

# The Future of Work in Malaysia After COVID-19

Survey conducted by Aisling Group



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# INTRODUCTION

Aisling Group, a prominent talent solutions provider native to Malaysia, embarked on a mission to explore the ever-evolving landscape of **'The Future of Work in Malaysia After COVID-19'**.

This endeavour aimed to delve into the shifting dynamics, challenges, and opportunities that have emerged in the Malaysian workforce in the wake of the COVID 19 pandemic, which has reshaped the very essence of work.

The study, meticulously crafted to gather valuable insights, was conducted through an online questionnaire from July to October 2023. These questionnaires were carefully disseminated via email to a curated database, ensuring that each recipient received a unique link to prevent duplicate responses.

The survey participants were selected from the pool of email addresses registered with Getvase.com, ensuring a diverse and representative sample.



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

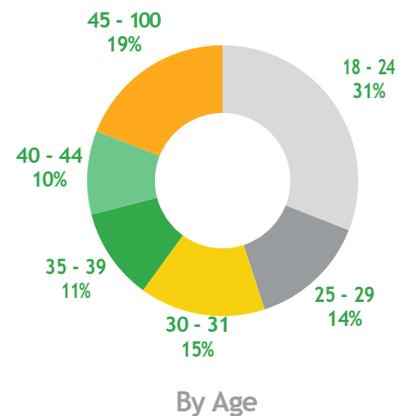
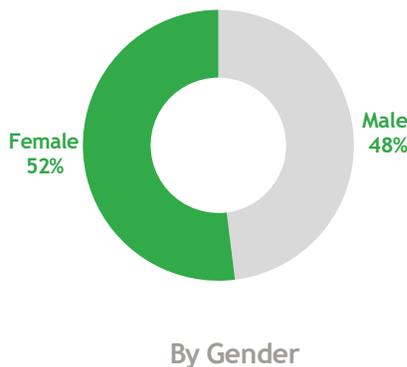
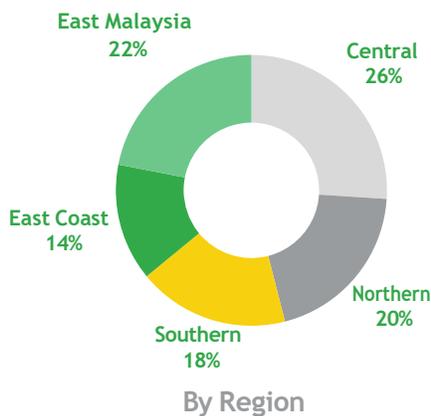
This whitepaper offers insights derived from a comprehensive survey aimed at understanding the shifting dynamics of the Malaysian workforce in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. The survey, which amassed a significant total of 716 responses, was conducted virtually between July to October 2023 and ensured a diverse representation of working adults across Malaysia, covering a wide age range from 18 to 60 years old. Employing a robust random sampling methodology, the survey provided statistically valid insights into the current state of the workforce.

The demographic breakdown revealed a notable dominance of Generation Z respondents, comprising 31% of the total, indicative of the emerging workforce trends. Following closely were combined segments of Gen X and Boomers at 19%, with Millennials accounting for 15%. Geographically, respondents were spread across different regions, with Central Malaysia representing the highest proportion at 26%, followed by East Malaysia at 22%, Northern Malaysia at 20%, and the East Coast at 14%. Additionally, the gender distribution showcased a slight majority of female respondents at 52%.

In terms of work arrangements, the majority of respondents reported working full-time in traditional office settings, constituting 63% of the sample. However, a considerable portion, accounting for 22%, indicated adopting a hybrid work model, blending remote and in-office work, while 16% embraced fully remote work arrangements.

The survey findings underscore several key themes that have emerged in the post-pandemic workforce landscape. Notably, there has been a transformative shift in work dynamics and interpersonal relations, emphasising the critical importance of prioritising employee well-being, leveraging advanced technologies, fostering inclusive corporate cultures, and promoting innovation. These trends reflect broader societal shifts accelerated by the pandemic, such as the growing demand for workplace flexibility and increased focus on employee mental health and well-being.

Importantly, the survey highlights that these trends are not transient but are likely to persist in the long term, shaping the future of work. Organisations that recognise and adapt to these evolving dynamics stand to gain a competitive edge, attract top talent, and drive sustainable growth in the post-COVID-19 era. By aligning strategies with the needs and preferences of their workforce, businesses can position themselves for success in an increasingly dynamic and interconnected global landscape.



# OVERVIEW

The pandemic has ushered in a multitude of challenges for those engaged in remote work, with technical issues and connectivity problems proving to be the most prominent stumbling blocks, affecting 58% of respondents.

Additional challenges include communication and collaboration difficulties with colleagues, as well as struggles with maintaining motivation and focus, reported by 55% of those surveyed. The inadequacy of a suitable workspace or equipment affected 51% of respondents, and the perennial issue of work-life balance was cited by 47% as a significant concern.

Health and safety in the workplace emerged as the paramount concern for those returning to the office (45%), with 20% highlighting the adjustment to commuting and traffic as their primary challenge.

The survey also discerned a noticeable shift in hiring practices, with 34% of respondents noting an increased reliance on virtual interviews and assessments, underlining the industry's adaptation to digitalisation in response to pandemic-induced challenges.

Furthermore, the survey revealed a substantial 57% increase in the use of digital communication tools, such as email, chat, and video calls, with a simultaneous decrease in

regular interaction and collaboration with colleagues reported by 23% of respondents.

A noteworthy 50% of participants observed an amplified emphasis on employee well-being and mental health support, while 26% perceived a decline in this focus, and 24% reported no significant changes in organisational culture.

Preferences regarding work arrangements also came to the forefront, with 56% favouring a combination of remote and in-office work, and 13% expressing a preference for exclusively remote work. In contrast, approximately 27% of respondents favoured working primarily in an office setting. The two most prevalent concerns surrounding the post-pandemic work environment centred on mental health and well-being (66%) and health and safety in the workplace (63%).

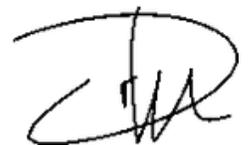
In summary, the survey findings underscored the profound impact of the pandemic on work dynamics and interpersonal relationships within the workplace. They emphasise the imperative for organisations to offer robust support and resources for remote work and to prioritise employee well-being and mental health support. Furthermore, the results suggest that a hybrid work model may be the favoured choice for a substantial segment of employees in the post-COVID-19 era.

# INSIGHTS

There has been a transformative shift in work dynamics and interpersonal relations, accentuating the significance of prioritising employee well-being, integrating advanced technologies, promoting an inclusive corporate culture, and championing innovation. Our survey reinforces some of the trends we've seen coming out of the pandemic (such as the desire for flexibility at work, and more focus on employee well-being and mental health), and highlights the fact that they are here to stay. By addressing these needs, organisations can create a competitive edge, attract top talent, and drive sustainable growth in the post-COVID-19 era.

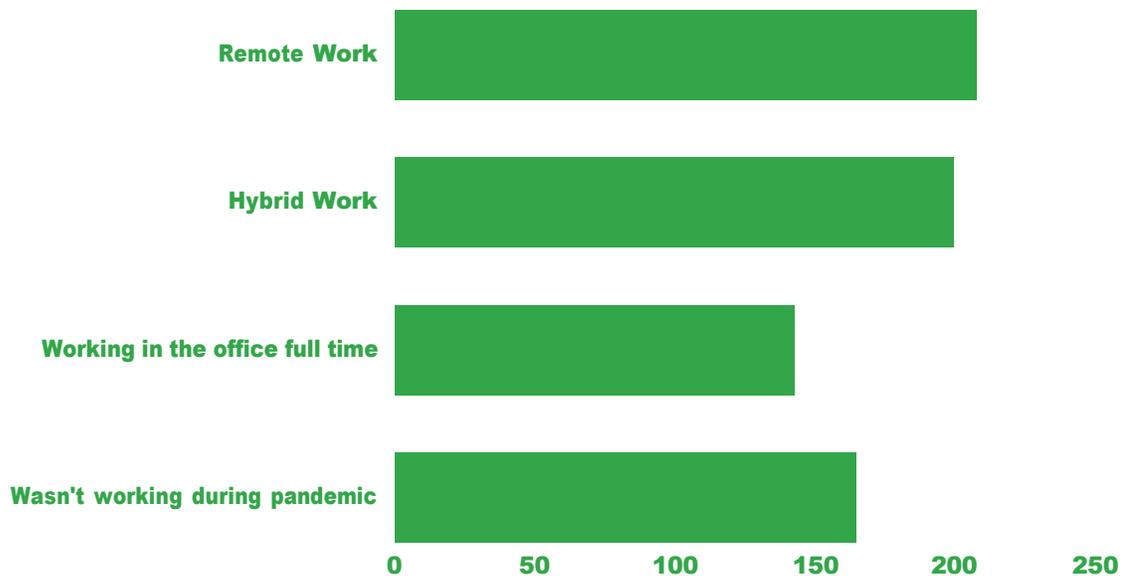


Melissa Norman  
Founder & Managing Director  
Aisling Group

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'M Norman'.

## Insight 1: Work Arrangements During and After the Pandemic

- The survey results paint a clear picture of how work arrangements have evolved during and after the pandemic.
- Post-pandemic, the majority of respondents (63%) have returned to working in a traditional office setting on a full-time basis.
- This is a remarkable shift compared to the initial period of the first Movement Control Order (MCO) in Malaysia, from March to May 2020, where only 20% were working in the office full-time, while 29% were fully remote, and 28% adopted a hybrid work model. Furthermore, 23% were not working at all during the height of the pandemic.



## Insight 2: Challenges and Opportunities in the New World of Work

- "Work from home and flexible work get you productivity as much as working from the office. That, along with a growing concern about health and well-being are becoming increasingly important factors," Steven Yudiyantho, SVP, Human Capital Strategy, PT Bank Mandiri (Persero) Tbk.*

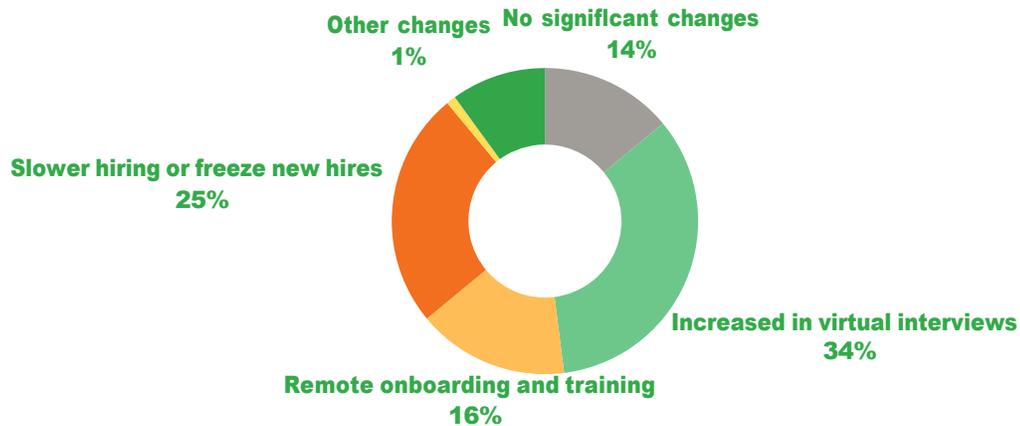
*People Matters*

The transition to remote work, whether full-time or partially, brought forth a myriad of challenges.

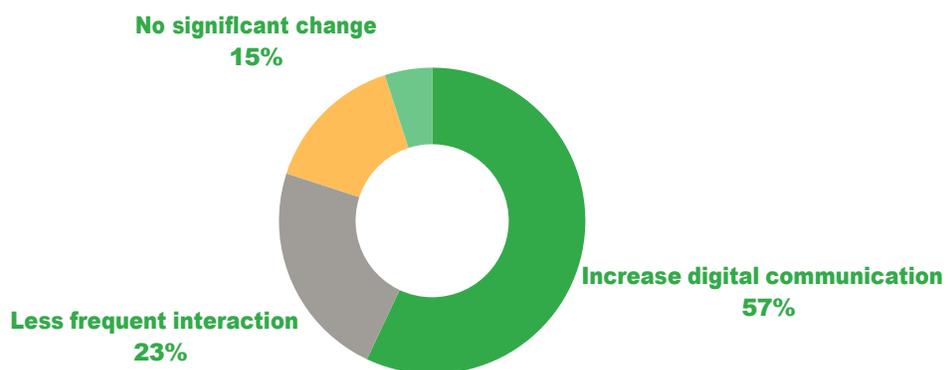
- Technical issues and connectivity problems emerged as the most significant hurdle, with a notable 58% of respondents citing this as a major concern. This was closely followed by difficulties in communication and collaboration with colleagues (55%), struggles in maintaining motivation and focus (55%), a lack of proper workspace or equipment (51%), and the perpetual challenge of maintaining a work-life balance (47%). A small percentage (5%) reported not facing any specific challenges.
- The return to office introduced a distinct set of challenges, with health and safety in the workplace taking precedence (45%).
- Additionally, 20% of respondents found adapting to commuting and traffic to be their primary challenge. After a prolonged period of working from home, 19% struggled with readjusting to a structured office routine, while 11% faced difficulties in reconnecting and collaborating with colleagues in person. Other challenges included dealing with parking, associated fees, lunch arrangements, and other expenses.



### Insight 3 : Changes in Hiring and Interactions with Colleagues



- The survey highlighted notable shifts in the hiring process during the pandemic.
- The most significant observed change was the increased use of virtual interviews and assessments, reported by 34% of respondents. This underscores the industry’s swift adaptation to digitalisation as a means to overcome the challenges posed by the pandemic.
- Additionally, 25% of participants noted a slowdown or freeze in the hiring process, while 16% highlighted a greater emphasis on remote onboarding and training for new hires.



- In terms of interactions with colleagues, the shift towards remote work led to an increased reliance on digital communication tools such as email, chat, and video calls for 57% of respondents. However, 23% reported having less frequent interaction and collaboration with colleagues. Interestingly, 15% noted no significant changes in their interactions with colleagues.

## Insight 4 : Well-being and Mental Health Support in the Workplace

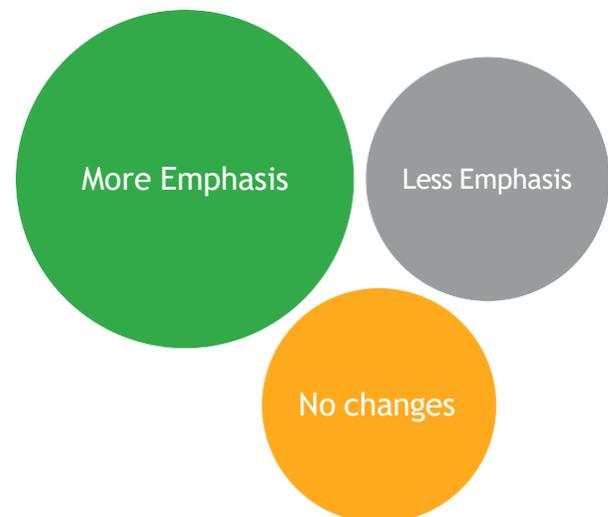
*"There are concerns about the under-addressed issue of mental health within the workplace, and the secrecy surrounding it often discourages employers and leaders from seeking assistance," Emerging Journey Asia, organiser of the Mental Health Experiential Conference 2.0*

*The Star*



- ◆ However, it's worth noting that not all organisations responded in the same way. Some respondents (26%) observed a decreased focus on employee well-being and support, while others (24%) reported no significant changes in their organisational culture in this regard.
- ◆ These findings highlight the need for organisations to take a proactive approach to addressing the well-being and mental health of their workforce, particularly in the wake of the pandemic.

- ◆ The pandemic brought about a significant transformation in organisations' approach to employee well-being and mental health support.
- ◆ Half of the respondents (50%) indicated that there is now a heightened emphasis on employee well-being and mental health support within their organisations. This signifies a recognition of the importance of addressing the mental and emotional needs of employees during challenging times.



## Insight 5 : Returning to the Office: Challenges and Solutions

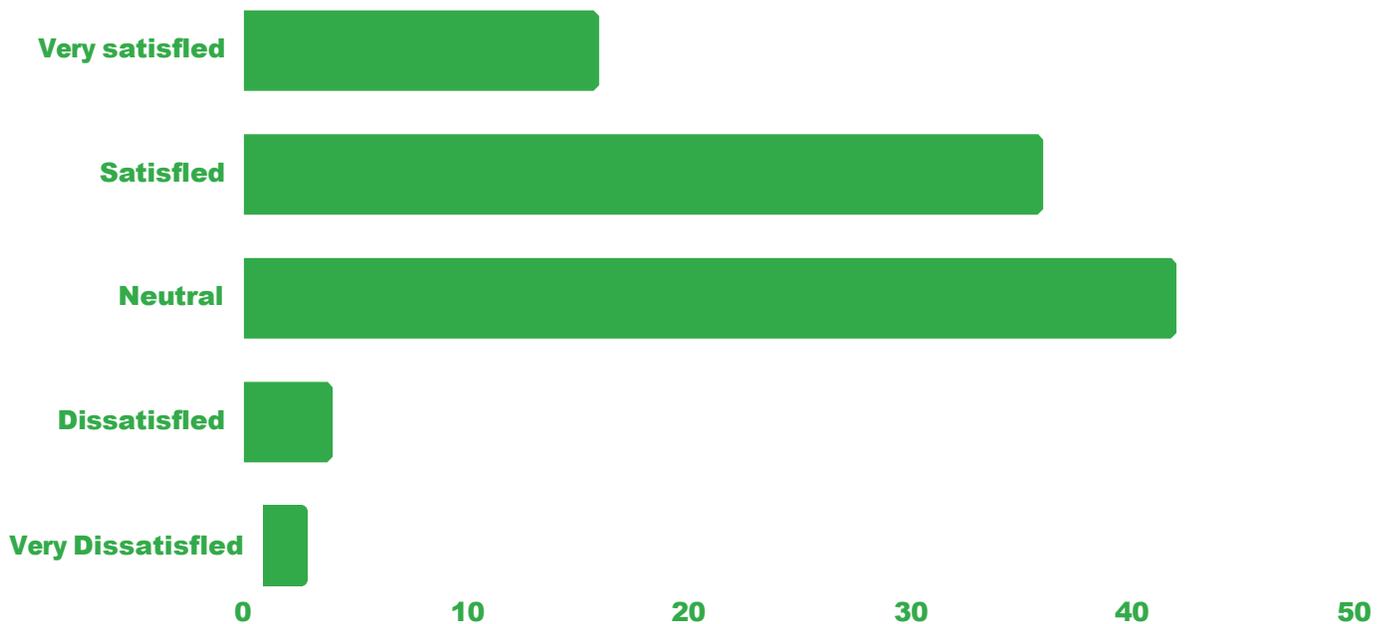


- The transition back to the office post-pandemic has not been without its challenges.
- Health and safety in the workplace emerged as the primary concern for workers returning to the office, reflecting the heightened awareness of safety protocols in the wake of the pandemic. Many respondents expressed apprehension about potential health risks and the need for comprehensive safety measures within the workplace.
- These concerns must be thoughtfully addressed by organisations as they navigate the return-to-office mandates.

## Insight 6 : Remote Work Support and Resources

*"It's important to remember that remote work and office-based work have unique differences. With hybrid environments, it's important for employers and managers to keep that in mind and make sure that employees working in both situations are equipped and have the resources needed to effectively work with everyone in the company regardless of their work location," Timothy Dick, Founder & Chief Executive Officer of VOIPO*

*Forbes*



- For those continuing to work remotely or adopting a hybrid work model, the survey indicates that the majority feel their employers have provided adequate support and resources for remote work, albeit with room for improvement.
- A significant 38% of respondents reported excellent support and resources from their employers, suggesting a positive employer response to the challenges of remote work.
- However, 13% expressed dissatisfaction, feeling that their employers have not provided sufficient support and resources for this mode of work.
- This finding underscores the need for organisations to continually assess and enhance their support for remote work to ensure employee satisfaction and productivity.

## Insight 7 : Career Development Opportunities in the Post-Pandemic Era

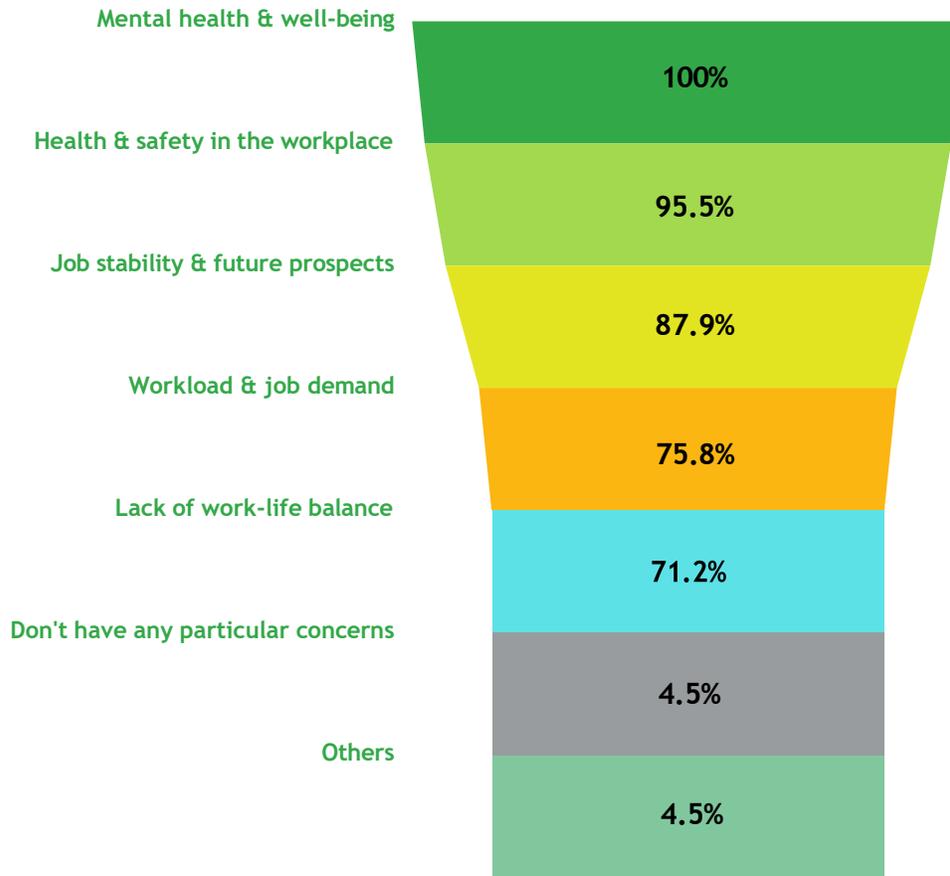
*"Half of all employees around the world will need reskilling by 2025 - and that number does not include all the people who are currently not in employment."*

*World Economic Forum's Future of Jobs Report 2020*



- In terms of career development, the survey results show a nearly even split between those who perceived expanded career development opportunities, such as online training and webinars (41%), and those who reported limited career development opportunities (42%) in the post-pandemic era. The remaining 17% noted no significant changes in career development opportunities.
- This balance suggests that while some organisations have actively adapted to provide additional career development avenues in the virtual space, there is still room for improvement in ensuring that all employees have access to such opportunities.

## Insight 8 : Concerns About the Future of Work



- The concerns regarding the future of work have been discussed in detail in Insight 2 and Insight 4 of the whitepaper. These concerns primarily revolve around health and safety in the workplace, work arrangements, and the ongoing impact of the pandemic on the workforce.



## Insight 9 : Work-Life Balance

- The survey findings also underscore concerns about work-life balance, particularly as companies enforce return-to-office mandates.
- Nearly half of the respondents (47%) expressed worries about the potential disruption of their work-life balance as they transition back to in-office work. This concern highlights the need for organisations to consider flexible work arrangements and policies that prioritise work-life balance as they navigate the evolving landscape of work.



## Insight 10: Implications for the Workforce in Malaysia

*"Leaders need to rethink how to cultivate an inclusive culture, place employees - their experience, engagement, and well-being at the center, and modernise their networking and security infrastructure to provide a seamless, secure and inclusive employee experience," Hana Raja, Managing Director of Cisco Malaysia*

*Focus Malaysia*

- The primary concerns surrounding health and safety in the workplace emphasise the importance of creating a safe and secure environment for employees returning to the office.
- Organisations should proactively implement safety measures, communicate these measures clearly to employees, and ensure strict adherence to health guidelines.
- The preference among most respondents for a combination of remote and in-office work or remote work indicates a growing demand for flexible work arrangements.
- Organisations should recognise this shift and consider adopting hybrid work models that cater to these preferences, which can lead to increased job satisfaction and retention.



## Insight 11 : Recommendations for Employers

- The survey findings highlight an increased emphasis on employee well-being and mental health support.
- To align with this trend, employers should consider implementing comprehensive well-being programmes and providing resources to support employees' mental health needs. This can contribute to a healthier and more productive workforce.



# CONCLUSION

The survey findings presented in this report illuminate the profound impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the way Malaysian employees work and interact with their colleagues.

It is evident that the landscape of work has undergone significant transformation, prompting a need for businesses to adapt swiftly and effectively to these changes.

The key insights from this study underscore the importance of prioritising employee well-being, embracing technological advancements, nurturing an inclusive company culture, and fostering innovation. To empower their workforce for success in the post-pandemic era, businesses should consider the following strategies:



1

### **Embrace Technological Advancements:**

The pandemic has accelerated the digital transformation of work. To thrive in this new era, businesses must not only embrace technology but also remain agile and adaptable to rapid changes. Leveraging technology effectively can enhance both employee productivity and organisational efficiency.

2

### **Nurture an Inclusive Company Culture:**

Inclusion and diversity are fundamental pillars of a resilient and forward-thinking organisation. Companies should foster a culture where every voice is not only welcomed but also actively heard and respected. This inclusivity creates an environment where employees feel a deep sense of connection to the company and its people, leading to higher engagement and retention.

3

### **Address Gender Pay Inequality:**

Striving for pay equity is a critical step in creating a fair and equitable workplace. Addressing gender pay inequality demonstrates a commitment to fairness and sends a powerful message of trust and transparency within the organisation.

4

**Prioritise Employee Well-being and Mental Health Support:**

The pandemic has underscored the importance of employee well-being and mental health. Providing adequate resources and support for employees in these areas is not just a moral imperative but also a strategic advantage. Healthy, engaged employees are more productive and resilient.

5

**Encourage a Hybrid Work Model:**

The survey findings indicate that many Malaysian employees prefer a hybrid work model, which offers flexibility and accommodates individual preferences. Businesses that embrace this model can enhance job satisfaction and work-life balance, ultimately contributing to greater employee happiness and productivity.

6

**Promote Open Dialogue and Debate:**

An environment that encourages the expression of opposing ideas and thoughtful debate fosters innovation and critical thinking. By acknowledging diverse perspectives and presenting compelling counterarguments, businesses can cultivate a culture of intellectual rigour and adaptability.

# 7

## **Create a Safe Environment for Innovation:**

Stagnation is the enemy of progress. Companies should establish a safe space that encourages innovation and change. Encouraging employees to take calculated risks and experiment with new ideas can lead to breakthroughs that keep the organisation competitive and dynamic.

In conclusion, businesses that prioritise their employees' well-being, provide the necessary support and resources, cultivate a culture of inclusion and innovation, and adapt to the evolving demands of the post-pandemic era are poised for success. By recognising and embracing the changes catalysed by the pandemic, businesses can empower their workforce to excel, achieve their goals, and navigate the challenges and opportunities of the new world of work effectively.





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