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EFFECTIVE WORKFORCE REPORTING

Improving people
data for business
leaders

Survey report
February 2023

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The CIPD is the professional body for HR and people development. The registered charity champions better work and working lives and has been setting the benchmark for excellence in people and organisation development for more than 100 years. It has almost 160,000 members across the world, provides thought leadership through independent research on the world of work, and offers professional training and accreditation for those working in HR and learning and development.

Survey report

Effective workforce reporting: Improving people data for business leaders

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Acknowledgements

The CIPD would like to thank all the HR and business leaders who took part in this survey and in our roundtable discussions as part of this work. Their contributions bring the research to life.

We would also like to thank Sophy Hinchcliffe and Sebastian Grandon-White at YouGov for their support throughout this research project. And finally, a thank you to CIPD colleagues and teams who supported and contributed to this work in some manner, especially to Susannah Haan, Hayfa Mohdzaini and Heather Bond for their input and perspective from other CIPD-related research.

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Publication information

CIPD. (2023) *Effective workforce reporting: Improving people data for business leaders*. London: Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development.

1 Introduction

There is a strong consensus that people are any organisation's most important asset. Yet too often this sentiment is not matched by business leaders' decisions on how they invest in, manage and develop their workforces.

The gap between rhetoric and action matters. In the UK, there is a longstanding decline in company investment in training, poor productivity growth and a lack of diversity in too many firms. Recent CIPD [research](#) shows that too few organisations use strategic workforce planning to understand their current and future skills needs, which is restricting their ability to tackle rising skills and labour shortages.

Organisations are unlikely to perform well over the long term unless decisions taken at executive management and board level are informed by an in-depth understanding of the value of their people, as well as the potential risks associated with their workforce. This is particularly the case as companies seek to become more environmentally sustainable. Companies will need to understand the skills needs of their workforce and provide training and development to ensure that new and green technology can be effectively utilised as it is adopted. Changes will be required to job design and workers will need to have clear direction – embedded through appraisals and performance management systems – to work in new ways.

The need to create more sustainable businesses in the transition to net zero has also led to a stronger focus from policy-makers and investors on how organisations report externally on key workforce issues, which further highlights the growing requirement for good-quality people data and analytics.

Consequently, it is more important than ever to understand how organisations currently value and use people data to inform decisions on business and workforce investment and identify areas for improvement.

This report explores how business and HR leaders use people data and reporting, and the importance they place on this. Drawing on a survey of 1,500 UK business and HR leaders, as well as roundtables and interviews with senior executives, it also considers how improving the quality of workforce data and insights could provide support to organisations in becoming more responsible and sustainable over the long term.

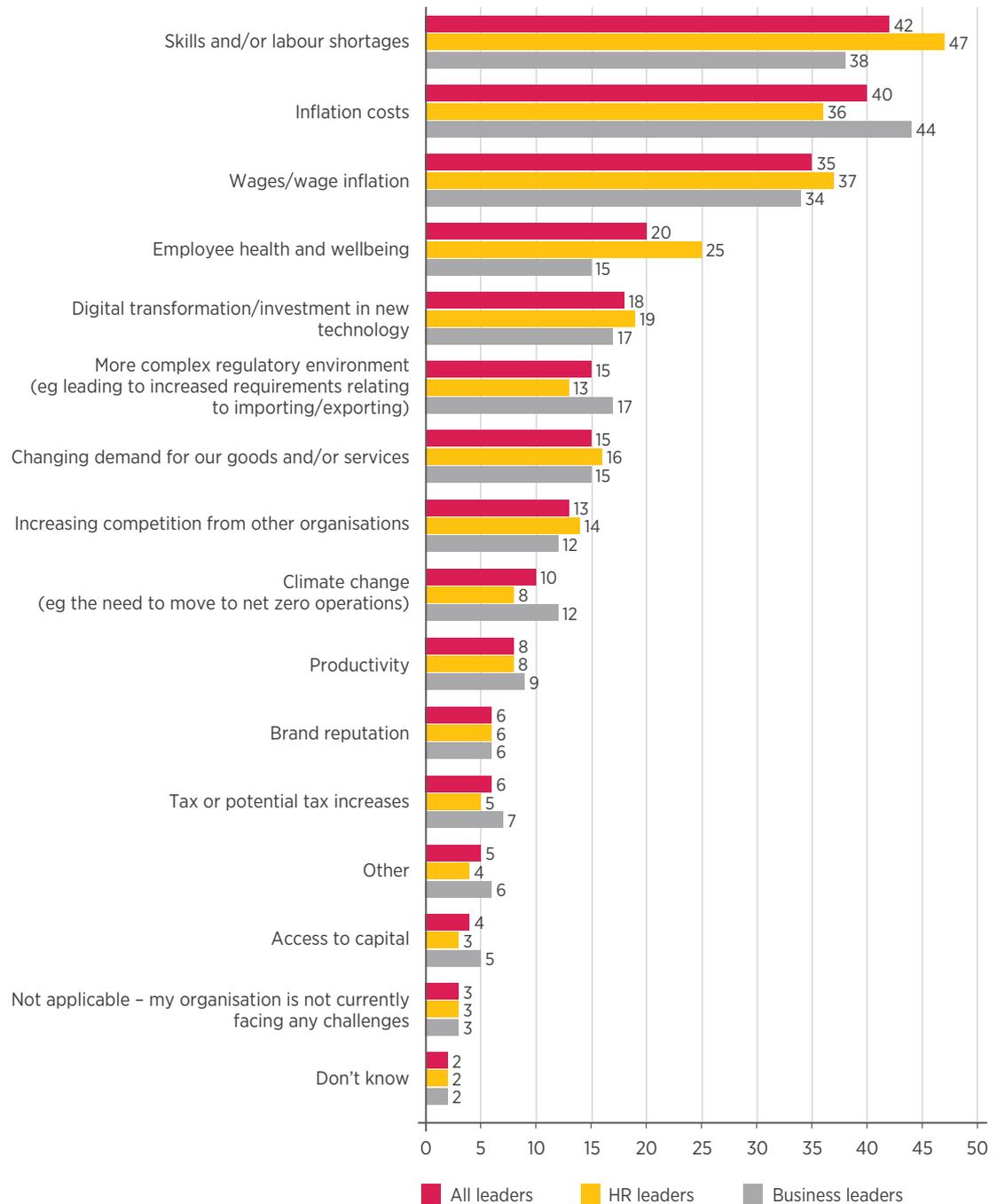
2 Top organisational challenges for leaders

Given the current economic and labour market context, our survey of 1,500 UK HR leaders and non-HR business leaders unsurprisingly found that the biggest issues facing organisations were related to inflation, recruitment, retention and pay/reward. Four in 10 (42%) leaders said skills and/or labour shortages were one of the main challenges facing their business, while a similar percentage (40%) cited inflation in the general cost base and 35% specified wage inflation.

Despite the challenges facing businesses in relation to climate change, hybrid working and productivity, only 18% listed digital transformation as a key business issue and only

8% mentioned productivity (although the ability to be productive is, of course, closely linked to skills and labour availability and investment in new technology). Only 10% of respondents regarded climate change and the need to move to net zero operations as a 'top three' business issue (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Skills and labour shortage was the main challenge cited by UK business leaders
The top challenges currently facing organisations (% of respondents)



Base: all leaders: n=1,560; HR leaders: n=783; business leaders: n=777.

Question: What are the main challenges currently facing your organisation?

Our survey shows that leaders' views on organisational challenges differ significantly between sectors. For example, respondents from the manufacturing sector were more likely to identify inflation (49%), a more complex regulatory environment (21%) and climate change (17%) as key challenges. This is not surprising given the reliance of this sector on long and complex global supply chains.

In contrast, by far the biggest challenge reported by healthcare sector respondents was addressing skill and labour shortages, with 64% of respondents in this sector citing this as a top three issue. Employee health and wellbeing was also identified as a key organisational challenge for healthcare respondents (37%), those from the education sector (38%) and those from the public administration sector, including central government and the fire and police services (29%).

Overall, the survey finds little difference between the views of business and HR leaders on the big challenges facing their organisation, except on a few particular issues. For example, business leaders are more likely to identify inflation, while HR leaders place greater emphasis on skills and labour shortages.

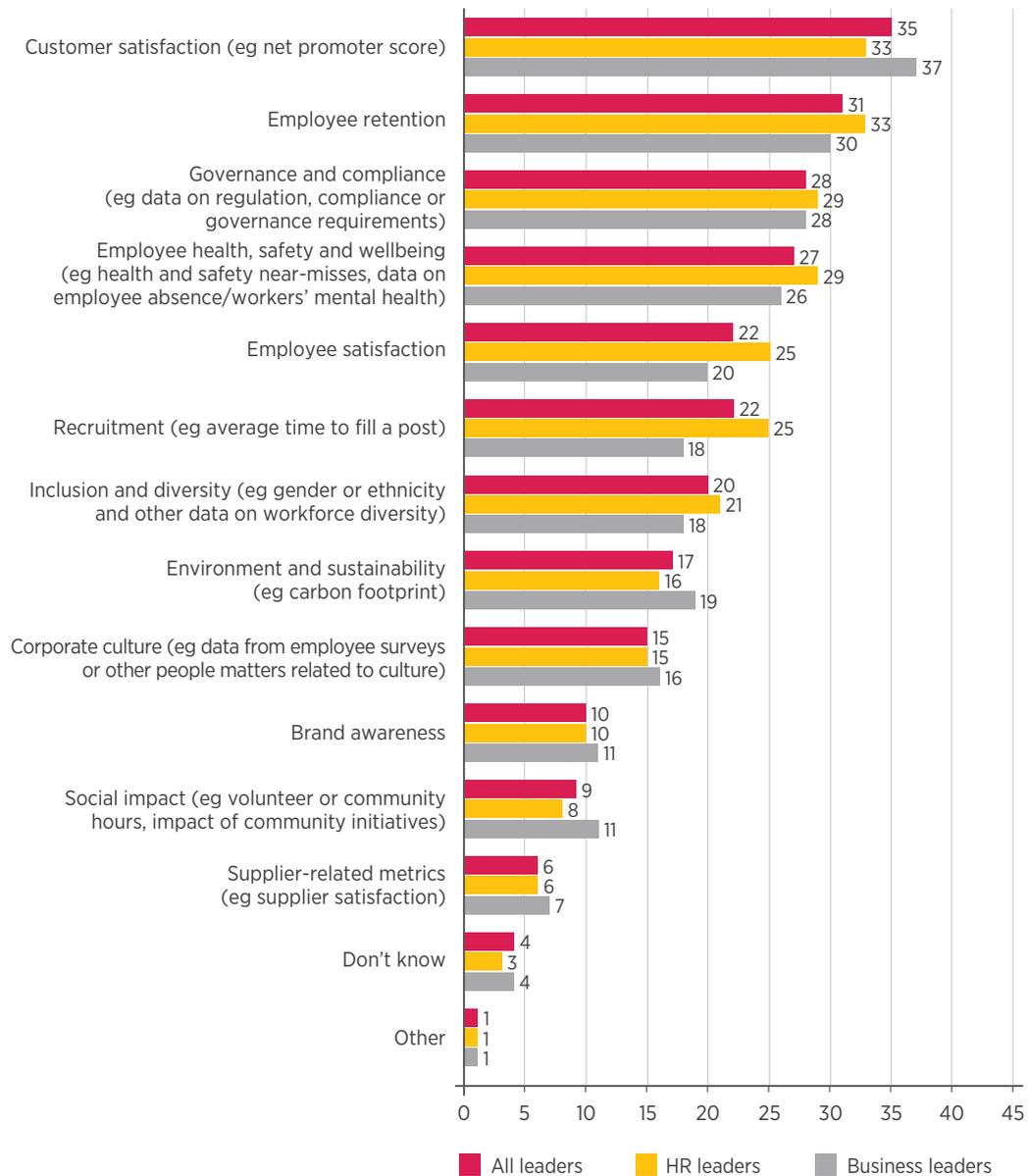
3 Top non-financial measures of performance

The themes above are reflected in the non-financial metrics that leaders consider most important to review on a regular basis (see Figure 2). When asked to list up to three non-financial metrics most significant for their business, over a third (35%) said customer net promoter score, 31% listed employee retention, and 28% cited metrics relating to governance and compliance. Concerningly, issues such as inclusion and diversity, environment and sustainability, and corporate culture are lagging behind.

Again, there are some significant sector variations. Private sector respondents were most likely to identify customer satisfaction as a top three measure to track (43%), with healthcare and public administration respondents least likely to mention this (both 26%). A greater proportion of healthcare leaders reported that recruitment (36%) and retention (45%) were key measures to track. Manufacturing (36%) and healthcare leaders (39%) were more concerned with tracking employee health and wellbeing, reflecting the high proportion of safety-critical activities of organisations in these sectors.

Figure 2: Leaders value customer satisfaction and employee retention as the most important non-financial metrics to track

Leaders' views on the most important non-financial measures for their organisation to track (% of respondents)



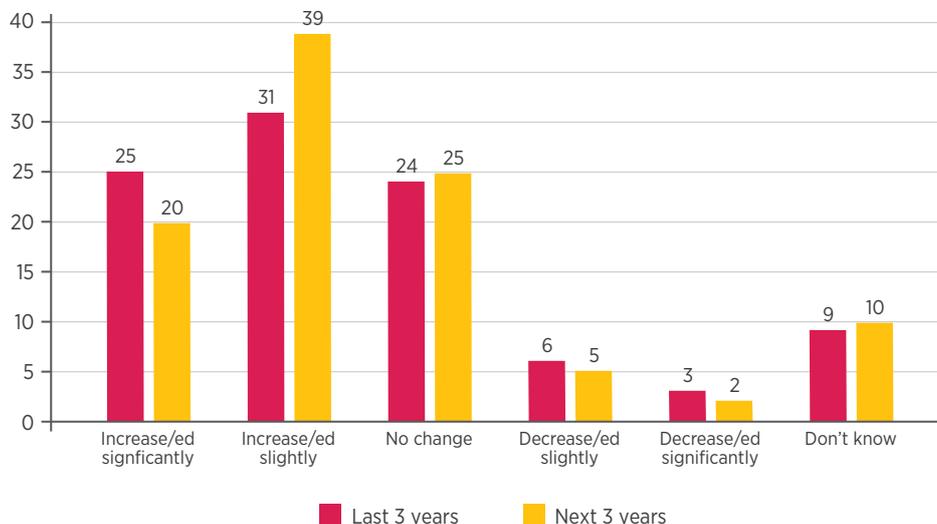
Base: all leaders: n=1,560; HR leaders: n=783; business leaders: n=777.

Question: To the best of your knowledge, what non-financial measures of performance are most important for your organisation to track?

The survey results indicate that the importance of such non-financial measures of organisational performance has been gradually growing and is set to increase further. Comparing the next three years with the last three years in Figure 3, more respondents expect the importance of non-financial measures to rise (net 58% versus 56%), while fewer expect them to decrease (net 7% versus 9%).

Figure 3: The majority of business leaders expect the significance of non-financial measures to increase over the next three years

Business leaders' views on the changing importance of non-financial measures of performance over the last three years and the next three years (% of respondents)



Base: all leaders: n=1,560.

Questions: When thinking about the non-financial measures your organisation's management team focuses on, how, if at all, has the significance of these measures changed over the last three years?

How, if at all, do you anticipate the significance of non-financial measures to change at your organisation over the next three years?

(Note: Figures may differ or not add up to 100% due to rounding.)

Increasing focus by regulators and standard-setters on human capital/workforce reporting

The growing recognition that effective people reporting is central to the development of responsible and sustainable business practices underpins moves by regulators and standard-setters to require greater external disclosure of human capital or workforce matters.

For example, the US Securities and Exchange Commission has introduced new human capital disclosure requirements designed to encourage improved disclosure of material workforce issues.

The European Union has produced draft European Sustainability Reporting Standards, which are likely to have quite specific and prescriptive workforce reporting requirements for companies operating in Europe and for firms doing business with European companies in the future.

A growing number of International Human Resource Management Standards (ISOs) exist, including ISO 30414 - Human Resource Management - Human Capital Reporting.

Human capital disclosure requirements are also likely to be called out in the development of new international sustainability standards being developed by the International Sustainability Standards Board, which the UK government has pledged to support.

4 Top people priorities and opportunities

As mentioned above, our survey found that recruitment and retention are the people issues most front of mind for leaders when thinking about the overall challenges facing their organisation. The survey also drilled down to explore leaders' views on their key *people* challenges in more detail (see Figure 4).

More than half (53%) said that recruiting people with the skills they need was their top people issue, and 47% said that retaining people with skills the organisation needs is a priority for the next three years. This is reflected in the [CIPD's Labour Market Outlook](#), which finds that 46% of recruiting employers are struggling with hard-to-fill vacancies.

More than a third see retention as the biggest opportunity for improving organisational performance. Encouraging retention is seen as a bigger opportunity area for improving performance than recruitment, suggesting that many leaders recognise the importance of home-grown talent and internal training and promotion. Again, this is reflected in the latest [Labour Market Outlook](#), which finds that the most common employer response to hiring difficulties is upskilling existing staff (cited by 47% of employers).

It is surprising given the recognition that retention is an organisational priority that the survey did not find a stronger commitment to developing and training the existing workforce. Only 15% picked this as a top people priority, although 27% identified it as one of the biggest opportunities for improving organisational performance, suggesting potential plans, or at least hopes, for future investment in this area. (However, there are, of course, other ways beyond training and development to retain people, including offering above-market pay and benefits, and embracing other dimensions of [good work](#).)

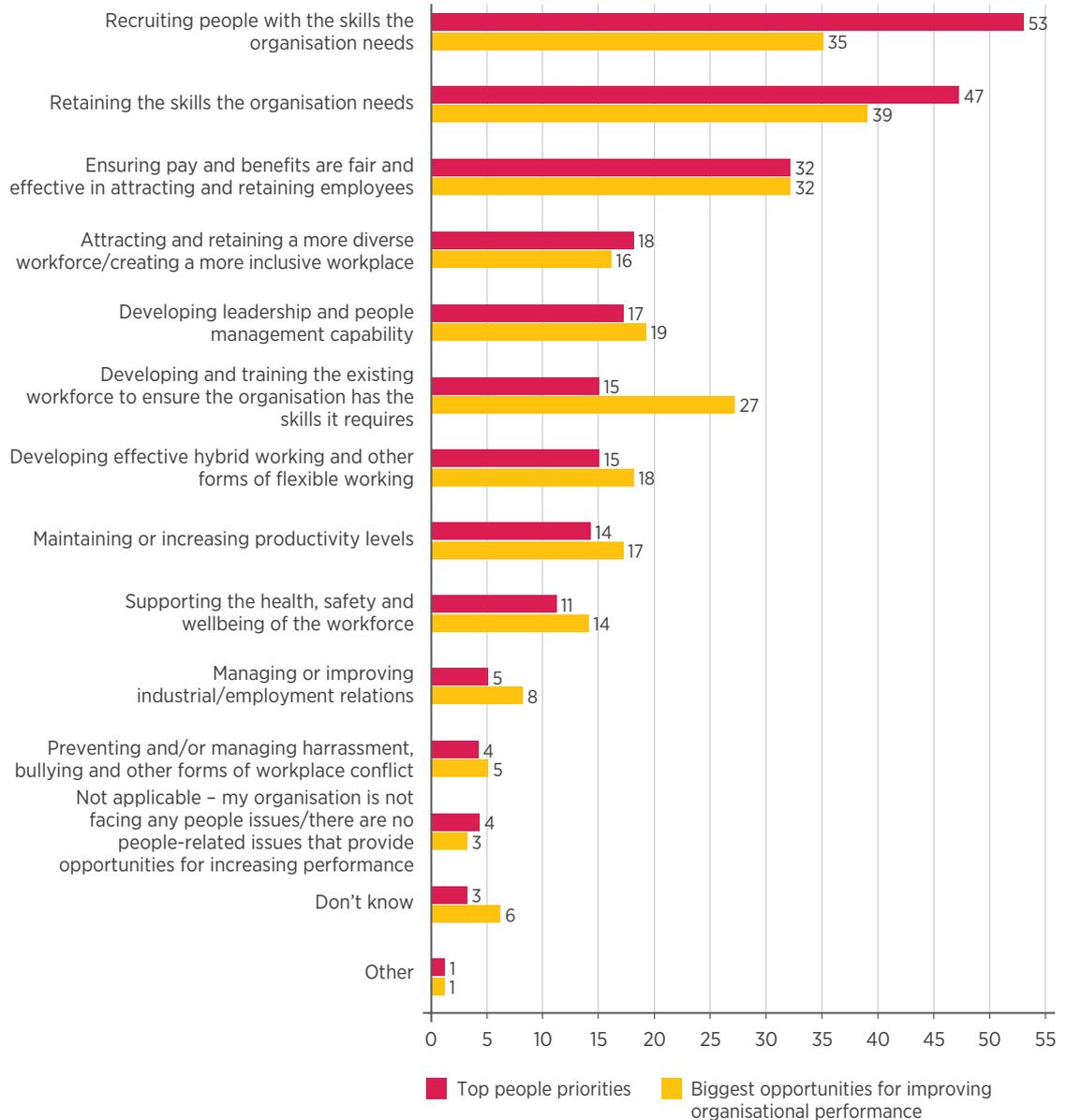
A third of leaders (32%) also cited the importance of ensuring pay and benefits are fair, effective and attractive as a key risk. This is in part due to the ongoing cost-of-living crisis facing businesses, alongside overarching concerns about wage inflation and the short-, medium- and long-term impact this will have on business profitability.

It could be argued that there is a risk that persistent challenges over recruitment and pay could crowd out other equally critical and strategic people issues, such as wellbeing, culture and productivity. Only 14% see wellbeing and health and safety as an opportunity for their organisation to improve performance, and only 14% see issues around productivity as a key risk.

Our HR leaders highlighted that part of the role of the people profession is to educate other leaders on the importance of focusing on people matters. It was seen as important to elevate issues that matter at the time, building the case for a deeper dive into specific areas that are most relevant, while understanding the need to take a holistic 'systems-thinking' approach to people strategy.

Figure 4: Leaders identified retaining people with the right skills as their biggest opportunity for improving organisational performance

Leaders' views on current top people priorities and the biggest people-related opportunities for improving organisational performance (% of respondents)



Base: all leaders: n=1,560.

Questions: What are the top people issues, if any, that your organisation is currently facing?

Thinking about the UK's employment landscape as a whole, what, if any, are the biggest opportunities for improving organisational performance?

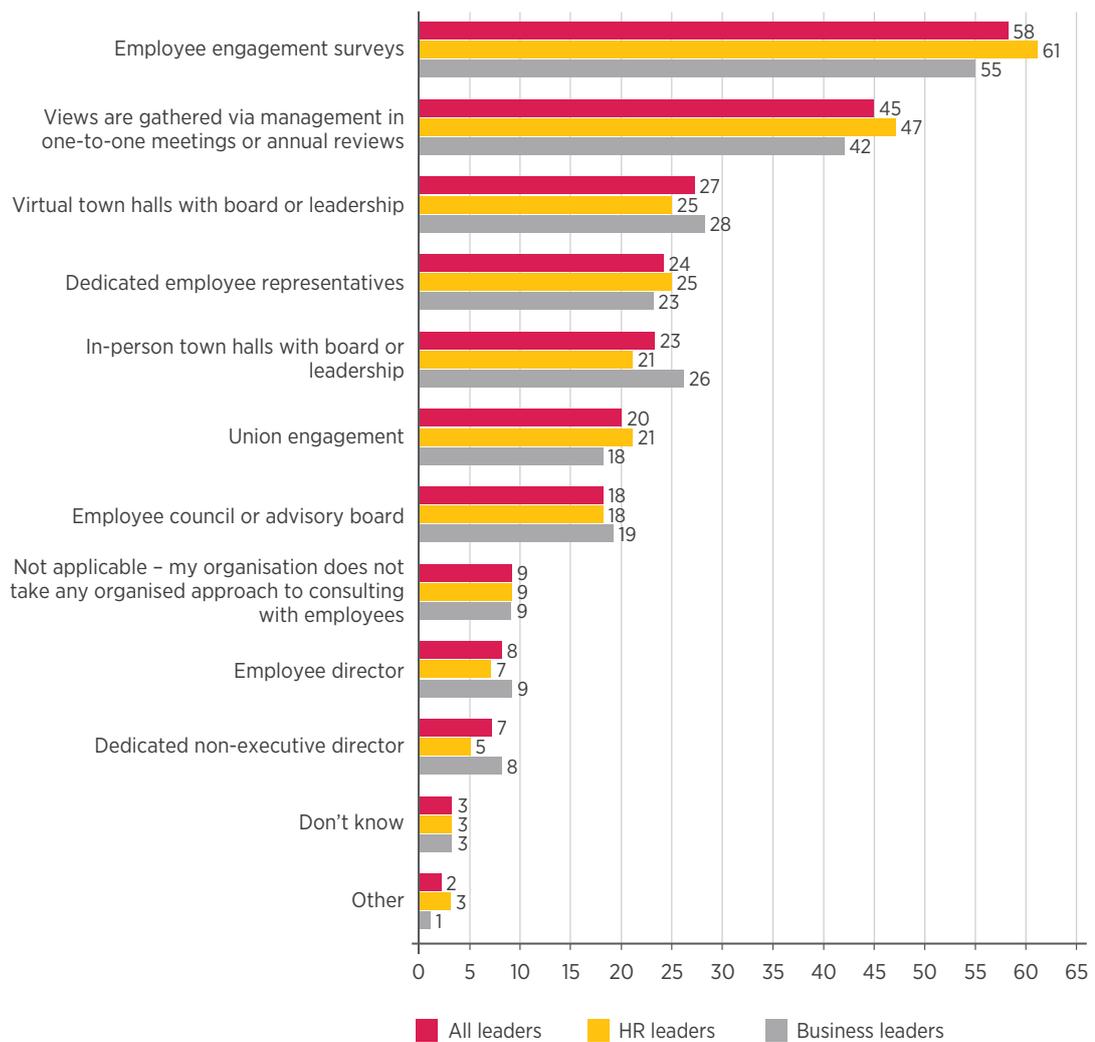
5 Current workforce reporting practices

How is people information gathered?

How an organisation listens to and consults with its employees is a core plank of reporting people matters. This paints a picture of what it feels like to work in an organisation or, as one chief people officer described it, “the general people health of the business”.

We found employee engagement surveys to be the most common way of tapping into employee voice, as cited by 58% of leaders (see Figure 5). This is followed by views gathered through management one-to-ones or in annual reviews (45%). Other methods are less common, although between a fifth to a quarter of leaders mentioned town halls, dedicated employee representatives and union engagement.

Figure 5: Employee engagement surveys are the most common method of recording employee voice
The approaches organisations use for listening and consulting with employees (% of respondents)



Base: all leaders: n=1,560; HR leaders: n=783; business leaders: n=777.

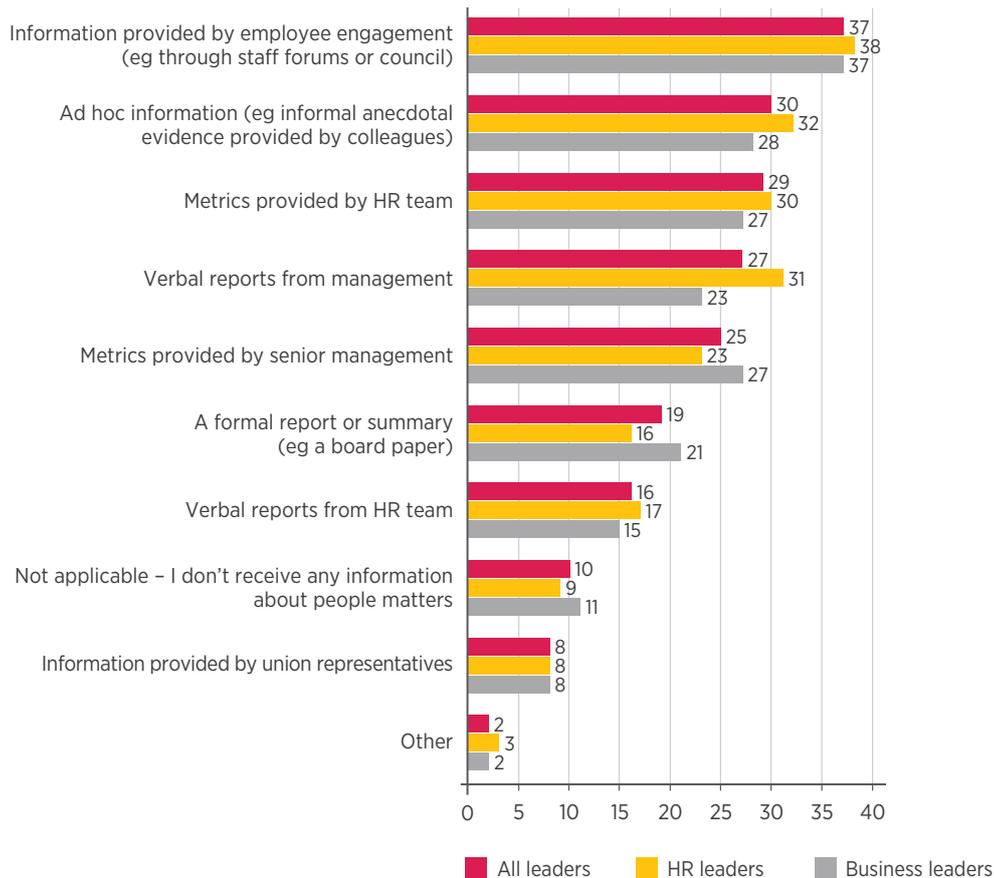
Question: What approaches, if any, does your organisation take for listening to and consulting with employees?

How do leaders receive people information?

A popular way to gain information on people matters is through employee engagement mechanisms such as staff forums, cited by 37% of respondents (see Figure 6). Almost three in 10 (29%) said they get metrics from their HR team, and a similar number (30%) rely on ad hoc, informal or anecdotal information.

Figure 6: Leaders most commonly receive information about people matters through employee engagement mechanisms, such as staff forums

How business and HR leaders receive information about people matters in their organisation (% of respondents)



Base: all leaders: n=1,560; HR leaders: n=783; business leaders: n=777.

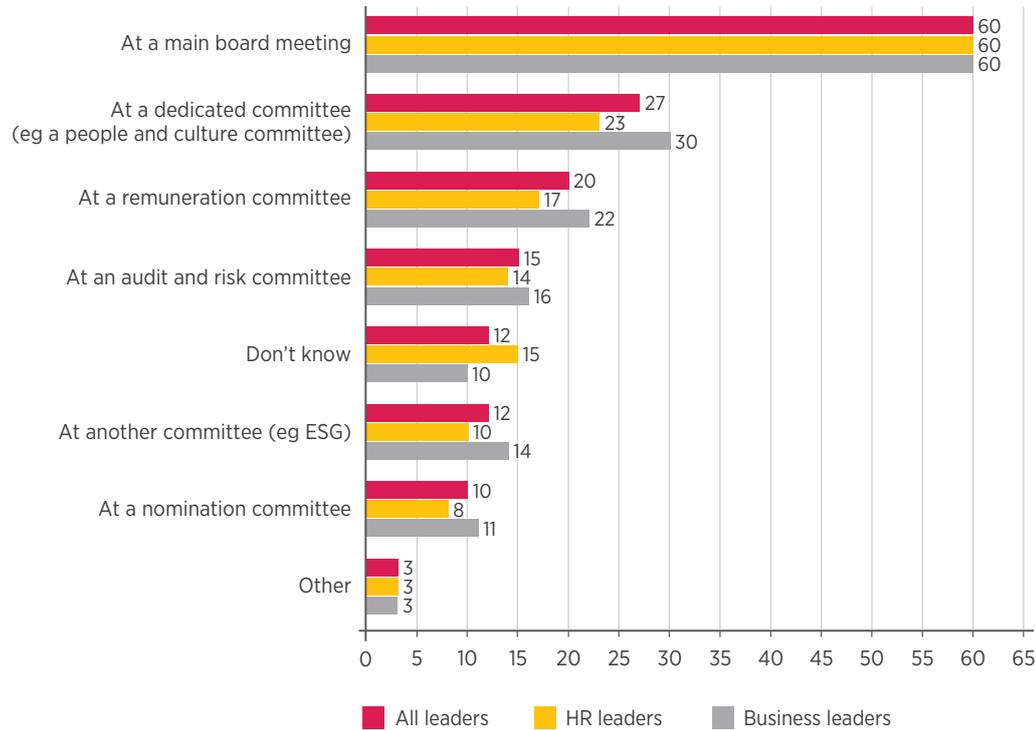
Question: How, if at all, do you receive information about people matters within your organisation?

How do boards discuss and review people information?

In terms of how often people matters are discussed or reviewed at board level, only 12% of survey respondents said these were discussed at every meeting, although 23% said they were often discussed and 23% said they were sometimes discussed.

Most (60%) said people matters were discussed at the main board, while 27% said their organisation had a dedicated committee (such as a people and culture committee). A further 20% said that people matters were discussed at a remuneration committee (RemCo) meeting (see Figure 7).

Figure 7: Most leaders reported that people matters were discussed at the main board meeting
Where organisations' boards typically discuss people matters (% of respondents)



Base: all leaders: n=1,560; HR leaders: n=783; business leaders: n=777.
 Question: Where does your organisation's board discuss people matters?

During our discussions with HR leaders, some suggested that having a separate people committee is a more useful way to review actions and outcomes, and that the creation of a dedicated committee can demonstrate a commitment to people matters. However, others felt that delegating this below the level of the main board can risk it being downgraded in importance. One large financial services organisation, for example, has a different board sponsor for each strategic area of people matters (such as diversity and inclusion), which helps to ensure that the issue is considered within the discussion at board level.

It was agreed that a quarterly deep dive on people issues should be a minimum for boards, but that ideally it would be covered in some way at every meeting, given the materiality of people matters to strategy and risk. Some reflected that people data is often either demanded at short notice (sometimes in response to a crisis) or used only in annual planning or budgeting cycles, meaning people teams are “missing out on providing information to make solid management decisions”:

“In our senior leadership team meetings, we’ll spend 30 to 45 minutes every week digging into sales data, trying to understand what’s going on and the actions we need to take. If we could elevate some of our HR metrics to that level of discussion, that would be the holy grail.” (Chief people officer)

“It’s more push than pull [when it comes to people data]. I don’t think the organisation pulls on this data as much as it could. There’s not a rhythm to looking at our people data in the same way that we review commercials.” (Chief people officer)

Is there a mismatch between data gathered and data reviewed?

Respondents reported a focus on recruitment and retention at leadership level – most likely due to the current challenging economic environment and labour market.

A concerning but recurring theme in our research findings was the significant gap between the data that is collected and that which is reviewed by the HR director or senior leaders. This was reflected both in the survey responses and in our conversations with HR leaders, many of whom expressed concern that a lot of data was being collected without a clear aim or outcome, and that the information was not being used for business decision-making (see Figure 8).

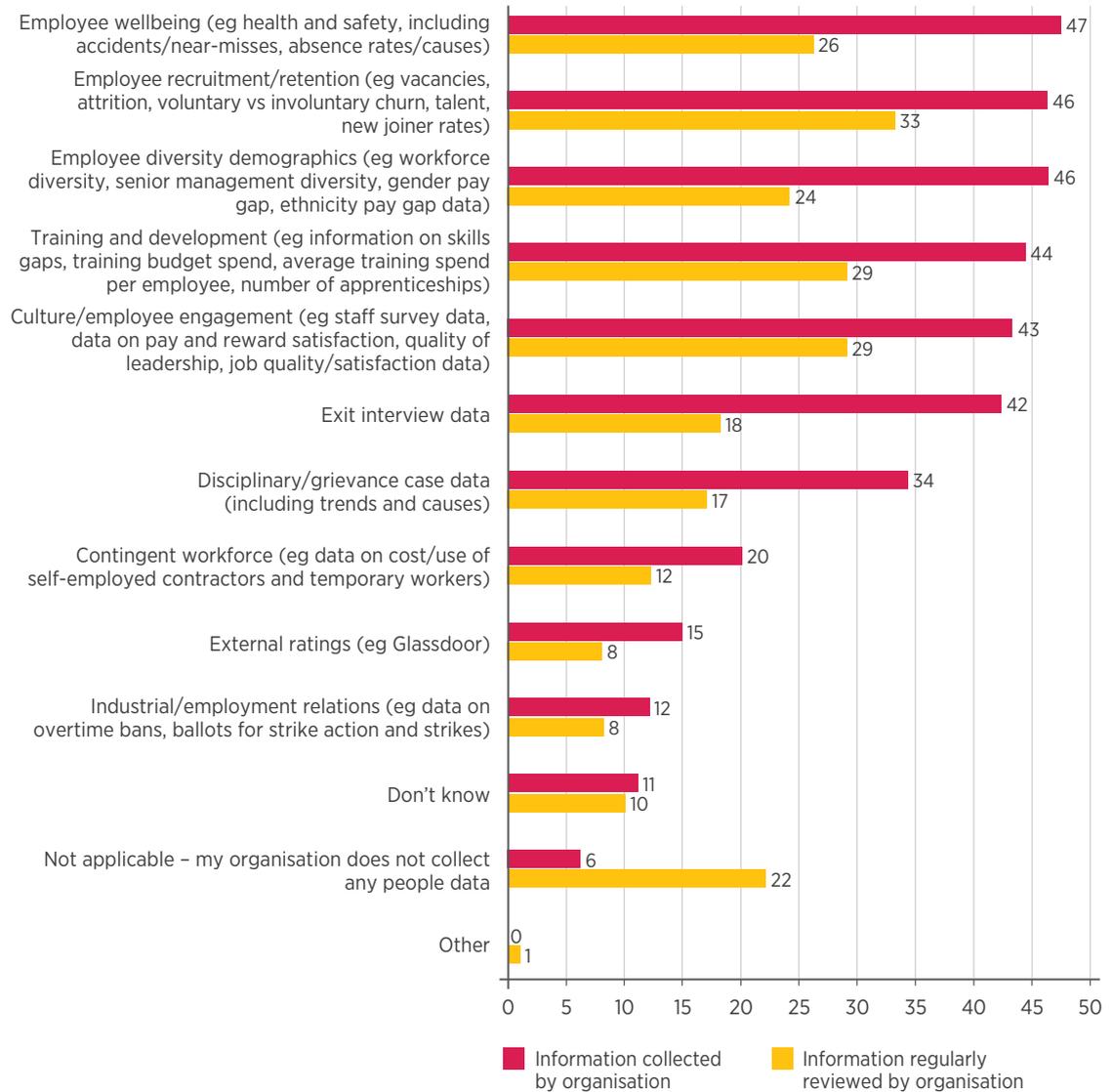
For example, while 42% of business leaders and senior decision-makers in our survey said their organisation collected exit interview data, only 18% said this data was actually reviewed by the senior leadership team. While 47% said they collect information on wellbeing, only 26% said this is reviewed. It's a similar story with culture/engagement data, which is collected by 43% of organisations, but only regularly reviewed by 29% of leadership teams. Similarly, about half of respondents say their organisation collects information on employee diversity but only around a quarter of business leaders say they review this data regularly.

Just a fifth of organisations (20%) collect data on their contingent workforce, such as temporary workers and the use of self-employed contractors, and just 12% of respondents say this information is regularly reviewed, which is slightly concerning given the cost and risks often associated with this section of the workforce.

Not surprisingly, business leaders from larger organisations were both more likely to collect information across all the categories and to say they review this information regularly, than those in smaller organisations. However, even among employers of 1,000 or more employees, there are still significant gaps in the workforce data which is collected and reviewed.

For example, 57% of business leaders from large organisations said their organisation collects data on employee diversity, while just 26% said they review this information regularly. Similarly, about half of business leaders in large organisations said their organisation collects data on employee recruitment and retention (52%) and employee health and wellbeing (52%), but just 38% regularly review data on recruitment and retention and just 29% do so for health and wellbeing.

Figure 8: There is a significant gap between data collected and data reviewed by leaders
The types of people metrics and data organisations collected and the data reviewed (% of respondents)



Base: all business leaders: n=777.

Questions: To the best of your knowledge, what types of people metrics and data, if any, does your organisation collect?

What types of people metrics and data, if any, does your organisation's senior leadership regularly review (at least every six months)?

HR leader perceptions of collecting, presenting and reviewing information

In our roundtable conversations, several HR leaders reflected on the disconnect between the amount of data that is collected and reported on by the HR team, in contrast to the people information that other leaders and board members are engaging with and using to make business decisions.

HR leaders admitted feeling data was being collected “for the sake of it”, often without focused aims (perhaps related to the profession’s lack of confidence in its credibility around data and analytics). This risks creating “an industry in itself” around data and reporting, with team members “drowning in data” but not resulting in many impactful or influential outcomes.

“We collect so much and are probably only reviewing two-thirds of it. It begs the question: ‘Is this what the business needs? Will this make the difference?’”
(HR director)

“I don’t know if anyone reads the reports. We got to a point where we put some gobbledygook into the system to test whether anyone had actually read it.”
(Chief people officer)

In most organisations we spoke to, the board is not setting the agenda for what people data it wants to see. It is not coming armed with a wish-list of metrics. Instead, it is looking to HR leaders to make sense of what information – numbers and narrative – is the most meaningful.

As one leader pointed out, knowing what is meaningful is about making sure the information is relevant to the current priorities of the organisation and the external context, elevating the issues that are business-critical, downshifting focus on more business-as-usual information, and resisting the temptation to report on everything, every time. The curation of what is meaningful is an area where external and internal reporting can differ. It is down to the HR director to be the curator.

“It’s our job to adjust what data we are focusing on as a business. There might be a point in time where the biggest issue is around attrition, but six months later you see a spike in grievances. Your ‘hygiene factor’ dashboards might not be looked at that much, but our job is to point out where the issues are, elevate those issues and have deep, detailed discussions to understand what is going on and how to address it.”
(HR director)

“We’ve become a bit of a data machine. It’s become routine: ‘We collect these things and this is the scorecard’... Actually, it’s our job to be saying: ‘That stuff is alright at the moment. What we need to look at is talent or diversity or employee relations or whatever because we’ve got a spike, and this is the impact of that on our business’s ability to be successful.’” (People data expert)

6 Barriers to better-quality workforce reporting and discussion

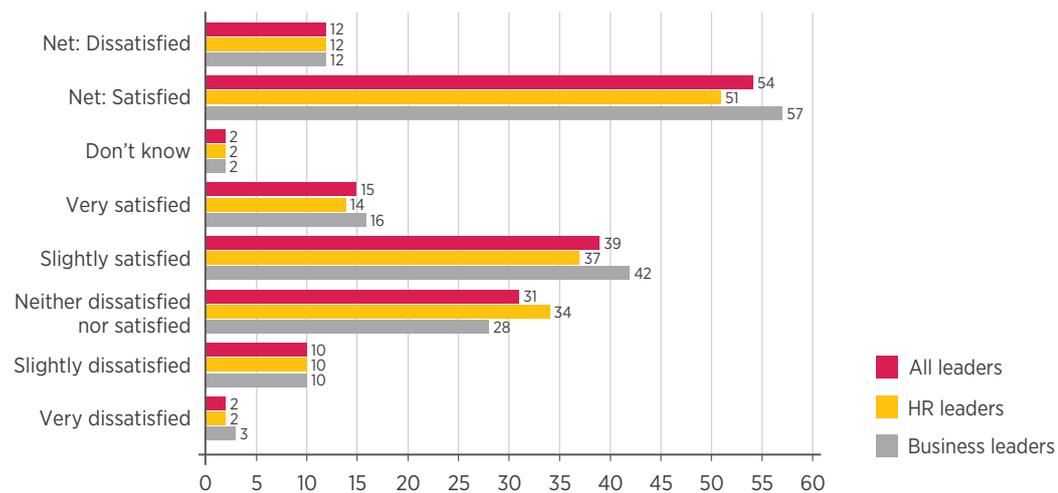
Our research highlighted a concern about the quality of insight that leaders both ask for and receive around people matters in organisations. We found mixed responses.

More than half (54%) of the leaders surveyed said they are satisfied or very satisfied with the information they get about people matters, although only 40% are positive specifically about the data they receive.

This is an area where HR leaders and senior leaders in other areas differ slightly: non-HR leaders are more positive about the quality of people information than the HR leaders themselves. While 54% overall are positive about the information they receive about people matters, this reflects 58% of senior leaders and 51% of HR leaders (see Figure 9).

Figure 9: Non-HR leaders are more positive about the quality of people information and data received than HR leaders

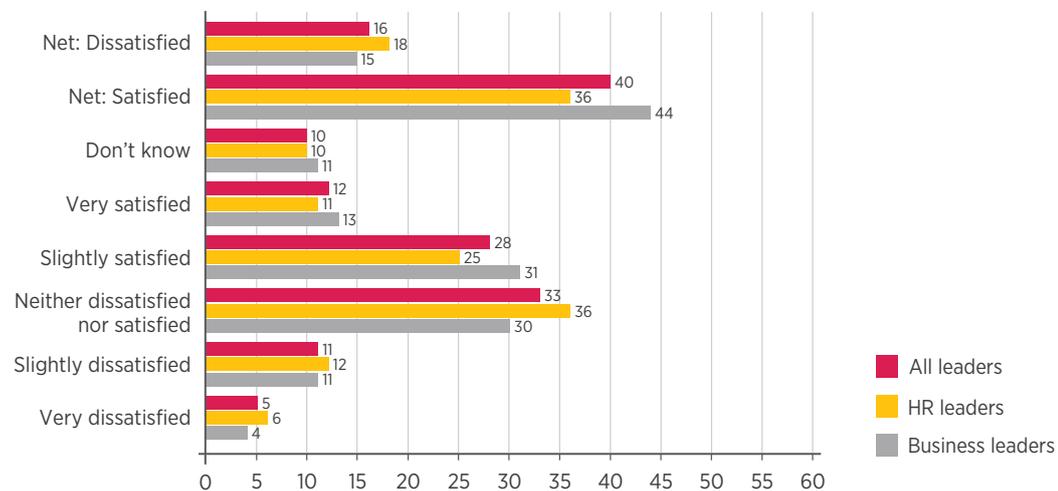
Satisfaction levels about people information received (% of respondents)



Base: all: n=1,560; HR leaders: 783; business leaders: n=777.

Question: How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the information you currently receive about people matters within your organisation?

Satisfaction levels about people metrics and data received (% of respondents)



Base: all: n=1,560; HR leaders: 783; business leaders: n=777.

Question: Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the people metrics and data you receive within your organisation?

The survey also provides some indications of why some leaders are not satisfied with the people metrics they receive or how the impact of this data could be enhanced. The most commonly cited concerns link to lack of context or explanation for the information presented and that the data is too narrow rather than holistic (see Figure 10), with leaders saying they don't get the full picture (30%) and it not being clear how data connects to organisational priorities (22%).

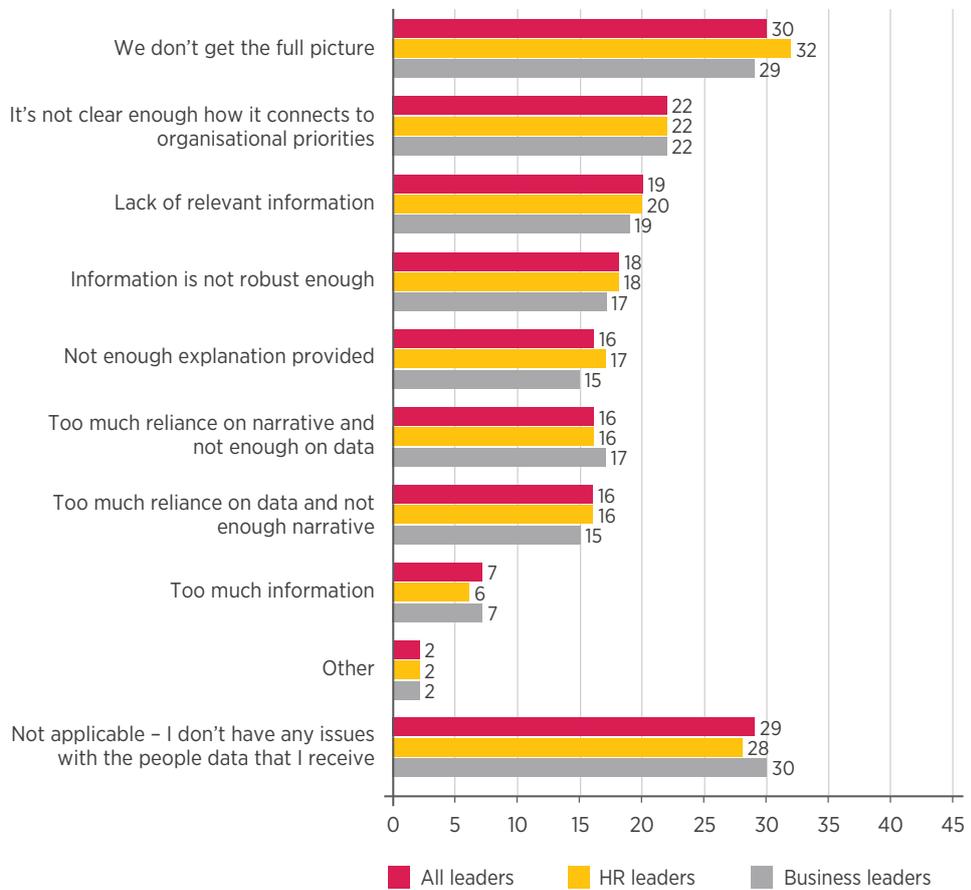
This could reflect the fact that different areas of people management and development are connected and interdependent. For example, information on health and safety needs to include data on causes of absence, including work-related stress, as stress is linked to a higher risk of conflict, mistakes and accidents, and is an indicator of organisational culture.

Similarly, recruitment information would need to be presented alongside retention data – internal promotions or moves, and an understanding of why people are leaving – if it is to be used meaningfully to improve talent acquisition and management outcomes. With any people data, it is important to create a narrative that highlights the connections between different pieces of information and their significance to business priorities and strategy.

It is the role of the HR leader to clearly articulate this narrative and make the connection, translating people matters into business language and showing the link to organisational priorities, rather than simply producing the data. As one people data expert put it, it is incumbent on HR leaders to be 'systems thinkers', understanding the interconnectedness of people issues organisation-wide, rather than viewing things in isolation. Leaders may need to be educated, as this expert put it, to understand that "another dashboard is not the answer".

"Much of our job is to help educate... just like a finance person will educate you on which numbers are connected; for example: 'If you do this, you get this.' ... We should be saying: 'If we haven't got these skills in this area, we're not going to be able to do these things in our strategy.' That is our job: the meaningful data that impacts our ability to achieve our goals." (HR leader/non-executive director)

Figure 10: Leaders are mainly dissatisfied with people metrics as they lack context or explanation
The issues business leaders highlight when considering the information they receive about people matters in their organisation (% of respondents)



Base: all: n=1,560; HR leaders: 783; business leaders: n=777.

Question: Which of the following issues, if any, do you have with the information you currently receive within your organisation about people matters?

HR leader perceptions of barriers to better-quality people information

Our survey found HR leaders are less positive than business leaders about the quality of people data. It was proposed in the roundtables that this could be reflective of HR leaders having greater awareness of what great people insight *could* look like, and frustration around the barriers to collecting and reporting on people data, including the HR information systems available on the market. There was some concern as to whether some people data is collected because it's easier, compared with what is collected because it's strategically important.

“HR systems are massively oversold in terms of reporting functions – the data that comes through isn't as complete as it should be.” (Vice president, HR)

Several HR leaders suggested business leaders “don't know what they don't know” when it comes to people information, again reflecting the CHRO's duty to educate senior colleagues about the right questions to ask when it comes to people data, as well as providing coherent and compelling analysis to explain the nuance and context behind the numbers. One HR director used the example of engagement surveys, explaining how her CEO can become “obsessed” with beating last year's score. With the organisation about to go through significant restructuring, engagement is likely to be impacted so must be seen through a different lens.

For many organisations and HR leaders, even getting started with collecting data is a big part of the battle. As one HR leader resignedly put it: “If you can't even start, it's hard to conceive of how you would get to a commercial conversation.” Most organisations continue to struggle with what an accurate headcount even looks like, given the complexity of many workforce makeups and the fluctuating use of contingent labour.

These barriers to effective people reporting are nothing new. The [CIPD's People Profession 2022 survey report](#) found the same top three barriers to successful people analytics have remained consistent since 2021:

- technical and analytical systems (38% in 2022)
- access to resources (29%)
- workforce capability and analytical skills (28%).

“It feels like I'm begging, borrowing and stealing to try and get what I need in this space – and that means the people data will never be at the same level as finance data.” (Chief people officer)

However, it is important that HR professionals don't get overly hung up on the barriers and instead look for ways around them. While data is important, people leaders don't necessarily need countless dashboards of watertight numbers to have a high-quality discussion around people matters and their link to organisational strategy and priorities. And one successful basic use case can be used to leverage a business case for more investment in this critical area.

7 Conclusion

Our survey shows that non-financial measures of performance are only going to become more important for organisations. People reporting is a key part of this, given the materiality of workforce matters to both business success and risk management.

The growing recognition that effective people reporting is central to the development of responsible and sustainable business practices also underpins moves by regulators and standard-setters to require greater external disclosure of human capital or workforce matters.

It is increasingly understood that organisations will not perform well over the long term unless decisions taken at executive management and board level are informed by an in-depth understanding of the workforce and how it is managed.

However, the insights in this report make clear that further progress is required to improve both the quality of people data that business leaders and boards receive on a regular basis, and how this is explained in the context of the organisation's priorities.

There are still some key workforce issues that many firms have very limited insight on because they don't collect the data in the first place. For example, about half of large organisations don't collect data on recruitment and retention, workforce diversity, employee health and wellbeing, or training and development.

Even among organisations where key workforce data *is* collected, it is often not reviewed, suggesting that there remains room for improvement in using this data to make business decisions or shape business outcomes.

The gap between the amount of data collected and that reviewed is somewhat concerning. Work needs to be done by HR leaders to make sure workforce data is meaningful, translated into commercial impact where appropriate and linked to organisational priorities.

Areas of people data are often inextricably connected and interdependent, meaning that people professionals and leaders reviewing this information need to take a systems thinking approach that extends beyond the numbers to the wider context and related impacts.

HR leaders can demonstrate real insight on the issues underlying their organisation's workforce metrics. Translating this for senior leadership teams and boards on why they are critical to business strategy and objectives will ensure that 'people issues' receive the attention they require.

Visit our [Effective workforce reporting](#) webpage for:

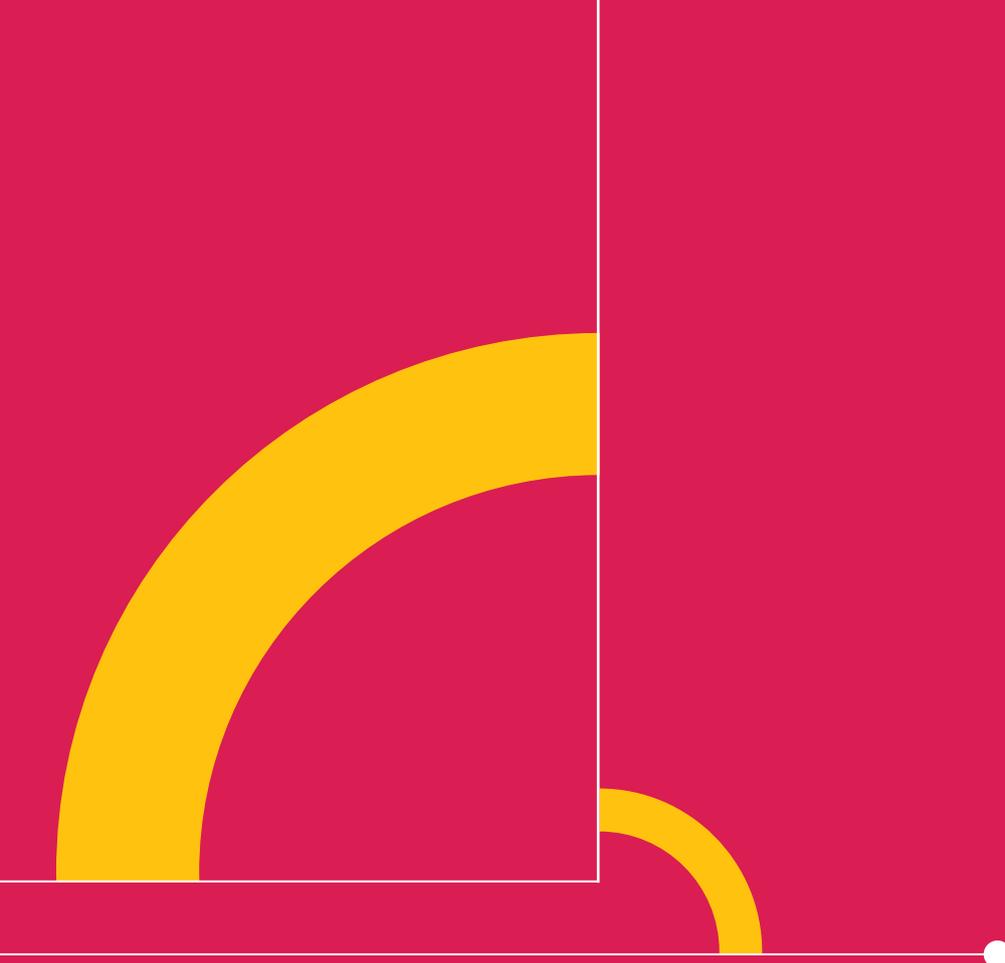
- top tips for HR professionals on how to improve their workforce reporting
- case studies from NatWest Group and Equiniti on how they have successfully used people data to influence strategy.

8 Methodology

This survey was conducted online between 22 August and 15 September 2022 by YouGov, commissioned by the CIPD.

The total sample size was 1,560 (made up of 779 HR decision-makers and 781 senior decision-makers) and is representative of senior decision-makers and those in the HR profession in the UK. It was weighted by work sector and business size.

The objective of this research was to compare the views of senior decision-makers in an HR role with those of senior decision-makers from other functions in UK businesses.



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Issued: February 2023 Reference: 8333 © CIPD 2023

