

CULTURE HACKER  
REPROGRAMMING THE EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCE™

# EX Insights into the New Zealand Work Experience



SHANE  
GREEN

## Introduction

Shane Green, a New Zealand culture expert and employee experience consultant, partnered with Stickybeak, the preeminent New Zealand survey platform, to gather data from **over 800 working New Zealanders** across all industries about their experience at work.

**The result of this research provides the most recent and relevant insights into real New Zealand workers, especially as concerns regarding kiwi companies' ability to attract, engage, and retain their best talent are at an all-time high.**

While company owners and managers often talk about the importance of company culture and taking care of their employees, the results from this survey and the constant media barrage of companies cultivating a bullying or toxic culture suggests otherwise.

**“38%  
of New Zealand workers are disengaged or  
not happy at work.”**

—New Zealand EX Survey, September 2021



To put that into perspective, according to an article in 2020 that highlighted New Zealand's largest private sector companies, this would mean that our biggest employers have over 6,500 unhappy employees talking poorly about them and under performing at any given moment. While this accounts for many employees, the percentage of disengaged workers can be more detrimental to New Zealand's small businesses (less than 20 employees) that account for 97% of this country's enterprises. With up to four employees per company underperforming, this can seriously strain the ability of small businesses to be successful and even survive.

New Zealand workers have concerns about their employer's interest and investment in their growth and development, whether they take health and wellbeing seriously, and even if they can be trusted. The study also found that we have many managers in place who lack the core managerial and leadership skills staff gravitate towards and stick around for.

“Employees who are not engaged cost their company the equivalent of 18% of their annual salary.”

—Gallup, 2020

In this report, we offer some important advice for New Zealand owners and executives as they consider how to elevate the performance of their business and those working in it.

“Culture is no longer an HR thing. It is a business thing. It is everything.”

—Shane Green, Culture Hacker

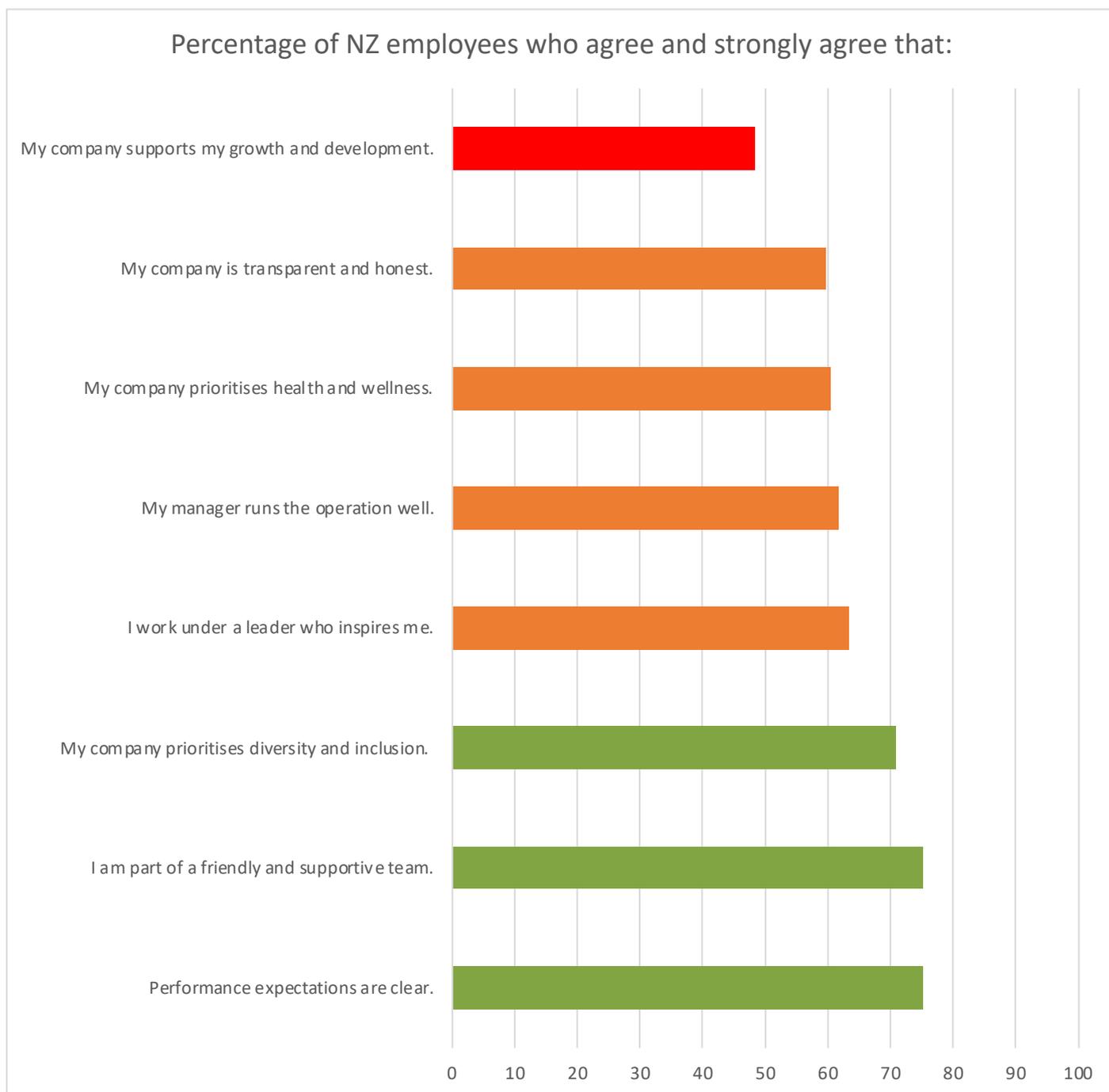
If you are serious about business, then you need to be serious about your employee experience and the culture it creates. The 2021 EX Guide by the Josh Bersin Group and commissioned by Microsoft included over 950 companies globally; it clearly notes that companies with a strong EX are more likely to **delight customers, be innovative, are more likely to adapt to change, exceed financial targets**, and are over **five times more likely engage and retain employees**.

“Companies with an EX strategy are 5.1 times more likely to engage and retain employees.”

—The Josh Bersin Company, 2021 Employee Experience Report

In New Zealand today, too many companies blame a tough labour market, disinterested younger workers, government assistance programs, a lack of overseas workers who they can hire and get rid of every six months, and the pandemic for problems with their culture. But, in fact, they should look at themselves and their lack of investment and interest in taking care of their employees and building a high-performing culture.

Our survey revealed where New Zealand companies are doing well in terms of their employee's experience, where improvement is needed, and where we must overhaul our attitudes and activities to establish a positive and performance-driven culture.



When compared to our work with companies globally, we have highlighted in green any scores that are in line with international expectations; highlighted in orange areas where New Zealand needs improvement; and highlighted in red components that New Zealand is behind on in comparison to its global peers.

We will consider each area and detail why they are important to the employee experience, what we observe is happening in many companies, and some thoughts on what owners and managers should be working on today.

## Clear Performance Expectations

Performance is defined by what is to be delivered against how it is delivered. Companies must establish clear expectations to employees on what needs to get done and how it needs to be accomplished.

“75.2 percent of New Zealand workers believe their company is clear about what it expects from them and how they can make a difference every day.”

—New Zealand EX Survey, September 2021

Employees must know the tasks to be completed, the results they must attain, and the goals to be achieved. However, we often find from our employee surveys that they are not given goals or metrics by which their performance is judged. Setting goals and clearly defining a person's expected outcomes are essential organisational processes and manager habits.

Performance expectations must also include how to perform, which an organisation's values often capture, defining how employees should act and interact with others. Company values cannot be merely written on a wall or website—rather, employees must see the values in their leaders' and senior managers' actions and activities. Employees often share with us that they are told about values and expectations during the interview process or early in their career only to see managers work completely differently, creating uncertainty on exactly how performance is measured. For an employee, knowing clearly what their performance is based on and how it is measured greatly affects how they feel about their business and manager.

For an employee to perform their best and be engaged, they must believe they can make a difference or impact the organisation and their work. Their impact may result from some ideas or feedback they share. It can also come directly from their work either externally with customers, partners, the community, or internally with other employees. When employees feel they can make a difference, they feel pride in what they do and are more likely to want the organisation to succeed.

“Connect the dots between individual roles and the goals of the organisation. When people see that connection, they get a lot of energy out of work—they feel the importance, dignity, and meaning in their job.”

—Ken Blanchard, business consultant

We found employees responded extremely positively when a manager would acknowledge that they made a difference at the end of their shift or day. This acknowledgement is not the same as recognition, which tends to be more specific and in the moment. We found that employees see their manager as a good leader when they say goodbye at the end of their shift and acknowledge their efforts, saying something like, “We could not have done this without you,” or “You really made a difference today.”

Another best practice we often recommend to managers is to have your team members at the end of each week say how and to whom they made a difference that week. While employees may be somewhat uncomfortable initially, making this a regular exercise makes people more comfortable with the idea that what they do matters. It is also helpful to hear how other employees are making a difference in and out of the organisation to reinforce that everyone can make a difference.

## A Supportive Team

For employees to feel good about the work they do and the company they work for, it is necessary for employees to feel they are a part of a great team. The social outcomes from going to work and being around people they like are often reflected in performance. Gallup research has found that having a best friend at work has a strong positive correlation to the amount of effort an employee exerts in their role.

“75.1% of New Zealand workers believe they are a part of a supportive, friendly, and collaborative team at work.”  
—New Zealand EX Survey, September 2021

For the most part, employees crave social interactions at work, which was probably highlighted more than anything during the pandemic as people found themselves more isolated and working from home. While traditionally viewed as timewasters, the many short and informal conversations a person has during work indicate how employees feel about their work, impacting their overall well-being and performance.

Creating a collaborative culture is also about having an environment where people support and help each other. You cannot make people want to help others; therefore, this collaborative culture must be nurtured at all levels of an organisation, especially within the management ranks. Our company surveys indicate managers who are comfortable asking their staff questions or for their help in completing various tasks (even though they are quite comfortable coming up with the answer or doing the task on their own) significantly improve teamwork within a group.

Additionally, our research has identified that managers who share their experience and expertise are more likely to inspire their employees to perform their best. However, managers need to be readily available and accessible so employees can easily seek their manager's expertise and experience. We strongly encourage managers at all levels to schedule time each day to walk their operation or work alongside their employees to share information, ideas, and reinforce a collaborative approach to work.

“Few things leaders can do are more important than encouraging helping behaviour within their organisations. In the top-performing companies, it is a norm that colleagues support one another's efforts to do the best work possible.”

—HBR, IDEO's Culture of Helping, 2014

Organisations with helpfulness as one of their values scored more highly on this question in surveys than those that did not. If you want a more collaborative and supportive work environment, you need to embed helpfulness into your values and reinforce its importance, so those who help others most can be easily recognised and formally rewarded for their efforts. We have identified certain activities that support a culture of helpfulness—namely, monthly engagement meetings where teams get together to brainstorm ideas. We also noticed companies that support cross-functional work teams and create opportunities for people to work on projects with employees from different areas seemed to foster a more collaborative and helpful culture.



## Diversity, Equality, and Inclusivity

Every day, employees have a moment to consider whether they feel accepted, included, and respected at work. It is probably one of the most important moments a person experiences every day. But it is unfortunate to think that 29% of New Zealand workers have to spend more time each day wondering about their fit and worth because of how others react to their race, sex, ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability, or beliefs.

“70.9% of New Zealand workers agreed the company they work for promotes a positive, inclusive, and respectful work environment.”

—New Zealand EX Survey, September 2021

While 29% of our workers are a part of a culture that is not conducive to high performance nor individual well-being, these numbers are better than some of the work environments we have worked with internationally. While recent investigations and newspaper reports have highlighted a pervasive bullying culture in New Zealand workplaces, this research suggests it may be more isolated to certain industries, companies, and out-of-touch managers.

While this number encourages me, there is no doubt that every company in New Zealand today must consider how it creates a positive, inclusive, and respectful work environment. Too many workers do not work to their fullest potential because of others' biases against them. While everyone is biased in some way, some people more blatantly express their views through their actions, words, attitudes, and responses towards others. As a result, some employees feel disconnected and disrespected every day at work. While most people will be quick to apologise if they stepped over the line or made someone feel uncomfortable, others will be less aware of their biases' negative impact or just not care.



It should be every business' goal never to have their employees question whether they accept and respect them for who they are. All managers must be willing to acknowledge their biases and work on minimising their impact. Nobody is perfect, and we have found that managers who are open and honest about their imperfections set the best possible example to help others feel accepted, included, and respected.

“Ultimately, it's management's responsibility to demonstrate their commitment to diversity and the value it brings to the company as well as holding others accountable.”

—Heidi Lynne Kurter, workplace consultant

Managers must also ensure they avoid words that can be seen as insensitive. Words can profoundly shape our actions and behaviours, so, as managers, we must be sure not to let our and others' words negatively affect how people feel. We also must not treat members of our staff differently. Managers must be consistent in their tone, manners, conversations, and feedback. Finally, managers can make a point to demonstrate what their people are worth each day by telling them they made a difference or asking them for their opinion and insights on various topics to demonstrate how they value their input.



## Strong Management and Leadership

Management and leadership are different but are two sides of the same coin—meaning both skillsets are necessary for a manager to be successful. Management skills include planning, staffing, organising, and ensuring the necessary tasks get done each day. Leadership skills are focused on inspiring people to get the work done and deliver their best every day. Leadership skills incorporate softer skills, such as sharing expertise, working diligently, setting an example for how work gets done, and caring about their team. Both skillsets must work hand in hand for a team to perform well.

“38% of New Zealand workers believe their manager does not have the necessary management skills to run their operation.”

—New Zealand EX Survey, September 2021



“37% of New Zealand workers indicated their direct manager lacks the necessary leadership skills to inspire their best performance.”

—New Zealand EX Survey, September 2021

While it would be easy to say 37% to 38% of managers or those with titles should not be in their roles, it may go deeper than this. We often find those who focus on managerial skills do so at the expense of their leadership skills, and vice versa. Ultimately, these numbers could indicate that over 70% of our managers lack some of the critical skills required for companies and teams to perform and be successful.

Research strongly suggests that growth and development may be the most significant reasons why people leave their jobs and why certain companies win the talent war. While investing in people is critical, companies must first prioritise learning and development for their managers and supervisors.

“Well-developed managers are an unstoppable force. They attract, engage, and keep workers in an extremely competitive talent marketplace.”

—Scott Miller, Gallup, content manager

In our experience and conversations with several New Zealand companies this past year, only a limited number of development plans are in place to instil management and leadership skills prior to any promotion or advancement. While we see a focus on developing management skills, we see a complete lack of leadership development programs that focus on the soft skills that inspire employee performance.



For the past two decades, we have researched and coached managers on their leadership skills and have found that some critical leadership skills are not being taught or are taught improperly. For a country that loves its sports, we see a lack of coaching skills and understanding of how to elevate performance. Specifically, New Zealand managers lack the skills to give feedback effectively, recognise people meaningfully, and have tough conversations correctly.

“The real challenge is to combine strong leadership and strong management and use each to balance the other.”

—John Kotter, business author

While we communicate expectations well, New Zealand managers need to learn how to communicate to ensure understanding, listen empathetically, and manage conflict across different communication styles and generations. While New Zealand managers are hands-on and work in the operation well, they are less comfortable working on their operation or business. They need to understand how to enable their team with the right training, information, and tools and then get out of the way, empowering their people to control their work or make decisions for the customer.



## Health and Well-Being

Companies understand that sick, unhealthy, or stressed employees are less productive, less engaged, and unhappy, so they actively work with health experts and invest in programs and interventions to get employees to take on healthier habits and handle their stress more responsibly.

**“4 out of 10 New Zealand workers indicate their company does not prioritise health and wellness.”**

—New Zealand EX Survey, September 2021

Research suggests work can be a leading cause of stress in people's lives, and most people do not know how to recover from stress very well. Workplace stress is being taken home, and, as a result, we have an unacceptable amount of abuse occurring in the home.



I don't believe you can avoid stress, but recovery developed from a series of tactics and techniques is available to everyone. We have worked with companies that invest in teaching their employees how to take effective breaks, provide stress-recovery techniques, and are mandating managers not to email employees out of work and on weekends. Companies are realising that people are extremely time poor and are struggling to keep up. As a result, they are instituting no-meeting workdays, turning off email servers on weekends, and offering more flexibility to workers around when they work. Most importantly, companies are partnering with healthcare experts to ensure their employees have access to the help and support they need.

Although New Zealand offers several resources for people to support their mental well-being, the stigma around mental health (either reinforced by co-workers or society in general) means that those resources are not always used by those who need them most. From the moment someone joins your company, you need to inform them about the well-being support systems in place and let them know it is okay to ask for help. I recently spoke with some workers within a construction company. They indicated that because their manager admitted he had reached out for help with his anger issue because it was hurting those he loved, it quickly inspired others to get their own assistance as well. Managers have a tremendous opportunity to encourage those at work not to take their physical or mental health for granted.



## Trust in the Business

New Zealand companies' next area of focus is their transparency and honesty with their staff. We all know trust is important, yet many companies inadvertently reduce trust by not being forthcoming with their goals, plans, and why change is necessary.

“40% of New Zealand workers do not view their employer as transparent and honest about objectives, plans, and why change occurs.”

—New Zealand EX Survey, September 2021

Since being back in New Zealand, I have had too many conversations with executives who truly believe their staff does not need to know their company goals, and it is only something for executives or the board. Employee engagement is an employee's interest and involvement in helping the business get better. Simply put, a company will not achieve its goals until every employee knows what the goals or plans are and understands what is expected of them.

**“Management by objectives works if you know the objectives: 90% of the time you don't.”**  
—Peter Drucker, business consultant

If employees are not clear about the company's goals, it's difficult for them to contribute to achieving them. Consider your organisation's process for letting employees know your goals right now and, more specifically, how their work impacts those goals.



Employees need to know both the broad long-term objectives and specific plans being implemented to achieve the organisation's goals. This step is critical to an organisation's change management process. Ultimately (without getting into change management), when you are transparent about plans, and employees know why the organisation is taking specific actions, change can be less daunting and more expedited. You are far more likely to succeed with any change effort if your employees are engaged in the process and trust the manager or organisation.

“Good strategy extends beyond leadership teams. When strategy cascades to teams, and individual people see where they fit, how they contribute, and what is expected of them, it creates a powerful alignment throughout the organisation.”

—Nancy Olsen, co-founder, OnStrategy

You need to keep your employees updated with the latest results on how the organisation is doing against its goals. Results matter, and whether good or bad, every employee should feel connected to and invested in the company's results as it pertains to their success. Keep your people up to date with all key metrics so they understand when a change of plan may be required or why celebrations occur. By creating a culture where results are sought each month, everyone is interested and involved in making them better.

Our survey data clearly shows that a sense of transparency and honesty about the company often comes down to the direct manager for many employees. A manager's history of open and honest conversations, even when the employees do not like what they are hearing, is one of the most endearing traits a manager can possess and often translates to the company being trusted.

## Growth and Development

At the top of every employee's mind (especially younger ones) is whether the company they work for is investing in their growth, development, and career.

“52% of New Zealand workers indicated their company does not prioritise nor invest in their growth, development, and career.”

—New Zealand EX Survey, September 2021

When talented workers (especially young workers) decide to leave an organisation, it is often because of a lack of development and opportunity.

Workers want to know their employer is invested in helping them grow and develop in their role and as a person. This development goes beyond training, which, while important, is only one of the contributing factors in helping people grow.

“81% of respondents noted it was important to them that the organisation offers training to help them keep their skills up to date.”  
—2021 Edelman Employee Research Report

Many workers need to know their manager and the business are concerned about their career, even if a person's career will obviously continue beyond your business. Even if employees have career goals in a completely different industry, every manager should have a conversation and understand how they can help an employee reach those goals today. It may include providing some help with specific skills; maybe it is giving them opportunities to learn how to manage others; maybe it's about giving them a chance to cross-train in a different role; maybe it's just about listening and providing some advice on career steps when needed.



When a manager invests time in an employee by sharing their expertise or experience, it significantly impacts that employee's motivation at work and loyalty to that manager and the company. Regardless of whether you believe a worker will stick around forever—and they probably won't—they need to see you as interested and invested in helping them grow for their performance and engagement with the organisation they are currently with.

## The New Zealand eNPS

The employee net promoter score (eNPS) measures how employees feel about the company they work for. It is based on the NPS, which is a measurement of customer loyalty developed by Bain & Company and Fred Reichheld to measure the customer experience (CX).

“New Zealand’s  
eNPS score is  
-11.”

—New Zealand EX Survey, September 2021

The eNPS is calculated by subtracting the percentage of detractors from the percentage of promoters. In our survey, only 27% of our respondents strongly agreed they would recommend their company as a great place to work to family and friends. Thirty-five percent would be considered passive, meaning they were happy but not committed enough to say their company is a great place to work. This group, while satisfied, always has the potential of leaving you for better opportunities. This left 38% of New Zealand workers as detractors, who are not engaged or happy at work.

In the CX world, a negative score indicates the business has some work to do to reduce the number of unhappy customers. With this score in mind, I would suggest that New Zealand has some work to do to improve the employee experience and reduce their number of disengaged or unhappy workers.

“To succeed, [organisations] must start with a bold EX strategy that supports their business strategy and is based on a consistent model.”  
—Suzanne McAndrew, global head of talent advisory, Willis Towers Watson

Company culture is not something small or short-term when it comes to its impact on your company's performance. Consider what your strategy is moving into 2022 to attract, engage, and retain the best talent in New Zealand today. We hope this data and these insights will generate more conversations and consideration for how you will create a better employee experience moving forward and a culture that your employees say is great!

“It is not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent, but the one most responsive to change.”

—Charles Darwin, English naturalist

For more information regarding the data, ideas, or recommendations offered in this report, please email [connect@shanegreen.com](mailto:connect@shanegreen.com)

## Research

The survey mentioned in this paper was conducted on the Stickybeak platform, which polls a unique sample of people fresh for each survey recruited via social media. This poll was conducted between 12 September to 11 October 2021.

## Shane Green

A world-renowned consultant, keynote speaker, author of Culture Hacker, and television personality, Shane Green works with global Fortune 500 leaders and innovative start-ups on customer experience, organisational culture, and leadership. Shane draws upon his upbringing in New Zealand, his time with The Ritz-Carlton Hotel Company in the US and Asia, and his work across multiple industries in the US and Europe, transforming employee mindsets, habits, and skills to improve customer experiences and team performance. He has worked with brands like the NBA, W Hotels, Westfield, MGM Resorts International, Foot Locker, NetJets Inc., Cisco Systems, United Airlines, and BMW to reprogram their employee experiences to elevate performance and deliver better customer experiences.

## Stickybeak

Stickybeak is a New Zealand start-up launched globally two years ago. It uses chatbots to make quantitative market research more conversational and less boring for respondents, and faster and less expensive for companies. Unlike conventional research, which uses professional paid responders' panels, Stickybeak recruits unique respondents fresh for each survey via social media. The company is based in Auckland and is backed by some of the country's most successful investors. Global clients include the World Health Organisation, Dole, SCJ, Tetra Pak, O2, Vodafone and Costco and global agencies like Ketchum, Fleishman Hillard and Golin. New Zealand clients include Tasti Foods, The New Zealand Nurses Organisation, The Spinoff, and agencies Acumen and Anthem. Stickybeak polls have been cited by media like CNN, The Guardian, The New York News, Stuff, The New Zealand Herald, Business Desk, and trade publications like PR Week and PProvoke Media.

