



# Creating High-Trust Cultures

What can we learn from  
Belgium's Best Workplaces™?



# About Us

Great Place to Work® is a global people analytics, employee experience and consulting firm. We operate in **over 60 countries around the world** to partner with organisations of all sizes and industries in order to build stronger cultures and achieve better business results.

Our mission is to build a better world by helping organisations become great places to work for all. The methodology that we use is based on **more than 30 years of research**, representing over 100 million employees' workplace experiences. For more than 30 years, Great Place to Work® has been supporting organisations in assessing their current workplace culture and developing a more engaged and effective workplace.

In this approach, we partner with HR professionals, as we are convinced that an important contribution to driving the culture-journey towards organisational success comes from the people strategy and practices that an organisation has adopted. We empower organisations and acknowledge them in their good employment practices and people-oriented organisational culture. These organisations realise that investing in their people pays off – for everyone!

In 2019, in Belgium, we organised the **17<sup>th</sup> edition of the Great Place to Work® research**. During this edition, our research reached around **48,000 employees**. **44 Belgian companies** have been recognised for their people strategy: 24 of them received the Great Place to Work® certificate, and 20 organisations have been recognised as being Belgium's Best Workplaces™ for 2019.



# Insights

Many organisations are fascinated by the way Best Workplaces™ have been able to transform their workplace into one where you **trust the people you work for, have pride in what you do, and enjoy the people you work with.**

In our research, we encounter all kinds of companies in terms of size, sector and structure. As a research and consulting firm, Great Place to Work® celebrates the power of workplace cultures, while being dedicated to understanding best people practices. Our study aims to understand such practices and to capitalise on the current and future trends in Human Resource Management in Belgium.

## What can we learn from our Best Workplaces™ when it comes to people practices?

Organisations are reinventing themselves to keep pace with the challenges of this fluid, unpredictable world. Both local and global markets are transforming continuously, and new digital technologies and business models are causing a significant level of disruption. Enterprises are being forced to rethink their existing structures and to continuously improve themselves.

### The world may be changing faster than we are – but companies that invest in creating a great place to work for all are not only keeping up, they're moving ahead.

Best Workplaces™ excel at creating added value with their people practices. They go beyond what is expected to achieve their organisational objectives. As a result, they create opportunities for building strong relationships of trust.

By analysing the data of Belgium's Best Workplaces™, we have identified **7 key areas** that are of great importance when defining people programmes today:



Collaborative innovation



Meaningfulness



Agility



Authentic communication



Continuous learning



Employee well-being



Aligned people strategy

In this paper, we examine each of these areas, looking into the current trends and analysing the differences between Best Workplaces™ and other organisations. How do they deal with areas of attention? And what can we learn from this?

# Key Area 1: Collaborative innovation



Innovation is regarded as vital in the workplace, because it gives companies an edge in penetrating markets faster. The idea that innovation is the responsibility of only 1 person, or an exclusive committee of persons, has been disproven. We must think of innovation as a collaboration and a capacity that needs organisation-wide support.

A growing trend for boosting innovation in many corporate cultures is to promote **intrapreneurship** amongst colleagues. Intrapreneurs are motivated to think big, and they go beyond the status quo, which leads to innovative new ideas. As being able to make mistakes is an important part of the innovation process, an environment of trust must be created in order to implement an intrapreneurial culture within an organisation. **Mistakes allow for variation** far beyond what was expected, and they stimulate us to think outside the box. Successful companies succeed in maintaining a balance between performance on the one hand and creating learning cultures on the other. 86% of our Best Workplaces™ employees state that they can make mistakes in their working environment, whilst this figure is only 66% in other organisations.

Another way to promote innovation is to stimulate employees to give feedback, suggestions and ideas. This encourages them to participate in the process of collaborative innovation and ensures that ideas and strategies are shared in order to **co-create value** for the organisation. When it comes to seeking and responding to employee suggestions and ideas, we see a significant difference between our recognised workplaces and the non-recognised ones: 83% of our Best Workplaces™ employees are convinced that their **suggestions and ideas** are valued; whilst in non-recognised workplaces, this is the case for only 58% of the employees.



## In practice...

With the 'Prolabs' initiative, **Protime** implemented a programme that allows every programmer to spend some time working on his/her own idea within the organisation. That way, employees are being encouraged to think outside their narrow cocoon and to experiment with new technologies and concepts.

## Tips & tricks to increase collaborative innovation:

1. Boost intrapreneurship and give your employees the freedom and the trust to make mistakes and learn from them.
2. Provide your employees with the time to experiment – create explicit time slots for them to work on their own ideas.
3. Show people that you value their ideas and suggestions by giving feedback on this input, by awarding innovation, and by stimulating it through knowledge-sharing.

## Key Area 2: Agility



Organisations characterised by a high level of agility have the ability to renew and adapt themselves fluently when their environment requires change. This second key area – the need to be agile – is the reason these organisations need an environment of rapid learning and fast decision cycles and why the static organisational chart is becoming more and more flexible. Structural hierarchies are being replaced by networks and agile, empowered teams.

The term '**holacracy**' is often used to describe self-directed and autonomous team structures. Projects are being launched cross-functionally and cross-departmentally, allowing employees to extend their knowledge and responsibilities; and collaboration tools are being introduced to positively influence the level of productivity.

After doing the research amongst the recognised and non-recognised organisations in the Great Place to Work® dataset, it is striking that great workplaces succeed in being agile organisations because they create the right context to enable this agility. When employees are clear about what is expected from them and feel trusted in the way they do their jobs, they have the ability to rise to the occasion. **Empowerment** on the one hand, within a clear framework set by

the organisation on the other, leads to productive networks and agile teams.

When looking at the data, we see that 89% of our Best Workplaces™ employees feel that they are being trusted in doing their job and 90% state that they are given a lot of responsibility. When people feel that they have the **freedom** to make decisions and changes, they are more likely to accept accountability and ownership for ensuring success.

Moreover, at the Best Workplaces™, 83% believe that their management makes their **expectations** clear, whilst only 59% of employees of non-recognised organisations feel this way. Showing that, in order to achieve results, it is extremely important that expectations are communicated clearly and transparently to employees.

	Best	Other
Management makes its expectations clear.	83%	59%
Management trusts people to do a good job without watching over their shoulders.	89%	76%
People here are given a lot of responsibility.	90%	70%

### In practice...

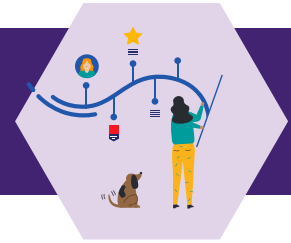
At **Axxes**, consultants in different domains organise several competence centres during the year, in order to share knowledge and expertise with each other. In 2018, Axxes organised the first 'cross-competence conference weekend' (called 'HAXX'). Employees were asked for input and were encouraged to volunteer as speakers. Axxes launched a video to call for speakers, and people could volunteer to share their knowledge about a certain topic (soft skills, personal themes, technical skills, etc.). As about 50 people volunteered to give a presentation, it was a tremendous success!

### Tips & tricks to become even more agile:

1. Move away from the static organisational chart and work towards networks and agile empowered teams linked by a common goal.
2. Self-steering teams have a strong need for a clear framework – therefore, invest in the communication of clear goals and expectations.
3. Create opportunities (such as competence centres, work groups, etc.) where employees can work cross-functionally and cross-departmentally.



# Key Area 3: Continuous learning



More than ever, the recognised organisations realise that nurturing talent is key and that aligning the training and development strategy to the business strategy is the road to success. This leads us to key area #3: namely, continuous learning. Companies realise that a good L&D approach is crucial for their growth and productivity. Investments in creating learning experiences allow employees to build skills easily, quickly, and on their own terms.

The traditional standard vertical career models have been transformed into **personal learning paths**, allowing people to re-invent, re-vitalise and re-skill their work lives. Current learning environments should be specifically tailored to the employee's individual needs – thereby creating a personalised Learning & Development journey.

The data clearly shows that Best Workplaces™ are succeeding in this L&D challenge: 86% of their employees feel that they can develop themselves by means of training and development. Moreover, it's not only the professional training that counts: no less than 60% of the recognised workplaces subsidise non-work-related courses.

	Best	Other
I am offered training or development to further myself professionally.	86%	68%

Continuous learning also means continuously gathering feedback and developing yourself by learning from this input. We notice a shift, from a focus on annual appraisals to an emphasis on **continuous feedback and coaching**. As there is a growing need for real-time, regular and multi-directional feedback, employees and organisations expect continual learning.

## Tips & tricks towards becoming a learning organisation:

1. Create personal learning paths, tailored specifically to individual needs, allowing people to re-invent, re-vitalise and re-skill their work lives.
2. Empower employees to be responsible for their own learning paths – but support this by asking for their development needs and by organising learning opportunities within the company.
3. Stimulate continuous feedback and qualitative dialogue, create a culture where people are aware that receiving feedback is a gift that makes them grow and develop.

## In practice...

At **AE**, the annual evaluation form is a thing of the past. Consultants tell their own personal story through the 'AE Scrapbook'. What did you achieve in the past year? Where do you see yourself in the short/long-term? What are your talents and shortcomings? More specifically, the Scrapbook includes one or more Wiki pages that consultants fill out themselves. Consultants can invite relevant persons, add content and comments. Everything in place to facilitate a qualitative dialogue!

## In practice...

**KBC** launched 'Matching Place' – an initiative that matches the competences and knowledge of employees with specific temporary projects. When the project is finished, employees return to their current function, fully packed with a lot of new experiences and knowledge.

# Key Area 4: Aligned People Strategy



The fourth area that we have identified as a differentiator is the attention given to aligning business with people. Whilst employee autonomy keeps growing, the organisation's **strategic direction** is still considered to be one of management's most important responsibilities. As employees look to their management for this strategic direction, it comes as no surprise that they want to be assured that their management will choose the right path and that they can trust their management's judgement. Best Workplaces™ outperform their peers in this area, as 89% of Best Workplaces™ employees regard their management as competent at running the business. In addition to competencies, having a clear view of direction is considered to be essential in ensuring that both the business and the employees can grow.



Best Workplaces™ are creating their **people strategy** as an integral part of their strategic business planning process. These organisations shape their plans to meet their workforce needs, knowing that their most important competitive advantage is the ability to attract and retain the right people.

Putting employees at the centre is the most promising competitive advantage that an organisation can create. An outstanding positive **employee experience** has emerged as the new contract between employees and their employer. The most successful HR leaders are able to link people programmes to business results and engage other leaders to achieve those goals.

**People analytics** is a means for making this people-business link by calculating correlations between business KPIs and HR KPIs. By using specific HR metrics (such as employee engagement and absenteeism), and linking them to business metrics (such as revenue or sales), HR analytics can be a systematic way to clearly judge the impact of people on company results and thus integrate people initiatives and business goals.

## In practice...

**MediaMarkt** strives to calculate the impact of their initiatives and investments on various business areas. From a Great Place to Work® to a Great Place to Shop. Every year, a correlation is calculated between the Great Place to Work® survey results and the Customer Delight scores. They also calculate the correlations between Business KPIs and other HR KPIs.

## Tips & tricks to align your people with your business:

1. Make the people strategy an integral part of your strategic business planning process.
2. Put employees at the centre, making them your competitive advantage.
3. Focus on employee experience as the new contract between employees and their employer.
4. Possibly use people analytics to make this people-business link.



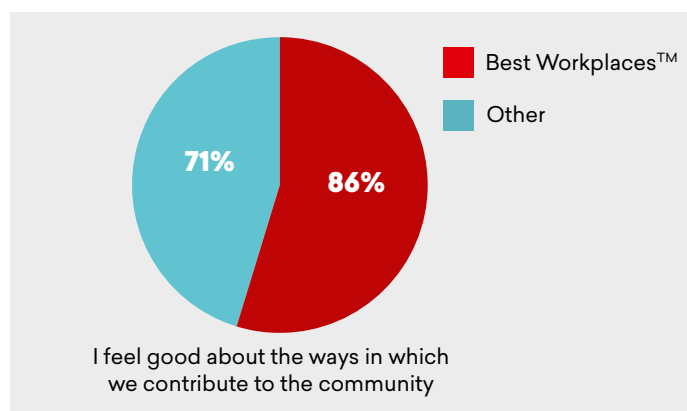


# Key Area 5: Meaningfulness



Our research shows that another area in which great workplaces excel is their increased attention to purpose and meaningfulness. Helping employees understand their purpose within the organisation is part of creating a high-trust, high-performance culture. When focusing on employee experience, the concept of ‘meaningfulness’ emerges. Meaningful work is something we all want, and it’s something that has been continuously recognised as a key driver of employee engagement. Research has discovered that meaningfulness goes beyond the workplace and is more about finding a **connection to humanity** through your job. Again, Best Workplaces™ succeed in making this link: 88% of our Best Workplaces™ employees state that their job has special meaning for them and that they don’t regard it as ‘just a job’.

Finding a connection to humanity through your job implies that everything is connected. Organisations are not only being judged on their financial performance, quality or service, but also on their relationships with the external world. Today, every company is a **‘social enterprise’** that understands that organisations have a responsibility, not only towards their own workforce, but also towards the society at large. Best Workplaces™ play into this trend. Their employees realise (and are proud of) the contributions that the company is making with regard to corporate social responsibility. 86% of the Best Workplaces™ employees feel good about the ways that their organisations contribute to the community.



## In practice...

**Roche's** organisational purpose? ‘Doing now what patients need next.’ With last year’s ‘Beat Our Best’ internal campaign – a theme chosen by the employees – people were asked to write down some of the initiatives they or their team had taken during the past year.

For every initiative, a puzzle piece was secured to a wall. The purpose? Construct the entire puzzle by the end of the year. The perfect way for employees to think from a ‘growth mindset’! Out of all these initiatives, a winning accomplishment was selected.

## Tips & tricks

1. Communicate about your organisational purpose and explain to your employees how their work has meaning.
2. Consider your company as a ‘social enterprise’ with a responsibility, not only towards your own workforce, but also towards the society at large.
3. Communicate the efforts you make to be socially responsible and try to involve your employees in these initiatives as much as possible.

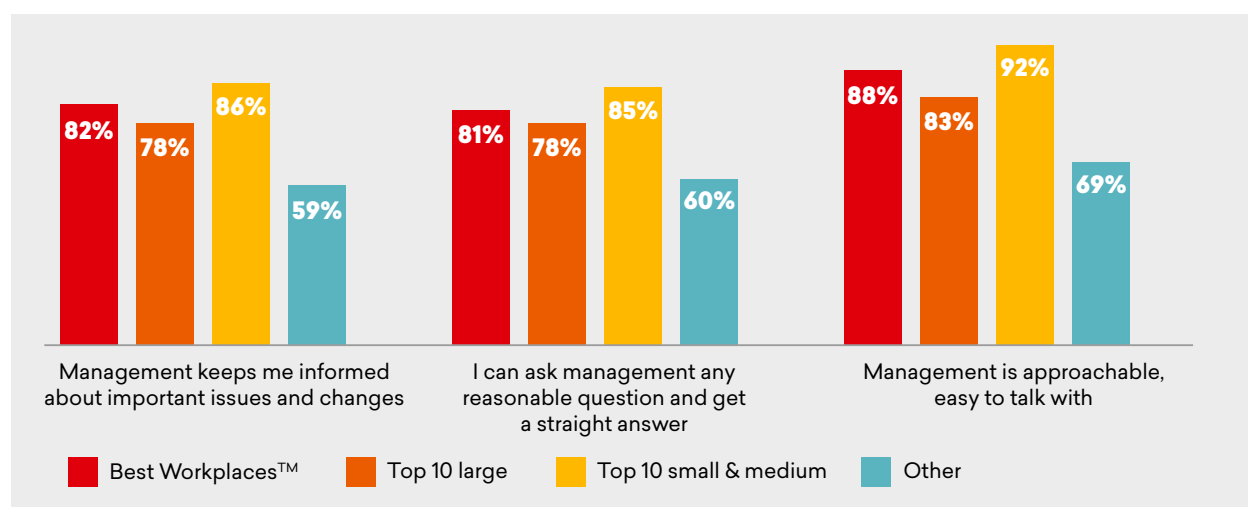


# Key Area 6: Authentic communication



Key area #6 is all about communication. As the idea has emerged that an open culture can be generated by creating an environment of transparency and accountability, more and more organisations believe that authentic communication is the language of **transparent and credible leadership**. When we engage in authentic communication, we move from merely a transactional relationship to real human connection.

When management reaches out to their employees in **formal and informal ways** on a regular basis, the employees feel that their management truly makes an effort to keep them informed. Best Workplaces™ do this much better than the average company: 82% of their employees consider themselves to be well-informed. Within the group of Best Workplaces™, large companies are experiencing more challenges regarding communication and creating an open culture. Creating an open culture is not easy. It's a challenge for all organisations, and even more so for organisations that are spread out geographically. Embracing **real-time technology and digitalisation** can provide an answer to this challenge.



## In practice...

**Torfs** has integrated thoughtful and caring leadership in its mission of 360° thoughtfulness. The company expects its leaders to take care of 3 different stakeholders: in addition to taking care of their team and their customers, leaders must (in the first place) take care of themselves personally. Leadership journeys are constructed in such a way that all 3 priorities are respected.

## Tips & tricks

1. Take responsibility for your communication. You need to have ownership of the message and be responsible for any fall-out or negative response.
2. Listen more than you speak – and make sure that, when you are listening, you are fully attentive and your focus is on the speaker.
3. Authentic communication brings benefits not only to leaders but to employees throughout the organisation. And in addition to creating better relationships, building trust, managing conflict more effectively, and improving team spirit, authenticity helps create happier, more self-confident and open individuals.



# Key Area 7: Employee well-being



The final key area is the focus on employee well-being. Total well-being support isn't a perk, it's a vital performance strategy.

The continuous changes in our workplaces, and the associated demands placed on employees, mean that organisational approaches to fostering high employee well-being are constantly evolving. Employee well-being is a complex blend of the **physical, psychological and social aspects of people's working lives**. When optimised, these dimensions provide a sustainable platform for all employees to flourish both in and outside their workplace. Work affects life in very important ways, and organisations meet their responsibility by taking care of their employees as persons.

While physical health has received attention for years, mental health is finally getting the attention that it deserves. Best Workplaces™ outperform their peers in this area: 83% of Best Workplaces™ employees feel that their organisation is a psychologically and emotionally healthy place to work in, whilst this is true for only 62% of the employees of non-recognised organisations.

	Best	Other
This is a psychologically and emotionally healthy place to work in.	83%	62%

## In practice...

Many organisations in Belgium are having to cope with growing levels of absenteeism, with long-term absenteeism increasing particularly sharply. At **Accent**, substantial efforts are being made to prevent illness due to stress and burnout. From 2017 onwards, the entire HR team and all the managers have been trained to recognise the symptoms of stress and burnout. How do you sense an employee is being overwhelmed by his/her workload? How do you discuss absenteeism with employees? What causes burnout? In addition, Accent also gives its employees the option of participating in workshops on this theme. Every employee is free to participate. The aim of these workshops is to increase the employees' awareness of their own energy levels, so they can avoid taking on more than they can cope with. These programmes strive to strengthen mental resilience.

## Tips & tricks to boost employee well-being:

1. Think of employee well-being in the physical, psychological and social sense.
2. Managers who take care of their own well-being lead by example.
3. Provide a context and a culture that allow people to set their own boundaries
4. Take initiatives to reinforce attention to well-being: from supporting exercise and eating healthily at work, to organising meditation sessions.

# Conclusion

It's clear that Best Workplaces™ excel at adding value to their people practices. Each in its own way, these 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 strong relationships of trust. They show us that it pays off to invest in your culture – because you will be stronger for it in the end.

## Find Out More

Curious about how we can help your organisation create a high-trust culture?

### Contact us!

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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:

