THE BRIGHT SIDE OF THE PANDEMIC

A paper discussing the opportunities that the pandemic created for organisations and work experiences.

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MEASUREMEN

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TO WORK IS TO

SUSTAIN
IMPROVE
REPAIR
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HAPPINESS
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From pandemic to our work experience

We can't deny that the pandemic has negatively impacted a lot of people and lives. However, its also important to look at the opportunities that it has created, and to look at the bright side of it especially now that things are opening up again. One thing we know for sure is that the pandemic changed the world of working big time. Organisations have been forced to be flexible and resilient by changing their strategies. The flow of communication changed, the customers changed, and the resources changed. Besides, the physical offices of these organisations crumbled to many small home offices, connected digitally.

Altogether, this affected the people and their work big time too. They didn't have to travel to an office, they missed the atmosphere at the office, they lacked physical interactions with their colleagues, yet they did spend much more time at home (with their family).

Together, the pandemic caused employees to have a wholly different working experience. During the pandemic, people needed to attune to the new situation and had to find a way of working that suited them. Work has become blurred with personal lives as living rooms have also become offices and kitchens have also become break rooms. While this also happened the other way around, as their personal lives reached their work, children got involved with video calls, and colleagues were replaced by spouses to discuss work issues while sharing lunch.

Either way, what we all notice is the fact that we all needed, and need, to find our own way of getting through the day in this new world of work. Before the pandemic, personal living situations were relatively ignored. It did not matter that much if someone lived in a single bedroom apartment or had four children. If someone was at work, they worked. Now, we can't and shouldn't ignore these differences anymore.

PEOPLE JUST HAVE ONE LIFE AND WORK IS AN INSEPARABLE PART OF THAT.

People just have one life and work is an inseparable part of that. But the way people organise their work in their day differs largely between people. Some have clear 9-5 separations, while for others work and life blurs relatively together (read our previous blog about this). The different role that work plays in peoples' lives has become more and more evident across the pandemic. Some people were searching for more social contact between colleagues, whereas others distanced themselves and got more involved with their families. Some people got absorbed in their work because of higher autonomy, while others couldn't get any work done.

Organisations are shifting

The pandemic pulled out the stronger individual differences between people and illustrated the need for different approaches for making work, work for them. For this reason, many organisations have turned towards strategies focused on employee experience. Employee experience is the sum of all the moments that matter between an employee and an employer (Willis tower Watson). It's a more human-centric approach that focuses on the way employers can support their employees in order to make them thrive. According to Willis Tower Watson, who surveyed a total of 1,550 employers representing 9.45 million employees, more than nine in 10 employers (92%) indicate that enhancing the employee experience will be a priority over the next three years, while only 52% said enhancing the employee experience was a priority to their organisation before the pandemic.

The goal of enhancing employee experience is to facilitate employees into reaching what they want to get out of their work. In general, this implies improving the well-being of employees, improving engagement and satisfaction, avoiding burnouts, and attracting and retain talent. There is quite some scientific evidence that enhancing employee experience is indeed beneficial. For example, a recent scientific meta-analysis across 230 independent organisations found a significant, strong positive correlation between employees' satisfaction with their company and employee productivity and customer loyalty, and a strong negative correlation with staff turnover. Maybe not surprisingly, another survey by the Global Wellness Institute found that when U.S. workers feel physically or mentally unwell, it affects many aspects of their work performance, including getting their work done (62%), work engagement (63%), and motivation (62%).

What others say

92%

Willis Towers Watson
92% of organisations prioritising employee experience enhancements over the next three years.

Deloitte
80 percent of executives rated employee experience very important or important.

80%

68%

The Future Workplace 2021 HR Sentiment Survey
68% of senior HR leaders (of which 40% were CHROs) rated employee well-being and mental health as a top priority.

Gallup
$322 billion of turnover and lost productivity cost globally due to employee burnout.

322 billion

98%

McKinsey
98% of the CHROs is thinking about how HR can shift from mechanistic skill and talent management to addressing the employee experience in a more targeted, dynamic way.

HAPPY AND HEALTHY EMPLOYEES GET MORE AND BETTER WORK DONE BECAUSE THEY ARE MORE ENGAGED.

Focus on well-being

In sum, it's not a difficult but a weirdly neglected strategy and it comes down to this: ill, sad, and stressed employees get less work done with lower quality. While happy and healthy employees get more and better work done because they are more engaged, more friendly to customers, to colleagues, and can focus better. The employees are thus better for their company, while they are also better for themselves and the people in their personal lives. They might not work tirelessly from 9-5, but they will find a sweet spot to be efficient and meaningful for themselves and for their organisation (read our blog about making employees thrive through meaningful work). Through this path, employees get a positive experience when they think about their work, and think of it as a supportive community which they can use to pursue their goals albeit a good career, providing for their family, or a sense of belonging. Together, this work atmosphere should also retain and attract talent.

Challenges

The challenge remains, however, to support your employees with the right things that will boost their work experience. As discussed earlier, remote working has brought personal differences to the centre of the stage which underlines that people need different things to thrive at work. From talented young employees who live in a single-bedroom apartment, desperately searching for a good workplace, guidance, and career opportunities, to stable older employees who live in a huge house with their children desperately searching for autonomy and flexibility, to handle their busy schedule. Offering them the opportunities that match their need, would pave the path to better employee experience but it might not always go as easy as that.

In the past, and still today, people have been downgraded to a (simple) workforce; subordinates who were used as a tool to provide work for their supervisor. This relationship creates a distance between the employer and employees which raises (from both sides) strong needs for privacy, strictly work-related communication, and senses of distrust and/or manipulation. In such relationships, communication about personal needs is associated with fear and failure since communicating about personal needs also implies inability. This is a very risky strategy since a lack of communication about personal needs (work or non-work related), has a high chance to lead to results such as burn-out (due to an inability to balance the workload with personal energy) or poor performance (due to a lack of search for support). In order to avoid this, both employers and employees need to change their views.

WHAT A PERSON EXPERIENCE

VS.

WHAT AN ORGANISATION NEEDS TO OFFER

JEANETTE, 23 Y/O

SINGLE ROOM APPARTMENT
STARTER POSITION
HIGHLY STRESSED

A WELL DESIGNED OFFICE
CAREER TRACKS
YOGA CLASSES

SAM, 62 Y/O

HOUSE WITH HOME OFFICE
DEFINED WORK TASKS
ENGAGEMENT ISSUES

WORK REMOTELY
9–5 WORK SCHEDULE
LIMITED CONTACT HOURS

JESSICA, 35 Y/O

SMALL HOUSE
MANAGING POSITION
1 BABY

2D REMOTE / 3D OFFICE
FLEXIBLE SCHEDULE
LESS WORK HOURS
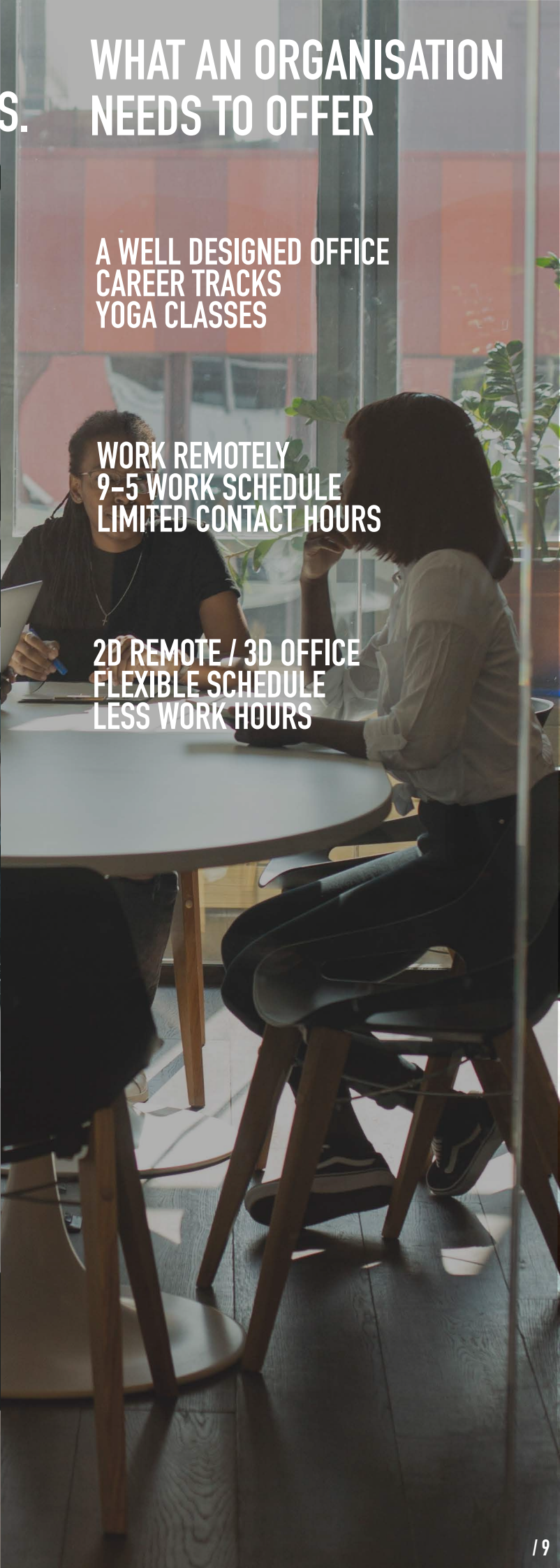
Change our views

We can change our view on organisations and the relations we have with our employees. We need to realise that the people are making the organisation, and organisations make the employees, that employees can benefit from their managers, and that managers benefit from their employees. Working in an organisation should be mutually beneficial because you're in this together. Employees do not just work for their managers; they work for themselves as well. As managers, and as employees, we should then try to change our view sometimes and look through the perspectives of others to see how we can support both them and ourselves.

Getting to a space where we can be there for each other comes basically down to communication. Being open and honest about your inabilities and strengths is the fastest way to get support or to provide support. Stating true intentions and needs makes it clear for employees what they're working for and generates a sense of trust. Through communicating about changes and attuning expectations (feedback), we can continuously grow and support the shared path of the employees and managers around us, keeping us in sync with each other. Altogether, working on common goals that are beneficial for the involved parties improves engagement and effort for both sides, since it realises their own needs.

Scientific basis

The most well-known scientific basis for workplace well-being is the Effort-Reward Imbalance model. This theory argues that imbalances between (high) effort and (low) rewards lead to adverse health outcomes such as burn-out, depression, and even coronary heart diseases. It exemplifies how employees need to be rewarded through their work that compensates for the effort they are spending on it. If there is an imbalance, the work will drain their energy and thus also their effort. Managers can both work on the effort side (by providing support such as tools or power), as well on the reward side (a higher pay or more autonomy) to regain the balance between them.

More directly job-related but quite similar, the Karasek's Demands-Resources model focuses on sustaining the balance between work demands and the resources an employee has. For example, a recent study showed that increasing resources through supportive management and involvement in decision-making lead to a better balance with less family-work conflict. More fundamentally, complexity theorists have posed that the primary goal of humans is to sustain and improve a balance between themselves and their environment, creating their personal ecosystem. By attuning to other humans (through cooperation), the energy can flow more efficiently reducing effort while increasing the benefits, which then creates a self-organised organisation.

PEOPLE MAKE THE ORGANISATION
THE ORGANISATION IS AN OUTCOME OF THE PEOPLE

DIFFERENT PEOPLE REQUIRE DIFFERENT SOLUTIONS
DIFFERENT SOLUTIONS WILL LEAD TO DIFFERENT PEOPLE

WORKSPACES AND WORKPROCESSES SHAPE THE
BEHAVIOUR OF PEOPLE, THE BEHAVIOUR OF PEOPLE
SHAPES THE ORGANISATION

Changing perspectives (a short story)

One morning, John went to work thinking about what his organisation needed from him today. He took the perspective of Lara, his manager, and thought about ways he could make Lara's work life easier. He knew she was struggling with their position in the market during these trying times. John wanted to offer her to do some market research, so she didn't need to stress all day and reach her goals easily. However, John hoped he could work at a good desk today where he could focus properly and get things done.

That same morning, Lara went to work thinking about what her employees needed from her today. She took the perspective of John, her employee, and thought about ways she could make John's work life easier. She knew that he was struggling with finding a good desk within the office. Lara wanted to find ways to properly support him in this so he didn't need to stress all day and reach his goals easily. However, she didn't have time to support him because she needed to focus on their market research to define their position in the market.
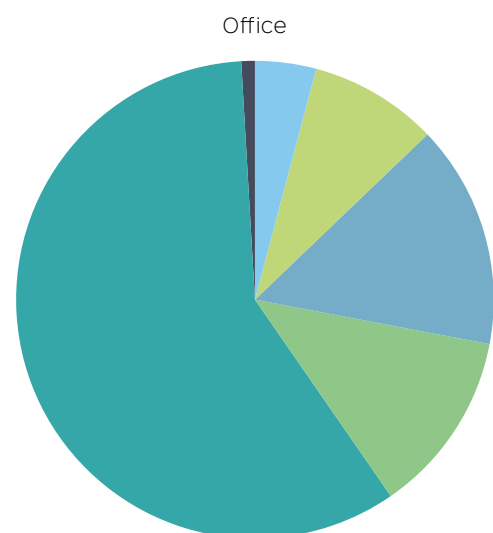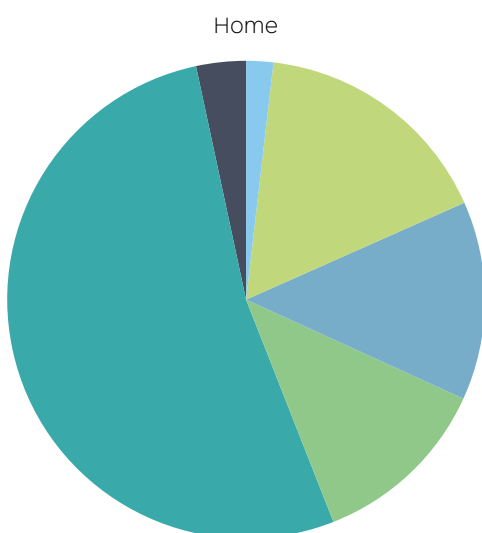
A small pilot study

To understand personal needs and improving the performance and potential of employees, we performed a small pilot study at two organisations using our Habital tool. We asked 85 people in real-time (while working) what they were doing, how it was going (on a scale from 1-10), and what limited their potential (categorised on work tasks, well-being, health, workspace, organisation, nothing, and prefer not to say). A follow-up question dove more into the specifics within each category, to dive deeper into their personal needs.

The first thing we noticed is that we didn't see that many differences between working from home and at the office. At the office, we see a slightly higher performance at the office, 8.1 on average, compared to working from home, 8.0 on average. Not surprisingly, we also see fewer occasions where people answered "Nothing limits my potential". In contrast, at home, we see relatively more well-being and health complaints.

In general, if we look at people who perceive to perform low (lower than five), we find that they have mostly well-being and health complaints, of which mental health issues were the most mentioned factor (see the next page for a visualisation).

Together, our findings build upon and confirm other sources mentioned in this whitepaper. Low health and well-being do negatively influence the performance of employees. We further find that mental health issues are the most mentioned health complaint. When it comes to actual improvements (addressed in a small survey), the most mentioned thing employees needed was "Better communication lines within the organisation". This adds to the fact that 29% of the participants mention that they currently don't feel comfortable sharing their mental health complaints. However, this data does not represent the general population, and personal needs can widely differ between organisations. Therefore, it is important to assess personal needs within each organisation separately before taking rigorous action which will benefit the well-being of your employees and your organisation.

Home

Office

● My organisation   ● My well being and health   ● My work space   ● My work tasks   ● Nothing is limiting my potential   ● Prefer not to say

People who rated higher than 7

- ● My organisation
- ● My well-being and health
- ● My work space
- ● My work tasks
- ● Nothing limits my potential
- ● Prefer not to say
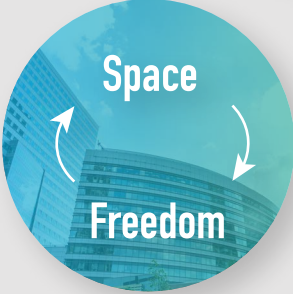
0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
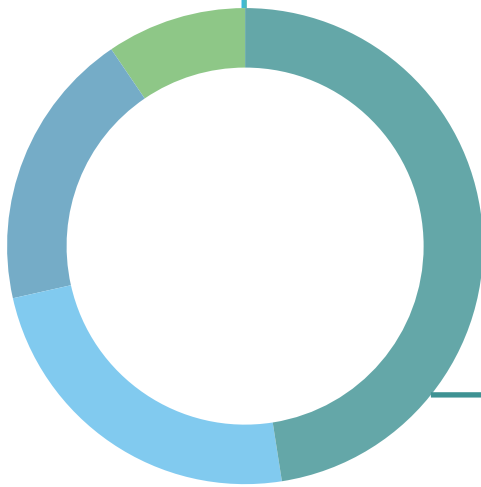
People who rated lower than 5

- ● My well-being and health
- ● My work space
- ● My work tasks
- ● Prefer not to say

Deeper dive of the people who answered my well-being and health:

Mental health	40%
Physical health	30%
My work/life balance	20%
My general well being	10%

Trust → Autonomy

Freedom → Creativity

Flexibility → Gratitude

Tools → Power

Organisation ⇄ Employee

Space → Freedom

Money → Work

Opportunities → Growth

Inspiration → Innovation

Responsibility → Engagement

Creating a model

Using this body of literature, we can make a model (pictured below) of the whole looping process of work. This looping process is created when an individual engages in a (supposedly) balance relationship with an organisation through a job. Through the total execution of the job, the individual employee receives recognition (e.g. money and gratitude) and has a sense of meaning (e.g. impact and belonging) through the impact of the work, which then has an impact on the individual (e.g. motivation) and the organisation (e.g. satisfied customers). However, in this process, the work processes and work environment affect the quality of work.

The match between the work processes within the organisation and the preferred work processes of the employee can support or drain the employee. For example, strict policies might work for some people and not for others. Moreover, the (physical and digital) work environment also affects the execution of the job, for example, some work environments are more supportive for focus work than others. There are, however, on both individual and organisational sides, factors that can break or change this relationship. For example, the internal factors of an individual (such as degrees, living situation, and goals) can change work motivation and the job an employee desires. While on the side of the organisation, external factors (such as market dynamics, organisational goals, and strategy) could break or change the relationship as well.

EXTERNAL FACTORS

ORGANISATION

RECOGNITION | WORK PROCESSES | JOB | WORK ENVIRONMENT | MEANING

INDIVIDUAL

INTERNAL FACTORS
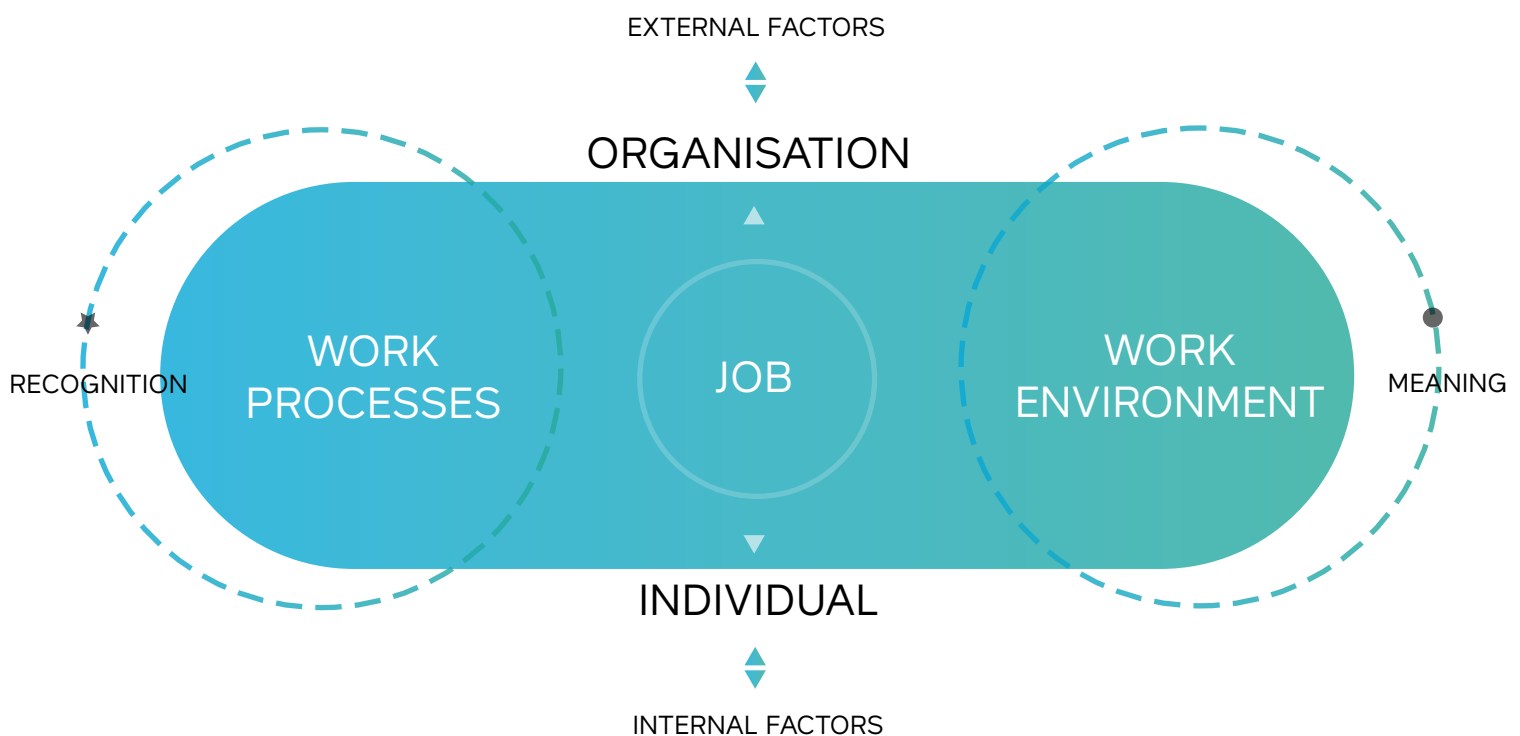
Conclusions

Although the pandemic was challenging for all of us, there is definitely a bright side to be seen. Organisations are, with good reason, shifting to a stronger focus on employee experience and wellbeing. The scientific sources, market reports, and our own pilot study show strongly that a human-centric approach can identify the needs of employees and supports them in their path to flourishing.

Searching for a balanced relationship between employees and their organisation, while taking into account individual needs and differences is the first step towards this goal. The exact path towards this goal is however unique for each organisation considering the personal differences between them. Nonetheless, the people make the organisation and improving their wellbeing and work experience benefits them, the people around them, and you as well.

A HUMAN-CENTRIC APPROACH CAN IDENTIFY THE NEEDS OF EMPLOYEES AND COULD SUPPORT THEM IN THEIR PATH OF FLOURISHING.

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Contact information

We are Measuremen. We are an ambitious, international team whose main goal is to help workplace professionals worldwide improve their Work Life. With more than 15 years of experience, we know the ins and outs of the world of work. We are passionate about partnering with world-leading firms. Together we help them transform the data into actionable insights that make a difference in the work life of tomorrow.

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