



DSM USA
DES MOINES, IOWA



WORKFORCE INSIGHTS STUDY

SKILLS OF THE FUTURE



GREATER DES MOINES
PARTNERSHIP



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2024, the Greater Des Moines Partnership invested in the third administration of a detailed workforce analysis. The third study focused on gaining a deeper understanding of future workforce skills in the region. This was a new focus as previous studies examined understanding Downtown workers' needs and interactions with Downtown Des Moines (DSM). This Workforce Insights Study was conducted using a representative sample of employees from 22 regional organizations in May 2024 to assess the ongoing evolution of the Greater Des Moines (DSM) workforce.

To understand this population in terms of their feelings, priorities and utilization patterns — both inside and outside of work — Bâton Global partnered with Reworc, another experienced global firm located in DSM, which offers a suite of analytical tools to assist leaders in assessing an organization's work behaviors, networks, cultures and spaces. After developing questions specifically for this study, their expert team leveraged an innovative virtual interview methodology to capture the sort of robust data needed to make informed decisions. Ultimately, there were five topics investigated through the assessment:

- 1. Skills of the Future (the skills needed to thrive and our readiness with them)**
- 2. Work Behaviors (the types of things our workers are doing day-to-day)**
- 3. Mobility (where our workers have been working and plan to work)**
- 4. Attributes (including of the organization and surrounding environment)**
- 5. Work Culture (both current and future states)**

We have not yet come across another workforce study that has obtained this much hyper-localized and crowdsourced data addressing the future of work. Ultimately reflecting insights generated from over 1,500 staff participants across 22 employers, this report confidently provides a deep understanding of both the present and future priorities of workers across the region.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

SKILLS OF THE FUTURE 4

How We Define and Measure Skills 4

The Future of Skills is Human 4

Generational Perspectives on Skills 8

Industry Perspectives on Skills 9

THE FUTURE OF WORK 10

The Work We Do 10

How Our Needs are Met 13

Benefits and Health 16

Leadership 17

The Culture We Experience 18

Workplays for Changing Culture 19

SKILLS OF THE FUTURE

HOW WE DEFINE AND MEASURE SKILLS

To best understand our DSM workforce perspective on the skills needed for the future, a clear and robust framework needed to be identified along with simple question items to ensure clarity amongst participants. A sub-set of the World Economic Forum's skills taxonomy was utilized for this purpose¹.

Eighteen skills were used in the study for participants to select from and provide feedback on. The participants were shown the 18 skills and were asked, "Which skills do you believe will be most important for roles or functions like yours in the next three-to-seven years?". This provided the data that generates an importance rating for the skills. The more respondents selected a skill, the higher the importance of the skill.

With the 18 skills of the future prioritized by our workforce, participants were asked, "How prepared is your organization for these needed skills in the next three-to-seven years?". This item aimed to gain insight into our employers' perceived capabilities in meeting future requirements. The goal is to identify future-forward opportunities at the corporate, training or educational level to support workforce skills needed in DSM.

THE FUTURE OF SKILLS IS HUMAN

INSIGHT #1

The most crucial skills for the future emphasize human qualities. Traditionally, skills are categorized into hard skills, i.e., those that are more technical in nature, or soft skills, meaning skills that lean into human engagement. Human skills are needed for highly complex and/or highly collaborative work activities. Of the top 10 skills for the future, 90% are related to human skills, with only "general technology literacy" in the top 10.

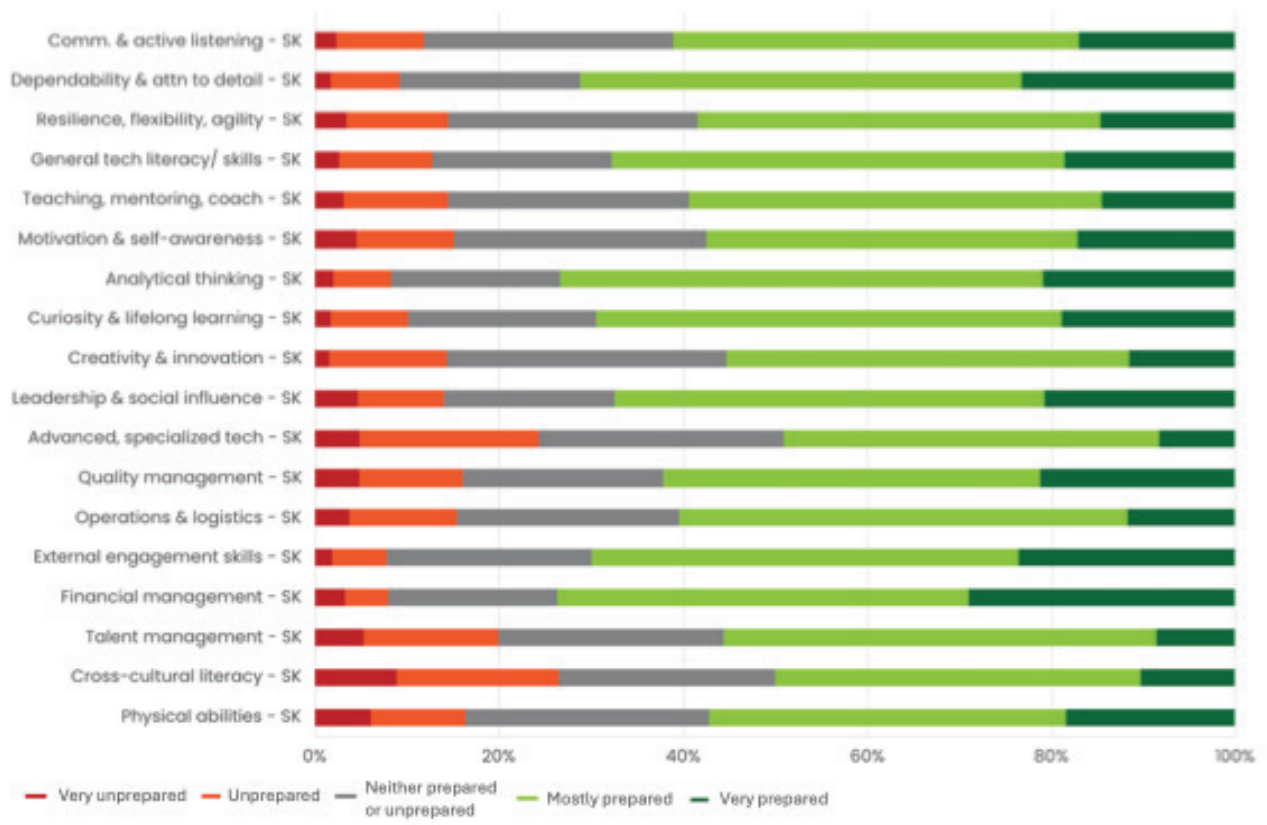
There are variances in the workforce perspective on how well-equipped their employers are to be able to help them reach the required level for the future:

The DSM regional workforce feels most confident that employers can provide appropriate upskilling in technical areas such as finance, sales and analytical thinking.

The skills where the workforce expressed the least confidence in are cross-cultural literacy and advanced, specialized technology.

¹ "Building a Common Language for Skills at Work - A Global Taxonomy", January 2021. World Economic Forum.

The following chart illustrates two key dimensions for future skills. First, the skills are ranked in order of importance to the DSM regional workforce, with communication and active listening being the most important and physical abilities being the least important. The color scales represent respondents' perceptions of organizational preparedness — meaning the business's ability to adapt and succeed — over the next three to seven years.



INSIGHT #2

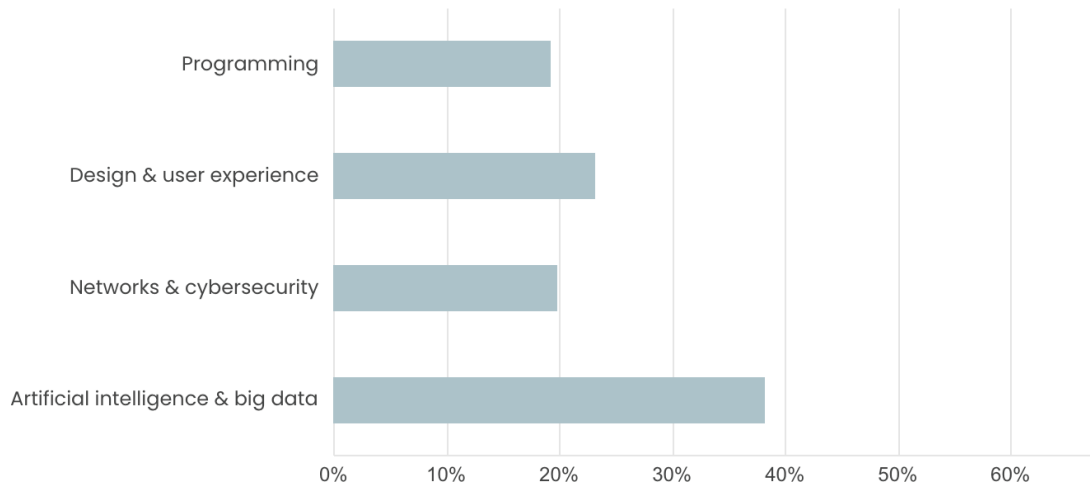
Our workforce largely has confidence in their employer's abilities to upskill them. Unpreparedness is rarely perceived to exceed 20%. This is positive news. The exceptions are in cases involving advanced, specialized technology and cross-cultural literacy.

Skills with higher levels of red as “very unprepared,” or orange as “unprepared,” demonstrate potential opportunities for collaboration and upskilling through an employer’s internal development and training programs, by partnering with a local institution of higher education or private training providers. For example, an employer may want to consider adding a cross-cultural competency training class into its internal development program.

INSIGHT #3

AI is on our workforce's mind. Although more technical skills tended to be ranked less important than human skills, this doesn't mean that technical skills aren't needed in the future. For the skill, advanced, specialized technology, our workforce indicated that when talking about this category, they mostly talked about AI (see chart below).

What advanced / specialized technology skills will be most important?



The use of this skill category to largely mean AI, combined with low confidence in participants' organizations' ability to up-skill them in this area, creates an opportunity for additional training and educational emphasis — both on the ethical and technical use of data, as well as the adaptation of AI in the workplace.

INSIGHT #4

Market opportunities for learning. Our workforce shared with us the things that could be in their way to attaining the level of skills that they feel are needed for the future (see chart below).

What, if any, do you believe are the barriers for you or other employees to gain the skills you have identified?



Nearly 20% of respondents indicated that their obstacles related to training being unavailable internally or that they lacked awareness of what was available or how to access it.

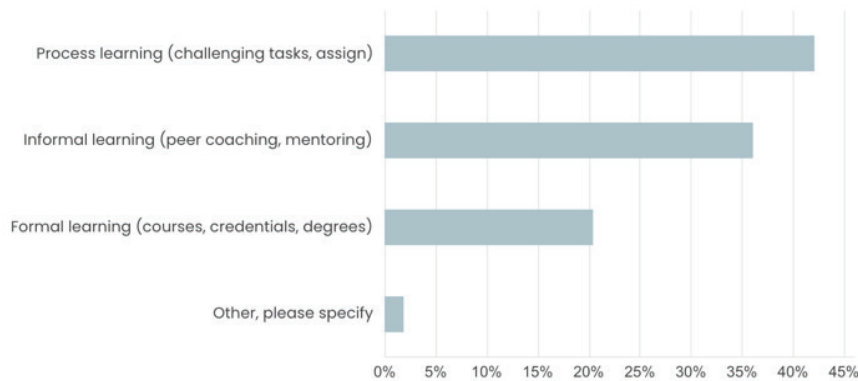
Time constraints were more often attributed to conflicts with work responsibilities (22.73%) than personal responsibilities (9.21%), indicating that our workforce expects upskilling to be part of their responsibilities.

Very few respondents cited the cost of external, formal programs as an issue, whether expressed in terms of financial constraints (6%) or perceived value versus cost (7%). This indicates an opportunity for external providers to be a part of the solution for our DSM workforce. Cost factors were more pressing for younger respondents in Gen Z.

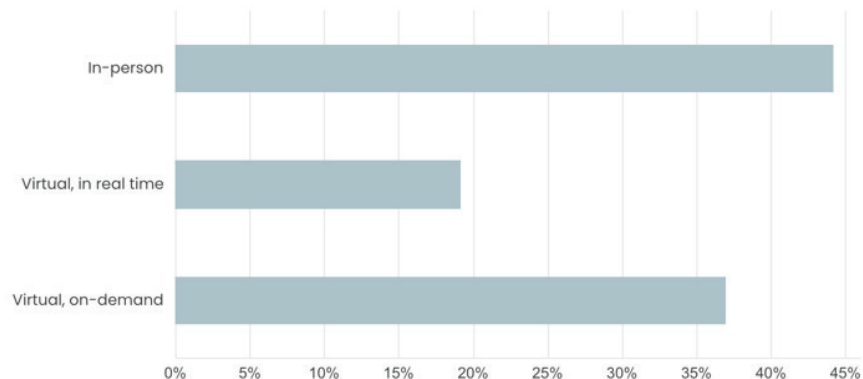
Leadership should make room for learning in their organizations, and consider how offerings are communicated and marketed internally among team members., while also increasing access to their offerings.

In considering how to deliver learning, we found that our workforce prefers process-driven learning over other types of formal learning. However, when they have a formal learning experience, they prefer in-person (see below).

Which methods of learning are most effective for you?



How do you prefer to do your formal learning?



Combined with data gathered around how organizations can promote teamwork and collaboration, which indicated that 56% of respondents want events promoting socializing or learning and development, the data provides insight into how to structure up-skilling activities most successfully. Employers should reimagine learning and development (L&D) efforts to incorporate a social component for maximum success in promoting teamwork and collaboration.

GENERATIONAL PERSPECTIVES ON SKILLS

Our methodology allows for the slicing of findings by various factors. Our analysis indicates that attitudes toward the skills of the future vary across generations.

INSIGHT #5

Gen Z is most confident that their employer can provide them with the skills they need for the future (70.87%). General technical literacy and advanced technical skills are exceptions where they are less confident in their employer’s ability to upskill them. Teaching, mentoring and coaching are other skills where this generation feels their employer may be unable to bridge the gap, but they feel it is very important as it is their 4th most highly ranked skill. Lifelong learning is highly important compared to other generations, indicating a cohort of our workforce that is ready to learn, sees value in lifelong learning and is confident in their employer’s support.

Millennials are the least confident in their employer’s ability to upskill them (59.72%). Millennials largely agree with Gen Z on the top five skills of the future. Millennials see curiosity and lifelong learning as slightly more important than Gen Z. This reinforces that our young workforce is open to learning future skills.

Gen X is slightly more confident in their organization’s ability to upskill them. Communication and active learning, creativity and innovation, and advanced specialized tech are the skill areas where this generation feels least prepared. Baby Boomers express greater confidence in their organizations’ ability to upskill them, placing them ahead of Gen X and Millennials. These two generations share much of the same view on which skills are important. Motivation and self-awareness are more important for the older generations than younger generations, which may be a factor in inter-generational relationships.

The table below shows the top five skills of the future by generation.

RANK	GEN Z	MILLENNIAL	GEN X	BABY BOOMERS
1	Dependability & attn to detail	Comm. & active listening	Comm. & active listening	Dependability & attn to detail
2	Comm. & active listening	Dependability & attn to detail	Dependability & attn to detail	Comm. & active listening
3	General tech literacy/skills	Resilience, flexibility, agility	Resilience, flexibility, agility	General tech literacy/skills
4	Teaching, mentoring, coach	Curiosity & lifelong learning	Motivation & self-awareness	Resilience, flexibility, agility
5	Resilience, flexibility, agility	General tech literacy/skills	General tech literacy/skills	Motivation & self-awareness

INDUSTRY PERSPECTIVES ON SKILLS

Our methodology allows for the slicing of findings by various factors. Our analysis indicates that attitudes toward the skills of the future vary across generations.

INSIGHT #6

Different industries = different capabilities. Professional, Scientific and Technical Services as an industry, and the Finance and Insurance industry are the most confident in their ability to be upskilled, with average preparedness across all skills at 63% and 62%, respectively. Unpreparedness is, on average, low at approximately 14% for both industries. Trade Associations and Chambers have similar preparedness levels, both at 60%, while Educational Services and Public Administration also have comparable preparedness at around 60%, but with higher levels of unpreparedness at 19% and 21% respectively.

Beyond the aggregate level, the industry slices revealed differences in the perceived importance of skills. The top five skills of the future by industry sector can be found in the below table. The highest and lowest confidence levels of the different industry sectors are as follows:

RANK	Professional, Scientific & Technical Services	Finance & Insurance	Trade Associations & Chambers	Educational Services	Public Administration
1	Dependability & attn to detail	Comm. & active listening	Resilience, flexibility, agility	Dependability & attn to detail	Comm. & active listening
2	Comm. & active listening	Dependability & attn to detail	Comm. & active listening	Comm. & active listening	Dependability & attn to detail
3	Resilience, flexibility, agility	Resilience, flexibility, agility	Dependability & attn to detail	Resilience, flexibility, agility	Resilience, flexibility, agility
4	General tech literacy/skills	General tech literacy/skills	Leadership & social influence	Teaching, mentoring, coach	Teaching, mentoring, coach
5	Creativity & innovation	Analytical thinking	Motivation & self-awareness	General tech literacy/skills	Leadership & social influence

Professional, Scientific and Technical Services are most confident with general technical literacy; analytical thinking; and dependability and attention to detail. This industry sees more challenges with advanced, specialized tech; talent management; and teaching, mentoring, coaching.

Finance & Insurance are most confident with financial management; analytical thinking; and dependability and attention to detail. This industry sees more challenges with cross-cultural literacy; advanced, specialized tech; and quality management and teaching.

Trade Associations & Chambers are most confident with leadership and social influence; curiosity and lifelong learning; and analytical thinking. This industry sees more challenges with talent management; teaching, mentoring coaching; and general technical literacy.

Educational Services are most confident in teaching, mentoring, coaching; general technical literacy; and external engagement skills. This industry sees more challenges with talent management; advanced, specialized tech; and creativity and innovation.

Public Administration is most confident with analytical thinking; curiosity and lifelong learning; and external engagement skills. This industry sees more challenges with cross-cultural literacy; advanced, specialized tech; and motivation and self-awareness.

THE FUTURE OF WORK

The Workforce Insights Study gathered data on several important workforce attributes in addition to the data on the skills of the future. Insights from the work we do, the culture in which we work and how workforce needs are met were all gathered.

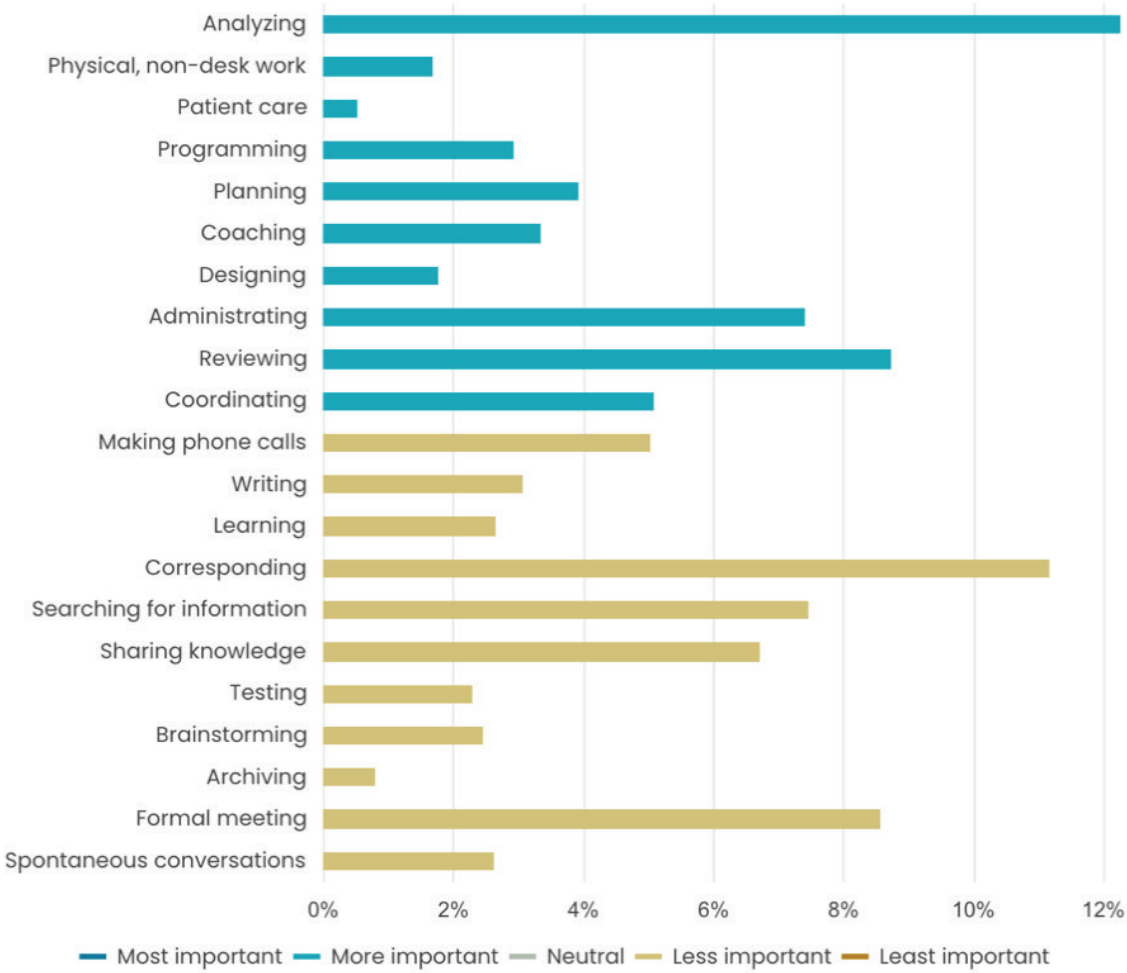
THE WORK WE DO

Consistent with prior years, the work performed within the DSM region is highly analytical, and the most valued activities for success (blue) are a mix of collaborative and expertise-oriented activities. This data also supports that employees see that 'human' work is the most valuable to creating value and profit in our organizations, as discussed in Insight #1.

INSIGHT #7

High-value with room for optimization. More than half of the reported work time was spent on high-value activities. The proportion of high-value work increased slightly from 50% in 2023 to over 52% in 2024.

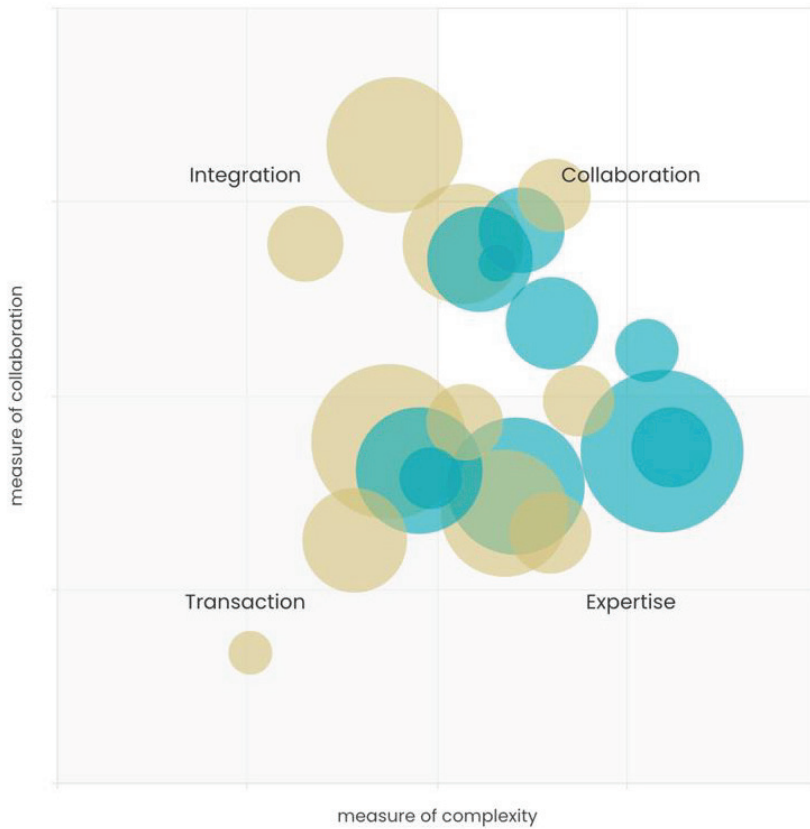
The proportion of activities seen as lower value indicate room for data optimization, attributable to higher levels of searching for information. Progress in this area could deliver greater efficiency and improved work satisfaction for our workforce. Searching for information and corresponding are activities that will lend themselves well to AI-driven improvements.



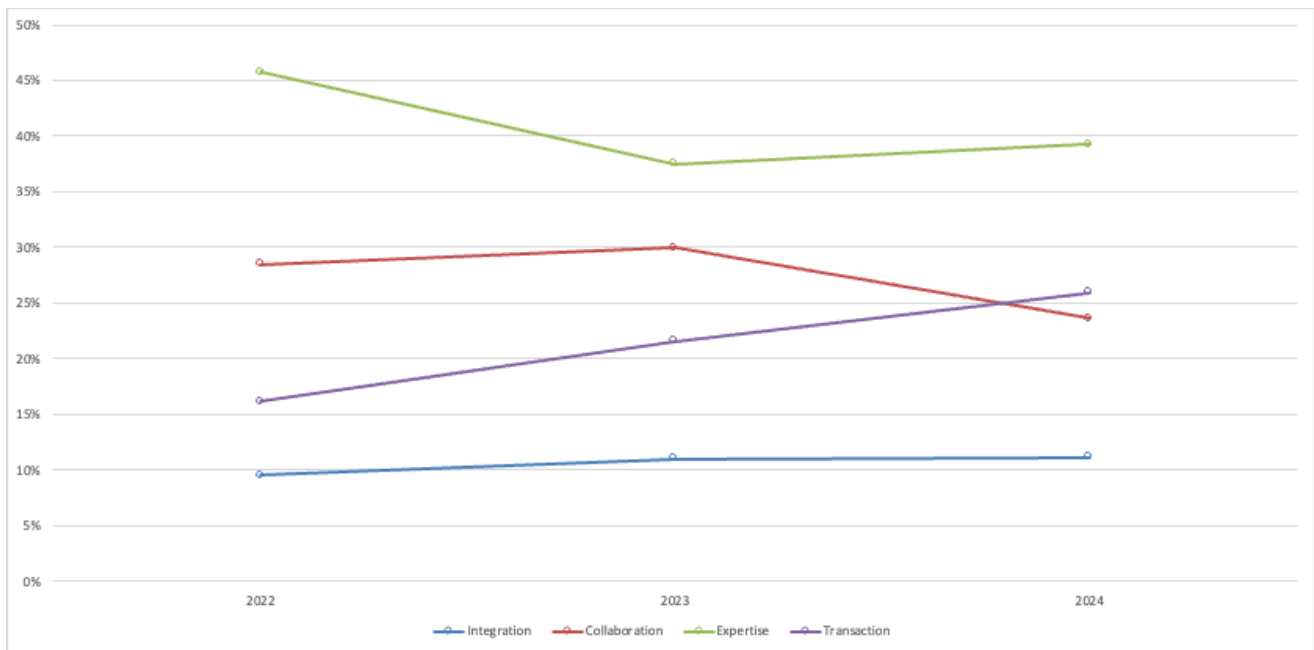
Examining the work we do in the context of collaboration and complexity can help us learn about the type of work that is important to our workforce.

In the chart, the work activities from the previous chart above are mapped as bubbles (see below). The size of the bubbles indicates the amount of work that is performed. The position of the bubbles relates to how complex and collaborative the activities are.

The future of work will come from shifting work activities to the right — towards more human and complex activities in the collaboration and expertise quadrants. This will be accomplished through technology deployment and efficacies that drive growth. Conversely, organizations that allow work to linger in the transactional quadrant will struggle with inefficiency, staff retention and attraction.



Our workforce study participants have had different types of work styles over the three years the study has been conducted (see chart below).

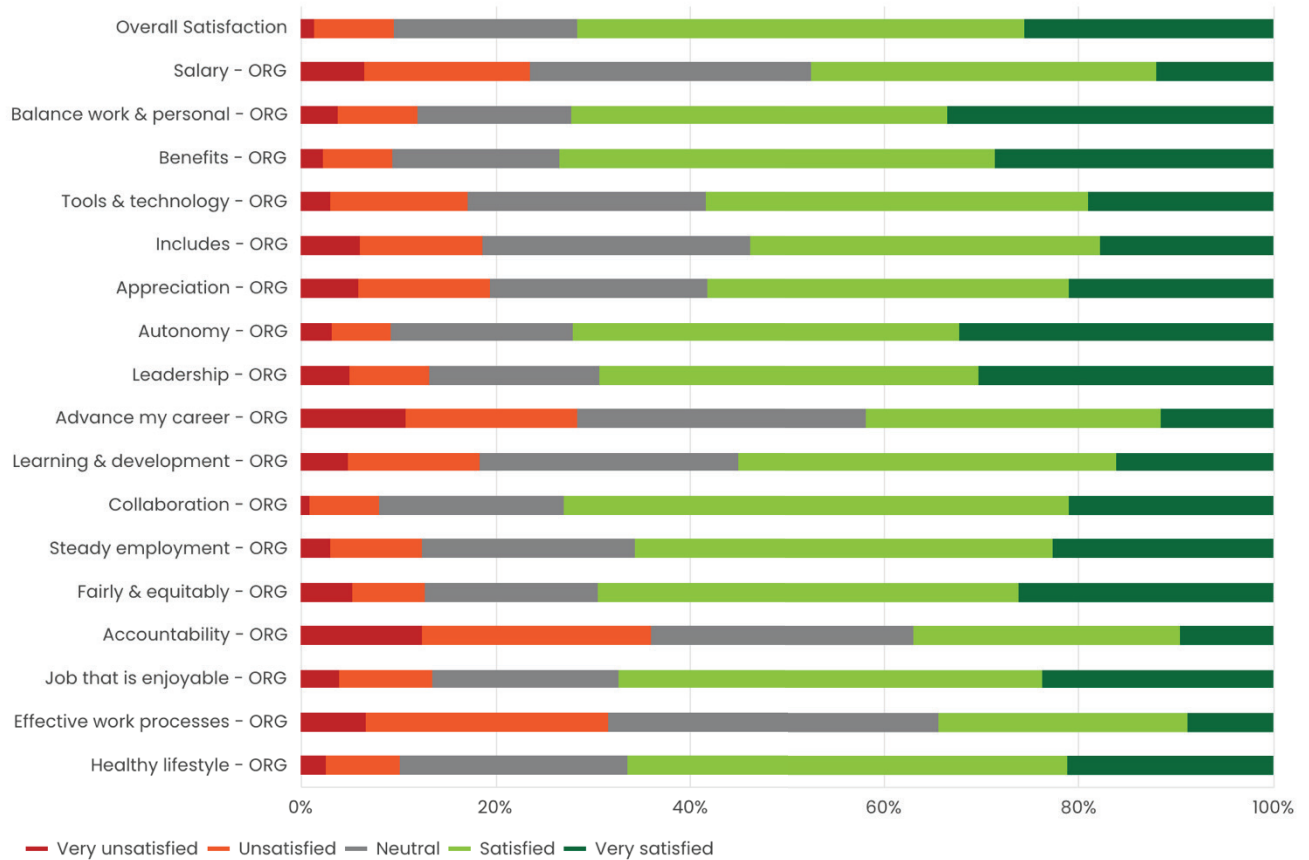


We have found a correlation in the type of work activities performed and their levels of overall satisfaction. The proportion of collaborative work for DSM’s regional workforce is directly correlated to overall satisfaction. Increases in expertise driven work has a minor positive impact as well.

HOW OUR NEEDS ARE MET

What matters most — the top three attributes, or Employee Value Proposition (EVP) — remains the same across all three study administrations. Competitive salary, work-life balance work and employment benefits are the three factors that, taken together, form the critical components of workforce satisfaction.

Satisfaction criteria

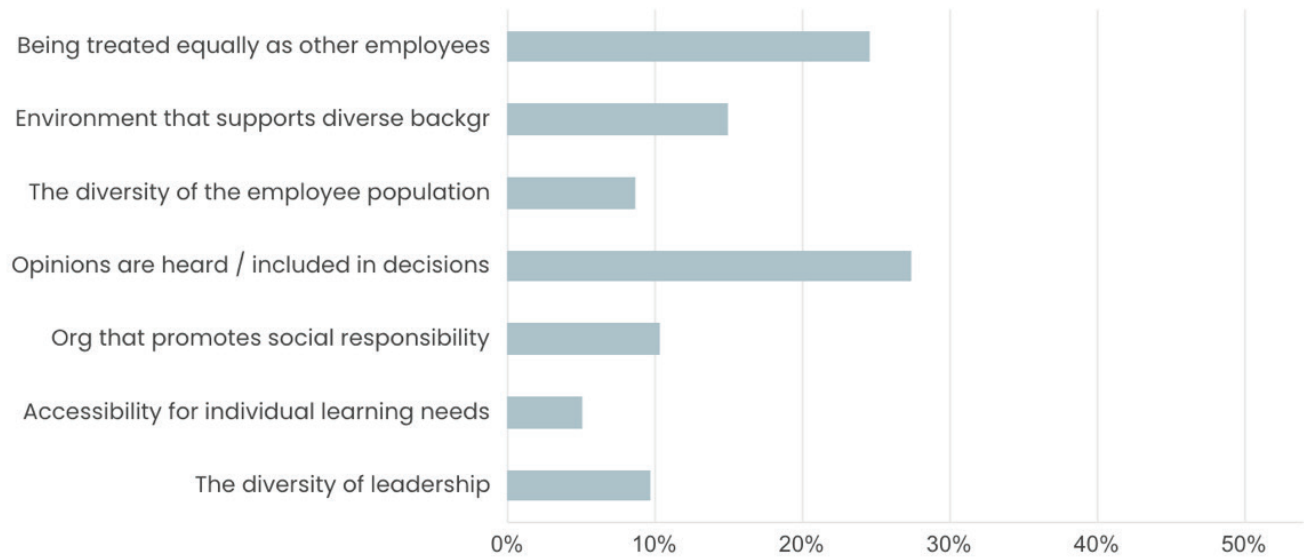


The top five performing attributes in 2023 and 2024 remained relatively consistent. Being treated fairly and equitably entered the top five in 2024, replacing leadership.

TOP FIVE - 2024	TOP FIVE - 2023
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Benefits • Collaboration • Balance work & personal • Autonomy • Fairly & equitably 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaboration • Autonomy • Leadership • Benefits • Balance work & personal

With fair and equitable treatment now in the top five for 2024, the chart below provides additional context. For our workforce, this means feeling heard and seeing all staff treated equally.

Which aspects of equality matter most to you?



The bottom five performing attributes in 2023 and 2024 remained the same with minor changes to their order.

BOTTOM FIVE - 2024	BOTTOM FIVE - 2023
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Includes • Salary • Advance my career • Accountability • Effective work processes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Salary • Includes • Advance my career • Effective work processes • Accountability

Overall satisfaction dropped from 80.61% in 2023 to 71.61% in 2024. To understand this decline, we can adjust for variations across participating organizations each year. As noted in the previous section, collaborative work influences overall satisfaction. Considering changes in work activities, the adjusted satisfaction figure is 73.78%, which still shows a decrease from the previous year.

The positive effects of collaboration on overall satisfaction, as well as the decrease in transactional activities required to facilitate this change, indicate that organizations can enhance work processes. This is a great opportunity to enhance work efficiency and profitability and free up our workforce for more complex, collaborative and ‘human’ tasks. This need to shift the nature of work in the DSM workforce is a red thread running through the data on work activities, satisfaction and even culture.

Understanding factors that might negatively impact overall satisfaction, we observe decreases in satisfaction with effective work processes, learning and development, collaboration and accountability, which may lead to the overall decrease in satisfaction.

Respondents work from home approximately 8% more than in 2023. This indicates that mobility became less of a factor from 2022 to 2023 but has appeared again as an area of friction in 2024. There are also shifts in how respondents perceive the obstacles to working in what they perceive to be the ideal manner. Employer’s policies are most responsible for employees’ dissatisfaction with mobility in the workplace. Additionally, there has been an uptick in manager expectations driving in-office requirements.

ANYTHING PREVENTING YOU FROM WORKING THIS WAY?	2023	2024	CHANGE
Nothing is preventing me from working this way	41.96%	42.50%	0.54%
Company policy	19.87%	24.20%	4.33%
Company culture	12.81%	8.15%	-4.66%
Manager/supervisor expectations	6.87%	9.10%	2.23%
Other, please specify	7.36%	7.46%	0.10%
Technology/tools	4.26%	3.33%	-0.93%
Client/customer needs	5.18%	2.39%	-2.79%
Workspace availability in our office(s)	1.69%	2.88%	1.19%

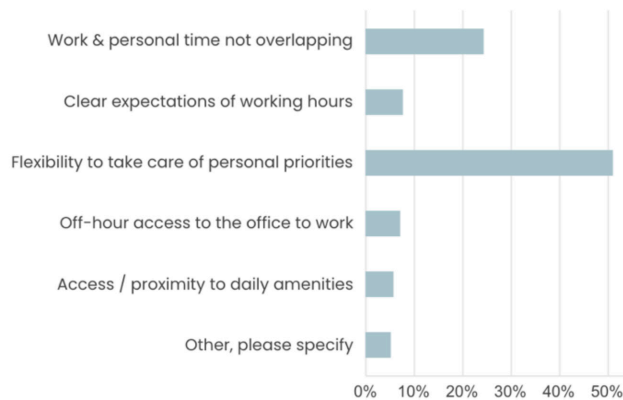
BENEFITS AND HEALTH

INSIGHT #8

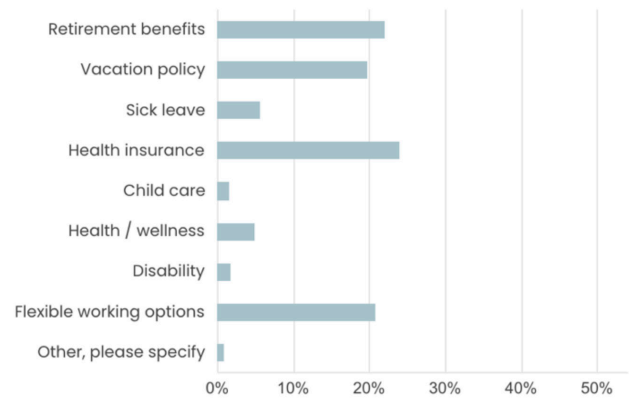
Flexibility is critical. We have seen an increase in the calls from our workforce for increased flexibility since our initial study in 2022. The balance of work and personal considerations has consistently been the #2 work attribute most valued, and satisfaction with this factor has decreased since 2023 (80.43% in 2023 and 72.24% in 2024). The need for flexibility is obvious from this component of the Employer Value Proposition, and its importance is highlighted in several different ways across the data.

First, flexibility is how half of our workforce defines a work-life balance (see below graph, left). Secondly, when asked for more detail about benefits — the third most highly ranked attribute — flexibility is cited as a critical benefit that our workforce has come to expect. Flexible working options have increased as a sought-after benefit from 18% in 2023 to approximately 21% in 2024, bringing its importance on par with health insurance, retirement plans and vacation (see graph below, right).

How can we best promote a healthy work / life balance?



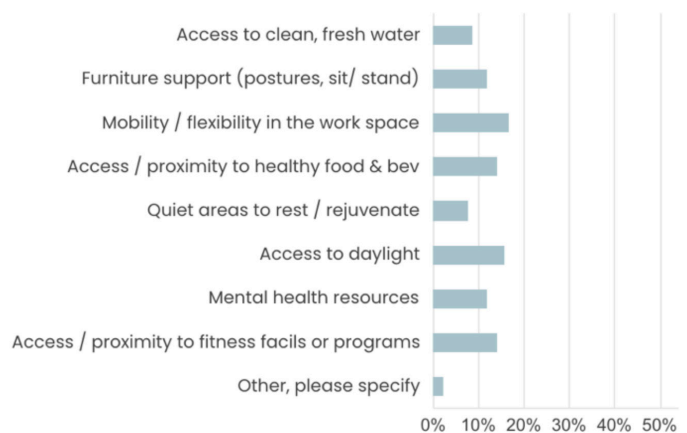
What type of employment benefits matter most to you?



The third way that flexibility is called for in the data is related to factors that promote a healthy lifestyle. When asked to describe how employers can promote a healthy lifestyle, the idea of ‘mobility / flexibility in the workspace’ is the highest performing attribute — on par with access to sunlight.

Flexibility is no longer a nice to have for employers, it is essential for attraction, engagement and retention.

How can we best promote a healthy lifestyle in the workplace?



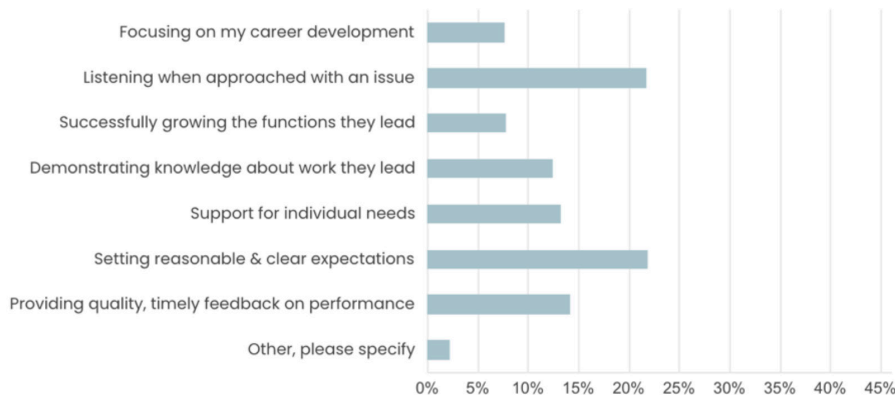
LEADERSHIP

INSIGHT #9

Straightforward management. Perspectives of what makes great leadership were gathered from our workforce. 42% of participants selected leadership as an important attribute, making it the sixth highest ranked attribute with 69% satisfaction. These aspects apply to any role with human capital leadership — front-line supervisors, middle-managers and the C-suite can all leverage this feedback.

Our workforce values clear and straightforward processes from their leaders. Leaders should set clear expectations, be willing to listen and provide timely feedback. These aspects can form the basis of new and existing manager training to ensure better performance with their staff. Organizations should review training mechanisms for leaders to feel skilled in active listening, setting clear expectations with team members, and know how to provide high quality feedback on performance.

What aspects of your leadership matter most?



The feedback from our workforce also provided several additional insights related to leadership:

Satisfaction is directly correlated to the hierarchy level of roles. Executives, Directors and VPs have high levels of satisfaction and low levels of dissatisfaction. Managers, however, have a much lower overall level of satisfaction — 65% compared to 82% for Directors, 85% for VPs and 95% for Executives.

- Despite feeling pressure, the workforce reports that managers provide a good work culture experience. Cultural alignment with ‘management of employees’ is significantly more aligned than with ‘organizational leadership’ (see the section on workforce culture for more details). The managers in our workforce provide the levels of collaboration that the workforce seeks.
- Managers value the tools and technology they use more highly than other hierarchy levels. This may provide employers a path to increasing managers’ levels of satisfaction.

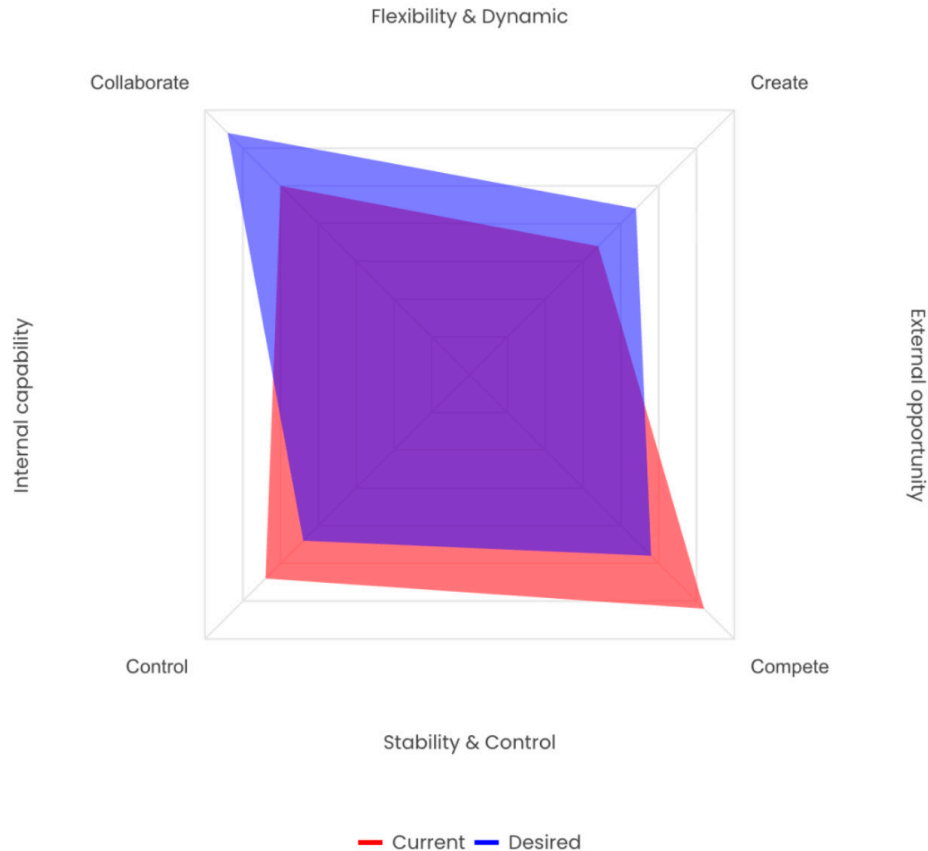
Managers have a voice in decisions that impact their work. Improving inclusive communication around decisions below the Director level could also boost managers’ levels of satisfaction.

THE CULTURE WE EXPERIENCE

The culture our workforce experiences has remained consistent over the three administrations of the study. Our workforce is driven to compete, as signified by the orange shape extending far down the bottom right. This indicates a strong desire to focus on the customer, work diligently and hit targets. The next characteristic of our culture is a focus on control (bottom left), which denotes an established hierarchy, clear processes and approval mechanisms, and quality checks. These two elements are the dominant aspects of our culture today, and the purple shape denotes the future culture our workforce seeks.

INSIGHT #10

Making room for innovation. The workforce indicates that we should aspire to increase our levels of collaboration (top left) and innovation (top right). The meaning behind the desired culture (purple) moving “up” is that our workforce wants to be shown and guided toward how they can innovate and be more agile. Our workforce is sending us a clear and consistent message that what has worked for us in the past needs to be innovated collaboratively and inclusively to succeed in the future.



WORK PLAYS FOR CHANGING CULTURE

Culture can be changed — it almost always should be for organizations as they evolve and develop. We are providing some food for thought to help leaders consider options that could provide the cultural shift our workforce is looking for. You may already be doing some of these things, but we hope that something from these suggestions will be actionable.

1. INCREASING COLLABORATION

- Provide opportunities to learn and interact with other departments during onboarding and leadership development programming.
- Involve employees in all phases of strategic planning.
- Develop programs to increase the facilitation and team-building skills of the workforce.
- Find the long-standing conflicts between groups. Study these conflicts and create a plan to resolve them effectively
- Develop a training program for middle managers that allows them to better understand the strategic pressures on the organization and that conveys how their role must change for the company to be more effective.
- Energize the employee recognition system. Empower managers to use resources to reward extra effort.

2. INCREASING INNOVATION AND AGILITY

- Make a critical analysis of the current vision statement. Does it provide both cognitive and emotional direction? Does it inspire creative initiatives?
- Move from a hierarchical to a flexible structure that emphasizes speed and agility.
- Identify the major emerging issues of concern in the company and apply the “one voice” concept by making one champion responsible for each emerging issue.
- Ask a task force of first-line people to conceptualize new strategies for expanding markets and developing new businesses.
- Read extensively on the concept of continuous improvement. Find out what is being done successfully in other places.
- Bring all disciplines and departments into the first stages of the design process for new services and products. Ensure that the customer is included or, at least, represented.

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