

## Corporate Security: 10-Point Retention Plan for CSOs

### Key Insights Up Front

High performing corporate security groups recognize that retaining top talent requires a strategy, as well as long term planning. These five trends should inform and guide retention efforts:

- The corporate security workforce is getting **younger**. There is, therefore, a **greater need for structured professional development opportunities** that enable development at a pace attractive to the best and brightest talent.
- The corporate security workforce is becoming **more diverse**. This necessitates **open and inclusive management and leadership** to optimize performance and retain diverse talent.
- Employees continue to show a strong preference for **flexible work** arrangements. Corporate security functions that do not offer flexibility will struggle to retain high performers.
- **Multiple generations** in most workplaces come with different expectations. Managers and leaders will need to adjust and adapt their approaches to retain the best talent at all career stages.
- There is a greater emphasis on **mental health**, which comes with an expectation that employers will provide appropriate support for employee wellbeing.

This insight report explores each trend, what it means for CSOs and their teams, and includes a 10-point retention plan for CSOs to ensure their talent strategies retain the best talent.

### **Trend 1: The corporate security workforce is getting younger. There is, therefore, a greater need for structured professional development opportunities that enable development at a pace attractive to the best and brightest talent.**

The corporate security workforce is getting younger for four reasons:

- Personnel are leaving 'traditional' public service security backgrounds much earlier in their careers to move into private sector roles.
- CSOs are recruiting from a broader range of backgrounds. For example, while 80% of those 55+ came from government service, just under two-thirds of those 44 and under have this background. Two-fifths of CSOs have teams where fewer than half their team members have come from government service (fig. 1).
- There is less emphasis on this traditional background, which means future recruitment pools are much larger. Those in the older cohort are four times more likely to think this background is essential for corporate security, compared to those 44 and under.
- There has been a significant growth within the intelligence vertical, which offers an entry point for early career analysts.

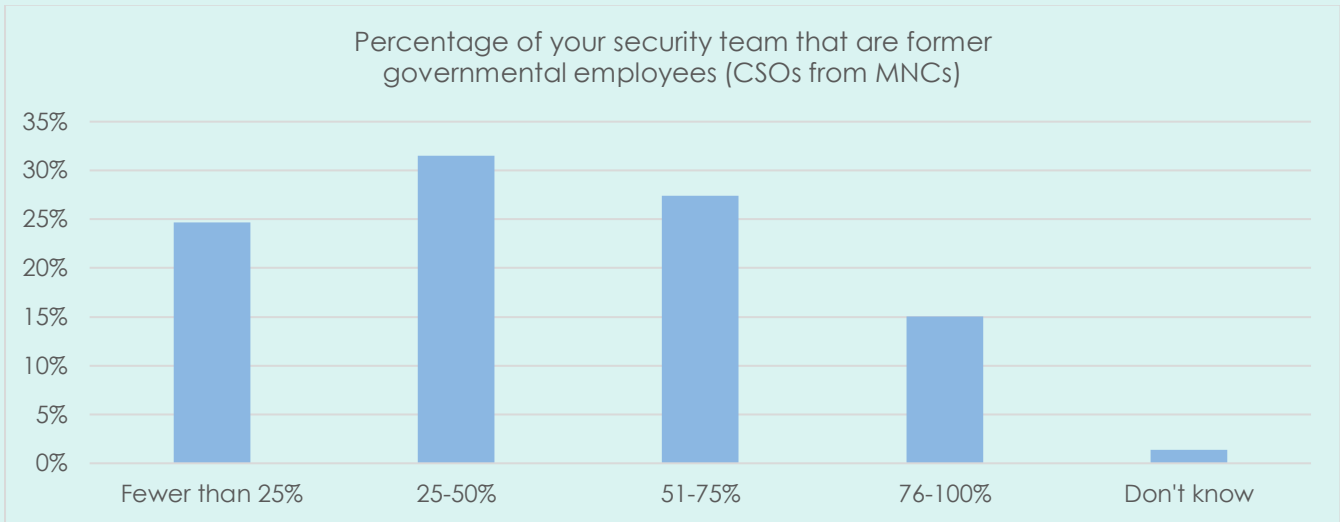


Figure 1: Percentage of your security team that are former government employees (CSOs at MNCs)

Early career security professionals demand greater focus on career development. Our survey found that they are 30% less likely to be satisfied with their career pathway than their older peers, and they are five times more likely than CSOs to strongly disagree that 'corporate security is an attractive career option for young people' (fig. 2).

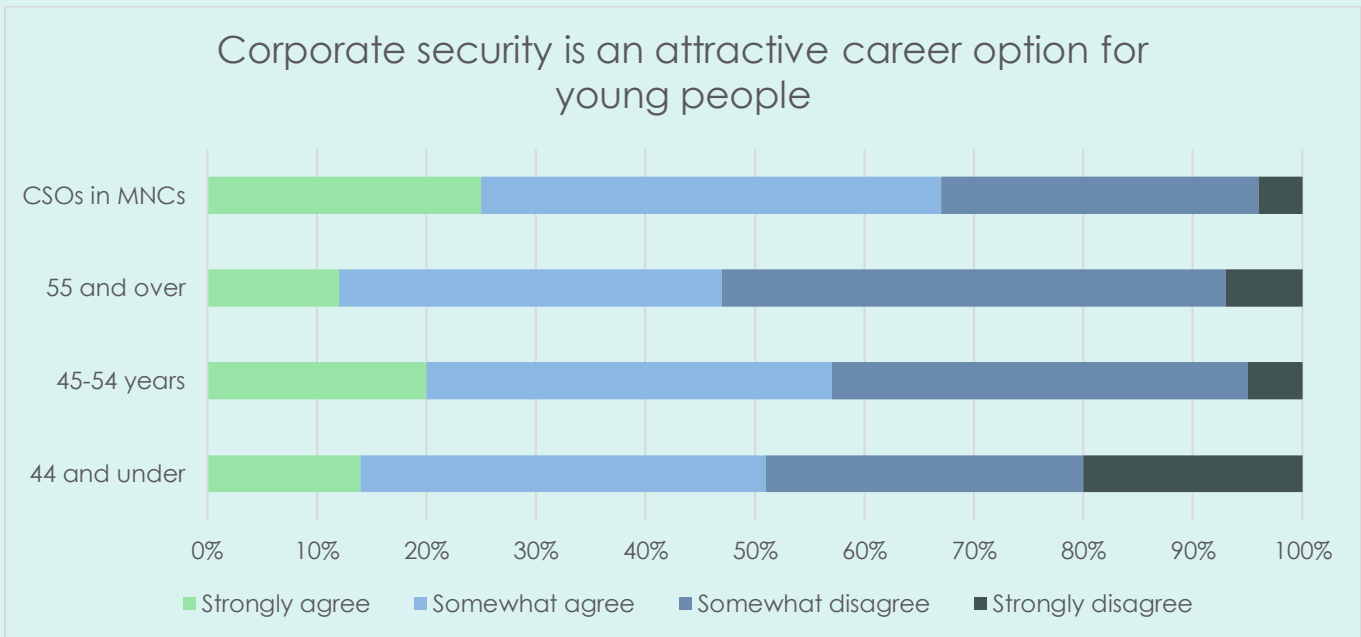


Figure 2: Corporate security is an attractive career option for young people (by age and CSOs in MNCs)

When corporate security functions are constrained by team size and low turnover, career development within the function is particularly challenging. Leaders in these programs must adjust their approaches and will need to find creative ways to develop and retain talent.

Recommendations for corporate security leaders:

- Create a talent strategy for the function and share it with team members.
- Create a structured talent development plan for individual team members, enabling less experienced members of the team to grow at a pace that is mutually beneficial.
- Ensure both strategies align with functional and organizational needs.

## **Trend 2: The corporate security workforce is becoming more diverse. This necessitates open and inclusive management and leadership to optimize performance and retain diverse talent.**

The future is now. The corporate security workforce is already more diverse:

- **Gender:** Women account for just 15% of those 55+ but one-third of those 44 years and under. There remains work to be done, with some functions lagging behind. Half of the CSOs we surveyed have fewer than one-quarter women on their teams and fewer than one-in-ten CSOs has achieved gender parity in their function.
- **Race and ethnicity:** Our survey suggests racial and ethnic diversity is decreasing. Twice as many respondents 55+ than those 44 and under self-identify as a racial or ethnic minority in their country of residence (19% versus 10%). Just 14% of CSOs are racial or ethnic minorities.
- **Neurodiversity:** One-in-ten of all survey respondents self-identifies as neurodiverse, rising to 12% of those 44 and under, compared to 15-20% of the general population.
- **Wider organizational experience:** Younger team members are more likely to have worked in another function outside security (For more on this trend, see [Securing Future Talent](#)).
- **More diverse career background:** As noted above, fewer are coming into corporate security from traditional public service roles.

[Research has shown](#) that diverse teams are often more productive, more innovative, and make better decisions, all of which are critical for effective corporate security in a volatile and fast-paced global operating environment.

This 'diversity dividend' is only unlocked through inclusive teams overseen by open and less hierarchical managers and leaders. [Google's data](#) shows that these kinds of teams have higher levels of satisfaction and retention, as well as performance, because they score higher on psychological safety, where team members can share ideas and take risks.

Our survey shows that the younger cohort is much more likely than their older peers to cite 'the wrong kind of leadership within security' as one of their top three obstacles to the effectiveness of the function. They are also four times as likely to cite 'insufficient diversity within the security team' as a key challenge.

While many CSOs have initiatives to recruit diverse candidates, few have strategies to develop and retain diverse talent. This is true of broader diversity initiatives. A [Forbes](#) survey of DE&I leaders from multinational corporations found that while two-thirds had programs in place on recruitment, fewer followed that up with diversity-focused development (53 percent) or diversity retention (44 percent) programs.

A [2023 report by The Clarity Factory](#) on behalf of the ASIS Foundation found that minorities in corporate security feel their opportunities are negatively impacted by their identity. More than half of the women surveyed agreed that their career has been held back as a result of their identity compared to two-fifths of men, a trend replicated across other majority/minority groups, such as sexual orientation, race and ethnicity, disability, and neurodiversity.

Recommendations for corporate security leaders:

- Develop retention strategies for diverse teams.
- Foster and deliver open and inclusive leadership.
- Provide training and development for mid-level and early career managers to ensure they are able to manage in an open and inclusive way.
- Champion a culture that encourages and rewards openness.

### Trend 3: Employees continue to show a strong preference for flexible work arrangements. Corporate security functions that do not offer flexibility will struggle to retain high performers.

Corporate security professionals, like peers across their organizations, show a strong preference for flexible working. Three-quarters of our survey respondents said they prefer hybrid working, and twice as many in the youngest cohort prefer fully remote working than their older peers (fig. 3). Almost all CSOs we surveyed (90%) offer some type of flexible working arrangement.

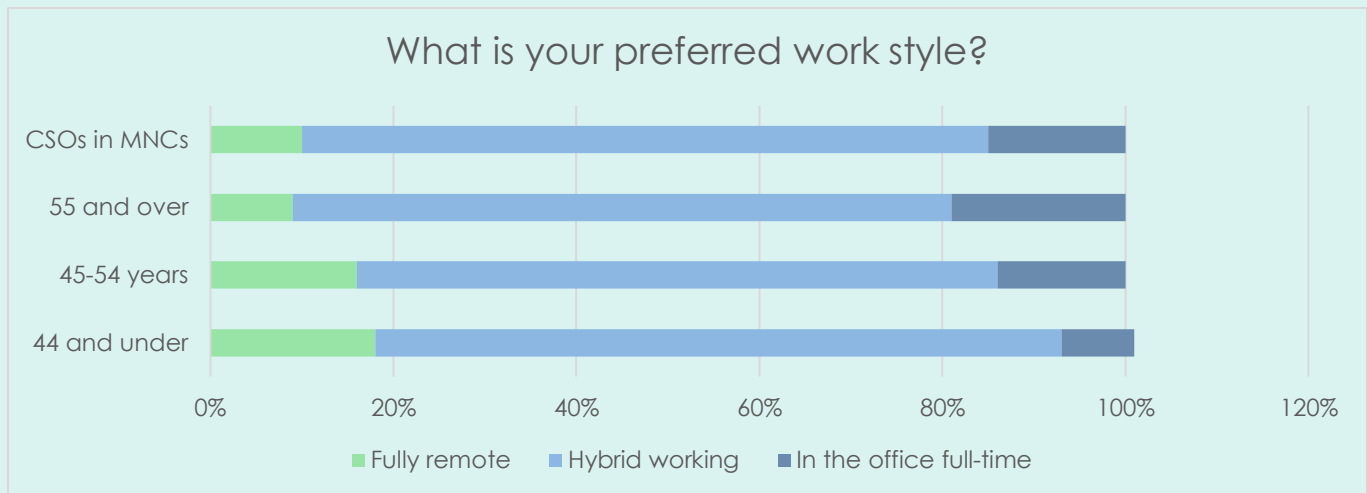


Figure 3: What is your preferred work style? All, by age, and CSOs from MNCs

There is [evidence](#) that flexibility is one of the key drivers of retention, and CSOs that are not able to offer it will often struggle to retain their top talent. Lack of flexibility was cited by 15% of CSOs as one of their main recruitment challenges, and one CSO we interviewed with in-office requirements told us that 20% of the roles on his team are currently vacant. In a 2024 OSAC Women in Security survey, half of respondents were opposed to, or strongly opposed to, considering roles that required in-person work five days a week.

Recommendations for corporate security leaders:

- Where possible, enable flexible work arrangements.
- Find creative ways to offer flexibility. For instance, if your organization insists on in-office, look for company locations closer to employees' homes, or allow employees to vary their hours in office.
- Make the case to senior leadership about the challenges associated with fully in-office policies and why and how corporate security teams benefit from more leeway.

### Trend 4: Multiple generations in most workplaces come with different expectations. Managers and leaders will need to adjust and adapt their approaches to retain the best talent at all career stages.

There are four generations in the workplace, Baby Boomers, Gen X, Millennials, and Gen Z. By 2030, all Baby Boomers will be [65 years or older](#), and Gen Z and Millennials will soon be the dominant generations. The corporate security function has tended to be more hierarchical than others due to the traditional backgrounds of its leaders, which makes this demographic smorgasbord especially challenging.

#### Tackling the Gen Z Conundrum

Each generation has different expectations about careers, values, work location, work-life balance, team composition, communication styles, and technology. Management of the Gen Z cohort can be the biggest challenge, because they have different values, perspectives and lived experiences. Today's corporate security leaders may struggle to understand how best to incentivize, develop, and retain this generation of workers.

So what is driving Gen Z? Monetary rewards remains important, but this generation is also more concerned about work-life balance, flexibility, social issues, and equality. They also expect to be able to advance

within their career at pace. As [Johnson King](#), managing director at BDO Hong Kong put it, 'Taking years to elevate up a career path from junior to a senior management position is too long and not appealing.'

By being inclusive and valuing the contributions of Gen Z, there are huge opportunities for corporate security teams. Gen Z can fill gaps that have held corporate security functions back, including technology and communications skills.

Recommendations for corporate security leaders:

- Create multigenerational taskforces within your function to tackle your biggest challenges and unlock the talent of your Gen Z and Millennial colleagues.
- Identify opportunities for team members to contribute regardless of role, position, or seniority. Stretch assignments foster professional growth.
- Include Gen Z team members in the design and delivery of professional development plans and strategies.
- Leverage Gen Z team members so they can contribute on technology and communication needs.

## **Trend 5: There is a greater emphasis on mental health, which comes with an expectation that employers will provide appropriate support for employee wellbeing.**

Our research shows that corporate security leaders are aware of the importance of mental health and wellbeing, and a large majority (85%) of CSOs from MNCs said their company offers wellbeing and mental health support. This is particularly important in the context of the corporate security function, which is expected to operate 24/7 and the nature of the work can result in highly stressful dynamics.

Our research suggests corporate security functions are making progress on mental health and wellbeing. The vast majority of survey respondents across all age groups said they would feel comfortable raising wellbeing or mental health concerns with their manager. This compares favorably to data about the workforce at large, where less than half of Gen Z employees say their boss helps them [maintain a healthy workload](#), and 28% say they struggle with their mental health because of their boss," according to [Deloitte](#).

Complacency is not an option. Corporate security leaders can take the following steps to ensure the mental health needs of their team are appropriately supported:

- **Culture:** Establish a team culture where people can speak openly about mental wellbeing.
- **Debriefing:** Ensure teams have regular debriefing sessions to enable colleagues to process, share, and unload the stress they experience.
- **Multidisciplinary teams:** Where possible, have multidisciplinary teams work on difficult or traumatic issues to reduce isolation and create opportunities to release their pressure valve.
- **Role model:** Leaders should model self-care: "Do as I do, as well as I say."
- **Workflow:** Ensure workflows have regular breaks and check-ins: As basic as these things are, research shows they have a significantly positive impact on wellbeing.
- **Assistance programs:** Direct team members to the organization's Employee Assistance Program (EAP) services relevant to wellbeing.
- **Mission:** Reinforce the mission to build resilience. As one [psychologist](#) put it: "The work that most security professionals are doing... is so important. Keeping that work linked to mission and purpose—the value of it—will help maintain a sense of value, honor, and purpose that is fortifying. It's a counternarrative to the negativity of some of the material. You are proactively creating the scaffolding for resilience... Vicarious trauma is not something that is terminal—it is a depletion beyond one's resilience. Healing happens when resilience is replenished."

## 10-Point Retention Plan for CSOs

CSOs can follow our 10-point retention plan to help them retain and develop their best talent:

1. Create a structured talent development strategy to enable less experienced members of the team to grow at a realistic and sustainable pace.
2. Ensure talent strategies take into account the needs of diverse and multigenerational teams.
3. Develop, promote, reward, and model open and inclusive approaches to management and leadership that enable all team members to prosper and generate commitment and loyalty to the team.
4. Provide training and development for managers in how to manage in an open, inclusive and non-judgmental manner.
5. Foster a culture that encourages and rewards openness.
6. Offer flexibility where possible, to remain competitive in attracting and retaining the best talent, and make the case for flexibility if the organization doesn't offer it.
7. Be intentional about managing and leading multigenerational teams, including establishing multigenerational taskforces and finding ways for less experienced team members to contribute alongside more experienced colleagues to get the benefit of different perspectives.
8. Recognize and build on the unique values and benefits of Gen Z, including their use of technology and communications methods.
9. Establish and promote a culture where people can talk openly about mental wellbeing.
10. Put in place an intentional wellbeing strategy, underpinned by practical measures to decrease isolation, promote self-care, increase peer support, and encourage utilization of support services.

## About the Authors and Partners

**Kathy Lavinder** is Founder and Executive Director of SI Placement

**Rachel Briggs OBE** is Founder and CEO of The Clarity Factory

[SI Placement](#) is the premier retained recruiting firm operating in the security arena. With more than 20 years' experience and a proven track record for assisting multinationals and the family offices of the high-net-worth community with critical talent needs, SI Placement has a unique window into the needs and concerns of complex organizations.

[The Clarity Factory](#) consults with major multinationals, producing knowledge, actionable insights, and practical solutions to drive innovation in corporate security and cyber security.

SI Placement and The Clarity Factory offer a range of joint services to assist CSOs with their talent strategies. This includes: talent audits, future talent strategy facilitation, staff development and training, compensation reviews, job description reviews, and advice on recruitment needs.

To discuss how SI Placement and The Clarity Factory can assist you, please contact [Kathy Lavinder](#) or [Rachel Briggs](#).

## About the Study

This insight draws on research conducted by SI Placement and The Clarity Factory in 2024, including interviews with CSOs from a range of sectors and geographies, and a global survey of corporate security professionals. The survey data for CSOs quoted in this insight relates to CSOs from multinational corporations. Where survey data is broken down by age, it draws on all survey respondents. More information on this study can be found [here](#).