



Perceptyx Employee Engagement Report 2026

# Anticipating Success: Understanding and Activating Employee Engagement



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# Executive Summary

Employee engagement remains one of the strongest indicators of organizational health, yet it is often misunderstood.

In an environment defined by constant change and uncertainty, engagement is not only about how people feel but also what they believe. At Perceptyx, we define engagement as the degree to which employees anticipate gaining their desired measure of success. When people expect their effort will lead to meaningful outcomes for themselves and the organization, they invest more energy, creativity, and persistence in their work. When that expectation breaks down, engagement erodes.

The Perceptyx Engagement Index measures this through four validated items that together capture how employees connect purpose, confidence, belonging, and motivation:

## Pride

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“I am proud to work for my organization.”

## Advocacy

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“I would recommend my company as a great place to work.”

## Intent to Stay

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“I intend to stay at my organization for at least the next 12 months.”

## Accomplishment

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“My work gives me a feeling of personal accomplishment.”

These four items form a diagnostic framework that reveals how internal and external factors shape engagement. Each dimension tells a distinct story about culture, leadership credibility, and the employee experience.

**When people anticipate success, they engage. When they engage, success follows.**



# Why Engagement Matters

## Engagement as a Strategic Signal

Engagement has long been linked to retention and performance, but its greatest value lies in foresight. In Perceptyx's 2025 benchmark data, employees who report being highly engaged are more than 2.5x as likely to believe their organization is headed in the right direction and 3x as likely to feel valued and energized at work (Perceptyx Panel Study, 2025).

That confidence translates into measurable results. Business units with high engagement outperform peers in productivity, customer satisfaction, and innovation, while also experiencing lower turnover and absenteeism.

# Engagement's Dual ROI: Retention and Performance

Engagement delivers measurable returns on two levels: who stays and how they perform once they do.

In Perceptyx customer data from 2024 to 2025, spanning more than 400 business units, a one-point increase in **intent to stay** corresponded with a **0.66-point reduction in attrition**. For a 1,000-person business unit, even a modest three-point improvement could prevent roughly 20 departures each year, representing about **\$1.5 million in avoided turnover costs**.

These percentages reflect the direct financial impact of how people feel about their future with the organization. When employees see a path forward, they stay longer, invest more effort, and sustain higher levels of performance.

But engagement's influence extends far beyond retention. It shapes how people show up, contribute, and innovate. Across millions of survey responses, engagement consistently predicts both **motivation and discretionary effort**, the willingness to go beyond what is required because the work feels meaningful.

The correlations between engagement and its core motivational drivers are exceptionally strong:

Personal accomplishment	>	$r = 0.67$
Pride in the organization	>	$r = 0.66$
Willingness to recommend the company	>	$r = 0.63$

For readers less familiar with statistics, these correlation ( $r$ ) values indicate a very strong relationship. In social science, correlations above 0.60 are rarely observed; they signal that engagement and motivation move almost in tandem. When employees feel pride and accomplishment, they become energized contributors who elevate the performance of those around them.

# Engagement as a Driver of Innovation and Agility

Perceptyx's September 2025 panel data reinforces this connection between engagement and performance. Employees who were favorable on all four engagement indicators reported:

**+44 points higher**



confidence in their organization's ability to handle change

**+39 points higher**



agreement that curiosity and risk-taking are valued

**+36 points higher**



agreement that mistakes are treated as learning opportunities

These differences reveal the presence of a performance culture. Highly engaged employees are:

## More adaptive

"My team adapts quickly when things go wrong". **+34 points**

## More innovative

"People at all levels are encouraged to contribute creative ideas without waiting for permission". **+44 points**

## More resilient

"Humor and joy are encouraged to build trust and connection". **+31 points**

Together, this data shows that engagement functions as a **leading indicator of agility and innovation**. When employees feel connected to purpose, valued by leaders, and confident in the organization's direction, they are far more likely to generate new ideas, collaborate across boundaries, and help the business navigate disruption successfully.

# Engagement as a Business Strategy

Across industries, Perceptyx benchmark data shows that teams with higher engagement outperform peers in productivity, customer satisfaction, and innovation velocity.

Engagement predicts the energy of the organization, the degree to which potential power is converted into performance. By strengthening even one of the four engagement dimensions — **pride, advocacy, intent to stay, or personal accomplishment** — leaders can influence outcomes that directly affect profitability, growth, and long-term resilience.

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**For leaders, the takeaway is clear: engagement is not a soft metric, it is a strategic performance variable.**

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# Engagement as Shared Success

Engagement thrives when people can see a clear link between their own progress and the organization's success. When employees believe their contributions make a difference, they commit energy willingly and sustain effort even through challenge or change.

This creates a reinforcing cycle of momentum:



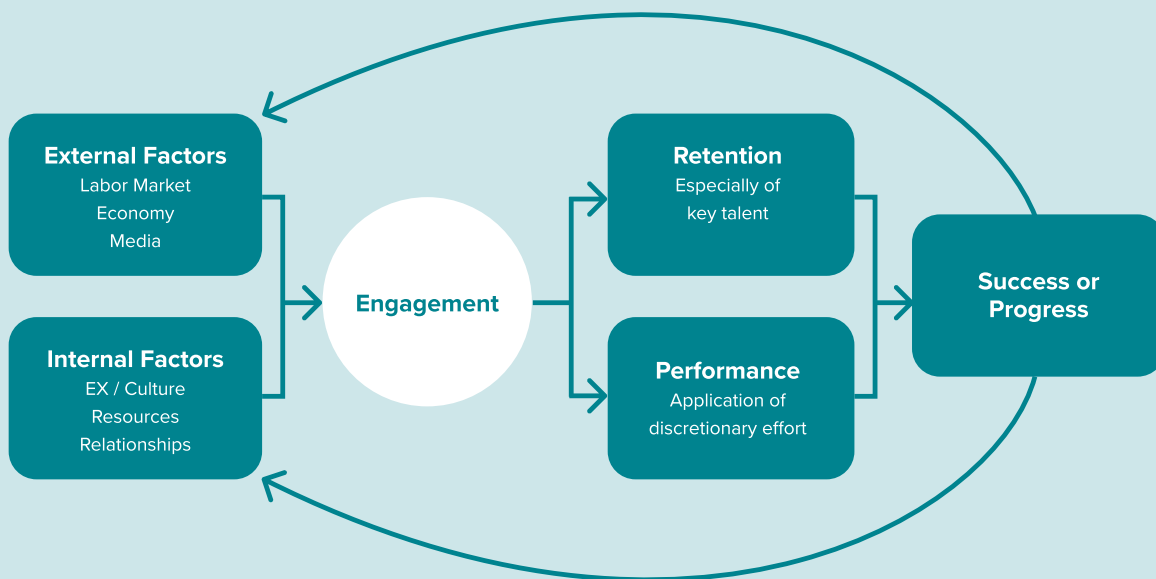
Each stage fuels the next. As employees experience success, their confidence in the organization's direction grows. That confidence increases the anticipation of future success, which in turn strengthens engagement.

Leaders play a key role in sustaining this loop. When they help employees connect the dots between effort, achievement, and impact, both personal and organizational, they activate a self-sustaining engine of motivation. Over time, that sense of shared success becomes a cultural force that drives continuous performance improvement.

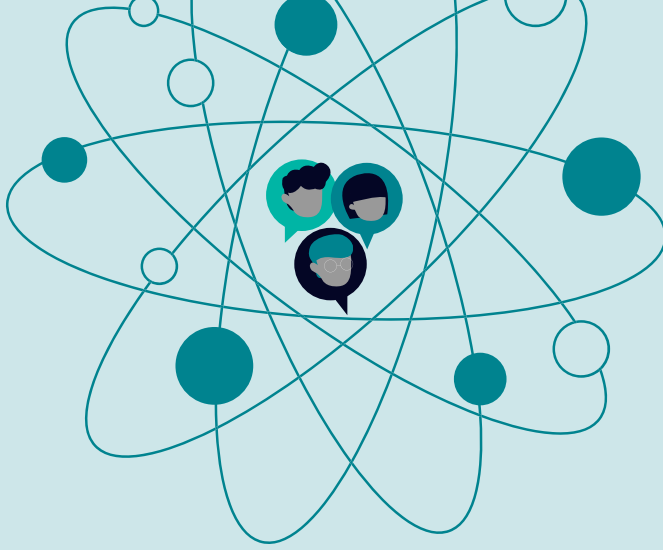
# The Perceptyx Engagement Model

## Engagement as the Anticipation of Success

At its core, engagement reflects belief in the future. Employees choose to engage when they expect their effort will produce outcomes that align with what success means to them: achievement, belonging, growth, or stability.



Engagement emerges when these forces align. Internal belief meets external reinforcement, creating the conditions where people not only perform but also anticipate success. That anticipation sustains commitment, energy, and growth, transforming engagement from an attitude into a performance advantage.



## Origins and Evolution of the Model

The [Perceptyx Engagement Model](#) builds on the logic of the **Service Profit Chain**, first introduced in the 1990s. The Service Profit Chain linked employee satisfaction to customer loyalty and business results, demonstrating that an engaged workforce fuels organizational success. Perceptyx advanced this concept by reframing engagement as the anticipation of success, a forward-looking belief that effort today will yield meaningful outcomes tomorrow.

Our early work applying this model began during the rollout of the **Affordable Care Act (ACA)**. In that period, many of our healthcare clients, particularly insurance providers, experienced unprecedented levels of voluntary attrition, despite having strong, supportive cultures and positive employee experiences. The issue was external, not internal. Employees feared their industry might be legislated out of existence, making it difficult for them to envision a future with their organizations. The perceived external threat disrupted their ability to anticipate success for themselves and their employers.

That experience led us to expand the model beyond internal factors like meaning and belonging to include **external factors** such as broader economic trends, geopolitical environments, and technological advancements. These elements capture the broader context in which engagement lives — the marketplace, the economy, and societal conditions that shape how employees view their future.

We saw this dynamic again in **2020** during the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite uncertainty, engagement scores rose across many organizations as employees rallied around shared purpose and trusted leaders to guide them through disruption. The external threat, in this case, strengthened commitment rather than eroding it.

Just two years later, the **Great Resignation** offered a different illustration of the same principle. External economic pressures, particularly inflation, shifted perceptions of success once again. Many employees sought new roles not because they were disengaged, but because financial realities made it harder to see a sustainable future with their current employers.



## Validating the Perceptyx Engagement Model

How should we define engagement, and do the specific questions we ask actually matter?

For years, survey vendors have presented engagement as a singular concept, yet a closer look reveals a range of definitions, measurement strategies, and theoretical assumptions. Some tools focus on internal experience, such as how energized or mentally absorbed employees feel at work. Others prioritize advocacy, intent to stay, or pride in the organization. At Perceptyx, we wanted to test how these approaches relate to one another. Do different engagement models reflect the same underlying construct? Can results from one be generalized to another?

To answer these questions, we conducted a large-scale panel study in September 2025 with over 3,900 employees from across industries, job types, and demographic groups. This section provides a look at who participated, what we asked, and what we found when comparing common engagement measures side-by-side.

## Panel Composition

Our panel included employees from diverse backgrounds and organizations:

- **Employment Type:** About 78% worked full-time, with the remainder employed part-time.
- **Job Classification:** A mix of salaried, hourly, and contract workers.
- **Organization Size:** Participants represented small, mid-size, and large enterprises.
- **Industry Diversity:** Healthcare, tech, education, manufacturing, and more.
- **Demographics:** Self-reported data on gender, race, age, and education ensured inclusive analysis.

## Measures Compared

Participants responded to engagement-related questions from a variety of sources:

- **Perceptyx Engagement Index:** Four core items measuring advocacy, pride, personal accomplishment, and intent to stay.
- **Gallup Q12**
- **Happiness and Advocacy measures**
- **Employee Net Promoter Score (eNPS)**
- **Individual-State Alignment (ISA) model**
- **Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) proxy items**
- **Perceptyx's Baseline Survey:** Included for additional analysis and context.

By bringing these together, we could test how closely different approaches to measuring employee engagement align, and where they diverge.

## Key Findings



### Conceptual Clarity Still Lags

Engagement is often described as though it is universally understood, but the items used to measure it vary widely. Some emphasize feelings (e.g., “I feel positive about my work”), while others track behaviors (e.g., “I intend to stay”).



### Many Measures Are Statistically Related

Our data showed strong correlations among several engagement items across vendors. For example, advocacy and pride items from Perceptyx correlated highly with similar questions from Glint and Gallup. This suggests partial overlap in what these tools are capturing.



### But Not All Engagement is the Same

Measures derived from more academic models, such as UWES and ISA, were less tightly linked to action-oriented items like intent to stay or recommend. This points to important differences in focus: motivational state versus organizational sentiment.



### Measures Should Not Be Treated as Interchangeable

From a research perspective, assuming that all engagement tools measure the same thing risks misinterpretation. While the applied utility of engagement scores may make them appear interchangeable, the theoretical underpinnings differ. Using results from one tool to draw conclusions about another can lead to flawed assumptions.

## Implications

This study was not designed to crown a single best measure of engagement. Instead, it asks a more fundamental question: When we say “engagement,” are we all talking about the same thing?

Our findings suggest a partial yes, but with important caveats. Leaders should be cautious when comparing scores across platforms or assuming equivalency in outcomes. At the same time, alignment across certain measures indicates that building a common understanding is possible, provided we are clear about what we are measuring and why.



## Engagement Driver Trends: A Decade of Change

From 2016 to 2025, we have seen engagement drivers shift within individual organizations, but when we stepped back, aggregating data from our global benchmark database with over 20 million employee responses, a larger narrative came into focus. Over the past decade, the world of work has absorbed a global pandemic, the rapid emergence of generative AI, and a broader erosion of trust in institutions. Confidence in leadership now plays a much greater role in shaping engagement than it did a decade ago. Engagement is neither static nor immune to context. What we found was a clear signal about what employees need from their organizations and how those needs have changed.

Below are five patterns that stood out, backed by a decade of driver data from Perceptyx's benchmark database collected between 2016 and 2025.

## Before 2020: Career, Recognition, and Investment in the Individual

From 2016 through 2019, the same themes dominated the top engagement drivers:

- *“I feel valued as an employee of the company.”*
- *“My current responsibilities are positioning me for a successful career here.”*
- *“There are career opportunities for me at the company.”*
- *“When I do an excellent job, my accomplishments are recognized.”*

Variations on feeling valued, fair advancement, and visible investment in career growth sat at the top of the list every year before the pandemic. The core engagement story sounded like this: “If you help me grow, treat me fairly, and recognize my contributions, I will show up and give you my best.”

Employees looked ahead. They expected a long relationship with the organization and evaluated engagement through a lens of advancement and development. Leaders could earn commitment through clear paths, fair promotion practices, and meaningful recognition.

That foundation did not disappear after 2020, but it no longer defined the center of gravity.

## Belonging Rose to the Top, Then Started to Recalibrate

Belonging barely registered in the top drivers before COVID-19. That changed quickly.

- In 2021, “I feel like I really belong at our company” entered the top five.
- From 2022 through 2024, it held the #1 engagement driver position.
- In 2025, it dropped to #4 as other concerns moved ahead of it.

This pattern reflects more than a temporary reaction to remote work and social isolation. The surge in belonging also aligned with intense focus on inclusion, equity, and psychological safety. Employees tested a simple question in a period of disruption and division: “Is this a place where I fit, feel respected, and feel safe to be myself?”

By 2025, belonging remained a strong driver, yet it no longer sat alone at the top. That decline in rank does not signal that belonging now matters less. It likely signals that other issues feel even more urgent, especially security and confidence in the future.

As we look toward 2026, leaders should treat belonging as a baseline cultural expectation, not a differentiator that they can afford to ignore.

# Confidence in Senior Management: A Powerful Barrier or Accelerator

For years, the top engagement drivers did not include any items about clarity of direction or senior leadership. That absence tells its own story. Employees focused on local experience, not enterprise leadership.

That pattern shifted in 2021 when “I have confidence in Senior Management” broke into the top five for the first time. It ranked:

- #4 in 2021
- #4 again in 2022 and 2023
- #3 in 2024
- #2 in 2025, just behind change effectiveness

In an environment of economic uncertainty, geopolitical instability, and constant headlines about layoffs and restructuring, people now look up more often. They want evidence that senior leaders know where the company is going, have a credible plan to get there, and make decisions that align with stated values.

This shift reframes engagement drivers as possible barriers. Where employees lack confidence in senior management, they hesitate to fully engage, withhold discretionary effort, and doubt the organization’s long-term success. Where confidence runs high, employees feel more willing to commit, even when conditions stay volatile.

Transformation requires more than engagement metrics. It requires visible, trustworthy leadership that people can believe in.

## Change Management: The Dividing Line

The most dramatic change in the last three years involves how organizations manage change.

In 2023, items related to support during change entered the top drivers, including “My manager supports me in my efforts to adapt and change.” By 2024, “Change is handled effectively in my company” appeared in the top five. In 2025, that same item reached the #1 engagement driver position.

This reflects the reality many employees face: layoff and restructuring anxiety, GenAI and automation adoption, and rapid shifts in strategy and priorities.

The gap in experience between organizations that manage change well and those that do not has become stark. Employees in organizations that manage change well report far higher engagement and optimism. They feel informed, supported, and treated with respect, even when

news is tough. Employees in organizations that handle change poorly feel confused, disposable, and wary.

In practice, effective change management now includes: clear, honest explanations of why change happens; specific detail on what will change for teams and individuals; visible support for managers who must translate and implement the change; and space for employees to ask questions, express concerns, and suggest improvements.

Change no longer functions as a background condition. It has become a primary lens through which employees judge their experience.

## Careers and Feeling Valued: Lost Ground, Then Returned in Survival Mode

One of the most sobering patterns appears in the recent trajectory of career and recognition items.

After years at the top of the list, career growth and feeling valued fell out of the top five entirely in 2023 and 2024. They re-entered in 2025, but only at #5, behind change effectiveness, confidence in senior management, and belonging.

Feedback from clients and employees suggests a shift in mindset. Before, people asked: “Can I build a career here, and will the company invest in me?” Now, many first ask: “Will I still have a job here in 90 days?”

Without reassurance about job security and a clear direction for the organization, many employees move into survival mode. They pull back on long-term planning and focus on short-term protection.

Herzberg’s two-factor theory provides a useful frame. Job security, reasonable policies, and competent leadership behave like hygiene factors. When they fall short, they create dissatisfaction and crowd out motivation. Career growth and recognition function as motivators. They boost engagement when the basics feel secure, but they cannot compensate for a sense of threat.

Our data suggests that many organizations have not yet met that baseline. Employees still want growth and appreciation, but first they want stability and trust.

# Implications for Leaders in 2026 and Beyond

The ten-year trend tells a simple story. Employees have shifted from a focus on “How can I grow here?” to “Can I trust this organization to navigate uncertainty with me?” Leaders who recognize that shift can respond in practical ways.

Here are four places to focus:

- **Treat change as a shared journey, not a broadcast**  
Build structured routines around change: early communication, manager toolkits, Q&A forums, and feedback loops. Explain the “why,” outline the path, and acknowledge the human impact of each decision.
- **Earn confidence in senior leadership through consistent action**  
Increase transparency about priorities, tradeoffs, and outcomes. Align decisions with the values you ask employees to embrace. Close the loop on past commitments so people see that promises matter.
- **Protect belonging as a cultural foundation**  
Keep listening to groups that experience exclusion or lower psychological safety. Equip leaders and managers with simple, repeatable behaviors that reinforce inclusion in meetings, feedback conversations, and day-to-day interactions.
- **Rebuild space for careers and recognition as stability improves**  
Recommit to career conversations, internal mobility, and development opportunities, even in lean years. Make recognition specific and connected to impact, not generic praise. Signal that the organization still sees a future with each employee, not just short-term output.

# Engagement Is Personal and Contextual

The shifts in drivers over time reveal that engagement is both **personal and contextual**. Internal factors determine how employees experience their work, but external factors shape whether they believe success is achievable in that environment. When both align, engagement becomes a powerful predictor of performance, innovation, and retention.

The Perceptyx Engagement Model captures this dual reality. It recognizes that engagement is not static; it rises or falls as people weigh their personal sense of meaning against the external forces that shape their expectations for the future.

## Inputs and Outcomes

Engagement exists at the intersection of capability and culture.

Capability



answers, “Can I succeed here?”

Culture



answers, “Will my success matter here?”

When both are positive, engagement becomes self-sustaining, transforming belief into performance and performance into progress.



The **Perceptyx Four-Item Index** provides a clear, research-based framework for understanding engagement across industries and geographies. Each question represents a specific dimension of how employees connect to their work, their leaders, and their organization. Together, they offer a holistic view of the employee experience and its link to measurable business outcomes.

Indicator	Item	What It Measures	Why It Matters	Business Outcome
<b>Pride</b>	<i>"I am proud to work for my organization."</i>	Brand alignment and cultural credibility.	Connects personal values to organizational identity.	Reputation, customer trust, revenue growth.
<b>Advocacy</b>	<i>"I would recommend my company as a great place to work."</i>	Confidence in leadership and the employee experience.	Reflects belonging, fulfillment, and psychological safety.	Employer brand, reduced cost to hire.
<b>Intent to Stay</b>	<i>"I intend to stay at my organization for at least the next 12 months."</i>	Retention intent.	The strongest predictor of actual turnover.	Talent stability, cost savings, risk mitigation.
<b>Accomplishment</b>	<i>"My work gives me a feeling of personal accomplishment."</i>	Intrinsic motivation.	Links meaning, purpose, and performance.	Innovation, efficiency, engagement sustainability.

Each question tells a distinct story about how people experience work. **Pride** reflects cultural authenticity and the alignment between personal and organizational values. **Advocacy** reveals whether employees feel safe and supported enough to recommend the organization to others. **Intent to stay** captures trust in the organization's future and the individual's place within it. **Accomplishment** speaks to intrinsic motivation, the drive that fuels innovation and sustained performance.

When all four indicators move in the right direction, organizations unlock a powerful cycle of confidence, contribution, and commitment. These questions do more than measure engagement; they diagnose where belief in the future is strongest and where leaders can take action to strengthen it.



# The Unique Value of Each Engagement Dimension

# Pride: Confidence and Alignment

Pride is both emotional and rational. It reflects how employees perceive the credibility, purpose, and future direction of their organization. When employees feel proud, they express confidence not only in what the organization does but in what it represents.

## The strongest correlates with pride include:

- “I am confident my organization is headed in the right direction.”
- “I trust leadership to make decisions that ensure long-term success.”

Employees who express pride report 59-point higher favorability on leadership confidence and 51-point higher alignment with organizational values. These patterns suggest that pride is less about sentiment and more about identity. It captures whether employees see themselves reflected in the organization’s mission and values.

Pride fuels affiliation, the psychological bond that connects individuals to a collective identity. Research on organizational identification shows that when people view their organization as part of their self-concept, they demonstrate greater commitment, resilience, and discretionary effort. They become advocates who carry the organization’s reputation into every customer interaction, meeting, and decision.

Affiliation also protects organizations during periods of change. As seen in studies of mergers and acquisitions, employees who identify strongly with their organization are more likely to stay, adapt, and contribute to integration success, even amid uncertainty or disruption. Pride gives employees a sense of continuity and belonging, anchoring them to something stable when external conditions shift.

In this way, pride bridges internal culture and external reputation. It links the organization’s values to how employees describe and defend it. A proud workforce signals that the organization has earned credibility and trust from within.



### Key takeaway:

*Pride creates a shared sense of identity. It unites personal and organizational success, strengthening both belonging and brand reputation. When leaders cultivate pride through authenticity, transparency, and values-based decisions, they build not just engagement, but loyalty that endures through change.*

# Advocacy: The Willingness to Recommend

Advocacy reflects the social proof of engagement. It captures the extent to which employees would endorse their employer to others. Measured by the statement, “I would recommend my company as a great place to work,” advocacy signals trust, belonging, and confidence in the organization’s future.

Perceptyx panel data shows that employees who strongly agree with this item, those who are fully engaged, report substantially higher favorability across nearly every dimension of the employee experience. Compared with all other respondents, employees who answered favorably on all four Perceptyx engagement items were:

- +52 points higher > on feeling valued as an employee
- +53 points higher > on belonging
- +51 points higher > on confidence in leadership’s vision for the future

These differences confirm that advocacy is not an isolated sentiment; it represents an integrative signal of the employee experience. When people feel included, recognized, and aligned with organizational purpose, they naturally become advocates. Their willingness to recommend is not driven by obligation, but by genuine belief in the organization’s direction and integrity.

The opposite is also true. In organizations where leadership credibility is uncertain or where stated values do not match daily behavior, advocacy declines sharply. The panel data illustrates this pattern. Employees who were neutral or unfavorable on the engagement index were **20 to 30 points lower** on perceptions of fairness, recognition, and innovation — core elements of psychological safety and organizational trust.

# Advocacy as an Early Signal of Organizational Health

Advocacy is one of the most sensitive indicators of organizational health. During times of restructuring, layoffs, or mergers, it often declines before other measures. Employees may adopt a cautious, “wait and see” mindset. These temporary dips rarely signal disengagement. More often, they reflect uncertainty about leadership direction or confidence in the organization’s future stability.

## Recovery depends on three reinforcing actions:

- **Leadership credibility:**  
Clear and consistent decision-making that rebuilds trust.
- **Transparent communication:**  
Open dialogue about what is changing and why.
- **Visible follow-through:**  
Demonstrating that employee feedback leads to meaningful action.

## Business Linkage

Across Perceptyx research, advocacy correlates strongly with overall engagement ( $r = .63$ ) and predicts outcomes tied to brand strength and talent attraction. Business units with higher advocacy scores report stronger external reputation, higher internal referral rates, and lower cost per hire.

In practical terms, advocacy converts employee experience into employer reputation. It signals to internal and external audiences that the organization’s culture is authentic, fair, and worth belonging to. When advocacy is strong, it becomes a form of organizational capital, one that attracts talent, retains customers, and reinforces trust in leadership.



### Key takeaway:

*Advocacy is the outward expression of engagement. It reflects an employee’s confidence in leadership, belief in the organization’s values, and pride in belonging to it. When advocacy is strong, it becomes a competitive advantage that strengthens reputation, attracts talent, and reinforces culture from within.*

# Intent to Stay: A Commitment to the Organization

Intent to stay is the most predictive outcome of engagement. It captures whether employees believe their future success and the organization's success are connected.

A one-point increase in intent to stay favorability corresponds to a **0.66-point reduction in voluntary employee attrition.**

## Relationship Between Intent to Stay and Predicted Retention

Score	Predicted Retention
1 (Strongly Disagree)	> 60.5%
3 (Neutral)	> 85.5%
5 (Strongly Agree)	> 95.7%

This relationship makes intent to stay one of the clearest signals of organizational stability. Low scores often indicate a lack of growth opportunities, career clarity, or confidence in leadership's direction. High scores, by contrast, reflect optimism and belief in a shared future.

## The Cost of Turnover

Hiring and onboarding are among the highest expenses for most organizations. The cost of replacing an employee can exceed 150% of their annual salary when considering recruitment, training, and the lost productivity that occurs during ramp-up. Yet the true cost extends beyond finances. **Every departure also risks the loss of institutional knowledge, customer relationships, and continuity of service; assets that take years to build.**

Retaining key talent preserves organizational memory and intellectual property, sustaining the quality and consistency that customers depend on. In many industries, continuity of service is a differentiator that directly affects trust and reputation.



## The Need for Strategic Retention

While some organizations now seek to do more with leaner teams, focusing only on overall headcount reduction can overlook the importance of **strategic retention**, keeping the right people in the right roles at the right time. High performers, critical thinkers, and employees who hold deep organizational knowledge amplify engagement across teams. Losing these individuals can create ripple effects of disengagement and instability.

Leaders who understand intent to stay as a strategic metric can identify early warning signs of attrition and take proactive steps to retain key contributors. Development opportunities, transparent communication, and visible paths for growth are all proven levers that increase both commitment and confidence in the future.

## Retention with Purpose

Staying is not always a signal of commitment. In today's environment, many employees engage in "job hugging", clinging to roles that feel safe even if they no longer inspire. Whether driven by economic caution, limited alternatives, or organizational uncertainty, this form of reluctant retention carries real risk. Creativity stalls. Collaboration thins. Momentum fades.

Some employees quit and stay, remaining physically present but disengaged in energy and effort. Commitment is not only about minimizing exits. It is about creating conditions where people choose to stay because they see a path to success for themselves, for their teams, and for the business. That is the kind of retention that fuels performance and builds resilient cultures.



### **Key takeaway:**

*Intent to stay is a barometer of confidence as well as a measure of loyalty. It reflects whether employees believe that their continued effort will lead to progress, purpose, and shared success.*

# Accomplishment: The Energy Source

Accomplishment reflects intrinsic motivation, the extent to which employees find their work meaningful, fulfilling, and worth doing for its own sake. It represents the inner drive that sustains engagement and performance.

Perceptyx research shows that accomplishment has the strongest correlation with enthusiasm, energy, and creative performance ( $r = 0.67$ ). Employees who experience high levels of accomplishment consistently demonstrate discretionary effort. They go above and beyond even when no one is watching — not because they are told to, but because the work itself matters to them.

## The Psychology of Intrinsic Motivation

In his book [\*Drive\*](#), Daniel Pink describes three elements that fuel lasting motivation: autonomy, mastery, and purpose. When people have the freedom to make decisions about their work, opportunities to improve their skills, and a clear sense that their effort contributes to something meaningful, they sustain energy and creativity over time.

Intrinsic motivation turns effort into fulfillment. Employees who see purpose in what they do don't need constant reminders or external rewards to perform well. Their satisfaction comes from progress itself and from seeing how their work connects to something larger than individual achievement.



# The Perceptyx Evidence

Perceptyx benchmark research across hundreds of organizations confirms that intrinsic motivation is directly linked to higher performance. Individuals who report a strong sense of accomplishment also report higher confidence, curiosity, and innovation. Their performance remains steady even during change or challenge because their motivation does not depend on external incentives.

Teams with higher accomplishment scores deliver stronger productivity, greater adaptability, and higher customer satisfaction. Progress reinforces fulfillment, and fulfillment drives new effort. This cycle of internal motivation creates a durable source of energy for both individuals and organizations.

## Why It Matters

Accomplishment connects engagement to culture. It transforms routine work into purpose-driven contribution. When people believe that their effort makes a difference, they invest more of their creativity, persistence, and care in their work. Engagement then becomes self-sustaining.



**Key takeaway:**

*Accomplishment is not simply about feeling good at work. It is the energy source that fuels innovation, resilience, and long-term performance. Leaders who create conditions that support autonomy, mastery, and purpose unlock the deepest and most enduring form of motivation.*



# Engagement and Organizational Culture

## Culture as the Ecosystem of Engagement

Engagement is the lived experience of culture. When culture reflects fairness, purpose, and alignment between what leaders say and what employees see, engagement follows naturally.

Perceptyx research shows that employees' belief that their organization "lives its values" and genuinely cares about people's well-being is a powerful marker of cultural credibility. Even benefits, often treated as basic hygiene factors, communicate what the organization values. When those offerings reflect a people-first mindset, they reinforce engagement. When they do not, credibility and trust decline.

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**Employees' belief that their organization "lives its values" and genuinely cares about people's well-being is a powerful marker of cultural credibility.**

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## Cultural Congruence and Retention

The link between culture and engagement becomes most visible during growth or transformation. As organizations scale, they often trade flexibility for stability. Systems, processes, and controls are necessary for efficiency and governance, but they can also limit autonomy and weaken the sense of ownership that fuels engagement.

[Wilson's \(2022\) doctoral research](#) found a significant relationship between cultural congruence and employee retention during post-merger integrations. Employees were **3.5x more likely to stay** when they perceived alignment between their own values and those of the organization. Cultural congruence created a buffer against uncertainty and reinforced belonging, which is especially important when identity and trust are fragile.

Our internal research with customers at Perceptyx supports this same pattern. In post-merger environments, we've seen that when integrations build psychological safety and protect employee agency, organizations experience stronger engagement, trust, and retention. By contrast, rigid, top-down approaches often erode these outcomes. These dynamics extend beyond mergers. As organizations scale, sustaining cultural alignment becomes more complex and more essential. Leaders must create intentional space for autonomy, creativity, and employee voice inside the systems built to support growth.

# Balancing Structure and Agency

Healthy cultures balance stability with self-determination. Too little structure leads to confusion, while too much creates compliance without commitment. Employees engage most deeply when they believe their effort leads to meaningful outcomes for themselves and for the organization.

That belief depends on both structural clarity and the freedom to influence how work is done. When employees have clear channels for input and feel their voices matter, engagement, pride, and intent to stay increase. When systems become opaque or overly prescriptive, engagement declines, even in organizations with strong performance.

For leaders, the message is clear. Scaling a business should not mean shrinking employee agency. Culture must evolve alongside growth. Sustaining engagement requires flexibility, fairness, and belonging. People engage most fully in cultures where they understand the organization's direction and see themselves as active participants in shaping it.

## Motivation as the Bridge

Intrinsic motivation forms the bridge between engagement and culture. It explains why some organizations maintain energy and commitment even under pressure. When employees experience progress and meaning in their work, they invest more effort and creativity because the work itself feels valuable.

Organizations that empower autonomy, recognize contributions, and encourage growth create the psychological conditions that sustain engagement. These conditions give employees a sense of control, competence, and purpose, all of which reinforce commitment.

Perceptyx data shows that employees who strongly agree their work provides a sense of accomplishment are **more than 40 points higher** on belonging, trust, and perceptions of an innovative climate. In these environments, people do not rely on constant external rewards or reminders. Instead, they are motivated by the satisfaction of solving problems, learning new skills, and contributing to something larger than themselves.

Culture sustains engagement not by making work easier, but by making it meaningful. When employees see that their effort matters, they persist through challenges, adapt more quickly to change, and help others do the same. The organizations that consistently outperform peers are those where progress and purpose coexist, where the daily experience of work feels both challenging and worthwhile.

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**Employees who strongly agree their work provides a sense of accomplishment are more than 40 points higher on belonging, trust, and perceptions of an innovative climate.**

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# Engagement During Change

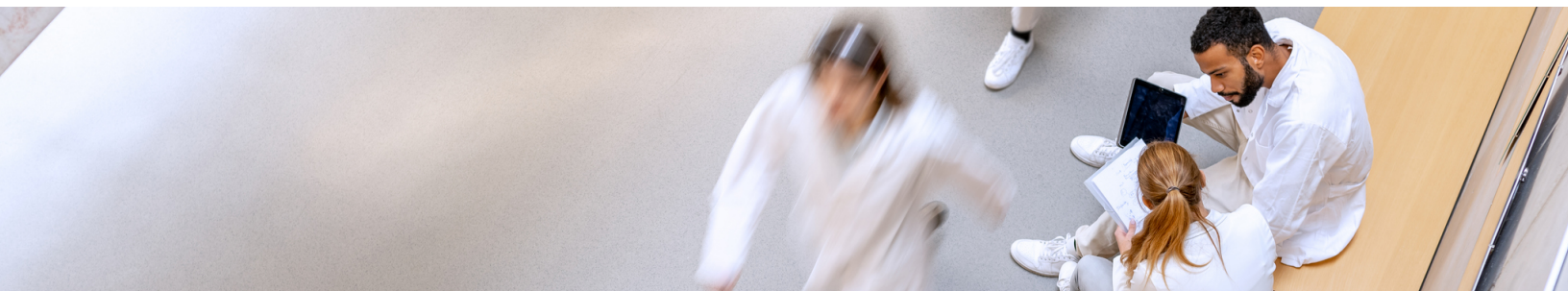
Periods of transformation test the strength of engagement. Perceptyx internal customer research across hundreds of change initiatives shows that **advocacy** and **intent to stay** typically decline first after major disruptions such as mergers, reorganizations, or layoffs. These measures are sensitive to uncertainty and reflect how employees assess the credibility and direction of leadership.

**Pride** and **accomplishment** often remain more stable because they connect to intrinsic motivation and personal identity. However, if ambiguity persists for too long, even these deeper forms of engagement begin to erode. Sustained uncertainty weakens employees' belief that effort will lead to success, which is the foundation of engagement itself.

## The fastest-recovering organizations share several traits:

- They **communicate clearly and consistently**, providing honest updates even when all answers are not yet known.
- They **demonstrate follow-through**, showing that feedback leads to visible action.
- They **equip managers as engagement multipliers**, helping them listen, respond, and reconnect their teams to purpose.

These actions rebuild confidence, which is the cornerstone of anticipation and engagement. When leaders communicate transparently, honor commitments, and empower managers to guide through uncertainty, employees begin to see progress again. That sense of forward motion restores trust and renews belief in the future, both essential ingredients for lasting engagement.



# Engagement Profiles: The Power of Combination

While the four indicators of engagement are closely related, they are not interchangeable. Each reflects a distinct element of the employee experience. When one dimension is strong while another lags, the story changes significantly.

The Perceptyx Engagement Profiles framework identifies sixteen possible combinations of responses across the four engagement items, revealing nuanced strengths and risks within the organization.

## The 16 Engagement Profiles

**1. High Advocacy, High Pride, High Commitment, High Motivation:**

*Fully engaged and energized; loyal, inspired, and likely to be a strong culture carrier.*

**2. High Advocacy, High Pride, High Commitment, Low Motivation:**

*Dedicated and loyal but feeling drained; at risk of burnout despite strong organizational alignment.*

**3. High Advocacy, High Pride, Low Commitment, High Motivation:**

*Energized and aligned with the brand, but not planning to stay; likely sees better personal opportunities elsewhere.*

**4. High Advocacy, High Pride, Low Commitment, Low Motivation:**

*Positive about the company externally, but internally disconnected; may be disengaging quietly.*

**5. High Advocacy, Low Pride, High Commitment, High Motivation:**

*Invested in the work and future at the company, but disillusioned with the organizational identity or leadership.*

**6. High Advocacy, Low Pride, High Commitment, Low Motivation:**

*Sticking around, but with little inspiration; a loyal realist who may suppress concerns to avoid friction.*

**7. High Advocacy, Low Pride, Low Commitment, High Motivation:**

*Driven by the work itself more than the organization; a passionate performer with a foot out the door.*

**8. High Advocacy, Low Pride, Low Commitment, Low Motivation:**

*Says the right things but feels little attachment; engagement is more surface than substance.*

**9. Low Advocacy, High Pride, High Commitment, High Motivation:**

*Highly engaged internally but hesitant to recommend; likely affected by resource or culture challenges.*

**10. Low Advocacy, High Pride, High Commitment, Low Motivation:**

*Proud and loyal, but energy is depleted; silently struggling with sustainability of their effort.*

**11. Low Advocacy, High Pride, Low Commitment, High Motivation:**

*Proud and driven but not planning to stay; a high-performing short-timer who values the mission but sees misalignment.*

**12. Low Advocacy, High Pride, Low Commitment, Low Motivation:**

*Culturally aligned but emotionally distant; respect remains, but belief in the future is fading.*

**13. Low Advocacy, Low Pride, High Commitment, High Motivation:**

*Committed and energized, but skeptical of leadership or culture; might be loyal to team or role more than company.*

**14. Low Advocacy, Low Pride, High Commitment, Low Motivation:**

*Staying out of duty or necessity, not inspiration; likely a retention risk if motivation isn't re-ignited.*

**15. Low Advocacy, Low Pride, Low Commitment, High Motivation:**

*Ambitious and self-driven, but disconnected from the organization; may be preparing for their next move.*

**16. Low Advocacy, Low Pride, Low Commitment, Low Motivation:**

*Disengaged on all fronts; at risk of quiet quitting or immediate exit.*

# Why Profiles Matter

The Engagement Profiles framework turns engagement from a single score into a map of culture. Instead of asking only whether employees are engaged, it helps leaders understand how they are engaged and what that means for performance.

Each profile represents a different pattern of belief, motivation, and experience within the organization. By examining these patterns, leaders can pinpoint the cultural forces that shape engagement (both positive and negative) and identify where targeted action will have the greatest impact.

The value of this framework lies in its precision. Engagement profiles reveal which business outcomes are most at risk, whether that risk shows up as rising turnover, declining innovation, or an erosion of brand credibility. They make engagement actionable by connecting survey data to everyday business challenges.

**Profiles also encourage dialogue. They prompt leaders to ask questions such as:**

- What do these patterns tell us about how people experience success here?
- Where do employees see barriers to progress or belonging?
- Which aspects of our culture are strengthening engagement, and which are holding it back?



When used well, Engagement Profiles shift the conversation from measurement to meaning. They move engagement data out of dashboards and into leadership discussions about trust, growth, and accountability.

# Engagement Profiles and Their Business Implications

Profile Category	Description	Expected Business Outcomes	Leadership Actions
<b>Highly Engaged (All Four High)</b>	<i>Employees express pride, advocacy, intent to stay, and accomplishment. They believe in leadership, feel valued, and see clear purpose in their work.</i>	Highest performance, innovation, and customer satisfaction; low turnover risk.	Recognize achievements, sustain transparency, and provide new challenges to prevent complacency.
<b>Early Warning (Three Strong, One Weak)</b>	<i>Engagement is mostly strong, but one area lags (e.g., declining trust, uncertainty about the future, or limited career growth).</i>	Emerging friction points that may lead to attrition or declining motivation if ignored.	Identify the weak dimension and address it directly through communication, development, or alignment of values and actions.
<b>Cultural Drag (Two Strong, Two Weak)</b>	<i>Employees feel connected in some areas but disconnected in others. The culture supports engagement unevenly.</i>	Inconsistent performance; frustration among high performers; reputation risk.	Diagnose which systems or processes block engagement. Strengthen leadership credibility, inclusion, and recognition.
<b>Admiration Without Activation (High Pride and Advocacy, Low Accomplishment and Intent to Stay)</b>	<i>Employees admire the brand but struggle to see progress or sustainability in their work.</i>	Strong external reputation but internal fatigue and turnover risk.	Improve workload balance, clarify career paths, and connect brand purpose to daily work experience.
<b>Performing Without Pride (High Accomplishment and Intent to Stay, Low Pride and Advocacy)</b>	<i>Employees are productive and committed but feel disconnected from leadership or culture.</i>	Short-term performance without long-term loyalty; possible reputation decline.	Strengthen communication, reinforce values, and rebuild trust in leadership.
<b>Prestige Without Connection (High Pride Only)</b>	<i>Employees take pride in the organization's name but feel little internal support or belonging.</i>	Attraction of talent but limited retention and engagement depth.	Focus on inclusion, recognition, and authentic leadership communication.

# Engagement Profiles and Their Business Implications (cont'd):

Profile Category	Description	Expected Business Outcomes	Leadership Actions
Country Club Culture (High Advocacy Only)	<i>Employees enjoy social connections but lack accountability and performance focus.</i>	High satisfaction but low productivity; weak link between engagement and outcomes.	Clarify goals, set clear expectations, and reward contribution over comfort.
Stability Without Energy (High Intent to Stay Only)	<i>Employees remain for security or benefits but lack pride, advocacy, and motivation.</i>	Low innovation, limited adaptability, and potential stagnation.	Reconnect people to purpose and growth opportunities; encourage ownership of results.
Purpose Without Sustainability (High Accomplishment Only)	<i>Employees find meaning in their work but lack systemic support and resources.</i>	Short bursts of performance followed by burnout; potential turnover among top talent.	Strengthen resources, clarify priorities, and ensure workloads are sustainable.
Disconnected Engagement (One or Two Dimensions High, Others Low)	<i>Employees show effort or pride in isolated areas but feel blocked in others.</i>	Fragmented culture; uneven team performance; low trust.	Use engagement discussions to identify barriers to progress; rebuild coherence between purpose and systems.
Cultural Crisis (All Four Low)	<i>Employees feel disconnected from purpose, leadership, and progress. Trust and credibility are severely damaged.</i>	High turnover, low innovation, and reputational decline.	Listen deeply, act visibly, and rebuild fairness, trust, and shared purpose before pursuing new initiatives.

Ultimately, profiles give leaders a way to read the cultural landscape of their organization. They show not just the level of engagement, but the balance between pride, advocacy, intent to stay, and accomplishment. Understanding that balance allows leaders to reinforce what is working, address what is not, and build cultures where engagement becomes both a signal of health and a driver of performance.

# The Anticipation of Success

## Why Anticipation Matters

Engagement is inherently forward-looking. It grows when employees see a clear link between their effort and the success they value most. When people believe their work contributes to something meaningful, they persist through challenges and recover more quickly from setbacks.

When that sense of anticipation fades because of uncertainty, inconsistency, or loss of trust, engagement begins to collapse. Employees withdraw energy and creativity when they no longer believe their effort will make a difference.



# Removing Barriers to Anticipated Success

Many organizations unintentionally create conditions that weaken employees' ability to anticipate success. These barriers often stem not from lack of effort, but from lack of clarity, consistency, or belief in the possibility of progress.

## Common Barriers to Anticipating Success:

- **Unclear direction:** People cannot anticipate success if they do not understand where the organization is going or why. When strategy shifts without explanation, employees lose sight of how their work contributes to larger goals.
- **Leadership inconsistency:** Mixed messages and shifting priorities undermine confidence. Employees need to see alignment between what leaders say and what they do. Credibility is built through consistent decisions that reinforce shared purpose.
- **Lack of recognition:** When effort goes unnoticed, success feels hollow. Recognition provides social proof that progress matters. It tells employees that their contribution makes a difference.
- **Low psychological safety:** Fear and uncertainty make it difficult for employees to expect progress or to voice ideas. Without safety, they are more likely to withhold insight or avoid taking initiative.
- **Fixed mindset:** Perhaps the most subtle but damaging barrier is a fixed mindset; an underlying belief that ability, intelligence, or performance capacity is static. When this mindset takes hold, employees view challenges as threats rather than opportunities to grow. They focus on avoiding mistakes instead of pursuing improvement. This outlook stifles innovation and weakens resilience.

In contrast to a fixed mindset, organizations that cultivate a **growth mindset** help employees view effort as a pathway to mastery. Leaders who model curiosity, learning, and adaptability send a clear message: progress is possible. This belief fuels anticipation because people can see how they, and the organization, can get better over time.

Engagement thrives in cultures that balance clarity with optimism. Employees need proof that learning, feedback, and perseverance lead to progress. When that belief takes root, anticipation strengthens, and engagement follows.

# Engagement and the Employee Value Proposition (EVP)

The Employee Value Proposition (EVP) is the promise an organization makes to its people: what employees can expect in return for their time, talent, and trust. Engagement thrives when that promise is clear, credible, and consistently honored.

When employees believe the organization delivers on its commitments through opportunity, fairness, and belonging, they invest more deeply in their work. When that promise feels vague, inconsistent, or broken, engagement declines quickly, no matter how generous the compensation or benefits.

As [Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory](#) reminds us, pay and benefits are hygiene factors rather than true motivators. Their absence creates dissatisfaction, but their presence alone does not generate engagement. Adding another wellness app or increasing vacation time may earn appreciation, but unless these initiatives reinforce purpose, progress, or belonging, they rarely inspire discretionary effort.

Engagement comes from aligning the EVP with how employees define success.



# The Four Pathways to Anticipating Success

Perceptyx research identifies four broad ways employees experience success. When the EVP helps employees anticipate success on their own terms, engagement becomes more durable.

Pathway	Description	What Employees Anticipate	Risk When Ignored
<b>Affluence (Extrinsic Reward)</b>	<i>Tangible rewards such as compensation, benefits, and recognition.</i>	Fairness and security.	Disengagement if rewards are inequitable or unclear.
<b>Achievement</b>	<i>Progress, accomplishment, and growth.</i>	Confidence that effort leads to results.	Frustration and stagnation if barriers persist.
<b>Affiliation</b>	<i>Belonging, connection, and shared purpose.</i>	Trust, inclusion, and community.	Isolation and burnout if culture erodes.
<b>Autonomy</b>	<i>Freedom, flexibility, and balance.</i>	Control and self-direction.	Anxiety, fear of failure, or reduced motivation.

Each employee values these pathways differently. A single parent may prioritize autonomy, while a recent graduate may seek achievement and affiliation. A mid-career professional may focus on affluence and growth. Engagement is sustained when leaders communicate and act across all four dimensions.

# Personalization: Speaking to Success in Their Language

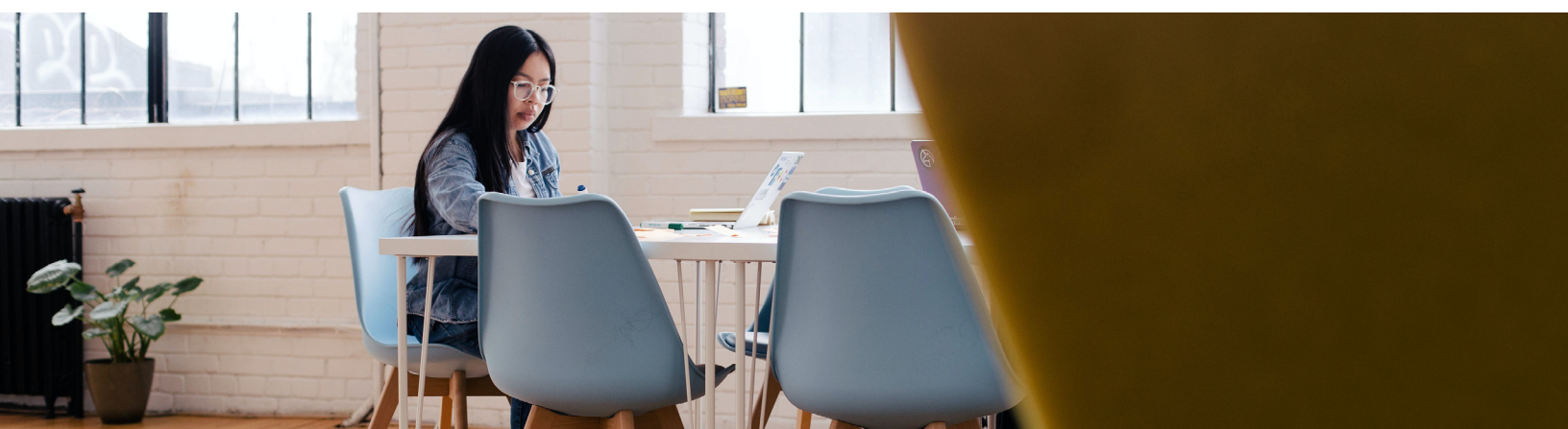
A one-size-fits-all EVP no longer works. Leaders must personalize how they connect the organization's goals to each employee's definition of success.

When leaders speak only in terms of revenue, market share, or aggressive growth targets, they may energize some employees but overwhelm others. For someone struggling with work-life balance, that message does not inspire; it signals more pressure and less control. Instead of anticipating success, they begin to anticipate failure.

**The most engaging leaders make organizational goals personally meaningful. They help employees see:**

- **“Here is how our success helps you succeed.”**
- **“Here is how your contribution connects to something that matters.”**

Personalization does not mean lowering standards or offering constant reassurance. It means communicating with empathy and connecting strategy to the individual experience of progress. When leaders do this well, they strengthen both belief in the organization and anticipation of success.



## About the Author

[Dr. Bradley Wilson](#) is the Global Head of Workforce Insights & Innovation at Perceptyx, where he leads research and strategy to help organizations turn employee feedback into behavior change at scale. Brad partners with Fortune 500 companies to align engagement, culture, and performance using human-centered, data-informed approaches.

His work focuses on how people and technology interact in the evolving workplace, with an emphasis on cultural transformation and leadership effectiveness. Brad's speaking credits include conference keynotes, more than 1,000 executive briefings, and multiple SIOB presentations, including the 2025 Engagement Wars debate on the future of employee engagement.

He holds a Ph.D. in Industrial/Organizational Psychology, an MBA in Innovation and Organizational Design, and a BA in Communication and Leadership Development. His research explores how employees adapt to change, with a focus on cultural alignment and talent retention during transformation. An avid long-distance hiker, Brad often draws on lessons from the Appalachian and Pacific Crest Trails to inform his thinking on resilience, leadership, and performance.



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Perceptyx is the Employee Experience (EX) transformation company helping enterprises turn insight into impact through continuous listening, advanced analytics, and behavioral science. Trusted by one-third of the Fortune 100, its purpose-built platform combines multi-channel listening, AI-powered nudges, and personalized coaching to go beyond surveys and drive meaningful action.

Backed by in-house industrial/organizational psychologists and behavioral scientists, Perceptyx empowers organizations to reinforce learning, build better habits, and fuel lasting performance aligned to both personal and business goals.

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