

**Great
Place
To
Work[®]**

Belgium's Best Workplaces™ 2021

**Lessons Learned:
How Best got Better!**



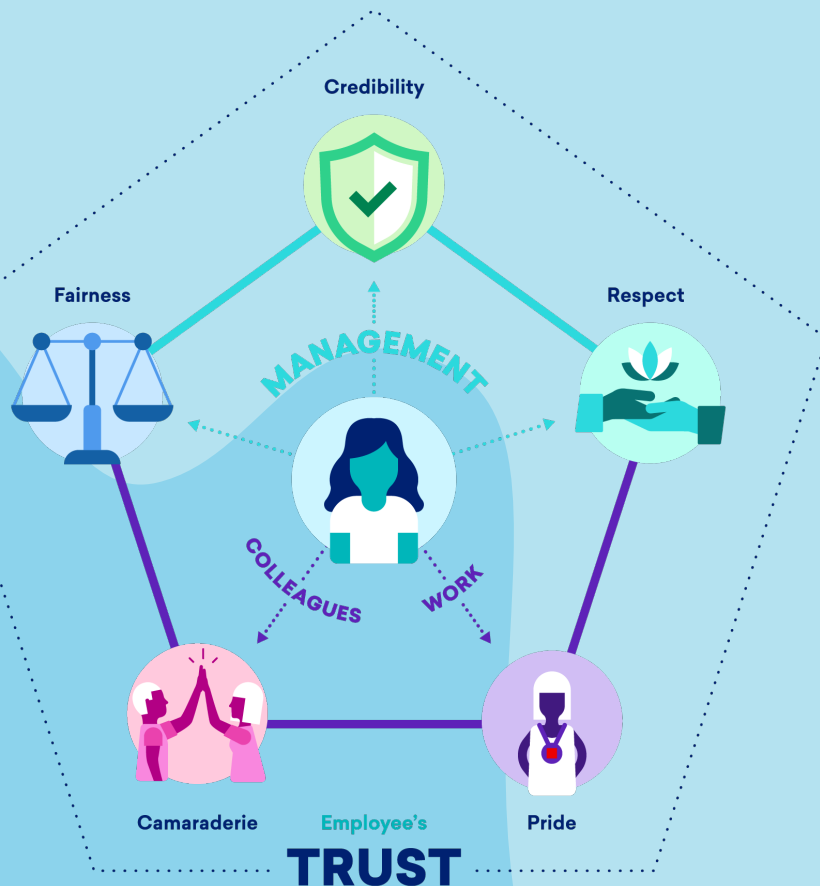


When people think of a Great Workplace™, they often picture an organisation with lavish perks, fancy parties and amazing benefits. While those elements are present in many of the well-known Best Workplaces™, the definition of a Great Workplace™ goes far deeper than perks and benefits. In fact, **it boils down to trust**. Thirty years of research and experience have enabled us to define what it means to be a Great Workplace™, to understand how to measure the trust in the workplace, and how to help any organisation become a great workplace.

In 2021, in Belgium, we organised the 19th edition of the annual Great Place to Work® research. Companies whose scores exceeded the predetermined threshold have been recognised with a Great Place to Work-Certified™ label. Additionally we use our For All Model and Methodology to evaluate our pool of Great Place to Work-Certified companies. Top-performing companies are recognized as Best Workplaces™.



Our tool



The Great Place to Work® Trust model® is the foundation of our Trust Index® employee survey. It is based around five values that determine whether an organisation is perceived as a good employer, irrespective of the type of organisation or country.

The first three dimensions of **Credibility**, **Respect** and **Fairness** are those that shape the trust-based relationship between employees and management. The two additional dimensions are **Pride** and **Camaraderie**. These represent how employees feel about their own individual impact on their organisation, and whether employees believe their company is a strong community where colleagues are friendly, supportive, and welcoming.

The percentages that appear throughout this paper are the average positive response scores from the Trust Index® survey. The items of this survey are each scored on a 5-point Likert scale with labels going from *Almost always untrue* to *Almost always true*. The percentages shown in this paper are the average percent of positive replies to each statement, i.e. answers indicating *Often true* or *Almost always true*. We report the results in positive percentages to detect the strengths and possibilities for improvement.

Let us dive into the Best Workplaces key findings of 2021 to see how these companies have performed during this exceptional year!

To best compare the different quality of workplaces from a human perspective we have clustered organisations into two categories:

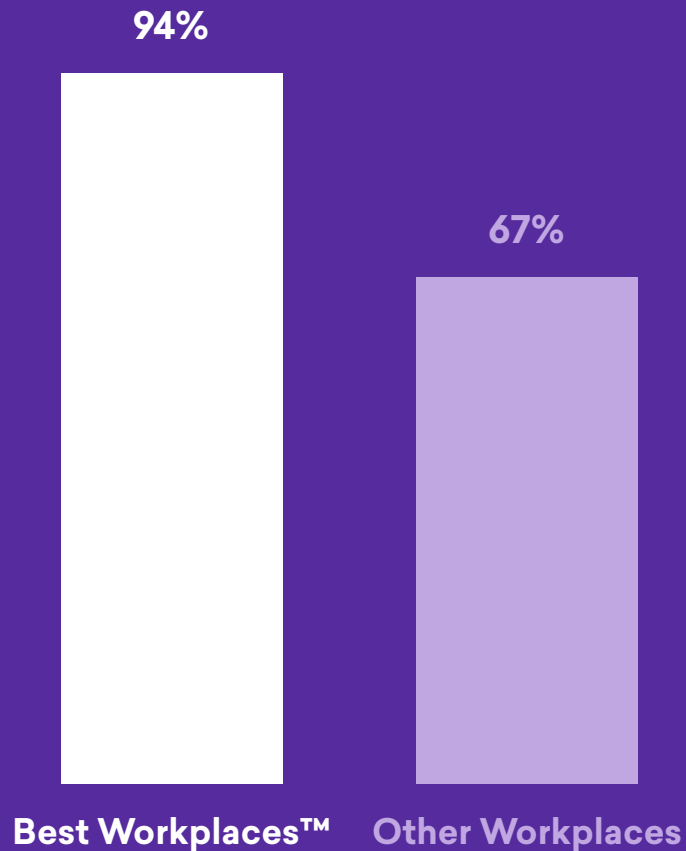
- **Best Workplaces™ 2021**
- **Other**, consisting of the Great Place to Work® Certified™ organisations 2021 and Non-certified organisations 2021



Introduction

Covid-19
&
Overall Employee Satisfaction

Taking everything into account,
I would say this is a
Great Place to Work®.



93% of employees in the Best Workplaces say their company is a Great Place to Work®.

What makes these organisations Best Workplaces? That's a question we get asked often. It is, in particular, an extremely difficult issue as there is no **one-size-fits-all answer**. How employees experience their workplace is an **interplay** of many different factors ranging from how management interacts with employees and communicates about critical incidents to how they respond to the diverse needs of employees. The ball is not solely in management's court, either. In addition, employees of a best workplace also experience a high degree of pride in the work they do and feel a strong connection with their colleagues. A Best Workplace has it all!

It's a complicated enough question in a normal year, but as we all know, 2020 has been anything but normal. The impact of COVID-19 has not only reshaped how workers are doing their job, it has also profoundly changed the workplace dynamic.

At Great Place to Work® we've seen first-hand the enormous pressure this pandemic has placed on the everyday relationships that make workplaces tick. As organisations have tried their best to adapt to lockdowns and home working, managers and employees have worked together to implement new practices, cultures and procedures that protect staff members from the virus and put wellbeing first.

However, if the pandemic has proven anything, it's that trust is the foundation to success. It's the factor that guarantees that employees always give their best, and everyone works to secure a company's future.

In this paper, we will take a closer look at some of the themes that drew attention this year and provide data on how the Best Workplaces performed in comparison to the other companies that went through a Great Place to Work® trajectory. Numerous tips and tricks on how to tackle each of these central themes in the future are also integrated. At last, we also included our Great Place to Work® forecast for the future: insights on what the new post-pandemic workplace could look like and what points of attention are needed in this re-imagine process.



Trust

The foundation to success

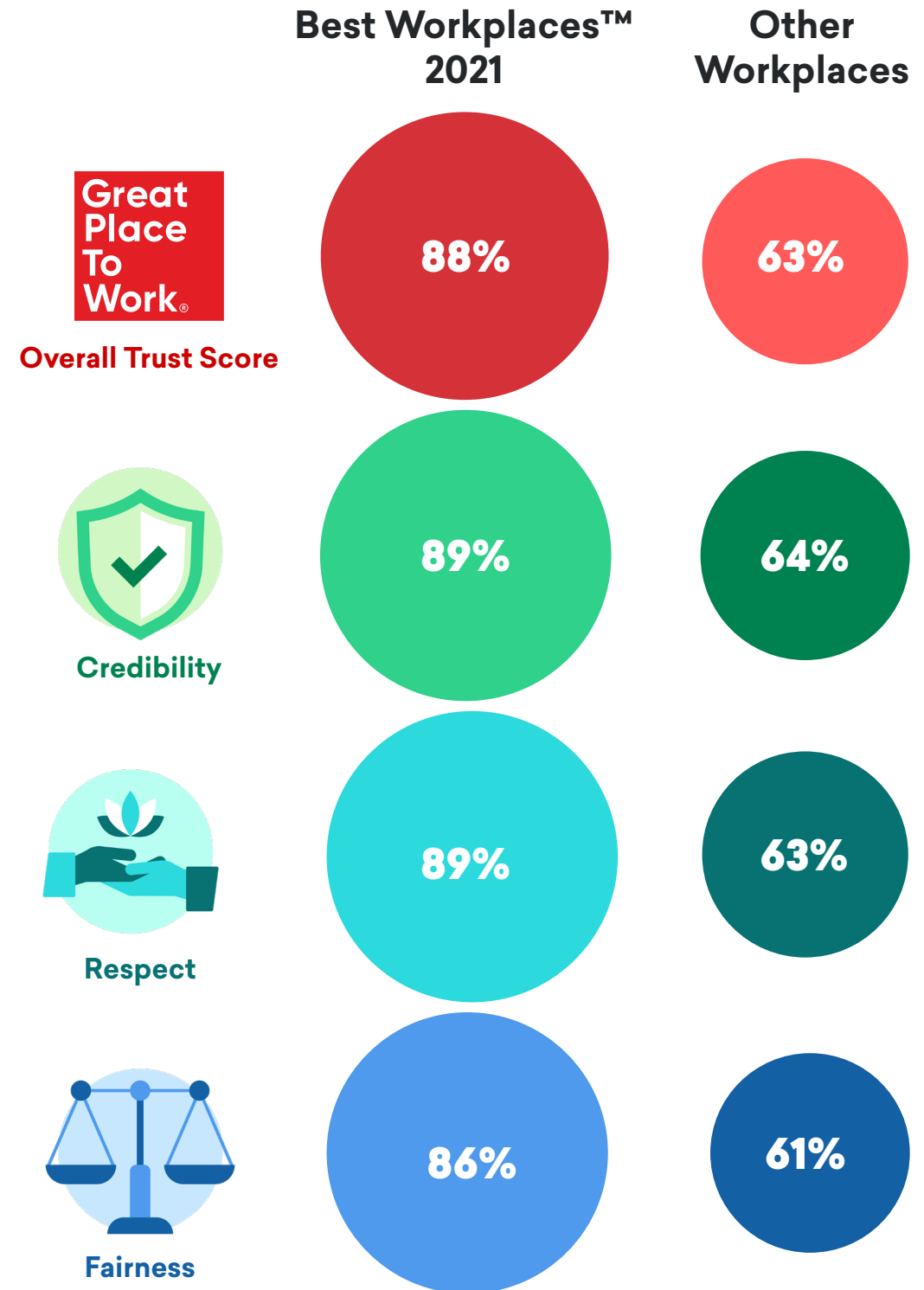
Trust the foundation for success

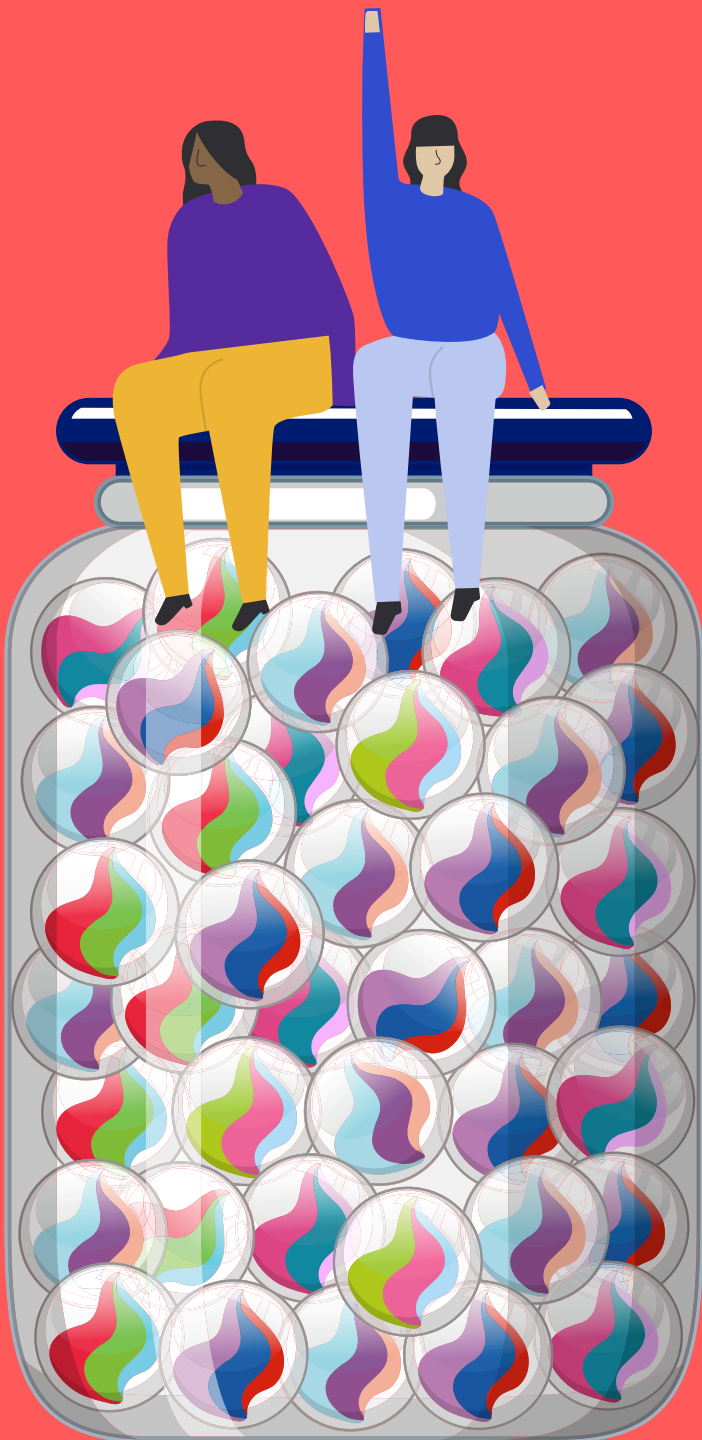
If the pandemic has proven anything, it is that **trust remains the foundation for success**. The leaders of the Best Workplaces established and maintained the trust of their employees. They continued to invest in employee relationships by paying attention, showing understanding, being knowledgeable and leading by example.

As a leader, you want the people in your organisation to trust you. And with good reason. When trust is low, many aspects of working life suffer:

- Employees put less effort and attention into their work
- Levels of collaboration and cooperation with others tumble
- Employees care less about the success of the organisation

The associated business cost is clear, even if it may be difficult to quantify. But creating that trust or, perhaps more importantly, re-establishing it when you've lost it isn't always that straightforward. We know that trust takes time to build.





How to fill the jar with trust marbles?

Psychologist and author, Brené Brown explains the functioning of trust using a jar of marbles as a metaphor:

- Every time someone does what they say they are going to do; you add a marble to the jar
- Each time someone breaks trust; you take a marble out

The goal for all of us is to fill each other's jar. But how?

- 1. Nurture Positive Relationships.** Trust is in part based on the extent to which a leader is able to create positive relationships with other people and groups. It's difficult to have trust with someone you don't know well. Regular and frequent one-on-one time to explore employee's goals, motivations and interests, even if only for 15 minutes, creates conditions to connect in a way that generates trust.
- 2. Express Good Judgement and Expertise.** Another factor that determines whether people trust a leader is the extent to which a leader is well-informed and knowledgeable. Trustworthy leaders must understand the technical aspects of the work as well as have a depth of experience. Coming across as a capable leader requires therefore open communication and knowledge sharing. Taking the time to share information transparently and authentically is a show of respect and a powerful trust builder. A leader's expertise is a powerful gift that deserves to be shared to help the entire team.
- 3. Be consistent.** The final element of trust is the extent to which leaders do what they say they will do. People rate a leader high in trust if they are a role model and set a good example. In short: Walk the talk! Honour commitments, keep promises, follow through on commitments and start adding these marbles to the jar!



Communication

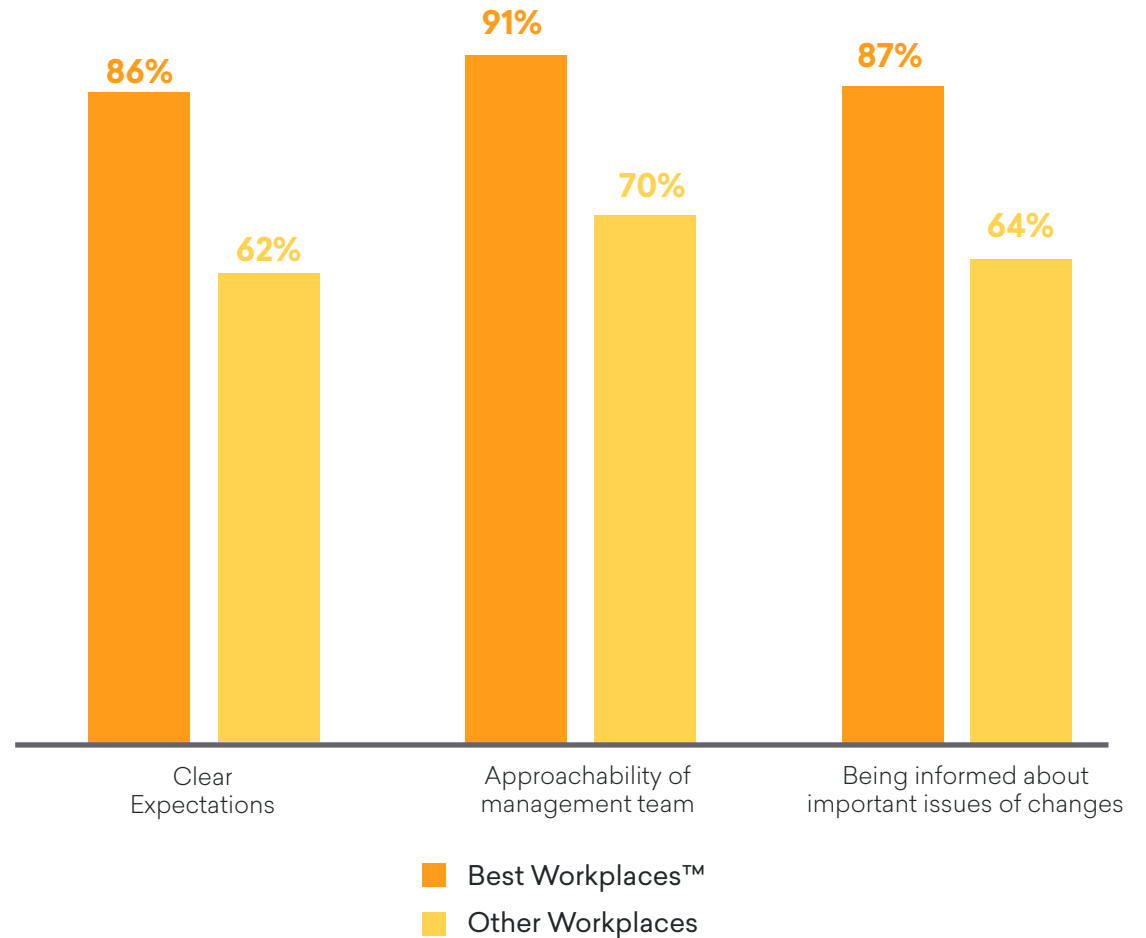
Effective planning

Communication in Uncertain times

In times of uncertainty, employees crave communication. From questions about working safely and effectively in the new digital environment to needing clarity around the organisation's standpoint and the reasons to believe the organisation will survive this. Workers need reassuring information from leaders and subject matter experts to help them understand what is happening, connect with and support each other, have trust and confidence in leaders, and get aligned to the new way forward.

After all we have been through this year, does anyone still doubt the importance of good communication?

Communication is not haphazardly spreading messages around. Good workplaces typically have a well thought out communication strategy and focus on not only being reactive to upcoming crises but also put time and effort in proactive communication planning.



Communication in times of uncertainty should be ...



- 1. Frequent** - Most leaders need to communicate to staff far more often than they think is necessary. Frequent communication reduces fear and uncertainty and ensures that employees have heard the message. While leaders may experience fatigue from repeating core messages, they need to realize team members need to hear these messages multiple times.
- 2. Multichannel** - Different people may need to hear messages in different ways and through different channels. Evaluate your communication channels appropriately and track whether your communication is reaching everyone on time.
- 3. Convenient** - People are inundated with news, mail and messages. It takes a lot of energy to filter out the crucial aspects. By using labels such as “need to know” and “nice to know”, urgent information is more easily picked up and remembered.



Reassuring

At a time when so many people are experiencing bad news and negative consequences largely, leaders need to remember to find the bright spots and highlight them. They similarly can offset bad news by reminding people of times when they faced challenges in the past and the organisation came out on top (e.g., during the dot.com bust in the early 2000s or the 2008 financial crisis).

How organisational leaders communicate can make or break employee commitment to their organisations. Leaders should look to almost overdo communication, as it's talking that builds transparency and transparency that builds trust. The more leaders can share with their employees, the more trust, appreciation and genuine warmth develops in an organisation, and the more resilient these organisations become.





Learning and Development

The foundation of survival

Learning & Development in Uncertain times

In a very short space of time, COVID-19 has in many ways turned the business ecosystem upside down. In such conditions, it's natural for business leaders to focus on short-term objectives and preventing losses, but one thing that shouldn't be pushed aside during this time is the learning, development and training of your team! Like all major crises, and perhaps more than most, the COVID-19 pandemic is destined to leave behind lasting changes in the way work and business take place. Learning will be the foundation of survival for both organisations and the employees who make them up.

So how can business leaders ensure their teams continue learning, developing and sharing knowledge through this pandemic?

I am offered training or development to further myself professionally.

Best Workplaces™
2021



89%

Other Workplaces



61%





Internal: encourage cross departmental learning

An organisations effectiveness depends on cross departmental collaboration, working together towards a singular goal of overall company success. When all business functions were operating as normal and in close vicinity to one another, knowledge sharing across departments was straightforward. With the new remote way of working knowledge is suddenly scattered with information silos cropping up in every department. This, needless to say, can have a damaging impact on a business. But it doesn't have to be this way! The key is creating a digital workplace where all of the useful information your teams need to do their jobs well is centralised into one single transparent place, where they can search. Such a digital knowledge hub is memory efficient, with little disturbance for others. If remote working highlights anything, it's that collectively we learn so much from one another through knowledge sharing.





External: re-invent your L&D approach

It is likely that most of your companies Learning & Development budget went to external courses in pre-pandemic times. But now that the offer of external physical training possibilities is largely reduced, should you just wait until social distancing measures are relaxed? Or should you simply distribute a reading list of textbooks for your teams to work through? The short answer to both questions is: NO! Now is a valuable opportunity for you and your team, including any furloughed employees, to invest in their training and to explore the newest technological means to do so. However, a key principle to keep in mind when looking for new training opportunities should be: it's got to be engaging!

- **Engaging, why?** Team members now find themselves in a usually unproductive setting, working from their kitchen table or bedroom desk with a multitude of distractions around them. Adapt the strategy you had in place pre-pandemic, rather than abandoning it and replacing it with basic and boring learning practices. Make sure your employees development needs and interests are questioned and search for learning opportunities that take their career to new heights.
- **Engaging, how?** Learning and development teams, HR teams and course partners should collaborate to redesign the content that was intended to be delivered in person, so that it can be delivered remotely and digitally. There are currently numerous tools available, where you can host interactive webinars or gamify courses, to name just a few. Commit to your training budget and objectives, to show your team that you value their development and invested in their education, regardless of the pandemic.



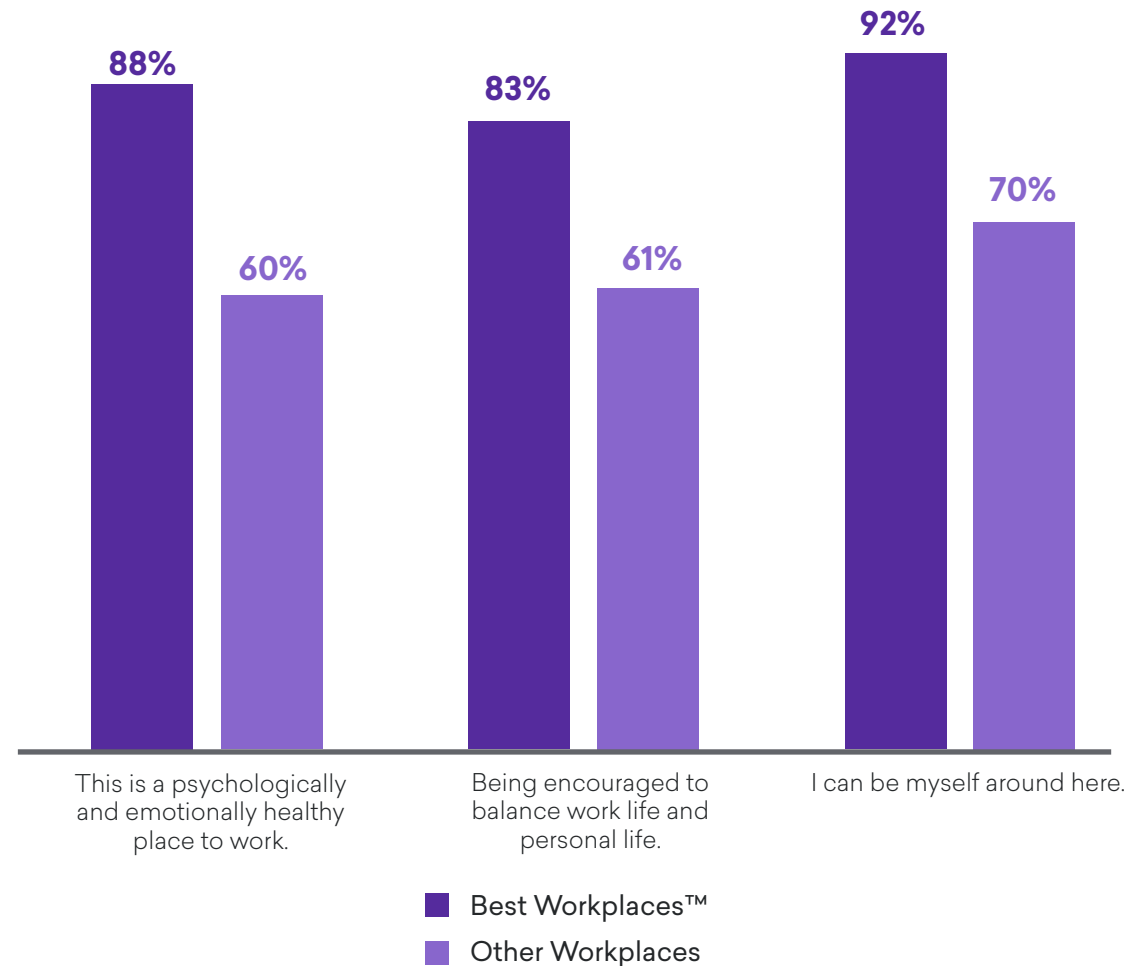


Psychological safety

**Social support
& Care-based leadership**

Psychological safety in Uncertain times

The stress of the COVID-19 pandemic affects us all differently, and emotionally we're all in different stages of dealing with this crisis. Social support – family and friends you can count on, as well as other close relationships – can cushion us against a variety of worries, including workplace stress, that can compromise health. Caring was the top priority of our Best Workplaces this year. As such, they succeeded well in creating a psychologically and emotionally safe work environment that allows for a personal approach, despite the uncertainty and blurred work-life boundaries, the pandemic brought to us.



3 tips to get you started

1. Give each other a “pass”

It's another way of saying we need to practice forgiveness in a variety of ways:

- Give your colleagues and employees the benefit of the doubt
- Internalize that everyone you interact with is struggling to work and live in this difficult time, and in ways we may never fully know or understand
- Assume that everyone is acting from a place of good intentions; when someone acts in an atypical way toward you, avoid taking it personally

Show patience and compassion toward ourselves and others.

2. Check in and trigger informal interactions

In the socially close physical office, people pop over to desks or gather in the kitchen for an informal chat. These exchanges often bring together employees from across teams and give junior team members an opportunity to connect with their senior colleagues.

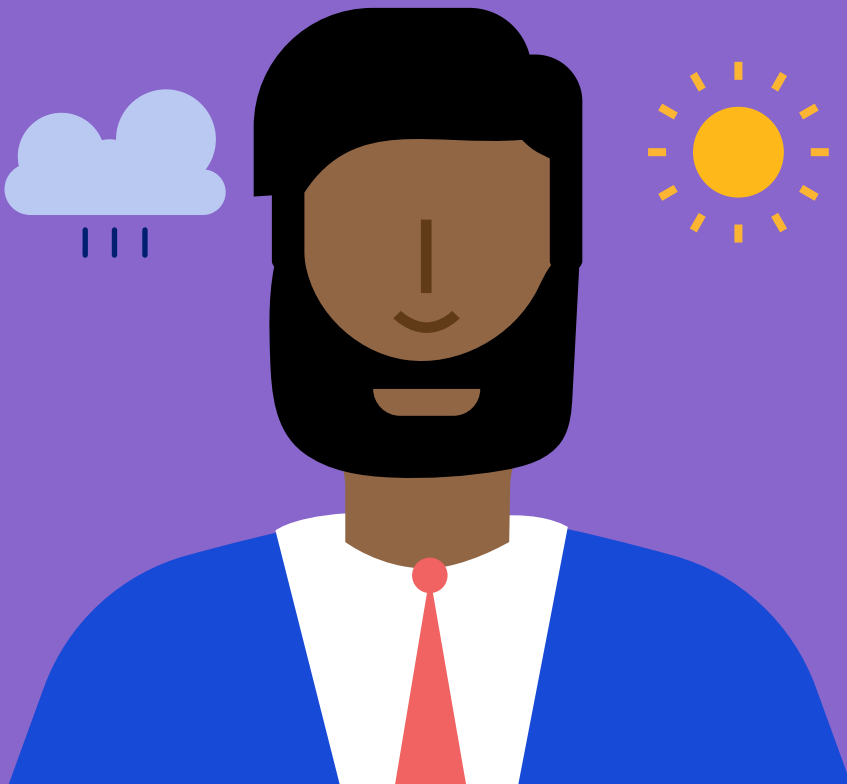
You can still foster these spontaneous interactions without a physical office. One easy way to do this is to set up casual meetings such as virtual coffee dates or opt-in meetings with no agenda. To encourage extra connection, you can make these gatherings cross-departmental.

3. Remind employees to practice self-care

Under stress, it's natural to feel like we should be doing more, whether out of:

- Gratitude for still having a job while unemployment climbs
- Fear that we'll join the jobless ranks if we don't do more than ever to show that we're indispensable

Under the best of circumstances, many of us struggle to take care of ourselves, opting instead to worry and care for everyone else. These are not the best of circumstances, and it's more important than ever to be sure we are taking time to care for ourselves.





When leaders encourage and model self-care, it gives employees permission to do the same. Let employees know:

- In these circumstances, we are all going to be less productive
- You want them to take breaks to exercise, give time and attention to their children and loved ones and get more rest
- Ways you are practicing self-care as a leader

Your encouragement will go a long way to supporting this important need.

A Swedish proverb goes: “Shared joy is double joy; shared sorrow is half a sorrow.” Shared experiences are valuable as they can cut across generation, race and workplace hierarchies and bring us together. As these examples show, you don’t need to be sitting side-by-side to encourage social closeness.



A Great Place to Work[®] forecast

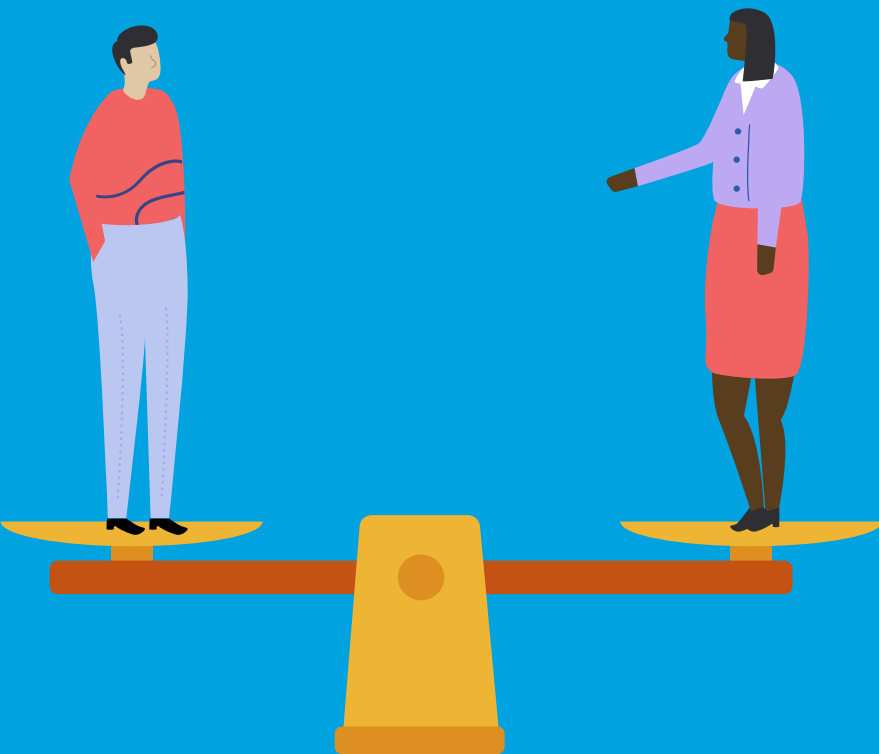
Through our collaboration with many companies this year, we received a glimpse of what some of the plans are for the post-pandemic workplace. In this last section we provide you our Great Place to Work[®] forecast. Before creating ambitious plans for the future, a reasonable question would be: do employees even want to return to the workplace? And then, if the answer is yes, what will they possibly be returning to?

Do employees want to return to the workplace?

Leaders are working hard to redesign, reorganize, and rebuild office spaces. New work processes need to ensure safety and compliance with new norms and regulations. This all with the goal of ensuring maximum productivity once workers return to the office. But as organisations develop these comprehensive plans to make their office spaces work, questions remain: How likely is it that workers even want to return?

Organisations have good reason to be concerned about workers' likelihood of returning. Hesitancy to return may be driven largely by a lack of trust—toward the employer, toward colleagues, and toward others they are likely to interact with at the workplace. Thus, as companies rethink and rebuild their office spaces, leaders should put the same level of effort into building or re-establishing trust with their workers.

If you communicate proactively with employees and invest time in listening, for example through an employee survey that asks thoughtful questions, you can avoid confusing and uncomfortable situations while ensuring a safe and successful reopening.



4 tips for a back-to-the-workplace employee survey:

1. Social support and connections

Are people getting the support from their co-workers that they need? Do they feel isolated or still connected with their colleagues? When employees feel social connection and camaraderie with their colleagues, they are more likely to feel safe in the new workplaces as everyone forms 1 front to battle the pandemic and to follow the rules.

2. Resources and support, inside and out of work

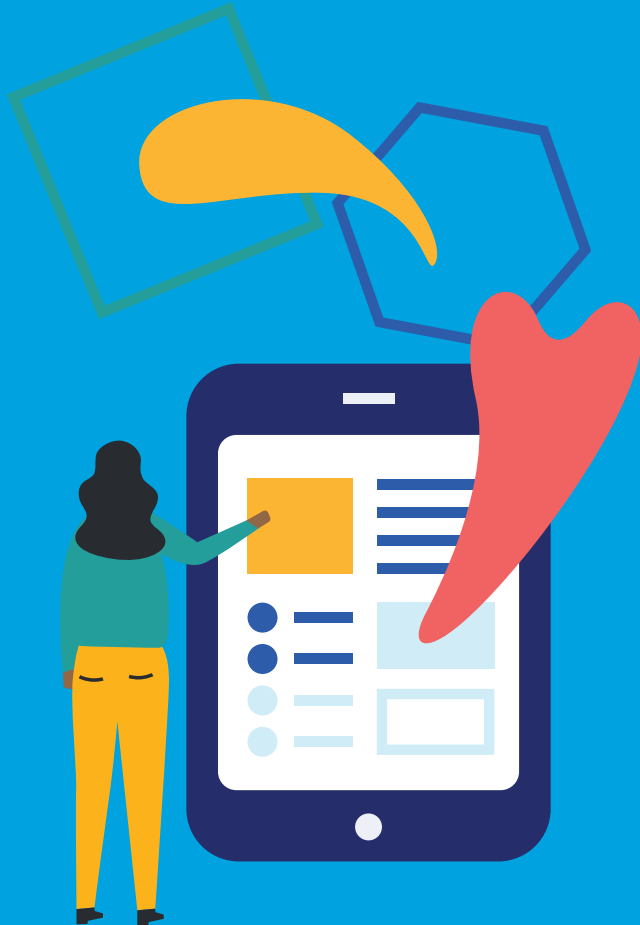
Employees need to feel like they have the tools to go to work and be safe, whether that's working from home or in an office, a retail store or a restaurant dining room. Support also needs to extend beyond the workplace to employees' personal and home lives, whether it is a parent worried about childcare or anxiety over exposing their elder relatives to COVID-19. As an employer you often have less control over these concerns but listening, being aware of them and adapting if possible is already a good step forward.

3. Confidence and clarity

Do employees trust the intentions and ability of leaders, resulting in a positive/optimistic view of the future? Is there a strong feedback loop between leadership and the frontline workers? Is there clear communication and do employees have confidence in leadership? Are they convinced that managers have their back in case of an outbreak?

4. Innovation and influence

Do people feel involved in changes, or do they feel that changes are just "happening to them?" Employers need to measure if employees feel like their ideas are sought out and listened to. That's going to make whatever you decide to do way more successful.



And if there is enough trust to return, what do we return to?

We've already picked up ideas of offices as clubhouses with more of a home-like setting where people can come together with a focus on connection and celebration and that partially remote working will certainly continue to exist for the more operational tasks. Multiple sources lead us to believe that we are moving toward a hybrid model of working. In several aspects we have proven that remote work can be successful, even for organisations that believed they couldn't do it. Nevertheless, after several months most knowledge workers indicate they would prefer a mix of remote and office work. Like everything else, such disperse workforce does comes with its pros and cons.

Hybrid communication & connection:

Some people like the boundaries of a commute and the buzz of an office setting. Others prefer the comfort of being at home. In that regard, the new hybrid approach will provide more flexibility and ways to indicate your own work preferences. There will be a new balance of how often people visit the office, and why. But it's important to consider the impact a mixed model will have on how we communicate and connect.

For example, while in-person meetings tend to flow more organically, remote meetings focus on a single platform. When participants are split, it can be hard to encourage engagement from both sides. In that manner we can learn a lot of global companies in the future as they are hybrid by nature. Their best practices on how to guide disperse teams will become of enormous value.

Understanding the diverse needs of your workers:

While some individuals have comfortable and quiet home environments, others might face distractions from children or roommates. The magic isn't finding one thing that suits everyone. Instead, it's about finding ways to group your workers based on commonalities and building programs and processes targeted to their specific needs. This approach can help employers create environments that are truly centred around employee well-being.



Just as workplaces have evolved, so have workers. Thus, in many respects, we will never “return” to the office in which we worked. The exit in March could be compared to a revolution. The journey back will, in contrast, be more of an evolution. This opens opportunities for organisations and employees to work in new ways with the potential to be more effective than before. For that potential to be realized, organisations will need to create trust among their workers, and workers will need to create trust between each other.

As the Great Place to Work® team® we are convinced that every company will eventually find a successful back-to-work approach that both suits their company’s strategy and their employee’s needs. We feel honoured to be able to witness this evolution from the first row and are excited for what the future will bring.





Conclusion

The results make it clear that all companies do well but that especially the Best Workplaces™ 2021 really excel when it comes to these highlighted themes. So, what makes these Best Workplaces 2021 so special? These companies in particular turned the pandemic into an opportunity to grow rather than experiencing it as a burden. They set up strong communication strategies, continued to invest as much as possible in digital training and, most importantly, have taken care of their employees while providing a safe working climate. Each in their own way, these Best Workplaces invest in their people and play into the trends and challenges that we are all faced with in this rapidly changing, unpredictable world. By going beyond what is expected to achieve their organisational objectives, they create opportunities for building even stronger relationships of trust in management, taking pride to a higher level and stimulating (digital) connection with colleagues even more. All of this due their efficient and professional approach during these unpredictable and turbulent times.

Introducing emprising

As Great Place to Work[®], we are continuously thinking about how we can better serve our clients in becoming a Great Place to Work[®] For All[™]. That is why, this year, we are excited to introduce Emprising, our new culture management platform. It will empower leaders to take ownership over the survey rollout and provide the real-time reporting and insights they need to make data-driven people decisions.

The Great Place to Work[®] team is here to help you every step of the way. Your Customer Success Manager and Culture Coach will help you design, launch and understand your Trust Index[™] survey.

Whether through our new Culture Management Platform, our Certification Program or Culture Consulting services, Great Place to Work[®] has the tools you need to assess and improve your workplace culture according to the global standard of greatness. As a result, your organisation –and your employees–can achieve their full potential and drive performance to new heights.



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Great Place to Work® is the global authority on workplace culture. Since 1992, they have surveyed more than 100 million employees around the world and used those deep insights to define what makes a great workplace experience. It boils down to trust. Great Place to Work® helps organizations quantify their culture and produce better business results by creating a hightrust work experience for all employees. Emprising™, their culture management platform, empowers leaders with the surveys, real-time reporting and insights they need to make data-driven people decisions. Their unparalleled benchmark data is used to recognize Great Place to Work-Certified™ companies and the Best Workplaces™ in the U.S. and more than 60 countries, including those on the 100 Best Companies to Work For® and World's Best lists published annually by Fortune. Everything they do is driven by the mission to build a better world by helping every organization become a Great Place to Work For All™.

A collection of various abstract shapes in different colors (yellow, blue, red, green) scattered across the lower-left and bottom-center of the page. These include a yellow circle, a blue triangle, a red circle, a blue wavy shape, a yellow wavy line, a blue inverted triangle, a red outline of a heart-like shape, a green teardrop shape, and a red outline of a diamond.

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