



Impact of
COVID-19 on
Employee
Productivity
and
Engagement
*Survey Results
and Analysis*



SIGRED
SOLUTIONS

Welcome,

We are excited to share with you the findings of our **Global Engagement and Culture Survey** as they relate to the COVID-19 crisis and the upcoming reopening of our businesses. The survey results were obtained from over 100 respondents from 11 sectors across three continents.

Our analysis underscores the rapid and dramatic change in the talent market due to COVID-19. Both employers and talent must now approach hiring and employee retention differently.

What follows are the responses from the COVID-19 portion of Sigred Solutions' **Global Engagement and Culture Survey** along with recommendations for what you can do to keep your current and future employees connected and engaged. We present our findings to help leaders guide their organizations to transform and prosper with these new constraints and opportunities.

We hope that the findings are helpful as you look to recover and thrive in this "new normal."

Stay safe,



Kristi



Mike

About Sigred Solutions

Talent drives company profitability and viability. Yet, attracting, retaining, and developing leadership talent is hard work and requires expertise. Great employers rely on Sigred Solutions to identify, hire, and develop amazing leadership talent.

We take the pain out of your talent management processes by leveraging our unique skillsets and diverse experiences to create pragmatic and effective solutions. Our team have all walked in your shoes – we have run companies, we have led teams, and we have consulted across multiple industries. We know how to find and develop the best talent for you.

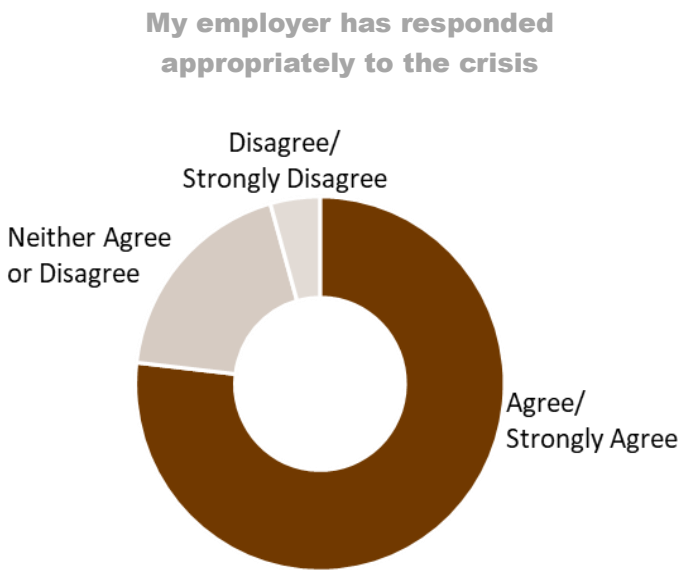
The coronavirus and the global pandemic it caused took everyone by surprise. While most companies have disaster recovery plans, almost no one expected such rapid and dramatic damage to the global economy.

Companies that were on track to have a record-breaking 2020 have been forced to put their recruiting and employee development plans on hold. Other companies have taken the opportunity to actively grow their talent base.

Employees faced other challenges. Many candidates that were considering new jobs became more risk-averse and decided to stay where they are. Others that were happy with their job suddenly found themselves on the market. While we may be dealing with higher unemployment for several years, there will still be strong competition for talent.

It is inevitable that the COVID-19 crisis will have a lasting impact on people and on our approach to work (not to mention our approach to socializing). As people begin to go back to work and companies develop their vision for the “new normal,” it is important for leaders and their employees to have a conversation about expectations. Leaders need to have a high level of empathy for the fears their employees may have and how they impact their performance. Those companies that ask (and listen to) their employees about what is important will have the advantage in hiring and keeping their best employees.

How employers have responded

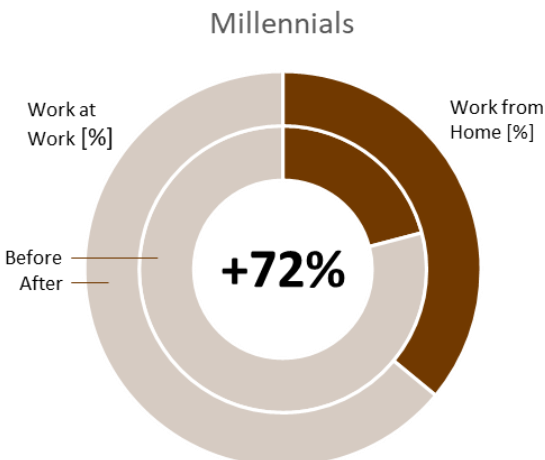
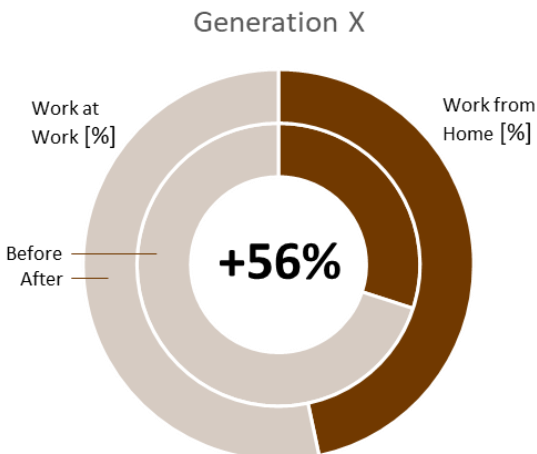
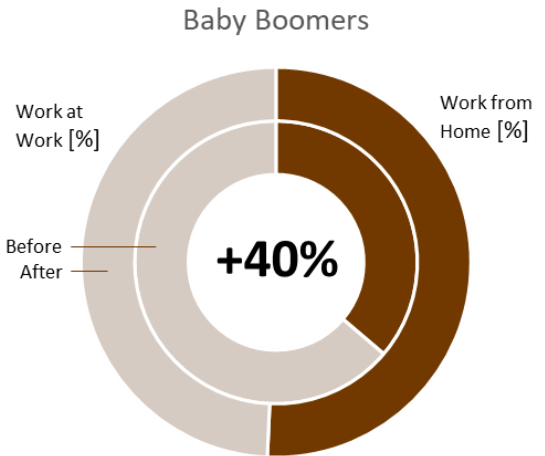


Companies did not have a playbook for this situation. With that in mind, they have done a remarkable job in their response to the crisis.

It was encouraging to see 78 percent of respondents to our survey agree or strongly agree that their employer responded appropriately to the crisis. Only 3 percent disagreed.

The expectations going forward

What percentage of the time do you expect to work from home?



Going forward, most people expect to see a significant increase in the amount of time they spend working from home, but the amount varies by generation.

In recent years, the work from home movement was starting to show signs of reversing, with some companies beginning to bring everyone back onsite. However, in a post COVID-19 world remote work is here to stay.

Baby Boomers and Generation X expect they will be working from home up to 50 percent of the time. Millennials expect to see a 72 percent jump in time spent working from home (to 36 percent).

As stay-at-home restrictions begin to ease, employers need to create policies and procedures to succeed in this new climate.

What's next?

We expect the aftermath of the COVID-19 crisis to force leaders to address several challenges as they develop long-term strategies for their employees:

- Balancing remote work
- Increasing communication
- Managing productivity
- Maintaining engagement

Balancing Remote Work

Social distancing is here to stay – at least for the foreseeable future. Where an open concept office space was able to accommodate 100 employees, tomorrow it may only be large enough for 50.

Companies need to develop plans to maintain safe distances between workers. One approach is to move employees to fixed work from home schedules. A 100-employee workforce could be divided into two 50-person teams that work from home on alternate days (or weeks). This can provide both safety and consistency for employees.

Moving to a sustainable mix of onsite and remote work will require employers to develop a set of policies and procedures that include:

- Workplace safety – incorporating social distancing guidelines in the office, on the shop floor and in gathering locations.
- Technology – ensuring employees have the technology they need to be productive in a remote work environment (including home internet).
- Work-from-Home strategies – ensuring employees have the tools, beyond essential technology, to work from home efficiently and safely.
- Work/Life balance – monitoring to ensure that remote work does not lead to expectations for a 24/7 work environment.

Developing a meaningful work from home policy

Remote work can offer both flexibility and productivity gains. However, managing a geographically dispersed workforce is inherently different from a co-located one and requires special consideration regarding policies and expectations.

It is important to balance these work rules with the fundamental value of trust.

A lack of trust shows up in overly rigid policies that create a disconnect between what the company says about valuing its employees and how it manages their work. This lack of "walking the talk" demotivates remote workers and derails productivity. Employers need to look for ways to empower rather than regulate.

Cheryl Czach – Cheryl Czach Coaching

The home-life situation for your employees is not one-size-fits-all. What works for an empty-nester may not be efficient for a family with two grade-schoolers. Furthermore, not everyone has access to quality broadband at home. It is important to understand the needs and constraints of your staff and to develop policies that can accommodate a wide variety of situations.

“The expectation is to work evenings and weekends to manage our increasing and quickly changing workload, creating an exhausted and stressed workforce.”

What can you do?

Balancing Remote Work

- Set (and communicate) expectations, but be empathetic about individual constraints
- Ask employees what they want/need to be successful
- Be flexible – one size will not fit all
- Coach leaders to develop a sense of trust in and with employees
- Reinvent office environments to better accommodate physical distancing standards

How can we help?

Let us help you understand your employees' remote work needs

Increasing Communication

Communication was a major topic in both the responses to the COVID-19 survey as well as in our **Global Engagement and Culture Survey**.

“Communication has been intermittent and inconsistent, so it is hard to plan.”

“The biggest challenge was conflicting messages between my Governor and the Federal response, and the anxiety that arose about not having a concise direction.”

Especially in times of crisis, clear communication is essential. Lack of communication between federal and local governments and inconsistent communication with the public created uncertainty and insecurity with employers and employees alike.

As a leader, your ability to communicate is critical. When left with incomplete information, it is natural for your employees to assume the worst. Once the rumors start circulating, it is hard to rein them in.

Communication has a strong impact on employees' perception of job security, with 65 percent of respondents stating that more communication from senior management would increase or strongly increase their sense of job security. Further, 85 percent of respondents were interested or very interested in being able to meet with and discuss topics with senior management.

The companies that have been most successful so far have been the ones that are proactive, empathetic and honest in their communications. You might not have

Communicating During a Crisis

Helping employees adjust and adapt to a new “normal” during and after a crisis can be challenging. It requires a commitment to connect consistently with employees, to understand their needs and to share an overarching storyline at the outset. This narrative serves as the foundation for different levels of messaging.

Knowing your employee audience and how to reach them across countries, cultures, business units and functional areas is critical.

You must become comfortable with different communication methods. Face-to-face is the preferred method to connect with employees. However, the COVID-19 crisis makes it important to pivot to methods such as phone calls, video, texting and other social platforms.

Leaders should be communicating a consistent message daily, helping employees refocus on their role in serving customer needs, fulfilling the company's mission and supporting business priorities.

Robert Herta – Herta Communications

all the answers, but you can tell your employees what you do know and what they can expect from you.

What can you do?

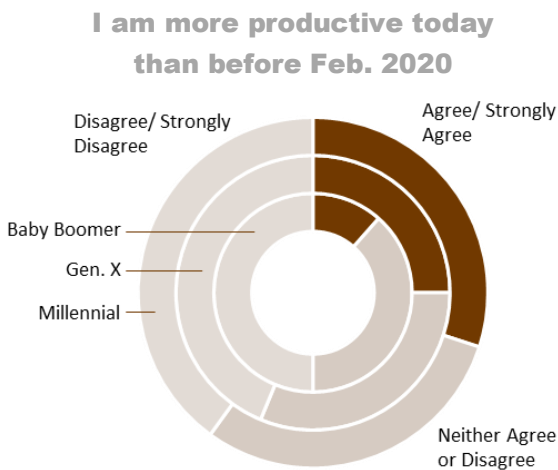
Increasing Communication

- Develop a plan for communicating with employees consistently
- Build an overarching message that connects with employees across your organization
- Listen to employees and discuss their pressing issues
- Show appreciation for the work your employees have completed and share your plans for the future
- Coach leaders to communicate with openness and honesty

How can we help?

Let us help you develop approaches to employee communication

Managing productivity



The responses to the question about productivity were a little surprising. Only 40 percent of the respondents felt less productive today than before the crisis. However, feelings about productivity gains and losses varied significantly by generation. We found 36 percent of millennials agreed or strongly agreed that they were more productive now, with 25 percent of Generation X feeling the same way. Only 14 percent of Baby Boomers feel more productive today (and a full 48

percent feel less productive).

With these results, it is interesting to consider how productive we are feeling as a collective workforce. In less than a week, some stopped work completely. Other organizations transitioned employees to Work-from-Home in a matter of days. Companies on the frontlines continue to work in person. The legacy of COVID-19 is that many of our employees know someone impacted by the disease, which adds additional strain to an already unprecedented situation.

There are reports of stress from all fronts and expectations of future post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)-type symptoms to come. Structure and routine directly influence productivity, so many are feeling this loss every day. Individuals and leaders will need to redefine productivity, and we should all expect to have some stressful days living in “the gray.”

Working from home is not all good or all bad. There is a mixture of pros and cons which make each individual feel more or less productive.

Pros

- No commute
- Flexibility to work “at any time”
- Fewer “workplace” distractions
- Fewer meetings
- Ability to multi-task with household chores

Cons

- Lack of a fixed schedule
- Feeling the need to be “on” 24/7
- More “family” distractions
- Feeling less connected
- Higher expectations from managers

Employees and their managers each have individual definitions of productivity. Most employees have good mid- to long-term ways of measuring productivity, including annual goals and performance objectives.

However, the new situation of working from home is more tightly tied to measuring outcomes in hours. Employees, especially Baby Boomers and Generation X, that are used to assessing their productivity based on the time they spend in the office, no longer have a convenient measuring stick. Managers who gauge their employees' productivity by "face-time" are similarly disoriented.

Without "face-time" at work, outcomes become the key to determining success. Employees and managers need support to define productivity expectations and to find a balance between supportive leadership and micro-management. As with all these changes, two-way communication is important.

Help reduce stress to increase productivity

During times of crisis, our priority should be helping our employees lower their stress level. Stress can cause a lack of focus. When someone lacks focus, their productivity suffers. Two simple methods to lower stress are cultivating **awareness** and **acceptance**.

Awareness is the ability to tune into what is happening in the moment without the filter of the past or anticipation of the future. It allows us to pay attention to what the situation is, not what we are interpreting it to be. Clear communication with employees helps them gain awareness of "what is" and reduces the stress of not knowing.

Acceptance allows us to halt judgment and stop labeling situations as "good or bad." Helping employees accept the situation, while understanding what we are doing to address it can reduce their stress response and allow them to productively engage.

Cheryl Czach – Cheryl Czach Coaching

Leaders and employees should build individual productivity plans that include:

- Weekly deliverables
- Regularly scheduled check-ins
- Expectations for response time (to voice-mail, e-mail, texts, etc.)
- Expectations about flex scheduling
- Commitment to open communication

What can you do?

Managing Productivity

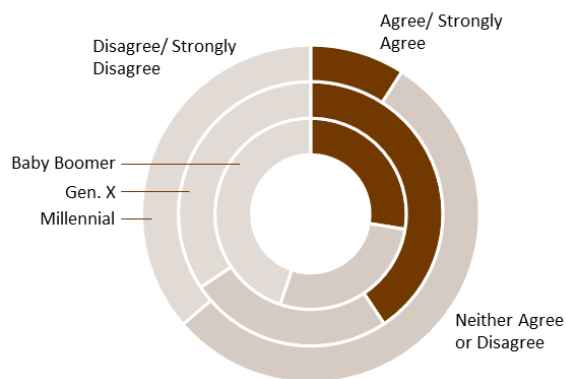
- Create a clear communication plan to help employees reduce stress
- Provide consistent information on the business situation
- Collaboratively develop individual productivity plans, tied to the current opportunities and challenges in your business
- Accept that working from home in a time of crisis creates challenges as well as opportunities for your employees

How can we help?

Let us help develop pragmatic approaches to productivity that work

Maintaining engagement

I am more engaged today than before Feb. 2020



The feeling about engagement varied significantly by generation. We were surprised to see 41 percent of Generation X feel more engaged now than before the crisis, with 34 percent feeling less engaged. Millennials (most of whom are digital natives) have felt the least impact on their engagement. A full 55 percent of millennials report no changes to their engagement level. The biggest impact has been on Baby Boomers with 45 percent reporting that they feel less engaged.

Managing employee engagement will need to be a major focus for companies developing a post COVID-19, more socially distanced workplace. Understanding employee preferences and responding to them will be critical as we move forward.

Many companies measure employee engagement, but struggle to make sustainable improvements in their results. Others don't measure engagement at all. Why bother with surveys if it is hard to make an impact? Especially in times of crisis, investments in employee engagement make a huge difference in your business results.

Leaders have a significant opportunity to unlock discretionary effort by increasing employee satisfaction and engagement. An engaged employee is in a special zone that aligns personal passion with company goals and drives them to produce amazing results.

"I have struggled to keep my team connected and feeling as if their work matters."

Our **Global Engagement and Culture Survey** identified the top three drivers of employee satisfaction that have a direct impact on employee engagement:

1. Feeling that they are having an impact
2. Maintaining work/life balance
3. Feeling a high level of responsibility for what they do

Improving these areas of satisfaction will have a direct effect on engagement and will improve employee retention in a post COVID-19 work environment.

Based on our survey, changes that will most improve these satisfiers include:

- The ability to discuss issues with senior management
- Less micro-managing
- More flexible scheduling

All three of these actions involve increasing the level of trust between managers and employees.

By measuring the engagement of your employees and understanding what is most important to them, you can coach your leaders to make changes that will impact engagement and drive improvements to your bottom line.

As communities around the world relax restrictions and companies adjust to the “new normal” of their workplaces, there is a unique opportunity to unlock engagement. Leaders need to rearticulate the goals and mission of the organization and communicate how the work their employees do ties to the “greater good” in the community.

What can you do?

Maintaining Engagement

- Start to measure employee engagement now – understand what is important and how satisfied your employees are
- Develop a plan to address low levels of engagement
- Coach your leaders on proactive methods to improve engagement
- Implement 2-way communication tools with your employees

How to communicate to increase engagement

Do employees trust the leaders in your organization? Trust is a key driver for employee engagement. Ralph Waldo Emerson said it best, “Your actions speak so loudly, I cannot hear what you are saying.” What mechanisms are in place to listen and keep a steady pulse on your top three employee issues and concerns? Understanding and responding quickly to the items that matter most to employees will help build engagement. Most importantly, aligning leadership actions with the words they say will ultimately create a “trusted” employee experience.

Robert Herta – Herta Communications

How can we help?

We help measure engagement and develop realistic plans to improve it

Where do we go from here?

There are still a lot of unknowns:

- When will the economy start to improve?
- Will there be a “second wave” of COVID-19?
- How long will the economic recovery take?
- How can we restructure our business to keep our employees safe (both physically and mentally)?

Companies are moving beyond the immediate crisis and looking for information to start planning for the future. Our survey has identified common threads that can be used to help develop your post COVID-19 culture and improve employee engagement and retention. These include:

- Empathetic leadership
- Proactive, open and honest communication
- Trust – both in the employees and in the leaders
- Collaborative planning
- Coaching of leaders and employees

Sigred Solutions and our partners who collaborated in this study have decades of experience helping companies and leaders develop plans to improve employee recruiting, retention and engagement.

Let's discuss how best to engage your talent in the post COVID-19 workplace.

“My clients and boards are reaching out more often now, seeking different perspectives, requesting advice, conversations and reviews.”

About the Sigred Solutions Team

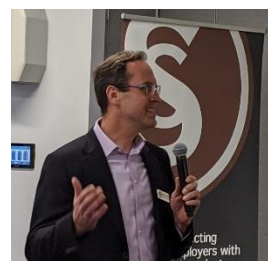
Sigred Solutions is a retained management recruiting and leadership advisory firm. Our mission is to drive the prosperity of great employers by connecting and developing amazing leadership talent.

Attracting, retaining and growing leadership talent is hard. We work with our clients to take the pain out of their talent management processes. Our team have all walked in your shoes – we have run companies, we have hired our own leadership teams, we have consulted across multiple industries. We know how to find and develop the best talent.

Mike Dergis

mike.dergis@sigredsolutions.com

Mike has over 25 years of experience in operational management, executive recruiting, organizational development, and international strategy consulting. Having served in senior management positions in industry and consulting, he has a well-rounded understanding of organizational strategy, recruiting and organizational development.



Mike is passionate about connecting people. He founded Sigred Solutions to help clients increase their profitability by leveraging the team's unique skills and experiences to create pragmatic solutions.

Kristi Stepp

kristi.stepp@sigredsolutions.com

Kristi has over 25 years of experience in human resources across the automotive, healthcare and workforce solutions industries. Her experience includes strategic planning, change management, operational excellence, and team collaboration.



Kristi is passionate about education and learning. In addition to her professional experience leading global learning organizations for Fortune 500 companies, she is board vice president of the Cornerstone Jefferson-Douglass K-8 school board and sits on the board of the historic Pewabic Pottery, both based in Detroit, Michigan.

About our contributors

Cheryl Czach
Cheryl Czach Coaching
cheryl@cherylczachcoaching.com



As a business leader, Cheryl has been guiding professionals through their work and life journeys for over 20 years. Her passion for coaching employees, at all levels of the organization, to reach their personal and professional goals led her found Cheryl Czach Coaching and Consulting, LLC.

Cheryl is passionate about building community. Whether it be hosting networking events to bring people together or her work as board president for a local non-profit, she believes in the power of community to heal, connect, and uplift.

Robert Herta
Herta Communications
robert@hertallc.com



Herta Communications specializes in solving complex business issues through strategic communications and marketing.

Robert Herta is passionate about helping Fortune 500 companies, startups and non-profits grow their customer base, improve bottom line results, and become (or stay) leaders in their respective fields.



sigredsolutions.com

+1.877.421.8902