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WHITE PAPER · 2026 EDITION

# Employee *Resonance*

*How organizations can sustain trust, alignment, and performance in a polyerisis.*

BY

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This white paper is the product of an editorial collaboration between Dr. Laurianne Le Chalony's research on employee resonance and Great Place To Work®'s global expertise on the quality of workplace culture. The framework presented here is grounded in quantitative research conducted across seventeen countries among private-sector employees, complemented by in-depth individual interviews and focus groups with employees, managers, and Chief Human Resources Officers. This combined quantitative and qualitative approach was developed within Dr. Le Chalony's Executive DBA programme at École des Ponts Business School.

This publication offers CHROs, CEOs, and executive committees a more useful lens for understanding how the conditions of performance are transforming in a sustainably volatile environment, and identifies the concrete levers leaders can apply in response.

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# In three minutes

01

## The case

Classical engagement models were designed for a more stable world. In a polycrisis environment, they no longer explain the performance of organizations.

02

## The framework

Employee resonance is the organizational capability to sustain alignment between values, leadership behaviour, and enterprise action under prolonged pressure.

03

## The levers

Two dimensions structure resonance: organizational coherence and socio-environmental awareness. Nine strategic priorities follow for executive leaders.

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### THE STAKES IN NUMBERS

**\$1 trillion**

Global annual productivity loss linked to anxiety and depression: 12 billion working days.

WHO, 2024

**\$438bn**

Cost of declining employee engagement to the global economy in 2024.

GALLUP, 2025

**62%**

Of employees experienced more workplace change than the previous year, and 44% did not understand its purpose.

PWC, 2024

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*The next frontier of performance is no longer engagement alone. It is resonance.*

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# The exhaustion of engagement models



Most organizations still respond to today's workforce challenges with engagement models designed for a more stable world. That approach is no longer sufficient.

Organizations are no longer facing a succession of isolated disruptions. They are operating in a polycrisis: a prolonged period during which climate change, geopolitical conflict, economic volatility, social fragmentation, and technological disruption interact and reinforce one another.

Employees do not leave these pressures at the door of the enterprise. They live with sustained instability and bring it into work as continuous media exposure, economic insecurity, concern about future relevance, and growing uncertainty about the world around them. Over time, this erodes attention, trust, emotional energy, and the willingness to embrace change.

*This is not only a well-being issue. It is an execution issue.*

The capabilities organizations most need in volatile environments, including focus, judgment, adaptability, collaboration, innovation, and willingness to reskill, are also the most vulnerable to chronic uncertainty.

This white paper introduces employee resonance as a more useful strategy. It identifies two defining conditions, organizational coherence and socio-environmental awareness, then offers a set of concrete actions that executive leaders can act on today.

# The workforce impact of the polycrisis

*When external volatility becomes an internal job demand*



Polycrisis is not a succession of separate events. It is the convergence of interdependent risks that reinforce one another. Climate instability, geopolitical tension, economic volatility, social fragmentation, and technological disruption are simultaneously transforming markets, regulation, operating models, and employee expectations.

The critical shift for organizations is this: these pressures do not remain outside the enterprise. Employees internalize them and bring them into work as chronic demands, layered on top of traditional internal pressures such as workload, restructuring, and skills transformation.

At the same time, organizations are accelerating their own transformation. According to PwC's Global Workforce Hopes & Fears Survey 2024, 62% of employees report experiencing more workplace change than the previous year; 45% report a higher workload; and 44% say they do not understand the purpose of the changes underway.

External instability and internal transformation therefore reinforce one another. Employees are being asked to adapt faster precisely when they are already cognitively overloaded.

## Burnout and polycrisis anxiety are not the same.

This distinction matters. Burnout typically originates inside the organization: poor process design, excessive workload, insufficient autonomy, or inadequate support. Polycrisis anxiety, by contrast, often originates outside the enterprise and reflects rational concern about forces that employees cannot directly control.

That deeply changes what leadership is expected to do. When the source of strain is largely external, generic wellness language and isolated benefits are not enough. Employees want to know whether their employer understands the world they live in, has a credible response to it, and acts in line with the values it claims to hold.

*This is not only a well-being issue.  
It is an execution issue.*

23%

Higher profitability among the most engaged teams compared to the average.

GALLUP, 2025

18%

Higher sales productivity among engaged teams, with significantly lower absenteeism and turnover.

GALLUP, 2025

75%

Of employees worldwide say they trust their employer to "do what is right."

EDELMAN TRUST BAROMETER, 2025

*The effects of anxiety show up in execution before they show up in risk indicators.*

# Why this matters for enterprise performance

*Where performance erodes before it shows up in the numbers*

The costs to organizations are already considerable. The World Health Organization estimates that anxiety and depression cost the global economy 12 billion lost working days each year, equivalent to roughly \$1 trillion in lost productivity. Gallup estimates that declining employee engagement cost the global economy \$438 billion in 2024 alone.

The more important insight for executive leaders, however, is this: the effects of anxiety show up in execution before they show up in risk indicators.

## QUIET CRACKING, NOT JUST QUIET QUITTING

A workforce under chronic strain does not always disengage visibly. Employees keep producing; but the organization observes lower creativity, more defensive behavior, weaker collaboration, less appetite for experimentation, and slower adoption of change. CHRO interviews reveal a striking phenomenon: employees are not so much in "quiet quitting" as in "quiet cracking."

## Value misalignment amplifies the risk

Anxiety is not only about threat; it is also about misalignment. Employees increasingly assess their employer not only on pay, workload, and development opportunities, but also on the consistency between stated values and the company's actual behavior.

The 2023 Net Positive Employee Barometer found that nearly half of employees in the UK and US would consider resigning if their company's values did not align with their own. On the climate dimension, the European Investment Bank reported in 2023 that 76% of Europeans aged 20 to 29 say a potential employer's climate impact is an important factor in their job search.

# From engagement to resonance.

*A more useful model for volatile environments*

Employee engagement remains important, but it is no longer sufficient as the primary lens for analyzing performance under sustained instability. Traditional engagement models focus on internal factors: recognition, manager quality, culture, development, and workload. Those dimensions remain necessary, but they no longer fully explain what happens when employees are also navigating systemic uncertainty, moral tension, and existential concern that reach well beyond the boundaries of work.

*Employee resonance offers a broader and more strategic frame.*

TRADITIONAL ENGAGEMENT	EMPLOYEE RESONANCE
Focuses primarily on internal organizational conditions	<b>Integrates the effect of external pressures and societal disruption</b>
Measures motivation, engagement, and satisfaction	<b>Measures coherence, trust, alignment, and adaptive capacity</b>
Assumes employees leave external concerns outside work	<b>Recognizes that employees bring external instability into work</b>
Emphasizes communication and culture	<b>Emphasizes visible action, meaning, and credibility</b>
Often treated as an HR responsibility	<b>Requires enterprise-wide leadership and governance</b>

*Employees do not expect agreement. They expect coherence.*

# The two dimensions of resonance.

*Two capabilities structure employee resonance. Together, they explain how organizations sustain alignment under prolonged pressure.*

## Dimension 01

### Organizational coherence

The alignment between what the organization says, what it does, and how employees experience both.

- The psychological conditions that keep employees cognitively available.
- Consistent action across strategy, leadership, and managerial messages.
- The lived, day-to-day experience of change.
- A governance posture that protects credibility under pressure.

## Dimension 02

### Socio-environmental awareness

The organization's ability to recognize the external context shaping employee experience, and to make it intelligible and actionable.

- Mapping external pressures by employee segment.
- Privileging constructive realism over artificial reassurance.
- Anchoring daily work in a broader, legible context.
- Restoring agency through credible levers.

*These two dimensions do not remove volatility. They allow the organization to operate coherently within it.*

# From external risk to resonance.

*The three-phase pathway: how external disruption becomes an internal performance risk*

## PHASE 01

### Polycrisis drivers

External pressures act as chronic job demands: climate events, geopolitical tension, AI-driven uncertainty, polarization, inflation, continuous media exposure.

## PHASE 02

### Organizational consequences

→ External pressure translates internally into emotional exhaustion, chronic stress, cognitive dissonance, loss of meaning, and declining trust. Business indicators follow.

## PHASE 03

### Resonance interventions

→ Leadership and HR convert anxiety into coherence and agency. Systems are redesigned so the organization absorbs the strain, not only individuals.

## TAKEAWAY

*Resonance is how organizations preserve execution capacity when volatility is part of everyday operating reality.*

# Strategic priorities for executive leaders.

*Nine concrete levers to operationalize resonance, part one*

*Employee resonance should not be conceived as another HR program. It is a cross-enterprise capability that sits at the intersection of strategy, leadership, operating model, communication, and work design.*

## **01 Treat external anxiety as a legitimate workforce variable**

Executive leaders do not need to solve climate change, geopolitical conflict, or labor-market disruption. But they must recognize that these realities directly affect employees' capacity to perform, and they must map these sources of anxiety by workforce segment, geography, and job family.

## **02 Lead with constructive realism, not artificial reassurance**

Employees do not expect perfect certainty. They expect honesty, consistency, and clear direction. In AI-driven transformations in particular, they place more trust in leaders who acknowledge the evolutions to come and explain the logic of the possible pathways.

## **03 Replace passive reassurance with agency**

Employees respond more positively to uncertainty when they have a path to act: reskilling, process redesign, experimentation, peer learning, temporary assignments, autonomy on internal initiatives.

## **04 Strengthen the coherence between narrative and reality**

Resonance degrades rapidly when a gap appears between leadership narrative and lived reality. Mature organizations test messages before publishing them, align incentives with stated priorities, and ensure that strategic choices embody the values being communicated.

## **05 Equip front-line managers as translators of uncertainty**

Front-line managers are the critical lever. Employees experience the enterprise through them. Advanced organizations train managers to recognize weak signals of anxiety, hold difficult conversations, connect global transformations to local realities, and know when to escalate.

# Strategic priorities, part two

## 06 Design systems that reduce strain rather than asking individuals to absorb it

Resilience cannot be framed solely as an individual responsibility. Organizations must also redesign processes, tools, and operating modes so the system itself absorbs more pressure. AI, in particular, can become an opportunity to reduce friction and redirect human effort toward higher-value activities.

## 07 Build crisis-adapted support mechanisms

Traditional employee assistance programs and wellness initiatives are often too generic. Mature organizations adapt their mechanisms to the concrete realities their teams are living: trauma support, grief assistance, conflict management, AI- or climate-related anxiety.

## 08 Create structured spaces for collective sensemaking

In uncertain contexts, employees need more than information; they need to interpret what is happening. Advanced organizations set up workshops, manager-led conversations, employee forums, and scenario exercises to help teams collectively understand the changes underway.

## 09 Differentiate approaches by workforce segment

Dominant anxieties vary significantly across job families, geographies, and employee categories. A mature resonance strategy therefore adapts messages, development structures, and support to the specific realities of each segment.

### TAKEAWAY

Push and pull. The most effective organizations combine structural interventions ("push") led from the top with participatory mechanisms ("pull") that enable employees to interpret, influence, and act within change. The two logics reinforce each other.

# Measuring resonance and its economic value.

*Four measurement dimensions useful to executive committees*

The global economic case for investing in employee health is substantial. The McKinsey Health Institute estimates that improving overall employee health could generate between \$3.7 and \$11.7 trillion in global economic value, roughly \$1,100 to \$3,500 per employee per year.

Employee resonance is not yet a standardized indicator. But executive leaders do not need a perfect index to begin measuring its value. Four dimensions are particularly useful:

01

## Trust and coherence

Trust in leadership, clarity of direction, perceived alignment between words and actions.

02

## Execution capacity

Speed of transformation adoption, skill development, cross-functional collaboration, and managerial effectiveness.

03

## Workforce health and sustainability

Absenteeism, presenteeism, exhaustion, and recovery from workload.

04

## Talent outcomes

Voluntary attrition, internal mobility, retention of critical talent and younger generations.

*Tracking these four dimensions regularly allows the executive committee to identify early signals of misalignment, before they appear in financial indicators.*

# Implications for leadership.

*Three parallel readings: CHROs, CEOs, executive committees*



## FOR CHROs

### An expanded mandate

The mandate evolves: the role is no longer only to drive engagement, but to contribute to the overall coherence of the enterprise. Resonance becomes a shared object of governance, at the intersection of strategy, leadership, communication, and work design.

## FOR CEOs

### Communication is no longer separable from operational choices

In a volatile environment, every strategic decision signals what the enterprise actually values and the credibility of leadership. Discourse and action are read together, and perceived as a measure of coherence.

## FOR EXECUTIVE COMMITTEES

### Integrate workforce psychology into transformation governance

Workforce psychology must now be an integral part of transformation governance, alongside strategy, finance, and risk. Resonance is not an adjacent topic: it conditions the organization's capacity to execute.

*Performance in the next decade will not depend only on strategy, technology, or capital, but on the capacity to preserve trust, clarity, and alignment under sustained pressure.*

# What leaders *should remember.*

- 01 *External pressures no longer wait at the door of the enterprise: they become chronic demands at work.*
- 02 *Burnout is internal; polycrisis anxiety is external. The leadership response is not the same.*
- 03 *Quiet cracking precedes quiet quitting. Conventional indicators are slow to reveal the actual erosion.*
- 04 *Engagement remains necessary, but it is no longer sufficient. Resonance is a more useful lens.*
- 05 *Two dimensions structure resonance: organizational coherence and socio-environmental awareness.*
- 06 *Trust is an operating asset, and it degrades quickly when narrative and reality diverge.*

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## THE ESSENTIAL TAKEAWAY

*The next frontier of organizational performance is no longer engagement alone. It is resonance.*

# About.

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Dr. Laurianne Le Chalony is Chief Human Resources Officer at EcoVadis and serves on the boards of several organizations. Her work focuses on leadership, enterprise transformation, sustainability, and organizational resilience.

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She developed the employee resonance framework from quantitative research conducted across 17 countries, complemented by interviews and focus groups with employees and CHROs.

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Great Place To Work® is the global authority on employee experience. Since 1992 worldwide, and 2002 in France, we have surveyed over 100 million employees across 60 countries. Their insights have enabled us to define what truly makes a high-quality employee experience.

At the core of our approach lies a fundamental principle: trust. We have developed a unique, trust-based methodology that helps organizations build inclusive workplaces, shape effective HR strategies, and drive sustainable performance.

We celebrate and recognize outstanding organizations through our Certification and the annual publication of our Best Workplaces lists.



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