

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

### **New research highlights the rise of the genuine worker**

**27 August 2020** - Australian workers feel that they're able to bring their real selves to work as a result of COVID-19's impact on organisational culture. This is according to new research launched today by the Australian HR Institute (AHRI).

More than half (51.9%) of the HR professionals surveyed felt that employees were connecting in a more genuine way while almost two thirds (61.8%) said people were sharing more about their personal lives at work.

AHRI CEO Sarah McCann-Bartlett said: "The vast majority of organisations have seen an impact on culture as a result of the COVID-19 crisis. Social isolation and the ongoing uncertainty have had a significant impact on overall morale and employee wellbeing.

"One of the ways that we're seeing organisations manage this is through a greater focus on authenticity. Pets, partners and kids are making cameo appearances on video calls and people are having honest conversations about how they're managing this incredibly challenging situation.

"This is empowering people to remove the barriers between their 'work self' and their 'real self' - allowing them to connect with their colleagues in new and often more meaningful ways. This not only benefits the individual employee, it boosts engagement and productivity."

Emma Montrose, People & Culture Lead at Littlepay has seen a rise in the genuine worker – from the employee level right up to their CEO.

"Earlier this week, our CEO admitted he'd been struggling with homeschooling the kids. So he's replanned his workday to start the morning with a walk, then he does a few hours of work, logs off for a few hours to homeschool the kids, then starts working again in the afternoon. By sharing his story, it sends a really clear message to employees that restructuring your own time is okay – it says 'this is the cultural norm here', she said."

The research also showed that people are more likely to ask for help (46.6%), challenge the status quo (29.3%) and bring up work-related issues (30.9%) than they were before the crisis.

These shifts are indicative of broader change among Australian organisations with 84% of survey respondents saying that the COVID-19 crisis is forcing their organisation to see, think, feel, plan and act differently.

“It’s important that organisations take these learnings into the future. Culture is a crucial element of every organisation, often determining its success or failure. We’ve seen the impact - both good and bad - that the current crisis has had on organisational culture and believe that organisations have an opportunity to embed the transparency and authenticity that have emerged from this crisis for the long-term,” said McCann Bartlett.

She added that this change will be led from the top.

“Leadership style defines the culture of an organisation. Our research showed that the adverse impact of the COVID crisis on an organisation’s culture was directly linked to the empathy and energy displayed by that organisation’s leadership. Leaders therefore need to take responsibility for creating an open, transparent culture that allows people to feel comfortable bringing their real self to work.”

Montrose agrees, highlighting that a big part of ensuring their culture survived COVID-19 was by avoiding what she refers to as "toxic positivity".

"When leaders are honest and share their struggles it sends the message that 'it's okay to not be okay'... that makes people feel genuinely supported and is actually really motivating."

The full ‘COVID-19’s impact on culture’ report is available here.

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**Notes to editors**

The Australian HR Institute surveyed 233 HR and business leaders across all Australian states and territories. Research was undertaken in partnership with Dr Marc Stigter and Sir Cary Cooper.

**About the Australian HR Institute**

The Australian HR Institute (AHRI) is the national association representing human resource and people management professionals with 20,000 members from Australia and across the globe.

