

MALAYSIA'S HEALTHIEST WORKPLACE | AIA Vitality

WORK ENGAGEMENT

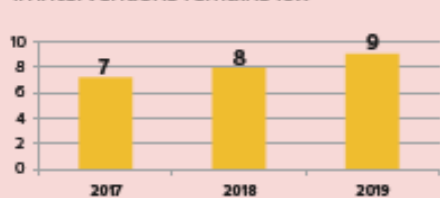
Only 15% of employees show high work engagement



The average awareness rate (%) of interventions remains low



The average participation rate (%) in interventions remains low



\* For more information on the 2019 Survey Results, visit [healthiestworkplace.aia.com](http://healthiestworkplace.aia.com)

Increasingly, research on corporate wellness has indicated that proactive management of employees' physical as well as mental health can help reduce staff turnover and absenteeism and, in turn, boost productivity.

And it seems that about half of all employers globally subscribe to this belief, as they offer some kind of health and well-being programme, according to a global survey on health promotion and workplace wellness strategies by Buck Consultants in 2012.

The more recent Malaysia's Healthiest Workplace by AIA Vitality 2019 survey, the first science-backed survey commissioned by AIA that analyses productivity for companies as well as employees' health, shows that 61% of 290 organisations polled have a budget for health and well-being facilities and services. And at 80% of the organisations involved, staff health and well-being are discussed at the board level at least once a year.

But employees are only going to benefit from health and well-being programmes if they are aware of and actively take part in them. In the Malaysia's Healthiest Workplace by AIA Vitality survey, the average awareness rate among employees about health and well-being programmes or interventions offered at the workplaces is a low 15%, while the participation rate in the interventions by employees is below 10% of eligible employees. Further data collected shows a significant gap between what employers say they offer and what employees perceive the offer to be.

The survey, which polled 17,595 employees, also found that the cost of health-related absenteeism and presenteeism translates into 73 days lost per employee per year for organisations. While absenteeism needs no explanation, presenteeism refers to the scenario when an employee clocks in but is unable to perform work due to health issues.

The days lost per year are equivalent to RM1.46 million worth of estimated average monthly cost per organisation.

Clearly, there is a need for better employee engagement to understand what they really need to help them on their journey to better health and well-being. This is especially because most employers do not have a good understanding of the health and well-being risks their employees face, says Dr Christian van Stolk, executive vice-president of not-for-profit research institute RAND Europe, which focuses on helping improve policy and decision-making through research and analysis.

Getting the motive right

There are many approaches to making employee engagement work. However, the worst thing a manager can do is engage with employees on the basis that his engagement is driven by financial motives, says van Stolk.

For example, by focusing on sickness absence, it would imply that the only reason a manager cares about staff health and well-being is to reduce productivity loss, he says. This tends to lead to lower levels of engagement.

As a result, van Stolk encourages organisations to survey their employees, hold workshops with them and collect information about them and from them through staff forums or line managers. It is good for an organisation to have a work council or staff forum, as it typically translates into higher employee engagement.

Ultimately, it is about giving employees a voice in how the organisation works and the design of intervention programmes for them, he adds.

Line managers are also crucial in such efforts, as they are not only the facilitators but also barriers to better staff health and well-being. "Role modelling by senior executives is important as well as reporting on health and well-being in the workplace. The latter speaks to the old adage, 'what gets measured gets done'. Organisations are more likely to take action when health and well-being is being discussed at executive and board level," van Stolk notes.

And if employees are less inclined to change, creating an environment conducive to change and a culture of health within the organisation may provide them with extra motivation.

As an example, van Stolk cites the AIA Vitality programme, under which members get rewarded with benefits and discounts by staying healthy,

TOP 5 MOST OFFERED INTERVENTIONS IN MALAYSIA

- 1 Access to fresh drinking water (other than tap water)
- 2 Clinical screening (for example, blood glucose, blood pressure)
- 3 Access to a fridge
- 4 Access to a microwave
- 5 Wellness days when employees have health checks and get advice on improving their well-being

which will encourage more healthy behaviour.

Interestingly, van Stolk says loss-framed incentives work as a powerful incentive tool.

"RAND did some work on a Vitality programme in the UK that used an Apple Watch. The members received the watch and it would remain free of charge if they undertook a certain exercise regime. If they fell behind, they would have to start paying for the watch. The effect was quite impressive, as employees wanted to avert losing the watch or having to pay for it.

"Promotion and renewal are also important in programmes. Employers often put interventions in place without promoting or updating them. This tends to lead to low awareness and participation. Those participating also want new interventions over time. So, programmes need to be continuously reinvented to drive engagement and remain relevant," says van Stolk.

AIA Bhd chief human resources officer Thomas Wong, meanwhile, says engagement programmes should be customised to the needs of the particular organisation as well as individual work teams.

"At AIA, we view engagement as the product of the interplay of human needs at the workplace, which range from the basic one such as clarity of role and responsibilities to higher needs such as growth and development. The links between each need and high performance provides a framework for managers to influence and inspire their team's engagement and actions. Offering rewards and benefits will only take us so far. We believe that fostering a purpose-led organisation underpinned by empowerment and trust will ensure the sustainable growth of the people and the organisation," he says.

What makes employees tick?

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Dr Marzuki Isahak



Employees know when employers care

Employees can sense that a company cares for them. Needing to feel that one belongs is a basic psychological need, says Dr Marzuki Isahak, an associate professor at the Department of Social and Preventive Medicine, Faculty of Medicine, University of Malaya.

"At the moment, most companies in Malaysia often practise a basic minimum compliance with the country's labour law [when it comes to employee treatment], with no additional consideration given to employees. Hence, firstly, we need to go back to the basics. When offering salary and the different types of leave, the company has to consider if these are sufficient for their employees.

"Secondly, companies have to see if their policy benefits employees and not just the company. Is the policy conducive for the growth and needs of employees?"

"Thirdly, companies have to present themselves as being employee-friendly in that opinions, suggestions and voices are allowed to be heard without employees feeling threatened or scared," he says.

According to Wong, the biggest misconceptions about employee engagement are higher pay leads to greater engagement, and engagement can be strengthened through fun one-off events and activities.

"Employees have different needs, expectations and motivations and what resonates with each varies.

"Engagement strategies therefore need to be integrated with daily work activities underpinned by regular, focused, meaningful conversations between employers and employees," he says.

In Malaysia, AIA invests in various formal and informal initiatives to recognise employees' extra efforts and exemplary behaviours, and in development programmes to expose its people to learning experiences and career opportunities that will enhance their technical and leadership competencies.

"We are especially encouraged by our progress in improving the health and well-being of our employees through the AIA Vitality programme. It has formed the basis for us to introduce a range of workplace health and wellness interventions over the last four years. Our progress indicates that the initiatives are what our people need and want. We believe that when our people choose to be healthy and stay healthy, they will bring the best of themselves to work and give their best," says Wong.

When it comes to organisational psychology, it is always debatable to say what is the best practice, Marzuki says, as understanding employees' needs has always been linked to individual well-being.

WHAT EMPLOYEES SAY THEY NEED FROM EMPLOYERS

Do what employees need from employers to help them become healthier and happier workers differ much from what employers think are needed? We asked a handful of employees from different industries what their expectations are, and this is what they say.

Malaysia is far behind when it comes to granting appropriate, proportionate and equal rights to both parents. This is why flexibility in the workplace is important to me, especially as a parent of two children. For example, leaving slightly early to fetch them from school, or taking care of them when they are sick. I appreciate it when my employer understands that I may need a little room to tend to family situations or emergencies, without penalising me or making me feel inadequate/guilty about it. When my job allows me to tend to my family, it makes me happy to come to work and spend the hours in the office more productively.

Trust is important too. As a lecturer, I value the trust given to us by not monitoring our every movement. [and] knowing that we are sometimes working around the clock, on weekends and even public holidays. If educators are monitored for the hours they clock in even more stringently than their own students, it takes away their enjoyment of the job and sense of independence.

DR MURNI / Academic sector



What I expect from an employer in this tough economic period is stability in employment. Knowing that I will have a pay cheque at the end of the month is somewhat comforting. Additionally, apart from the typical benefits such as annual leave and medical allowance, I would want the company to allow me to grow and learn, in the form of training.

Companies can better understand their employees via constant communication between the C-suite level and executives. There is a weekly management meeting, but the outcomes of those meetings don't get communicated to the working groups. Also, management needs to ensure that they don't have favourites. They should convey their message to everyone.

In a perfect world, the benefits I would want apart from the typical phone and travel allowance, for example, would be flexible hours, with fixed block hours where you have to be at the office and days when you can work from home, as well as healthcare benefits for dependants.

AMAR / Construction sector



In relation to employee well-being, scholars suggest that providing more job resources, such as recognition, training, rewards, social support and a positive work climate, will enhance work engagement and increase job satisfaction.

Marzuki cites a new theory called psychosocial safety climate, which proposes four main elements that could help build a psychologically safe working environment. They are 1) management priority, 2) management support, 3) organisational communication and 4) organisational involvement.

The thing I look for in a workplace is the workplace culture — whether it's a conducive working environment with a relatively flat hierarchical structure, whether they respect work-life balance and whether there are equal opportunities for all.

I also look for career progression. However, there needs to be a degree of certainty of there being room to grow into a better role. I believe what works is allowing the employee to be promoted vertically or laterally, with more responsibilities. What does not work, however, is a glass ceiling that gets communicated during an appraisal. I also look for healthcare benefits and the extent of my personal coverage, and how much of it can be extended to my family members.

NADIA / e-Commerce



I have recently come to appreciate the importance of workplace culture and its impact on daily working life, as it permeates every aspect of the workplace. If a company's culture is one of openness and willingness to improve, it would promote trust, empowerment and accountability in its people as well as engender progressive views such as flexible working arrangements, diversity as well as inclusivity at work.

I also think that reasonable healthcare coverage is important. As someone with a young family, employer-provided insurance is a great help to my expenses as well as a load off my mind during emergency situations. Good healthcare benefits can be a strong factor for employee retention and productivity. In my own case, it is one of the reasons I am willing to spend the hours that I do at work.

Knowing that there is clear career progression is also immensely important. I'd like to be assured that all the hard work and hours I am putting in are counting towards the goal of growing my experience and skills to ultimately progress in my career. A mature employer should have a proper framework and system in place to enable this by providing guidance, mentoring and/or training whenever appropriate so that employees are steered towards the right path.

ALIYAA / Finance sector

"It's important to create an employee-friendly company in which employees can voice out their concerns and suggestions, and the company acts on the feedback, rather than just entertaining employees and burying the issues thereafter.

"Listen to employees, see what else is lacking in the policy, how they can do better as a company. For this, Human Resources has a major role to play," he says.