

Boosting Workforce Resilience Through Crisis

Marcus Buckingham shared surprising new statistics about employee resilience at HR Tech.

BY NICK OTTO

From a global pandemic to social unrest, how are current events impacting the state of resilience and engagement in the workforce today?

They are all connected, *New York Times* bestselling author and business consultant Marcus Buckingham said in his keynote address on the third day of the virtual HR Technology & Conference Expo.

Buckingham shared for the first time results of two large, global surveys on the state of resilience and engagement in the workplace, which he conducted with his team at the ADP Research Institute.

“[Resilience and engagement] are related, but they are independent of one another,” he noted. “You can be highly resilient and not very engaged. You can be highly engaged and not very resilient.”

To measure resilience, Buckingham and his team came up with a set of core statements, involving views on work freedom, trust in leadership, personal focus and other issues.

“Resilience as a thing is created through, hopefully, a really positive ecosystem of your own understanding of what you can control in your life, what your team leader does for you ... and the role of the senior leader,” he said.

According to the data, 17% of the world’s workforce feels highly resilient.

Interestingly, Buckingham noted, there weren’t any major differences in resilience between gender (16% of men and 14% of women were rated resilient) or age (resilience levels varied from 16% for ages 20-39, 14% for ages 40-54, 12% ages 55-74 and 16% for age 75-plus).

COVID-19 and Resilience

Going into the research, Buckingham said, he thought resilience would vary with the way participants’ respective countries had responded to the pandemic. “So, I thought those countries that had had lower death rates and fewer cases, they would be more resilient. And countries with higher death rates would be less resilient. That didn’t turn out to be true at all.”

According to the study, he noted, citizens in Brazil, the United States and Sweden, where there have been high rates of infection and death due to COVID, reported levels of resilience similar to those countries with much lower numbers of COVID cases, like Australia and Singapore.

“However, what we did find is that the more intimate your experience of COVID was, the more resilient you are,” he said.

Respondents who had been infected, or been associated with a family member, close friend or colleague who had tested positive, were found to be 2.8 times more likely to be resilient. Participants who indicated yes to all of those questions were four times more likely to be highly resilient, he said.

“We humans do better psychologically when we deal with the reality full in the face,” Buckingham said. “We do not need leaders to sugarcoat things for us and pretend things are going to go back to normal.”

With that data in mind, he cautioned business and HR leaders not to rush workplace reopenings.

“We don’t need to rush our employees back to normal because we’re trying to make them feel better; it won’t,” he said.

What makes people feel better is reality, he added. “If we know the changes that are going to happen at work, we’re not only fine, we’re better. We’re stronger.”

PEOPLE SIDE OF DIGITAL

By Jason Averbook / Columnist



10 Ways to Reimagine HR for 2021

People have, quite simply, changed forever. The humanization of work must follow.

This year has poured gas on the digital revolution.

Dramatic world shifts, the prioritized prevalence of the digital workplace and distributed work, and a need to be physically distant with deeper connections than ever to work and each other dramatically accelerated digitization in our personal and professional lives.

It’s the parallel revolution that makes 2020 so significant: The human revolution overlaid these world shifts, making work suddenly, if not refreshingly, more human than ever. The global health pandemic rooted us in communal health, mental wellness, physical safety, psychological resilience and a local and global sense of both shared trauma and newfound community. The social justice pandemic shined new light on historic wounds, forced awareness and conversation, challenged value systems and inspired change. People have, quite simply, changed forever. The humanization of work must follow.

And we’re not even done yet: Employment, global economies, business models, health data, education systems and a pending U.S. political election all remain in wild flux while we valiantly attempt to forge the future. Rather than passively accepting a “to-be-determined new normal,” one that deals itself out to us by chance like a deck of cards as the world morphs and reshapes, what if we thoughtfully and proactively design a better normal

for business? What if we stacked the deck in favor of people?

Approached with optimism, the “now of work” presents incredible opportunities for organizations that establish a people-first mindset; instill a culture that encourages experimentation, innovation, inclusion and growth; and set out to design it with purpose. It’s not only possible, it’s up to us, HR, to set an agenda and lead the reset toward building a better normal.

10 HR Reimaginings for a Better Normal

1. A new model for HR operations, HR technology and employee experience supports whole employee care, bi-directional workplace communication and trust, and a frictionless workforce experience.
2. Old talent management habits make way for new talent stewardship strategies.
3. Talent wars are waged within our own organizations; the business prioritizes reskilling, the development of workforce resilience and intelligent mapping of capabilities and career drivers to the strategic needs of the business.
4. Organizations develop accurate, timely line of sight to the full, extended workforce. Experience, engagement, inclusion and mobility strategies apply to all, regardless of employment status.
5. Workforce experience is designed with a people-first and data-driven mindset.
6. Whole employee care and a truly frictionless workforce experience necessitate a unified digital people vision, the dissolution of HR silos, coordination

of people strategies and better people data than ever before.

7. Static strategies and multiyear roadmaps are replaced with agile, nimble strategies focused on what people and businesses need in the now of work and future-proof investments for an unknown period ahead.

8. Technology is configured, optimized or selected to address spikes and pitfalls and general changes in workforce behavior.

9. Renewed strategies are intentionally prioritized and sequenced to drive maximum business impact by leveraging tangible “measures of success.”

10. HR reimagines budgets and leverages sequencing to set the stage for sustained transformation in 2021.

Whatever crystal ball we relied on prior to 2020 was an illusion at best; we never needed it, we certainly don’t have one now and we’ve learned it was always up to us in the first place: to decide what we want to be, who we want to be as an organization, how we will operate and why it matters to our people and to broader society.

Jason Averbook is a leading analyst, thought leader and consultant in the area of HR, the future of work and the impact technology can have on that future. He is the co-founder and CEO of Leapgen, a global consultancy helping organizations shape their future workplace. Send questions or comments to hreletters@lrp.com.