



Emotional Engagement

What makes some employee groups more emotionally engaged than others?

A study about differences in employee emotional engagement for career stage, gender and tenure.

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Introduction

Insync Surveys – a customer, employee and board survey provider – presents this employee research on emotional engagement. This study explores what drives emotional engagement among workforce demographics.

Many employee engagement initiatives were designed in strong economic times. As the economy slows and money dries up, organisations are also threatened with a downturn in employee engagement.

This study shows that employees in different demographic groups feel differently about what's important to be emotionally engaged with their employer. Differences are analysed for career stage, employee gender and tenure within an organisation. Human Resource (HR) managers aiming to increase employees' levels of engagement can leverage these differences by tailoring initiatives to suit the demographic makeup of their workforce. This helps to optimise resources and maximise outcomes.

Please note that every organisation is different. This study does not constitute advice or recommendations for action. Instead, organisations that need to fine tune their engagement initiatives can call Insync Surveys to discuss their unique situation.

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Key findings

| | |
|---|---|
| <p>Career starters vs. employees close to retirement</p> | <p>There are moderate differences in drivers of emotional engagement depending on respondents' career stage. The career starters and the established career employees in this demographic group showed the most variance compared to the other demographic groups explored in this study.</p> <p>Career starters are more engaged emotionally through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ professional support by their immediate manager ▪ organisation communication about its direction ▪ organisation values and behaviours that they support ▪ organisation commitment to improving operating systems ▪ organisation commitment to high performance ▪ organisation focus on team performance <p>Employees with more established careers are more engaged emotionally through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ trust and respect for their immediate manager ▪ high performance standards for the organisation ▪ understanding how organisation strategies are met ▪ fair HR policies and procedures ▪ their organisation reducing risk and acting responsibly |
| <p>Male vs. female</p> | <p>When looking at gender, there are slight differences between males and females in terms of emotional engagement with their employer.</p> <p>Males are more engaged emotionally through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ the organisation's long term strategies and goals that provide support for their individual performance <p>Females are more engaged emotionally through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ effective processes and procedures in place to support and secure the workplace |
| <p>New starters vs. longer serving employees</p> | <p>When looking at tenure, there are slight differences between new starters and longer serving employees in terms of emotional engagement with their employer.</p> <p>New starters are more engaged emotionally through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ the relationship with their immediate manager ▪ effective communication in the organisation ▪ organisational performance ▪ a customer service culture within the organisation ▪ the organisation reducing risk <p>Longer serving employees are more engaged emotionally through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ the organisation's long term strategies and aims ▪ HR policies and practices ▪ plans and projects for organisational success |



Methodology

The engagement dimensions

The aim of this research is to describe differences in employees' emotional engagement across demographics: career stage, gender and tenure. We use three statements from the Insync Surveys Organisation Alignment Survey to indicate employees' emotional engagement with their organisation. They focus on:

- employees' pride for their work
- employees' level of enjoyment regarding their work
- the extent that employees would recommend their employer to others

We believe these three measures (above) represent two parts of the complex concept known as "emotional engagement". Employee pride and enjoyment of their work reflects the emotional relationship they have with the organisation they work for. We have summarised this as a dimension called "*happiness*". The third point above is about employees' likelihood to recommend their employer; this is a dimension called "*advocacy*".

The measurement tool

Data gathered from the Insync Surveys Organisation Alignment Survey are used as a basis for this study. The Organisation Alignment Survey measures the alignment of an organisation's vision and strategy with the actions, behaviours and outcomes of its employees. Organisations including those going through significant leadership changes or those adapting to new market pressures use the tool to take stock and then devise the best path for a sustainable high performance future.

The Organisation Alignment Survey is more comprehensive than other employee opinion and satisfaction surveys as it deals with areas that are necessary for sustainable high performance. Despite being more comprehensive than other surveys, the Organisation Alignment Survey takes only 20 minutes for respondents to complete online.

Correlation analysis

Correlation analysis, a research technique, has been used to measure how two variables relate to each other. High correlations signal a strong relationship between two variables. For example, a strong positive correlation between employees' pride for their work and being rewarded and recognised by their immediate manager may exist. This would mean that employees who perceive their manager to demonstrate an increase in reward and recognition will also suggest an increase in pride for their work.

Differences in correlations across demographics have been calculated between our three measures of emotional engagement and other statements in the Organisation Alignment Survey that indicate organisation alignment. The larger the difference in correlation in demographic groups, the more the respective alignment statement reflects a unique driver of one group's emotional engagement.

Reading the figures

The three measures of emotional engagement – feeling proud, enjoying work and likelihood to recommend – were measured on a seven-point scale of agreement. By aggregating employee ratings of one to three and ratings five to seven, we can group the percentage of positive and negative responses. The figures within this report describe the distribution across the ratings and are shown as positive (green), negative (red) and neutral (beige) for all three areas.



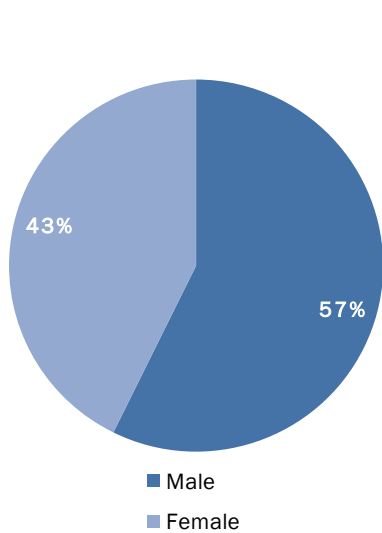
About the sample

The sample of over 14,000 employee responses from more than 70 organisations is from Insync Surveys' benchmark databases, which collectively contain the responses of more than 750,000 people. The responses are from between 2004 and 2008.

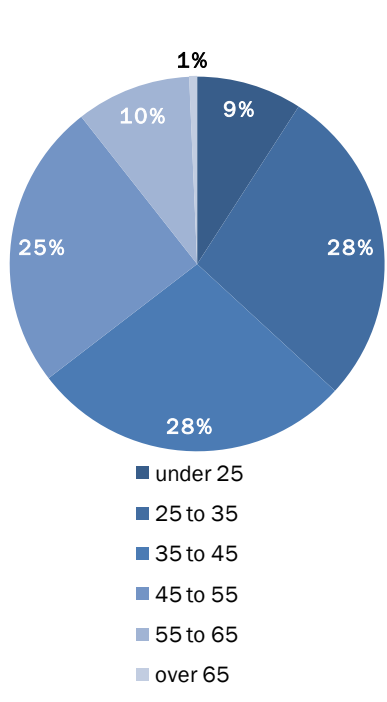
A range of organisations are covered, including not-for-profit organisations and those from the public and private sectors. Most industries are represented, including logistics, health care, education, government, resources, finance, tourism, professional services, manufacturing and research.

Data were collected in line with the privacy policy of Insync Surveys. This policy informs survey invitees that their responses may be used for the purposes of research. It also guarantees that their identity will not be linked to their responses.

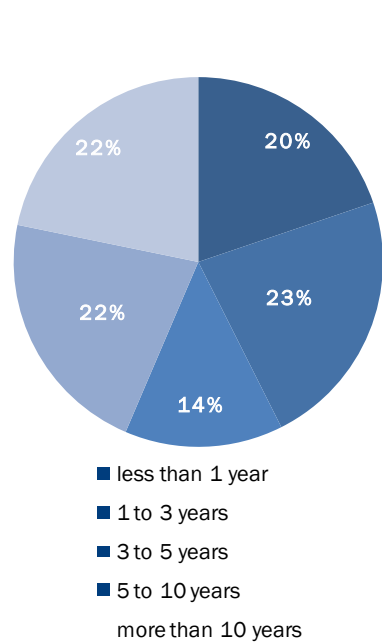
Population distribution by gender



Population distribution by age



Population distribution by tenure





Why emotional engagement is important

In times of economic doom and gloom, employee engagement can drop off because employees lose confidence and become fearful about the organisation's future. If there have been staff redundancies within an organisation or targets aren't being met, there can be a downward spiral effect on employee productivity which can further eat into organisation performance. However, when employees are emotionally and psychologically engaged with an organisation, it will perform more effectively. This has a flow on effect as employees become even more engaged. People take stronger ownership when they're involved in the organisation's improved performance and future development. They also become more enthusiastic and supportive about what's happening in their work environment. With the global financial crisis at our doorsteps we need employees on board now more than ever.

Research found that employees' engagement demonstrates a positive influence on the key areas of customer engagement, improving sales and profit as well as decreasing costs (Lockwood 2006, Flemming & Asplund 2007). Engaged workgroups are more productive, more profitable, better at engaging customers, less likely to leave the organisation, less likely to be involved in workplace accidents, less prone to absenteeism, and less likely to be a source of inventory shrinkage compared to disengaged workgroups (Konrad 2006, Hay Group 2002, Robinson & Hayday 2003, Flemming, Coffman & Harter 2005). Furthermore, the authors provide evidence that employee engagement leads to enhanced organisation performance over time.

To engage employees, an organisation must capture their hearts and minds by sharing and communicating its strategic direction and goals and by rewarding and recognising performance. This stems from effective leadership (Gerard H. Seijts & Dan Crim 2006). Hence, employee engagement is strongly driven by the immediate manager and his or her ability to meet employees' emotional requirements. In this context, it is suggested that people are motivated more by intrinsic factors, such as personal recognition, rather than simply focusing on extrinsic factors, such as pay (Robinson & Hayday 2003). Since employee engagement is an important predictor of organisation performance, it is essential to gain information about what drives employee engagement. This knowledge enables managers to positively influence organisational outcomes, such as growth and profit. ¹

Although we know a lot about the things that influence the general level of employee engagement, we have less clarity about differences between specific groups of employees. This study asks an important question: "What makes people more engaged when specific demographic characteristics apply?" Most research concentrates on how organisational differences affect engagement. However, this study asks whether things about people based on their demographic groups might affect what engages them.

¹ Detailed references available on request

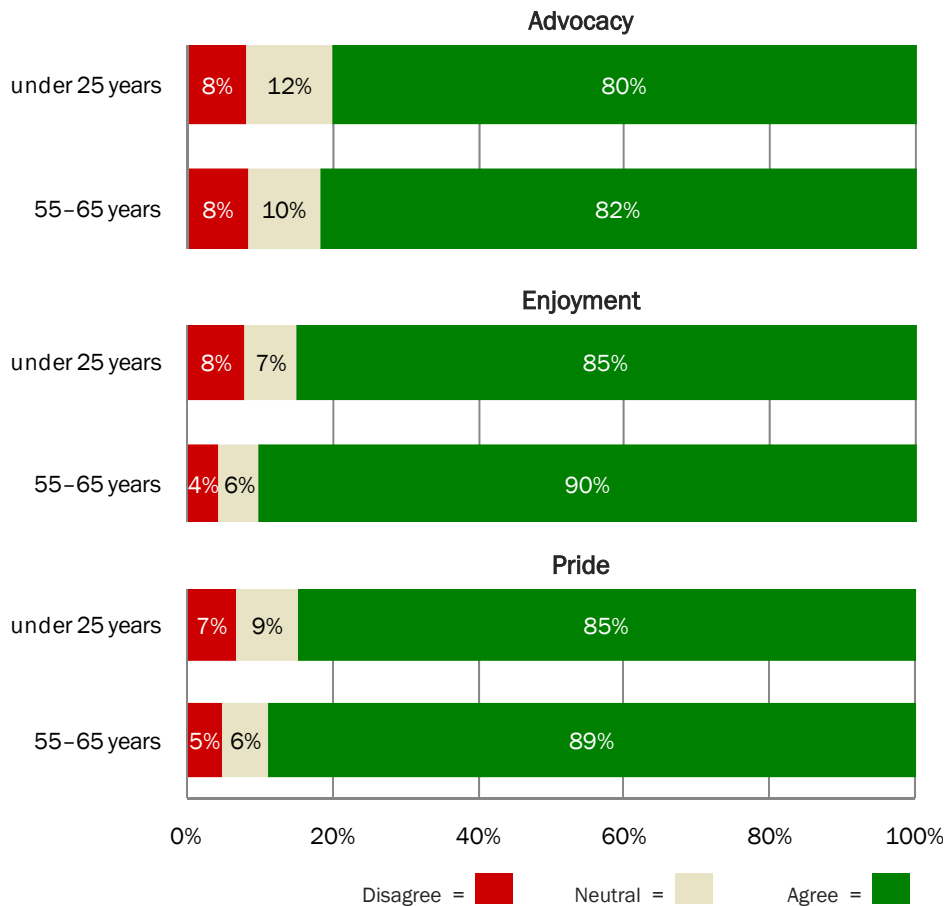


The results: Career starters vs. employees with an established career

The results for career starters versus employees closer to retirement are more diverse than those for gender and tenure, which are reported in the subsequent sections of this study. The difference in emotional engagement between career starters and employees closer to retirement are the largest effect noted in this study. This section shows that career starters' emotional engagement is driven by guidance and structure and that established employees' emotional engagement is driven by relationships and sharing in success.

Engagement measures and levels of agreement by career stage

As we go into the results in more detail, the first demographic group reported on is career stage. The three employee engagement measures based on career stage are shown below in the "advocacy", "enjoyment" and "pride" figures below. The largest difference is in employees' level of work enjoyment. Surprisingly, for career starters aged less than 25 years, 5% of them show lower levels of enjoyment for working with their employer when compared to employees closer to retirement aged 55 to 65.



Drivers of emotional engagement by career stage

We can now look at the correlations between the engagement dimensions, happiness and advocacy, and the alignment statements by career stage.

The level of emotional engagement for **career starters** is likely to be high when they agree with statements about the following topics:

- communication and support of the organisation's long term strategies and chosen values
- professional behaviour of their immediate manager
- effective IT and communication systems
- organisational commitment to high performance and productivity
- systems and processes to serve customers and achieve success
- processes to respond to employee concerns
- the organisation's community contribution
- the organisation's focus on growth
- a strong organisation focus on their work group, particularly in terms of measuring and improving performance

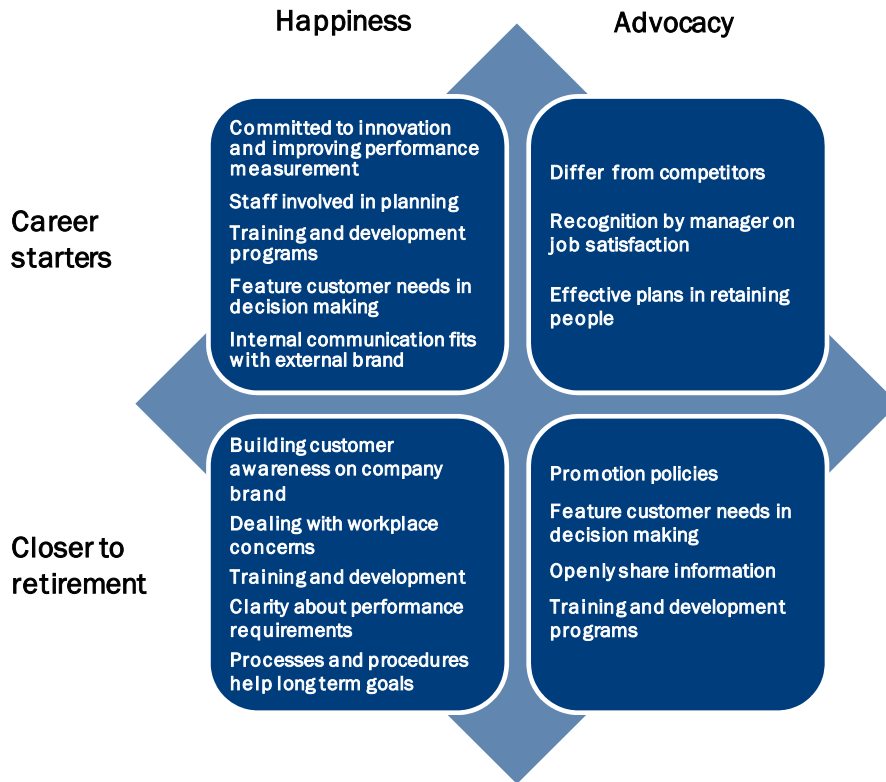
The points above are relevant to *both* the happiness and advocacy dimensions of emotional engagement.

The things that encourage emotional engagement of employees who are **closer to retirement** are different to those listed above for career starters. The emotional engagement for employees closer to retirement is more closely related to:

- having high performance standards for the organisation
- understanding how the organisation's long term strategies will be met
- a perception that long term organisational goals and customer strategies help achieve the organisation's growth plans
- the organisation sharing information, knowledge and facilitating collaboration
- clarity about the organisation's values and behaviours
- trust and respect for their immediate manager
- successful communication and management of organisational change
- appropriate HR policies and practices (e.g. recognition, reward, promotion policies and professional development)
- the organisation being committed to reducing risk and acting responsibly

Again, the points above are relevant to *both* the happiness and advocacy dimensions of emotional engagement. However, the *unique* drivers of advocacy and happiness by different career stage are shown for the first time in the matrix below.

Correlation-impact-matrix: unique drivers by career stage across different engagement dimensions



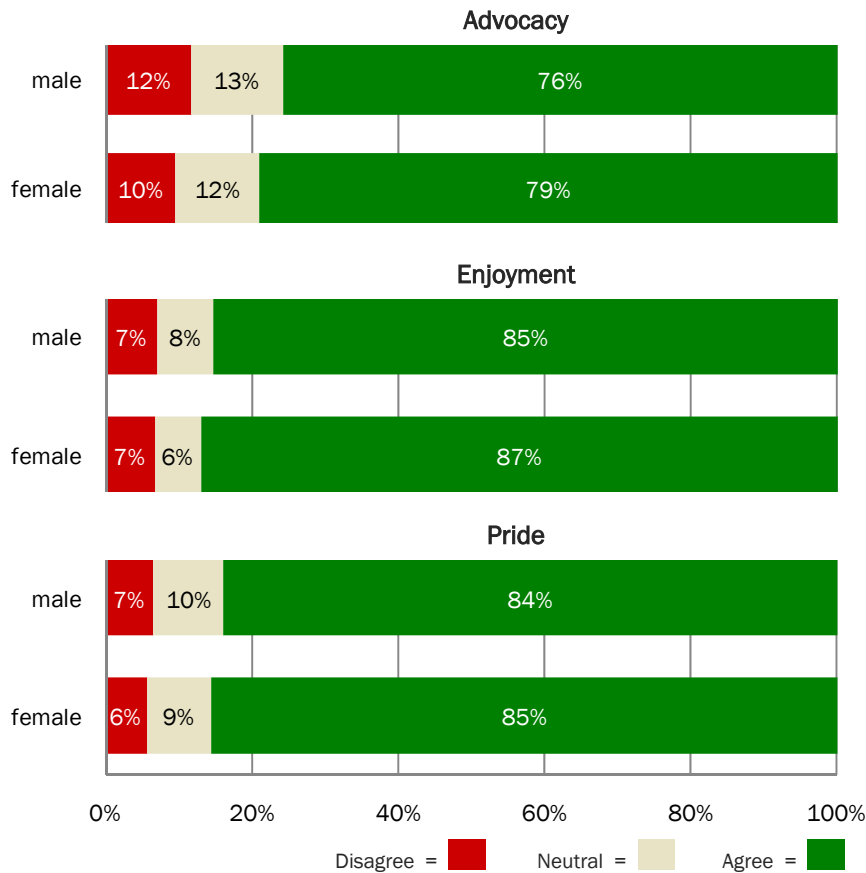
The matrix above shows that if an organisation’s goal is to increase employee happiness in a specific group of employees, such as those closer to retirement, it can focus on the areas that stand out for this specific group. Looking at the matrix above, employees who are closer to retirement are more likely to be happy if workplace concerns are dealt with, customer strategies and brand awareness exists and training and development needs are addressed.



The results: Male vs. female

Engagement measures and levels of agreement by gender

The second demographic group explored is gender. The figures below show that male employees do not differ substantially in their responses towards the three engagement measures compared to female employees. This means that the levels of emotional engagement are similar between males and females. For example, both males and females display lower levels of advocacy compared to the enjoyment and pride areas.



Drivers of emotional engagement by gender

When looking at correlations between the three measures and other alignment statements, we can see the drivers of emotional engagement compared by gender. However, there are only slight differences between males and females in terms of emotional engagement with their employer.

Males are more engaged emotionally through:

- the organisation’s long term strategies and goals that provide support for their individual performance
- strong work group ethics
- strong leadership and management capability within the organisation

This means that the level of engagement for male employees overall is influenced by the organisation's strategies and the extent to which males believe they fit in with stated goals.

Females are more engaged emotionally through:

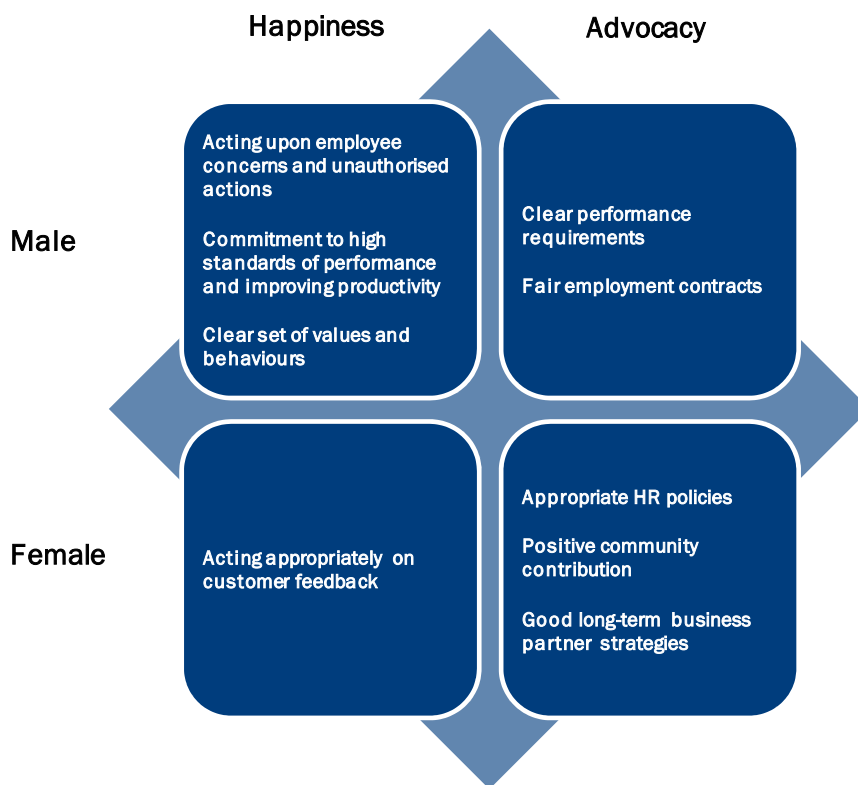
- effective processes and procedures in place to support and secure the workplace
- their work group coping with change
- effective communication systems
- the organisation effectively communicating the brand to customers
- effective systems to serve customers well

This means females' level of emotional engagement is more closely related to the processes and procedures in place for HR, Information Technology (IT), occupational health and safety and the support these areas provide to their working lives.

The points above are relevant to *both* the happiness and advocacy dimensions of emotional engagement.

However, there are other areas that are unique drivers for advocacy or happiness rather than overall engagement. These unique drivers are displayed in the matrix below.

Correlation-impact-matrix: unique drivers by gender across different engagement dimensions



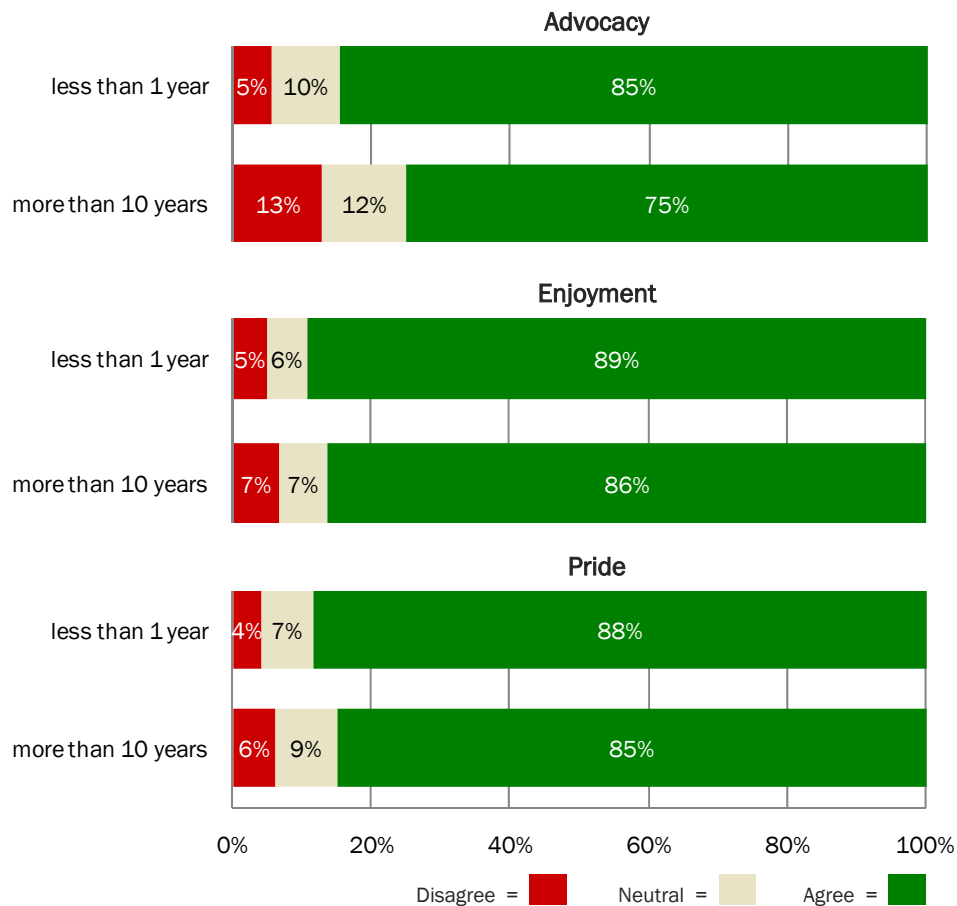
This matrix shows that if an organisation's goal is to increase advocacy in a specific group of employees it can concentrate on the areas that stand out for this group. For example, looking at the matrix above, **female** employees are more likely to recommend their employer if the organisation improves HR policies. On the other hand, to improve female employees' **happiness** a strong focus on customers is necessary.



The results: New starters vs. longer serving employees

Engagement measures and levels of agreement by tenure

The third and final demographic group explored is employee tenure. The results provided are particularly useful for organisations with high staff turnover, such as call centres. Employees with tenure of less than one year in the organisation are 10% more likely to recommend their employer to others than longer serving employees.



Drivers of emotional engagement by tenure

For **new starters** the following areas showed higher correlations with their levels of emotional engagement across *both* the happiness and advocacy dimensions. The group is emotionally engaged when their organisation:

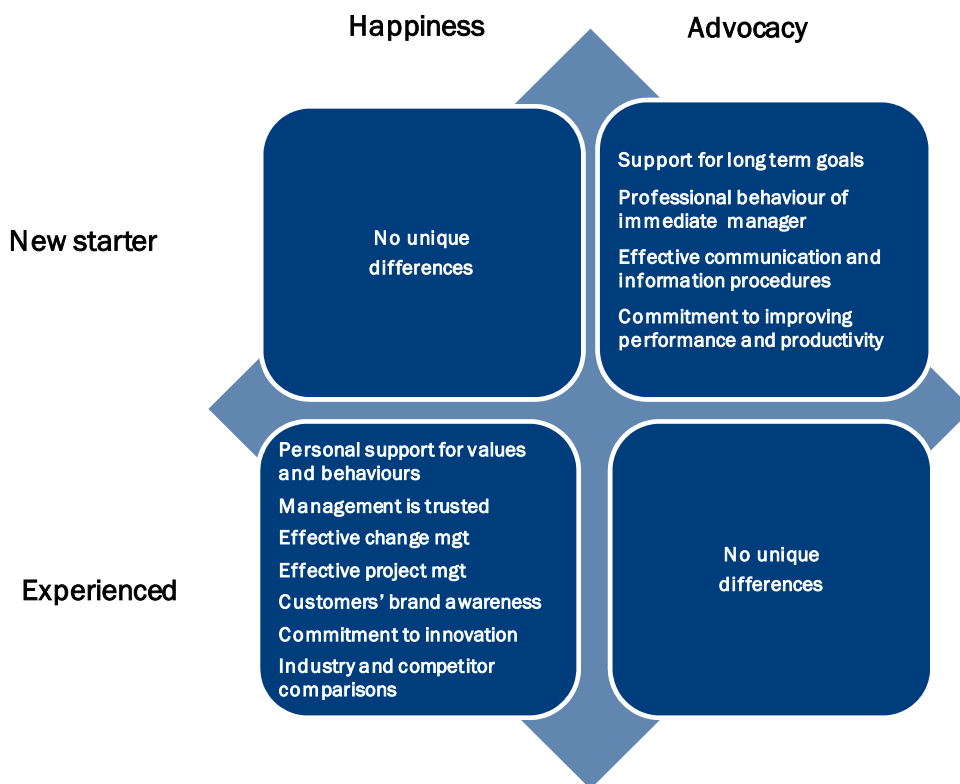
- communicates their value proposition clearly (internally and externally)
- reduces risk of all types
- behaves environmentally responsibly
- has a customer centric culture
- monitors performance towards targets
- brings innovative products to the market

The main things that make **longer serving employees** within the organisation more engaged than new starters are around the organisation having:

- long term strategies and goals
- appropriate HR policies such as selecting, promoting and retaining the right people, and rewards and appraisals
- a strong focus on legislation, regulation and risk policies and procedures
- effective IT systems

Again, the areas above are relevant to *both* the happiness and advocacy dimensions of emotional engagement. However, the *unique* drivers of advocacy and happiness by tenure are shown for the first time in the matrix below.

Correlation-impact-matrix: unique drivers by tenure across different engagement dimensions



The matrix above shows which areas can be influenced for different members of the tenure demographic group. For example, an organisation looking to increase advocacy among new starters may choose to encourage professional behaviour of their line managers, as this is shown to be a unique driver of engagement among this group.

It is surprising that no unique influences could be identified for new starters' happiness or for experienced employees' advocacy. This means that these areas can be addressed by improving the global issues identified for new starters and experienced staff given earlier in this section.



Conclusion

In summary, the largest finding in this study is that career starters' emotional engagement is driven by guidance and structure and that established employees' emotional engagement is driven by relationships and sharing in organisation success. Results for career starters versus employees closer to retirement are more diverse than those for gender and tenure.

Females' level of emotional engagement is related to processes and procedures that support their day-to-day working life, while males show higher levels of engagement when long term strategies and goals provide direction and also when organisation performance and targets are positively received. However, the interrelations for this demographic group are slight.

We also looked at tenure. For new starters, their relationship with their immediate manager is important for engagement. Similar to the findings for male employees, longer term employees show a stronger connection to the organisation's long term strategies and plans and to policies and procedures for higher levels of emotional engagement.

Emotional engagement is an intangible asset. Intangibles such as people and brand make up a large part of share market valuations and can't be ignored. Employees' emotional engagement influences an organisation's performance and success but it's not a stand-alone measure. Instead, engagement shows strong interrelation with other factors of organisational alignment. These linkages can differ between specific demographic groups – career stage, gender and tenure – and across the happiness and advocacy dimensions of emotional engagement. This shows that for each demographic group the most important things in predicting emotional engagement can vary.



Implications for organisation performance

If an organisation improves performance, the outcome is profit not employee engagement.

The Insync Surveys Organisation Alignment Survey has performance measures that are important to employees but also benefit the organisation. It is important to understand which of these performance measures are most highly linked with overall emotional engagement, and therefore performance outcomes. Leaders can also decide what's important based on their workgroup's demographic breakdown. This information is essential when determining where to direct company resources. The best method for organisations is to collect data with a survey and choose their most important performance dimensions, based on the demographic breakdown of their workforce.

This study shows that even an outcome variable such as emotional engagement contains different components which are partly influenced by very specific areas of organisational alignment. When implementing actions for improving performance, organisations can recognise the different factors that improve emotional engagement.

This study shows that employees engage differently depending on their career stage, gender and tenure. While gender and tenure show only small differences in what is important to them with regard to their level of emotional engagement, the stage of employees' career shows a stronger effect than the other two demographic groups.

For organisations seeking to improve their employees' emotional engagement it is important to take the demographic differences explored in this study into account when implementing action plans. A diverse strategy addressing the specific needs of the different demographic groups within the organisation will maximise emotional engagement. Managers can see variability as a friend rather than an inhibitor for improving performance. Without any doubt, managers using knowledge about variations between groups of employees when implementing change will help their people be more successful in achieving overall organisational goals.



About Insync Surveys

Insync Surveys is a 2009 *BRW* Fast 100 company with a range of leading edge integrated benchmarked stakeholder surveys. Our surveys are distributed in over 40 countries and in over 15 languages and include surveys for employees, customers, boards, board committees and many other organisational stakeholders.

Insync Surveys has carried out surveys for some of the largest organisations in Asia Pacific and has offices or representatives in Australia, Asia, North America and the Europe. Insync Surveys' technology also powers the surveys of Board Benchmarking.



Contact us

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