



The 2024 Data Talent Radar

Essential insights and strategies for motivating, retaining and developing your data talent

A toolkit and whitepaper for data leaders



Data leaders have a problem

They're spending an average of 42.6% of their time working on strategies to keep their teams motivated and satisfied.

It's the age-old issue: how can you attract and retain top talent? How do you keep those talented data professionals happy once they're in your team, ensuring creativity, innovation and productivity remain at the forefront?



Providing a workplace where employees feel valued and supported isn't just common sense, but absolutely essential, serving as a critical strategy in preventing the costly process of recruiting and training new data talent.

Corndel's 2024 Workplace Training Report shows that the ground is shifting. The evolving expectations of employees are reshaping today's workplace, moving beyond snack bars and ping-pong tables to influencing organisational structures built on empathy, well-being, and inclusion.

It's more important, and costly to organisations, than ever. According to research by Oxford Economics and Unum, the average cost of turnover per employee has now soared to approximately £30,000.

In a world of work where data reigns supreme and **amidst an unprecedented data skills shortage**, understanding the landscape of talent retention, predictions for industry demand, and strategies to foster innovation is incredibly important.

It goes without saying that the data recruitment market in the UK is highly competitive, with data professionals seeking not just strong compensation, but also clear career progression, engaging work, and a positive work environment. Companies looking to attract and retain top data talent will need to address these key priorities.



At Corndel, we undertook research with 125 senior data professionals to help shed light on the pulse of the UK's data industry, delivering invaluable insights directly from 125 senior data professionals, a conglomerate of managing directors, CEOs, and various senior managers across diverse sectors.



What we discovered was a revealing snapshot of the UK's data talent shortage, and insights into what drives and motivates data professionals, guiding us toward effective strategies for retention and recruitment in an increasingly competitive landscape.



Retention: More than just a paycheck

We wanted to understand what keeps top data talent in their roles, so we asked senior data leaders about the benefits and perks they provide their teams. What we found was eye-opening – what factors actually influence retention? Turns out, learning and development opportunities is the number one thing keeping data talent happy.

Companies who pay the Apprenticeship Levy With a significant 60% of organisations reporting that offering learning and development opportunities is an important factor in retaining their data professionals, it's evident that fostering personal and career growth is key to keeping top data talent in the UK.

Following closely behind are flexible work arrangements and clear career paths, showing a growing focus on balancing work and personal life and advancing professionally. However, there's an interesting paradox at play - the top reasons cited for data professionals leaving their current roles include competitive pay offers elsewhere (46%), better benefits and perks elsewhere (31%), and lack of career growth opportunities (28%).

Surprisingly, only 40% of data employers are currently offering competitive remuneration, revealing a significant gap between the demand for data skills and their financial value.

This discrepancy extends to workplace dynamics, where despite most data professionals (73%) experiencing burnout, only 40% of organisations prioritise managing workloads. Recognition also ranks low among retention strategies, indicating a missed chance to motivate and adequately value data professionals.



Which of the following strategies are currently used by your organisation to retain data professionals?

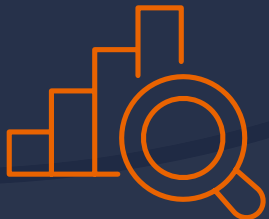


Retention Realities: Balancing Turnover and Tenure

Although our research shows that the average tenure of a data professional is a respectable 4.5 years, on average, 3.1 data professionals leave data teams annually, leaving a huge gap in resource. Shockingly, one in 5 respondents reported more than five data professionals leaving in the last 12 months, indicating significant turnover challenges for some organisations.

According to our research, when looking at the typical number of data professionals in a team, this indicates a turnover of just under 20% within data teams annually. CIO UK states that the average turnover rate in the technology industry is around 13.2%, so a 20% turnover rate is significantly higher than the industry average.

Why is turnover so high in data roles? Our research discovered the top reasons that data professionals are leaving their current roles:



Unsurprisingly, competitive pay and benefits are the top reasons data professionals leave their current roles, with 2 out of 5 citing better pay offers elsewhere and 1 in 3 citing better benefits and perks. This confirms what we know about the data recruitment market – it's highly competitive, with companies needing to offer attractive compensation packages to retain top talent.

A Corndel client who leads a data team sees this issue play out first hand




In our team, we see not so much turnover challenges, as recruitment challenges. It is difficult to recruit top talent. Our strategies are around development, independence and flexibility - we just cannot offer higher salaries."

Beyond the paycheck, career growth and development opportunities are also major factors, with 28% citing lack of growth and 23% citing better promotion prospects elsewhere. This indicates data professionals are looking for clear career paths and the ability to advance their skills and responsibilities.

Other significant drivers of turnover include wanting to work with new tools/technologies (25%), seeking more meaningful projects (22%), and workload/stress issues (21%). This implies data professionals value variety, challenge, and a healthy work-life balance in their roles.

Factors like poor diversity, lack of learning opportunities, and unclear company culture play a role for 10-15% of data professionals, suggesting these cultural elements are also important considerations when evaluating job opportunities.





This is an issue which divides opinion – the Data Director at Mitie confirmed:

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Diverse teams are more creative, bringing a broader range of perspectives to help solve challenges and generate fresh ideas, so this is something we’ve really prioritised when building our teams. We know this is also important to our colleagues, so while I’ve never had a team member cite lack of diversity as a reason for moving on, our commitment is to hire colleagues that represent a range of backgrounds, perspectives, and experiences.”

However, another data leader who works with Corndel disagrees:

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“In my experience, people are leaving to seek opportunities elsewhere, or because they wanted more money, or were not motivated by our challenges. None of the leavers over the last 5 years have cited diversity as a reason for leaving.”

Productivity Peaks and Pitfalls: Recovering from Departures

When a key member of your data team leaves, the speed at which your team can recover and regain productivity is crucial. Encouragingly, most respondents (74%) reported a fast or accounted-for recovery time after such departures. This suggests that many organisations have effective measures in place to mitigate productivity loss.



Within this category, the most common response was a fairly fast recovery, indicating that streamlined processes and succession plans play pivotal roles in minimising disruptions.

However, the lingering concern is the 25% of respondents who reported slow or no recovery post-departure, signalling serious challenges in maintaining productivity levels. As a data leader, this underscores the importance of not only attracting top talent but also nurturing a resilient team culture equipped to adapt to changes.

This is an issue that rings true for the data team at Mitie



Strong data skills are in high demand so the answer to creating a talented and engaged team requires a 360 approach. From creating a culture of empowerment and ownership, to regular recognition, reward and communication, and constantly upskilling through training and development opportunities, we are ensuring all our colleagues feel valued and recognise that Mitie offers the right environment to nurture their long-term careers.”



Insights into Future Movements: Data Professionals' Career Intentions

In our survey, we asked respondents if they have plans to change their current role within the next year. Interestingly, the majority (73%) stated they have no intentions of leaving. However, digging deeper, we found that within this group, a substantial 44% expressed openness to considering new opportunities, suggesting a dynamic workforce landscape.

While most data professionals are content in their current roles for now, a significant quarter (25%) are contemplating a change within the next year. This includes some who plan to transition to similar roles elsewhere (4%), explore entirely different career paths (10%), seek internal opportunities within their current company (7%), or even exit the workforce entirely (3%). This signals a potential shift in the composition of the data professional workforce in the near future – which data leaders will need to be aware of.

Of those considering a departure, a noteworthy 10% are eyeing a complete career change, indicating evolving career interests or aspirations within the data field. This highlights the need for organisations to remain adaptable and responsive to the changing needs and aspirations of their data talent. How can data leaders keep their data talent within the profession?



Curiosity is one of the defining characteristics of successful analysts and data practitioners. After a while in any post, they will become familiar - let's say over-familiar - with the challenges in their organisation, so will look for fresh pastures. A level of churn is healthy as it opens positions for new joiners, but too much loss of knowledge and skills is a clear risk. Let's also be realistic that anybody who joined the profession 10+ years ago was working in a very different data space to the one they inhabit now. Unless they are keeping their skills fresh, they may struggle to stay productive and satisfied."

Navigating Burnout: Insights into Stress and Mental Health Among Data Professionals

Shockingly, the vast majority of respondents (7 out of 10) revealed that they or their data professionals have grappled with burnout, shedding light on a prevalent challenge within the data professional community. It's clear: burnout is a significant issue, touching the lives of many in this field.





Among those who acknowledged experiencing burnout, the survey unveiled varying degrees of impact. 2 in 5 noted that some of their team members have encountered burnout, while 1 in 3 admitted to experiencing it themselves. This shows that while burnout affects individuals personally, it's also a shared struggle within wider teams. Interestingly, a smaller subset (10%) reported that many data professionals in their organisations have faced burnout, hinting at potential disparities in the severity or frequency of burnout experiences across different workplace cultures.

Delving deeper, respondents were asked to quantify the impact of stress and mental health issues on workdays. On average, data professionals took just 3.5 days off in the past year due to work-induced stress or mental health concerns.

Despite the prevalence of burnout, almost half of respondents (44%) said they took no time off for stress-related reasons in the last 12 months. This isn't a good sign, suggesting that while many face stress to the point of burnout, a substantial portion either struggle through without requiring time off or feel reluctant to take breaks due to these issues.



Among those who did take time off, the majority (22%) opted for breaks lasting more than a day but up to a week, indicating a need for brief respites from work. However, a notable proportion (17%) required more extended breaks, spanning over a week up to a month, underscoring the profound impact of stress and mental health challenges on some individuals' ability to function effectively in the workplace.

This, combined with the fact that 1 in 5 of data professionals are leaving roles due to the prevalence of burnout and stress, highlights the need for psychological safety to combat this issue.

This rings true with David Reed, Chief Information Officer at Data IQ's, experience:

“

Burnout in the data office is no surprise - few are staffed to their establishment level and all are operating in the red zone because of high demand. Combined with an underlying workaholic tendency among analysts and data professionals, this spells trouble ahead.”

So how can organisations deal with burnout in teams?

For Sharon Clews, Director, People and Talent Management at techUK, culture is key:

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Do people feel they can speak up when they are feeling overwhelmed and trust that the organisation will do something about it? A supportive line manager who is tuned in to their team and can anticipate and proactively manage peaks in workload. Having supportive policies and benefits in place such as EAP, early intervention can also help”.

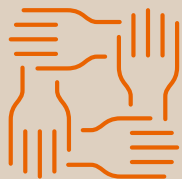


The Leadership Impact: Driving Data Culture and Talent Retention

As data leaders already know, involvement and buy-in from senior leadership is paramount to keeping a motivated team - and the numbers in our research speak volumes.

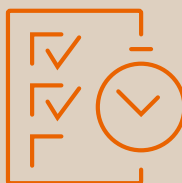


According to our survey, a resounding majority of data leaders believe that senior leadership involvement significantly influences various aspects of their organisation's data landscape – especially in these 3 areas:



Fostering the growth of junior data professionals:

An overwhelming 91% of respondents agree that active involvement of senior leaders in data initiatives has a positive impact, signalling the importance of leadership in nurturing budding data talent.



Retaining skilled data professionals:

A solid 86% of respondents recognise the pivotal role of senior leadership in retaining skilled data professionals within the organisation. This underscores the importance of creating an environment where data experts feel valued and supported.



Attracting new data talent:

With a staggering 90% consensus, it's clear that senior leadership's involvement enhances the organisation's appeal to prospective data professionals. This highlights the significance of leadership visibility in signalling commitment to data-driven practices and innovation.

Dr Alex De Castro, Senior Teaching Fellow and Data Scientist at Corndel's Apprenticeship Partner Imperial College Business School, confirms the impact that senior leadership can have:



As we navigate an era where new technology, notably AI, outpaces the rate at which many can adapt, senior leadership's role becomes increasingly critical. By fostering an environment that not only supports but also leverages AI to integrate and translate cross-domain knowledge, leaders can cultivate a workforce that is both versatile and proficient. Such leadership not only aids in retaining skilled data professionals but also in attracting new talent, as it demonstrates a commitment to cutting-edge practices and ongoing professional development."



But it's not just about leadership involvement; it's also about providing clear pathways for career growth. Fortunately, the majority (89%) of respondents perceive their organisation's career paths for data professionals as clear, defined, and accessible. This clarity in career progression translates into a positive impact on talent retention, with 9 out of 10 respondents acknowledging its significance.

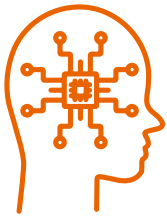


The data reveals a compelling narrative: Senior leadership involvement isn't just beneficial; it's indispensable. By championing data initiatives and offering clear career pathways, organisations can not only attract and retain top data talent but also cultivate a thriving data culture that drives success in today's data-driven landscape.

Forecasting Demand: AI and Beyond

The anticipation of growth in the data sector steered by AI advancements and a digitally driven economy sparks optimism among data leaders. The adoption of cloud solutions and the expanding role of data across various business functions were highlighted as key factors driving this demand. Yet, lurking beneath this enthusiasm are concerns about bridging the AI skills gap and mitigating professional burnout – crucial considerations for sustaining growth.

Data leaders expressed concerns about the gap between AI advancements and the availability of qualified candidates. Issues such as professional burnout and the need for additional skills and qualifications were identified as potential hurdles. Worries persist about data privacy protection and cybersecurity, with apprehensions about the potential impact of AI on job availability and security.



The future demand for data skills, intensified by rapid advancements in AI, calls for a proactive approach from our leaders to bridge the skills gap and address professional burnout. Effective leadership must not only anticipate the skills needed for tomorrow but also create robust strategies to nurture and retain talent. This involves implementing comprehensive training programs and fostering a work environment that prioritizes mental health and well-being, thereby ensuring that our human capital remains vibrant and competitive in a digital economy.”

- Dr Alex De Castro, Senior Teaching Fellow and Data Scientist at Corndel’s Apprenticeship Partner Imperial College Business School.



Apprenticeships: An Untapped Resource for Data Leaders

In the data industry, one thing stands out: practical experience reigns supreme. Our survey uncovered a significant trend among data leaders, with a majority favouring hands-on experience over formal degrees. More than half are more likely to hire individuals with practical expertise gained through apprenticeships, recognising the value of real-world training in the data field.

This rings true with David Reed, Chief Information Officer at Data IQ's, experience:



Skills can always be learned, experience can only ever be lived. Many employers are trying to get both, which can be unrealistic when asking for both sector knowledge and data skills. Data is a horizontal skillset which can transfer into almost anywhere, so hiring against the ability to build products, models or code is valuable even if it comes without a certificate.”

For Sharon Clews, Director, People and Talent Management at techUK, the picture is more nuanced than that:



“In terms of experience over qualification, it really depends on the role and crucially the team structure. Some roles will require more practical experience and experienced team members will be able to draw on their knowledge of what works, and can anticipate pitfalls. But it’s equally important to grow the next generation of talent and encourage fresh ideas. So, team structure is important where you have a blend of new ideas and established ways of doing things to get the best result.”

The Apprenticeship Levy also emerges as a powerful tool, yet its potential remains largely untapped. While 86% of data professionals are aware of its existence, only 65% have utilised it or plan to do so, leaving a substantial 35% untapped. This is a missed opportunity for data leaders to harness apprenticeships in upskilling their teams, potentially hindering their ability to bridge the tech skills gap effectively.



Jake O’Gorman, Director of Data, AI and Technology at Corndel, shares the sentiment that the Levy is underutilised:

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Unfortunately, many senior data professionals aren’t aware that their organisation pays into a levy pot, so the amazing benefits that come from running these programmes is sometimes never realised. This is at the same time that they’re searching for budget to upskill people on an evolving tech stack. It is within this context that apprenticeships can open many doors and make a real strategic difference.

Degree apprenticeships especially can offer three phenomenal advantages: (1) Attract tech talent into your teams and provide them with a support network that reduces their chance of leaving. (2) Create devastatingly effective problem solvers with a good breadth of knowledge, ready to be deployed to solve any problem, and (3) you can create pipelines of talent flowing through your organisation without the usual restrictions on social mobility, such as ability to pay university fees.”

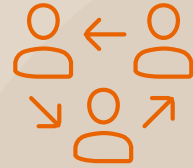
- Jake O’Gorman, Director of Data, AI and Technology at Corndel

The sentiment toward data apprenticeships is overwhelmingly positive, with 31% of data leaders viewing them as a key solution to the industry’s talent shortages. Notably, there’s a widespread acknowledgment of their cost-effectiveness (46%) and their potential to foster diversity (39%) within teams. Despite these advantages, there’s a lingering sense that apprenticeships are underutilised, with 35% perceiving them as such.



Cost effectiveness :

Almost half of data leaders agree that data apprenticeships are cost-effective, indicating a belief in the economic benefits of such programmes.



Building a diverse team :

39% agreed that data apprenticeships are a good way to build a diverse team, suggesting recognition of the potential for apprenticeships to enhance diversity in the workforce.



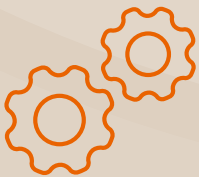
Quality :

38% of respondents believed that data apprenticeships are often of high quality, indicating confidence in the calibre of training provided through these programmes



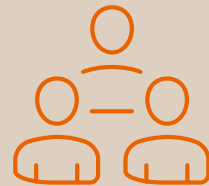
A missed opportunity for tech leaders :

Just over 1/3rd of data leaders believe that data apprenticeships are underutilised within the sector in general, suggesting a perception that there is untapped potential in leveraging apprenticeships for data-related roles.



Solving the tech skills gap :

One out of 3 data leaders agreed that data apprenticeships can help solve the tech skills gap within their organisation, highlighting the perceived role of apprenticeships in addressing skill shortages.



Producing hard workers:

30% believed that data apprenticeships produce hard workers, indicating a positive view of the work ethic instilled through apprenticeship programmes.



Need for less training:

28% agreed that data apprentices need less training than graduates because of their workplace experience, suggesting an acknowledgment of the practical skills gained during apprenticeships.



Underutilisation within organisation:

27% agreed that data apprenticeships are underutilised within their organisation specifically, indicating potential for increased adoption of apprenticeship programmes internally.

Degree apprenticeships also emerge as a favoured choice among data leaders, with 6 out of 10 reporting utilisation in the past year. This demonstrates a strong inclination toward these schemes for nurturing data talent. However, barriers to adoption persist, with 35% of organisations yet to explore these avenues. In terms of the kinds of challenges that data leaders might face when implementing new apprenticeship programmes, Jake O’Gorman, Director of Data, AI and Technology at Corndel, has advice to share: “Apprenticeships are a strategic tool, yet often not used as such. High quality data programmes can make a big difference to a data culture, and much sooner than you might imagine.

To run a data programme, there are three usual stakeholders:

- 1.** Someone from the business with people needing upskilling. They hold the use cases.
- 2.** Someone from the people functions, HR or L&D familiar with the internal process for talent and upskilling.
- 3.** Someone from the data function who is connected to the skills gaps around data and technology.

A programme can be successful when any two of these three come together. If you’re one of these, you know where to look.”

Our findings unveil a clear pathway forward for data leaders: by embracing apprenticeships and degree apprenticeships, organisations can unlock the full potential of their workforce and effectively address the data skills gap. With practical experience gaining precedence and apprenticeships offering a viable solution, it’s never been more urgent to start developing your team. By investing in apprenticeships, organisations can cultivate a skilled workforce equipped to navigate the complexities of the data-driven world.



Looking Ahead: Bridging Gaps and Embracing Potential

Looking ahead, it's clear that data will be at the forefront of driving innovation in the coming years.

The voices of data leaders across the UK emphasise the urgent need to tackle skill shortages, prioritise mental well-being, and create a more inclusive profession. Apprenticeships stand out as a promising solution for building a strong, diverse talent pool that can lead the way into the future.

In the UK's data landscape, there are both opportunities and challenges on the horizon. Balancing talent development, diversity, and anticipating future needs will be crucial for testing the sector's resilience and fostering innovation.

For organisations and professionals navigating this dynamic environment, these findings not only reflect the current state but also provide direction for a strategic and inclusive future in data.

Ready to find out more about how tech apprenticeships can drive your organisation forward?

Contact us >>>

Corndel works with leading UK businesses to develop the organisational capabilities which drive performance.

We design and deliver people development programmes to support operational improvement, digital transformation, data analytics, cultural change and leadership development.

Our programmes are carefully designed to take advantage of the apprenticeship levy, so organisations can maximise their investment in valued employees.



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