

The Employee Experience Stress Test: Lessons for leaders

Enabling collaboration and agility in a reconfigured workplace



Employee wellbeing took a significant turn for the worse in 2020

In response to the pandemic:



Half of global employees expressed a **moderate to large** degree of **anxiety**, peaking at nearly **60%** in August and September

By year-end, **over a third (36%)** maintained moderate to large financial worry, **down from a high of 51%** in June and July



25% suffered from significant distractions while working from home (particularly driven by caregiving demands).

By year-end, those who felt distracted fell **7%** as schools reopened or they found long-term solutions.



Lesson for leaders:

These effects will be felt for a long time to come.

Employee confidence in their leaders' ability to protect their health and wellbeing wavered during the pandemic

Initial phase of pandemic (March-April 2020)

72% had full confidence in leaders to protect employee health and wellbeing

By end of 2020

Confidence in leaders fell to **57%**

Only **41%** were fully confident their work locations were not a health risk

80% worried about their health and safety from commuting

71% preferred to continue working from home

But there's positive news too!

Employee perception of their company's **interest** in their wellbeing rose slightly

↑5%

Employees reporting their company benefit offerings met their needs jumped

7%



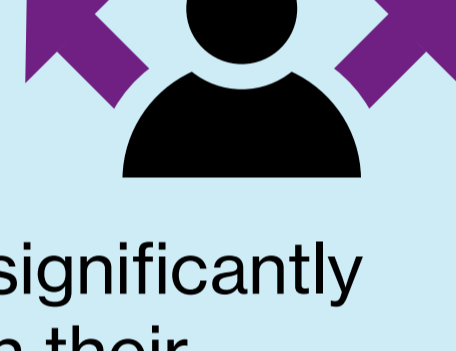
Lesson for leaders:

Wellbeing needs change so it is important to stay connected with employees to adapt the necessary supports.

Developing a strong culture of trust matters

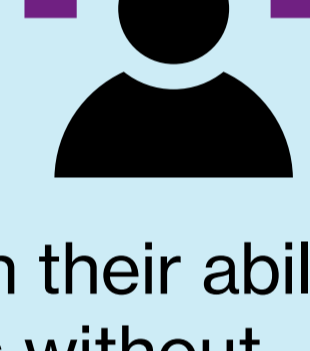
In 2020, employees' felt:

↑16%



Managers were significantly more confident in their decision-making abilities and judgement

↑9%



More confident in their ability to be themselves without worry of how they would be accepted

As organizations reimagined operating models, strong cultures of trust were bolstered as:

↑10%

Silos were broken down leading to increased collaboration across locations and businesses

↑12%

More open and honest communication took place

↑9%

Employers increased focus on actively listening to employee feedback



Lesson for leaders:

This sets a challenge for leadership to maintain levels of trust.

Resilience through challenge has been key – but focus on speed and accelerating performance is lagging



Employee approval of their company's ability to manage change fell sharply (**14%**) to just **43%**



Employees felt their companies were slower to make key decisions (**down 7%**)



Performance focus declined as reviews were seen as less helpful (**down 8%**) with less focus on consistent standards for excellence (**down 8%**)



Lesson for leaders:

Shaping the new world of work and rewards will not be easy.



Call to action for employers:

- 1 Lead the workforce in ways that emphasize empathy, inclusion, and building connection**
Managing through the pandemic requires especially with remote workforces. This leadership skill will remain important at least through 2021.
- 2 Protect employees' wellbeing and build resilience**
Supporting workers and their wellbeing in a world not yet finished with the impacts of the coronavirus is critical to any sustained rebound from the pandemic. If employers hope to mitigate risk to their people and businesses post-pandemic, they will need to be more proactive and supportive than they are today.
- 3 Advance governance and human capital oversight**
Developing key environmental, social and governance-related measures related to people, emphasizing health, workplace safety, psychological safety and corporate sustainability will be critical to the sustained effectiveness of any rebound.
- 4 Reimagine work and Total Rewards**
In many companies, virtual working will remain the norm post pandemic. To do work effectively will mean finding ways to drive agile delivery, reskill talent with needed capabilities and apply automation to streamline existing processes. Equitable Total Rewards will also be critical yet challenging, as budgets remain tight and 2021 business outlook remains uncertain.

Source: The Employee Experience Stress Test: Insights from the world's largest database of employee opinions, Willis Towers Watson, July 2021