

CONVERSATIONS

WORKPLACE TRANSFORMATION IN A WORLD OF FAST CHANGE

At the pace the world is evolving, what can companies do to optimise their human capital? We find out from workplace and human capital specialist and TAFEP's work-life ambassador Jacqueline Gwee.

1. The way we work has changed significantly with digital transformation and most recently, COVID-19. What are some human resource-related challenges that have come along with this shift?

COVID-19 has accelerated the rate of adoption of technologies. Compulsory work from home at the beginning of the Circuit Breaker period had changed employers' mindset on its feasibility as companies continued to implement work from home during Phase 2 of the pandemic situation. Companies in non-essential sectors had to adopt technologies to facilitate virtual meetings and change their operational processes quickly. Cloud adoption surged during the pandemic as 62% of Singapore SMEs shifted their business operations online to manage operations more efficiently and better engage with customers.

With these changes, there were new processes to be reviewed and established, and managers had to pick up new competencies to deal with the new norm. The following are some areas which companies had to think about, and continue to do so in the new norm of work:

- How do leaders effectively manage performance and continue to motivate staff working virtually/remotely?
- How to ensure that staff know how to manage cyber security issues out of their normal workplaces?
- How do leaders maintain a culture of trust and ensure performance and customer responsiveness are not compromised when working virtually/remotely?
- How will employers rethink staff and mental well-being initiatives and the employee experience to keep the team engaged?
- How can employers ensure a growth mindset and enable staff to embrace new technologies to continuously rethink the way to achieve outcomes more effectively?

2. aAdvantage specialises in helping companies with workforce transformation in areas such as human capital and culture. Why is it important to enhance such processes in this rapidly evolving landscape?

People are the key to driving and executing strategies and changes.

In the age of digitalisation and calls to transform businesses to meet global and local challenges, employers need to rethink human capital approaches, invest in their employees and define new competencies and skills to transform their business. This will allow them to remain adaptable and agile with evolving changes in jobs and tasks. Employers benefit when their people are adaptable, learn things quickly, "just-in-time" to meet the changing business requirements and ensure business continuity. Employees benefit as they are continuously employable.

Employers need to focus on employee engagement, retaining talent during transformational times, developing their employees to enable them to adapt to changes, equipping them with new skills, knowledge and capabilities to stay competitive and ahead of the curve to support the business moving forward.

Nowadays, employees are taking a holistic approach to defining what makes a good organisation. Apart from professional development, they also look for inclusive work culture aligned to their own beliefs, work-life initiatives, the organisation's development of employees across different age groups, and employees' well-being.

With tight competition for talent, employers would need to up their game, and work hand-in-hand with



Jacqueline Gwee, Director and Founder, aAdvantage Consulting Group, and Work-Life Ambassador of TAFEP

their employees for the success of the organisation.

3. Tell us about some of your organisation's talent development initiatives.

At aAdvantage, we strive to be a "Great Place to do Great Work" by investing in our people. This is reflected in our embracing and collaborative culture, the desire to create a fun working environment, and the systems and policies that are set with the welfare of our employees in mind.

We provide such initiatives across the board - from new recruits to future leaders. We support fresh university graduates and interns through the SME Talent Programme, provide upgrading and learning opportunities for our staff with planned training programmes, and groom promising talents into leadership roles by actively identifying high-potential staff.

Instilling a culture of internal learning and development is a focus at aAdvantage. Our in-house committee organises events, where experts are invited to speak on various topics including Coaching Skills, Design Thinking, Perception Analytics and Business Simulation. We also invest in resources such as books and publications and encourage our people to keep up with the latest trends and thought leadership across various management topics.

During the Circuit Breaker, we realised, like most organisations, we depended on on-the-job coaching and face-to-face sharing to bring new employees up to speed. To prepare for a post-Covid norm, we implemented a Learning Experience platform (Enablely) to create content, and document institutional knowledge. This was to ensure sustainability and shareability of knowledge with our employees.

Some outcomes from strengthening our human capital capabilities include having a positive workplace culture to support the organisational growth and success, our ability to attract and retain employees as they viewed our organisation as a place to learn and develop their career. Equipped with the appropriate capabilities and attitudes, our employees can better serve our clients and results to increased customer satisfaction and loyalty on our services.

4. aAdvantage has been advocating flexible work arrangements, even before working from home became the norm due to COVID-19. Why was that so?

From the first day when started our business 18 years ago, we knew that flexible work arrangements would need to be part of the way we work and instilled this in our culture. Due to the nature of our work, it is inevitable to have deadline crunches with occasional longer work hours. Hence, "flexibility" became our focus, and is a key factor in staff retention.

Today, the culture that we built over the years has become part of our brand. We have been successful in attracting

like-minded individuals to be part of the team. Some challenges that we faced were to ensure that the way we practised flexibility and our culture were clearly understood, and to maintain the level of trust in the organisation.

This was overcome through a rigorous process during induction and putting in place practices such as our Buddy and Mentor systems.

5. What are some other progressive workplace practices that have worked for you?

We believe in hiring and supporting our people at their various life stages.

For example, we welcome back-to-work mums into our workforce and also provide them with opportunities for flexible work arrangements, to help them with their transitions into their new responsibilities.

We also recognise the value our older workers bring to us. To help them cope better with the ever-evolving shifts in technology, we organise e-training sessions and one-on-one coaching sessions. Recently, we redesigned our training administration support process and roles, and identified opportunities to be more productive through implementing analytics tools and automating processes. A couple of our older colleagues had to learn new tools and they were able to achieve that due to their open mindset to learn and adapt.

6. With the job market shifting so rapidly in recent years, how can employers keep their workforce employable?

Employers will need to continuously look into ways to upskill their employees, redesign jobs where necessary, encourage career mobility and provide opportunities and exposure on different roles within the organisation. Employees will have to play their part by changing their mindsets, stepping out of their comfort zone to try different areas of work, and keep on learning.

7. How has being part of the HCP programme benefited aAdvantage?

The HCP programme brings together a community of employers with common beliefs on how we want to create and sustain progressive workplaces, further develop our people, and provides us with opportunities to exchange insights with like-minded employers. It gives us many platforms such as forums, events, online resources where employers can share our practices, and these opportunities are instrumental in leading us towards organisational success.

COVID-19: SINGAPORE'S OLDER WORKERS ARE ADAPTING WELL TO THE NEW NORMAL

TAFEP poll further reveals the groundwork necessary for employers to achieve this positive outcome.

COVID-19 has brought unprecedented change to the way we work. During this time of change and adjustment, older workers are [seen as especially vulnerable](#)¹. However, according to a [recent poll by TAFEP](#)^{2,3} of Singapore employers, older workers are doing well; almost 90% of respondents gave positive responses when asked about their older workers' transitions and performance during this period.

The poll also revealed that the following factors played a key part in helping older workers adjust well during the initial period of transition:

- Long-standing age-friendly hiring practices (e.g. belief in training & development, responsible re-employment practices and policies)
- Clear communications on support (e.g. one-to-one check-ins with supervisor, active guidance, managing with empathy)

Such practices allowed these employers to create an inclusive workplace culture for all staff to thrive in even through the worst of times.

What Employers Can Do

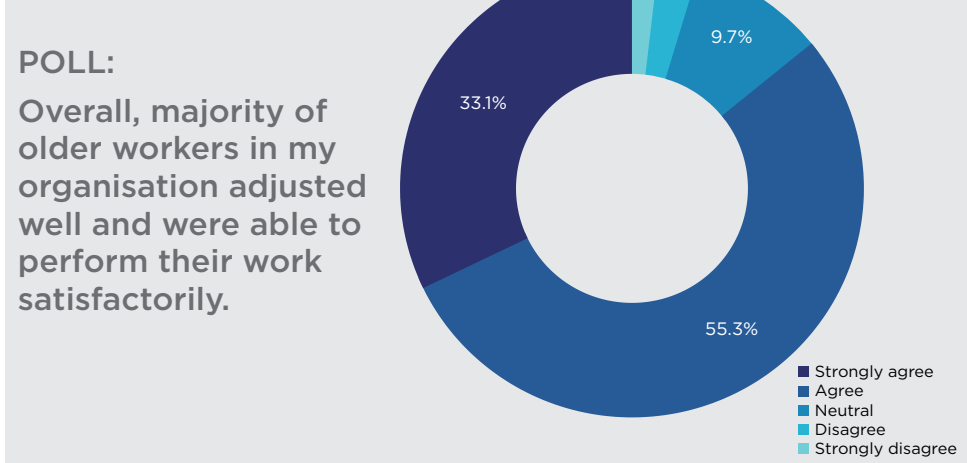
Here are some tips for companies looking to reinvent their workplace into one that prepares current and future older workers for success:

1. Understand your organisation and operating environment.

Having a clear view of what you can offer your older workers is key to creating an effective workplace. Evaluate your current organisational structure, and what it means for your older workers. What is it like now? How likely is it to change in the future? What must be done now to support these changes?

2. Reskill for the future.

Job roles in the future will only get more complex - and very quickly. Companies must have the foresight to support the sustainability of employment regardless of how work evolves.



Take a long-term view when charting employees' career paths. Start by creating an inclusive learning environment for older workers - one that encourages them, and also gives them easy access to acquire new knowledge and hone their skills in developing fields. This culture will set the stage for a workforce that is always willing and ready to learn, adapt, and excel.

3. Develop a workforce that is always ready to take on change

COVID-19 has shown the world that today's operations and processes may very well become tomorrow's obstacles, and today's jobs may become obsolete tomorrow. This, more than ever, reinforces the importance of workforce agility - the ability to adjust the workforce and/or business operations to support changes in the business landscape.

Encourage and support internal career switch programmes throughout employees' careers. For example, employees can shadow colleagues from different departments with overlapping duties, or participate in cross-departmental work. These help them develop new skills and prepare them to adapt to possible future changes in their roles.

4. Always look for opportunities and silver linings in challenges.

Indeed, COVID-19 presents challenges

to businesses. But it also brings along [new realisations and opportunities](#)⁴ - new ways of working that can do companies good even after the crisis has passed. Perhaps those long in-person meetings aren't always the most efficient way to get things done. Maybe workers who are constantly stressed over juggling home and work demands can be just as productive working remotely. Or those liberated from long commutes have more time to get things done. These are just a few of many examples of discovering new ways of working - companies have to proactively reassess how to improve the way they work.

5. Start now.

COVID-19 thrusts many into unfamiliar territory, with many companies scrambling to make the new normal work. However, companies that had already implemented practices such as flexible work and embraced digital transformation with digitised workflows had an easier time transitioning. Starting early means you don't have to scramble to play catch-up when crisis actually strikes.

This article was adapted from TAFEP's two-part series on preparing older workers of today and tomorrow to succeed.

MORE GREAT REASONS TO RETAIN SENIOR WORKERS

Two grants and up to \$375k for companies committed to retaining their senior workers.

Senior workers can contribute in many ways through their wealth of experience, commitment, loyalty and great work ethic. Many have aspirations to continue working for as long as they are able to. Employers can enable their senior workers to continue participating in the workforce and thrive in the future economy.

Companies that support keeping seniors in the workforce are eligible for the following grants¹:



SENIOR WORKER EARLY ADOPTER GRANT

WHAT IT'S FOR

Supports progressive employers who have increased their internal minimum Retirement Age (RA) and Re-employment Age (REA) above the statutory minimum.

Note: The current national RA and REA are 62 and 67 respectively. From 1 July 2022, they will be raised to 63 and 68. By 2030, they will be raised to 65 and 70.

**FUNDING SUPPORT:
Up to \$250,000²**



PART-TIME RE-EMPLOYMENT GRANT

WHAT IT'S FOR

Supports employers who commit to providing part-time re-employment opportunities to eligible senior workers who request for it.

**FUNDING SUPPORT:
Up to \$125,000²**

HOW TO QUALIFY

Companies should:

- Be registered or incorporated in Singapore
- Have at least one senior worker aged 60 years and above under its employment

[Note: Companies will be required to make relevant changes to company HR policies and employment contracts, and communicate them to employees.]

**Application, funding breakdown, deliverables, FAQs and more
[DETAILS HERE](#)**

¹ Companies can apply for either one or both grants.
² Capped at 50 senior workers per company.