

THE STATE OF ENGAGEMENT IN CORPORATE ORGANISATIONS



With new challenges coming our way, accelerated by the pandemic and lockdown, it is pertinent that organisations start relooking at the way they engage employees.

SEPT 2020

INTRODUCTION

It is acknowledged that employee engagement is a vital factor contributing to organisational success. Strong engagement could have positive implications in all aspects of any business. In fact, many studies have found that companies with engaged employees significantly and dramatically outperform companies with low engagement repeatedly. According to such studies, their people are more open and likely to go looking for innovative ideas and new ways of doing their work, the engagement translates to better customer service, and everyone enjoys a happier place to work altogether.

We recently conducted our own survey in order to get a first-hand view of the state of engagement in Malaysia and the region.

Our survey found that 91% of companies involved view the engagement of their people as critical to company growth. In this series of white papers we will cover the results of the survey and provide insights that would be useful for organisations to consider when making their own plans for engagement strategies and measurement. In this first installation we focus on the overall state of engagement and emphasis that organisations put on it.

the state of engagement in corporate organisations.

Investigates how engagement is measured.

Focuses on future trends when it comes to employee engagement.

Why Does Employee Engagement Matter?

Employee engagement goes beyond happy-looking, laughing employees participating in meetings and chatting with colleagues. Employee engagement goes deeper and is a determinant of the relationship between employee and organisation. Engaged employees therefore are those that are truly enthusiastic and focused on their work, and are therefore truly interested in improving the organisation as a whole. A variety of studies across the globe have found that engagement impacts multiple facets of running an organisation, namely:



Increase in profitability



Higher customer loyalty



Improved recruitment rates



Improved retention rates



Commitment to the company



Better communication



Boost in workplace happiness



More collaboration



Higher levels of productivity



More innovation



Connected employees

METHODOLOGY AND DEMOGRAPHICS

Methodology

Demographics

The employee engagement study surveyed **46 participants** representing their organisation who were currently employed, over a span of **39 days**. It was administered online via a form that was distributed using emails, WhatsApp and other social media platforms.

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.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

These are the main results that emerged from the survey responses we gathered:



91% of companies surveyed see the engagement of employees as critical to growth



35% Of Companies saw engagement improve this year, and another 35% saw it remain the same.



59% of companies surveyed run engagement surveys, and of those, 70% do so once a year.



Empowering employees in the engagement processes, introducing changes, measuring the results of engagement initiatives and having engagement, as well as data management seem to be areas that organisations struggle the most with when it comes to understanding their workforce's engagement level and its impact.

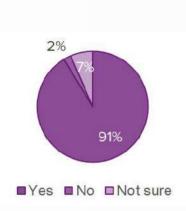


Popular engagement initiatives include providing learning opportunities, initiatives like having a knowledge sharing system in place and promoting wellness at work.



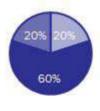
The top three items on a wish list for great employee engagement are having managers be responsible for engagement instead of HR, real-time insights throughout the year - not just reporting but also having guidance on improving it.

Survey Question: Does your company see the engagement of employees as critical to growth?



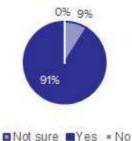
91% of our respondents indicated that their organisation see engagement as critical when it comes to the growth of their company. Our survey found that most of the companies that did not agree to employee engagement being critical to growth are not sure about employee engagement or how to calculate its impact. A person we reached out to also mentioned that they did not want to take the survey so that they do not skew the data, as their company does not believe in the importance of engagement. From the breakdown below looking at the responses we gathered by company size, it looks like most of the companies that do not believe in the importance of employee engagement are SMEs, below 50 employees. This may be because the smaller organisations have many other challenges that need to be prioritised and therefore not enough focus is put on engagement.

Does your company see the engagement of employees as critical to growth? (1-50 employees)



■Not sure ■ ■Yes ■No

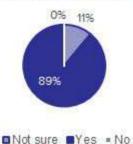
Does your company see the engagement of employees as critical to growth? (101-500 employees)



Does your company see the engagement of employees as critical to growth? (51-100, 501-1,000, 5,001-10,000, 10,001-20,000, and 20,000+ employees)



Does your company see the engagement of employees as critical to growth? (1,001-5,000 employees)





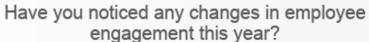
Employee Engagement in Our Region

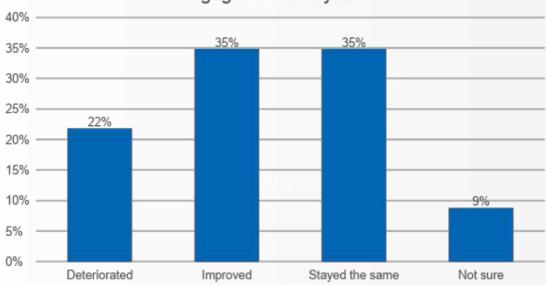
Condition of transnational engagement: 53% of employees across the globe are engaged in their assignments.

EMPLOYERS HAVE WORK TO ACCOMPLISH IN EVERY NATION

A recent Qualtrics study has also found that Malaysia specifically is doing slightly better with employee engagement reaching 54%. HRM Asia supports this as they released a statement saying Asia has the highest level of employee engagement globally as India, Thailand, and Hong Kong took up top three spots in the Employee Engagement Score. It's a positive to see that 91% of respondents say that organisations see engagement as critical to their growth. However, a 54% engagement rate overall in Malaysia indicates there is still some way to go ensuring that employees are truly engaged.

Survey Question: Have you noticed any changes in employee engagement this year?





With the dramatic shift in the way companies had to operate this year because of the effects of the lockdown and the pandemic which also resulted in significant impact to the economy, we wanted to see whether companies were affected in terms of employee engagement.

The results indicate that, even though 22% saw a deterioration of engagement, the majority saw engagement improve (35%), or stay the same (35%). This improvement might be because of increased efforts to maintain the engagement of employees given the harsh conditions we had to face.

The media as well as work-related consultants and experts have also been very swift to focus on organisations taking a much stronger stance in ensuring the wellbeing of their people, because of the unprecedented times we had to (and still are) going through. With all this taking place, it makes sense to see improvement in many cases or at least stability on engagement levels.

Globally, the impact of the pandemic and the lockdown that occurred as a result of it has influenced the way employees engage in their organisations.



53% of employees surveyed by HBR say they feel more exhausted.



60% of employers have increased employee listening efforts, few are using formal listening approaches



22% of remote employees say that they struggle to unplug after work (Buffer)



A full week of virtual meetings leaves 38% of employees feeling exhausted while 30% felt stressed (Forbes)



75% of employees say they feel more socially isolated and 53% say they feel more emotionally exhausted (HBV)



85% of employees say they're most motivated when management offers regular updates on company news (Trade Press Services)



During the pandemic, employees worked up to 3 hours more each day (Bloomberg)



20% of remote employees say that they lack a sense of belonging and sometimes feel lonely (Forbes)



86% of employees say they feel the need to prove to bosses they are working hard (Cityam)

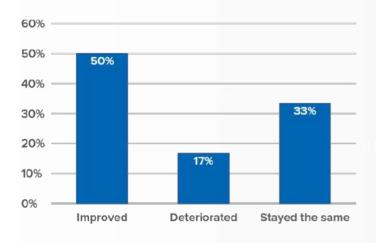


More than 90% of employees said they wanted at least weekly communication from their company (HBV)

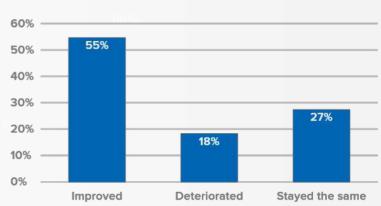
Companies in Malaysia are decreasing recruitment budgets. They prioritise employee engagement and support initiatives to cope with the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, human resource consulting firm Mercer LLC reported.

In our survey, if we break down the responses to the question of "**Have you noticed any changes in employee engagement this year?**" we see some differences. For companies that have 1-50 employees, they said that it stayed the same.

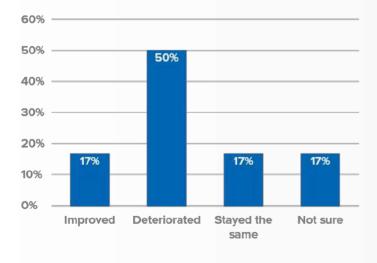
51-100 employees:



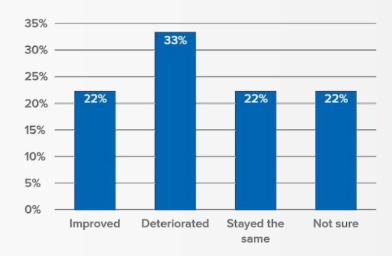
101-500 employees:



501-1000 employees:

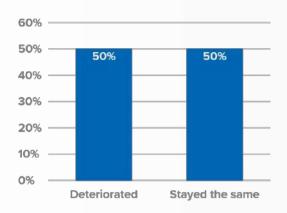


1001-5000 employees:

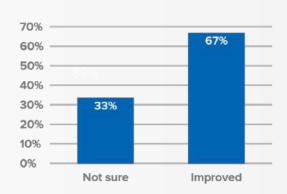


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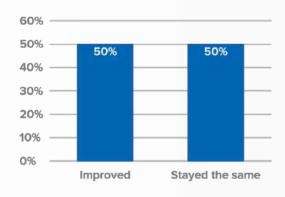
5001-10000 employees:



10001-20000 employees:



>20000 employees:



Based on the responses we gathered, the companies whose employee size falls between 501-10,000 employees seem to have seen a deterioration of engagement levels this year. Companies smaller than 500 seem to have seen an improvement overall, and so did companies bigger than 10,001.

Perhaps a way to understand this difference between different organisational size, is to consider the ease with which communication can take place in each size category. In smaller firms, perhaps the relationship between employees is a lot stronger, and additional attempts to drive engagement may therefore yield even bigger results. In bigger organisations, where relationships may not be as intimate, it may take much more effort to drive engagement during hard times. In the very big organisations perhaps, where fear of disengagement may be higher because of the size of the workforce alone, attempts may have been more concentrated and therefore may have shown stronger results.

A study done in Bulgaria showed that the level of employee engagement is inversely proportional to the size of company. As such, this could explain in part the drop in engagement levels for bigger companies. For companies with size more than 10,001, there is a lack of evidence to support why there is an overall improvement in engagement levels, however, it could be because of increased fear as mentioned.

Survey Question: If you answered improved / deteriorated above, what would you say the primary reason is for this?

Respondents noticed both positive and negative changes in employee engagement in 2020.

Improved (due to)	
Enhanced internal communications	4
Fear of loss of job / Alignment to ensure company sustainability	3
More involvement and communication from leaders	3
Change of leadership / structure	3
Care shown from the company on employee wellbeing	2
Changed ways of working	1
Covid-19	1
Drive to perform	1

From respondents that answered "improved" or "deteriorated to the question "Have you noticed any changes in employee engagement this year?" the reasons above were the main determinants of the positive change in engagement levels. The table above summarises the theme of categories of responses given in an open-ended manner. Critical factors contributing to increased engagement include:

- 1. Better internal communication than usual.
- 2. Solidarity to ensure job security and company sustainability.
- 3. Higher involvement from leaders and changes in the leadership structure.

This is in line with other reports stating that companies in Malaysia put a lot more emphasis on the wellbeing and engagement on existing employees and chose to reduce efforts in other areas instead.

Deteriorated (due to)		
Covid-19	2	
Changes happening	2	
Cost containment emphasis	2	
Economy in a crisis	1	
Poor leadership	1	
Pay Cuts, cutting benefits, risk or redundancy	1	

In regard to respondents experiencing deteriorating levels of engagement during the past year, some identified reasons for a drop in such which include:

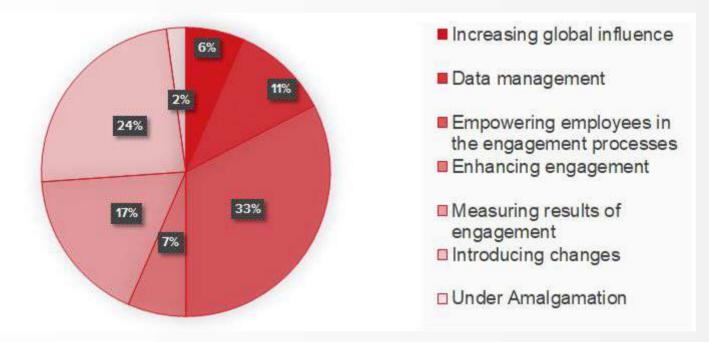
- 1. Uncertainty of the pandemic's effect on working conditions and the economy
- 2. Excessive emphasis placed on cost containment
- 3. Heightened levels of organisational changes

According to Gallup Panel data, in May 2020, employees and managers were 20% more likely than they were in June 2020 to agree that:

- 1. Their immediate supervisor keeps them informed about what's going on in their organisation.
- 2. Their organisation cares about their overall wellbeing strongly.
- 3. Their employer has communicated a clear plan of action in response to Covid-19.
- 4. They feel well prepared to do their job.

The term Covid-fatigue may well apply in the case of employee engagement. As the repercussions of the pandemic and the lockdown continue for a longer time than initially anticipated, organisations need to make sure that attempts to keep engagement levels high intensify rather than die down in order to improve the positive impact desired in the organisation's performance overall.

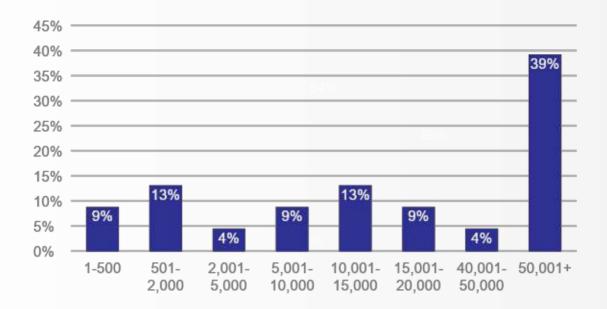
Survey Question: Which part of the process of employee engagement does your company struggle with the most?



Empowering employees in the engagement processes, introducing changes, measuring the results of engagement initiatives and having engagement, as well as data management seem to be areas that organisations struggle the most with when it comes to understanding their workforce's engagement level and its impact.

These are components of employee engagement that require constant check-in points with employees as well as fast action once information is received from the ground to modify engagement attempts. It is therefore not surprising that they pose a challenge to many of the organisations we had represented in the survey. To tackle some of these areas, organisations may look for more creative ways of ensuring time-sensitive feedback is received and acted upon by employees, and information is processed, analysed and dealt with quick and to the point.

Survey Question: How much money do you spend on employee engagement initiatives per year? (amounts in USD)

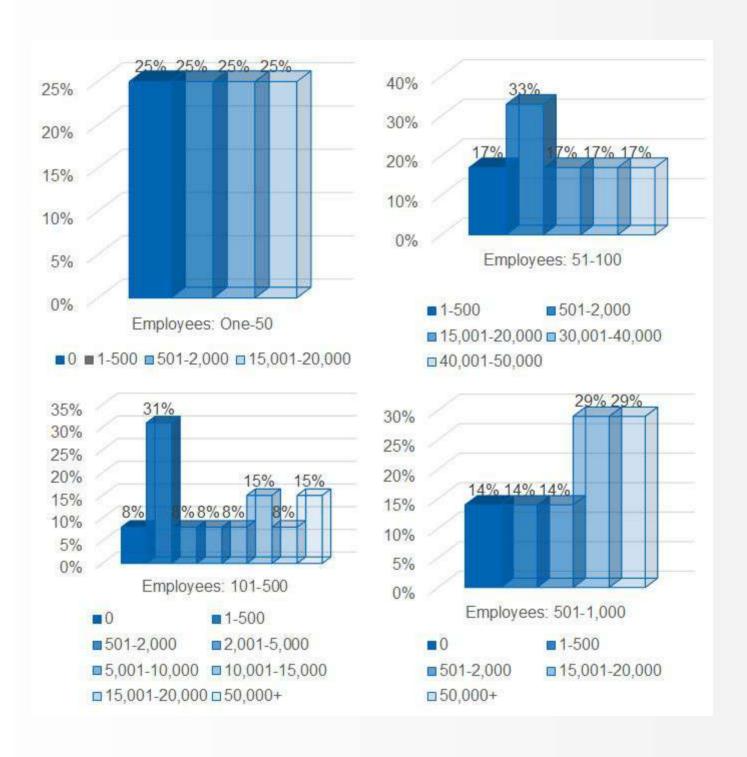


A high percentage of respondents noted that their organisations spend a significant amount of money on employee engagement initiatives each year.

In the pages that follow we will delve into the specific types of initiatives these cover. This indicates that expensive solutions are put in place with the purpose of enhancing employee engagement. Even so, when considering the question on the page before, companies still do struggle with issues such as empowering their employees to be involved in the process of engagement, measuring engagement and introducing changes. This indicates a mismatch in the efforts and amounts spent, with the outcome of the value that is seen.

Below, we break down the amount of money spent on employee engagement initiatives per year. It is logical to expect bigger organisations to spend more because of the number of their workforce but also their means. However, the breakdown shows that there are some smaller organisations that are also putting a lot of emphasis on engagement initiatives, investing big amounts of money, which also indicates the importance employers put on engagement.

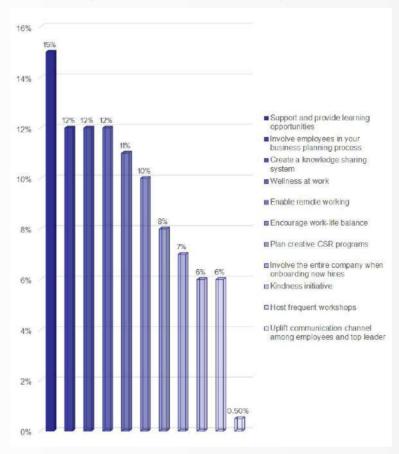
Survey Question: How much money do you spend on employee engagement initiatives per year? (amounts in USD) - breakdown by company size



Survey Question: How much money do you spend on employee engagement initiatives per year? (amounts in USD) - breakdown by company size (continued)



Survey Question: What kind of engagement initiatives does your company have in place?



The table above shows the responses gathered on the initiatives that companies have in place, aiming to improve employee engagement. Providing learning opportunities tops the list, with initiatives like having a knowledge sharing system in place and promoting wellness at work following.

The Qualtrics study that was conducted here in Malaysia this year, indicated that for employees, key drivers for employee engagement include:

- Listening to their feedback (67%)
- Opportunities for learning and development (67%)
- Recognition for good work (62%)
- A clear link between the work and the company's strategic objectives (62%)
- Confidence in senior leadership to make the right decisions (62%)
- Managers who help employees with career development (59%)

In particular, the report pointed out that businesses providing a feedback programme achieved an engagement score of 58%, as compared to 42% for those who do not.

Comparing the two lists indicate some discrepancies in terms of what employers are offering and what employees value the most.

Survey Question: What are your employees' expectations for employee engagement?

When asked this question, our respondents offered the following answers, according to company size:

1-50 employees

2 out 3 chose: Learning and growth opportunities and for employers to be open to constructive feedback

101-500 employees

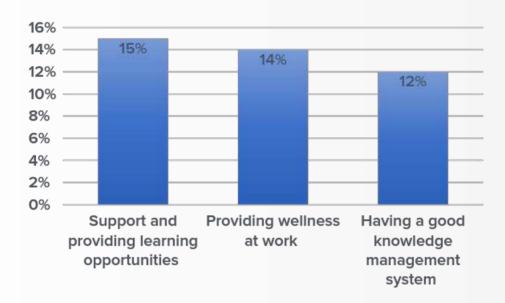
5 out of 6 chose: Acting on the results in a timely and accurate manner

20,000+ employees

The same behaviors from their employers, learning and growth opportunities, acting on the results in a timely and accurate manner, anonymity, feedback from the result of the employee engagement, and for employers to be open to constructive feedback

Survey Question: Which engagement initiatives has your company found to be the most effective for your organisation?

Going a bit deeper, the survey asked the respondents on which of their initiatives they found to be the most impactful in a positive way on employee engagement.



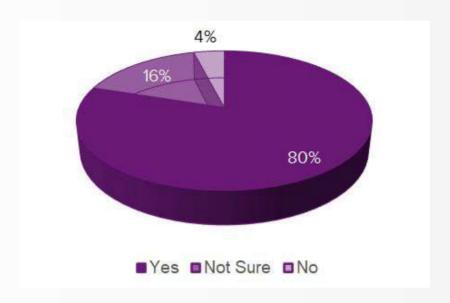
It became additionally challenging for firms to retain leading talents because of transforming employee expectations. For example, employees do not merely examine the benefits but rather also think of the company's values and the growth options on offer. Likewise, the deficit of skills that industries are presently encountering also poses a stout challenge.

As such, leaders in successful institutions are recommended to invest in their employees' professional growth and to ensure that all employees understand what the enterprise expects of them.

To enhance employee engagement, supervisors can correspondingly think of:

- 1. Pushing out employee recognition more regularly
- 2. Requesting for employee input
- 3. Improving employees' monetary health
- 4. Equipping employees with definitions of the company's objectives
- 5. Transforming the mode of obtaining knowledge

Survey Question: Do you think employee engagement has a correlation to productivity?

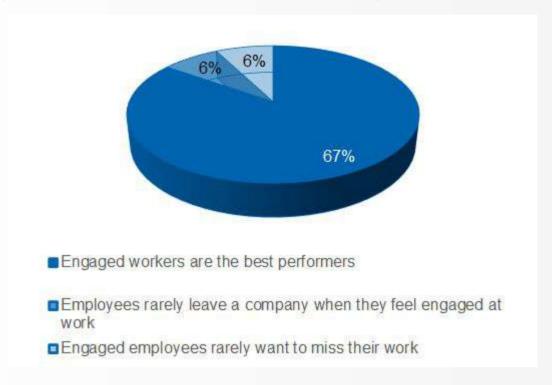


Four out of every five companies indicated that they think employee engagement correlates to productivity. This is in line with them seeing employee engagement as critical to their organisation's growth, It's been proven that higher levels of engagement lead to better results for an organisation overall, and higher levels of productivity, in the long run. Yet, there is a combined 20% that are still not sure or do not believe that productivity is impacted by engagement.

In a follow up question, respondents listed increased productivity, higher retention, and decrease in absenteeism as positive outcomes of higher employee engagement.

Follow up Survey Question: Please share your thoughts on how it IS or IS NOT correlated.

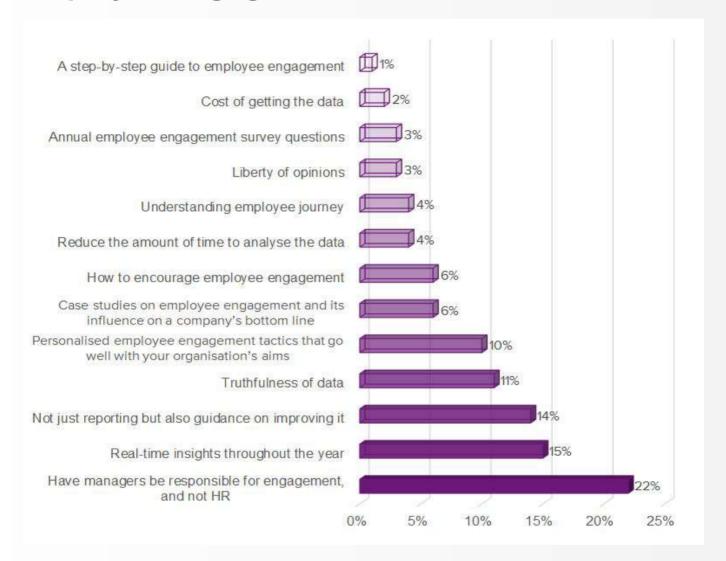
Some important themes that we observed from the responses are:



For this open-ended question, we only got responses from those that see employee engagement as having a correlation to productivity. Here is what they had to say:

- Engaged employees will aspire to deliver their finest work and will provide outside the spectrum of their profession.
- Engaged employees influence the company outcomes directly via their productivity and performance level.
- They are keener to run the additional mile for the corporation.
- Better engaged employees manage to contribute better to the firm, oversee better, and be more present.
- Employees will function with more passion when they are engaged and aligned with enterprise objectives.
- As a unit, they will thrive to attain the desired outputs.
- As role models for other employees, engaged employees will aim to reach beyond expectations and produce their best.
- Offering care to employees encourages them to care for their work.
- The product delivered from increased cooperation will be superior when employers harbour proper engagement levels.
- More satisfactory engagement will guide to better productivity.
- Employees deliver more satisfactory quality work when their engagement level improves, as they are more satisfied.

Survey Question: Which of the following would be high on your wishlist when it comes to employee engagement?



The biggest facet that our respondents identified as desirable for improved employee engagement is to have managers be responsible for engagement instead of HR. Rightly so. A study in the US found that managers account for as much as 70% of variance when it comes to employee engagement scores. This makes sense. Managers are the ones that are in direct contact with the employee on a daily basis. They are responsible of providing clarity to them, guidance, and picking up on any issues that may arise. Putting the pressure of employee engagement on managers, rather than expecting it to be fully driven by HR company-wide initiatives should be the way to go.

Real time insights throughout the year came up second on the wish list. Again, this is logical, as real time insights may lead to more timely action, and therefore improved engagement as a whole.



The way forward

In this whitepaper, we attempted to present our findings on what the state of engagement is in Malaysia and some neighbouring countries, especially with all the unexpected events companies and employees had to endure this year.

In the following pages, we aim to focus on how the 'new normal' – remote working and a geographically spread workforce - also affects engagement considerations, and how remote working and working in the office each affect engagement.

The Employee Experience

In this whitepaper so far, by walking through the survey we conducted, we talked about how employers see employee engagement. As it was briefly mentioned in some parts, the employees is the other side of the equation. Here in Malaysia, the Qualtrics study found that employee engagement is at 54%. Globally, it's at 53%, and if we look at specific dimensions, the results may be more compelling:

85%

of employees are not engaged in the workplace (Gallup: State of Global Workplace 2017) 70%

of variance in engagement is attributed to managers (Gallup: Workplace Analytics, 2018)

69%

of employees would work harder if better appreciated (Hubspot, 2015)

21%

more profitable in highly engaged business units (Gallup: The Right Culture, 2017)

"Engaged employees are those involved in, enthusiastic about and committed to their work and workplace" as Gallup puts it. They are the ones who will go the extra mile, they will focus on doing a task well, thinking of all possible implications, and will do the best for the benefit of their organisation. There are three dimensions to employee engagement:



Behavioural engagement: taking initiative to discuss

work-related improvements
with colleagues



Emotional engagement:

concerns the extent & nature of positive and negative reactions towards work-related factors



Cognitive engagement:

concerns learners' level of investment - thinking hard about work tasks and how to do it better

Engagement in the Working Context

It has been found that there are a few points that need to be kept in mind when thinking about employee engagement:

- ✔ Positive interactions are most meaningful and impactful for employees
- Managers are most critical to engagement, but lack support to do a better job at engaging their teams
- ✓ Negative moments are mostly unexpected for the workforce
- ✓ Severe delay between data and decision making is a common issue that holds organisations back when it comes to tackling any engagement issues that may arise.

With this in mind, as well as the benefits of engagement we already discussed throughout this white paper, we move on to understand what exactly determines engagement, and what detracts from it - in a physical, and in the more uncertain, newer remote working setting.

There are multiple factors that may detract from employee engagement. Some of them are:



Lack of focus during meetings



Lack of clarity - individuals are unsure of meeting agenda, tasks, or even worse, company goals



Bureaucracy - some individuals may lose motivation to be innovative or to share their ideas



Poor leadership



One-sided communication - individuals may be left out as a few may dominate the discussion space



Poor time management

In the case of working in the same space, i.e. in the office, there are some easy ways to alleviate some of these challenges.

These include:

- Constantly checking in with team members to ensure that they are keeping up with the discussion / presentation
- When possible, opting for more one-to-one sessions with individual team members instead of constantly meeting as a whole team
- Creating opportunities for water cooler conversations to take place - have HR look at the office layout and the culture of the organisation to ensure it allows for casual conversations to take place
- Observing the way team members interact with each other and go about doing their work



The added challenges of remote working

With the drastic changes this year has seen, and the sudden move of many of the workforce members to working remotely, new engagement challenges emerge:



Digital literacy: Having the knowledge of using online communication tools - Google meet, Zoom, Skype, Discord



Technical issues: Laggy laptops or poor internet connection



Poor trust / honesty among team members, miscommunication: A lack of personal/deep connection could result in team members not being able to trust each other, or even result in information being presented in a way that is unchallengeable - all these impede decision making processes



Lack of role clarity, poor interaction online: In virtual teams, it is easy for team members to face role ambiguity and conflict especially when there is a lack of/poor interaction and communication between team members



Lack of motivation & disengagement among team members: Especially within a virtual space, a lack of face-to-face interaction could leave members feeling unmotivated and disengaged, resulting in inefficient work processes

With the onset of these new challenges threatening employee engagement, even more so for the remote workers, it is more crucial than ever to tackle the engagement challenges that organisations face.

As our survey found, organisations struggle with empowering their people in the engagement process, introducing changes, and measuring the results of engagement. In addition to the above, we also discussed other challenging factors such as: feedback, relationships with the manager, company alignment and communication, relationship with colleagues, and recognition. With all these challenging factors to consider, the nature of addressing such issues become complex and prolonged.

In the crisis, many seem to have done well, but much work is needed for the momentum to remain and in some cases improve.

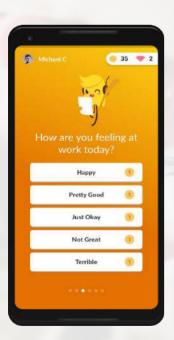


Fulfilling Your Engagement Needs



Across the globe, we are seeing a rising trend in employee engagement as global businesses place even more emphasis on this especially in areas of organisational agility, leadership and talent management. However, at the same time, a UK study reports that 85% of leaders indicate employee engagement as a priority but only a third of this actually acts upon it. Our survey shows that a combined 9% of respondents do not think employee engagement as important and as such do not have or are unsure of the mechanisms needed and how the impact could be calculated. In line with the same UK research, 35% of leaders identified focusing on employee engagement as a form of distraction from getting 'real' work done, and thus unnecessary. We identify that many organisations both globally and locally do not have or have limited mechanisms in place to promote employee engagement due to the lack of resources and the prolonged time needed to see measurable results. The outcomes of engagement initiatives are made harder to measure especially when organisations only conduct surveys annually.

In addressing these challenges, we present Happily as a solution to creating meaningful experiences for a better workplace. Happily is a mobile application that is built on behavioural science, people analytics and A.I. We see engagement as an experience that can be captured and nurtured through the use of pulse surveys.



To know more, reach out to us at tinyurl.com/happily

Employees receive a set of questions daily and with each response, they earn coins that can be converted into rewards later on. Based on the questions, insights are generated and provided to key people in the organisation on work life dimensions such as employee happiness, wellness, satisfaction, personal growth, alignment to company goals and values, and so on. These valuable insights become drivers of honest conversations, feedback, and change within the organisation. Moreover, gamification as a mechanism through the use of coins, gems and medals allow employees to be recognised and rewarded - increasing employee engagement, productivity and motivation across the whole organisation.

Happily has been proven to improve employee engagement upwards of 80%. The data also shows that organisational feedback has also increased to 60%. With daily insights, we help organisations guide culture change through employee engagement, people management, mindset transformation, and personalised employee benefits - working towards a happier and more productive workplace.

Conclusion:

A Way Forward

In this white paper from the Employee Engagement series, we looked at the state of engagement in Malaysia and neighbouring countries. We went through the results of our survey and identified how many organisations feel that engagement is critical to the success of their goals. Furthermore, despite the difficulties of this year, or perhaps because of them, the majority of companies saw an improvement in their employee engagement, mostly crediting this to improved and enhanced internal communications.

Nevertheless, organisations still do struggle with many of the areas that make up employee engagement, and with the added risk due to new arrangements of working remotely, this becomes a critical area to focus on. The main areas of struggle include empowering their people through engagement, communicating and implementing change, as well as measuring engagement and its results.

Thousands of dollars are spent on employee engagement initiatives, as well as measuring engagement. Even small organisations seem to invest a lot on multiple engagement initiatives, with providing support and learning opportunities being the most popular type of engagement initiative among our respondents.

The gap between what employees are looking for and what employers offer still remains, however, in many cases. It is therefore critical to relook at some of these issues and plan a stronger strategy.

We also make mention of a tool that helps in multiple facets of engagement and indeed creates a deeper understanding of the workforce for organisations to explore.

It remains largely agreed that employee engagement is critical to employee growth and has a direct correlation to the productivity of the organisation. With new challenges coming our way accelerated this year by the pandemic and lockdown, it is pertinent that organisations start relooking at the way they engage employees.

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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

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May 2020

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As the culture of remote working continues to be the norm, our research has shown that there are some negative outcomes that organisations need to address. Specific interventions and re-designs can help restore some of the organisation's morale and productivity issues stemming from extended working from home.

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