

MAXIMISING ORGANISATIONS' GREATEST ASSET: **HUMAN CAPITAL**

*A Singapore Workforce
Engagement Study 2018*



Foreword by Editor

Since 2011, aAdvantage Consulting has been conducting its Singapore Workforce Engagement Study. Every year, we gather feedback from more than 1,500 employees across industries and profiles to uncover what drives a highly engaged Singapore workforce, and what we can do as employers in the Singapore context.

99% of enterprises in Singapore (i.e. more than 217,000) are defined as SMEs, employing more than 2.2 million employees. We recognise that there is a lack of extensive data of employee engagement in SMEs as these companies do not typically measure staff engagement levels. Our study is designed to gather data from the employees' perspectives across various employee profiles, including whether they work in SMEs vs non-SMEs. Hence, where there are differences in perception of employees working in SMEs vs non-SMEs, we will highlight these differences.

Most employers, especially SMEs, measure success by financial performance only and some also measure customer satisfaction. Most organisations also agree that employees are their assets but at the same time, most organisations do not measure how engaged is their workforce or proactively review what they need to do to drive employee engagement. The employee experience is not necessarily of high priority in SMEs but in more recent years, we have observed greater awareness of the need to change and adopt more progressive human capital practices. For the first time since 2014, our Employee Engagement Index in SMEs has increased from 2016 to 2017. There was also an increase of the Employee Net

Promoter Score® in SMEs during this period.

I believe we all want a passionate, collaborative and competent team aligned to achieve our business outcomes. In aAdvantage, our HR strategy is to build a "Great Place to do Great Work". In our own journey, we have experienced ups and downs over the last 16 years. What we have learned is that it takes continuous and conscious effort, by aligned Leaders, to achieve the desired results across all staff levels. Our experience is similarly shared by our clients and it usually starts with understanding what's happening in the organisation at a given time and tracking the results as a check-point on whether our policies, initiatives and programmes are making any difference.

In this year's paper, we included additional questions on leadership behaviours, and fair and progressive HR practices to understand the impact these have on employee engagement and loyalty. We are happy to share our findings and hope that the data will provide reference for employers who are interested to improve their employee experience, to understand the key important factors that require attention.



Jacqueline Gwee, Director
aAdvantage Consulting Group Pte Ltd

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Methodology

aAdvantage Consulting tracks three indicators of Employee Engagement and Loyalty in its annual Singapore Workforce Engagement Study:



Employee Engagement Index (EEI)

aAdvantage Consulting defines an engaged employee as one who:

Feels proud and happy working for his / her organisation



Experiences a sense of fulfilment in the course of work



Would recommend the organisation as a good place to work

These outcomes form our Employee Engagement Index.

Employee Net Promoter Score® (eNPS)

Since 2011, aAdvantage Consulting has been measuring the Employee Net Promoter Score® (eNPS) in its annual Singapore Workforce Engagement Study. Conceptualised by Bain and Company, it provides organisations with an indicator of employee engagement by determining the likelihood of employees to recommend their organisations as a good place to work.

We observed that employee satisfaction levels did not parallel with the likelihood of employees to recommend the organisation to others, for reasons such as career preferences. Recognising the influence of social factors in the likelihood of recommending the organisation as a good place to work, we included a variation of the Employee Net Promoter Score®, as another indicator of employee engagement – the likelihood to speak positively about the organisation to others (eLSP). We believe employees who are more engaged have a higher likelihood of sharing positive experiences with others.

PROMOTERS

Ratings of “9” and “10”

Advocates of the organisation who will recommend qualified individuals to join the organisation.

PASSIVES

Ratings of “7” and “8”

Satisfied employees who make few referrals to others. High propensity to move over to a competitor’s organisation if being wooed.

DETRACTORS

Ratings of “0” and “6”

Dissatisfied and unhappy employees who will speak negatively of the organisation to others.

Net Promoter, Net Promoter Score and NPS are trademarks of Satmetrix Systems, Inc., Bain & Company, Inc., and Fred Reichheld.

As organisations compete to create great workplaces, measuring employee engagement and Employee Net Promoter Score® would provide meaningful insights on the efforts and effectiveness of organisations’ policies and practices to attract and retain talent.

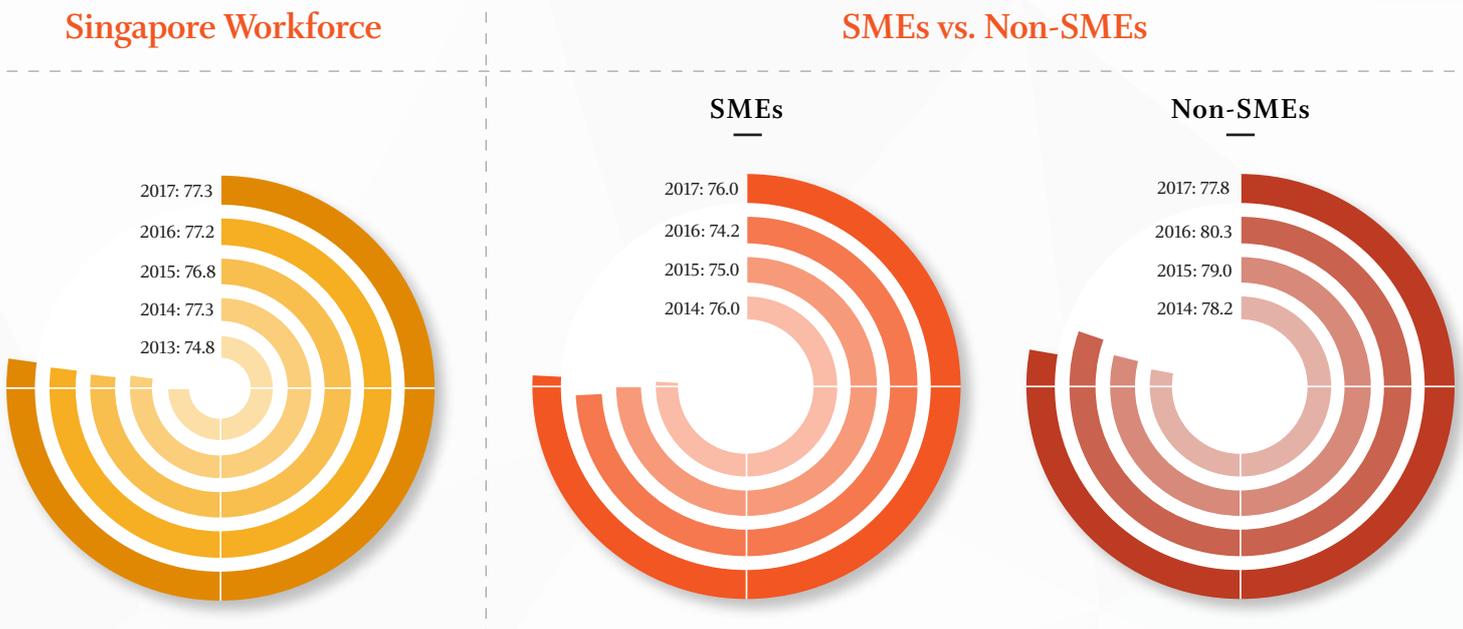
How engaged is the Singapore Workforce?

Employee Engagement Index

aAdvantage's Singapore Workforce Engagement Index increased from 2013 to 2014 and thereafter has since been relatively stable. The Employee Engagement Index (EEI) was statistically similar from 2014 to 2017.

Although the Singapore workforce overall has witnessed stable employee engagement in 2017, respondents working in SMEs are less engaged and less likely to recommend their organisation, as compared to respondents in non-SMEs. This finding is consistent since 2014.

An interesting trend in EEI is that from 2014 to 2016, although the EEI in SMEs was decreasing, there was a positive increase from 2016 to 2017. However, the opposite trend was observed for respondents working in non-SMEs.

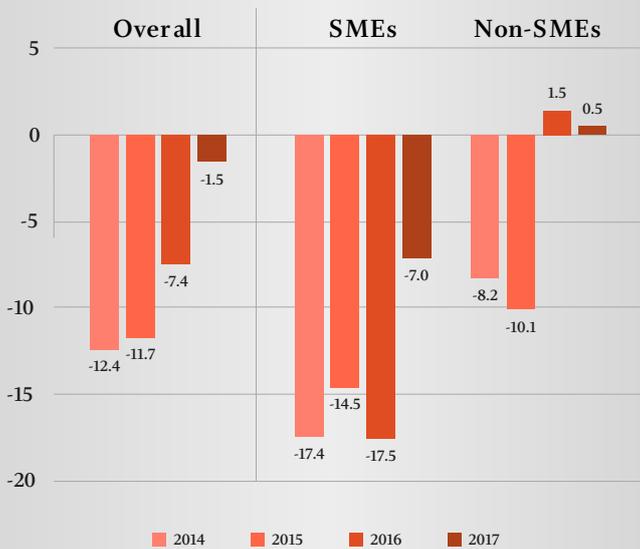


Employee Net Promoter Score®

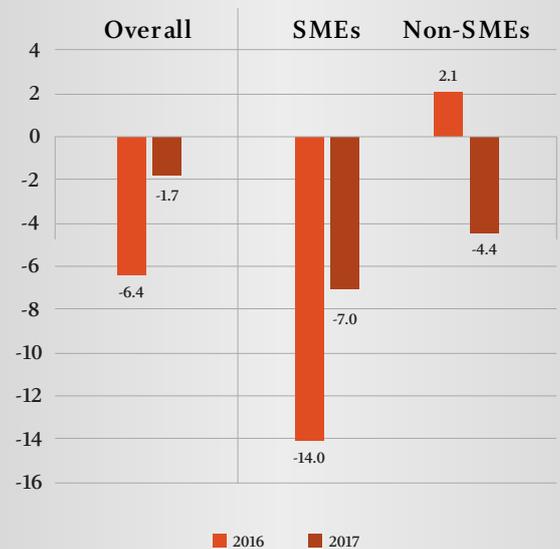
Results from the Employee Net Promoter Score® (increase from -7.4 to -1.5) and Likelihood to Speak Positively (increase from -14 to -7) suggest that there has been increased employee loyalty among the Singapore Workforce, from 2016 to 2017. Employees were not only more likely to recommend their organisation as a good place to work, they were also more likely to speak positively about their organisations to others.

However, it is interesting to note that the eNPS and eLSP for respondents in SMEs has increased from 2016 to 2017 and a decrease is observed for respondents in non-SMEs. This mirrors the results for the Employee Engagement Index. We look forward to seeing if this trend continues in 2018's results.

— eNPS —

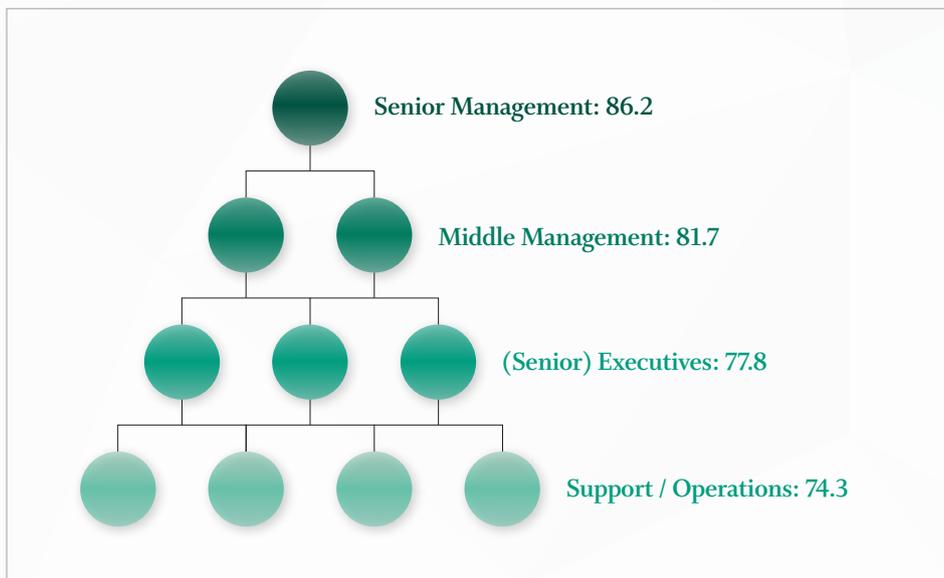


— eLSP —



Do engagement levels vary across job levels?

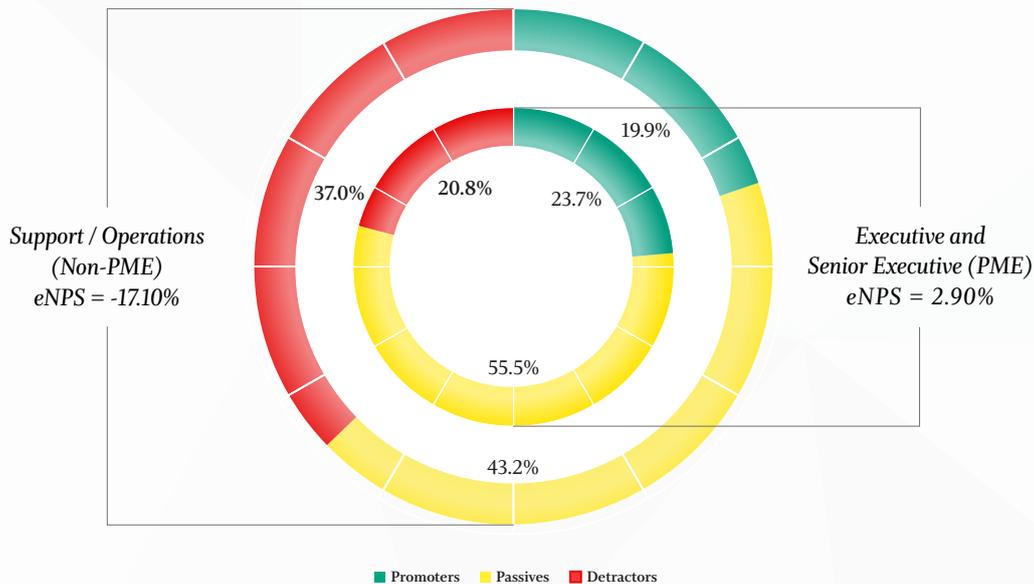
Employee Engagement Index across Job Levels



Taking a closer look at the results by job level, we found that as we go down the staff levels, engagement levels and likelihood to recommend or speak positively of their organisation decreases.

There were more Detractors amongst the Support / Operations group of staff as compared to the Executive and Senior Executive group.

Employee Net Promoter Score® across Job Levels



Findings also indicate that PME (Executives or Senior Executives) were more likely to recommend or speak positively of their organisation, as compared to non-PME (Support or Operational roles). This could be attributed to the nature of Support or Operational roles which are usually filled by a more transient workforce, whereby engagement is less conscious and deliberate.

In designing HR policies and engagement activities, employers should be reminded that a 'one-size-fits-all' approach would not be effective as the needs across staff demographics differ.

Through our consulting work, it is common to find that the needs of staff differ. For example, non-PME staff appreciate health-related staff benefits as compared to flexible work timing. This may be because addressing safety or physiological well-being needs are more important to them.

Perhaps organisations could examine what are important factors to drive positive engagement for the different staff levels on addressing the different needs.

The next section of our Paper identifies the common factors that impact employee engagement as well as employee loyalty – areas which employers fared better at and areas which are of higher priority to address to increase engagement and loyalty.

Do Leaders recognise and address the needs of the different staff profiles?

Are Leaders only focused on engaging middle management and how about the ground staff?

Key Drivers of Employee Engagement: What matters to our people?

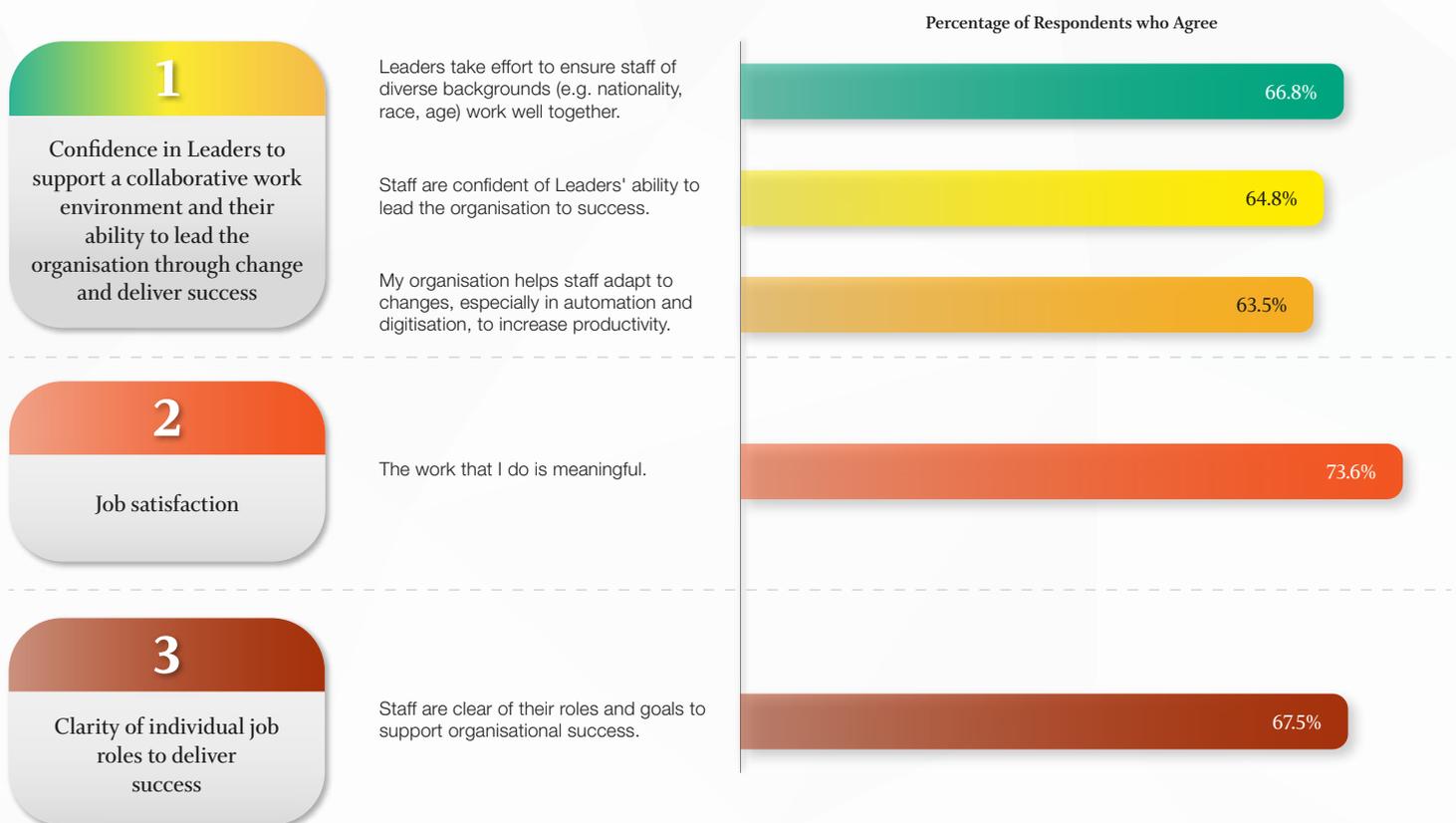
A workforce's level of engagement directly impacts the organisation's performance.

Sustaining employee engagement levels begins with understanding the factors that drive employee engagement for our workforce. Being aware of what keeps your employees engaged enables organisations to identify and continue such practices. Conversely, being aware of the reasons for low employee engagement enables organisations to take action to improve engagement levels.

An engaged and loyal workforce can mean lower attrition rates, better talent retention, enhanced productivity and ultimately revenue growth. Engaged employees identify with organisational outcomes and are more willing to go the extra mile for the organisation. Organisations are also more likely to reap the rewards of capability building efforts, when employees stay long enough to acquire adequate skills and knowledge to make valuable contributions to the organisation.

Areas Done Well: What keeps our workforce engaged

Key factors that positively impact employee engagement and loyalty/positive word-of-mouth (similar for respondents from SMEs and non-SMEs) and in which respondents were more satisfied include:



Note: All questions on engagement attributes used a 6-point rating scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Values above reflect the proportion of respondents who select 'Agree' and 'Strongly Agree' to the respective statements.

Priority Areas for Action: What can we do more of?

From our experience working with various organisations across industries, we understand the importance of prioritising areas for improvement as resources are finite. The following priority areas have been identified as lower performing factors that impact employee engagement and loyalty, and which require management intervention.



In the following sections, we deep dive into each of these areas to understand how organisations can tackle these areas and create a more engaged workforce.

■ Inspiring Leadership

What distinguishes an inspiring Leader from others, is the level of engagement and loyalty of its workforce.

Why is it important for Leaders to inspire the workforce? According to an article on Forbes¹, one of a Leader's key responsibilities is inspiring others. Doing so creates "a culture that motivates and empowers", along with desirable business outcomes.

However, results suggest that employee engagement levels are currently limited by the lack of inspiring leadership.



Non-management staff (i.e. those in Executive, Support / Operational roles) were less satisfied with the leadership in their organisations, with respect to the three leadership questions above. Results showed that more respondents in SMEs were agreeable that their Leaders walk the talk, as compared to non-SMEs. Through our work with various types of organisations, larger organisations tend to have processes in place to communicate their strategic directions and plans, however personal engagement of Leaders may be less regular. Hence it is not surprising that fewer employees in non-SME companies agree that "Leaders walk the talk".

There was no significant difference in perception of employees in SMEs or non-SMEs in how they feel about their Leaders inspiring them or whether Leaders set clear directions. These are certainly areas of focus as part of leadership development for organisations.



Are Leaders in SMEs more aligned as compared to Leaders in non-SMEs?

Leadership, at its core, is about bringing people together to achieve a goal. A Leader needs to be able to connect with people, bring them together, communicate clearly to provide direction, ensure alignment of the shared goal within the team, and provide the required support. Many sources have similarly cited these as important traits of Leaders of the future.

According to Gerard Seijts, Professor of Organizational Behaviour and Dan Crim, student of Organizational Behaviour², it is critical for Leaders to clearly communicate the vision as employees want to understand the vision for the organisation, as well as the goals for the division, unit, or team.

Leaders who inspire are also Leaders who “walk the talk”, and demonstrate personal alignment to the organisation’s espoused culture and values. From our experience working with various organisations across industries, we found that individuals with these traits draw the respect of employees, and consequently increase their influence as Leaders.

What can we do?

In becoming an organisation with inspiring leadership, perhaps companies could consider reviewing the following areas to enhance leadership capabilities to inspire staff:

Is the organisation culture clearly defined and do our Leaders walk the talk?

Have we clearly articulated the desired behaviours expected of our Leaders?

Have we clearly defined the leadership qualities that are important to lead the organisation to success?

How do we build leadership capabilities to inspire staff to achieve success?

Fair and Progressive Human Resource Practices

The adoption of fair and progressive Human Resource practices in organisations is a strategic imperative that gives an organisation a competitive edge in terms of talent attraction, motivation and retention. According to Mercer’s Singapore Employee Engagement Index study in 2017³, “fair treatment” was identified as one of the core needs of employees.

The rapid development of Singapore in recent decades has contributed to an increasingly diverse workforce. Employees’ needs have moved from “working to meet basic needs to fulfilling higher level needs and aspirations”⁴ and organisations are increasingly aware of the importance in meeting these changing needs. Against the backdrop of rapid change, it is not surprising that fair and progressive employment practices was identified as a key driver of employee engagement in our study, for both SMEs and non-SMEs. However, while organisations recognise the need to embrace fair and progressive employment practices, how each organisation defines and practices “fairness” and “progressiveness” can differ.

Our study revealed that only 57.5% of respondents agree that their organisations adopt fair and progressive employment practices in addressing diverse needs. In particular, respondents in Support or Operational roles and those aged 61 years old and above were less agreeable that their organisations adopt fair and progressive Human Resource practices.

Further analysis revealed that the majority of older employees also held Support or Operational roles in their organisation.

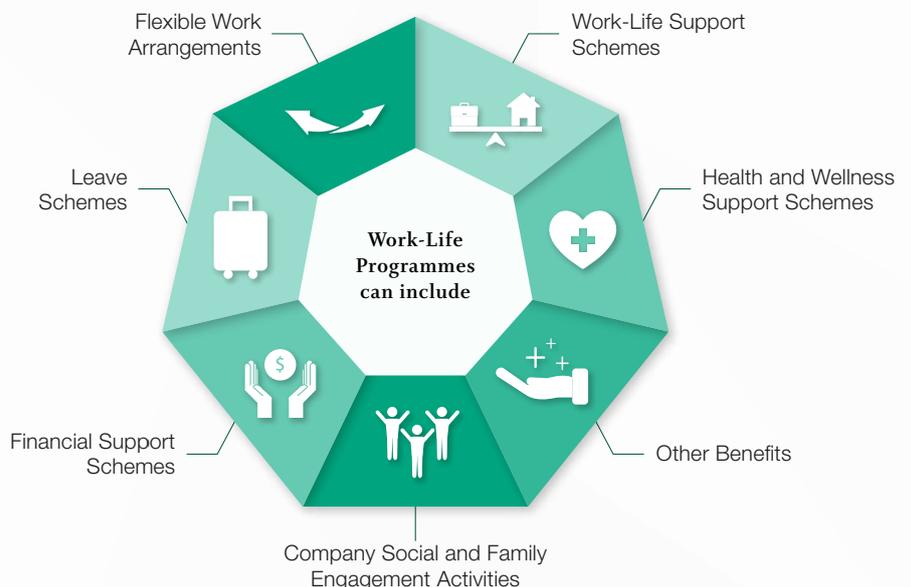
It is commonly recognised that employees’ needs may differ across job levels; what is important to respondents working in Support and Operational roles may differ from respondents in higher job levels.

It is currently not clear what is defined as “fair and progressive” employment practices across the different job levels and this can be further explored in our subsequent studies as the interpretation and priority may differ, and can include a range of areas including and not limited to the following:



Progressive work-life practices

One aspect of fair and progressive employment practices, which has seen increased discussion and uptake in recent years, is Work-Life Programmes (WLPs). It is noted that more companies offer WLPs especially Flexible Work Arrangement (FWA). Data from MOM’s Conditions of Employment Survey 2016 indicates that 76.9% of companies offer at least one adhoc FWA and 47% of companies offer at least one formal FWA.



In a recent study commissioned by TAFEP on quantifying the benefits of WLPs, findings revealed that the WLPs that employees perceived as useful, differed by job level.

When employees were asked what WLPs were useful in helping them manage their work and family / personal responsibilities more effectively and what WLPs would encourage them to return to their company after a career break, most non-PMEs selected Health and Wellness Support Schemes^a. In contrary, PMEs perceived Leave Schemes^b and Flexible Work Arrangements^c (FWAs) to be more beneficial. This finding did not come as a surprise, as FWAs, for example, may not be as accessible to employees in Support and Operational roles due to the nature of their work and operational requirements.



While organisations are increasingly recognising the need for fair and progressive practices at the workplace, at the heart of fair and progressive practices lies a deep understanding of employees' needs⁵. Understanding one's employees comes from appreciating the value of employees, and viewing them as assets and capital to the organisation, instead of a mere resource. Ultimately, this sets an organisation apart from others, to reap the benefits of human capital management through fair and progressive practices.

What can we do?

Organisations should continually review the Human Resource practices adopted in their journey toward becoming a more fair and progressive organisation. If we agree that being fair means a differentiated approach to meet the differentiated needs of our workforce, then we need to be prepared to understand, design and explain the rationale of our policies more effectively. Some of the considerations are as follows:



^aHealth & Wellness Support Schemes include Health and Wellness Programme, Health Screening, Medical and Insurance Coverage for Family, Subsidy for Gym Membership, Corporate Gym Membership, Fruits Day, Stress Management, Leaving Early from Work on Designated Days

^bLeave Schemes include Personal Leave other than Annual Leave, Childcare Leave, Family Care Leave, Compassionate Leave, Emergency Leave, Temporary Leave of Absence, Block Leave, Unrecorded Time Off for Family/Personal Matters

^cFlexible Work Arrangements include Part-Time Work, Phasing In or Out, Contract Work, Telecommuting, Flexible Work Timing, Compressed Work, Flexible Shift Arrangements, Flexible Lunch Arrangements, Creative Scheduling

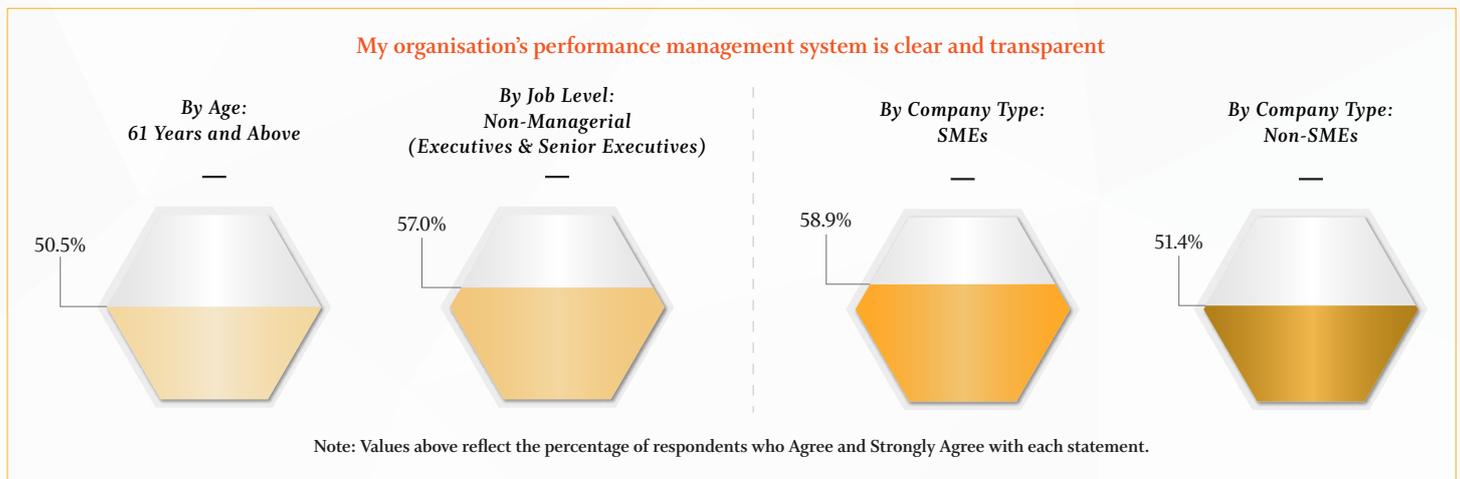
■ Clear and Transparent Performance Management System

Each organisation has its unique system to assess the performance of its employees and reward them. There is no one-size-fits-all approach to performance management, and organisations should ensure the system is aligned to its culture and nature of work. However, across the various systems adopted by organisations, clarity and transparency are fundamental to an effective performance management system.

In an ideal state where an organisation's performance management system is seen to be clear and transparent, all employees understand the expectations of their role, how they are being evaluated, and the linkage of their performance to rewards (e.g. in the form of salary increments or variable bonuses). With the assurance that they are treated fairly and will be recognised for their work, employees feel valued and can invest increased effort into their work⁶. A clear and transparent performance management system lays the foundation for a healthy organisational culture, which helps to grow and sustain a productive workforce focused on achieving organisational outcomes.

On the other hand, a performance management system that is not viewed as clear or transparent, can potentially create distrust, fear, job insecurity and employee disengagement, as employees do not feel duly recognised for their contributions. Without timely and careful intervention, this can foster an unhealthy culture of silo-mentality or politicking in the organisation.

Findings from our study revealed that respondents were less agreeable that their organisations' performance management system is clear and transparent. Respondents who are aged 61 years old and above, working in non-SMEs or non-managerial (Executives and Senior Executives) roles were less agreeable to the above statement.



The above findings suggest potential communication gaps within organisations, resulting in groups of employees perceiving the system as unclear or lacking in transparency. This can happen when the performance management system was not cascaded in a consistent manner across job levels and roles, or when communication of related decisions were not prompt or consistent. As a result, the level of awareness and understanding of the system (e.g. how performance grade is derived) varies across employees.

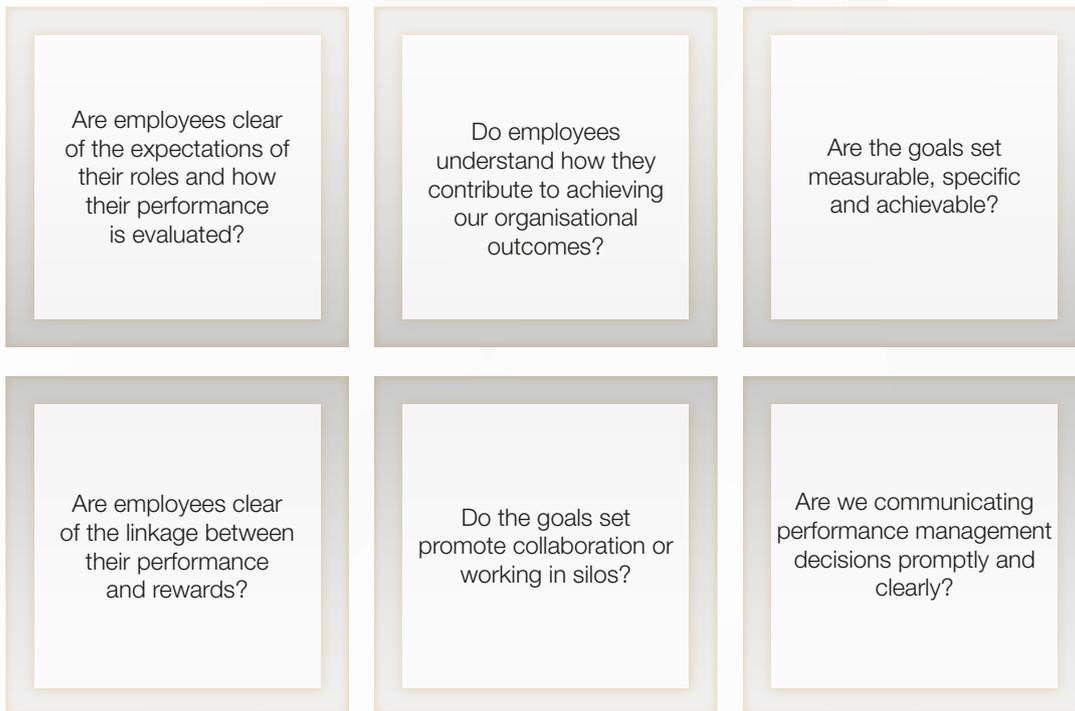
This is more common among larger organisations, which face greater challenge in ensuring alignment throughout the organisation, due to the larger number of stakeholders. Similarly, employees in non-managerial roles, who are typically not involved in the decision-making process, may perceive the system to be less clear or transparent as a result. As such, it is all the more important to identify and intentionally engage pockets within the organisation who experience this communication gap.

An effective performance management system also ensures that employees are evaluated by performance indicators that directly result from their work. With a clear and direct line of work, employees can understand how their work impacts business goals.

It is not uncommon for organisations to be task-focused in measuring an employee's performance. However, performance indicators should be outcome-focused. Instead of a laundry list of tasks to complete, effective performance indicators should address the objectives of the tasks at hand.

What can we do?

In becoming an organisation with a clear and transparent performance management system, areas to consider include:



What's Next?

On what high-performing companies should be striving to create: A great place for great people to do great work.

- Marilyn Carlson, former CEO of Carlson Companies

As organisations continue to grow, it is important to remember that human capital is still one of the greatest assets to organisations. Therefore, a focus on human capital development is imperative for business success.

To stimulate this desire, employees need to feel happy and engaged. A happier and more engaged workforce is aligned to the organisation's strategic direction and business outcomes, which encourages employees to go the extra mile for the organisation.

Our paper delved into some key issues SMEs and non-SMEs may experience today, and what organisations can do to manage these issues. However, each organisation is different and has its unique needs. In addition to the key drivers identified, there are also other areas that need to be considered when driving employee engagement. What are some of these other areas your organisation needs to focus on?

All employees have an innate desire to contribute to something bigger than themselves.

- Jag Randhawa, author of "The Bright Idea Box: A Proven System to Drive Employee Engagement and Innovation"

Notes and References

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Other Research and Insights Studies by aAdvantage Consulting

aAdvantage Consulting conducts several benchmarking studies across various areas, including desired workplace culture and employee engagement.



Since 2011, aAdvantage has conducted its **annual workforce engagement survey**. Each year, more than 1,500 employees across industries are interviewed to understand their level of engagement. The study also analyses the key drivers of employee engagement and the importance of work life in the workplace.



Every 3 years since 2012, aAdvantage conduct a **National Values Assessment**. Our findings were compared to similar global studies. The study also explored the type of workplace culture desired by employees. Results for 2012, 2015 and 2018 are available for download at the link below.



In 2014, aAdvantage partnered with the Institute of Singapore Chartered Accountants (ISCA) to conduct an **industry level employee engagement study**. The study aimed to identify the key drivers of employee engagement so as to address talent retention issues in the accounting sector, particularly in small and medium sized practices.



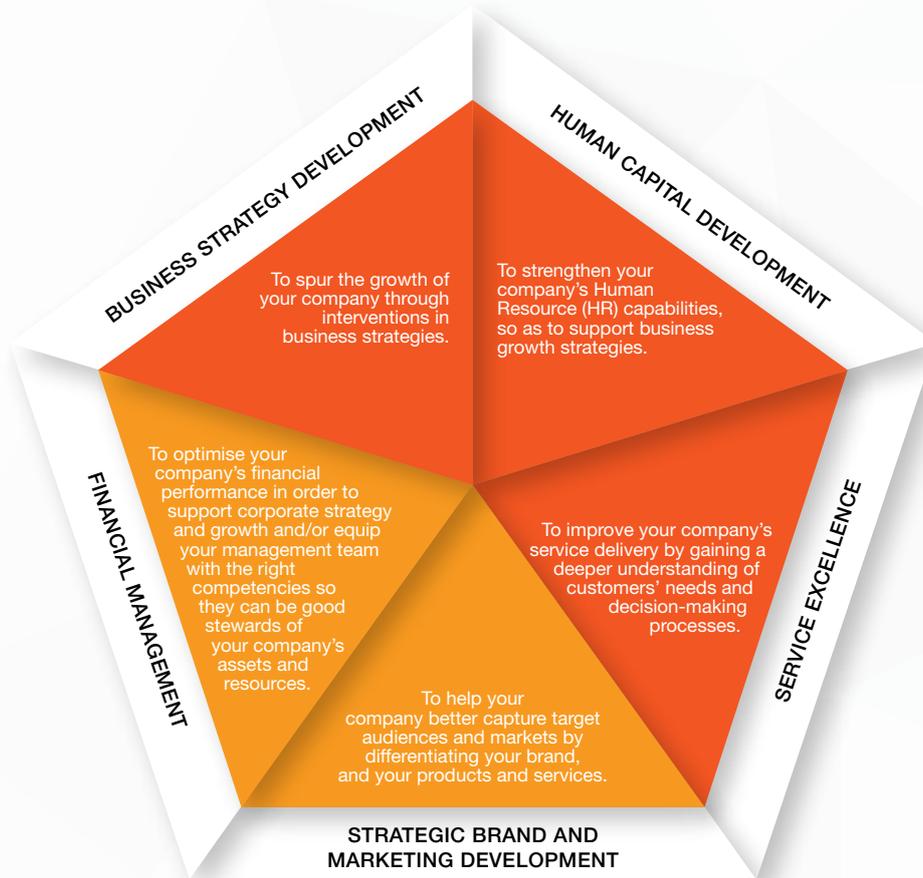
Periodically, aAdvantage conducts its Net Promoter Score® (NPS®) benchmarking study on selected industries. In 2018, we published our NPS® study on selected public sector agencies.

Resources from these studies are available for download at:
<http://www.aadvantage-consulting.sg/Resources-&-Tools>

Leveraging the Enterprise Development Grant (EDG)

The Enterprise Development Grant (EDG) helps Singapore companies grow and transform. This grant supports projects that help you upgrade your business, innovate or venture overseas, under three pillars - 1. Core Capabilities, 2. Innovation and Productivity, 3. Market Access.

aAdvantage can assist in building its core capabilities. Projects under Core Capabilities help businesses prepare for growth and transformation by strengthening their business foundations. These should go beyond basic functions such as sales and accounting. Areas include:



aAdvantage Consulting has experience in working with organisations in these areas:

BUSINESS STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT

Project may address any of these areas:

- **Business Excellence** *
- Corporate growth strategy
- Free Trade Agreement (FTA)
- Intellectual Property (IP) strategy

* aAdvantage Consulting is able to assist in this area.

SERVICE EXCELLENCE

Project may address any of these areas:

- Diagnosis and gap analysis of customer needs to improve service levels and drive customer-centric behaviour
- Service innovation, adoption of advanced customer research, analytics and service process redesign to enhance customer experience

HUMAN CAPITAL DEVELOPMENT

Project may address any of these areas:

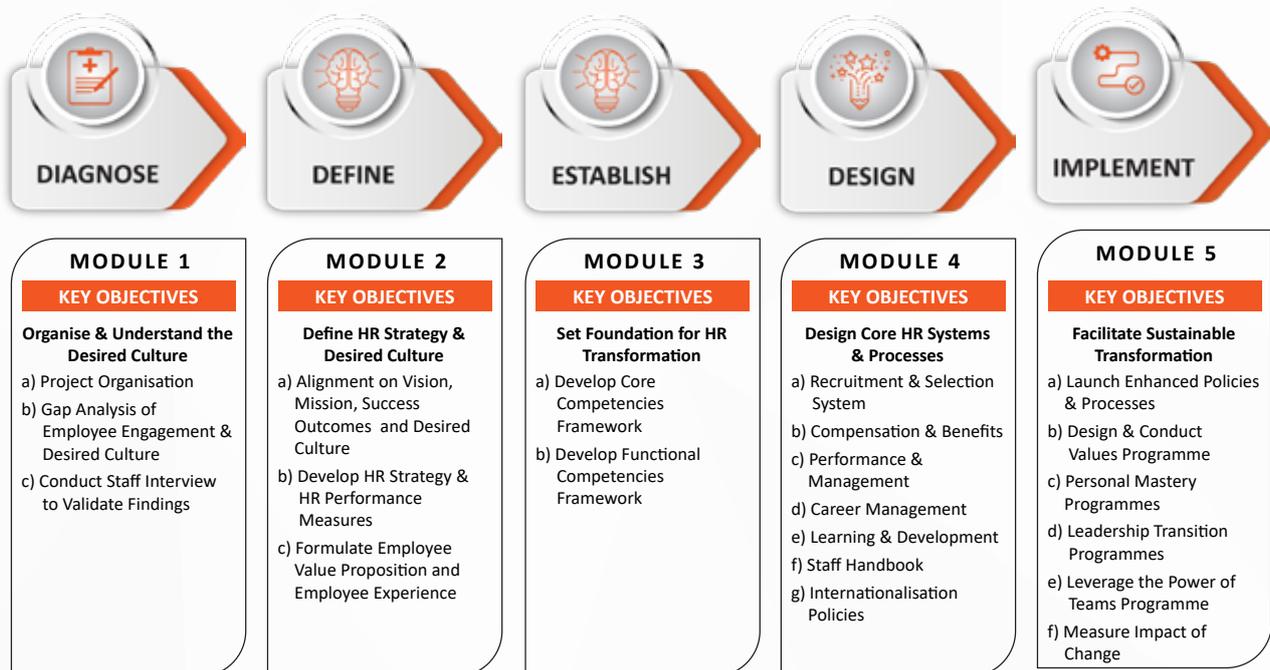
- Compensation & Benefits
- Employee Engagement & Communication
- Employee Value Proposition
- HR Management
- International Mobility
- Job Redesign
- Learning & Development
- Manpower Planning
- Organisation Culture
- Performance Management
- Recruitment & Selection
- Talent Management & Succession Planning

aAdvantage's Human Resource Transformation Solutions

aAdvantage's mission is to partner our clients to achieve impactful implementation & seamless transformation for sustainable growth. To achieve the desired transformation regardless of the context (i.e. business, human capital or service), we believe that attention to culture is critical to deliver sustainable change and transformation across all staff levels. Our consultants possess domain expertise to execute the desired vision to achieve the results.



Over the years, we are increasingly working with Leaders of local enterprises who recognise the importance the human capital and consciously building a culture to execute strategy. We believe that an organisation's Human Capital Strategy must support the Business Strategy. Our overall end-to-end approach to Human Capital Transformation begins with the end in mind to develop structured systems to attract, develop and retain the right talent for the organisation.



About aAdvantage Consulting

aAdvantage Consulting is a business consultancy firm that partners organisations in leading their business and organisational transformation from “Vision to Results”. Established in 2002, we are now in our 16th year of operations.

We help our clients turn strategies into business results through our People, Process and Performance solutions. As part of our organisation development and business transformation consulting services, we provide holistic and customised solutions to assist clients achieve lasting change.

We believe that a shared leadership, vision, clear standards, processes and roles, performance management and people development all come together to ensure sustainable change in organisations.

If you would like to discuss these findings, or would like to embark on similar studies for your organisation or industry, please contact:

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