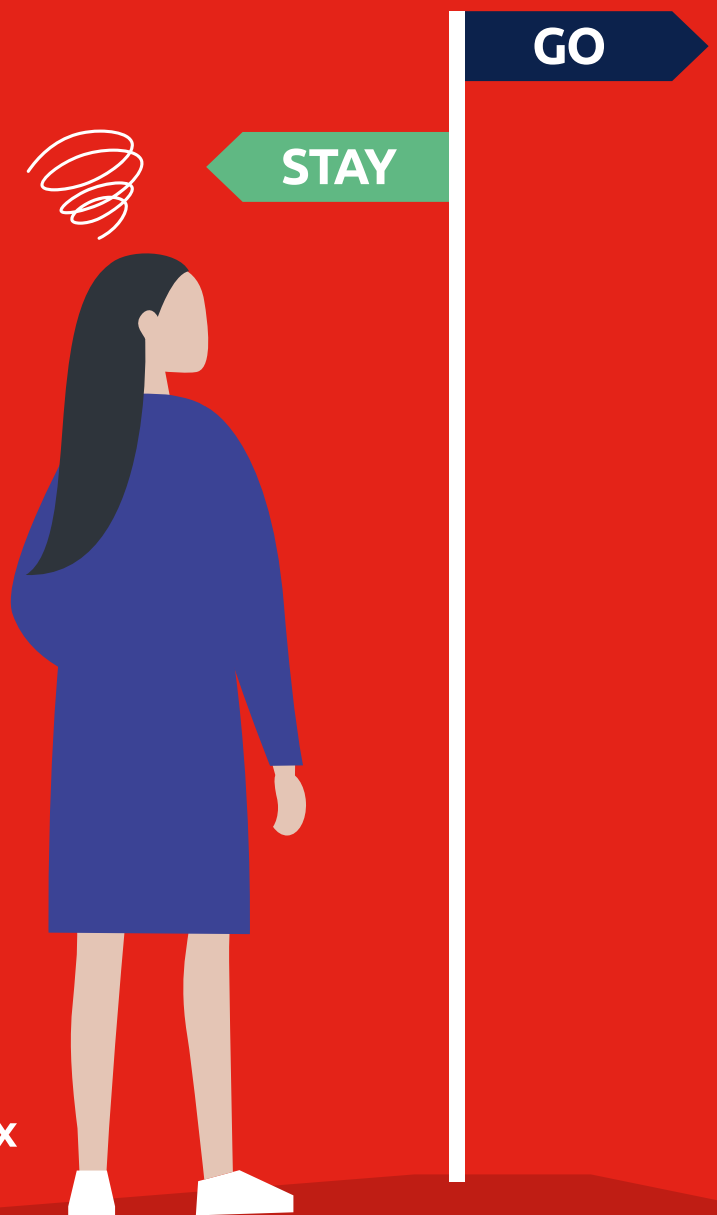


# SHOULD I STAY OR SHOULD I GO?

The factors that influence our decision to leave our job – or not



# Introduction

**Attracting and keeping hold of the best talent is a priority for any organisation – perhaps never more so than right now.**

The working landscape has changed for so many people – maybe forever. But has the turbulence of recent years fundamentally changed the way we think about work? Has it influenced people's reasons for staying in a role, or seeking out a new one?

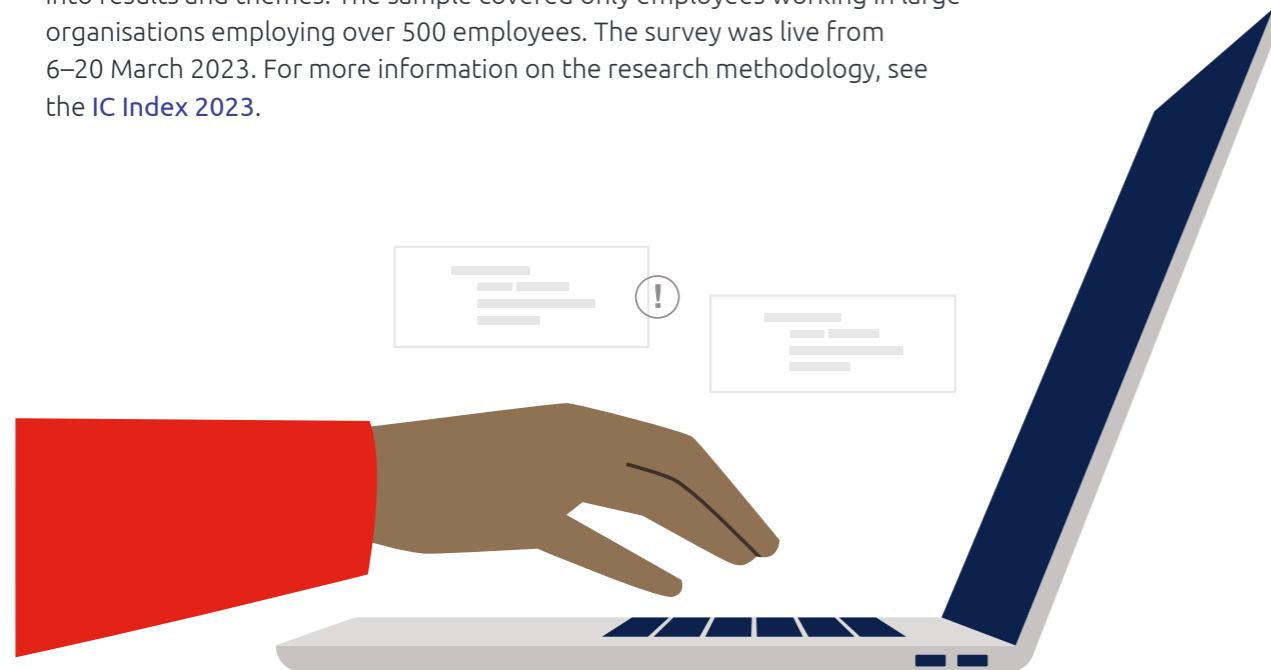
Using data gathered from 3,000 UK workers in March this year, this report examines the key push and pull factors that are most important to employees when considering their existing and potential employers.

We hope the findings will help internal communications and HR professionals:

- Design effective communications strategies for different points in the employee lifecycle.
- Support leaders and managers to communicate about the things that people truly care about.
- Effectively tailor messaging for different audiences based on their varying interests.
- Prioritise content based on insight instead of instinct.

## About this report

- Data in this report comes from research undertaken by Ipsos Karian and Box among UK workers in 2023, which led to the production of The IC Index 2023, in collaboration with the Institute of Internal Communications.
- A sample of 3,000 UK workers was selected to ensure the ability to dive deeper into results and themes. The sample covered only employees working in large organisations employing over 500 employees. The survey was live from 6–20 March 2023. For more information on the research methodology, see the [IC Index 2023](#).



# What are the key findings?

**A small number of factors dominate employees' considerations around staying put or moving on...**

Understandably, when forced to choose what is most important to them, employees lean towards factors that ensure that the job is doable and enables them to meet their basic needs – like pay and benefits, location, and flexibility. Considerations about the organisation itself tend to be secondary – for the majority at least.

But the precise detail of employees' complete wishlists is as individual as they are. What are 'must haves' for one appear barely consequential to others. Digging a little deeper into the results reveals some real nuances in the intentions and desires of different groups. Here are our top findings.

## 01

### Majority in no rush to leave

- Most people intend to stay with their current employer for the foreseeable future, a quarter of them for the long term until retirement.

## 02

### Money talks

- Pay and benefits trump everything else as the most selected reason for considering leaving or taking a job.

## 03

### Women leaving to progress

- Career progression figures highly as a push factor, emerging as the second most common reason for leaving a job. This is especially true for women and younger people.

## 04

### Priorities differ for certain groups

- Younger people are more likely to value an organisation's environmental responsibility and purpose, while flexible working becomes more of a priority for those of typical parenting age. Performance and the leadership of an organisation are key considerations for senior leaders.

# Two in three plan to stay with their employer for three years or more

While UK job vacancies are falling from their peak in spring 2022 (ONS.gov.uk), they remain at a historically high level, providing plenty of opportunities for employees who are looking for an exit. Yet the vast majority of employees are intending to stay put... at least for the next three years.

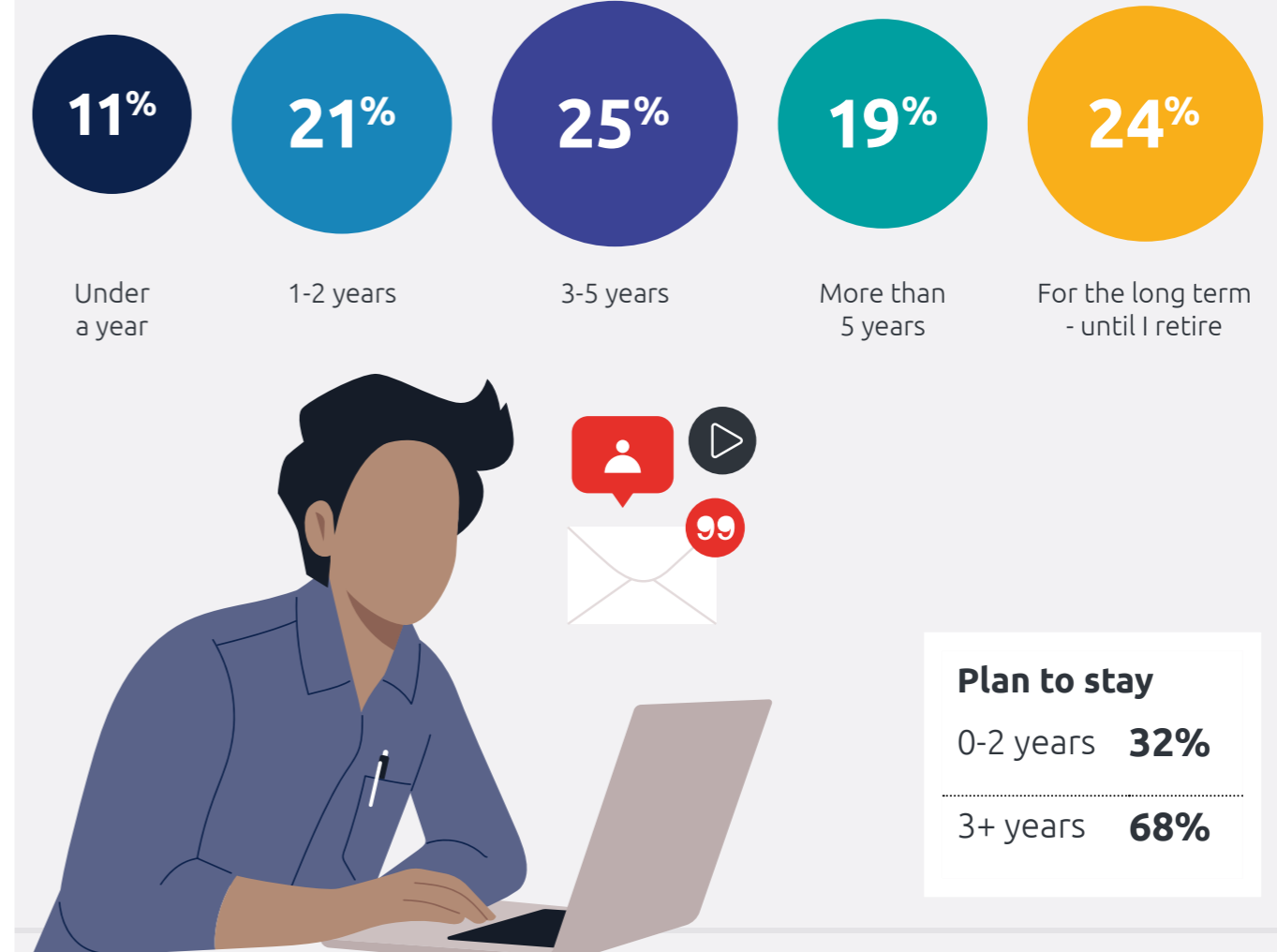
Most people are in no immediate rush to leave their current employer. Two in three (68%) plan to stay where they are for at least three years, and a quarter (24%) are in it for the long haul.

These figures support the conclusions of Ipsos Karian and Box's 'The great resignation: fake news?' report, which examined whether the actual data around attrition supported widespread media speculation around a mass employee exodus, post-pandemic. It concluded that, although more people were looking, or intending to look, for new jobs, it was more a rebalancing of the normal attrition rates following the pandemic than a spontaneous mass exodus.

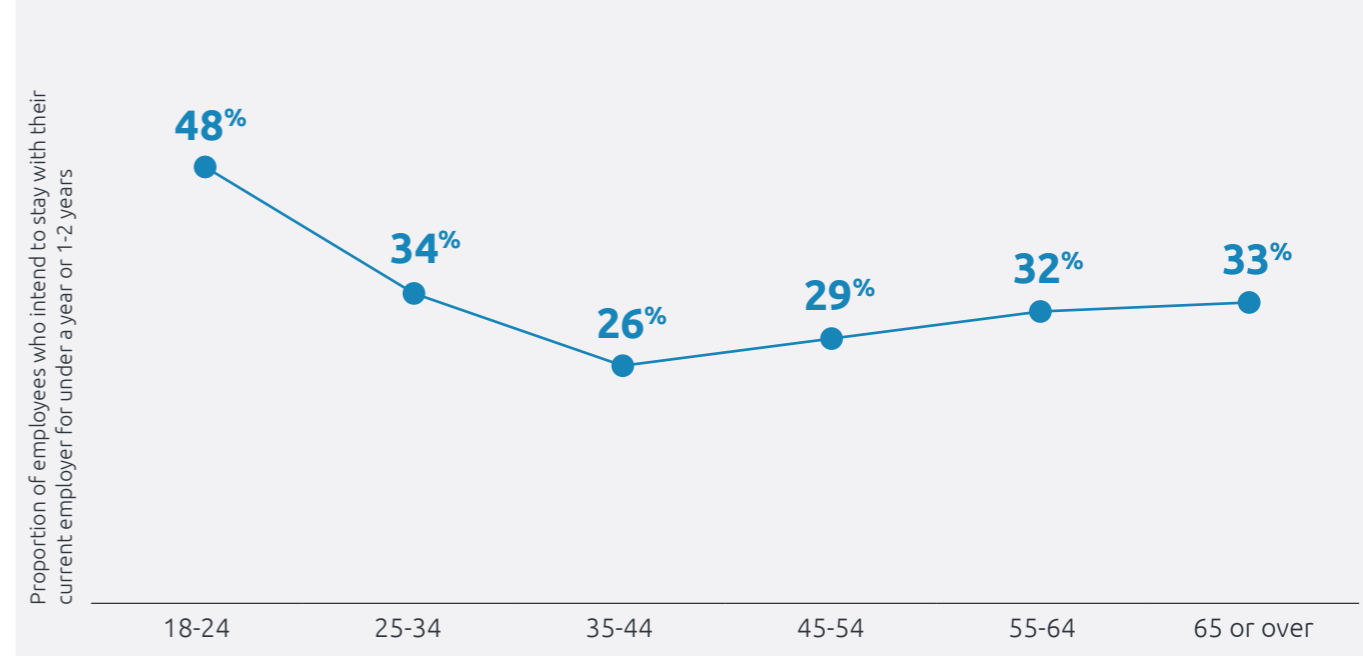
## Youngest employees most likely to leave

Perhaps unsurprisingly, 18-24 year olds are the most likely to plan to leave their job in the next couple of years. One in two (48%) plan to leave in less than two years – perhaps because of a wish to grow their early career experience and explore different paths. Employers who are keen to ensure that young people are well represented in their organisations may need to reflect on how their Employee Value Proposition (EVP) and retention policies can be better tailored to give them the best chance of retaining new talent.

## I plan to stay working for my employer for...



## Almost half of 18-24 year olds plan to leave their current job within two years



Source: 3,003 adults working for large organisations in the UK, surveyed online between 6-20 March 2023. Base sizes for age groups: 18-24 (313), 25-34 (899), 35-44 (907), 45-54 (294), 65 and over (49).

# Leaders and managers least likely to stick around for the long-term

## Seniority and organisational size both have a bearing on employees' intent to leave.

You might expect employees in leadership positions to be content with their roles and package and, therefore, be happy to see out their careers with their existing employer. The truth is that this group is far less likely to want to stick around than their most junior colleagues, with only 15% saying they intend to stay for the long term, compared to 28% of those in the most junior positions (much of which is driven by older employees approaching retirement).

Senior colleagues are, however, also much less likely than average to plan to leave within a year – only 4% feel this way, compared to 12% of people who don't manage anyone. What might be driving these interesting contradictions? Those in the top positions often tend to stay in a position for a few years before moving on to their next challenge. They don't jump ship too quickly, but they're often not interested in steering the same course long-term.

## Size matters

People working in the largest organisations are much more likely to plan to stay with them until retirement than those in smaller organisations. Intent to stay increases in line with organisational size – from 17% in organisations that employ fewer than 1,000 to 32% in organisations that boast workforces of 10,000 people or more.

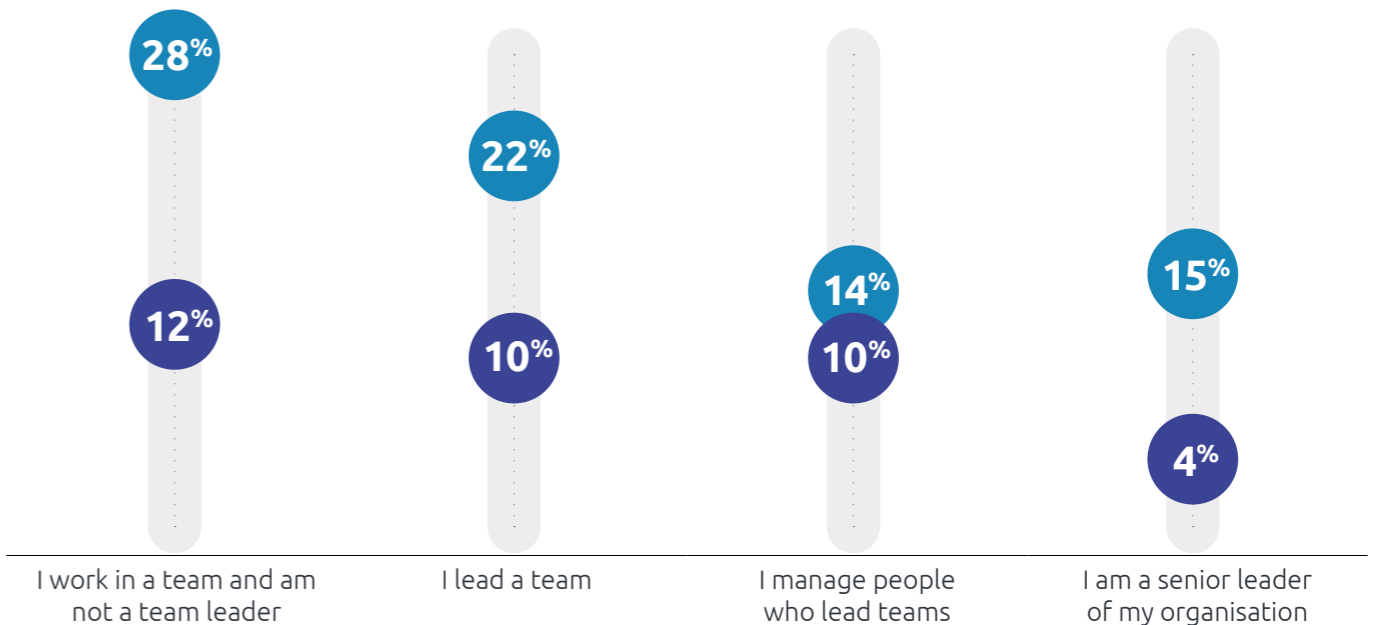
This may well be a reflection of differences in the pay and benefits package, career opportunities and job security that larger organisations are often better able to offer. Anecdotally, people often hypothesise that you can more easily hide or coast within a large organisation, which could be appealing for those winding down their careers, or for whom career advancement isn't a big priority.

Although the difference is much less pronounced, the likelihood to leave within a year also broadly increases in line with organisation size. Retaining new talent is as much a challenge for big organisations as it is for smaller ones, in spite of all the additional benefits and opportunities they can offer.

## Senior leaders are both less likely to leave and to plan to stay until retirement

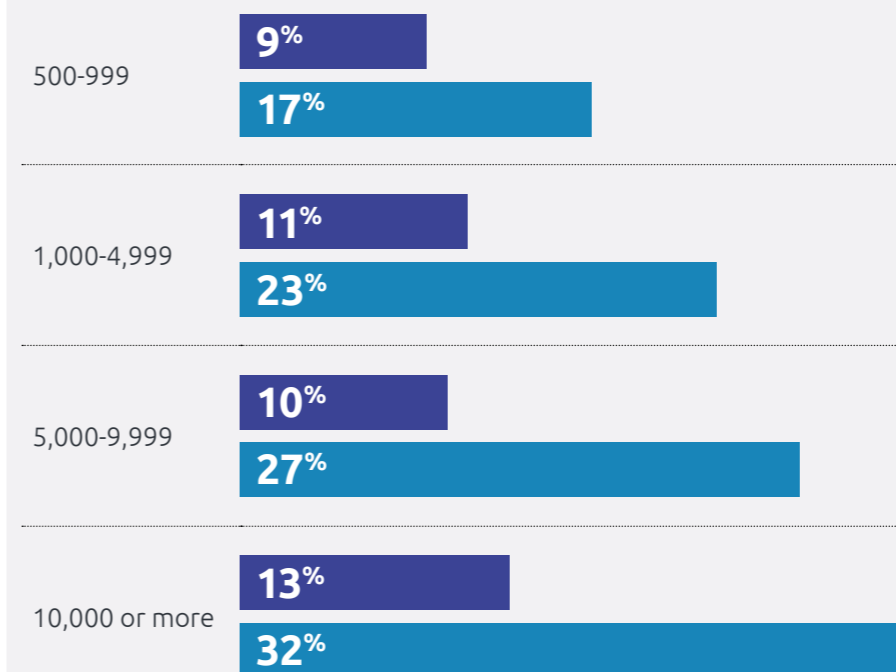
**Key:** ● Plan to stay working with employer for under a year  
● Plan to stay working with employer for the long term – until I retire

**i** Male and female senior leaders are equally likely to plan to leave within a year. However, 24% of female senior leaders plan to leave within 1–2 years, compared to 15% of male senior leaders



## People in larger organisations lean towards the extremes of intent to stay

**Key:** ■ Plan to stay working with employer for under a year  
■ Plan to stay working with employer for the long term – until I retire



Source: 3,003 adults working for large organisations in the UK, surveyed online between 6–20 March 2023. Base sizes for seniority: I work in a team and am not a team leader (1636), I lead a team (819), I manage people who lead teams (289), I am a senior leader of my organisation (259). Base sizes for organisation size: 500–999 (857), 1,000–4,999 (860), 5,000–9,999 (454), 10,000 or more (832).

# Flight risk driven primarily by pay, but lack of recognition and manager behaviours are also key

**People’s reasons for leaving an employer can be complex – recognition, culture and management all play a part. However, one driver trumps all of the others: pay and benefits.**

Around half (48%) of all respondents, regardless of gender, seniority, location or working pattern, selected pay as a key reason for thinking about leaving. The only group for whom this wasn’t the principal driver were the over 55s, who cited retirement as the main factor for their departure.

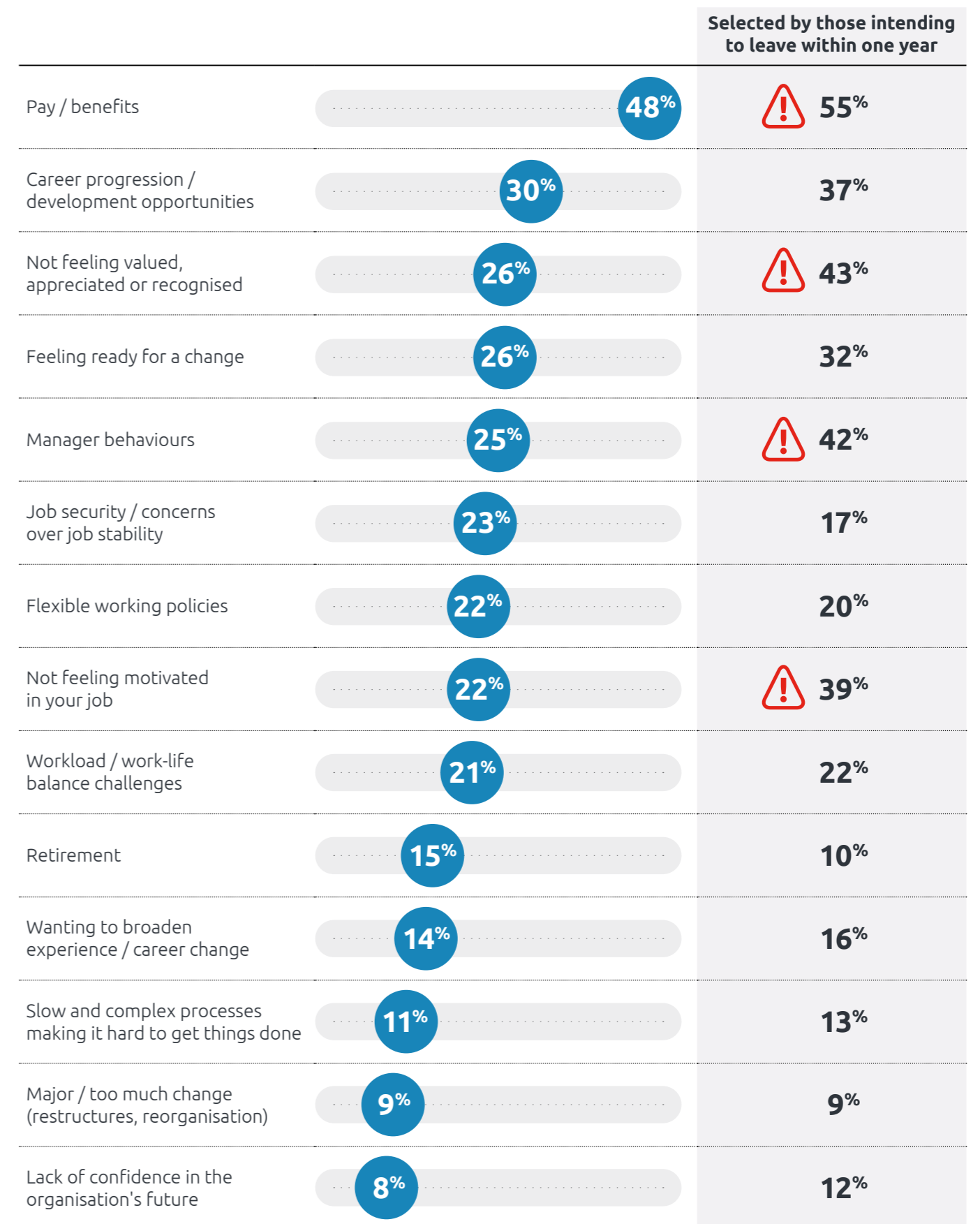
After pay and benefits, the most commonly cited reasons for leaving are career progression/development and not feeling valued, appreciated or recognised. Managers have a significant role to play in employees’ experience of both of these things. And manager behaviours emerge as a top three push factor for those intending to leave within a year, second only to not feeling valued (which managers can also influence) and to pay and benefits. Together, the data does seem to support the idea that people leave bad managers, not bad organisations.

Flexible working and job security also show up as important – with almost a quarter of people selecting them. Although only eighth on the list of reasons overall, not feeling motivated is in the top four selected by those intending to leave within a year – showing that people do still place emphasis on having a job that interests and excites them.

At senior levels people are less likely to select pay and benefits as a main reason for leaving – perhaps because their reward packages tend to already be more generous. It is a push factor for just over a third of senior leaders (37%), but a significant driving factor for over half of those with no line management responsibilities (52%).

## What would be the main reasons for you to consider leaving your current employer?

**Key:** ⚠ Indicates the factors most likely to be driving those planning to leave immediately



Source: 3,003 adults working for large organisations in the UK, surveyed online between 6–20 March 2023.

# Career progression a bigger push factor for women and younger employees

Although pay is the overall top factor pushing women and younger employees to leave an organisation, they are more likely than their respective male and older peers to factor career development into their considerations.

A third of women (33%) say that career progression is a main reason they would consider leaving, versus only around a quarter of men (26%). This may be an indication of a glass ceiling that still exists in some organisations, with women feeling overlooked for more senior positions, forcing them to look outside in order to progress their careers further. At all but the highest grades, women are much more likely to consider leaving to progress their career, which appears to support these suggestions.

## Importance of progression and stability wane with age

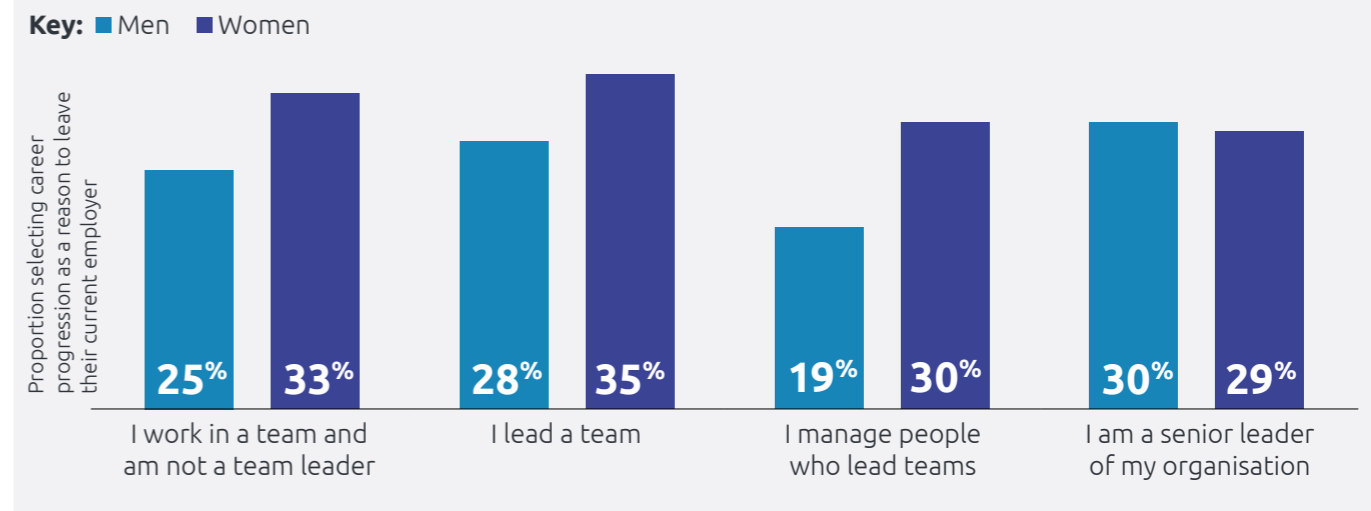
The importance of career development as a push factor declines steeply for those over the age of 45. Understandably, early and mid-career employees are seeking opportunities to move forward. They also see job security as a more important factor in seeking a new position than their older peers. This trend peaks in the 25–34 year old bracket, possibly in response to the life commitments that typically come along at this stage. In contrast, job security is much less of a concern for people from the age of 55, perhaps as mortgages are paid off, children move into adulthood and retirement moves into nearer focus.

It will be interesting to see whether the age at which employees become less concerned with career development and job security rises alongside the State Pension age.

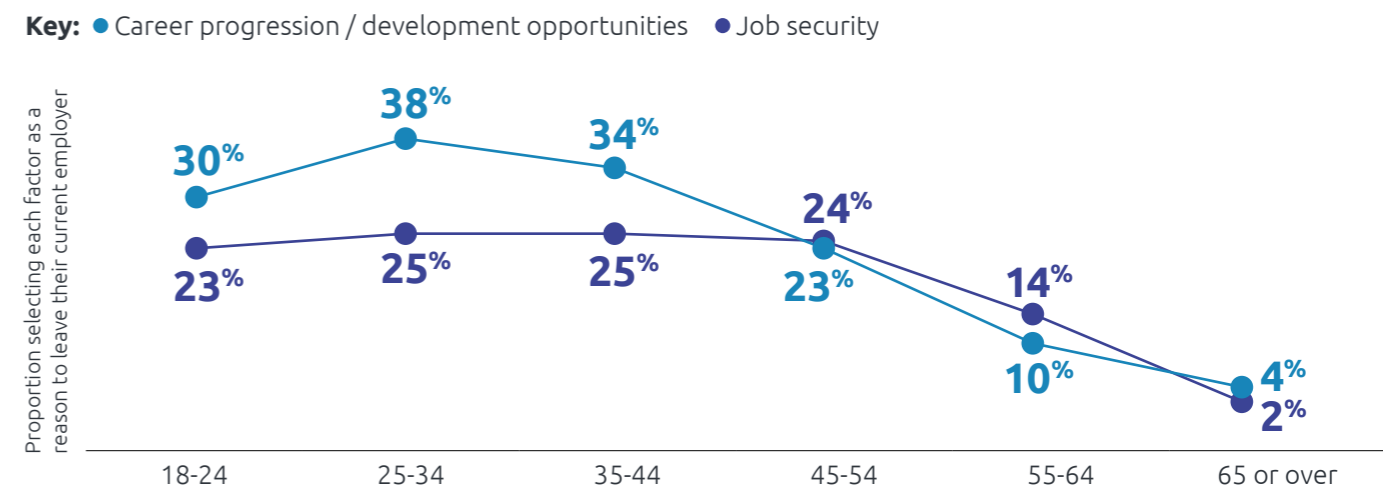
## Career progression is a main reason to leave for...



## At all but the highest levels, women are notably more likely to consider leaving to progress their career



## Younger employees want a secure job with development opportunities



Source: 3,003 adults working for large organisations in the UK, surveyed online between 6-20 March 2023. Base sizes for age groups: 18-24 (313), 25-34 (899), 35-44 (907), 45-54 (294), 65 and over (49). Base sizes for seniority by gender: I work in a team and am not a team leader - men (545), women (1080), I lead a team - men (368), women (446), I manage people who lead teams - men (138), women (149), I am a senior leader of my organisation - men (155), women (104).

# Pay, place and flexibility are top pull factors when considering a new job

As with push factors, pay and benefits are the standout concern when considering a new job – cited by almost two thirds (63%) as the most important.

But other things that are perhaps lower down the list of push factors come more into play in the consideration of a new role. The priority many employees attach to flexible working (41%) and location of the primary working space (35%), suggest that basic, practical needs must be ticked off before engaging with any other features the role or organisation has to offer.

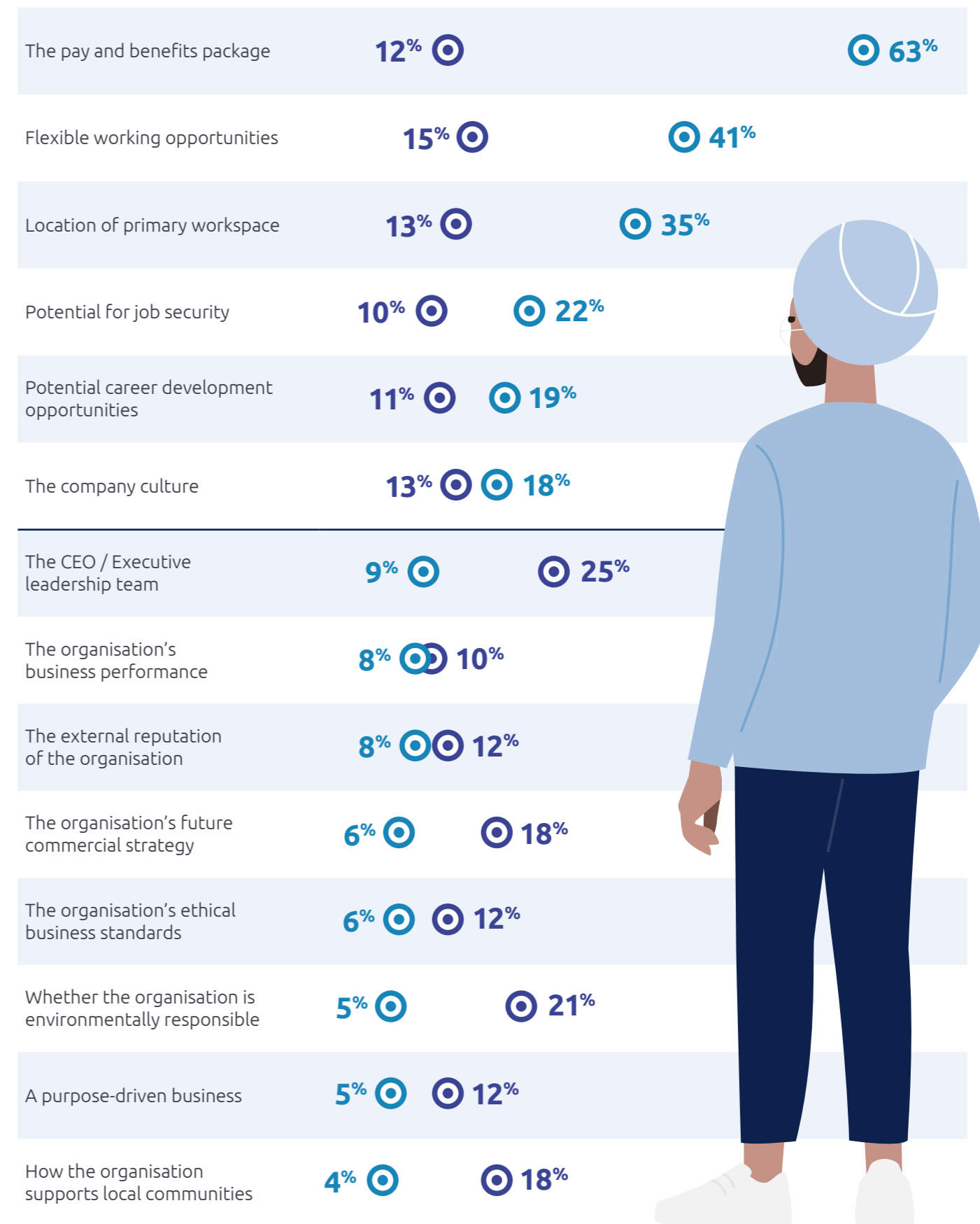
The importance of pay and benefits to potential candidates supports growing calls for all job adverts to include salaries. Doing so meets candidates' needs, and is likely to encourage more applicants. Not doing so risks perpetuating gender, ethnicity and disability pay gaps, as more room is allowed for unconscious bias and people's previous salaries to affect pay negotiations ([Reed.co.uk](https://www.reed.co.uk)).

The six factors that employees select as most important all relate to their individual experience of work. Below the line, this dynamic changes, moving away from the individual and towards the organisation itself – its people, performance and values.

While the percentages who are likely to be attracted by these things are relatively low, 6% of a UK workforce of 33 million is 2 million people. That's 2 million people who say that an organisation's business ethics are in the top three things they'd look at when considering a new place of work.

## Which of the following factors would be the two or three most and least important when considering a new job?

Key: Most important Least important



Source: 3,003 adults working for large organisations in the UK, surveyed online between 6-20 March 2023.

# The rules of attraction vary depending on who you ask

Interesting distinctions lie beneath the headlines, with certain groups much more likely than average to prize certain factors when considering a new employer.

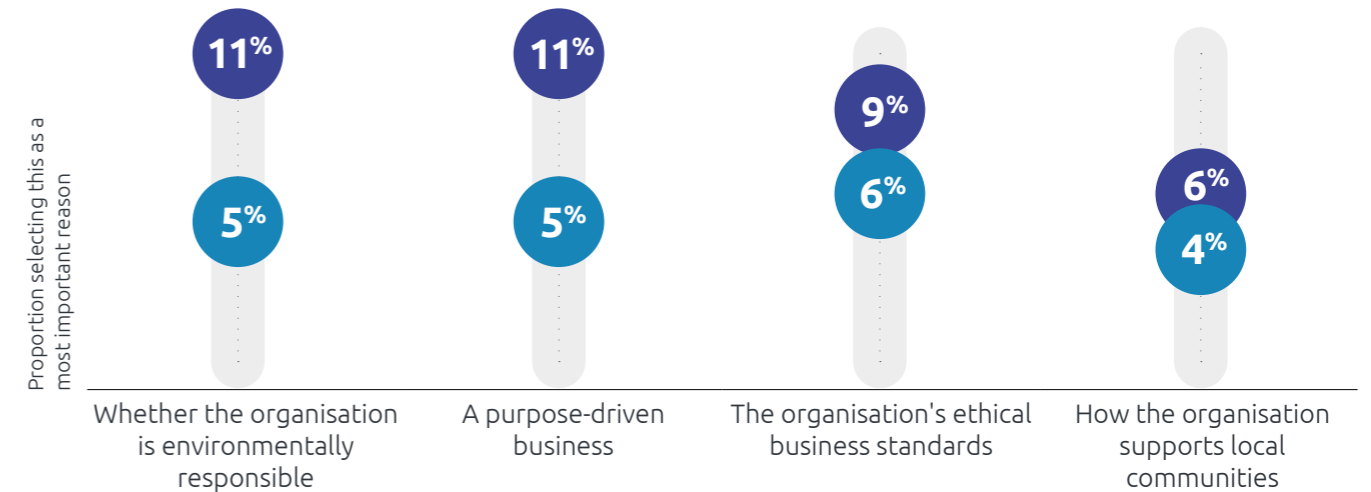
18–24 year olds are more likely to select environmental, social and governance (ESG) factors. Around one in ten (11%) say environmental responsibility is one of the top three things they're looking for in a prospective employer – more than twice the average (5%). The same is true for these younger employees' prioritisation of organisational purpose, and they're also more likely to look at a business' ethics and its support for local communities than the working population overall.

Data shows that flexible working opportunities become much more of a priority for employees in the likely parenting years, with the impact being more strongly pronounced among women. While men track consistently below women across most age groups, there is significant divergence at age 65 or over. It's possible that, at this age, women prioritise greater flexibility as they are more likely to take on additional caring responsibilities – of grandchildren, or elderly parents for example (ONS.gov.uk).

Those in the most senior positions are much more likely to look at business performance (21%) and the CEO/leadership team (21%) when considering a potential new employer. At this level, the former may impact on their remuneration – in the form of bonuses – while the latter are the people that they will likely be working with on a day-to-day basis. The importance of these factors generally increases with seniority, but they are still a top three consideration for a small number of the most junior employees.

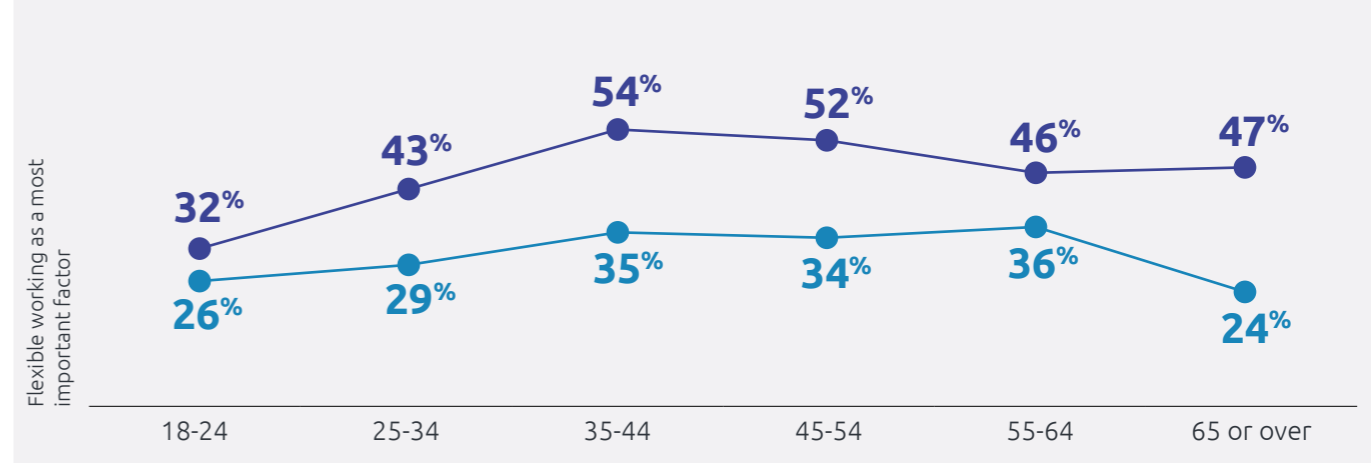
## Younger employees place more emphasis on ESG

Key: ● Overall ● 18-24



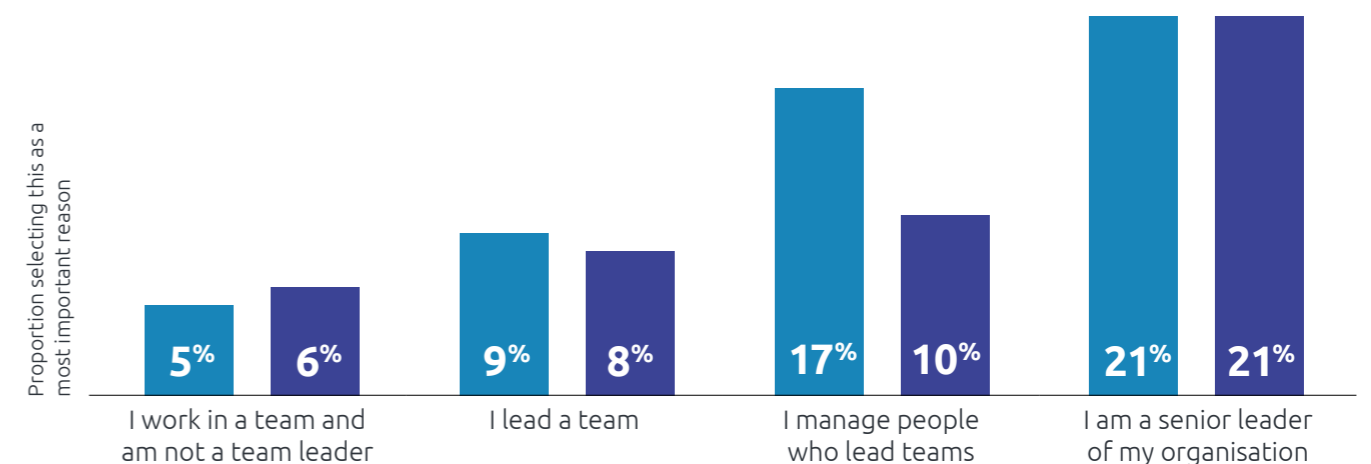
## Need for flexible working opportunities peaks in likely parenting years

Key: ● Men ● Women



## Business performance and the top leadership team are focuses for the most senior employees

Key: ■ The CEO / Executive leadership team ■ The organisation's business performance





# What happens next?

## Key things your organisation should be doing, based on these findings...



### To attract new people:

- Pay is the priority. Make sure that the roles you're seeking to recruit into are reviewed against industry benchmarks, and set the salary appropriately.
- Benefits are also part of the winning draw, so ensure that the overall benefits package is competitive.
- Include the salary, benefits and details of flexible working opportunities in all your job adverts.
- Consider developing case studies in which different employees talk about their experiences and how working for your organisation fits their needs, wants and interests.
- At interview stage, candidates want to see the depth of your organisation, so don't let the focus on pay, place and flexibility stop you communicating all the other factors that they may be looking for in a new employer. Ensure that they leave with a good understanding of what job security, career development, values and culture look like at your organisation.



### To keep your people:

- Regularly review your pay and benefits against others in your industry to make sure that they remain competitive – what might have seemed good and attractive on day one may feel derisory a year or two down the line.
- Introduce a regular drumbeat of communications about the benefits available to employees. Use case studies and user-generated content to ensure that the whole range of benefits is communicated effectively internally, so people know what's available and know how to make use of it.
- Nail your approach to reward and recognition so people feel valued. Consider regular visible 'thank yous' on your internal communications channels and look at introducing a peer-to-peer recognition scheme to build a culture of appreciation.
- Review any leader and manager communications channels to ensure they are being regularly provided with:
  - the tools and skills to make their people feel valued.
  - any updates and campaigns in relation to employee benefits.
  - the knowledge and confidence to support their team's overall development and progression.
  - an understanding of what your organisations' values mean in practice – any gap between what you say your culture should be and their behaviours will be very damaging.



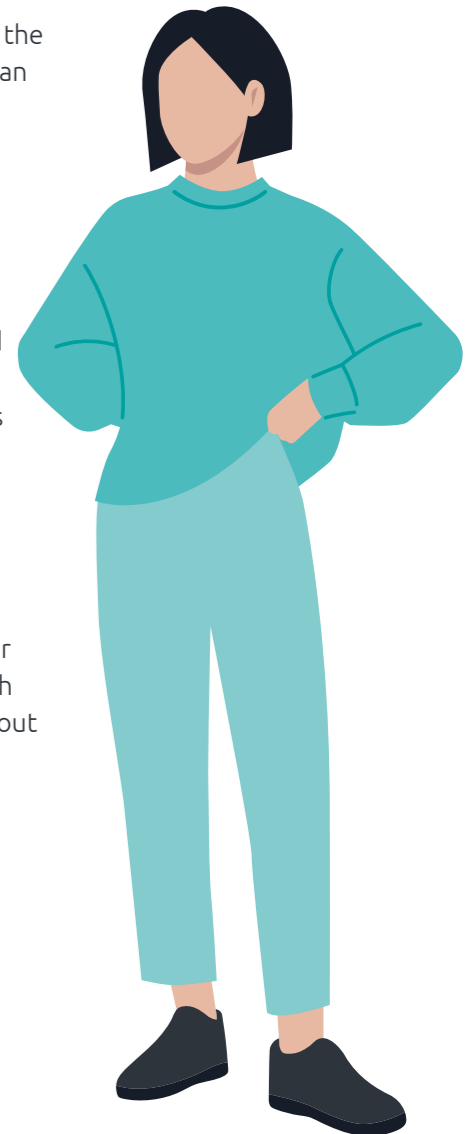
## ...and three things to remember

- 1 Keep an eye on your EVP**

Respect all the elements that make up a strong employee value proposition, not just the heavy hitters like pay. Some may be the most important to a smaller numbers of employees, but no doubt feature on the extended wishlists of many others. The more of these an organisation can check, the more likely it is to be able to attract, recruit and keep the best talent.
- 2 It's all about the journey**

The most successful organisations think deeply about the full range of experience through the employee journey, watch for future trends, and react quickly to the changing needs and expectations of employees. Your purpose, sustainability strategy and community engagement plans matter, especially to your younger employees.
- 3 You've got to let them know**

Your people need to know about all of these things in order for them to have a positive impact on how employees feel about working for your organisation. So, review your communications strategy, and engage with your people on the whole range of topics that make them feel great about working for your organisation.



The research behind this report was conducted by Ipsos Karian and Box on behalf of the IoIC.

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