

Five Insights to Elevate Engagement in 2025 – Trends and Conclusions from Employee Engagement Benchmarks

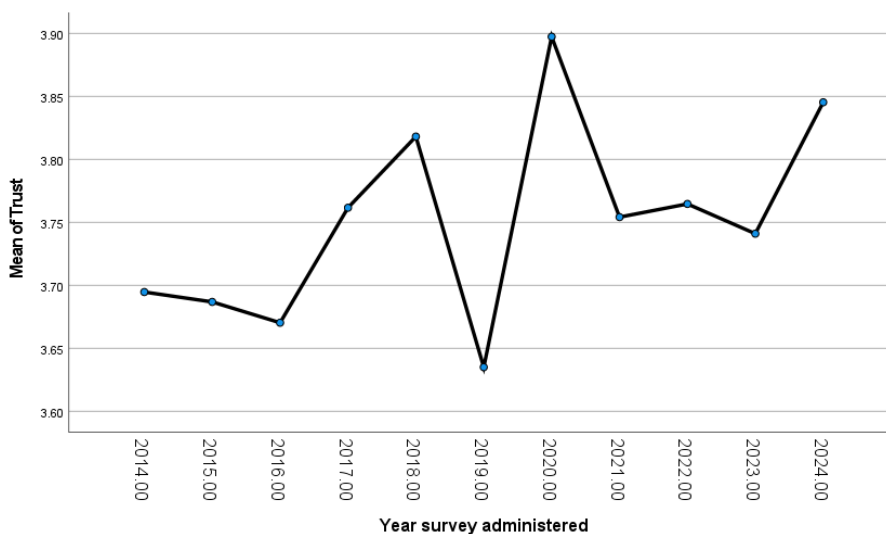
For the last decade, Global Aspect has been partnering with zoos, aquariums, and museums to assess employee opinions and work with institution leaders to implement data-informed changes. Over time, we have assembled a database of employee benchmarks that provides robust representative data and insights into how zoo, aquarium, and museum employees view the workplace. The core benchmark survey captures sentiment on a dozen topics (Leadership, Immediate Supervisor, Mission, DEAI, etc.) as well as several indexes – Engagement, Wellbeing, Psychological Safety, and Union Vulnerability. The benchmarks provide Global Aspect survey clients with important context when considering their own results, but the data are also supported with tools and analytics to help leaders move from data to insight and sustainable organizational change.

As we approach the end of 2024 and look forward to a new year, we wanted to take a moment to review the benchmark data for insights, trends, and offer up a set of insights and potential actions for zoo, aquarium, and museum (ZAM) leaders. We landed on five insights --

Insight 1 – During the pandemic, employee workplace scores improved to all-time highs. While scores have declined from the COVID peak, they have settled into a slightly elevated "new normal".

In 2020, scores on several survey dimensions (**Senior Leaders, Immediate Managers, Trust & Respect, DEAI**) increased markedly. While those scores declined from the COVID peak, they have now settled at a higher level than before the pandemic.

An example can be seen in the figure that tracks the scores on Trust & Respect across years.



A notable exception to this pattern is **Meaningful Work**. This area peaked during the pandemic but then fell to lower levels than they were prior to COVID. This matters for at least two reasons. First, in our analysis of employee data, **Meaningful Work** is consistently identified as a driver of **Employee Engagement** and **Wellbeing**. This means that institutions with lower scores on **Meaningful Work** will also experience lower levels of employee engagement and wellbeing. Second, according to the AZA Trends 2023 report, the desire for meaningful work is growing in the industry. As the number of Gen Z employees are poised to overtake the number of Boomers in the workplace, the strong desire that Gen Z expresses for work that is meaningful and aligns with their values is only growing.

Based on our data and the growth of Gen Z, attention to meaningfulness in the workplace is and will continue to be an important consideration for leaders.

Insight 2 – Employee opinions are remarkably similar in zoos, aquariums, or museums (e.g., same highs, same lows, same engagement drivers), which suggests that similar actions can be leveraged to address organizational challenges (retention, development, union avoidance, etc.).

For a presentation to the 2024 American Alliance of Museums (AAM) conference earlier this year, Global Aspect compared and contrasted responses from employees in zoos, aquariums, and museums. We looked at responses overall (zoos vs aquariums vs museums) and found striking parallels across them on the survey dimensions (i.e., same peaks; same valleys). We also found that while the patterns were similar in form, there were differences -- aquariums tended to score highest; zoos tended to score lowest; museums scored in between).



This similarity also applies to functional groups (Administration, Operations, Collections, Guest Services, etc.) and other demographic variables (Job Level, Tenure, etc.). For example, employees in Operations and Living/Non-Living Collections gave lower ratings (regardless of zoo, aquarium, or museum membership) than employees in Administration functions (Finance, HR, etc.). Consistent patterns were also noticed by job level (senior leaders are more favorable than supervisors, managers, non-management employees).

Given that zoo, aquarium, and museum employees' pattern of responses are more alike than different, it suggests that leaders in one type of organization can learn from and share best-

practices with others. It also suggests a similar set of potential management interventions and action planning activities to address those peaks and valleys, and impact future levels of **Engagement and Wellbeing**.

Insight 3 – We continue to be convinced that for most organizations, the “big four” issues to influence employee Engagement and Wellbeing are – Meaningful Work, Trust & Respect, Senior Leadership, and Workplace Culture.

To help leaders focus on what really matters most to them, we typically conduct a key driver analysis (Relative Weights Analysis – RWA) to determine the areas that – if improved – have the greatest likelihood of improving Employee Engagement Wellbeing. The logic is if you identify and “pull” these critical levers, leaders can more efficiently and effectively improve future engagement and wellbeing. For zoo, aquarium, and museum employees, the three common driver dimensions (and sample survey items) are –

- 1) **Meaningful Work** - *My job makes good use of my skills and abilities; I feel genuinely appreciated in this organization.*
- 2) **Trust & Respect** - *In this organization people treat one another with trust and mutual respect; I feel safe at work to do or say what I think is best for this organization.*
- 3) **Senior Leadership** - *The leadership of this organization has communicated a vision of the future that motivates me; Senior leaders’ actions demonstrate their commitment to our Mission.*

Organizations that do well on all three common drivers are more likely to experience high levels of **Employee Engagement and Wellbeing**. Those that do less well in one or more of the areas, by contrast, are likely to have lower levels of **Employee Engagement and Wellbeing**.

In practical terms, this means that zoo, aquarium, and museum leaders can promote employee engagement, commitment, and a positive work culture by – 1) ensuring that employees are in roles that they find meaningful and where they can make an impact, 2) taking steps to promote mental health, 3) foster a workplace where trust and respect are demonstrated in words and actions, and 4) senior leaders communicate clearly, hold themselves and others accountable, and demonstrate (through words and actions) their commitment to the mission.

Workplace culture is the fourth area that is highly predictive of **Employee Engagement, Wellbeing**, and several other workplace characteristics (e.g., quality of relationship between employees and managers, confidence in leaders, collaboration within and across teams, inclusivity). Whether people work in zoos, aquariums, or museums, employees are significantly more positive about the workplace when they describe their institution’s culture in positive terms. Conversely, we see significantly lower scores if they describe their culture in negative terms.

Insight 4 – Industry benchmarks provide critical context to help leaders determine what to prioritize based in part on how they compare to peers (i.e., leading, lagging, on par) at the institution level and among particular segments within the institution (job function, status, level, etc.).

Global Aspect helps leaders build a roadmap for change that takes into account two critical pieces of information. First, a key driver analysis (RWA) determines which items are relatively more influential. Second, the benchmarks provide additional insight so that leaders can zero in on the drivers that need to be prioritized (i.e., those that are severely lagging peers) or celebrated (i.e., those that exceed peers). The benchmarks are critical because there are several areas (for instance Senior Leaders, Communication) that are typically score lower than other areas. The benchmarks provide perspective on just how good or bad those scores are.

To provide this context, Global Aspect has been collecting opinion data from zoo, aquarium, and museum employees for a decade. These data provide valid and representative data for leaders to benchmark their institutions at an overall level, as well as segments of their employee populations. These data can indicate, for example, if the lower scores among their Keepers are similar to – or significantly different than what is typical. Likewise, the data can be broken down by other demographics (job level, status, race/gender identity), giving leaders the ability to better understand where they may have issues that need to be addressed.

Insight 5 – Data and insights prepare leaders to take action, but tangible sustained change is much more likely to happen when senior leaders hold themselves and others accountable for taking action AND when leaders are provided with tools and support to take action.

While it can be relatively easy to develop and administer surveys in institutions today, getting leaders to respond appropriately -- share results with their teams, identify potential improvement areas, and take action -- remains one of the greatest challenges for survey practitioners.

And it matters. When we ask employees if they participated in a discussion of their last survey, and if their team or institution took action on the results, those who agree are – significantly more confident that actions will take place after their latest survey. They are also significantly more engaged, and hold a more favorable view of their leaders and manager/supervisor. And the payoff is real. When we compare Global Aspect clients who have surveyed employees at least two times, we see statistically significant gains year-over-year in several areas -- **Employee Engagement, Trust & Respect, Senior Leaders, DEAI** – and we see gains (though not quite as large) in three more areas -- **Teamwork & Collaboration, Meaningful Work, and Training & Development.**

To enable organizations and their leaders achieve these year-over-year gains, Global Aspect offers a set of best practices that are specifically designed to help leaders move from data to insights and sustainable change. Specifically:

- **Data-Informed Recommendations in Reports** – Upon completion of a survey, Global Aspect delivers data reports to eligible recipients – typically leaders of major functions/divisions (Operations, Guest Services, etc.) and the departments or teams within those functions/divisions. Included in those reports are specific priority areas and recommended actions. The priorities and recommended action areas that are arrived at through a data-informed approach that takes into account multiple factors (current scores,

trend, benchmark comparisons, key drive results). The net result is that report recipients are provided with a clear list of areas to consider working on.

- **1:1 Coaching Sessions** – To ensure that leaders understand the results, including the data-informed recommendations – Global Aspect conducts a 1:1 coaching session with report recipients. During the 1:1 session, we thoroughly review the results with each leader, answer any questions they may have about their own results, and zero in on the data-informed recommendations and expectations for next steps in the action planning process.
- **Manager’s Guide to Organizational Change** – To help each leader take the next steps (share results with their teams, engage their team in a discussion of priorities, and develop specific actions), we provide leaders with a guide specifically designed for this next step in the process. For example, the Manager’s Guide includes tips and suggestions on sharing results, specific prompts that can be used to generate a conversation, and recommended actions for every survey content area in the survey.

About Global Aspect Human Capital Advisors

We have been providing employee opinion surveys, analytics, benchmarks, and change-management support to zoos, aquariums, and museums since 2012. Our team of organizational psychologists can either provide Turnkey Survey Programs (design, administration, reporting, change management) or Advisory Services (in addition to or instead of a survey).

Turnkey Survey Programs include:

- Core employee survey, programming, administration, and reporting
- Additional custom items as needed (e.g., Union Driver Index, Leadership Effectiveness Index)
- Industry benchmarks for core survey items
- Data and comment reports with trends and benchmarks; by function, department, etc.
- Priorities and recommendations for leaders
- Manager’s Guide to Change and 1:1 coaching for report recipients

Advisory Services Examples:

- Skip the survey and go directly to recommendations – Global Aspect provides briefing to leaders on current state of engagement (including strengths/opportunities, top 10 engagement drivers, priorities for the institution), and recommended next steps for your institution
- A variety of services based on your unique needs. Such as survey design, analytics/interpretation, change management (focus groups, action planning), coaching, etc.

If you are budgeting for 2025, we would be happy to provide an estimate. If you would like to learn more about Global Aspect or the services we offer, email Dr. Kyle Lundby at klundby@globalaspect-hca.com or visit www.globalaspect-hca.com.