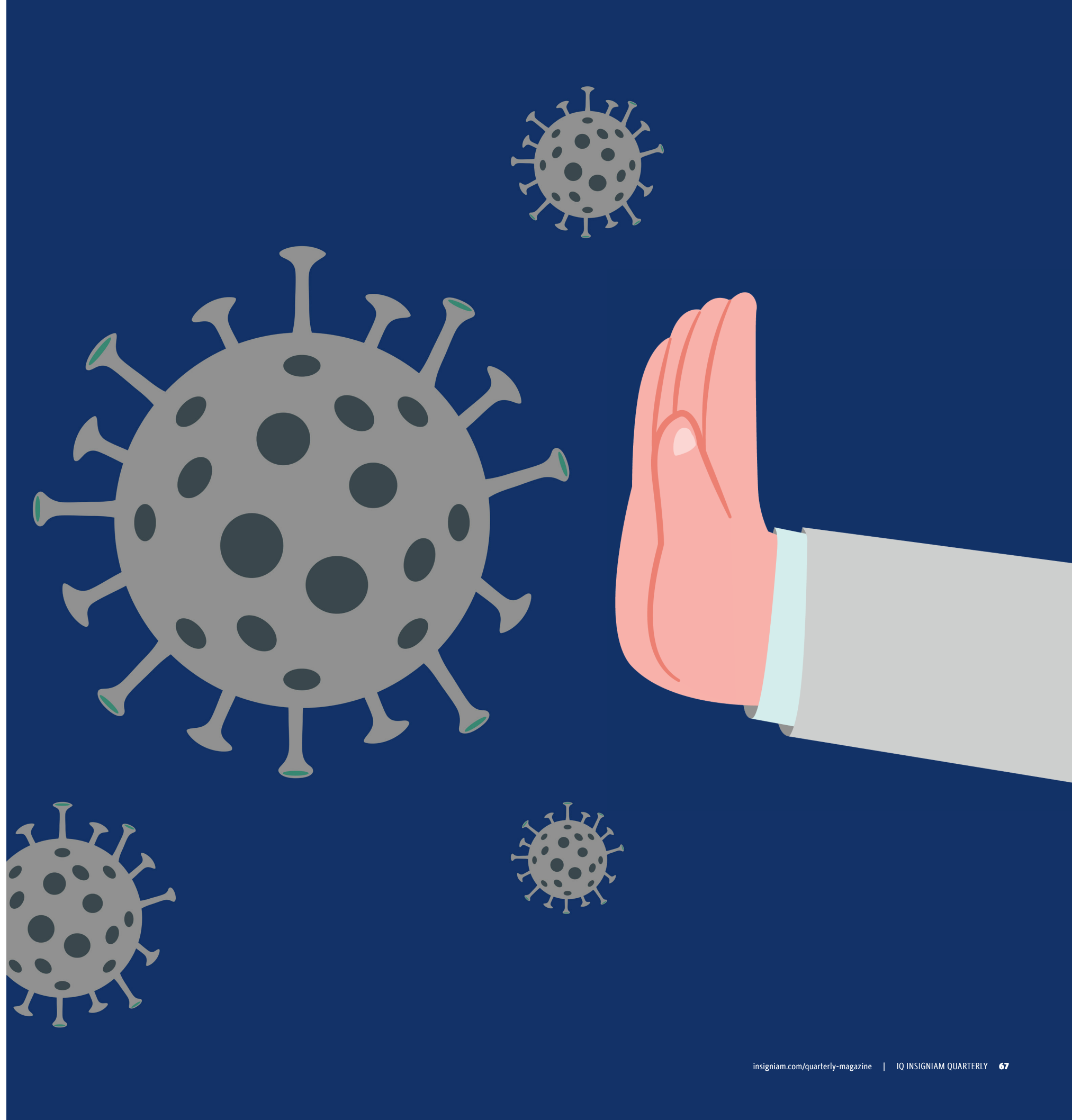


# Insigniam's 2023 Post Pandemic

THE  
CHANGING  
PARADIGM  
FOR  
LEADERSHIP  
ISSUE

# Update

Measuring where **critical shifts and implications** for business have evolved since our **landmark 2021 survey.**





**Imbalancing Act**  
According to Emily Oster, author of *Disparate Burdens*, before the pandemic, mothers who wanted to be successful in their careers rarely discussed with others the physical and mental tasks associated with caring for a family.



A profound truth emerged from the upheaval caused by the pandemic: people refuse to let history repeat itself.

**I**n 2021, Insigniam published the results of our first Post-Pandemic Survey, which revealed sweeping changes in how employees perceive themselves, how they perceive their lives, and, as a result, how they perceive their work environments—all of which indicates a different calculus for how they behave.

Within our findings, a profound truth emerged: people refuse to let history repeat itself. The experience reshaped their priorities and shifted their perspectives. What was once deemed acceptable is no longer seen as desirable or even tolerable. Life now takes precedence over work, as health triumphs over deadlines, family surpasses the rigors of commuting, and the importance of seeing friends outweighs the allure of staying late in the office.

Now, two years later, we are revisiting our initial data and comparing where and how attitudes continue to shift. Initially, we asked three questions:

1. In what ways have you changed (including as a leader) during the pandemic?
2. During the course of the pandemic, in what ways have you changed your expectations of the people leading your organization?
3. How will your organization need to change to adapt to the post-pandemic you?

Our findings were illuminating and identified five shifts in the way people view the world:

1. My life takes precedence over my work—the latter will not displace the former again.
2. The illusion of “two selves”—work and home—has been shattered.
3. I see that in an instant anything can change.
4. I know now that leadership can be found anywhere and in anyone, including myself.
5. I am inextricably connected to others around the globe.

To understand where attitudes have shifted and evolved over the past 24 months, let’s revisit and see where we stand today.

**My life takes precedence over my work—the latter will not displace the former again.**

Early in the pandemic, nearly half of the global population—almost 4 billion people—found themselves in lockdown. Busy travel schedules and daily commuting gave way to working while homeschooling children, three meals a day at home and evenings with family. At that time, many people came to a startling realization: Before the pandemic, they had let their work displace their families and personal lives.

At the time, 42% of executives surveyed by Insigniam said life and family would come first in the future, and 41% indicated they would no longer choose an inflexible workplace.

According to Gallup, this sentiment continues to permeate among executives globally and is an area where many are still attempting to find balance.

“We know that engaged employees produce far better outcomes, but [we] recently discovered that engaged workers who are not thriving in their lives are much more vulnerable and add risk to your organization,” notes Gallup. Comparing employees who are engaged but not thriving with those who are engaged and thriving, those who aren’t thriving report the following risks:

- 61% more likely to experience burnout often
- 48% more likely to report daily stress
- 66% more likely to experience daily worry
- 2x more likely to report daily sadness and anger

Furthermore, the analytics giant emphasized that, “In the absence of a good job and fulfilling career, there is no net thriving. When organizations intentionally address both wellbeing and engagement, the effects are additive and mutually beneficial for employees and business outcomes alike.”

Additionally, the MIT Sloan School of Management explored the challenges working women faced before and during COVID-19 in an online conversation with Emily Oster, author of *Disparate Burdens*, to explore how healthy work-life balances may be within reach for more employees as we emerge from the pandemic.

“Before the pandemic, mothers who wanted to be successful in their careers rarely discussed with others the physical and mental tasks associated with caring for a family,” said

Ms. Oster, speaking to MIT alumnae and faculty.

“Then, remote work pulled the curtain on women’s lives. Everyone saw that you are in your bedroom, and your kid is behind you jumping on the bed. They saw everything and that made our parenting less of a secret.” Revealing these tensions, said Ms. Oster, can bring about positive change.

“We still have a lot to learn, and a lot of adjustments need to be made along the way,” said MIT alumnus Castillo Dearth, a managing director at Wellington Management, who participated in the forum.

“We need to continue building that flexible mindset muscle.”

**The illusion of “two selves”—work and home—has been shattered.**

Before the pandemic, people tried to keep “work” and “life” separate. The pandemic has shattered that “two selves” illusion. Working from home physically brought work and life together. Children and pets wandered into Zoom frames; team members worked from small apartments with shared, limited bandwidth; coffee in the break room became time for laundry and household chores. Some were forced to take meetings from bathrooms or cars just to get privacy. Needless to say, boundaries were blurred.

In our 2021 survey, 28% of executives said they could no longer keep life and work separate, and 57% said they expected leaders to understand that “being real” and caring mattered.

“We still have a lot to learn, and a lot of adjustments need to be made along the way. We need to continue building that flexible mindset muscle”

—Castillo Dearth  
Managing Director,  
Wellington Management

# “From disruptions and geopolitical events, it is critical to manage uncertainties through strategic planning, scenario analysis and a willingness to adapt and pivot.” - Forbes Nonprofit Council

The pandemic revealed the fallacy of certainty about the future. And even as the world begins to reopen, we will never see it as quite the same again.

According to a 2023 trends report published by Gartner, 82% percent of employees now say it's important that their organizations see them as a whole person, rather than simply an employee.

In February, Rachel Feintzeig, the *Wall Street Journal's* “Work & Life” columnist, spoke as part of the R. Peter Straus Lecture series at the Yale School of Management, suggesting that although the pandemic blew up the traditional, in-the-office work week for many, it didn't necessarily make achieving a healthy work-life balance any easier.

“I think something has shifted, but I'm not sure where it's going to go,” Feintzeig said to the audience at Yale. “While remote work arrangements have made life less hectic for some workers, others feel isolated in at-home offices and anxious about missing out on valuable facetime with managers.”

Karen Guzman, associate director of communications at Yale School of Management who also attended the lecture writes, “A new generation of workers, more invested in their personal lives, is seeking environments that foster work-life balance. This realization has fueled the ‘quiet quitting’ trend that's seen employees leaving the workforce or opting for reduced roles.”

Ms. Feintzeig is quick to point out that an emphasis on work-life does not denote a lapse or absence in terms of professional ambition.

“It's a different kind of ambition,” Ms. Feintzeig said. “[Executives] are serious about their careers and building skills and making a difference...but they also want to be their best selves and kill it in their personal lives, too... It's not all about climbing the ladder.”

Ms. Feintzeig noted that employees “at all career stages need also to be upfront about their need for boundaries between work and life—especially with managers who believe that technology means an “always available” workforce—and to prioritize self-care and time

with family. Periods of unplugged time when an employee is literally unreachable are a good start.”

## 3 I see that—in an instant—anything can change.

One respondent summed it up concisely: “I am more aware of the fragility of our global ecosystem.” The pandemic brought the realization that in an instant, anything can change. We have become aware of the fragility of life in a way that was perhaps impossible to fathom before the pandemic. As a result, we are no longer able to view the world as stable or predictable. The pandemic revealed the fallacy of certainty about the future. And even as the world begins to reopen, we will never see it as quite the same again.

In our 2021 survey, 17% of executives said an increased awareness of uncertainty changed them and that their organizations must adapt to increased uncertainty.

At heart, the question of how leaders can help their business flourish through uncertainty and bolster institutionalized resilience remains top-of-mind for many global executives.

According to the Forbes Nonprofit Council, “Through shifts in consumer behavior to changes in regulations, technological disruptions and geopolitical events, effective leaders must remain nimble. It is critical to manage these uncertainties through strategic planning, scenario analysis and a willingness to adapt and pivot whenever necessary.”

The Council suggests that by “expecting and perhaps even embracing uncertainty, leaders can build more resilient organizations better prepared to weather future challenges.” The Council goes on to say that maintaining a strong work culture is vital in the face of business uncertainty, as it provides a sense of stability and purpose that can help guide employees through challenging times.



**Risk Management**  
On April 25, 2023 China's Foreign Ministry Spokesperson stated that people traveling to China will be permitted to take an antigen test instead of a PCR test within 48 hours of boarding. In addition, airlines will no longer be required to check the pre-boarding COVID-19 test certificates.

Forbes Council member Azzedine Downes—President and CEO of International Fund for Animal Welfare—writes that, “From my experience, this is crucial for several reasons: It fosters a sense of community and support among employees, helping them stay motivated and focused despite external challenges; a positive work culture can create a sense of stability and security for employees, which is critical during times of uncertainty; and it can help businesses weather difficult times by providing a foundation of trust.”

Ms. Downes advises that enterprises should, “Realize that regardless of whatever change a business is undergoing, employees are still at the center of an organization's greatest efforts. Acknowledge them. Challenge them. Give them a safe space but remind them that they have to deliver as well.”

## 4 I know now that leadership can be found anywhere and in anyone, including myself.

In the midst of adversity, many found a quality within themselves that they were perhaps unaware of: leadership. The urgency of the crisis caused people to don the mantle of leadership—whether it was leading other people or leading themselves. It shifted their perspective on what they were capable of and what they had to offer others. In other words, people began to view themselves as leaders.

In our 2021 survey, 70% of leaders said they found a greater sense of empathy and awareness amid the global pandemic.

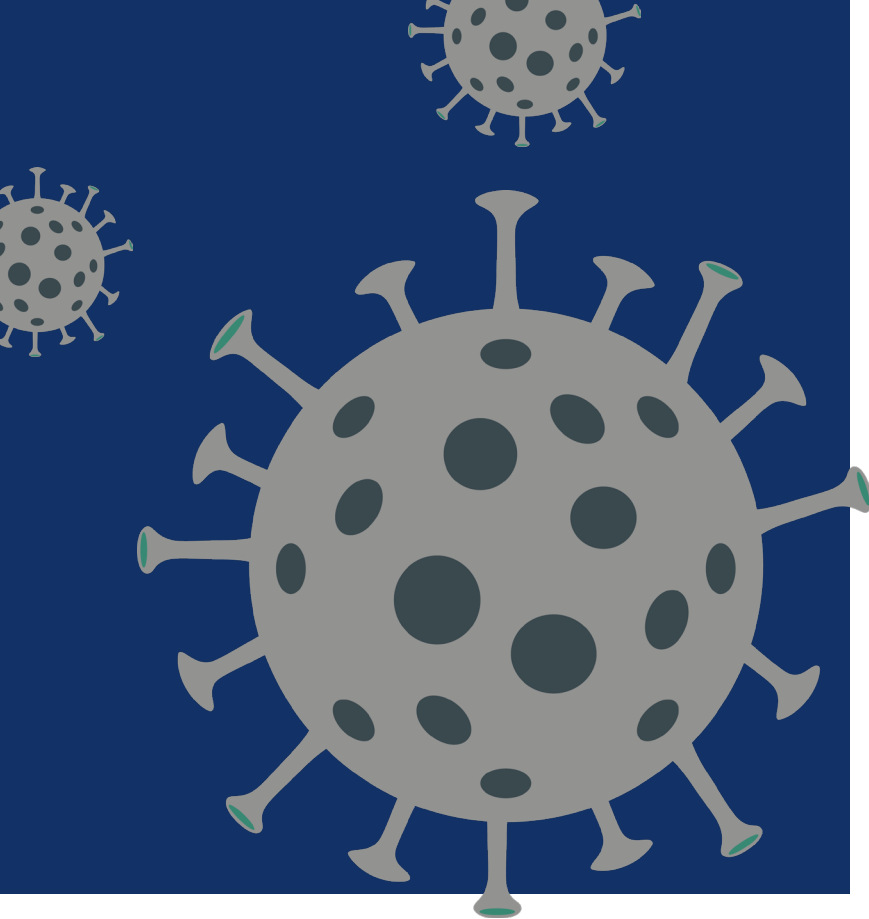
Although the practice of empathetic leadership is not new, it has taken on fresh significance post-pandemic, writes Rob Volpe, CEO of Ignite 360, a U.S. consumer insight and strategy firm based in the San Francisco Bay Area.

“We've been heading toward this embrace of empathetic skills for over a decade now with the growing awareness that EQ [emotional quotient] is as important as IQ [intelligence quotient],” said Volpe in an interview with *Business Chief* magazine.

Mr. Volpe notes that for years, empathetic leadership had been viewed as a “soft skill” that contrasts with the qualities of strength, success, and resilience typically associated with the business world. However, in recent years, empathetic leadership has gained significant traction and is now widely recognized as the foremost and most impactful arrow in an executive's quiver.

Present data would appear to confirm Mr. Volpe's assessment: According to a recent survey conducted by The CEO Forum group, for nearly half (44%) of those polled said that being in a workplace with more empathy and human connection is more important to them now than it was pre-pandemic.

Nevertheless, it is important to note that leaders should not feel obligated to fulfill every request or indulge every whim, says



#### Remote Control

According to a report in Forbes Advisor with data provided by Upwork, the pandemic's impact on remote and hybrid work environments will be lasting. An estimated 32.6 million Americans will be working remotely by 2025, which equates to about 22% of the workforce. Additionally, research shows that employers can save \$11,000 per employee when switching to remote work presently.

Rhys Cater, managing director of Precis Digital, a UK-based digital marketing agency. "As leaders, we need to balance the needs of tens, hundreds, or even thousands of people along with the success of the business," says Mr. Cater, speaking to the CEO Forum.

#### I am inextricably connected to others around the globe.

Before the pandemic, people viewed their actions as relatively isolated from those outside of their immediate circle. It was difficult to believe that a personal choice to go to a restaurant, board a plane or attend a conference could change a stranger's life a thousand miles away.

On a global scale, we no longer situate ourselves as individuals. Rather, we see ourselves as inextricably interconnected with others—part of a complex, adaptive system. Our decisions have ripple effects on others, effects we were unaware of before, and many of us take them seriously.

In our 2021 survey, 10% of executives polled said they felt an increased sense of connectedness and believed their organizations should adapt to reflect this.

Writing on the topic in *Fortune*, Dov Seidman, author of *How* and founder of

The HOW Institute for Society, and Angela Ahrendts, former SVP of Apple Retail and current board member at Airbnb, Ralph Lauren, and WPP say, "While many factors influence human connection, leadership is disproportionately consequential in shaping communities, institutions, and society."

Furthermore, the authors note that, "We had an instinctive sense that given our physical distance from one another owing to the pandemic, it was imperative that leaders work harder—and differently—to create a sense of connection and community. We found human connection was strained for all employees but particularly for women and younger workers—those historically in positions of less power. In fact, 30% of U.S. workers felt less deeply and meaningfully connected to their organizations, and 44% felt less connected to coworkers since the start of the pandemic."

Yet, the authors note that these findings also suggest workers "felt more connected when their supervisors exhibited and embodied behaviors and attributes associated with moral leadership."

"In fact, the gender and age disparities dramatically decrease, and in some cases disappear completely, with moral leadership. When reporting to moral leaders, 60% of workers felt more meaningfully connected to their organization, 80% more connected to coworkers, and 90% more connected to their leader," write Mr. Seidman and Ms. Ahrendts.

Lastly, the authors note that, "The pandemic gave us an opportunity to pause and reflect on where we are, reconnect to our values, rethink our assumptions, and reimagine a better path forward. We witnessed businesses pivot overnight from selling to saving lives. The ethos, values, and instincts that animated us to save, can now anchor our pivot toward serving. Through moral leadership we will deepen connections, build sustainable communities, and foster meaning. The path forward must be forged anew. It is our hope that leaders at all levels and in all spheres of society will join us on this journey and help illuminate that path."

#### Assessing The Current Implications

In our 2021 survey, Insigniam identified the implications that leaders must recognize and respond to: Inflexible work environments are a thing of the past (and so are leaders, managers and organizations that don't show care for their

people); uncertainty has given rise to anxiety—and to an appetite for positive change; the world feels smaller, and people care about their own impact on it; and authenticity matters.

Fast forward to 2023 and the implications suggest disconnects may persist between employee attitudes and trends across global enterprises, particularly in the following areas:

- **Flexibility Among Work Environments is a Challenge:** "Since last summer, we've been observing a bit of a mismatch—employers are definitely ready for workers to come back to the office, but workers really like remote options," says Karin Kimbrough, LinkedIn's chief economist, in an interview with *TIME*. "Now, just about 13% of jobs listed on LinkedIn offer remote work, down from 20% in March 2022," she says.
- **Uncertainty Continues to Breed Anxiety:** According to Peter Cappelli, a management professor at the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania, uncertainty continues to fuel anxiety for many, particularly in areas such as employee benefit cost-cutting. "Engaged employees perform better at work than those who don't like their jobs or bosses, the cost of cutting benefits may be higher than the cost of the actual benefits themselves," says Mr. Cappelli in *TIME*.  
Yet, Mr. Cappelli says, "For many CEOs who became leaders without any training in human resources, and who are, increasingly, trained in engineering rather than in management, employee management isn't high up in the list of their priorities. The idea of making your company better is just swamped by other concerns like deal-making and acquisitions and plotting clever business moves."
- **The World Feels Smaller, and People Care About their Impact:** In an article entitled "The Underrated Impact Of Leading With Care," Forbes Council member Jill Bornstein writes, "In this market, the level of care a manager or other business leader shows their employees can directly impact a company's bottom line. Retaining employees remains a significant challenge for companies right now;

loyalty levels are low, and many younger employees are coming into jobs with different expectations about workplace culture than their predecessors. It's important to acknowledge that many of these problems with employees feeling unnoticed and undervalued have been exacerbated by the pandemic when everything went virtual—the opportunities for someone to run into a colleague and ask how they are have become fewer and further in between."

- **Authenticity Still Matters—Perhaps More than Ever:** The need for authentic leadership is not necessarily new, however, it cannot be ignored, especially given employee attitudes that emerged post-pandemic.

In a *Harvard Business Review* podcast, Babson College management professor Tina Opie said leaders must bring their best selves to work and help others do the same – by focusing on good communication and expressing emotion effectively.

"How you express yourself in the workplace is connected to authenticity," says Ms. Opie, who denotes that authenticity is about being your best self, not necessarily the same authentic self we exhibit at home, for instance.

"Nobody wants to see your authentic self, your authentic self is nasty—that's not the authentic self that I'm talking about."

For Ms. Opie, this authenticity can best be denied as 'direct with kindness.'

"I will say to someone (when they come to me and ask a question), do you want to hear the truth? Do you want to hear what I really think? Or do you want me to just say something to sort of appease the situation? Because I actually think if we could adjust the culture and workplaces to where 'direct with kindness' was valued as opposed to indirect which doesn't necessarily have a kind intention behind it. Direct, critical feedback that would help you evolve into a better employee." IQ

"The pandemic gave us an opportunity to pause and reflect on where we are, reconnect to our values. The path forward must be forged anew. It is our hope that leaders at all levels will join us on this journey and help illuminate that path."

—Dov Seidman, Author of *How*, and Angela Ahrendts, former Apple Retail SVP and current Airbnb board member, speaking to *Forbes*.