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AN ANALYSIS OF EMPLOYEE WORK ENVIRONMENT: IMPROVING METHODS
FOR ENGAGEMENT, AFFECTIVE COMMITMENT, AND
RETURN-TO-OFFICE STRATEGIES

by

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Dedication

Thank you to everyone who has supported me during this process. I would like to extend a special thanks to my professors who have educated and supported me throughout my journey towards a master's degree in I/O Psychology. I look forward to being a positive figure in this field.

ABSTRACT

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University of Houston-Clear Lake, 2022

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Employee engagement and organizational affective commitment are increasingly popular topics, especially with the rise of remote workplaces and hybrid work models. This project focuses on the engagement and commitment levels of employees at a mid-sized software organization. While this organization (hereafter referred to as “The Company”) is a global entity, this project focused on its United States branch. After the onset of the coronavirus pandemic, travel for events and on-site client engagements were heavily disrupted, as did their in-person work schedule. Employee engagement and affective organizational commitment were observed utilizing a 33-item survey that included existing measures such as Utrecht’s Work Engagement Scale (2004) and the Allen & Meyer (1990) Organizational Commitment Survey. The results gathered from the survey helped to create an informed guide for an interview which provided clarity on employee engagement and commitment in relation to one’s work environment. The results gathered from the survey suggest that frequency of remote work positively correlates with employee engagement, but not with affective commitment. Changes to the frequency of remote work negatively correlate with higher levels of engagement and organizational commitment. There were no significant differences in engagement or commitment with race, but tenure, gender, and age were found to have a significant positive relationship with commitment. There is

an additional need for change management initiatives to ease employees into any work format and scheduling shifts. Additionally, when transitioning work schedules or planning return-to-office initiatives, change management processes may be required to ensure that engagement levels do not decrease.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

The Company After COVID-19

The United States branch of a mid-sized Information Technology company desires to understand how engaged and committed their employees are to the greater organization. The Company is a global entity with offices in multiple regions including the Americas, Europe, and Asia. Prior to the pandemic, in-person activity was considered normal and included travel to client sites, attending workplace events, and regularly working in-office. The propagation of the coronavirus pandemic greatly impacted the normal operations of The Company and eventually saw to it that most offices transitioned to a predominantly remote work model.

After the initial peak of COVID-19 circa 2020, The Company adjusted their model of operation to best match the ever-changing situation of the pandemic. As an example, their U.S. headquarter office adopted a rotational schedule that saw different teams working in-office two days out of the month during their assigned week. Teams were determined by supervisors, current projects, and seniority. This structure decreased the likelihood of the virus spreading and, based on feedback provided by the United States Executive Leadership Team, appeared to be well received by staff.

The Omnicron COVID-19 variant that struck in November and December of 2021 once again created a shift in work schedules both for the United States office and abroad. Rotational schedules were once again switched to remote, and this has remained the schedule throughout the end of 2021 and the through the first few months of 2022.

As of Spring 2022, talks to return to the United States office took place and, as time passed, plans to transition back to an in-person or hybrid model began to once again become a reality. With the desire to once more incorporate in-person work into employee schedules, understanding how one's work environment may influence his or her respective engagement and organizational commitment would prove useful to organizations on similar journeys.

Purpose

The purpose of this project is to better understand how employee engagement and affective organizational commitment may be influenced by an employee's work environment. Particularly, the project is meant to examine how the frequency of remote work related to the aforementioned variables, and whether or not employees needed additional support adjusting to their work environment.

The Company's robust recruiting efforts have made employee engagement and affective commitment of particular interest. This is due to the positive associations that employee engagement and affective commitment have with favorable business outcomes such as decreases in turnover and increases in productivity. As the different teams continue to grow and, as the pressure for a return-to-office schedule increases, there are certain questions that need to be answered:

- 1) Does the frequency of remote work correlate with employee engagement and/or affective commitment of employees overall?
- 2) Are there any trends found between employee engagement/affective commitment and the consistency of work environment?
- 3) Does the frequency of remote work correlate with employee engagement and/or affective commitment of employees based on tenure?

Information gathering is needed to better understand the answers to these questions and thus better understand The Company's burgeoning workforce. As the organization's workload grows, it becomes imperative to understand what factors may influence employee engagement and commitment levels to ensure The Company retains the talent they have been recruiting and investing in.

Before conducting a survey, I conducted a thorough literature review to better understand existing theories of employee engagement and organizational commitment. This ultimately helped to create relevant and helpful intervention strategies for The Company.

Employee Engagement

Employee engagement is one of three major variables of this project. While it has many definitions and theoretical frameworks, this project treats it as *work engagement*, which can be defined as “a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption. Rather than a momentary state and specific state, engagement refers to a more persistent and pervasive affective-cognitive state that is not focused on any particular object, event, individual, or behavior,” (Schaufeli, Salanova, & Bakker, 2006, p. 702).

Employee engagement can be broken down into three major aspects: vigor, dedication, and absorption. As a whole, these three factors are considered the opposite of burnout, a negative concept that leads to inefficacy in the workplace. Separately, two of the three aspects have their own opposites; vigor and dedication are opposites of exhaustion and cynicism respectively (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Schaufeli et al. (2004) describes each aspect of engagement as “Vigor is characterized by high levels of energy and mental resilience while working... Dedication refers to being strongly involved in one’s work... Absorption is characterized by being fully concentrated and happily engrossed in ones work” (Schaufeli et al., 2006, p. 702).

Vigor, dedication, and absorption negatively correlate with exhaustion, cynicism, and burnout. Burnout has been shown to correlate with negative business outcomes such as decreased productivity, poorer client relationships, poorer colleague relationships, and lower effectiveness at work (Maslach, Schaeufeli, & Leiter, 2001). Focusing on improving employee engagement, which negatively correlates with burnout, may lead to improved efficacy in the workplace and quality deliverables for clients. Additionally, employee engagement positively correlates with business outcomes that include profitability and productivity. It also negatively correlates with absenteeism, shrinkage (theft), and quality issues (Sorenson, 2013).

Gallup (2012) reports that with higher amounts of engaged employees tend to outperform companies who lacked them. This is reflected in higher earnings per share (EPS) as well as their likelihood of success. Engaged employees see anywhere from two to four times the level of

success rate than those who were not (Gallup, 2012). This makes employee engagement an important factor for both organizations and employees alike.

Affective Organizational Commitment

Organizational commitment is another important factor of this study. While it can generally be defined as one's dedication and willingness to work for an organization, it can also be broken down into smaller components (Jex & Britt, 2014). Allen and Meyer (1990) break organizational commitment down into three unique forms: normative, continuance, and affective commitment.

Sense of obligation and duty to the organization is known as normative commitment. Continuance commitment relates to how much employees feel the need to stay at their organization. More specifically, it refers to the costs employees associate with leaving their organization (Jex & Britt, 2014). Finally, affective commitment is essentially "employees' emotional bond to their organization" and can help determine their dedication and loyalty (Rhoades, Eisenberger, & Armeli, 2001, p. 825).

This study focuses on affective commitment for a few reasons. First, affective commitment is positively correlated with employee engagement, another key study variable (Kaur & Mittal, 2020). Demonstrations of affective commitment likely align with demonstrations of employee engagement. These demonstrations include high involvement in job and organizational activities. In a virtual work environment, it may be more difficult to showcase and observe affective commitment as there are less opportunities to be around employees, connect with coworkers, and express concerns. As such, this type of commitment is of particular interest for a study interested in determining the potential relationship work environment has with employees' personal connection to the organization.

When employees are affectively committed, it can increase their involvement, engagement, and tenure. These are all of great benefit to an organization, particularly if the goal is to increase retention and decrease turnover (Deepak, 2020). Doing so can positively impact the

organization by decreasing the costs needed for hiring and training while also keeping needed skills and experience within the organization.

Employee engagement is often cited as having a strong effect on organizational commitment (Hanaysha, 2016; Rameshkumar, 2020). By determining ways to improve employee engagement, it may be possible to also increase affective commitment and, thus, further improve the overall retention of the team.

Work Environment and its Impact on Employees

Research shows how employees' work environment can impact thoughts, feelings, and actions regarding their role and their relationship with the workplace overall. For the purposes of this project, work environment refers to "the atmosphere of an organization where employees do their work," (Hanaysha, 2016, p. 291). This can include involvement with other people (i.e., team cohesion, supervisor support) and the physical environment (i.e., physical comfort, working conditions). Thus, I propose that:

Research Proposition 1a-1b: Frequency of remote work varies with employees' (a) engagement and (b) affective commitment such that there will be a difference between those who work remotely and those who work in-person.

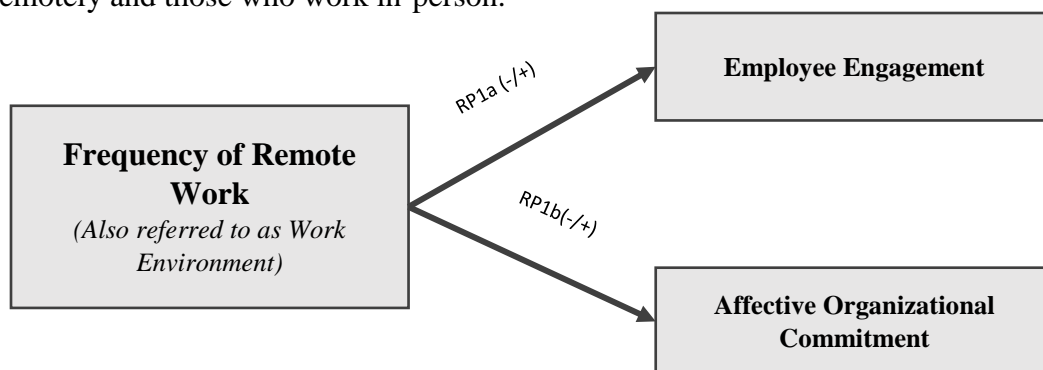


Figure 1.1
Model illustrating the Influence Remote Work Frequency has on Employee Engagement and Affective Organizational Commitment

Because work environment is such a critical factor in an employee's everyday life, and because it can be difficult to manipulate in the face of environmental pressures such as pandemics, understanding how work environment may impact employee engagement and

affective organizational commitment can be beneficial. This is particularly true for organizations that transitioned into remote environments. With the rapid increase in remote work over the past few years, many organizations likely have not considered how to implement changes to ensure that the employee's relationship to the organization has not been affected.

Early research suggests there isn't a significant difference in stress levels or perceptions of the organizational climate for remote employees and locally managed employees (Staples, 2001). In this study, however, employees did not experience the abrupt shift in workplace norms caused by the 2020 pandemic. Therefore, these results may not be applicable to the employees this project sampled, as the reasoning behind the change in their workplace was due to the outside influence of a federal lockdown orders. Not only did the COVID-19 pandemic lead to sudden transitions in where and how people work, due to the uncertainty of the severity of future strains, planning a proper transition was not possible. Workplaces were instructed to social distance, and to avoid spreading the virus, many organizations operated in a remote format.

Studies have shown that existing models can impact both in-person and virtual workers in similar ways. Bakker and Demerouti's job demands-resources model (2007) states that high job demands paired with low job resources can yield increases in stress and burnout. This model was used as a reference in a 2021 study that shows how increases in remote job demands such as work-family conflict and social isolation can lead to a decrease in work engagement and productivity (Galanti et al., 2021).

This implies that remote work may not lead to a more engaged and committed workforce on its own. Organizations with lower job demands and more resources in their virtual work environment than their in-person work environment may see that their remote workers are more engaged (Galanti et al., 2021). Understanding what The Company's employees consider demands (negatives) and resources (job positives) would help discover why there may be a difference in engagement and commitment scores based on the frequency of remote work.

Remote work does mitigate concerns regarding COVID-19 infection in the workplace (Galanti et al., 2021). People emotionally affected by the virus were shown to have higher levels of productivity and motivation when working remotely.

While these factors may correlate with higher engagement scores, social isolation and independence/autonomy could also influence organizational identification (Wiesenfeld & Raghuram, 2001). Organizational identification is how “individuals define the self with respect to their organization” (Wiesenfeld, Raghuram, & Garud, 2000, p. 213). Because organizational identification positively correlates with affective commitment (Mete, Sokmen, & Biyik, 2016), it can be an important consideration when monitoring its relationship with remote work.

Similar to affective commitment, organizational identification has also been associated with cooperative workplace behaviors such as motivation to fulfilling organizational goals, organizational citizenship behaviors, and intent to stay (Wiesenfeld et al., 2000). Potential virtual predictors of organizational identification may include the spatial distance between employees and their workplace, the visibility of organizational members, and the exposure to the organizational structures such as uniforms and the office design (Wiesenfeld et al., 2000).

Understanding how different elements of remote work may correlate with the organizational commitment and engagement of employees can help create processes to mitigate adverse effects.

Application to Company

When the virus appeared to die down in late 2021, The Company tried implementing a rotational schedule that allowed teams to come into the office on corresponding days. However, when another spike in COVID-19 cases appeared, work was again changed to a remote format. The virus creates an atmosphere of change and uncertainty that can be difficult for leadership team members to manage. Utilizing change management techniques to alleviate negative reactions from staff is thus made more difficult. As such, I propose that:

Research Proposition 2a-2b: Employees who experience consistency in their work environment will have higher (a) engagement and (b) affective commitment levels.

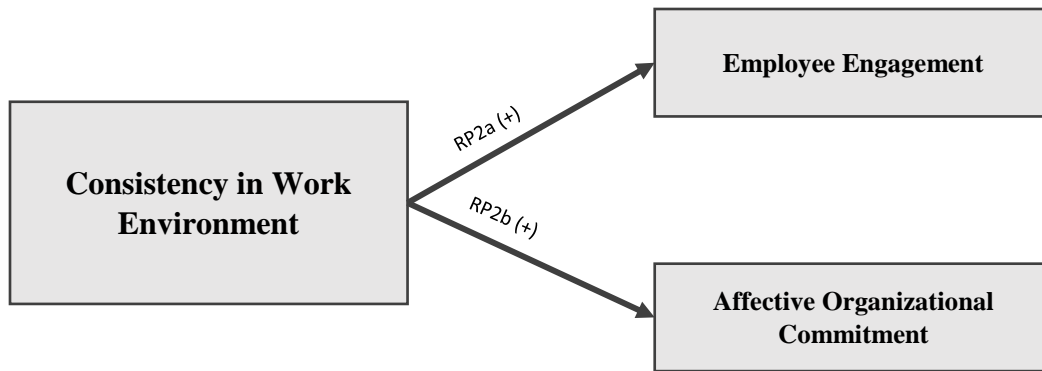


Figure 1.2
Model illustrating the Influence that Consistency in Work Environment has on Employee Engagement and Affective Organizational Commitment

Tenure

Studies have shown that tenure has a relationship with both employee engagement and affective organizational commitment. Employees who have been employed less than 2 years at their organization tend to be more engaged than others (Welch & Jackson, 2007). A Peakon study on employee voice found that employees experience different needs and desires throughout their tenure at an organization.

While they are learning to define their space during the first year or two, after they have become established in their position, they tend to begin looking for leadership and growth opportunities. While this can be beneficial to both the employee and the organization, it poses potential disengagement risks as employees may experience pushback or search for growth opportunities elsewhere (Peakon, 2019). While research has found ambiguous responses on how affective commitment relates with tenure, there has been findings that suggest that longer tenure does correlate with higher affective commitment (English, Morrison, & Chalon, 2010). It is possible that different organizational factors (ex: work environment) may influence the relationship. For The Company, those with longer tenure were more likely to have worked in-person prior to the pandemic, so they had more opportunities to build connections with the team. Because of this, I propose the following:

Research Proposition 3a-3b: Employees who are more tenured will have lower (a) engagement, but higher (b) affective commitment levels.

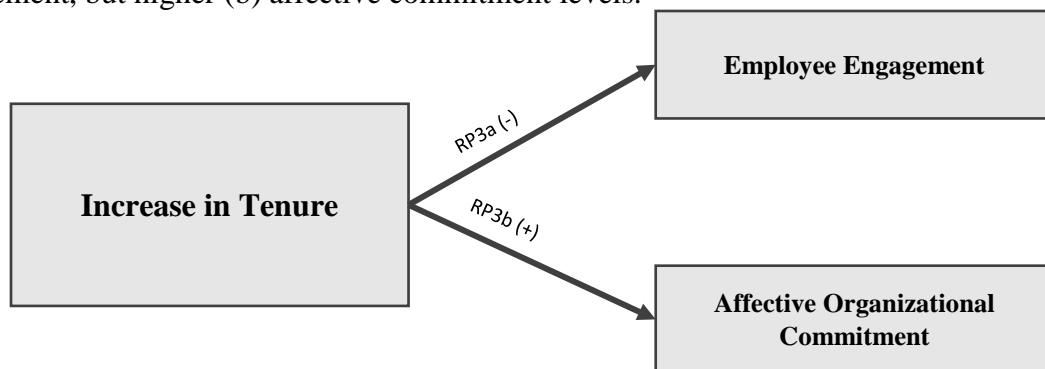


Figure 1.2
Model illustrating the Influence that Tenure has on Employee Engagement and Affective Organizational Commitment

CHAPTER II: METHODOLOGY

Overview

I created a survey to assess employee engagement, organizational commitment, and overall work environment. Survey respondents were given the opportunity to participate in a follow-up individual interviews meant to provide further insight into their answers. From the information gathered by the survey, interviews, and additional research into successful intervention techniques, recommendations were made. Below, the measures and procedures for each are detailed.

Survey Sample and Procedure

The survey, which had 33 items, was emailed to the entire U.S. staff, which, at the time, had about 35 people (age range 25–64) who had been working for at least 2 months. Those were the primary targets for the survey as they had enough experience with The Company to give an accurate determination of their engagement and commitment levels. Follow-up reminders helped gather additional responses.

After the survey deadline passed, 23 of the 35 employees ended up completing the survey, with 20 responses being usable, resulting in a response rate between 57.1% and 65.7%. A non-usable response would be any respondent that failed to fill out critical survey questions needed for analysis. Of the individuals who had filled out the survey, approximately 45% identified as males and 45% identified as females, while 10% preferred not to respond. Based on survey responses, 78% of The Company employees worked remotely, thus making it difficult to determine if there was a difference based on work environment. It should also be noted that 85% of employees' tenure amounted to less than three years, on average.

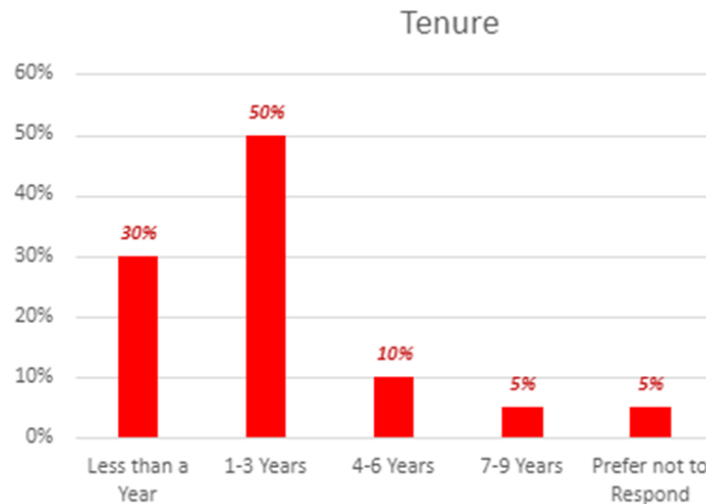


Figure 2.1
Tenure breakdown of the survey participants

Prior to the launch of this survey, The Company had distributed a diversity survey to examine the demographics of its employees. This survey was created by The Company’s HR department with the guidance of the Global Executive Leadership Team. While not enough information had been gathered on the racial breakdown of the company, the United States team was about evenly divided between males and females. This, along with a similar age breakdown, implies that the project sample is at least moderately representative of the greater office.

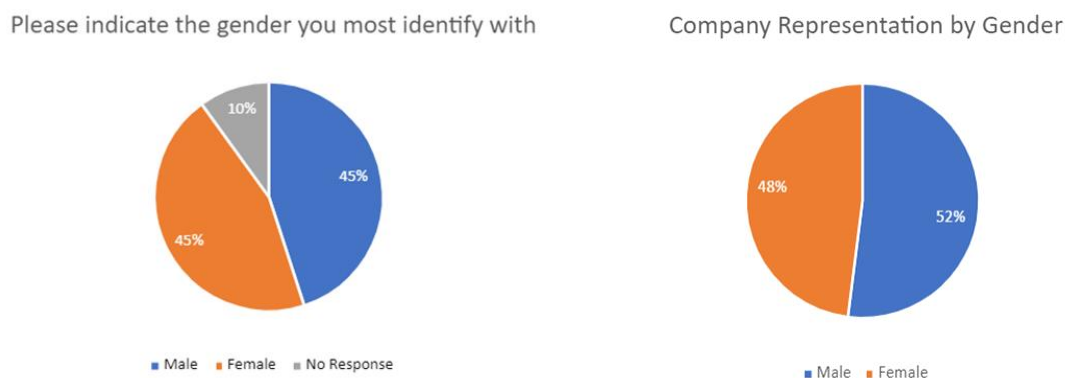


Figure 2.2
Gender breakdown of the survey participants. The bar graph on the left represents the breakdown of participants who took the project Engagement survey. The graph on the right represents the gender breakdown of the individuals who took the company Diversity & Inclusion survey.

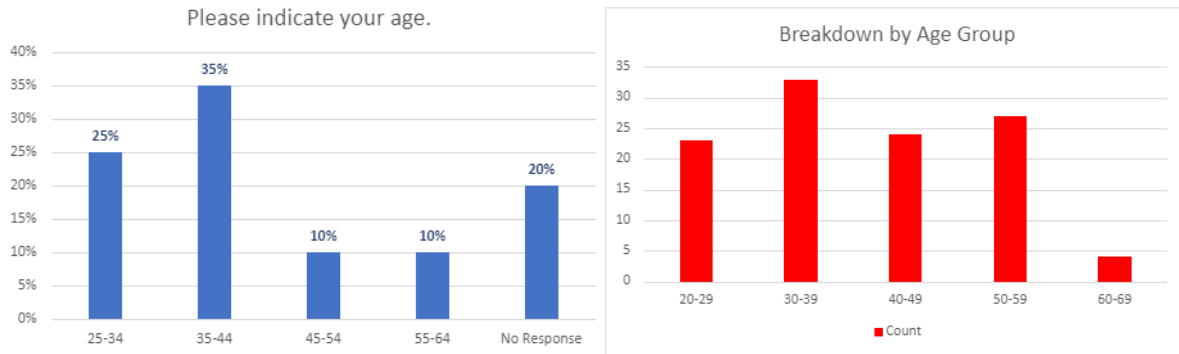


Figure 2.3

Age breakdown of the survey participants. On the left, a bar graph depicts the age range of employees who had taken the project engagement survey. The bar graph on the left showcases the age breakdown of those who had taken The Company's Diversity & Inclusion survey.

It should be noted that while the bar graph on the left is representing the United States office specifically, the graph on the right represents the age group breakdown for the global team.

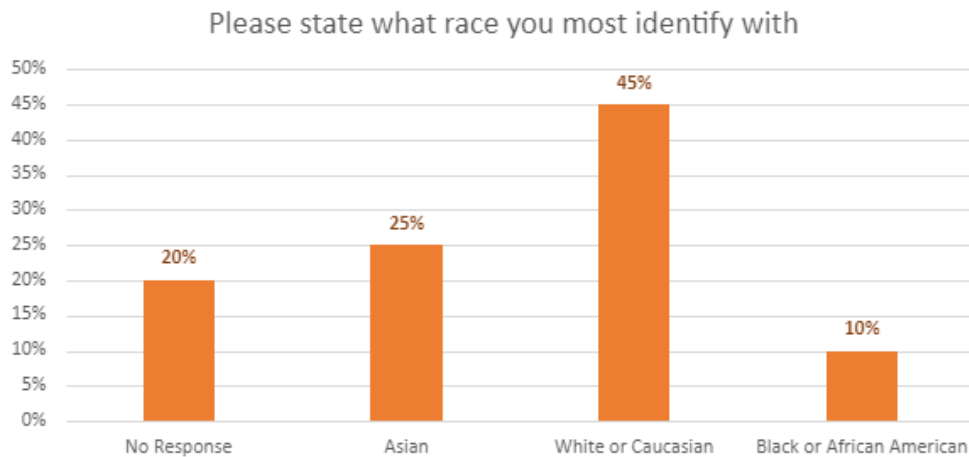


Figure 2.4

Race breakdown of the survey participants in the survey sample.

As depicted in Figure 1.5, most of the survey sample identified as white while the next largest demographic representation identified as Asian. A separate question also asked whether respondents identified as Hispanic or Latino. It was found that 90% of the survey participants did not while 10% did not respond. Demographics questions utilized in this project's survey were modeled after those asked in the United States census survey.

Workplace Engagement Survey

The first measure used was the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale-9 developed by Wilmar Schaufeli (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). This self-report questionnaire measures the three aspects of work engagement mentioned in Chapter I: vigor, dedication, and absorption. The information is collected in a 7-point Likert Scale between 0 and 6 with 0 being ‘never’ and 6 being ‘always/every day’. When statistically analyzing these data, the anchors were increased by 1 so that 1 became the code for ‘never’ and 7 became the code for ‘always/every day’. The measure used in this project is a shortened version of the UWES-17, a 17-item measure and had been tested cross-nationally to determine its validity psychometrically. The questions used in this project can be found in Appendix A.

Table 2.1

Cronbach's a of the UWES-9 (N=9,679)

	Total	Md	Range
Vigor	.84	.84	.75 - .91
Dedication	.89	.89	.83 - .93
Absorption	.79	.79	.70 - .84

The above table depicts Cronbach's alpha for Schaufeli & Bakker's UWES-9 survey. This project, which utilized UWES-9 as well, was found to have a Cronbach's alpha that was $\alpha=.93$.

Organizational Commitment Survey

The second measure was developed by Allen and Meyer (1990). While it measures three aspects of organizational commitment, for the purposes of this project, only the Affective Commitment Scale (ACS) was used. Affective commitment was measured by 6 items and, like the UWES-9, used a 7-point Likert scale ($0=strongly\ disagree$, $6=strongly\ agree$). Like the coding used for the UWES portion of the survey, the scale values were increased by 1 during the data analysis phase of this project.

It should be noted that there were three questions that were reverse-coded in order to match the positive-negative direction of the other items listed. The Cronbach's alpha for affective commitment ranged from $\alpha=.77$ to $\alpha=.88$ (Allen & Meyer, 1990). The Cronbach's alpha for the 6-item Organizational Commitment survey used in this project was found to be $\alpha=.74$.

Work Environment

To measure work environment, three questions were added. One determined the frequency the respondent worked remotely by breaking them into four groups:

- 1) This has been my work schedule about 100% of my time at this company*
- 2) This has been my work schedule about 75% of my time at this company*
- 3) This has been my work schedule about 50% of my time at this company*
- 4) This has been my work schedule about 25% of my time at this company*

Respondents could also select 'other' and manually input an answer or select 'prefer not to respond'.

Another question determined how long a respondent had been working in that format and is described as "consistency in work environment". This question's goal was meant to identify whether employees who saw less consistency in their work environment showed different levels of engagement or commitment than peers who had been working in the same format for a longer period of time. Lastly, a question to determine their regional office was included in case anyone outside of the United States team had completed the questionnaire. This question was included in order to ensure that the sample indeed featured United States team members. Any individual who selected another region would have been removed from the sample.

While the survey responses provided quantitative information, I decided to hold interviews. These would provide qualitative information that gives a more well-rounded view of the situation.

Interviews

Survey respondents were provided the chance to opt into focus groups at the end of the survey. Out of nineteen responses, five opted into the focus groups. Eleven respondents were unsure at the time of the survey. The purpose of the focus groups was to add additional context to the responses provided. An email was sent out with a sign-up link for interested individuals to sign up. Scheduling conflicts made it so that individual interviews were utilized in place of focus groups. Interested parties were contacted individually to schedule their session. The interviews were held remotely via Microsoft Teams, the primary meeting platform for The Company.

To create the questions for the interviews, I examined the survey data to identify any areas that needed additional information and clarification. Most survey participants had worked remotely during the time they had taken the survey as the U.S. team had still not transitioned back to the rotational office schedule proposed earlier in the year.

The interviews were held after August 2022, which was when the in-person schedule officially began. This provided a better understand of how the work environment of employees might affect their engagement and commitment. Answers were compiled and compared to determine similarity, priority, and potential next steps.

Special care was used to ensure that respondents had different levels of remote work frequency. Of the eight individuals who participated, there were those who worked entirely remotely, those who came in once a month, and those who came in once a week. Determinations of what schedule one had depended on location and seniority (not to be confused with tenure).

The interviews included 8 questions. A script, which is included in Appendix B, was drafted to ensure that the conversation was guided and addressed all areas of interest. Example questions are featured below.

1. *How would you define employee engagement?*
2. *How would you define organizational commitment?*
3. *What helps you to feel more committed to an organization? Do you feel these are present at this company?*

4. *If you've experienced a change in your work environment (remote vs in-office), how has that affected your ability to feel engaged with the organization?*

Prior to the start of the interviews, participants were assured that their responses would not be shared outside of the meeting.

CHAPTER III:

RESULTS

Survey

Analysis was conducted through IBM SPSS Statistics to better understand the gathered survey data. The desire was to determine whether there was a correlation between the variables, employee engagement and affective commitment, and work environment. Work environment was divided into the five categories displayed in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1

Distribution of Remote Work Frequency Across Employees

Variable	%
I currently work in person 3-5 days a week	0%
I currently work in person 1-2 days a week	5%
I currently work in person 3-5 days a month	0%
I currently work in person 1-2 days a month	10.5%
I currently work at home/remotely most of the time	74%
No Response	10.5%

Most survey respondents worked from home, creating an overrepresentation for that group. As such, utilizing these results for the general population would not be recommended. The primary reason that there is such a high number of employees who work remotely at The Company is due to delays in return-to-office processes because of the continued spread of the coronavirus and new variants.

Even so, a bivariate correlational analysis was run to gauge whether there was a relationship between frequency of remote work and employees' engagement and commitment levels. Frequency of remote work and employee engagement were positively correlated, $r(17) = .231, p < .05$, two-tailed. Commitment, however, was not found to be related to how often

employees worked in-person ($r(17)=.267, ns$). These findings support research proposition 1a. Research proposition 1b was not supported.

The length of time an employee spent working in their work environment during their tenure at The Company was also examined. A Pearson correlation coefficient was computed to determine whether there was a relationship between employee engagement, affective commitment, and the amount of consistency employees experienced in their work environment. Employees who experienced less consistency to their work environment experienced higher levels of work environment consistency. There was a positive correlation between employee engagement and consistency in one's work environment, $r(16)=.615, p<.05$, one-tailed. Similarly, there was found to be a positive correlation between affective commitment and consistency in one's work environment, $r(16)=.489, p<.05$, one-tailed.

Table 3.2

Consistency in Employee Work Format During Time at The Company

Length of Time in Current Work Schedule	%
100% of their time at the company	58%
75% of their time at the company	16%
50% of their time at the company	11%
25% of their time at the company	11%
Prefer not to respond	5%

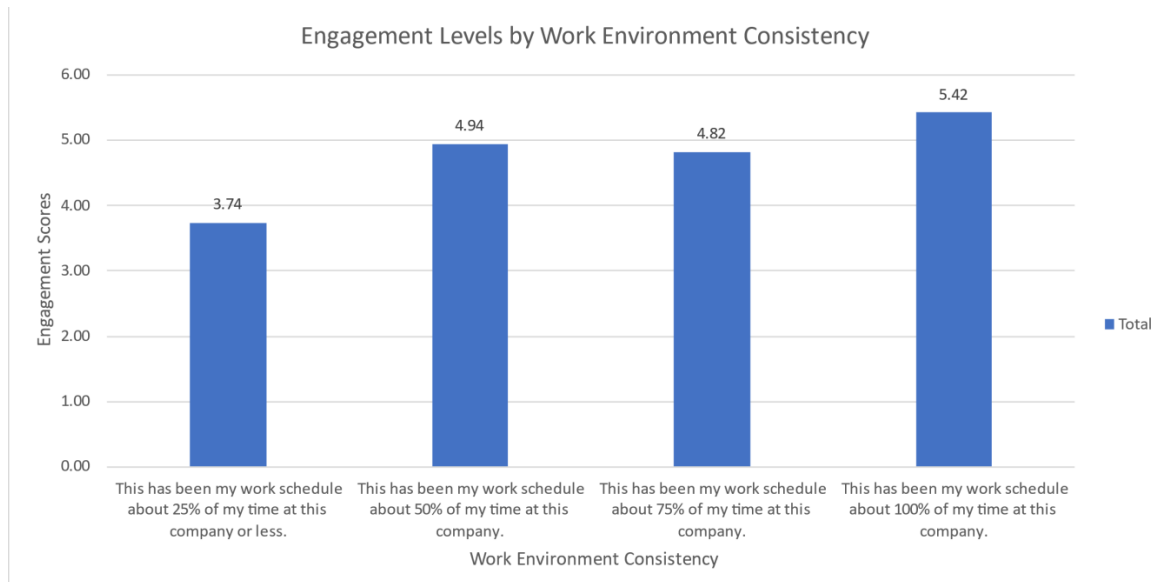


Figure 3.1
Average Employee Engagement Based on Consistency in Employees' Work Environment

These results support research proposition 2a and 2b. Despite this, due to the relatively low sample size, further study is recommended to see whether increasing consistency in employees' work environments would indeed be associated with increased commitment and engagement scores.

A one-way Analysis of Variance test was run to determine the effect of one's tenure on their engagement and commitment scores. It was found that there was not a significant difference in engagement scores dependent on one's tenure, $F(3,15)=2.053$, *ns*. Therefore, research proposition 3a was not supported.

However, research proposition 3b was supported as there was a significant difference in commitment scores showing that those who had served longer at the organization also felt more committed, $F(3, 15)=3.664$, $p<.05$.

Additional analyses were carried out to see if there were any other factors that may also share relationships with the engagement and commitment levels of employees. These included comparing the participant scores across gender, age, race, and tenure.

An independent samples t-test found there was a statistically significant difference between male and female employee engagement scores such that men typically were less

engaged than women, $t(16)=-2.502, p<.05$. There was no significant difference between the affective commitment scores of male and female employees, however, $t(16)=-.692, ns$. The sample sizes used for males and females were even due to 3 respondents not disclosing their gender ($n=9$).

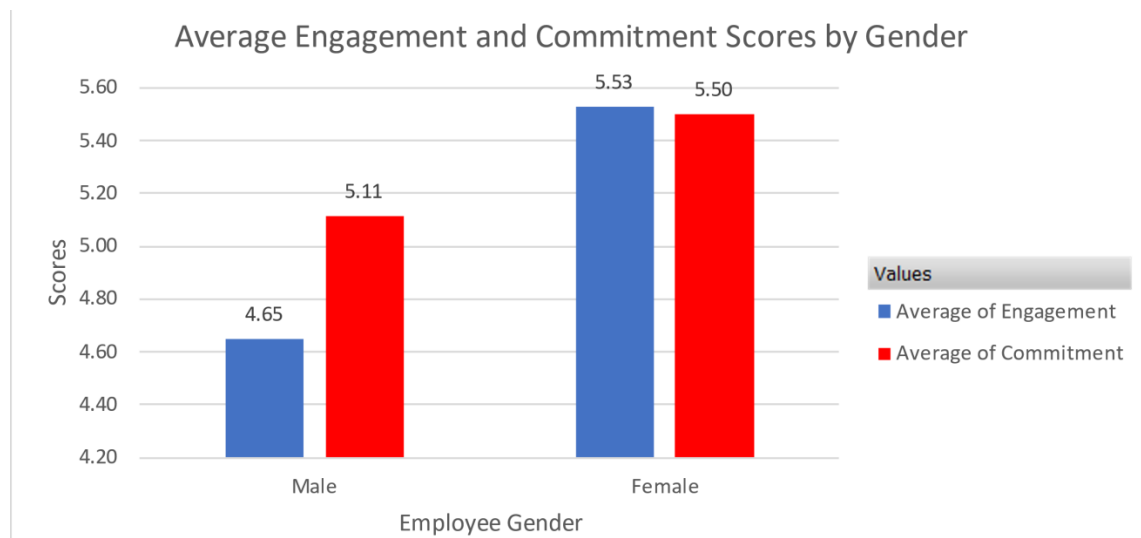


Figure 3.2
Average Commitment and Engagement Scores Between Male and Female Employees

A one-way Analysis of Variance test was run to determine the effect of one's age and race on their engagement and commitment scores. While age was not found to have a strong relationship on employee engagement ($F(4,14)=2.302, ns$), the ANOVA found that there was a strong, positive relationship between age and affective commitment, $F(4,14)=5.297, p<.01$.

An ANOVA analysis was also conducted to determine the relationship between race and employee engagement as well as race and affective commitment. There was no statistically significant relationship found, $F(2,13)=.848, ns$, and $F(2,13)=.504, ns$.

Analyzing Results from Interviews

Because interviews yield qualitative data, there was no SPSS analysis used. Instead, answers were compiled and compared to determine similarity, priority, and potential next steps. In general, the interview responses aligned with the ideas presented in the survey. It provided context as to why the scores between those who experienced a change in work environment may

have lower engagement scores than those who did not experience a change. More detail is available in the client deliverable found in Appendix C.

Prior to the pandemic, there had been more opportunities to build connections with other employees through team potlucks, in-person work, and other gatherings of that nature. As this was something respondents described as helping them to be engaged in a company, it would follow that less chances to do this would lead to them feeling less engaged and less connected to The Company. Even those hired after the onset of the pandemic noted that in-person meetings increase their ability to connect with others.

Shifts back to the office also could influence their engagement as it was noted that adjusting to the office took some time. Preparing to go to work and dealing with the long commute were also noted as potential pain points. This suggests that whether employees shift to remote or to in-person work, there is a level of adjustment needed in order to be most satisfied and productive. Therefore, creating a plan to transition to or from remote work could be very beneficial in employee engagement.

Everyone who participated in the interviews noted the benefits of remote work that helped them feel more engaged. Autonomy, flexibility, and focus were commonly cited themes across all participants. Despite this, most participants agreed that some level of in-person work would be beneficial not only to themselves as individuals but to the team at large.

CHAPTER IV:

DISCUSSION

Ultimately, the project findings supported three out of four of the research propositions. Employee engagement was found to positively correlate with employees' frequency of remote work. Affective commitment, however, did not show a statistically significant difference in scores based on frequency of remote work. This ultimately supports proposition 1a, but it does not support proposition 1b. The interviews with The Company employees showed a more complete story by highlighting the factors that could sway their levels of engagement. This was an important part of the project because it helped me better understand why having multiple references can more clearly represent employee mindsets. It also validates me recommending The Company to continue examining the role remote work plays in employee engagement to avoid the associated negative workplace outcomes (Sorenson, 2013).

Consistency of employee workplace environment was found to positively correlate with both employee engagement (RP2a) and affective commitment (RP2b). Further, while male employees did not experience lower affective organizational commitment scores than female employees, they did experience lower employee engagement scores.

Tenure did not have a statistically significant relationship with employee engagement, but there did appear to be a significant difference in affective commitment scores which suggests that the longer an employee served at the organization, the more committed they were. Age was not found to have a strong relationship with engagement, but it did have a positive relationship with affective commitment. The results did not suggest there were significant differences in engagement or commitment scores based on respondents' race.

The findings, which will be discussed further in the Implication section, are supported by past research, and suggest that organizations should take time in crafting and implementing their return-to-work schedules so as not to hamper employee engagement. Additionally, investigating

differences organizational commitment levels based on employee gender, tenure, and age should be further studied.

The project allowed me an opportunity to apply what I have learned in my master's program in a real-life setting. Survey creation and analysis, consolidating feedback, and managing the unexpected changes associated with field research were all different skills I learned due to this project. I also created a deliverable that I provided to my organization, which will help guide their work schedule plans going into 2023. The deliverable can be found in Appendix C.

This deliverable outlines a process for The Company to use in creating a work schedule and managing the employee responses that may follow. There hadn't been a consistent roll-out method for the initial return-to-office schedule which may have contributed to differences in engagement and/or commitment across the different groups of employees. The proposed strategy emphasizes easing employees into the different phases of the work schedules while also actively gathering feedback that may be applicable in the future.

I focused heavily on feedback and communication as it is one of the factors people mentioned in the interviews as being something they enjoyed about The Company. Actively seeking employee feedback can educate company leaders on the resources most needed by their team. As shown by the job demands-resources theory (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007), having more resources can help alleviate negative outcomes such as burnout, making it crucial for The Company's executive leadership team to welcome both positive and negative feedback.

Implications

Based on the survey research gathered from this project, the amount of time an individual spends working remotely shares a positive relationship with their overall engagement. While it should be noted there are certain negatives associated with remote work such as social isolation, long working hours, and conflicts in work-family demands (Adisa, Ogbonnaya, & Adekoya, 2021), positive associations have also been mentioned in research both pre- and post-pandemic.

Work-life balance is cited as a common positive associated with remote work, as well as increased productivity (Felstead & Henseke, 2017). Remote work also provides freedom of work location and a reduction in time spent commuting. While understanding the benefits that remote work can bring is an important consideration for business leaders, being knowledgeable of possible hindrances to engagement, productivity, and other beneficial workplace outcomes is just as critical. Studies have shown that common roadblocks employees face when working remotely include work-home interference, ineffective communication, procrastination, and loneliness (Wang et al., 2020). It is imperative for an organization considering a remote or hybrid work schedule to actively work against these inhibitors to improve employee engagement.

While the study did not find significant differences in affective commitment scores between those with different frequencies of remote work, a recent trend that has emerged in recent months may suggest that the two variables should continue to be monitored. “Quiet Quitting” is a term picked up by news articles across the country to describe those who do not give discretionary (extra) effort for their workplace (Zenger & Folkman, 2022). In other words, more employees are putting limits on what they do at work; they would not surpass contract hours, for example, and try to create a clear separation between themselves and their work responsibilities. The affective commitment scale used in this study includes a question that can associate with this:

I really feel as though this organization's problems are my own.

Quiet quitters' main goal is to detach the organization from their personal life and remove unnecessary spillover, suggesting that they would be less committed than individuals who do not do so. With less social interaction between employees who work remotely than those who work in person, detaching from one's organization may not be as difficult as it once was. With an increase in burnout and Zoom fatigue, remote workers may also be more motivated to separate themselves from their workplace (Espada, 2022). It should be noted that quiet quitting is not solely associated with remote work. Inefficient managers have also been shown to influence the rate of the phenomenon (Zenger & Folkman, 2022). Still, being mindful of the possible

relationship between the frequency of remote work and employees' commitment to their company should be considered when upper management teams create their strategies.

There also appears to be a relationship between consistency in work environment and employee's engagement scores. Implementing a return-to-work schedule is a type of change and, thus, should be handled carefully. While there is little research to suggest that return-to-work schedules led to increased turnover or decreased satisfaction, the way change is handled has been a heavily researched topic over the years. This is likely due to employee resistance being a major cause of failure for organizational change initiatives (Bovey & Hede, 2001).

Change might create stress and discomfort for employees. It is also likely that anxiety levels may increase (Bovey & Hede, 2001). While it is true that some may have an easier time processing any changes to the organization, others may move slower through the change process and struggle to adapt. Thus, handling changes with care and including employees in the conversation could help alleviate some of the negative consequences found.

Bovey and Hede further warn upper management to be mindful of defense mechanisms when implementing organizational change. Information-based interventions and counseling-based interventions were recommended to help individuals process change in healthy, adaptive ways. Combinations of these intervention practices are also commonly recommended. Emphasis is generally placed on addressing emotions, effectively communicating, and engaging employees in decision making (Wanberg & Banas, 2000).

Employee involvement in decision making is noted to be a critical determinant of employee engagement during change. Measuring employee engagement during the change can also highlight potential issues that arise, granting upper leadership more clarity on ways to better adapt their initiatives to better suit their workforce. Control is a key aspect of engagement that employees tend to lose during implemented changes (Aon Hewitt, 2013). Allowing them an opportunity to provide ideas and feedback, such as through focus groups or surveys, can grant employees the control to allow them to feel a part of the change rather than victims of it.

As has been commonly observed across numerous organizations, the changes experienced to where and how people worked have, in some way, impacted how employees feel about their job. The one-on-one discussions provided further insight into how this phenomenon affected The Company specifically. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, many of the interactive and relationship-building activities were abandoned. As in-person meetings become more commonplace again, revisiting old practices and revamping them to complement employees' new mindsets can be a positive strategy to re-engage those who crave in person interaction.

Past research supports the project results that showed gender having a relationship with employee engagement. As was the case in this project, it has been found that female employees are more engaged than male employees (Shukla, Adhikari, & Singh, 2008). And, while this was not the case in the project, studies have also suggested that women tend to report affective commitment that higher than men. This could be due to various factors including perceived coworker support, as a study noted that women reported higher affective commitment as well as higher perceived coworker support (Sloan, 2017). The reason for this could trace back to a women's tendency to "tend and befriend" rather than "fight or flight", illustrating women's differing response to stress than men (Taylor et al, 2000). Stereotypes on gender could lead to less support being offered to male employees in comparison to female employees as well (McGuire, 2012). Monitoring this further could be beneficial to both employee engagement and affective commitment scores.

Tenure was not found to be a significant indicator of employee engagement. However, the tenure of employees did appear to be a significant indicator of affective commitment. This finding has not always been supported by past literature. Meyer and Allen (1984) studied a sample of university employees and determined that tenure in an organization did not directly relate to commitment. This does not mean there is no correlation present, as the study (Meyer & Allen, 1984) also found that time spent at an organization did correlate with higher affective commitment levels, which could also lead to increased tenure.

As suggested by the project results, employee age appears to coincide with employee affective commitment scores with older employees being more committed than their younger counterparts. The quiet quitting phenomenon, for example, appears to also appear differently across different age groups, especially considering the difference in values between the generations (Espada, 2022).

Race was not found to be an indicator of employee engagement or affective commitment. Although there were several South African studies that investigated these variables, the difference in population and cultural contexts may not make these applicable to American workers.

Return to Work Strategies

Involving employees in return-to-work plans and obtaining their feedback on how to approach the matter may help in reducing the negative impact changes in work environment can have on their engagement. While upper management may have the best intentions at heart, when these intentions aren't readily shared with the larger organization, employees may feel as though the change is happening *to* them rather than *with* them. As previously stated, this could play a role in the lowered engagement scores.

Providing ample opportunity for clear, two-way communication with leadership, particularly during the implementation of the return-to-work initiative, can be a major driver of employee engagement (Aon Hewitt, 2013). Placing emphasis on communication and encouraging constructive feedback should be embedded in all return-to-work strategies, provided that the intention is to help employees remain engaged during said transition. I suggest The Company should implement the following process when planning to create and enact their return-to-work strategy:

Inform employees of intent and seek feedback. Ideally, this would be done in a staff meeting. Leadership can describe their initial plan along with a tentative timeline on when and how said plan would be enacted. This should be presented as an opportunity to receive employee feedback. Employees could either make suggestions during the meeting or submit suggestions

afterward to a central location. An alternative approach would be to host a focus group with a population representative of the United States team. A discussion could be had about the initial return-to-work plans, and feedback could be noted at this time. Providing a place and time to gather employee feedback can grant them a sense of control, thus allowing them to feel more comfortable with any impending changes, (Aon Hewitt, 2013). Participative decision making is also a variable that research has shown has a positive relationship with affective commitment in particular (Meyer & Allen, 1997).

Adjust initial strategy as needed. After receiving employee feedback, leadership would have the opportunity to make the necessary changes. Naturally, not every suggestion will be possible or even practical. Still, time should be taken to consider the feedback given and apply the suggestions that will help to create a more engaged, productive workforce. A goal-oriented mindset can help identify helpful ideas.

Present plan along with a projected timeline. Whether this is communicated through direct supervisors or at a follow-up meeting, there should be a specific time dedicated to sharing the official plan with a projected timeline. It might be helpful to point out where employee suggestions were implemented to further emphasize the importance and value of their opinion. Transparency in decision-making and mistakes is a key aspect of authentic leadership, a concept that is positively related to favorable work attitudes such as commitment, job satisfaction, and engagement (Jex & Britt, 2014).

Communicate any changes to the plan or timeline. There will likely be some amount of change before the schedule is implemented. Letting employees know in advance will allow them time to prepare and adjust to any changes that come. Transparency can be beneficial in this aspect, particularly when the plans directly impact how and where employees work. With ineffective communication being noted as a major drawback of remote work, ensuring its inclusion can help to alleviate this negative outcome (Wang et al., 2020).

Clearly set up a way to raise concerns. This stage is important both before, during, and after any changes are made. Creating a way for employees to raise concerns during the change

process can not only make them feel included, it also can alert leadership to potential issues they may not have considered or noticed.

Implement the plan. After creating the plan, receiving feedback, and updating it as needed, implementing the return-to-office schedule follows. Ensure that the plan is clearly communicated so that employees understand when they are expected in the office. Allowing a few weeks or months of prep time can be very beneficial, as employees will be able to adjust their personal plans to accommodate coming into the office once more.

Regularly seek feedback on the plan. Even with a way for employees to submit feedback, it is also necessary for leadership to reach out and determine how the return-to-office schedule is being received. It should be noted that there will not be a schedule that pleases everyone. But being mindful of employees' needs and respectful of their opinions can help assuage any discontent with the frequency of in-person meeting.

Adjust as needed. Due to both internal and external influences, further change may be needed. These can also be influences that affect the whole company, select teams, or a single individual. Being adaptable may help to reduce unintended outcomes that may arise specifically because of remote or in-person work, such as a work-family conflict that cannot otherwise be avoided. These can be reduced through examining job tasks, work-home interferences, social support strategies, and job autonomy (Wang et al., 2021). Clearly communicating these changes as well as the rationale behind them to employees can go a long way in ensuring they feel a part of the organization.

Employee Engagement

Employee engagement initiatives are especially tricky during the time of COVID-19. While restrictions are loosening, the potential for a resurgence in the virus remains a persistent threat. Thus, there may be continued caution surrounding engagement activities such as lunches, work parties, and the like. Based on the past few months, most of the Houston-based team members are willing to meet in person, particularly in an outdoor environment. This could suggest that implementing in-person engagement activities can be further explored.

Throughout the duration of the pandemic, The Company hosted virtual happy hours to help build connections even when employees weren't meeting in the office. Hosting in person happy hours as covid restrictions wane could be further explored to help coworkers bond outside of the work environment. This should not suggest that virtual happy hours should be removed, however, as it still helps to connect the permanently remote employees The Company has.

Hosting some type of activity during the days employees come into the office could also be a way to increase employee engagement. Ensuring that there is some level of bonding occurring when team members meet could increase the utility of in person meeting and further increase collaboration between coworkers.

Encouraging meetups for non-Houston-based United States employees could also help these employees create a deeper connection with their coworkers and the organization at large. Also ensuring that these employees have the emotional and professional support that they need through supervisor check-ins and team meetings can also aid in connecting them to The Company. Quarterly lunches where non-Houston based employees are invited to the office could be useful. In these instances, reimbursing their transportation and lodging could encourage their participation.

CHAPTER V: CONCLUSION

The study ultimately found that (1) frequency of remote work positively correlated with employee engagement and (2) consistency in work environment positively correlated with both employee engagement and affective commitment. While this does appear to suggest that remote work is desirable for many employees, company leadership teams should not make the assumption that this arrangement will always have positive outcomes (Wang et al., 2021). Being mindful of the negative factors associated with remote work can help upper management overcome them, thus creating a more engaged and committed workforce. Taking care to consider how age, tenure, and gender may affect engagement and commitment can be beneficial to company decision-makers as well in order to reduce counterproductive workplace behaviors and outcomes such as absenteeism and intention-to-quit.

With COVID-19 restrictions loosening countrywide and increased interest in return-to-office initiatives, it is imperative for organizations to carefully plan and implement their desired strategies so that employees remain engaged to their mission and goals.

Strengths and Limitations

There are a number of limitations worth noting that should be considered when analyzing the results of this study. With a survey sample of only 20 participants, the generalizability of this study as well as the statistical power are limited. It should also be noted that while there were no significant results were found across different racial groups, some populations were more highly represented than others.

As stated previously, the original intent of the study was to determine if there was a difference in employee engagement depending on one's work environment (or, how frequently one worked in-person compared to remotely). Nearly 70% of the sample worked remotely, further reducing the statistical power and reliability of the results. This was in large part due to the delay in implementing a return-to-office schedule following the resurgence of the

Coronavirus in the beginning of the year. The follow-up interviews alleviated some of this by providing more variability in perspective, but as the data yielded from the interviews were qualitative, they could not be statistically analyzed.

Survey participation was also likely hindered by survey fatigue. The Company released a Diversity & Inclusion survey about a month prior to this one and, additionally, completed annual performance appraisals shortly before the project survey launched. A more ideal time to have conducted the survey would have not been around the fiscal-year-end of The Company. This might have allowed for more participation from employees as they would have had less administrative items to complete.

Using pre-validated measures such as Utrecht's Work Engagement Survey and Allen & Meyer's Organizational Commitment Survey increased the validity and reliability of survey findings. Additionally, there being an even representation of male and female participants further increased reliability of gender-related findings.

Gathering data from both a survey and interviews was another strength of this project. The two methods used to gather information helped to understand the issue from different perspectives.

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APPENDIX A: COMPANY SURVEY

Utrecht Work Engagement Scale-17

The following statements are about how you feel at work. Please read each statement carefully and decide if you ever feel this way about your job.

At my work, I feel bursting with energy.	0 – Never
I find the work that I do full of meaning and purpose.	1 – Almost Never
Time flies when I am working.	2 – Rarely
At my job, I feel strong and vigorous.	3 – Sometimes
I am enthusiastic about my job.	4 – Often
When I am working, I forget everything else around me.	5 – Very Often
My job inspires me.	6 – Always
When I get up in the morning, I feel like going back to work.	
I feel happy when I am working intensely.	
I am proud of the work that I do.	
I am immersed in my work.	
I can continue working for very long periods of time.	
To me, my job is challenging.	
I get carried away when I am working.	
At my job, I am very resilient, mentally.	
It is difficult to detach myself from my job.	
At my work, I always persevere, even when things do not go well.	

Meyer & Allen (1990) Affective Commitment Scale

The following statements are about how you feel at work. Please read each statement carefully and decide if you ever feel this way about your job.

I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career in this organization.	0 - Strongly Disagree
I really feel as though this organization's problems are my own.	1 - Moderately Disagree
I do not feel like "part of the family" at this organization. [R]	2 - Slightly Disagree
I do not feel "emotionally attached" to this organization. [R]	3 - Neither Disagree or Agree
This organization has a great deal of personal meaning for me.	4 - Slightly Agree
I do not feel a strong sense of belonging to this organization. [R]	5 - Moderately Agree
Please indicate how long you have been working at your organization	6 - Strongly Agree

Demographics Survey

Please indicate how long you have been working at your organization.

- 1) Less than 1 year
- 2) 1-3 years
- 3) 4-6 years
- 4) 7-9 years
- 5) 10-12 years
- 6) 13-15 years
- 7) 16-18 years
- 8) Prefer not to Respond

Please indicate your age

- 1) 18-24
- 2) 25-34
- 3) 35-44
- 4) 45-54
- 5) 55-64
- 6) 65-74
- 7) 75+
- 8) Prefer not to Respond

Please indicate how long this has been your schedule.

- 1) This has been my work schedule about 100% of my time at this company.
- 2) This has been my work schedule about 75% of my time at this company.
- 3) This has been my work schedule about 50% of my time at this company.
- 4) This has been my work schedule about 25% of my time at this company.
- 5) Other
- 6) Prefer not to Respond.

Please state your office location.

- 1) Australia
- 2) New Zealand
- 3) Singapore
- 4) United Arab Emirates
- 5) United Kingdom
- 6) United States
- 7) Other
- 8) Prefer not to Respond

Please state the gender you most identify with.

- 1) Male
- 2) Female

- 3) Other
- 4) Prefer not to Respond

Please state the race you most identify with.

- 1) Asian
- 2) White
- 3) Black or African-American
- 4) Middle Eastern or North African
- 5) Native Americans and Alaska Natives
- 6) Native Hawaiians and other Pacific Islanders
- 7) Other
- 8) Prefer not to Respond

Would you be open to participating in a focus group to expound on your responses?

- 1) Yes
- 2) No
- 3) Unsure at this time

Before submitting your responses, is there any additional information you would like to share?

APPENDIX B:
FOCUS GROUP SCRIPT

Employee Engagement Focus Group Script	
Purpose: to provide the focus group facilitator with a detailed script for running the focus groups. When asking questions, you can also ask probing questions to gain further clarity on participant answers.	
Facilitator	Amaka Egbe
Greeting	Good afternoon, everyone! Thank you so much for participating in this focus group.
Opening Remarks	The purpose of this focus group is to learn more about how work environments may affect your relationship with your workplace. I will be taking notes during this conversation, but I will not be recording who is sharing what. The data gathered will go into a summary report for the US Executive Leadership Team. By participating in this group, you acknowledge that any information shared during this meeting will remain known only to the participants and should not be repeated.
Engagement Questions	How is everyone doing today? Do you have any questions that I can answer before we begin?
Exploration Questions	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How would you define employee engagement? 2. How would you define organizational commitment? 3. What helps you to feel more committed to an organization? Do you feel these are present at this company? 4. If you've experienced a change in your work environment (remote vs in-office), how has that affected your ability to feel engaged with the organization? 5. There have been talks about a return-to-office schedule. What would your ideal schedule be like? Why? 6. Do you have any concerns about transitioning back to a work schedule that includes meeting at the office? 7. What is a major pro about working in-office at this company? 8. What is a major pro about working remotely at this company?
Closing Remarks	Thank you again for participating in this focus group. Your input is very appreciated. Feel free to reach out to me if you have any questions or concerns. Have a wonderful rest of your day

APPENDIX C:
CLIENT DELIVERABLE

Deliverable to The Company

Executive Summary

This report consists of the findings of a project that analyzed the relationship between frequency of remote work on employee engagement and organizational commitment scores for the United States team of a global Information Technology organization. Through conducting a survey in May 2022 and follow-up interviews in October 2022, data was gathered to measure engagement and commitment scores of employees.

Through determining whether there is a relationship between remote work and employee engagement and commitment, recommendations were created to assist the organization in refining their return-to-office strategy and schedule.

Employee engagement and affective organizational commitment were measured utilizing a 33-item survey that included existing measures such as Utrecht's Work Engagement Scale (2004) and the Allen & Meyer (1990) Organizational Commitment Survey. Follow-up interviews were scheduled to provide further context to survey respondents. Employees were invited to participate in the project via email. Out of 44 employees, 20 completed the survey, and eight individuals were interviewed.

Based on survey responses, those who worked remotely more frequently saw *increased* employee engagement scores compared to those who worked in person more. There was *no significant difference* in affective organizational commitment scores based on frequency of remote work, however.

Due to the sample size and the low variability within groups, the interview data was used to provide further context and validation to survey responses. Employees generally enjoyed working remotely more than working in-person, though they showed positive reactions to the one-day-a-month schedule introduced in August 2022. Based on interview findings, the following pros and cons were determined:

REMOTE WORK BENEFITS	IN-PERSON BENEFITS
Flexibility of location, hours, and schedule	Mental preparation to enter “work mode”
Increased productivity	More Opportunities to bond with team
Limited distractions	Access to leadership and decision-makers
More Autonomy	Opportunities for knowledge exchange
Work-life Balance	
Personalized work set-up	
Increase global interaction	
No Commute	

Through determining whether there is a relationship between remote work and employee engagement and commitment, recommendations were created to assist the organization in refining their return-to-office strategy and schedule.

35 <i>US based employees as of July 2022</i>	72% <i>Survey Response rate</i>	5.16 <i>Average Employee Engagement Score</i>	5.35 <i>Average Organizational Commitment Score</i>
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Variable Definitions

This section defines key variables that were observed throughout this project. Most were variables defined in past literature (employee engagement, affective commitment, work environment) while some are terms coined specifically for this project (work format frequency).

Employee Engagement Schaufeli, 2004	Employee Engagement, or as it is sometimes denoted <i>work engagement</i> , is when employees have a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor (energy and resilience), dedication (work involvement), and absorption (concentration and engrossment in one's work).
Affective Commitment Allen & Meyer, 1991	Affective Commitment can be defined as employees' emotional bond to their organization. This can help determine their dedication and loyalty to the organization. When an employee is affectively committed, their involvement, engagement, and continued tenure may increase.
Work Environment Hanaysha, 2016	For the purposes of this study, work environment refers to as the atmosphere of an organization where employees do their work. This can include aspects that involve other people as well as their physical environment (physical comfort, working conditions).
Work Format Frequency	We also examine how frequently a person goes into the office to work. This will be called <i>work format or work format frequency</i> . Change in work format/work format frequency would suggest that employees went from one schedule to another.

Methodology

To better understand potential relationships between employee engagement, affective organizational commitment, and the frequency of remote work in a mid-sized Information Technology organization, the following procedure was created:

First, a 33-item survey was disseminated to get a better understanding of where the engagement and commitment levels of The Company's employees were whilst also determining what their work environment was. Survey respondents were given the opportunity to participate in follow-up individual interviews meant to provide further insight into their answers.

From the information gathered by both the survey and interviews as well as through additional research into successful intervention techniques, recommendations were created and presented to the executive leadership team. Below, the measures, procedures, and results for each are detailed. To ensure anonymity, the information is aggregated.

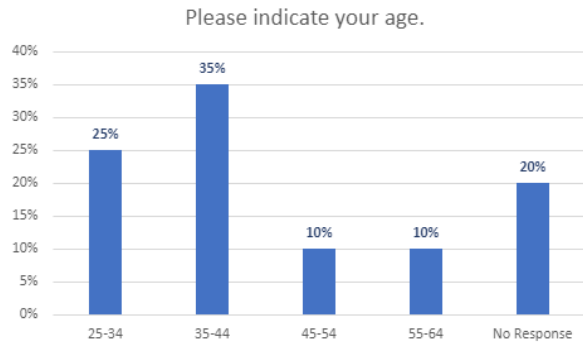
Employee Engagement Survey

Survey Dissemination

The survey was emailed to the entire United States staff, which stood at about 35 employees as of May 2022. Please note that the survey was only sent to those who had been working at the company for at least 2 months. This was to ensure that participants had enough experience with The Company to give an accurate determination of their Engagement and Commitment levels. Follow-up reminders were sent to gather additional responses.

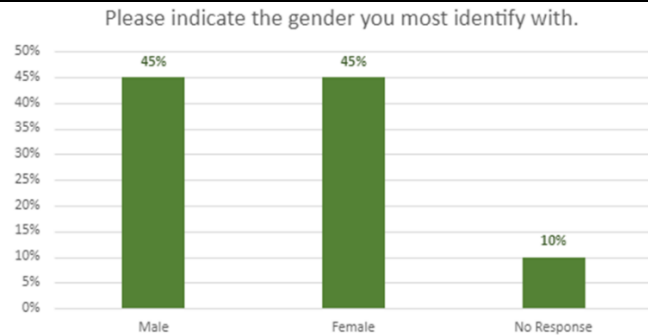
Survey Demographics

After the survey deadline passed, 23 of the 35 employees filled out the survey, with 20 responses being usable. A non-usable response would be any respondent that failed to fill out critical survey questions needed for analysis. Of the 20 individuals who had filled out the survey:



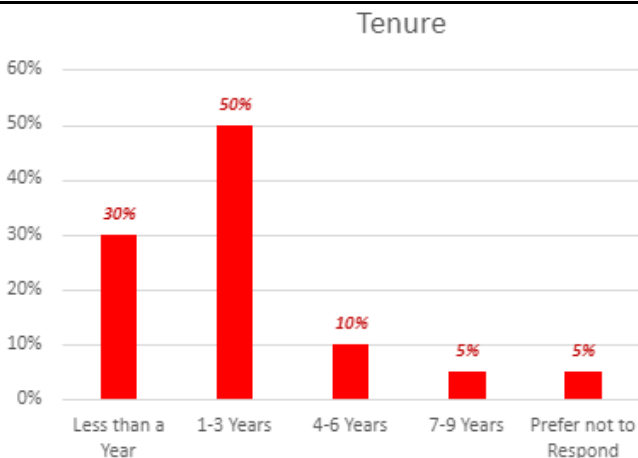
Survey Respondent Age:

Most respondents (seven) selected the 35-44 age bracket, with the second most common response being 25-34 (five).



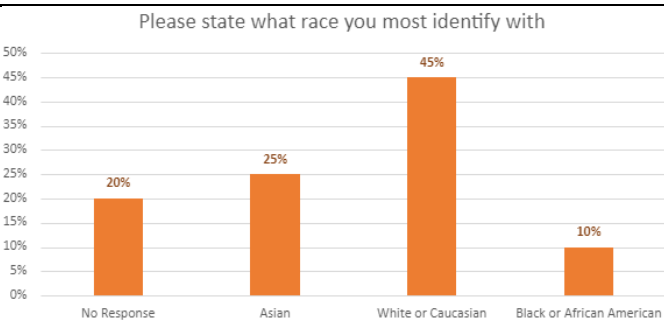
Survey Respondent Gender:

The survey found that 45% of respondents identified as males (nine) and 45% identified as females (nine).



Survey Respondent Tenure:

Most respondents (ten) selected the one to three years as their tenure, with the second most common response being less than a year (six).



Survey Respondent Race:

Nine participants identified as White while five identified as Asian and two selected Black or African American.

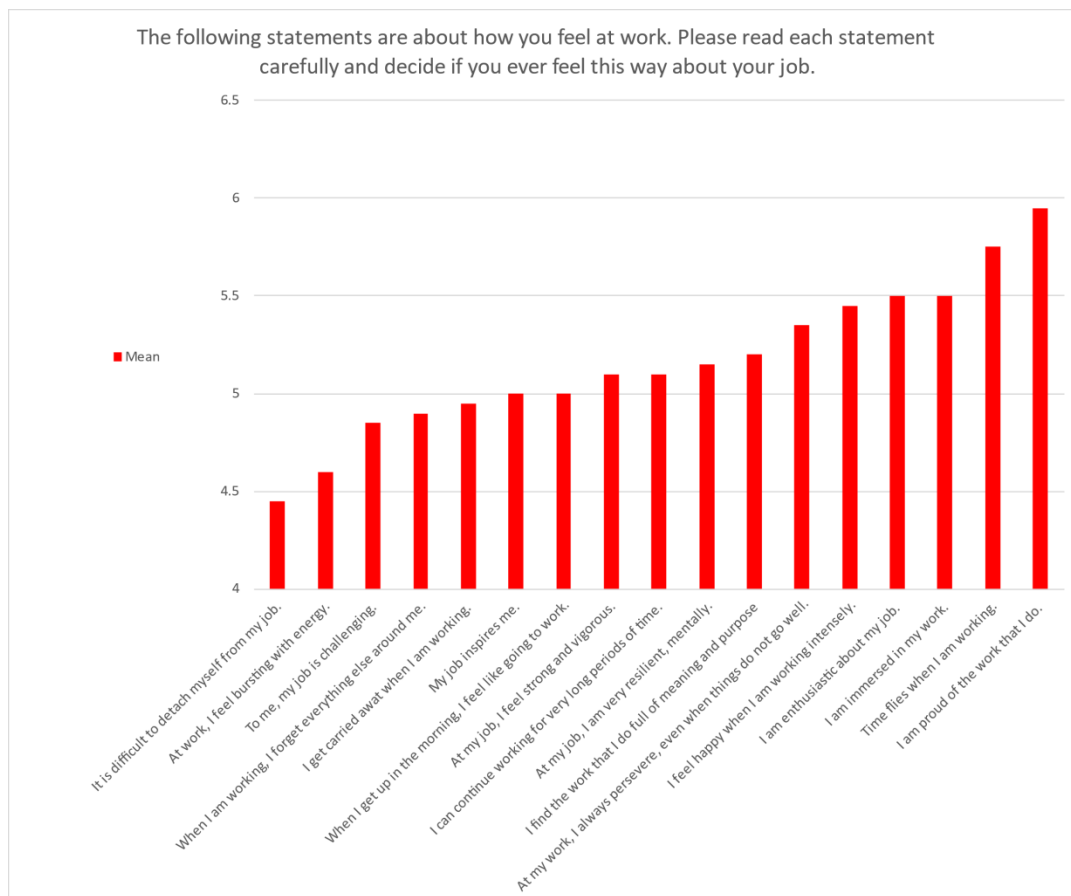
It should be noted that an additional question asked whether respondents identified as Hispanic or Latino. 90% of participants selected *no* while 10% either selected ‘*prefer not to respond*’ or skipped the question.

Employee Engagement

Survey respondents answered questions related to their employee engagement by indicating how often they experienced a certain feeling on a 7-point Likert scale:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
<i>Never</i>	<i>Almost Never</i>	<i>Rarely</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Often</i>	<i>Very Often</i>	<i>Always</i>

The following graph displays the average for each question related to employee engagement. This has been organized in ascending order by what was least frequently experienced by survey respondents.



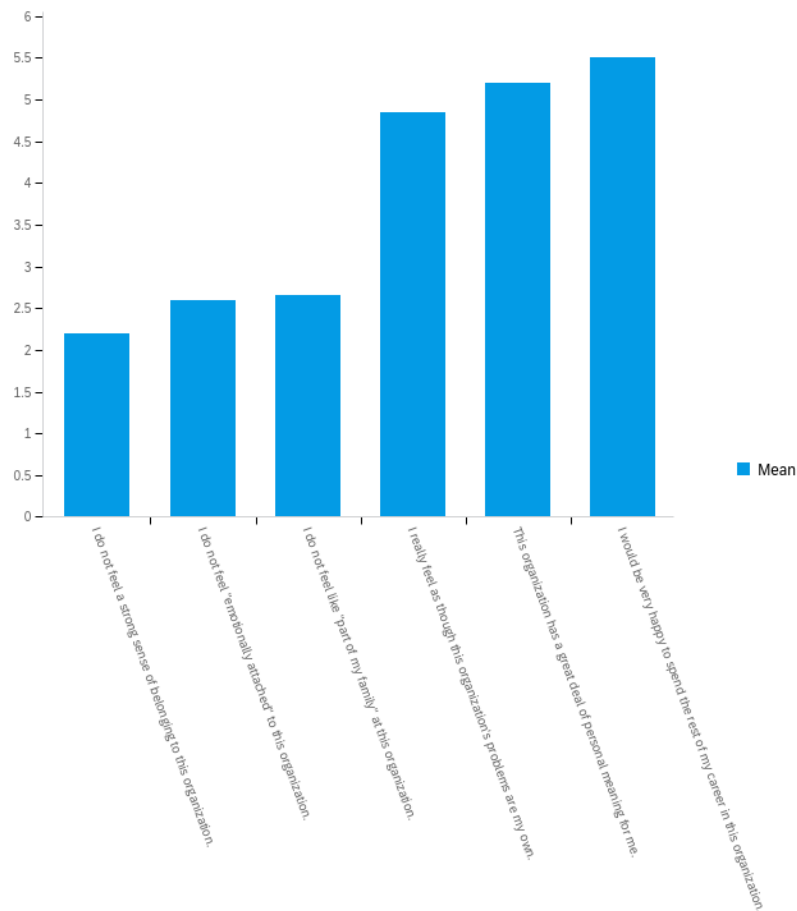
Affective Commitment

Survey respondents answered questions related to their affective commitment by indicating how often they experienced a certain feeling on a 7-point Likert scale:

<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>7</i>
<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Moderately Disagree</i>	<i>Slightly Disagree</i>	<i>Neither Disagree nor Agree</i>	<i>Slightly Agree</i>	<i>Moderately Agree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>

The following graph displays the average for each question related to affective commitment. This has been organized in ascending order by what was least frequently experienced by survey respondents.

The following statements are about how you feel at work. Please read each statement carefully and decide if you ever feel this way about your job.



Individual Interviews

Transition to Interviews

While the original idea had been to conduct follow-up focus groups, scheduling conflicts made it so that individual interviews were prioritized. These interviews were held virtually via Microsoft Teams. The US team was invited via email initially with follow-up messages sent through the company's instant messaging platform. A major benefit to these interviews was the time they were held. When the survey had originally been sent out, the US team had still not transitioned back to the rotational office schedule that had been proposed earlier in the year.

However, the schedule officially began in August of 2022, which allowed for further understanding of how employees felt about in-person work in particular. Answers were compiled and compared to determine similarity, priority, and potential next steps.

Interviewee Demographics

Special care was used to ensure that respondents had different levels of remote work frequency. Of the eight individuals who participated, there were those who worked entirely remotely, those who came in once a month, and those who came in once a week. Determinations of what schedule one had depended on location and seniority (not to be confused with tenure).

Understanding of Employee Engagement and Organizational Commitment

The first two questions of the interview were meant to determine what employees understood by the terms ‘employee engagement’ and ‘organizational commitment’. They were encouraged to share what they thought by stating that there were no wrong answers and that the goal was to make sure we were aligned in the term definitions.

Based on respondent answers, I provided further context to how these terms were used in this project in particular so that they would have a better understanding of the upcoming questions. The following tables include terms that respondents used to describe employee engagement and organizational commitment.

Terms Describing Understanding of Employee Engagement	Frequency
Caring about org success, progress, culture, etc.	2
Willingness to build connections, interact, collaborate, etc.	4
Accountability	1
How the organization brings in the employee	2

Terms Describing Understanding of Organizational Commitment	Frequency
Helping and supporting others	2
How committed an employee feels regarding the organization	2
Level of ownership an employee has to the organization	1
Doing what they are “supposed to” (work tasks, best work, timeliness) <i>This aligns with normative organizational commitment</i>	3
How the organization committed to my development and well-being	3

Organizational Commitment Factors

Because the survey did not determine a significant relationship between affective organizational commitment and frequency of remote work, a question was added to identify potential factors that correlate with employees’ commitment to the organization. Because no statistical analysis was used, the identified factors are merely commonalities that can be studied further.

Influences on one’s Organizational Commitment	Frequency
Connection with workers/team	2
Alignment of employee’s goals, morality, vision, purpose with organization’s	1
Sense of belonging	1
Growth and development opportunities at the organization	2
In-person engagement opportunities (happy hours, socials)	2
Leadership providing support and accessibility to workers	2
Accountability	1
Transparency	1

Involvement in decision making and ability to be heard/make a difference	2
When needs are being met	1

No respondent suggested that there was a lack of these in the organization. As a whole, they agreed that these items were present the majority of the time.

Change in Work Environment and Employee Engagement

Since the survey data suggested a significant relationship between frequency of remote work and employee engagement, a question asked: *If you have experienced a change in your work environment (ex: remote work to one day a week in office), has this impacted your ability to feel engaged with the organization?* I specified that this could be positive, negative, or neutral.

Respondents noticed different things depending on where they worked:

1. Office provides a clearer separation between home and work
2. Some respondents felt more at peace at home while some felt more at peace in the office
3. There is less ability to engage with team and build connections when working remotely
4. It is easier to focus and be productive when working remotely
5. The less days in office, the more flexibility and autonomy employees have
6. There is less stress preparing for work and getting to the office when one doesn't need to work in person frequently
7. It is easier to get clarity and direction when working in person

Work Preferences

A question also asked how people would prefer to work if they'd been given total autonomy on their schedule. Most people preferred a **remote** schedule due to the flexibility, but they noted that going into to the office from time to time would help them remain connected with

the team. They also discussed how in-person days would be beneficial for the team's cohesion overall. There has been favorable response to the current office schedule that has been implemented across the board.

Concerns about in-Person Work

Employees who worked in-person for at least a month were asked whether they currently had or used to have concerns about coming into the office. Most were not too concerned primarily due to the flexible nature of the company. Individuals do not have to come in promptly at 9am and can leave prior to 5pm to avoid traffic. This is noted as something that would have been a bigger concern otherwise.

The potential to catch COVID-19 is a mild concern, though many respondents no longer feel as though they are at risk of catching it due to the preventative measures they have taken. Remote employees similarly did not have major concerns, but they noted that being remote can be isolating at times as they do not have the same opportunities to see team members.

Benefits of in-Person or Remote Work

To conclude the interview, two closing questions were asked:

1. What are major pros (benefits) of working in-person at this company?
2. What are major pros (benefits) of working remotely at this company?

The following table lists out the various benefits interview respondents listed.

REMOTE WORK BENEFITS	IN-PERSON BENEFITS
Flexibility of location, hours, and schedule	Mental preparation to enter "work mode"
Increased productivity	More opportunities to bond with team
Limited distractions	Access to leadership and decision-makers
More autonomy	Opportunities for knowledge exchange

Work-life balance	
Personalized work set-up	
Increase global interaction	
No commute	

Recommendations

Return-to-Office Strategies

Involving employees in return-to-work plans and obtaining their feedback on how to approach the matter may help in reducing the negative impact changes in work environment can have on their engagement. While upper management may have the best intentions at heart, when these intentions aren't readily shared with the larger organization, employees may feel as though the change is happening *to* them rather than *with* them. This could lower their feelings of engagement.

Providing ample opportunity for clear, two-way communication with leadership, particularly during the implementation of the return-to-work initiative, can be a major driver of employee engagement according to a 2013 article by Aon Hewitt. Placing emphasis on communication and encouraging constructive feedback should be embedded in all return-to-work strategies, provided that the intention is to help employees remain engaged during said transition. I suggest The Company should implement the following process when planning to create and enact their return-to-work strategy:

Inform employees of intent and seek feedback. Ideally, this would be done in a staff meeting. Leadership can describe their initial plan along with a tentative timeline on when and how said plan would be enacted. This should be presented as an opportunity to receive employee

feedback. Employees could either make suggestions during the meeting or submit suggestions afterward to a central location. An alternative approach would be to host a focus group with a population representative of the United States team. A discussion could be had about the initial return-to-work plans, and feedback could be noted at this time. Providing a place and time to gather employee feedback can grant them a sense of control, thus allowing them to feel more comfortable with any impending changes, (Aon Hewitt, 2013). Participative decision making is also a variable that research has shown has a positive relationship with affective commitment in particular (Meyer & Allen, 1997).

Adjust initial strategy as needed. After receiving employee feedback, leadership would have the opportunity to make the necessary changes. Naturally, not every suggestion will be possible or even practical. Still, time should be taken to consider the feedback given and apply the suggestions that will help to create a more engaged, productive workforce. A goal-oriented mindset can help identify helpful ideas.

Present plan along with a projected timeline. Whether this is communicated through direct supervisors or at a follow-up meeting, there should be a specific time dedicated to sharing the official plan with a projected timeline. It might be helpful to point out where employee suggestions were implemented to further emphasize the importance and value of their opinion. Transparency in decision-making and mistakes is a key aspect of authentic leadership, a concept that is positively related to favorable work attitudes such as commitment, job satisfaction, and engagement (Jex & Britt, 2014).

Communicate any changes to the plan or timeline. There will likely be some amount of change before the schedule is implemented. Letting employees know in advance will allow them time to prepare and adjust to any changes that come. Transparency can be beneficial in this

aspect, particularly when the plans directly impact how and where employees work. With ineffective communication being noted as a major drawback of remote work, ensuring its inclusion can help to alleviate this negative outcome (Wang et al., 2020).

Clearly set up a way to raise concerns. This stage is important both before, during, and after any changes are made. Creating a way for employees to raise concerns during the change process can not only make them feel included, it also can alert leadership to potential issues they may not have considered or noticed.

Implement the plan. After creating the plan, receiving feedback, and updating it as needed, implementing the return-to-office schedule follows. Ensure that the plan is clearly communicated so that employees understand when they are expected in the office. Allowing a few weeks or months of prep time can be very beneficial, as employees will be able to adjust their personal plans to accommodate coming into the office once more.

Regularly seek feedback on the plan. Even with a way for employees to submit feedback, it is also necessary for leadership to reach out and determine how the return-to-office schedule is being received. It should be noted that there will not be a schedule that pleases everyone. But being mindful of employees' needs and respectful of their opinions can help assuage any discontent with the frequency of in-person meeting.

Adjust as needed. Due to both internal and external influences, further change may be needed. These can also be influences that affect the whole company, select teams, or a single individual. Being adaptable may help to reduce unintended outcomes that may arise specifically because of remote or in-person work, such as a work-family conflict that cannot otherwise be avoided. These can be reduced through examining job tasks, work-home interferences, social

support strategies, and job autonomy (Wang et al., 2021). Clearly communicating these changes as well as the rationale behind them to employees can go a long way in ensuring they feel a part of the organization.

Employee Engagement Initiatives

Employee engagement initiatives are especially tricky during the time of COVID-19. While restrictions are loosening, the potential for a resurgence in the virus remains a persistent threat. This might lead to caution when it comes to engagement activities such as lunches, work parties, and the like. Based on the past few months, most of the Houston-based team members are willing to meet in person, particularly in an outdoor environment. The interviews also suggested that there is a desire for in-person events to fortify team connections and bonds. This suggests that implementing in-person Engagement activities can be further explored.

Throughout the duration of the pandemic, The Company hosted virtual happy hours to help build connections even when employees weren't meeting in the office. Hosting in person happy hours as covid restrictions wane could be further explored to help coworkers bond outside of the work environment. This should not imply that virtual engagement opportunities should be removed, however, as it still helps to connect the permanently remote employees The Company has.

Hosting some type of activity during the days employees come into the office could also be a way to increase employee engagement. Ensuring that there is some level of bonding occurring when team members meet could increase the utility of in person meeting and further increase collaboration between coworkers.

Encouraging meetups for non-Houston based United States employees could also help these employees create a deeper connection with their coworkers and the organization at large. Also ensuring that these employees have the emotional and professional support that they need through supervisor check-ins and team meetings can also aid in connecting them to The Company. Quarterly lunches where non-Houston based employees are invited to the office could be useful. In these instances, reimbursing their transportation and lodging could encourage their participation.