

# Ten Years of Employees Rising

Since 2014, United Minds has tracked, observed and catalogued employee engagement and advocacy through its Employee Rising series.

On balance, over the last decade changing dynamics in the employee experience have been a net positive for U.S. workers. This is reflected in our [2024 global study](#). Employees today are...happy, and employee satisfaction and positive perceptions of the workplace are up across the board. This is attributed in part to nearly two decades of investment in improving employee communications and engagement. Companies who have built strong foundations in basic communications, executive visibility, and employee listening are seeing dividends in overall performance, talent retention, and employee advocacy.

## **And yet, there is still work to be done.**

While recent advances in workplace policies and approaches have prioritized a more flexible, empathetic, inclusive workplace, at the same time, in the U.S., there is a widening gap in income and pay inequality. Swings in labor relations and power dynamics that have created deeply embedded trust gaps between workers and their employers.

## A Closer Look at an Uncertain Labor Environment for Represented Employees

Our divided age with its societal struggles, inequities, and disagreements get reflected in the workplace, perhaps nowhere more sharply than in union organizing and collective bargaining negotiations. Reaching and building trust with union workforces in particular remains a key challenge – both practically and philosophically – for many companies as they seek to build effective lines of communications and dialogue, and provide a reasonable counterbalance to what’s being said in the local union hall.

On top of ongoing day-to-day talent management challenges, we now place the uncertainty of a new U.S. Administration. For union workforces especially, every new presidential term brings a certain level of economic and labor uncertainty as National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) membership shifts, and new Labor Secretaries set their agendas. It is too early to predict the impact the Trump administration will have on unions and their members – early signs pose more questions and contradictions than answers.

**What we know so far** is that a second Trump administration is expected to pursue a slate of pro-manufacturing, economic protectionist policies to make the U.S. a “manufacturing superpower” and Trump’s pro-tariff economic agenda has so far been largely embraced by represented workforces. Add to this Lori Chavez-DeRemer, Trump’s nominee for Labor Secretary who has supported major pro-union legislation as a member of the House of Representatives, and has the endorsement of the president of the Teamsters, Sean O’Brien.

At the same time, the last Trump administration wasn’t as pro-worker as initially hoped and the Labor Department rolled back a slate of worker protections and benefits, from paid leave to worker classifications. Project 2025, if taken as a blueprint for next four years, can also be read to focus on a continued repeal of organizing, labor, and wage protections for represented employees.

It is within this duality of an ongoing focus on employee engagement, and the uncertainty surrounding labor rights and protections, that we want to take the opportunity to check-in on where represented workforces stand generally in sentiment and engagement, and what companies can continue to build upon, regardless of external influences, to sustain and secure a strong employee value proposition and experience for represented workforces.

## Union Workers are Proud of the Work They Do

In the **2024 United Minds Employees Rising** survey, across Professional, Service, and Trade job types, a majority of U.S. private sector union employees say they are enthusiastic about the work they do (79%) and are motivated and energized to do their best work (79%). A full 78% say they are proud to work for their employer.

In 50 positive statements about workplace experience, organization, and leadership, sentiment scores were higher for union workers (73%) than their non-union peers (65%).

While this is positive (and perhaps somewhat surprising) news, digging a little deeper, differences begin to emerge in engagement among union members based on job type.

Union members working in trade jobs fall below the union average at 66% in overall engagement compared to 77% among workers in professional jobs and 80% among workers in service jobs.

### In the 2024 Employee Rising Study, Union survey respondents fall into three job types:

- 01 Professional:** legal, banking, finance, etc.
- 02 Service:** teaching, nursing, retail, hospitality, etc.
- 03 Trade:** manufacturing, construction, machinery, maintenance, etc.

Pride in Work and Employer

Indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree (Agree: 4-5 on a 1-5 scale)	Non-union employees %	Union employees %	Trade job %	Professional job %	Service job %
Overall Engagement	65	73	66	77	80
Am proud to work for my employer	68	78	75	78	80
Am enthusiastic about the work I do	68	79	71	86	85
Feel motivated or energized to do my best work	67	79	76	80	84

Pride in work extends to pride in employer for many union members who say they care about their employer’s success, reputation, and mission. While scores show employees in trade jobs feel less of a connection and shared direction than those in professional and service jobs – potentially due to how difficult it is for communications to reach and connect with these workers on the job – overall ratings are still positive and slightly above their non-union peers.

Connection to Mission, Purpose and Strategy

Indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree (Agree: 4-5 on a 1-5 scale)	Non-union employees %	Union employees %	Trade job %	Professional job %	Service job %
I understand how my role contributes to organization’s success	78	79	73	77	91
I care a great deal about my employer’s success	71	77	74	87	71
I care about my employer’s mission and purpose	65	77	67	93	78
I care a great deal about my employer’s reputation	63	77	72	83	78
My employer, my fellow employees, [IF UNION: and my union], are on a path to succeed together	61	71	64	74	78

A strong majority of union workers, as opposed to far fewer non-union employees, report being satisfied with their jobs and feeling valued in the workplace, and nearly three-quarters would recommend their employer as a place to work. The outlier again are union members in trade jobs, who are less satisfied and less aligned to company goals and priorities.



Job Satisfaction

Indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree (Agree: 4-5 on a 1-5 scale)	Non-union employees %	Union employees %	Trade job %	Professional job %	Service job %
I am very satisfied with my job	58	74	62	80	87
I feel valued at my job	56	73	71	74	77
I would recommend my employer as a place to work	63	73	65	77	83
I feel aligned with the goals and priorities of my company leadership	62	70	61	77	80
I am able to make a positive impact on client or customer experiences through my work	78	79	64	86	94
I am able to balance work priorities and personal life	74	74	68	75	83

Our Insight

Communicate to Connect and Engage

Union employees have no less of a need or desire be connected to the mission, purpose, and strategies of their organizations than their corporate counterparts. But because the opening to engage with these employees is often narrow, reaching them takes more time and planning. Successful engagement of union, or any hard-to-reach, workforce relies on a balance of human and digital engagement

that meets employees where they are and empowers them with a regular cadence of targeted information to drive awareness, understanding, and action. Too often, organizations leave the job of communicating and engaging employees to the union, forfeiting a valuable and essential opportunity to extend a point of view, recognize employees for their work and contributions, and build vital trust and relationships with their own workforces.

# Union Workers Are Also Willing to Change Jobs

Despite relatively high engagement and job satisfaction, when it comes to being open to new opportunities, **42%** of union employees in our survey said they would change jobs tomorrow if given the chance. This is compared to **37%** of non-union workers.

Among union employees, willingness to change jobs also differs significantly by job type: in service jobs **20%** are willing to look elsewhere, and **35%** in professional jobs. The biggest percentage willing are in the trades – manufacturing, construction, machinery, maintenance, etc. For these workers, a full **59%** report they would be open to new opportunities.

A singular attrition driver for trade workers is hard to pinpoint, rather a confluence of factors is likely challenging the overall employee experience across fields and industries. Labor disputes, a decade or more of compensation and benefit concessions, two-tiered wage systems and contractor policies, are some of the more publicly acknowledged factors. These are in addition to the often difficult physical and time/scheduling demands that are the hallmark of many of these jobs and which can erode workforce performance, health, and safety if not managed by employers effectively.

Our survey findings also point to a set of cultural drivers that may be impacting the work environment and employee experience in trade environments. Union workers in the trades tend to be less satisfied with their job overall (**62%** vs. **87%** service and **80%** professional) and report lower levels of civility and respect.

Indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree (Agree: 4-5 on a 1-5 scale)	Non-union employees %	Union employees %	Trade job %	Professional job %	Service job %
My employer respects diverse opinions and perspectives within the company	68	71	56	75	92
My employer does not tolerate discrimination, microaggression, or harassment	74	80	68	87	91
People in my job treat one another with civility and respect	74	69	57	76	81

# The Ideal Job

When asked to rank the benefits of an “ideal job,” both union and non-union employees prioritize wage and benefits, followed by career and work fulfillment.

Indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree (Agree: 4-5 on a 1-5 scale)	Non-union employees %	Union employees %	Trade job %	Professional job %	Service job %
Monetary benefits: The wage or salary and benefits my employer pays me	93	88	84	83	100
Functional benefits: My ability to advance my personal career goals	78	74	68	91	67
Emotional benefits: The positive feeling or fulfillment I get in the work I do	77	74	71	79	72
Social benefits: How my peers or groups I am part of feel about my employer	52	64	63	67	63
Societal benefits: The values and positions my employer takes on societal issues	49	59	63	69	42

# Our Insight

## Know Your Audience and their Challenges

A corporate leadership disconnected from the day-to-day experience and working conditions of its union employees risks engendering low employee trust and engagement and, in the extreme, poor operational and business performance. A sound employee listening strategy is necessary to help leaders and managers at multiple levels know their audience better through an awareness and appreciation for both their concerns, as well as their contributions.

Listening and dialogue are essential to building trust. Done well, organizations who invest in empowering the employee voice through listening and engagement are able to better anticipate operational, cultural, and performance issues impacting business strategy over the near and long term, contributing to the long-term value of the organization.

# The Leadership Trust Gap is Pervasive

While employees across union and non-union workplaces report pride and high engagement in their work, our research shows a persistent and demonstrable trust gap between employees and leaders.

In our 2024 survey, this leader trust gap is smaller for union employees. Union employees rate trust and confidence in their CEO and leadership teams **15%** and **10%** higher respectively than their non-union peers. They put their highest trust and confidence in local union leadership (**76%**), followed by national union leadership (**75%**) across all union job types.

## Overall Trust and Confidence in Groups

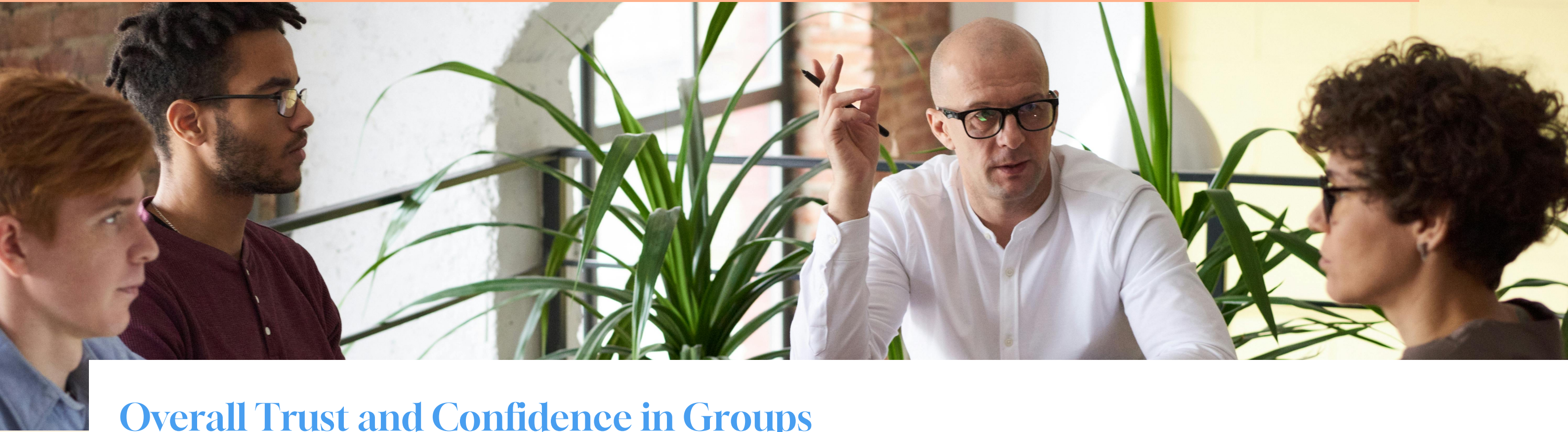
### Trust and Confidence in Company Leadership

Indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree (Agree: 4-5 on a 1-5 scale)	Non-union employees %	Union employees %	Trade job %	Professional job %	Service job %
My employer's chief executive or top leader	54	65	66	75	51
My employer's top leadership team	54	60	55	80	46
My employer's local leadership	57	58	45	75	63
My direct manager or supervisor	71	69	67	76	63

### Trust and Confidence in Union Leadership

My union's local leadership	n/a	76	85	81	66
My union's top leadership	n/a	75	87	60	77





## Overall Trust and Confidence in Groups

### Trust and Confidence in Colleagues and Coworkers

Indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree (Agree: 4-5 on a 1-5 scale)	Non-union employees %	Union employees %	Trade job %	Professional job %	Service job %
My colleagues and coworkers	72	72	64	79	76

# Our Insight

### The Vital Role of Managers and Supervisors

Union and non-union employees in all roles, industries, and job types tell us trust is relational and local. Our survey shows that workers across the board reserve their highest trust levels for those closest to them, that is their direct managers, supervisors, colleagues, and coworkers.

The bright spot found in the trusted relationships between employees and their direct managers and supervisors presents an opening for these leaders – with the right support and empowerment – to play an even more significant role in driving the positive culture and employee engagement required for growth, performance, and operational efficiency. Investing in critical leadership and communications training and support for frontline and mid-level managers delivers a strong return on investment and should be a starting point for any organization seeking to forge better, more lasting relationships with their represented and frontline workforces.



# Leadership Impact on Operating Culture + Values

Union members in professional and service jobs hold more positive perceptions of leaders and their ability to both behave and act in accordance with values and to work to create a positive and inclusive culture. Those respondents in trade jobs assigned lower positive sentiment to these traits – in part a potential reflection of their overall employee experience and lack of visibility and relationships with senior corporate leaders.

## Corporate Leadership Impact on Operating Culture + Values

Indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree (Agree: 4-5 on a 1-5 scale)	Non-union employees %	Union employees %	Trade job %	Professional job %	Service job %
Corporate leadership behaves and acts in accordance with the organization’s vision and values	65	71	67	73	73
Corporate leadership creates a good culture, makes the organization a good place to work	65	71	64	75	79
Corporate leadership works to make everyone feel included and respected	60	68	59	72	78
My manager/supervisor listens and responds well to me and is committed to my success	70	74	71	73	80

Close to 80% of union-represented employees say they have confidence in their union leadership and see these leaders behaving and acting in accordance with their union’s vision and values. Rank and file agreement with the goals and priorities of union leadership, while still strong, hints at gaps in point of view and position that we often see played out in collective bargaining negotiations.

How much you agree or disagree with each of the following statements about the leadership of your union.

Please think of the highest level of leadership you are familiar with. (Agree: 4-5 on a 1-5 scale)

	Union employees %	Trade job %	Professional job %	Service job %
Union leadership behaves and acts in accordance with the union's vision and values	80	75	88	81
I feel aligned with the goals and priorities of my union leadership	76	72	91	68
Union leadership is transparent and open	76	76	76	78
My union leadership is aligned with the goals and priorities of the company or organization where I work	71	74	70	69

# Our Insight

## Investing in Increased Leadership Visibility

Managers and supervisors may dominate a union workforce’s day-to-day experience, but corporate leaders play no less of a vital role in connecting and engaging employees to the broader vision and business strategy. By nature, employees are more likely to buy into a future they have a hand in building. For that reason, it’s essential that an internal leadership visibility plan focus equally on listening and communicating. Leaders’ ability to actively listen to and engage employees in meaningful dialogue, as well as act on that feedback, builds trust and credibility within the workforce. Provides executive teams with a valuable source of strategy and business insight directly from the frontlines.

And yet, the distance between leaders and their workforces – physical, experiential, ideological – can be emmense and overwhelming. It is important that leaders in the c-suite and below, are afforded the time, resources, and support to remain engaged and visible to employees at all levels and in all corners of the organization. When leaders show up in the right ways, employees will follow them.



# Trust to Create Positive Workplace Experience

When it comes to giving credit to leadership on specific aspects of the employee experience, union employees credit both corporate and union leaders equally for compensation and benefit satisfaction, and give slightly more credit to company leadership for overall job satisfaction and day-to-day workplace experience.

<i>In your opinion, who deserves more credit for each of the following...</i>	Union Leadership %	Company Leadership %	Both Union and Company Leadership Equally %
...my compensation and benefits	37	39	24
...my day to day workplace experience	26	42	31
...my overall satisfaction with my job	28	36	32

A hostile work environment— defined as experiencing discrimination, disrespect, harassment, aggression or violence, and feeling unsafe—results in dramatically lower levels of job satisfaction and higher turnover.

For this study,

31%

of union employees reported one of these hostile events – significantly higher than the 19% reported among non-union members.

Among union members, hostile behavior crosses gender but is reported at slightly higher rates among women than men (35% vs. 29%). It is also reported at higher rates among union employees in service (36%) and trade (36%) jobs more than professional ones (22%).

Employees who experience negative behavior are less satisfied with their job (60% vs. 80%), feel less valued (52% vs. 83%), are less like to recommend their employer (46% vs. 86%), and would change jobs tomorrow if they could (56% vs. 36%).

The experience of hostile behavior on the job also has a **dramatic impact** on trust and confidence in leadership, from the CEO down. It impacts union leadership, but to a much lesser extent.

## Impact of Hostile Workplace Experiences on Trust and Confidence Among Union Members

(Trust: Rating 4 & 5 on a 1 to 5 scale) Level of Trust and Confidence in...	Total Union Employees %	Union Employees Who Experienced Hostile Behavior %	Union Employees Who Have not Experienced Hostile Behavior %
My union's local leadership	76	71	78
My union's top leadership	75	63	81
My colleagues and coworkers	72	52	81
My direct manager or supervisor	69	54	76
My employer's chief executive or top leader	65	53	71
My employer's top leadership team	60	38	71
My employer's local leadership	58	40	67

## Belief in the Power of Collective Bargaining

While feelings and perceptions towards leadership are mixed, in general, union members who participated in our survey have an overwhelmingly positive view of labor unions – 95% positive, with high satisfaction with their union membership (79%), and positive feelings about their union’s reputation (76%).

Our data shows that the reasons for joining a union remain fundamentally unchanged and grounded in the fight for representation able to achieve better wages, benefits, and job security, as well as working/safety conditions.



Very Important Reasons to Join a Union

How important are these reasons for you to join a union?	Non-union employees %	Union employees %	Trade job %	Professional job %	Service job %
Better benefits, such as pensions or healthcare	63	65	55	73	75
Greater job security	62	57	54	50	74
Better working or safety conditions	58	57	50	67	58
Increases wages	67	54	49	40	79
Better or regulated work schedules	55	50	47	56	50
Greater bargaining or negotiating power	56	50	54	42	54
Access to trainings or development opportunities	46	48	57	51	28
Protection against unfair discipline or harassment	56	43	40	45	47

Positive perceptions of union membership are not exclusive to represented employees. A full third (34%) of non-union workers say they would join a union if they had the opportunity with a majority of non-union members holding positive views of union membership (56% positive).

While positive union sentiment is likely to remain stable during the new administration, changes in the rate of organizing efforts is more likely to decline. During the Trump’s first four years in office, union petitions fell by 22% and may do so again as a new National Labor Relations Board tightens rules around organizing. Companies should apply caution; however, as the trends and drivers underlying worker discontent – compensation that fails to rise in line with cost of living increases, desire for a stronger employee voice on operational policy and practice, a general distrust in leaders and institutions – are still present and strong.

In addition, unions including the United Autoworkers Union (UAW) and the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers (IAM) have scored big wins for their memberships in the last two years. In our survey, nearly as many non-union members (65%) as union members (71%) agree with the statement that, “sometimes a strike is the best course of action for employees when employers don’t do what employees want.”

These gains could well have a demonstration effect – as non-represented employees see the very public fights, and very public gains unions like the UAW and IAM have achieved on behalf of their members, and the power and voice it gives these employees, their likelihood to retain positive sentiment around union representation and bargaining power will remain, and potentially grow. It raises a central question companies should be asking themselves, which is *would my employees be (or believe themselves to be) better off represented by a union?*

# About the Research

**476** American adults

**18 to 65** years old

work full-time in large companies & organizations with **500+** employees

**Jan. 5 to Feb. 4** dates of the survey (2024)

United Minds, in partnership with KRC Research, conducted a 20-minute quantitative survey from January 5 to February 5, 2024, among 476 U.S. working adults, of which 193 are private sector union members, randomly drawn from a large national opt-in panel and conducted online. In this report, we compare private sector union members to non-union members.

## Profile of Participating Private-Sector Union Members

Overall, private-sector union members in our sample are more likely than their non-union peers to be among the rank-and-file, on the lower end of the job hierarchy—most are individual contributors (**79% vs. 51%**). Far more than their non-union peers, most are paid an hourly wage (**90% vs. 44%**) over an annual salary (**10% vs. 56%**). A much higher proportion said they must be physically present on-site at their job to do their work (**76% vs. 50%**). Three quarters have been at their current job for 5 or more years (**71% vs. 61%**).

### About KRC Research

KRC Research is a global opinion research consultancy. Staffed with multidisciplinary research professionals, KRC has conducted research and delivered insights to corporations, governments, not-for-profit organizations, and the communications firms that represent them for more than 40 years. For more information, visit [krcresearch.com](https://krcresearch.com).

### About United Minds

United Minds is a global management consultancy dedicated to making business more human through organizational transformation. We combine cultural intelligence, leadership strategies, change management principles and our deep roots in communications to help communicators adapt and evolve themselves and their function, and reimagine how communications is done.