

# Disruptive Change Hits Managers Hard, Putting Them at Risk for Burnout, Gallup Says

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Employees who report disruptive change also are less engaged and more likely to leave the organization, researchers said.

While workplace difficulties often affect front-line workers, in the current business landscape, disruptive change is hitting managers and leaders the hardest: They are 56% more likely to experience extensive disruptive change in their organization than individual contributors, according to recent findings from Gallup.

Gallup's Q3 2023 survey of more than 18,000 employees raised another red flag: "Employees who report experiencing disruptive change are less engaged and less connected to their organization's culture. They are also more likely to be burnt out and to leave their employer," Heather Barrett, a Gallup senior consultant, and Andy Kemp, a Gallup researcher and analyst, wrote in a May 23 analysis.

However, there are ways to speed up the pace of adjustment to change. Namely, two aspects of leadership — trust and communication — make a significant difference, Barrett and Kemp said.

Of employees who cited significant disruptive change last year, those who strongly agreed they trusted leadership were 4.5 times as likely to be engaged and 62% less likely to feel burned out at work.

Employees who strongly agreed their leaders communicate effectively with the rest of the organization saw similar benefits: They were 4.3 times as likely to be engaged and 65% less likely to feel frequently burned out at work, according to the survey.

The Gallup findings are consistent with other recent surveys pointing to a disconnect between organizational leaders and employees, as well as mounting pressure on leaders to address uncertainty and constant change.

Researchers attribute the disconnect to many factors, although most agree the source has to do with boundaries that traditionally govern the rules of work dissolving in the wake of the pandemic, as Deloitte noted in a January 2023 report.

One example is the shift away from the traditional job structure to a skills-based approach to work, a Deloitte consultant said.

A recent Mercer report confirmed the trend. The global talent firm identified the concept of “agile roles,” which it said benefit from skills-based planning and credentialing. Based on a survey of more than 12,000 HR professionals, employees, executives and investors, Mercer also found that nearly all employers are planning “work design changes” to tweak workflow increase and productivity.

The transformation of job roles, which Gallup says contributes to disruptive change, has brought to light another disconnect: How members of the C-suite view a manager’s role in developing talent.

According to a 2023 survey by talent management firm Beamery, almost 6 in 10 of C-suite members believe HR is responsible for retaining talent, yet C-suite members identified the most important aspect of a manager’s role as helping workers find their next career opportunity and connecting teams to upskilling opportunities.

However the transformation of work plays out, organizational leaders recognize that shifting to a different approach is important to their entity’s success, yet only a fifth said they were ready to tackle the challenge, the Deloitte survey found.

“Many of the disruptions that employees cite result from leadership decisions intended to benefit the organization long term,” Gallup’s Barrett and Kemp wrote. But “change can be unsettling and tumultuous” and not all organizations successfully manage it, they said.

To better do so, leaders can build trust by allowing people to feel heard through informal conversations, listening strategies, internal communication forums and other opportunities to be heard — and respond to employee feedback, Barrett and Kemp recommended.

Although leaders may be wary about communicating before they can speak clearly and confidently about the changes to come, they still need to communicate more frequently about what they do know with certainty and what may yet be unknown, Barrett and Kemp said.

The absence of communication is grist for the rumor mill: “Employees run the risk of filling the void with narratives that may or may not reflect the reality of the change,” they cautioned.