

A stylized sun graphic with a face, split vertically. The left side is light blue with a white circle for an eye. The right side is white with a light blue circle for an eye. The sun has several light blue triangular rays on the right side. The background is a mix of teal and light blue geometric shapes.

INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS AND WELLBEING

An overview of compelling new research
that verifies why we need to keep working
on improving internal communications

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INTRODUCTION

Terminology like employee engagement, wellbeing and even internal communications wasn't widely used within organisations until fairly recently.

This report provides an overview of compelling new research that verifies why we need to keep working on improving internal communications.

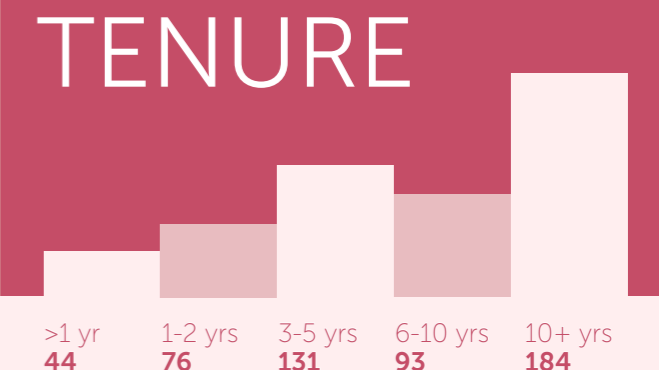
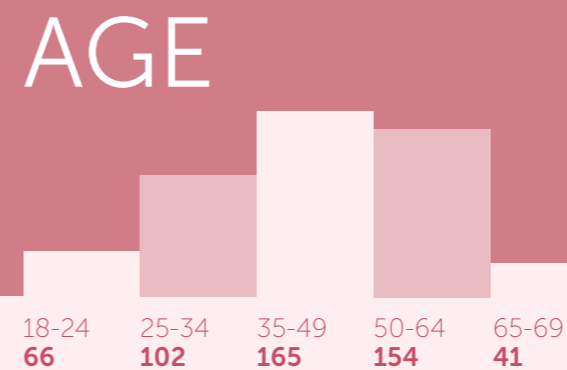
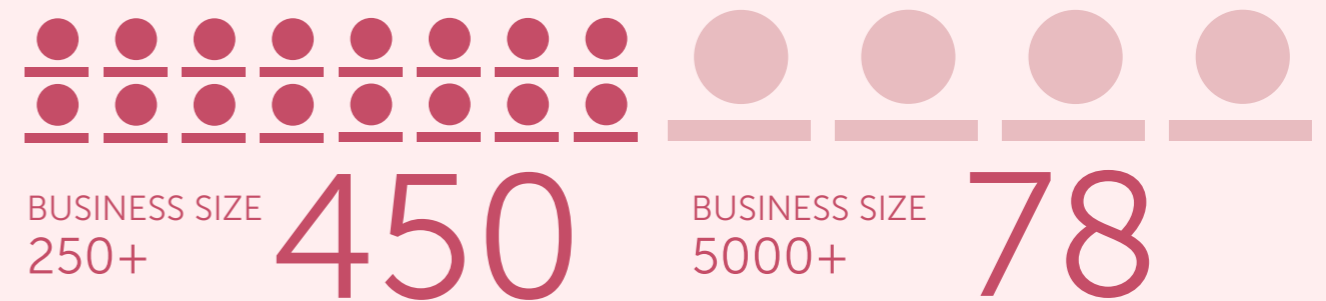
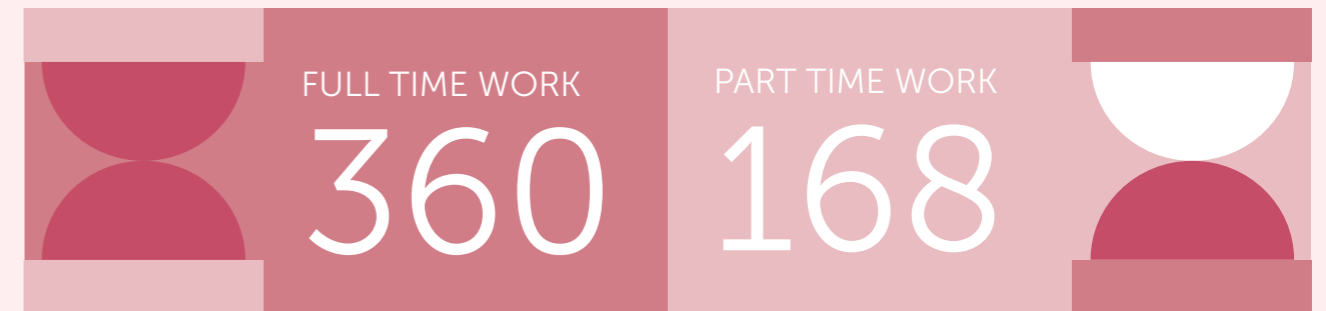
It also demonstrates the extent of the impact that good and poor communication can have across many different aspects of the employee experience.

But did we really need these terms to know it was desirable for people to feel valued, recognised and connected with the company they worked for? Or that it was right and worthwhile for employees to do what was asked of them whilst being able to stay healthy, both physically and psychologically?

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Luckily it is no longer considered acceptable for people to wear stress like a badge of honour at work, and it is encouraging to witness more attention being focused on employee wellbeing. But what role can and does internal communication play in relation to wellbeing?

This independent research was carried out by Research Now. All 528 respondents were based in the UK, with a representative sample across gender, age, job roles and tenure.

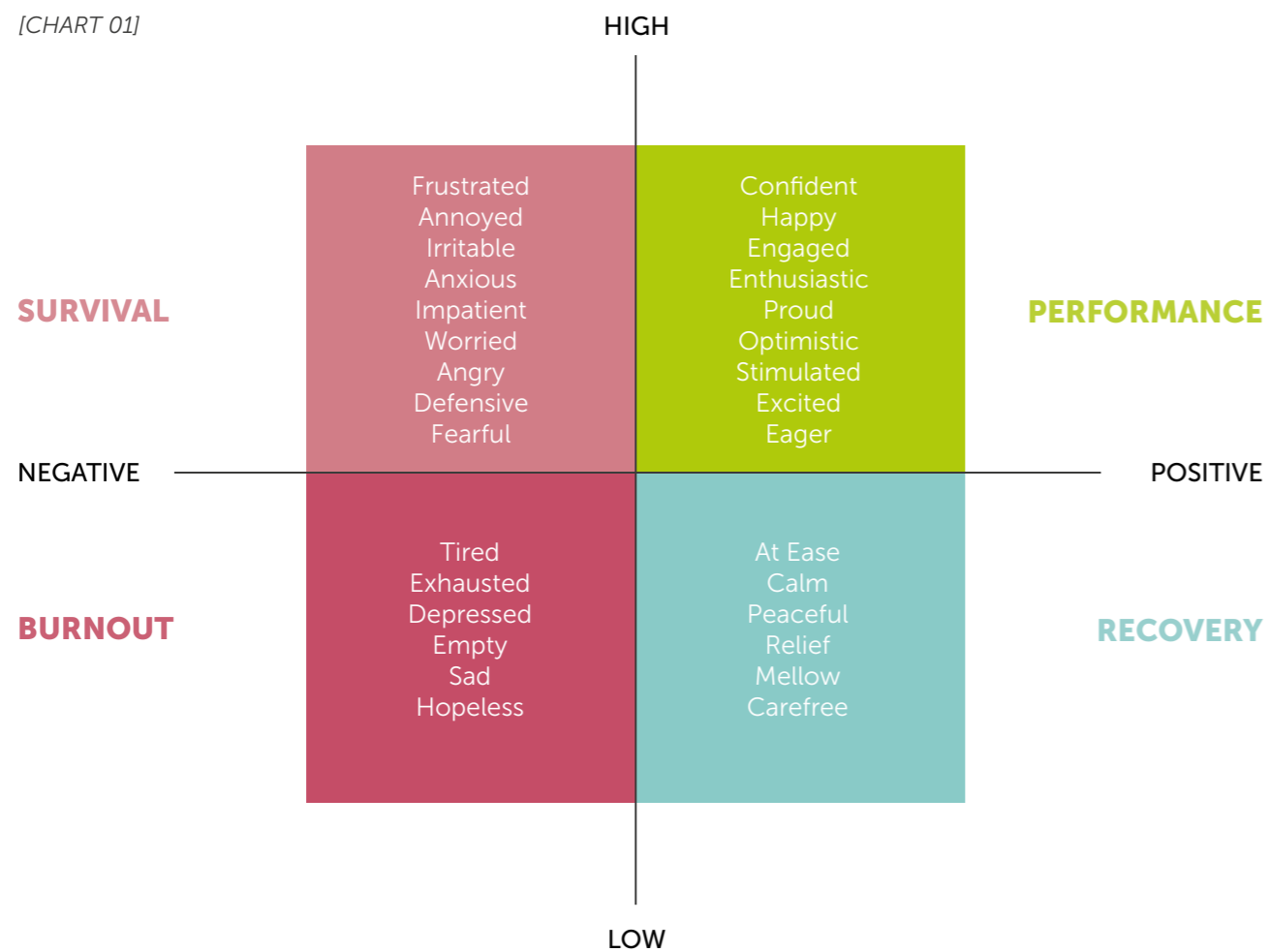


APPLIED POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY

The wellbeing aspects of the research were built around an applied model from the field of positive psychology.

The premise of the model is that people need to find productive ways to manage their emotional states to ensure they remain healthy and productive.

[CHART 01]



The range of emotions we may experience are considered to be either high or low in their intensity, and positive or negative in their impact on our state of wellbeing.

So for instance, there are a range of emotions present when we are in optimal performance mode, which include feeling confident, enthusiastic and eager. However, these emotions are not infinite and can be difficult to sustain over longer periods of time.

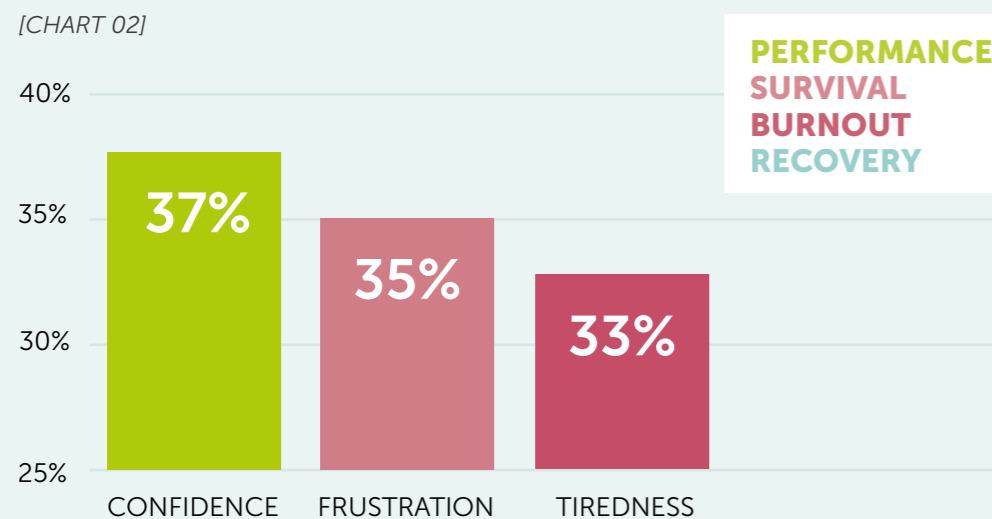
We must actively shift out of the high intensity emotions and into lower intensity emotions to allow a period of re-charge or 'recovery'. Finding the right balance between these high and low intensity emotions is

paramount to staying healthy and for enhancing our longer term wellbeing.

If we don't allow ourselves or fail to create the conditions to experience 'recovery' emotions, we will gradually find ourselves experiencing the types of emotions associated with 'survival' – emotions such as frustration, anxiety and defensiveness. If we continue to operate predominantly from the survival zone emotional states, and do not find time for recovery, then the likelihood of ultimately experiencing emotions associated with burnout increases.

01. WHAT EMOTIONS ARE PEOPLE EXPERIENCING MOST REGULARLY AT WORK?

Respondents were asked: which of the following emotions do you **regularly** experience at work. Here are the top three responses:



The top response was a high intensity/positive emotion – one which would be associated with the performance zone: 37% saying that they regularly feel confident.

However, the next two most regularly experienced emotions were from the survival and burnout zones: 35% feeling frustrated (survival) regularly, and 33% feeling tired (burnout).

That's not surprising in itself. Of course we will all feel all these emotions at some point. Most of us can probably relate to feeling frustrated or tired at work at certain points in our life and career.

But the key thing is, people were asked how they **regularly** feel. And clearly, if you are regularly feeling frustrated and tired, then that will have a negative impact on your state of wellbeing.

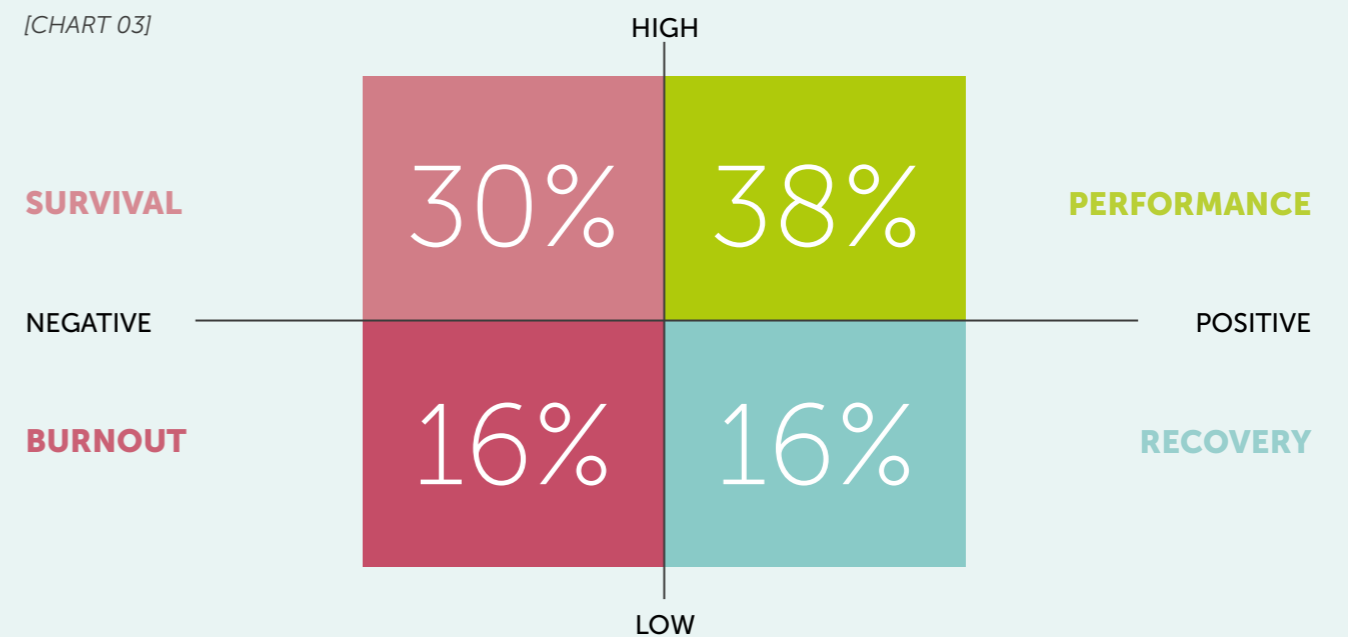
To experience high levels of wellbeing, we would expect employees to be regularly feeling the emotions on the right hand side of the model, shifting as required between the high and low positive emotions (performance and recovery). And at the same time, avoiding or preventing the emotions on the left hand side of the model (survival and burnout).

Here's the spread of emotions across the different zones as a total sample [CHART 03].

As you'll see, 38% of the respondents regularly experience performance related emotions;

30% survival related emotions; 16% burnout emotions; and 16% recovery emotions.

This is far from an ideal picture. Overall in this sample, almost half of the emotions being experienced regularly at work are associated with survival and burnout. If you extrapolate this to the UK employee audience, it could suggest that almost half of employees are regularly experiencing emotional states that will be negatively impacting their state of wellbeing.



02. WHAT IMPACT DOES COMMUNICATION HAVE ON WELLBEING?

Employees were asked to rate the quality of the internal communications within their organisations across a range of factors from quality and frequency to relevance and accessibility.



Good, or very good **40%**

Fair **40%**

Poor, or very poor **20%**

Overall, 40% of respondents said communications are 'good' or 'very good', 40% described communications as 'fair' and 20% described communications as 'poor' or 'very poor'.

But what impact might the perceived quality of internal communications have on the emotions that employees are regularly experiencing?

To find out, we cross-referenced the assessment of the quality of internal communications with the emotions that employees stated they experienced most regularly.

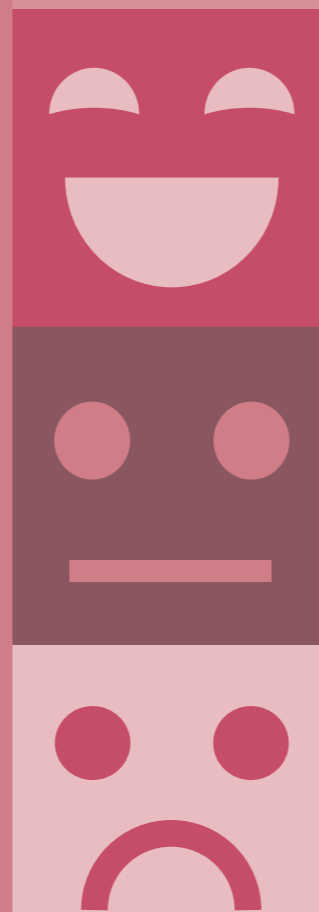
In chart 04, the pink columns represent people who rated their organisational communications as 'poor' or 'very poor',

and the green columns represent those rating their organisational communications 'good' or 'very good'.

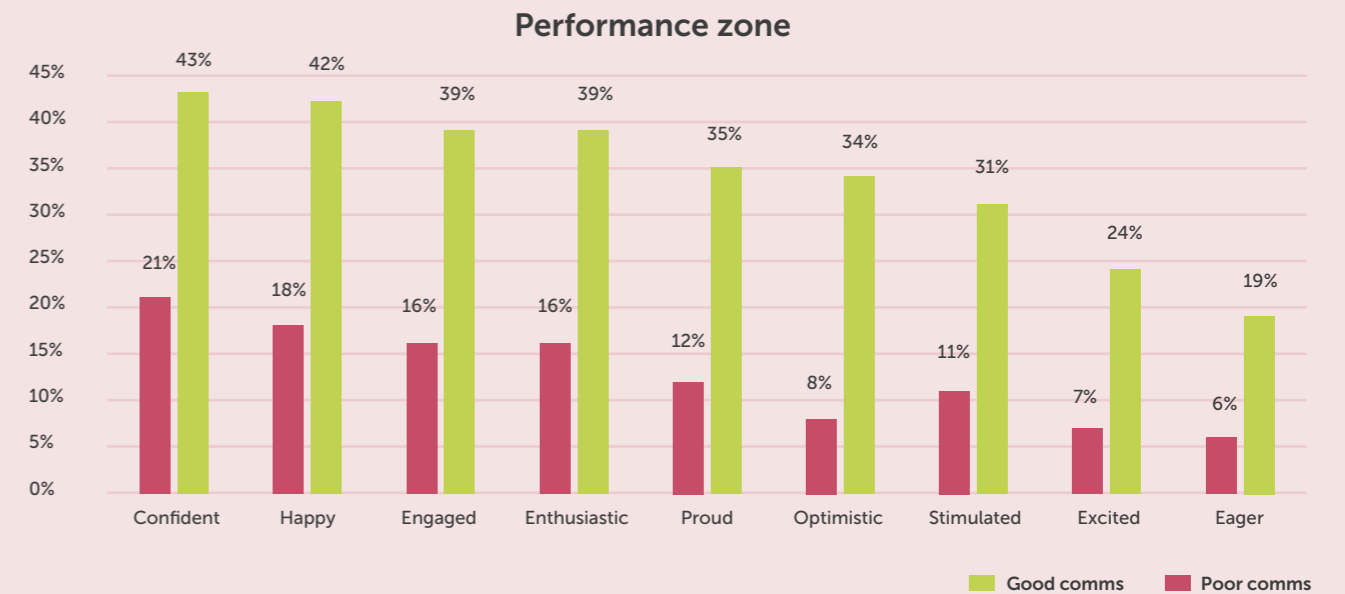
The difference is not only significant. It is compelling.

Those who consider their internal communications to be 'good' or 'very good' are:

- almost twice as likely to feel confident;
- two and half times more likely to feel happy, engaged and enthusiastic;
- almost three times more likely to feel proud;
- and four times more likely to be optimistic, stimulated and excited.

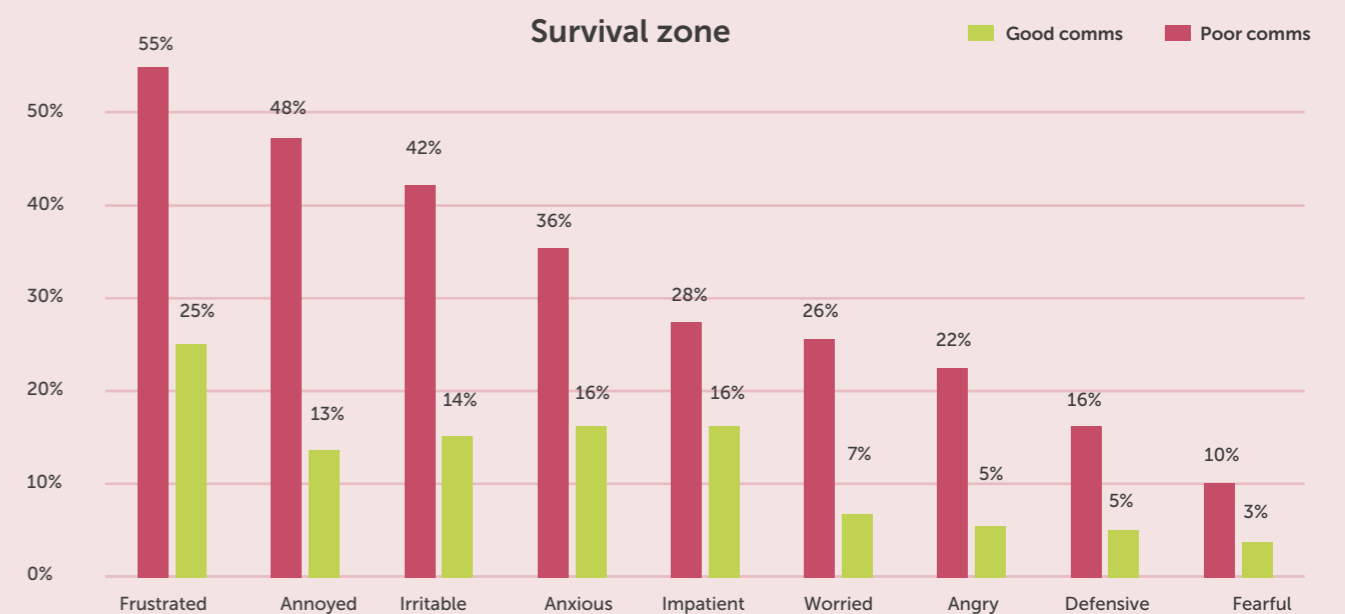


[CHART 04 – Those with good comms far more likely to experience performance zone emotions]



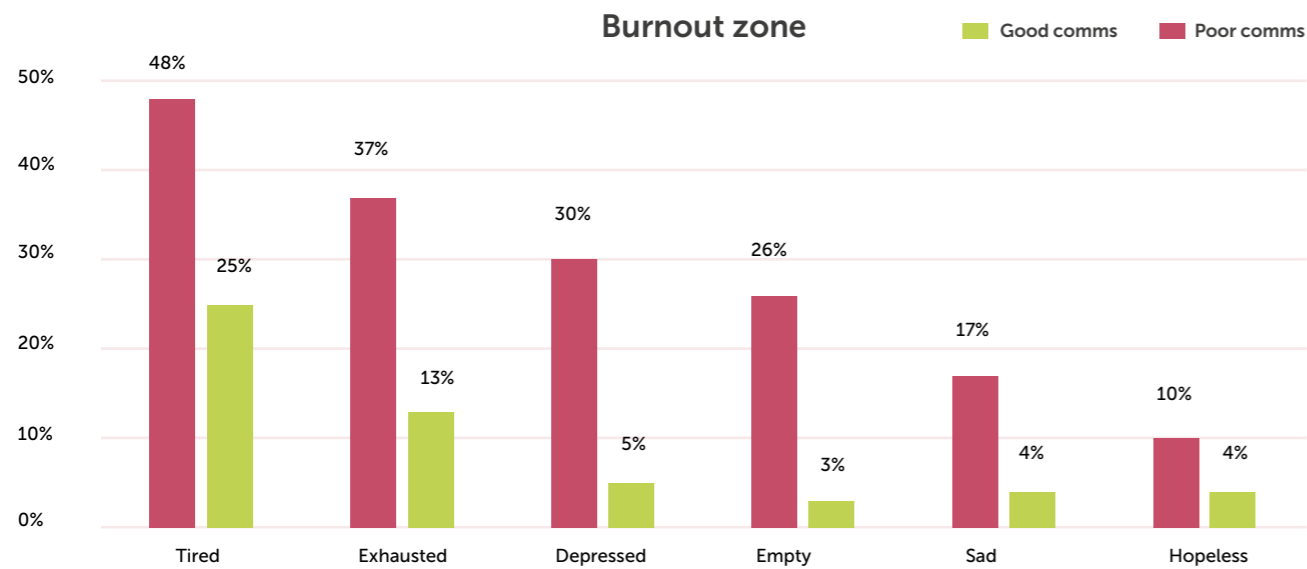
Conversely, 55% of those people who perceive the communications to be 'poor' or 'very poor' regularly feel frustrated. They are almost four times more likely to feel annoyed, and significantly more likely to feel irritable, anxious, impatient and worried [CHART 05].

[CHART 05 – Those with poor comms far more likely to experience survival zone emotions]



And even more illuminating is that on every measure, those who rated their internal communications as 'poor' or 'very poor' experienced burnout emotions significantly more regularly than those who rated communication as 'good' or 'very good' [CHART 06].

[CHART 06 – Those with poor comms also more likely to experience burnout emotions]



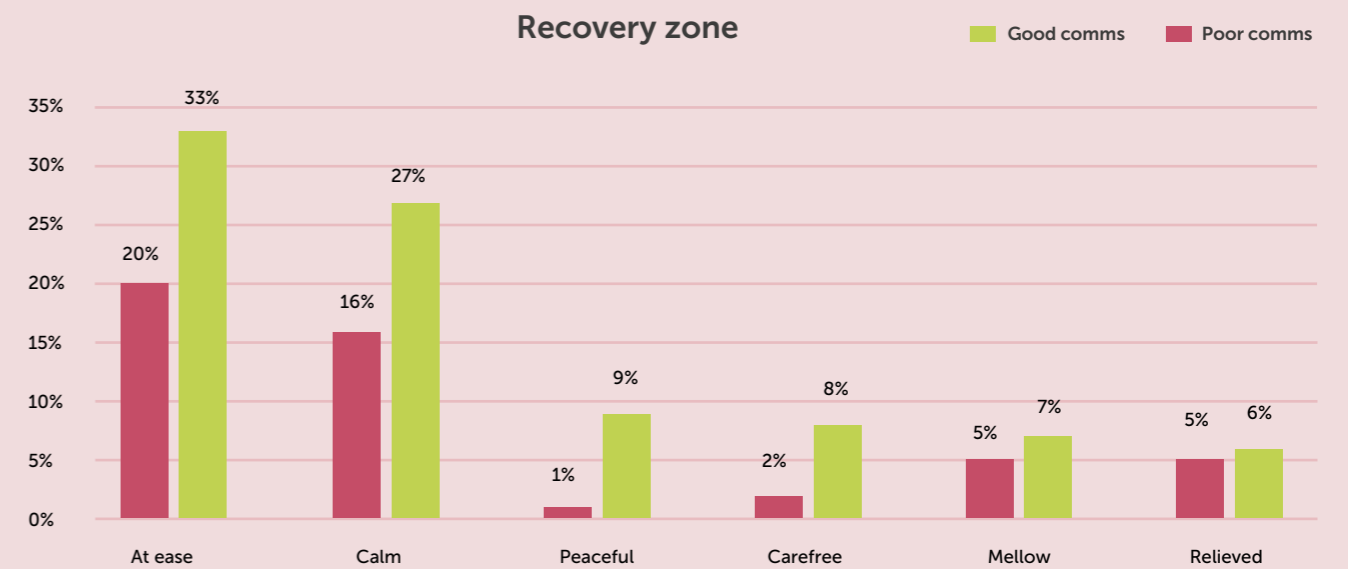
Almost half of those people who described their internal communications as 'poor' or 'very poor' claim to feel tired regularly, compared to only a quarter of those who describe their internal communications as 'good' or 'very good'. And they are:

- three times more likely to feel exhausted;
- six times more likely to feel depressed and;
- eight times more likely to feel empty.

The numbers are robust enough to give us confidence that there is a strong causal link between the quality of internal communications and the affect it has on people's emotional states.

It's also important to note, that irrespective of whether the communications are perceived as good or bad, people on the whole are not experiencing emotions relating to downtime, as demonstrated in chart 07.

[CHART 07 – Recovery zone is a bit more mixed, but those with good comms are more likely to be 'at ease' and 'calm']



03. HOW DOES COMMUNICATION RANK AGAINST OTHER POSSIBLE ENGAGEMENT FACTORS?

We asked employees what aspects of their work experience had the biggest impact on their engagement with and commitment to their organisation.

It included many different factors, from flexible working and salary to CSR initiatives and relationships.

would expect them to rank highly as commitment and engagement factors. So with the hygiene factors taken care of – what then was considered to be most important?

The **top three** are perhaps not that surprising – job security (46%), salary and bonuses (46%) and health and safety (42%). As hygiene factors, we

- 1** Salary and bonuses **46%**
- 2** Job security **46%**
- 3** Health and safety **42%**

[CHART 08 – Top 8 factors impacting engagement]

% strongly agreeing



As you can see from chart 08, the next most important factor was interesting and engaging work (41%), followed by good organisational communications – making communications as important to the respondents as ‘being clear on what’s expected of me’ and ‘relationships with colleagues’.

40% of people strongly agreed that good organisational communications was important to their levels of engagement and commitment.

Good communications was also ranked higher than:

- clearly defined roles (35%);
- flexible working (33%);
- inspiring leadership (28%);
- career development and planning (26%);
- opportunities for growth and advancement (26%);
- pensions and healthcare (24%);

- social interaction (21%);
- design & style of working environment (21%);
- and wellbeing resources (12%).

CSR initiatives were only considered very important by 10% of the respondents.

04. HOW DOES COMMUNICATION RANK AGAINST OTHER WELLBEING FACTORS?

When we asked respondents how important different factors were to their sense of wellbeing, the responses were, on the whole, similar.

- | | |
|--|--|
| <p>1 Salary and bonuses</p> <p>2 Job security</p> <p>3 Interesting and engaging work</p> <p>4 Being clear on what's expected of me</p> | <p>5 Good organisational communications</p> <p>6 Relationships with colleagues</p> <p>7 Clearly defined roles</p> <p>8 Health and safety</p> |
|--|--|

The main difference was that health and safety dropped from 3rd place to 8th – replaced by interesting and engaging work.

Once again, communications ranked highly.

There is a picture starting to form here that strongly suggests that good organisational communication is considered to

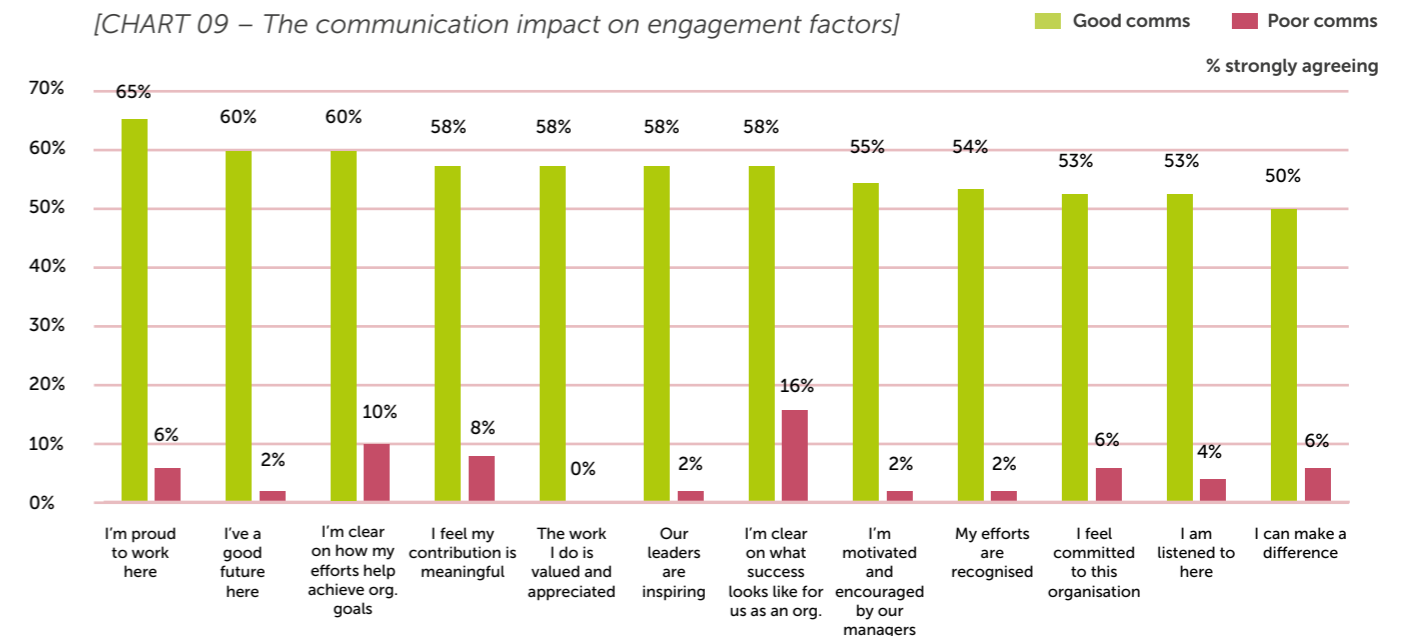
be very important to employees when it comes to their wellbeing, as well as how engaged and committed they feel about the organisation that they work for.

What is perhaps surprising is how highly employees are ranking it above the other factors.

05. TO WHAT EXTENT DOES COMMUNICATION IMPACT ENGAGEMENT?

It is well documented that there is an undeniable link between good internal communications and employee engagement.

[CHART 09 – The communication impact on engagement factors]



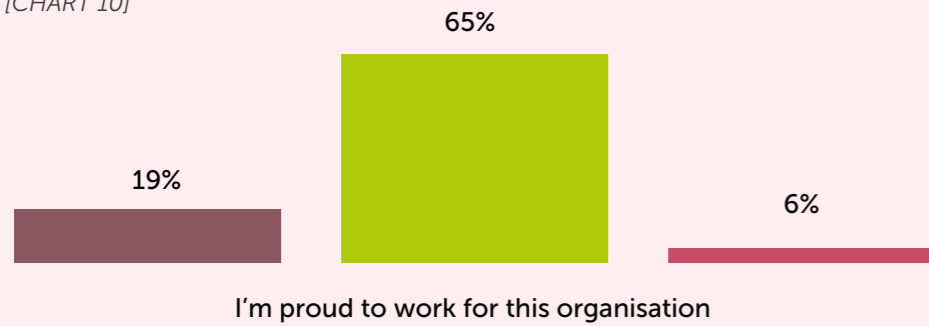
The purpose of this study therefore was not to add to this literature, but to provide further insights into just how much of an impact IC can have.

What we discovered is that on every single engagement factor,

the difference in the way people felt – from pride and recognition to motivation and commitment – is significantly influenced by the quality of the communications in the organisation.

When you drill down further, the impact becomes even more pronounced. For example, let's take a closer look at pride (I'm proud to work here in chart 10). In the overall sample, 19% of people agreed that they feel proud to work for their organisation. Whereas 65% of people working in organisations with good communications strongly agreed that they feel proud. Only 6% of those people who perceived communication to be poor felt proud to work for their organisation.

[CHART 10]



And there was a similar pattern emerging in the way people viewed their future with the organisation.

20% of people in the overall sample agreed that they felt they have a good future with their organisation. Whereas 60% of people working in organisations with good communications strongly agreed.

Only 2% of those respondents who perceived communication to be poor agreed that they have a good future with their organisation – significantly below the sample average.

[CHART 11]



All of this data is showing us that there's an inextricable link between internal communication, employee engagement and wellbeing. And while it's not advisable to stop investing in things like perks and benefits, CSR, personal development and flexible working patterns, it is worthwhile considering internal communications as an essential aspect of wellbeing and engagement.

Knowing the potential impact that poor employee communications are having on the way people feel at work and the benefits that good communications can have on wellbeing, engagement and commitment, it can be argued that communication needs to be elevated as a key aspect in thinking and planning around employee and wellbeing strategies. Not just as a means of communicating a wellbeing plan, but as a wellbeing factor in its own right.



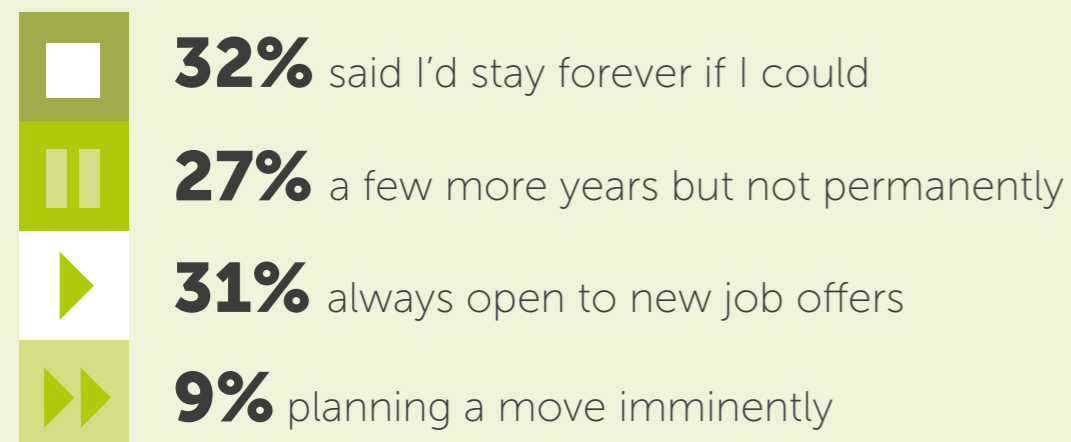
Communication needs to be considered as an essential aspect of wellbeing

06. LOOKING AT COMMUNICATION MORE BROADLY

The study also explored the role of communications in a number of other relevant business factors such as retention, advocacy and business performance.

What is the impact of communication on retention?

Respondents were asked how long they intended to stay with their organisations.



When examined from the perspective of good and poor communications, twice as many people who rated communications in their organisation as 'good' said they would stay forever, versus those who said that the communications were poor.

What is the impact of communication on the propensity to recommend a company as a good place to work?

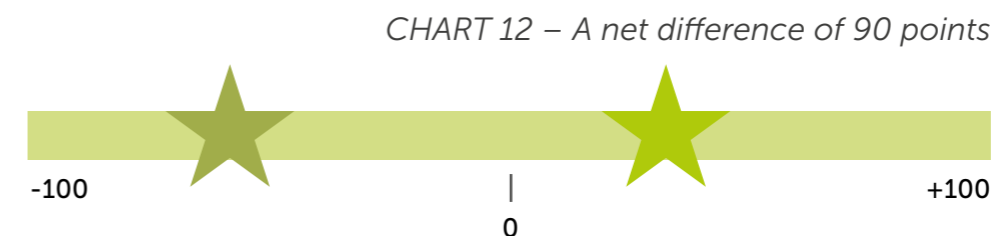
The NPS rating scale was used to highlight the extent to which good and poor communications impact on employees' likelihood to recommend their company as a good place to work.

For those who might not be familiar with the Net Promoter Score, it's an eleven point rating system built on a scale of 0-10. 'Definitely would not recommend' is at the '0' end of the scale, and 'definitely would recommend' is at the '10' end of the scale.

The Net Promoter Score is calculated by taking the number of detractors (those scoring 1-6) from the number of promoters (those scoring 9-10). A score above '0' is considered a good score and conversely, a score below zero is not considered good.

The NPS for those who considered the organisational communications as good was +33. A robust NPS score. The NPS for those who considered the communication poor was -56.

The difference between them is a significant 90 points [CHART 12].



This has far reaching implications in terms of recruitment, talent attraction, reputation and so on.

To what extent might communication impact organisational performance?

The data in chart 13 represents the respondents' assessments of organisational performance.

One might argue that those who think the communications are poor might not even know the answer to these questions. However they did have an option to choose 'don't know' or 'N/A'. Less than 1% chose that option.

On all key performance metrics the respondents were asked to assess, organisations perceived to have good communications were believed to be outperforming those with poor communications, and convincingly so.

[CHART 13 – ROI of good organisational communication]



IN CONCLUSION

If you're reading this report it's likely that you already know communication has a crucial role to play in all aspects of an employee's work experience.

From the relationships employees have with their colleagues and their sense of value and worth, to their levels of involvement, aspiration and motivation – communication is at the heart of it.

This study demonstrates that good internal communications doesn't just impact business performance; it has a massive influence on the emotional state and wellbeing of employees, too. It demonstrates that good communication has a significant impact on retention, and the propensity for employees

to recommend their company as a great place to work.

Good internal communications doesn't just impact business performance; it has a massive influence on the emotional state and wellbeing of employees, too.

This study adds to and supports the growing bank of IC and employee engagement research, providing further evidential data to support the conclusion – that if we're seeking happy, productive, healthy employees to keep our businesses thriving and successful, then we must continue to invest in and improve the way we communicate internally.

