

7 Tips on How to Manage Employee Expectations at Your Organization

AIHR | Simona Iancu | 2025



In recruitment, it is not only the candidate who needs to impress but also the company. Once an employee gets hired, not only do they need to perform well but the organization has to provide them with what they need to succeed. The process goes both ways. The successful integration, progression, and retention of strong employees rely in huge part on how well a company meets employee expectations.

And it is the HR department which is most responsible for securing a solid first – and lasting – impression.

Why is it important to manage employee expectations, and how do you do it? In this article, we will answer both these questions and provide employee expectations examples.

Why do you need to manage employee expectations?

Strong management of employee expectations will reduce turnover and improve retention rates. In fact, a study found that 48% of employees left a job because it didn't align with their expectations. With increased transparency about the nature of a job, the demands and pressures, and opportunities (or lack) for progression, the likelihood of job dissatisfaction decreases.

Notably, higher rates of employee satisfaction are directly linked to higher company performance and profit. According to an analysis by Gallup, the companies scoring the highest on employee engagement showed 21% higher productivity levels. So how can you, as an HR professional, play a part in increasing employee engagement? The answer lies in managing employee expectations, well.

When employees with a clear understanding of what they can expect from their company, it contributes to higher employee morale. Higher morale results in a greater sense of team unity, purpose, and higher productivity.

Employee expectations examples

Employees have expectations about many things throughout their stay within an organization. These include the following:

- Compensation and benefits and salary raises
- Learning and development opportunities
- Organizational culture
- Diversity and inclusion
- Employee relationships
- Digital employee experience
- and more.

Let's look at two examples of employee expectations in more detail. We will explain the nature and importance of employee expectations in a comprehensive way.

1. Work-life balance

Work-life balance is a major consideration for all employees. This concept pinpoints the extent to which work dominates an employee's time and how much time is available for family, leisure, and relaxation. Expectations vary across countries, fields, and age groups.

To a large degree, employee expectations are culturally shaped. For example, in the US, it is the norm to work long hours. There is no paid parental leave obligation for employers, legal requirements for universal sick pay, or legal limit on how many hours employees can work per week.

This contrasts hugely with countries that are members of the European Union. Due to a directive on Work-Life Balance for Parents and Carers, introduced in 2019, by 4th April 2022, all EU member states must offer a minimum of 10 days of paid paternity leave. All EU countries provide sick pay. And if employees wish to work more than 48 hours a week, they must opt out of the working time directive.

The field an employee is working in and the level of responsibility required – and autonomy granted – in a role shapes how much an employee expects to work and how willing they may be to work beyond these expectations.

For instance, in companies in which profit is a core aim and a competitive culture exists, with ample opportunities for progression, long hours are often rewarded well financially. Such an employee will expect to be pushed to work longer hours. Similarly, in companies where altruistic goals are a core aim, a culture of equality, compassion, and empathy is likely to be more prevalent with perhaps less chance for progression.

2. Career progression

Career progression is about having a sense of advancement in work. To improve retention rates within your company and ensure that the most productive and innovative employees stay, there should be opportunities for the staff members to progress in their roles.

For instance, why would a young graduate who expects to learn on the job and quickly process in their career stick around if they can find a more challenging and probably better-paying position at a rival company? Suppose a company does not provide regular feedback, resources internal opportunities for progression within the workplace. In that case, the youngest cohorts of employees, the future of your company, are likely to move elsewhere. We discuss generational differences in employee expectations in more detail below.

Career progression is not a critical expectation for all of your colleagues. In fact, a significant proportion of mid-level and senior staff will be content with their role and the level of advancement they have reached within the company and in their career. HR should consult with employees on what their expectations about career progression within the workplace are.

Career progression is not always about moving upwards; towards more responsibility and money. Career progression can also include opportunities to move sideways (or horizontally), into a different department or role, with new learning opportunities and challenges. Career progression can also include secondment opportunities within and outside the company and support to take a career break.

Broadly, there are five career stages that employees go through. These are:

Exploration – Many employee expectations about work are created before their career begins. These expectations are shaped by education, parents, financial and cultural capital, and the media. The exploration stage can be the most fraught, as employees may find that expectations built by others do not match their own goals or match the reality of the workforce. This stage can involve the highest rates of job dissatisfaction and change. From another angle, HR can do a lot to interest and persuade people who are searching for a field to commit to after disappointment in another area. For example, in the UK, many people entering university to train as nurses are mature students (over 21 years old), for whom nursing is a second or third career.

Establishment – The establishment stage has some cross-over with the exploration stage. An individual may establish themselves in one field, and due to either employee expectations or performance expectations, pivot to a new career. Alternatively, an individual will continue to progress within their initial career choice, with either an early specialization in one specific area

of their field or switching to a different aspect of their profession. For example, two 21-year-old law graduates begin their careers in an international law firm. In 5 years' time, one graduate has progressed to management in the same law firm. After one year, the other graduate left to train as a solicitor and is working in a small family-run firm.

Mid-career – At the mid-career level, the most ambitious employees will be seeking to enter senior leadership. This can be a time for adjustment of priorities if people decide to become parents. At the mid-career level, employees also quite often step out into self-employment.

Late career – In late career, a number of employees will take on formal and informal mentoring and guidance of younger colleagues. By late career, more time is spent teaching in the workplace, as opposed to learning. In the late-career stage, many employees will be seeking to reduce the number of hours and job responsibilities they work as they move towards retirement.

Decline – The final stage is leaving the workforce. Depending on individual financial success, needs, and government support, employees will retire fully or work part-time. At this stage of life, volunteering, time spent with family, and traveling often replace work as the central focus of life.

Generational differences in employee expectations

Generational differences significantly impact employee expectations in the workplace. This relates to how the economy has changed. Boomers – called so because of the baby “boom” after the end of the World War II – are employees born between 1946 and 1964. After the end of the second world war, quality of life gradually, then abruptly increased. Many employees of this generation worked in one job for life. This job stability led to high levels of home ownership. As work resulted strongly in an improved quality of life, and work was largely stable, employees felt a high level of loyalty to their employer. Many people of this generation readily worked longer hours.

At the opposite end of the scale, Gen Z – those born between 1996 and 2010 – are the newest generation entering the workplace. Although sharing many similarities with the generation before (Millennials, born between 1980 and 1994), Gen Z are the first generation of employees to grow up in an entirely digital world. This means Gen Z has grown up with greater access to services and greater ease in using those services.

For example, Gen Z have only ever known a time with full internet access via broadband. Millennials lived a sizable chunk of their lives pre-internet and experienced the transition from dial-up to broadband.

So how does this translate to the workplace?

Gen Z have higher expectations for the efficiency of work tasks and seek to use the best quality technology. For both Millennials and Gen Z, home ownership in many countries is no longer as achievable. The inability to see their work reflected in material stability in their own lives results

in these employees having much less loyalty to their employers. This also results in greater importance placed on leisure time and valuing life experiences more so – such as travel and hobbies. These are the main rewards for working available to these two cohorts of employees in society.

Tips for managing employee expectations

How can you play your part in successfully managing employee expectations and retaining your employees as an HR professional? Here are our seven tips on managing employee expectations in the workplace.

1. Start in the recruitment process

Communicate openly about what your organization and the job are all about. A vital part of the recruitment process is finding the right fit on both sides. For instance, you can invite potential candidates to visit the department informally ahead of applying. This is common for roles in the healthcare sector.

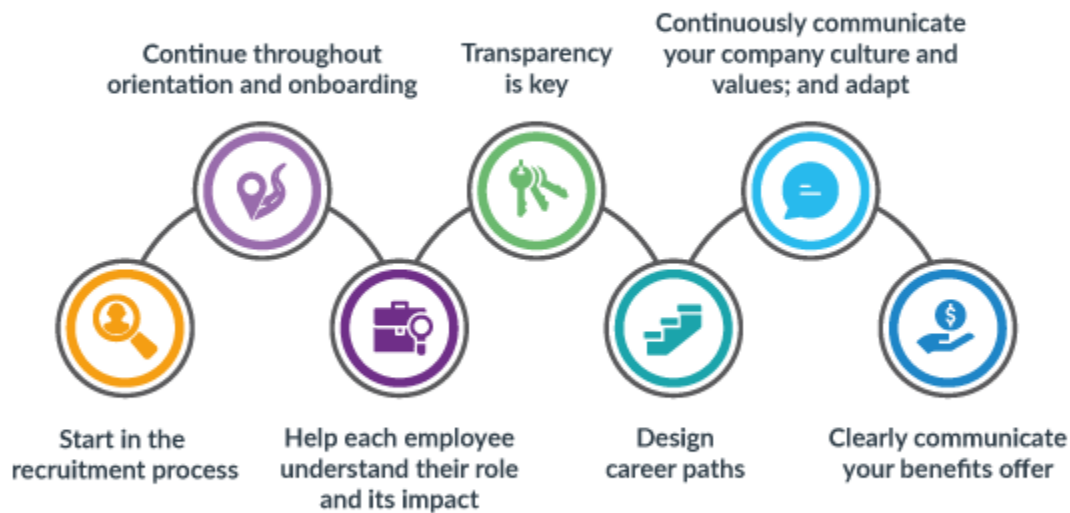
Or perhaps, instead of a traditional job interview, candidates could undertake a typical work task in the same environment in which they will be working. This can be a beneficial approach for roles in which high pressure and time constraints are central. For example, instead of asking a journalist how they would go about writing a news story, the interview process could involve a simulated task.

Moreover, don't wait until the offer stage of the selection process to share information about your compensation package. Otherwise, you might be wasting both your and the candidate's time.

Ask your existing employees about how accurately the role and the organization's description was depicted in the recruitment process. Then, actively listen to what they tell you.

The speed at which your company progresses candidates through the recruitment process is also important. 81% of candidates expect a hiring process to take up to two weeks. If your company takes several months to confirm a start date, an employee could drop out to take another offer or start their new role frustrated, having lost significant excitement and energy. That's why it's important to provide clarity on your hiring timeline to your candidates throughout the process.

Tips for Managing Employee Expectations



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2. Continue throughout orientation and onboarding

Orientation on the first day and subsequent onboarding are essential stages in the employee life cycle when it comes to successfully managing employee expectations.

Onboarding sets the tone for the entire employee-employer relationship. If your onboarding is disorganized, slow, and clunky, employees start at your company with a lower estimation of it. 90% of employees decide to leave or stay within the first six months.

For onboarding to be a success, HR should ensure that every employee starting a new job has accurate expectations about their role, what achievement looks like in their role, and if they feel a sense of belonging to your organization.

3. Help each employee understand their role and its impact

Every employee should understand what is expected of them in their role and what the top priorities are. They need to know how it contributes to the organizational goals and the business success. This is especially important for maintaining morale in lower-paid or more junior roles; these employees will often have to complete more mundane tasks.

While the work may be challenging, if it is communicated to employees how valuable this work is to the wider organization, this can make a hugely positive impact. If senior management recognizes and rewards this work and the company offers opportunities for advancement,

retention rates will be much higher. The likelihood of burnout decreases too. Employees will have realistic expectations about the job and its impact.

4. Transparency is key

Transparency isn't only important at the beginning of an employee's relationship with your company – as mentioned, when it comes to recruitment. It's essential to maintain throughout their stay with you.

Imagine your company needs to make cuts or redundancies. If this news comes from your HR department before the media report it, higher levels of trust and resilience will exist across the workplace.

Transparency is also important when it comes to feedback on progress and productivity. For example, if an employee is given several opportunities to improve underperformance during probation, this worker may well grow into a competent team member. This will boost morale and improve retention rates.

5. Design career paths

For employees who are at the exploration and establishment stage of their careers, HR professionals can do a great deal to help employees set expectations. They can outline opportunities to advance within roles linked to their current role and to move into different positions. That way, employees are less likely to feel stagnant, frustrated, and leave your organization.

For example, an employee starts as a receptionist in a large hospital. They are 20, having left school with basic qualifications. Before starting as a receptionist, they worked for six months to a year in various hospitality and customer service roles. While working in the hospital, they become interested in nursing. By offering opportunities to move sideways into healthcare assistant roles, and with strong performance, on-job nursing training, this employee could end up spending several decades with this hospital.

6. Continuously communicate your company culture and values; and adapt

Culture is not static – in all areas of life, including work. If your company is sold to a new owner, opens new offices abroad, or comes under new leadership, organizational culture could change dramatically. This is especially true if a public sector company comes under private ownership.

That's why you have to make sure to consistently communicate to your employees what your culture stands for. It will help them understand what kind of work environment to expect. For example, if your culture valued collaboration and teamwork, a new investor expecting quick results might force your organization to become more results-driven. You need to manage employee expectations about how your organizational culture is changing going forward.

Work culture can also shift in line with changes in society. An example is how the COVID-19 pandemic is reshaping work culture. Remote work was forced to become the norm within many fields. A year and a half on from the start of the pandemic, employee expectations are shifting towards hybrid office-remote working and more flexibility in terms of working hours.

7. Clearly communicate your benefits offer

Pay is not the only way to reward employees. In fields in which profit is not a core aim of a company – such as the third sector – or in times when the national or global economy is in recession, non-financial rewards are particularly important.

HR should seek to capitalize on these rewards and communicate them clearly to employees. Perhaps your company can no longer afford to pay a holiday bonus – however, there exists a discount partnership with a wide range of high street shops. This benefit may go a long way to helping employees meet the costs of the holiday season in the way the bonus used to.

Concluding thoughts

All in all, managing employee expectations has two core benefits. Employees are happier, more productive, and more fulfilled in their work. This results in improved employee retention rate, organizational performance, and ultimately, has a positive impact on the bottom line. On the whole, all of this reduces HR costs relating to recruitment, onboarding, and training.