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Welcome to the UBA Partner Firm exclusive monthly newsletter, delivering insights into timely human resources and employee benefits topics.

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- Employee Benefits | Redesigning Benefits for a Multigenerational Workforce
- Workplace Culture | Rebuilding Connection in a Hybrid Environment
- Dear HR Manager | Reducing the Stress of Taking PTO

Employee Benefits | Redesigning Benefits for a Multigenerational Workforce

For the first time in history, many employers are managing a workforce that spans five generations—from employees just entering the workforce to those delaying retirement well into their sixties and seventies. While this diversity can strengthen organizations through broader perspectives and experience, it is also reshaping how employers think about benefits.

[Traditional, “one-size-fits-all” offerings are becoming less effective as employees prioritize very different financial, healthcare, and lifestyle needs depending on their stage of life.](#)

Younger employees are often focused on immediate financial pressures such as student loan debt, affordable healthcare, and housing costs.

Mid-career employees may be balancing childcare expenses, eldercare responsibilities, or career development.

Older workers are increasingly prioritizing retirement readiness, chronic health condition management, and flexible work arrangements that support longer careers.

As these expectations continue to diverge, employers are finding that benefit strategies must become more flexible and personalized to remain competitive in recruitment and retention.

This shift is driving growing interest in voluntary and lifestyle-oriented benefits that allow employees to choose what matters most to them. Student loan repayment assistance, caregiving support programs, mental health resources, financial wellness platforms, and expanded leave policies are becoming more common components of modern benefit packages.

Employers are also reevaluating retirement benefits by pairing traditional 401(k) plans with financial coaching, phased retirement options, and educational resources designed to improve long-term financial confidence across all age groups.

At the same time, employers are under pressure to manage rising healthcare and benefit costs. [Rather than simply adding new programs, many organizations are taking a more data-driven approach to benefits planning.](#) Utilization reports, employee surveys, and workforce demographic analysis are helping HR leaders identify which offerings deliver the greatest value and engagement. In many cases, employers are discovering that communication plays just as important a role as the benefit itself. Employees often underutilize programs simply because they do not fully understand what is available or how benefits apply to their personal situation.

Benefit advisors are also seeing organizations place greater emphasis on flexibility and choice during renewal planning. Instead of expanding every offering equally, employers are prioritizing benefits that can adapt to different employee needs over time. Examples include customizable voluntary benefits, tiered health plan options, and digital tools that help employees navigate healthcare and financial decisions more effectively. This approach allows employers to support a broader workforce population while maintaining greater control over long-term benefit spending.

As employers begin planning for 2027, multigenerational workforce strategy will be a central consideration in benefit design. Organizations that successfully align benefits with the needs of their evolving workforce may be better positioned to improve retention and strengthen employee engagement. In an increasingly competitive labor market, benefits are no longer just a cost center—they are becoming a key component of HR strategy and organizational resilience.

Workplace Culture | Rebuilding Connection in a Hybrid Environment

Over the last several years, employers have spent significant time refining hybrid work models, shrinking office spaces, and implementing flexible work policies. Yet many organizations are discovering that workplace flexibility alone does not automatically create strong workplace culture. In fact, one of the most significant challenges emerging in 2026 is not where employees work, but whether employees still feel connected to the organization at all.

Across industries, HR leaders report growing concerns around remote employee isolation, weakened collaboration, lower organizational trust, and reduced engagement among distributed teams. While productivity metrics in many organizations remain stable, culture indicators are becoming more difficult to sustain.

[With fewer face-to-face interactions, managers must work harder to sustain engagement, communication and team cohesion. These obstacles require HR teams to step in and guide organizations toward identifying and supporting effective remote leaders.](#)

Rather than relying on proximity or office attendance to build connection, organizations are now being forced to intentionally design culture in ways that are measurable, inclusive, and adaptable to hybrid work realities.

Why Workplace Connection Is Becoming a Strategic Priority

Hybrid and remote employees value flexibility, but they also want strong interpersonal relationships, clear communication, and alignment with organizational goals. They are not just reporting disconnection; they're pointing to specific gaps in communication, visibility, and career clarity. These gaps increasingly influence retention, innovation, productivity, and leadership development.

Employers are beginning to recognize that culture cannot be maintained through occasional events or office mandates alone.

The Shift From “Perks” to Intentional Culture Design

One of the biggest workplace culture trends emerging this year is the movement away from surface-level engagement efforts toward more intentional culture architecture.

In previous years, many organizations focused on culture through office amenities, social events and campaigns, and wellness perks.

[HR leaders find that hybrid and remote employees increasingly evaluate culture based on daily work experiences rather than occasional programs.](#)

Employees are paying closer attention to the quality of manager communication, the level of transparency demonstrated by leadership, and whether workloads feel sustainable over time. Collaboration norms, visibility into career growth opportunities, and the presence of psychological safety are also becoming increasingly important factors in how employees perceive workplace culture.

Managers Are Becoming the Center of Culture Execution

Another major trend shaping workplace culture is the expanding role of frontline managers. In hybrid environments, employees often experience organizational culture primarily through their direct supervisor rather than through the company as a whole.

This creates significant pressure on managers, many of whom are already balancing operational demands, staffing challenges, and performance expectations.

Organizations are increasingly investing in manager development focused on:

- Communication, conflict resolution and coaching skills
- Leading hybrid teams
- Employee recognition and performance conversations
- Mental health awareness

Some employers are also revisiting manager span-of-control structures after discovering that overly stretched leaders struggle to maintain meaningful employee relationships.

Hybrid Employee Trust Factors

Trust continues to emerge as one of the defining workplace culture themes of 2026. Inconsistent communication or unclear decision-making can quickly damage employee confidence. This can be intensified for those employees who don't see each other daily.

Employers are responding by increasing focus on:

- Frequent leadership updates around business priorities
- Greater visibility into decision-making
- More transparent career path discussions
- Consistent policy application across teams

Many organizations are also reevaluating how they gather employee feedback. Annual engagement surveys alone are no longer providing enough insight into workforce sentiment.

Instead, employers are adopting pulse and real-time feedback tools, stay interviews, and small-group employee forums. The goal is to create a stronger feedback loop between employees and leadership.

Looking Ahead

In many companies, culture gaps are not necessarily caused by flexibility itself, but by inconsistent employee experiences between teams, locations, and managers. Auditing the employee experience can help organizations identify where communication breakdowns occur, and how successfully remote employees are being integrated into the organization. Onboarding processes have become a major area of focus as employers work to ensure remote and hybrid employees feel connected early in their tenure.

Workplace culture is no longer defined primarily by physical office environments or employee perks. For many organizations, culture is becoming a daily operational experience shaped by leadership behavior, communication quality, manager effectiveness, and employee trust.

As hybrid and remote work continues to mature, employers that intentionally design connection, collaboration, and transparency into the employee experience will likely be better positioned to retain talent and sustain engagement.

Dear HR Manager: Reducing the Stress of Taking PTO

Dear HR Manager,

We're seeing employees work during vacations or avoid taking PTO altogether because they feel overwhelmed. At the same time, flexible work has blurred the line between being offline and simply working remotely. How can I encourage healthy PTO use for my team?

– Supporting an Always-On Team

Dear Supporting,

This is becoming increasingly common in hybrid and fast-paced work environments. Many employees hesitate to fully disconnect because they fear falling behind, burdening coworkers, or appearing less committed.

For employers, the bigger issue is sustainability. Employees who rarely unplug are more likely to experience burnout, disengagement, and eventually turnover. While organizations may benefit from short-term productivity when employees stay connected during time off, the long-term impact can include lower morale, reduced creativity, and increased retention challenges. There may also be wage-and-hour concerns when nonexempt employees continue responding to messages or completing work during PTO.

Leadership behavior plays a significant role in shaping workplace expectations. If managers regularly answer emails while on vacation or praise employees for always being available, teams may feel pressure to remain connected as well. HR can help managers model healthier habits by encouraging them to respect out-of-office boundaries, avoid unnecessary after-hours communication, and normalize taking uninterrupted time away from work.

Organizations looking to strengthen PTO culture should review PTO usage trends, evaluate whether workloads realistically allow employees to disconnect, and train managers on boundary-setting behaviors. Encouraging proactive coverage planning can also help employees feel more comfortable fully unplugging while away.

As conversations around employee wellbeing and sustainable performance continue to evolve, employers that actively support meaningful time away often find that employees are more focused and productive when they return to work.

– HR Manager

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