



BRINGING THEM CLOSER FROM AFAR

VIRTUAL EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT IN THE NEW NORMAL

Today's hybrid workforce, although physically distant from one another, strongly yearns a sense of belonging in addition to a sense of pride in contributing to the organisation in a meaningful way. This poses a question for the HR department on what should be done to make employees feel emotionally connected even while working in isolation. How does one drive engagement among the same as well as different strata of the organisation and what is the new model of design considerations to be implemented for maximum employee satisfaction.

David Litteken, Senior Vice President, Asia Pacific Region at BI WORLDWIDE, Surabhi Sharma, General Manager Human Resources at Coforge, Sandeep Jha Associate Director Human Resource at TIAA, share their personal experiences and guide with how to keep the hybrid workforce engaged, as we adapt to a new normal.

ADAPTING TO THE DISTRIBUTED WORKFORCE

A HYBRID WORK ENVIRONMENT CHANGES THE ENGAGEMENT GAME

By David Litteken, Senior Vice President, Asia Pacific Region, BI WORLDWIDE

As HR and global leaders, we understand that change is inevitable, and distributed workforce is here to stay. There is certainly a shift towards a more hybrid work environment which shall continue for months or years to come, but none of us are certain of what the future has in store. Research by economists from Harvard Business School shows that **1 out of 6 workers will work from home continually or sporadically** even after the pandemic. Another survey conducted by Upwork states that **1/5th of the workforce could be working entirely remote, which is 20% of an organisation.**



David Litteken

Senior Vice President, Asia Pacific Region,
BI WORLDWIDE

When the pandemic forced us to work from home, while some found it stressful, others found it a dream come true. However, this also led to a quick WFH burnout and now the onus is on the leaders and managers to engage the staff even in a hybrid work environment. We are all seeking to enhance the workforce experience and research suggests that workforce engagement is best achieved when there is a culture of recognition, engagement and celebration.

London Business School and the University of California, Davis, discovered that often, a **virtual employee is passed over for a promotion more often, and faces lower wage hikes as compared to a traditional worker.**

In order to Recognise, we need to be creative with digital solutions, to ensure managers and teammates are aware of what everyone is doing, whether in the office or virtually. For Celebration and Engagement, managers must make added efforts to integrate virtual workers in the company's culture because they might feel isolated. We need to adapt a Recognise, Engage, Celebrate approach (REC Framework by BI WORLDWIDE) and think about designing the system around the virtual workforce first.

Recognition

- **Go digital with your Total Rewards Platform** At BI WORLDWIDE we too have a recognition tool called the Daymaker, which elevates the result of your recognition initiative with features like virtual assistants for managers,

service awards, social recognition, gamification, RPM dashboard, Micro-targeted content, and more. Such tools are a great way to make your employees feel special while recognizing them for desired behaviours or work well done.

- **Host ceremonies virtually** using event studios. Instead of an employee travelling to an event to be recognised, now his/her entire family can join in for it.
- **Express Gratitude** not just within the workplace, but outside as well with clients, partners and vendors, prospective clients and essential workers especially. If you're keen on doing it virtually, you can use BI WORLDWIDE's free appreciation tool called <https://appreciate.biwww.com>. All you have to do is add it to your toolbar to get started.

Engage:

- Let your staff **upskill for work and pleasure**
- **Involve your staff** in the company's strategies
- **Build resilience** so they are comfortable with being uncomfortable
- **Encourage them to share their feelings.** They need not always be positive.

Celebrate:

- **Conduct weekly virtual round ups** and celebrations using platforms like Kudoboard
- **Be creative using platforms** like SongDivision, where you can write lyrics and create music and sing along together.
- **Get interactive** with team games, trivia sessions and contests
- **Encourage virtual coffee breaks** by letting employees connect with other employees who they barely know. This is a great way to encourage them to be free and vocal, especially the shy ones.

Real Examples, Real Engagement

Bridging the gap to drive engagement

A medical company we work with has fostered a culture of recognition and celebration, and now because of a 10-year journey, they managed to achieve a common goal by engaging the complete workforce. We got 90,000 employees across the globe to follow one corporate goal - to be prudent and save on financials in 2 years' time. 75% online employees and 90% offline employees were educated about the goal via online trainings, sessions, and other means of communication.

61% OF THE 90,000 EMPLOYEES MADE PERSONAL COMMITMENTS TO SUPPORT THE STRATEGY AND THE GOAL WAS ACHIEVED IN JUST ONE YEAR INSTEAD OF TWO.

VARIOUS FACETS OF THE VIRTUAL WORLD

DOING ONLINE ENGAGEMENT, THE RIGHT WAY

By Surabhi Sharma, General Manager Human Resources, Coforge

“Managers happen to be the frontline warriors who are engaging with employees and hence need to drive the employee engagement strategy as well.

THE KEY POINTS FOR LEADERS ARE TO UNDERSTAND THE COMPLETE EMPLOYEE LIFECYCLE, MAP THE PERCEPTION, AND THEN SENSITISE MANAGERS ON POINTS THAT DRIVE EMPLOYEES.

This also involves a high degree of customisation, be it employee wellbeing, connecting and communicating, or recognising and celebrating. Only when a manager understands it well and conveys it to the employee in the same spirit will the engagement model be complete. Being overwhelmed by online engagement was 7-8 months ago, now it is based more on trust and setting the right goals as everyone has settled in.

Rebranding made virtual

The three phases of getting it right

Our company recently underwent a rebranding exercise, and it has certainly been challenging, owing to the current hybrid model. The strategy encompasses building a new Employee Value Proposition by identifying and articulating what it means for internal and external stakeholders. We got everyone on board and collaboration with a partner who took us through a 3-phase journey. The first was to involve everyone, understand the pros and cons via a series of leadership sessions, surveys, and conversations to understand their perspective.

In the second phase we articulated and revised the proposition.

The third phase in progress is communication which is key. Communication has to be done carefully, so as the reach out to new joiners, old employees, vendors, suppliers, and the complete ecosystem.

Drawing the line

Better time management

The biggest problem HR departments face today is burnout and mental health issues as the lines between work and personal life seem to be blurring. Initially everyone was only concerned with business continuity and day or night didn't matter, but as we have moved on there is an element of stability back in everyone's lives. Therefore, going forward, whether you work from home or from an office space, flexibility is going to be key, which makes it our

responsibility as leaders and managers to handle better time management. There needs to be a culture where HR can openly voice the kind of working hours the teams are putting in and the kind of leave pattern they want to incorporate. Leaders and managers need to be made aware of the limit of tolerance and once the teams are aware enough, flexibility can seep in.



Surabhi Sharma

General Manager Human Resources,
Coforge

Speaking from experience

Engagement techniques that work

Firstly, recognition will be a key building block as it is the need of the hour. While organisational recognition is ongoing at our company, we actioned small nudges, celebrations like Gratitude Week and Thankathon, and it was surprising to see that while we have 11,000 employees, we had over 15,000 recognitions on the portal. Following the crisis, employees yearn for recognition.

The second technique would be staying connected, as leaders, managers and HR need to know the pulse of the organisation, so as to be prepared for uncertainties.

STAY AHEAD, INNOVATE.

INVESTING WISELY IN TECHNOLOGY FOR THE BEST RESULTS

By Sandeep Jha, Associate Director Human Resource, TIAA

To use tech effectively we need to incorporate a framework that drives engagement. Ask yourself, what is it that attracts people and keeps them going as they move up the ladder - it is the kind of engagement that touches emotions.

WE NEED TO REPURPOSE TECHNOLOGY BASED ON OUR GOALS.

To give a recent example, WhatsApp is one channel that everybody uses and even before a project begins, the WhatsApp group begins. Hence, to connect people right from the get-go, organisations can consider WhatsApp as an effective communication platform.

The second aspect is gamification which is tailored based on every organisation size and there are multiple areas where it can be used to build a culture of engagement. Like a wellness app giving you a bronze medal after 10 workouts - that drives engagement and inculcates a sense of partnership and competition.



Sandeep Jha

Associate Director Human Resource, TIAA

Maximising Ideas for your Rewards Programs

Rewards and recognition is one program, that you can use well and invest wisely in. You can use plenty of features on existing apps like LinkedIn or Zoom and make employees feel good about themselves. Conduct coffee sessions and other activities that encourage casual conversations. While

you aren't investing much in these, you are making good use of the infrastructure and using it to its best potential. Engagement isn't always about activities. Sometimes it's also about rebranding, repurposing, and reprioritising how you convey it to the people. You can put in your best efforts into a tool and drive results.

Special group engagement

The Process

Engagement needs aren't the same for everyone. From your potential candidates, to your new joiners and even your existing employees, all have different requirements, hence making it necessary to define a framework and how to deal with it. Before the pandemic everything was face-to-face, today even onboarding, though the same process, is entirely different. In the first stage communication with the candidate is imperative so as to ask questions frequently. IT equipment and documents of any sort are sent way in advance, so they have enough time to prepare. While onboarding them it is essential to involve all teams who can speak on company policies and the organisation as a whole.

AFTER THE VIRTUAL CONNECT IS BUILT, THE COMPLETE LIFECYCLE OF TRAINING, GOAL SETTING AND PLANNING MONTHLY OR QUARTERLY BEGINS.

Educate your managers

Imagine you launch a policy and bring in a framework. Within an organisation, employee communication is well set, but when they reach out to managers, they seem to have just as much information as the employee. To avoid this, **conducting a soft launch for managers is always a plus** where you brief them, hand out books to grasp the knowledge needed and enable line managers with enough information. The biggest learning curve for managers is also when they understand organisation better and believe that it is okay to not be okay, be it themselves, or the employees.

To align and integrate the workforce with the engagement plan, every organisation needs to decide what communication and recognition route they want to choose and how much communication they want to encourage. What companies need to begin with is creating a robust engagement framework and then plan key points, that vary from firm to firm, to drive engagement.