

# CHRO insights

PwC US Pulse Survey—October 13, 2020 findings

## Job confidence could fuel growth: CHROs, workers settle into the pandemic

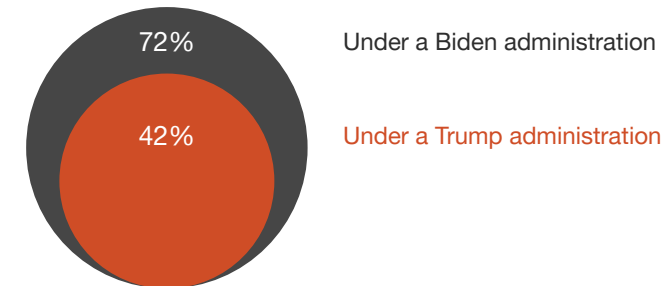
Optimism abounds among chief human resources officers (CHROs) and employees, who both report confidence about jobs and the workforce despite a faltering US economy. This positive outlook bodes well for a consumer-fueled recovery — when people feel secure in their employment, they're more likely to spend.

But our survey also found this optimism isn't universal. There's a significant divide between male and female employees when it comes to how they feel about their future employability and the success of employer-backed measures to improve their work experience. For example, 64% of male respondents believe they would be able to find a new job in their chosen field within three months if needed, but only half of female respondents said the same. Among CHROs, the potential outcome of the US election is also skewing their outlook:

while 72% of CHROs are confident they'll see a net increase in their organization's headcount under a Biden administration, just 43% expect the same under a Trump administration.

As CHROs contemplate how to keep their workforce engaged and productive — and how they can keep employee confidence high — personalized benefits will be critical to helping employees with different needs get support that makes a difference to them. It's also important to focus on the areas employees say matter most to them right now, such as flexibility, well-being and upskilling. Using data analytics to easily tap into employee sentiment data can help, something CHROs appear to recognize: 39% say they're seeking to optimize their approach to data analytics across the business to accelerate revenue growth over the next twelve months.

### CHROs expect a headcount increase over the next 12 months



Q: What impact, if any, will the outcome of the US election have on headcount in your organization? (responding 'net increase')  
Source: PwC US Pulse Survey  
October 6, 2020: CHRO base of 69

## Top findings

Nearly 70 CHROs and human capital leaders from Fortune 1000 and private companies, along with other C-suite executives, weighed in on policy-related issues in our latest [PwC US Pulse Survey](#), fielded September 30, 2020 to October 6, 2020. Find these insights in our [Road to Election 2020](#) report.

In the ongoing survey, CHROs also shared their perspectives on other top-of-mind issues, including positive expectations for headcount growth in the coming year, how voluntary employee relocations are helping the bottom line and the actions they're taking to help workers sustain productivity.

PwC also surveyed more than 1,000 American workers nationwide during the same period, as part of our ongoing [PwC Workforce Pulse Survey](#).

## Rose-colored glasses in season for CHROs, employees

Regardless of the US election results, nearly 60% of CHROs expect a net increase in US headcount, with just 4% anticipating a net decrease. Granted, some of that increase could come from a change in the workforce mix as opposed to the addition of new jobs, such as through the hiring of contract workers. And the swing in more CHROs expecting a net headcount increase in their organization's headcount under a Biden administration, as compared to a Trump administration could be due to economist [analysis](#) suggesting Biden's proposed policies would add 7.4 million jobs more than Trump policies. Biden plans to spend on education, infrastructure and clean energy as well as increase the size and productivity of the workforce with new family leave, elder care and early childhood education programs.

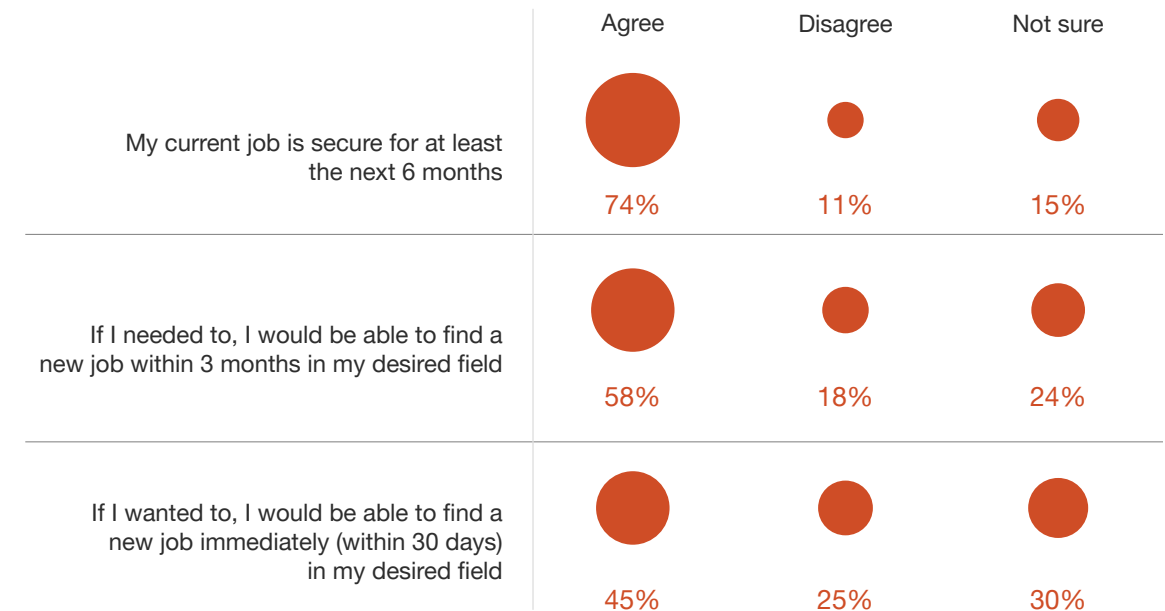
Those results come on the heels of the [Labor Department's latest job report](#), which revealed a drop-off in hiring gains as furloughs turned into permanent layoffs and marked the first month since April that overall

hiring was below 1 million jobs. While the unemployment rate fell slightly, it may reflect more people leaving the workforce, possibly because of weak job prospects or the need for employees to care for children or other family members.

Meanwhile, confidence abounds in the workforce, with 74% of employee respondents believing their current jobs are secure for at least the next six months. That figure was even higher in the Northeast (83%), which has a concentration of employees with jobs that allow them to work remotely and where the resurgence of COVID-19 cases is lower than elsewhere in the country.

The optimism doesn't end there. Nearly 60% of employees believe they would be able to find a new job in their desired field within three months if they needed to. And 45% of employees believe they could find a new job within 30 days, if desired.

## US workers are optimistic about their job security and job prospects



Q: Do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?  
Source: PwC Workforce Pulse Survey  
October 5, 2020: base of 1,013

## Want productivity that won't quit? Focus on flexibility and well-being

As the pandemic forces business leaders to reset how they measure success in an upended workplace and marketplace, HR leaders have already told us they recognize employee anxiety and burnout as the biggest challenge for delivering on workforce priorities.

So it comes as no surprise that the employees considered flexible working hours and a focus on their health and well-being — factors relatively within people's control — as the most successful of their employer's initiatives to improve the workday experience and help sustain productivity.

CHROs are also encouraging sustainable employee productivity as the pandemic continues, with nearly half (49%) saying their

focus is on driving objectives and outcomes (for example, delivering on customer satisfaction metrics vs. sales quotas), alongside employing new virtual tools and training.

HR executives can consider upping their well-being efforts, whether by expanding on the programs in place or communicating more regularly and more openly about available options. As we enter month eight of the pandemic, CHROs also need to review their traditional onboarding plans to make sure they are helping new employees get off to a fast start in a changed work environment and that a plan is in place for conducting performance reviews that reflect the best measures of performance for the moment.

## Where CHROs are focusing to make worker productivity sustainable



Q: Of the changes you've made to encourage sustainable employee productivity as a result of COVID-19, which of these are you most focused on? (Select up to three.)  
Source: PwC US Pulse Survey  
October 6, 2020: CHRO base of 69

## Female employees, older workers say efforts to improve their experience aren't measuring up

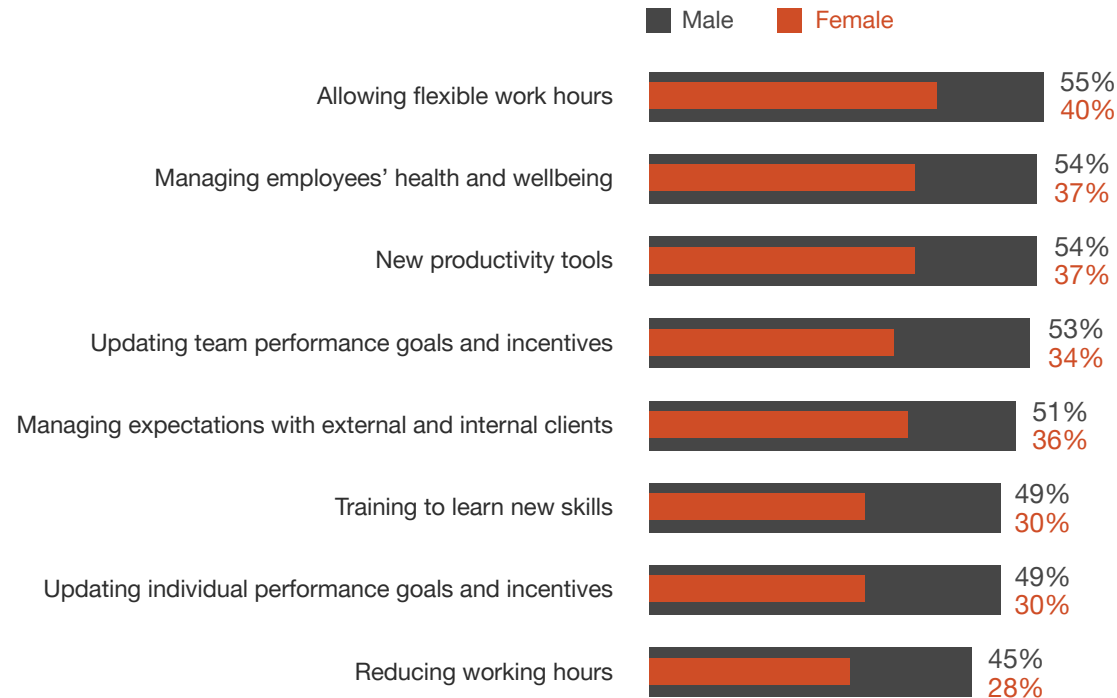
Across the board, female employees consistently give lower marks overall when rating the success of employer changes meant to improve their day-to-day work experiences. Given that working mothers in particular are bearing a [disproportionate burden](#) of childcare during the pandemic, one-size-fits-all solutions may not be enough to reset the scale of work-life balance.

Female workers were also much less optimistic about their job prospects compared to their male counterparts. Just half of women respondents believe they would be able to find a new job in their chosen field within three months if they needed to (compared to 64% of men); that percentage drops to just 41% of women who believe they would be able to find work within 30 days (compared to 49% of men). Respondents in the Western part of the country also lag behind their peers when it comes to confidence in finding a new job.

And older respondents (age 45 or older) are even less likely to believe they'd be able to find a new job. Nearly 50% of respondents aged 45 or older believe they would be able to find work within three months (compared to 63% of respondents aged 18–44). And that confidence sank further when asked about finding a new job within 30 days: Only 35% of respondents aged 45 or older say they'd be able to find work, compared to 52% of 18–44 year olds.

Some groups of employees are also feeling the lack of upskilling opportunities at their companies. When asked if their current employer had helped them develop marketable new skills, 65% of male workers agree, but only 51% of female workers say the same. Older employees report their companies were drastically less successful at training them in new skills: Just 36% of employees aged 55 and older say they developed new skills.

## Female employees see less benefit in employer measures to improve their work experience



Q: Since COVID-19, many employers have implemented changes to improve the day-to-day work experience of their employees. How successful do you think your company has been at implementing each of the following changes? (responding 'very successful' and 'extremely successful')  
Source: PwC Workforce Pulse Survey  
October 5, 2020: base of 1,013

## As jobs become remote, do companies know where their employees are?

While headlines may be filled with stories about tech sector employees making mass relocations, companies jumping at the opportunity to take advantage of virtual talent and workers choosing to work from anywhere, the reality is that relocation is a complicated decision for employees.

A third of employee respondents (33%) say they changed their living situation due to COVID-19, with the ability to work remotely paving the way for short-term moves to save money and leave the city behind for the suburbs. (Younger workers, aged 18–34, are unsurprisingly leading the way in relocation, accounting for 45% of all workers opting to voluntarily relocate.)

However, only 5% of employees say they relocated for longer than six months as a result of COVID-19, and 67% say their living situation did not change at all.

It's too early to tell whether this stickiness will be a long-term trend or if relocation will become more common. But CHROs have taken advantage of voluntary employee relocations, with 72% reporting that they have adjusted compensation based on factors such as cost of living when an employee relocates, and 64% having realized labor cost savings.

Meanwhile, 28% of CHROs say they don't have a way of accounting for where their employees are physically located on a daily basis. As “work from anywhere” becomes the norm, even CHROs who believe they know where their employees are based on any given day should be testing the systems and procedures they have in place to help track that information. This is in part for tax and compliance purposes, but also for business continuity at a time when hurricanes, fast-moving wildfires, the pandemic and other issues disrupt work.

## Many CHROs lack visibility into where employees are ‘working from anywhere’

CHROs who are unable to account for where their employees are **physically located** on a daily basis



28%

Q: Are you able to account for employees' physical locations on a daily basis? (responding 'no,' 'considering but haven't yet developed a plan to do so,' 'Have a plan in place but haven't started,' or 'unsure')

## Execs see analytics as key to accelerate revenue growth

Real analytics can drive real revenues — and fuel economic recovery. Optimizing the approach to data analytics across the business is the No. 1 digital transformation investment executives expect to spur revenue growth over the next 12 months, according to 42% of C-suite respondents.

CHROs need to consider the people metrics that will enable the business to support growth — depending on the organization, what data is needed to illuminate well-being, engagement, productivity, hiring or compliance insights? To help business units and functions support revenue recovery and sustain productivity in this challenging environment, human resource leaders need to be mindful of the different needs of their workforce talent. Once employers [know what matters to their workforce](#), they can more easily develop impactful benefits that resonate on a personal level with their talent. Employees have made clear the risk of burnout is real.

The security people feel in their employment also bodes well for the other top digital investments executives plan to focus on, including consumer-focused investment in product/service development and delivery

(the top pick, selected by 46% of CHROs) and reimagining the customer experience, as well as leveraging automation technologies across the business.

Investments in digital upskilling are considered less immediately important to accelerating revenues (21% for executives and 28% for CHROs). This could be due to companies believing their people have already embraced new tools and ways of working and don't need a formal program. Or perhaps executives see a less immediate connection from upskilling to revenue growth. Less likely is that executives are comfortable with their employees' digital acumen.

While analytics may help near-term growth, CHROs should still see digital upskilling as an important goal. All of these transformation initiatives will be greatly aided and accelerated by a digitally upskilled workforce, in addition to the societal benefits of equipping workers with new, marketable skills. Many companies routinely struggle with data fluency — executives do not understand data enough to effectively use it in their decision-making, and managers struggle to communicate what the data is saying.

## Where executives are investing in data and digital to accelerate revenue growth



Q: Which of the following digital transformation initiatives is your firm investing in to accelerate revenue growth over the next 12 months? (Select up to three.)  
Source: PwC US Pulse Survey  
October 6, 2020: base of 537, CHRO base of 69



## Latest findings: Road to election 2020

No matter who occupies the White House next, business leaders must anticipate what policy and regulatory shifts will mean. The election focuses on big issues, such as economic stability, the role of government programs in driving economic recovery, and responsibility of business in creating domestic jobs and championing diversity and inclusion. See what's top of mind and keep up with perspectives on how your company can be more agile and responsive to whatever comes next.

[Learn more](#)

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### Past surveys

To view data and insights from previous PwC US Pulse Surveys, please see below.

[September 15, 2020](#)

