

# EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT TRENDS 2021



in times of crises, we all huddle together and become stronger, as long as we do so intentionally. JAN 2021

# INTRODUCTION

As Charles Darwin said, it is not the strongest or the most intelligent who will survive but those who can best manage change. COVID-19 pandemic's consequences will endure. We have to reimagine our understanding of corporate work. As we train for the next normal, there are some trends that enterprise heads should hold close.

Unusual events have compelled corporations to rearrange and acclimate in much of 2020. This year we will exist to evolve.

Focussing on employee engagement, we specify some of the trends that will shape the next normal in this White Paper.

In late October of 2020, McKinsey issued a customer survey. They uncovered that nations with more youthful residents, such as India and Indonesia, live more hopefully than those with more ageing demographics, such as France, Italy, and Japan. China has more aged individuals despite being conspicuously optimistic - it stands as an anomaly.

Significant improvement in 2021 is the expectation of three out of five Malaysians. 50% of Malaysians seem to believe "the world will shift for the better following this pandemic". Malaysia remains just off the centre of this optimism spectrum.

Optimistic customer belief and willingness to invest more in internal needs are necessary to turn the corporate wheels. Internally though, allow for the investment of time and resources in different aspects of organisational health. New circumstances under which the workforce comes together to complete work make employee engagement a critical area to look into.

This White Paper is the third part of a series of white papers on engagement. Looking at how employee engagement has been practised and measured so far, it is time to look at new ways to adapt and deal with the new realities of working life.

### White Paper I

Focuses on the state of engagement in corporate organisations.

### White Paper II

Investigates how engagement is measured.

### **White Paper III**

Focuses on future trends when it comes to employee engagement.



# Methodology

While we look at overall trends, in order to put this whitepaper together we also rely on an employee engagement study we conducted late last year. The employee engagement study surveyed 46 participants representing their organisation. It was administered online via a form that was distributed using emails, WhatsApp and other social media platforms.

# **Demographics**

This study looked at organisations across six countries. Below is the breakdown of respondents amongst those countries.

Malaysia 65% Thailand 22% India 7% Singapore 2% Australia 2% Laos 2%

The survey represented employees at the manager/head level (46% of respondents) as well as VPs and C-level executives representing their organisations' stance.

# Employee Engagement Trends 2021



Creating More
Profound Bonds
Between Individual
and Institutional
Missions



**Engagement Above Resilience in 2021** 



**Belonging** 



Going Past Diversity and Inclusion to Equity, Justice, and Belonging



Millennials and Gen Z Friendly Benefits



Addressing the Total Self at Work



Operating in the **Present** 



Placing Results First, Time and Location Second



A Fresh Recognition of the Basics

# Creating More Profound Bonds between Individual and Institutional Missions

For years we hear of the importance of having purpose-driven organisations and ensuring personal values, passions, and purpose align with those of the employers. As a Korn Ferry report puts it, "The reality is that companies cannot talk about the organisation's purpose without considering the individual purposes of their people. Companies must find points where organisational and individual purposes intersect".

When people connect with an organisation's purpose, this provides meaning to their work and nurtures a sense of connection, happiness, and fulfilment. Indeed, the most successful leaders are those who have a robust personal purpose and have also managed to align it with the purpose of the organisation/group.

One key idea in 2020 was Employees As Brand Spokespeople. "An employee accumulates 561% more engagement on the identical message conveyed by a corporation on social media because an employer has ten times fewer followers on social media than their employees".

In this age, there is increasing reliance on the internet for reviews, assessments and guides to company cultures, productivity and overall effectiveness. A high level of employee engagement leads to a passionate conveyance of the messages you would like the organisation to push out into the world.

Even with technology bringing a tremendously positive transformation for employee engagement, 70% of corporates surveyed last year only ran an engagement survey once a year. Suppose employers want to get ahead and know how people feel about the organisation, and how aligned they are at different times to the company's purposes, they need to check in with employees and track engagement far more often.

Many organisations and individuals alike revisit and amend their purpose and direction even more so now. Add to those new ways of working that seem to extend indefinitely, such as remote working. Measuring engagement more frequently will allow for the more current understanding of alignment to shine through.

# Measures You Can Implement to Align Your Employees with Your Strategic Purposes

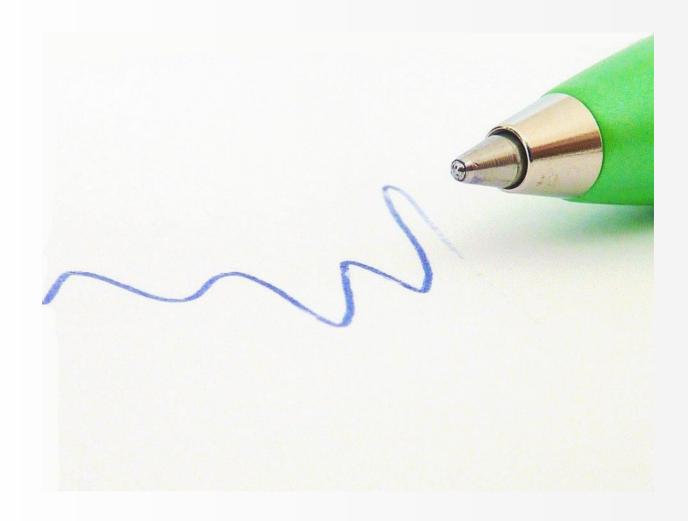
### Appraise Your Prevailing Internal Communications Plan and Adopt the Appropriate Channels

- Begin evaluating your current internal communications plan and assure that you deliver your strategic purposes to everyone to build a greater synergy at your workplace. Indeed, one of the chief causes of misalignment, low motivation, and sub-par productivity is poor internal communications.
- Begin assessing how you are currently communicating your enterprise aims and purpose to your whole workforce, whether office-based or remote.
- A digital tool, such as an employee communication platform, tells your company's aims and strategy to your employees efficiently.
- Manage your employee communication platform to give inherent knowledge to ensure that your employees comprehend your company's ideas and purposes, such as:
  - i. Business updates
  - ii. Commodity updates
  - iii. Sales returns
  - iv. Updates on your competitive review
  - v. Instructional materials such as tutorials
  - vi. Meeting recordings
  - vii. Webinars and podcasts
  - viii. Marketing elements such as videos, eBooks and accomplishment narratives

### Determine the Alignment Necessary and Inspire Your Employees to Perform an Effective Role in Your Internal Communications

- Give employees a say to support them in accomplishing mutual aims through each of the unique projects.
- If you distribute content to your employees, urge them to reply to and discuss the content. It also assures that their project units secure appropriate resources.
- o Introduce your plan. Invite inquiries and investigate issues. To fulfil the plan, establish the projects that have to happen. Prepare the projects.
- Assemble all those inquiries about your enterprise preferences, purposes and focus on using your employee communication platform. To better collaboration quality, it can be a great approach to finance a team-building exercise.
- Conceive a culture where various functions in the same company can rely on one another to achieve what they say. That way, it is effortless to keep up with what is occurring in the business, even for employees who do not actively aid in the talks.

# Measures You Can Implement to Align Your Employees with Your Strategic Purposes



#### Make Sense of Complexity

- Current program supervisors, project supervisors, and other enterprise managers need to grasp contemporary work environments' rising complexity.
- Knowing the context in which project-based activity is taking place is one solution to breaking down any modern-day complexity. Thus, managers need to distinguish the most relevant, appropriate and vital skills and instruments to challenge complicated working conditions.

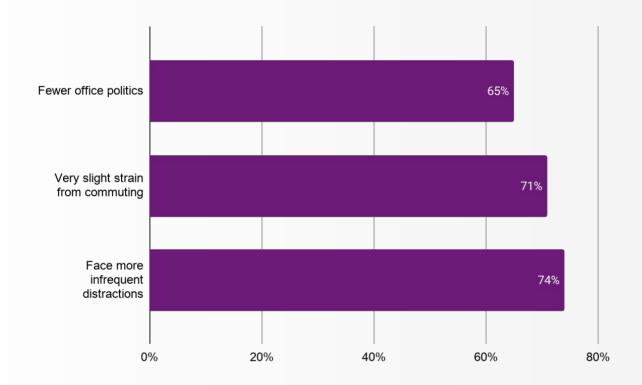
### Measure and Reward Achievement

- Grant rewards after ascertaining the correct metrics to appraise alignment and strategic improvement instead of extending bonuses separated from a strategic context.
- Assure those project unit members are rewarded for the business's more comprehensive overall strategic implementation, not for their assignment execution.

## **Engagement Above Resilience**

A significant point in the engagement debate in 2020 was a more major highlight on Work-life Balance. The urge to fulfil work-life harmony was higher since resilience follows suit. For example, working from home was, in fact, a good employee engagement movement and an extraordinarily cost-friendly one at that for employers and employees alike.

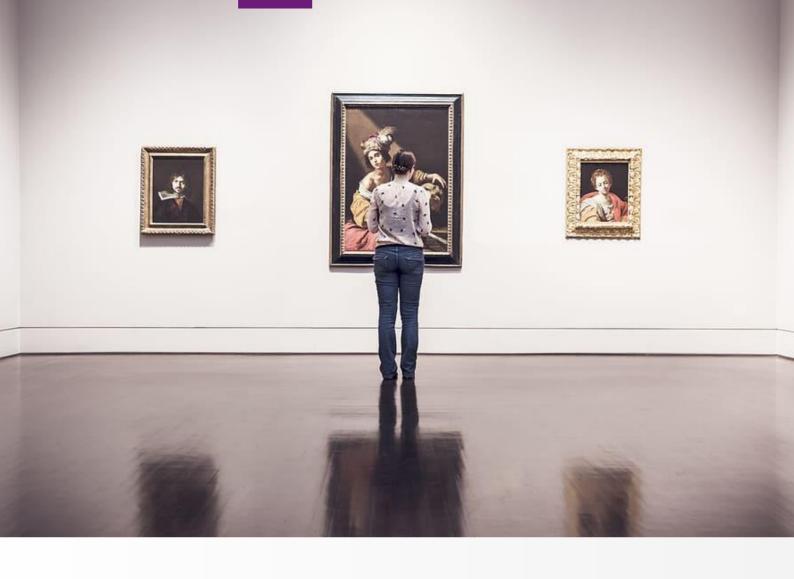
FlexJob reported that 75% of employees expressed more excellent productivity levels from home.



In 2021 though, the trend leans towards building on Engagement over and beyond the achievement of resilience.

We at Leaderonomics have defined resilience as Bounce Back, and indeed, it was the keyword of 2020 for many organisations. Roughly **50%** of struggle with employee engagement can be explained by a lack of resilience, as ADPRI's recent Workplace Resilience Study saw.

For 2021, organisations should apprehend that resilience will not get them through the shifts yet to come. Instead, employers will have to require their employees to construct innovative attitudes that authorise them to take ownership of what they can govern, wherever they are working.



# 2 Manageable Steps to help employees move above resilience

#### Commence a culture club.

Employees need to know that employers hear them. The administrative team for culture clubs can be various individuals each time. A cross-departmental assortment of personalities partakes in culture clubs, which is what makes them excellent. Everyone conveys a novel view of the corporation. They can also attain viewpoints and support for their particular corporation sectors and serve as exceptional advocates.

### Create an honesty box.

Build an online form where individuals can convey ideas for organisational developments. It provides you with a beat on what people's anxieties are. It equips employees with a simple space to air objections or give opinions.

# Belonging

The third trend from 2020 was great possibilities for Career Growth. Our survey reported that 19% (third highest) of employees expressed that learning and growth opportunities are their expectations for employee engagement.

However, when Qualtrics talked to individuals as part of their multinational investigation of more than 11,800 participants at the end of 2020; a feeling of Belonging arose as the most necessary driver of employee engagement. It came ahead of the capacity for career growth. In 2021, they envision this yearning for belonging to reshape the employee experience entirely.

Our understanding of belonging is never going to be stagnant. However, we know that it involves a sense of affinity for a company. For both employees and enterprise, it brings outstanding results.

### Attain a Feeling of Belonging with these 3 Actions

### **Believe in Yourself Completely**

There is nothing more desolate than being with people but believing you are alone. Your mind is declaring, "I do not want to speak to anyone. No one recognises me here." But the rational character in you is yelling "How could you possibly believe you are alone right now?"

An endless pit of unworthiness creates several moods of solitude. "People do not like me, do not understand me, do not know me, or that people do not appreciate me." Improving self-esteem and genuine self-acceptance is one of the only methods to draw oneself out of the unpleasant emotions of not belonging.

### Create Space for "And"

There are occasions when an individual considers she or he belongs with a job but not a firm. Or to her or his associates but not with their family. Belonging is multi-faceted. It is crucial to appreciate your characters' complexity in the areas you consider you do or do not belong. It is essential to practice the word "and" rather than "or". To provide an opening to believe in yourself, realise that you can feel in various forms — even if they conflict.

### **Prioritise Improving the self**

Crucial to reaching a feeling of belonging is spending time on personal growth and shaping a healing course as a priority. If you are not conscious of what demands development, you cannot correct those habits, associations, or mindsets.

For someone to believe they belong, particularly in our more divided society, is difficult. When social media depicts a nonsensical idea that no one else ever seems alone, it makes it even harder. Nevertheless, to feel alienated at times is natural. Cherish the fact that you are loved when that surge of solitude hits you. You do not have to be anyone else but yourself, in that situation, you are worthy.



# Going Past Diversity and Inclusion to Equity, Justice, and Belonging

The fourth trend in 2020 is Workplace Wellness. 12% of companies surveyed offer Wellness At Work programs to employees, the second most used engagement initiative.

However, Recruiter.com says this year; we are looking at an initiative that is not on last year's list. **We move past Diversity and Inclusion to Equity, Justice, and Belonging.** A considerable number of organisations have already ditched the acronym "D&I" and are thrusting toward better, more meticulous terms, like "DEI" (diversity, equity, and inclusion); "DEB" (diversity, equity, and belonging); and "JEDI" (justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion).

Drill for more in-depth insights, have challenging chats with your people and re-examine institutional intolerances. Try to rectify past errors and construct significant improvement with present individuals. Reassess your approaches and facilitate conversation across the board.

# Racial justice and belonging in the workplace come to fruition with the help of these two factors.

#### ALLYSHIP AND ACKNOWLEDGMENT

We must acknowledge the inequities that have lasted for ages within our societal and corporate structures before enacting change. Biases exist in our corporate networks and organizations' practices and culture, which means we also need to look inward. It is a crucial first step, but it will likely be uncomfortable. Leaders must be role models who operate with intention and conviction to continuously practice and learn the art and science of inclusive leadership skills.

Nike and Adobe provided a day off for employees to commemorate Juneteenth, and take time to reflect, learn and support each other; this is progress.

Qualitative and quantitative analysis of goals and annual benchmarks is a requirement as the measurement is an essential component of this accountability. Measures must occur on the department level and across the company.

Ensure regular quarterly diversity check-ins with senior management and explore creating an annual workforce diversity report if you have not already. Internal employee survey tools also provide a direct feedback loop. In a way that helps inform strategy and action, these real-time surveys offer crucial insights into employee sentiment and needs.



#### **BUILDING A DIVERSE TALENT PIPELINE**

We have made slow progress in prioritizing diversity and racial equity at our organizations. We must recognize that. Study after study has demonstrated that racially diverse leadership makes a company more profitable and raises performance. Companies with the most racial and ethnic diversity are 35% more likely to have financial returns above their respective national industry medians, according to research from McKinsey.

Building a more diverse workforce has been the recent commitment of many companies. Over the next five years, Google announced plans to improve representation at senior levels by 30%.

We all succeed when people from diverse backgrounds and cultures work together. Build programs across the employee lifecycle to create a culture of belonging to evolve the way we hire and retain and promote employees.

One of the key focus areas is a company-wide learning curriculum and accountability framework in addition to an increased focus on diverse candidate slates and new investments in onboarding and mentorship.

# Produce a Feeling of Belonging in the Workplace

### Eliminate "outsiderness."

Numerous employees subdue themselves, presenting them as average associates because they still seem like aliens in the workplace. Thinking like an outsider is a cognitive disturbance that threatens focus and execution, a privately unpleasant, cold reality.

Report and appreciate originality in the workplace. Give regular chances for check-ins and show interest in every employee. Diminish the plausibility of an individual feeling like an alien through workplace help, recognition and assurance.



# Produce a Feeling of Belonging in the Workplace

Review recruitment methods.

### To produce a more various pipeline:

- 1. Begin by taking a look at your job information.
- 2. Insert expressions urging every applicant to get in touch, reassess restricting determinants like university qualifications and voluntary internship activity, and exclude any gendered language.
- 3. Every job information should utilise gender-bias software.

View resumes without applicants' names. Following, curb careless prejudice when analysing candidates by ascertaining the most critical criteria for a position in advance of viewing resumes.

Remain deliberate concerning your committee of interviewers when scheduling interviews. Make an effort for applicants to talk with interviewers in their unique settings, and choose a combination of interviewers with an array of experiences and expertise.

Everyone is at a distinct step in their course to enhance inclusivity. Build from these actionable changes. You do not need to have a complete map outlined immediately. More extensive, transformative advances arise from a focus on precise next moves.

Most importantly, interact honestly with employees, and let them know where your institution is in this campaign. Exactly as you do with different sections of your company, emphasise and evolve your plans. Take your team with you on the journey, and have a learning mindset.

# Millenials and Gen Z friendly benefits

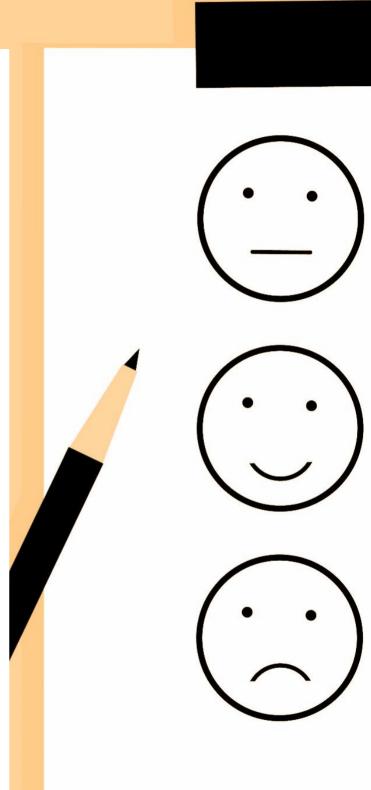
A trend that already started emerging strongly in 2020 was Millennials and Gen Z friendly employee engagement benefits. According to VantageCircle, millennials will form 50% of the workforce in 2021 and 75% by 2030. Health assistance (1% in our survey) or a Rewards & Recognition programme (3%) will no longer work. Millennials and Gen Z favour distinctive, personalised and considerate employee benefits and bonuses. They treasure a multitude of adjustable options.

# Benefits as tools to enhance engagement

Because employees work from home, employers apprehend their employees' surroundings better, from their backyards and bedrooms to their households and pets. The intelligent thing to do is create connections around these intimate components and employee engagement efforts.

Benefits for 2021 look more like 'mind and body' health services, youth and eldercare solutions, and more flexible holiday procedures.

More profitable outcomes come from providing for what we require today than pushing for a fit with past procedures.



# A Prosperous Benefits Strategy in 5 Moves

- Get a record. You grasp your employees' interests more thoroughly than anyone else. Where are the gaps in employee training and engagement? Persuade employees to share what they appreciate and what they need. Utilise an engagement or benefits questionnaire.
- Understand your company's aims.
   Solicit the reforms that chief
   stakeholders and decision-makers
   would prioritise. Do your company's
   current maturity and priorities align
   with the benefits you are giving?
- 3. Do not go at it solo. Your agent or adviser and your vendor comrades can manage it with you. Improve your businesses by reaching out for opportunities. Leverage their expertise to thoroughly appreciate your expense drivers and direct them to review your up-to-date claims data. Guarantee that the potential to scale, store data and expense administration are fit for your partners.
- 4. Develop a business case.

  Recommend specific plans or benefits drives. Decide how you will gauge the achievement of your new programs.
- 5. Chart it out. Design an outlining instrument your entire company can apply to conceive your HR team's roadmap for the future and the adjustments you need to execute. Utilise it to efficiently engage employees and manage your communication with your more extensive team.



# Addressing the total self at work

A trend in 2020 was Workplace Wellness. 12% of companies surveyed in our survey offered Wellness At Work programmes to employees, the second most used engagement initiative.

As we mentioned earlier, 2020 looked at additional importance to work-life balance and employee well-being. 12% of the companies surveyed found initiatives relating to work-life balance to be most effective.



**78**%

of individuals who sense as though they belong have a superb feeling of well-being.

This year, employers should continue their focus on work-life balance and employee well-being. They should also continue their efforts on improving the sense of belonging. According to Qualtrics, 78% of individuals who sense as though they belong have a superb feeling of well-being. At the same time, there is an increased need to address issues that employees face even outside the workplace. Remote working has allowed employers and employees to understand each other's personal circumstances more than ever, with a view of their homes, their families and challenges they face. To ensure employee engagement, there's a bigger need to help people address any family and personal issues they may be facing, such as self-care, childcare and eldercare, and flexible work and leave policies.

Well-being has an immediate correlation with the performance grade of employees and productivity. Taking care of the total self becomes a critical aspect of engagement.

# Operating in the present

The year 2020 started with many plans by organisations for the year. However, those plans quickly became irrelevant, and organisations overall had to quickly adapt and look for new priorities and new ways of operating. What the experience has shown is that, even though strategic planning is still important, long term - even year long or months-long plans may not always be suitable.

While planning and thinking of strategies remains important, there is a need to assist teams in planning for shorter time periods, to allow for any sudden changes that may occur. Agility is something that is often talked about - now more than ever before it becomes a critical skill and attitude to nurture.

With this need to plan for shorter time periods, HR and also has to adopt a more agile approach, especially when it comes to performance measurements and expectations for employees, to allow the freedom to pivot as needed throughout the year.

Employees, managers, organisations and customers alike are going through their own cycles of change and struggles - allowing the space to morph tasks, processes and culture around those to accommodate and, even more, assist all the different parties involved will prove a strong engagement policy by any organisation.

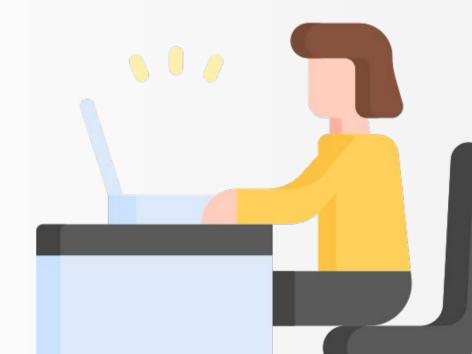


# Placing Results First, Time and Location Second

Remote working is here to stay - for many industries and roles. Even for the ones that view it as a temporary solution to a problem (i.e. the pandemic), they will find that it will probably take quite a bit of this year before we begin to go back to some form of 'normal'.

Understanding the challenges that remote working entails for organisations and individuals alike - and we covered these in two whitepapers in 2020 titled "Working from Home as the New Normal: How ready are you?" and "Working from Home: Overcoming Challenges and Developing Steps to Success" is fundamental in facilitating effectiveness of work and high levels or productivity. This also includes looking at output and results rather than 'hours clocked in' and location from where people complete the work. With work crossing borders and being conducted online for the majority of individuals, new ways of defining 'work' are necessary.

These changes will also raise questions and highlight the need for change in the areas of compensation, as well as performance measurement and management. Placing people - individual employees in the centre of these discussions and ensuring they are evaluated in a wholesome manner that goes beyond hours of work, presence in a specific location or tasks met will allow for stronger engagement.

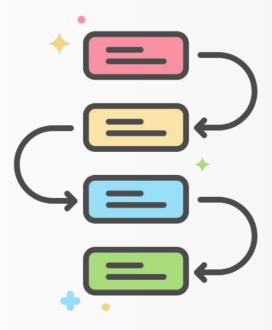


# A Fresh Recognition for the Basics

With the multitude of changes organisations are undergoing, especially when it comes to different-than-the-past working arrangements and the new challenges that come with that, it is time to slow down and relook at the needs of the organisation, as well as of the individual employees. With high-speed change and disruptions in the way work is conducted - possibly in many cases overhaul of entire roles and departments, there arises a need to go back to basics, in order to ensure employees have what they need in order to be successful.

For example, do all employees understand the changing direction of the organisation? How the organisation has been affected beyond working arrangements and possible paycuts? Do they understand fully and without any blindspots new products, processes, methods of delivery, and how all these affect their specific functions? And does the organisation need to relook at compensation and benefits to be more aligned to new realities?

Pausing to plan sustainably, keeping in mind that further changes may be along the way soon once again will give a strong edge and solidify employee engagement further.





# **Staying Agile and Relevant**

As discussed earlier, having a sense of purpose as an individual employee and as a collective organisation, building the right organisational culture, and creating a sense of belonging are some of the identified crucial pieces to employee engagement.

We previously highlighted that organisations need to identify intersection points between individual employees' and the organisations' purpose. In order to identify these intersection points, managers and C-level executives need to be having intentional and meaningful conversations as often as on a weekly basis. However, the yearly engagement surveys and often packed schedule of managers and C-level executives do not quite facilitate such conversations. Furthermore, engagement surveys that are conducted yearly do not enable quick assessment of culture misfit or address issues such as poor collaboration or workplace silos quickly enough. As such, we cannot emphasise enough the importance of employee pulse surveys that could assess an organisation's internal engagement trend consistently and over time.

Happily as an engagement tool helps employers and their organisation identify internal employee engagement trends because it provides live, daily, and continuous insights on the state of engagement over a period of time. This is a mobile application that is built on behavioural science, people analytics, and A.I. - a tool that drives meaningful engagement in both the physical and remote workplace.

Through different functions such as daily questions, monthly peer feedback, recognition and reward system, town hall (discussion space), and more, Happily encourages healthier and honest conversations. Furthermore, the university and town hall which are spaces for skill exchange and sharing of information and ideas respectively, enable HR and employers to guide culture change towards a happier and more productive workplace. The gamification aspect of having employees placed in Happily Houses as according to a work style also promotes better teamwork and collaboration. By understanding different work styles, teams can communicate better and work together more effectively - which overall give rise to a sense of belonging within and across the workplace.

## **Conclusion:**

# A Way Forward

In this last white paper of the engagement series we looked at new trends for the year 2021 and ahead. The whirlwind year we had in 2020 brought many drastic changes in the way we conduct work - not necessarily new ways, in many occasions. However, it has drastically accelerated a move towards a new way of working, that brings along new needs, mindsets and attitudes that are needed by organisations and employees alike. And with that, a new era of engagement with emphasis on new areas of concern.

In this paper, we have identified 9 major trends to look out for in 2021. Focusing on these areas, organisations may achieve deeper levels of engagement - which is proven to have a strong positive correlation to overall efficiencies and happier customers.

We also make mention of Happily - a digital engagement tool that can provide a daily input of information on the employee's psyche, their challenges and concerns. It can allow deeper understanding between managers and team members, provide feedback to employees on a regular basis, and allow people to recognise their colleagues all in a fun, friendly digital environment. A tool like Happily can assist with some of the more fundamental pieces of maintaining high engagement.

With this, we urge organisations to have their eyes, ears and hearts open to hear the signs from their people, as well as what's happening outside, to ensure employee engagement keeps surging, despite the challenging times we are going through. Indeed, in times of crises, we all huddle together and become stronger, as long as we do so intentionally.



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# White Paper Publications: Working from Home series and other relevant topics



#### October 2020

# The State of Engagement: Engagement in Corporate Organisations

In this first white paper of the engagement series, we shed light on current employee engagement practices, and the various methods organisations are currently monitoring and nurturing engagement in the workplace.



### October 2020

### Measuring Engagement: How Ready Are you?

Assessing employee engagement is vital to having effective organisations. We share insights on how to measure accurately, in order to aid your understanding of how to improve engagement. We talk about diverse processes and modern strategies for consistent, systematic engagement measurement.



#### June 2020

### WFH: As the New Normal How Ready Are You?

We are at a juncture whereby we are recognising the return of working from home and the welcoming of remote working as we begin to see a mindset change in the third quarter of 2020. With this new shift, are working individuals and organisations ready to embrace the new ways of working?



### **July 2020**

# WFH: Overcoming Challenges & Developing Steps to Success

In order to create an effective working environment specifically for remote workers, we seek to understand the different levels of challenges. What are the challenges of working from home and remote working? Are our people and organisation equipped for this shift into new ways of working?

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# Growing People into Leaders, Building Communities of Love, Transforming the Nation

Leaderonomics is an organisation driven by the purpose of transforming the nation through building leaders. We believe that everyone with the right mindset and support can become a leader that can profoundly affect the social and economic health of their community, be it their organisation, community, or nation. With our guiding frameworks and intelligence gathered over the years, we work with children, university students, employees of all levels, management, and senior leaders to help them discover, develop and hone their leadership abilities.











