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2026 Integral Index Finds One in Three "Engaged" Employees Has One Foot Out the Door

Sixth annual study finds engagement scores are hiding organizations' biggest workforce risk and quantifies the cost: an \$11 million swing per 1,000 employees per year.

(New York, June 29, 2026) – Integral, the employee experience agency, today released the 2026 Integral Index, its sixth annual study of the American workforce conducted with The Harris Poll. This year's study, titled "The Engagement Fallacy," finds that the metric most organizations rely on to gauge workforce health is hiding their largest source of risk.

While 76% of American employees qualify as engaged by conventional measures, nearly half say they would consider leaving but are afraid to lose benefits like health care coverage. One in three looks engaged while being held in place by fear.

The study calls this group 'Captive Contributors'. They expect corrosive colleague behavior, including sabotage, leaking confidential information and warning away candidates, at more than six times the rate of their freely engaged peers (38% vs. 6%), and at higher rates than even disengaged employees.

"Engagement has been treated like a strategic scoreboard, measuring feelings rather than behavior," said Ethan McCarty, founder and CEO of Integral. "Many employees are in their jobs because they fear leaving, and that predisposition carries a price tag that can run into the nine figures. Meanwhile, intentionally cultivating better employee experiences can net employers enormous financial and reputational benefits."

"Six years of fielding this study has given us an unusually durable view of the American employee experience," said Wendy Salomon, Head of Reputation at The Harris Poll. "This year, more than ever, the data shows quantified examples of what can happen when organizations overlook crucial aspects of workplace dynamics."

Five conditions shape workplace behavior. Trust, Manager Activation and Freedom to Speak Up lift the employee experience; Job Lock and AI Job Concern drag it down. Each condition shifts predicted workplace behavior by 20 to nearly 60 percentage points.

Managers are both the biggest lever and the most neglected. Manager Activation raises expected supportive behavior (like 'defend the organization if it faces a crisis' or 'post positive reviews') by 55 points, more than any other condition. Yet nearly every form of manager support

in employee communications declined year over year.

AI fear shows up in behavior. Employees worried AI will replace their jobs expect corrosive colleague behavior at 39%, versus 10% among those without that concern.

Trust influences the experience of change. Employees in high-trust organizations are nearly four times as likely to feel excited about organizational change.

New in this year's Index: the price tag. Integral's fully documented economic model estimates poor conditions cost organizations approximately \$5.6 million per 1,000 employees per year in things like excess attrition and productivity drag. On the flipside is a fully activated workforce that creates approximately \$5.7 million in added value at the same headcount. Scale that to 10,000 employees and the total attainable value exceeds \$100 million annually. Every input traces to a public source; the full methodology is published with the study.

The 2026 Integral Index is based on a survey of more than 2,000 full-time U.S. employees at organizations with 100 or more employees, conducted February 3–18, 2026, weighted to U.S. census demographics.

The study is available for download at <https://www.teamintegral.com/integral-index/>.

About Integral

Integral is an award-winning employee experience agency combining boutique creativity with experienced leadership. Integral partners with clients across industries to develop employee experience as a strategic business driver, focused on transformational change, employee communications and organizational intelligence.

About The Harris Poll

The Harris Poll is one of the longest-running and most respected surveys in American history, tracking public opinion, corporate reputation, and brand health since 1956. As part of Stagwell, The Harris Poll delivers research, analytics, and measurement solutions to some of the world's leading brands. With a global research reach of more than ninety countries, The Harris Poll offers advisory services across sectors to world leaders, CEOs, and business decision-makers with state-of-the-art analytics, real-time software services, and practitioners in marketing, reputation, customer experience, trends, futures, and thought leadership/research-for-public release. The Harris Poll translates shifting social sentiment into a competitive marketplace advantage. The Harris Poll is a Stagwell (NASDAQ: STGW) company. www.theharrispoll.com.

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