

Views From The Top: Why is Singapore's employee engagement below-average? What can employers do?

THIS WEEK'S TOPIC: Why do you think the level of employee engagement in Singapore is below-average, compared to other countries? How might an employer spark enthusiasm and boost the sense of commitment in staff?

The Business Times



Ho Yat-Wai, Singapore Country Manager, American Express

Rosalynn Tay, CEO, Dentsu Aegis Network Singapore

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Ho Yat-Wai
Singapore Country Manager
American Express

At American Express, we boost employee engagement by providing:

- 1) varied career development and learning experiences,
- 2) clear vision from leaders,
- 3) healthy work-life balance,
- 4) a generous rewards and recognition programme, and
- 5) the supporting internal processes and organisational structures to enable our employees' success.

More importantly, we ask for employees' feedback on these factors and tailor our strategies and practices based on what's most important to them. Taking this approach has helped our employees stay engaged so they go the extra mile knowing that we have their backs.

American Express in Singapore has participated in the Aon Best Employer study for many years, and we are proud to have been recognised five times as a Best Employer in Singapore. In 2017, our employee engagement index surpassed the regional average and the region's highest country average.

Rosalynn Tay
CEO
Dentsu Aegis Network Singapore

WAKE up and smell the coffee - how else can we expect to drive the next 50 years if not through building culture and engagement?

To chart the future of engagement, Singaporeans will need more self-awareness and self-drive. Effective communication is a critical tool that builds shared goals and the spirit of collaboration is an essential value which can help to establish trust. Embracing diversity and championing inclusivity will allow a greater sense of belonging which enhances our unity in purpose.

Most of all, we should be agile in our responses, flexible and have fun! Results will then naturally follow.

Pierre Fallion
MD, Asia (ex-Japan)
Spring Professional

IMBUING a sense of purpose that goes beyond monetary gains is key to building a culture of commitment among employees. Business leaders need to understand the diverse motivations of their people in order to create inclusive cultures that can drive commitment and productivity across the board.

This can be done through involving managers to define individual team cultures, which allow for more personal touches as well as flexibility to create supportive environments that drive employees on a daily basis.

Apart from establishing culture, business leaders should also set precedence and lead by example. Through embodying the values they are advocating - be it commitment, productivity or work-life balance - they should serve as champions of engagement, and this will inevitably have a trickle-down effect to their teams.

John Bittleston
Founder & Chair
Terrific Mentors International Pte Ltd

I THINK that employer engagement is lacking as much as employee engagement. We have known for many years that engagement is achieved only when there is interest. Interest is displayed when the right sort of questions are asked. Employees do not instinctively engage unless the model for doing so is displayed by their boss.

The first 30 or so years of building modern Singapore demanded strict discipline. Even today, discipline is an essential feature of a well-ordered society. However, with modern communications, greater flexibility of jobs and higher education, employees can expect more from their jobs than just a wage.

Employers have to provide that.

Max Loh
EY Asean and Singapore Managing Partner
Ernst & Young LLP

SINGAPORE has one of the highest costs of living and longest working hours in the world. With companies focusing on productivity and transformation to drive bottom-line growth, it is too easy to prioritise tasks and results over employee aspirations and supporting them in navigating change.

Nourishing the “corporate soul” is important and having a strong organisational purpose - why the company exists - makes a difference. Purpose creates an intrinsic sense of meaning and motivation as employees see how their daily work is part of something greater.

Keeping purpose at the centre of decision-making, clarifying desired business outcomes and constantly delivering on quality work will help employees understand the longer-term context of what they are contributing and spark enthusiasm and commitment.

Sheena Chin
Country Director, Singapore
Veritas

IT is not surprising that career opportunities top the list of factors that could perk up Singapore employees, given that pragmatism rules. For employees to stay invested and engaged, organisations should recognise their contributions and reward them accordingly.

It is also important for companies to address the issue where employees feel that they are not given the right opportunities to learn and grow, which could be a case of genuine skill-mismatch or unmet inspirations.

Having regular conversations with employees to help them understand how they contribute to the company’s performance; equipping them with the digital or “future-proof” skills to stay relevant in the workplace; and celebrating success as a team, are positive factors that will win the minds and hearts of employees and motivate them to go the extra mile.

Ray Ferguson
Founder & Managing Partner
Caber Partners Pte Ltd

I OFTEN hear two ends of the spectrum: Singaporeans are mindless robots versus Singaporean employees are among the most intelligent and hardworking workers there are.

Are they engaged? Depends where they are on the career rung. I have yet to find an engaged administrative clerk who finds joyful meaning in printing 100 copies of meeting minutes or bringing coffee, be it in NY, Manila or Singapore.

Further up the rungs where they have control over their career, finances, personal life and time, there I have found some very engaged employees.

People across the world are engaged when they have no other choice (punishment) or because being engaged has meaning for them (reward and personal growth). However, creative and innovative employees in Singapore... well, that's another Views topic.

Chris J Reed
Global CEO and Founder
The Dark Art of Marketing and Black Marketing

PEOPLE work for people. There are only a few charismatic leaders in companies whom people want to work for. Where are the Elon Musks and Richard Bransons developing their personal and employer branding to attract talent?

Singaporeans want work-life balance, not to be judged by what time they get to work and what they wear.

I employ 25 millennial women and attract talent through my own personal branding (The only CEO with a Mohawk!) and by offering flexible working and co-working. My team is attracted by being trusted and empowered to work where they want when they want. I don't care what hours they work as long as the work gets done. My team loves that I trust them and they take responsibility as a result.

Trust your staff and more will be engaged. Simple.

Paul Henaghan
Vice-President, Data Centre Solutions, APJ
Dell EMC

IN my experience, a culture of equal opportunities and collaboration, fuelled by an enabling infrastructure and a healthy work-life balance, forms the cornerstone of an engaged and committed workforce that ultimately drives business results.

At Dell, initiatives such as Connected Workplace enable greater work flexibility while our Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) such as Women in Action (WiA), Planet and Pride, create platforms for networking, leadership development and community volunteer opportunities among employees.

Our consistently high employee opinion scores (eNPS) are a clear indication of how employee-oriented practices yield higher engagement and in turn higher employee satisfaction.

To keep employees engaged, organisations must continue to innovate practices that ensure employees feel valued and can meaningfully contribute to the success of the business while making a positive impact on the communities in which they live.

Andrew McGlinchey
Senior Director, Asia-Pacific
Indeed

EMPLOYEES today want to be in roles that are both impactful and rewarding. There are many ways that business leaders can help to engage employees on that level, including creating opportunities to learn, and allowing for exposure to global approaches and trends.

At the core of it all is the innate human desire for a sense of purpose. Since we spend most of our waking hours at work, it makes sense that employees want to feel inspired by their company's core mission and be a part of something meaningful.

Purpose-driven employees are more likely to come to work feeling enthusiastic and motivated to do their best work and advance business goals.

Chris Burton
MD, Singapore and Malaysia
Vistra Group

THE availability of numerous job opportunities within a small jurisdiction, relative affluence, and the propensity of younger employees to stay with parents, reduce the inconvenience and risk of changing jobs.

But, also, Singapore, in general, is a highly efficient, modern city governed with the people at heart. Expectations of organisations are very high and tolerance of dysfunction is low. Many organisations are not perfect, and may not meet the high expectations of local employees who aspire to better. But the grass is not always greener.

Organisations need to improve their technology framework to improve the overall quality of work. Accept that people need work-life balance, and are not prepared to stay back late, night after night.

They need to invest in employees and create clear development paths. They should have transparent remuneration arrangements that allow “no surprise” bonus payouts. Finally, they need to create a fun physical environment in the workplace, to provide areas for relaxation, breakout space – and plenty of room in the pantry for lunch.

These factors will help retain staff to some extent – but turnover will always be higher than average in Singapore.

Ricardo Pesce
Managing Director
Embraer Asia-Pacific

THE lower level of employee engagement in Singapore relative to the neighbouring countries may be because Singaporeans have higher expectations in general, be it of the company or of themselves. Singaporeans may have a stronger desire to be more involved in a company's decision-making. It does not necessarily mean that they are not as committed or are less productive, less efficient or innovative compared to other Asians.

Employees must understand their company's vision and strategies and how each of their own activities contributes to the firm's goals and success. Opportunities for employees to maximise their strength, to learn, develop and grow within the company as well as believing in the value the company brings to the public provide an intrinsic motivation and pride. These – along with a trusting, friendly and balanced work culture – will harness employees' enthusiasm and commitment.

It may sound like a lot for a company to do but at the end of the day, it is the people that makes the company. In Embraer, we strongly believe in this and that's why the first of our six values is "Our people are what make us fly".

Alena Rossini
Managing Director, Asia
Engine Group Asia

I'M not at all surprised by the results – they are reflective of the cultural context. In societies which are "individualistic" (such as Singapore), it is often more difficult for employers to find effective ways to engage staff compared to cultures anchored around "collective good" (for example, Indonesia or the Philippines).

In Singapore, employees mostly focus on career opportunities and work-life balance, and for organisations to engage their staff successfully, they need to create an environment which motivates them to behave in a self-driven and self-sustaining way, where their personal and professional goals are fully aligned with the business.

That's very different to, say, the Philippines, where bringing people together and aligning them to common goals will resonate much more. Whatever the context or culture, the first and most important steps are for employers to listen and shape initiatives in collaboration with their staff.

Martin Mackay
President and General Manager for Asia Pacific & Japan
CA Technologies

IMPROVING employee experience goes beyond providing material perks. Equally, if not more important, is shared purpose, as well as an environment that actively encourages participation and contribution towards the growth and success of the organisation.

At CA, our mission is to remove the barriers between ideas and outcomes. We have DNA principles that remind all of us how we operate and what we value, such as being creative and agile, socially aware and authentic. It also helps that we give our employees a sense of pride that they are working at a company that has been recognised as one of the world's most ethical three years in a row.

We have initiatives like the Leadership Development Programmes to groom future leaders, CA Accelerator to encourage innovation, and multiple CA Communities to support and help them get involved in CA's growth and success. We see our culture as a differentiator; people create the culture.

Our focus is to create a sustained memorable employee experience through authentic communication and adherence to our DNA. As leaders we must listen, explain the reasons behind decisions and ensure that all employees understand their relevance to the bigger picture.

Dileep Nair
Independent Director
Thakral Corporation Limited

EVERYONE knows it's people who create value in a business. Most also agree that an engaged staff is more productive and happier. To establish a culture of employee engagement requires effort and must begin from the top.

However, in many organisations, particularly SMEs, there is a mismatch between words and action. Employee engagement is left to middle management or to HR. Given that SMEs make up 99 per cent of enterprises in Singapore and employ two-thirds of the workforce, the low level of employee engagement here is not surprising.

To be serious, companies need to confront employee disengagement head-on. Company boards should devote attention to ways of raising engagement levels. Employees must be trusted, challenged and their work made more meaningful. It's no use just doing employee engagement surveys and making superficial adjustments. Employers must really believe in their people.

Indeed, if done effectively, employees will go beyond being engaged, but actually, inspired.

Krishna Arani
Senior Vice-President, APAC & ME
Aspect

UNDERSTANDING the expectations and needs of employees is crucial to the operational success of any business. Soon, millennials – the first always-on generation –

will increasingly dominate the workforce. As a digital-first generation, they expect employers to keep pace and digitalise key business processes and day-to-day activities, from recruitment to performance management and training.

Organisations should therefore, invest in technologies and solutions that not only empower their employees but also keep them consistently engaged and motivated, which ultimately contributes to superior customer engagement and improved operational efficiency.

Adam Lyle
Executive Chairman
Padang & Co

ENGAGEMENT numbers are an outcome of employee motivation which in turn is a function of – as Daniel Pink writes in *Drive* – autonomy, mastery and purpose the employee accomplishes in his/her daily work. All employees ultimately desire to have a sense of control over their work, want to learn, grow and feel there is purpose in what they do.

Purpose is increasingly important. We need to provide the environment for them to achieve these goals.

Further, as leaders and managers we must provide regular feedback on their progress and ensure all hold one another accountable for commitments which in turn drive the trust and respect that deliver real teamwork, reinforcing engagement. Easy, no, but the benefits speak for themselves.

Bara Pasupathi
CEO
Jetstar Asia

AT Jetstar Asia employee engagement scores are above the national norm at 86 per cent. This has been driven by the overall culture at Jetstar which embraces openness, transparency, mutual respect, fairness for all and a common purpose. Our leadership teams focus on making these aspects of our culture come alive every day and seek out moments that matter to deliver great employee experiences for our people.

As with all companies, career development and growth is important, but not all opportunities may be what people want. By being transparent and letting employees see first-hand what it takes to run our business, we give them the opportunity to calibrate their expectations accordingly.

Singapore employers may want to consider re-assessing their overall company culture as experienced by people and not as written in mission and vision statements. By creating meaningful employee experiences, strong and engaged teams of people will become the basis for any organisational success.

David Hope
President, Asia-Pacific
Workday

As a cloud-based provider of human resources solutions, helping companies understand the factors behind employee engagement is an integral part of what we do.

Over the past year, we have, jointly with our clients and partners in the region, fostered a number of conversations on how technology-led transformation and positive workplace cultures can create meaningfully engaged workforces.

One thing we've seen that really stands out is just how important senior leadership is in enabling engagement and instilling a sense of commitment. Business leaders need to drive change and lead by example to really get the best results. Transformation starts from the top!

Pauline Goh
CEO, Singapore & South-east Asia
CBRE

THERE is definitely a case for enabling infrastructure to boost staff engagement. CBRE undertook a global survey of millennials around the world in 2016 on their aspirations for their career, among other things including their views on leisure and home ownership. The survey was important because millennials represent the next generation of employees for tomorrow's workplaces.

In that survey, close to 70 per cent said they will trade other benefits for a better workspace. When choosing an employer, an overwhelming 78 per cent ranked workplace

quality a top priority. Organisations need to be able to create efficient, sustainable, healthy workspaces where professionals are able to excel.

Even better, if employees are engaged to co-create their workplace community. A workplace community that leverages technology to promote health and wellness, collaboration, learning and development, will increase the productivity of employees and above all improve work experience and strengthen loyalty.

Mayank Parekh
Chief Executive Officer
Institute for Human Resources Ltd

A TRANSFORMATION is taking place in terms of how people view their jobs and where they work. Technology has led to employees expecting more control and empowerment in their work.

Yet, many organisational and HR practices remain entrenched in traditional models. Often employee engagement is seen as synonymous with marketing campaigns - developing an Employee Value Proposition or an employer branding exercise.

Chief executives and human resource leaders should instead take a stronger and more visible lead in driving towards a more engaging and rewarding work experience through progressive HR practices that better align organisation needs to employees' wants.

François Lançon
Senior Vice-President, Oracle Asia-Pacific
Oracle

WITH Singapore at the heart of a competitive regional business landscape, companies here are in a unique position to provide the means and opportunities for employees to leverage technology to embrace digital transformation – whether through exploring different job roles or flexible working hours.

At Oracle, we believe the workplace of tomorrow is truly digital and the level of employee engagement is impacted by the right technology and social capabilities. For our newly launched Oracle Digital Hub in Singapore, we invested in collaborative self-service tools and leveraged design thinking to craft an integrated and differentiated employee experience.

Technology, integrating artificial intelligence and machine learning, will redefine the future of work, reducing repetitive processes.

Vipin Kalra
Chief Executive Officer
BankBazaar International

I BELIEVE engagement is lower in mature markets such as Singapore because employees, especially millennials, who make up a large part of the workforce, are driven by different aspirations and have higher expectations from their employers. In addition to monetary rewards, employees are increasingly seeking career development and personal growth opportunities, an area many employers overlook.

To boost commitment, companies need to identify what motivates their employees, and align personal and organisation goals for mutual benefit. At BankBazaar, we work with employees to match their job roles and skill sets, while also providing avenues to further develop these skills. In addition, we have multiple feedback cycles to ensure continuous two-way communication.

Foo Mao Gen
Head of South-east Asia
Qualtrics

A RECENT study we conducted shows that nearly a quarter of Singaporeans are stressed because of work. In addition, 15% are looking to leave their current jobs within the next two years. These have definitely raised concerns for organisations on how to improve employee experiences (EX) across the entire employee lifecycle.

To make significant and real-time change in your EX, some tips for organisations include ensuring your EX programme is personal to your organisation and aligned to business outcomes; allowing multiple feedback channels through digital open doors; and lastly, turning employees' feedback into actionable insights.

Wilfred Blackburn
Chief executive Officer
Prudential Singapore

COMMITTED employees know what they're working towards and that they can make a real difference in their organisation. Having a clear organisational purpose is crucial to rallying colleagues around a common cause, and ensures everyone knows they have a part to play in the company's success.

Employees also want to be supported in their career development. Our training and development courses are designed to prepare our people for the fast-moving digital economy, while our internal mobility programmes give those who are willing to learn new skills the opportunity to take on new roles.

Last year, 10 per cent of our workforce took up this challenge.

Tony Lombardo
CEO Asia
Lendlease

CREATING employee engagement requires establishing personal connection with staff, understanding what motivates them and providing a conducive environment for each individual to thrive and excel.

At Lendlease, we believe in creating places that support our employees' needs, priorities and lifestyles.

We implemented a culture of care to encourage managers to have regular quality conversations with their staff to enhance understanding so that they can provide meaningful work linked to the broader purpose desired by the employees, or even provide flexibility empowering employees to better manage work and life demands.

Ultimately, it is increasingly important to have greater customisation of the employee experience, instead of a one-size-fits-all approach.

Rathakrishnan Govind
CEO, LSBF Global
London School of Business and Finance

THE countries that have higher engagement levels are also typically those with higher unemployment. It is quite logical that an employee who toiled to get a job is likely to be more loyal and motivated at the job than someone in Singapore who can find a job more easily, or who has more options.

Secondly, Singapore's business climate, with its fast pace, is like that of any other big vibrant city, with little room for work-life balance – which gives rise to fatigue and disengagement at work.

Senior management and boards need to have brave pro-employee agendas to actively meet this area of concern, and not just focus on business profitability. Staff retention ultimately means less cost and more profit for the business!

Emma Thompson
Managing Partner
Spurwing Communications

LEADING an organisation specialising in internal communications here in Singapore, I've come across many statistics on the importance of engaged employees. It is often cited, that companies with engaged employees can outperform those without by over 200 per cent.

At Spurwing, we tell our clients that employees crave transparency. They want to understand why business decisions are being made, know what motivates their leaders and feel being part of where their organisation is going in the future.

We help business directors to tell their stories and promote their businesses' positive contribution to their most important stakeholders – their employees.

Arleen Paulino
Vice-President of Singapore Site Operations
Amgen Singapore Manufacturing

MANY different factors can lead to stagnant levels of employee engagement. Common challenges include a lack of a clear employee development plan, disjointed decision making and a lack of communication. Companies need to better understand what drives their employees, and what specifically is demotivating them from doing their best work.

As a biotech pioneer, Amgen continually invests in the growth of our talents, maximising their potential both personally and professionally by providing opportunities, resources, training and rewards of a global enterprise.

Along with complementary work policies, our upcoming NextGen Workplace in Singapore is designed to empower a future-ready workforce with highly flexible work options that enhance our productivity, encourages collaboration on-the-go, drives better decision making and how we connect with each other. The end result is a more productive workforce and a vibrant work culture.

Reginald Peacock
CEO, Singapore Branch
Zurich Insurance Company Ltd

SENSE of achievement is very important to Singaporeans, as well as having strong family values and relationships. Singaporeans want to do well at work, and at the same time have good work-life balance.

Singaporean employees look for leadership that is accessible – one they believe in and can trust.

Above all, employees want to feel they are being listened to, and leaders need to be transparent when driving change to ensure that employees are motivated and engaged. Communicating a clear direction for the business and for every role, regular reward and recognition opportunities and achievable development paths is a must.

Above all employers need to instil a culture where people can make a visible impact in their role and this achievement should promote passion in people's jobs.

Foo See Yang
Managing Director and Country Head, Singapore
Kelly Services

BASED on PERSOLKELLY's 2018 APAC Workforce Insights, the Singapore workforce places great value on flexibility. This is especially true of Gen Z workers here, who are increasingly looking towards contract-based roles for varied and interesting work, a greater sense of agency in their careers, and the opportunity to connect with new

people. They are also more likely to seek instant recognition, instant feedback, and an instant work-life balance.

As the influx of Gen Z employees grows, employers must continue to evolve to meet Gen Z's immediate needs and aspirations. Employers who are able to champion these values as a core part of their employee value proposition can expect greater employee attraction, retention, well-being, and engagement.

Eylon Cohen
Vice-President and General Manager, Asia Pacific – Enterprise and Education
Kaltura

EMPLOYEEES feel most engaged when they feel empowered to do their best work. However, enterprises often fail to recognise the link between employee engagement and workspaces customised to meet the needs of today's digital-first workforce, an issue highly pronounced in Singapore where most firms are in the early stages of their digital transformation journey.

With digital natives from Generation Y and Z entering the workforce, this means empowering employees with access to the same calibre of technologies they use in their consumer lives. Companies could look at integrating communication and collaboration tools that incorporate video and other forms of multimedia - tools that have proven to improve employee engagement in the same way that similar technologies improve consumer engagement.

Pierre Veyres
Regional Head for South-east Asia and CEO, Singapore
BNP Paribas

THE key to boosting employee engagement is understanding what makes them tick and measuring where we stand in these areas to create a framework for positive change.

At BNP Paribas, we have regular dialogue with our staff as well as our annual people survey. From that feedback, it is clear that sustainable engagement goes beyond professional engagement. We act at two levels: at an individual level thanks to development programmes and internal mobility facilitation, and at a bank-wide level, role modelling and staff welfare are key.

Meanwhile respect, diversity and giving back to the community have become important drivers of engagement levels.

Jean-Michel Dumont
Chairman
Ruder Finn Asia-Pacific

THE success of any company is directly linked to the success and drive of its employees. To better compete, a company must continuously assess the way it creates opportunities for employees to collaborate and innovate for growth.

As a communication consultancy, we believe that driving staff engagement calls for, at its core, aligning employees behind a common purpose, setting a clear and inspirational direction.

The company then needs to focus on cultivating a work experience that is as engaging, dynamic, and fulfilling as their personal lives, through a combination of traditional employee communications, digital strategy and internal customer experience, focusing on two key points: employee connection and engagement. Easier said than done, but certainly worth the effort!

Bill Lewis
Co-Founder
Temasys Communications

SINGAPORE had (and is still seen as having) a pervasive patriarchal, authority-driven management culture, particularly among the indigenous management group (whether government, GLC, or private sector). This culture is not conducive to engagement.

To have engagement you require an employee and leadership mindset that has been steeped in questioning, collaboration, challenge – which is (allegedly) the anathema to the traditional education and management approach in Singapore.

If you bring young people out of an authoritative system that demands obedience and acquiescence, and does not foster personal responsible participation, self direction, and challenge, do not expect them to suddenly change in the workplace and become participative and engaged.

If you have a new generation with fundamentally different values than earlier generations, the challenge is even greater. Sparking enthusiasm and boosting commitment is down to the inherent culture of the organisation – changing culture first requires you to recognise that something is wrong. And that "wrong" is generally ingrained in the management hierarchy.

Maren Schweizer
Director
Schweizer World Pte Ltd

THE fish stinks from the head. Executives account for employee engagement and commitment. Here are the keys to raising employee engagement and motivation.

1. Focus on a win-win : I believe in the importance of working for a company that also benefits your private life.
 2. Refrain from traditional organisational hierarchy: Engage dynamic two-way flows of power and authority based on knowledge, trust, credibility and a focus on results, driven by excellence, enabled by interconnected people and technology.
 3. Connect with employees: Become deeply aware of and truly mindful about the scope and reach of interconnected markets and flows of information. Understand how and why people are connecting, talking, sharing information. Be prepared to listen deeply, be responsible, be accountable and be transparent.
 4. Be a role model for change: Become more aware of the changing nature of work, and the traditional structures of authority. Develop a clear understanding of how to be both empowered and valuable and of service. Understand how to navigate through a constantly shifting landscape of work.
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Andrew Chan
Founder & CEO
ACI HR Solutions

IN Singapore's work-centric culture, it is common for companies to prioritise sales figures over employee engagement. Employers are focused on what employees have to give instead of how they can be trained and developed to be better. Unfortunately, opportunities for growth and honing one's skills are lacking in today's work culture.

Employers should implement new approaches to encourage employee engagement and better work-life balance. One way to do this would be to build relationships beyond a transactional leadership approach. It is a shared responsibility, and a good employer should take time to understand what motivates his/her staff.

Jayajyoti Sengupta
Asia-Pacific Head
Cognizant

TO keep up with employees' shifting motivational forces and spark stronger levels of engagement, business leaders need to encourage open conversation and transparency to uncover what truly matters to employees.

The key is for employers to regularly review and redefine internal programmes such as compensation, benefits, rewards, performance measurement and career development. This will ensure that employees meet their desired career goals and receive the recognition they deserve.

At Cognizant, what has worked for us is creating an entrepreneurial culture that gives associates freedom to push the envelope and develop innovative ways to better meet customer needs – thus inspiring responsibility, commitment, knowledge sharing and excellence at all levels.

Bertrand Saillet
General Manager, Asia
FCM Travel Solutions

IN order to keep employees motivated and committed, business leaders need to inspire a culture of innovation and openness. Employees want to advance in their company and having opportunities for both personal and professional growth will help to spark the enthusiasm.

Meeting employees' needs in terms of compensation and benefits is crucial but might not be enough. With the current changes in technology and a buoyant economy, employees are looking for opportunities to learn and upskill. Managers need to become the 'career coaches' and engage in an open dialogue with their colleagues. This will help identify their expectations, outline desired career goals and recognise possible skill gaps that could be solved through adequate training.

Lim Teck Yong
Head of Regional Operations and People Team
Shopee

THE priorities of the new workforce are changing but companies are not evolving fast enough to address these shifts. Millennials will make up more than 70 per cent of the global workforce by 2020 and they prioritise personal growth, preferring purpose over paycheques.

Employees want to see growth in both their career and personal development, and as employers, we should provide them with the necessary resources to help them achieve this.

At Shopee, about 90 per cent of our employees are millennials, and we support their growth and development through our Shopee Academy programme, which offers general training workshops to all employees at beginner and intermediate levels.

We also run more advanced regional leadership training courses where we bring leaders from all markets together for leadership modules and team-building.

Jayaprakash Jagateesan
Chief Executive Officer
RHT Holdings Pte Ltd

ACROSS all sectors and industries, businesses are experiencing disruption in the form of new ideas, technologies and creative services in a rapid and unprecedented manner, resulting in increasing demands on employees.

To address this, we believe businesses need to constantly evolve and embrace new opportunities together with employees by inculcating a sense of ownership and empowering them to drive positive change. Investing in coaching and career development will help further motivate employees and enable them to see how their contributions will help the company succeed.

Existing people strategies need to be updated to reflect the rapid pace of change and achieve sustainable growth in talent.

Chris Foster
Regional President
Y&R Asia

IT'S not my experience that Singapore employees are any less engaged than those in other Asian countries. When it comes to employee engagement however, the onus must lie with the employer. In my experience, it is all about culture. Getting buy-in from the team requires strong, transparent leadership, with purpose and drive, and hiring based on personality, rather than academic credentials alone.

Ultimately, making sure that each member of the team is the right "fit" for your organisation, while cultivating a culture which rewards achievements from the top-down, is the best way to engineer a situation where employees feel valued and engaged.

Frankie Chia
Managing Partner
BDO LLP

TO increase staff engagement and job enthusiasm, leaders should cultivate an environment which challenges staff potential and appreciates innovative efforts to reach or exceed that potential. Failures should be viewed as an investment into the innovation process to encourage staff to challenge themselves to be better.

Long hours do not always equal more productivity; leaders must strike a balance to keep staff energised and their work ethic at a high level. With the right engagement from leaders, the staff will be motivated to come to work with the right mindset of organisational and personal development.

Dirk-Peter Van Leeuwen
Senior Vice-President & General Manager
Red Hat Asia-Pacific

THE result from the study came as a surprise to us. We take pride in our employee engagement activities in Singapore and in contrast, every year our employee survey results show a highly active participation of associates.

One of the key reasons for this success is because our employees understand that their engagement results in real actions, and they are aware of their power of influencing the company's direction.

At Red Hat, our culture is built on the open source beliefs of transparency, inclusivity and collaboration. We are an Open Organisation where every employee participates in defining the future of the company.

Helen Ng
Chief Executive Officer
General Storage Company Pte Ltd

THE study findings are a true reflection of the state of employee engagement in the self-storage industry. Performance-linked incentives are one way to boost employee satisfaction but sparking a sense of purpose and commitment among staff requires more than just financial incentives.

Regular team building and bonding activities, such as dinner get-togethers and inter-company sports matches, go a long way towards strengthening employee engagement. To this end, the Self-Storage Association Asia organised our first inter-storage company friendly bowling match in Singapore this year.

Neeta Lachmandas
Executive Director
Institute of Service Excellence
Singapore Management University

WE believe that employee engagement is an important metric that should be closely watched given its potential to shape customer experience and impact customer satisfaction.

An engaged employee tends to be a better brand ambassador for a company. Poor performance in this area could be due to factors including a perceived lack of recognition, issues with job fit, or mismatched expectations. The nature of work has become more ambiguous, complex and multifaceted and that calls for a more sophisticated approach in functions including hiring, training and appraisals.

Besides financial rewards, employees, in particular millennials, may also be looking for more intangible aspects such as meaning and a sense of community.

Daniel Soh
Managing Partner
Leadership Advisory Inc

WHILE definitions may vary, fundamentally, employee engagement is about attracting talent, cultivating commitment, and retention of human capital. Though many business leaders appreciate the importance of having an engaged workforce, they often have limited understanding of how to drive and sustain it.

There is possibly a big disconnect between employers' and employees' views when it comes to staff engagement, resulting in low engagement levels in Singapore. Hence it is tough to expect employees to be engaged when they do not feel informed and listened to.

Greater employee engagement and communication can ultimately lead to lower absenteeism and turnover, and greater efficiency and performance. Fundamentally, it's about giving employees opportunities to voice out work-related matters and communicate their opinions about various aspects of their jobs.

Toby Koh
Group Managing Director
Ademco Security Group

EMPLOYEE engagement is all about getting likeminded talent together who have an emotional attachment to the organisation – a team who believes in the mission and feels excited and happy to collaborate together.

At Ademco, our recruitment criteria are not simply based on skills and experience but a heavy weightage is placed on “fit” – that is, whether we feel that the potential teammate will fit our corporate culture and team attitudes.

Across the seven countries that we operate in, we see the need to continually engage our team and keep everyone aligned. There is no shortcut to employee engagement. It must be methodically planned and executed. And the ultimate goal is that the team feels like family.

Stephen Chow
Co-Founder and CEO
Sense Infosys

IN resource-scarce Singapore, human resource is the main production unit. Time and effort are drivers of revenue. Hence, inadvertently, employees are being “squeezed” to extract maximum economic value.

This mindset is however being force-changed by technology and digitisation. Businesses, as a minimal survival mode, increasingly have to operate in a knowledge-driven landscape. Human resources are now better appreciated as human capital and knowledge workforce.

To best appreciate and “extract value” from the human capital is to engage them through continuous skill upgrade, in-dating, learning and career engagement. In return, the employees will feel valued, be motivated and stay committed to the organisation.

Edwin Khew Teck Fook
President
The Institution of Engineers, Singapore

OUR workforce, especially the millennials, may be driven by different factors and aspirations compared to employees in other Asian countries. For millennials, a greater focus on short-term job gratification and work-life balance may be more important than putting food on the table. These employees also have lesser hesitation in leaving their jobs, possibly due to financial safety nets provided by their families and confidence in finding new employment.

To improve staff commitment, employers need to focus on getting the most important drivers of engagement right: leadership, management, meaningful work and professional growth.

Employers should also not isolate engagement as a separate endeavour but integrate it as a priority into its work culture.

Lee Siang
Chief Executive Officer
Dyslexia Association of Singapore

PASSION results in high engagement. As the Dyslexia Association of Singapore (DAS) is a charity, people join us with strong passion and commitment to the organisation's mission to help children with dyslexia so they mostly show high engagement.

A sense of belonging also contributes to engagement. At DAS, great camaraderie and mutually supportive relationships among colleagues has been cited as a key motivator for achieving results.

Engagement can be further facilitated by providing an environment encouraging work scope expansion, professional enhancement and assuming of leadership roles.

At DAS, this has contributed to achievement being ranked by staff as the most valued aspect of their work.

Lim Soon Hock
Managing Director
PLAN-B ICAG Pte Ltd

SINGAPORE, as a First World country, is economically more successful than most of the other countries surveyed by Aon. We are at almost full employment, so our employees are less hungry and less desperate for jobs.

Unfortunately, this is the price we have to pay for affluence and economic progress. There is always a better job down the road to entice an employee to seek greener pastures to accelerate the attainment of his or her aspiration. The pressure to earn more to afford the higher costs and better standard of living is another cause of job hopping.

One effective way to spark enthusiasm and boost the sense of commitment in employees, as I have learned from companies that I have been involved with, where the average tenure of an employee is at least 15 years, is recognising tenure when rewarding bonuses.

In other words, in the distribution of performance bonuses, based on a matrix of performance rating and years of service, the golden corner with the maximum bonus payout would be employees who score "Excellent" for performance and have the longest years of service.

Beyond loyalty, it is about creating opportunities for the employee to learn, unlearn and relearn, which can only happen when an employee stays long enough with a company.

Dora Hoan
Group CEO
Best World International Ltd

DIFFERENT cultures and environments create different needs among people and hence employee engagement across countries cannot be measured using the same yardsticks.

Due to the high living costs in Singapore, the salary is often not enough for many people. To pursue a higher standard of living, they need to make more money and one way is to go after jobs with higher wages. Singapore's unemployment rate is lower than other countries'. It is relatively easy for people to switch jobs.

To get staff to be committed, they should know the company's vision and goals, and how they fit in, what kind of contribution is required from them, how the vision can be realised, and what rewards await them.

In a nutshell, employers need to get staff involved to give them a sense of belonging and achievement. If their contribution is visible, and recognised with rewards, they will be more enthusiastic.

Incentive-based compensation can be added to financial rewards, to recognise individuals or teams, based on their performance. This will surely motivate them to work with commitment and stay put to reap their harvest.

A good working environment and good corporate culture is just as important.

That is how my company maintains its low staff turnover rate all these years.

Cindy Leong
Founder
Relationship Studio Pte Ltd

AS a personality trainer who does a lot of team bonding, training and lunchtime talks for companies, I have seen business owners telling us – “why bother fixing when it ain't broken?”

Some have the perception that staff engagement is “costly”, with no “actual results”. Others lament the lack of manpower to facilitate these engagement activities, or the low turnout. Thus I see that a lot lies with how the management influences their people and

encourages participation. Many leaders do not empower staff and choose to take a back seat, resigned to a “fate” of having disengaged staff.

Thus, the leadership themselves have to first have the heart for their employees and the x-factor to influence. How many companies spell out their vision, mission and values? How many have monthly “drink with the boss” sessions? How about lunch time talks by experts in various fields? Bulk purchases of festive items? Contests with attractive prizes? Just some activities that are low cost but can be high engagement.

For those who take up the baton to initiate staff engagement, they breed a different kind of staff morale and company culture. Employees look forward to team bonding, are hungry to learn and are happy that the company allows them to take time off work to get enriched, educated and empowered.

Tan Mui Huat
President and CEO, Asia
International SOS

AT International SOS, it helps that everyone in our company sees themselves as being in the job of protecting and saving lives, which is highly meaningful, motivating and creates a sense of common purpose. Coupled with a positive and nurturing work environment, we believe that these are key attributes which help boost commitment levels.

We are involved daily in medical and security crisis situations. Workloads can be heavy and the atmosphere can be intense, so getting the right talent that fits the role and culture is important. As a global organisation, we’ve also been proactively developing our people to reach their highest potential through cross-border and cross-department assignments. We support diversity and flexible work arrangements and also invest heavily in our digital agenda to meet the needs of our clients as well as to enable our employees in their work.

Lynette Seah
Founder & CEO
Alpha7

WHAT would make the employees enthused and committed? Engage with your employees, invest time in getting to know them professionally and personally, help them

reach their career goals. Provide a safe, fun and flexible working environment that will facilitate cross-functional engagement.

Encourage work-life balance.

Terence Mak
CEO and Founder
WhereIsWhere.com

IT all stems from a lack of hunger and “having it all”. Many Singaporeans have already reached the state where they have quite a bit of everything, compared with many other Asians who are still vying for the next important thing they need to have. Singaporeans must want to feel the need for the next mountain to climb before change will happen.

Robin C Lee
Group COO
Bok Seng Group

I BELIEVE the weak level of employee engagement in Singapore may have resulted from our fast-paced lifestyle, competitive nature, high cost of living and technological disruptions that change our working environment. Such distractions would no doubt take some focus off being engaged at work.

To improve on this, employers need to constantly recap their company vision to staff by aligning their action towards that direction. Open and frequent communication to keep staff posted on the latest happenings is a must.

Having clear roles, responsibility and accountability will also greatly improve engagement as many unintended overstepping or unproductive politics can be avoided to create a more harmonious and engaging work place.

Ian Lee
Regional Head, Asia-Pacific
The Adecco Group

A PLAUSIBLE reason for the low engagement level among Singapore employees could be the effect of subdued growth seen in certain sectors such as construction and offshore and marine. Some of it could also be attributed to the fact that growth has not yet fully picked up and permeated to all sectors of the economy when the survey was conducted.

One way to keep employees engaged is to create a corporate purpose that goes beyond profitability to actually doing good for the society and activating this purpose through innovative programmes. The programme would work especially well if it combines several factors that drive employee engagement.

One example of this is an initiative that the Adecco Group runs called Win4Youth that encourages employees to engage in sports activities to raise funds for identified youth-related charities. It successfully sparks enthusiasm and commitment from employees since senior leadership is committed to it, it provides opportunities for personal development and is one way to maintain a healthy work-life balance.

Zaheer K Merchant
Regional Director (Singapore & Europe)
QI Group of Companies

EMPLOYEES today seek not only monetary gains. Their expectations (think work-life balance and such) coupled with distinct career goals in life all add to the element of “engagement”. Lack of career development or training opportunities and poor corporate management add to reduced staff engagement and dissatisfaction. Those with little or no pride in their work are not driven to perform better. Boosting staff enthusiasm and commitment is relatively straightforward.

Create opportunities for employees to take up new challenges and higher-level responsibilities, build a deeper corporate culture. Simpler steps like implementing incentives such as a flexi-hour work schedule, work-from-home schemes and flexi-leave, continuing education and all-round genuine employee-employer relations will work wonders in any organisation. We have found that being there for any employee has remarkable upside.

Ronald Lee
Managing Director
PrimeStaff

THERE are many reasons why employees are disengaged so it is important to go to the root of the issue for each individual.

One major culprit behind disengagement could be that the employee is doing a job he or she does not enjoy. I'm of the view that employees should take ownership of their own job satisfaction and if they are not engaged, they should find something more aligned with their interests. Employers can help by adjusting the employee's portfolio to include responsibilities closer to their interests, where possible.

Ultimately, it's about the fit between the employee and the company culture, and between the employee and his or her job scope. Employer branding and regular corporate social responsibility events are powerful tools that help create a sense of belonging, as well as allow for greater rapport between team members and employer.

That said, one proven way to help lift engagement is to create more opportunities for camaraderie to flourish among co-workers, whether through team-bonding events or other casual team activities. Having a good support system within the workplace is useful in helping employees manage stress, and happier workers are generally more productive.

David Leong
Managing Director
PeopleWorldwide Consulting Pte Ltd

SINGAPORE'S low score in employee engagement does not square with the fact that it is one of the world's richest economies.

Staff engagement may be lower here because Singaporeans are increasingly clamouring for better work-life balance and want a better and healthier work environment with enabling infrastructure and supportive staff welfare.

To spur enthusiasm to better work commitment and dedication, employers should consider improving their skilling and enabling infrastructure so that Singaporeans can move up the skills and career ladder for better self-actualisation.

Annie Yap
CEO
AYP Associates

CLEARLY, disenchantment is plaguing the Singapore workforce. And this threatens to undermine Singapore's competitive edge – productivity. The dawn of the gig economy, the “silver tsunami” and digital transformation have led to an overhaul of our workplace.

As a result, disparate teams and disrupted dialogue are becoming more common, and this cannot simply be overlooked. Employers have to set the right expectations and play to their employees' strengths. Create clarity in work responsibilities and communicate potential career pathways. Connect them to the larger company vision. Rethink “Employee Value Proposition”.

Stephen Wang
Managing Director
Talent Plus, Asia-Pacific

THE level of employee engagement gaps is reflective of and attributable to underlying macroeconomic shifts in the emergence of a younger workforce and “job fit” gaps. Employers should take proactive action to meet this new paradigm by focusing on staff commitment from a “trust in leadership” angle.

For example, how transparent is the organisation about its strategies and is its vision conveyed? Is there purposeful job design to make work meaningful and challenging to meet the employees' personal aspirations? Are the rigours of their roles commensurate with their skills? And finally, is the workplace a positive environment that engenders deep relationships and camaraderie among co-workers?

Rakesh Kumar
CEO
HUMAN-Film

TRADITIONALLY, economies which are dependent on expat talent have seen low employee engagement on account of tougher competitive benchmarks and skill competencies. Singapore as an economy has constant pressure on innovation and smarter work mechanisms.

To spark enthusiasm, the importance of “human” learning (over AI and machines) needs to be heightened. It is also important to highlight the merits of local talent and performance-based rewards which go beyond the fixed salary. Morale and other measures that appeal to the emotion need to be appropriately addressed.

Allen Ang
Group Managing Director
Aldon Technologies Services Group

I BELIEVE it has got to do with the global labour market environment in Singapore. Unemployment is generally low. The workforce is very protected. Work-life balance has been misinterpreted.

Employers should have an effective incentive and penalty system, feedback sessions, well-defined scope of responsibility, and create a conducive working environment.

<https://www.sgsme.sg/resources/views-top-why-singapores-employee-engagement-below-average-what-can-employers-do>