

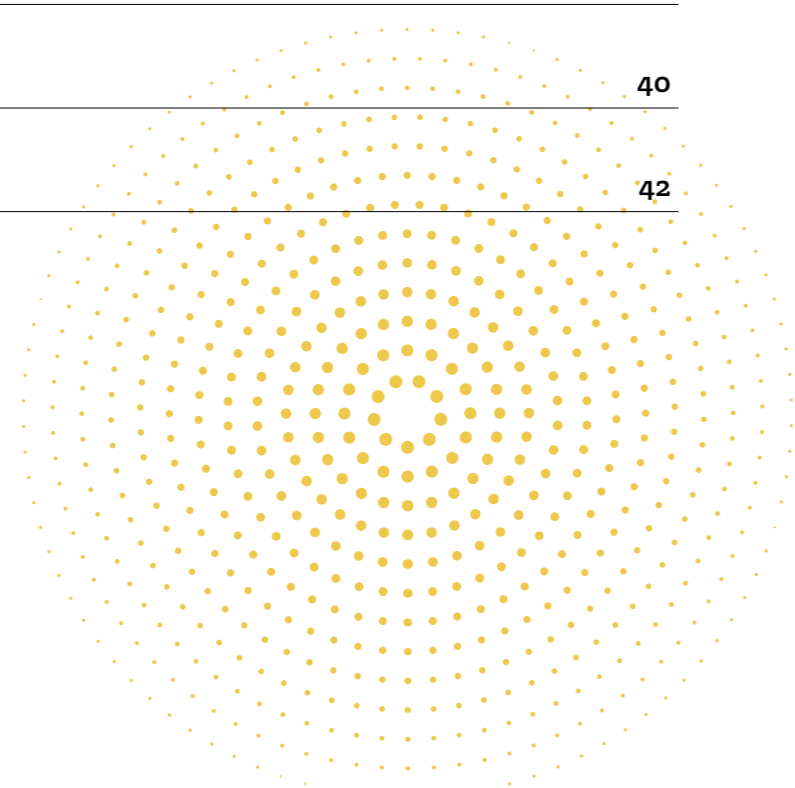
Steering your leadership teams

A how to guide for HR



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Author's profiles



Melisaan Foster

Customer Success and Experience Director at WorkBuzz

Melisaan is an experienced consultant in employee experience and engagement with a demonstrated history of working across a variety of sectors and regions. Melisaan has a real passion for creating inclusive cultures.

She has a depth of experience in internal communications and led 'Communicate for Success' in 2018. Melisaan was awarded the Mark of Excellence, Outstanding Young Communicator Award at the CIPR Excellence Awards in 2018, was recognised as an Inspiring Leader by Inspiring Workplaces™ in 2020, judged the IoIC (Institute of Internal Communication) Awards in 2020/21, and had been shortlisted in the Customer Success Excellence 2022 EMEA Awards as a CS Rising Star.



John Backhouse

Head of People Science at WorkBuzz

John joined WorkBuzz in 2021 to lead People Science and is the Principal Consultant to many of WorkBuzz's key clients. John started his career as a Junior Researcher, working his way up through to Director and Head of Employee Research, and brings 25 years' experience in employee listening, across both the public and private sectors. He has a deep understanding not only of how to build and deliver successful employee listening programmes, but also on what the results tell us that we need to do to drive organisational success through our people.



Dawn Smedley

Culture and Enterprise Clients Lead at WorkBuzz

Dawn works with some of our largest clients here at WorkBuzz, including the Priory Group and Aspris. Her mission is to help organisations improve the employee experience. Dawn brings a huge amount of energy and 10 years plus experience in global culture and insights to the conversation.

Introduction

Leaders in business face continuous change, perhaps now more than ever given the last few years. The emergence of Covid-19 has placed additional pressures on leaders. They have been thrown into the spotlight and forced to adapt, whilst facing the challenges associated with a new way of working with zero planning.

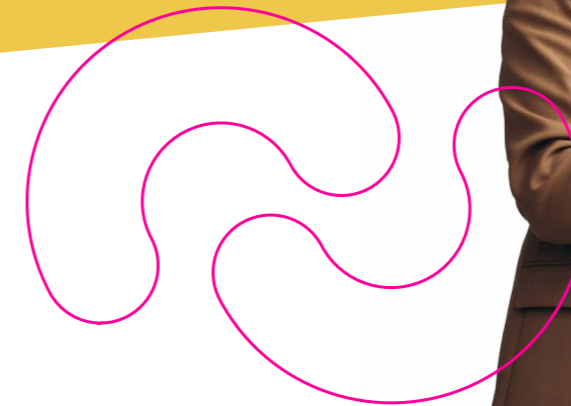
Covid-19 has accelerated many changes to the world of work that had been slowly burning away. It caused a rapid acceleration of home working, remote working, hybrid working, remote collaboration, remote learning and growth, plus much more. We often say the following in presentations which always gets a chuckle from leaders:

'Pre-Covid-19, employees used to have to give a very strong argument on why they need to work from home. Post-Covid-19, the organisation needs to give a very strong argument on why they need employees to be in the office!'

Working from home hasn't been the only challenge for leaders though. Covid-19 also brought with it a greater focus on employee wellbeing and retention, which has largely impacted employees' priorities.

According to a [McKinsey report](#), almost two-thirds of employees in the US claim that the Covid-19 experience has driven a deep reflection on their purpose in life. Nearly half said that they are reconsidering the kind of work they do because of the pandemic. And millennials were three times more likely than others to say that they were re-evaluating work.

[ONS](#) and other data suggests that an increasing number of employees are shifting occupations as they re-evaluate their lives and some are taking time out of work completely (classed as being economically inactive).



*Some resources are credited to [www.freepik](#).

This has left many organisations scrambling to pick up the pieces in a rapidly changing working world where labour shortages are in abundance and inflation is rapidly rising.

It's now time for leaders to step up and switch from being in survival mode to utilising the experiences they've had to prepare and plan for the future.

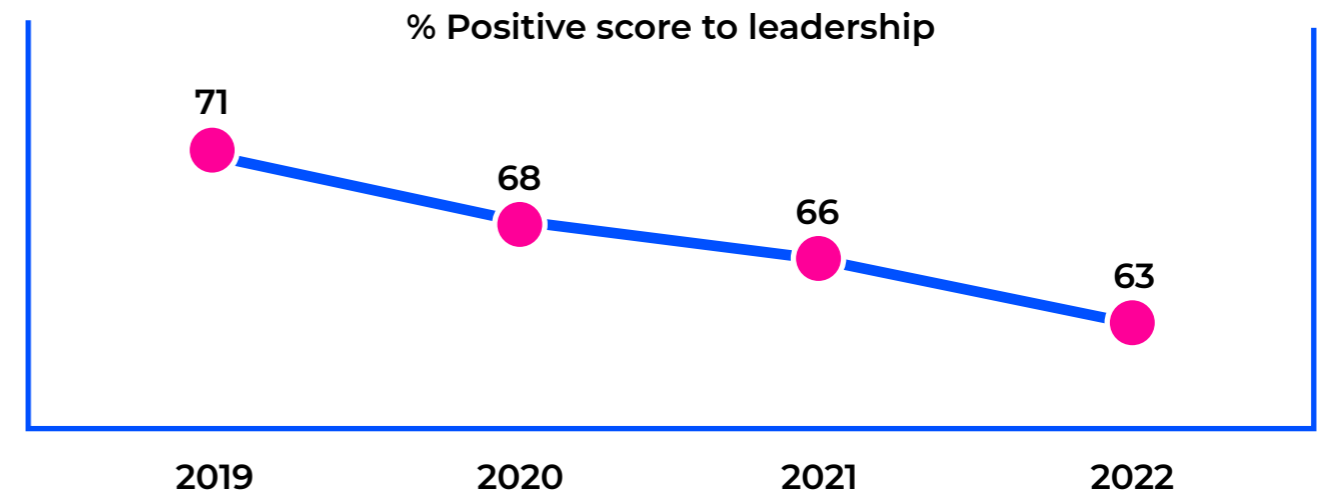
In this eBook we will share with you how views on leadership have changed and how leaders can adapt to this, and steer their teams successfully in 2022 and beyond.



How have views on leadership changed?

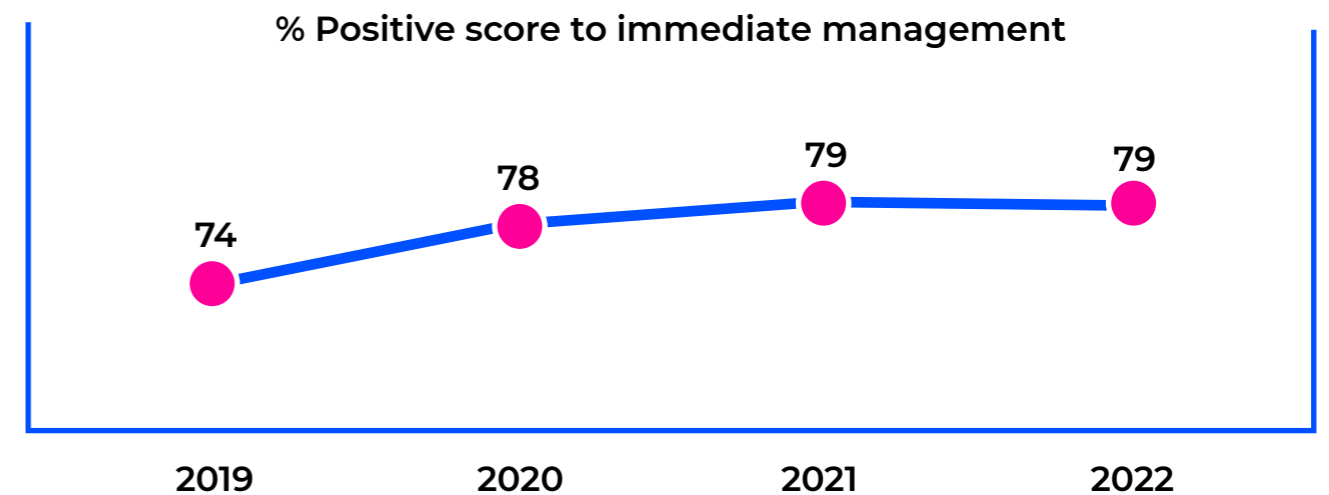
At WorkBuzz, we are a great believer in the statement ‘why guess when you can measure.’ So, if discussing the concept of leadership in the ‘modern age,’ let’s start with putting a few evidence-based markers in the sand and go from there. As the title of Marshall Goldsmith’s 2007 book about leadership suggested, ‘What got you here won’t get you there.’ So, where is ‘there’ and where is ‘here’?!

WorkBuzz is in the business of collecting employee survey data, so what does recent data tell us about employee perceptions of their leadership over time? The following employee survey scores shown are the percentage of positive scores (‘strongly agree’ and ‘agree’ answers) collected over the last four years to some of the most common questions our clients (across a wide range of sectors e.g., manufacturing, construction, care, food, finance, and professional services) ask their employees on leadership:



In this benchmark, we’re talking about large numbers, so a 1% change year by year is significant. As you can see from the chart, employee satisfaction with leadership is on a downward trend.

This is even more stark when you compare this against perceptions of immediate managers over the same period:

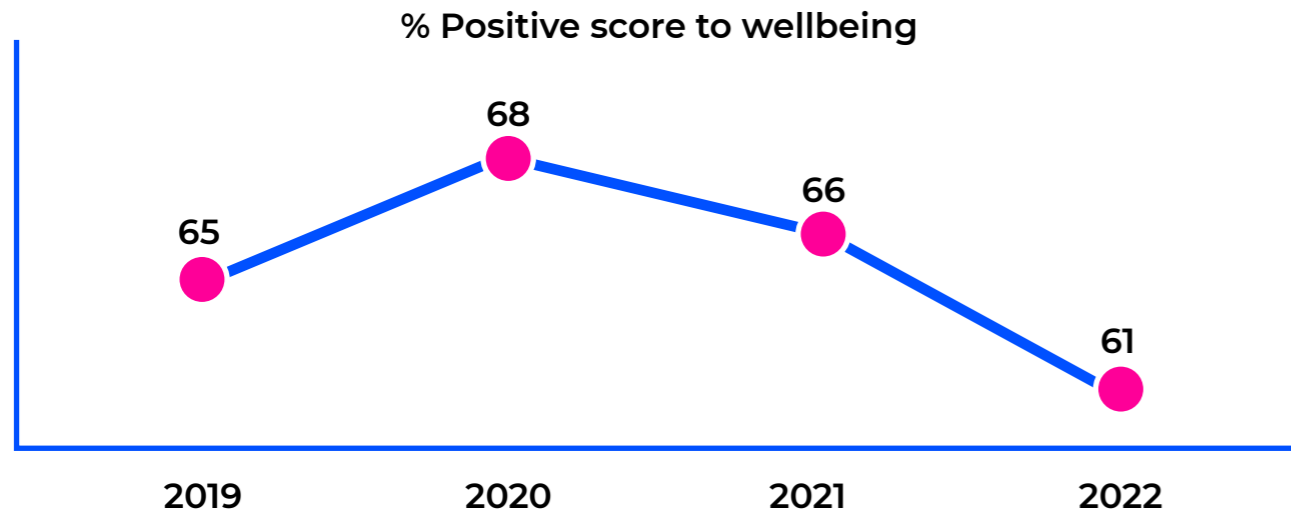


The data here shows an initial upswing between 2019 and 2020, and then it’s remained relatively stable as a metric through to the time of writing this eBook.

These data points illustrate a before, during, and after Covid-19 viewpoint. So, why are perceptions on leadership on a downward trend, whilst perceptions on immediate managers are remaining at a higher and more stable level?

Let's look at a few more pieces of evidence that may give us a clue...

The below chart shows employee perceptions on wellbeing over time:



Not every organisation splits out their employee survey data by manager versus non-manager but, for those who do, whenever you compare the wellbeing questions, managers consistently score their wellbeing and work-life balance the lowest (in comparison to their colleagues).

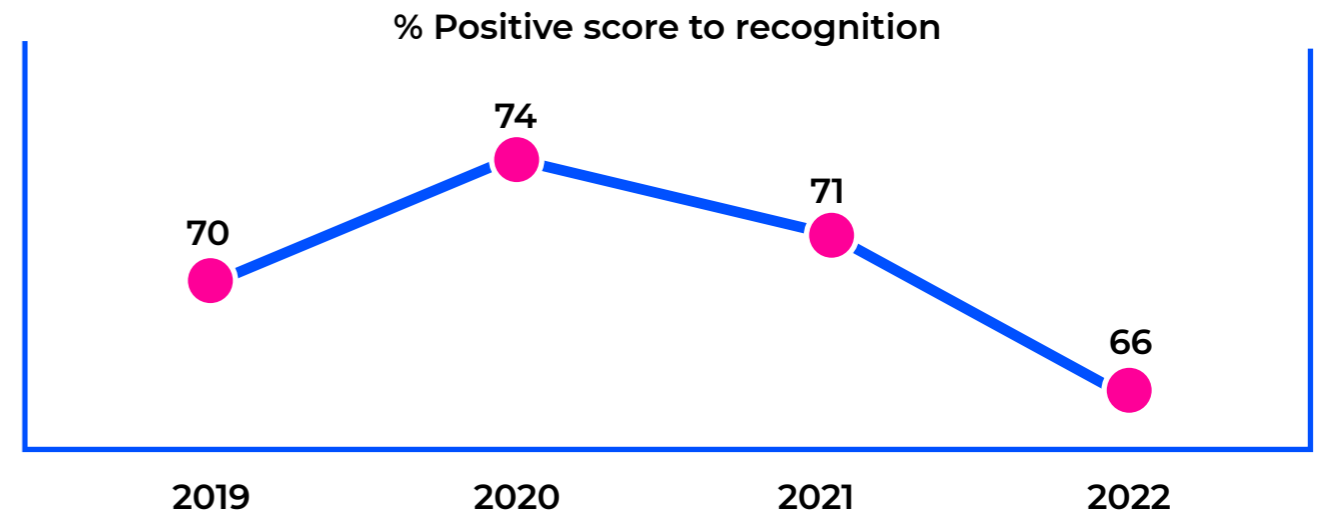
Wellbeing has been impacted significantly for many of us over the Covid-19 pandemic, but especially for mid-level managers.

Through survey comments and focus groups, these managers tell us that they have had to backfill operationally as increasing numbers of their teams have been off sick with Covid-19. This meant that these managers have had to deal with additional processes, often having to pivot multiple times to keep their organisations going. Managers have sometimes felt out of the loop and/or felt that, on top of their own additional workload demands, the goal posts keep changing.

Many managers, and their own teams, are talking about resource issues caused by people leaving and either not being replaced at all, or difficulties in recruitment to replace them. Both of these resulting in others having to pick up additional workload and responsibilities. This has resulted in managers and their teams increasingly calling out ineffective systems/processes and ways of working, which may have been somewhat hidden when there were more people to do the work.

If you are stretched resource and workload-wise, then you want things to be operational, not cause additional pressure. Quite a few managers have said they could cope with lower headcount, and increased workload, if there were effective fit-for-purpose systems/processes/ways of working in place. But who do they look at to make this happen? Their leadership?

Another key dimension to discuss, which is very much linked to what we've spoken about so far, is recognition over time:



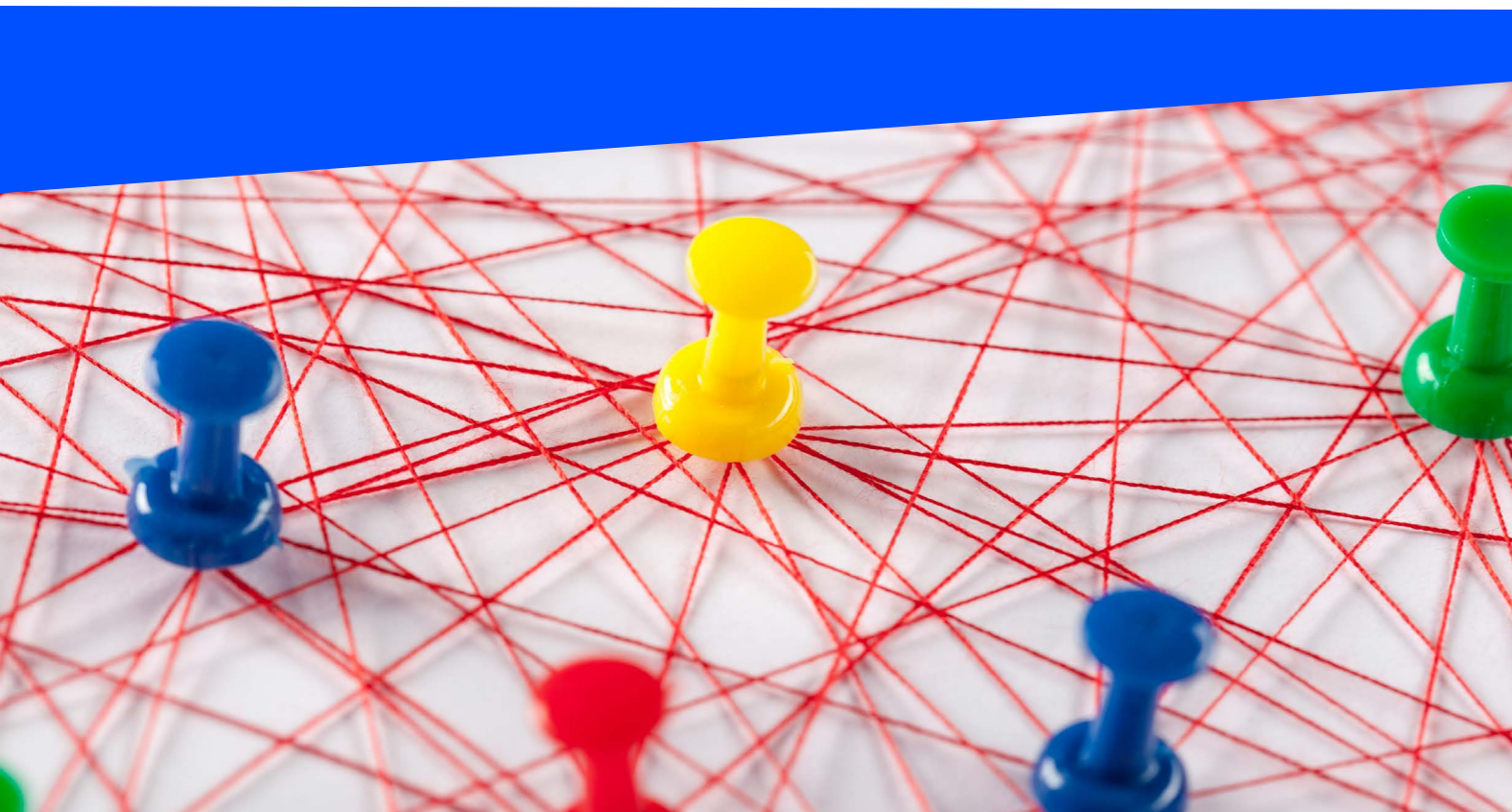
Like perceptions on wellbeing, there was an initial upswing early into Covid-19 on wellbeing, and then it's been on a continual decline. Recognition in WorkBuzz surveys covers both the monetary and non-monetary forms, from pay and benefits through to being publicly thanked and made to feel appreciated in its wider sense.

From survey comment analysis, employees have spoken about similar struggles to managers – having to do more, picking up the workload or roles of others who have gone off sick or even left, and having to work longer and harder. This is all against a possible backdrop of their own families and home lives being disrupted by Covid-19. In many cases, employees have said that all they want is a simple acknowledgement and appreciation from leaders about them going above and beyond.

We have also learnt through survey data that both employees and managers are looking to leadership to fix the things they are most concerned about right now, in particular:

- **Wellbeing**
- **Recognition**
- **Growth (often as a route to more reward)**
- **Empowerment (often as part of the ineffective systems/tools/ways of working puzzle)**

Because employees may be sympathising with managers as they go through similar struggles and express similar wants and desires, this may indicate why their views on managers have stayed the same (or slightly increased) while their views on leadership – who they are really depending on to affect change – have dropped.



“



On this data, hear from Neil Hayward, Ex FTSE 100 Chief People Officer, Non-Executive Director, Board Advisor & Business Investor, as he shares his view on what both leaders and managers need to do if they want their organisations to thrive:

“Management is your secret weapon because on a day-to-day basis people join or leave companies based on how they are treated by their immediate supervisor. So, make sure your managers know how to set goals, how to coach their teams to achieve these goals, and how to drive accountability via regular personal and personable check-ins. If they do that, then you are more likely to create a performance-driven culture and keep your best talent.”

However, right now, managers may first need you to ensure their wellbeing and energy levels are in a good place, and to free up time to ring fence the people management element of their role, enabling them to drive this forward.

But management alone isn't enough because your people also need to feel connected to a genuine purpose, and to believe in what your company is trying to do. Setting that higher purpose is what leadership is all about. Leaders can learn from listening to what matters to people just as much as managers can or should do...”

”

Where does leadership fall in terms of importance both pre and post-Covid-19?



One major thing we tell all our clients at WorkBuzz is that isolated scores are only a small part of the story. As is trend over time. What they really need to know is how important the various elements of the employee experience are in driving employee engagement. Employee engagement has been proven in many studies to drive other organisational performance metrics like retention/attrition/sickness days/accident rates/productivity etc.

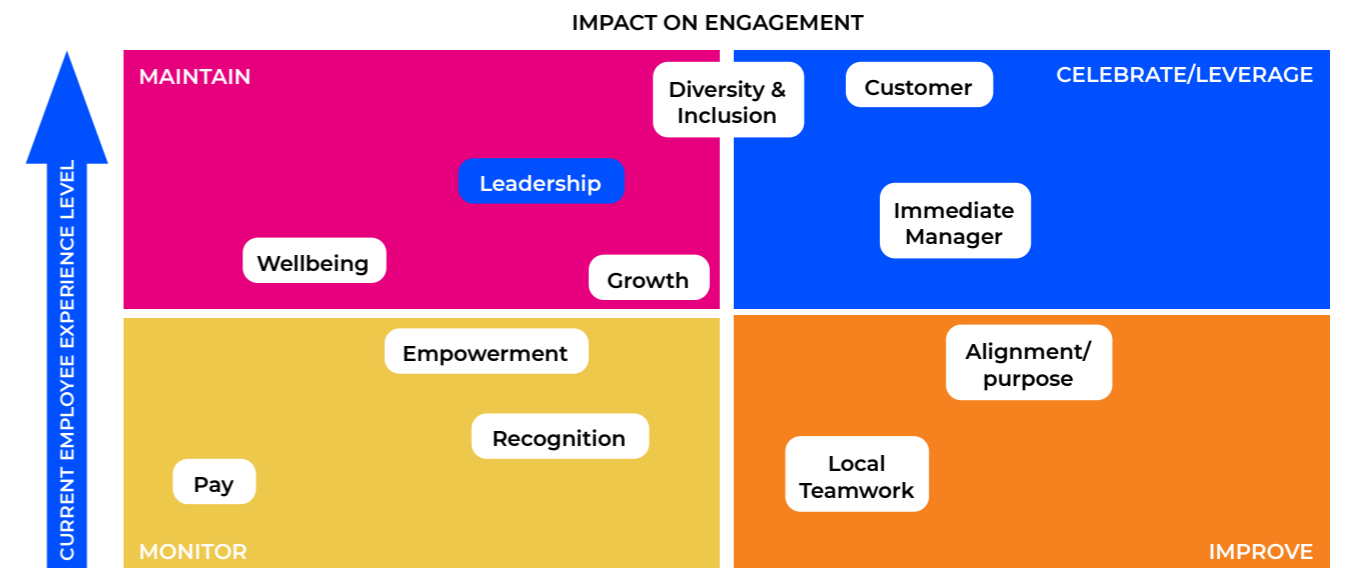
To help you understand the most recent picture across our client data, we ran correlation and/or regression analysis, which gives us the following hugely insightful insights...

How to view the below graphic:

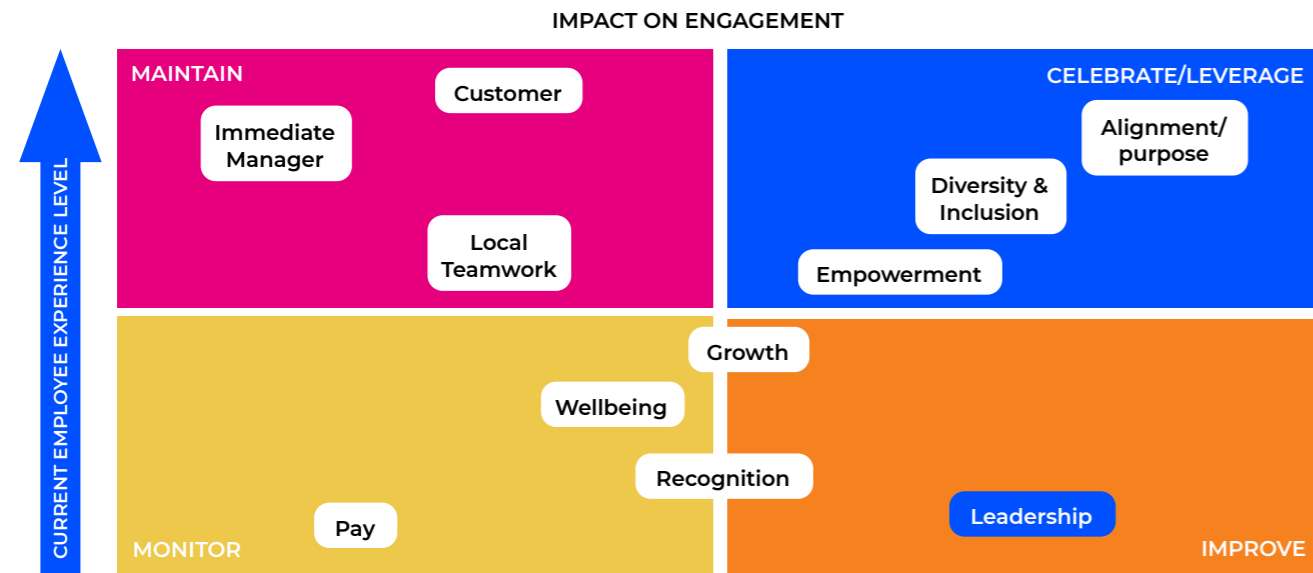
- The higher an element of the employee experience is, the more satisfied employees said they are with it
- The further to the right it appears, the greater the association and impact it is having on overall employee engagement
- Anything in the bottom right quad, or close to it, has a low relative satisfaction level but a high impact i.e., the areas we ideally need to focus on to improve

Note: leadership as an element is highlighted in dark blue

So how did this look pre Covid-19?

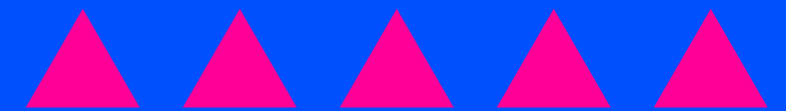


How did it look post Covid-19?



Relevant to the leadership story, what are the key takeaways from these charts and what should you be taking note of?

- ▶ **Satisfaction with leadership** has decreased, and its impact on engagement has increased
- ▶ **Satisfaction with recognition** has decreased, and its impact on engagement has increased
- ▶ **Satisfaction with pay** has decreased, and its impact on engagement has slightly increased
- ▶ **Satisfaction with wellbeing** has decreased, and its impact on engagement has increased
- ▶ **Satisfaction with growth** has decreased, and its impact on engagement has increased
- ▶ **Satisfaction with empowerment** is similar, and its impact on engagement has increased
- ▶ **Satisfaction with the immediate manager** has increased, but its impact on engagement has decreased



A new style of leadership

As we continue to navigate our way out of the pandemic and settle into the new 'normal' of our working lives, it's clear to see that hybrid working is here to stay.

With the many benefits of either remote or hybrid working being felt – from saving time on a daily commute, general costs savings, and increased time spent with family – it is easy to see why more employees than ever are pushing for their organisations to commit to a long-term hybrid working model. Hybrid working is now being driven by employee demand not employer preferences

A recent [Statista](#) survey showed that 73% of employees want flexible remote work options to stay, meaning that business leaders are now having to shape new ways of working faster than ever before. It is clear to see that, **business leaders are now having to pivot their traditional ideas of how their workforce should work** not only to meet this demand, but to ensure that the employee experience is not compromised.

The pandemic gave many employees a chance to pause and reflect on what is truly important in their lives. [Employment Hero](#) reported that up to 43% of employees agreed that Covid-19 has decreased the importance that they place on their career. When considering the above points, the role of leadership is pivotal for striking the right balance between ensuring teams continue to work as effectively as ever, whilst also feeling just as connected to their employer, despite being in the office less.

With 81% of leaders saying that they are changing their [workplace policies](#) to offer more flexibility, now is the time for leaders to be considering how best to make this work for their own unique organisations.

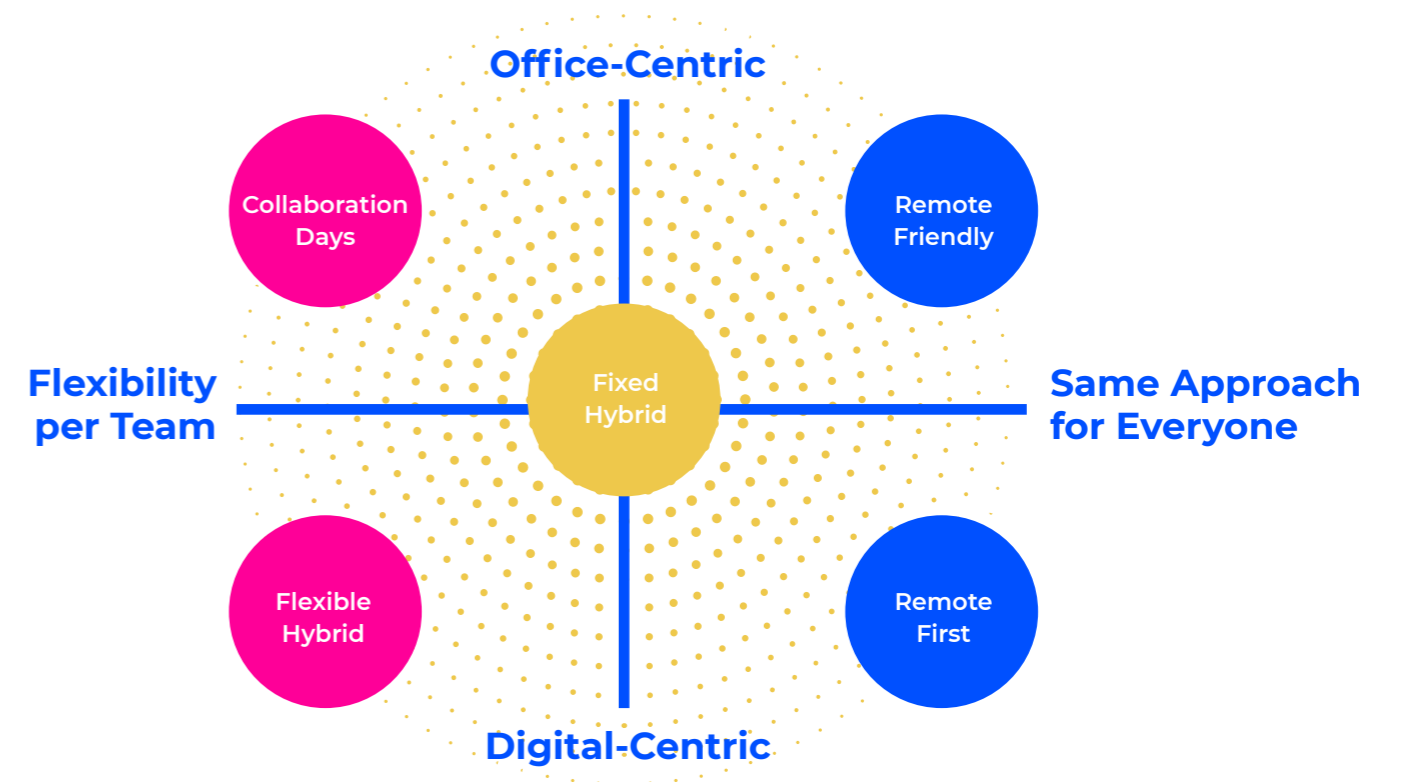


How to make flexible working work:

- 1 Keep talking**
As an organisation, it's so important to engage with your employees at all levels to define what a sustainable and successful working model looks like. You must give all employees a voice in this from your senior leadership team through to each employee so that you can maintain clear and open communication channels whilst new routines are being settled into.
- 2 Set clear expectations**
Ask yourself as an organisational leader, what does acceptable and successful hybrid working look like? Many consider hybrid working as just working from home, but it can be so much more. Employees are now embracing the opportunity to work elsewhere such as from abroad, taking a walking meeting, or even working from their children's soft play for some added family time. It's up to you to determine and communicate what is acceptable.
- 3 Make it fair**
There is a big risk for leaders to assume that every individual's expectation of hybrid working is the same. Every employee has different responsibilities and preferences. So don't assume that every person will want to work remotely, you need to make sure that there are considered options that are equitable for all colleagues.
- 4 Model the right behaviours**
After you have set the expectations about what is acceptable and not, for your own hybrid working model, it's important as a leader to model those behaviours yourself to ensure they become truly embedded in your organisation. Could you schedule meetings outside of norm that has become Zoom or Microsoft Teams calls to keep things interesting? When are you hitting the send button on emails? If it is late nights or early mornings, this will reflect onto your team as being acceptable. Think of the tools you have on hand (e.g., delayed send).
- 5 Increase communication**
It's said repeatedly, but poor communication will undo even the best of plans! A lack of communication from leadership has been flagged as an issue during our conversations with both customers and prospects. Ensure that, as the physical visibility of leaders is reduced, this is made up for in terms of communication. Virtual weekly meetings, daily team get togethers, and spontaneous conversations about your employees as individuals will all help to sustain open communication channels for the long term.

While it's important to keep communication flowing with employees working away from the office, it's also important that you don't overcommunicate and mollycoddle them. This is a great opportunity to empower your employees and show them that you trust them to get the job done. Instead, use communication as way of informing employees of the day to day but also to motivate and encourage them.

- 6 Make hybrid work, work for you**
Reassess if there are times when it is best to have everyone together. This may be weekly set days to come into the office, or perhaps only at bigger milestones such as a monthly team meeting or big project. It is important to consider your employees' optimal work rhythms and make your approach to hybrid working unique to you and your organisation. Build your hybrid working model on the demands of the work itself and objectively consider this first before diving in.
- 7 Give them the means to work efficiently**
It's all well and good allowing your employee to work from home because it's what they prefer, but do they have access to all the tools and equipment they need to perform their roles to the utmost? What is their broadband speed like? Do they have a comfortable place to work? Do they have a second screen? All these things are so important to think about. And if they aren't thought through, you're only shooting yourself in the foot!



Leadership for inclusion

As society evolves, we've seen an increasing need to ensure that organisations and, in particular, leadership of those organisations, keep up with changes. This has never been more apparent when it comes to diversity and inclusion.

The studies are clear – diverse teams are more likely to succeed.

- ▶ [Top team diversity](#) is strongly correlated with profitability
- ▶ Inclusive leaders can drive a 17% increase in team performance and a 29% increase in team collaboration
- ▶ 76% of jobseekers and employees say that a [diverse workforce](#) is an important factor when evaluating companies and job offers

Representation matters – in media, popular culture, and in business. The more you can see someone who looks like, or who shares similarities with you, the more you're able to understand how you can fit into the business and make a pathway for yourself. So, we need more leaders to share their diversity traits and ensure they are visible and vocal about their support for marginalised groups.

This is the only way we'll start to disrupt decades of patriarchal, white-dominated business practice.

“

Hear from Melisaan Foster, Customer Success and Experience Director at WorkBuzz:



“For me personally, I've struggled with a lack of representation my whole life. I've rarely met other Eurasian women, let alone seen any that are in positions of power and leading businesses. I still struggle to see people I can aspire to that understand my diversity – how my background of combined cultures influences my perceptions of the world, including how I view success, treat money, and why I'm exceptionally passionate about understanding backgrounds of others to improve how I lead, or help them understand how businesses can better accommodate them. It's only recently that I've seen people like me represented in the media, so I imagine it will take another decade for me to see those same traits in a successful business or leadership context too.”

”

As leaders, we need to consider future talent and how we attract it. [Equality, diversity, inclusion and belonging](#) (EDIB) is a driving principle for [Generation Z](#), who have a greater interest in human rights, race and ethnicity issues, LGBTQ+ equality, and feminism than any of their predecessors. With this front of mind, we need to ensure that the future workforce – the talent now coming through – is met by organisations that are equally as passionate about rights as they are.

This brings opportunity and challenge – the future workforce will expect diversity and inclusion as an essential from their employers, not the 'nice to have' approach that currently exists.

It won't be a simple fix. If your leadership team isn't representative of the workforce, you could promote or add a leadership role for someone that gives the underrepresented a leader like them to look up to – but that's just a sticking plaster.

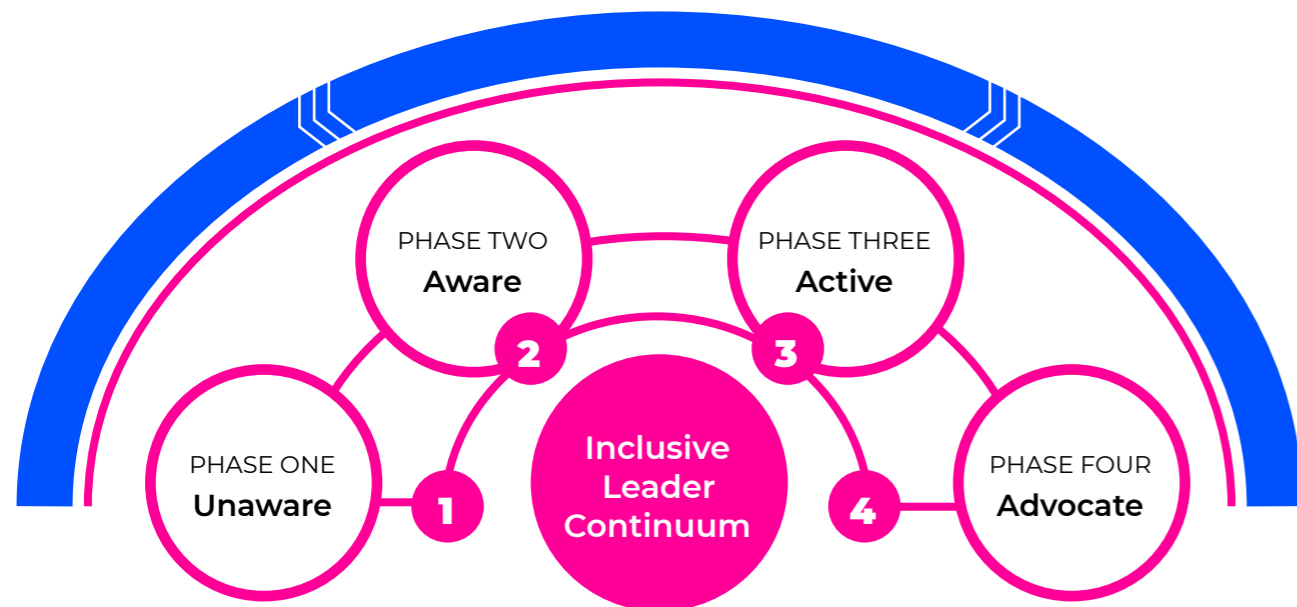
Instead, you need to get into the roots of the issue – why haven't you already got a representative leadership team? Where are you hiring from? Is everyone able to progress and be themselves in your organisation? Are the same opportunities for development open to all? Can you take more chances on people that haven't 'been there and done that' to make home-grown talent? By understanding more about the roots and why the problem is happening, you can then address it through actions to improve those root causes to ensure a pipeline of talent succession for the future.

Jennifer Brown's Inclusive Leader book introduces a concept that describes a continuum of learning from Unaware through to Advocate.

The concept explains that at any point you can be at several points on the continuum and can move into different stages, so you must re-evaluate your position and where you are in relation to different groups, and always take strides to revisit your learning.

We have to keep learning and reinventing as leaders, so our organisational cultures adapt, and we create workplaces that better enable inclusivity.

Organisational Perspective



UNAWARE

You think diversity is compliance-related and simply tolerate it. It's someone else's job – not yours.

AWARE

You are aware that you have a role to play and are educating yourself about how best to move forward.

ACTIVE

You have shifted your priorities and are finding your voice as you begin to take meaningful action in support of others.

ADVOCATE

You are proactively and consistently using your privilege to the advantage of others. You consider their issues your issues and stand in solidarity with them.

Private // Low Risk // Individual Perspective

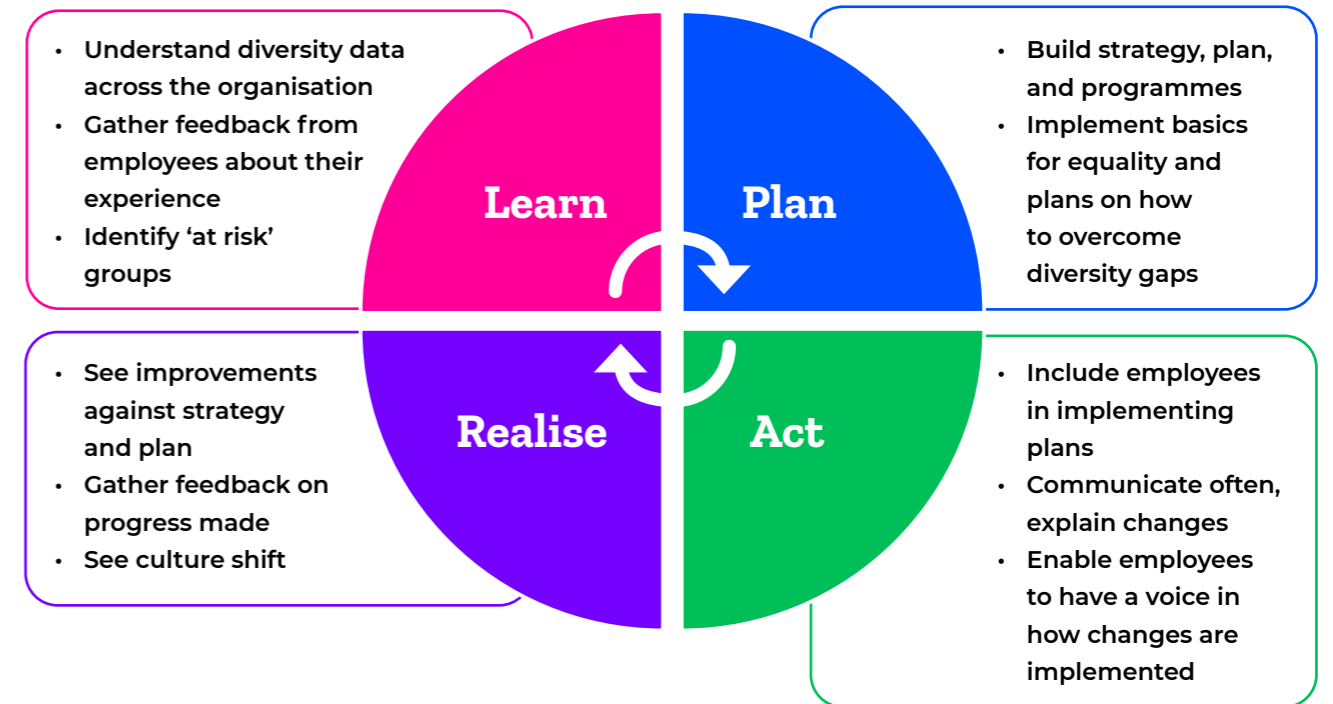
Public // High Risk // Organisational Perspective

Jennifer Brown's Inclusive Leader Continuum

It's not enough to give promises. We need action-orientated leaders who are open to dialogue and putting themselves in positions of learning.

WorkBuzz created a continuous improvement model called the Learn, Plan, Act and Realise Model which can help you create a more inclusive culture:

Learn, Plan, Act and Realise Model



Graphic from our [Four steps to create a more inclusive culture eBook](#)

While the model details the elements of each stage, it's all about keeping it simple:

- ▶ **Learn** – gather data, listen to your people
- ▶ **Plan** – use that information to create the way your organisation will move forward
- ▶ **Act** – keep your promises and involve employees in taking action
- ▶ **Realise** – witness and celebrate the changes you have made and gather feedback from employees to confirm your journey (and start it all over again)! Afterall, to create an inclusive culture, you have to continuously develop it and not see it as a one-off exercise.

What do employees themselves want from leadership?

Earlier on in this eBook we demonstrated how views on leadership have changed in recent years and the importance that plays in the overall employee experience. Let's now have a look at some employee survey scores that sit within leadership itself so we can see how important leaders are in driving overall employee engagement – the key to business success!

At WorkBuzz, we score impact on a four-point system:

1

Low impact

2

Medium impact

3

High impact

4

Very high impact

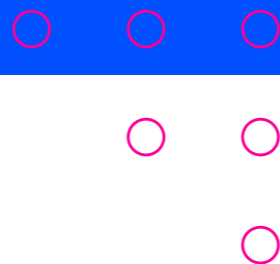
Note: the average score to questions across many surveys is 67%. So, to give us real evidence on the areas of focus needed on leadership, we are looking for scores below 67% that have an impact of two or higher.

Perception on leadership question/statements	Impact on engagement (high-low)	Net % positive score
'Is well led'	3.7	40
'I trust the Senior Leadership Team'	3.5	59
'The Senior Leadership Team are taking us in the right direction'	3.4	54
'I understand our company values'	3.4	74
'I understand how my work contributes to the success of the organisation'	3.4	88
'Communication from leaders is open and honest'	3.1	50
'Our senior leaders act in ways consistent with our values'	3.0	66
'I have seen feedback from the last survey being turned into positive action/action will be taken'	2.5	44
'Change is well managed'	2.3	37
'I understand the future plans of the organisation'	2.3	70
'I am encouraged to come up with new or better ways of doing things/empowered'	2.2	62
'Kept informed of change that affects me'	1.7	55
'Understand the challenges we face'	1.5	45
'Senior leaders are sufficiently visible and approachable'	1.3	51

So, in layperson's terms, what this data is telling us as leaders or as HR/people professionals on what people need from their leaders is:

- ▶ **'I need more confidence** that the organisation is being well led'
- ▶ **'I need to have greater trust** in the senior leadership team'
- ▶ **'I need greater belief** that the senior leaders are taking us in the right direction'
 - ▶ 'However, I do understand what that direction may be (70% understand future plans)'
- ▶ **'I need greater trust** that communication from leaders is open and honest'
- ▶ **'I need more proof** that senior leaders role model our values and behaviours'
- ▶ **'I need proof** that the organisation is listening and acting on employee feedback'
- ▶ **'I need to experience** much better management of change'
- ▶ **'I need to feel** much greater levels of empowerment, that we have a culture of innovation/ideas sharing and employee voice'

So, this is what we're hearing from employees in what they're looking for in their leaders, but is this the direction modern leaders are going in?



Today's leaders

There's a lot of talk and articles today about the modern leader, moving away from more traditional command and control, autocratic and task-oriented style, through to being a 'servant leader' (focusing on the needs of others before considering their own), collaborative and people focused.

What's interesting though is that this evidence has actually been there a very long time...

Take, for example, the book we mentioned earlier, Marshall Goldsmith's 'What got you here won't get you there.' In the book he talks about many behaviours which may have proved successful to get you to a certain point in your career, but these same behaviours may in fact hold you back from progressing to the next level, especially into leadership roles.

Many of the forward-looking behaviours for success were centred around being more human and open, listening, accepting feedback (even if critical), responding positively, swallowing pride and apologising when it's warranted, telling the world how you are going to be better after apologising, and following up.

In Stephen R. Covey's business and self-help book 'The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People (1989),' key behaviours were identified such as:

- ▶ **Habit 4:** Think win-win (collaborate more and build high-trust relationships)
- ▶ **Habit 5:** Seek first to understand, then to be understood (listen before you talk, develop a deep understanding of the needs and perspectives of others), and
- ▶ **Habit 7:** Sharpen the saw (make time for yourself for renewing activities to increase motivation/energy and work-life balance)

Both of these relatively famous books are 15 and 33 years old respectively, yet both talk a similar language of a human, open, listening, collaborative, yet purpose-focused style of achieving success.

So successful leadership has and hasn't changed. What has definitely changed is how that successful leadership style is needing to be deployed.



Let's look at how this can be achieved...

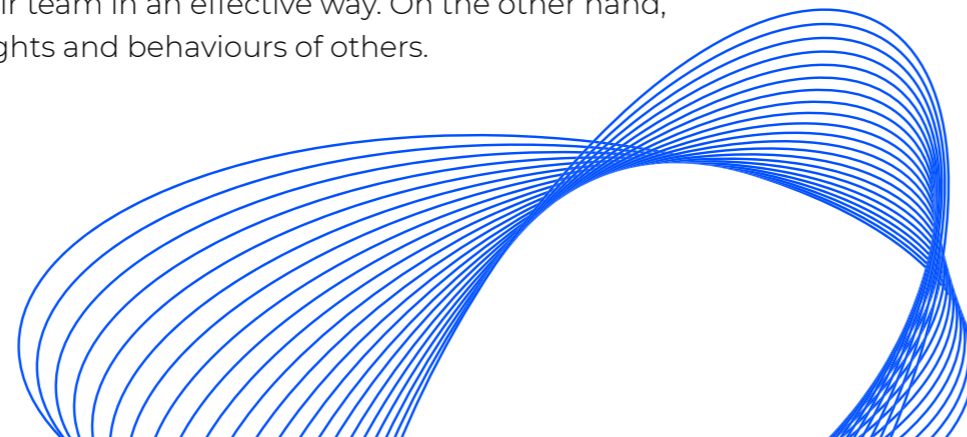
Creating the leaders we need today

Key skills all leaders now need

Are leaders born or bred? This debate has been ongoing for decades and is deeply rooted in our understanding of human behaviour and just how much of our personas are gained from nature or nurture.

It's clear that some things can only be of our nature, we are born with some traits that are genetic and part of our DNA. However, much of how we operate in the human world – including how we interact with others, and elements of our personality, can be nurtured. Humans are extremely adaptable, and an individual can change elements of their character to benefit themselves or those around them.

Management and leadership are not one and the same thing. Someone who is a manager should be able to command their team in an effective way. On the other hand, a leader is expected to influence the thoughts and behaviours of others.



Leaders can be transactional or transformational. Transactional leaders organise their subordinates' work efficiently, set reasonable objectives, and provide help for their employees. Transformational leaders set strategic direction and gain their employees' confidence to increase commitment. They are charismatic and have a vision of their goals and targets. They are understanding and have empathy with their people.

This goes hand in hand with what's required for leaders now and in the future, they need to be adaptable, transparent, and authentic. They must communicate effectively and create a culture of learning – they shouldn't be threatened by the future, but excited by it and what they'll be able to achieve with their teams.

You can find a huge list of leadership traits that would make a person successful in a leadership role, but organisations, and the employees within them are so diverse, **there isn't a one-size-fits-all approach to successfully leading.**

The type of leader an organisation needs is simple to understand by asking employees, investors, customers, and other interested parties what's critical for their leader to be successful. But it's not always that simple to meet all those requirements and find the perfect leader. Very few people will be able to tick all the boxes of stakeholders immediately, but it's all about finding a transformational leader who is open to learning, developing, and adapting to the unique needs of their organisation.

By listening to the key stakeholders of the organisation, you will often be able to identify the must-have and nice-to-have list of traits you require in your leaders. This gives you a blueprint to work against and by then utilising tools like [engagement surveys](#), performance metrics, and 360 feedback tools, you can map the skills and abilities of your leaders to the blueprint. By conducting this analysis, you can then find the gaps that exist for leaders you work with, and then search for ways to coach and train them in the areas that require development.

It has been said that some personality types are better fits for leadership roles – extroverts are more likely to be successful in the field of management than introverts due to their charismatic and interactive manner.

For [Myers-Briggs](#), it would be seen that ‘ENTJ’ or ‘ENFJ’ personality types would be the most suitable for leadership roles.

These personality types are typically well-rounded; they are authoritative figures which command respect and appeal to their employees because of their charismatic manner. Even in a position of leadership, these personality types can socialise and empathise with their people. They inspire their employees and raise loyalty, enthusiasm, and engagement within a group. They understand the importance of delegating responsibility without smothering employees with constant demands. While they are often social people, they also have a deep-rooted sense of duty, which is equally important in a leadership role. They can keep on task and motivate and ensure their employees are doing the same. They’re not afraid of getting their hands dirty and doing the same work as their subordinates. This makes them well respected in the workplace and able to adapt to any situation without stress and worry.

By inspiring and encouraging their employees, these personality types bring out the best in the people around them – which is a much sought-after quality in a leader. But these are not the only personality types that are capable of being extraordinary leaders.

Leaders aren’t born.

And a leader that has been successful in one organisation may not always be successful in another due to the unique needs of each.

The one trait you must have in a leader is ultimately to be adaptable.

A leader that is willing to change, learn from others, and continuously improve will be able to lead in any organisation with time, preparation, and desire.



How HR can influence at board level

2022 is bringing a greater focus on leadership than ever before. In times of uncertainty, everyone in an organisation turns towards their leaders, so it's not really a huge surprise.

At WorkBuzz, we're seeing it come through as one of the biggest drivers of engagement in the vast majority of our surveys. This is a real shift in the data from pre-pandemic results.

We need to listen!



Expectations have changed – individually and collectively. According to a Financial Times white paper entitled [The Great Board Reboot](#), board performance is now judged on the following criteria:

Best ways to assess board performance

Which of the following are the most effective measures for judging board performance?

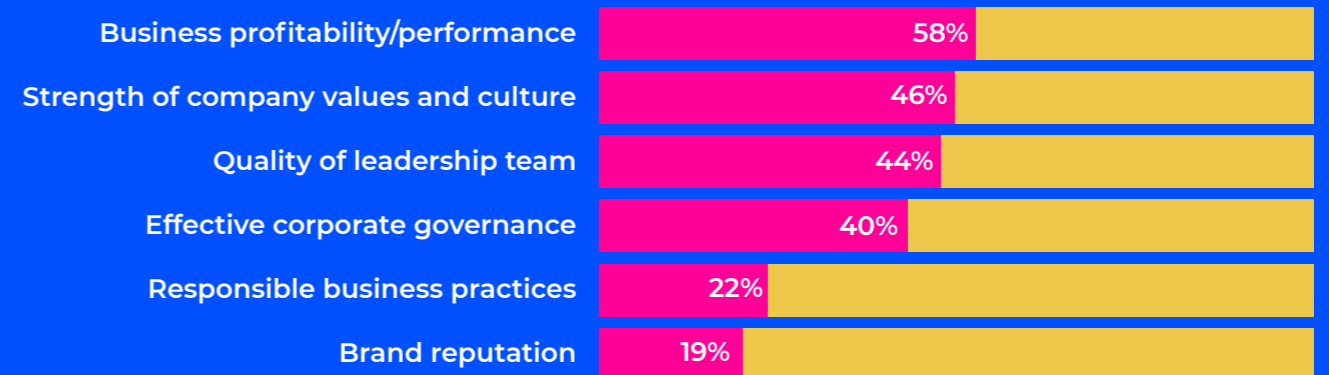


Chart taken from The Great Board Reboot, Financial Times

After business profitability, you can see that culture matters more than it ever has and is intertwined with the quality of leadership teams. Over the last three years, the world has asked leaders to step up in new ways. A different set of skills are now required to inspire, instil confidence, build trust, and create a shared belief in the future.

We often say at WorkBuzz that you can't drive engagement, it's a choice. All you can do is create an environment that your people choose to engage with. So, how do we hold leaders accountable from the top down to live and breathe this every day? To show up and display in their actions that they are doing what they say they will.

And what happens when you work in an organisation where this isn't happening? What can you do as an HR leader to do the right thing and challenge the direction/strategy and vision of the organisation?

1

Make sure you have a seat at the table

The pandemic has elevated the role of an HR leader more than ever before. Think about your people strategy and the impact it has on business performance. Rather than dealing with challenges after the fact, **why not have an experienced HR leader on the board who can help prevent them from occurring in the first place?**

“Boards have to show the sort of leadership that pulls the best of their organisations’ people and thinking into play,” says John Elkington, who has served on more than 70 boards and advisory boards.

“The best ones do exactly that – they are made up of people who are curious and committed – and who understand that the world changes, often in unexpected ways.”

2

Make data-driven decisions

Leverage all data available to you through employee listening and other means to back up your recommendations and play smart by linking this to your wider business strategy and objectives. It's a lot harder to question insights created from data. If you are working with an external supplier who can support you with insights, even better. Sometimes it's more powerful to hear the hard messages from a trusted third party who is one step removed.

3

Understand the gaps

If it's about leadership capability, where are the gaps? What are the gaps? How does a great leader act? If it's about wellbeing, what does this really mean? Outside of the company-wide initiatives, how do leaders check in on their teams? What support is there for them to have meaningful conversations? What does wellbeing mean to your people and how does this differ based on role/team/location? How do you know where things are working well so lessons can be learned from this and replicated in other areas? **Basically, keep asking yourselves lots of questions!**

4

Seek diversity of perspective and personality

Continue to challenge leadership recruitment and promotion at all levels. Push to ensure that all voices are represented and heard based on your organisation and sector. Encourage all leaders to explore their unconscious biases and seek to understand how this is affecting decision making to ensure inclusion isn't just a tick box exercise.

5

Look to your outer circle

Continuous learning is key and it's important that this comes from both internal and external networks to give you a broader range of perspectives and experiences. Read, network, attend external events, remain curious and always be learning, so you become the trusted advisor to other leaders around you.



WorkBuzz's leadership journey:

From three to nine in less than 12 months

"The pessimist complains about the wind. The optimist expects it to change. The leader adjusts the sails."
– Author John C. Maxwell

In fast-growth companies, the culture that helped you launch can be one of the hardest things to scale. But it's also one of the most important things to get right: nurturing the right culture helps you attract and retain great talent, inspires your people to go the extra mile and make the right decisions and, ultimately, this helps you to grow more sustainably.

Leadership is critical to building on and maintaining that culture. Managers and employees look to the leadership team for guidance and to 'set the standard.' They need to have trust that the leadership team will be there to celebrate the 'wins,' work through the 'losses,' and support with everything in between.

At WorkBuzz, after raising our first round of venture funding, we doubled our headcount in six months, created our first international team, and built out brand new departments. With this, came a new leadership team and a new way of working.

We had nine employees pre our first round of funding, and our leadership team consisted of the CEO, Head of Customer Success, and Head of Sales. Fast forward 12 months and we're a team of over 40, with eight people on our leadership team who cover the core business areas: customer success, People Science, sales, marketing, finance, technology, and perhaps most importantly, culture!

When hiring for these roles, every decision was made with culture and the company's vision in mind. In some instances, candidates with more 'proven' experience were discounted due to not being the right culture fit.

Hear from our CEO and Founder, Steven Frost:



"We say that working at WorkBuzz is a bit like Marmite – it's fast paced, challenging and fun, but definitely not for everyone. When we recruit, we try to sell our vision and how the next few years at WorkBuzz could be career defining, but we actively try to put candidates off. If they want to know exactly what they'll be doing in two years' time or need their hand holding, we won't be the right fit for them."

As CEO, there's always pressures on your time and focus, especially to hit your numbers. Each member of our leadership team carries a target which contributes to the wider goals of the business. We run on OKRs and always have an objective focused on our culture to keep it front of mind. Whether it's maintaining our excellent employee engagement levels (we use our own platform to track these and listen to our people so we can nip any emerging issues in the bud quickly), improving the onboarding process, or maintaining our Glassdoor reviews. And every time we recognise someone, we always bring it back to our values, so these get reinforced."

We're by no means perfect, but by consciously thinking about culture, ensuring members of our leadership team buy into our vision, and measuring how well we're doing through the WorkBuzz platform, it's made scaling easier and helped us attract and retain some amazing talent."

Communication, visibility, and accountability are critical pillars for the WorkBuzz leadership team (LT).

The LT meet every Thursday with an open agenda – some meetings take 10 minutes, some take two hours. Every Monday morning, LT members provide a department update during the weekly team call which focuses on highlights from the previous week and priorities for that working week. During the monthly team meeting, a more in-depth update is provided. It's encouraged that the team celebrate the 'wins' during these updates and offer recognition – but also flag anything that isn't working or hasn't gone to plan, and more importantly, what the rescue plan is. Mistakes happen and things don't always work out how we want – it's important that our culture recognises this and encourages positive conversations on improvement rather than blame.

As with most leadership teams, there's always things we can do better, and we don't get everything right. But in our last employee survey, leadership scored 92%, employee retention scored 94%, and we have doubled our revenue this year, so we're certainly on the right track!



What do WorkBuzzer's look for in a leader?

Recently, we asked the WorkBuzz team what they thought made a good leader. Here are some of their responses:

- ▶ **"Someone who focuses** on communication, the good, the bad, and everything in between."
- ▶ **"Someone who leads** from the front but doesn't micromanage."
- ▶ **"Someone who is confident** in the process but is also open to feedback and change."
- ▶ **"Someone who can generate enthusiasm** in their team for motivation."
- ▶ **"Someone who actively cultivates a 'we' culture** instead of an 'I' culture."

- ▶ **"Someone who offers a safe place** for guaranteed feedback and guidance."
- ▶ **"Someone who sets a clear vision** and can outline the approach on how to achieve it."
- ▶ **"Someone who maintains positive energy** and eradicates negative energy."
- ▶ **"Someone who gives praise** and acknowledges achievements and contributions – no matter how great or small."
- ▶ **"Someone who recognises the need for balance** across the organisation."

As demonstrated above, defining what 'makes a great leader' will vary across your team. For some, clear communication will be the most important factor. For others, there will be a greater emphasis on recognition and culture.

Ultimately, the key to being a great leader relies on being able to adapt your leadership style to suit the requirements of your individual team members, whilst maintaining your own vision and company culture.

Summary



Through our own employee survey data and throughout this eBook, we have identified how views on leaders have changed both through and post-Covid-19. We have also listed the key skills and traits that the leaders of today need to exhibit if they are going to make a success of both their organisation and themselves.

Because we have given you much food for thought and lots to digest, we have put together some key takeaways for you from this eBook...

Key takeaways

- **Employee listening is key**
 No leader can be truly successful if they are not listening to and actioning employee feedback. How will they know what their teams wants and are looking for if they do not ask?
- **Hybrid/flexible working is the future**
 In this new working world where employee demands are perhaps the highest they've ever been, being able/willing to offer flexible/hybrid working options could be the difference between losing and retaining employees as well as at attracting new talent to your organisation.
- **An inclusive and diverse employee base results in increased business growth**
 If your employees feel included, this will be reflected in both the quality of their work and the character they bring to your organisation. If you have a diverse workforce, not only will you benefit from greater innovation and creativity, but you will also attract a wider pool of talent.
- **The employees and managers of today are relying on leadership to step up**
 Views on leadership have changed. Whilst employees are feeling closer to their direct managers due to having similar struggles throughout Covid-19, they are looking to leadership to turn these challenges into momentum for future business growth and to bring them on the journey.
- **Today's leaders must be adaptable**
 There is no one-size-fits-all approach to great leadership, but the best leaders will be able to recognise the wants and desires of their teams and fulfil expectations whilst also knowing how to motivate them to do their best work.

About WorkBuzz

At WorkBuzz, our mission is to help organisations create cultures where every voice matters, and every person can be their very best.

Because you need the right partner to navigate new challenges

WorkBuzz provides an agile employee engagement platform and expert consultancy to help you gather real-time feedback from your people, allowing you to make data-driven decisions and manage change better.

Develop engaged and high performing teams

We spend a third of our lives at work, so ensuring this is meaningful, enjoyable, and productive, has always been important. But recent changes, like hybrid and remote working, have created brand new challenges for HR.

WorkBuzz is HR's secret weapon. Through our employee engagement platform, you can learn how to improve the employee experience and build a more inclusive culture.

WorkBuzz helps you drive measurable business results

Improving employee engagement requires buy-in from senior leadership and people managers.

We help put HR in the hot seat, by linking employee engagement to business KPIs, so the whole organisation gets behind your decisions.



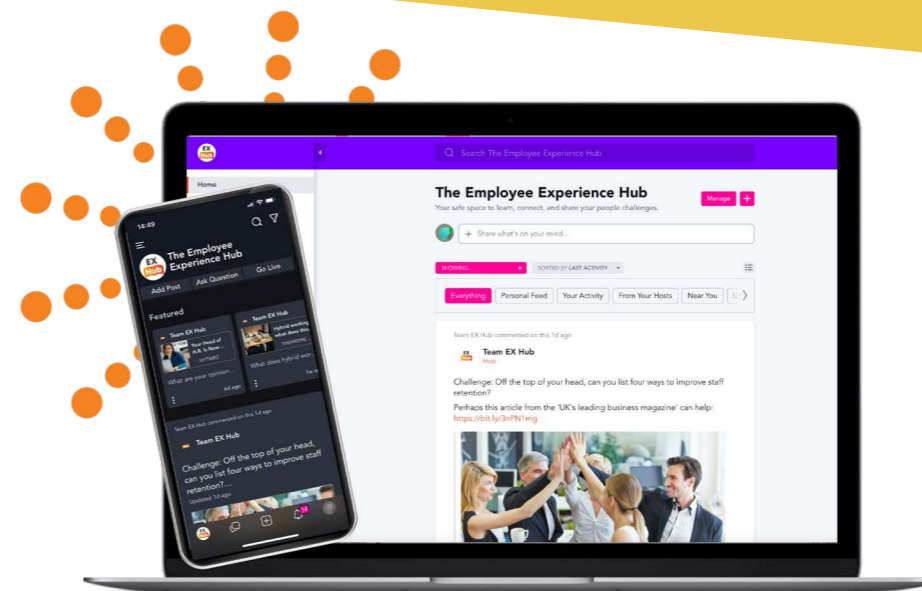
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- ▶ 30+ countries where employees are using WorkBuzz
- ▶ 98% of our clients choose to continue working with us every year

Deliver an exceptional employee experience

Get started with a free demo of the WorkBuzz platform or speak with our friendly team for more information on how best we can help your organisation thrive:

hello@workbuzz.com



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