



# ONE WORKFORCE, MANY WORLDS

Winning the Talent Game  
in a Global Market





# CONTENT

03

**INTRODUCTION**

---

05

**VOICE OF THE WORKFORCE**

---

08

**WHY COMPENSATION STILL  
COMES FIRST**

---

09

**BEYOND PAY**

---

11

**DESIGNING FOR HARMONY**

---

13

**THREADS OF CONNECTION**

---

15

**DRIVING A GLOBAL VISION  
WITH LOCAL IMPACT**

---

16

**FROM MANY WORLDS TO  
ONE WORKFORCE**

## INTRODUCTION

Global trade is teetering on the edge, and businesses face a critical question: how do you attract, engage, and retain talent in a world where workforce expectations are evolving quickly? Companies that understand what employees value—across cultures, industries, and roles—stand a better chance of winning the talent game.

Our report shares findings from Korn Ferry’s [global Workforce 2025 survey](#), revealing how work experiences and expectations differ across regions. We look at core elements of work life—pay and rewards, relationships, workplace policies, and growth opportunities—to show how local realities and global trends shape today’s workplace.

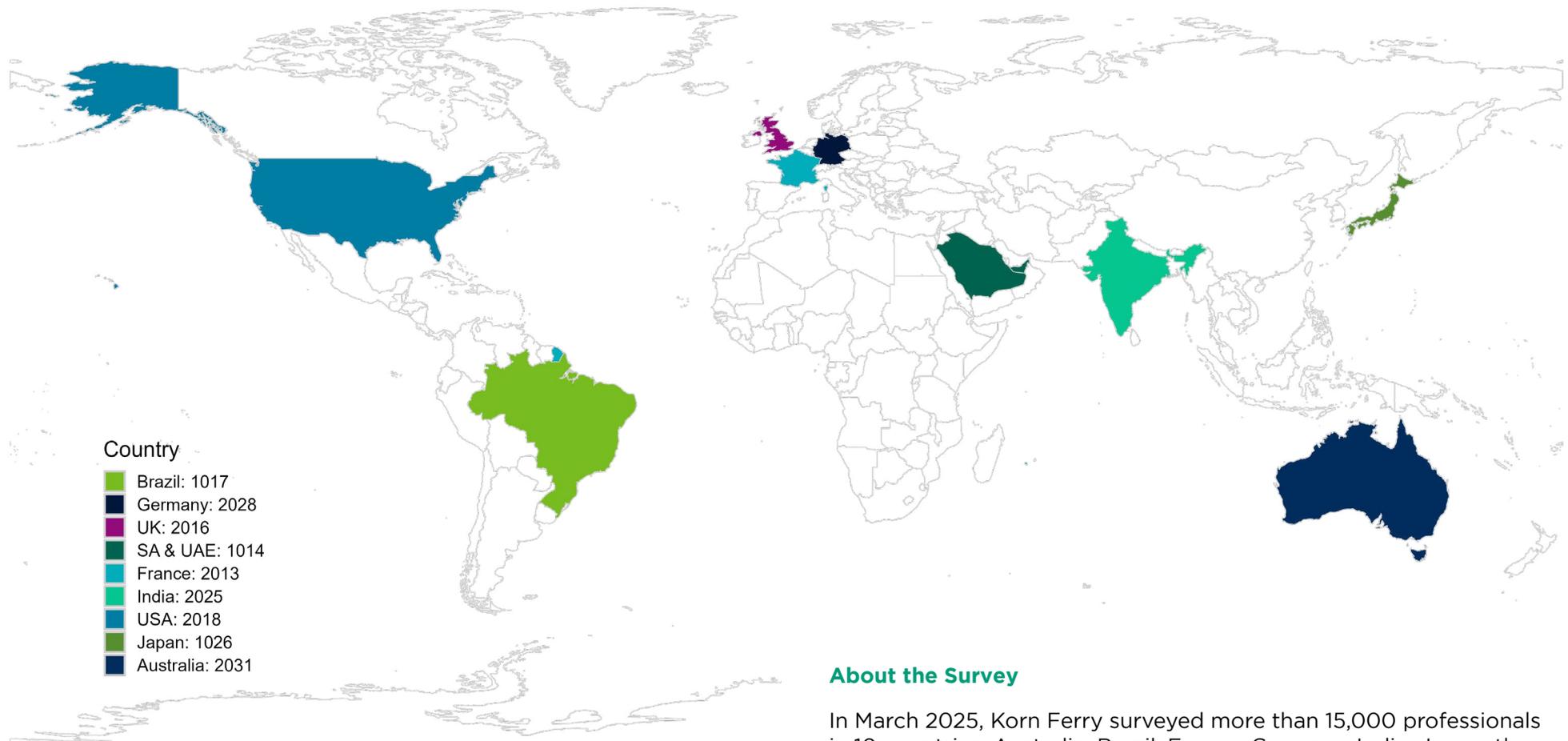
### Why It Matters

Education systems worldwide aren’t keeping pace with what employers need. As technological development accelerates, the gap between skill supply and demand continues to widen, leaving many organizations short on critical talent.

In a recent Korn Ferry survey of CHROs, [nearly 72% said they need to rethink their recruitment strategies](#). But hiring is only part of the equation. Even when companies succeed in recruiting the right talent, retaining them is another challenge altogether. Our Workforce 2025 survey found that while 69% of employees believe their organizations make an effort to motivate them, nearly half are considering leaving or actively seeking new opportunities.

These pressures raise the stakes. To build a stronger, more resilient workforce, companies need to understand what people want from their work experience.





### About the Survey

In March 2025, Korn Ferry surveyed more than 15,000 professionals in 10 countries: Australia, Brazil, France, Germany, India, Japan, the United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom, the United States, and Saudi Arabia. We combined responses from the UAE and Saudi Arabia to represent the Arabic region. Each region contributed at least 1,000 responses, spanning all levels of the organizational hierarchy (32% individual contributors, 21% frontline supervisors, 32% middle managers, and 15% executive leaders).

## VOICE OF THE WORKFORCE

### What Drives People to Join and Stay

As the mismatch between talent supply and demand intensifies, businesses face growing pressure to compete *and* differentiate. The companies that succeed will offer something people can connect with—and that starts with listening. When leaders understand and act on what people value, they build loyalty, improve performance, and grow with confidence.

### Global Factors to Find and Keep Top Talent

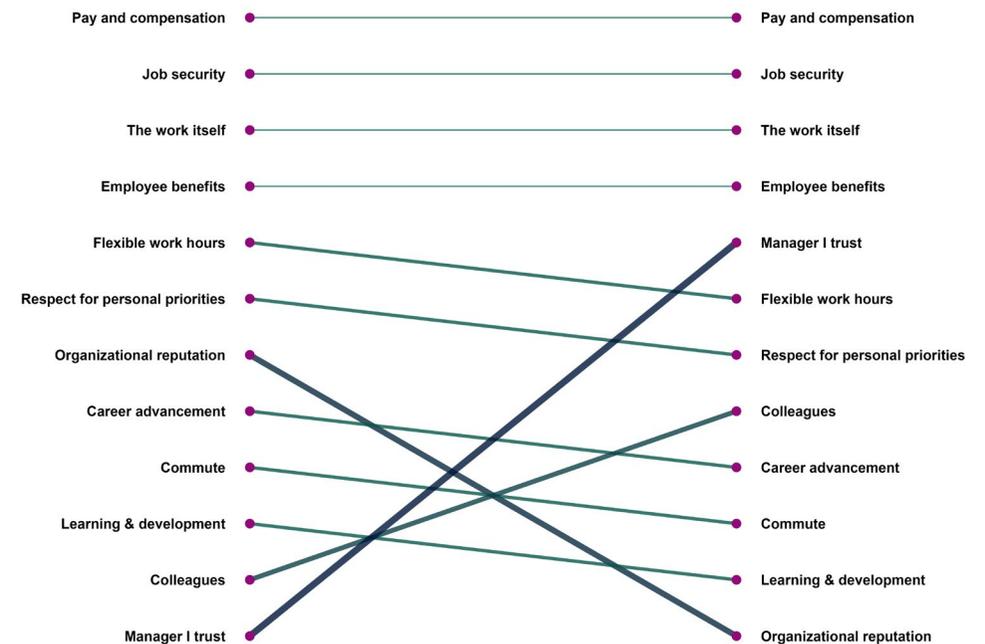
Korn Ferry's Workforce 2025 survey asked participants to rate the importance of 20 factors they consider when choosing a new job and deciding whether to stay. The chart below shows the top-rated attraction and retention factors, ranked by importance.

We see the same top four factors across attraction and retention: pay, job security, benefits, and the work itself. This reflects a mix of practical needs and personal fulfillment—that is, what people want from work, not just their workplace.

Once someone joins an organization, though, relationships start to matter more. Two factors in particular rise in importance: the manager and the team. Trust in direct managers ranks among the top five reasons people choose to stay. That shift may signal changes in leadership structures since the COVID-19 pandemic. As senior leaders retire and hierarchies flatten, many companies are left short on experienced management.

With less structure, employees often face inconsistent or insufficient support, eroding engagement and satisfaction. In that environment, a trustworthy manager becomes a stabilizing force—someone who brings clarity, builds trust, and influences whether people stay or go.

**Figure 1.** Attraction factors (left) vs. Retention factors (right).  
(Line width & color based on distance)



## WHAT ATTRACTS AND RETAINS TALENT?

There's no *one* item, but instead a mix of priorities. When considering new job opportunities, candidates focus on several intangible and tangible factors—a company's reputation, its pay and benefits, whether there's job security, and if they offer flexible hours.

But once someone comes on board, their focus shifts. The quality of their relationships with managers and colleagues becomes far more influential in shaping their daily work experience and long-term engagement. To keep talent, organizations need to recognize the dynamic nature of their employees' needs. By understanding how their preferences change over time, they can craft and implement talent strategies that improve the employee experience throughout the entire career lifecycle.

### Regional Nuance in Workforce Expectations

While global themes around attraction and retention exist, subtle regional differences have emerged. In countries like Brazil, India, and the Arab world,

participants place higher value on career advancement and learning & development. This points to a strong drive in these dynamic and evolving markets to grow professionally and elevate socioeconomic status.

Figure 2. Top attraction factors in different regions

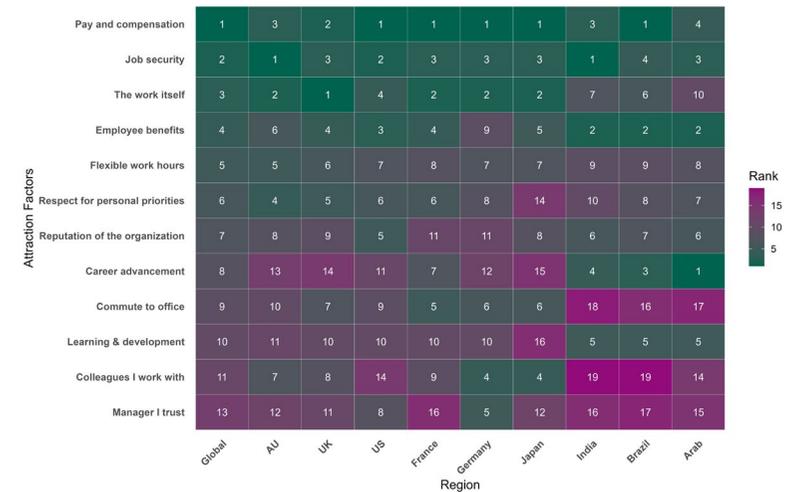
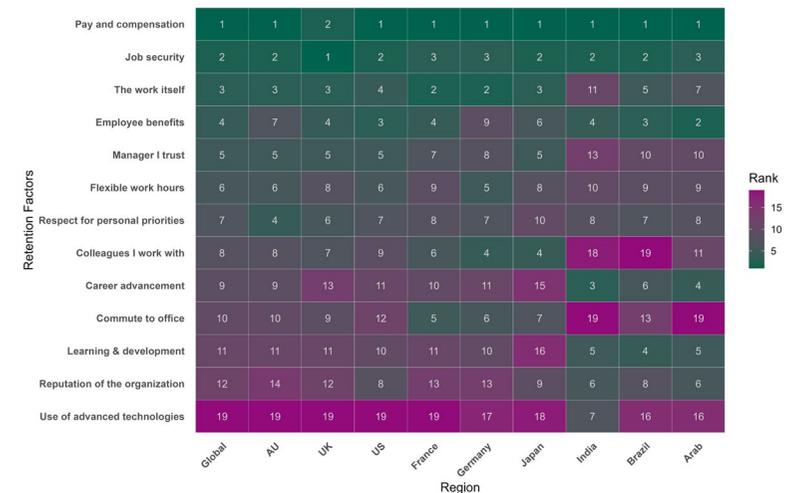


Figure 3. Top retention factors in different regions



Meanwhile, participants in several developed countries place higher value on commuting to work, relationships with colleagues, and trust in managers. In regions with established infrastructure and work environments, professionals often prioritize convenience and strong workplace relationships to support collaboration and work-life balance.

These regional overlaps and variations reveal both common ground and diverging views on what talent prioritizes when applying for roles and deciding to stay. While some factors hold universal appeal, others reflect distinct regional values and challenges. As companies expand globally, they

will need to align talent practices—such as hiring, performance management, and succession—to reduce complexity and help leaders manage across borders.

At the same time, advancements in AI continue to shrink the world, breaking down language barriers that once hindered global collaboration. Leadership mobility now allows businesses to strategically deploy talent where it can make the greatest impact. But for these strategies to work, organizations must first understand what people value—both globally and locally. Only by recognizing the universal drivers and local nuances of workforce expectations can companies build talent models that resonate across markets.

## THINK GLOBAL, ACT LOCAL

Many global companies default to replicating talent practices developed at headquarters, assuming a one-size-fits-all approach works everywhere. But our survey findings challenge that thinking. To stay competitive and relevant, organizations will need to move beyond a headquarters-centric mindset and engage employees across regions and segments. That means investing in regular, authentic listening to surface both universal truths and critical local nuances. The bottom line: ask, listen, and adapt—never assume.

## WHY COMPENSATION STILL COMES FIRST

### Skill-Based Pay Under Scrutiny

We live in a world shaped by inflation. Seventy percent of respondents say the cost of living is rising faster than their salaries. Even in Japan—long known for its economic stability—[people are feeling the pressure](#). More than 60% of participants there report that living costs are outpacing wages.

It's no surprise, then, that professionals across regions rank pay and compensation among the top reasons they would join or stay with a company. Employee benefits also rank high in most markets.

Our Workforce 2025 survey shows that people who feel the rising cost of living is outpacing their salaries are more likely to stay in jobs that meet their financial needs—even if they don't enjoy the work. And

those who believe they're fairly compensated for their skills show less interest in leaving their current roles.

Ultimately, the market value of a person's skills largely determines their earning potential. Most professionals take a pragmatic view, prioritizing fairness over inflated ambition. They're more likely to see their compensation as fair when it aligns with the true value of their skills.

Globally, about 58% of respondents say their pay and benefits reflect the value of their capabilities, but 35% believe they earn less than they should. Perceptions vary across regions: in France, more professionals feel underpaid, while in India, that number is significantly lower.

Pay inequity can drive turnover. Strengthening workforce stability starts with aligning reward strategies to the actual market value of skills and adapting those strategies alongside economic changes.

Figure 4. Concerns regarding cost of living outpacing salary, by region

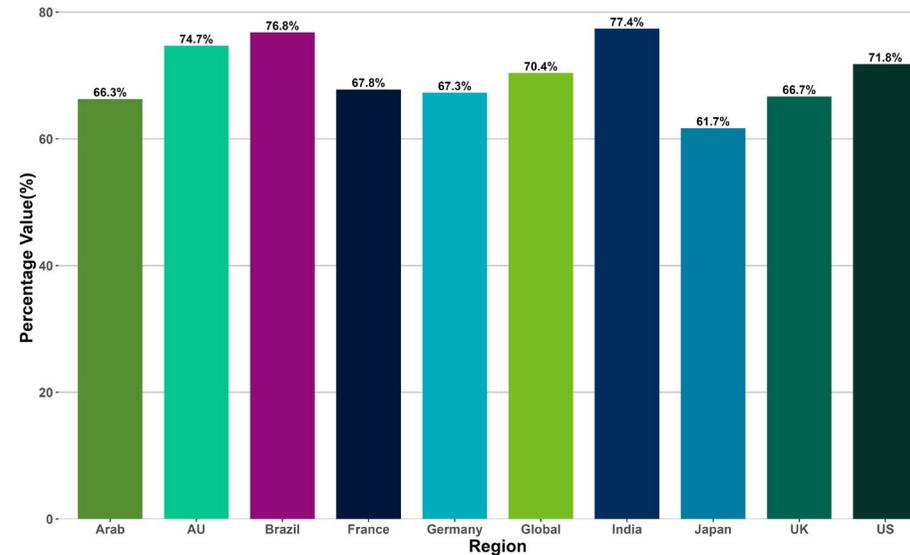
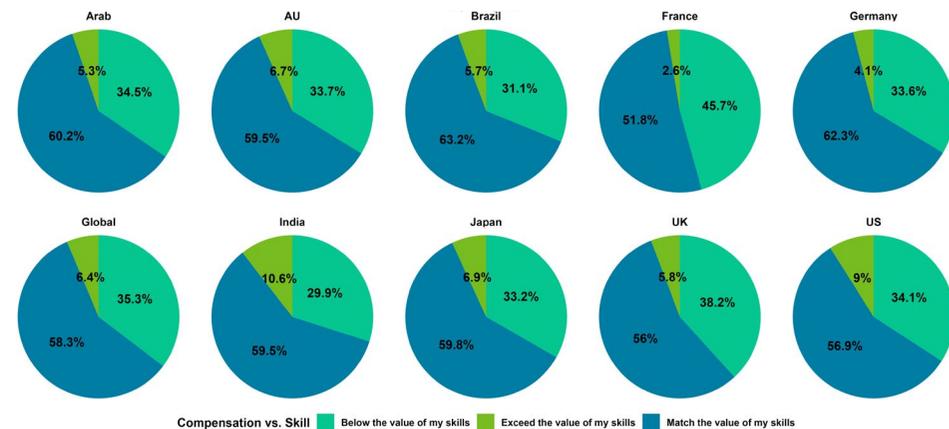


Figure 5. How workers feel their pay matches their skills, by region



## BEYOND PAY

### The Intangible Rewards of Work

Pay and benefits matter, but it's the work itself that often seals the deal. In developed countries, especially, professionals consistently rank meaningful, engaging work among their top five priorities when deciding where to go and why they stay.

In fact, survey participants say they are more likely to go above and beyond—and less likely to leave—when their job feels fulfilling, is challenging and interesting, and draws on their full capabilities. These three factors reflect the core elements of intrinsic motivation: the need for meaning, growth, and self-competence.

Globally, our Workforce 2025 survey reveals strong levels of intrinsic satisfaction:



76% say their job makes good use of their skills and abilities

73% report having opportunities to do challenging and interesting work

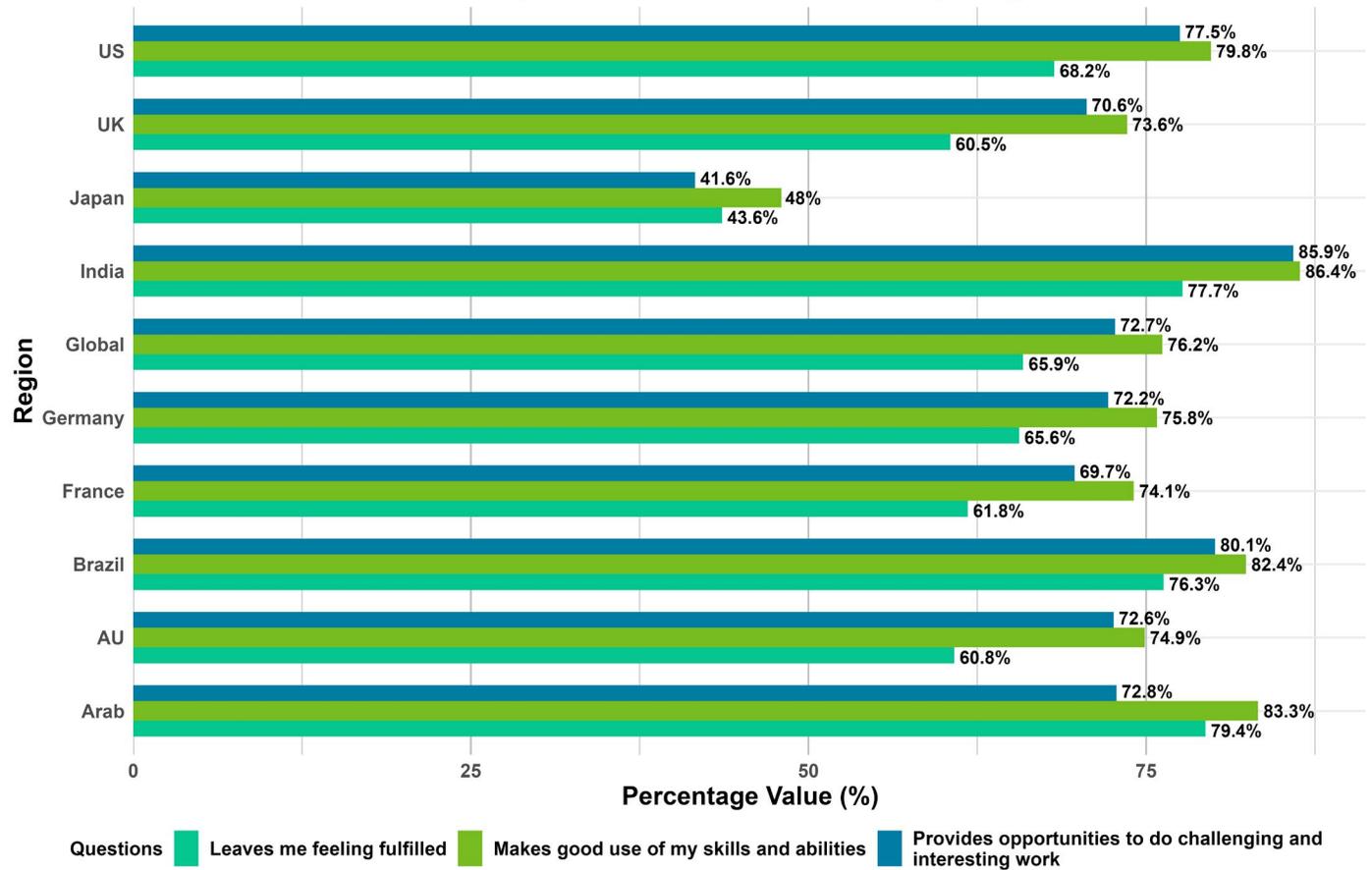


66% feel fulfilled in their roles

Regional differences do stand out—most notably in Japan, where participants report significantly lower levels across all three intrinsic aspects of work. This finding aligns with other surveys showing [low employee engagement in the country](#).

While many factors influence engagement, our global survey points to the lasting impact of intrinsic motivation. Unlike external rewards, which often need ongoing adjustment, intrinsic drivers—such as purpose, growth, and fulfillment—can keep employees engaged over the long term, especially during periods of uncertainty.

**Figure 6.** How employees feel fulfilled across three intrinsic motivation factors, by region



## DESIGNING FOR HARMONY

### Supporting Personal Priorities Outside of Work

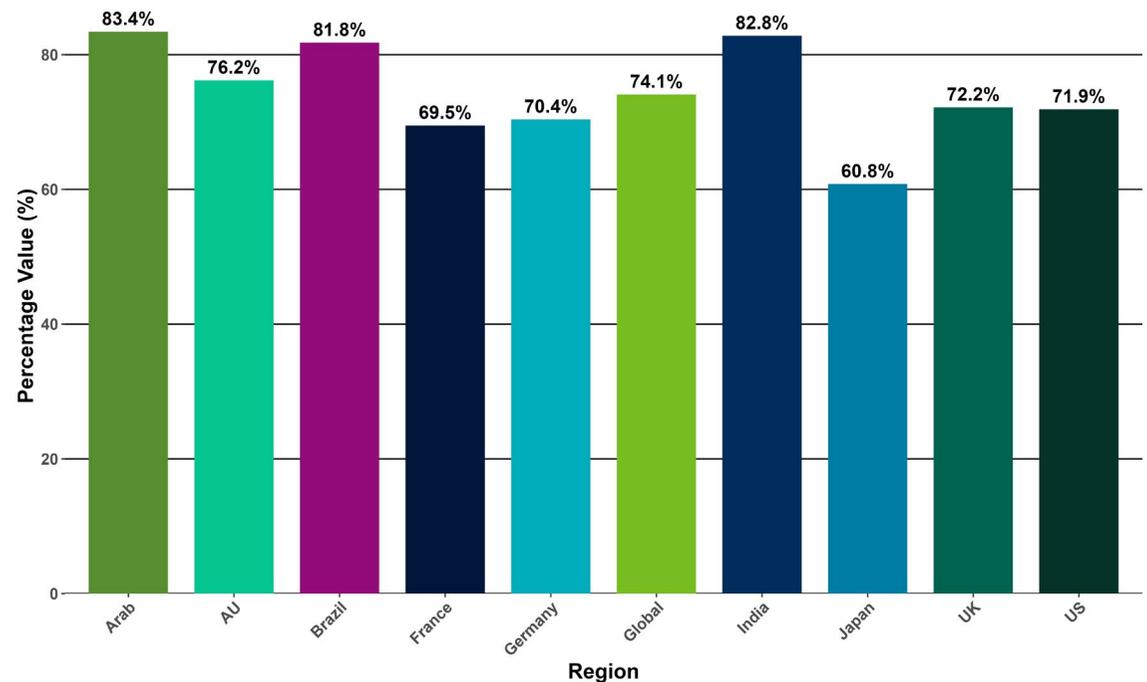
While not in the top five, respecting employees' priorities outside of work still ranks high for both attraction and retention. One clear way to support this is by offering flexible work arrangements. Employees who value work-life balance are more likely to prioritize flexibility and strongly support policies like a four-day workweek.

There are many ways to structure a four-day week—rotating schedules, compressing 40 hours into four days,

or reducing weekly hours while maintaining full pay and benefits. A 2024 American Psychological Association survey found [strong enthusiasm across formats](#), with about 80% of respondents saying they'd be happier and just as effective working four days a week.

Our Workforce 2025 survey echoes this sentiment. When asked whether a four-day schedule at the same salary would motivate them to work harder, more than 74% said yes. This idea is especially popular in India, Brazil, and the Arab world. Even in Japan—where support is the lowest—more than 60% of participants still favor it.

Figure 7. Share of employees willing to work harder under a four-day schedule at the same salary, by region



Another way to support employees' priorities outside of work is by creating space to "switch off" at the end of the day. Globally, nearly 48% of survey respondents say they can easily disconnect after work—but this ability varies by region. In developed countries like Germany, employees report feeling comfortable logging off once the workday ends. Yet in developing economies—particularly, in India and the Arab world—many professionals find it harder to unplug. With a strong focus on career advancement, many worry that stepping away could slow their professional growth.

As work and life continue to converge, managing employee energy has become critical to building a resilient workforce. The organizations that lead are those that honor personal time through culturally aware policies and leadership that respects boundaries. In the global talent market, that discipline will set them apart.

**Figure 8.** Share of employees who feel their company allows them to switch off after work without availability expectations, by region



## THREADS OF CONNECTION

### Weaving the Social Fabric of the Workplace

Connection matters. Even for remote employees, interaction remains a crucial part of the work experience. In fact, 68% of those who favor full-time remote work say that connecting with

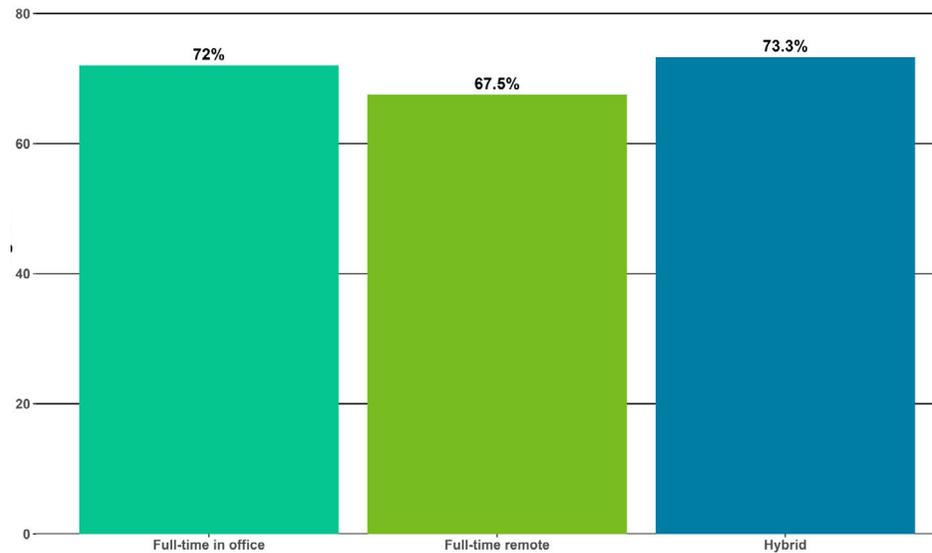
colleagues is important. This number climbs to 73% among respondents who prefer being in the office full-time.

While returning to the office remains a challenge for some, many employees still crave the sense of connection and culture they once had. Structured hybrid models can help rebuild that sense of community without compromising flexibility.

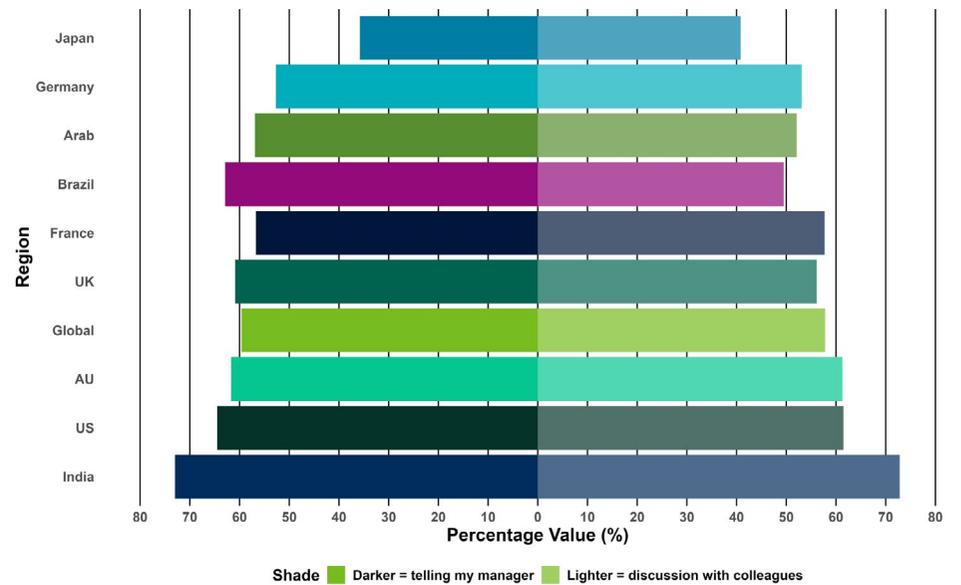
Among the many dynamics that shape the employee experience, the connection with one's manager stands out. Trust in managers ranks as a top five reason employees choose to stay. Interactions with colleagues also influence retention decisions. Together, these relationships help create psychological safety, which is foundational to engagement and well-being.

To gauge trust, our survey asked participants how comfortable they feel discussing personal issues with their managers and colleagues. As shown in Figure 10, comfort levels vary by region. Employees in India report the highest overall comfort, while those in Japan feel the least at ease opening up—to either leaders or coworkers.

**Figure 9.** The importance of connection in the workplace, by model



**Figure 10.** How workers feel discussing personal issues with managers vs. colleagues, by region



We do see an interesting pattern when it comes to workplace trust. In most regions, employees are more likely to discuss personal issues with their managers than with colleagues—a trend particularly pronounced in Brazil. On the other hand, participants in Japan feel more comfortable confiding in colleagues than in managers, reflecting the greater value they place on peer relationships when deciding whether to stay. Similar trends are seen in France and Germany.

Organizations that understand these regional differences can take a more culturally sensitive approach to building trust. In regions where managerial support carries more weight, initiatives like one-on-one check-ins and mentorship programs may have a greater impact. In places where colleague connections matter more, companies could focus on activities that reinforce team interactions and informal support networks.



## DRIVING A GLOBAL VISION WITH LOCAL IMPACT

The world is growing [more divided](#). Technological disruptions and geoeconomic tensions are threatening trade systems that took decades to establish. As global integration strains under new pressures, companies now must redefine what resilience looks like in a fragmenting world.

When systems falter, talent becomes the lever that matters most.

Organizations need to invest in a talent-centric culture that delivers meaningful, career-enhancing experiences aligned with what people want from work. That starts with listening—and it all begins from the outside in.

Korn Ferry's Workforce 2025 Survey reveals both similarities and notable differences in what people value. Leading companies embrace both. They balance global consistency with local nuance, creating employee experiences and corporate identities that resonate across geographies.

**So, how can leaders turn insight into action? Based on our global findings, we've identified four areas to anchor any modern talent strategy:**

**1. Authenticity.** Start by understanding the experience you're already offering. Go deeper than surface-level metrics. Use surveys, focus groups, and exit interviews to capture feelings and perceptions by region, business unit, and demographic. What do employees truly feel? What do they value? What's missing?

**2. Differentiation.** Once you understand your internal experience, look outward. What matters most to the talent you're trying to attract? How can you offer something others can't? A compelling employee value proposition (EVP) resonates with people's needs and aspirations and distinguishes you in a crowded marketplace.

**3. Aspirations.** People prioritize what feels urgent—pay, benefits, flexibility. While those tangibles matter, the real breakthrough comes when work connects to something bigger. A differentiated EVP goes beyond the basics—it inspires by linking individual roles to the organization's evolving mission.

**4. Amplification** The next step is amplification—because a strong EVP doesn't matter if no one sees it. Think of your EVP like a brand. Shape how people perceive your company as a place to work. Share it, show it, and embed it—internally and externally.

As companies shape their talent strategy, they should apply three lenses:

**1. Universality.** Define the core values and principles that everyone—regardless of location or background—should experience. Reinforce them through consistent practices and support. A strong employer brand helps people feel part of a shared culture and mission, building connection and unity across the organization.

**2. Local Expression.** A strong global identity needs local relevance. Organizations need to understand and respect the unique expectations, motivations, and work styles in each region. This means using a shared global framework while allowing flexibility in how it's applied locally. The goal isn't to weaken core values, but to express them in ways that resonate across cultures.

**3. Evolution.** Preferences shift. Economies change. Values evolve. Treat your talent strategy as dynamic, not static. Revisit your assumptions often. Monitor local and global workforce trends. And be ready to adjust. This will keep your talent strategies and positioning aligned, responsive, and future-forward.



## FROM MANY WORLDS TO ONE WORKFORCE

The world today is pulling apart, and companies can no longer afford to treat their workforce like a monolith. To build a strong employer brand, they need to rethink how they attract, engage, and retain talent across regions. After all, what matters most to employees in Germany may not resonate in Japan. And what motivates someone in Brazil might fall flat in the United States.

Korn Ferry's latest global workforce survey confirms what forward-looking leaders already know: successful talent strategies are grounded in shared values but shaped by local realities. They balance consistency and adaptability—who a company is and what its people need.

Organizations that thrive don't find the balance by accident—they build it intentionally. In doing so, they build agility and resilience that help their people and their business grow stronger over time.



Korn Ferry is a global organizational consulting firm. We work with our clients to design optimal organization structures, roles, and responsibilities. We help them hire the right people and advise them on how to reward and motivate their workforce while developing professionals as they navigate and advance their careers.

**Business advisors.**  
**Career makers.**

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