

WELL-BEING AT WORK

**FOSTERING A HEALTHY WORK
CLIMATE FOR ALL**

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SUMMARY

Many organizations have launched new efforts to address employee well-being, yet there are many factors and perceptions surrounding this topic. In this research brief, we note that many successful organizations have created a positive well-being climate. While individual employee needs may vary, fostering a healthy climate can make a significant impact. With a focus on the well-being climate in Singapore organizations, our study highlights the rise and decline of employee well-being over the past five years along with demographic differences. We also take note of the critical factors of psychological safety and teamwork, which are essential to employee well-being. We find meaningful differences by age and gender, which suggests that employers may need to consider the unique context of the work climate and culture. We find several linkages with the climate of well-being that suggest that a more nuanced approach may be needed to address all population groups in the workforce. Based on the results of this analysis, we outline suggested management action steps to foster a healthy work climate for all in Singapore.



CONTEXT OF WELL-BEING

In the years before the COVID-19 pandemic, attention to employee well-being was gaining traction in organizations around the world. Many employers have been focused on the health and well-being of their workforce with various programs and incentives over that past two decades (Grawitch, Gottschalk, & Munz, 2006). Following the stressful period of the pandemic, employers quickly recognized a dramatic shift and need to support employee well-being and mental health.

Today, employee health and well-being is a top priority for human resource managers in organizations of all types as the focus on health and lifestyle continues to grow. In Singapore, the Ministry of Health published the National Population Health Survey in August 2024 that shows that Singaporeans are adopting healthier lifestyles. This is consistent with the recent addition of Singapore as the sixth Blue Zone Region, a measure of general health and longevity. The idea behind Blue Zones, a phrase coined by the founder Dan Buettner, is that of a lifestyle of physical activity, healthy diet, social interaction, low disease, and low stress levels. By many measures, the healthy lifestyle in Singapore is admirable relative to many other countries.

Yet, when it comes to the work culture and work ethic, it seems that Singaporean employees are feeling stressed. A survey by AON and Telus Health showed that more than 50% of Singaporeans were feeling more sensitive to stress after the pandemic. This is consistent with other studies focused on mental health around the world, showing that more than 20% of employees are experiencing burnout (Brassey, et al, 2023).

While there has been an ongoing global campaign to reduce the stigma surrounding mental health and increase access to mental health services, the challenge has been growing. Between 2019 and 2022, use of mental health services increased by almost 40 percent. Meanwhile, almost a third of employees reported symptoms of anxiety and depression (Ducharme, 2023). The simultaneous increase in the use of services and decline in mental well-being suggests that part of the solution lies beyond the healthcare system.

The workplace has been identified as a key component in improving well-being. The Singaporean non-profit, WorkWell Leaders, has been established to encourage every leader to be a champion of well-being for their organization. WorkWell offers programs and information to help organizations and leaders address well-being in a holistic way.

In addition, many employers have stepped-up their efforts to address to the well-being crisis among employees. Workplaces have been working to provide more mental health support and offer time off for mental health reasons. Additionally, unlimited vacation, shorter workweeks, and flexible work arrangements have been suggested as ways to improve work-life balance. While new programs are being introduced in many workplaces, it is often unclear which interventions have a positive impact and how employers might create a climate of well-being in their organization.



EMPLOYEE WELL-BEING

Once relegated to sporadic seminars and occasional office bulletins, the discourse surrounding well-being and mental health in the workplace has surged in recent years, with substantial interest in the topic among organizational leaders. Research exploring the link between employee well-being and performance has provided leaders reasons to explore how maximizing these once-overlooked factors may be central to increasing productivity, engagement, and organizational success.

Historically, well-being and mental health support in the workplace was considered as a personal issue that was channeled on a reactive basis to Employee Assistance Programs (EAP). This is akin to only providing employees with compensation when they are injured at work – rather than working to ensure a safe work environment. The good news is that many organizations

are now taking a proactive view of well-being and mental health – as many organizations now recognize that well-being in the workplace starts with the work environment!

Proactively addressing employee well-being makes good business sense. Poor mental and physical health in a workforce can erode profits through higher turnover, decreased engagement, reduced customer service, and increased healthcare costs. Yet, equally important to the potential ROI of well-being programs are employee perceptions of these programs, which can only be effective to the extent that employees embrace them. Workplace climate must provide the foundation for initiatives and programs related to well-being since the success of these programs is dependent on the strength of the workplace practices and norms.

ABOUT THIS RESEARCH

The Johns Hopkins University Human Capital Development Lab, in partnership with Great Place To Work®, continues to track trends related to well-being, organization culture, and human capital factors around the world. In this report, we take aim at uncovering unique insights to advance our understanding of organizational climate factors that influence employee well-being in Singapore.

This report builds on our prior research with a focus on Singapore over the last several years and leverages Great Place To Work flagship data, gathered using a proprietary employee survey. The Trust Index™ Survey

is administered to over 200 organizations with 40,000 survey respondents last year in Singapore. In this study, we analyze various organizational and individual factors that may be linked to the climate of employee well-being. Given the heightened awareness of well-being and mental health since the COVID-19 pandemic, we examine the trends and patterns related to well-being between individual demographic groups as well as organizations over the last five years.

Proactively addressing employee well-being makes good business sense.



A CLIMATE OF WELL-BEING

A positive workplace climate of well-being has been identified as a significant factor associated with engagement and work outcomes. Research from a longitudinal study on workplace climate suggests that a positive work climate is linked to lower odds of diagnosed depression, increased overall well-being, mental health, physical health, social connectedness, and financial security (Weziak-Bialowolska, et. al., 2023). Moreover, researchers indicate that a positive climate can decrease distraction at work and increase productivity, potentially contributing to enhanced job satisfaction (Dollard & Bailey, 2021). These findings underscore the importance of fostering a positive organizational climate, which could be achieved through various initiatives aimed at building trust, recognition, and supportive relationships among employees. Such interventions not only benefit

employee health and well-being but also contribute to improved work-related outcomes, aligning with the principles of humanistic management and ethical caring in the workplace.

Providing an organizational climate of well-being may sound like a relatively straight-forward practice to implement, yet this involves several facets of work that are not easily controlled or manipulated in the short-term. A climate of well-being is closely anchored to organization culture, management practices, and HR processes since it relates to how a member of the workforce experiences their life at work.

In our study, we measure several key dimensions that have been shown to contribute to a climate of well-being. These include:

- **Mental and emotional support** – when employees sense that they have the mental support of others, they are more likely to have a positive or optimistic attribution, which can build energy, hope, and confidence.
- **Sense of purpose** – when employees have a sense of meaning, progress, and fulfillment through their activities at work, they are more likely to have higher resilience and a positive view of their employer.
- **Personal support** – when employees have the support from their manager regarding their unique personal situation, priorities, goals, and interests, they are more likely to have positive engagement and commitment to the employer.
- **Financial health** – when employees have adequate financial means to feel stable and there is equity in the compensation (and promotion) practices, they can avoid anxiety and fear.
- **Meaningful connections** – when employees are able to develop social relationships with others at work, they are more likely to feel a sense of teamwork and belonging, which can enhance the employment experience.

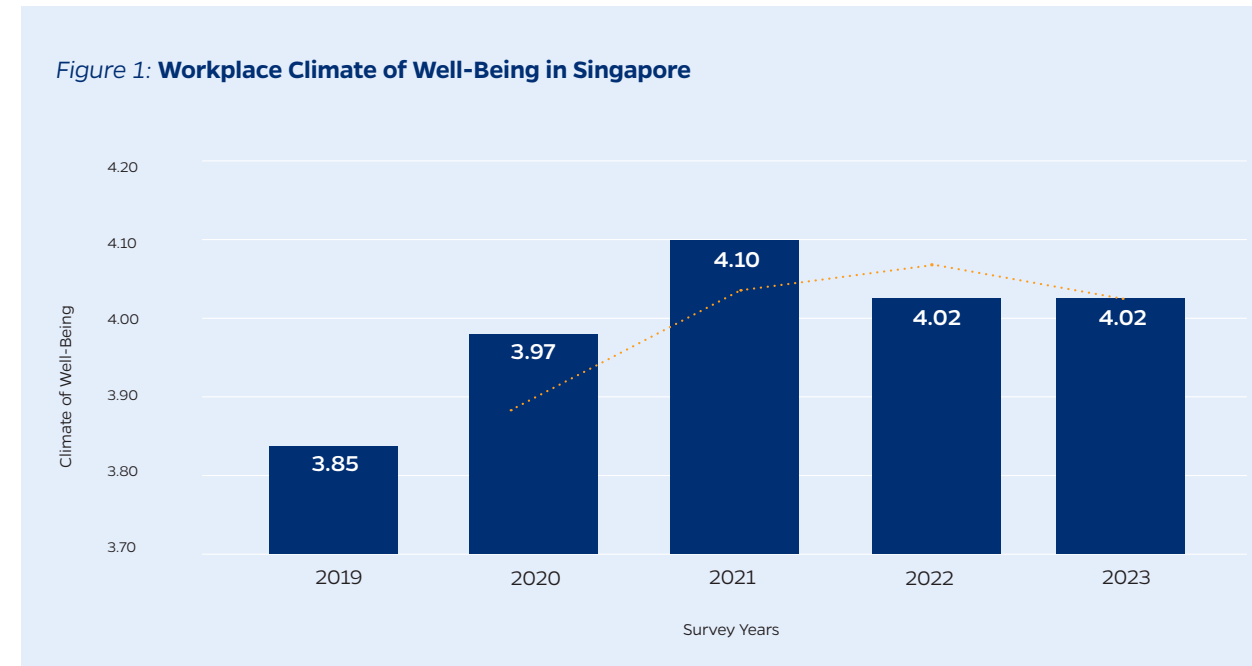
It is important to note that actual well-being of an individual requires a precise method of targeted questions. To provide an indicator at scale, we use factors to measure the organizational climate that promotes positive employee well-being. This approach is supported by other research studies seeking to measure the climate of well-being and thriving of individuals in the context of organizations (Su, Tay, Diener, 2014).

These findings underscore the importance of fostering a positive organizational climate.



We examine the climate of well-being in Singapore over the last five years, which provides unique insight on the changes during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond. The climate of well-being over time is shown in Figure 1. The survey used to

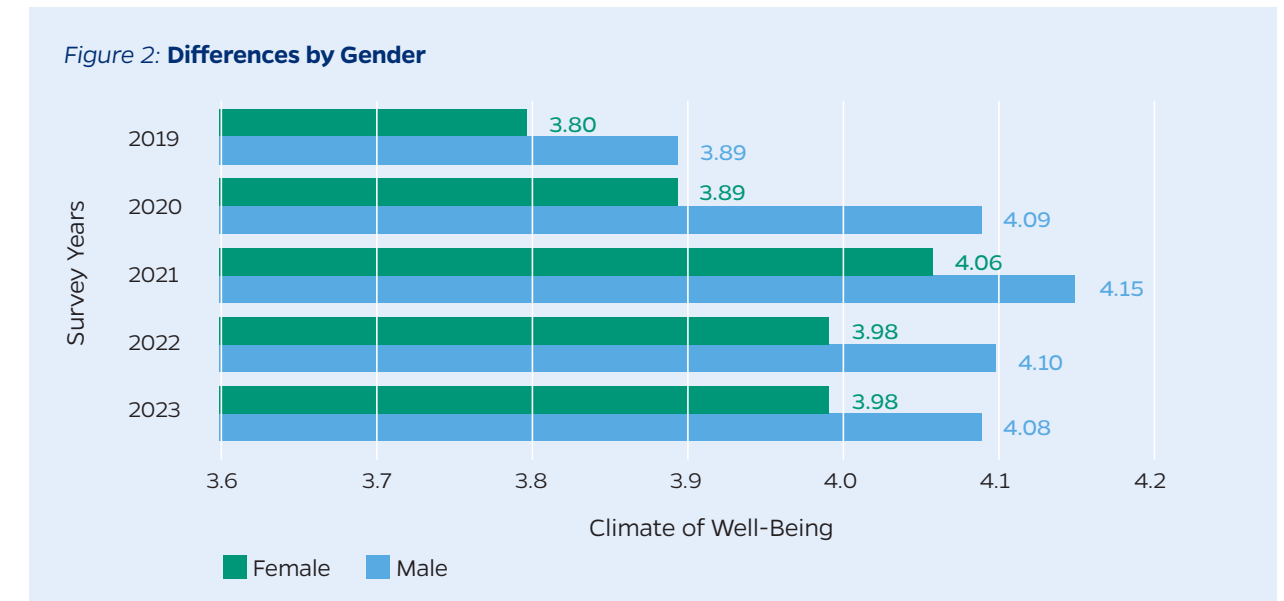
assess employee well-being was based on a scale ranging from 1 to 5. Scores of 1 or 2 indicate a negative experience, a score of 3 indicates an inconsistent experience, and scores of 4 and 5 indicate a positive experience.



ANALYSIS BY GENDER

To understand the sense of well-being in Singapore, we took a closer look at the differences by gender. As shown in Figure 2,

we find a significant difference between male and female respondents in the areas of well-being, psychological safety, and teamwork.



The gender gap in these areas suggests that there is more work to be done to address how women experience their workplace. These findings suggest that incorporating measures to address disparities between perceptions and experiences of well-being in the workplace is a crucial part of developing a positive climate of well-being for all employees.



During the COVID-19 pandemic, various facets of employee well-being were adversely affected, including job security, mental health, and work-life balance. However, our research shows what many people experienced in the first year of the pandemic – employers rising up to address the global crisis – which created a temporary spike in employee well-being during this period. As workplaces transition back to pre-pandemic norms and more employees return to physical office spaces, well-being trends have regressed from their peak levels observed during the pandemic. In this report, we examine the factors that influence the climate of well-being as well as the impact on various sectors of the workforce.

ANALYSIS BY AGE AND TENURE

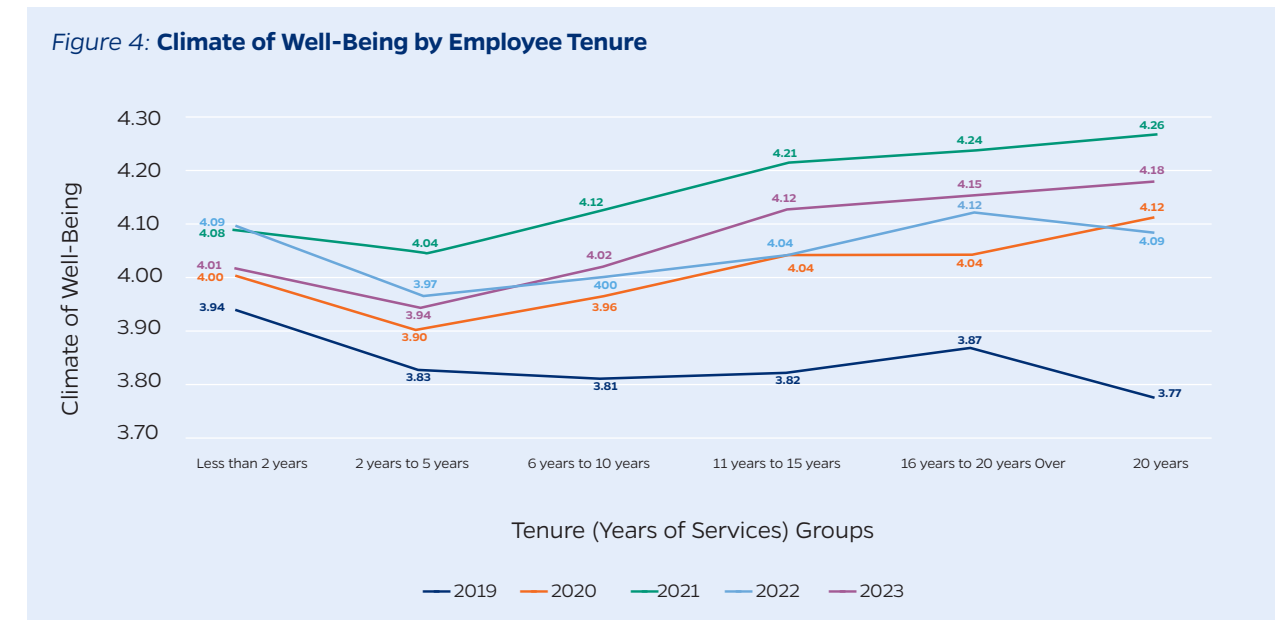
Upon review of the data trends by age, we quickly note the differences between younger and older employees. Historically, we would generally find a declining score in well-being scores with advancing age groups. However, between 2020 and 2023, this trend reversed, indicating an increase in well-being scores with age as shown in Figure 3. Notably, younger age groups, such as those aged 25 and younger and 26 to 34 years, displayed more significant fluctuations in well-being scores over

the years compared to older age groups. Conversely, the well-being scores of older age groups, including those aged 55 years and older, 45 to 54 years, and 35 to 44 years showed more stability over time. These findings suggest a nuanced understanding of well-being trends across different age categories and underscore the importance of considering age-related variations in well-being assessments and analysis.



When considering scores for employee sentiment on things such as well-being, we often find similar scores for both age and tenure, since these tend to be correlated. However, we find a consistent pattern over the years, which highlights a higher score for employees with two years or less of experience with their employer followed

by a significant drop in the following years with a steady improvement over time as shown in Figure 4. The increase over time may reflect a similar pattern that we see by age group, yet the “honeymoon period” of the first two years may be experienced by people of any age group.

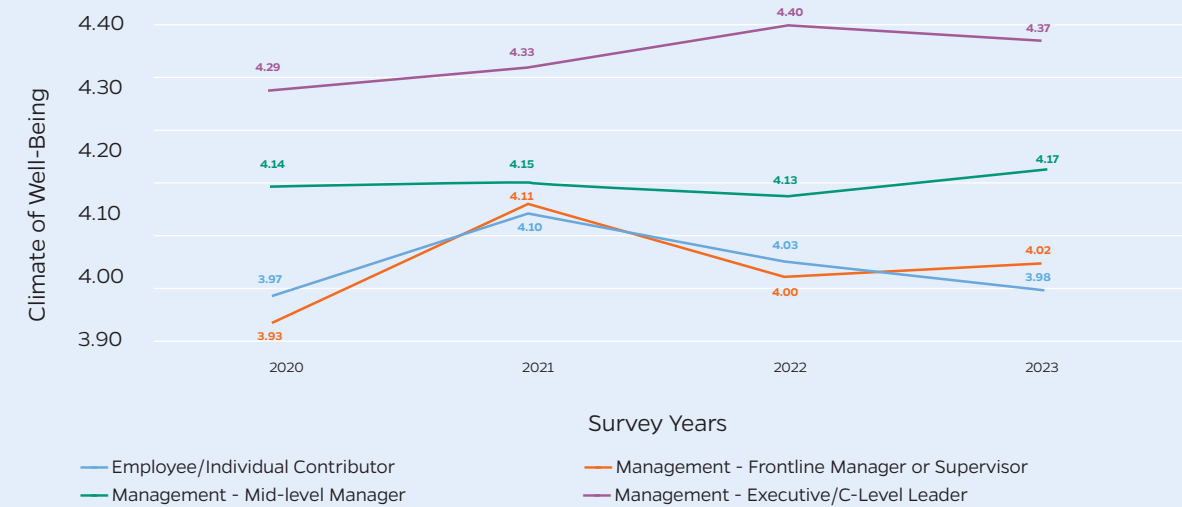


ANALYSIS BY MANAGEMENT LEVEL AND CONFIDENCE

We investigated variations in well-being across managerial tiers. Employees were classified into four categories: Individual Contributors, Front-line Managers, Mid-level

Managers, and Executive-level Leaders. Increasing well-being scores corresponded to higher management levels as shown in Figure 5.

Figure 5: Climate of Well-Being by Managerial Level

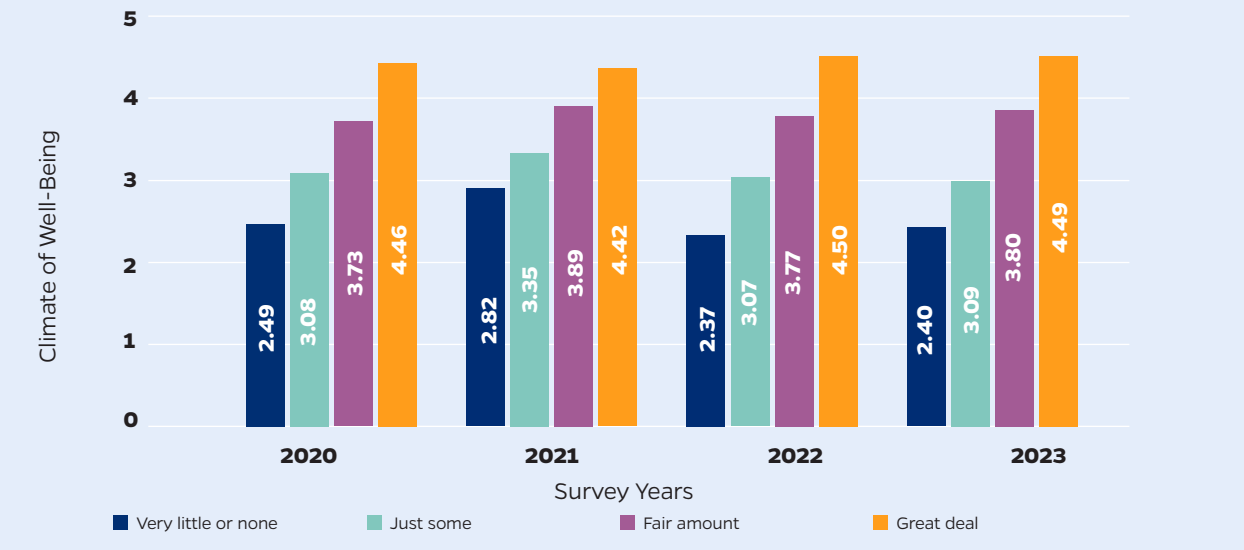


Our analysis is consistent with prior research that shows that senior level managers typically encounter lower stress levels than their subordinates (Skakon, et. al. 2011). While these managers contend with heightened job demands and conflicts, they also benefit from increased autonomy, superior management quality, and more avenues for personal growth. These factors, alongside elements like social support, influence, and the significance attached to work, contribute to the diminished stress levels observed among these senior level managers. Our analysis highlights the potential risk of these managers being out of touch with their employees. The ones that are able to continue to relate and earn trust with their workforce, must do so by

recognizing that their own experiences are not representative of those of their employees.

To illustrate the importance of earning trust with employees, respondents were asked to rate their confidence in management. We find that 47.29% of respondents indicate a 'great deal' of confidence, 41.79% indicate a 'fair amount' of confidence, and the others having 'just some' or 'very little' confidence in management. More importantly, we find a very clear linear relationship between the degree of confidence and well-being score as shown in Figure 6.

Figure 6: Climate of Well-Being by Confidence Level in Management



CLOSER LOOK AT KEY FACTORS

Underlying the climate of well-being in the workplace are the two important factors of teamwork and psychological safety. To create a climate of well-being, employees must feel supported and connected to others who genuinely care about them as individuals. High levels of teamwork require mutual trust and support to collaborate and work together toward collective goals. Psychological safety is the degree to which individuals feel free to voice ideas, share feedback, and be themselves – without any retribution or consequence. Prior research

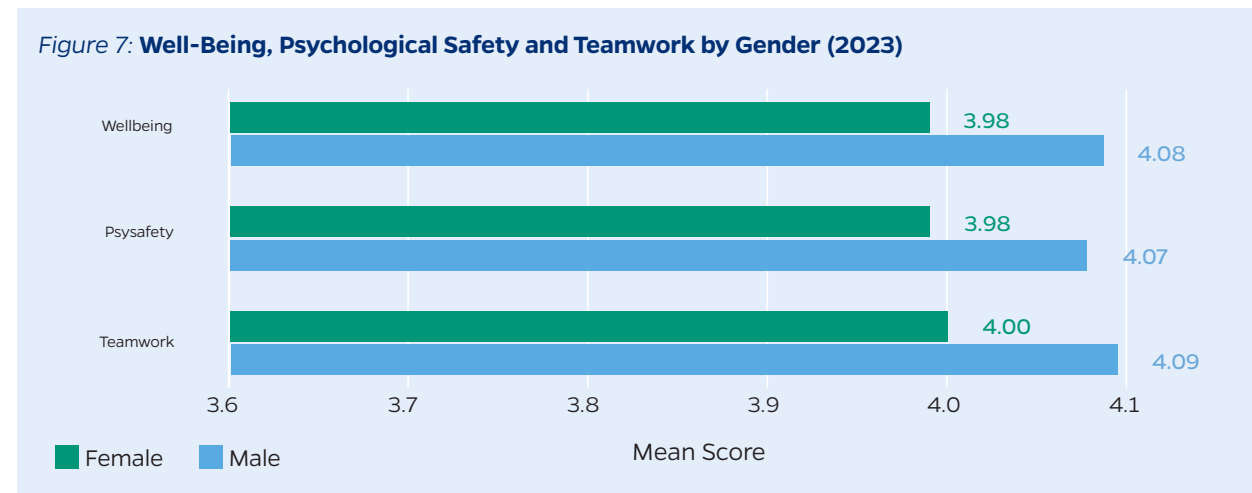
shows that when employees feel a sense of teamwork and psychological safety they are much more likely to agree that they work in a place that has a positive climate of well-being. We tested these relationships using the Singapore data and found a high correlation between teamwork and climate of well-being (76.3%) as well as a high correlation between psychological safety and climate of well-being (88.4%). Both of these correlations are well within a 95% confidence interval.

This relationship can be seen in Figure 7

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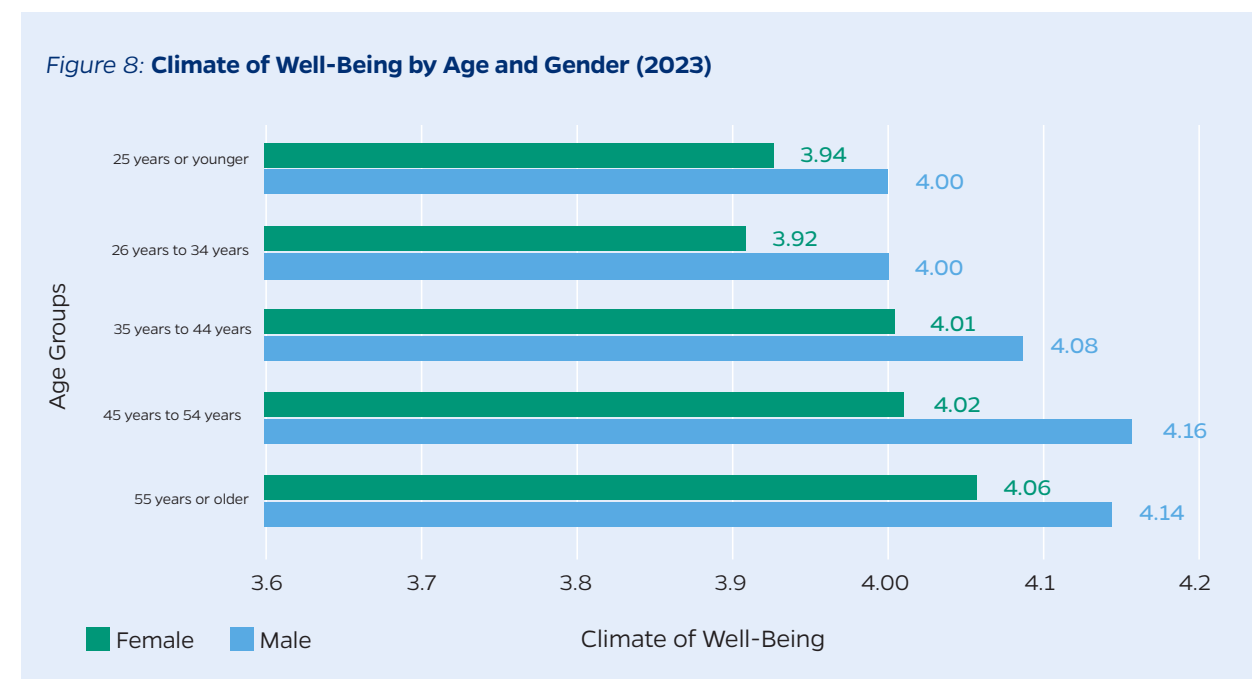
that highlights the consistent results across each of these organizational factors. Our analysis of these factors in 2023 highlights

the multi-faceted nature of well-being and the need to address this holistically in organizations.



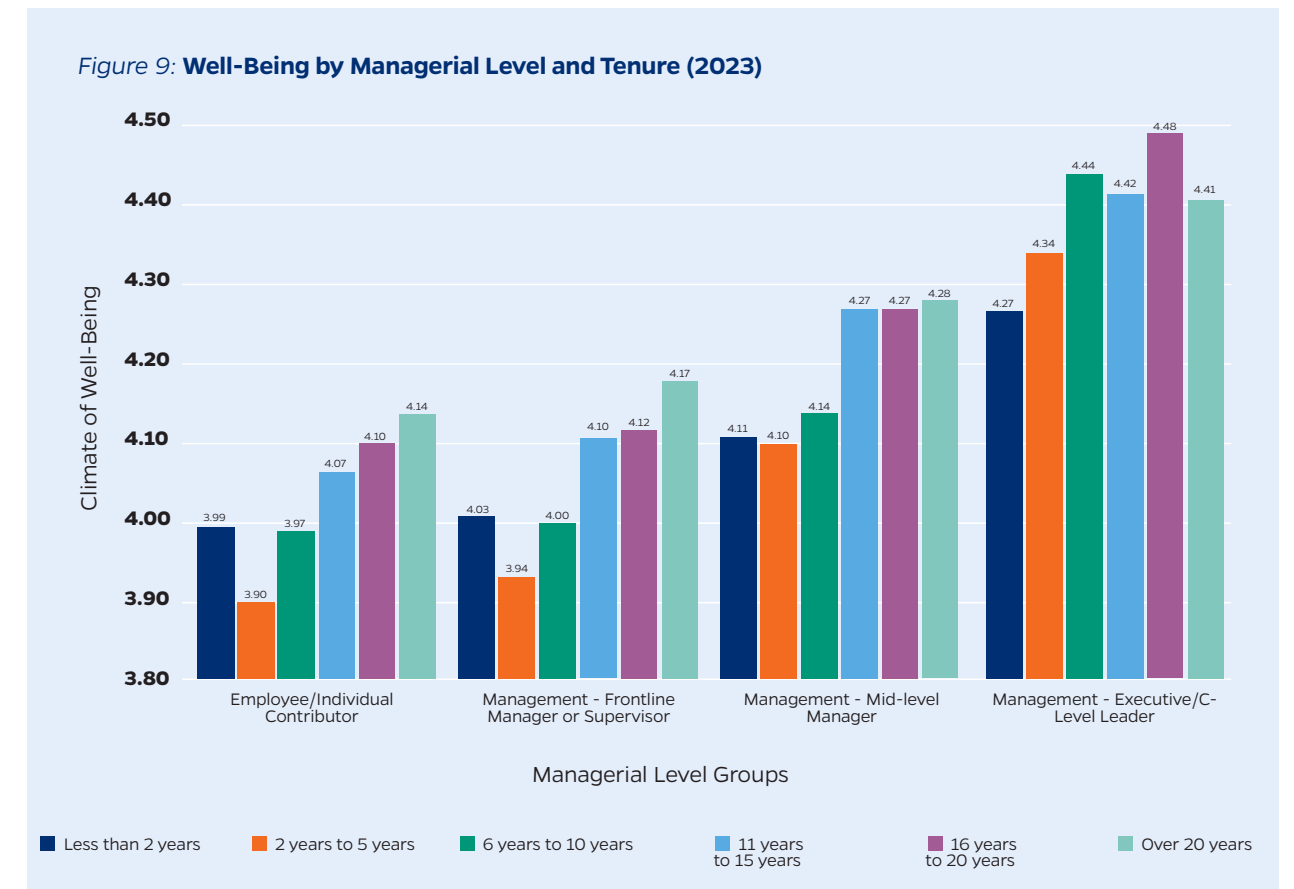
As we look more closely at well-being by age group and gender, we see consistent differences between the male and female scores, yet a more pronounced gap in the age group of 45 to 54 age group compared to younger cohorts, as shown in

Figure 8. The findings suggest that gender differences in well-being might gradually close in the future, as evidenced by the smaller gap in well-being responses among the younger generation, who represent the future workforce.



A closer look at the results by managerial level and tenure helps to highlight the general increase in employees' sense of well-being over time at level as well as the increase in well-being by managerial level as shown in Figure 9. Worthy of note

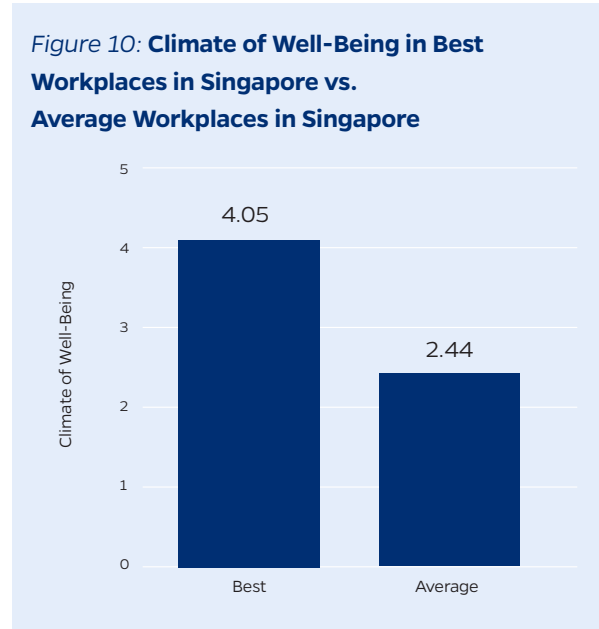
is the higher scores of the employees with less than two years of tenure. This might suggest a "honeymoon period" for employees with less than two years of experience, yet we do not see this pattern repeat at the higher levels of management.



IMPACT OF HEALTHY CLIMATE OF WELL-BEING

Across our analysis the gaps associated with fostering a climate of well-being were clear. Creating a positive work environment that fosters a climate of well-being takes commitment, hard work, and leadership involvement. Yet, many business leaders might be asking for the ROI on the investment needed to address employee well-being. Others may find the effort discouraging and wonder if there is really a significant performance difference between firms that create a positive climate of well-being for their employees and those that don't.

To test these differences, we completed a comparison between a random sample of employees in Singapore with a random sample from Great Workplaces in Singapore. Both samples used the same survey and methods. The normative sample was gathered using a research database sent to thousands of employees in Singapore from across several industries, levels, and age groups. We compared this normative sample to a sample of employees from the companies that are listed as Best Workplaces in Singapore™ (as ranked in 2023). To help ensure the robustness of this comparison, we employed the bootstrap sampling method and gathered equal samples and repeated this process 1,000 times. This analysis, across all industries, aimed to compare the scores associated with employee well-being in different work environments. After comparing the samples from each group, we found a significant difference in well-being scores between employees at average Singapore organizations and employees at Best Workplaces in Singapore as shown in Figure 10.



While this difference is not surprising, it illustrates the significant gap between organizations when it comes to facilitating a climate of well-being. Not only do the employees at great workplace firms enjoy a healthy environment of well-being, but also score higher in psychological safety and teamwork. Prior analyses show that the top ranked workplaces also out-perform their peers as measured by return on invested capital and total returns to shareholders over time. These firms tend to focus on strong leadership, clear communication, and opportunities for professional development, which contribute to high employee satisfaction and retention. Additionally, these companies often provide comprehensive benefits, competitive compensation, and supportive work environments that prioritize work-life balance. These factors collectively enhance organizational well-being, leading to higher scores in employee surveys and overall rankings.

SINGAPORE ORGANIZATIONS WITH POSITIVE CLIMATES OF WELL-BEING

Reviewing the actions taken by companies in Singapore to help address well-being at work, we found many examples focused on physical health, mental health, financial health, sense of purpose, and personal support. Many companies have made employee well-being a clear priority in Singapore.

To help employees with emotional support, HP believes that an active mental well-being strategy in the company is key. It has certified/trained 150+ Mental Well-Being Ambassadors, implemented a Wellness Day in April, provided a Wellness Allowance, Headspace application and introduced ME Day for employees to take time off to disconnect from work.

DHL Express' health and well-being program *Fit for Work, Fit for Life* focuses on the four key areas of employee wellness – personal, physical, mental, and emotional. Some initiatives organized under the physical wellness umbrella include healthy menus in its facilities, nutritionists, exercise classes/dancing or gym facilities, vaccinations, cancer screening, targeted medical checks for vision/hearing/blood pressure, ergonomic training/support, as well as hobby clubs such as soccer and table tennis, and others.



At Capella Singapore, staff gatherings serve as more than just occasions for celebration – everyone at the hotel participates in these events, from senior leaders to interns. These gatherings are integral to creating a sense of belonging and inclusivity, and its celebrations become a platform for building connections beyond professional duties. Through team-building activities, shared experiences, and informal interactions, these events contribute to a cohesive work environment where every member feels seen and appreciated.

Ultimately, by prioritizing these elements, companies can cultivate environments where employees feel valued, supported, and motivated, leading to improved organizational performance and employee well-being across diverse global contexts.

SUMMARY AND MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

This research provides a comprehensive view of the trends in employee well-being observed during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite the adverse impacts of the pandemic on various facets of employee well-being, including job security and work-life balance, our analysis of organizational and employee data revealed a temporary spike in employee well-being during this unprecedented period. As this analysis has shown, when leaders make people a priority in the organization (such as during the pandemic), the results can be rather striking. Unfortunately, this focus on the employees and their well-being has not continued, which is evidenced by the data trends.

These challenges have been recognized in Singapore by prior studies by the Institute of Policy Studies as they measured attitudes toward work and work arrangements during COVID-19 in Singapore (Mathews, et al, 2022). The Singapore tripartite advisory on mental health and well-being at workplaces, jointly issued by the Ministry of Manpower, Singapore National Employers Federation and National Trades Union Congress (2023), provides recommendations to support the mental well-being of employees.

For managers of workforces, we find several important implications for the future. Rather than a prescription for success, we focus on first steps toward building a trusting culture and a healthy climate of well-being in organizations.

1. Boundary Spanning – As we have noted, there are significant differences between organizations due to management approaches, organization culture, and industry assumptions. Understanding the workplaces of others in the same industry, along with suppliers and customers, may provide insight, but may also affirm assumptions. Leading organizations often challenge their own assumptions by moving past these boundaries to embrace new perspectives from other countries and contexts that may be beneficial to the organization.

- 2. Level Skipping** – As we have seen, the sense of well-being improves as people move up the managerial ranks. It is important for senior managers to not only skip one level, but multiple levels to gain a clearer understanding of what the work life is like for others in the organization. The data shows that C-suite executives may have a distorted view if they rely on their own perceptions.
- 3. Trust Building** – A team is needed to address culture change and foster a positive climate of well-being. This requires everyone in management to work toward earning the trust of the workforce. Open dialogue about the actions that both inspire confidence as well as those that create distrust are important to put on the table and address as a team.
- 4. Active Listening** – Understanding and appreciating those who may be in the minority (e.g. by age, gender, race, etc.) can be difficult across levels and organizational boundaries. Starting with active listening and thoughtful questions are the right first steps. Through empathetic listening and building trust, managers can learn more about what is important for groups that may be different from their own.
- 5. Internal Reflecting** – Finally, the opportunity for fostering a positive climate of well-being in each organization rests with each leader. Seeking feedback from others and reflecting on personal experiences in engaging others may provide simple clues on the changes that each individual might make. By taking these first steps, managers at every level can begin to create a stronger team with workforce members experiencing a healthy climate of well-being at work.

The COVID-19 pandemic was a world-wide crisis, yet organizational leaders proved to the world that they can do better in taking care of their workforces. While this focus has waned in recent years, the bar has been raised. As organizations navigate the evolving landscape of work, let these findings serve as a roadmap for fostering resilience, equity, and well-being in the workplace of tomorrow.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

This study is based on data gathered by Great Place To Work® as part of their work with organizations interested in certification and ranking. While the data and process of analysis are robust for this study, there are limitations with this sample since organizations must choose to participate in the Great Place To Work process. This self-selection likely provides a sample that has higher scores than the average employer in Singapore. While we have the benefit of a normative sample in Singapore to compare with employees at great workplaces, the sample sizes are limited and caution should be used to avoid generalizing to all organizations in the country. We note that other initiatives by the government and local community groups such as WorkWell Leaders may provide future direction on the factors affecting workplace well-being in Singapore.

As we consider future directions, we recognize that more work is needed to understand differences across gender and cultural backgrounds in workplace regarding perceptions and experiences. Also worthy of further exploration is the linkage between voluntary employee turnover with well-being, along with a closer look on flexible and remote work arrangements. With more interest in work modalities, alternative work weeks, and flexible work arrangements, we wish to further test ideas and hypotheses related to future designs of work.

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