

# Knowledgetics Research



## UNCOVERING EMPLOYER-EMPLOYEE SENTIMENTS DURING COVID-19

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# Introduction

COVID-19 pandemic is driving profound organizational shifts, leading to significant rise of uncertainty and randomness dictating the current market and job environment. Employers and their workforce are responding variedly with a strong undercurrent of mixed feelings of uncertainty and anxiety. Many organizations are resorting to the routes of empathy and wellbeing for safeguarding their employee's mental frame of mind. However, the barrels of layoffs and shutdowns have created an uncanny situation that is greatly seen affecting the sentiments of both employers as well as employees.

In light of this, Knowledgetics Research developed a survey in India to help understand Employer-Employee sentiments that has been seen altering in the COVID-19 crisis. On one hand, owing to the huge business impact that COVID-19 has brought, organizations are forced to take few extreme and immediate measures for their survival. Alternatively, the perturbed employee segment is also seen battering to manage the crisis in their own way. Hence, it is imperative to understand both the sides and if you as a leader haven't asked your workforce how they are feeling and what their concerns are, you are definitely missing out on some critical piece of information that may have a long lasting effect.

With this research study, we have crafted an in-depth report on the changing employer-employee dynamics and sentiments.

## Employer Sentiments

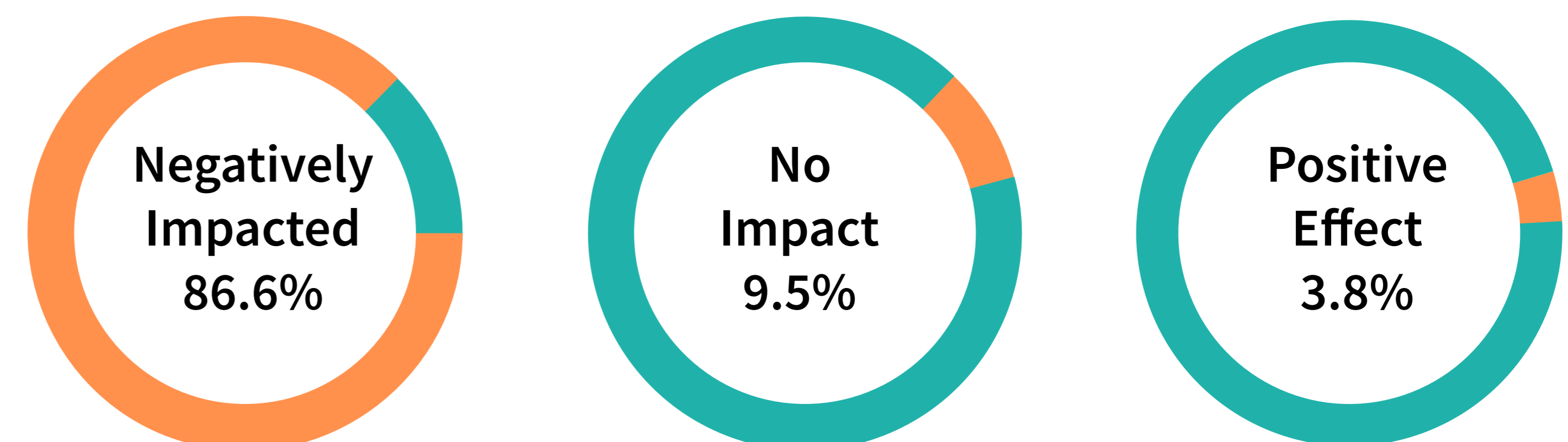
The COVID-19 storm brewing across the world, with huge impact in businesses has brought a shift in employment market affecting employer-employee sentiments. With travel bans, shift in work culture, skeleton crews, cross-functional collaboration, remote work, and social distancing becoming some new norms; employers and employees are concerned about how the future workspace will shape up. Some of the identified top sentiments of business leaders from employer point of view are:

### 1. On The Edge Of The Curve

A confluence of challenging developments have marked the beginning of a difficult era as COVID is already hitting businesses hard. Around 71.6% companies are seen losing business, especially in the start-up and MSME sector.



71.6%  
Losing  
Business



Companies have started seeing a downward trend. As per the study, around 86.6% organizations in India have been negatively impacted.

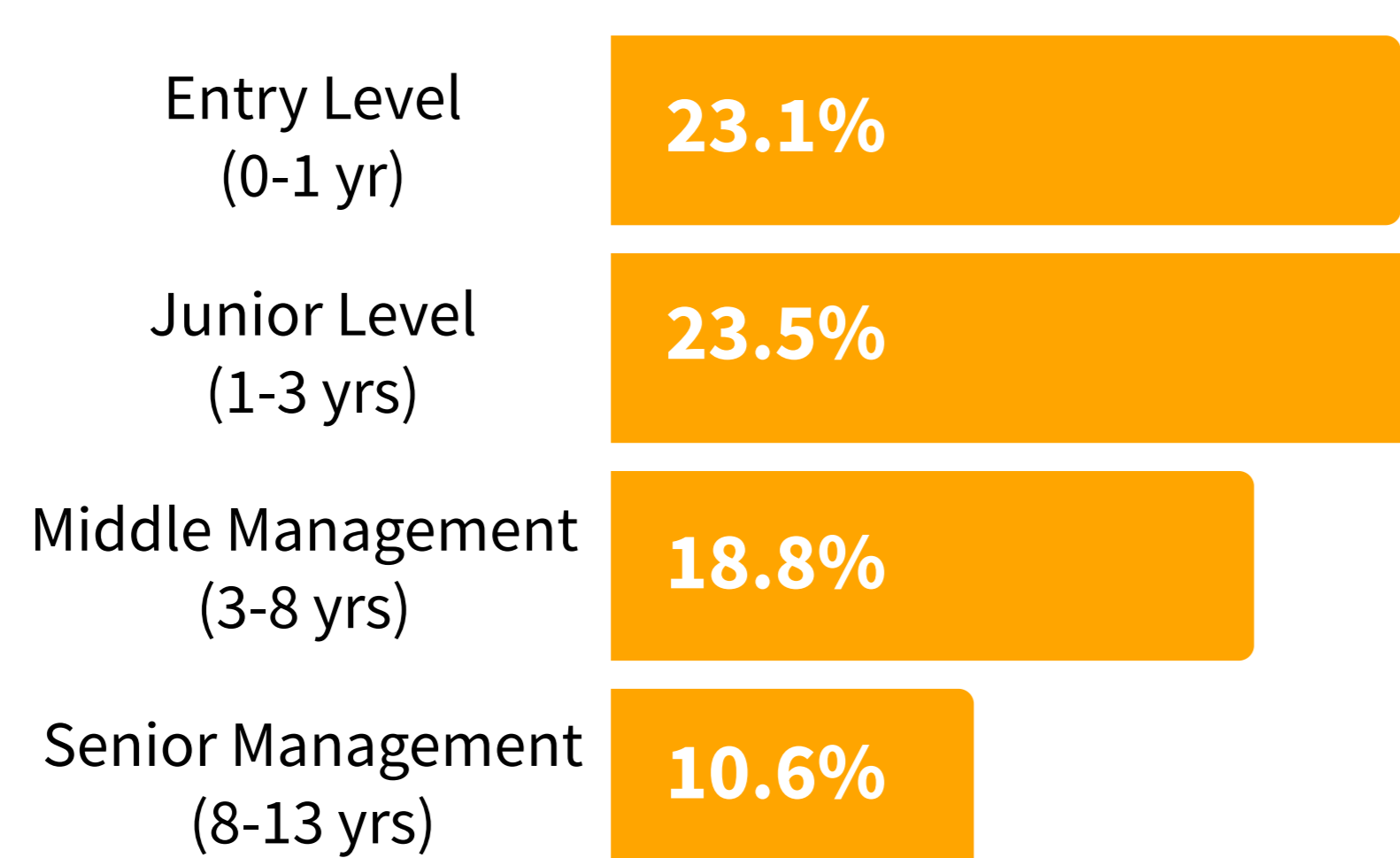
COVID has decimated almost all industries with huge losses incurred in these recent months. India's GDP loss is expected to nearly double that of Latin America and Africa with businesses struggling to survive.

### 2. Testing Times

It is clearly evident that companies have resorted to immediate action directed towards laying off their workforce and reducing number of new hires.

While protecting critical assets (the high performers), businesses are planning for furloughs by letting go their workforce at almost every level. Around 23.5% job losses in the experience bracket of 1-3 years are seen and the senior level accounts to 10.6%. Unarguably, there is no worse time to lay-off than this, but as per the study most employers feel that they do not have any choice left and it has become necessity for survival.

**Which level is more susceptible to layoffs in the current COVID era?**



### 3. Fixing BCPs



**Re-shaping Business Continuity Plan**

Evaluating short-term liquidity and re-jigging working capital cycle to stress-test financial plans are taken up by employers in their discussion tables. Majority of business leaders are trying to find ways to reimagining a business-as-usual environment.

One of the top focus is on re-shaping their business continuity plan (BCP) for minimizing disruptions.

For comprehending the potential impact on financial performance and become future ready, employers feel that BCPs need to be validated frequently.

### 4. Patronizing Outsourcing

Living in a time when short-term pressures have grown exponentially, there is hardly any choice left with employers except exploring ways to reduce cost at every level. The current focus of companies are about surviving the crisis by



**Outsourcing Strategies for Cost Control**

managing supply chain disruptions, solving operational issues, preventing health and safety threats, reducing emotional distress of employees, controlling costs and managing the status quo.

Leaders have restricted all sorts of spending barring few key projects. Companies are reviewing overall operating costs and considering curtailing all non-essential expenses by switching to outsourcing models. Employers are taking the path to outsource and expanding access to data, software, and research through partnerships. Outsourcing options are definitely a larger part of employers' current strategy.

### 5. Embracing Up-skilling

With businesses incurring huge losses, professional careers have profoundly been affected threatening the livelihoods and wellbeing of billions of people. Amidst this, the pandemic has put a spotlight on companies to retain their top performers.



**Up-skilling Workforce**

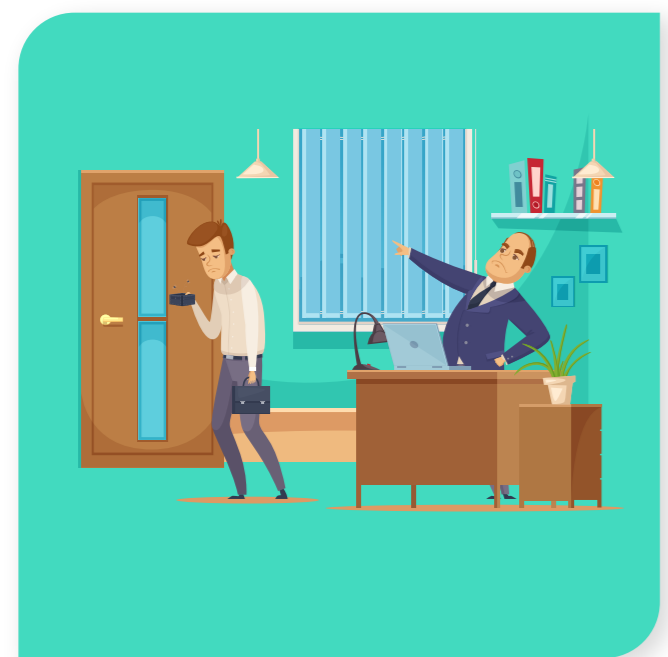
Companies have started to focus on ways of making their current workforce motivated so that the negative sentiment does not take a toll on their performances. Among the top retention strategies, up-skilling accounts to 40.3%. Companies are seen to

double their budget to up skill their workforce to the changing business models. Companies at the global level too are taking responsibility to upskill not only their own employees but preparing people from the unemployed pool to be able to join the employment industry again. LinkedIn and Microsoft are set to train 25 million unemployed workers for high demand jobs this year by offering free job-seeking tools. The program will also use LinkedIn data to find jobs that employers seek to fill and then plan to offer free access to content for developing required skills with reduced charges on certifications.

## Employee Sentiments

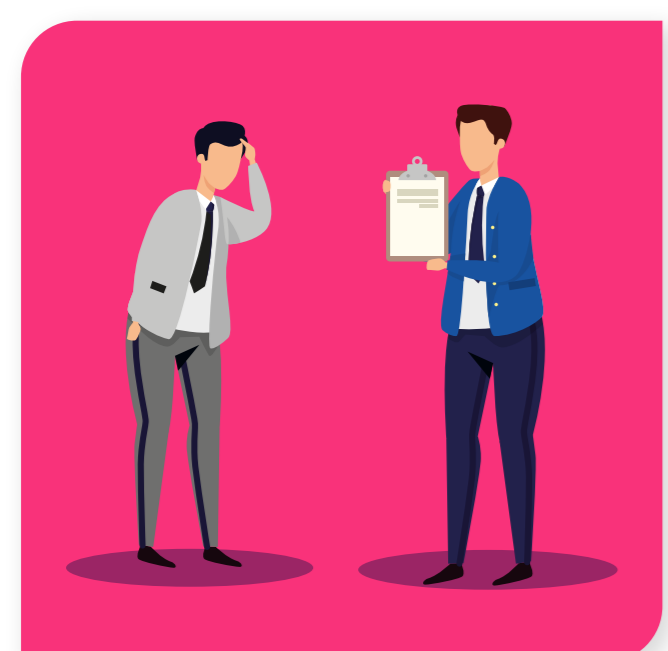
Over 90% of employees have shown concern in the way workplace changes have been taking place. With the pandemic leading to reduced cross-functional collaboration and a changing work culture, employees are anxious on what the future beholds for them.

### 1. Riding on a Roller Coaster



34.1%

Laying Off  
Employees



37.4%

Freeze On  
Hiring

Worries about unemployment are seen mounting amongst employees. Around 34.1% organizations are seen resorting to furloughs to survive through the crisis. In order to recalibrate the focus, majority of companies have started to freeze their hiring processes and it is likely that many job offers will not be honored. As per the study, 37.4% companies have frozen their hiring numbers. Such developments have left employees mentally strapped and financially dismantled. With businesses impacted, employees are worried about losing their jobs and the financial impact of this pandemic is seen to be a prominent area of concern for them.



## 2. Impetus to Freelance Model of Work

As per the study, it is seen that the focus of hiring is shifting towards freelancing model of work. With tighter budgets and cost-cutting strategies, 17.4% of companies have switched gears to freelancing model of getting work done. Freelance roles are slowly opening up in sectors like advertising, e-commerce and IT in the areas of content development, digital marketing, data entry and online sales. In spite of less pay in freelance roles, industry experts suggests taking up such temporary roles till future job opportunities open up.

## 3. Re-slicing the Pie



**Skilled Resources  
are still being  
hired to close  
vacant positions**

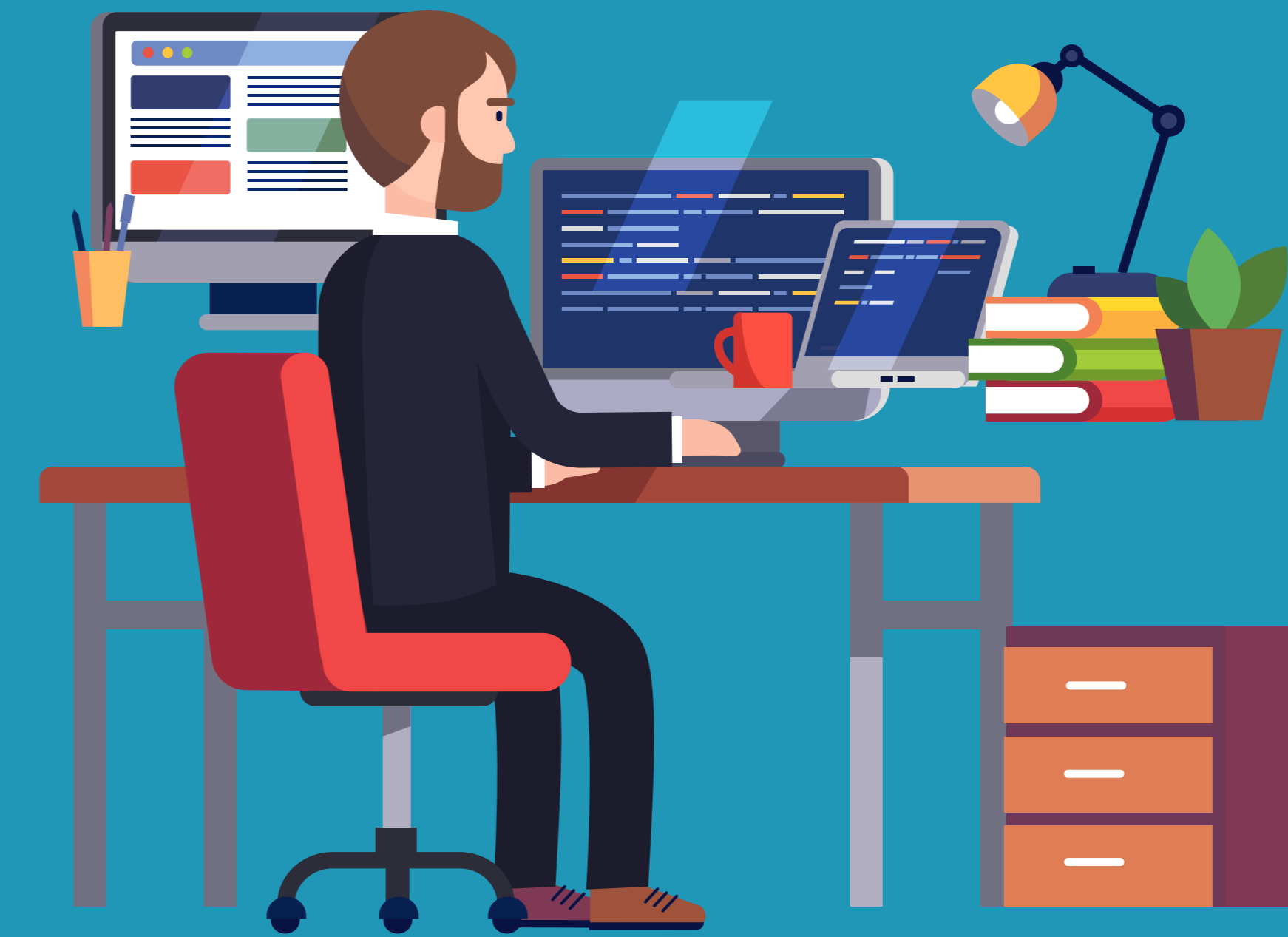


**Organizations  
are hiring for  
niche positions  
only**

Despite several lay-offs and economic downturn, some organizations are seen hiring. By re-slicing the recruitment strategy, around 14.3% companies are hiring skilled resources to fill their existing open positions and 21.9% of companies are hiring for niche roles. The trend is scattered around experience levels, i.e. 24% of companies are hiring professionals falling under the experience bracket of 1-3 years and 23% under the experience of 3-8 years. Around 21.2% employers are hiring freshers up to 1 years of experience. Senior management jobs have taken a hit with just

8.4% companies filling highly skilled resources. Many employer sentiments reveal that they feel it is better to train junior or middle level employees rather than investing time and cost on fetching and developing senior level workforce.

## Looming Concern On Well-being



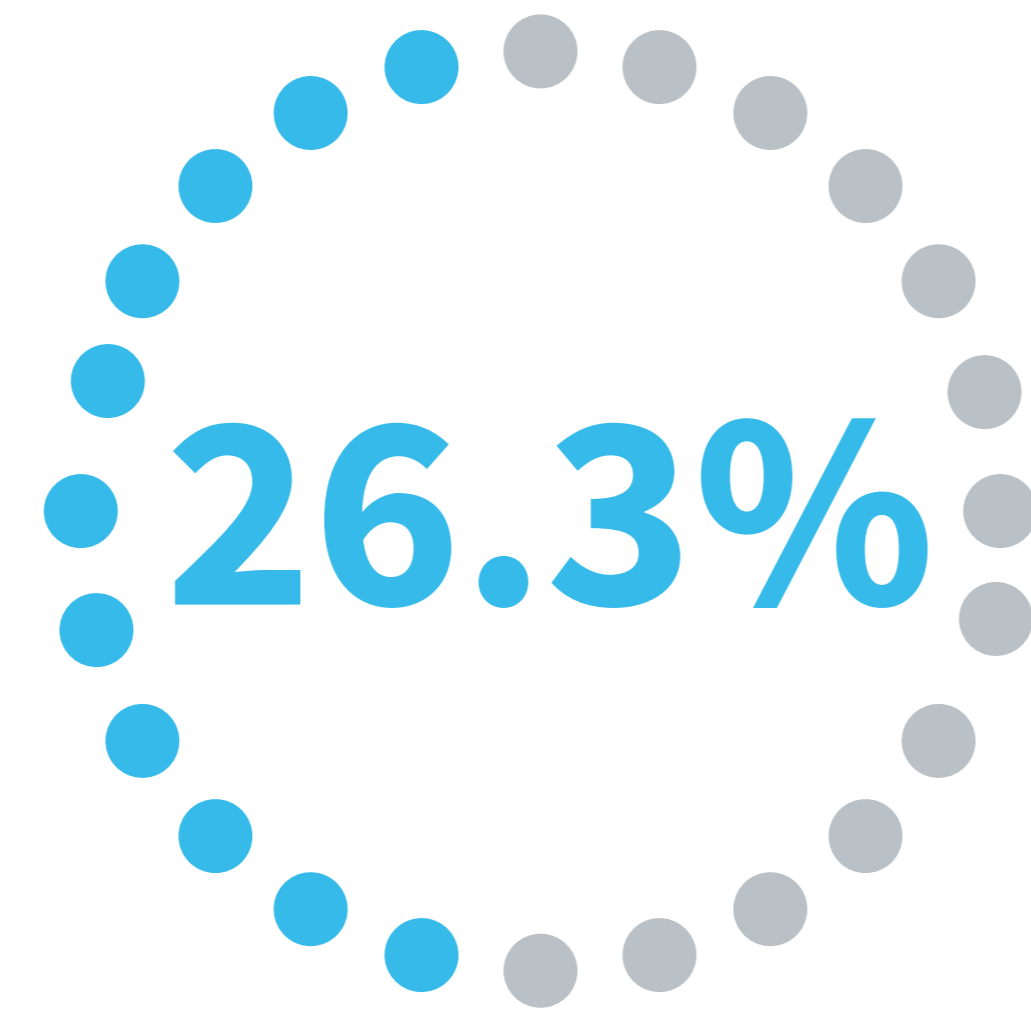
Employees feel that they are safe while they work from home and need to be supported. Wellbeing and safety concerns have become a top priority. Though very quickly, many companies have become 100% remote; however employees are feeling stressed and overwhelmed due to blurring of personal and professional boundaries. Many companies are seen revisiting their employee wellness strategies to effectively develop targeted programs and policies. However, only 25.3% companies have rolled out effective wellbeing initiatives for their workforce with the aim to offer better health protection covers in the current crisis.

# The Way ahead - Juxtaposing Sentiments for the Right Balance

The way ahead is all about preparing a solid contingency plan by building resilience for better response to future crises by both employers as well as employees. Striking the right balance by laying a stronger foundation between both is the pre-requisite. Companies need to consider how to introduce robust business models, BCPs, operational strategies and talent management frameworks to help them recover and sail through the crisis.

In view of this, around 26.3% organizations are developing new-age policies for their employees to ensure a better future with positive sentiments. With the ongoing remote working culture taking up longer than expected, employers have to ensure that employees are getting the right mental support they need to cope up with the stresses of work-life issues, social isolation and anxiety caused during the crisis. Strategies need to be built by prioritizing people through empathetic leadership.

There are plenty of other ways in which employers need to strengthen the bond between them and their workforce. Creating communication channels to aid human resilience is one of them. It should begin by opening all lines of communication. Another crucial element is acknowledging and disseminating best practices that are taken up by business leaders for employees' safety and welfare in frequent intervals.



## Developing New Age Policies For Employees



Allowing employees to express their vulnerable spots by creating opportunities for bonding is critical at this point of time. Create a sense of connectedness and help them ride through the crisis by fostering mutual level of trust. Employees need to make real efforts to create a safe environment - both physical as well as mental.

Alternatively, employees also need to be patient and should make efforts to bring in positivity for self and their teams. At these critical times, employees must be obligated to add value with their persistent effort in solving issues at work and treat problems as a learning process. As changes are a part of life, employees need to willingly develop the ability to interpret and respond to situations with full resilience. Employees should keep a realistic perspective and feel free to seek help from employers for guidance and support at any given point of time.

By recalibrating efforts to build the right relationship; everyone can pull through the current crisis. The future is more about building resilience and agility by juxtaposing employer-employee sentiments and symbiotically surviving through the volatile ecosystem.

# Uncovering Employer-Employee Sentiments during COVID-19

## Knowledgetics Study

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