

# HR Leaders Monthly

August 2021

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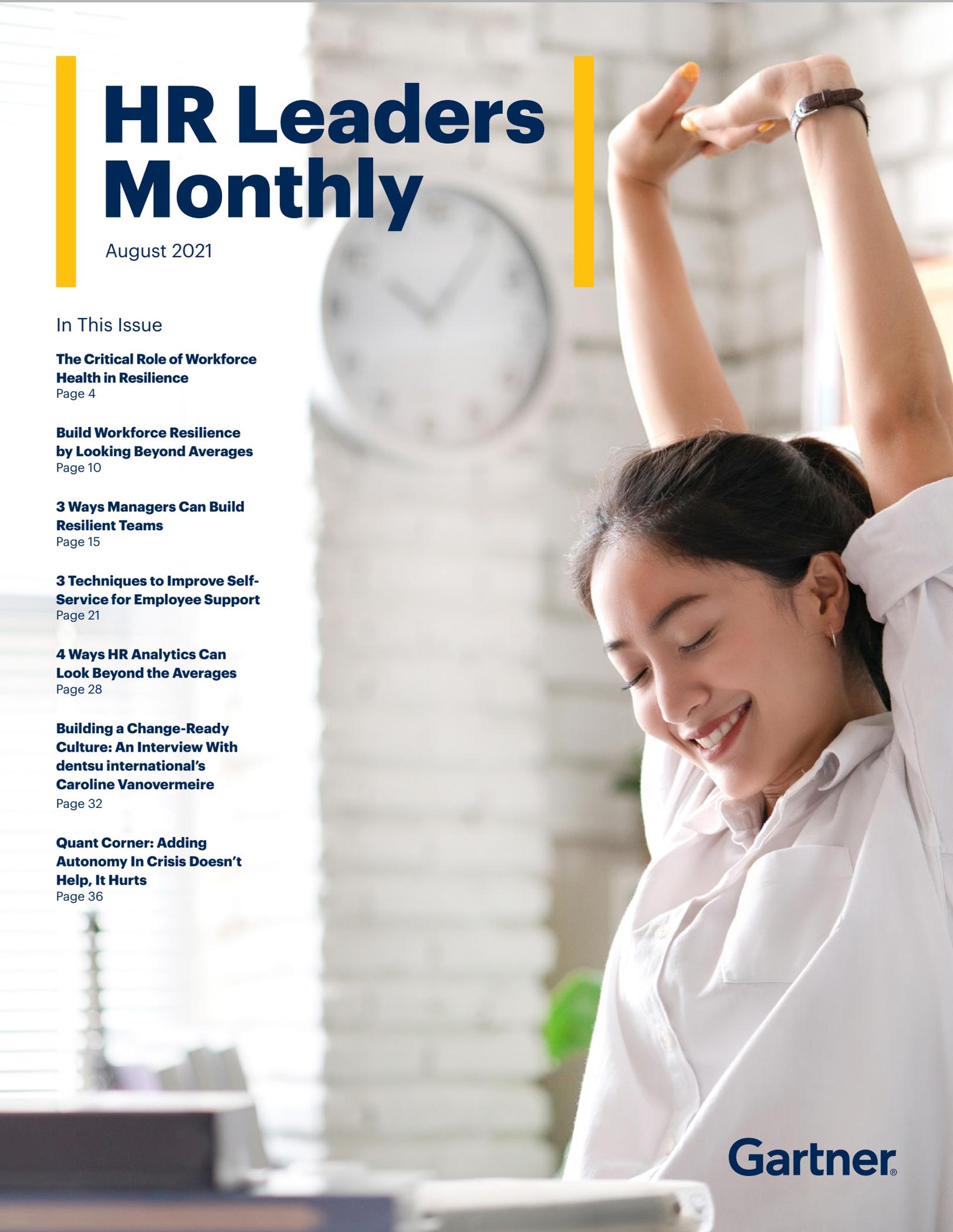
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# HR Leaders Monthly

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# Editor's Note

by Brian Kropp and Lauren Romansky



In 2020, HR leaders were surprised by the resilience the workforce demonstrated in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic and its disruptive effect on the work environment. The sudden shift to remote work did not hurt performance as much as many leaders had feared, and many employees actually excelled in the remote setting. But as the year wore on, we began hearing more and more concerns about employee burnout and new struggles with mental health and work-life balance. We began to suspect that this sustained performance through the disruption was coming at the cost of damage to employees' well-being.

In one of our signature studies this year, we investigated these hidden costs and drew lessons from the pandemic to guide HR leaders in repairing the damage and building workforce resilience for an increasingly hybrid world of work. This issue of HR Leaders Monthly showcases several of our key findings from that study.

In this journal, you will learn how we combined a multitude of indicators to capture a more complete picture of workforce health, revealing insights that traditional measurements might miss. We examine why it is important to look beyond the average employee and address the variety of ways employees experience disruption, as well as highlight the roles of managers and talent analytics in measuring and developing resilience. We also look at some of the innovative new approaches organizations are taking to these challenges.

Resilience is becoming a more critical component of HR's strategic role as organizations navigate the postpandemic recovery and look ahead to the future of work. With a broader understanding of workforce health and a willingness to look beyond the averages, HR leaders can design resilience strategies that strengthen the organization and have a lasting, positive impact on employees' well-being.



# The Critical Role of Workforce Health in Resilience

by Piers Hudson

HR leaders seeking to improve their position coming out of the pandemic, rather than just recovering back to their starting point, need to elevate their view of resilience from just individual well-being to a broader sense of their workforce's health.

## The Productivity-Resilience Paradox

"Resilience" became one of the bywords for 2020 and 2021 as organizations sought to help their employees get through the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic by bolstering their individual resilience. Moreover, senior leadership teams began to consider the resilience of their

organizations overall; for example, the resilience of supply chains or product portfolios.

Eighteen months after the initial impacts of the pandemic, what have HR leaders learned about their workforces' resilience? The first surprising finding in our research was just how sustained employees' productivity has been. In early 2021, our survey found that upward of 86% of respondents believed their workforce's or team's

productivity had either sustained or increased during the pandemic.<sup>1</sup> This was further confirmed in research interviews.

Again and again, we heard the shift to remote or other new ways of working had been “incredibly smooth.” Employees, faced with unprecedented change in their work and home lives, had largely found a way to pull through. Some organizations even said the pandemic provided additional urgency or helped break down organizational silos, leading to improved results.

We briefly questioned whether there was actually a resilience challenge to address. Despite the pride in how adaptable and engaged employees had been, HR leaders were concerned whether the sustained performance was coming at some hidden cost that would be felt later. Furthermore, with limited sense of this potential cost, HR leaders were unsure whether their current efforts to support employees were working.

## Workforce Health: The Key Component of Resilience

These findings led us to delve deeper into what our clients meant when they spoke of resilience. This revealed a myriad of concerns, from employee burnout to employee fatigue with leadership communications. Some worried

their corporate culture was being undermined by remote working; others, that company decisions had eroded employees’ trust in their managers and leaders.

Despite these worries, few HR leaders could yet prove whether they actually had resilience problems in their organizations. While 51% of HR leaders said they could tell which parts of their workforce were resilient, only 14% said they had a method to measure resilience across the organization.<sup>2</sup>

We found that HR leaders’ concerns grouped into three categories:

- **Healthy employees** — The state of employees’ physical, financial and mental well-being
- **Healthy relationships** — The quality of employees’ relationships with their colleagues, managers and teams
- **Healthy work environment** — Whether the work culture and climate support resilience; for example, whether innovation, development and inclusion are valued

We used this insight to develop a rounded measure of “workforce health” (see Figure 1). This contains 16 individual variables, split among these three categories, allowing a better understanding of the true cost of sustained workforce performance through the pandemic.

**Figure 1. Components of Gartner’s Measure of Workforce Health**



Source: Gartner

## Significant Scale of Damage to Workforce Health

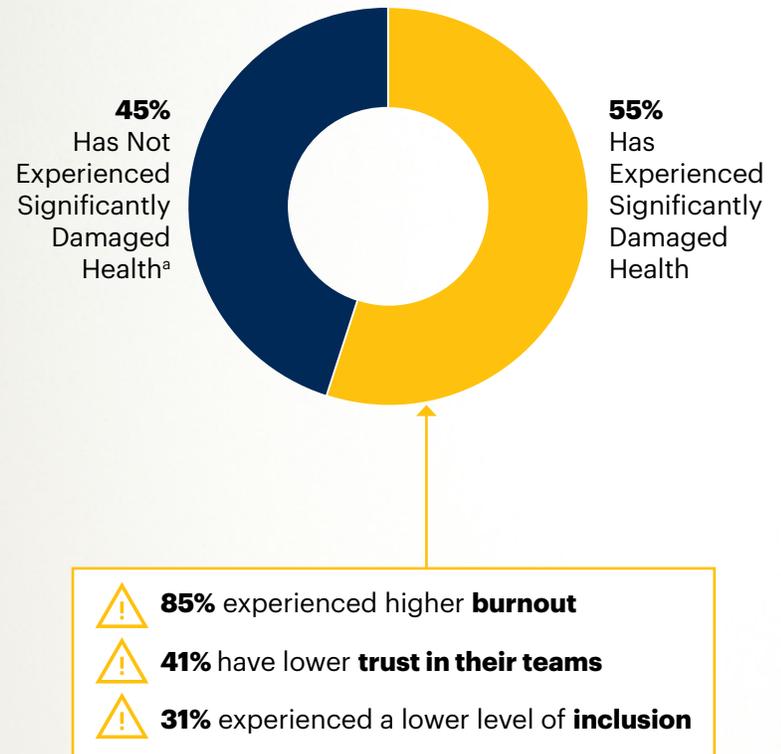
As it turns out, HR leaders were right to worry about these different aspects of workforce health. Based on this measure, 55% of employees have experienced damage to workforce health during the pandemic (see Figure 2). Importantly, this damage occurred across a range of variables — to not just their work-life balance or financial well-being but also their relationships and work environment. Taking data from before and during the pandemic, we measured “damage” as an employee experiencing an acute drop in at least three of the variables.

Furthermore, this level of damage was not limited to particular types of employees or particular industries. When we split the damage figure by job level, we found at least 50% of workers at the executive level, midlevel management and frontline level had experienced damage. Across all our industry categories, at least 35% of employees in every industry had experienced damage.<sup>1</sup>

Many leaders outside of HR are concerned about employees’ individual health but believe that recent high productivity suggests the impacts can be easily reversed with added time off or greater stability.

The extent of the damage certainly surprised us, but where the damage has occurred is also of concern. Many leaders outside of HR are concerned about employees’ individual health but believe that recent high productivity suggests the impacts can be easily reversed with added time off or greater stability. Not only is this unlikely in many of the employee health variables but also the damage done to relationships and the work environment will be harder to reverse. Qualities such as trust, feelings of inclusion and psychological safety are built up over time and will take time to repair. These elements will hold back organization-level performance even when individuals have recovered their own personal health.

**Figure 2. Damage to Employee Health**  
Percentage of Respondents



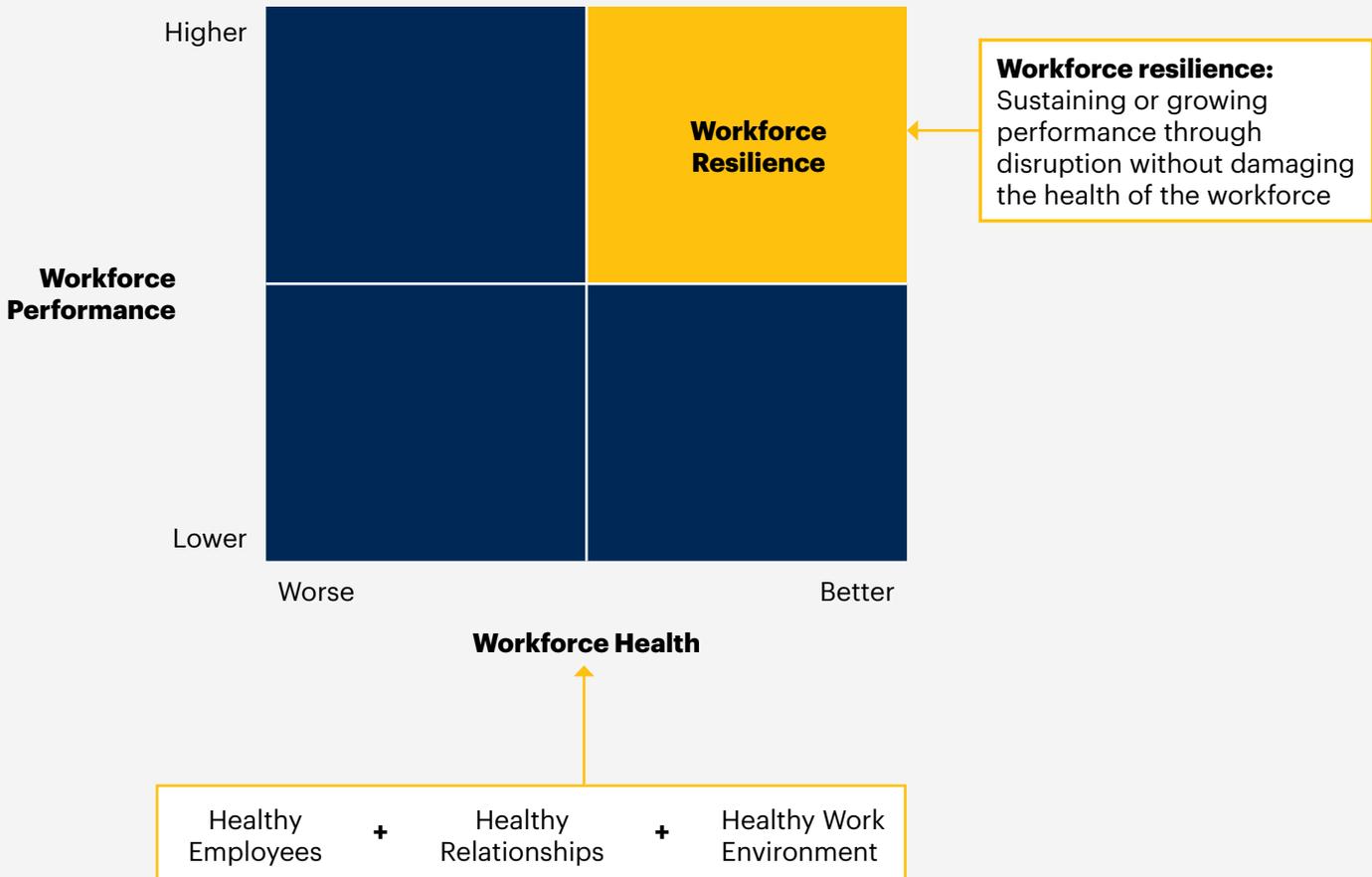
n = 3,690

Source: 2021 Gartner Workforce Resilience Employee Survey

<sup>a</sup> Significant damage is defined as experiencing an acute decline in at least three elements or a moderate decline in at least nine elements of workforce health.



**Figure 3. Gartner Model of Workforce Resilience**



Source: Gartner

These findings lead us to our definition of workforce resilience: **sustaining or growing performance through disruption without damaging the health of the workforce**. By including this balance of productivity and workforce health as well as all the aspects of workforce health, this definition highlights where damage exists and its implications for an organization (see Figure 3). It also provides a new way to see which resilience-building measures are effective. Hence, we have used our measure of workforce health to test a range of hypotheses from our clients, and the conventional wisdom, about who the pandemic impacted and whether initiatives to protect resilience have worked.

## Two Immediate Implications for HR Leaders

Two themes stand out in this research that point to what HR leaders need to do next. First, they need to consider how they measure workforce health, not just individual well-being. HR leaders have, for the most part, focused during the pandemic on measuring employees' individual health. This hides the myriad ways that disruption can impact the organization's current and future performance through damaged relationships and work environments.

Furthermore, HR leaders need to see how workforce health changes for different

employees at different times to track this before and after a disruption. The good news is that many organizations are already tracking many of the items in our workforce health measure, or similar metrics. These need to be combined to get a rounded view of how different individuals have experienced different types of damage, over time, to understand where this damage impacts workforce resilience.

Secondly, HR leaders can use this broader view of workforce health to look for opportunities to bolster this in a much wider way than just individual well-being support. Our findings show that aspects such as an individual's personal connection to their work and colleagues, or how work processes make it easy for them to get their work done, all have a significant impact on workforce health. HR leaders should also integrate resilience considerations into the design of any new HR or talent processes, or use our findings to see which existing HR and talent processes can be better leveraged to support workforce health. Consider, for example, how performance management can help deprioritize low-value work to protect workforce health,

or how return-to-the-workplace policies could damage workforce health if they reverse some of the conditions that have benefited certain groups of employees.

While the level of damage from the pandemic has been severe, HR leaders have more tools for addressing this damage than they may realize. A broader concept of resilience may seem intimidating at first, but it also provides a new platform for HR to drive organizational performance for the long term. of employees.

<sup>1</sup> 2021 Gartner Workforce Resilience Employee Survey, n = 3,690 employees

<sup>2</sup> 2021 Gartner Workforce Resilience Member Survey, n = 70 HR leaders

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# Build Workforce Resilience by Looking Beyond Averages

by Jonah Shepp



To build resilience, HR leaders should look beyond the averages in their employee engagement and well-being data to identify which employees are struggling through disruption and which are thriving. A closer look can reveal hidden problems as well as scalable solutions at the team level.

The disruptions of the COVID-19 pandemic did not affect the entire workforce equally, and some organizations, teams and individuals weathered it more successfully than others. HR leaders had anticipated a universally negative impact, but they did not predict that some employees' performance and well-being would actually improve during the disruption. As they work to build resilience in their organizations

going forward, HR leaders will benefit from understanding who struggled during this disruption, who flourished and why.

To take advantage of this insight, HR leaders must not fall into the trap of focusing on the average of all their measures of employee experience, which may not capture any individual employee's actual experience. Disruption can have widely disparate impacts

on various segments of the workforce; you can't simply address employee well-being and resilience with a one-size-fits-all approach. A strategy designed for the average employee is unlikely to succeed, because with such a wide variety of individual experiences, few employees are actually "average."

## While Some Employees Thrive, Others Dive

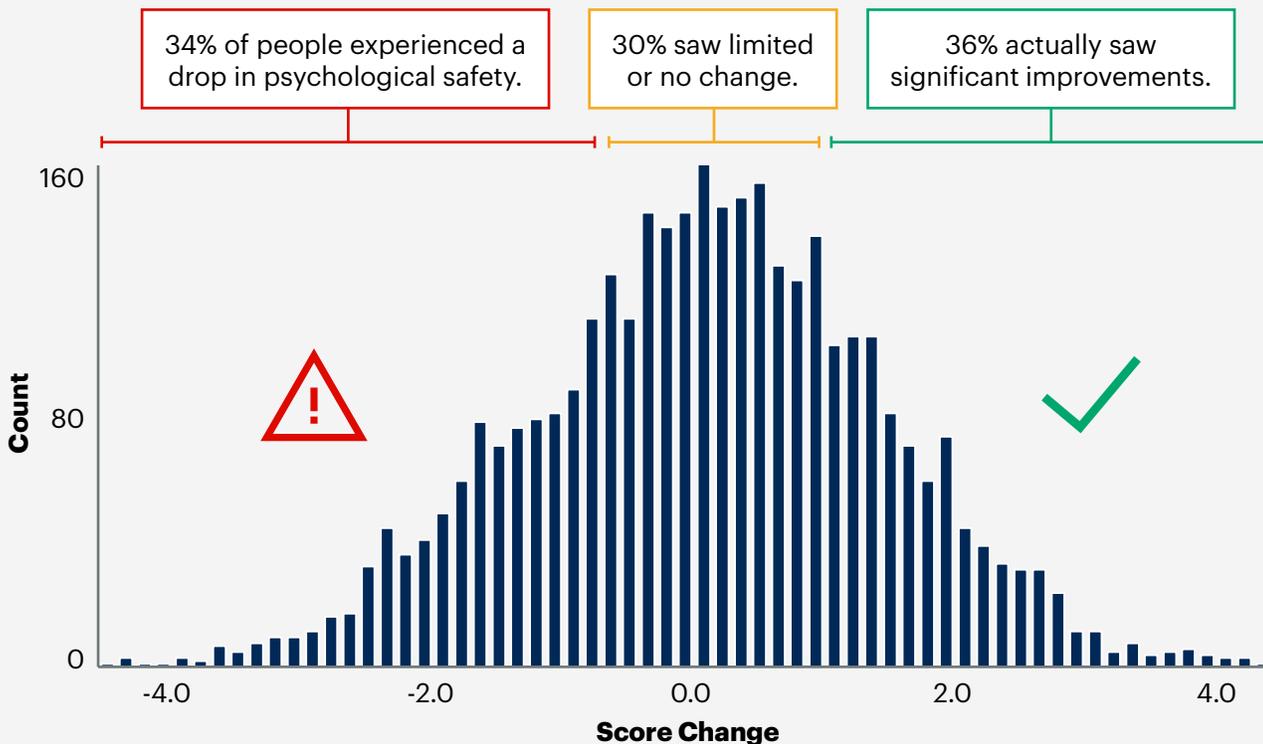
Consider a high school class that shifted to remote learning during the pandemic. About a third of the students struggled to focus in virtual lessons, and their grade point averages declined by about 10 points. Another third found remote learning easier or had more supportive home environments, and their averages increased by the same amount. The final third of the class did about as well in the remote environment as they had in person, and their grades were about the

same. If their teacher looked only at the average difference in student performance during the pandemic, they would see no change at all, but they would know from experience that the impact on individual students was enormous.

Something similar happened in the workforce over the past year in terms of the employee experience. In our recent research, we built a model of workforce health that considers 16 attributes of employees' individual well-being, work relationships and work environment.

For many of these attributes, we found a wide distribution of how employees' experiences had changed in the past year. For example, the "average employee" experienced little to no change in their sense of psychological safety at work during the pandemic. However, these average employees in the middle of the distribution only represent about 30% of the workforce (see Figure 1).

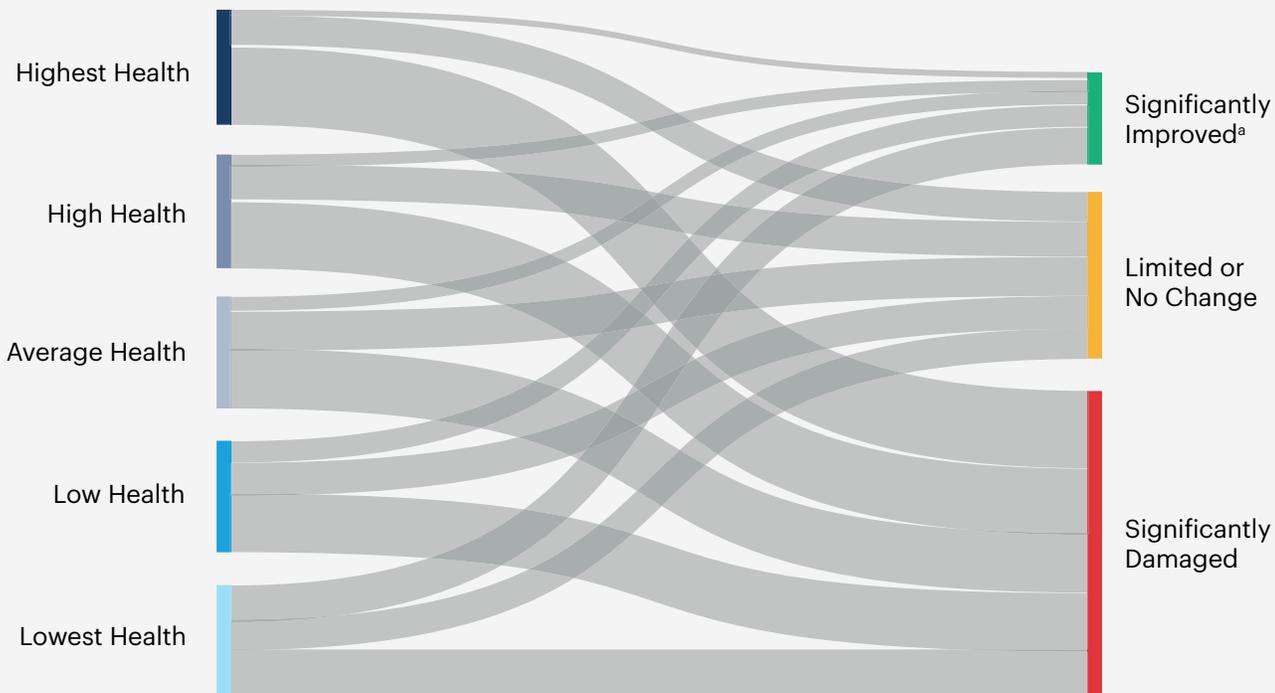
**Figure 1. Feelings of Psychological Safety**



n = 3,690

Source: 2021 Gartner Workforce Resilience Survey

**Figure 2. Chance of Thriving or Diving During Disruption by Prepandemic Health Level**  
Percentage of Chance



n = 3,690

Source: 2021 Gartner Workforce Resilience Survey

<sup>a</sup> Employees in the top 15% of improvement in workforce health

Meanwhile, 34% of employees experienced a decline in psychological safety, while 36% experienced a significant increase. If HR leaders designed psychological well-being strategies based on the average employee’s experience of the pandemic, they could effectively be ignoring 70% of employees.

For many employees (a plurality in this survey), the disruption had a positive impact on their psychological safety. Perhaps a shift to full-time remote work improved their work-life balance, or the reliance on virtual communication improved their sense of inclusion or ability to form social bonds with their colleagues. HR leaders’ resilience plans need to account for those who have “thrived” as well as those whose well-being “dived.” The steps an organization takes to limit the impact of disruption on the latter may be unnecessary or even detrimental to the former.

This distinction should factor into HR leaders’ plans for the postpandemic work environment. Fifty-two percent of employees who shifted to fully remote work during the pandemic say their day-to-day experience has gotten better over the past year, while 12% say it has gotten worse.<sup>1</sup> Forcing all employees back to on-site

work would create a worse experience for many employees, but abandoning in-person work entirely would harm those who have struggled in a remote environment.

To design an approach that supports the whole workforce, HR leaders must take into account the fact that employee experiences vary. To do so, they must dig beneath the average to see which parts of the workforce have been affected and how.

## Disruption Shuffles the Deck

It is difficult to predict how various employees will be affected by a disruption. Going into the pandemic, many HR leaders assumed the employees most at risk would be those who were already struggling. However, employees’ overall level of workforce health (a measure of individual well-being, healthy relationships and the work environment) prior to the pandemic did not predict whether that level improved, deteriorated or stayed the same during the pandemic. Every quintile of workforce health contained some who thrived, some who dived and some who experienced little change (see Figure 2).

In other words, disruption “shuffles the deck” when it comes to workforce health. The employees who have been thriving during and after the COVID-19 disruption are not the same ones who were thriving in the prepandemic environment. Historical well-being data is not predictive of how well employees weather a disruption.

This makes it even more challenging for HR leaders to identify pockets of resilience and vulnerability within their workforce. You can't rely on averages, and you can't predict outcomes from historical data. To learn from this disruption and build your workforce's resilience for the future, you need to take a more granular look at the impact on employees, especially on the team level.

## National Bank of Canada's Resilience-Diagnosis Support

During the pandemic, National Bank of Canada's (NBC's) employee engagement survey found high levels of engagement, low levels of stress and high morale. These findings were somewhat surprising, as they conflicted with anecdotal evidence that some employees were really struggling. This is a common story at many organizations: Survey data tells a positive or neutral story about employee engagement and well-being that conflicts with what HR leaders and managers are seeing on the ground.

The bank's talent analytics team suspected the topline data might mask a more complicated reality, so it dug deeper. Building on the questions in the engagement survey, NBC deployed context-specific pulse surveys to ask more specific questions and track employees' responses over time. By observing where engagement and morale were increasing or decreasing, NBC identified pockets of thriving and diving within the organization. It then developed hypotheses about why some employees were challenged and others were more resilient.

In testing those hypotheses, the talent analytics team at NBC found that within groups that seemed to be doing well overall, more specific subgroups were struggling. For example, young people on average seemed to enjoy working remotely, but employees under 35 who live

**The employees who have been thriving during and after the COVID-19 disruption are not the same ones who were thriving in the prepandemic environment.**

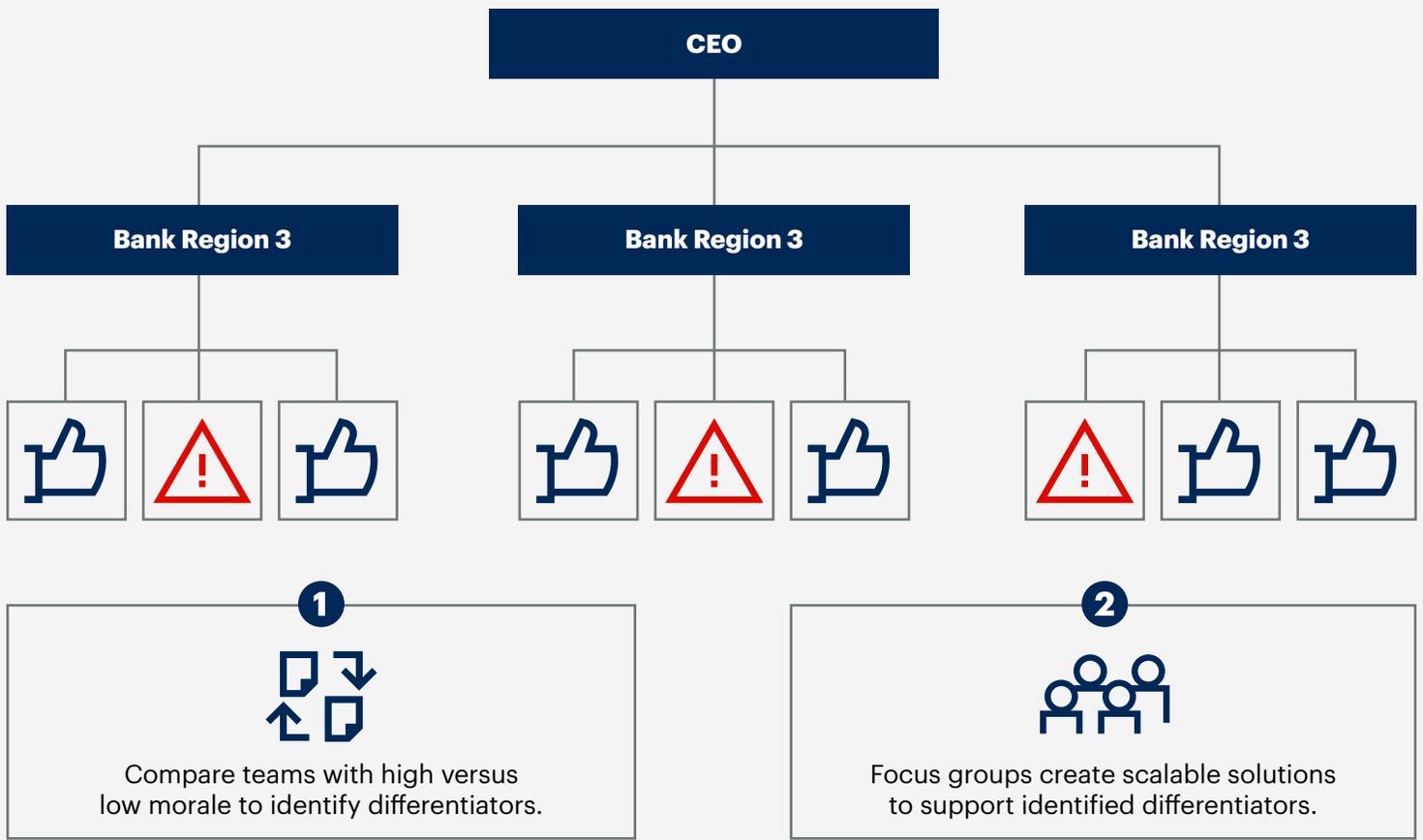


alone were reporting the lowest morale in the organization. Employees with children appeared resilient overall, but parents of preschoolers were experiencing high stress. Had NBC only looked at the first cut of the data, these employees' challenges would have remained invisible to HR.

The next step was to find solutions to help the employees who were struggling. NBC chose not to focus on individual resilience, which is often determined by factors the organization (and sometimes even the employee) can't control. For example, there is no way to change the fact that some employees have preschool-aged children, and expecting these employees to change their individual behavior to become more resilient is neither scalable nor particularly fair.

Instead, NBC considered resilience on the team level. Instead of asking, “What are the characteristics of a resilient employee?” the analytics team asked, “What differentiates our resilient teams from those that are taking damage?”

**Figure 3. National Bank of Canada's Team-Level Solutions Identification**



Source: Adapted From National Bank of Canada

NBC started by comparing teams with high and low levels of morale to identify differentiators common to highly resilient teams. These differentiators were fairly standard measures of good management, such as open and transparent communication or empowerment to make decisions, but identifying them allowed NBC to focus on specific practices that had the greatest impact on resilience at the organization. Once NBC identified these differentiators, it gathered focus groups of employees from across the organization to work out steps the organization could take to make these differentiators a reality in context (see Figure 3).

This way, NBC took advantage of what was already working in the organization and involved employees directly in duplicating and scaling these solutions. The results so far are encouraging, as most employees said the resilience-diagnosis support initiative improved agility, productivity and empowerment at the bank.

## From Individuals to Teams

One reason why NBC's initiative is so compelling is because it challenges the conventional wisdom about how to measure and promote resilience in an organization. In a traditional approach, measurements are often too broad and solutions too narrow. If you look only at topline averages, you lose important nuances in the data at the team and business unit level. If you focus interventions only on individual employees, you end up chasing outcomes you can't control and missing out on more viable solutions. A better approach to resilience looks past the averages to identify pockets of resilience and vulnerability within the workforce and what characteristics are associated with resilience at the team level, where interventions can often have the greatest impact.

<sup>1</sup> 2021 Gartner Hybrid Work Employee Survey, n = 2,809 employees



# 3 Ways Managers Can Build Resilient Teams

by Cian O'Morain

Managers play a critical role in building and supporting resilient teams through disruption. This article outlines three actions the best managers take during disruption to build resilient teams and showcases examples of how the best HR leaders are supporting them to do so.

The COVID-19 pandemic has prompted the greatest overhaul of work practices in a generation. HR leaders, tasked with supporting their employees through this transition, have realized the central role of workforce resilience in navigating the disruption. They have celebrated their workforces' agility in maintaining strong performance: 86% of employees and 90% of HR leaders report that productivity has stayed the same or increased since the onset of COVID-19.<sup>1,2</sup> However, they have also shared concerns that it may not be sustainable, and these concerns are well-founded.

Our research defines workforce resilience as the ability to sustain or grow performance through disruption without damaging workforce health (i.e., the health of individuals, relationships and

the work environment). And though performance has remained high, 55% of employees have suffered significant damage to workforce health in that same time.<sup>1</sup>

## Connector Managers Play a Critical Role in Protecting Workforce Health

Our research has identified four types of managers, with one clear winner: Connector managers. They outperform Always On, Teacher and Cheerleader managers when it comes to driving the key outcomes of employee performance management, skills preparedness, inclusion and intent to stay (see Figure 1). Despite

**Figure 1. Maximum Impact of Employee Outcomes for Manager Types**

▲ Positive Impact   ▼ Negative Impact   — No Impact

	 Teacher	 Always On	 Cheerleader	 Connector
<b>Employee Performance</b>	▼	—	▲	▲
<b>Skills Preparedness</b>	▼	—	▲	▲
<b>Inclusion</b>	—	▲	▲	▲
<b>Intent to Stay</b>	▲	—	—	▲

n = 4,787 employees

Source: 2020 Gartner Manager of the Future Survey

this clear advantage, they make up only 26% of all managers.<sup>3</sup> Connector managers elevate their teams' performance and motivation by focusing on three key connections: the employee connection, the team connection and the organization connection.

Our new research on workforce resilience reveals that local employee and team connections are critically important during disruption, highlighting the need for Connector managers to focus on facilitating these two connections. Resilience becomes a team sport during disruption: Collaborative relationships within direct teams increase the likelihood of sustaining workforce health by up to 10%, while collaborative relationships with further-out networks have no significant impact.<sup>1</sup>

The data highlights three imperatives for managers to build resilience during disruption:

1. Help team members realign their personal purpose.
2. Make prioritizing the team's work a top priority.
3. Make cohesion an ongoing team pursuit.

## Help Team Members Realign Their Personal Purpose

Over the past year, many HR leaders have told us about the importance of keeping their employees inspired and invested heavily in clearly communicating an overarching organizational purpose. Inspiration is critical to sustaining workforce health. However, during disruption, the ingredients that feed that purpose are personal. In the past year, efforts to show that the organization shares a passion for causes employees care about have fallen flat (with no significant impact on workforce health). By contrast, employees who report their work is personally relevant to them were 26% more likely to sustain workforce health.<sup>1</sup>

When a disruption knocks an employee's personal "why of work" out of joint — by changing what an employee is working on or what work the organization says is now a priority — it is their managers who are best placed to help them realign it. Connector managers feed the connection with their employees by

### **Case in Point: Resource Composability**

Leaders and HR within the IT function at The Co-operators, a Canadian financial services firm, recognized the importance of continually aligning work with changing demands. To ensure managers are well-equipped to realign their team's goals and priorities along with changing needs, the leadership team publishes a practicewide "backlog" of the top priorities on a monthly basis. Clear prioritization criteria mean all managers (and employees) have a clear view into practice- and function-level priorities, especially as they change.

HR and leadership further enable their managers by tying these priorities to formal performance management targets referred to as objectives and key results (OKRs). Their team-first approach means managers and leaders are evaluated 50% on hitting achievable targets for collective OKRs (i.e., shared by a full team or multiple teams) and 50% on individual contribution. These incentives encourage managers to foster greater collaboration and take a team-first approach that fuels the team connection.



overinvesting in getting to know them and diagnosing potential misalignment.

HR plays a key role in enabling managers to do this effectively. For example, HR and leadership at the software organization Salesforce have long recognized the importance of helping their employees connect their personal purpose with changing business needs. Salesforce uses its vision, values, methods, obstacles and measures (V2MOM) tool, which gives employees a framework to translate changing organizational goals into their own unique contexts. Importantly, it guides employees on how and when to update their V2MOMs (for example, as they kick off new projects).

HR at Salesforce has also embedded the tool into its performance management process so managers can regularly discuss purpose with employees and ensure continual realignment. Furthermore, HR supports managers in discussing V2MOMs at a team level to help turn personal purpose into greater team cohesion.

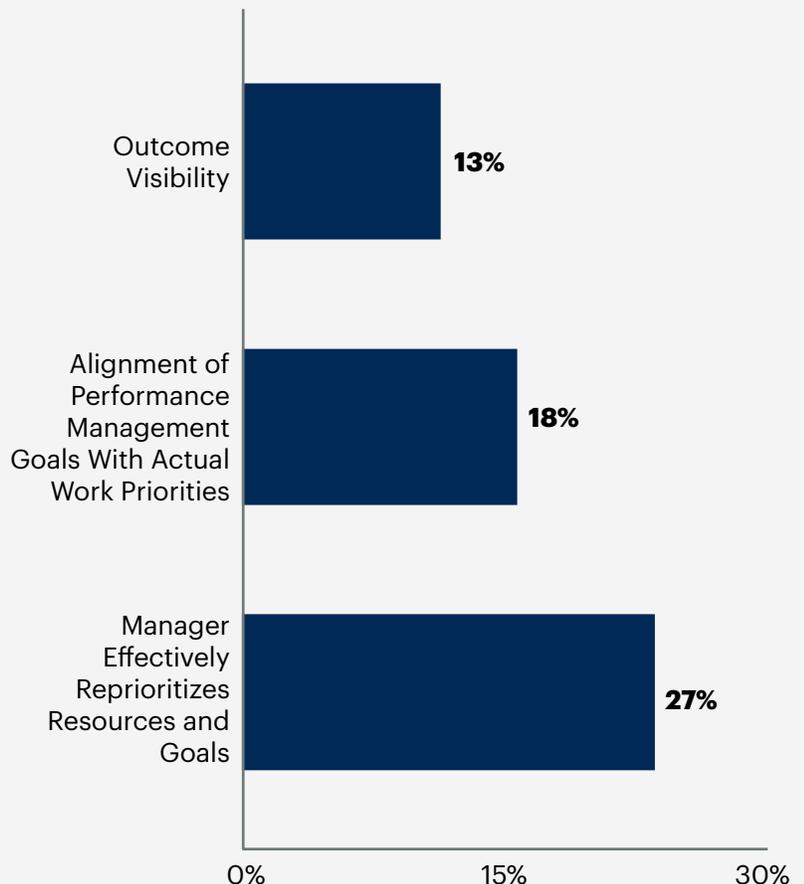
## Make Prioritizing the Team's Work a Top Priority

If there's one thing the pandemic has highlighted, it's the importance of managing with empathy. Eighty-nine percent of HR leaders say it is more important to lead with empathy in a hybrid environment.<sup>4</sup> But there is more to managing with empathy than simply acknowledging your team's pain. And when it comes to supporting a team's health and resilience, the most actionable empathy is work empathy.

Managers best feed employee and team connections by showing empathy to changing circumstances. Ways of practicing work empathy include making sure key outcomes are visible (even if they're changing), aligning team members' formal goals with actual work priorities and continually prioritizing a team's resources toward updated needs. These three actions combined can increase the likelihood of sustaining workforce health by up to 58% (see Figure 2).

## Figure 2. Impact of Adapting Priorities to New Circumstances

Percentage Change in Likelihood of Sustaining Workforce Health



n = 3,690

Source: 2021 Gartner Workforce Resilience Survey





### **Case in Point: Team Resilience Workshops**

Hilti, a global manufacturing organization headquartered in Liechtenstein, has developed ongoing team resilience workshops to help its teams realign and nurture immediate working relationships on an ongoing basis. Teams come together in dedicated workshops to collectively diagnose performance barriers at four levels: the individual, the team, the organization and outside the organization. Focusing on what teams have in their control, they commit to making changes at the team level (whether those changes relate to personal or team-level challenges). By doing this activity as a team, they can spot which barriers are shared across the team, which are personal and which are outside their control. This makes it easier for them to develop team-level solutions to the most important stressors.

Importantly, teams must then regularly meet to check in on progress. This ongoing practice assumes new disruptions will arise, requiring new solutions. What's more, Hilti ensures each team, from the executive leadership to the shop floor, conducts the exercise. This means each manager conducts the activity twice: once as a team member and once as a manager of a team. This multilevel approach enables its managers to learn as part of their own team so they can better lead the teams they're managing.

## **Make Cohesion an Ongoing Team Pursuit**

Resilience is a team sport. Highly cohesive teams are 37% more likely to sustain workforce health through disruption. The problem is that teams are not stable, especially during disruption. More than half (51%) of teams were significantly disrupted (i.e., a change in team manager or significant change to team composition) during the COVID-19 disruption.<sup>1</sup> The best Connector managers ensure the pursuit of cohesion is a full team activity, empowering teams to openly discuss challenges and opportunities to work better together. They also recognize that a team never stands still (especially during disruption) and conduct regular "training" for that cohesion as a team sport.

## **Conclusion**

Workforce resilience will be an enduring success metric for HR as it navigates a future of inevitable ongoing disruption. Managers will be the vessel through which teams' resilience can be nurtured and sustained long term. HR leaders have a key role to play in ensuring they hire, develop and promote Connector managers, and in providing them with the support they need to protect and foster employee and team connections through disruption.

<sup>1</sup> 2021 Gartner Workforce Resilience Employee Survey

<sup>2</sup> 2021 Gartner Workforce Resilience Member Survey

<sup>3</sup> 2020 Gartner Manager of the Future Survey

<sup>4</sup> 2021 Gartner Hybrid Work HR Leader Survey

# Reinvent your EVP for a Postpandemic Workforce

The traditional employee value proposition isn't delivering, and the most progressive organizations are shifting toward a human-centered value proposition aimed to inspire in employees emotions that see them stay longer and work harder, driving the success of the business. Progress here delivers benefits:

- 28%** increase in employees who are likely to recommend the org by delivering deeper connections
- 40%** increase in high performers by delivering radical flexibility
- 6%** increase in intent to stay by delivering personal growth
- 7%** increase in employees' physical, financial, and mental wellness by delivering holistic well-being
- 9%** increase in employees who are highly likely to accept the job again by delivering shared purpose

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# 3 Techniques to Improve Self-Service for Employee Support

by Eser Rizaoglu



To improve service delivery and functional resiliency, HR leaders have moved toward more efficient digital self-service channels to provide high-quality employee and manager support. By taking advantage of rich channel data, HR leaders boost adoption and improve channel quality and effectiveness.

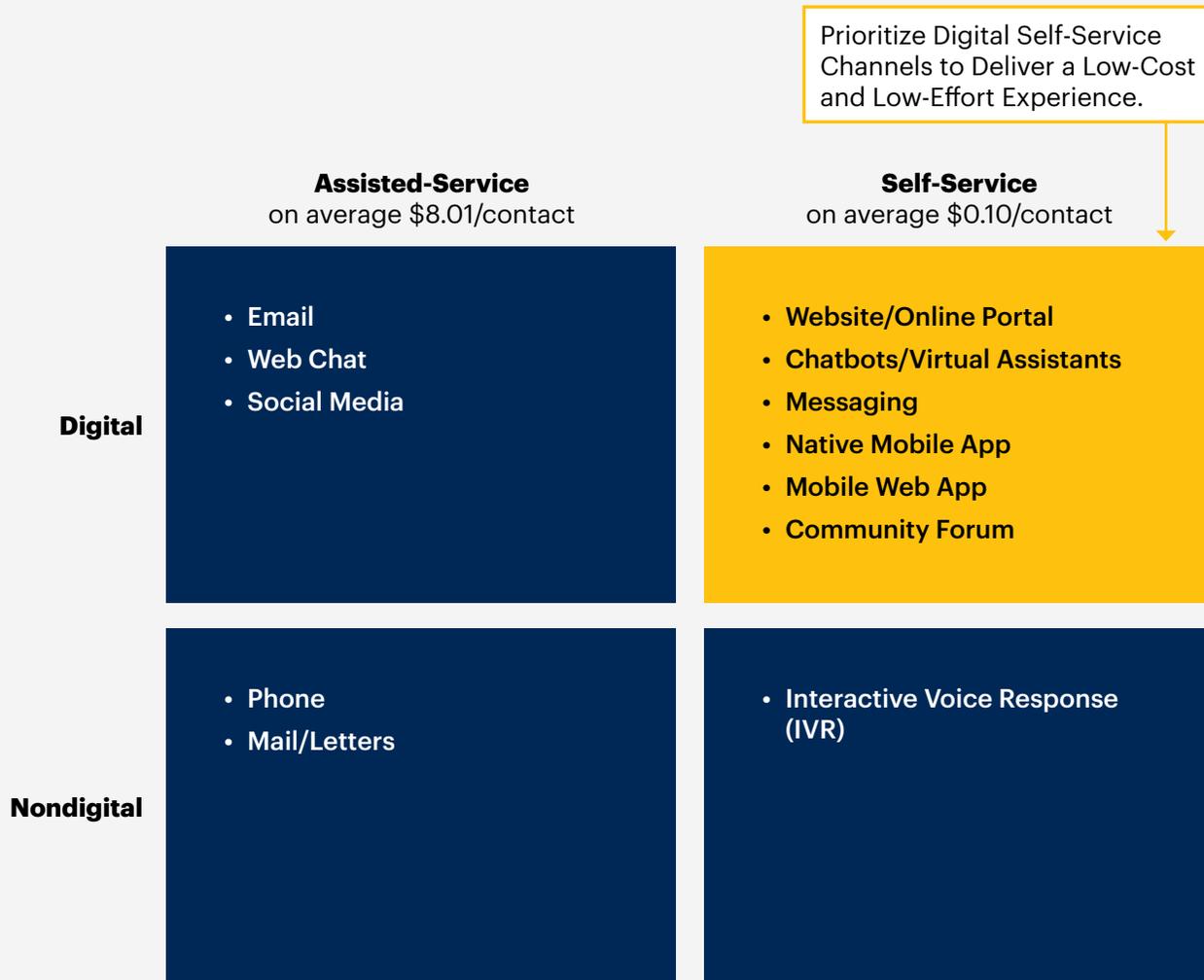
HR leaders have led their functions toward digital self-service to provide more efficient and effective HR-employee support. Digital self-service interactions are requests that allow employees and managers to resolve their query without interacting with an HR staff member.

Based on our 2019 Customer Service and Support Leaders Poll, an assisted-service contact, regardless of whether it occurs over the phone or in a digital channel, costs \$8.01 per contact on average. This is far more expensive than a digital self-service contact, estimated at \$0.10 per contact (see Figure 1).

While customers may report a preference for assisted-service interactions, they prefer issue resolution the most. Whether they use their

## Figure 1. Contact Channel Matrix

Illustrative



Source: Gartner

preferred channel has no meaningful impact on customer satisfaction, effort or loyalty.

Therefore, HR leaders should use three key insights from our customer service practice to boost adoption and improve the quality and effectiveness — as measured by the first-contact resolution (FCR) rate — of their digital self-service tools for HR-employee support.

### Limit the Number of Channels

Traditionally, employees and managers have been able to contact HR for employee- and

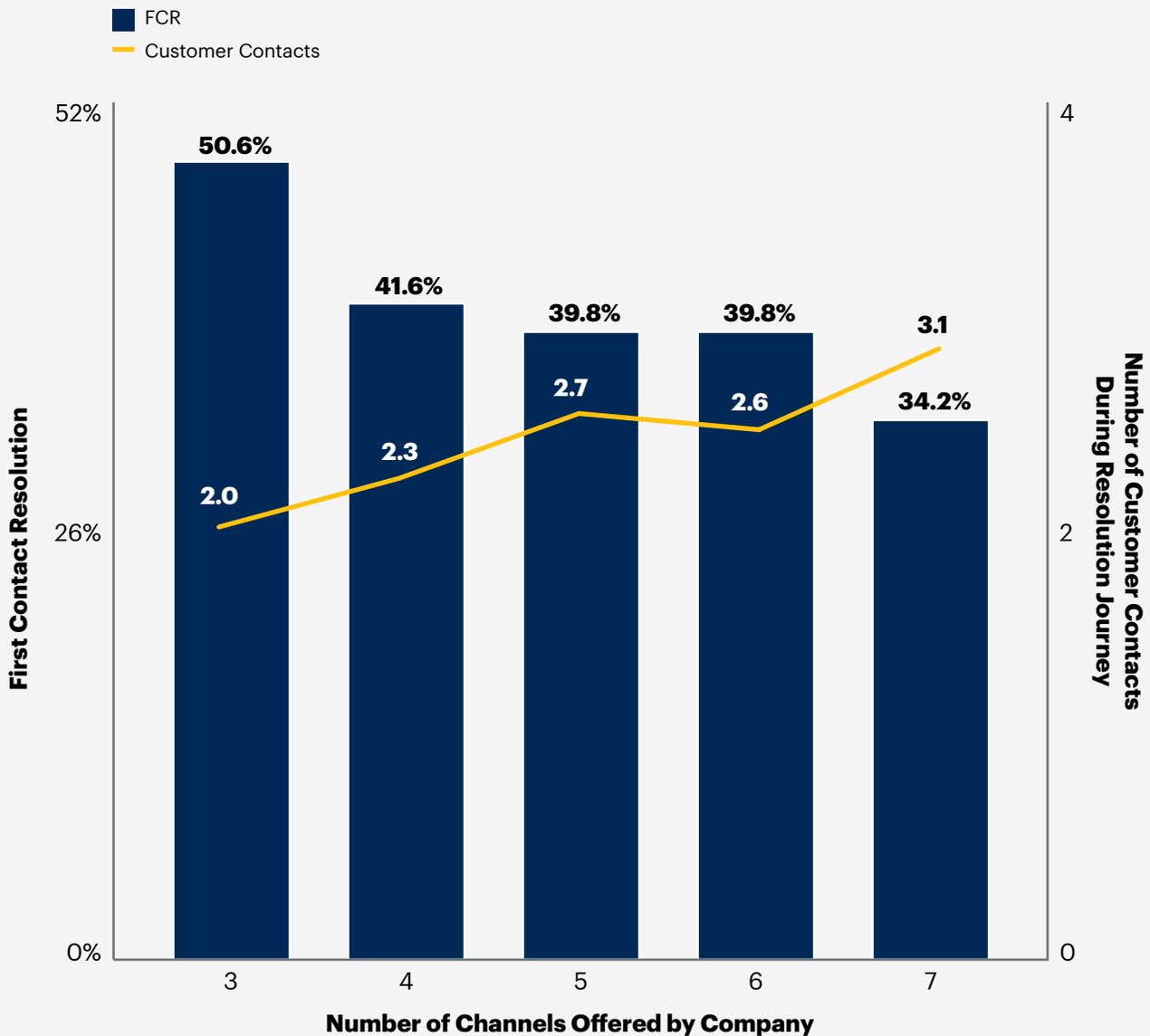
manager-related support using many different channels. As HR leaders turn to digital self-service tools such as online HR portals, chatbots and virtual assistants, the number of channels employees can use to contact HR rapidly increases.

Our customer service research shows customers are open to using multiple channels in pursuit of issue resolution, but variety comes at a greater resource strain. First, the number of channels a company offers is directly related to the average number of contacts customers make during a single resolution journey (see

Figure 2). In other words, more choice begets more use. Additionally, more choice is difficult for companies to support, as resources become stretched to support a multitude of channels. This trend is reflected by FCR rates, which steadily decline with each additional channel a company offers.

After examining over 8,000 customer journeys, we found most customers (61%) use both live and self-service channels in their attempt to resolve a single issue. Only 9% of customers had successfully only used self-service in their customer resolution journey. The more customers switch between channels, the

**Figure 2. Comparison of Channels Offered, Customer Contacts and FCR**



n = 125 companies

Source: 2014-2019 Gartner Effortless Experience Survey

greater the cost implication for the organization (see Figure 3).

Given the varying costs associated with each channel, HR leaders should focus on using data from digital self-service channels to improve processes and information related to HR support for employees and managers through digital self-service. This in turn can increase FCR and improve adoption of digital self-service channels.

## Use Data to Improve Resources and Processes

Traditionally, HR analytics have been sourced from transactional applications, but transactional applications only store the user’s final decision. Digital self-service channels can be rich in site traffic data, which can indicate which programs and HR support may be most important to your employees.

Site traffic data will allow you to uncover valuable insights into employee behavior and offer an easier, more personalized service experience while delivering efficiency savings to the

organization. HR leaders can use three forms of data insights to improve their HR-employee support service offering:

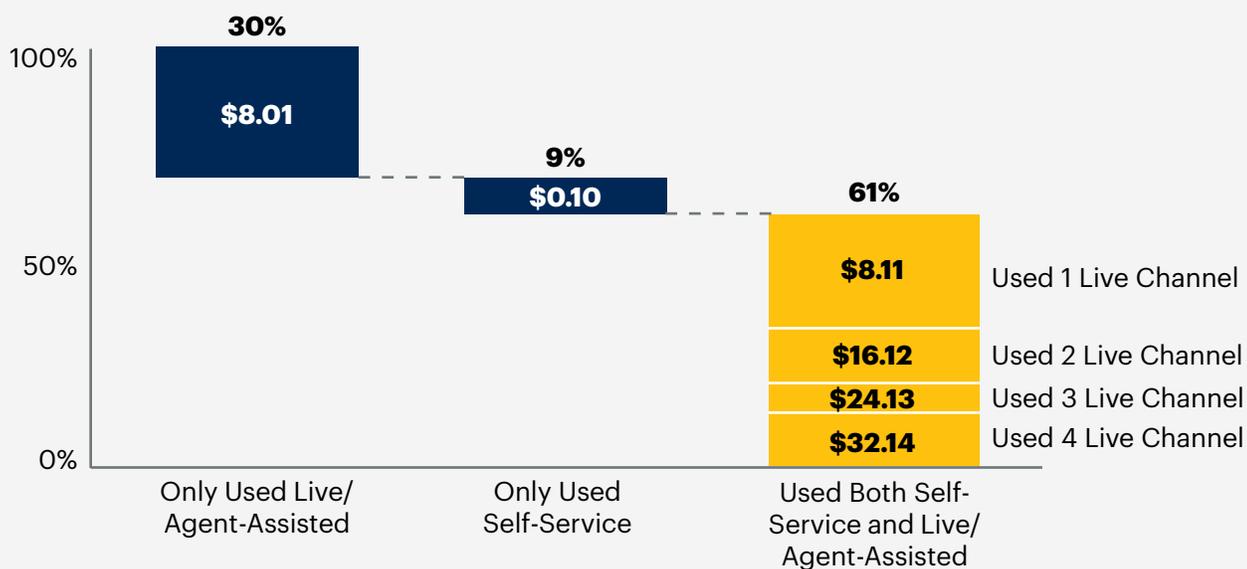
### 1. Solicited data collected from employees directly, such as —

- Rating the usefulness of search results
- Rating the usefulness of individual pieces of content
- Providing textual feedback on content in a public comment
- Providing textual feedback or requests directly to HR
- Providing private and anonymous feedback directly to HR
- Taking a brief survey about the portal experience while entering or exiting the portal

### 2. Unsolicited data collected through monitoring HR portals and chatbots, such as —

- Insight into the relative importance employees place on various programs

**Figure 3. Breakdown of Customer Resolution Journeys and Journey Costs**



n = 8,398 customers

Source: 2019 Gartner Customer Service Behavior and Expectations Survey

- When and from where employees are seeking information
- Points of abandonment (e.g., a high abandonment rate can indicate content was difficult to find or confusing)

**3. Transactional data collected through HR workflow ticketing systems, such as —**

- Ticket type (e.g., payroll, benefits, time off query)
- Ticket volumes
- Ticket resolution times
- Ticket types by demographics (e.g., job family, location, seniority)

By collecting these data points, HR leaders can learn which employee and manager support services are most important to the workforce, when the majority of HR-employee support is required, and where to clarify and improve resources and plug any process gaps.

## Reduce Self-Service Abandonment

Most organizations design their digital self-service resources to cover many aspects of support queries related to employee-

manager- HR. One common approach within HR portals and digital self-service sites is to have large information repositories such as frequently asked questions or quick reference guides. The notion is that if employees need something, they can easily search for it on the portal.

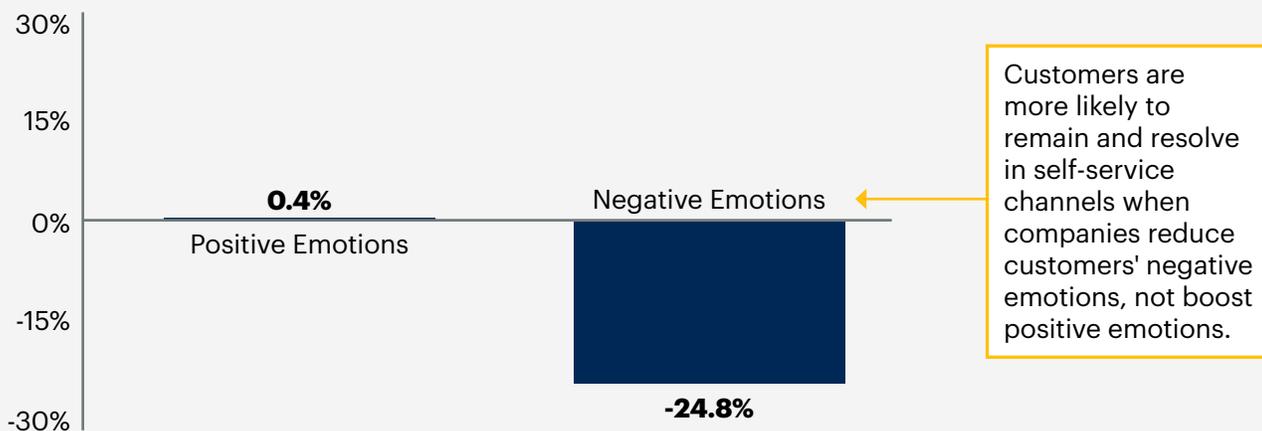
While well-intentioned, these portals quickly become sprawling, interwoven networks of information that overwhelm employees and can cause uncertainty and frustration, ultimately leading employees to contact HR using assisted channels.

To better understand containment in self-service channels, we investigated how a customer’s psychological state predicted defection to assisted channels. We discovered that attempting to influence positive emotions does not predict whether a customer abandons self-service and switches to an assisted channel. However, the presence of negative emotions — for example, anxiety, frustration or doubt — has a huge effect.

Hence, HR leaders can reduce abandonment of digital self-service channels by reducing employees’ negative emotions toward these channels (see Figure 4).

The factors that best predict containment in self-service are clarity, credibility and confirmation,

**Figure 4. Impact of Positive and Negative Emotions on Containment in Self-Service**



n = 2,276 customers

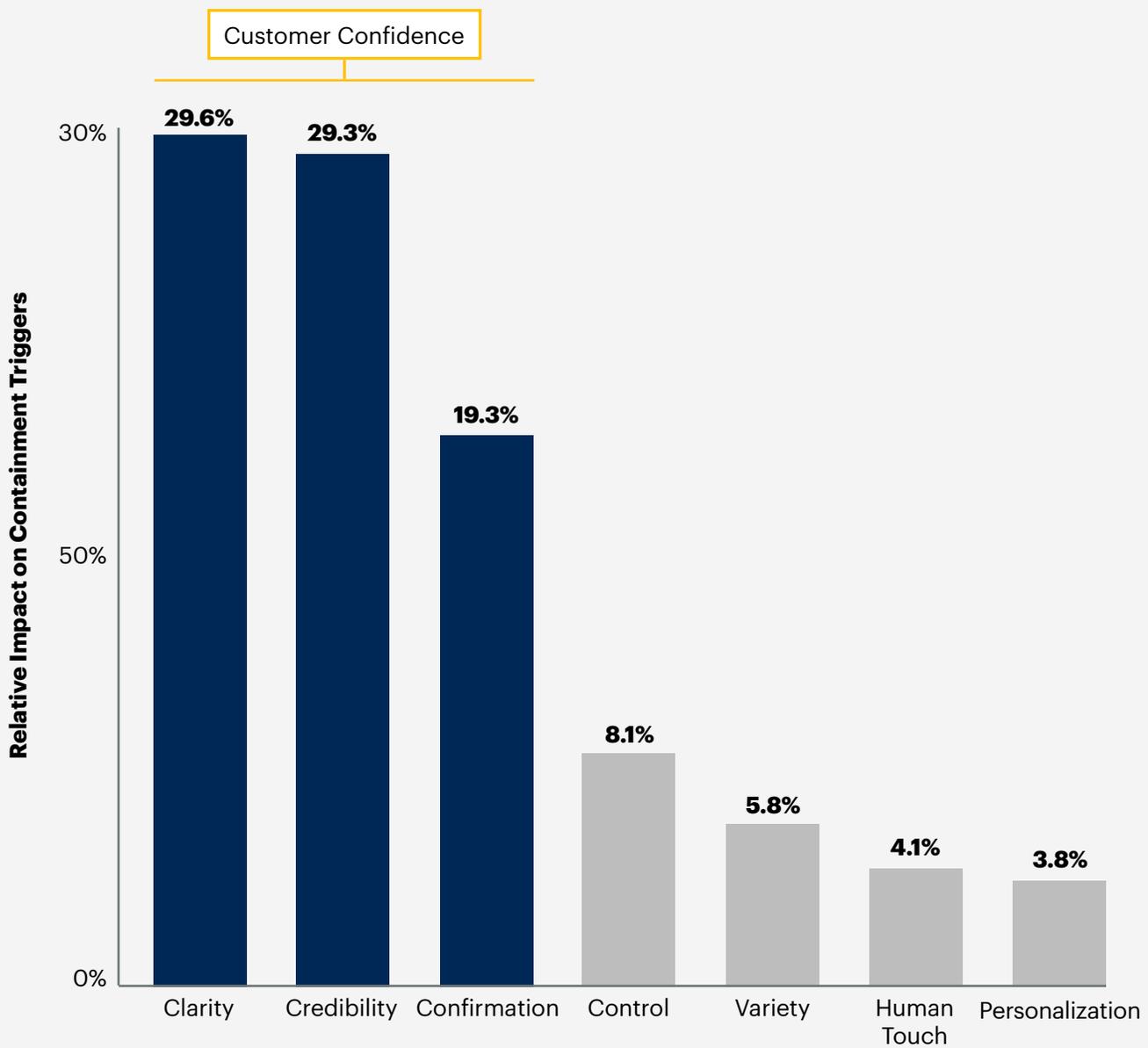
Source: 2019 Gartner Customer Service Behavior and Expectations Survey

which make customers more confident in their ability to resolve an issue on their own and reduce the feeling of uncertainty (see Figure 5). Feeling uncertain in using self-service is natural as there is no live support to guide users, but

this uncertainty increases the likelihood of self-service abandonment.

HR leaders should ask the following questions about clarity, credibility and confirmation to improve employee confidence in digital

**Figure 5. Factors Ranked by Strength of Relationship With Containment Triggers**



n = 2,276

Source: 2019 Gartner Customer Service Behavior and Expectations Survey

**Table 1. Key Questions for the Three Components That Build Confidence in Self-Service**

<b>Clarity</b> Create information that is simple and directional.	<b>Credibility</b> Develop content that is relatable and believable.	<b>Confirmation</b> Provide messaging to signal that actions are being taken or are complete.
Does the content make employees feel like they are on a self-service journey?	Is the language active and action-oriented?	Does content provide assurance that future action will be completed on employees' behalf by a set timeline?
Is there a visible demonstration of steps or processes (e.g., screenshots of steps)?	Does the content let employees know they are on the right path?	Does content indicate resolution is complete?
Are employees informed of the resolution process or timeline?	Is there indication the information was helpful to others in the past (e.g., top questions section)?	Does the content convey no additional action is necessary?
Is the text easily digestible?	Is the text relatable to employees and free of internal HR jargon?	

Source: Gartner

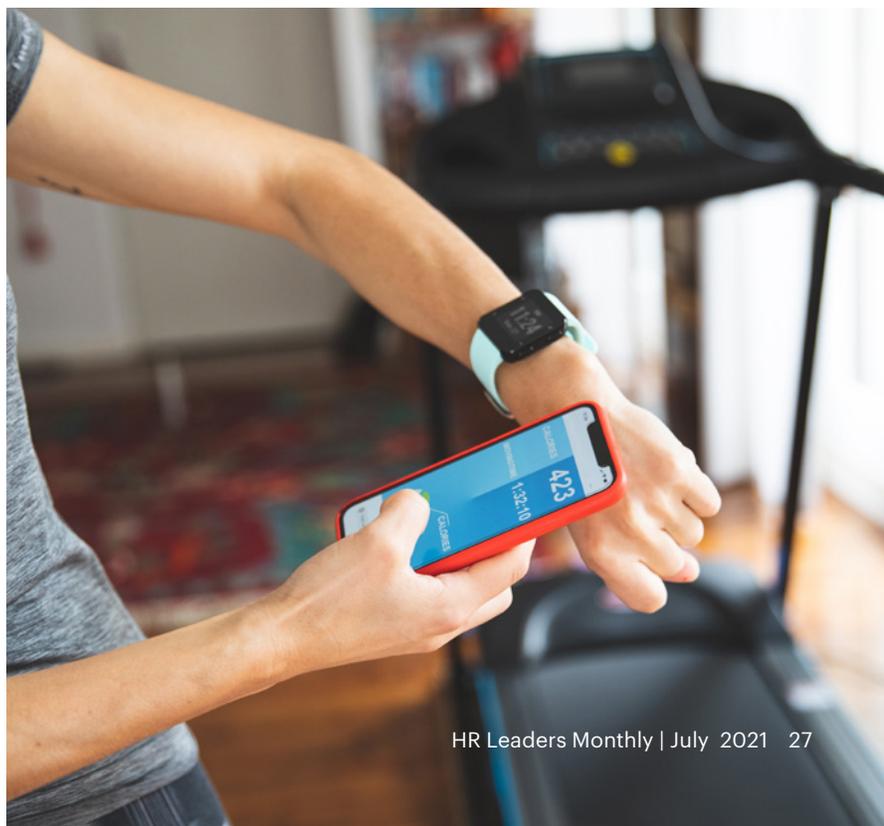
self-service for their HR-employee support (see Table 1).

## Conclusion

As HR leaders lead their functions toward more efficient digital self-service in providing HR-employee support, they should implement these three key insights to improve digital self-service adoption and increase FCR rates.

HR leaders can impact channel adoption and use by only focusing their efforts on:

- Using a small number of channels
- Using data insights from these channels and transactions to improve resources and processes
- Focusing on clarity, credibility and confirmation to increase employee confidence in the self-service journey and reduce abandonment of these channels





# 4 Ways HR Analytics Can Look Beyond the Averages

by Molly Tipps

In times of disruption, traditional measures of employee engagement, well-being and performance often don't paint a complete picture of an organization's resilience. HR analytics leaders can do four things to go beyond the averages and get more value out of their talent data.

The COVID-19 pandemic and year of disruptions that followed have revealed the need to better leverage talent data and insights for cost-effective and high-impact management decisions and interventions. But an additional, largely unanticipated consideration in the use of that talent data is the degree to which traditional measures of the workforce's health, engagement and productivity are insufficient to make those sound, data-driven decisions. Because employees felt the disruptions of 2020 in highly differentiated ways, leaders who make decisions based on enterprise wide averages are deploying blunt instruments against an extremely nuanced set of needs and priorities.

HR analytics leaders have a role to play in shaping leaders' understanding of the employee landscape to enable incisive calls to action that support employees during times of uncertainty and in the future of work. Progressive HR analytics leaders are looking beyond the averages in four critical ways.

## **1** Look for the Thrivers

Because disruption creates change, processes and environments that were optimized toward one group of employees will, by definition, be upended. But often lost in the concern for negatively impacted employees is the realization

that the change may have resulted in an improvement for others. The upheaval of change and disruption does not create uniform losses, and the most progressive organizations seek to identify, understand and support those who are thriving in addition to those who are struggling and the most progressive organizations seek to identify, understand and support those who are thriving in addition to those who are struggling.

## 2 Measure Change, Not Just a Point in Time

Our research has found that not only does disruption impact everyone differently but assumptions about who is coping well and who is struggling are often incorrect. Employees with the highest levels of workforce health (as measured by 16 indicators of individuals' health, relationships and work environment) before the pandemic aren't necessarily the ones who thrived or successfully coped with the disruption.<sup>1</sup> So point-in-time data will tell you where people are now, but it will not tell you whether they have declined or improved against the metric as a result of disruption.

To better understand employee well-being, one of the most powerful approaches we have seen from HR analytics leaders is conducting longitudinal surveys: connecting predisruption

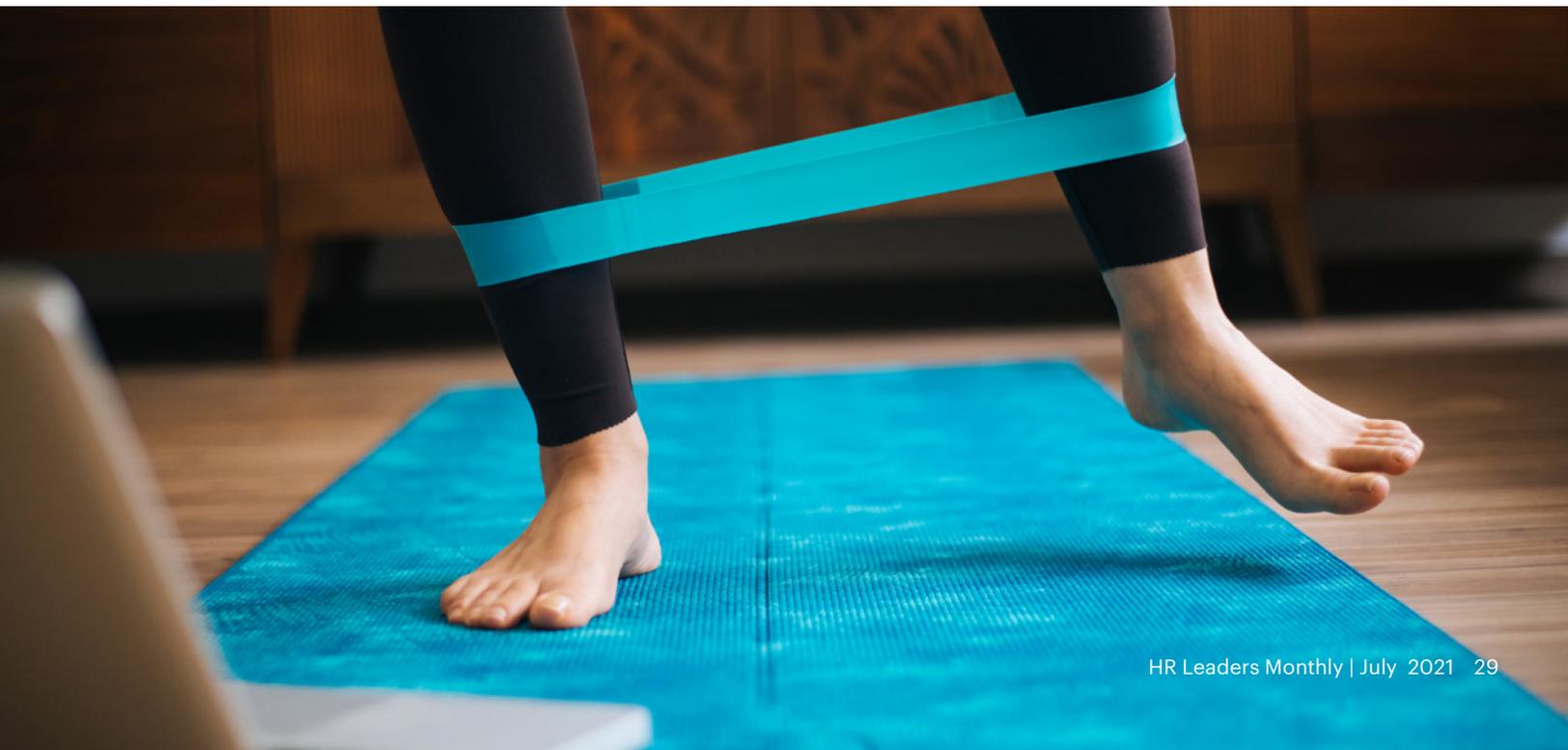
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To better understand employee well-being, one of the most powerful approaches we have seen from HR analytics leaders is conducting longitudinal surveys: connecting predisruption data to postdisruption data and measuring the change to better understand the negative and positive impacts.

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data to postdisruption data and measuring the change to better understand the negative and positive impacts. Because it's hard to know and design a survey before a disruption, these organizations use existing, predisruption data as the springboard for designing postdisruption surveys and metrics that can be retroactively aligned at the individual or team level. This allows an ad hoc measure of change and obtains a much more insightful picture of the disruption's impacts.

Tracking individual employees over time, which can be difficult, is not necessary to obtain this insight. Team-level longitudinal data can also provide a clear picture of changes in workforce health over time, even as teams change.



### 3 Get Curious About Team Resilience

Focusing on teams has other benefits as well. Traditional approaches to workforce resilience have emphasized building individual resilience or grit, but progressive leaders are seeing that individual solutions that depend on a person having a different “attitude” are expensive, riddled with exogenous factors and ultimately not effective.

Team-level resilience, by contrast, offers a much stronger path forward. HR analytics can help chart this course by identifying statistically significant team-level differentiators of resilience. These insights can help direct scalable investments and interventions that rely less on every employee being independently resilient and focus more on the team sharing the burden of organizational stressors. Additionally, a “team resilience” approach can spur solutions that enable team cohesion and unearth innovative ways of working in the new paradigm.

### 4 Be Sensitive to Signal Value

Time and again in our research, we find the impact of policies and decisions on workforce health has as much to do with their signal value to employees as with their direct impact on employees’ day-to-day work. For example, workforce health is increased when an organization offers thoughtful and clearly defined benefits, even among employees who haven’t used those benefits. The signal value of an employee having the option to use a benefit is sometimes as powerful as availing oneself of it.

We see a similar effect in change communications: Even if employees disagree with a change the organization has made, if their voices have been heard in the decision-making process, they are more accepting of it. The signal that leadership made the decision with employees’ input and took their needs into account is meaningful, regardless of whether any given employee is happy with the outcome.

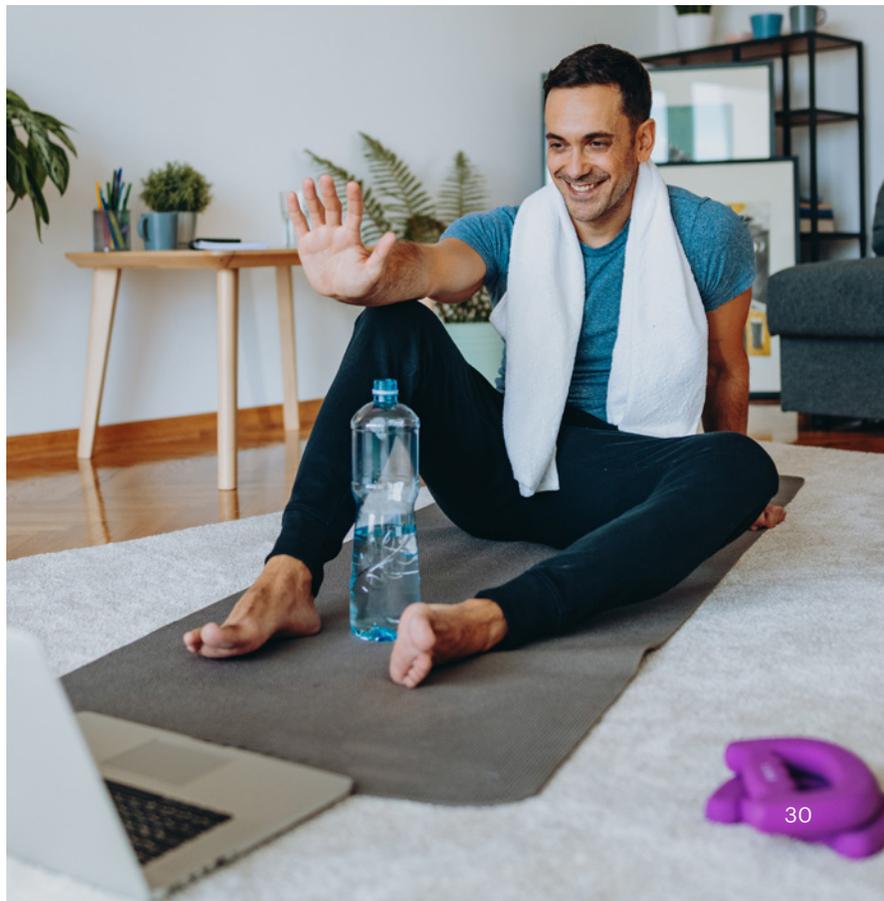
What this means for talent analytics is that as you collect and analyze data and relay your insights to leaders, it is important to recognize the signal that

a data-driven decision may convey to employees. The data may imply one decision is right, but the signal value may be, in practice, all wrong.

For example, imagine that utilization data shows your organization is offering several voluntary benefits employees just aren’t using. The data suggests the organization could save some money by cutting these benefits, and only a few employees would miss them. However, cutting benefits amid disruption would send a negative message to employees about the organization’s financial health or its commitment to their well-being. The potential impact of that signal on workforce health, employee engagement and retention, which the data didn’t capture, could potentially outweigh the savings. The organization might still make the change, but considering the signal value can help leaders time and communicate it more effectively to mitigate the potential downsides.

The context of the insight is as critical as the finding itself, and in times of disruption, employees are particularly sensitive to those signals. HR analytics leaders should be sensitive to them as well.

<sup>1</sup> 2021 Gartner Workforce Resilience Employee Survey, n = 3,690 employees



# Interview

## Building a Change-Ready Culture: An Interview With dentsu international's Caroline Vanovermeire

by Kaliko Zabala-Moore

From our interview with Caroline Vanovermeire, global director of talent at dentsu international, HR leaders can learn how dentsu transformed its culture and leadership model to help the organization withstand the changing environment and navigate times of uncertainty and disruption.



### **Caroline Vanovermeire** Global director of talent, dentsu international

Caroline Vanovermeire is the global director of talent at dentsu international, a pioneering, high-growth marketing services and solutions company. Caroline was previously the global head of organizational development for all support functions at Barclays and a principal at Heidrick & Struggles' global leadership advisory practice. Caroline is a trained psychologist and coach, accredited in various psychometric tools; she also has a master's in human resources management.

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**Can you tell us what prompted your cultural transformation?**

There were a couple key external factors that prompted us to transform our culture. For one, our competitive landscape had changed with new entries from more technology-based companies looking to disrupt traditional media. We took that change as an opportunity to look at ourselves to make sure we sustained performance and continued to deliver societal value through interactions with all our stakeholders. That meant examining our relationship with our people, clients, suppliers and shareholders, and society as a whole.

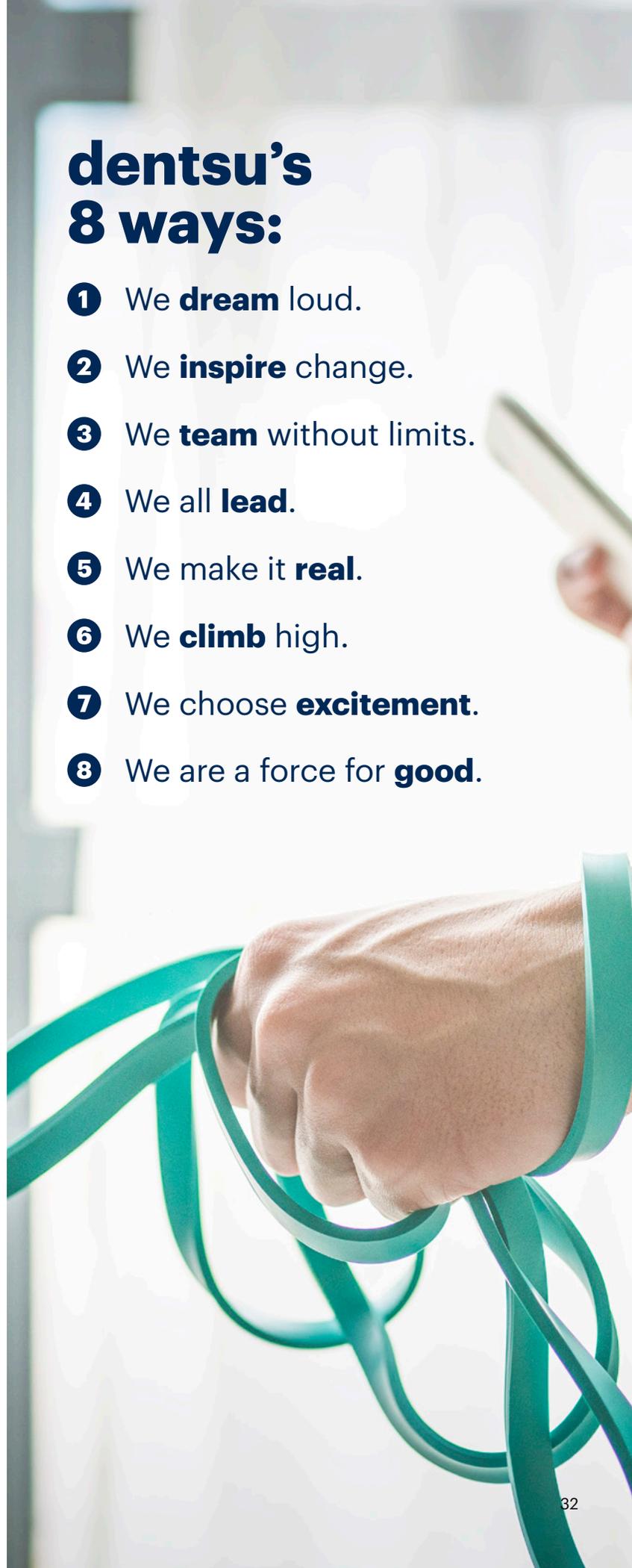
We were also seeing changes in consumer behavior, which meant our clients were going to have to rethink how they look at their brands to make sure they connect with consumers. These changes prompted us to rethink how we support our clients and to focus more on integrated solutions. Another factor at play was the exciting evolution of dentsu group, where more and more synergies were happening between dentsu international and dentsu Japan, amalgamating our rich heritage with a tremendous future relevant offering and supporting our growth strategy. We are embracing a new journey of the never before, underpinned by the eight ways, which are our ideals and through which we describe our culture.

**Did this cultural transformation require you to think about leadership differently?**

Yes; in fact, we created the leadership@dentsu model to bring our desired culture to life and support our business transformation. As part of this model, we defined behavioral expectations and the competencies needed to achieve those expectations for all our leaders. These expectations then informed other HR

# dentsu's 8 ways:

- 1 We **dream** loud.
- 2 We **inspire** change.
- 3 We **team** without limits.
- 4 We all **lead**.
- 5 We make it **real**.
- 6 We **climb** high.
- 7 We choose **excitement**.
- 8 We are a force for **good**.



activities like leadership hiring, promotion and performance evaluation.

We understand change is the only constant, and ambiguity and uncertainty are something to embrace; we are convinced that this reality requires us all to be leaders. “We all lead” is actually one of our eight ways. We believe that leadership is what we do together. Anyone at dentsu can lead us toward new things and support the business’s outcomes. We expect every single person to lead, and therefore, we felt that our leadership model needed to reinforce that. That’s why our model has an element of self-leadership, client leadership, business leadership and people leadership. We also went through the process of defining leadership expectations and specific behaviors for every single level and role within the organization.

There were some themes that we wanted to bring to the forefront of our leadership model based on how leadership was evolving. For example, we thought that well-being was an element that needed to be more explicitly referenced. Related to that, we also wanted to focus on fostering a culture of inclusion and driving societal value. That meant making sure we were doing the right thing by eradicating ethical blindspots. We also reinforced the importance of collaboration, with remote and cross-cultural teams. Last but not least, we recognized that things will always change and evolve and not just because of the pandemic, so we needed to reinforce the importance of having a change-ready mindset.

### **How did you account for remote and hybrid teams in your cultural transformation?**

One of our pillars, radical collaboration, starts to get at how we are accounting for remote and hybrid teams. People traditionally have thought that they could get an answer or solution from someone sitting next to them in the office. We really wanted to change that mindset and instead get people thinking about how to tap into the collective genius of all of us. This idea is also important when you think about growing talent and building teams. For leaders looking to build their team, we wanted them to think beyond connecting their employees with the usual suspects like their other direct reports or the people that may be sitting next to them. Similarly, it’s important that we create winning

teams for our clients and bring the best of all of us together and deliver what the client really needs. There should be no boundaries to opportunities for our people, through collaboration and career development.

### **How do you expect leaders to behave differently in a hybrid environment?**

One of the critical behaviors we outlined for leaders is inclusive leadership. On a practical level, we need leaders to be equipped to have meetings where some people are in the room and some people are remote. I think the pandemic has brought a level playing field because everyone is remote. But it takes a certain skill for leaders to consciously think about everyone on their team and ensure everyone has a voice.

We need to make sure employees’ varied experiences don’t result in differences in opportunity. Everyone has to be mindful of being inclusive by making sure people listen and double-checking if everyone is still with them. In a meeting, some people are more reflective, while others like to jump in. Managing these meetings with hybrid teams has to become a basic skill for leaders; it has to become part of the new normal.

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It goes back to how we try to instill empowerment in our employees through the concept that “we all lead.” If someone feels like they haven’t been listened to or they couldn’t contribute, we encourage them to speak up. If you look into our employee surveys, empowerment is always one of our highest-scored items, along with trust and the connection with leaders, which are three very positive elements to start off with.

**Beyond your leadership model, what structures and processes did you put in place to help employees shift their mindset and adapt to the new culture?**

One example that is very tangible is in how we set up rewards and bonuses. The team component is quite substantial, and all teams are held accountable for supporting dentsu’s strategic goals. This creates the mindset that we want everyone to collaborate.

Another example is something that was triggered by the pandemic. I wanted to set up a learning community that allowed people to connect and learn. It didn’t matter where people were based or who had the content. So quite radically, we built our first global platform. We now host monthly live learning sessions that cover topics that matter to our people, from diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI), well-being, leadership and coaching to our work and clients. These can be created by anyone and are open to all employees. It’s essentially our own Netflix because we record sessions and have an on-demand library where everyone can access them. This is another way we want to encourage people to share good practices, to learn from each other and build relationships as a result. It’s been a platform to showcase the best of our people and their talents too. If people know each other and their capabilities, then they will start thinking broader than just the people they know of. This learning platform is another example of radical collaboration.

**You’ve highlighted dentsu’s commitment to leadership at all levels of the organization — your “we all lead” concept. Can you tell us about how you included employees in the creation of your leadership model?**

We adopted an inclusive approach and gathered leadership insights from over 750 employees

across regions, service lines and functions. This included 13 workshops and over 60 one-on-one stakeholder interviews. In these sessions, we used technology to show an interactive Excel. We structured it so that when we asked questions, all the people in the workshop could concurrently give input and everyone could see the results on the screen. Some questions we asked were to assess the current culture: “How would you describe the working environment culture here?” and “What elements of your culture get in the way?” Other questions were targeted toward desired culture: “What are key cultural drivers that will help drive the brand culture?”

We combined all that input from these workshops and interviews with different data so that it was validated and transparent. When I had to start embedding the leadership model across the organization, people included in the workshops were excited to see what it led to and how they contributed; they felt like a part of the cultural transformation.

**What advice would you give your peers undergoing a similar cultural transformation?**

Be as inclusive as you can in the design of it. The model should be reflected in every experience a person has with the company. We didn’t stop with just the people processes. We made sure our culture was embedded in client credentials and our code of conduct too. You want to get to a place where people don’t see a model anymore but are just behaving in line with it because it is second-nature and very much embedded in every process, decision, experience, expectation and measurement that you make.





# Quant Corner

## Adding Autonomy In Crisis Doesn't Help, It Hurts

by Morten Wendelbo

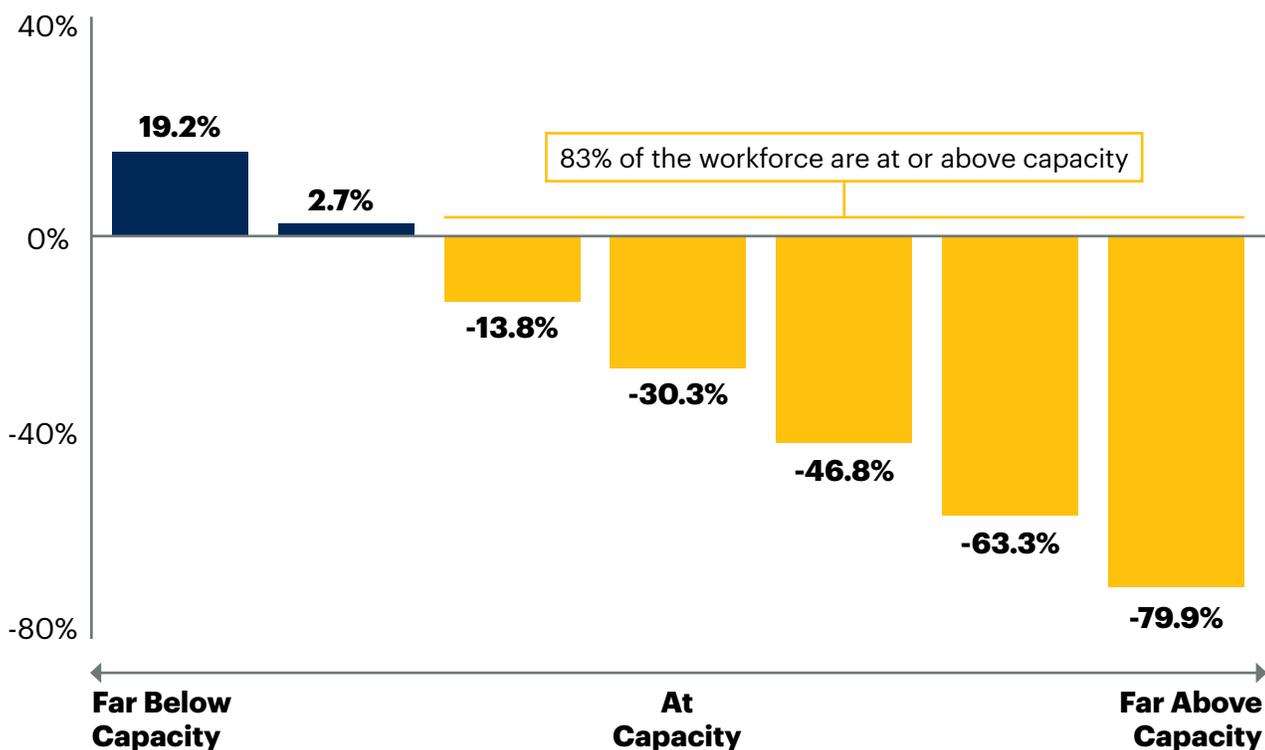
Higher levels of employee autonomy are generally associated with higher productivity and engagement, and with this in mind, many organizations gave employees more autonomy to offset the increased workloads and stress caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. After all, as priorities and ways to do work shifted rapidly and unpredictably, who would know better how to get work done than the employees themselves?

We were surprised when the data showed that not only was autonomy ineffective at lessening the burden on the employee, it was also associated with a big hit to employee health.

A close look at the data revealed that the negative effect occurred when employees were already working at or above capacity. Giving autonomy to an employee who is already struggling to keep up makes it even harder to get work done, because they do not have the time or capacity to exercise that autonomy. Our research shows that globally, 83% of all employees were at or above capacity in early 2021.

Don't abandon your efforts to give employees more autonomy, but be thoughtful about timing these efforts so employees are able to use the autonomy you provide them.

### Impact of Increased Autonomy on Workforce Health as Workload Increases



n = 3,690

Source: 2021 Gartner Workforce Resilience Survey