



Empowered by data:
Leadership in a
new working world





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Introducing the agile leader

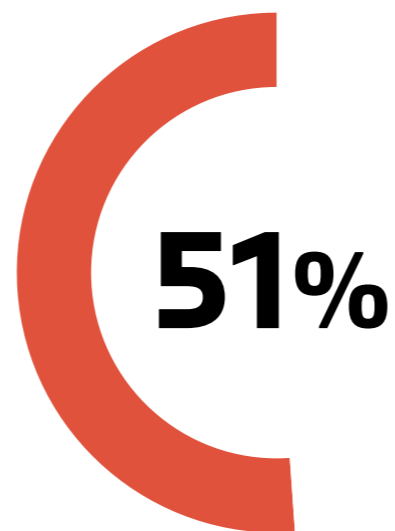
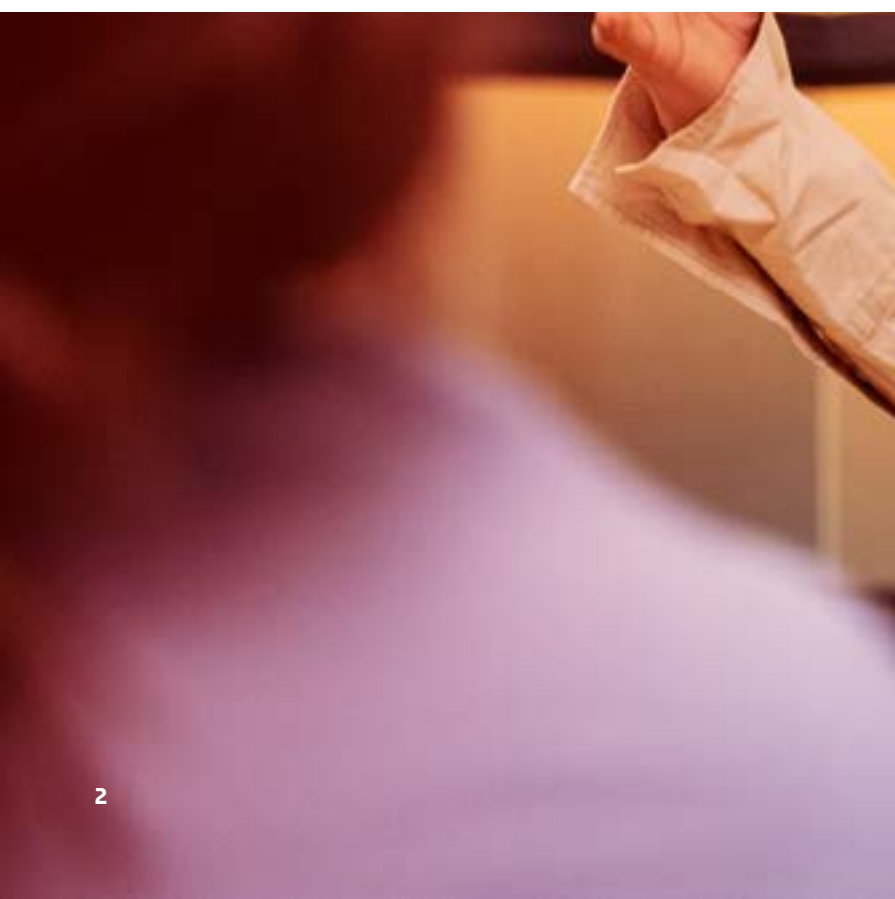
The world of work has changed irreversibly, and leaders know they need to change with it. Top of their agenda are developing skills to manage hybrid teams, attracting and retaining top talent, and making informed decisions about the future of the workplace.

Most leaders (86%) strongly agree or agree they are equipped through their role to bring a unique perspective to future transformation plans, but 51% strongly agree or agree they don't know what the workplace will look like in three years' time.¹

To manage effectively through this uncertainty, they need to listen to their people. Then, they need to act on what they have heard.

"Keeping pace with the speed of change and employee expectations will require leaders to adjust their expectations and mindsets to become more flexible and patient," says Moira Alexander, leadership expert, author, and founder of Lead-Her-Ship Group and PMWorld 360 magazine.

Today's leaders are already expected to be empathetic to their employees' needs. But to be truly agile, they must find better ways of listening to their team's experiences and responding rapidly. This is where data comes in.



of business leaders strongly agree or agree they don't know what the workplace will look like in three years' time²

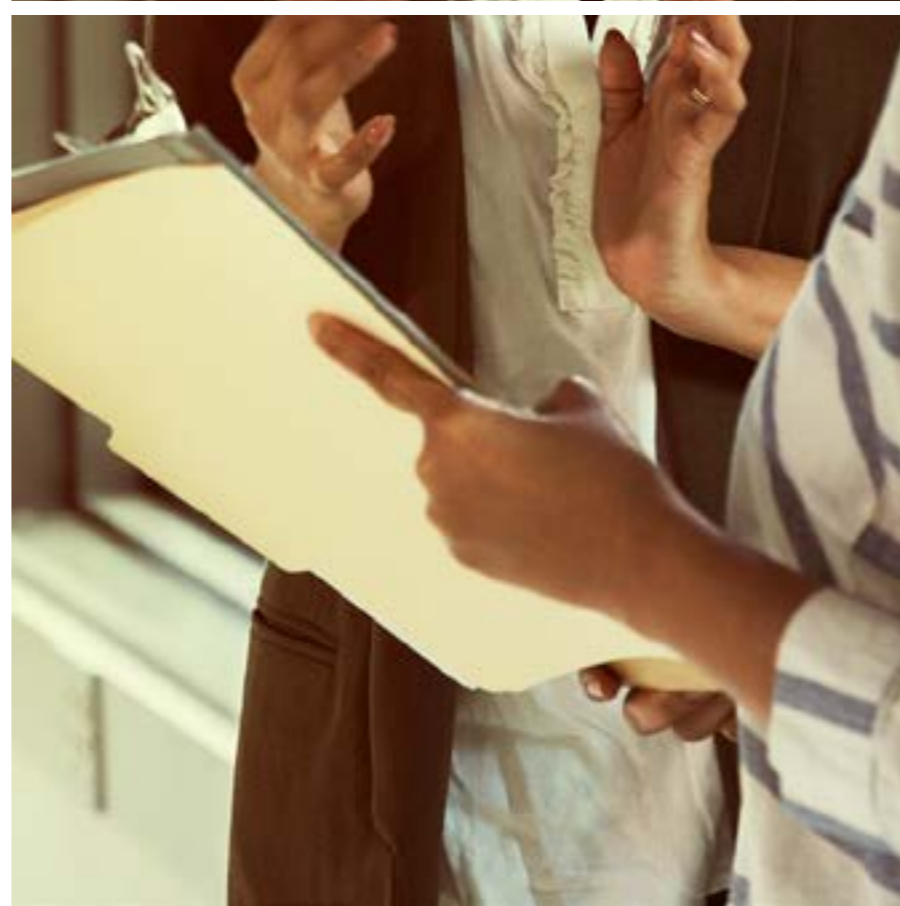
Good leaders are getting to truly know their people

Boardroom discussions now center on people-centric topics such as diversity, equity and inclusion, workplace health and safety, and employee wellbeing. Leaders are also awake to the fact that the physical workplace presents both an opportunity and challenge for managing effectively in a hybrid world. And the war for talent³ means that engagement and retention is no longer solely an HR concern.

Data – facts and statistics gathered for reference, analysis and to generate insights – has long been the key for leaders who want to understand their people. But now, in this new world of work, the right data arms them with the insights they need to evolve their skills, make effective decisions and manage disruptions with clarity and speed.

“We are moving from a very static management of the workplace to a very dynamic one,” says Yannick Villar, CEO and Co-Founder of Wx, a hybrid Sodexo corp-up. “Historical data is less relevant to predict the future, which was the case before.”

So, what data should today’s leaders be listening to? And how can they use it to meet their employees’ evolving needs, make informed decisions and lead their companies into a new era of work?



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Yannick Villar,
CEO and Co-Founder of Wx, Sodexo

3. <https://www.bbc.com/worklife/article/20210629-the-great-resignation-how-employers-drove-workers-to-quit>



There is a whole arena around people analytics that allows us to make much more data-based, informed decisions about how our population comes together.”

Sharon Findlay,
Global Talent Director,
Sodexo

1.

Bring inclusion into the boardroom

Three-quarters of business leaders believe that equal opportunities and diversity have grown in importance for employees in the past year. But only 40% of companies anticipate that employees’ experience of the workplace will be as ‘inclusive’ in 12 months’ time as they are at present.⁴

Leaders need data that includes everyone

Movements, such as #MeToo and Black Lives Matter in particular, and initiatives, such as the UK’s gender pay gap reporting,⁵ have helped to drive diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) up the boardroom agenda. Now, as a new working world takes shape, leaders must get hold of the data that will inform their future DEI strategies.

“There is a whole arena around people analytics that allows us to make much more data-based, informed decisions about how our population comes together,” says Sharon Findlay, Sodexo’s Global Talent Director. “It’s absolutely something we need to wrap our heads around, build capability and really push forward.”

For example, leaders who are hiring can use metrics to track candidates’ backgrounds to understand the diversity mix of a candidate pool. Metrics such as these can also help to identify bias during the interview and candidate selection process.

By arming them with the insights they need, data can help leaders – and HR in particular – to navigate hybrid working in a way that takes into consideration every employee’s needs.

4. 2021 Sodexo Experience Next Corporate Insights Research

5. <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/gender-pay-gap-reporting>

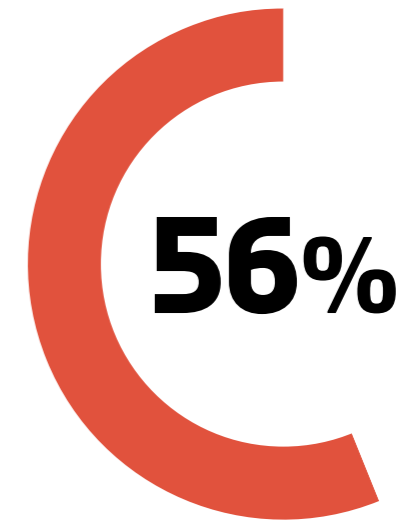
Hybrid work can help with inclusion

Decisions about the future of work – such as where, when and how employees are able to work – can't be allowed to jeopardize important progress made on DEI during the past 18 months.

Amanda Sinclair, Professorial Fellow at Melbourne Business School, believes that the best leaders will take advantage of new and hybrid ways of working to encourage inclusion. "Evidence shows that some women and people from diverse cultural backgrounds have felt more comfortable participating while at home," she says.

Gartner research, meanwhile, finds that 56% of knowledge workers who have a disability say the extent to which their working environment helps them be productive has improved in the past 12 months. It also finds that 73% of women who were fully on-site prior to the pandemic but have been remote since have increased expectations for working flexibly,⁶ which suggests it has been working for them.

"We're all the same size on screen. You don't have that same sense of physical dominance that can sometimes get in the way of open, authentic interaction," says Sinclair. "With skillful management, we can see the benefits of that continue as companies move to hybrid models – this might enable more inclusivity, and the democratization of teams."



of knowledge workers who have a disability say the extent to which their working environment helps them be productive has improved in the past 12 months⁷

2.

Manage the workplace for a hybrid world

As more and more organizations plan hybrid working models, physical workplaces and their policies and practices will have to evolve. What insights can leaders base those changes on?

First, they must listen to their employees' feedback to ensure they can meet their needs with appropriate resources and facilities as they shift to hybrid working. But feedback alone is not enough, because employees may not know exactly what they need before they return to the workplace, and their preferences may shift as personal or external circumstances change.

"Data is a key piece of the people priority plan that we have at Sodexo," says Findlay. "As a dispersed organization with 420,000 employees globally, getting your arms around that from a data perspective can sometimes be challenging, but that is an absolute focus for us.

"We want to create a dashboard that will allow our people leaders to leverage key people insights and put them to use when considering people/team decisions – not only for today, but also for tomorrow – that are truly based on the insights."





How data creates a better office experience

When a leading professional services firm needed tools to quickly and safely reopen its offices following the Covid-19 lockdowns, it used an existing space management solution from Wx.

The platform, which had been installed in 2017 to optimize the company's real estate costs, now allowed its leaders and employees to be better informed about office capacity, the occupancy rates of workstations and which communal spaces were open for their use.

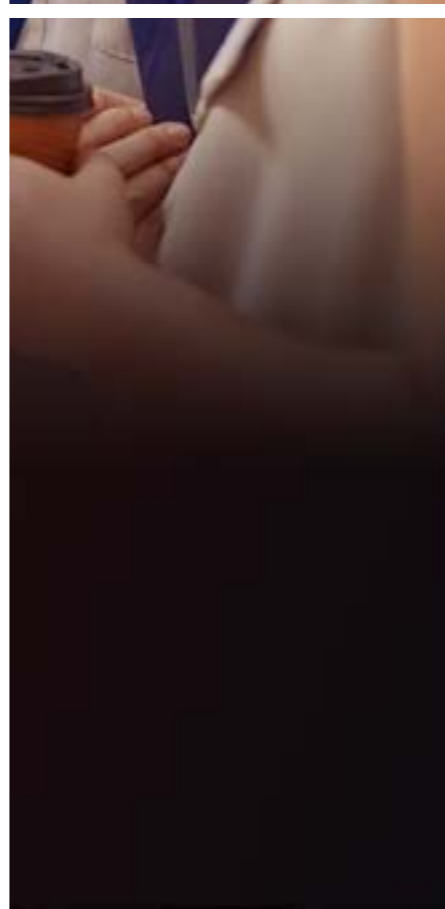
The insights enabled a more optimum experience for a safe return to the workplace.

New questions for a hybrid workplace

51% of business leaders strongly agree or agree they don't know what the workplace will look like in three years' time.⁸ And when a widespread return to work does become possible, leaders expect a number of different types of spaces – virtual spaces (77%), flexible spaces (75%) and individual spaces (69%) – will all be important.⁹

This means the facilities management process must be as adaptable as the physical spaces themselves. To be effective in creating and organizing workspaces, leaders must now consider questions that might not have featured in their planning before – such as what sort of work their people need to be performing in each location, and how many days a week employees would like to work remotely.

“How many people will come to an office on a certain day at a certain time? This used to be pretty easy to predict. But it's becoming way more complex – not only in terms of when people are coming in, but also what they're going to be doing there,” says Sodexo's Yannick Villar. “To understand these flows you need data and a solid algorithm, and to manage scarcity, you have to implement systems to ask people to declare their intentions.”



Give employees the food they want

That data, along with employee feedback loops, will also help companies to meet the food needs of their people – whether they are in the workplace or working from a different location.

Research conducted by Sodexo and Harris Interactive shows that employees' top reasons for purchasing food at lunchtime are that it is tasty, good value for money and healthy. When a return to the workplace is possible, 60% strongly agree or agree they will visit their staff canteen/cafeteria as regularly or more regularly than they did pre-pandemic.¹⁰

So as leaders must ensure their workspaces are the right type and capacity, they must also ensure they provide enough food to meet demand on busy days and minimize waste on quiet ones. The waste point is particularly important, because 73% of leaders strongly agree or agree that sustainability policies and practices have become more or much more important to their employees in the past 12 months.¹¹

"If you have the data beforehand, you can flex and adapt your service model up and down," says Villar. "So that you can maximize the user experience at one end and optimize costs at the other."

10. Sodexo/Harris Interactive, Worklife Continuum Report, Wave 5 Results

11. 2021 Sodexo Experience Next Corporate Insights Research



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Yannick Villar,
CEO and Co-Founder of Wx,
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employees state that flexibility on hours/days/location is the **number one criterion** when considering a new role or employer (alongside salary, job responsibilities, commute time and job title)¹²



3.

Empower an engaged workforce

Leaders have a big opportunity to use new working models to improve their employees' experience and engagement. They can also make their organization more attractive to potential new talent. This will be crucial as the war for talent intensifies, and retention will no longer rest solely on HR.

"Many employees today, especially Millennials and Gen Z, place significant value on how well they are treated and supported," says leadership expert Moira Alexander. "Jobseekers are looking specifically for employers that have a reputation for cultivating a positive, inclusive and rewarding culture."

Flexibility will persuade talent to join (and stay)

One in four employees state that flexibility on hours/days/location is the number one criterion when considering a new role or employer – alongside salary, job responsibilities, commute time and job title.¹³

"Organizations are now having to focus on creating a much more flexible solution to ensure they're well positioned to not only retain but attract talent," says Sodexo's Sharon Findlay. "Collaborating with employees to create those solutions is going to be key."

Again, using data effectively can help business leaders to understand what their employees expect from their employers. "It's about looking through the stats and making sure [leaders] understand what the experiences are of different employees and look at it on the basis of how they prefer to work and experience the workplace," says Melbourne Business School's Amanda Sinclair. "This data is key to good leaders."

Take an insight-led approach to employee experience

Data is also a powerful tool to enhance experience on an ongoing basis. For instance, Sodexo's TwelvePay solution enables organizations to gather insights through consumer data collection to provide transformational and operational value to businesses.

For example, a marketing team member may receive monthly consumer segmentation insights to better understand consumers' habits and behaviors which might then inform the design of new promotional offers, and menus and recipes to better target their needs. By contrast, a site manager may receive forecasted consumer numbers to predict and anticipate demand, enabling them to adjust their workforce planning and stock levels to avoid wastage or shortage.

By harnessing insights across one or more key areas of the business – from consumer behavior and global food trends to analyzing product pricing and monitoring and benchmarking portfolio performance - TwelvePay gives leaders an agile solution to better understand and cater to consumer needs, and to optimize supply chains, pricing and performance.



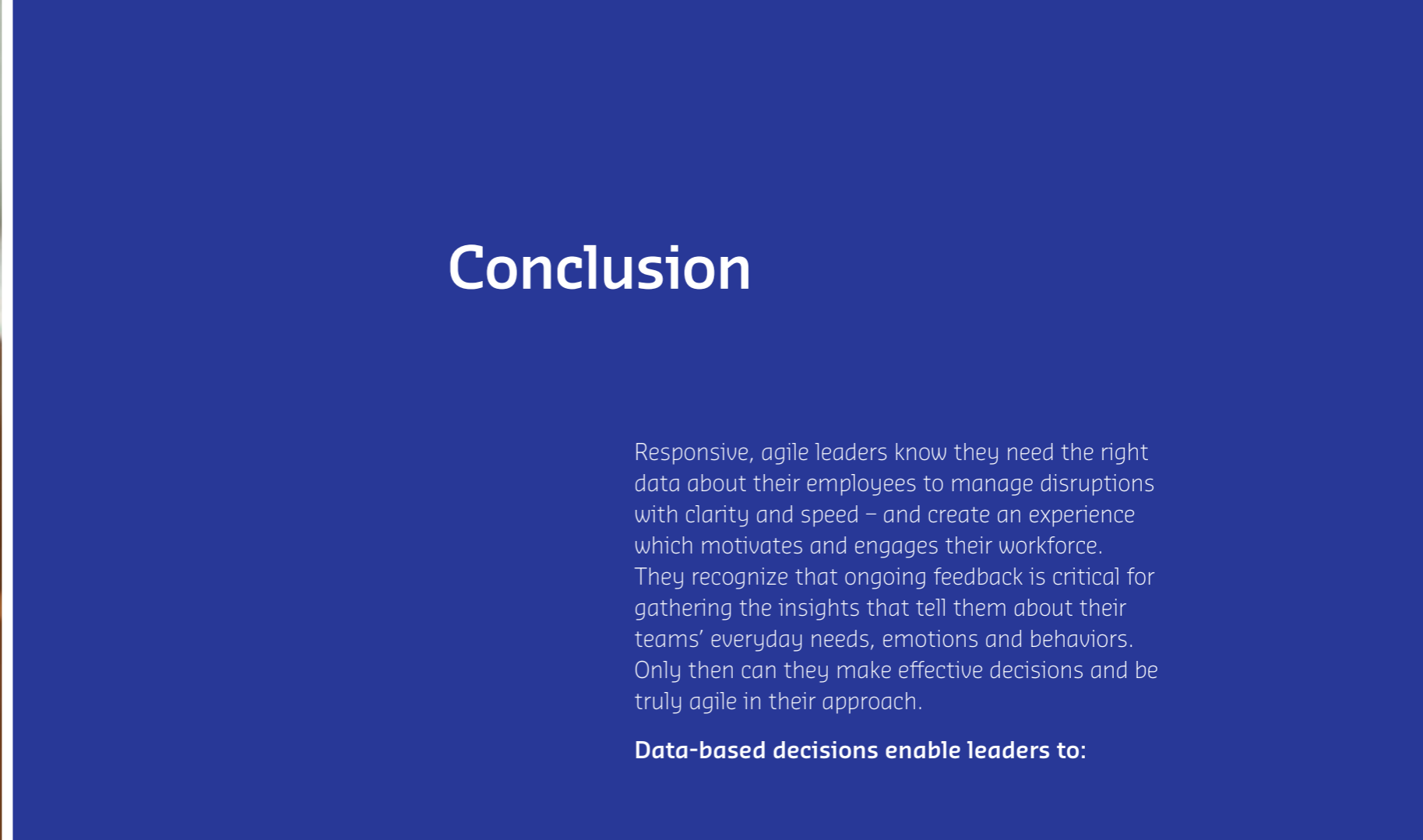
A service that customizes experiences

Sodexo's corporate concierge service, Circles, tailors its offering to employees' changing needs. Its range is customizable to the needs of individual businesses, meaning it can react to requests.

The service allows employers to offer emotional and practical support networks to their team by taking care of their 'life admin'. This gives them back invaluable time and enables them to choose which tasks they want to devote their time and energy to, improving employee wellbeing and satisfaction.

"It's about building an environment where people appreciate what you're doing for them," says Circles Managing Director Michael Fildes. "We're giving everyone an extra set of hands, which on average equates to 2 hours and 55 minutes time saving for every interaction. If you're able to say 'we're going to look after you inside work, and outside of work', that's a powerful message."¹⁴

14. <https://uk.sodexo.com/inspired-thinking/work-reimagined/the-missing-piece-of-the-uks-pro.html?t=1>



Conclusion

Responsive, agile leaders know they need the right data about their employees to manage disruptions with clarity and speed – and create an experience which motivates and engages their workforce. They recognize that ongoing feedback is critical for gathering the insights that tell them about their teams’ everyday needs, emotions and behaviors. Only then can they make effective decisions and be truly agile in their approach.

Data-based decisions enable leaders to:



1. Optimize workplaces for the new world of work

Data will inform successful leaders on the best ways to use space and facilities, and to cater to the needs of employees as they evolve.

2. Improve DEI outcomes for all

As leaders set their sights on building back effectively, data will be critical to ensure all people are heard and included – and that any progress that has been gained is not lost as a safe return to the workplace is made possible.

3. Create personalized employee experiences

A state-of-the-art workplace is no good if people can’t use it effectively. Responsive leaders will use data to ensure that employee experience is tailored, personalized and engaged.



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