



Research

# Golden Era for WA Workers

Western Australian employees are engaged and loyal, but that doesn't mean they are not ready for a career move if conditions are not to their liking.

The following *P&L* special report reveals the findings of a recent Australian Institute of Management survey into levels of Employee Engagement in Western Australia.

# Research

## WA WORKERS SEEKING SOCIALLY RESPONSIBLE ORGANISATIONS

Western Australian employees generally feel good about the organisations in which they work and also with their managers and leaders. However, at the same time many of them are very aware that they will probably change employers within the next year.

These are the interesting results recently found using an on-line survey to members of the Australian Institute of Management (AIM), with the objective of gaining a snapshot of the important workplace factors that relate to employment engagement in the workplace.

The research has revealed a number of different factors that rated employee satisfaction within their own job roles and the performance of their managers. Responses were almost identical across the nation (as determined by a similar national survey), with no meaningful differences across borders.

So why study employee engagement?

In management speak, engagement is about growing an employee's relationship with their company from 'significant other' to 'partner'.

How important is this commitment and are Western Australian employees ready to take that step from 'significant other' to 'partner'?

For 21 per cent of employees the mental decision has already been made and they expect to be moving to another employer within the next 12 months. This is further compounded by another 12.5 per cent who are unsure about their intentions.

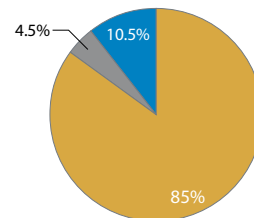
Furthermore, the research indicates one third of employees in Western Australia are vulnerable to approaches from other employers.

Two-thirds of employees who expect to stay with their employer do so because they have a good relationship with co-workers (36 per cent), good relationships with managers (30 per cent), a sense of purpose and meaning in their jobs (37 per cent), fair and reasonable pay and benefits (31 per cent), and new and interesting challenges (31 per cent).

The message is clear. Although Western Australian companies are proving to be employers of choice, organisations can always improve greater employer engagement by striving to turn employees from 'significant other' to 'partner'.

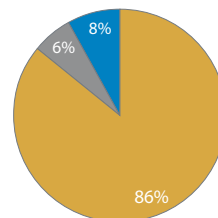
## HOW EMPLOYEES FEEL ABOUT THEIR ORGANISATION

More than 85 per cent of respondents thought that they 'work for a great company, which is socially responsible'. This score comes down only a little when responding to the cultural values of the company, where 79 per cent 'see these in alignment with their own.'



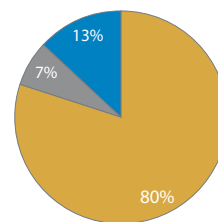
I work for a great company

Agree  
Neither  
Disagree



My company is socially responsible

Agree  
Neither  
Disagree



The cultural values of the company are aligned with my own

Agree  
Neither  
Disagree

"There is a growing awareness and need for companies to be more socially responsible," explained AIM Executive Director, Patrick Cullen.

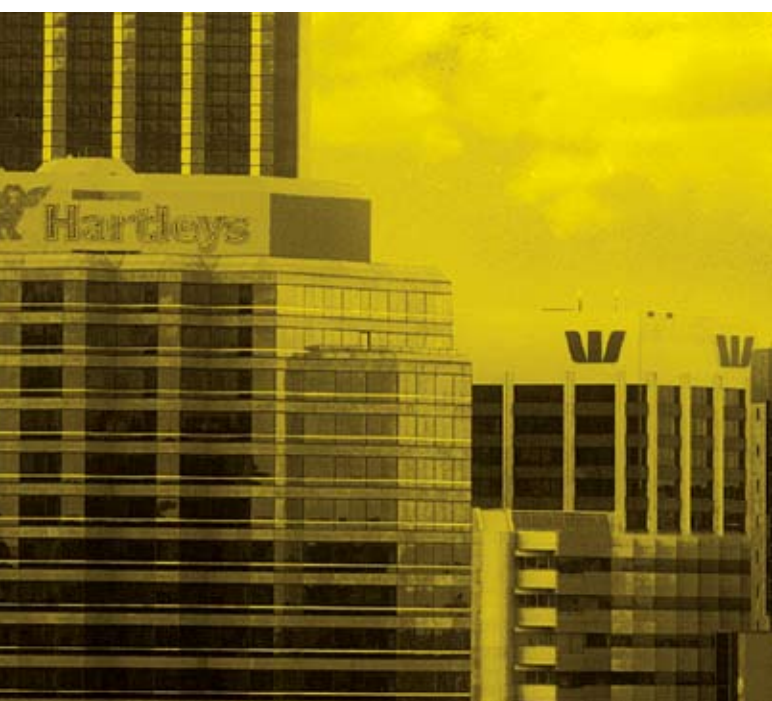
"There are many opportunities for organisations to focus on more than the bottom line for future success. Companies which are performing well in buoyant markets have the opportunity to focus on giving back to the community and society. Employees see themselves as part of the community and have come to expect that organisations can be more than just a 9 to 5 job.

"Social contribution is seen as 'doing the right thing'. This is the right thing for everyone, including employees, shareholders, stakeholders and the community at large."

## THE SURVEY SAMPLE

The sample consisted of Personal Members of the Australian Institute of Management in WA who received an electronic questionnaire via email. 902 Members responded to the survey, of whom 55 per cent were male and 45 per cent were female.

The sample is not strictly representative of the WA business community at large which typically has a larger proportion of people employed in organisations of 20 or less employees. Similarly, the number of people who indicated they were in senior roles exceeds the numbers found in the general business community. The results should be considered in light of this skewed sample.



*In management speak, engagement is about growing an employee's relationship with their company from 'significant other' to 'partner'.*

### **EMPLOYEE/WORKPLACE ALIGNMENT**

Four out of five respondents felt that they were 'offered good training/development opportunities', 'have their opinions listened to' are 'strongly committed to their employer' and 'find their work interesting and challenging'.

The responses were similar for respondents 'feeling valued by the company they work for', 'being paid a fair wage for what I do' and 'having their efforts recognised by the company'.

"Extraordinary employee performance can be achieved with good alignment of company and personal values," says Patrick Cullen. "Firstly, for an organisation to achieve high levels of alignment, they must recruit for it — recognising the true values that the organisation has and then matching them to the employee. In this current market, employees are selecting workplaces that have values aligned closely to themselves and are opting to work for companies which suit their values."

Around 20 per cent of respondents felt that they are not 'working at their full potential', and are 'dissatisfied with their current job', while 15 per cent are 'dissatisfied with the relationship they have with their manager'.

"Employees can increase productivity in every instance. However, it is the responsibility of managers and leaders to create a workplace and/or platform which can encourage people to make a greater contribution to their work," Mr Cullen said.

Steve Bowler, CEO - ITS People Solutions (a company specialising in selection, development, retention and transition of talent) suggests the best companies realise that a positive organisational culture and shared values are the foundation stones for success.

"In the selection process, organisations should spend time assessing the individual's values to ensure they align with the corporate values. The best approach is ensuring the candidate has the competencies and potential for the position, however, the critical success factor is the values, behaviour and attitude fit.

"To retain talented people the best organisations regularly conduct Employee Engagement Surveys. They hold managers and teams accountable for continuous improvement and the quest to be 'an employer of choice,'" he said.

"The final phase in the talent management cycle is the transition of people from the organisation. The best organisations conduct exit interviews and act on themes. They also treat those departing employees with the same level of sensitivity and dignity as when they started," he added.



## HOW EMPLOYEES FEEL ABOUT THEIR MANAGER

The work of a manager is never done. The learning never ends and there is always more that can be done to communicate with teams. That said, it's pleasing for managers that over three quarters of respondents respectively see their manager as 'appreciating them', 'supporting their development goals', and 'being good at problem solving'.

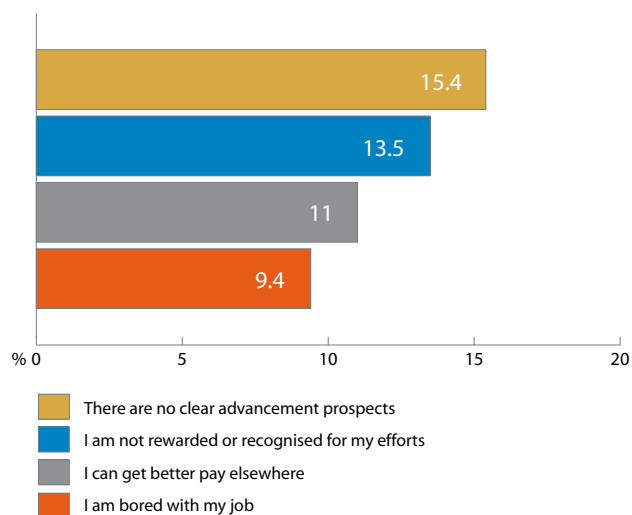
However, the figures drop for being 'good at managing people', 'communicating clearly', 'setting clear goals and objectives' and 'treating all people equally'.

Motivation and inspiration seems to be where managers and leaders struggle most, with a 61 per cent level of agreement with the statement 'my manager motivates and inspires me' and the negative response of 24 per cent. 13 per cent of respondents were unsure if they were motivated or inspired.

## EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT CAN BE MANAGED

So we're back to our starting point — employee engagement. Reading the data a different way tells us almost half the respondents intend to stay with their current employer upwards of three years. This is encouraging, but how can managers and leaders develop engagement further?

Perhaps the first place to look is the reasons why about one third of employees expect to be working with another company in 12 months.



Reasons cited for respondents intending to stay with their current employer less than 12 months.

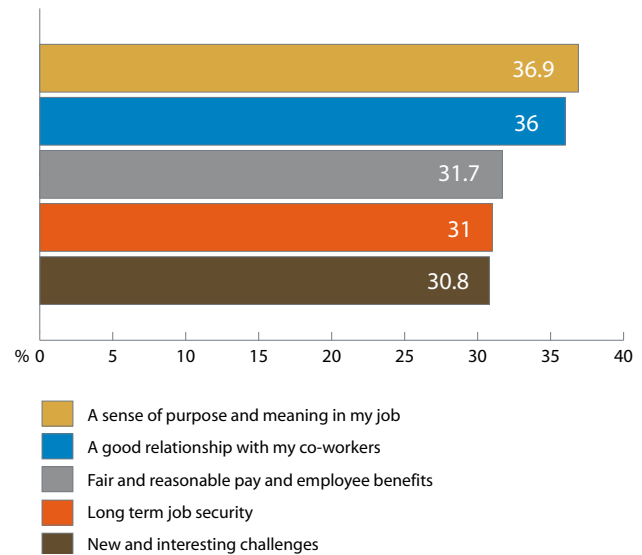
AIM's Patrick Cullen believes the key to staff retention is a mix of elements.

"In retaining experienced staff there is a basic need to pay workers market rates; however, to better align workers to your organisation, companies need to build on the needs of people.

"The key is to pay respectably and offer personal development opportunities and encourage a culture of good working relationships for continued stable employment," said Mr Cullen.

The research reveals employees who intend to stay longer than 12 months found the relational factors strongest ... assuming the pay and benefits were 'fair and reasonable'.

ITS People Solution's Steve Bowler believes that coaching leadership style is proving to be most effective in retaining people. The manager learns to have the socratic approach of coming from 'a point of ignorance' instead of always being the expert.



Reasons cited for respondents intending to stay with their current employer longer than 12 months.

"Leaders that make a concerted effort to align what they and their people say, think, feel and do has proven to inspire and engage. The coercive leadership style of simply saying and commanding people to do an activity without engaging them at the thinking and feeling level has the effect of disengaging people.

"Genuine learning organisations are developing a coaching and mentoring culture that focuses on professional development, career enhancement and well-being of its employees," he said.

"Formal and informal development of staff, providing career enhancement and personal achievement is a major key to keeping valuable employees," says AIM's Patrick Cullen.

The survey also showed other employee benefits and opportunities, such as access to medical and sporting facilities, can also assist in retention.

"Today organisations need to think of their workforce as a collection of individual employees. There is a need to deal with employees in a flexible and individual way to actually try to determine roles that suit the individual. This personalised role development encourages employees to make a further contribution back to the organisation and increases loyalty.

"Other flexible working options like casual, contract and working from home — especially in this short skill labour market — provides additional opportunities to retain valued employees.

"Personalised roles need to include a large element of flexibility and need to respond to an individual's career, personal and family needs. It is a challenging job but organisations can use this strategy to retain their best staff. Valuable staff are clearly one strategic way to positively impact the future success of organisations," said Mr Cullen.