



Signature Insights

Money Matters

How Australian workers really feel about money, financial security and work-life balance.



About SEEK

A leader in online employment marketplaces, SEEK has been helping people live more fulfilling and productive working lives and helping organisations succeed for more than 25 years.

Founded and headquartered in Melbourne, Australia, SEEK has grown into a multinational technology company with more than 3,300 employees and is listed on the Australian Securities Exchange.

SEEK's presence spans Australia, New Zealand, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand. Additionally, SEEK has minority investments in employment marketplaces in China, South Korea and Bangladesh.

In 2021, 2022, 2023 and 2024, SEEK was recognised as one of Australia's Top Ten Places to Work in Technology in the AFR BOSS Best Places to Work awards.

About this report

SEEK's latest research looks at how Australian workers really feel about money, salaries, and workplace flexibility. The study examines the relationship between financial security and work-life balance, and how money pressures are shaping the choices people make about their careers and workplaces.

The research was conducted by market research agency Nature on behalf of SEEK between February and June 2025 through an online survey. Responses were gathered from more than 4,000 people currently in the workforce (either employed or looking for work), aged 18 to 64, across Australia. The data has been weighted to accurately represent the labour force based on age, gender, location, and income.

Contents

Foreword	04
The context today	06
PART 1	
Financial security	08
PART 2	
The trade-offs	13
PART 3	
Practical guidance for workers	24
Practical guidance for employers	26

Foreword

The relationship between money and work in Australia has never been more complex. As I reflect on SEEK's latest research, what strikes me most is how profoundly financial pressures are reshaping not just what we want from work, but how we make every career decision.

We're witnessing Australian workers caught between competing demands. Financial insecurity affects two-thirds of the workforce, yet the desire for work-life balance has never been stronger. Time has become as valuable as money. Flexibility has become a commodity that workers will exchange for the right financial offer. And the traditional assumptions about what motivates people's career choices are being rewritten.

This transformation presents both challenges and opportunities. For workers, it means navigating trade-offs between financial security and quality of life. For employers, it means rethinking what constitutes competitive compensation in an era when a salary alone doesn't guarantee employee satisfaction or retention.

What fascinates me most is how practical workers have become. They're not simply choosing between money and balance - they're making calculations about total compensation, life stage needs, and what they can realistically afford to prioritise. This isn't about wanting everything; it's about making informed choices in a landscape where both financial pressures and lifestyle needs can't be ignored.

At SEEK, we believe understanding these evolving dynamics is essential for navigating today's workplace. This report offers insights into how Australian workers are balancing financial necessity with personal fulfilment, providing a foundation for better decision-making whether you're planning your career or designing your organisation's approach to talent.



Kathleen McCudden
Group Executive, People and Culture
SEEK





The context today

The last five years have reshaped how Australians think about work and money. The pandemic introduced widespread remote work, giving millions a taste of flexibility they'd never experienced. But as working from home became normal, cost of living pressures mounted - housing prices soared, inflation hit everyday essentials, and financial stress spread across income levels.

These pressures impact the generations in different ways. Baby boomers, with established wealth and paid-off homes, are less affected. Gen X and millennial workers find themselves squeezed between rising mortgage rates and supporting both aging parents and young families. Younger workers face the challenge of building careers while navigating unprecedented housing costs and student debt.

This context helps to explain why the relationship between money and workplace preferences has become so complex.



So, how much does money matter in Australia when it comes to work?

It matters, but the answer is not as straightforward as you might think. We asked Australian workers what's most important to them in a job – is it good work-life balance or money?

While most Australian workers say they'd choose balance over a higher salary, offer them a 20% pay rise and watch those priorities shift. Meanwhile, only one in three workers feels financially secure, and two in five can't live comfortably on their current salary.

This research reveals a workforce caught between competing priorities. They want both money security and flexibility, but when forced to choose, money often wins.

From the willingness to trade remote work for higher pay to the preference for extra annual leave over traditional perks, Australian workers are rewriting the rules about what they want from work. The question isn't whether money matters - it's understanding the trade-offs and when money becomes the deciding factor.

PART 1

Financial security



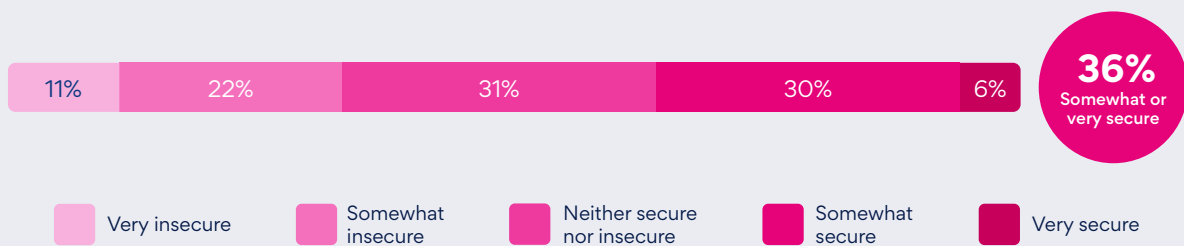
KEY FINDING 1:

Only one third of Australians feel financially secure

Australian workers are feeling the pinch right now. Only 36% of workers report they feel secure about their current finances, including any savings and investments they may have. The remaining respondents express some level of insecurity about their finances, reflecting broader concerns about economic instability.

The largest proportion of respondents (31%) report feeling neither secure nor insecure, suggesting financial uncertainty. Combined with 22% reporting some level of insecurity, and 11% reporting they are very insecure, this shows that many Australians are lacking confidence in their finances.

Security in financial situation



“Salaries are not keeping up with the cost of living.”

- Gen X worker

Cost of living challenges are almost universally felt across Australia with 96% of Aussies concerned. For 31% of workers, the biggest concern is the rising cost of goods, however for Gen Z, 33% say that buying a home is their biggest concern, compared to 0% of baby boomers. This stark divide highlights how housing affordability has become the defining financial challenge for younger generations.

When people lack confidence in their finances, money decisions are more carefully weighed up. This rings especially true in the workplace. Should they take that job with better work-life balance but lower pay? Can they afford to negotiate for more flexibility? Is it worth switching jobs if it means financial risk? Career choices are increasingly driven by financial necessity rather than professional fulfilment.



TAKEAWAYS

- Only one in three Australian workers feel financially secure.
- Nearly all Australians (96%) are concerned about the cost of living.
- One third of Gen Z workers (33%) identify buying a home as their biggest financial worry.



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Financial security is extremely important to me.

- Millennial worker

KEY FINDING 2:

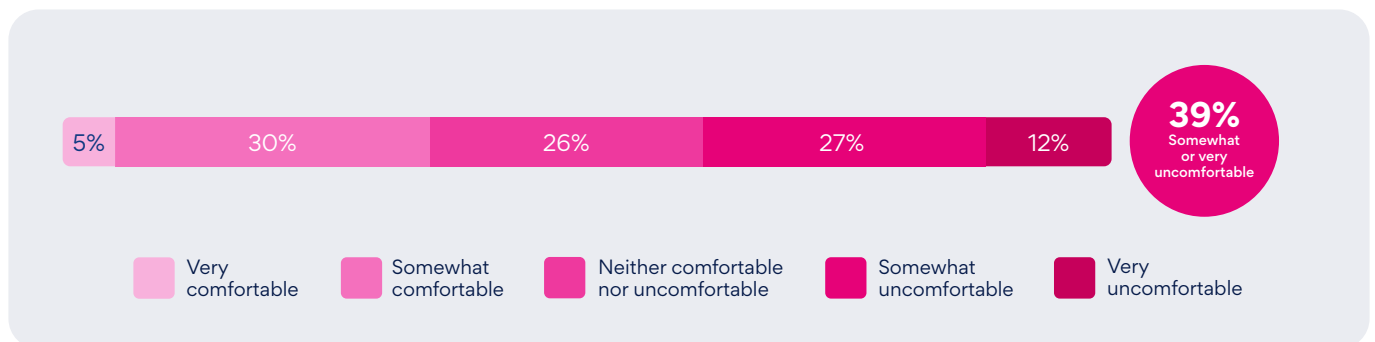
Two in five Australians are not comfortable living on their current salary

Having a job no longer guarantees financial comfort in Australia. Even among those who have jobs, 39% say they're uncomfortable with what they're earning, with 12% saying they are very uncomfortable. Another 26% feel neither comfortable nor uncomfortable suggesting they're managing their expenses but not building the financial security they want.

At the other end of the spectrum, 35% of employed Australians feel comfortable with their current salary (30% feel somewhat comfortable and 5% feel very comfortable).

So, what does “comfortable” actually mean in dollar terms? When workers were asked what they'd need to earn to live comfortably, the most common answer was \$80,000-\$100,000 (35%). This was followed by those wanting \$60,000-\$80,000 (24%), and then \$100,000-\$120,000 (19%).

Comfort with current salary

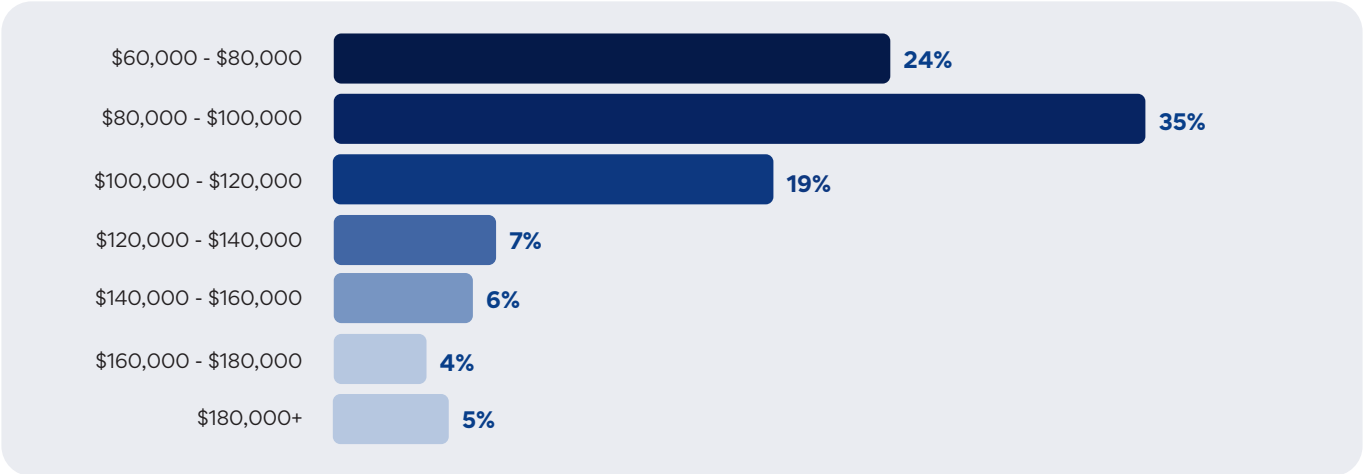


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The current financial situation is tough. Living comfortably is near impossible with rising costs.

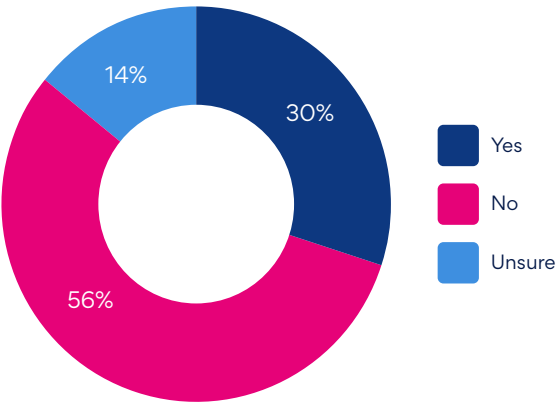
- Gen Z worker

Minimum salary to live comfortably



The problem is that even when workers can identify what salary they need, they don't see a clear path to get there. This is particularly evident among workers earning under \$83,000, of whom over half (56%) don't believe they can reach that \$100,000 mark within the next three years. The gap between what people think they need and what they think they can achieve is pushing people toward multiple income streams, with 52% of respondents intending to take on second jobs, and 56% having or planning to start a side hustle.

Is 100k a year achievable? (Among those who earn less than \$83,000)



Some industries are feeling the salary squeeze more than others. Consumer Services workers, who include those in admin and office support, hospitality and tourism, retail, and sales roles, are more likely to feel unfulfilled with their financial prospects than workers in other industries (35% compared to 28% for other workers). This suggests that these industries may have larger issues with pay progression.



TAKEAWAYS

- Most workers identify \$80,000-\$100,000 as the amount needed to live comfortably.
- Higher salaries appear increasingly out of reach, particularly for workers earning under \$83,000.
- Consumer Services workers are most despondent about their opportunities to achieve higher wages.
- Workers are clear about the salary they need, but pessimistic about their prospects, with more than half (52%) intending to take second jobs.

PART 2

The trade-offs



KEY FINDING 3:

Over three quarters of Australians are willing to give up working from home for more money

Money has serious negotiating power. The research reveals that over three quarters of workers (76%) would go back to their workplace full-time in exchange for a salary increase.

This finding reflects the reality that the remote work revolution was temporary for most people. While working from home peaked at 53% during the pandemic, ABS data shows it has now stabilised at 36% - only slightly higher than pre-pandemic levels of 32%.

Employed people who worked from home



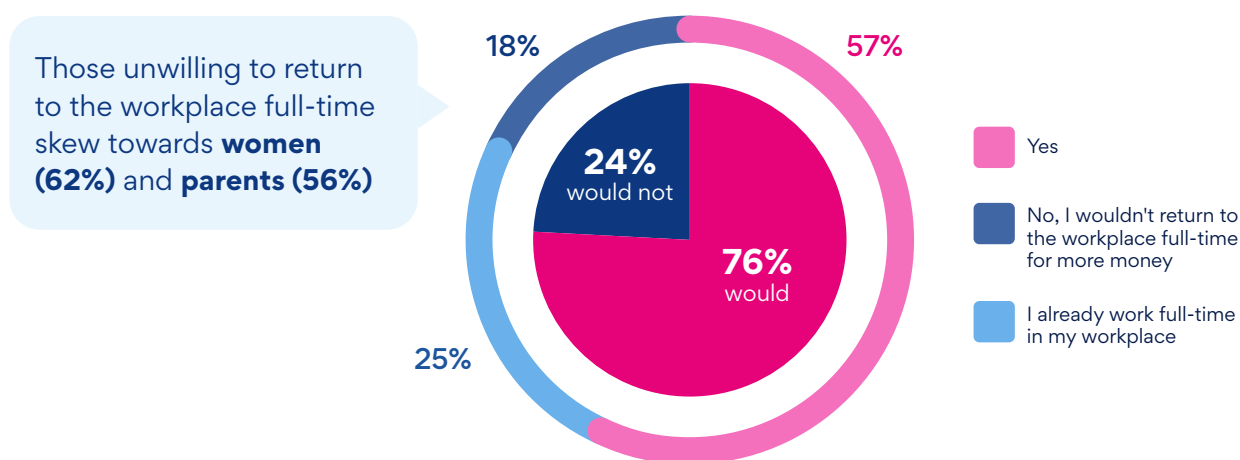
Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), August 2024, [Working arrangements](#)

Men (83%) and Gen Z (86%) show particularly high willingness to return to full-time on-site arrangements for more money. This may suggest that Gen Z see the career benefits of in-person work, and the social connections that office work provides.

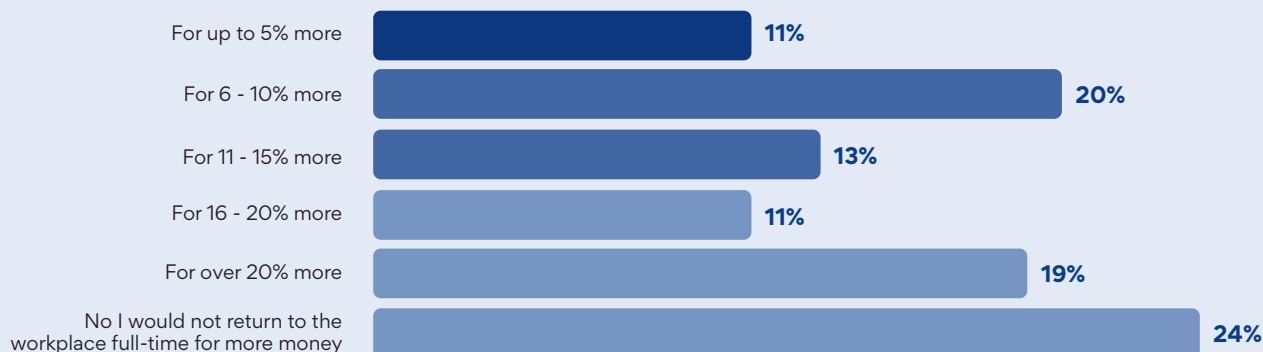
Then there's the 24% who simply would not give up working from home for more money.

Many in this group aren't just expressing a preference but a genuine need for flexibility. The people who make up this group are skewed towards women (62%), parents (56%), carers, and those with chronic health conditions and disabilities. Remote work is essential in balancing their personal and family needs, and a salary increase could not replace it.

Would return to the workplace full-time (in exchange for a salary increase)



Minimum pay rise to return full-time to workplace

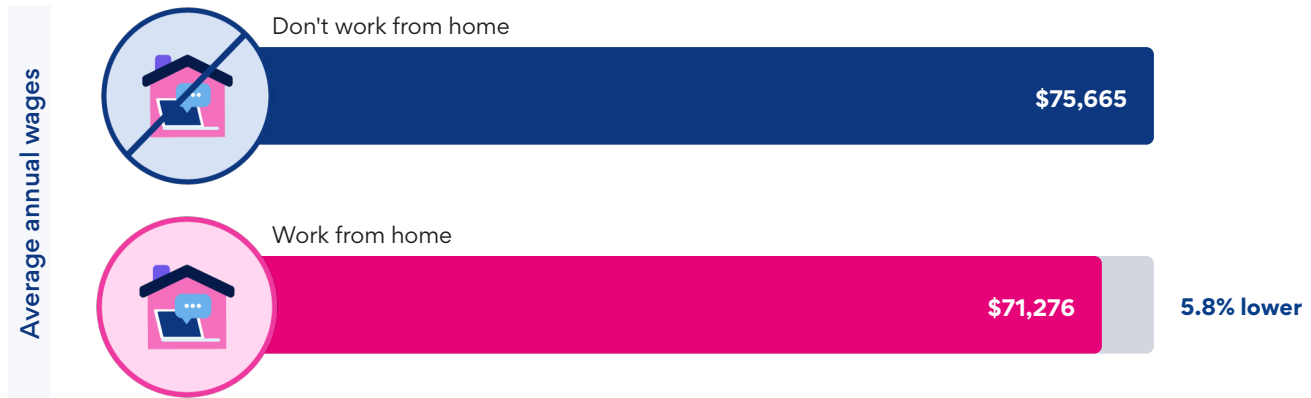


This demand for flexibility - whether out of need or preference - shows up in SEEK job search behaviour, with flexibility-related keywords, like 'work from home' (2 million searches), 'part time' (1.8 million searches), and 'casual' (2.5 million searches) used from January to July 2025.

The ongoing importance of remote work flexibility is clear and workplaces that want to retain talent may consider tailored arrangements for individual circumstances.

Working from home: Costs and savings

While workplace flexibility is highly valued, it can come with a cost. Recent analysis from the Committee for Economic Development of Australia (CEDA) based on a Household Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) survey, shows that people with hybrid or fully remote working arrangements earn 5.8% less than those who work on-site full-time. For someone earning the average wage of \$75,665, that's about \$4,400 less per year.



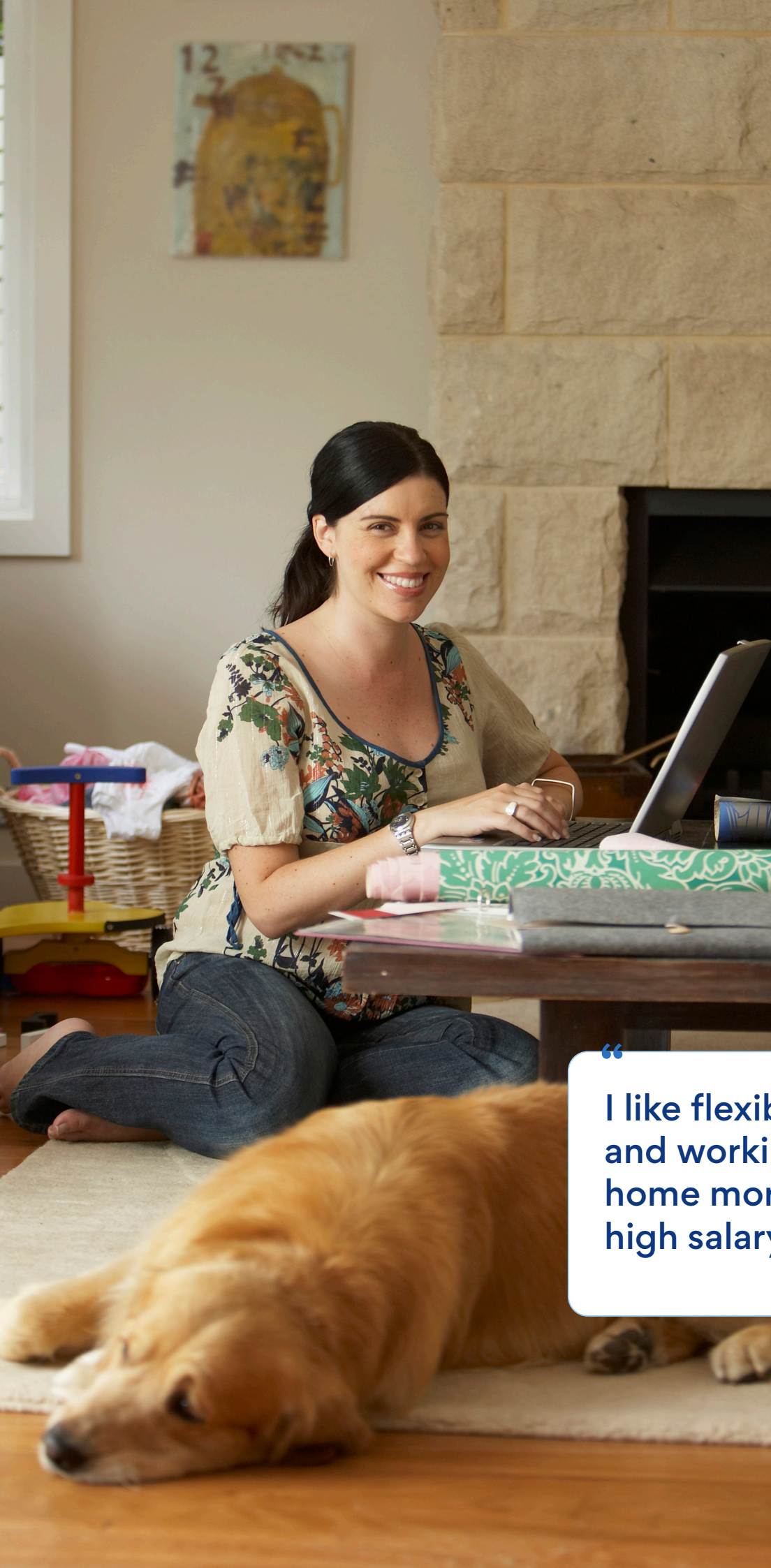
This wage gap may help explain workers' willingness to return to the workplace full-time. The pandemic gave people a taste of flexibility, but mounting financial pressures are forcing them to reconsider what matters most.

On the flip side, on-site work is costing Australian workers too. CEDA analysis of the HILDA survey found that people who work from home commuted on average 15.7% less than if they worked on-site, saving an estimated \$5308 a year based on average wages. When factoring in the meals, clothing and commuting costs associated with working on-site full-time, remote workers might actually come out ahead by spending less.



TAKEAWAYS

- Over three quarters of workers (76%) would return to their workplace full-time for a salary increase.
- Men (83%) and Gen Z (86%) show greater willingness to trade flexibility for money.
- A group of workers (24%) would not return to their workplace full-time regardless of financial incentives.



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**I like flexibility
and working from
home more than a
high salary.**

- Millennial worker

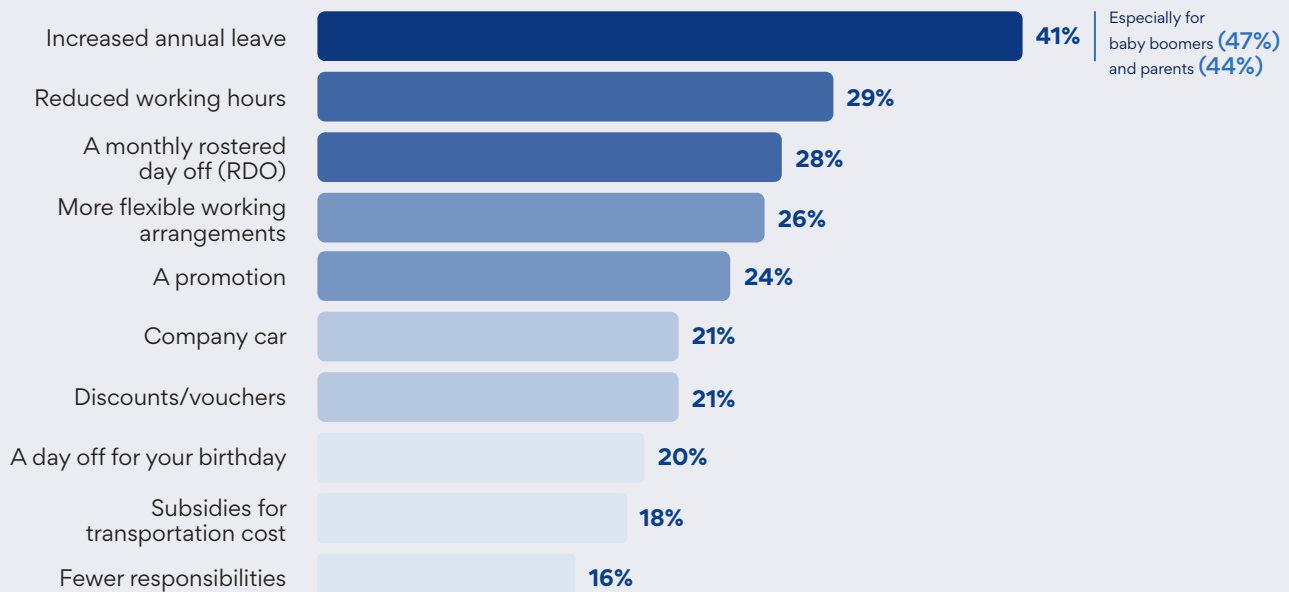
KEY FINDING 4:

More annual leave is the most popular alternative to a pay rise

When pay rises aren't possible, Australian workers prefer benefits that give them more time away from work. Research shows that increased annual leave is the most appealing alternative (41%), followed by reduced working hours (30%), monthly rostered days off (27%), and more flexible working arrangements (26%).

Demographic patterns emerge within these preferences, with annual leave appealing most to baby boomers (47%) and parents (44%). These variations fit with where they are in their lives. Workers juggling careers and family responsibilities show stronger preferences for time away from work, reflecting the competing demands of both work and family life.

Top 10 alternatives to a pay rise



TAKEAWAYS

- Increased annual leave (41%) tops alternatives to pay rises.
- Time away from work is strongly preferred over traditional workplace perks, such as company cars or discounts.
- Baby boomers and parents show the strongest preferences for more time away from work over other benefits.



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I would rather have the time to unwind and relax with family and friends than be at work doing overtime.

- Millennial worker

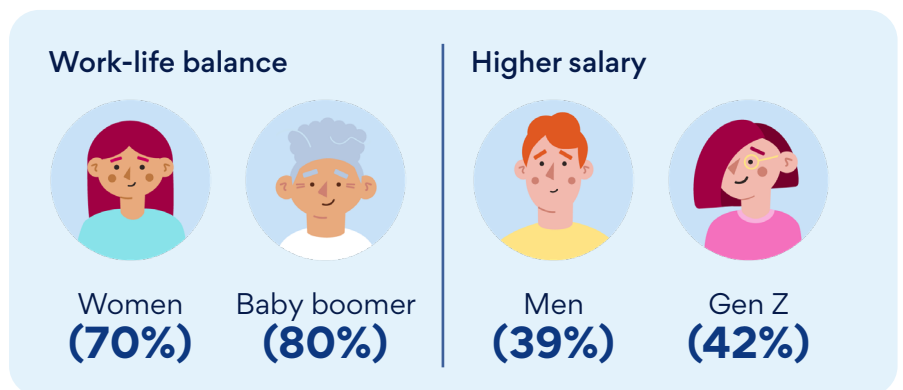
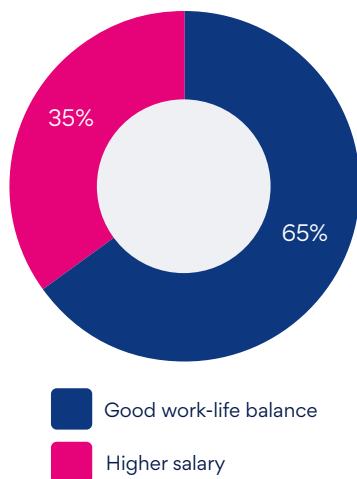
KEY FINDING 5:

Most Australians choose work-life balance over a higher salary, but the right amount can change minds

Despite widespread financial concerns, two-thirds (65%) of Australian workers show a strong preference for work-life balance over higher salaries. This reveals that quality-of-life considerations often outweigh financial motivations.

Preferences vary between different groups. Women (70%) favour work-life balance, while men (39%) are more motivated by a higher salary. Age makes an even bigger difference, with baby boomers (80%) showing a clear preference for balance.

Work-life balance vs. higher salary



Younger demographics show different priorities. Gen Z workers lean toward work-life balance (58%), but with 42% choosing higher salary, they're still more motivated by money than older workers. This may reflect the financial pressures that younger workers face, where work-life balance feels like a luxury they can't yet afford.



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A good balance is essential for my wellbeing. A large salary can bring its own issues.

- Baby boomer worker

Work-life balance vs. higher salary by generation



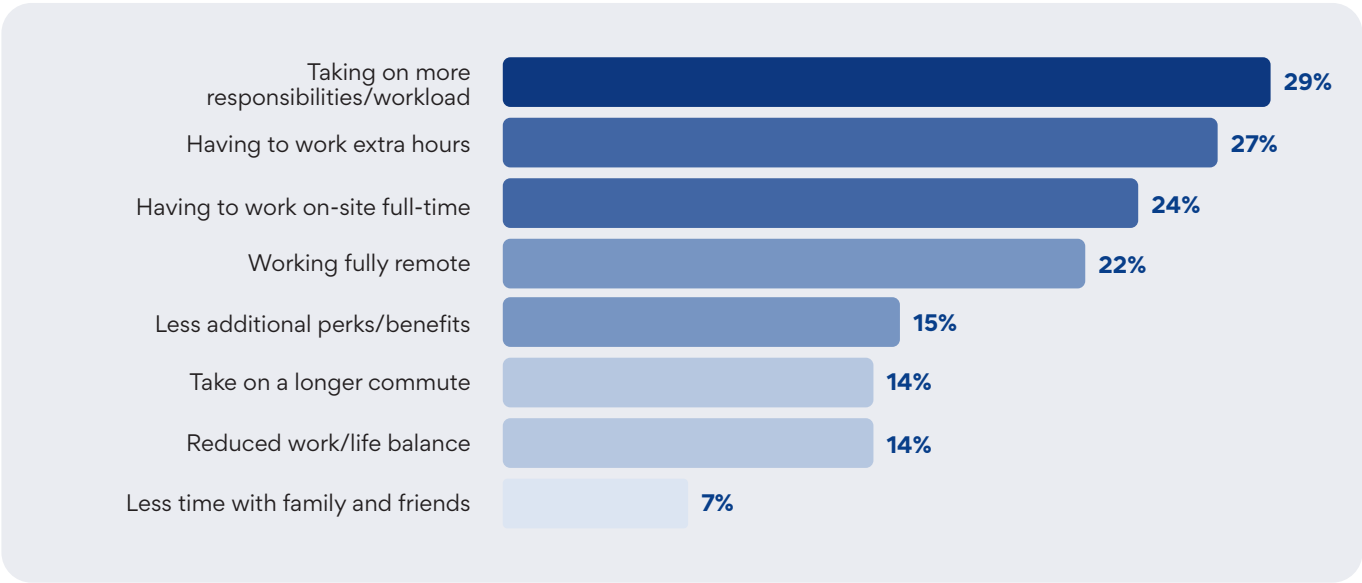
This generational divide suggests different life stages, financial pressures, and career priorities across demographic groups. Younger workers may face greater financial pressures from student loans, housing costs, and establishing their careers, Gen X and millennials are building their careers and juggling family life, while older workers may have achieved greater financial stability and prioritise lifestyle factors.

However, this preference for balance has limits when significant financial incentives are involved. When presented with a hypothetical

20% salary increase, workers show willingness to compromise. The most acceptable trade-offs include taking on additional responsibilities or workload (29%), working extra hours (27%), and returning to the on-site workplace full-time (24%).

The willingness to compromise for a 20% salary increase suggests that while work-life balance is valued, substantial financial incentives can shift priorities. Other compromises workers would consider include working fully remote (22%), accepting less perks and benefits (15%) and taking on a longer commute (14%).

Compromises for a higher salary



More money can afford workers better work-life balance by reducing financial stress and providing more choices, but only if they have the time to enjoy what their higher earnings can provide. It's about earning enough without sacrificing the time to benefit from that financial security.



TAKEAWAYS

- Two-thirds of Australian workers prioritise work-life balance over higher salary.
- Women (70%) and baby boomers (83%) show the strongest preference for balance over money.
- A 20% salary increase would motivate significant compromises from workers who generally prefer balance.



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Earning more money
now will always lead to
better work-life balance
in the future.

- Gen Z worker

PART 3

Practical guidance for workers and employers





Practical guidance for workers

Preparing for salary discussions

- ☐ **Research thoroughly before negotiating.**
Check salary guides, job advertisements and SEEK's salary data to understand market rates for your role and experience level.
- ☐ **Prepare your business case.**
Document your achievements, additional responsibilities, and market comparisons to support your request.
- ☐ **Look beyond base salary.**
Consider the total value proposition including flexible arrangements, additional leave, and professional development opportunities.
- ☐ **Know your bottom line.**
Determine your minimum acceptable outcome and alternative benefits you'd accept if your ideal salary isn't possible.
- ☐ **Timing matters.**
Schedule discussions during positive performance reviews or after successfully completing major projects.

Maximising your total compensation

- ☐ **Consider time-based alternatives.**
When salary increases aren't available, negotiate for additional annual leave, reduced working hours, or monthly rostered days off.
- ☐ **Calculate the true value of flexibility.**
Factor in commuting costs, work wardrobe expenses, and time savings when evaluating remote work arrangements.
- ☐ **Look for hidden benefits.**
Education allowances, professional memberships, and wellbeing programs can add significant value to your total package.
- ☐ **Negotiate sign-on bonuses.**
For new roles, one-time payments can offset the wait for your next formal salary review.
- ☐ **Request regular reviews.**
Establish clear timeframes for compensation discussions rather than waiting for annual cycles.

Building your financial security

- ☐ **Set clear salary milestones.**
Create a three-year plan with specific income targets and the skills needed to achieve them.
- ☐ **Develop in-demand skills.**
Identify high-growth areas in your industry and invest in relevant professional development.
- ☐ **Consider geographic flexibility.**
Explore roles in regions with stronger salary growth or lower living costs if remote work is possible.
- ☐ **Build multiple income streams.**
Develop side projects, consulting opportunities, or passive income sources to reduce dependence on a single employer.
- ☐ **Maximise employer benefits.**
Ensure you're taking full advantage of superannuation matching, health benefits, and development allowances.

Strategic career planning

- ☐ **Align choices with life stage.**
Consider whether maximising income or work-life balance makes more sense for your current situation and for future life stages.
- ☐ **Investigate company cultures.**
Research whether potential employers genuinely support flexible working or merely offer it as a recruitment tool.
- ☐ **Seek mentors who share your priorities.**
Connect with professionals who have successfully navigated similar work-life decisions.
- ☐ **Plan for career transitions.**
Identify roles that might offer better salary-flexibility balance as your priorities evolve.
- ☐ **Document your achievements.**
Maintain a portfolio of accomplishments that demonstrates your value regardless of where or how you work.





Practical guidance for employers

Addressing financial confidence

- ☐ **Implement transparent salary bands.**
Provide clear compensation ranges and progression criteria for all roles.
- ☐ **Conduct regular market benchmarking.**
Ensure your compensation remains competitive across all levels.
- ☐ **Offer financial wellness resources.**
Provide access to financial education, planning tools, and retirement guidance.
- ☐ **Create visible career pathways.**
Clearly communicate how employees can progress within your organisation.
- ☐ **Consider cost-of-living adjustments.**
Review compensation regularly against inflation and market conditions.

Designing attractive compensation packages

- ☐ **Segment your workforce.**
Develop different benefit options tailored to various demographics and life stages.
- ☐ **Emphasise time-based benefits.**
Offer increased annual leave, reduced working hours, or monthly rostered days off.
- ☐ **Create benefit choice programs.**
Allow employees to select the perks most valuable to their personal situation.
- ☐ **Highlight total rewards.**
Clearly communicate the full value of benefits beyond base salary.
- ☐ **Structure progressive increases.**
Design salary advancement that rewards performance and development.

Flexible working strategies

- ☐ **Implement policy consistency.**
Ensure flexibility options are available equitably across departments.
- ☐ **Focus on outcomes, not presence.**
Develop clear performance metrics that aren't tied to physical workplace attendance.
- ☐ **Create collaboration opportunities.**
Designate in-office days or events that maximise the value of face-to-face interaction.
- ☐ **Provide proper remote work support.**
Ensure home workers have appropriate technology, furniture and connectivity.
- ☐ **Consider hybrid-specific roles.**
Design positions explicitly around flexible working arrangements.

Retention and attraction strategies

- ☐ **Conduct stay interviews.**
Regularly check in with employees about their satisfaction and aspirations.
- ☐ **Develop personalised retention plans.**
Create individualised approaches for key talent based on their priorities.
- ☐ **Highlight flexibility in job advertisements.**
Clearly communicate remote work options and flexible arrangements from the outset.
- ☐ **Create re-boarding processes.**
Support employees transitioning between work arrangements.
- ☐ **Celebrate flexible success stories.**
Showcase examples of career advancement for employees with various working arrangements.





Managing return-to-office discussions

- ☐ **Clearly articulate the business case.**
Explain specific benefits of in-person collaboration for particular projects or teams.
- ☐ **Consider tiered approaches.**
Implement different in-office expectations based on role requirements rather than blanket policies.
- ☐ **Trial before mandating.**
Pilot return arrangements before implementing permanent policies.
- ☐ **Provide transition support.**
Recognise the practical challenges of changing work locations and provide adequate notice.
- ☐ **Create meaningful office experiences.**
Ensure in-office time focuses on collaboration, mentoring, and team building that can't be replicated remotely.

Building trust through transparency

- ☐ **Share company performance updates.**
Regularly communicate business results and how they impact compensation decisions.
- ☐ **Establish clear decision-making processes.**
Explain how flexibility and remote work policies are determined.
- ☐ **Conduct regular pulse surveys.**
Monitor employee sentiment regarding compensation and flexibility.
- ☐ **Train managers on compensation discussions.**
Ensure leaders can effectively communicate about salary and benefits.
- ☐ **Create open feedback channels.**
Provide safe ways for employees to express concerns about compensation and working arrangements.

Sources

Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA), 2017 – 2023
Committee for Economic Development of Australia (CEDA), March 2025
Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), August 2024, [Working arrangements](#)

This study was led by SEEK's Customer Research and Insights team.

We are the voice of our customers.

We diligently listen to their experiences and expectations, delving deep into the underlying reasons behind their feedback.

By understanding what our customers truly need and want, as well as pinpointing their pain points, we actively influence business decisions and drive change.

Our unwavering dedication to understanding and advocating for our customer empowers us to make a meaningful impact.

LEARN MORE

Reach out to Nicola Laver, Workplace Success Manager for more information, if you're interested in an industry deep dive of these insights or training for people leaders.

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