



30% Club Ireland

Breaking Glass Walls A New Shape on Modern Organisations.

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Table of Contents

- 04** **Introduction:**
Gillian Harford, Country Executive, 30% Club Ireland
- 05** **Foreword:**
Paula Neary, Country Chair, 30% Club Ireland
- 06** **Executive Summary**
Overview of Key Findings
- 08** **Care Economics:**
Quantifying the ROI of Supportive Workplaces
- 10** **Bridging Generational Gaps:**
Creating a Unified, Productive Workforce
- 12** **The Power of Purpose:**
Finding the Choice and Flexibility Balance
- 14** **Modern Leadership:**
The Empathy Imperative
- 17** **Reflections for Leaders**
Shaping Modern Organisations
- 18** **Appendix**
Methodology and Survey Findings

Introduction: A Note from our Country Executive

The use of the term “**glass ceiling**” has become mainstream in our business language as we describe the barriers that impede gender balanced progression into the most senior roles of influence.



However, the ceiling is the final step in the architecture of our organisations. While we may take great steps to make our organisations more equitable and transparent in relation to our policies; our processes and employee experiences continue to include hidden barriers that impact on career path moves, reinforce stereotypes, hide underrepresented voices and hinder economic value from talent investment.

The pace of change in organisation design is now unrelenting. New recruits are no longer inducted into a one size fits all company rule book that will last for the duration of their career. The ability to adjust and thrive is becoming essential for talent progression across all generations. Modern organisations need less policy and more principles, less rules and more accountability, less management and more leadership and ultimately an employment brand that reflects, economically, both the cost of people policy inputs and value of commercial outputs. These are the glass walls we need to break if we are to address the related topics of gender power, gender pay and gender pension gaps. These are the glass walls we need to break to improve retention of essential talent, no matter the economic cycle.

For this specific research we have chosen to focus on the glass walls in the area of ‘**care**’, not because care is strategic but because it is the one constant raised by our supporter organisations when they discuss barriers to retention, pipeline and gender balanced progression. We have also chosen to take a more holistic view of care and to move beyond the primary focus on childcare responsibilities, and to instead include the undervalued area of self-care, particularly as work/life blend becomes the norm, and the undermentioned area of elder care, as a potential time-bomb for the future workforce.

In this research we also introduce:

- ‘**Care Economics**’ where the business case is reshaped to ensure that organisation investment in caring structures provides the best value for employees and employers alike;
- the growing importance of **choice and flexibility** as essential components of an employer brand;
- bridging the **generational gaps** with an approach that reflects individual differences;
- and most importantly the impact on **modern leadership styles** and demands.

We would like to thank the many employees and employers across Ireland who contributed to the research and brought the topic to life with their comments and opinions. Our thanks to the team at Reputation Inc for collating and interpreting the data, and we extend particular thanks to the leadership team at Accenture Ireland for their generous support for the research, and for our campaign ambitions.

We hope that the research will provide food for thought as you progress your journey.



Gillian Harford

Country Executive,
30% Club Ireland

Foreword: A Note from our Country Chair

The conversation is evolving, and that is necessary. If we do not adapt, progress stalls. What was once framed solely as diversity and inclusion is now about trust, respect, and accessibility. Our role is to continue supporting this agenda, not just by sustaining momentum but by ensuring that inclusion remains a business priority for leaders who understand its contribution to productivity, profitability, and long-term success.



The Next Evolution: Sustaining Progress, Not Just Reaching It

Leaders and organisations that are committed to this work have made significant strides. But now the focus must shift from reaching parity to sustaining it. Gender balance is not an expensive ‘good thing’ to do—it is a competitive advantage. The choices businesses make today will determine whether they continue to lead or fall behind in an increasingly dynamic talent market.

The Business Imperative of Care Economics

One of the most significant, yet under-addressed, areas affecting talent retention and progression is care. This research builds on the idea that care is more than just a personal challenge—it is a business issue that has direct implications for economic performance. Traditionally, conversations around care have centred on childcare, but our findings reinforce the growing importance of self-care and eldercare as workforce-wide concerns.

This research is not about revisiting the past—it is about enabling the future. The insights here are designed to help leaders take meaningful action, ensuring that organisations remain places where talent can thrive. There are no simple answers, but the right questions will help leaders assess where they stand and what steps to take next.

Now is the time to act. The businesses that get this right will not just survive—they will lead.



Paula Neary

Country Chair,
30% Club Ireland

Senior Managing Director
of Communications,
Media & Technology
at **Accenture Ireland**

Executive Summary

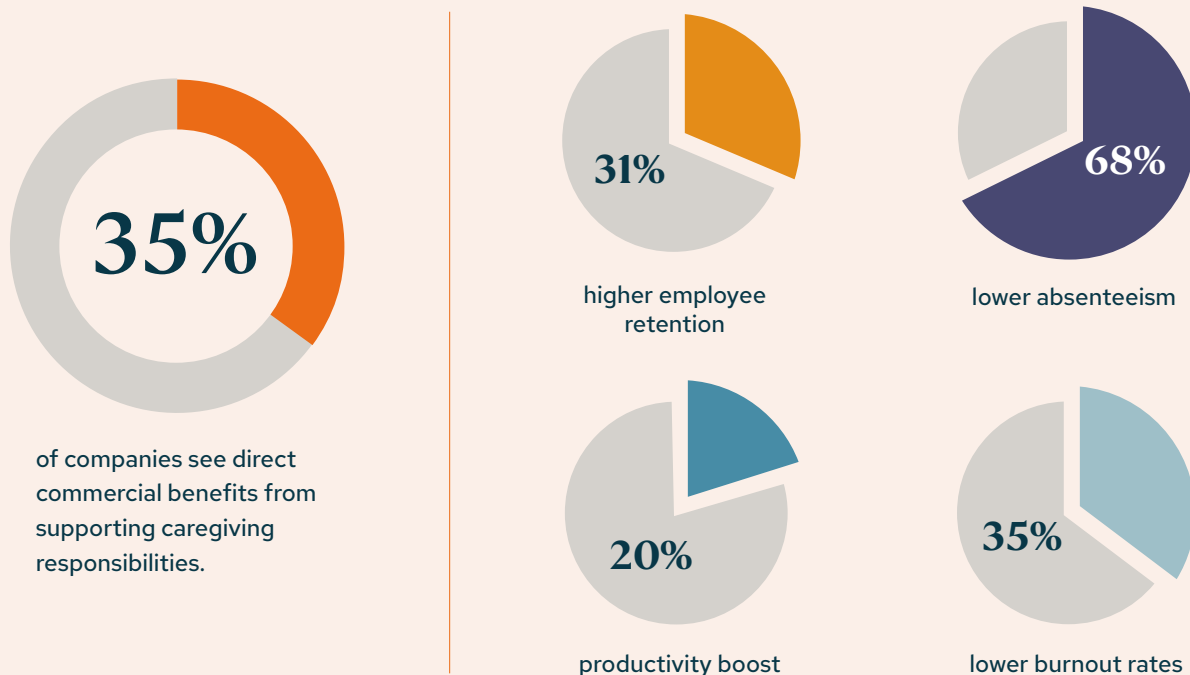
Breaking Glass Walls to Break the Glass Ceiling

The term glass ceiling represents the final hurdle in leadership that remains out of reach for many women based solely on gender. But before they even reach that ceiling, what other barriers prevent diverse talent from rising to the top? **Enter glass walls - the manifestation of the policy vs experience imbalance, particularly in relation to care.**

Care is a fundamental yet under-discussed workplace issue that directly impacts talent retention, workforce productivity, and overall business success. Caring responsibilities - whether childcare, eldercare, or self-care - are a growing challenge for employees across all career stages - affecting progression at various different stages of the career journey for many individuals.

The business case for supportive workplaces:

Our data not only shows that employees across all age groups feel most supported when employers provide flexibility that supports all forms of care, from self-care to childcare and eldercare, but also evidences clear business advantages for companies who support caregiving responsibilities.



The perks of flexible, people-focussed care policies are felt at all levels of business, showing a positive impact for employers and employees alike. Thus, 'care economics' stand to make a positive difference for all.

71%

of employees say **work-life balance policies** have improved their overall well-being.

25%

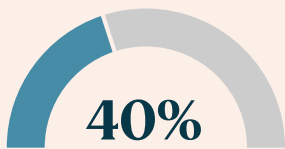
Multi-generational inclusion enhances innovation, with organisations fostering cross-generational collaboration experiencing **25% higher innovation rates**.

What is care economics?

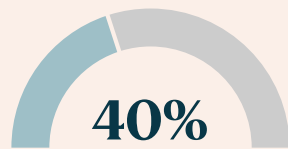
The business case for integrating caregiving support into workplace strategy ensuring that organisational investment in flexible caring structures provides the best value for employers and employees alike.

Despite this, **over a third of Irish employers rarely or never discuss care** in their workforce strategy, missing a critical opportunity for value creation.

Our research shows a clear and stark gap between employers and employees, creating a push-and-pull dynamic:



of employees feel their employer does not sufficiently support their caregiving responsibilities.



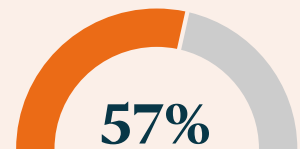
of working parents have considered leaving their jobs due to a lack of support.

In an evolving workplace, leaders are no longer just decision-makers; they are experience owners, responsible for shaping environments where employees can thrive.

A key part of this role is recognising the realities of caregiving and ensuring that organisational policies reflect and support employees' needs.



of employers believe business leaders should advocate for better care support, both internally and externally.



of employers report higher engagement under flexible, empathetic leadership.

The workforce is more diverse than ever, with different generations holding distinct expectations about work-life balance. Bridging the generational gaps with an approach that reflects individual differences is of the upmost importance to retain talent:



50% of Gen Z employees prioritise work-life balance over salary.

42% of millennials report that a poor work-life balance is a leading reason for leaving a job.

Call to Action: The Leadership Imperative

For businesses to remain competitive, leaders must proactively integrate care into their talent strategies. Empathy, flexibility, and inclusive policies are not just cultural aspirations - they are business imperatives.

Organisations that champion caregiving support will attract and retain top talent, build more resilient workforces, and drive long-term profitability.

Now is the time to move beyond discussion and into action to redefine leadership, reshape workplaces, and unlock new opportunities for both employees and businesses alike.

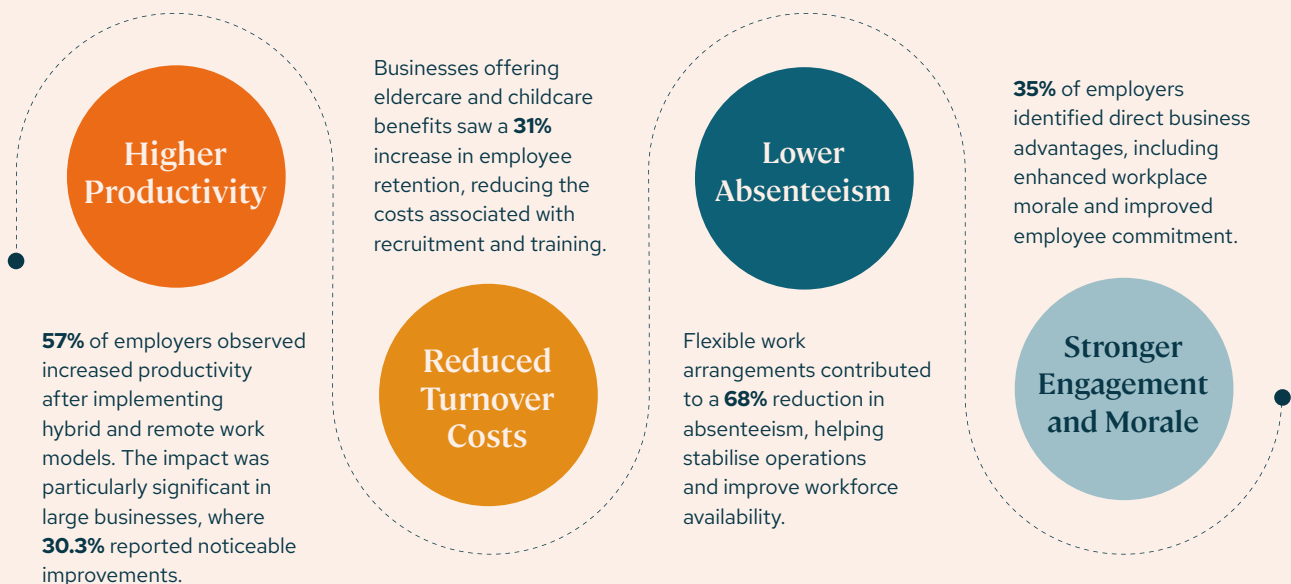


Care Economics: Quantifying the ROI of Supportive Workplaces

The ongoing tension between what employees want and what employers know is best for the business has never been more pronounced. Employees seek greater flexibility, the ability to balance caregiving responsibilities, and workplaces that acknowledge their personal needs. Meanwhile, employers must ensure that business objectives—productivity, efficiency, and long-term profitability—are met. The challenge is finding a model that satisfies both perspectives while delivering measurable business benefits. Our research underscores the undeniable commercial advantages of integrating caregiving support into workplace policies. Businesses that prioritise flexible work arrangements and caregiving support not only improve employee engagement but also experience tangible financial and operational benefits. This is an investment that pays off both in the short and long term.

The Business Case for Care-Supportive Workplaces

Employers who integrate caregiving support into their strategy report clear gains:



These benefits are particularly critical in industries with high turnover, where replacing skilled workers can cost between **50-150%** of their annual salary. By investing in care-focused policies, businesses not only retain experienced employees but also lower hiring and onboarding expenses.

The Role of Technology in Work-Life Balance

Technology has become a key enabler of work-life balance, helping bridge the gap between work demands and caregiving responsibilities.



Caregiving in the Irish Workforce: A Business Necessity

With an ageing population and rising eldercare demands, businesses must adapt to avoid losing skilled employees due to caregiving obligations. The reality is that workplaces that support employees through flexible policies and care initiatives are more productive and resilient.

As one employee in our study put it:

Companies are more productive when they support their people.



The Commercial Impact of Care-Supportive Workplaces

Beyond ethical considerations, care-supportive policies drive real financial returns:

Higher Workforce Participation:

Businesses that prioritise caregiving support see stronger workforce engagement.

Operational Efficiency:

With lower absenteeism and reduced stress levels, employees perform more effectively.



Enhanced Talent Retention:

Retaining employees through flexible policies reduces turnover-related expenses.

Competitive Advantage:

Employers that invest in care-friendly policies are more attractive to top talent in a competitive job market.

Care economics is not just a theoretical concept – it is a practical, data-backed approach to optimising workforce performance. As workforce demographics continue to evolve, caregiving responsibilities can no longer be seen as a personal issue; they are a core business concern.

Employers who recognise this shift and act decisively will position themselves ahead of the competition, ensuring their businesses thrive in an era where flexibility, retention, and productivity define long-term success.

Bridging Generational Gaps: Creating a Unified, Productive Workforce

Our research highlights the evolving expectations of employees across different generations, particularly regarding caregiving responsibilities, work-life balance, and career progression. As businesses strive to build more inclusive and high-performing teams, understanding these generational differences is crucial. Companies that effectively integrate multi-generational policies into their workforce strategy experience **25% higher innovation rates**, demonstrating that diversity in age and experience leads to more dynamic problem-solving and creativity.

The Impact of Care Responsibilities on Career Progression

A significant proportion of employees feel that caregiving and parenthood present barriers to career advancement:



37%

of carers

of employees with caregiving responsibilities believe these duties leaves their lives incompatible with senior roles



40%

of women

+



24%

of men

report that being a parent has negatively impacted their career progression.



35%

of women

+



29%

of men

feel that being a parent negatively impacts their ability to progress into leadership positions.

Our research highlights that employees who are not parents but have other caregiving responsibilities such as supporting ageing parents or extended family members often feel unseen in workplace policies. This sentiment is particularly strong among Gen Z and millennial employees, who report a lack of recognition for their caregiving commitments compared to working parents.



52%

say eldercare is not treated as seriously as childcare in the workplace, exposing a significant gap in policies and cultural expectations.

One respondent summarised:

“It’s not just about segmenting employees into different life stages - self-care, childcare, and eldercare are issues that affect people across *all* career phases.”

As a whole these findings indicate that workplace cultures still favour employees without significant care responsibilities, often sidelining those who need more flexibility.

Businesses that fail to address these challenges risk losing experienced employees who feel forced to choose between professional success and personal obligations.

The Disconnect Between Generations on Work Flexibility

Work-life balance and flexible work arrangements are key differentiators for employee satisfaction across different age groups. Our data shows that:



30%

of employees

aged 50+ feel excluded from flexible work policies, often due to outdated assumptions that they are less adaptable to remote or hybrid work.



50%

of Gen-Z

employees prioritise work-life balance over salary, making flexibility and well-being key drivers of retention among younger talent.



42%

of millennials

report that a poor work-life balance is a leading reason for leaving a job.

As one Gen Z employee in our study noted:

“Culture is changing. People no longer want to live for their jobs.”

This shift in priorities underscores the growing expectation that work should fit around life, rather than the other way around. Employers who fail to adapt to these changing dynamics will struggle to attract and retain top talent.

Why Generational Inclusion Matters

Multi-generational workforces offer unique strengths, blending the experience and knowledge of older employees with the fresh perspectives and technological fluency of younger generations. Companies that actively bridge generational gaps by fostering inclusive policies can:

- **Enhance productivity** by ensuring all employees, regardless of age, feel valued and supported.
- **Drive innovation** by combining diverse perspectives.
- **Strengthen retention** by offering policies that cater to employees at different life stages.

Commercial Impacts of Multi-Generational Inclusion

Organisations that fail to create inclusive workplaces risk:

- **Losing experienced employees** who feel unsupported in balancing their caregiving responsibilities.
- **Higher turnover costs**, particularly among millennials and Gen Z employees who are more willing to leave jobs that do not align with their values.
- **Reduced innovation**, as workplaces without generational diversity miss out on the benefits of knowledge-sharing between age groups.

Conversely, companies that invest in multi-generational policies benefit from:

- **Increased employee engagement** across all age groups.
- **Stronger succession planning**, ensuring leadership pipelines remain robust.
- **Enhanced employer branding**, making the organisation attractive to a wider talent pool.

Our research underscores that a one-size-fits-all approach no longer works in today's multi-generational workforce. Businesses that embrace generational diversity through flexible policies, inclusive leadership, and cross-generational collaboration will not only retain top talent but also drive long-term business success.

By proactively addressing the evolving needs of employees across all age groups, organisations can future-proof their workforces and create a more engaged, innovative, and high-performing team.

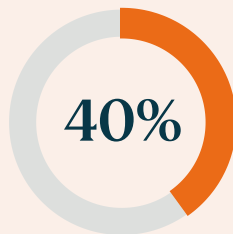
The Power of Purpose: Finding the Choice and Flexibility Balance

The Role of Choice, Flexibility, and Purpose in the Future of Work

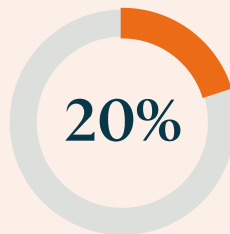
Our research highlights that work-life balance is a critical factor in employee well-being, productivity, and organisational success. Workplace flexibility is not a binary choice - it is not simply about choosing between remote, hybrid, or in-person work. Employees and employers alike value choice and autonomy, but true success lies in finding the right balance that aligns individual and business needs while being anchored in a shared purpose. When employees and organisations are aligned around a common goal, everyone thrives.

The Link Between Flexibility, Caregiving, and Retention

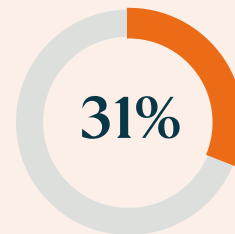
The data is clear:



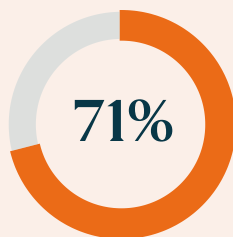
40% of working parents consider leaving their jobs due to inadequate family support policies.



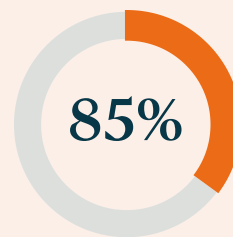
Companies with robust parental leave policies experience 20% higher retention rates.



31% of employees say technology-induced stress often or very often impacts their work life balance.



71% of employees say work-life balance policies have improved their overall well-being,



and those working in organisations with strong policies report 35% lower burnout rates.

These findings highlight that flexibility and support are key to employee retention. Employees who struggle to balance work and caregiving responsibilities are more likely to experience burnout, disengagement, or leave for organisations that provide stronger work-life balance options. As one working parent in our study stated: ***“Employers need to be understanding, it’s hard to feel valued or even seen otherwise.”***

Meanwhile, our research highlights a trend in employees also becoming increasingly keen to set stronger boundaries. As one senior professional in our study noted: ***“I’m certainly more militant about my right to disconnect than ever before.”***

This sentiment reflects the growing expectation for businesses to acknowledge caregiving and work-life balance as legitimate workplace concerns, rather than individual challenges employees must navigate alone.

The Business Case for Work-Life Balance and Employee-Centric Policies

Investing in flexible and care-supportive policies delivers measurable commercial benefits:

- **Higher Employee Engagement:** Employees who feel supported are more committed and productive.
- **Reduced Turnover Costs:** Retaining talent reduces recruitment and training expenses.
- **Lower Absenteeism:** Flexibility in caregiving leads to fewer unplanned absences.
- **Stronger Employer Branding:** Businesses known for supporting work-life balance attract high-calibre talent.
- **Increased Productivity:** Companies with flexible work options see a 20% productivity boost due to reduced stress and higher engagement.

Moving Beyond Rigid Work Models: Creating Adaptive Strategies

Despite clear benefits, many organisations still operate within rigid structures that fail to accommodate evolving workforce needs. Inflexible work arrangements, limited leave options, and lack of formal support create unnecessary barriers for employees who balance work and caregiving responsibilities. Without proactive change, businesses risk losing top talent to competitors who offer stronger work-life integration.

The Commercial Impact of Purpose-Driven Flexibility

Employers that align flexibility with business needs and a shared purpose see:

- **Stronger Employee Loyalty:** Employees who feel valued are more likely to stay long-term.
- **Reduced Stress and Burnout:** Flexible policies create healthier work environments.
- **Greater Gender Diversity in Leadership:** Supportive policies help retain women in senior roles.
- **Competitive Advantage in Talent Attraction:** Job seekers prioritise workplaces that offer meaningful flexibility and work-life balance.

The Future of Work: Finding the Sweet Spot Between Flexibility and Purpose

Employees no longer view work and life as separate silos; they expect a workplace that provides flexibility without compromising business success. This is not about choosing between remote, hybrid, or in-person models - it is about finding the right structure that aligns with business goals, individual needs, and a shared sense of purpose.

Organisations that prioritise adaptability and embed work-life balance into their corporate strategy will not only retain top talent but also build a healthier, more engaged workforce. The challenge for leaders is no longer whether to provide flexibility, it is about how to design a workplace where employees and employers thrive together.



Modern Leadership: The Empathy Imperative

Leaders as Experience Owners

Our research highlights that empathy in leadership is not just a cultural advantage, it is a strategic necessity. In an evolving workplace, leaders are no longer just decision-makers; they are experience owners, responsible for shaping environments where employees can thrive.

A key part of this role is recognising the realities of caregiving and ensuring that organisational policies reflect and support employees' needs.



Businesses where leaders actively support employees with caregiving responsibilities see stronger engagement, higher retention, and improved workplace satisfaction. However, our findings reveal that many businesses still fail to provide adequate support in this area:

40%

of employees feel their employer does not sufficiently support their caregiving responsibilities.

36%

The impact is particularly evident for those managing eldercare, with **36%** of carers reporting that these responsibilities have negatively affected their career progression.

While organisations that integrate caregiving support into their leadership approach see tangible benefits, only **19% of employers** discuss care responsibilities in their corporate strategy. This suggests that many businesses remain reactive rather than proactive, potentially leading to increased attrition and reduced productivity.

Trust & Advocacy: Leadership that Cares and Champions Change

Great leaders build trust, advocate for change, and drive meaningful progress. Our research underscores the growing expectation for business leaders to take an active role in supporting workplace caregiving:

- **84% of employers** believe business leaders should advocate for better care support, both internally and externally.
- **Medium-sized businesses (92.9%)** are the most committed to championing workplace care policies, followed by large businesses (**87.9%**). **In contrast, small businesses (25.6%)** are the least likely to actively promote or implement care-related initiatives.

Employees themselves also expect more from leadership. As one Gen Z employee in our research noted: **“Think about what kind of workplace you would want for your own children.”** Similarly, a millennial employee reinforced the need for leadership to genuinely care about employee well-being: **“People want to work hard, but they want to do it for leaders who care.”**

Balancing Self-Interest & Self-Care: A New Leadership Model

Traditional leadership models often prioritise business objectives over employee well-being. However, modern leadership must balance **self-interest (business performance)** with **self-care (employee sustainability)**, ensuring that both individuals and organisations thrive. This shift is particularly relevant as the demand for caregiving continues to rise especially amongst those in the workforce caring for elderly relatives. As caregiving needs grow, businesses must adapt, ensuring policies reflect the needs of their evolving workforce.

Organisations that successfully balance business goals with empathetic leadership see significant advantages:



Representation: An Engine towards Empathetic Leadership

Empathetic leadership thrives in diverse and inclusive environments. Leaders with varied backgrounds bring broader perspectives, fostering deeper understanding and support for employees’ needs. Diverse leadership teams naturally exhibit higher empathy, reflecting the workforce’s experiences. Employees feel more understood when leaders share similar challenges, such as balancing caregiving with career growth.



One respondent noted:

“Employees have nuanced life experiences – no matter your individual context, there’s always something happening outside of work.”

The Business Case for Empathy-Driven Leadership

Beyond ethical and cultural considerations, empathy in leadership delivers clear commercial benefits. Our research found that:



25%

Workplaces offering flexibility for caregivers report a **25%** decrease in stress-related absenteeism.



30.3%

of employers reported the highest percentage of significant gains, reinforcing the idea that when employees feel supported, they bring more focus and commitment to their professional responsibilities.

Empathy-driven leadership is no longer a **'nice-to-have'**, it is a business imperative. The modern workforce expects leaders to understand and support their diverse needs, particularly when it comes to balancing work and caregiving responsibilities.

Future-Proofing Workplaces: Leadership in Action

To remain competitive and resilient, organisations must integrate caregiving into corporate strategy. Leaders who champion these efforts will not only retain top talent but also cultivate a healthier, more engaged, and productive workforce. The question for business leaders is no longer whether to act, **but how quickly they can implement meaningful change.**



Reflections for Leaders

Care Economics

Do your care policies go beyond statutory requirements, and have you considered the potential economic value of exceeding them in key areas?

Are your policies predominantly rule-based? Could a principles-based approach improve efficiency and impact?

Do you invest in effective offboarding and reboarding for leaves of absence to support smoother, more productive returns?

Do you measure employee experience to confirm your policies deliver the expected value?

Do you regularly review and update policies to keep processes aligned with your evolving workforce and business needs? Are there outdated policies that might need to be retired?

Are your care policies streamlined into one comprehensive, efficient framework?

Do you benchmark your policies to stay competitive and aligned with your sector and brand?

Bridging Generational Gaps

Are your core values reflective to employees of all generations?

Do you consciously avoid generational stereotypes? What more could you do to ensure all individuals feel valued and integrated?

Do you regularly update internal communication practices to reflect modern technologies, or are traditional styles still the default?

Have you considered adding a 'reverse mentoring' option to your internal mentoring and coaching processes?

Do your care policies address 'whole life' needs, or are they overly focused on childcare?

Does your performance and talent process promote role models from all generations, regardless of level or rank?

Do your employee supports such as wellbeing programmes, EAP, and resource groups, address the impact of care responsibilities and related stresses for all generations?

The Power of Purpose

Have you clearly communicated the purpose behind different practices to your employees, such as using in-person time to foster collaboration?

Do you have clear communication boundaries and 'switch-off' guidelines to help employees recharge daily?

Do you regularly explore technological advancements to boost productivity while supporting more balanced work patterns?

Are your policies considerate enough to the realities of modern households, and are they designed to support all genders and age groups equally?

Does your culture and leadership normalise care and career breaks as part of a healthy, modern organisation, or are these seen as career obstacles?

Modern Leadership

Does your leadership training incorporate an inclusivity lens?

Do you recognise, encourage and reward inclusive, empathetic behaviours in leadership assessments?

Do your induction and onboarding processes emphasise rigid rules or foster a mindset of learning and growth?

Do your senior leaders demonstrate advocacy and sponsorship for all talent equally when it comes to performance, reward, progression and succession?

Do you prioritise self-care for yourself and your leadership team to support high performance and set a positive example?

Is the employee sentiment felt across your organisation reflective of the leadership culture you aim to foster?

Appendix



Methodology

This report is based on a comprehensive research study conducted by Reputation Inc between October 2024 and January 2025 designed to explore the intersection of caregiving responsibilities, work-life balance, and workplace policies. The research aimed to provide insights from both employees and employers across diverse sectors and business sizes.

The study employed a **mixed-methods approach**, combining **quantitative survey research** with **qualitative insights** from focus groups and in-depth employer interviews. This approach ensured a well-rounded understanding of the challenges and opportunities related to workplace caregiving support.

Gen Z Future Leaders Focus Groups

To explore emerging workplace expectations, **focus groups were conducted with Gen Z employees** who were classified as **future leaders** by their organisations. These sessions provided deeper insights into:

- Shifting attitudes towards leadership, work-life balance, and self-care.
- Expectations of workplace culture, flexibility, and caregiving policies.
- Perceptions of intergenerational differences in attitudes towards work.

Employee Survey

A **nationally representative survey** was conducted with **over 1,000 employees** from a range of industries, roles, and levels of seniority. The survey covered:

- The impact of childcare and eldercare on career progression.
- Perceptions of employer support for caregiving responsibilities.
- Changes in work-life balance since the pandemic.
- Workplace policies related to flexible work, leave, and well-being initiatives.
- The emotional toll of balancing work and care.

Employer Research

In-depth **qualitative** and **quantitative research** was conducted with **150 employers**, covering:

- SMEs, medium to large indigenous businesses, and major multinationals.
- Employers' perspectives on the impact of flexible work, caregiving policies, and well-being initiatives.
- Business leaders' views on productivity, employee retention, and commercial benefits.
- The role of leadership in advocating for care-related support in the workplace.
- Attitudes towards government policies and business responsibility in addressing caregiving challenges.

Data Collection & Analysis

- The **employee survey** was administered through an **online platform**, ensuring a diverse and balanced sample across age groups, industries, and job levels.
- **Focus groups** were conducted using a **semi-structured discussion guide**, allowing for open-ended insights while ensuring consistency across sessions.
- **Employer interviews** combined **structured quantitative questioning** with **qualitative discussions**, enabling the identification of patterns and emerging trends.
- The data was **thematically analysed** to extract key findings, with statistical insights validated against industry benchmarks where applicable.

Employee Survey Findings

1. Emotional Impact of Managing Childcare and Work

The most commonly reported emotions were:



**Guilt
(14.8%)**

"Guilt, frustration, conflicted."



**Sadness
(13.6%)**

"Sad, letting down the team."



**Anger
(9.5%)**

"Angry that I had to do it."



**Stress
(8.6%)**

"Stress, worry, anxiety"



**Regret
(7.3%)**

"Regret, sadness, anger."



**Relief
(5.3%)**

"Relief, joy, happiness."



**Empowerment
(3.8%)**

"Empowered, proud, grateful."

2. How Views on Work-Life Balance Have Changed Since the Pandemic

Employees reported:

- *"I prefer to work from home."*
- *"Spending more time with family has become my priority."*
- *"The pandemic highlighted the importance of balancing work and life."*
- *"Remote work is normal now."*
- *"The pressure to always be on has increased since working remotely."*

3. Long-Term Strategies for Supporting Working Parents

Employees reported:

- **Flexible Work Hours & Remote Work (25.4%)** – *"Flexible shifts and hybrid work should be the norm."*
- **Childcare Support (12.8%)** – *"On-site childcare would be a game changer."*
- **Paid Leave & Family Support (7.5%)** – *"Better maternity and paternity leave policies."*
- **Workplace Culture & Understanding (8.7%)** – *"Supporting parents shouldn't just be a policy—it should be a mindset."*
- **Alternative Work Schedules (8.1%)** – *"Four-day work week would be a practical solution."*

Eldercare Findings

Employees reported:

- **36% of employees** believe that eldercare responsibilities have negatively impacted their career progression.
- **45% of employees** stated their organisation does not have policies in place to support carers.
- **52% of employees** feel that eldercare responsibilities are not given the same level of importance as childcare.
- **37% of carers** feel that being a carer is incompatible with career progression, with **41%** of women and **31%** of men holding this view.

Key Quotes on Eldercare Challenges

- *"Eldercare isn't just an emotional burden—it's a professional one too."*
- *"There's an unspoken assumption that if you're caring for an ageing parent, you're not as ambitious."*
- *"My workplace has policies for childcare, but nothing for eldercare."*

Lack of Workplace Policies and Recognition

- *"There's no policy, no support—just the expectation that I'll somehow manage both."*
- *"If I had to leave early to pick up a child, that would be fine. But if I leave early for my father's medical appointment, I feel like I'm letting the team down."*

Gender Disparities in Eldercare Responsibilities

- *"As a woman, I feel like eldercare responsibilities are assumed to be mine."*
- *"Women in my workplace talk about their career 'ceiling'—for carers, it's more like a wall."*

Self-Care Findings

- **46% of employees** report hybrid work has had a positive impact on self-care.
- **38%** say their employer supports their self-care with flexible hours.
- **19%** have access to wellness programmes, while **22%** have access to mental health resources.

Challenges of Self-Care While Working from Home

- *"Without a clear distinction between 'work mode' and 'rest mode,' it's difficult to stop working and relax."*
- *"I can't switch off. When negative emotions happen, they invade my safe space."*
- *"Actually taking the time to step away feels guilty—everyone assumes you're available all the time."*

Guilt Around Prioritising Self-Care

- *"Self-care is not a luxury, but a necessary investment in my long-term well-being."*
- *"I remind myself that I should be working to live, not living to work."*

Corporate Culture and Self-Care

- *"Companies are more productive when staff are looked after."*
- *"Pushes employees to make sure we put ourselves before work and maintain a healthy work-life balance."*
- *"Companies do what they can to look good but don't really help when it's needed."*

Employer Survey Findings

Employer Research (n=150)

Employer Insights on Productivity Trends in Remote/Hybrid Work Models (Post-2020 vs Pre-2020)

Overall Productivity Changes (Employer Perspective)

- 23% of employers reported that productivity **increased significantly**
- 34% said productivity **increased somewhat**
- 37% observed **no change** in productivity levels
- 5% reported that productivity **decreased somewhat**
- 1% noted a **significant decrease** in productivity

Key Employer Insights

- ✓ 57% of employers reported an increase in employee productivity since shifting to remote/hybrid models
- ✓ Large businesses saw the highest percentage of significant productivity gains (**30.3%**)
- ✓ Medium-sized companies saw the strongest overall productivity improvements (**46.4% reporting moderate increases**)
- ✓ Small businesses were least likely to see improvements, with over half (**53.8%**) reporting no change
- ✓ Only **6%** of employers reported a decline in productivity, with large companies experiencing the highest drop

Impact of Technology on Work-Life Balance for Carers

Overall Impact of Technology on Balancing Work and Care Responsibilities

- 38% of employers reported that technology has **significantly improved** employees' ability to balance work and care
- 37% said it has **somewhat improved** the balance
- 22% observed **no impact**
- 2% reported that technology has **somewhat hindered** work-life balance
- 1% found that it has **significantly hindered** employees' ability to manage both work and caregiving

Key Insights:

- ✓ 75% of employers reported that technology has improved employees' ability to balance work and care
- ✓ Medium-sized businesses (**50-250 employees**) reported the highest level of significant improvement (**53.6%**)
- ✓ Large businesses saw the strongest overall benefit, with **84.8%** reporting at least some improvement
- ✓ Small businesses were the most likely to report no impact (**28.2%**)

Technology-Induced Stress and Work-Life Balance

How Often Employees Report Technology Negatively Impacting Work-Life Balance

- 11% of employees feel technology very often **negatively affects** their work-life balance
- 29% experience this impact **often**
- 25% feel it **occasionally affects** them
- 27% report it **rarely impacts** them
- 8% say it **never affects** their work-life balance

Key Insights:

- ✓ **40%** of employers feel technology frequently (often or very often) negatively impacts work-life balance
- ✓ Employees in large companies report the highest level of frequent technology stress (**54.5%**)
- ✓ Employers in small businesses are least likely to report frequent stress from technology, with **36.2%** rarely or never experiencing it
- ✓ Medium-sized businesses see the highest percentage of employees experiencing stress occasionally (**35.7%**)
- ✓ More than one-third of employers in large companies (**33.3%**) report that while technology causes stress, it is rare

Employer Strategies for Supporting Employees with Care Responsibilities (Next 5 Years)

Planned Strategies to Support Carers (Employer Perspective)

- **36%** of employers plan to **enhance flexible working arrangements** to better support employees with care responsibilities.
- **21%** intend to **increase paid leave options** for those balancing work and caregiving.
- **8%** will invest in **additional care-related benefits**, such as financial assistance or on-site care facilities.
- **35%** of employers currently have **no specific plans** to introduce new support measures.
- **0%** reported "Other" as a planned strategy.

Key Insights:

- ✓ Flexible working is the most common planned support strategy (**36%**) across all company sizes.
- ✓ Large companies are more likely to invest in additional care-related benefits (**9.1%**) than small and medium-sized businesses.
- ✓ Medium-sized businesses are leading in increased paid leave options (**28.6%**).
- ✓ Small businesses are the least likely to introduce new measures, with **43.6%** having no plans.

Employer Policies Supporting Employees with Care Responsibilities

Prevalence of Formal Care Policies (Employer Perspective)

- **62%** of employers report having **formal policies** in place to support employees with care responsibilities.
- **38%** of employers **do not** have any specific policies to support carers.

Key Insights:

- ✓ Larger organisations are significantly more likely to have formal care policies (**72.7%** in large businesses vs. **38.5%** in small businesses).
- ✓ Medium-sized businesses lead in care-related support, with **82.1%** offering formal policies.

Commercial Benefits of Integrating Care Support into Corporate Strategy

Employer Insights on Measurable Commercial Benefits

- **35%** of employers report **measurable commercial benefits** from integrating care support and work-life balance initiatives.
- **35%** have **not observed** direct commercial benefits.
- **30%** are **unsure** whether such policies have had a measurable impact.

Key Insights:

- ✓ Larger and medium-sized businesses are the most likely to report commercial benefits (**42.4% and 42.9%**, respectively).
- ✓ Small businesses are least likely to observe benefits, with only **23.1%** seeing a positive impact.
- ✓ A significant portion of employers (**30%**) are unsure whether care-support policies contribute to commercial success.
- ✓ Medium-sized businesses show the lowest uncertainty (**28.6%**), suggesting a stronger awareness of the impact of these policies.

Employer Perspectives on Government Support for Employees with Care Responsibilities

Overall Perception of Government Support

- **18%** of employers believe government policies are **fully supportive** of employees with care responsibilities.
- **37%** consider government policies **somewhat supportive**.
- **20%** remain **neutral** on the effectiveness of government policies.
- **9%** believe government policies are **somewhat unsupportive**.
- **16%** feel government policies are **not supportive at all**.

Key Insights:

- ✓ Larger and medium-sized businesses are more likely to view government policies as supportive compared to small businesses.
- ✓ Small businesses show the highest dissatisfaction, with over a quarter (**25.6%**) saying government policies are not supportive at all.
- ✓ Male employers are significantly more likely (**31.7%**) to see government policies as fully supportive than female employers (**8.5%**). **20.3%** female employers consider them not supportive at all.
- ✓ A significant portion (**20%**) of employers remain neutral, indicating uncertainty about the actual impact of government policies.

Employer Perspectives on the Balance of Responsibility for Care-Related Challenges

Overall Employer Views on the Employer-Government Balance

- **19%** of employers believe they are **shouldering more responsibility than is reasonable** in addressing care-related challenges.
- **33%** feel **the current balance between employers and the government is appropriate**.
- **30%** believe **the government should take on more responsibility** for care-related challenges.
- **14%** think **employers could take on more responsibility** for supporting employees with care needs.
- **4%** are **unsure or need more information** on the issue.

Key Insights:

- ✓ Large and medium-sized businesses are more likely to feel the balance between employers and the government is appropriate (**39.4% and 46.4%, respectively**).
- ✓ Female employers are significantly more likely (**40.7%**) to believe the government should take on more responsibility compared to male employers (**14.6%**).
- ✓ Small businesses feel the greatest strain, with **23.1%** saying they are taking on too much responsibility.
- ✓ Medium-sized businesses are the most satisfied with the current balance (**46.4%**).
- ✓ Small businesses (**38.5%**) and large businesses (**27.3%**) are the most likely to want increased government support.
- ✓ A minority (**4%**) of employers remain unsure about the best approach.

Employer Insights on Leadership Engagement with Care Responsibilities

Frequency of Leadership Discussions on Care Responsibilities

- 19% of employers say their leadership team discusses care responsibilities **regularly (e.g., quarterly)**.
- 46% report these discussions happen **occasionally (e.g., annually)**.
- 23% say leadership **rarely** engages with care-related topics.
- 12% state that care responsibilities are **never** discussed at the leadership level.

Key Insights:

- ✓ Medium-sized businesses lead in regular discussions about care responsibilities (**32.1%**), followed by small businesses (**15.4%**).
- ✓ Large businesses discuss care responsibilities less frequently at the leadership level, with only **12.1%** reporting regular discussions.
- ✓ Employers in small businesses are the least likely to have occasional discussions, with only **38.5%** reporting annual engagement.
- ✓ A significant portion (**23%**) of employers say leadership rarely engages with care-related topics, with another **12%** stating it is never addressed.

Employer Perspectives on Business Leaders' Responsibility in Advocating for Better Care Support

Do Business Leaders Have a Responsibility to Advocate for Care Support Beyond Their Organisations?

- 84% of employers believe business leaders **should advocate** for better care support systems beyond their organisations (e.g., public forums, policy engagement).
- 16% do **not** believe advocacy is part of business leadership's role.

Key Insights:

- ✓ The majority of employers (**84%**) believe business leaders should actively advocate for better care support policies.
- ✓ Medium-sized businesses (**92.9%**) show the strongest support for advocacy, followed by large businesses (**87.9%**).
- ✓ Small businesses are the least likely to support business leader advocacy, with **25.6%** believing it is not their role.
- ✓ Male and female employers share similar views on advocacy, with men slightly more likely (**85.4%**) to support external engagement.

Employer Perspectives on the Evolution of Societal Attitudes Toward Work and Care Responsibilities (Past 5 Years)

Overall Employer Perceptions

- 18% believe societal attitudes have **greatly improved**, with widespread recognition of work-life balance.
- 24% say attitudes have **greatly improved**, but only for those in leadership or higher-income roles.
- 30% feel attitudes have **improved somewhat**, though disparities still exist based on gender and income levels.
- 16% believe attitudes have **improved somewhat**, but true fairness for all is still lacking.
- 7% think societal attitudes have **stayed the same**, with little real progress.
- 2% believe attitudes have **declined somewhat**, as caregiving challenges have increased.
- 3% feel attitudes have **declined significantly**, making work-care balance harder.

Gen Z Focus Group Insights

Empathy and Leadership in Workplace Culture

Empathy is becoming a defining characteristic of effective leadership in today's workplaces. Leaders who genuinely care about employee well-being foster a culture where individuals feel valued and supported. Discussions from focus groups highlight that leadership rooted in empathy extends beyond traditional management approaches—it involves recognising the full human experience of employees and building a workplace grounded in respect, fairness, and

- Leaders should consider how they would want their own loved ones to be treated at work, ensuring fairness and kindness in their leadership approach. *"Leaders should think about the type of workplace they would want for their own children."*
- Employees are more motivated when they feel their work aligns with their values and when they operate in a supportive environment. *"People want to work hard, but they want to do it for the right people, where it feels meaningful."*
- The modern workforce expects more than just financial compensation—they seek a workplace culture that reflects their values and prioritises well-being. *"What kind of workplace do I want to be part of? What type of environment would I be proud to see my children working in?"*
- Empathy-driven leadership is not just a 'nice to have'—it is critical for shaping a sustainable, positive, and high-performing workplace. Leaders who understand the diverse needs of their employees, including emotional well-being and life outside of work, are more likely to inspire loyalty and commitment.

Work-Life Balance and Evolving Expectations

The era of the *"workaholic"* is giving way to a growing emphasis on work-life balance and personal well-being. Employees today no longer define themselves solely by their careers; they expect time and space to nurture their families, health, and personal interests. This shift is transforming the way workplaces function, with increasing demands for flexibility and employer support.

- Self-care and personal fulfilment are no longer optional—they are essential for both well-being and productivity. *"People are more aware of what they want, and they're prioritising self-care instead of letting their job define them."*
- Today's workforce is redefining success to include balance, personal growth, and well-being, rather than just professional milestones. *"Culture is changing—people aren't going to let their lives revolve around their jobs anymore."*
- Companies that fail to support work-life balance risk losing employees who prioritise flexibility and personal time. *"It's not just about segmenting employees into different life stages—self-care, childcare, and eldercare are issues that affect people across all career phases."*
- **Work-life balance is no longer a luxury; it is a fundamental expectation.** Employees are increasingly unwilling to sacrifice their personal lives for their jobs. To attract and retain top talent, organisations must respect personal time, offer flexibility, and establish clear boundaries between work and life.

Holistic Employee Support Systems

For employees to thrive, organisations must provide more than a paycheck—they need to create a support system that acknowledges and accommodates all aspects of life. From childcare and eldercare to mental and physical well-being, a holistic approach ensures that employees can focus on work without being overburdened by external stressors.

- Employees balance multiple life responsibilities—childcare, eldercare, and self-care—requiring workplaces to offer appropriate support. ***“People want the right support at different stages of life, depending on their care needs.”***
- A holistic support system ensures that employees can be fully engaged at work because their personal challenges are being acknowledged and addressed. ***“If you want employees to perform at their best, you have to support them—only then can they truly focus on their work.”***
- Companies that integrate comprehensive support for employees are viewed as more empathetic and, as a result, experience better retention and engagement. ***“People managing childcare also need time for self-care—they’re working, parenting, and exhausted.”***
- Businesses cannot thrive if their employees are overwhelmed by personal challenges without workplace support. A holistic approach recognises the complexities of modern life and provides the resources employees need to balance work and personal responsibilities effectively.

Intergenerational Perspectives on Workplaces

The generational divide in the workplace is becoming more evident, as younger employees enter a workforce still led largely by older generations. While traditional leadership has often been defined by long hours and career-first mindsets, younger employees expect a more balanced and flexible work environment that acknowledges their personal well-being.

- Younger employees bring a more holistic perspective to the workplace, where personal care, family, and flexibility are as important as career progression. ***“What kind of work environment do we want to create? Employees want to work hard, but for the right people.”***
- There is a growing call for empathy from leadership, recognising that employees are complex individuals with personal experiences that extend beyond their jobs. ***“Leaders need to see employees as more than just workers—people have responsibilities outside of work that impact their performance and well-being.”***
- Bridging the generational gap is key to building a cohesive, effective workforce where all employees feel seen and supported. ***“Employees have nuanced life experiences – no matter your individual context, there’s always something happening outside of work.”***
- The workplace is evolving, and so are employee expectations. Traditional leadership styles must adapt to the reality that employees seek more than just financial stability; they want a workplace that values them as individuals. Leaders who fail to acknowledge this shift risk losing talent to organisations that prioritise balance and inclusivity.



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