

# 20 employee engagement survey questions every company should ask

by Alexis Croswell

When I asked my dad how he'd define employee engagement he said, "It's allowing employees to feel a part of the system. Making them feel ownership of their work."

I polled another friend and she said, "It's simply employee happiness. Do people feel good about showing up to work?"

If you were asked to define employee engagement, what would you say?

**I'm sure you'd agree that it's not just defining, but truly understanding employee engagement, that has become a top priority for today's HR leaders.**

But, it's still important to have a working definition, right?

Here's ours:

Employee engagement represents the levels of enthusiasm and connection employees have with their organization. It's a measure of how motivated people are to put in extra effort for their organization, and a sign of how committed they are to staying there. Importantly, employee engagement is an outcome that depends on the actions of an organization, particularly the actions driven by leadership, managers, and people teams.

In this article, you'll learn:

- Why it's important to measure employee engagement (and how to get started)
- The best employee engagement questions to ask to understand engagement, which you can use as inspiration for surveys in your own company
- Why the question scale of an employee engagement survey matters

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## The 20 best employee engagement survey questions

We launched Culture Amp five years ago to help make the world a better place to work. Our employee feedback platform makes it easy to collect, understand and act on employee feedback. We enable HR leaders to make better decisions, demonstrate impact, and turn company culture into a competitive edge.



Our team of organizational psychologists, data scientists and engineers keep our platform up-to-date with findings from academic and industrial organizational studies, as well as feedback and learnings from our clients. It's our clients, who we call People Geeks, that make all the difference.

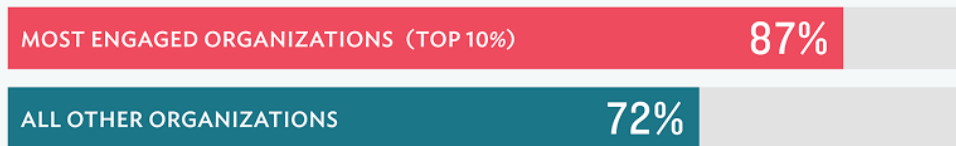
Over the past five years our employee engagement questions have been used in surveys by over 1,000 innovative companies who are putting culture first. Every year, we pull this data together for our benchmark research, providing industry analyses (like our 2017 New Tech Benchmark Report) with up-to-date employee engagement trends. Benchmarks for specific industries and company types are available within the platform.

Our employee engagement index questions have been validated through external metrics including Glassdoor ratings and Mattermark Growth scores. We also use external research on an ongoing basis to identify questions that may be redundant (which are removed) or add questions that address areas of emerging interest.

# Employee engagement matters

Let's take a look at how organizations with employee engagement scores in the top 10% perform compared to all other organizations.

## ENGAGEMENT SCORE



## MATTERMARK GROWTH SCORE

**612** vs **292**

## GLASSDOOR CEO APPROVAL RATING

**95%** vs **80%**



## EMPLOYEES WHO WORK AT THE MOST ENGAGED ORGANIZATIONS ARE:

**20%** more likely to recommend their employer on Glassdoor

**30%** less likely to be looking for a job

We've compiled the most effective questions for measuring employee engagement.

Here, we share the 20 questions that you should use, why they're important, and what we see as the typical score across our benchmarks.

## ENGAGEMENT INDEX QUESTIONS

In all twenty of the questions that follow, you'll see typical benchmark scores for each. We used our 'All Industry' data to provide the most general interpretation of each question. However, as our Chief Scientist Jason McPherson explains, "Our data is biased towards New Tech companies, who would typically have higher engagement levels. Indeed that means our benchmarks are somewhat biased in that direction. Culture Amp customers in general tend to be more engaged on average."

With that in mind we've provided interpretation of what the benchmark scores mean, and the general interpretation of a higher or lower score.

These first five questions represent what we call our "Engagement Index." We believe that understanding employee engagement takes more than one question. Our index combines questions that get at the key outcomes of employee engagement.

## 1. "I am proud to work for [Company]"

This question, unsurprisingly, gets at an employee's pride in the place that they work. It's colloquially called the "barbecue test" - would an employee be proud to tell someone where they worked if asked at a barbecue? Scores on this question reflect levels of brand and mission affiliation and can give you insight into how your external brand is viewed by people internally.

The benchmark to this question is 80-90% agreement, which is quite high. However, scores for this question should be high, and a low score (below 70%) is a red flag that there may be concern about your brand internally.

## 2. "I would recommend [Company] as a great place to work"

This is our version of the [Employee Net Promoter Score](#) question, which we believe is important to include in our engagement index. The eNPS was launched in 2003, and some companies use it as their sole indicator of employee engagement. However, we believe it's not robust enough of a measure on its own. Sometimes people might recommend your company but be planning to leave, or they are unsatisfied in their role but would still recommend it because of the high pay or perks.

Our benchmark for this question is again around 80-90% which indicates that people really like the experience of working at their company. Scores below 60% indicate that there may be day to day problems in people's roles or overall concerns about the workplace environment.

## 3. "I rarely think about looking for a job at another company"

This question gets at the present commitment of an employee to your company. It is sometimes a nice reality check for companies that have high scores on the other engagement index questions. People who are truly engaged at work often find that looking for a job somewhere else hasn't crossed their mind. On the other hand, those who are less engaged will find this an easy question to answer.



Due to the nature of this question, it has a moderate benchmark range of 55-60%. 70% on this question would be a very high score. Look for variation across demographics for this question in particular. Note that scores below 40% here are a strong indicator of churn.

#### 4. “I see myself still working at [company] in two years’ time”

This is a similar analysis of commitment as “I rarely think about looking for a job at another company” but with a specific time frame. Employees that aren’t looking for a job at another company still may not intend to stay for another two years. Together these questions give you a picture of present and future commitment and so we can calculate an overall retention index.

Similar to the above questions, benchmark responses for this question are in the 65-75% range. If your score is higher on this question than the one above, you can discount concerns about retention somewhat. However, these two questions tend to move together and can form a good guide for retention.

#### 5. “[Company] motivates me to go beyond what I would in a similar role elsewhere”

This is a discretionary effort question that is getting at whether your company is motivating people to do their very best. In industries where tenure is low anyway (like a seasonal workforce in which scores to “I see myself still working at ACME in two years’ time” would be low without much concern) this question is even more important.

Benchmark responses here are in the 70-75% range, and it’s generally a tough question to score highly on. Scores below 55% are sometimes an indicator that people feel disconnected to the company mission or don’t feel enabled to get things done.



#### L.E.A.D QUESTIONS

After our engagement index, we ask questions about four main factors that relate to employee engagement: Leadership, Enablement, Alignment and Development (LEAD).

You can think of the progression of questions in each of these sections as similar to Maslow’s hierarchy of needs.

For example in enablement, we look at things on the individual role level, broader career level, and overall company level. Basic hygiene needs (those on the individual level) generally need to be met for people to feel that they can reach a higher level of engagement.

## LEADERSHIP

### 6. “The leaders at [company] keep people informed about what is happening”

Communication is important for people to feel any level of engagement with their company. Informing people about what is happening builds a foundation for communication from leadership at the most basic level.

As organizations continue becoming less hierarchical, scores for this question should go up. As it stands, our benchmark for this question is in the range of 65%-75%. If your company’s level of agreement falls below this range, look at how your internal communication takes place and where there are opportunities for improvement.

### 7. “My manager is a great role model for employees”

Rather than asking specifically about the relationship between the manager and direct report, this gets at how people see their manager within the broader context of the company.

Low scores here would indicate that additional training for managers is needed. Maintaining high scores requires you to look at what you’re doing well and how that can be sustained and perhaps scaled up over time. The benchmark for this question is in the 70%-80% range.

### 8. “The leaders at [Company] have communicated a vision that motivates me”

In order for this higher-level statement to become true, people need to feel informed about what is happening (as in question six). Motivation, or a connection to something bigger than people’s day-to-day work, is important for increasing employee engagement.

Benchmarks for this question are in the 65%-75% range and can be impacted by how informed people feel as well (question six). To dig deeper into the reasoning behind this question, look at scores on the “informing” question, if they are both low, start with informing then move towards motivation.

## ENABLEMENT

### 9. “I have access to the things I need to do my job well”

This question is as it seems - do people have the day-to-day things they need to do their work and develop. This is an important hygiene factor, meaning that without this, you can't move forward. We've intentionally used the word “things” instead of something like “resources” or “tools.” The modern workplace is not about necessarily resources or tools.

Benchmark scores for this question are in the 75%-85% range, and scores that fall below that indicate you should look into what things people are lacking when it comes to doing their job. This is where looking at free-text responses associated with the question can be beneficial, as people might give you a direction for action.

### 10. “I have access to the learning and development I need to do my job well”

Going deeper than the previous question, this gets at the specifics - are learning and development opportunities (like training and information, coaching, intellectual and emotional support) there for people? Learning and development is a consistent driver of employee engagement across industries, so how your people respond to this question is important.

Low scores here indicate a lack of learning and development opportunities. Benchmarks for this question are in the 65%-75% range.

### 11. “Most of the systems and processes here support us getting our work done effectively”

We're intentionally avoiding the absolute here, using “most” instead of “all” since even at the greatest company, having all systems and processes working perfectly is difficult to achieve. On top of the things needed to get work done and the learning and development opportunities needed to succeed, is the company-wide infrastructure to enable this all to happen.

Because of the relative difficulty of achieving effective systems and processes, the benchmark for this question is in the lower range of 55%-65%. If you fall below this, it's a clear indication that it's time to evaluate your company's systems and processes and potentially invest in new infrastructure support.



## ALIGNMENT

### 12. “I know what I need to do to be successful in my role”

The first thing someone needs in order to be in alignment with the company overall, is to know what they need to do to be personally successful. Otherwise, they can't move forward at all. This basic level of understanding needs to be in place in order for people to develop their alignment with the company further.

Benchmarks for this question are generally on the higher end, in the range of 80%-90%. Lower scores are a signal that there is misalignment or misunderstanding on the individual level for what actions people can take to be successful. This question is one that can also vary based on a person's team or tenure with your company.

### 13. “I receive appropriate recognition when I do good work”

Once a person knows what they need to do to be successful, they should be appropriately recognized for their achievements. If people don't get any recognition for making progress, it's hard for them to stay motivated.

Scores here again can be influenced by how people feel about the previous question. Recognition is also a harder target for many companies, which is reflected in the benchmark for this question at 65%-75%. Scores below this level indicate that employees are not feeling recognized for their work, and potentially, that they are unsure of the definition of success in their role.

### 14. “Day-to-day decisions here demonstrate that quality and improvement are top priorities”

This is the top of the hierarchy of needs when it comes to alignment. When we initially wrote this question, it was teams of engineers that we had in mind. “Engineers typically have values around doing work that they're really proud of, and the company needs to be aligned with that and demonstrate a commitment to that kind of work,” says our Chief Scientist, Jason McPherson. We've found over time that this same philosophy rings true across departments and roles.

We know that this question is among the top drivers of engagement, particularly in high-performing, financially successful companies. The benchmark for this question is 60%-70%. If you're falling below benchmark here, it's a good opportunity to try out focus groups with your people and dig deep into why those day-to-day decisions are falling short.

## DEVELOPMENT

### 15. “My manager (or someone in management) has shown a genuine interest in my career aspirations”

This is a one-on-one level interaction that builds the basis for people feeling like they can develop at the company down the line. It's great when managers have technical competence and can share those skills with their team, but development is arguably more important for employee's success.

If this score is low, either the manager doesn't realize development is part of their job or the organization hasn't communicated to the manager that developing their team members is a key part of their role. The benchmark for this question is in the 65%-75% range.

### 16. “I believe there are good career opportunities for me at this company”

Whether in someone's current role or outside of it, when people feel there are good career opportunities for them, they're more engaged at work. We try and steer away from words like “upwards” or “advancement” - things that connote a higher level. The core idea is opportunities, and those could be at the same level or in a different department. This language is particularly important in less-hierarchical organizations.

We see the scores for this question in the 60%-70% range in our benchmark. Falling below this range can signify that people's perceptions of career opportunities are low. It's up to your company to start ensuring that these opportunities are available and communicate this fact.

### 17. “This is a great company for me to make a contribution to my development”

This question was inspired by author Dan Pink's [idea of mastery](#) - it's about the company making a contribution to your development in your craft or industry. This kind of development is beyond the company, it doesn't need to be related to the bottom line or the company's goals.

This question is frequently one of the top drivers of engagement, and the benchmark range is 70%-80%. Since development is so often driving engagement, low scores here should generally be prioritized. Find out why people aren't feeling that the company contributes to their development, take action on that, and communicate the change to your people.

## FREE TEXT QUESTIONS

18. “Are there some things we are doing great here?”

19. “Are there some things we are not doing so great here?”

20. “Is there something else you think we should have asked you in this survey?”

For all of the questions above, you’re looking to solicit open-ended feedback and give people a chance to provide general comments. Responses to these questions tend to be on more tangible things (like workplace environment) but they can also give you feedback on leadership, development and more. Perhaps if many people feel you missed asking something within the survey, you can include new questions in the future on that topic.

The value of free text questions is that they provide qualitative data in addition to the quantitative data that scale-based questions give. However, even scale-based questions can also provide an area for open-ended feedback, which takes us to a quick note on Likert scales, and why they matter in surveys.

## A QUICK NOTE ON LIKERT SCALES

For all of our questions (except free-text only responses), we use a 5-point likert scale that measures agreement to a statement. You might be asking, “Why five? Why not seven? Why not eleven?!”

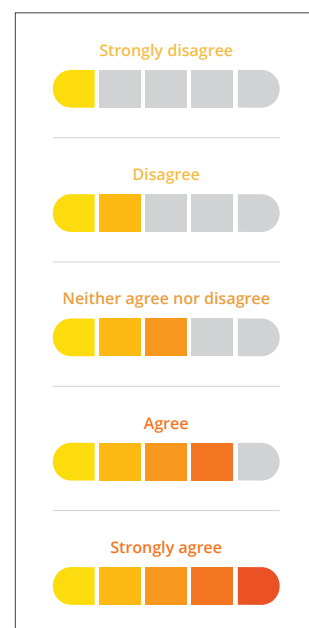
Good question.

There is ample academic research that debates the pros and cons of various different point scales. We’ve found that a 5-point scale encourages survey participation (less choices means it’s faster to complete) and it gathers the right amount of detail. A more detailed scale could add more nuance to your survey results, but we’ve found that it’s sometimes an inordinate and unnecessary amount of detail. A consistent, 5-point likert scale is simple and suits the needs of our people geeks.

### How our likert scale response works

The survey-taker is presented with a statement:

- “I am proud to work for Acme”



They then choose from a scale of agreement with the following options:

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

With a consistent likert scale throughout an employee engagement survey, people will be able to answer questions more easily. The familiarity of the scale takes away some of the stress of answering survey questions. We also think it's important to have levels of agreement rather than just a number-based scale. Everyone will interpret a simple 1-5 numerical scale differently, so your answers will be more varied.

Our questions are all phrased to identify the ideal state (for example again, "I am proud to work for Acme") this further removes ambiguity in answering each question.

In addition to the likert scale, each question has a field to collect open-text responses. We encourage this in all employee surveys because it provides you with quantitative and qualitative feedback from employees.

## WHY MEASURE EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT?

If you work at a small company, you might think, 'Why bother?' when it comes to measuring employee engagement. You can simply ask people how they're feeling when you see them.

At a larger company, you might think, 'Measuring employee engagement takes ages, we'll never get the results in time to make a real impact. We have more important metrics to look at than people data.'

So, why measure employee engagement at all?

With an accurate measure of employee engagement, HR teams can take meaningful action on what matters to people at work. Many organizations want to improve employee engagement because it has positive flow-on effects on things like [performance](#), [retention](#) and [innovation](#).

Employee engagement surveys enable teams to collect employee feedback at scale, empowering them with the right data. Feedback at scale is key, because it represents the collective voices of your employee base, rather than the loudest voices of a few people.



“

Surveys are the  
voice of many

—  
Julie Rogers

Global Head of People & Experience, Culture Amp

As our own Global Head of People & Experience, Julie Rogers, explains, “As an HR leader, people tell me their challenges and I get personal insights. However, the aggregated data through a survey tells me a story reflecting the overall view of where the challenges are. That’s important because otherwise you’re just hearing one voice. Surveys are the voice of many.”

**If you don’t measure employee engagement, you have no way to take informed action on improving company culture or peoples experiences at work.** Without a way to voice their feedback internally, many people take to social media or public review sites like Glassdoor to voice their opinions of their company. Sometimes this feedback is positive, and sometimes it’s critical or negative. No matter the type, most often public feedback happens after someone has left your company. If you’re not providing a way for people to provide feedback internally, you’re missing out on the opportunity to improve your employee experience.

Employee feedback collected through engagement surveys will help to flag problem areas before they become detrimental to productivity and overall company culture. With a regular cadence of surveys, you’ll not only be able to spot workplace issues before they get out of control, you’ll also see what’s motivating people to go above and beyond in effort and to stay at your company.

If you’re ready to collect feedback at scale and take action through employee engagement surveys, having the right questions in your survey is an important step.

## START CRAFTING YOUR ENGAGEMENT SURVEY

In any employee engagement survey we encourage you to use a balance of validated questions (like the 20 we've provided here) along with unique questions relevant in the context of your organization. The more you survey your employees over time, the more you'll be able to see what questions provide you with the best insights for action.

Collecting employee feedback is the best way to start shaping your company's culture. Listening to the voices of your people, then sharing with them what you've learned and how you'll move forward together is a cornerstone of what it means to be a great company today.



### Employee Engagement

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# Ready to get started?

If you enjoyed learning about our employee engagement questions, we'd love to speak with you about getting started with Culture Amp.

[Get in touch](#)

[www.cultureamp.com/contact-us](http://www.cultureamp.com/contact-us)