



Employee Attitude Surveys: Engagement and Workforce Perceptions

Over the last decade, employee engagement has become one of the key people issues discussed at executive and senior management levels. Having engaged employees is a primary objective for HR functions, with vast amounts of literature and money dedicated to this concept.

This presentation explores what employee engagement is, how it's measured, and how to analyze survey results to drive meaningful organizational outcomes.

What is Employee Engagement?

Academic Definitions

Kahn defined "behavioral work engagement" as "the simultaneous employment and expression of a person's 'preferred self' in task behaviors that promote connections to work and to others."

The Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) defines it as "a positive, fulfilling work-related state of mind characterized by vigor, dedication and absorption."

Consultancy Definitions

CultureAmp: "A metric representing enthusiasm employees feel toward their organization."

Mercer: "A psychological state in which employees feel a vested interest in the company's success."

Willis Towers Watson: "The intensity of the employee relationship with an employer."

Business Definitions

"Employee engagement is when the business values the employee and the employee values the business."

"You sort of smell it, don't you, that engagement of people as people. What goes on in meetings, how people talk to each other."

Despite varying definitions, engagement generally encompasses being in the zone, feeling positive, enjoying work, feeling proud, having commitment to organizational success, going the extra mile, having energy, and feeling valued.

Why Employee Engagement Matters

Research consistently shows that engagement is positively correlated with both task and contextual performance, well-being measures, and negatively related to intention to quit.

When engagement increases:

- Task performance improves moderately
- Contextual performance (social workplace behaviors) improves moderately
- Health and well-being improve slightly
- Intentions to leave decrease slightly



Correlation does not imply causality, but the relationship between engagement and these outcomes is significant ($p < 0.001$).

How Do We Measure Employee Engagement?

Since engagement is not tangible, it must be measured through carefully designed questions that capture various aspects of engagement.



Survey Design

Rather than asking "How engaged are you?", surveys use multiple questions to measure specific aspects of engagement based on a chosen definition.



Response Scales

Typically uses 5-point scales from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree" to measure agreement with statements about engagement.



Analysis

Responses are analyzed to create engagement indices or scores that can be compared across teams, departments, or benchmarked against other organizations.

Organizations may use external research companies like Willis Towers Watson, Glint, CultureAmp, Medallia, and Qualtrics, or design their own surveys.

Sample Engagement Questions

Rich et al. (2010) - Behavioral Work Engagement

- "I exert my full effort to my job" [physical engagement]
- "I am proud of my job" [emotional engagement]
- "At work, my mind is focused on my job" [cognitive engagement]

UWES (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003)

- "When I get up in the morning, I feel like going to work" [vigor]
- "My job inspires me" [dedication]
- "Time flies when I'm working" [absorption]

Professional Measures

Gallup Q12: Measures "actionable issues for management" that predict outcomes like satisfaction and loyalty.

Willis Towers Watson: Measures belief in company goals, emotional connection, and willingness to make extra effort.

Organizational Commitment (Allen & Meyer, 1990)

- "I would not recommend a close friend to join this organization."
- "I am extremely glad that I chose this organization to work for."
- "I really feel as if this organization's problems are my own."

Interrogating the Measures

Construct & Indicator

The **construct** is what we're trying to measure (engagement), while the **indicator** is the question used to gauge the construct.

Multiple indicators provide a more accurate measurement than a single question.

Classical Test Theory

$$X = t + e$$

Survey results (X) contain a true component (t) and an error component (e).

Good measures minimize error and accurately capture the true variation in engagement levels.

Validity Types

- **Face validity:** Do the questions appear to measure engagement?
- **Construct validity:** Do the indicators behave analytically as expected?
- **Discriminant validity:** Do the measures distinguish from other constructs?
- **Criterion validity:** Do the measures demonstrate statistical robustness?

A good measure is one that has indicators that accurately tap the construct under investigation, with a clear definition of what the construct actually is.

Factor Analysis: Ensuring Valid Measurement

Factor analysis helps check that questionnaire items are measuring the construct they're supposed to measure by examining patterns in responses.

If responses to questions about the same construct group together, this provides evidence that the items are measuring this construct.

Factor analysis can reveal whether:

- Questions show a consistent pattern (good measure)
- Questions don't show a consistent pattern (poor measure)
- Some questions form a good measure, others don't
- Questions measure multiple constructs rather than one



Example: A nine-item engagement scale might actually measure two separate constructs: "organizational engagement" and "psychological job engagement."

Reliability Analysis

1

Internal Consistency

Reliability analysis establishes how consistently respondents answer a specific set of survey items. If a scale measures a single construct, responses should follow a similar pattern.

2

Cronbach's Alpha

This statistic (ranging from 0.0 to 1.0) indicates how much variation in scale items is shared. Values above 0.70 are considered acceptable, indicating good internal consistency.

3

Multiple Indicators

Single-item measures cannot be tested for reliability. Multiple indicators allow us to assess whether variation in responses represents true differences or measurement error.

A reliable measure shows that respondents answer questions about the same construct in a consistent way, minimizing measurement error and accurately capturing the construct being measured.



Analyzing Survey Results

Statistical Methods

- **T-tests:** Compare engagement levels between groups (e.g., London vs. non-London offices)
- **Multiple regression:** Identify factors that predict engagement levels
- **Principal component analysis:** Identify underlying components in survey data

These methods help determine whether differences in engagement are statistically significant or could be due to random chance.

Example Findings

In one case study, regression analysis revealed:

- Organizational integrity was the strongest predictor of engagement ($\beta = 0.571$)
- Supervisor support significantly predicted engagement ($\beta = 0.148$)
- Teams with higher percentages of males showed lower engagement ($\beta = -0.209$)
- Team size and location were not significant predictors

Survey Comments Analysis



Natural Language Processing

Understands the meaning of words in context, how they relate to each other, and predicts their topic and meaning.



Sentiment Analysis

Analyzes text to determine the overall sentiment or emotion expressed about specific topics in survey comments.



Large Language Models

Trained on billions of text examples, these can identify when comments discuss specific organizational initiatives, values, or themes.

While qualitative data presents challenges in structure and generalizability, it provides enriched perspectives and can reveal themes that weren't considered by the survey team. The use of AI tools to analyze comments is still evolving, with organizations and vendors learning together.

From Insights to Action

Analyze Results

Use statistical methods to identify significant patterns and relationships in the data. Look beyond simple averages to understand what truly drives engagement.

Communicate and Implement

Share results and planned actions with employees promptly. Implement changes in a timely manner to maintain survey credibility.

Common engagement interventions include increased communication, town halls, access to senior leaders, career development, recognition schemes, better onboarding, mentoring, and informal social events.

Develop Targeted Interventions

Based on analysis, create specific interventions that address the actual drivers of engagement, such as supervisor training, diversity initiatives, or improving organizational integrity.

Measure Impact

Track the effectiveness of interventions through follow-up surveys or pulse checks to ensure they're having the desired effect.



Key Takeaways

Measurement Matters

Ensure your engagement survey uses valid and reliable measures that accurately capture what you're trying to measure.

Analyze Deeply

Go beyond simple averages to understand the true drivers of engagement using appropriate statistical methods.

Act Promptly

Respond to survey results with timely communication and meaningful actions to maintain credibility.

Respect Confidentiality

Always maintain the anonymity promised in employee surveys to ensure trust and honest feedback.

Employee engagement surveys are valuable tools for understanding workforce perceptions, but their effectiveness depends on proper measurement, thorough analysis, and meaningful follow-up actions.