T.R.U.S.T. in Practice:

Five Imperatives for Professional Services Leaders in 2026

Great Place To Work®

Executive Summary

People Reality in Professional Services 2026

India's Professional Services sector is expanding in scale, in complexity, and in the expectations placed on its workforce.

Yet beneath the growth, three pressures are converging that no leader can afford to ignore:

1. Attrition intent and Talent mobility remains high,
2. A generational shift is happening rapidly and rewriting the rules of retention and
3. AI adoption is moving faster than employee confidence and readiness.

This has clear implications on Client Experience and Delivery Quality, Growth and Execution Capacity, Leadership Effectiveness, and ultimately, Long-Term Competitiveness and Innovation.

Key Findings at a Glance

~1 in 2
employees is actively job-seeking

3 in 4
leavers will exit within 12 months

3%
points drop in Discretionary Effort

34%
of workforce is now Gen Z

1.7x
more likely to stay long-term when leaders practice thanking

59%
of organisations using AI meaningfully but only 21% inform employees on risks

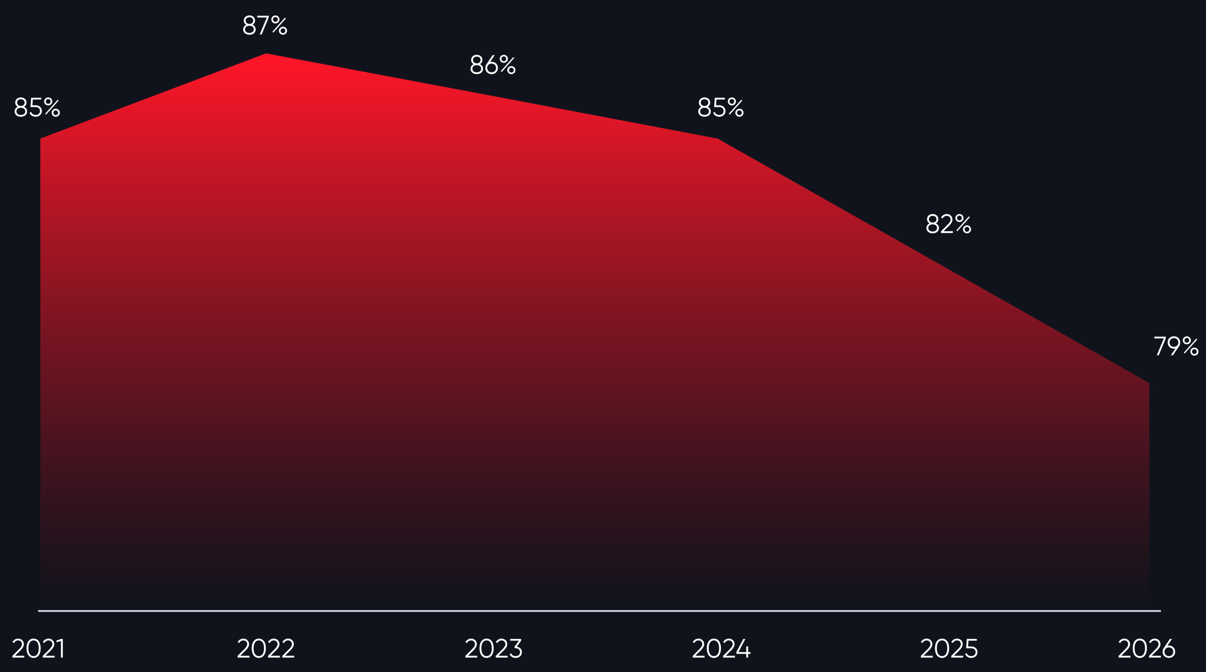
Workplace sentiment is rising, but commitment is not

Discretionary effort which measures whether employees are willing to go beyond what is required has declined by **three points** since 2025.

This implies that the workforce is seeing foundational conditions improve but has not yet experienced the systemic changes that would justify renewed stretch and loyalty. Employees are cautiously optimistic and one can say, not yet convinced.

This report identifies five workforce imperatives — **the T.R.U.S.T. framework** — that together explain where the gaps are, and what Professional Services leaders must do to close them.

Discretionary Effort



Note: Discretionary effort refers to "People here are willing to give extra to get the job done."

Five workforce imperatives to convert intent into impact.

T

Technology Confidence

Bridging AI adoption with the employee trust needed to make it work.

R

Retention Through Leadership Behaviour

Building the Leadership Behaviours that make people want to stay.

U

Understanding the New Workforce

Addressing Gen Zs, Managers eagerness to switch jobs.

S

Sustainable Performance

Moving away from burnout spikes.

T

Transparency & Fairness

Fixing the systems that govern rewards, decisions, and opportunity.

Technology Confidence

Bridging AI Adoption With The Employee Trust Needed To Make It Work

Technology Confidence

6 in 10 organizations use AI meaningfully but only 1 in 5 employees have been briefed on its risks and benefits

Meaningful AI Adoption

6 in 10

organisations are using AI meaningfully

AI adoption in Professional Services is no longer a future aspiration. Nearly **59% of the companies** are using Artificial Intelligence.

For an industry whose competitive advantage has historically rested on human expertise and judgement, this represents a fundamental shift in how value is created and delivered.

AI Risk Awareness

21%

strongly agree they've been briefed on AI risks & benefits

Yet the adoption story conceals a trust gap that leaders cannot afford to ignore. Only **1 in 5 employees** in Professional Services strongly agrees that they have been introduced to AI's benefits and risks.

Organizations are deploying AI faster than they are preparing their people to engage with it confidently, responsibly, and effectively.

From Adoption to Confidence

The most important AI leadership question for Professional Services in 2026 is not 'are we using AI?'. It is 'do our people understand what AI means for their roles, their skills, and their futures?' The absence of structured communication and literacy programs creates a trust vacuum that fills, predictably, with anxiety and resistance.

This matters especially in Professional Services because AI is not simply augmenting back-office workflows. It is reshaping the knowledge and advisory work that defines the sector's value proposition. Employees in consulting, staffing, accounting, legal and business process outsourcing are seeing their core tasks such as research, analysis, process management, client communication touched by AI in ways that are often faster than role redesign or reskilling can accommodate.

What Leaders Need to Address

- **Invest in AI literacy as a trust intervention, not just a productivity one. Employees who understand AI's benefits and risks are more confident, more adaptive, and more likely to engage constructively with change.**
- **Create structured forums for employees to surface concerns, share use cases, and contribute ideas making AI adoption a participatory process rather than a top-down deployment.**
- **Redesign roles explicitly as AI is introduced, ensuring that job architecture, performance metrics, and success criteria keep pace with how work is actually changing.**
- **Establish clear, communicated guidelines for responsible AI use, particularly in client-facing and analytical roles where ethical boundaries matter most.**

Best People Practice

RSM US Integrated Services India Private Limited's AI Revolution

RSM is investing $1 billion over three years to embed AI across its people and client operations as a workforce transformation and not just as a technology deployment. Rather than rolling out tools and stepping back, RSM has built an enterprise AI team spanning data science, product, and research to govern adoption end-to-end. **Professionals are supported through an upskilling curriculum, AI ideation events, and practical tools like prompt engineering guides and Power BI University, ensuring that AI literacy keeps pace with AI deployment.** With 200+ use cases in the pipeline and agentic AI being woven into day-to-day workflows, RSM's approach makes one thing clear: the investment is in people first, technology second.

Retention Through Daily Leadership Behaviors

Five daily leadership behaviors drive a 2x–3x increase in long-term retention intent

What Makes People Stay

In Professional Services, the decision to stay or leave is made not in annual review cycles or during onboarding conversations but in daily accumulation of leadership interactions; whether a leader noticed and acknowledged good work, whether an employee felt heard when they raised a concern or shared an idea and whether leaders keep their promises and remain invested in the careers of their employees. The implication for leaders is direct: **What works is the specific, repeated, daily practice of, expressing appreciation, and demonstrating genuine listening and investment in growth.**

Leadership Behaviour	Retention Multiplier
Thanking: leaders recognise individual contributions	2x to 3x
Listening: leaders genuinely solicit and act on employee input	
Celebrating: leaders mark milestones and team achievements	
Developing: leaders invest in individual growth	
Inspiring: leaders connect work to a larger purpose	

Best People Practice

ProductLife Group's Shadow Board

ProductLife Group builds retention through a practice that takes listening beyond the survey. Every year, ten high-potential employees from across functions and levels are selected to serve on a Shadow Board for twelve months - working directly alongside the Executive Committee and CEO on real strategic decisions. The board's explicit purpose is to bring a generational lens into leadership conversations: what younger talent needs, how the workplace must evolve, and where the gap between intent and experience is widest. **Sponsored by the CEO and integrated into the firm's core governance, the Shadow Board is literally a seat at the table.** For the employees who serve on it, the experience builds trust and commitment. For the leaders who listen to it, it ensures that the company remains agile and responsive to the needs and ideas of its employees.

Understanding the New Workforce

Addressing Gen Zs and Managers' eagerness to switch jobs

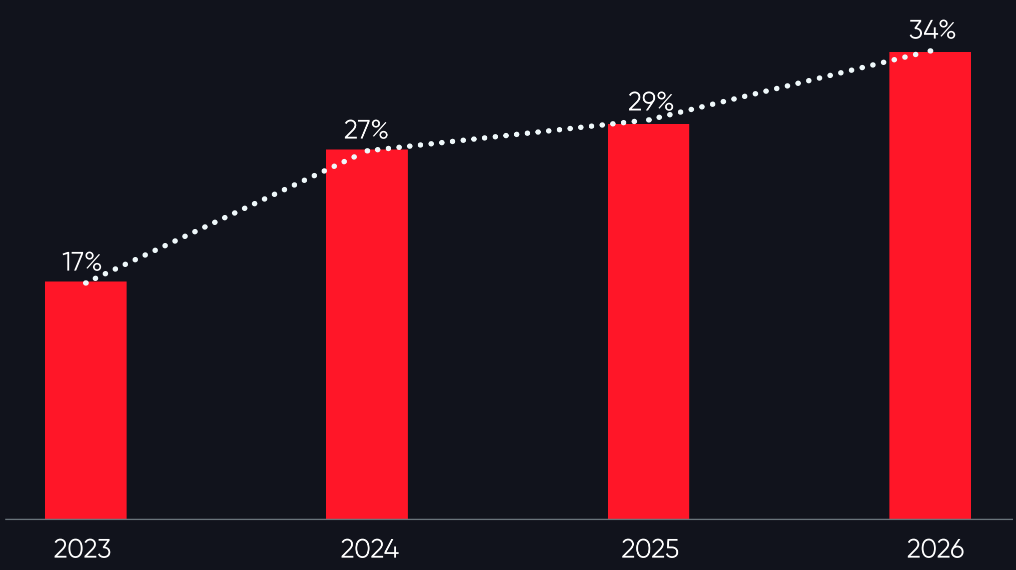
Representation of Gen Z in the workforce has doubled but only 2 in 10 plan to stay.

Gen Z representation in Professional Services has doubled since 2023, **rising from 17% to 34%**. Today, **1 in 3 employees in the sector is Gen Z** and these employees are not behaving like their predecessors.

Gen Z employees in Professional Services display the highest active job-search intent and the lowest inclination to stay of any generational group. **Only 2 in 10 Gen Z employees say they are not looking to leave**. Their active job-search intent is the highest of any generation in the sector, and it reflects a generation with lower tolerance for unresolved fairness gaps, limited patience to wait for conditions to improve, and a clearer sense of what they require from a workplace in order to commit to it. While all generations understand what they need from their workplaces, what distinguishes Gen Z is not what they want, but how quickly they act when they don't get it.

Critically, the sector cannot afford to treat Gen Z attrition as an accepted cost of doing business. At 34% of the workforce and growing, Gen Z employees represent the operational core of Professional Services delivery teams. Their departure does not just create recruitment cost but also depletes the institutional knowledge and client relationship continuity that the sector depends on.

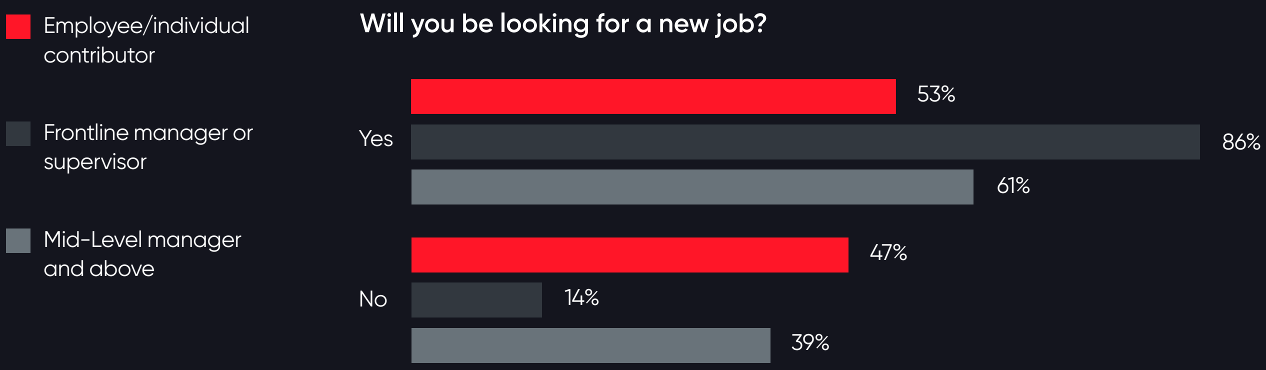
Gen Z Representation



Managers are absorbing System's Pressure

The highest attrition risk in Professional Services sits right in the middle. Managers are bearing the compounded weight of delivery pressure, people care responsibilities, and the expectation that they will absorb and translate every organisational change without disruption. Where this pressure is not acknowledged and addressed, attrition becomes self-reinforcing: the exit of one manager increases the burden on those who remain, accelerating their departure in turn.

Will you be looking for a new job?



What Leaders Need to Address

- Build fairness visibility into the first 90 days. Gen Z's tolerance for ambiguity on pay, recognition, and promotion criteria is the lowest of any cohort.
- Make growth paths concrete with complete clarity on what it takes to progress. Support high performers with accelerated growth opportunities. Vague 'you'll grow with us' messaging fuels exit, not loyalty.
- Track manager exit-intent as a separate, leading indicator not buried inside overall workforce sentiment.
- Give managers explicit authority to escalate workload and resourcing gaps without it being read as underperformance.
- Prioritise manager-specific support (coaching, peer forums, capacity relief). Their exit doesn't just create one vacancy, it accelerates exits beneath them.

Best People Practice

Michael Page International Recruitment Private Limited's Page Exchange

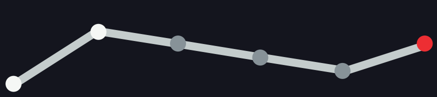
Every quarter, managers and above at one organisation are given the opportunity to handpick a regional office anywhere in the world for an all-expenses paid immersive visit for demonstrating values and behaviours. Called Page Exchange, the programme is designed to deepen cross-geography networks, expose managers to different disciplines, and create peer-level learning that goes beyond what any internal training can offer. **The deliberate shift away from performance metrics (such as meeting targets) as the selection criterion sends a signal that is hard to miss: the behaviours that build culture are recognised here just as visibly as the numbers.**

Sustainable Performance

All burnout indicators improved in 2026, yet most remain below their 2022 levels

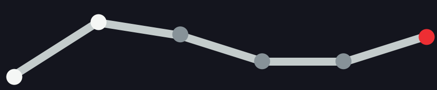
Structural wellbeing themes, 'Limited control over decisions' lags the most

The burnout story in Professional Services has evolved. For the first time since 2022, all measures have moved upward together but without signaling complete recovery. The industry has not moved out of a high-pressure state because it has adapted to operating within one. Employees are constantly managing ongoing workload intensity and therefore, few areas sit at the bottom of this group and point to a specific unresolved tension: the structural conditions of how work is experienced day-to-day. Employees' involvement in decisions that affect them, their confidence in getting straight answers from management, their sense that this is a psychologically healthy place to work, and the degree to which honest mistakes are recognized as part of doing business are not recovering at the same pace as everything else.

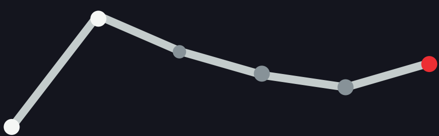


Psychological Healthy Workplace
Rose, declined three years, recovered, but not fully in 2026.

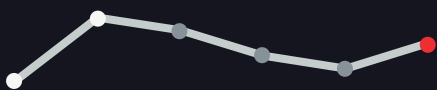
Work-Life Flexibility
Rose, declined three years, recovered in 2026.



Purpose & Clear Expectations
Rose, declined three years, recovered, but not fully in 2026.



Leadership's Involvement in Decisions
Rose, declined three years, recovered but stayed below it's peak.



Approachable Leadership
Rose, declined three years, recovered but stayed below it's peak.

- 2021-22
- 2023-2025
- 2026

The sustainable performance agenda in Professional Services is therefore a two-track problem. The first track is leadership behaviour that is moving in the right direction and needs to be sustained and scaled. The second track is structural conditions calling for deliberate intervention.

What Leaders Need to Address

→ Involvement in decisions must be built into how work is designed, not left to only individual manager discretion. Employees who feel consulted are more resilient under pressure.

→ Work-life balance expectations need to be set explicitly at the team and role level. Cultural norms around availability and effort are more powerful than policy.

→ Psychological safety, including the tolerance of honest mistakes must be modelled visibly by senior leaders and managers.

→ Straight answers from management build the trust that makes pressure feel manageable. Ambiguity, especially during change, is one of the fastest ways to erode it.

Transparency and Fairness

Fixing the fairness gap can unlock a 2x increase in discretionary effort

Leading with Fairness Experience

Professional Services has successfully embedded respect, inclusion, and professional pride into everyday experience. Where the industry leads is in the safety and dignity of the physical environment, in the consistency of respectful treatment regardless of who someone is, and in the quality of the experience that greets new employees at the door.

What is under threat is the credibility of the systems that sit beneath these values. The sector's lowest scoring statements all converge on fairness, specifically, **the fairness of how rewards are shared, how decisions are made, and how opportunities are distributed.** This is a description of culture that believes in fairness as a principle but does not yet consistently deliver it as an experience.

Fairness Experience	Discretionary Effort Multiplier
Fair share of profits	1.5x
Managers avoid having favourites	1.5x
People avoid politics and backstabbing	1.6x
People paid fairly for the work they do	1.6x
Everyone has an opportunity for special recognition	1.7x

The structural irony is striking: the experiences most powerfully linked to unlocking discretionary effort are precisely those at which the industry currently scores lowest. Fixing the industry's fairness gap is not just an equity imperative but also the highest-leverage performance intervention available to Professional Services leaders today.

Interestingly, the 2026 data offers genuine cause for optimism. As these are also areas where highest year on year improvement has taken place, it is a clear signal that organisations are responding to the right pain points. At the same time, these scores remain below where they need to be to unlock the full performance dividend that fairness can deliver.

Checklist

Leadership Reflection Checklist

Technology Confidence

- ✓ Have you redesigned roles, decision rights, and performance expectations alongside your AI deployments or are you introducing new capabilities into unchanged job architectures?
- ✓ Will a comfortable percentage of your people be able to accurately describe what AI means for their specific role?
- ✓ Do structured forums exist for employees to raise concerns, share ideas, and contribute to responsible AI adoption or is that conversation happening informally?

Retention Through Leadership

- ✓ Are your managers consistently practising the connective leadership behaviours - Thanking, Developing, Celebrating that most powerfully drive retention?
- ✓ Are these behaviours a defined, measured, and accountable standard or left to individual style and situational judgment?

Understanding the New Workforce

- ✓ Do you know where your attrition risk is actually concentrated - by generation, role level, and tenure cohort?
- ✓ What specific signals are you tracking in the first 24 months of an employee's journey?
- ✓ And what is the current support and development experience for your managers, the highest-risk group in the sector?

Sustainable Performance

- ✓ Where in your organisation is performance being sustained by effort and resilience rather than by design?
- ✓ What signals of overextension - declining discretionary effort, increasing hesitation or informal withdrawal and are you currently measuring and acting on these?

Transparency & Fairness

- ✓ Are your reward, recognition, and profit-sharing systems designed to feel fair or do they operate as a black box?
- ✓ How visible is the gap between your espoused values of fairness and how decisions are actually experienced day-to-day?
- ✓ What would it take to make fairness a daily operational reality, not just a cultural aspiration?

For All Methodology

What makes a workplace truly great? A great workplace is one where employees trust the people they work for, have pride in the work they do, and enjoy the people they work with. To be truly great, that experience must be consistent for every employee, no matter who they are, what they do, or where they work. Born from countless hours of interviews, focus groups, and employee feedback, the Great Place To Work framework establishes how workplace culture drives business success.

Backed by 30 years of data, Great Place To Work is the global authority on workplace culture. Great Place To Work's methodology, derived from years of studying the Best Workplaces™ across the globe, is recognised as rigorous and objective and considered the gold standard for defining great workplaces across business, academia, and government organizations.

Our proprietary methodology and platform enable leaders to capture, analyse and understand the experience of every employee, and compare outcomes with data collected from more than 100 million employees from 170 countries worldwide annually.

Great Place To Work's For All™ Methodology is based on fast-changing competitive landscapes, the need for speed and agility, and the belief that a healthy business improves results by creating workplace cultures where leaders empower all individuals to reach their full potential and where every employee feels a sense of belonging regardless of their demographic.

All organizations that nominate themselves for India's Best Companies To Work For and India's Great Mid-size Workplaces lists undergo an assessment. This assessment aims to study how organizations fully channelise people power and create inclusive workplaces through effective leadership, meaningful values, and a culture where all employees experience high levels of trust, enabling each employee to bring their best self to work.

As part of this assessment, all organizations are studied through two lenses. The first lens measures the quality of employee experience through a globally validated survey instrument known as the Trust Index™ Survey.

The survey measures trust in leadership, camaraderie among colleagues, and pride in the organization. It also assesses the consistency of employee experience across different demographic groups and roles through the For All™ model.

The second lens is called Culture Audit™, which is a proprietary tool of Great Place To Work that evaluates the strength of the leadership. This submission captures the meaningful values, philosophy, and the quality of practices and programmes that shape employee experience. This tool comprises six questions that provide greater insight into how and why the organization is great for all people.

Great Place To Work undertakes a robust validation process on the data gathered through the assessment process. The cumulative score of the Trust Index and Culture Audit determines an organization's position in the ranking scoreboard.

It helps identify India's Best Companies To Work For and India's Great Mid-size Workplaces. No individual or jury has a say in who makes it to the Top 100 ranks; only employee feedback and the quality of Culture Audit determine whether an organization is a great workplace.

Criteria for India's Best Companies To Work For

1. TRUST INDEX
(An employee survey seeking anonymous feedback)

2. CULTURE AUDIT
(A study of the people practices of an organization)

Disclosure: Every organization receives its employee survey feedback report, along with an online analytics dashboard post the completion of the assessment, for which each organization pays a standard fee. This assessment is done pro bono for not- for-profit organizations and Social Service Organizations in India.

Participant Profile

110K+
Employee Voices

130+
Organizations

Sub Industries that constitute Professional Services

- Staffing, Recruitment & Facility Management
- Consulting
- GCC
- Business Process Outsourcing / Call centers
- Accounting, Bookkeeping and Auditing
- Travel Agencies / Travel Management
- Legal
- Architecture/Design
- Others

Annual Calendar

As a Great Place To Work Certified™ organization, you have the opportunity to feature among the most credible Best Workplaces Lists in India and globally. Organizations are recognized across more than 20+ industries, types, sizes and themes that matter to employees.

REGISTRATIONS OPEN! BOOK YOUR SURVEY SLOT NOW!

Visit www.greatplacetowork.in/contact-us/ or write to in_getcertified@greatplacetowork.com

Note: Since the lists are announced throughout the year, there are process deadlines for each. Please reach out to us to know more.

India's Best Workplaces™ For Young Talent 2026	August 2026	India's Great Mid-size Workplaces™ 2027	June 2027
India's Best Workplaces™ For Women 2026	Sept 2026	India's Best Employers Among Nation-Builders 2027	June 2027
India's Best Companies that Care	March 2027	India's Best Workplaces™ Professional Services 2027	June 2027
India's Best Companies to Work For 2027	June 2027	India's Best Workplaces™ Staffing & Recruitment 2027	June 2027

Great Place To Work®

About us

Great Place To Work is the global authority on workplace culture. Our mission is to help every place become a great place to work for all. We give leaders and organizations the recognition and tools to create a consistently and overwhelmingly positive employee experience, fostering cultures that are proven to drive business, improve lives, and better society.

Turn Insights Into Action

Understanding your employees is the first step. Creating meaningful change is what drives results.

Great Place To Work helps leaders translate employee insights into measurable business outcomes. By combining the experiences of millions of employees with proven benchmarks and workplace culture expertise, we help organizations identify the factors that strengthen performance, accelerate innovation, improve retention and build resilience in a changing world.

From understanding the leadership behaviours that drive trust to identifying the workplace experiences that influence productivity, agility and discretionary effort, we help leaders focus on the actions that matter most.

Whether your goal is to strengthen organizational performance, build leadership capability, improve workforce effectiveness or create a culture ready for the future, Great Place To Work provides the insights, benchmarks and guidance to help you get there.

Authored by

Sanjana Sehgal
Delivery Head - Professional Services
Great Place To Work India

Contributors

Archit Pathrabe
Suraj Jadhav
Shivam Thakur

Research from Great Place To Work

For Research Collaborations or Feedback:
in_researchandinsights@greatplacetowork.com

For Certification or business enquiry:
Mr. Gaurav Choudhary
+91 91674 86428
gaurav.choudhary@greatplacetowork.com