Cloud 2022)

Today more than ever, organisations need to find ways to motivate their workforce to ensure staff retention, increased productivity and a competitive edge.

## What is "motivation"?

Frequently, people think of motivation as something either present or absent. **"Jo is motivated, but Ali isn't."** However, research on motivation has revealed that a more productive question to focus on is, **"What factors are motivating this person's behaviours right now?"** With this lens, we don't focus as much on whether or not a person is motivated, we focus on whether the motivation a person is experiencing is appropriate for goals they are pursuing, and the environment they are in.

As we move from thinking of motivation as **"the fuel"** of behaviour to considering it as a tool to effectively **"steer and accelerate"** employees towards their goals, we can begin to consider how HR leaders and managers can support different aspects of motivation. As the research shows, employee development is a key motivator for many jobseekers – and a tangible way in which employers can move the dial on employee engagement.

## Building a growth mindset

**A growth mindset will help employees if they hit a bump in the road.**

We all hit bumps in the road—it's inevitable. But what happens next? Some people may feel demotivated, taking the difficulties as a sign that they don't have what it takes to succeed. Others may see these difficulties as important parts of the journey—they feel driven to overcome these challenges as a way to improve and develop their abilities and skills. The idea that you have a set amount of ability which can't be increased is known as a **"fixed mindset"** and the belief that your abilities can develop is a **"growth mindset."**

In general, holding a growth mindset is associated with more persistence, less anxiety, and better outcomes than a fixed mindset. A growth mindset helps people who get temporarily lost to reorient themselves back in a productive direction, rather than just thinking, **"Oh well! I'm a bit lost so I'll head home!"**

## How can we help employees develop a growth mindset?

1

### SMART goals

SMART goals are Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time-bound. Setting SMART goals for each employee contributes to increased focus and motivation. Motivation is more likely to increase if employees gauge their progress against their own goals, rather than by comparing themselves to others.

2

### Reflection

Giving employees the opportunity to reflect on their goals and progress made against these goals on a regular basis is a proven way to increase motivation. This reflection should be built into regular one-to-ones rather than left to the annual performance review.

3

### Celebrate the small wins

By setting SMART goals, there are many opportunities during the year to celebrate the smaller accomplishments – on the way to achieving the larger, possibly departmental or company-wide goal. Who doesn't like being told they are doing a good job – backed up with tangible evidence? At the same time, avoid simply giving praise or feedback without outlining actionable next steps. Employee development is not complete when one goal is reached. It is an ongoing process that builds on previous steps.

4

### Recognise the fails

Not everything will go according to plan! Take time out to “celebrate” fails with the team. As Einstein pointed out: “A person who never made a mistake never tried anything new.” Create an environment of trust in which employees can be open about their fails without fear of retribution.

## Working as part of a global economy

**77%** of employers said they were having difficulties in finding talent with the skills they need (Manpower Group). A number of studies have highlighted the importance of **“soft skills”** or **“power skills”**: communication, creativity, collaboration, critical thinking, self-management leadership and social responsibility. [Cite Pearson's own research: Future Skills, Power Skills Outlook] In addition to these **“power skills”**, the research also highlights the importance of English in a global economy, especially for those countries where English is not the first or official language.

There are **over 1.5 billion** speakers of English in the world – but around two-thirds of these speakers are using English as a second or additional language. A large percentage of these are using English at work. Whilst many employers are actively seeking English-speaking employees in their recruitment process, our research (in collaboration with LinkedIn) revealed that only **7%** of employees felt confident when communicating in English at work.



## English skills for the workplace

The top 10 most common work tasks requiring English in the workplace are:

1. Attending business meetings
2. Maintaining international relations
3. Presenting company products or services
4. Using multilingual communications
5. Attending trade fairs, conferences, congresses
6. Preparing communication material
7. Interacting socially with customers
8. Retrieving and using business/technical language
9. Interacting in teams/with colleagues
10. Preparing internal operational procedures

– Study on Foreign Language Proficiency and Employability European Commission (2015)

For a lot of employees, having learned English as part of their school or university studies, many of these workplace language skills are new to them.

Business meetings, dealing with customers, emails etc., rarely feature in general English courses – meaning additional training is required once the employee is in position. Recent research, however, suggests that the majority of companies are not prioritising language training for their employees. Although valuing English language, **61%** of respondents admitted they had no language training programs in place for their employees (2022 Power Skills Survey, Pearson). Given the importance that employers attach to communication, collaboration and teamwork skills – along with employees' own prioritisation of development, these businesses could be missing a trick when it comes to recruiting and retaining talent.

## SMART goals for workplace English

To address the needs of employees using English in the workplace, Pearson has developed a framework of SMART goals at different levels of proficiency, supporting language development within a business context.

The **Global Scale of English (GSE) Learning Objectives for Professionals** were developed in collaboration with employers, employees and in-company teachers of English programs. They support learning of business-specific and job-specific skills, ensuring that learning is targeting the areas of most need. These learning objectives have been used to create learning materials (both self-study and teacher-led) and assessments to ensure a coherent learning solution to fast-track employees' progress.

For more information, go to: [For HR professionals | Pearson Languages](#)



## About Pearson

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Within our Corporate segment, Pearson Corporate Language Solutions plays a vital role, providing businesses with tailored language learning solutions to recruit, develop, and retain top talent. We understand that language proficiency is a strategic advantage in today's global marketplace, and we are committed to equipping organisations with the tools they need to succeed. Through our expertise, cutting-edge resources, and commitment to excellence, Pearson Corporate Language Solutions is the trusted partner to guide businesses towards growth, enhanced communication, and limitless opportunities.

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