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The nation's invisible bank

US edition

Conferma Insight Report 2025

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Employees are paying to work – and the cost is spiraling.

In 2019, we exposed a hidden truth: employees were quietly funding their workplaces by covering business expenses from their own pockets. Six years on, this invisible bank is bigger than ever.

Today, millions of Americans are acting as interest-free lenders to their employers – and the financial strain is becoming unsustainable. This isn't just a quiet inconvenience. It's a workplace cashflow crisis affecting employee well-being and business performance.

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RECEIPT

Average monthly out-of-pocket expenses

$343

PAID WITHOUT THANKS

Key findings

US employees are still acting as reluctant lenders – fronting a staggering $48bn in business expenses. That's more than the entire GDP of Vermont – and it's coming straight out of employee wallets.

How this compares to average personal monthly outgoings:

Health insurance..... **$337**
Gas.. **$227**
Life insurance............... **$45**

83%

of employees now front business costs themselves – up from 57% in 2019.

Total unclaimed expenses

$48 billion

83%

say return-to-office mandates have driven up the costs they incur on behalf of the business.

69%

PAYMENT DECLINED

of employees are suffering cash flow issues due to expense deadlines.

With inflation surging and living costs rising, slow reimbursement systems are leaving more and more employees struggling. The result? **Financial stress, disrupted operations, and a workforce stretched too thin.**

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From pinch to pressure

America's hidden workplace cashflow crisis.

Employees aren't just covering costs – they're making tough choices. Faced with no viable alternative, many are choosing to pay from their own pocket but costs are quickly escalating.

In six years...	2019		2025
The average employee's monthly spend has **more than tripled**. Adjusted for inflation, that's still a **168% real-term increase**.	$111	▶	$343
The share of employees now covering company costs has shot up.	66%	▶	83%
Cash flow strain on employees has **significantly increased.**	45%	▶	69%

This isn't a fringe issue. Business expenses are causing financial strain for millions of employees across the US.

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Return-to-office (RTO) reality check

Back to the office, back into debt.

Return-to-office has revived pre-pandemic costs and added fresh financial pressure for many employees. Employees are being forced to choose: pay out of pocket to be seen, or step back and risk being sidelined.

83%
say RTO has directly increased their business expenses.

56%
believe declining business travel would harm their career prospects.

45%
are now less likely to travel for work due to up-front costs.

For many, return-to-office has become a lose/lose choice between visibility and affordability.

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Expense dodging is impacting the business bottom line

When employees avoid buying what they need to do their jobs, companies don't just save money – they lose it. In productivity. In innovation. In growth. Expense admin now eats up the equivalent of one full workday per year – for every employee.

55%

avoid necessary work purchases to avoid out-of-pocket costs.

74%

spend more than 30 minutes each month managing claims.

42%

say fronting costs adds stress at the start of a trip, with 36% feeling less prepared for their work as a result.

When employees hesitate to invest in the tools, travel, or experiences needed to drive business forward, **organizations risk losing a competitive edge**.

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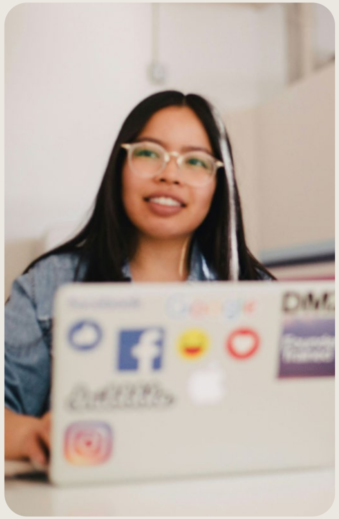
Who feels the strain?

The invisible bank hits younger workers hardest – forcing many to borrow from parents. But mid-career professionals are also trapped, afraid that cutting back on travel could stall their careers.



18-28 year-olds

78%

face cash flow problems.

78%

have less for essential spending.

35-44 year-olds

60%

fear career setbacks if they decline travel.

86%

report increased costs.

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The breaking point

A delayed expense claim isn't just an inconvenience, it can tip employees into short-term borrowing. 46% of employees now rely on credit cards just to keep working. And they're waiting nearly three weeks to be paid back. Without intervention, both employees and businesses face escalating costs – financial and human.

141.7 million employees in the US are now claiming expenses.

64% are stressed by slow expense reimbursements.

2.5 weeks is the average reimbursement time.

46% would use a credit card if lacking personal funds.

> For many employees, the worry is now whether they can afford to keep working under the current system.

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Close the invisible bank – for good

The invisible bank doesn't have to exist. We already have the tools to close it down. Modern payment technologies – like virtual cards – remove the burden from employees, speed up processes for finance teams, and keep businesses running smoothly. It's a simple shift with transformative impact.

For businesses

Operational efficiency

Employees spend where needed, without hesitation.

Reduced risk

Cash flow stress is no longer a barrier to productivity.

Happier, more loyal teams

Eliminating expense-related stress improves wellbeing, retention, and performance.

For employees

No more out-of-pocket costs

Corporate payments cover expenses directly, so staff never act as lenders again.

Instant payments

Real-time approvals keep work moving without delays.

Peace of mind

Automated checks and compliance mean less admin and fewer disputes.

The result? **A fairer, faster, more resilient system** – where employees can focus on their work, and businesses can focus on growth.

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> Virtual cards don’t just fix expense management. They reset the relationship between employees and employers – putting businesses back in control, reducing the burden of admin, and ensuring employees’ financial freedom.

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Methodology

This report is based on independent fieldwork carried out in June 2025.

Sample size

1,000 US adults (18+) in full-time or part-time employment.

Exclusions

Independent contractors and the self-employed.

Method

Online survey, nationally representative across age, gender, and region.

The findings are designed to provide a clear and accurate picture of how expense management practices are impacting employees across the US workforce.

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