How to Bring out the Best in your Employees?
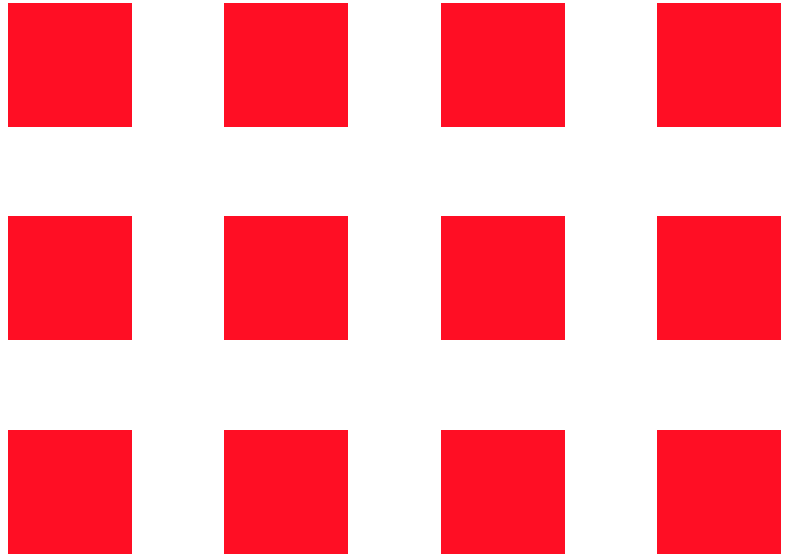
Lessons Learned: Belgium's Best Workplaces™ 2022

Contents

1. Introduction

Whereas the COVID-19 pandemic initially instigated a global economic recession – characterised by reduced economic activity, hiring freezes, lay-offs and pay cuts, and a tremendous amount of job insecurity – organisations worldwide are now recovering, turning the crisis into an opportunity and reimagining new ways of working. As companies are trying to rebuild their organisation, they are faced with a new reality: an unprecedented talent exodus. In addition to the aging population leaving the workforce, a record number of employees are voluntarily quitting their jobs and looking for a post-pandemic role – or even career – change.

In addition to cultivating a sense of alienation and disconnectedness at work, the numerous lockdowns suddenly created more time to reflect on, and re-evaluate, what people want in life, including in their careers. According to recent research by **Microsoft**, up to 41% of the global workforce in 2021 were considering leaving their employer within the next year. American economists have dubbed this phenomenon '**The Great Resignation**', and it may signal a need to rethink your workplace culture to retain high-quality employees.

In order to compensate for this skill shortage, organisations are increasingly competing for the best talent across diverse profiles in a tight labour market. While it was once enough to offer high salaries and attractive benefits to win this **War for Talent**, businesses today are operating in a society that expects more out of companies. Just as consumers are looking to brands that align with their values, job seekers – and especially millennials – are prioritising transparency, authenticity and meaning in a prospective employer. And if these expectations are not met, they are not afraid to seek employment elsewhere.

The War for Talent is raging harder than ever before. Organisations that want to succeed in this dynamic business environment need to harness their key talent and find new ways to attract the right candidates, for the present as well as the future.

How do you tackle this? Arising from the challenges the pandemic posed to organisations, are an overwhelming number of opportunities to leap forward and totally rethink the employee experience to successfully attract and retain top talent.

In this paper, we take a closer look at how the Best Workplaces™ in Belgium have responded to this new business reality in a way that symbolises flexibility in 4 different domains. But before inspiring you with some of their best practices, let us dive deeper into the Great Place to Work® methodology that guides this research.

2. Great Place to Work®

2.1. About Us

Great Place to Work® is an international research, advice and training institute with a clear mission: **to build a better world by helping every organisation become a Great Place to Work For All™**. The methodology that we use, is based on more than 30 years of research in more than 60 countries, representing over 100 million employees within organisations of varying sizes and industries. This research and experience have enabled us to define what it means to be a Great Workplace™, to understand how to measure it, and to help any organisation in their journey to becoming a Great Place to Work For All.

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, at its core, **a Great Place to Work is an organisation where employees trust the people they work for, have pride in what they do and enjoy the people they work with**. Additionally, the Best Workplaces unlock the full competitive power of their work culture by creating a consistently high-trust workplace experience For All™, no matter who they are or what they do for the organisation. These companies maximise the human potential in their organisation through effective leadership, meaningful values, and a deep foundation of trust with all employees. When those qualities are in place, these workplaces benefit from enhanced innovation and financial growth.

Great Place to Work is the global authority on workplace culture. We help organisations quantify their culture and produce better business results by creating a high-trust work experience for all employees. Through **our recognition and certification programmes**, we celebrate outstanding workplaces that excel at being a good employer with the Great Place to Work-Certified™ label and a spot on our prestigious Best Workplaces lists. Organisations recognised as Great Workplaces report greater talent attraction, higher retention and increased workforce productivity by putting the employee voice at the heart of their organisations. Certification should therefore be an essential part of your employer branding strategy to increase your visibility in the labour market, boost internal pride and win the War for Talent.

2.2. About the Research

In 2022, we organised the 20th edition of the annual Great Place to Work® cycle in Belgium. During this edition, around 18,000 employees filled in our Trust Index™ employee survey, which measures the level of trust, pride and camaraderie they experience in their organisation. 78 Belgian companies scored above our predetermined threshold and have been recognised for their people strategy with a Great Place to Work Certified™-label. Based on an evaluation of both their Trust Index scores and their Culture Audit™ (an additional company culture questionnaire) using our For All™ methodology, 21 of them can proudly call themselves a Belgium's Best Workplace™ for 1 year.

These Best Workplaces are thriving in the War for Talent by building a strong internal culture and taking care of their employees. They realise employer branding is not just about campaigning that you are a good employer, but it's about truly being a good employer. Consequently, they are telling their culture story from the inside out, through the genuine experiences of their own employees. And while the COVID-19 pandemic challenged all of us, the Best Workplaces have treated it as a learning opportunity, resulting in significant changes in their existing structures to improve the employee experience even more.

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

Year	Score
2019	91%
2020	91%
2021	94%
2022	95%
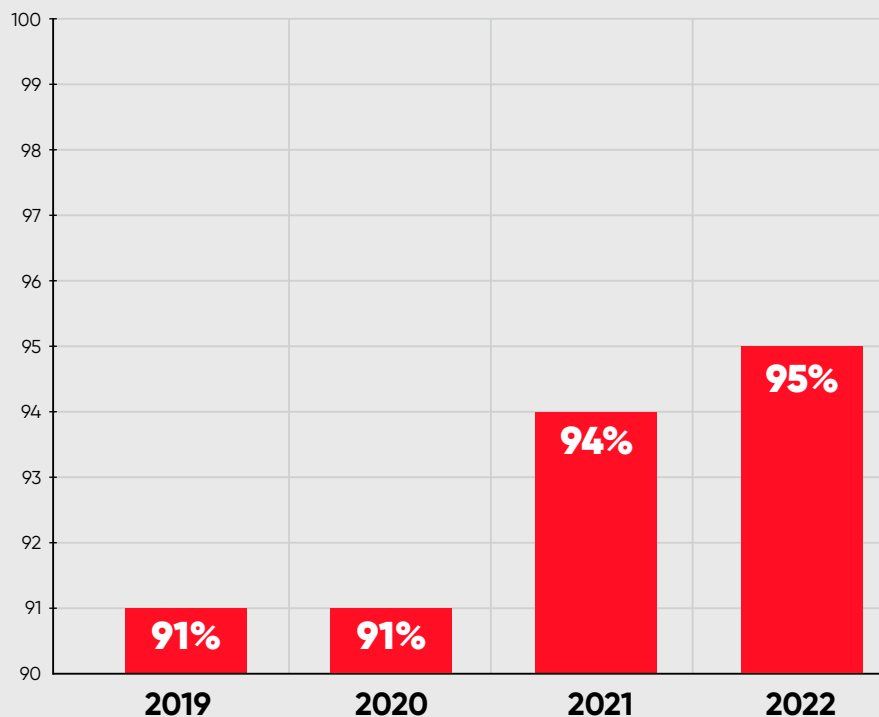
In this paper, we highlight 4 key trends we identified in our 20th Great Place to Work research cycle. These trends show how the Best Workplaces have fundamentally reinvented themselves over the past year, applying their learnings from the COVID-19 pandemic to improve their position as a great employer in the mindset of current and prospective employees. The bottom line in their approach is their inclusive, people-first focus. **While, in 2020, many organisations were forced to implement flexibility as a necessary safety measure, the Best Workplaces are now intentionally implanting it in all aspects of their organisation to fit their employees' divergent needs**. By fostering flexibility in every process, these companies create opportunities for building strong relationships of trust.

This paper provides you with some unique insights into, and inspiring practices for, how the Best Workplaces strengthen their high-trust workplace culture by offering employees flexibility in 4 different domains – i.e., working arrangements, well-being policy, development opportunities, and hiring decisions. Practical tips on how to tackle each of these trends in your organisation are also integrated.

Furthermore, to support the trends in this paper, we've added some data on how the Best Workplaces performed in comparison to the other companies that went through the Great Place to Work process. This other category consists of both Great Place to Work Certified™ organisations 2022 and non-certified organisations 2022. 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 ranging from 'Almost always untrue' to 'Almost always true'. The percentages shown in this paper are the average percentage of positive replies to each statement – i.e., answers indicating 'Often true' or 'Almost always true'. We report the results in positive percentages to indicate strengths and possibilities for improvement.

3. Flexibility in the Best Workplaces™

3.1. Hybrid Working

What is your post-pandemic workplace plan? Is it back to the office as it was in 2019? Or is it 'remote work' forever? Like most Best Workplaces™, your answer is probably somewhere in between: a hybrid work model that combines in-person work with some form of remote flexibility.

When the corona virus spread through the world in 2020, many companies were forced to close their doors and abruptly switch to remote work to protect their employees' health. In the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic, we wondered when things would go 'back to normal'. Now, as we enter the third year of the pandemic, it's becoming clear that we are not going back to anything. **The pandemic accelerated existing trends in remote work, and many companies are using this opportunity to design a future workplace that is more effective than before**. And just as workplaces have evolved, so have workers. According to a study by **McKinsey & Company**, 70% of employees indicated that being able to work from home for at least part of the week was a top criterion in selecting their next job.

Hybrid-what?

The old way of doing business is gone and we can only move forward. And that future is hybrid. **A hybrid work model empowers employees by giving them more control over where and when they work**. Just as some people enjoy the buzz of an office setting, others prefer the comfort of being at home without the stress of commuting. By putting employees' personal work preferences centre stage, a hybrid approach creates a caring workplace environment that caters to divergent needs. But businesses reap the benefits too.

A **two-year study** by Great Place to Work® found that working from home was just as productive – if not more so – as working in the office.

Ultimately, the success of hybrid working builds on employers trusting their employees to adjust their work schedules to how they feel operates the best, thereby increasing their well-being, job satisfaction and loyalty.

Challenges of a hybrid work model

Managing hybrid teams presents its own unique set of challenges. In addition to potentially blurred work-life boundaries and misunderstandings because of fuzzy expectations, research by **MIT** shows that **hybrid working can foster inequality** between remote employees and their in-person co-workers. When employees work remotely, it is far too easy to overlook them because they do not get as much face time with management. Thus, the consequences for remote workers can be lower performance evaluations, smaller pay raises, and fewer promotions.

Moreover, **certain activities can lose some effectiveness when performed remotely**[1]. While in-person meetings tend to flow more organically, remote meetings focus on a single topic. When participants are split, it can be hard to achieve engagement from both sides. Negotiations, brainstorming sessions, critical business decisions, coaching and providing sensitive feedback are some examples of activities rich in social interactions that will inevitably suffer in quality in a virtual workplace environment (given the limitations of existing ICT technologies)[2].

How to connect in a hybrid work world?

The main concern, however, is one of connection. Feeling connected in the workplace not only creates value for employees, who will feel more comfortable reaching out for help, but it also contributes to business success as it promotes effective collaboration towards organisational goals. **At the start of the pandemic, employees expressed their struggle to stay connected with each other and their organisation while working from home**. Virtual meetings usually did not have impromptu moments that build trust, foster camaraderie and create a sense of belonging in the workplace.

In response, companies have put great effort into connecting people with one another digitally during the pandemic, but they are eager to bring employees back to the office as soon as possible. As our **return-to-the-office survey** revealed mixed feelings among employees, indicating a need for a hybrid approach in the future, **leaders will nevertheless need to continue taking concrete steps to keep people connected**.

When trying to build connection both with and within an organisation adopting a hybrid work approach, communication centred around 4 Ps can help:

1. Proactive.

Taking time to share information transparently and proactively is a show of respect and a powerful trust builder. When their management reaches out to their employees on a regular basis, employees feel that management truly makes an effort to keep them informed about the business. Furthermore, employees feel more involved and valued if they are being heard and understood. Proactive leaders don't wait until employee feedback reaches them – instead, they actively encourage their employees to ask questions and share their thoughts. By taking an authentic and proactive approach, leaders ensure information is continuously moving through the company, both top-down and bottom-up, thereby creating stronger relationships between management and employees.

2. Purpose.

We all want to be connected with something greater than ourselves. Dedicating time to sharing stories about how a company's work is making a difference in society helps inspire and motivate employees to give their best. Whether it is during a dedicated town hall meeting or as part of daily team huddles, create conditions to regularly communicate about the organisation's purpose and explain how employees' goals relate to that vision. These mission moments are important because they create a human connection between the contributions employees make and the company's mission.

3. Positive.

From a very early age, people have a strong desire for positive affirmation. This continues to hold true as we move into the workplace. Positive recognition helps employees see that their company values them and their contributions to the organisation's larger goals. When employees feel appreciated, they are inspired to further contribute to the shared purpose. While it is crucial to recognize major accomplishments, every-day thank-yous can motivate employees just as much – and sometimes even more. Writing handwritten notes, or using the intranet to praise employees, can help instil a culture of frequent employee recognition. These shout-outs do not have to come from managers alone; some employees may find peer-to-peer recognition more satisfying because it strengthens the interpersonal bonds that tie them together as one team.

4. Personal.

As with in-office teams, it is easier to connect with colleagues when you can relate to them on a personal level. Because spontaneous interactions – informal chats at the coffee corner or in the hallway – are more difficult to recreate in a hybrid environment, leaders need to take a more proactive approach[3]. For example, when chairing a video meeting from your dining table/living room, why not open by asking team members to share about an object on their desk. Or maybe give them a venue to talk about non-work-related things by setting up digital communities of interest where people can come together with a focus on personal connection. The pandemic revealed organisations' exceptional capacity to come up with the most original ideas to gather employees for informal team-bonding purposes.

When looking at the data, the Best Workplaces outperform their peers in all four areas:

	Best Workplaces	(Non-)Certified Workplaces
Proactive	87%	75%
Purpose	89%	77%
Positive	86%	72%
Personal	87%	77%
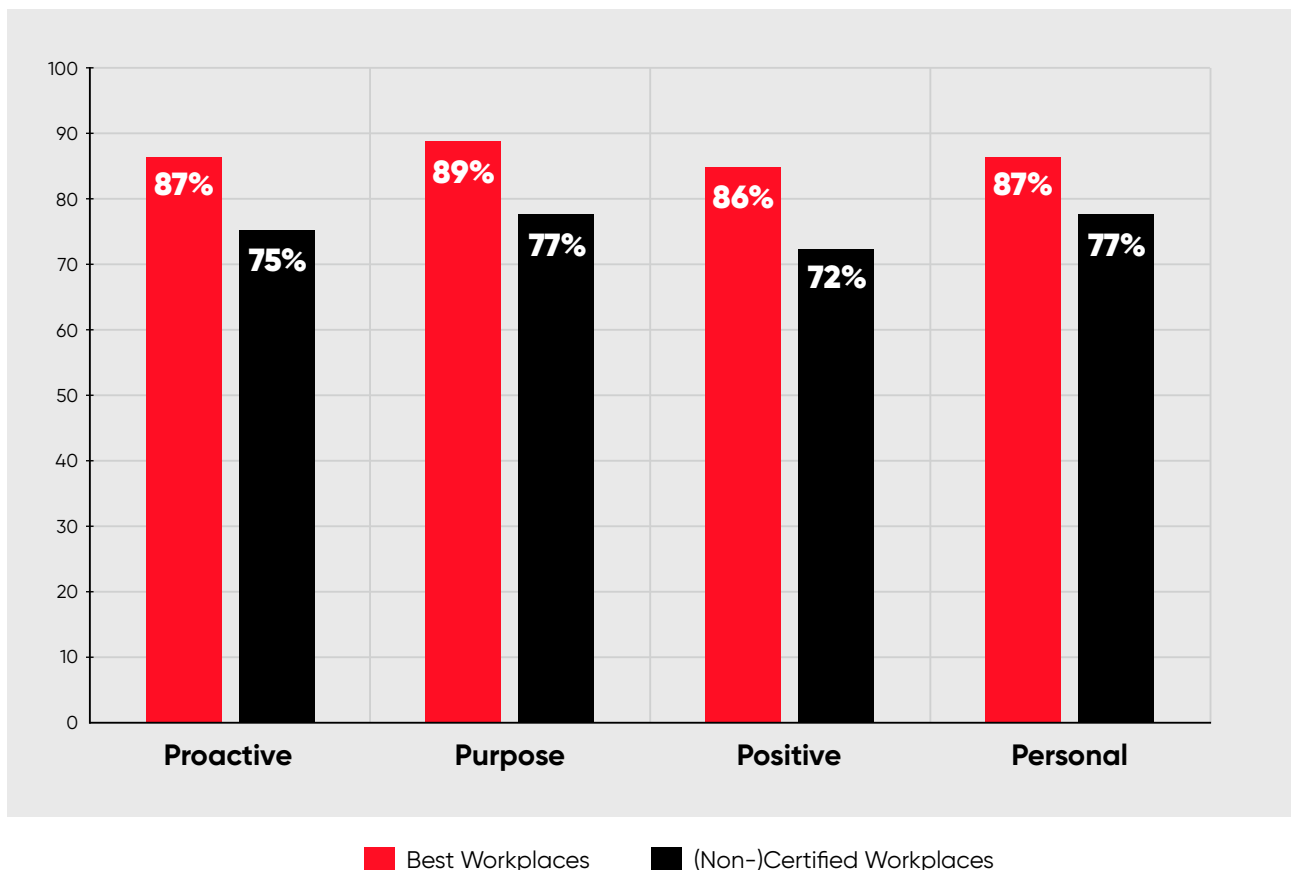
GET INSPIRED BY BEWIRE – 'Who is Who'-app

The 'Who is Who'-app is an application made by and for employees. Compare it to a sort of corporate Facebook platform. Every employee has a personal profile on which they can share their passions, talents, expertise, etc. with their colleagues. This way, employees with similar interests can find each other naturally and form close digital communities. In addition, management posts regular company updates, using the platform as one of their various communication channels to connect employees to the business. In the future, Bewire is planning to expand the app to support other HR-processes such as onboarding, talent management and performance management.
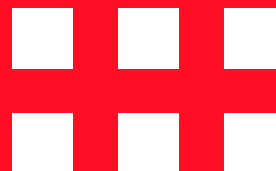
Conclusion: The perfect balance does not exist?

In several aspects, the pandemic has proven that remote work can be successful, even for organisations that believed they couldn't do it. However, based on the challenges mentioned above, the Best Workplaces are now formalising their hybrid working policies with clear guidelines that take both the organisation's and the employees' needs into account. They are applying the lessons they have learned during the pandemic and are continuously looking for dynamic solutions to further optimize their future workplace.

While most of them are still largely in an experimental phase – testing out new working models and collecting employee feedback, they all understand **the added value of the physical workspace next to a digital one**. Real, in-person social interactions add colour, richness, emotions and a sense of connectedness to the workplace culture that cannot be conveyed to the same extent during a virtual Zoom-meeting. Thus, both work experiences are complementary with their own strengths and weaknesses. Although remote work will certainly continue to exist for the more operational tasks, some activities that technically could be done remotely, will be performed in person again[1].

Unfortunately, there is no magic formula that prescribes the perfect balance between in-person and remote work irrespective of company culture, industry and size. What works for one organisation, may not work for another. While some Best Workplaces make the decision based on the nature of the activity, others are implementing a weekly maximum of remote working-days or are letting their clients decide. **Despite the variation of these diverse approaches, they all have one important thing in common: they uniquely fit the company in a way that builds trust**.

GET INSPIRED BY SALESFORCE – Future of Work

Salesforce listened to employees' feedback to guide their office reopening strategy and Future of Work. Survey results showed that nearly half of their employees wanted to come in only a few times per month, but 80% of the employees wanted to maintain a connection to a physical work space. As a result, they are planning for three worker types going forward:

1. Office-Flexible (± 65% of employees): most employees will work in a Salesforce office 1-3 days per week for in-person team collaboration, customer meetings, presentations, etc.

2. Home-Based (± 20%): employees who do not live near an office, or work in roles that do not require an office presence, will work remotely full-time.

3. Office-Based (± 15%): the smallest population of our workforce will work from an office location 4-5 days per week if they are in roles that require it.

In addition, they have introduced Flex Team Agreements (FTAs) on three levels – Company, Function and Team – to provide clarity on how and where the work gets done, such as how they behave and operate, how they schedule workdays, hold meetings, communicate and collaborate. For example, one of their global teams aligned core work hours for synchronous collaboration, but also empowered members to work asynchronously at other times. The group's FTA also agreed on meeting three times in a central location for in-person connection, having daily and weekly stand ups and adopting 'Mindful Meeting' guidelines.
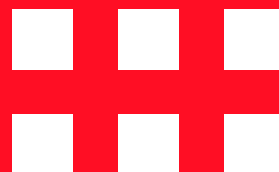
3.2. Well-being For All

Employees dedicate roughly a third of their lives – their attention, energy and emotions – to work, so employers can and should safeguard their well-being. As the pandemic accentuated the diversity of work experiences across employees, the Best Workplaces™ stepped up their efforts to create a personal and psychologically safe work environment.

The COVID-19 pandemic has put the well-being of the global workforce in jeopardy[4]. Now, as we are almost past the 5th wave, pandemic fatigue can team up with burnout from increased workloads for a double dose of mental drain. For example, **BCG** found that, after a year of largely working remotely, meeting volumes have increased by nearly 150%, and 40% of the employees reported feeling overworked and/or exhausted[5].

Given that well-being is vital for long-term organisational success, guarding employees' **health and well-being should be a strategic priority for all organisations**. Not only is this the ethically right thing to do, it boosts the employee experience as a differentiating factor for Great Workplaces™ and ensures that workforce productivity is sustainable. Indeed, healthier and happier employees are typically more engaged, take less time off from work due to illness, have a longer overall tenure and are more committed to the business. Therefore, workplace interventions that nurture employee well-being and mitigate stress are crucial to productivity and retention[6].

Employee well-being: A holistic approach

While physical health has received attention for years, the Best Workplaces prioritise a more **holistic approach to employee well-being**. Physical and mental health, together with financial, social, and occupational well-being, all are distinct – yet interconnected – parts in employees' overall well-being. When optimised, these dimensions provide a sustainable platform for all employees to flourish both in and out of their workplace.

Questions to ask yourself when designing a holistic well-being policy

1. Physical wellness:

- What kind of initiatives are in place to actively promote the physical health of employees (e.g., exercise, nutrition, ergonomics, sleep, etc.)?

2. Mental health:

- Do employees feel encouraged and comfortable to talk about their mental health, whether it is with their colleagues, line manager or a professional third party?

- What kind of initiatives and resources are offered to support and actively promote the employees' mental health (e.g., relaxation, employee assistance programs, stress monitoring, etc.)?

- In what ways are managers equipped to recognise signs of poor mental health and to assess the needs of their employees?

3. Financial security:

- How openly can or do we talk about money here?

- What kinds of initiatives, benefits or support are available to employees, during both stable and unstable times (e.g., financial planning services, insurance policies, financial education, etc.)?

- Do remuneration packages reflect a full spectrum of needs?

- Are employees who do the same work paid equally?

4. Social well-being:

- What kinds of initiatives or platforms exist for employees to meaningfully connect, collaborate and share ideas with one another?

- How are employees supported in managing their work-life balance, thereby fostering healthy relationships with family and friends?

- In what ways can employees participate, contribute and feel connected to a wider social environment (e.g., charity work, corporate social responsibility, etc.)?

5. Fulfilment at work:

- Do the employees' daily tasks utilise their skills and challenge them to an appropriate degree, ideally to the point of experiencing flow?

- How much control and empowerment do employees experience within the confines of their job role and key responsibilities?

- Does an employee's work allow for a developmental trajectory, in terms of professional development and career progression as well as personal growth?
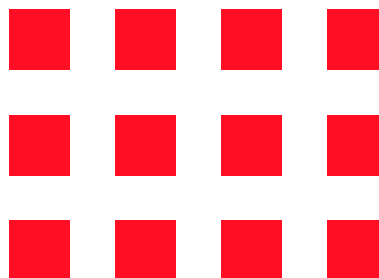
Compared to the other organisations, the results clearly show how the Best Workplaces excel in each of the five well-being domains:

Best Workplaces ■ (Non-)Certified Workplaces
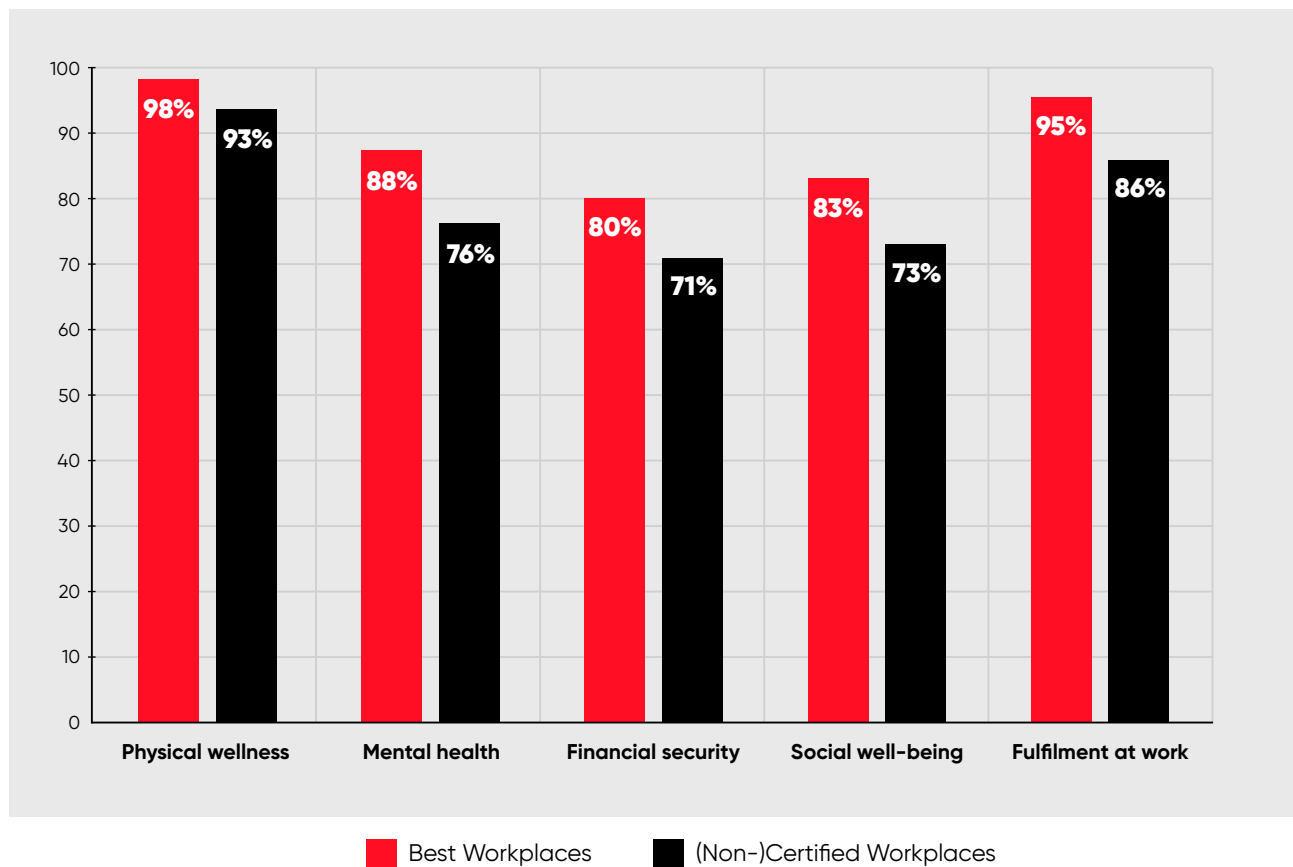
No one-size-fits-all

As the pandemic has clearly shown the diversity of work experiences across individuals, the Best Workplaces realise there is no point in designing a rigid, one-size-fits-all policy. Employees are unique individuals, with different personalities and aspirations, living in various family situations. Therefore, supporting employees' well-being works best when **personalised and tailored to their specific needs**.

To establish a holistic and customised well-being policy, the Best Workplaces offer employees a broad array of well-being initiatives, supported by a **personal and psychologically safe work environment**. They recognise the value of building an open and understanding working atmosphere,

where employees feel encouraged, as well as comfortable saying "I am struggling" – knowing that this is not a sign of weakness, but of strength. Organisations make sure the right resources are in place, and, at the same time, they create a culture where employees feel safe to speak up when necessary.

GET INSPIRED BY TORFS – Encounter circles

Out of concern for employees' well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic, Torfs set up an initiative, called the 'Encounter circles'. Here, a team of circa 6 colleagues comes together on a weekly basis with a focus on listening. Employees each get a moment to share how they are really doing – both in thoughts and in emotions. Leaders are trained as facilitators to create a safe environment where everyone feels comfortable to express oneself. By listening without judging or proposing solutions, the team takes care of each other. When employees find it difficult to open up in their own teams, they can join general circles under the guidance of an external partner.
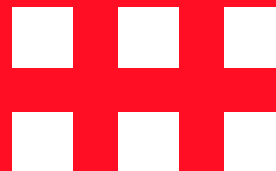
Well-being as a shared responsibility

Approached in this way, **well-being becomes a shared responsibility between employers and employees**. Employers need to develop into real people leaders who show a sincere interest in their employees as human beings. By genuinely listening to their stories, people leaders are able to identify their employees' needs and build a supportive workplace For All™. On the other hand, employees are empowered to speak up when they are struggling. Individual psychological resources – resilience, optimism and an internal locus of control – are at least as important as social support. In an ever-stressful and turbulent working world, the ability and strength to overcome obstacles, bounce back, and recover in the face of challenges, are key to thriving.

GET INSPIRED BY CONTINUUM – MyMindScan

During their annual conference 'Tribe Day', Continuum held an information session about growth mindset for all employees to build awareness around mental health. In addition, every month, employees are invited to test their mental well-being and resilience via an anonymous, online platform 'MyMindScan'. When the results indicate non-optimal scores, employees are encouraged to talk about it – for example, during their one-to-ones with management or an anonymous conversation with Continuum's business psychologist at the expense of the organisation. When more specialised support is needed, Continuum is willing to share the costs of external therapists.
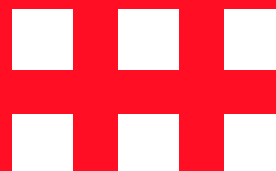
To boost your employees' well-being throughout your company, read our Tips & Tricks for both parties:

AS AN EMPLOYEE

Design a **daily and weekly routine** that balances enough sleep, exercise and personal time at work.
- Get up and move once in a while or do some stretches at your desk
- Never skip a meal because you are too busy
- Stay hydrated
- Take meaningful breaks

Mind your language: recognise that the language you use to describe your current circumstances can significantly impact how your feel and cope.

Practice **mindfulness and deep breathing** to counter stress.

Surround yourself with **supportive people**: a problem shared is a problem halved.
- Acknowledge and nurture positive relationships in life
- Don't hesitate to share issues with them and ask for help when needed

Reframe your mindset: rather than deny, ignore or underestimate the negatives in life, adopt a growth mindset and choose to confront difficulties openly and deliberately.
- See challenges as opportunities for learning and growth – perhaps even as a way of breaking free from bad habits.
- Practice positive self-talk – such as approaching a task with phrases like "I can do this" or "This is good, I've got this!
- Focus on an internal locus of control: try to remain focused on what you do have control over and accept the things that are out of your control.
- Remember you are not alone – acknowledging that there are others with similar or worse experiences can bring a new sense of perspective and confidence.
- Remind yourself that you never know what positive spill-over effects may result from 'negative' events.

AS A PEOPLE LEADER

Build trust by **listening**: understand the importance of being a **supportive line manager** and get to know people on a personal level.
- All one-to-ones should enquire about well-being
- React in an open and constructive way – where issues arise, ensure they are being seen professionally
- Be kind and compassionate, let your employees know that what they say matters and thank them for sharing openly.

Set the right example: managers who take care of their own well-being lead by example and encourage others to do the same.
- Reduce stigma by showing your vulnerability
- Prioritise your own self-care and work-life balance
- Incorporate health promotion into day-to-day processes, such as walking meetings

Ensure that **roles, responsibilities, expectations and priorities are clearly defined**, but be prescriptive only about job outcomes.
- Allow as much control and autonomy as possible
- Embrace flexible scheduling

Pay careful attention to **resourcing and workloads**, making sure teams are not stretched too thin. Encourage openness and look out for symptoms of stress.

Conclusion: A caring workplace culture

The Best Workplaces put their employees' well-being (physical, mental, financial, social and occupational) above profits, having conversations with the people who work for them about what they need, and following through. They succeed well in creating a psychologically safe working environment that allows for a personal touch, and they support employees in developing a resilient mindset. As such, they approach well-being not just as a policy but as a **long-term strategic change towards a genuine well-being culture**. It's a philosophy, a way of going about things.
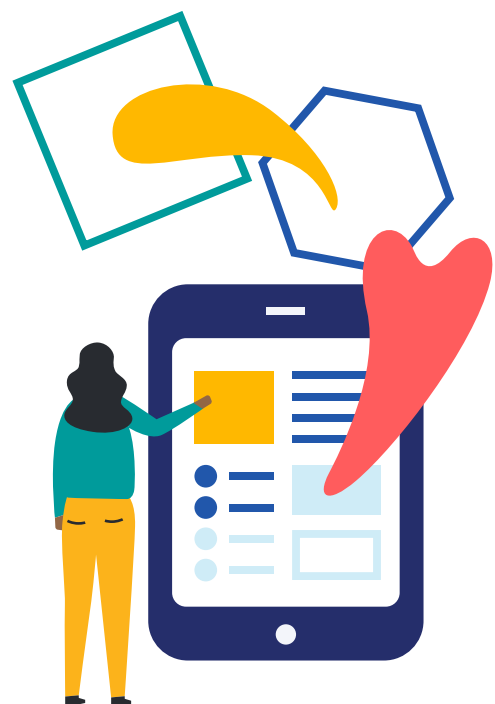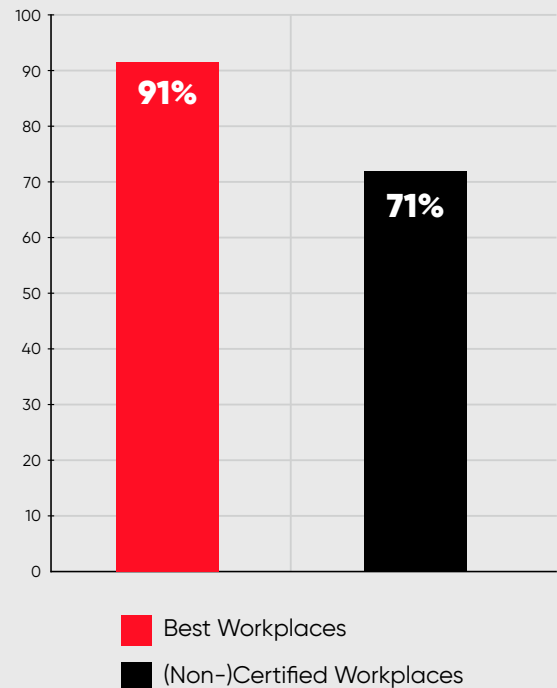
3.3. Employee Empowerment

Change is happening all around us and is impossible to overlook. How ready is your workforce to perform amidst uncertainty? The Best Workplaces™ are thriving because they fuel business agility by empowering all employees to continuously develop themselves in various ways.

At the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, business leaders shifted their focus to short-term objectives and preventing losses. However, as industries, customer needs and technologies continue to evolve, **rapid reskilling and upskilling** of employees for the work of tomorrow will be critical to an organisation's survival[7]. Or, as **McKinsey & Company** has put it: "Human capital requires ongoing investments in Learning & Development (L&D) to retain its value."

More than ever, the Best Workplaces realise that **nurturing talent is key and that aligning their L&D strategy to their business strategy is the road to success**. At the heart of growth and productivity, an effective L&D strategy enables employees to acquire new skills and broaden their expertise, thereby taking the business to new heights. Moreover, employees will leave their current jobs if their organisation does not provide sufficient development opportunities to drive their careers. Employees perceive an employer's investment in their growth as a sign of appreciation for their hard work – fostering feelings of fulfilment and competency - and consequently they are more likely to give their best effort and stay at the company for a long time. Essentially, individual thriving and organisational success are two sides of the same L&D coin.

I am offered training or development to further myself professionally.

- 🟥 Best Workplaces
- ⬛ (Non-)Certified Workplaces

Best Workplaces: 91%
(Non-)Certified Workplaces: 71%

Personalised and broad view on L&D

The Best Workplaces know that employees will be more effectively activated around emerging business priorities when they move away from a prescriptive approach to filling skills needs[8]. So, they **afford employees the agency and choice to create their own learning paths** – allowing them to re-vitalise their work lives according to personal needs and passions.

In addition, they **support employees in any kind of movement** – whether vertical, lateral or even cross-training to learn from another team.

Growth doesn't always mean attending expensive conferences or climbing the corporate ladder. It could be as simple as the space and time to learn something new and apply it to their work at hand. By offering employees various opportunities to 'grow in place' – e.g., stretch assignments or a new project –, these companies prevent employees from feeling stuck in their current positions while at the same time adding value to the organisation's overall performance.

GET INSPIRED BY CTG – Competence Developers

CTG greatly values employees' ownership of their own careers. Therefore, each department has one or more full-time Competence Developers (CD'ers) to coach about 50 employees. They function as 'co-pilots' in the employees' career and support them in their well-being and development. Together with their CD'er, employees determine their career objectives and the necessary L&D tools to reach these goals. To support them in this process, CTG developed a Competence Management System (CMS). The CMS is a framework for personal development at CTG and describes clear profile descriptions per role based on 43 competencies. It provides employees a transparent roadmap for career planning within CTG and ensures an objective assessment based on merits. The CMS allows job mobility in any direction to maximise both employees' and CTG's potential. But at the end of the day, employees themselves are responsible for the pace and outcome of their own development – with the support of their CD'er.
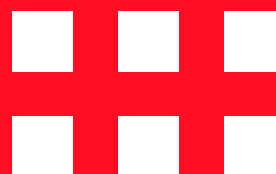
Empowered teamwork

For this reason, more and more companies are replacing their structural hierarchies by **agile networks of empowered teams**. Here, employees across the business come together to brainstorm on issues, contribute their ideas and leverage diverse perspectives in the company's service, whilst extending their own knowledge and responsibilities. They are involved in the decision-making process – motivated to think big and challenge the status-quo – in a safe environment where mistakes are seen as learning opportunities.

This decentralised way of working is characterised by more high-quality ideas, greater speed of implementation, and increased agility. Furthermore, when people feel that they have the freedom to make decisions and changes, they are more invested in the outcome and therefore more likely to accept accountability and ownership for ensuring success.

GET INSPIRED BY AXXES – Knowledge sharing

Knowledge sharing – between colleagues and with the outside community – is part of Axxes' DNA. "Axxes consists of highly competent employees with each their own expertise domain. Knowledge sharing is therefore essential to develop our people individually, as well as to strengthen the entire organisation." Recently, they appointed a structural Head of Learning and Development to strategically nurture their numerous initiatives. A small selection of their programs:

- HAXX is Axxes' very own conference weekend, created by its employees for its employees. It is a win-win situation for everyone: people can attend several sessions per day while the employees taking the floor to share their knowledge, have the opportunity to develop their presentation skills in front of an audience. The speakers are prepared for this role by an internal speakers community. In addition, there are diverse responsibilities backstage – e.g., technical operator – so that people who do not present, still can participate and contribute their potential.

- Employees do not only speak at internal conferences, but they also share their expertise with students during guest lectures at high schools and universities.

- Furthermore, experienced consultants can take up new responsibilities by teaching young potentials during Axxes' own traineeships.
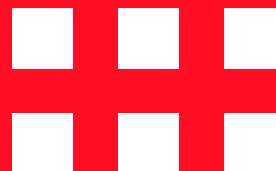
Empowering leadership

While this trend puts employees in the driver's seat of their own development journey, there are numerous ways leaders can support them along the way:

1. Create personalised learning paths

Leaders should not lavish resources on just a few 'high-potential' employees, but help everyone develop through personalised learning paths, tailored to individual needs. Investing in everyone's growth does not have to break the bank. They can include practices such as fostering collaboration or giving employees space and time to take ownership of a new project. More important, however, is to empower employees to be responsible for their own journey. Your sole role is to support them during this process by helping them explore their development aspirations and providing them with access to relevant L&D opportunities.

2. Implement continuous feedback and coaching

Performance management no longer needs to be a process for checking that people are doing what we need them to do. It can become so much more positive and expansive when you evolve to a vision where talents can be developed and retained in the business without losing people to the competition. So, shift from a focus on annual appraisals to an emphasis on continuous feedback and coaching. This approach is grounded in the belief that, in order for continuous learning to happen, feedback is best delivered in a timely fashion – helping employees look forward and make improvements rather than spending too much time dwelling on past failures that may have occurred months ago. In addition, feedback does not have to come from the leader alone to be valuable. Create a culture in which people are aware that giving and receiving feedback gifts that make people grow and develop.

3. Rethink how you promote people

If managing a larger team is the only way to a promotion at your company, you may want to rethink your promotion process. Smart companies (and effective managers) create multiple avenues to success to keep employees motivated. For example, help people earn new responsibilities and develop their skills through new projects, lateral moves and stretch assignments

4. Build bridges

Leading organisations actively build bridges, bringing people together who otherwise might never talk to each other – let alone collaborate (e.g., competence centres or work groups). Cross-functional collaboration not only creates value for not only employees (who will expand their internal networks), but it can help organisations solve tough challenges facing the business.

5. Energise employees to contribute

Effective leaders work with their teams – involving team members in decisions that affect them and seeking their ideas to co-create value for the organisation. They stimulate employees to share their suggestions by recognising efforts – and not just outcomes.

They make sure to thank everyone for proposing a new product, for participating in an ideation session, for providing feedback along the way. Even failures are seen as a reason to celebrate and an opportunity to learn. These leaders remove barriers and create time and space – both physically and emotionally – for employees to be creative, share their knowledge, and take risks. This way, you energise employees to keep contributing and learn from each other.

6. Replace control with trust

For employees to take the reins in developing their ideas, leaders should 'let go' of their perceived need to over-manage and create an environment of trust. They should lead by stepping aside, supporting employees whenever and wherever they can. Such leaders continuously ask themselves: "What can I do, as leader, to support my team in achieving its goals?" They set out a clear framework, keep their radar up for opportunities for the team to grow, and provide an inspiring vision, guiding values, and executive-level knowledge. But above all, they create positive, open relationships with all employees to foster a genuine high-trust connection with their team.

Conclusion: Business agility by employee empowerment

In today's turbulent business environment, virtually every organisation must increase its ability to adapt itself fluently if it is going to survive and thrive. **The Best Workplaces succeed in being agile organisations because they create the right context to enable this agility – that is, they recognise the people side**. They focus on employee development, understand the value of empowerment, and reinvented their L&D strategy to include a broad view of professional growth.

Whether through digital trainings, exciting projects or collaborative teamwork, the Best Workplaces encourage employees to continuously develop themselves in an environment of trust. Employees are in the lead of their own learning journey, while employers arm them with the right resources and support. By building a high-trust learning culture, the Best Workplaces are preparing themselves for success now and into the future.

3.4. Diversity, Equity & Inclusion

To survive and thrive in the future business world, organisations have to become Great Places to Work For All™. The Best Workplaces™ succeed in creating a positive work experience with exceptional consistency across employees. This means they promote a workplace culture that is welcoming to everyone, no matter who they are, what they do, who they love or what identity they carry. By doing this, they maximise the company's human potential.

To win the War for Talent, organisations must tap into **diverse and previously overlooked talents**. Remote working arrangements have, for example, enabled companies to expand their potential talent pool without relocation expenditures. As a result, employers can hire the best people across the globe, purely based on skills. Furthermore, diverse talents bring fresh ideas and perspectives to the table – while boosting a company's employer brand. As the labour market is becoming increasingly demanding and vocal, being known as a workplace with a diverse workforce will help organisations attract a diverse set of talent.

Towards a diversified workforce

An often well-intended, first step to achieving this is for companies to start working on their recruitment policies and hire people with more diverse demographics. Thus, many employers are **seeking out candidates that are a culture fit** – using their company values as the golden standard in hiring decisions. In other words, organisations evaluate talent based on the proposition that who you are as a person counts as much – if not more – as what you know or are capable of at any point in time[9]. 'Hire for attitude, train for skills' has never been more important than now. Indeed, employees who align with their workplace culture tend to be more satisfied with their job and are more likely to stay at the company[10]. According to the **Society for Human Resource Management,**

turnover due to poor cultural fit can cost organisations enormous amounts of money, resources and energy

But 'hire for attitude, train for skills' also entails a pitfall! While it certainly is crucial to ensure the compatibility of an applicant with the team and overall company, a culture fit hiring strategy may be riddled with **implicit biases**. When hiring for a culture fit, employers are essentially looking for someone who they will be comfortable around and who can be integrated seamlessly. However, we are generally most comfortable around people who are similar to us – e.g., the same race, gender or sexual orientation. Therefore, even when it is not explicit or intentional, seeking a culture fit can perpetuate homogeneity in a workplace and discriminate against anyone who deviates from it.

From a culture fit to a culture add

While homogenous teams may feel easier to work in – members can readily understand each other and collaboration flows smoothly – working on diverse teams unlocks innovation and produces better outcomes[11]. **That's why the time has come to move beyond the idea of a culture fit and into a framework of a culture add**. Seek candidates who can bring something new to the business, fill blind spots, push boundaries, and expand the horizons in ways that will equip the organisation for future success. This requires having a set of broad values that connect to the organisation's greater vision and goals, supported by a thoughtful and objective recruitment process that mitigates implicit biases in every aspect of it[12]. The end result is a workplace of people who do not necessarily share the same background or interests, but who are aligned with what really matters.

GET INSPIRED BY DURABRIK – Collaboration with social enterprises

"We perceive diversity as an enrichment to our organisation. Therefore, we welcome people from diverse backgrounds, with all of their talents, regardless of (social) origin, gender, age and religion". Durabrik takes an active approach to translate this vision into reality, and launched several initiatives to keep the 'application threshold' as low as possible. For example, they collaborate with social enterprises to employ people who do not always get the opportunities they deserve on the regular labour market – e.g., people with a mental disability (LetsCo) or those who belong to a disadvantaged group (JobRoad, KONEKT and VOKANS). In addition, they engage their employees to give construction-related workshops to young people with a background of poverty to help them discover their talents – an initiative in collaboration with Tajo.
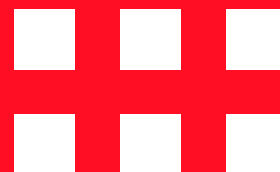
A diverse AND inclusive workplace culture

However, in order for culture adds to have a meaningful impact on business, just hiring a diverse workforce will not by itself boost results. For All™ is not a number game that you can win by applying smart recruitment practices. When employees do not feel that their ideas, presence or contributions are truly valued or taken seriously by the organisation, they will eventually leave. Diversity and inclusion are two interconnected concepts – but they are far from interchange-able. An inclusive workplace does not merely have diversity of people present – it has a diversity of people equally involved, developed, empowered and trusted by the business. For All is about the accumulation of day-to-day experiences that helps different people feel they belong, that their unique talents matter, and that their individual needs are cared for by their leaders and collea-gues. Our research has shown many benefits of a diverse and inclusive workforce[13].

What do we learn from the Best Workplaces?

For All leaders outpace their competitors by respecting the unique needs, perspectives and potential of all of their team members – resulting in higher revenue growth, greater readiness to innovate, increased ability to recruit a diverse talent pool, and a more engaged workforce.

I can be myself around here.

93% — Best Workplaces
85% — (Non-)Certified Workplaces
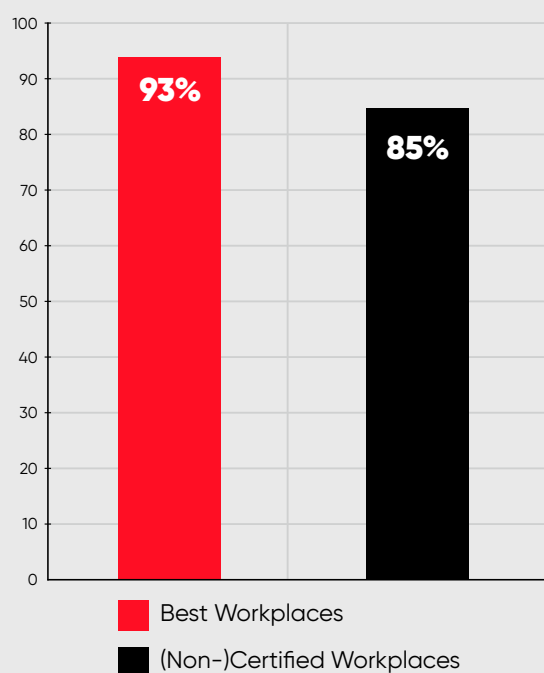
Towards a Great Place to Work For All in 3 steps:

1

Focus on the WHY

When leaders want to inspire action while implementing a For All culture, they first need to focus on the reason behind it. What do diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) mean for your company? How do these concepts fit into your mission? Why are they a strategic imperative to your organisation's ability to be successful? Take a clear stance and speak about it. **When employees understand why change is happening, fear and resistance will transform into positive energy**. But remember that action speaks louder than words. When DEI is a CEO's true priority, they not only talk about it, but they show their commitment in conscious, consistent and frequent actions – for example, by investing significant time, resources and money in it.

2

Discuss the HOW

After the Why is crystal clear on all levels of the organisation, leaders can start discussing How they will implement the change.

- Strong plans focus on closing gaps that actually exist. Leaders should therefore acquire a **deep understanding of the current environment to ensure taking targeted actions**. A thorough analysis of objective data on organisational processes can give you a good first impression – e.g., does a pay equity assessment indicate significant differences in pay relative to any irrelevant criteria? Are leadership roles evenly held across demographic groups? Are we losing certain groups disproportionately more than others? Etc.

- Resist the temptation to fix things immediately and instead, **start the discussion internally**. Take time to **listen to your employees' stories** and ask them if their experiences match what you have found. Do they feel included? Do they see under-represented groups involved in decision making, in leadership roles, and in hiring and promotion decisions? Unless you are a member of the group, it is almost impossible to know what it is like to be in their world. Your DEI plan will have much greater credibility – and will focus on the most impactful actions – when employees feel heard, and the underlying causes of the problems become more clear.

- Of course, talking about these kinds of sensitive topics requires a significant amount of **psychological safety** for employees to trust their management and speak out openly. To reinforce honest feedback, employers can turn to anonymous employee surveys to uncover any masked workplace expe-riences for different employee groups. Afterwards, by transparently sharing how the organisation is performing regarding various measures, survey results can also elevate awareness throughout the company.

3

Communicate the WHAT

Based on these insights, leaders have to **communicate What specific interventions they will be implementing**. Ultimately, change is about taking concrete actions. All too often, leaders have a brilliant master plan in mind that will solve all inequality in the organisation immediately. While it is great to dream big and set bold goals, unrealistic expectations can diminish credibility and, consequently, employees' commitment to change. At heart, an effective action plan aims for the bigger picture but concentrates on one, maximum two, meaningful interventions at the same time – focusing on doing them well before taking any further actions.

This implies that steps 2 and 3 are intrinsically linked in a continuous cycle: measure – act – gauge progress – adjust – repeat. Moreover, in both steps, employers can increase the odds of effective execution when they actively involve employees in a process of co-creation. Whether through mentorships or employee resource groups, gather your employees' feedback and give them the autonomy to personalise the change.

GET INSPIRED BY HILTON – Courageous Conversations

Hilton strongly believes that an inclusive workforce will make them more hospitable for all guests around the world. For them, an inclusive culture requires an openness to learning. Besides mandatory D&I-trainings for team members and leadership, they have introduced a program called Courageous Conversations. Using employees' feedback, this program was initiated as a proactive way to encourage and support open dialogue on complex topics – including systemic racism, unintended bias, mental health and gender equality. Through the Courageous Conversation series, team members from diverse backgrounds have a safe space to speak, listen, learn, and reflect. As leaders and members across the business continue to explore these topics and hear each other's perspectives, Hilton drives long-term change towards a culture where everyone feels at home and part of the Hilton family.
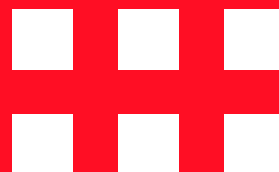
Conclusion: A Great Place to Work For All

Workplaces today are more diverse and globally connected than ever before. In this kind of economy, optimal performance requires **every person to plug in with energy, ideas and a solid understanding of the company's goals**. The Best Workplaces are prioritising DEI as never before, making strategic hires, evaluating existing processes and putting metrics in place to track progress[14]. They are inspired by the For All philosophy and installing **DEI as a central building block in their workplace culture**. They are committed to a long-term journey and acknowledge that there is always room for improvement. By putting DEI at the top of the agenda, these companies will thrive from their people's differences.

4. Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic has challenged all of us. Employees had time to reflect and re-evaluate what they want in life – resulting in an unprecedented number of workers leaving their jobs voluntarily. Companies on the other hand, are rebuilding their organisation –reimagining new ways of working to attract and retain key talent in an increasingly competitive labour market. **The Best Workplaces™ are thriving in this dynamic business environment by creating a strong workplace culture that boosts employees' work experience**. They set up hybrid work schedules, foster a safe working climate, continue to invest in employees' development and make everyone feel welcome. In other words, they start internally – positioning themselves authentically as an attractive employer – to win externally.

Essentially, the Best Workplaces turn the challenges the pandemic brought to us, into opportunities to grow rather than experiencing them as a burden. **By trusting their workforce with more flexibility, they are able to meet their employees' divergent needs** – whether it is where and when they work, what support they need, or how they want to develop themselves. In addition, these organisations take concrete steps to create this high-trust work environment consistently For All™ employees, regardless of gender, age, position, etc. While our Trust Index™ data shows that all companies do well, especially the Best Workplaces excel when it comes to these 4 trends. Each in their own way, these Best Workplaces strengthen their employer brand by building high-trust relationships with their current employees.

Great Place to Work® has the tools you need to assess and improve your workplace culture according to the global standard of greatness. We help organisations quantify their culture and produce better business results by creating a high-trust work experience for all employees. Emprising™, our culture management platform, empowers leaders with the surveys, real-time reporting and insights they need to make data-driven people decisions. Whether through our Emprising platform, Certification Program or Culture Coaching services, Great Place to Work can help you achieve your company's – and employees' – full potential, boost internal pride and increase visibility in the labour market.
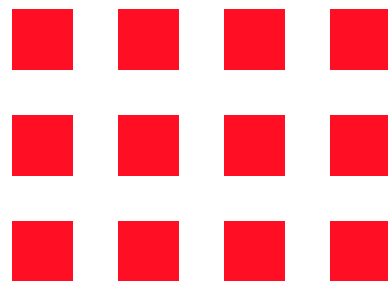
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These organisations are upgrading their people practices by creating extraordinary workplaces where employees work in an environment of trust, are proud of what they do, and enjoy the people they work with.
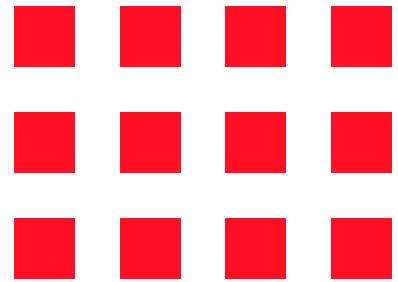
Small Companies

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ENERGY VISION

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