

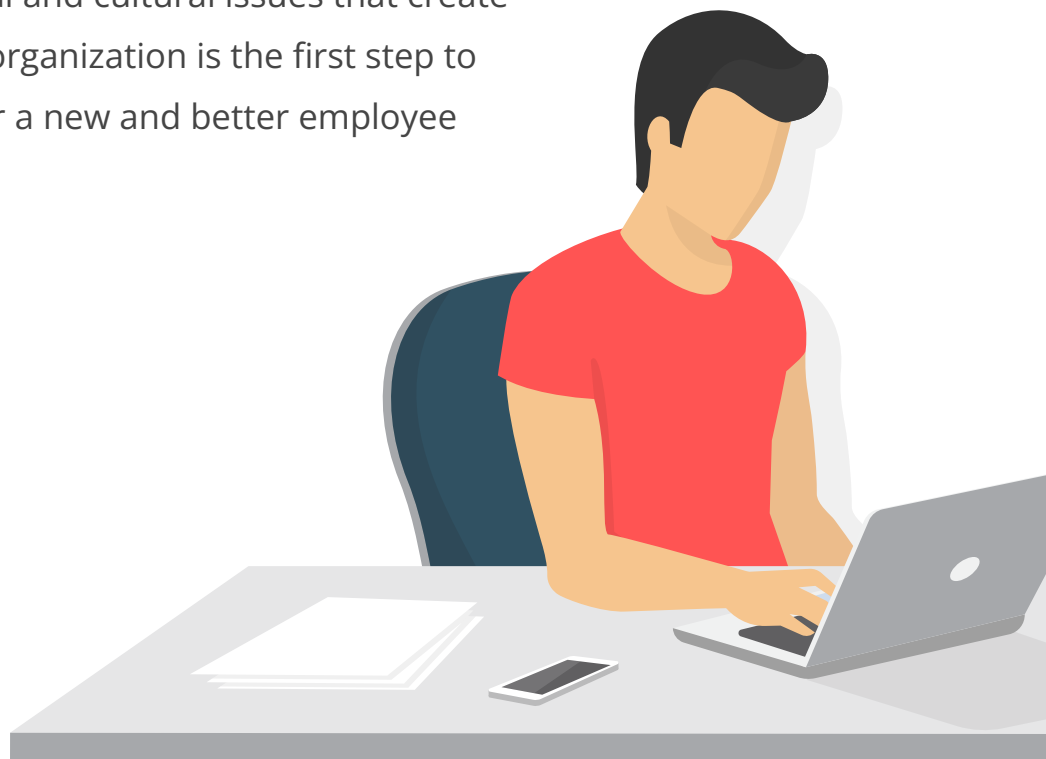
A Guide for Increasing Employee Engagement Among Distributed Teams



Last year, [Gallup](#) reported that while the number of engaged workers held steady at 32% the number of actively disengaged employees rose to 18%. This is not good news when you consider that a disengaged employee is 2.3x more likely to be exploring other jobs!

Employee engagement is a measure of employees' commitment to helping their organization achieve its goals. It's demonstrated by how employees think, feel, and act, as well as the emotional connection employees feel towards their organization, their work, and their teams.

Before the pandemic, engagement and well-being were rising globally for nearly a decade – but now, they're stagnant, and most believe it's because they don't find their work meaningful. Now is no time to take our eyes off the road, especially when it comes to your distributed knowledge workers' personal and professional well-being. Addressing the structural and cultural issues that create disengagement in your organization is the first step to laying the foundation for a new and better employee experience.



Top Reasons for Employee Disengagement & Turnover

Now more than ever, organizations are actively discussing the importance of employee engagement, but not everyone agrees on how to define and measure it. For our purposes, let's define it as a state and behavior in which employees are enthralled by their work and devote their hearts and minds to it. Engagement like this requires true connection— connection to others, the team, and business goals. Engagement like this is founded on an organization's and team member's trust, integrity, two-way commitment, and communication.

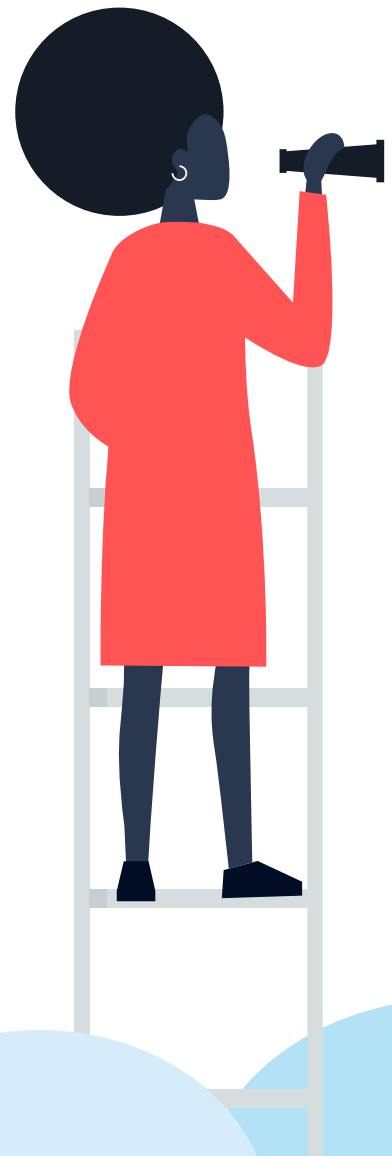
Here's Why Employee Engagement Matters

Employee engagement helps businesses succeed by improving organizational and individual performance, productivity, and well being. With the right employee engagement software, strategy, and leadership buy-in, an employee engagement strategy is:

- Quantifiable;
- Can be cultivated and substantially increased;
and conversely,
- Can be squandered and discarded.

It's no secret that companies with engaged workforces vastly outperform those without them. When people feel their work matters and that they're valued, **the sky is the limit**. Employee engagement has a very real impact on organizational success.

- Companies with highly engaged workforces are **24%** more profitable. (Gallup)
- Disengaged employees cost organizations an estimated **\$450-550 billion** each year. (The Engagement Institute)
- **80%** of employees said learning and development opportunities would help them feel more engaged on the job. (Udemy)
- Engaged employees are **44%** more productive than workers who merely feel satisfied. (Bain & Company)



Hight Engagement Impact



2.5x
Greater Revenue
Growth



2x
Annual Net
Income



62%
Less
Accidents



50%
Less Absence
Days



40%
Lower Employee
Turnover



24%
Higher Net
Promoter Score



18%
Higher
Productivity



12%
Higher Customer
Advocacy

Source: Smarp

With that as our backdrop, let's take a look at some of the main reasons employees continue to check out.

Burnout + Inadequate Opportunities & Recognition

Dissatisfaction with pay and benefits aren't the only reasons workers start disengaging and eventually leave. It should be no surprise many workers are reevaluating their jobs, considering the stress and isolation they've endured these past few years.



A March 2022 survey by the [Pew Research Center](#) found that while low pay was the primary reason people left their jobs last year, it was closely followed by respondents saying they lacked opportunities for advancement in their role. And 35% of people said that feeling disrespected at work was a major reason they left.

Employees want to know their employers see and acknowledge their hard work. If your business has employees who are pouring their hearts and souls into their work and rarely receiving acknowledgement for their accomplishments, they'll be at a higher risk of disengaging and burnout.

Burnout has also become a global issue - described by McKinsey and Company as [‘the great exhaustion’](#). Burnout among workers intensified during the pandemic, particularly in workplaces that remained open - specifically

retail, manufacturing and healthcare. McKinsey also reports that 42% of women said they were consistently burned out at work, while 35% of men report feeling burned out. The effects of burnout on remote employees also remain staggering:

2.0x

More than half of work-from-home employees are working more hours now than they were in the office: Nearly one-third (31%) say they are working “much more” than before the pandemic ([Indeed](#)).

2/3

of remote employees are experiencing burnout ([CNBC](#)).



Lack of Trust in Leadership

Despite its impact on burnout, the shift in where work gets done, with increased flexibility, has been by and large good for employees. But for organizations and people leaders, it has also made the need for [clear, consistent communication](#) more important. Yet, so many leaders continue to rely on word-of-mouth or quick lunchroom conversations for important information that it continues to sow seeds of mistrust among employees – especially those who are remote.



According to Gallup, when employees don't trust organizational leadership, their chances of being engaged are only three in thirty-six. Employees who have lost confidence in management have no real commitment to the organization.

They don't protect the brand. They don't defend management's decisions. They don't try to support management's vision. They develop an "us-versus-them" attitude and allow a deep and vast chasm to grow between them and leadership. They withdraw and withhold their ideas, their presence at times, and most certainly their best work. They become disconnected. They eventually stop trusting in all areas of the organization, not just in the one area that was compromised.

Lack of Connection to Work, Others & Vision

As communication and trust diminish, disconnect follows, as well as a loss of connection to the meaning of one's work. Sometimes, a company's vision doesn't resonate with employees. Or the company may fail to give its employees purposeful, meaningful work to perform. If an employee has a strong need for belonging and personal connection with others and those needs aren't being met, they will disengage.

Disconnect shows itself when communication and feedback are nonexistent. When it comes to communication, team members need to know what their managers expect from them, and they need clear feedback about how they're doing in their roles. Without knowing what they can do to improve or what their roles should look like, employees will likely find it difficult to connect to the vision, team goals, and their manager – never quite achieving the focus necessary for true engagement. Here's the difference in perception among those showing high vs. low levels of engagement.

	Highly engaged	Low or no engagement
They know what is expected of them at work	99%	89%
They have opportunities to learn and grow	98%	13%
Someone has talked about their progress	92%	13%
Their opinions count at work	91%	19%
They have been praised recently	88%	13%

Source: 7geese

Furthermore, in distributed environments that don't prioritize meaningful connection, team members

resoundingly express dissatisfaction with workplace cultures where their voices aren't heard, blame-placing is rampant, or any one of many toxic elements in an organization's culture may exist. And what they are really talking about here is a lack of psychological safety.

First coined by Amy Edmondson in a 1999 journal exploring its relationship to team learning and performance, psychological safety is the ability to speak one's mind without fear of punishment or embarrassment. At the heart of a psychologically safe environment is a sense of belonging with or being accepted by others. Feeling accepted reduces anxiety associated with interpersonal risk, allowing learning to occur. Learning improves the quality and frequency of contributions, and ultimately leads workers to identify and own productivity and efficiency improvements.



Psychological safety means an absence of interpersonal fear. When psychological safety is present, people are able to speak up with work-relevant content."

Amy Edmondson, the Novartis Professor of Leadership and Management at Harvard Business School

5 Keys to Increasing Employee Engagement

Distributed teams can only perform at a high level when they're set up for success, with the right tools, processes, and guardrails in place for optimal productivity. Creating an engaging, motivating, and supportive employee experience increases productivity and leads employees to being:

- ✓ 15x more likely to recommend the company to friends and colleagues.
- ✓ 1.5x more willing to learn new skills and responsibilities.
- ✓ Almost 6x more likely to plan on staying for a full career.

The good news...your employee engagement ideas don't have to break the bank. They just need to be deliberate, thoughtful and work in unison. With these five keys, you'll be well on your way to building a stronger internal brand, energizing employees, and promoting employee advocacy.

Enable Mentorship, Learning & Growth Initiatives

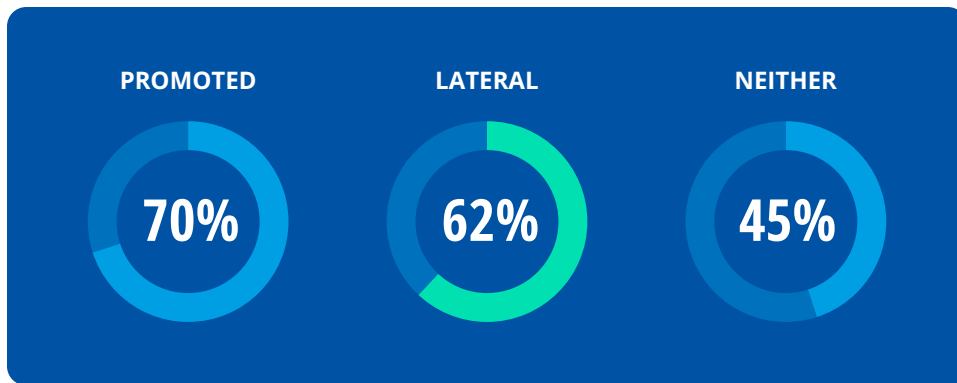


Enable Mentorship, Learning & Growth Initiatives

In a study of [32 million profiles](#) of active LinkedIn users who've worked at companies with more than 500 employees since 2013, data show that the likelihood an employee stayed with a company decreased as the years passed. One year after being hired, there's a 76% chance the worker would still be with the company. By year five, estimated retention was down to 38%.

But employees who were promoted within three years of being hired have a 70% chance of staying onboard, and those who made a lateral move have a 62% chance of staying. Those who were not promoted and who did not change jobs internally have only a 45% chance of remaining.





This data suggests that employers should rely on building, developing, and retaining their workforce through internal mobility programs tied to reskilling initiatives or learning development.

According to SHRM, [68% of workers](#) say they would stay with their employer throughout their career if the employer made an effort to **upskill** them, while 65% of workers said they would stay throughout their career if their employer made an effort to **reskill** them.

Workers need more skills development opportunities and their employers know it. More than half (52%) of workers said they need to learn new skills within the next year to continue their careers; and 46% said they are not as skilled as they want to be.



Actively Combat Burnout

In this area, there are some key questions for leadership to take stock of: What message is your time management sending to employees? Do you expect staff to be available around the clock? Do you take time off?



75%

medical costs accrued mostly due to preventable conditions



322B

global loss due to employee burnout

A healthy work and personal life is essential to job satisfaction. People need to know their managers understand they have lives outside of work — and recognize that maintaining balance can be even more challenging when working from home. Encourage employees to set boundaries, take their vacation time, enable them to schedule their time in the office, and consider mental health days. And if late nights are necessary to wrap up a project, consider giving them extra time off to compensate. Those at the highest levels should be a model for this behavior.

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**Click for 7 Actionable Steps
to Prioritize Your Employees'
Mental Health**

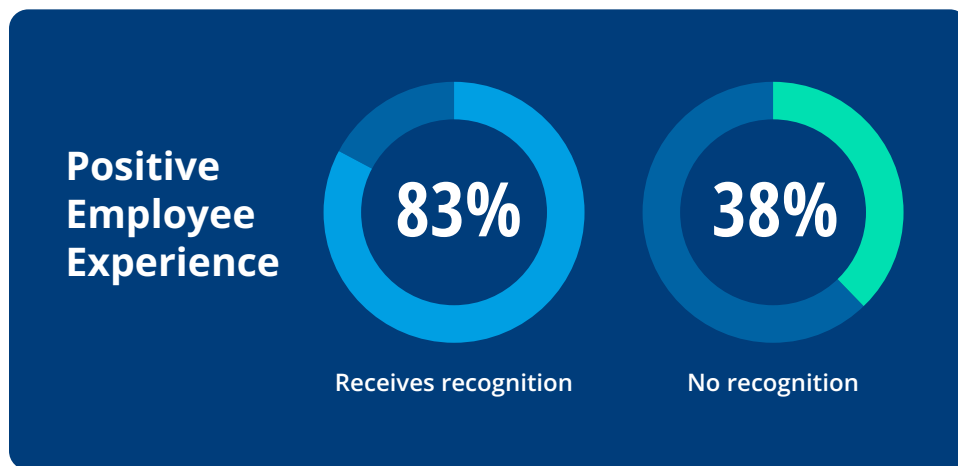
Organizations that promote [work-life harmony](#) have seen greater engagement and productivity – and a reduction in employee burnout and turnover. If you're not sure where to start, consider a survey simply asking your employees what they would need to achieve better work-life harmony.



Recognize Employee Contributions Big or Small

In this area, In addition to taking steps to prioritize employee well-being, recognition and gratitude are integral to creating a positive employee experience. Workhuman's Employee Experience Index with IBM Smarter Workforce Institute – based on a study of more than 23,000 workers –

showed that when employees receive recognition for doing good work, 83% report a more positive employee experience. When workers don't receive recognition, only 38% have a positive experience.



An employee recognition program can be formal or as simple as increasing and normalizing appreciation. In fact, when employees are thanked 12 times, attrition falls to just 2%. Workers recognized in the last month are half as likely to be looking for a new job (26% vs 49%). And you can even institute compelling recognition programs even if you have a small team or limited budget. No matter where you land on this spectrum, here are [some ideas](#) to get started.

Spotlighting strong performance can transform a content employee into a fully engaged one who actively pushes for greater things.

- 1. Drives Excellence** – Employee recognition is the foundation for creating a high-performing team. It strengthens relationships and provides a clear purpose aligned to achievable goals. Recognizing performance allows business leaders to drive toward key goals like retention by connecting people and culture to shared purpose.
- 2. Increases Engagement** – Eighty-four percent of those surveyed in this [SHRM/Workhuman Employee Recognition Survey](#) said that social recognition measurably and positively impacted engagement.
- 3. Reinforces Company Values** – Because employee recognition should be designed with rewards that map back specifically to each value, it integrates those ideals into employees' everyday thoughts and actions.
- 4. Nurtures Trust** – [According to a 2017 study](#), nearly 90% of employees who received recognition from their boss indicated high levels of trust in that relationship vs. just 48% for those who received no recognition. Research shows that workers who trust senior leaders are nearly 2x as likely to be engaged.
- 5. Impacts Bottom Line** – Organizations with formal recognition programs have 31% less voluntary turnover than organizations that don't have any program at all.



Make Time to Connect & Communicate

The shift to hybrid and remote work has underscored the importance of good workplace communication. Your direct reports, whether they work on-site or remotely, should feel they can come to you with ideas, questions, and concerns at any time. And as a leader, you need to make sure you're doing your part to help promote timely, constructive, and positive communication across the entire team. Make sure you proactively connect with each team member on a regular basis to get a sense of their workload and job satisfaction.



As a part of those check-ins or one-on-ones, be sure to bake in continuous feedback on performance. In fact, many employers are abandoning the annual performance review in favor of more frequent meetings with team members. In these one-on-one meetings, talk with your employees about their short- and long-term professional goals and help them visualize their future with the company. Talk through potential career advancement scenarios together and lay out a realistic plan for reaching those goals – perhaps something that ties back to your upskilling or learning opportunities.

Frequent check-ins can prevent a spiral of disengagement and exhaustion – and demonstrate employees have the support and guidance they need. When done effectively, these meetings create a stronger sense of trust, connection, and belonging. And that’s the kind of culture where employees will engage and grow.



Use Technology to Create a Work Environment Based on Connection & Trust

You don’t need to roll out big, fancy, expensive employee engagement software. But focusing on building trust and engagement is worth it.

Research has shown that workers who trust senior leaders are nearly **2x** as likely to be engaged, and that translates into successful business outcomes. Many U.S. studies report high-trust organizations are **2.5x** more likely to be high-performing revenue companies than their low-trust counterparts.



2X
more engaged



2.5X
more profitable

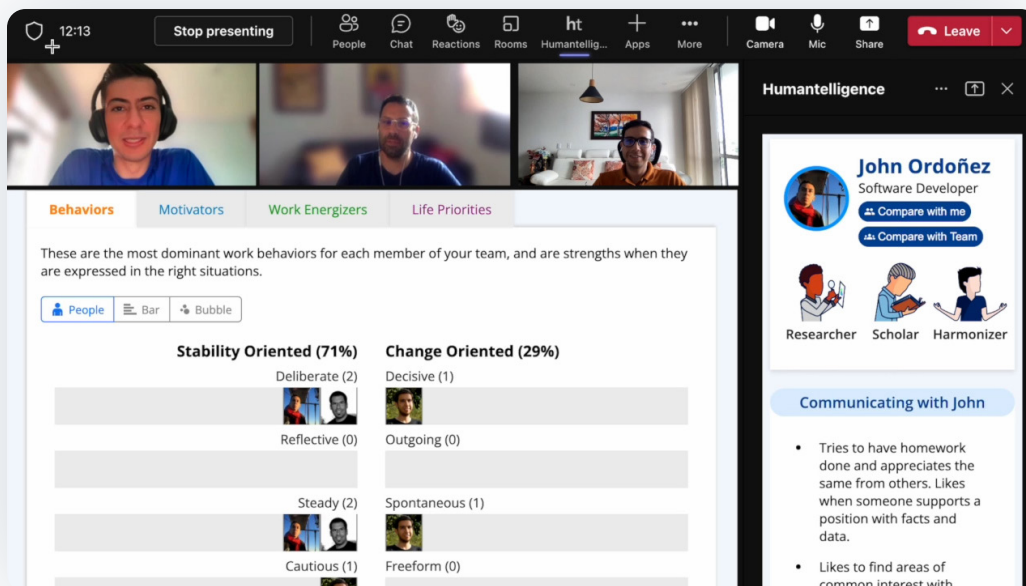
In 2016, Bart de Jong and colleagues conducted 112 studies with nearly 8,000 teams, finding a positive relationship between intra-team trust and [achieving shared goals](#). A willingness to be vulnerable is one of the states in which we can build that trust. Mayer, Davis and Schoorman, in their development of a Trust Model, discussed three elements that must be in place before we allow ourselves to be vulnerable, taking the risk to trust. We allow ourselves to be vulnerable when we believe someone:

- Shows Ability – knowledge, skills, competencies that allow someone to have influence in a specific area.
- Has Integrity – is on the same page with us about the principles we uphold—often implicitly assumed.
- Is Benevolent – the extent to which we believe that a person wants to do good for us. It's about caring about the other person, not having a vested interest, and not benefiting from the relationship.

As you might guess, an employee engagement strategy centered on building trust like this typically takes time because it's based on experiences. However, in today's remote and hybrid work reality where things happen quickly and there is less opportunity for organic interactions, managers need to expedite the process if you want employees to perform better and achieve results.

One of the most effective ways to accelerate trust-building and connection among employees is to use a simple add-on or plug-in to your existing communication tools. This surfaces actionable insights – generated automatically from self-assessments – into the existing daily workflows of all teams — within chats, team channels, emails, and meetings.

Your team then has access to the kind of information needed to better understand, connect, and collaborate with another – the kind of information that normally only comes after months, if not years, of working with one another, and the kind of information you use to only get when working in-office with others. For example, if you're meeting in Teams, you'll have custom communication tips for everyone who is a part of that meeting group.



At the end of the day, employee engagement involves a person's perception, feelings, and beliefs about the business, the people they work with, leadership, and the work itself. The drivers of employee engagement are highly personal, dependent on the company culture, and while they vary for each individual, these employee engagement ideas have proven to boost retention and coax the disengaged back into the game.

Ensuring a positive and empowering working environment where all employees feel valued and connected doesn't just help your company; it helps your people. An employee who feels connection to others is an employee who is more likely to find their work meaningful. An employee who finds their work meaningful is an employee likely to be engaged – demonstrating through their work a commitment to the overall success of the business.

Inspire deeper connection among colleagues. Create more collaborative relationships. See engagement soar.

[Get started today](#)

[Read more on our blog](#)

