Employee Experience

Research Findings

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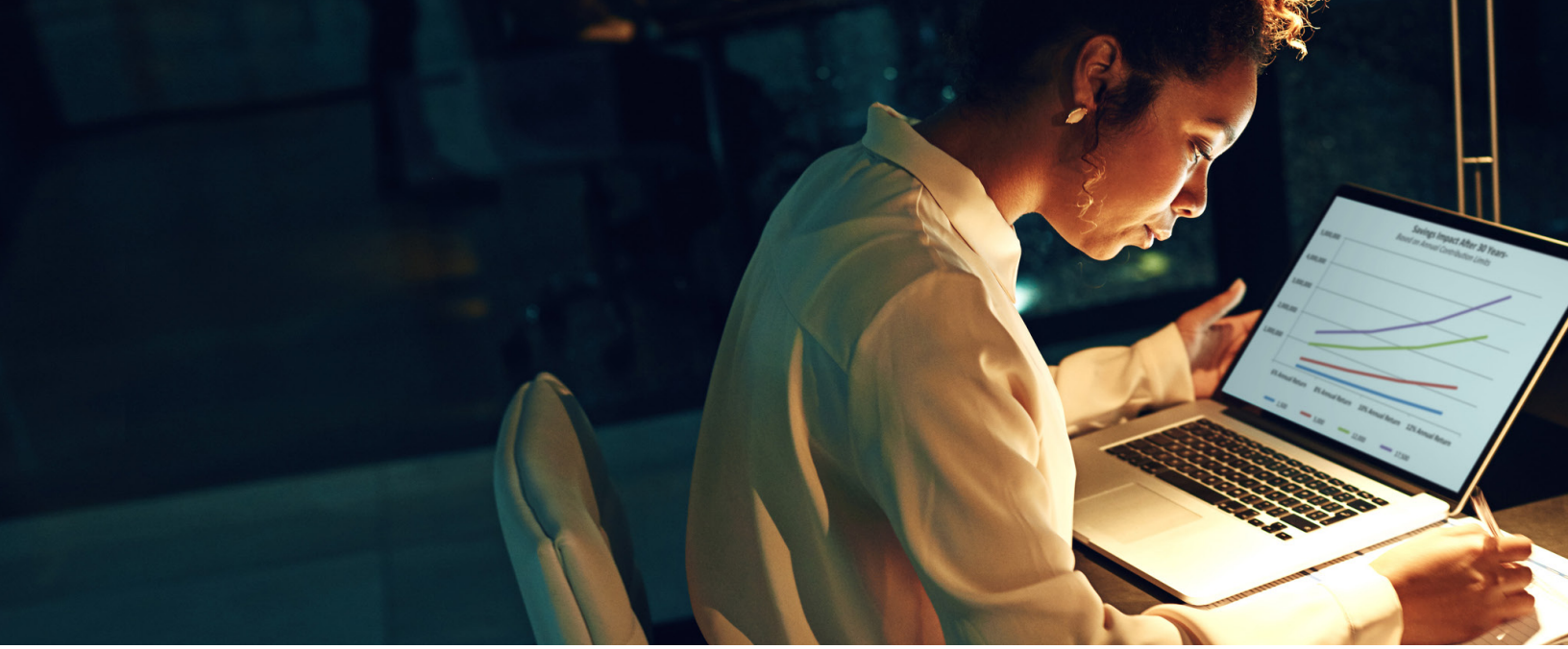


EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCE

Although the concept of the employee experience has rapidly grown in popularity over the past few years, definitions of employee experience thus far have been non-existent, tautological or very vague. Due to the limited academic research and literature on this topic, there is a large need to better understand the impact a positive employee experience can really have, and how a positive experience manifests itself within organizations. To help answer these questions, we conducted a study to dig deeper into the concept of employee experience.

Current Project

The intent of the current study was to further understand drivers and outcomes of a positive employee experience.

We divided the study into two research questions:

1. Research question 1: Does a positive EX relate to significant differences on outcomes of interest (e.g., intent-to-stay, likelihood to recommend, engagement, well-being)?

   a. To test this question, we utilized a Kruskal-Wallis test to determine differences based on group membership (favorable EX, neutral, unfavorable).

2. Research question 2: Which organizational care elements (e.g., safety, pay, respect, connection, care) emerge as the top predictors of a positive EX?

   a. To test this question, we utilized ordinal regression to determine which items emerged to the top as the strongest predictors of a positive EX.

Participants and Procedure

We administered an online survey using Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk) to examine employee perceptions of organizational care. After screening for participant criteria and data quality, the final sample consisted of 354 individuals. All participants were employed at least full- or part-time. The majority of the sample was White (65.5%), male (56.2%), and worked for organizations with fewer than 500 employees. Full breakdown of demographics can be found in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Participant demographics

Variable	n *(% of total sample)*
Gender	
Man	**199** *(56.2%)*
Woman	**152** *(42.9%)*
Non-binary/third gender	**3** *(0.9%)*
Race	
White	**232** *(65.5%)*
Black or African American	**21** *(5.9%)*
Latino/Latina/Latinx	**20** *(5.7%)*
Asian	**67** *(18.9%)*
Two or more races	**7** *(2%)*
Other	**6** *(1.7%)*
Employment Status	
Employed, working 30 or more hours per week	**319** *(90.1%)*
Employed, working less than 30 hours per week	**35** *(9.9%)*
Age	
18-24	**46** *(13%)*
25-35	**178** *(50.4%)*
36-45	**90** *(25.5%)*
46+	**39** *(11.1%)*
Job Level	
Individual contributor	**224** *(63.3%)*
People manager	**110** *(31.1%)*
Director or above	**15** *(4.2%)*
Prefer not to respond	**5** *(1.4%)*
Org Size	
1-50 employees	**92** *(26%)*
51-499 employees	**132** *(37.3%)*
500-4999 employees	**71** *(20.1%)*
5000+ employees	**56** *(15.8%)*
Prefer not to respond	**3** *(0.9%)*

Measures

The survey included 30 items designed to examine employee perceptions of various organizational elements such as trust, informational flow, safety, inclusion and care. We also included employee outcomes items such as intent to stay, likelihood to recommend one's company as a great place to work, overall stress, engagement, well-being and burnout. One item, "The employee experience at my organization is a positive one," was used to place participants into comparison groups for analytical purposes. Those who responded "strongly agree" or "agree" were placed in the Favorable group, those who responded "neither disagree or agree" were placed in the Neutral group and those who responded "strongly disagree" or "disagree" were placed in the Unfavorable group.

Directionality of identified relationships (i.e., which item was categorized as an outcome vs a predictor of employee experience) was drawn from theory and existing literature on constructs of interest; however, the limited research on employee experience renders these associations as exploratory.

After consideration, burnout was treated as both an outcome variable as well as a predictor variable, since it is plausible that while a positive employee experience may buffer against potential burnout, employee burnout may also likely impact an employee's overall employee experience.

Results

Overarching question: Does a positive EX relate to significant differences on outcomes of interest? To test this question, we utilized a Kruskal-Wallis test to determine differences based on group membership (favorable EX, neutral, unfavorable).

A series of one-way analyses of variance (ANOVAs) were conducted to examine the effects of EX group differences on outcomes of interest. Though our sample met the assumption of independence, the data did not demonstrate normality and Levene's test for homogeneity of variances was violated. We therefore used Kruskal-Wallis tests to examine differences in each variable as a function of group membership.

Results of the omnibus test revealed significant differences between EX groups on all outcome variables (see Table 2), including intent-to-stay, likelihood to recommend the company as a great place to work, stress levels, overall well-being, and burnout. Multiple pairwise comparisons were conducted to determine where differences existed (e.g., between those who DO report a positive employee experience vs those who are neutral vs. those who do NOT report a positive employee experience; see Table 3 for results).

Overall, results consistently indicated that those with a positive employee experience (favorable group) had significantly higher outcomes on all variables of interest compared to both individuals who did not feel as though they had a positive employee experience (unfavorable group) as well as those who were neutral (neutral group). Interestingly, the only two outcomes that showed a difference between the unfavorable EX group and neutral EX group were intent-to-stay and likelihood to recommend. This indicates that when employees consider staying or recommending their organization, their likelihood to do so gets significantly worse the farther away they get from a positive employee experience. When it comes to personal outcomes such as stress, engagement, well-being and burnout, however, what matters most is having a positive employee experience — this is the deciding factor. There isn't much of a difference between a neutral or unfavorable experience on these outcomes. See graphs below for a visual of outcome distributions by employee experience group.

Table 2. Kruskal-Wallis Results Comparing Employee Experience Groups

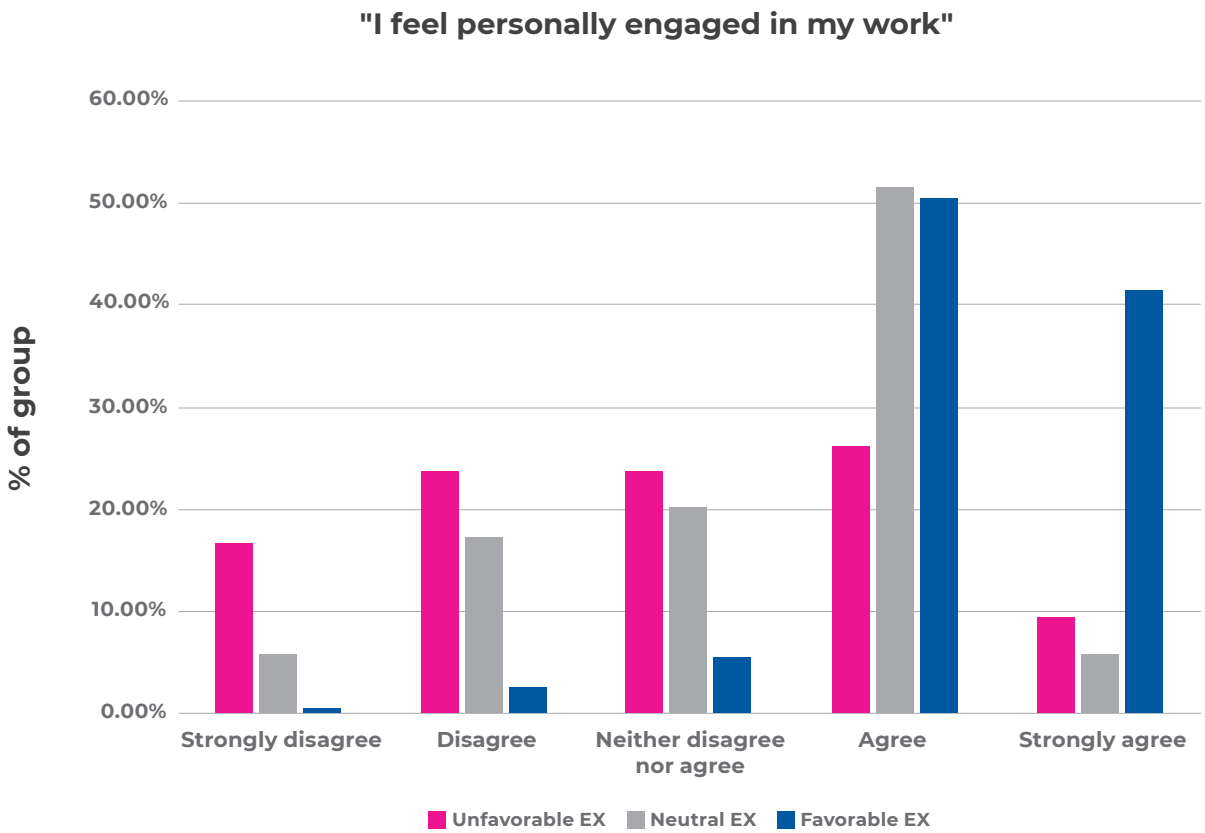
Outcome	Item	H*(df)*	p-value
Intent-to-Stay	*"I intend to stay at my organization for at least..."*	**78.08***(2)*	.00
Likelihood to Recommend	*"On a scale of 0 (not at all likely) to 10 (extremely likely), how likely are you to recommend your organization as a great place to work?"*	**150.08***(2)*	.00
Stress	*"Which of the following best describes the current level of stress in your life?"*	**29.29***(2)*	.00
Engagement	*"I feel personally engaged in my work."*	**75.17***(2)*	.00
Well-Being	*"Overall, I have well-being in my life."*	**79.93***(2)*	.00
Burnout	*"I feel burned out."*	**57.78***(2)*	.00

Note. Significant p-value (< .05) indicate that significant differences existed among groups on the outcome of interest.

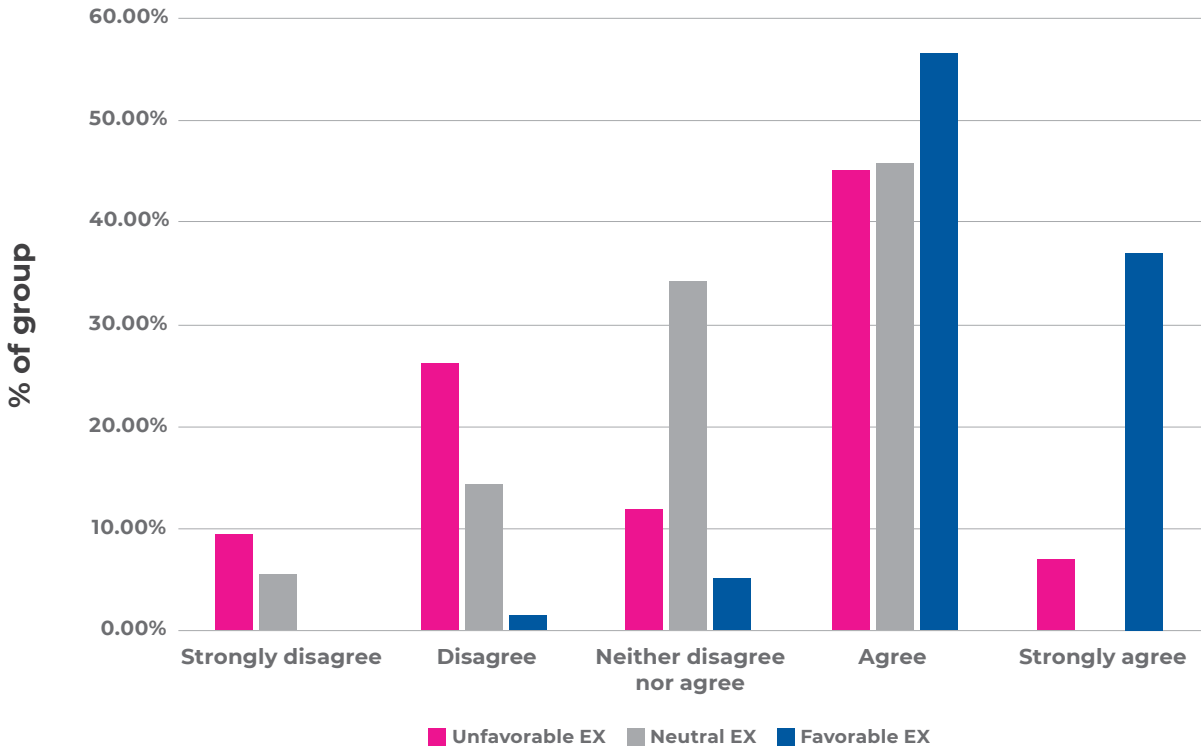
Table 3. Pairwise Comparisons Between Employee Experience Groups

Outcome Variable	Favorable - Unfavorable	Favorable - Neutral	Neutral - Unfavorable
Intent to Stay	133.18**	77.68**	55.50*
Likelihood to Recommend	178.57**	132.31**	46.160*
Stress	71.65**	63.00**	8.65
Engagement	114.74**	92.15**	22.60
Well-Being	99.72**	113.19**	13.47
Burnout	95.76**	97.82**	2.06

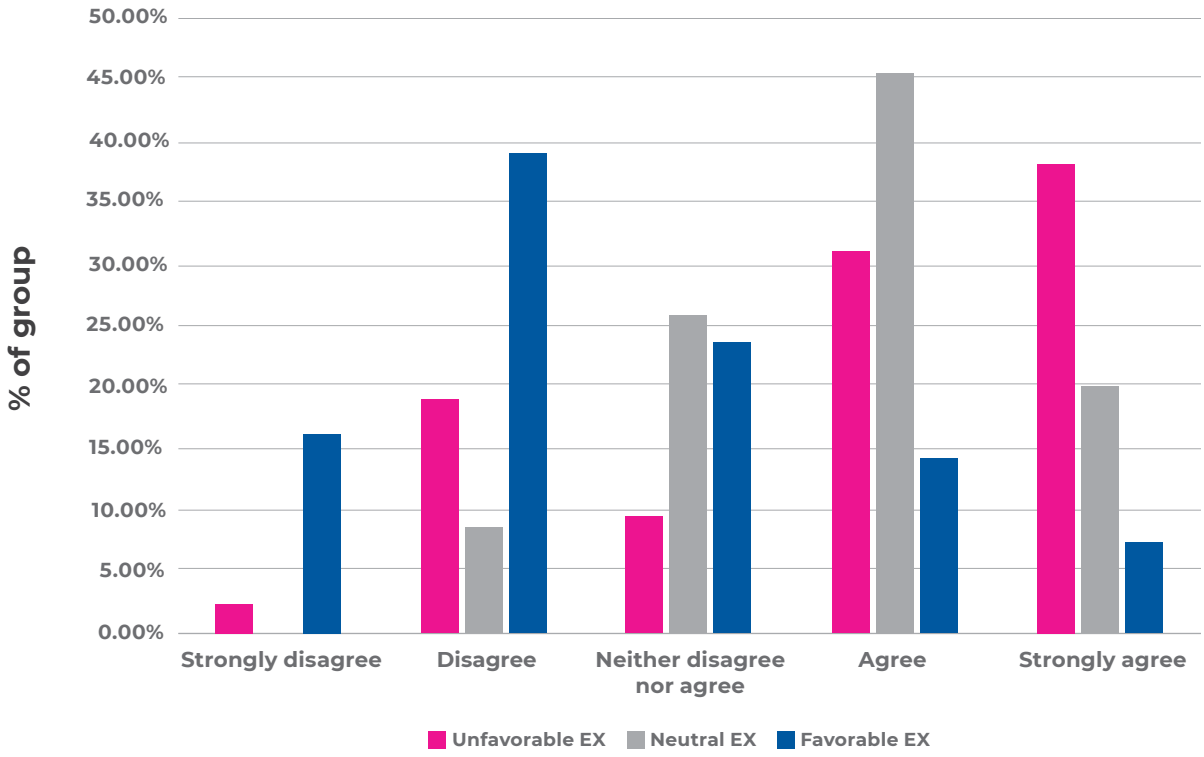
Note. * denotes a p-value < .05, ** denotes p-value < .01. A positive test statistic indicates that the first group had higher scores on outcome variables compared to the second group (and vice versa for a negative test statistic). Unfavorable = strongly disagree or disagree on EX item, Neutral = neither disagree nor disagree, and Favorable = strongly agree or agree on EX item.



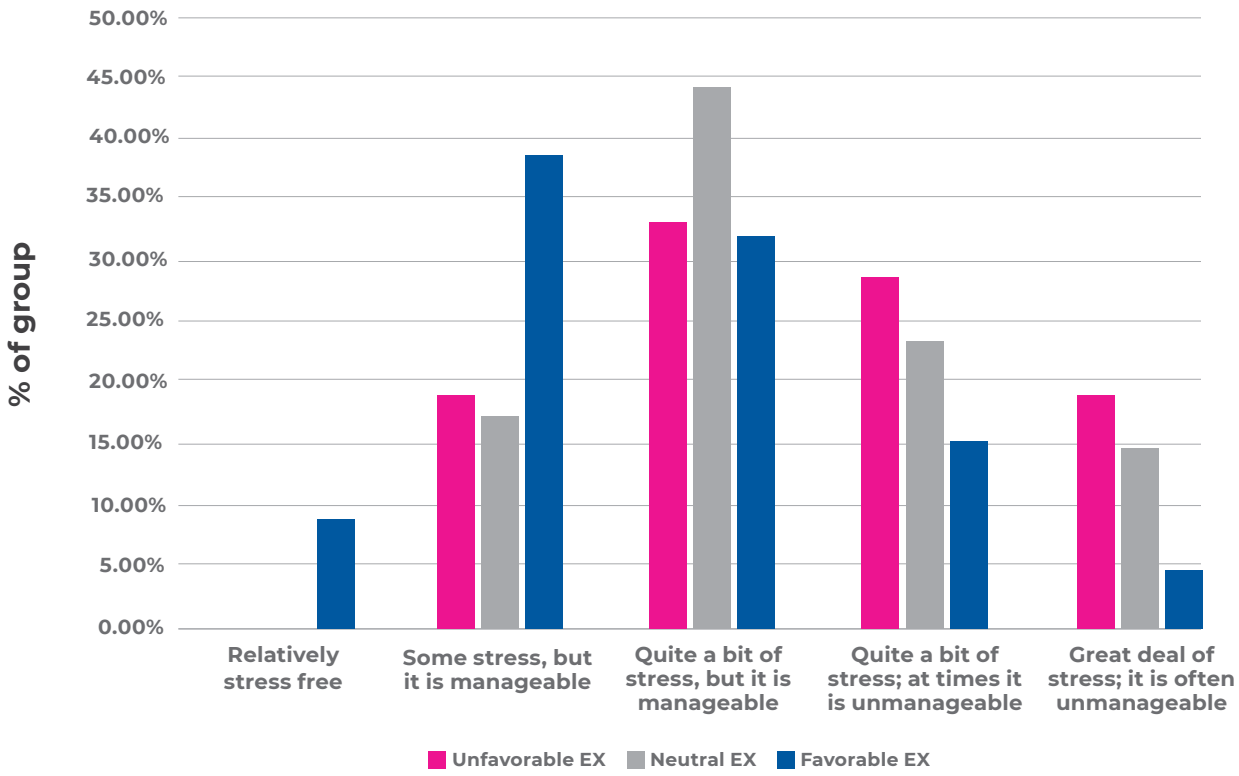
"Overall, I have well-being in my life"



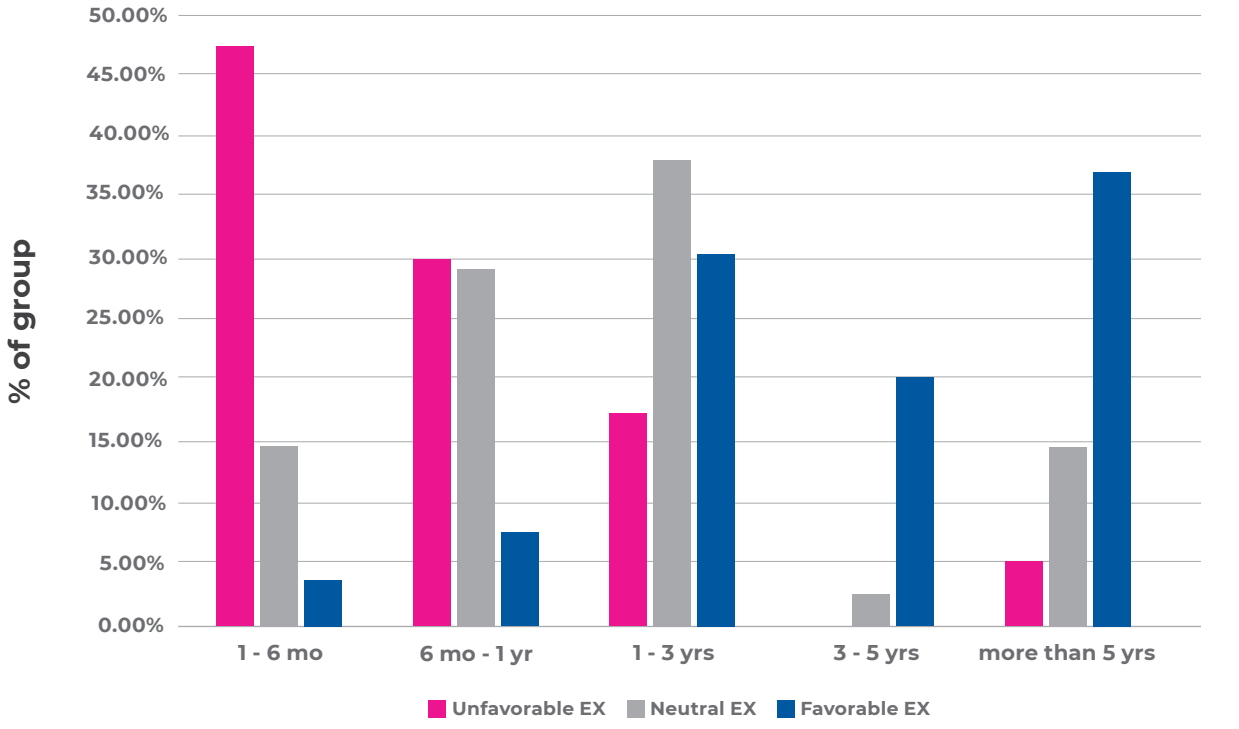
"I feel burned out"



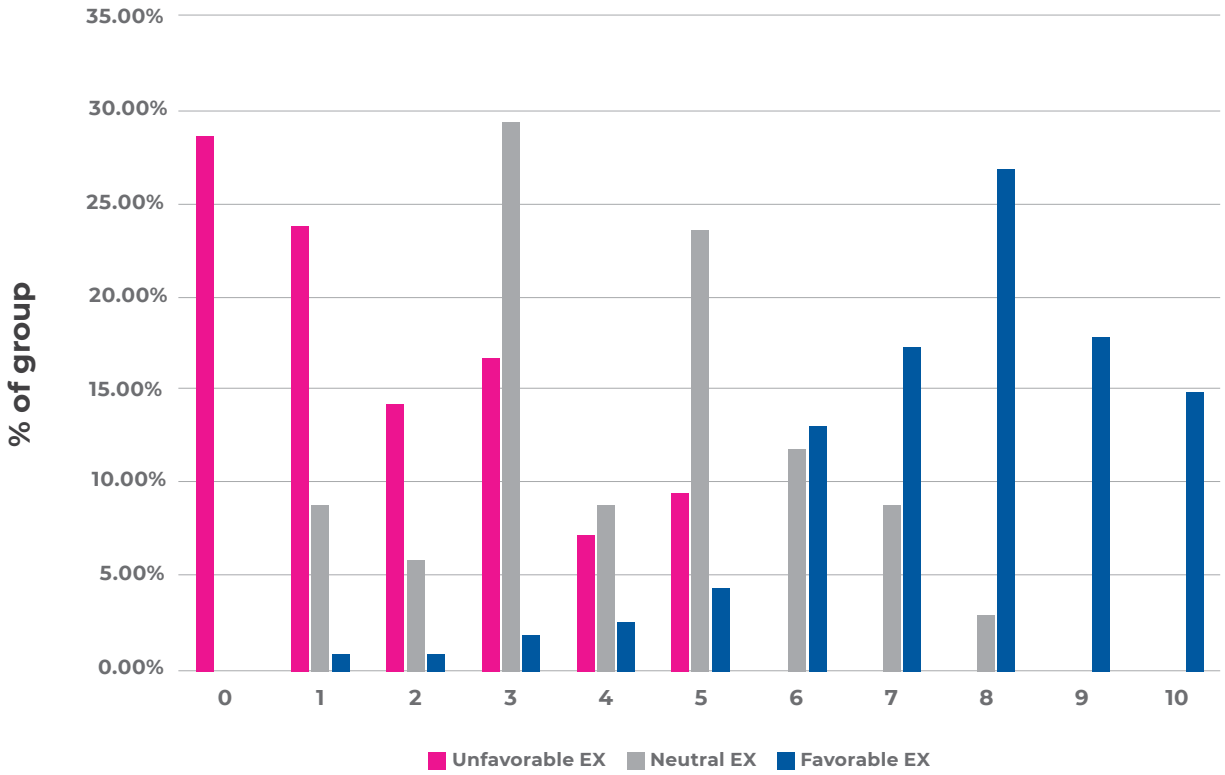
"Which of the following best describes the current level of stress in your life?"



"I intend to stay at my organization for at least..."



"On a scale of 0 (not at all likely) to 10 (extremely likely), how likely are you to recommend your organization as a great place to work?"



Overarching question:

Which organizational care elements most strongly predict a positive EX? To test this question, we utilized ordinal regression to determine which items emerged to the top as the strongest predictors of a positive EX. See list in Table 4 below.

Table 4. Predictor items

Organizational Care Element	Underlying Construct
I feel safe at work.	Safety
I am paid fairly for the work I do.	Fair pair
Information flows openly throughout my overall organization.	Communication - Flow
I receive adequate information within my organization.	Communication – Adequacy
I get enough time off work.	Benefits (time off)

Table 4. Predictor items

Organizational Care Element	Underlying Construct
I have the resources I need to be able to do my job effectively.	Resources
I get the right amount of feedback to be able to do my job effectively.	Feedback
My work allows for some flexibility in how, where, and when I work.	Flexibility
I am respected at my organization.	Respect
I feel connected to what's happening in my organization.	Connection
My work has purpose.	Purpose
I am realizing my potential at work.	Work growth
At work, there's a sense that "we're all in this together."	Sense of team
My manager "looks out" for me.	Manager support
My organization has a positive culture.	Culture
In general, my employer tries to do the right thing for its employees.	Mutual commitment
I trust my organization.	Trust in organization
I trust my manager.	Trust in manager
I trust my co-workers.	Trust in co-workers
I feel valued by my organization.	Feeling valued
The leaders of my organization inspire me to give 100%.	Inspirational leadership
I believe my organization makes the world a better place.	Impact on world
I feel like my organization cares about me.	Feeling cared for
I feel burned out.	Burnout
I feel included at my organization.	Inclusion

With all predictors in this model, the analysis met the assumption of proportional odds (test of parallel lines was non-significant; $X^2 = 24.47(25)$, $p = .492$). Among all items, only four emerged as significant predictors of the employee experience item: I feel connected to what's happening in my organization ($B = -.686$, $p = .043$), My organization has a positive culture ($B = 1.069$, $p = .004$), I trust my organization ($B = 1.046$, $p = .006$), I feel like my organization cares about me ($B = .800$, $p = .035$). These four items were entered into a final predictive model by themselves, which also met the assumption of proportional odds (test of parallel lines was non-significant; $X^2 = 1.18(4)$, $p = .881$). Final results indicated that one item, "I feel connected to what's happening in my organization" lost significance ($B = -.224$, $p = .346$). The final predictive items from this model, then, were "My organization has a positive culture" ($B = 1.233$, $p = .000$), "I trust my organization" ($B = 1.354$, $p = .000$), and "I feel like my organization cares about me" ($B = 1.186$, $p = .000$). See Table 5 for full results.

Table 5. Ordinal Regression Results Predicting Employee Experience

Item	B	SE	Wald	p-value
I feel connected to what's happening in my organization.	-.22	.24	.89	.346
My organization has a positive culture.	1.23	.29	17.94	.000
I trust my organization.	1.35	.30	20.11	.000
I feel like my organization cares about me.	1.20	.28	18.33	.000

Note. For every one unit increase on a predictor variable, the associated B represented the predicted increase in log odds of an employee being in a more favorable category regarding employee experience.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to investigate and further understand the antecedents and outcomes of a positive employee experience. The first portion of the analyses revealed that a positive employee experience was significantly related to more positive results on all outcomes of interest; specifically, employees who reported a positive employee experience at their organization also reported higher engagement levels, greater overall well-being in their lives, lower overall stress levels, lower feelings of burnout and greater intent-to-stay and likelihood to recommend the company as a great place to work. Interestingly, results indicated that when employees consider staying at or recommending their organization, their likelihood to do so gets significantly worse the farther away they get from a positive employee experience. When it came to the more individually-experienced outcomes such as stress, engagement, well-being and burnout, however, there wasn't much of a difference between a neutral or unfavorable experience on these outcomes — they are (statistically) equally as bad. Overall, a positive employee experience was consistently related to more positive outcomes across the board.

In the second portion of the analysis, we sought to understand which organizational care outcomes (e.g., getting enough resources or feedback, feeling respected, paid fairly) predicted how employees responded to an assessment of their employee experience. What we found is that among all items, the three that emerged were about the emotional connection one felt to the organization — specifically, feeling cared for by one's organization, trusting one's organization and viewing the culture of the organization as positive. This indicates that employee experience is more than transactions that occur, or processes and systems— it's about how employees feel about their organization overall. It's about the employee-organization relationship. These findings help validate the importance of not only focusing on the concept of employee experience — but of focusing on an intentionally curated employee experience within organizations that is distinguished by organizational trust, care and culture.

Limitations

Given the exploratory nature of our study, there are limitations to consider. One of these limitations is a lack of method-variance, as all items included within the current analyses were administered and completed together. It is possible that a portion of the common variance among variables may have been due to this shared method. Another limitation of the study is that the particular methodology that was employed did not separate predictors from outcomes. Since constructs were not separated out and were instead assessed concurrently, we cannot assume causality. Directionality of identified relationships was drawn from theory and existing literature on constructs of interest. Future studies should aim to strengthen assumptions of causality by manipulating antecedents and measuring outcomes separately to more fully understand and disentangle where they stand in relation to employee experience.

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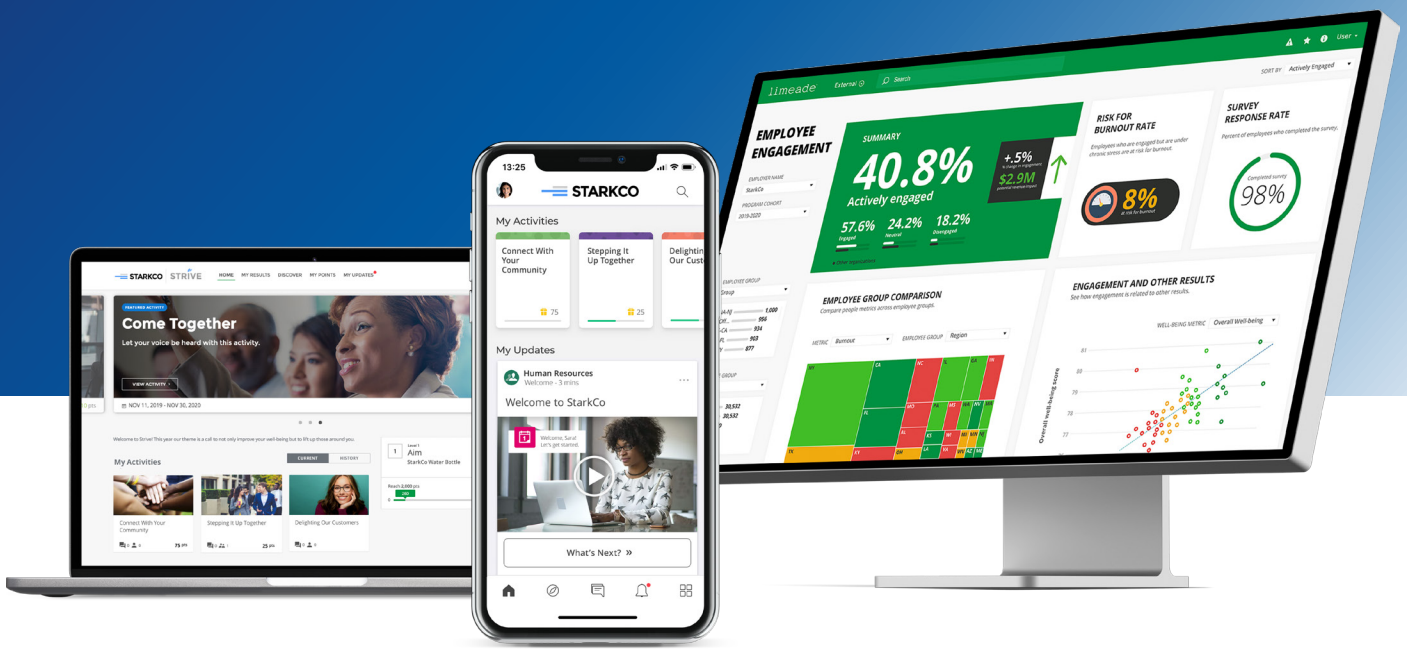

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