



Shipping and Distribution

# The State of the Deskless Workforce 2021

UK

# About the report

Welcome to Quinyx's Special Report on Shipping and Distribution. Here we reveal the latest State of the Deskless Workforce findings, uncovering the experiences, attitudes and behaviours of workers from this sector.

As the industry faces its most turbulent period in history, fuelled by congested terminals, unreliability of vessel scheduling, COVID-19, Brexit and the HGV driver shortage, we hope to support leaders who are negotiating unsteady waters, to help ensure their hardworking staff don't jump ship.

In total, we surveyed 11,100 deskless workers across 10 countries, 1,500 of whom were from the UK. The findings provide a glimpse into the working lives of frontline staff and how they are coping during these unprecedented times.

**Toma Pagojoute, Chief HR Officer at Quinyx**



## **This report covers areas impacting shipping and distribution workers:**

- Do your employees feel valued?
- Better planning – not just more staff
- Keep up the support
- Are your people working to live or living to work?
- Flexibility, flexibility, flexibility
- Time for action

# Do your employees feel valued?

No matter age, status or time of life, everyone wants to feel valued at work.

Employees who feel valued have higher self-worth, are more motivated, efficient and loyal. Put simply, they're better at their job.

As increased pressures mount on shipping and distribution staff, is enough being done within your organisation to ensure everyone feels valued?

According to our study, workers in the UK really aren't feeling it. In fact, Brits came bottom of the pile when compared to other countries that have prolific shipping industries.

## Percentage of workers who feel valued, by country:

79% in The Netherlands.

67% in Belgium.

62% in Germany.

48% in the US.

36% in the UK.

## Some of the reasons UK workers cited for not feeling valued include:

**24%**

My employer views me as a temporary or disposable resource

**24%**

My employer doesn't believe I'm capable of doing the work

**23%**

My employer regularly criticises my work performance

In fact, **39%** have considered quitting because they are unhappy in their work environment, with **60%** of 45-54-year-olds most keen to make a move.



**Toma at Quinyx**  
recommends

Since spring, 2021 has been colloquially known as 'The Great Resignation' or 'The Big Quit', meaning staff retention is more of a priority than it ever has been. Here are my top tips for ensuring all employees feel valued during their day job:

#### **Communication is key**

Evaluate your current methods of communication with your teams and ensure they're fit for purpose. Realistically, are they serving the right purpose? Do people feel they have a voice, and are they being heard? If not, it's time to remedy that. Ask them how they want to be engaged with, and look at implementing new communications channels. This could be something as simple as a staff WhatsApp group or private Facebook page.

#### **Recognition where it's due**

If there isn't already a company-wide reward and recognition scheme in place, now may be a good time to implement one. This should include a regular performance appraisal which highlights which of your staff are going over and above at work. This information could be fed down from team leaders and line managers or through peer nominations. 'Team Member of the Month' could be rewarded with a small prize and a company-wide 'shout out'.

#### **Consistent team polls**

By introducing regular staff surveys, perhaps through a workforce management platform like Quinyx or a free survey tool, teams can be asked for their honest feedback on issues. This feedback can be used to make much-needed changes. This is an easy, yet important, way to listen and learn from staff – and prove their opinion is of value.

# Better planning – not just more staff

With staff shortages a UK-wide problem, and the shipping and distribution sector arguably one of the hardest hit, effectively optimising staff cover for those already in role must be a priority.

But we know scheduling personnel can sometimes be an uphill battle, particularly when external factors, such as container delays or poor weather, make resource forecasting impossible to predict.

Ineffective staffing levels are not only costly, but they have a negative impact on those on the ground and on your customers.

**30%**

said they've noticed understaffing due to unpredicted demand or staff sickness.

**36%**

said it has resulted in poor customer service.

**27%**

said they've seen under and overstaffing.

**51%**

said understaffing leads to a more stressful work environment – this rose to 71% for staff aged 45–54 years old.

**38%**

feel understaffing contributes to longer waiting times for customers.



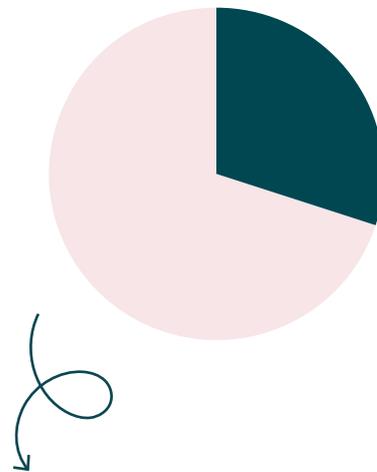
**Toma at Quinyx**  
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More staff may equal better service, but this may not be realistic in the short term. Managing staff to be available and ready to work, in-line with changing demand, is therefore crucial.

**But how? There has never been a better or more critical time to invest in AI-powered scheduling software - let technology shoulder some of the burden.**

Although paper or excel rota systems may have served you well for many years, they are simply not sophisticated enough to forecast staffing requirements.

Our studies show that companies not utilising AI-fuelled workforce management software, on average, overspent by 25% on salary costs and lost up to 15% revenue, due to ineffective staff schedules.



They were also either *overstaffed* by **30%** or *understaffed* by **16%**.

By speaking with senior personnel to discover their biggest challenges and top priorities in scheduling a deskless workforce, including those within the shipping and distribution sector, we found companies with legacy or no software in place during the pandemic, faced major operational challenges. They lacked the agility to meet the frequent shifts in demand, compounded by workplace sickness and changing legislation.

# Keep up the support

In comparison to the other deskless workers we surveyed, from sectors including healthcare, retail and hospitality, the treatment of shipping and distribution staff does appear to be fairer.

Yet, improvements can still be made and the current challenges for this workforce mean support cannot afford to falter.

**35%**

have gone to work sick because they couldn't afford to take the time off. While this is still higher than preferable, and an increase from the 19% who went to work sick during the first COVID lockdown, it is notably lower than:

- 65% of retail colleagues.
- 64% of health and social care workers.
- 57% in the hospitality industry.
- 53% in transportation and warehousing sector.

*The reason for the lower percentage may be due, in part, to the fact that 23% of shipping and distribution workers in the UK receive paid sick leave.*



76% have gone to work sick in **Germany**, 56% in the US, 43% in The Netherlands and 40% in Belgium.



**Toma at Quinyx**  
recommends

With everything that's happening in the world, now is not the time for bosses to rest on their laurels. Continuing to support staff, so that they feel comfortable to take time off when they need it the most, will not only enhance employee wellbeing and improve the company culture, but reduce the overall amount of absenteeism while helping to retain good staff.

However, **34%** reported that it is difficult to swap a shift with a colleague if they feel unwell, due to the lack of access to a tool or mobile app.

Introducing a tool that allows staff to swap shifts with colleagues when they're unwell, is a simple, yet effective move. Not only will it ensure there's no break in operational activity, but it takes pressure off managers to source cover, and staff will feel trusted to do right by the business.

# Are your people working to live or living to work?

When it comes to mental health, we wanted to see how workers in the sector fare – particularly as a higher proportion of shipping and distribution staff are male and around one in eight men have a common mental health disorder. Our study revealed many of the respondents are lacking good balance between work and life:

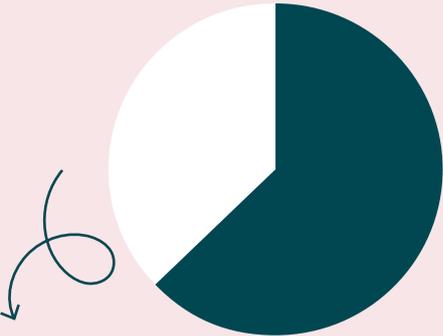
**30%**

have missed social events or holiday celebrations due to work schedules. This rose to **47%** for workers aged 45-54.

More than a quarter (**28%**) have been absent from major milestones such as family weddings, births or funerals, due to work scheduling or an employer request.

**39%**

say work schedules have forced them to skip personal time such as working out, mental health activities and relaxation. This is particularly true for 25-34-year-olds (**46%**).



**63%** feel awkward talking to their boss about working conditions and the impact on their physical or mental health - **73%** of 35-44-year-olds are least happy to do so.

**64%**

of respondents do not feel comfortable discussing scheduling issues around their personal life, rising to **69%** for workers aged 18-24.



**Toma at Quinyx**  
recommends

According to the Government's national wellbeing survey, men report lower levels of life satisfaction. Three times as many men as women die by suicide, and men aged 40-49 have the highest rates of suicide in the UK.

These statistics are not only worrying, but they highlight the vulnerability of this workforce – particularly with a consistently high percentage of workers we surveyed saying they missed personal activities because of work and they're not comfortable discussing how they feel with their employer.

Nurturing a happy and healthy working culture won't happen overnight, but there are positive steps that can be introduced. These include:

#### **A buddying system**

Matching staff together as 'buddies' is not only a great way to knowledge share and mentor more junior team members, but it encourages more communication between peers. While this should be a natural process, 'buddies' should be encouraged to meet or chat informally regularly – to check in with each other and cover off everything from the day job to how the other person is feeling.

#### **Wellness days**

By allowing staff to have the flexibility to take leave when they need to focus on their wellness, aside from their traditional holidays, they'll be more inclined to put themselves first. Offering extra leave may seem counter-intuitive when you're faced with staff shortages, but proactively encouraging staff to take time off when they need it, will reduce burn out and absenteeism.

# Flexibility, flexibility, flexibility

Being flexible in the shipping and distribution sector should mean a lot more than just bending and lifting correctly! It should, in fact, be another marker that demonstrates to your teams just how much they're trusted. Yet, according to the findings of our study, flexibility at work is declining:

**27%**

said they would prefer a flexible schedule in their job, even over higher pay, and 30% have left a job because the employer did not provide schedules with enough advance notice (a week or more).

Contributing factors for their need for more flexibility, include:

**30%** felt penalised by their employer or manager for not picking up a shift. This rose to 39% for employees aged between 25-35.

**30%** have felt that asking for a schedule change due to personal reasons would be perceived negatively by their employer. This was reported as even more of a problem for **35%** of 18-24-year-olds.

Encouragingly, **36%** have been given a tool or mobile app that allows them to swap their shift with a colleague, if necessary, yet:

**35 %**

don't have access to a tool and 30% are not allowed to even ask a colleague to change a shift with them.

**28%** are unable to swap shifts with co-workers on their own, due to employer or system restrictions.

**41%** must call or text their manager if they need to swap a shift with a colleague if they feel unwell.

**1 in 5** have seen their shift patterns change because of the pandemic – with them working more since the pandemic started.

**24%** felt pressured by co-workers into taking a shift they didn't want.

**Half (48%)** are contacted 'during off-hours' by a manager via phone or text.



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recommends

Giving over control can be terrifying, particularly when you have targets to meet and quotas to fill. However, the reality of staff shortages means that rewarding your staff for their loyalty and hard work, makes good business sense. Flexibility within your company could include:

**Utilising an app-based staff scheduling system**, such as Quinyx's workforce management tool, which allows users to request alternative shifts and offer to cover for colleagues, without being put on the spot or awkwardly having to call the boss for time off.

**Introducing a respect policy** across the company, which ensures time off and shift swapping requests are received without judgement – so there's no fear of staff being embarrassed or reprimanded in front of peers.

# Time for action

The dynamics of the shipping and distribution industry mean high staff turnover is commonplace, due to the nature of the business. From our study, we found nearly half of respondents weren't planning to stay in their current role long term:

**14%**

are currently looking for a new role.

**20%** are working in a temporary role before they start a professional career.

**13%** are working seasonally.

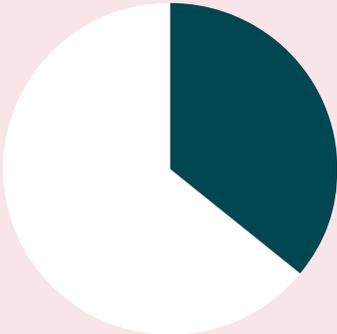


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**Despite the fact there is a mass exodus of people leaving jobs at present, this shouldn't detract from your hardworking, loyal and dedicated team who still turn up and get the job done.**

These people are your best assets and, while they might not be perfect (who is!), now, more than ever, they shouldn't be taken for granted or overlooked. Take the time to get to know them, support them and develop them – the investment will reap serious rewards in the long-term.

**Our other piece of advice?**  
Implement technology that can ease some of the burden – technological advancements needn't be feared, they could help you see the bigger picture of where gaps can be plugged.



In all, **only 36%** said they plan to stay with their current employer over the next one to three years.

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your workforce?**

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