

# FLASHPOINTS EMERGE BETWEEN EMPLOYERS AND STAFF AS POST PANDEMIC WAYS OF WORKING TAKE SHAPE

22 September 2021 | Global  
Firm news

---

Large corporates face a potential backlash from their employees as changing workplace policies and attitudes are adopted as a result of the pandemic.

According to a new report published by Herbert Smith Freehills, business leaders in some of the world's largest companies believe that a series of flashpoints could trigger a new wave of employee activism. However, just 37% view employee activism as a positive force for change - a figure that has fallen over the past two years. The result is that many organisations are introducing measures to monitor employee behaviour and communication.

"Never before have employees placed such high hopes in their employers when it comes to social obligations and the treatment of staff. Yet trust can so easily be lost, with workers quick to condemn perceived failings across a range of platforms. The implications for the employer-employee relationship cannot be overstated as, without change, the risk to reputation and revenue has the potential to be significant," says [Emma Rohsler](#), Herbert Smith Freehills partner and head of employment (EMEA).

Called 'The Future of Work,' the report is based on research amongst the C-suite in global organisations with an annual revenue of at least £250 million. Key findings include:

- **'ear to the ground'**: 94 % of respondents say their company has put active measures in place to manage what employees can say or do publicly - up from 46% in 2019. This figure rises to 97% in Australia, with the UK representing the lowest level (91%).

- **'eye on the employee'**: 70 percent of organisations are currently active on external employee forums and internal representative groups. Four out of five ( 82%) also plan to introduce digital tools to measure employee wellbeing within five years.

- **reputational risk:** concerns over how employers improve their approach to sustainability (46%), fears about the impact of losing data (37%) and how organisations respond to geopolitical events (36%) are now regarded as the most likely issues to damage corporate reputation.

The report also highlights employers' understanding of their employees' key concerns and showcases how they are responding to employee needs.

Asked to identify the triggers most likely to generate employee concerns, respondents suggest that worries about automation replacing the human workforce (41%), pay and benefit inequalities (37%) and corporate decisions were the most likely issues to create tension.

At the same time the report shows that one of the biggest concerns is the 'social' aspect of ESG, partly because legislation in this area is less developed than for environmental and governance legislation. It notes that the #MeToo, StopAsianHate and Black Lives Matter movements have propelled diversity up the boardroom agenda and cites how regulators are beginning to take action to drive effective change.

In response, the research underpinning the report reveals that there is a clear determination on the part of business leaders to adjust and meet employee expectations. For example, focusing on the next three years, a significant proportion claim their organisation will substantially change its approach to flexible/home working options (42%), compensation and benefits structures (also 42%) and employee wellbeing (36%).

Rohsler concludes: "In an age in which social obligations on businesses are rapidly expanding and workers are ever more vocal on perceived lapses, there has never been more pressure for leaders to get these issues right. Getting it right means taking time to focus on ethics and values. Getting it wrong is not an option."

The report can be downloaded [here](#).

## **MEDIA CONTACT**

For further information on this news article, please contact:

**MIKE PETROOK, COMMUNICATIONS  
MANAGER**

LONDON

Tel: +44 20 7466 3939

Mob: +44 7850 516 778

Email: [mike.petrook@hsf.com](mailto:mike.petrook@hsf.com)

---

