



Resign, Resigned, or Re-sign?

Pandemic-era job quitters
and their managers wish
they had a do-over

This report is based on a global survey across six countries that compares responses of 1,950 employees who quit their jobs during the COVID-19 pandemic with responses from 1,850 people managers who had employees on their team quit. It examines employee sentiment about quitting, if they regret their decision, the chances they would boomerang back to their old job, and the disconnect between managers and employees about why people are leaving during the Great Resignation.



Talent Tug-O-War

Reflections from pandemic-era job changers and the managers they left behind reveal that many quit too quickly, and managers hold the key to retention strategies within.

The Great Resignation. The Great Reshuffle. The Great Reset. The Great Return. The Great Rethink. Whatever “Re” cliché you call it, employees worldwide continue to quit their jobs in record numbers. But did they truly leave for greener pastures, or do they regret their decision? And what about the people managers they left behind?

For many pandemic-era job leavers, their leap did not result in a better experience. More than 2 out of 5 employees worldwide feel they were better off at their old job, finding many of the same issues at their new company with none of the familiar faces and routines. In fact, 1 in 5 have already boomeranged back to their prior company, with millions more open to the possibility of return.

Yet, organizations would much rather retain good people than beg them to return. Disconnects between managers and employees about why people are resigning have not been resolved, and, though many people managers genuinely believe they worked hard to keep their people from quitting, employees feel companies overestimate the effort they put into trying to retain them.

Unsurprisingly, strong people managers — those who build trust, foster open communication, and conduct active career discussions and stay interviews — are the key to retention and potential return. But, will these leaders be around for much longer? After two years of dealing with record resignations, 2 in 5 managers are considering quitting themselves, signaling a powerful next Great Resignation wave.

There is hope: Nearly a third of employees say leaving was difficult, and 1 in 5 were reluctant to leave in the first place. And, while efforts to retain employees have been considered underwhelming, job leavers provided valuable insight into why they left, how they feel about their new gig, and what would have made them stay (or come back). Lastly, getting good employees to boomerang back can require little more than their former manager making the first move.

A number of consistent patterns are revealed across countries, including signs of vulnerability as well as hope for organizations in the fight to retain their best people before it’s too late. Employees, for their part, could be more forthcoming about their wants and needs, especially when recruiters come calling, so that they don’t end up in a situation they regret.

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Should I Stay or Should I Go Now?

For many, their pandemic resignation decision would not be called great.

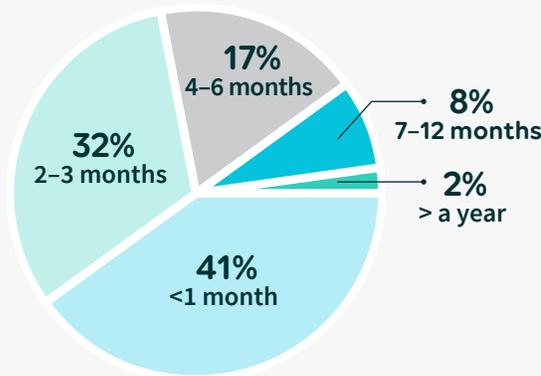
Changing jobs brings with it mixed emotions across countries. While employees are generally satisfied in their new roles, there is clearly a feeling that they were actually better off in their prior job, and their decision to leave may have been rash.



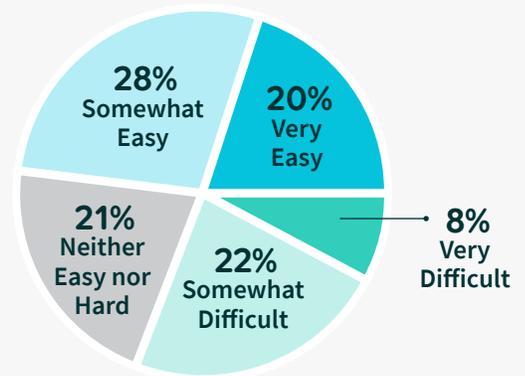
47% of U.S. employees say some days they miss their old job. Of those who are not fully satisfied in their new role, 62% admit "The job I quit was better than my job now."

The vast majority of employees — 90+% — thought about quitting for less than six months, with a whopping 41% going from not thinking about it to quitting in fewer than 30 days! And, in this hypercompetitive talent landscape, **nearly 1 in 5 employees weren't actively looking for a job when they quit.**

How many months did you contemplate quitting before you eventually left?



How easy or difficult was the decision to quit your job?



What people miss most about the job they left

Globally, job changers miss the following most:

- 38%** My peers/coworkers
- 31%** Familiarity/comfort in the role
- 22%** The customers served
- 19%** Compensation/pay
- 16%** Work-life balance

Tell Me the Truth. Why Are You Leaving?

A perception chasm exists between people managers and the employees who left them behind.

While employees and managers agree that pay is the #1 reason people quit, there's a significant disconnect about other contributing factors. Are employees not comfortable enough to voice their true feelings about work? Do they trust their boss? Do they have a vehicle to express frustrations and desires? Or are managers simply not paying close enough attention?

Top reasons managers think their people quit

Top reasons why employees really quit

1	Pay/compensation	Pay/compensation
2	Family/childcare/personal	Did not feel valued or that I belong
3	Too many COVID precautions	Poor work-life balance/burnout
4	Poor work-life balance/burnout	Lack of career development opportunities
5	Lack of career development opportunities	Frustration with executive leadership
6	Desire for shorter commute	Poor company culture

Money's not the only thing that talks: With 49% of employees leaving for a raise — about 15% on average — that means more than half left for reasons other than money.

1 in 5 job leavers actually took a pay cut to move on!

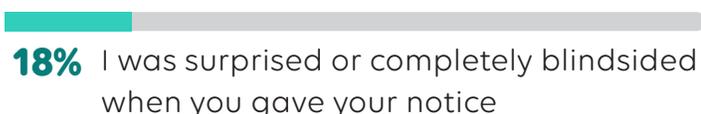
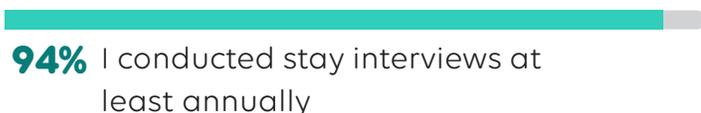
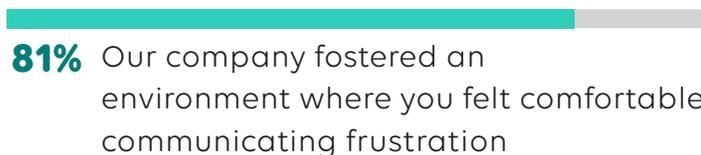
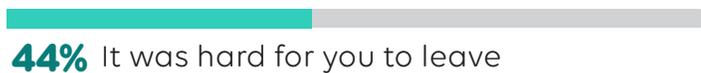
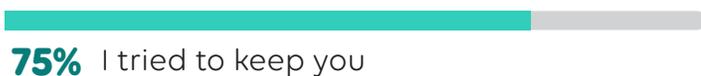


Really, Your Boss Tried To Keep You

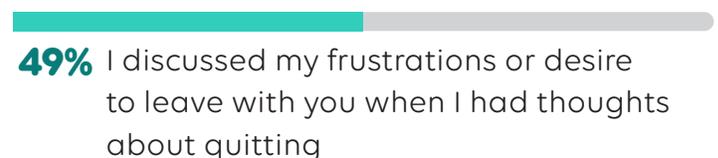
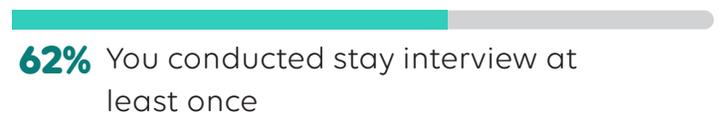
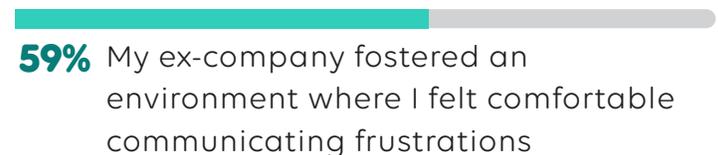
Managers don't want to lose good people. They genuinely believe they put in an effort to keep their employees, and 75% say their organization supported them at least somewhat in their efforts to retain good people — yet managers grossly overestimate how difficult it was for employees to leave. More than half (60%) of managers feel job changers made the wrong decision in leaving their roles.



What managers say



What employees see



People Leaders as the Next Leavers?

Great Reflection: If managers are wondering why employees are leaving, they only need to look in the mirror!

Globally, 2 in 5 people managers are contemplating quitting — and that number skyrockets to more than half of leaders in the U.S. and U.K. (53% each). While there's a chasm between why employees left and why their managers think they left, manager reasons for contemplating quitting mirror the same top five reasons as their former team members.

Why managers are thinking of quitting

- 1 Pay/compensation – 68%**
#1 for employees at 61%
- 2 Lack of career development opportunities – 65%**
#4 for employees at 59%
- 3 Frustration with executive leadership – 63%**
#5 for employees at 57%
- 4 Poor work-life balance/burnout – 63%**
#3 for employees at 59%
- 5 Do not feel valued or that I belong – 62%**
#2 for employees at 60%

How managers felt when their people resigned

- "Frustrated"
- "Concerned"
- "Surprised"
- "Upset"
- "Sad"
- "Disappointed"
- "Deceived"
- "Understanding"



Managers remain key to retention, yet the great resignation weighs heavily on them

Job leavers were 2x as likely to admit they made their decision to quit too quickly (50% vs. 22%) if they had a manager who fostered an environment where they felt comfortable expressing opinions and frustrations — e.g., in person, in email, through company surveys. This group is also more confident (57% vs. 45%) their concerns would be addressed if they came back.

Yet, people leaders have faced a specifically hard burden throughout the pandemic. They became health and safety enforcers. They adjusted styles and schedules to match various working environments and needs of their people. They were rightfully asked to put an added premium on supporting their team's mental health. Add on top the revolving door of resignations and the extra work that came with it, and it's not surprising that many are considering a change themselves.



A New Hope: Boomerang Employees

While boomeranging is not new, record resignations are leading to mass returns — and more openness from managers to bring people back.

Managers and their organizations are certainly doing some things right, as more than half of all job leavers have proven to be boomerang candidates. In fact, nearly 1 in 5 job changers worldwide have already boomeranged back to a job they quit during the pandemic! And for those who haven't yet returned, a whopping 41% of employees would consider going back to the job they quit if it were an option.



How to catch a boomerang

Boomerang employees² share some common traits

Have seniority: Manager+ boomerang more than individual contributors, including 32% of C-level employees

Gender: Men boomeranged at more than twice the rate of women

On the fence: One-third said quitting was difficult

Quitting was personal: Family and personal matters (#3), desire to move locations (#5), and lack of flexibility (#6) higher reasons for quitting

Job just popped up: Half (49%) say they had been looking for less than a month

Hasty leaver: Nearly two-thirds (64%) feel they left too quickly

Good managers drive the boomerang phenomenon

There is a clear connection between a strong, supportive manager and an employee's willingness to return. Two in 3 boomerang employees (66%) trusted their manager enough to discuss potentially leaving when they began contemplating quitting. Boomerangs also say their manager²:



Managers must make the first move

Even though 62% of people are confident they'd be rehired, only 1 in 4 (26%) have reached out to their former employer. While most managers (72%) are overconfident that employees who left will consider returning within a year, a big step to bringing people back is simply reaching out to reconnect.

BEWARE: Nearly half (47%) of boomerang employees² are considering leaving again.

Around the World

Great rethink perceptions from country to country

France



Nearly half (49%) of French job leavers have quit multiple jobs since the start of the pandemic — 2x the rate of other countries. French employees also feel regret the most, with 6 in 10 saying they were better off in their first job. The boomerang rate is lowest in France, and managers here are least likely to consider rehiring ex-employees. That said, French employees have the willingness to return if it were an option (65%).

Germany



Almost half (46%) of German employees say they were better off before they quit, and more than a third are considering leaving their new job. Frustrations that existed at their old job plague them at the new one, and ~1 in 5 have boomeranged back — though only 53% believe their old company would have addressed their original concerns. And much higher than the global average, 68% of German people managers think their people made a mistake by quitting.

Mexico



Mexican workers may be hardest to win back: 80+% are more satisfied in their new role, and the gap between manager and employee perceptions about open cultures and retention efforts is starkest here. That said, 1 in 3 Mexican employees (32%) were reluctant to leave — 2x the rate of the global average. Mexican job leavers are most likely to voice frustrations once they consider quitting, and half (48%) say a stay interview would have had retention impact.

Netherlands



Job leavers in the Netherlands deliberate the longest on the decision — on average, about five months — and are most resolute, with only one-third saying they were better off in their old job. Perhaps this is linked to the reasons why Dutch employees leave, which are often issues that aren't quick fixes, such as frustrations with executive leadership and poor company culture. Like Germany, 55% lack confidence their former company would have addressed issues if they returned.

U.K.



U.K. job leavers tend to do so with fewer regrets, with 8 in 10 (79%) satisfied with their decision and less than a third feeling they left too soon. They also are more likely to chance a career change, with 24% moving into a completely different industry and 1 in 5 (19%) into a completely different role — both greater than the global average. U.K. job leavers also exhibit the least openness to boomeranging, and about two-thirds told their manager they were thinking of quitting before doing so. The U.K. median job-change pay raise for those who got one is highest at 20%.

U.S.



U.S. managers are tied with the U.K. for most likely to quit themselves (53%). They also believe they're highly connected with employees, with 89% claiming to have stay interviews and 96% saying they foster transparent environments. Yet, only half (55%) of employees agree stay interviews happen or that an effort was made to retain them (50%). U.S. managers also pin 4 of the 5 top resignation drivers on pandemic-related issues — none of which crack the top 5 for job changers. For the employees' part, of those not entirely satisfied in their current role, 3 in 5 say the job they quit was better than their current job.

Vertical Snapshot

Different industries, different sentiments. Here's a look into why employees in different industries left their jobs and if they'd ever come back.³

"I'm currently considering quitting my current [new] job."

30%

Services and distribution (n=257)

25%

Retail, hospitality, and food service (n=170)

30%

manufacturing (n=96)

19%

Healthcare (n=68)



Services and distribution

Feeling undervalued or not belonging is a source of dissatisfaction for more than half of employees in the services and distribution sector (57%) — but trading one job for another isn't necessarily the solution: 43% say they were better off at their old job.



Retail, hospitality, and food service

Mid-pandemic job swapping generated significant wage increases for employees in the retail, hospitality, and food service sector, where median pay rose 20% for those who got a raise. Unsurprisingly, 3 in 5 retail workers said the decision to quit was an easy one and are most likely to change jobs in less than a month of deliberation (39%).



Manufacturing

Managers in manufacturing are most likely to foster a comfortable environment, empowering half of manufacturing employees (50%) to express thoughts of quitting early in the process — opening the door for their employer to potentially change their mind. Less than half (46%) say their decision to quit was easy, and 44% either took a pay cut or made a lateral salary move in their next job.



Healthcare

Overwhelmed and exhausted, healthcare workers changed jobs in search of higher pay, sense of being valued, and more flexible arrangements. They also are least likely to say their manager (54%) and organization (58%) fostered an open environment. However, more than half (57%) say they miss their prior job, and 1 in 3 (32%) believe they were better off before leaving. In fact, 47% would consider boomeranging back — under the right circumstances.

The Power of Stay Interviews

Influence connection, communication, and coming back

Stay interviews are casual discussions about why an employee stays at their job and in their role, including what they like most about the company, why they look forward to coming to work, what makes their job satisfying, and what other areas they are interested in. People managers who conduct regular stay interviews build a culture of trust, belonging, open communication, and loyalty. While stay interviews aren't the panacea to retention, nearly 2 in 5 job leavers who didn't have them said it would have made an impact on retention.

Of employees whose managers did conduct stay interviews⁴:

STAY INTERVIEWS NO STAY INTERVIEWS

76%

47%

"My manager fostered an environment where I could express my frustrations."

54%

38%

"I expressed work frustrations before deciding to quit."

56%

37%

"I miss my old job."

49%

27%

"I was better off in my old job."

49%

20%

"I left too quickly."

61%

28%

"My concerns would be addressed if I went back."

39%

9%

"I reached out to talk about boomeranging back."



Let's Fix It

While increasing pay tops every retention list, it's clearly not the only thing. More than half of pandemic-era job quitters left for a pay cut or no raise at all. Overcommunication, being vulnerable, providing insight into behind-the-scenes activity, giving autonomy, and active listening are key for managers and employees alike. That will give the manager a shot at retention and help ensure employees make the right move for themselves and their families.



Should've, could've, would've

Besides increasing pay, here are the top changes employees say their company or manager could have done to keep them:

1

Improved my benefits

28%

2

Offered a promotion or title change

25%

3

Lessened my workload by hiring more support

24%

4

Allowed greater remote-work flexibility

24%

5

Offered greater independence in my role

20%

It's clear that there's still a trust chasm that exists between managers and their employees. Building trust in the modern workplace is a universal element for success and foundational for the following tips to work.

Tips for managers

Provide avenues for open and honest discussion.

People are feeling undervalued, overworked, and unheard — and, unfortunately, they aren't telling you the full story. Employee surveys, polls, and sentiment analysis should be complemented with impactful one-on-ones, stay interviews, and modeling that employees are free to speak up.

Make more time to manage.

You're extremely busy — yet, managing is extremely important. Managers overrate their abilities and relationships with employees. That means even the best managers need to spend more time on vulnerable and transparent well-being discussions, career pathing, and aligning business objectives with employee needs and contributions.

Encourage employees to be transparent about their job search.

Don't ignore the fact that there are other great opportunities out there. It only takes one bad day or experience for your people to take that call from the recruiter. You don't own your employees' careers — but you can help them make the best decision, either with you or elsewhere.

Show you're working to make changes.

The average employee will wait three months for change before they start looking elsewhere. Even if you can't make magic happen in that time frame, keep them updated on what you are doing on their behalf behind the scenes.

Make the first move.

If you had good employees leave, stay in touch. Send them a one-off email or spontaneous text to check in. Schedule a lunch or a coffee break. If you let them know the door isn't completely shut, they are more likely to swallow their pride and consider boomeranging.

Tips for employees

Communicate wants and needs early, often, and tactfully.

Managers are struggling just as much — if not more — than you are. In fact, the reasons you are thinking of leaving are gnawing away at them too. If you're honest, they might just surprise you.

Take ownership of your career.

Even the best managers get caught up in their own work or get busy managing others. And they aren't mind readers. Squeaky wheels do get the grease (if done the right way), and you should be up front about your day-to-day needs and long-term desires vs. leaving for a job that you think will give you what you need.

Let them know when you start looking elsewhere.

One in 4 employees never even hint at frustrations before they quit, while many more wait until it's too late — or, worse, only tell their boss about a new job offer for leverage. If you trust your manager and like your job, keep them involved in your job search process so they have time to actually keep you.

Give them reasonable time to make a change.

Depending on what you want or what is frustrating you about work, it might take time for your manager to make it happen. Be reasonable in your requests and try to stick it out as long as possible, or you may be walking away from a better long-term opportunity for short-term satisfaction.

Don't burn the bridge, and keep in touch.

It's clear that managers don't want to lose good people, and are more willing to accept boomerangs than ever before. If you have a much better opportunity, take it — and leave the right way, so you can cross back over that bridge if it comes to it.

About UKG

At UKG, our purpose is people. As strong believers in the power of culture and belonging as the secret to success, we champion great workplaces and build lifelong partnerships with our customers to show what's possible when businesses invest in their people. Born from a historic merger that created one of the world's leading Human Capital Management (HCM) cloud companies, our Life-Work Technology approach to HR, payroll, and workforce management solutions for all people helps 50,000 organizations worldwide across every industry anticipate and adapt to their employees' needs beyond work. To learn more, visit ukg.com.

Research findings are based on a survey conducted by Morning Consult on behalf of UKG across the U.S., the U.K., Mexico, Netherlands, Germany, and France between December 23, 2021, and January 22, 2022. The survey was conducted in two separate groups: 1,950 employees who voluntarily quit or changed jobs at least once since the onset of the pandemic in March 2020, and 1,850 people managers who have been in their role at least six months and had at least one employee on their team quit during the pandemic. The project's objective was to better understand the attitudes and beliefs of job quitters and people managers alike amid the Great Resignation, including why quitters have left and what managers and organizations could have done differently to make them stay. All interviews were conducted online with adults 18+.

Footnote 1: Excludes employees who responded, "Don't know / no opinion." When included, the number is 1 in 5 employees.

Footnote 2: U.S. responses only. Sample size of boomerang employees not large enough in other countries to analyze how their manager influenced their decision to come back; however, trends are directionally consistent worldwide.

Footnote 3: Industry analysis available only in the U.S., as the sample size in other countries was not large enough to analyze trends across all industries; however, trends are directionally consistent worldwide.

Footnote 4: Stay interview data analysis in the chart is U.S. only.

For additional information:

ukg.com

Join the conversation:

@UKGInc

@WF_Institute

For more on the research, please contact:

Domenic Locapo
domenic.locapo@ukg.com
media@ukg.com



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