

A stylized graphic at the top of the page features a sun with a face, split vertically into light blue and white halves. The sun has two circular eyes and several triangular rays. To the left, a large teal arrow points upwards and to the right. The background consists of various shades 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

h&h

INTRODUCTION

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

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 have the capability to do what was asked of them whilst being able to stay healthy, both physically and psychologically?

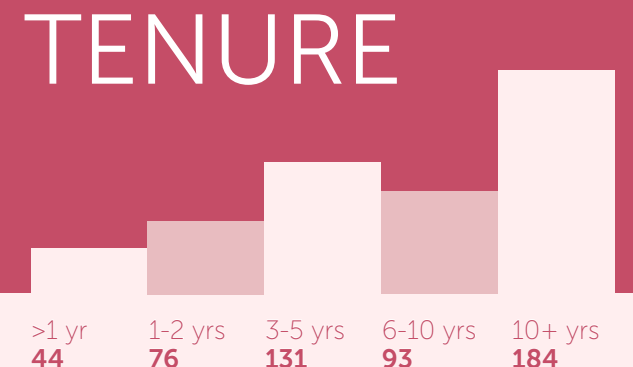
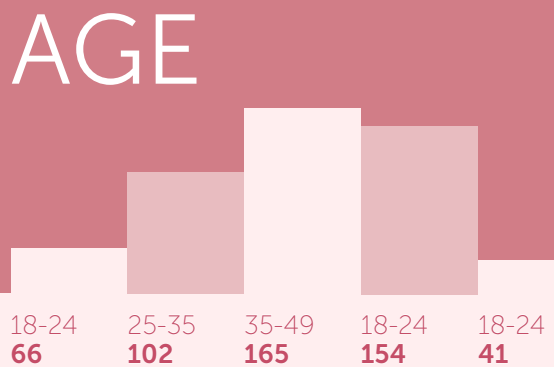
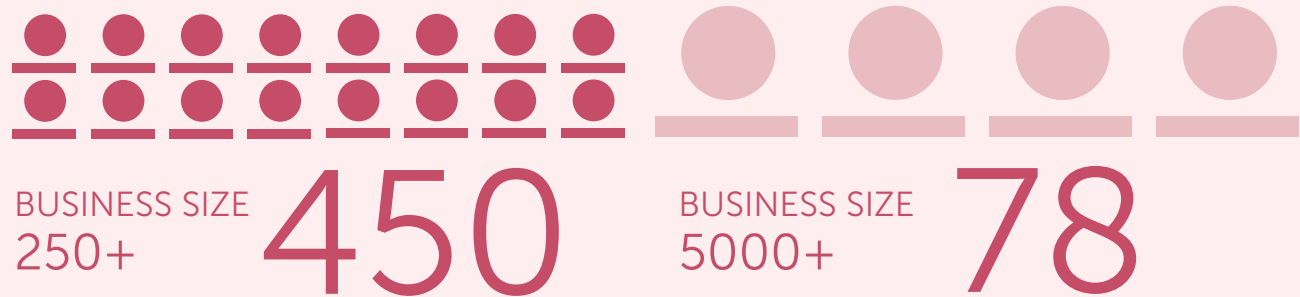
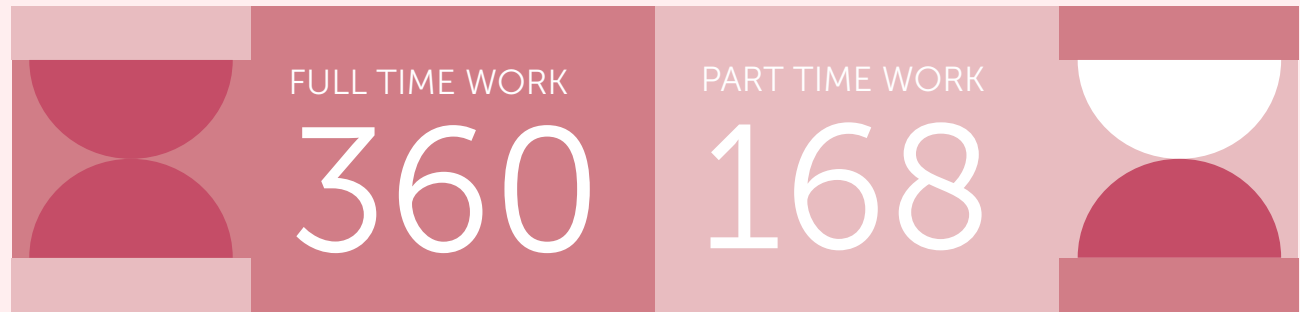
Luckily it is no longer widely considered acceptable for people to wear stress like a badge of honour at work, and it is very encouraging to witness much more attention being focused towards employee wellbeing. But what role can and does internal communication play in relation to it?

This report provides an overview of some 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.

Luckily it is no longer considered acceptable for people to wear stress like a badge of honour at work

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.

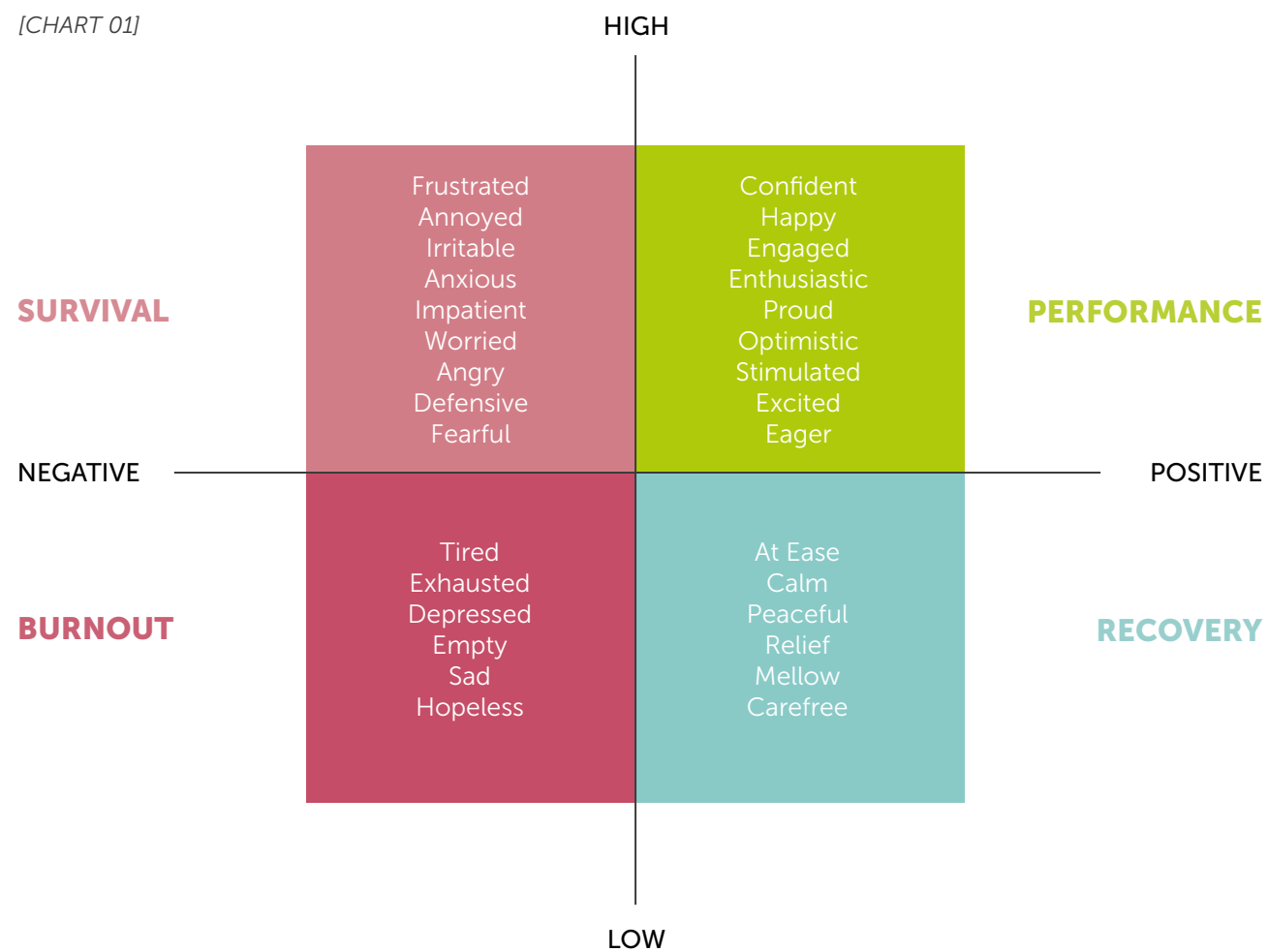


APPLIED POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY

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 daily 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.

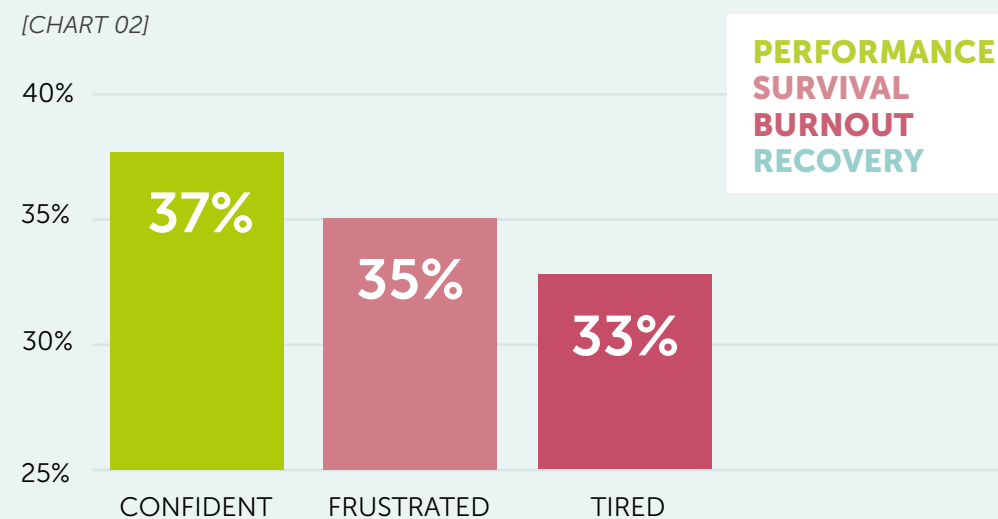
We must actively shift out of the high intensity emotions and into lower intensity emotions to allow a period of re-charge or 'recovery'. Finding the right balance between these high

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.

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. That is encouraging.

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.

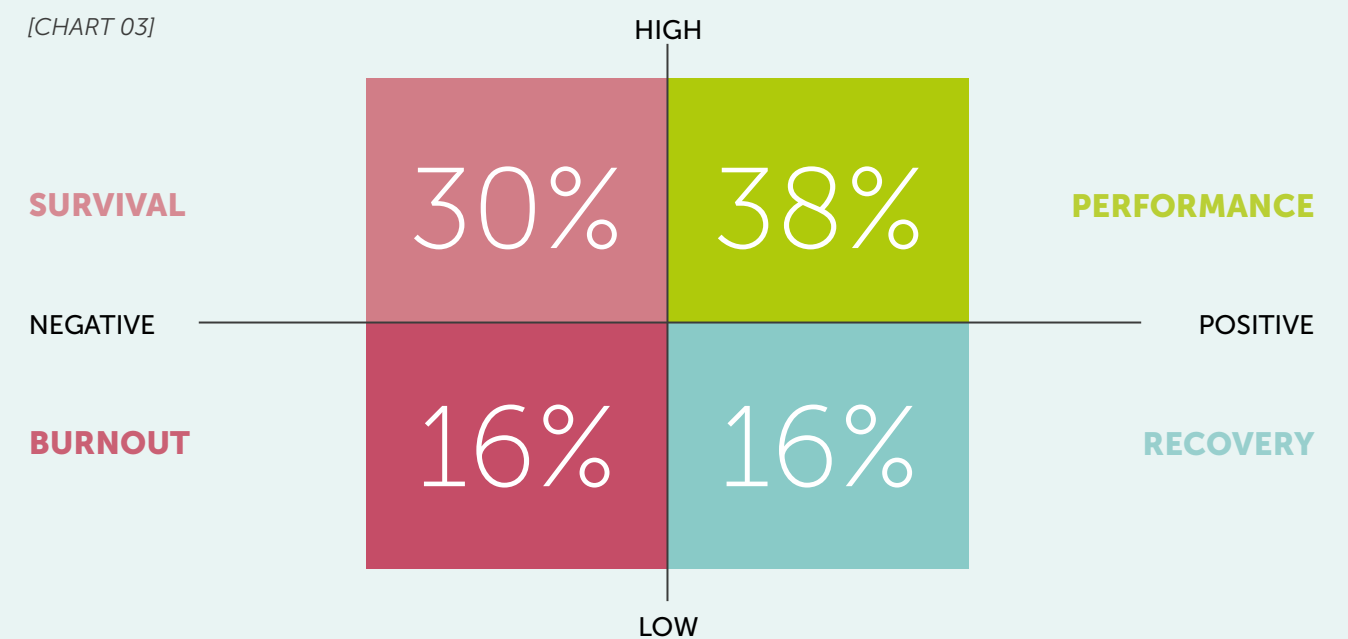
But the key thing is, people were asked how they **regularly** feel. And clearly, if you are regularly feeling frustrated and tired, then that will have a negative impact on your state of wellbeing.

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 (03).

As you can see, 38% of the respondents regularly experience performance-related emotions; 30% survival-related emotions; 16% burnout emotions; and 16% recovery emotions.

This is not an ideal picture. Overall in this sample, almost half of the emotions people are feeling regularly are in the left hand side of the model – those associated with survival and burnout. If you extrapolate this to the UK employee audience, it would suggest that almost half of employees are regularly experiencing emotional states that are likely to be negatively impacting their state of wellbeing.



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 different factors – quality, frequency, relevance and accessibility.



Good, or very good **40%**

Fair **40%**

Poor, or very poor **20%**

Overall, 40% of respondents said communication is 'good' or 'very good', 40% described communication as 'fair' and 20% described communication as 'poor' or 'very poor'. But what impact might the perceived quality of internal communications have on the emotions that employees are regularly experiencing?

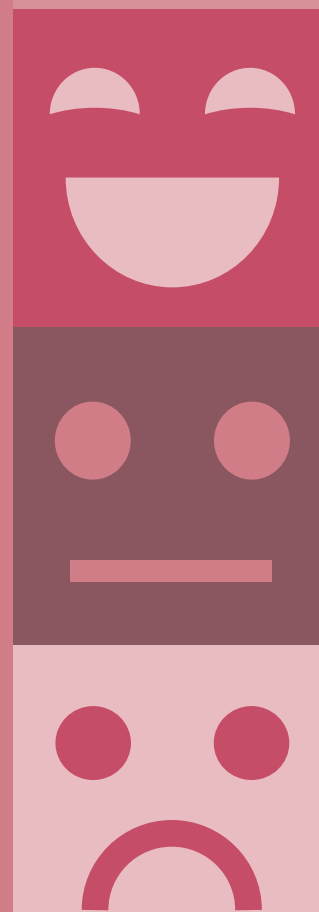
To find out, we analysed the sample and cross-referenced the emotions regularly being felt with the score given to the quality of the internal communications within their organisations.

In the chart (04), the red columns represent the people who rated their organisational

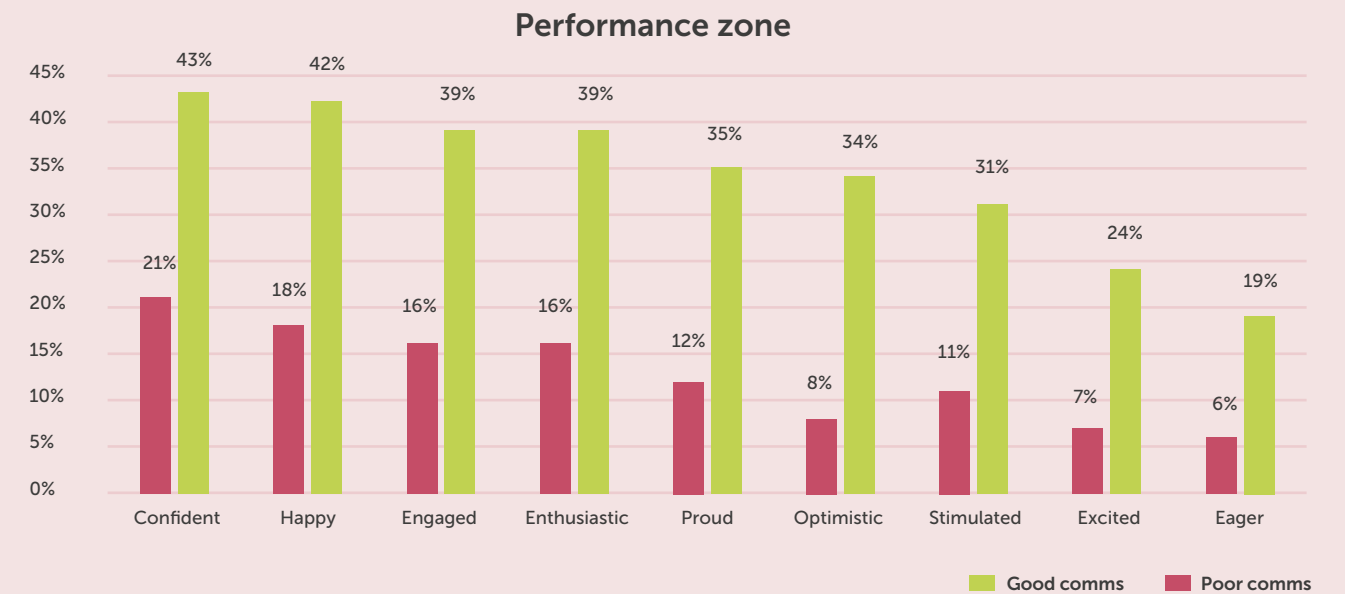
communications as 'poor' or 'very poor', and the green columns represent those who rated their organisational communications 'good' or 'very good'.

The difference is not only significant. It is compelling.

Those people 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.



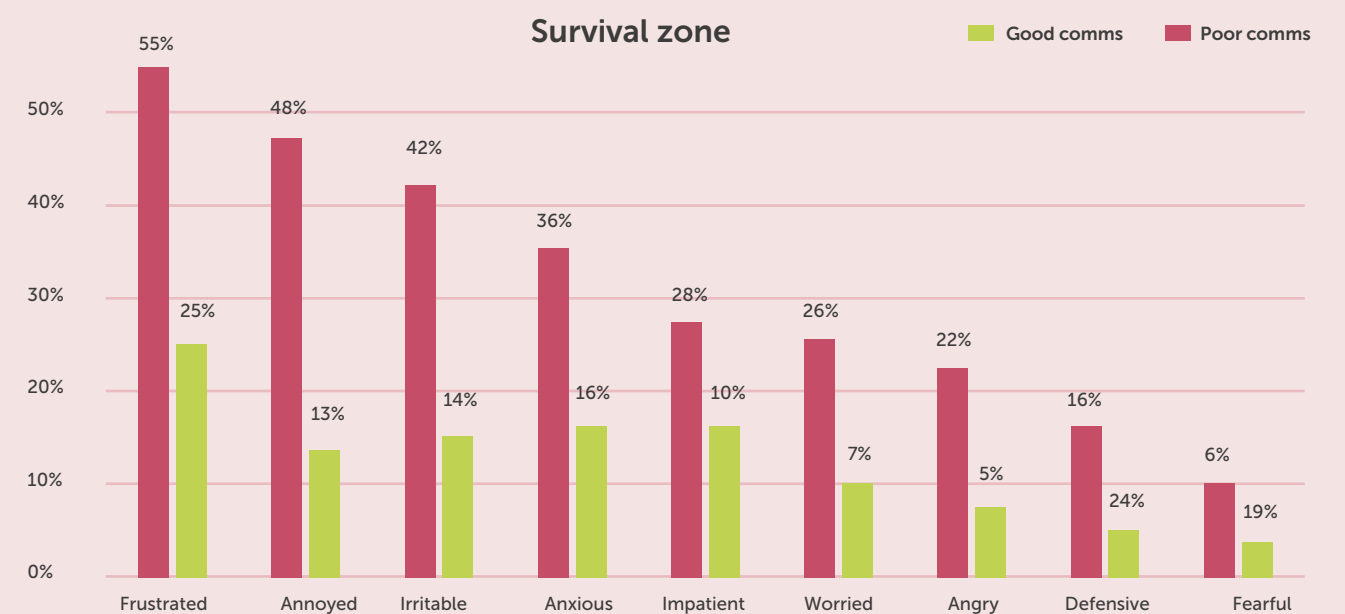
[CHART 04 – Those with good comms far more likely to experience performance zone emotions]



Conversely, when you look at the survival zone emotions, the differences become even more apparent, as illustrated in the chart below (05).

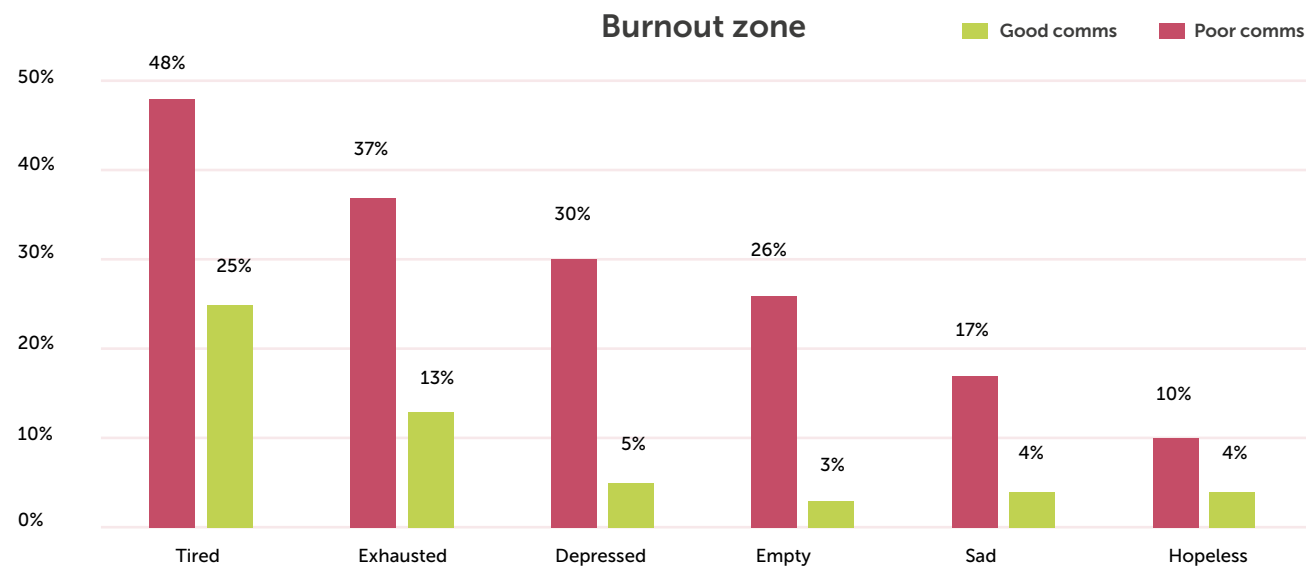
55% of those people who perceive the communications to be 'poor' or 'very poor' regularly feel frustrated. They are almost four times more likely to feel annoyed regularly, and significantly more likely to feel irritable, anxious, impatient and worried.

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



On every measure, those who rated their internal communications as 'poor' or 'very poor' experience burnout emotions significantly more regularly than those who rated communication as 'good' or 'very good'.

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



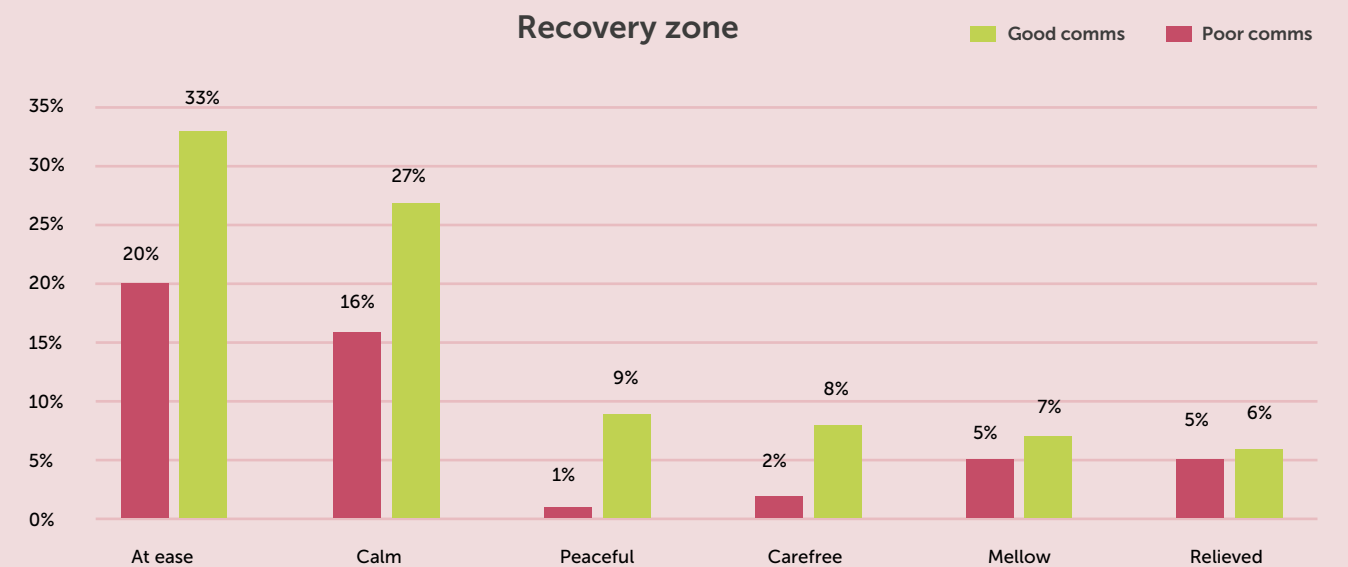
Almost half of those people who described their internal communications as 'poor' or 'very poor' claim to feel tired regularly, compared to only a quarter of those who describe their internal communications as 'good' or 'very good'. And they are:

- 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 link between the quality of internal communication in an organisation and the affect it has on people's emotional states. It suggests there might be some truth in the notion that the quality of internal communications can affect the health of employees.

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, creating or finding time for the recovery zone emotional states, as demonstrated in chart 07.

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



HOW DOES COMMUNICATION RANK AGAINST OTHER POSSIBLE WELLBEING FACTORS?

We asked employees to consider what is most important to them when it comes to their levels of engagement and commitment to their organisation.

It included many different factors considered to be important to engagement, from flexible working and salary to CSR initiatives and health and safety.

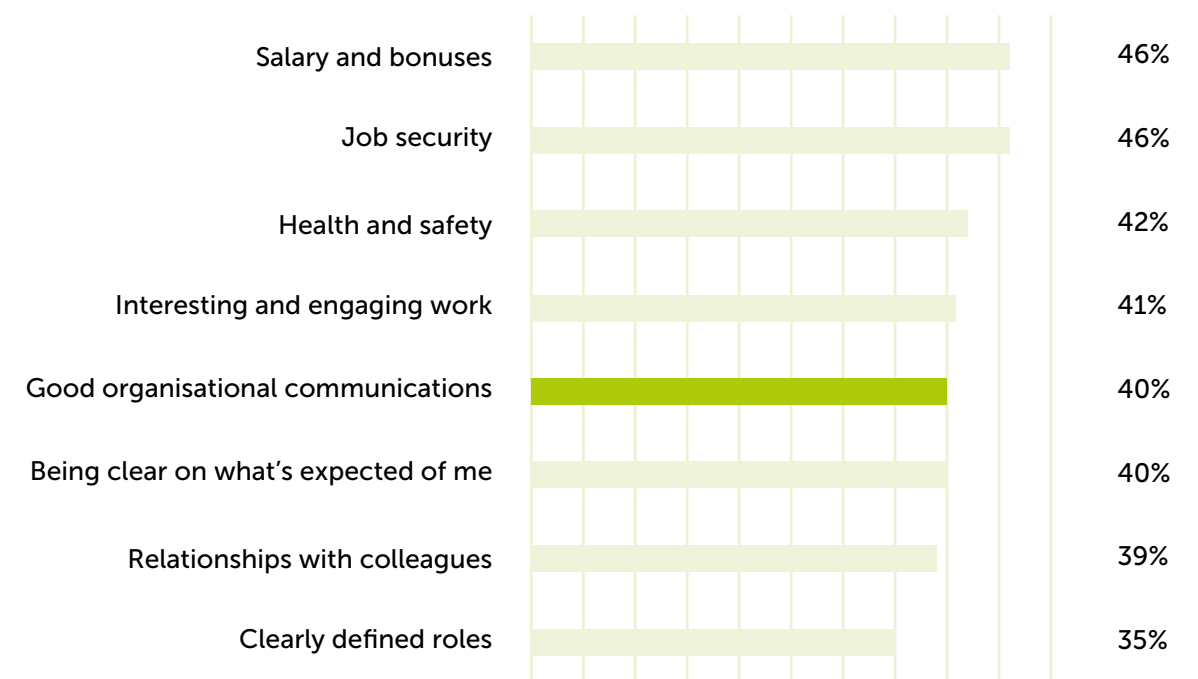
The **top three** factors are perhaps not that surprising - job security (46%), salary and bonuses

(46%) and health and safety (42%). These are hygiene factors, and we would expect them to figure highly as commitment and engagement factors. So with the hygiene factors taken care of – what then was considered to be most important?

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

[CHART 08 – Importance to engagement and commitment – Top 8]

% strongly agreeing - full sample



As you can see from the chart above (08), 41% of people strongly agreed that interesting and engaging work was important to their levels of engagement and commitment. And the next most important factor was good organisational communications, making it as important to the respondents as 'being clear on what's expected of me' and 'relationships with colleagues'. Both of which it might be argued are also related to good communication.

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 such as gym membership (12%). CSR initiatives were only considered very important by 10% of the respondents.

41% of people strongly agreed that interesting and engaging work was important to their levels of engagement and commitment.

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 to commitment and engagement.

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

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

Once again, good communications ranked highly.

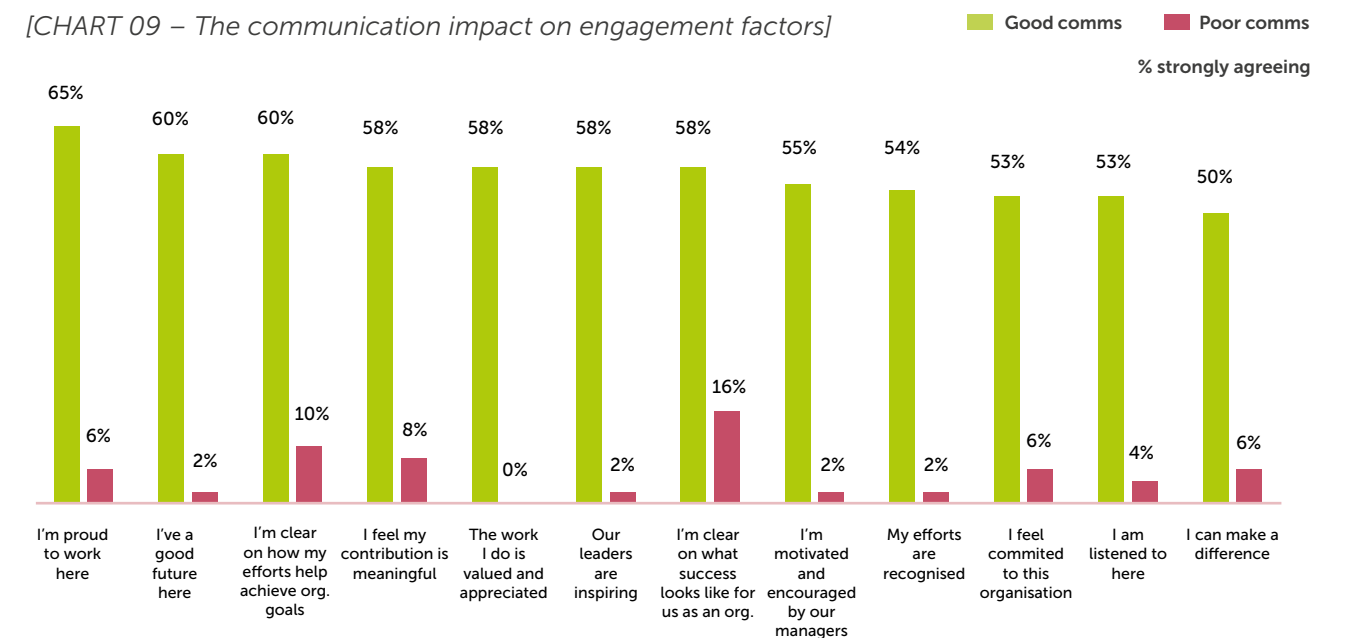
There is a picture starting to form here that strongly suggests that good organisational

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.

DOES COMMUNICATION HAVE AN IMPACT ON ENGAGEMENT?

It is well documented in numerous studies that there is an undeniable link between communication and employee engagement.

[CHART 09 – The communication impact on engagement factors]



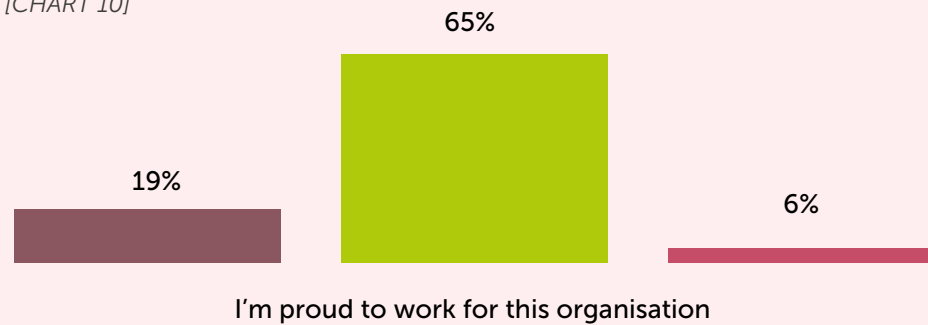
However, the responses above (09) shows the extent of the difference between good and poor communications.

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 perceived

quality of the communications in the organisation. It is already well documented that good communications will impact engagement; what is being demonstrated here is the potential extent of the impact.

For example, let's take a closer look at pride (I'm proud to work here). 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. A 350% increase. And only 6% of those people who perceived communication to be poor feel 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 feel they have a good future with their organisation.

Whereas 60% of people working in organisations with good communications strongly agreed – a difference of 300%. And 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]



It would not be advisable to suggest that organisations should stop investing in perks and benefits, CSR, personal development, flexible working patterns, renovating workplaces and so on in their quest to improve employee wellbeing. That might be a little counter-productive!

But what the data does suggest, is that communication needs to be considered as an essential aspect of wellbeing. Knowing the potential impact that poor 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 the wellbeing plan, but as a wellbeing factor in its own right.



Communication needs to be considered as an essential aspect of wellbeing

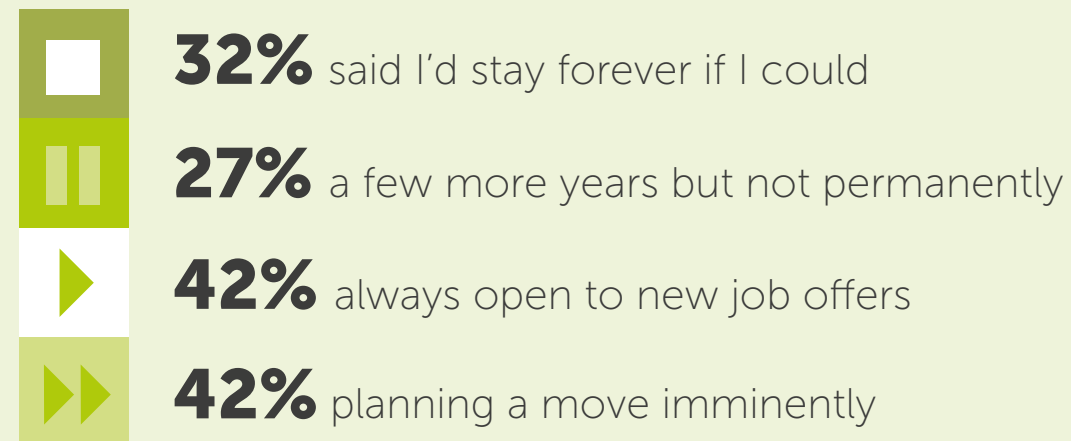
LOOKING AT COMMUNICATION MORE BROADLY

The study also explored the role of communication in a number of other relevant business factors such as retention, recommendation and business performance. Here's a quick overview of the results.

What is the impact of communication on retention?

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

32% said 'I'd stay forever if I could', 27% said 'for a few more years but not permanently', 31% said they were 'always open to new job offers', and 9% of respondents were 'planning a move imminently'.



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.

42% vs 21%

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

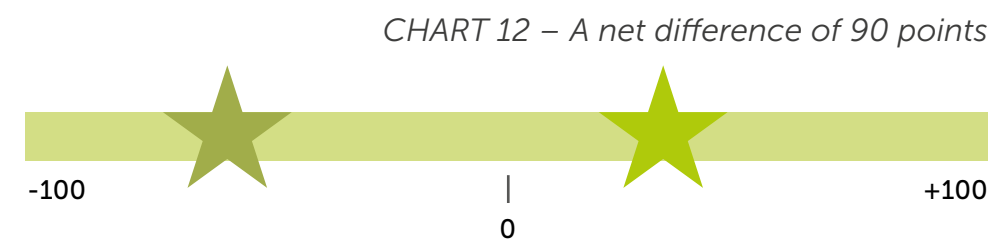
The NPS rating scale was used to highlight the extent that good and poor communications might have on an employee's likelihood to recommend their company as a good place to work.

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 (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 below (13) represents the respondents assessments of organisational performance. Whether or not the organisations in question are achieving the perceived results has not been verified. However, there is no reason to believe it is wildly inaccurate.

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 of key performance metrics the respondents were asked about, the 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.

and the propensity for employees to recommend their company as a great place to work.

Furthermore, the data also provides evidence that good internal communication is likely to have a significant impact on a wide range of performance KPIs.

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 found at the heart of it all.

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,

Good internal communication is likely to have a significant impact on a wide range of performance KPI's

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.

