

two thousand
eighteen

2018

The Year of Social Advocacy
in the Workplace



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“It’s about the
tribe I belong to,
not about me.”



Abstract

A century of management science built off a manufacturing economy has done little to prepare executives for the new digitally disruptive, social terrains that they must now navigate. The time when company size equated with longevity has ended and with it, the social contract rewarding cautious stewardship with stability. There are many examples of social media, left to its own devices, playing out as a negative force. Consumers and employees, incited by finally having a voice – or perhaps at times by viral fame and fortune – can easily become modern revolutionaries, toppling careful enterprise stewards. One viral video has the capacity to destroy billions of dollars in shareholder value. While a defensive posture against these threats is not unwarranted, it is not the only (or best) option. Executives are now realizing it’s equally possible that social media presents an enormous opportunity. Leaders who embrace this technology can marshal people globally on their mission like never before.

Leaders are rediscovering the benefits of employing workers not solely for their labor, but also for their full intellectual and social participation in the company mission. To discover why, and to uncover new best practices for organizations that realize this largely untapped potential, we conducted primary survey research of employees and management throughout the US and Canada on their usage, perceptions, and policies regarding social and mobile communication technologies in the workplace. Our findings were eye-opening:

- ▶ While over half of managers recognize the visibility gains and brand benefits of social advocacy, just 1 in 10 reports implementing a structured, comprehensive social media advocacy program as part of their digital strategy.
- ▶ Management opinion on the benefits of an Employee Advocacy Program vary widely. Notably, at the top of this list sits “building a shared sense of purpose,” what we would refer to as leading the tribe.
- ▶ According to our findings, employees overwhelmingly approve of companies’ social media posts, with the majority finding them informative, engaging, interesting, relatable, timely and of high quality.
- ▶ Employees are more likely to share company achievements than personal achievements. Company achievements are the most shared followed by company organized events.

The Challenge and Opportunity for Business Advocacy in 2018



Despite the hype, living and thriving in the new digital era can be a lonely business, particularly for traditional large-scale enterprises. Executive leadership, educated by over a century of management science built off the back of a manufacturing economy, can find this new terrain quite challenging to navigate. Pulling the right levers to optimize operations and fine-tuning engines to drive growth is often not enough. Disruptors in technology and social media are now constantly threatening and cajoling at the gate. Many leaders respond by searching for levers that do not exist, unsuccessfully commanding forces that lie outside their control. Others who cautiously welcome the change begin to see social media's opportunity, not only to embrace this but to use it to their full advantage. New management lessons emerge, most notably, the opportunity as never before to marshal their workforce on the mission they serve.

New leaders are rediscovering the tribal craft of accomplishing remarkable things, by employing workers not solely for their labor, but also for their full intellectual and social participation in the company mission. A new social contract is being formed between employer and employee, including shifting boundaries amongst workers, their leaders

and their communities of belonging. New best practices emerge. In the research that follows, we report on our investigation into the current state of social media in business and what opportunities lie ahead for new leadership that can harness these forces for future organizational growth and stability.

Workers have always engaged in social networking, but the activity of storytelling workplace triumphs and resentments is now no longer limited to the dinner table, rather it is now often amplified publicly around the world. **Social technology has fundamentally changed the way employees interact with the world around them and with the organization that they belong.** Most notably for large enterprises, employee reach on social media translates into an "incredible power in the marketplace"¹ that sadly, many organizations overlook.²

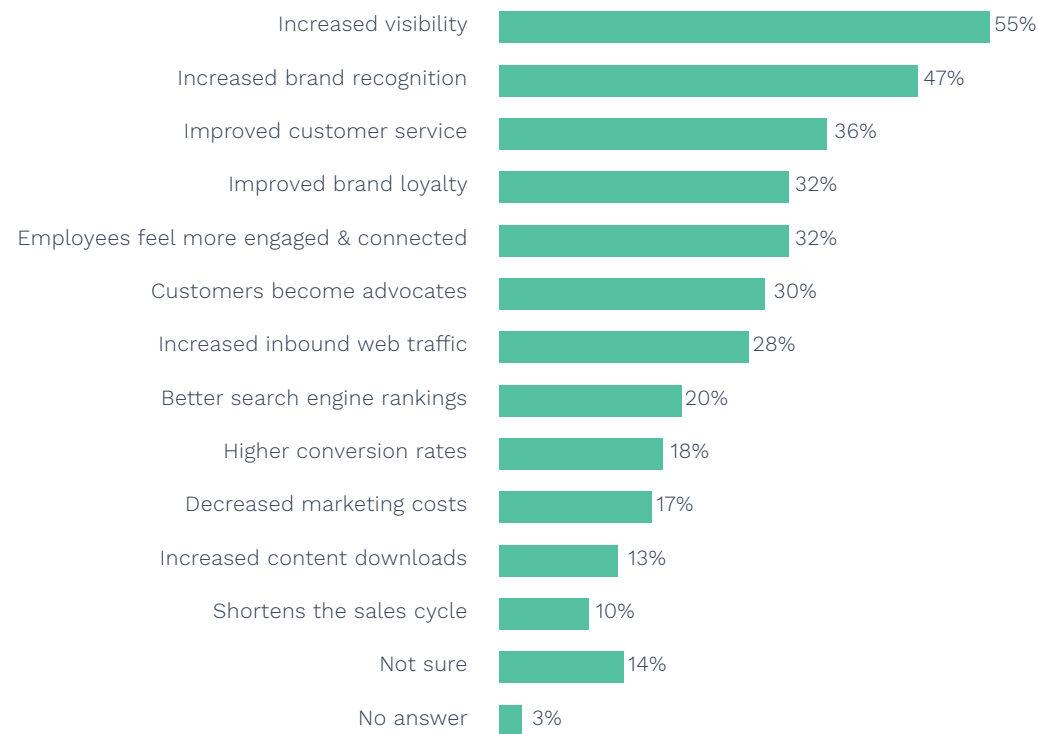
To discover why, and to uncover new best practices for leading organizations that realize this largely untapped potential, we conducted primary research of employees and management throughout the US and Canada on their usage, perceptions, and policies regarding social and mobile communication technologies in the workplace.

Harnessing the Power of the Tribe

Employers are not blind to current trends. They do recognize the power of social media for the brand as a whole, with management most often citing the opportunity to increase company visibility and brand recognition.

Company Benefits from Social Media

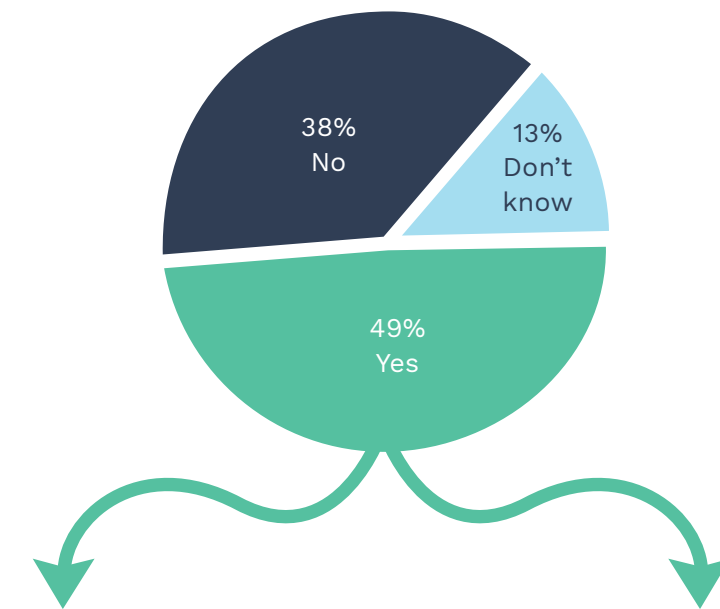
Management Survey (multi-pick)



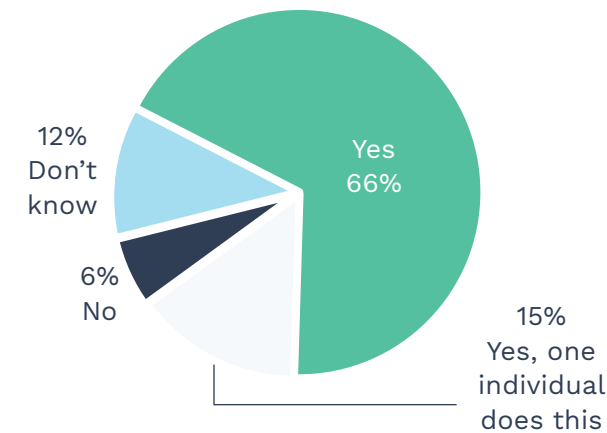
Nonetheless, organizations have slowly started to harness the communicative and engaging power of social media through their employees. For our purposes, "Employee Advocacy" is defined as a program by which organizations encourage their staff to share information about the company on social media. Just half of managers surveyed across North America reported that their company has a formal Employee Advocacy Program.

Has Employee Advocacy Program (EAP)

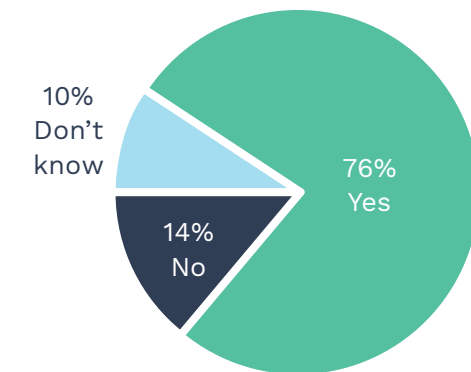
Management Survey



EAP Has Clearly Defined Strategy/Objective



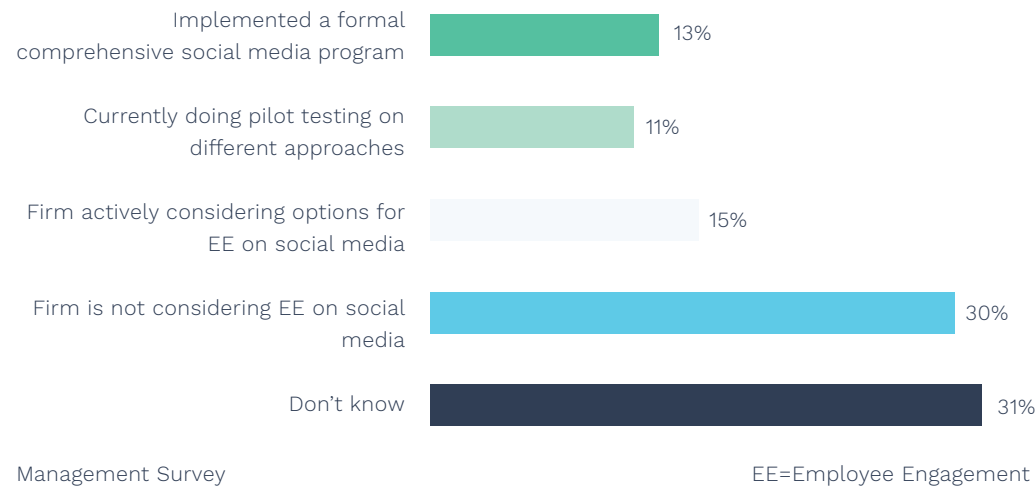
EAP Has Point Person or Resource



Of those companies, 76% have put resources towards it. Previous research found that few brands reported having mature Employee Advocacy programs with strategic impacts, but that many were beginning to make it a priority. In 2014, there was a reported 191% increase in interest.³ From our current research, we find still only a third of companies have a defined Employee Advocacy Program.

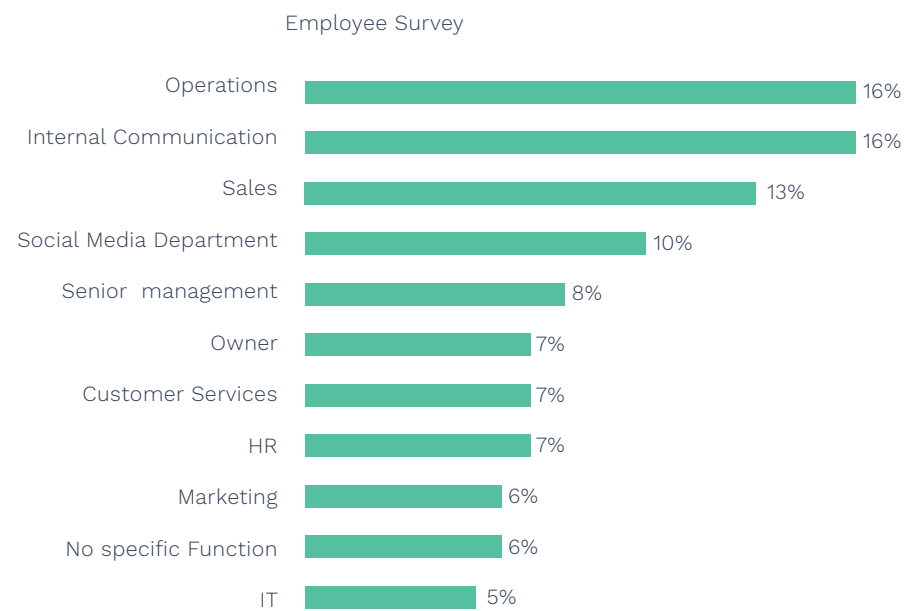


When asked further if their company's digital strategy included a formalized approach to social media, just over 1 in 10 reported implementing a structured, comprehensive social media program.



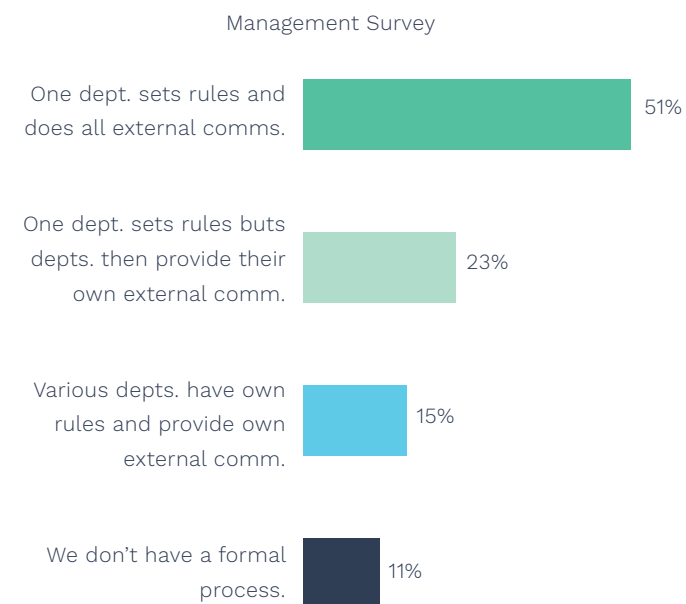
Given the slow rate of adoption toward social media, it is not surprising that there is little uniformity across companies on which department typically oversees it.

Department Running Social Media

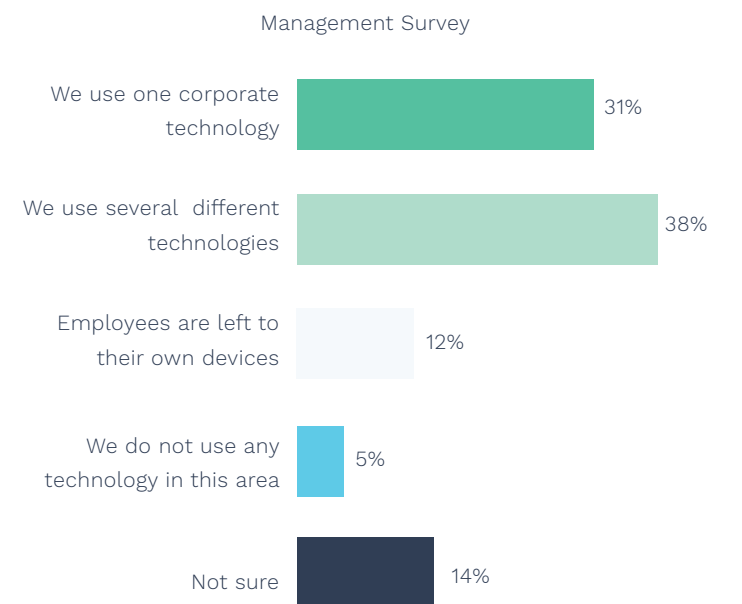


Only half of large companies have a centralized department that sets rules and manages external communications through social media. Almost a quarter of the time governance is a central policy, but individual units oversee their external communications.

Who Manages Social Media



How Social Media is Managed

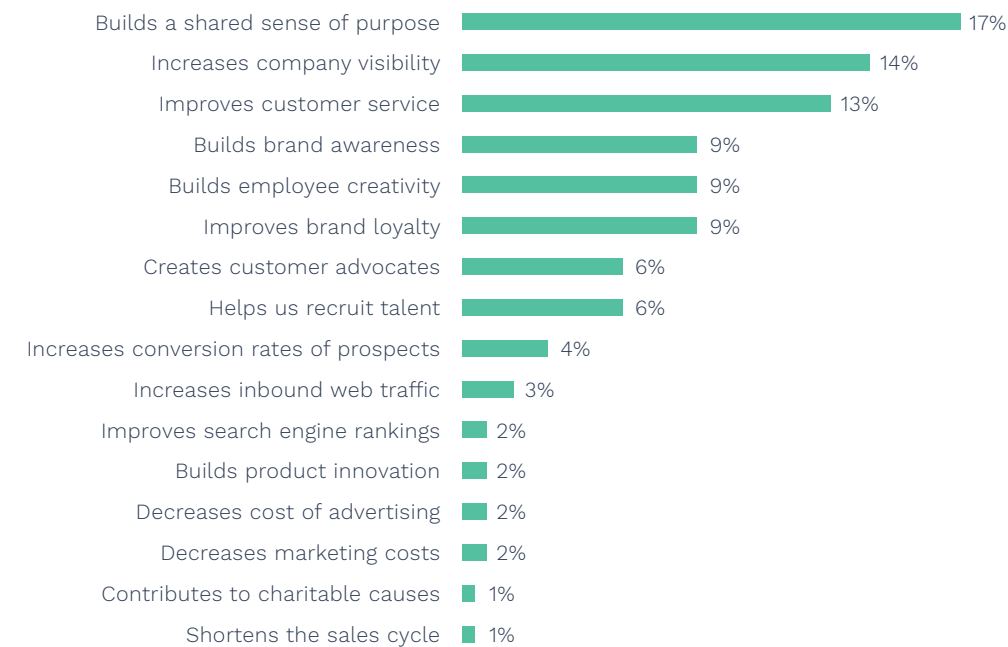


Advocacy: A Leadership Necessity

Consistent with the diffusion of responsibility across organizational functions, management opinion on the benefits of an Employee Advocacy Program vary widely. Notably, “building a shared sense of purpose,” what we would refer to as leading the tribe was considered a key benefit. Its essence speaks to charismatic authority versus formal or legal authority, a notion central to making a company’s social media voice authentic, relevant and of interest to others.

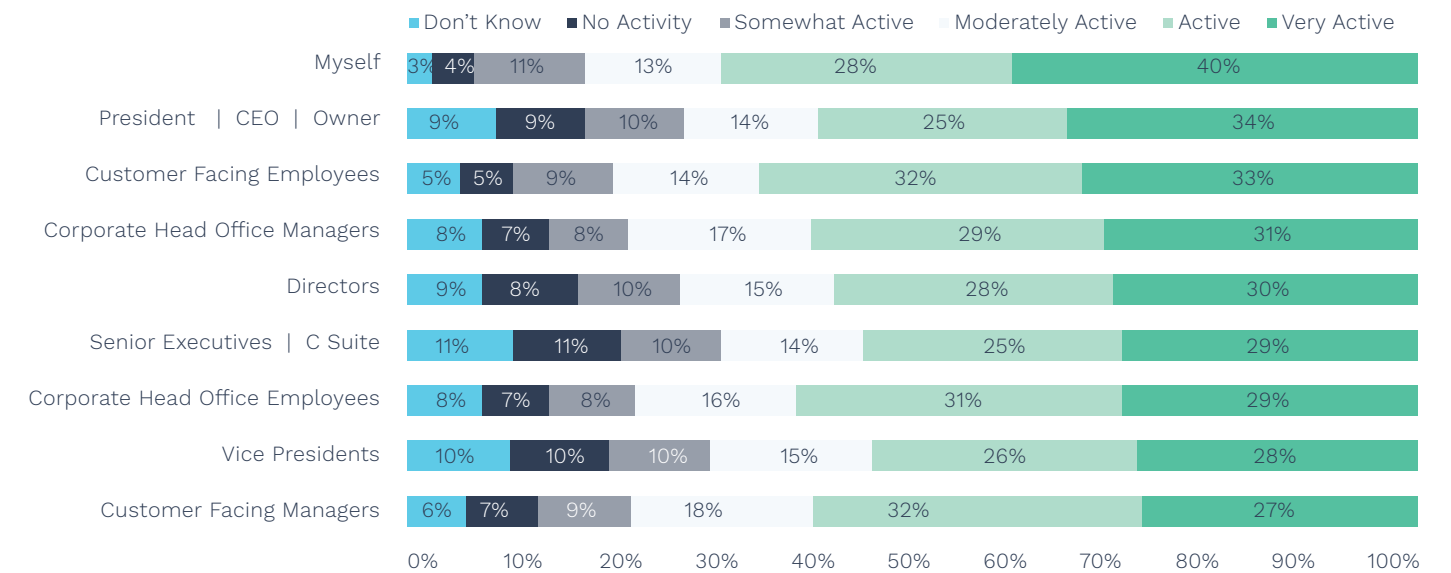
Main Benefit of Effective Employee Advocacy Program

Management Survey



Activity of Employees on Workplace Social Media

Employee Survey

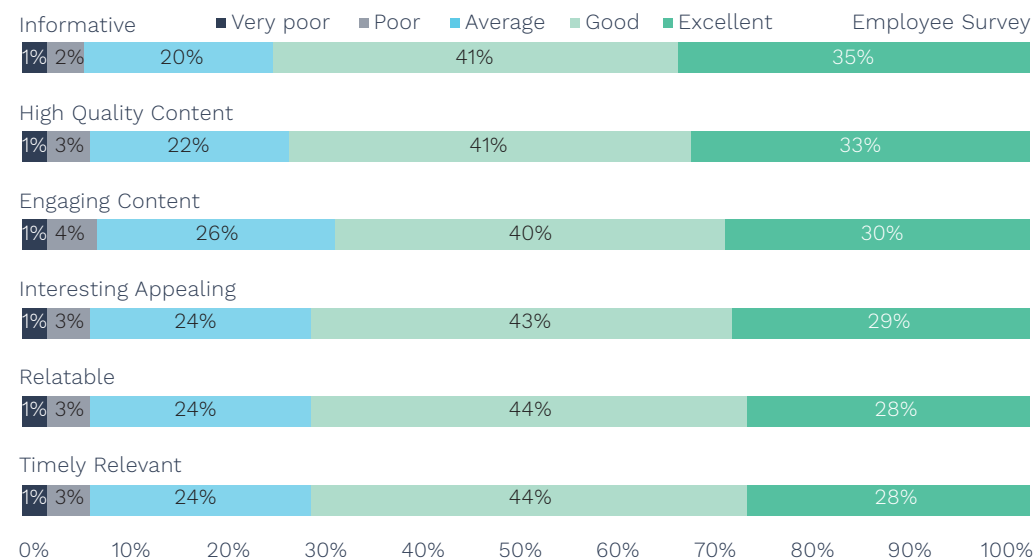


Leaders who embrace this opportunity achieve several benefits that provide them with a way to come out ahead and stake a competitive advantage.⁴ Spreading brand messages through employees on social media provides innovative ways to reach a wider audience of stakeholders. On average, employees have 10 times more contacts than the official branded channels. Company branded messages reach 561% further when shared by employees versus branded channels.⁵ Most importantly, research indicates that 84% of consumers trust recommendations from people they know compared to 15% who believe company messages.⁶ Similarly, 70% of adults online reported trusting recommendations from friends and family, but only 15% trusted companies’ social media posts.⁷

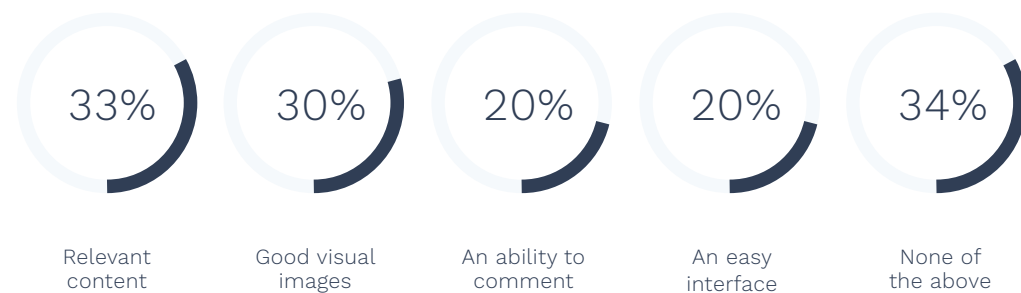
Top leadership (Presidents/CEOs/Owners) are the most likely to report elevated levels of personal brand promotion through social media channels. Their participation is a critical first step. Employees look to their leaders to define the brand mission that everyone rallies behind. Company leaders can also model how employees should interact with social media. Support from leadership is a critical component. When top administration is enthusiastically leading the charge, employees are more likely to participate.

According to our findings, employees overwhelmingly approve of their company's social media posts, with the majority finding them informative, engaging, interesting, relatable, timely and of high quality. This evidence strongly supports the notion that with encouragement, employees would be willing to increase engagement of these posts by sharing or commenting. It highlights that many employers are missing an opportunity to maximize the impact of their social posts in the market.

Employee Ratings of their Company's Social Media Posts



Employees answers when they were asked what would encourage them to share?



What would encourage employees to share more is simple; relevant content.

Making your brand pop amidst the noise of 24-hour media cycle is a challenge. The solution is not just an agency driven viral ad that quickly fizzles out, but rather, a steady stream of excellent content supported by diverse employee resources.

What are employees saying when they engage in social media about their workplaces? Simple: they make positive comments about their employers to friends and family, encourage others to buy company goods and services, and recommend their companies as great places to work.

How Employees Participate

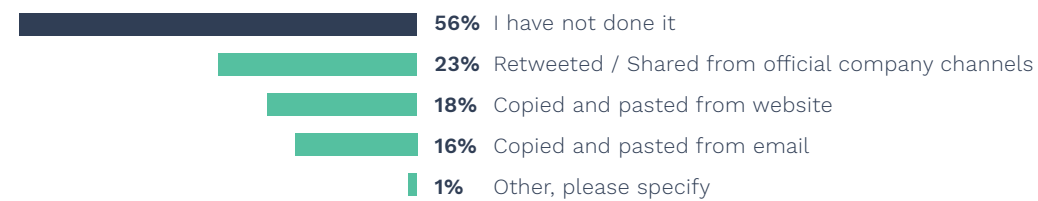
Employee Survey - Multi-pick



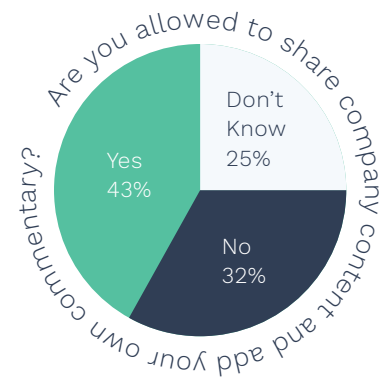
Employees who share company news on their social media feeds are most likely to share or retweet posts from official company channels. In a world of hashtags and alerts, this is the most straightforward method for organizations looking to generate social media buzz. Even *without* making it easy to do, over a third of employees report going to the trouble of copying and pasting information from emails or websites.

How have you shared company content?

Employee Survey
Multi-pick



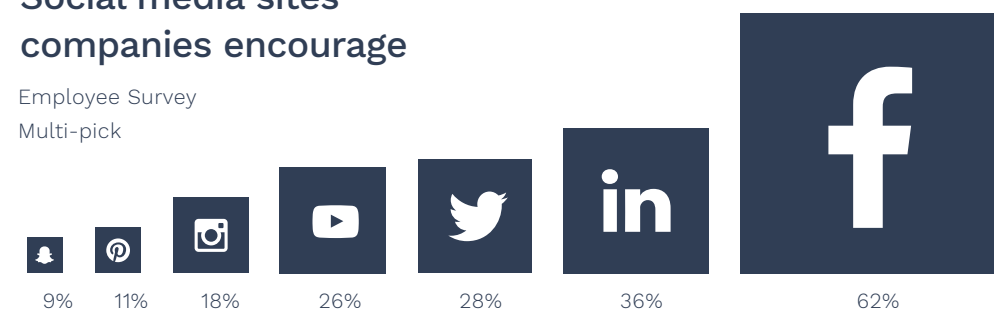
This statistic is somewhat remarkable since less than half of employees (43%) believe they are permitted to share their company's content while adding their own commentary.



Which social media sites are the most encouraged for employee advocacy? Facebook is the reigning champion of social networks that companies encourage employees to use for business, followed by LinkedIn and Twitter.

Social media sites companies encourage

Employee Survey
Multi-pick

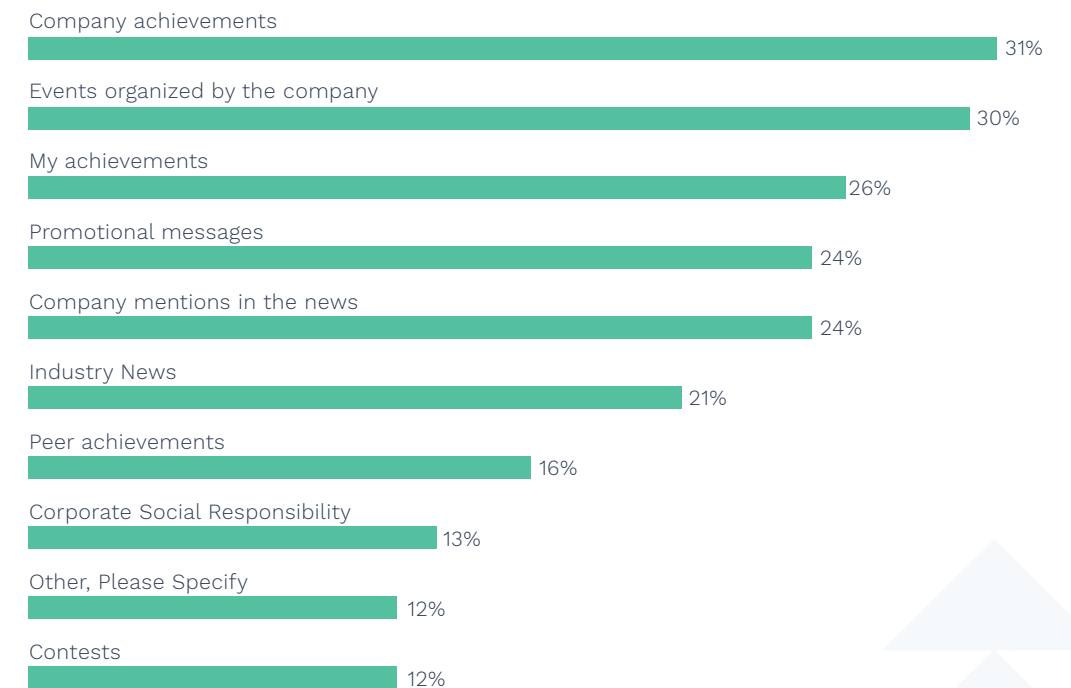


“It’s not about me. It’s about the mission I’m on with others that matters!”

Irrespective of what social site an employee uses, for employees: “It’s not about me as an individual - it’s about the mission I’m on with others that matters!” This theme re-emerges when we look at what content employees share. Company achievements are number one followed by company organized events.

What gets shared

Employee Survey - Multi-pick



Brand mission is critical to tribal leadership. Employee advocacy is not about cheesy contests. Employees gain strength through association. Bragging rights are about who someone works for and the mission they are on.

Employees are more likely to share company achievements than personal achievements. Expanding one's professional network is the number one benefit to employees; standing out amongst one's peers, the least important.

Benefits You Perceive as An Employee Posting About Your Company



Social media is not just about bragging rights for the company. In fact, employees use social media at work for pragmatic productivity reasons. One of the most popular uses is a problem-solving tool to find the latest information and ideas, allowing workers to explore novel approaches to the challenges they face.

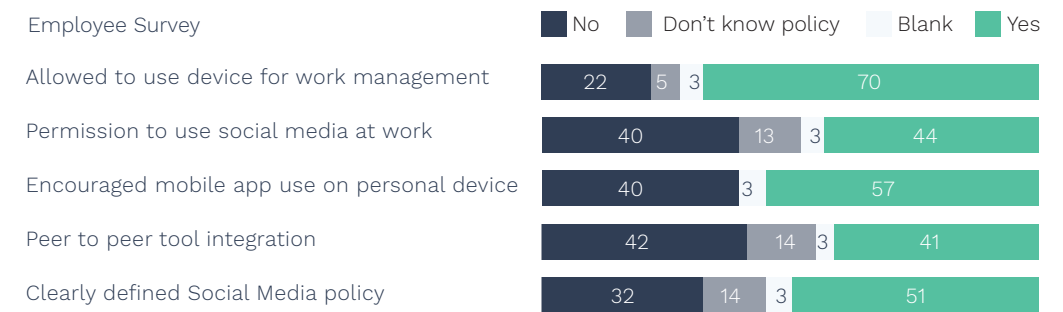
How Social Media helps Creativity of Employees



Resistance to Change

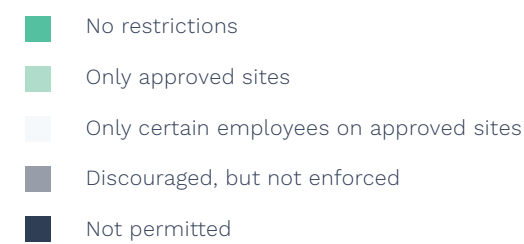
Against this backdrop of opportunity rests a remarkable resistance to change among many enterprises. Currently, many organizations block employee access to social media and adopt restrictive social media policies.^{8 9}

Social Media Management in the Workplace

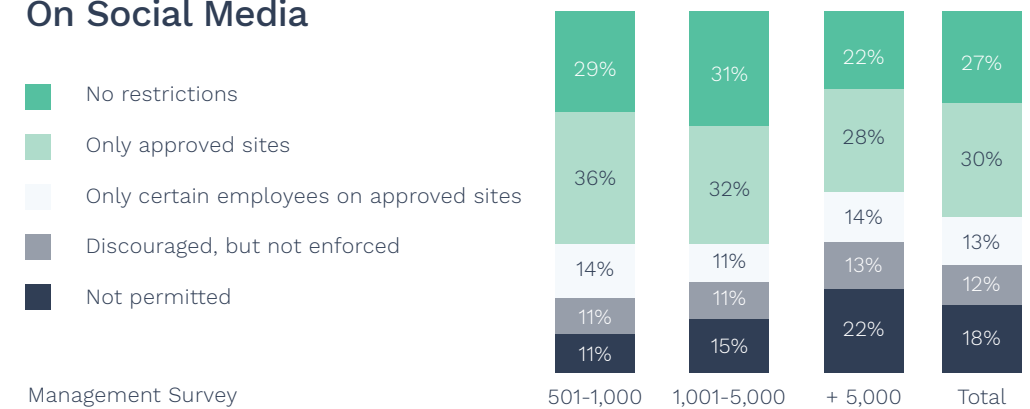


Large companies are much more likely to either discourage or not permit their employees to be on social media. Our findings align with these trends: while 70% of employees can use their mobile device at work, only 57% are encouraged to apply mobile work apps on their devices. Large companies (over 5,000 employees) are less likely (67%) to allow their employees to bring their device (e.g., smartphone) to work (67% versus an average of 77% for companies in the 501- to 5,000 employee range).

Company's Policies On Social Media



Company Size (employees)



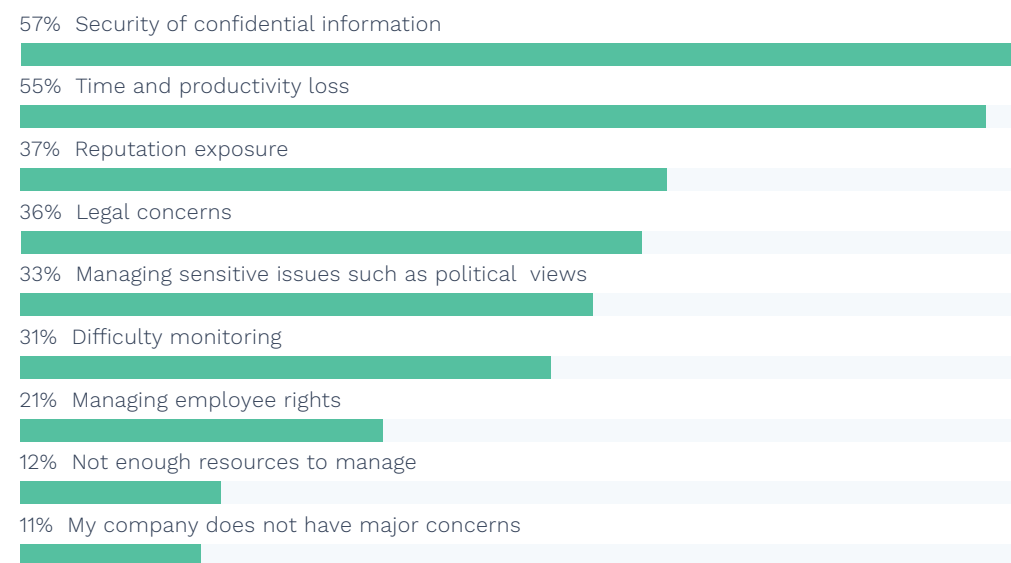
As with any resistance to change, fairness dictates a sober view of why many employers are reluctant to have employees embrace social media. There are associated vulnerabilities that enterprises must address. Most notably, for many companies, social media expands “the spectrum of reputation risk and boosts risk dynamics.”¹⁰

Employers are understandably concerned about the risks associated with social networks. They suspect workers focused on their next social status update will be less productive. They worry that a single picture taken out of context could damage their reputation, and they fear information leakage and compromised security.^{11 12 13} In worst-case scenarios, employees can act against their company as brand “saboteurs.”¹⁴ Our findings reflect these concerns throughout North America.

According to management, the top three concerns companies have regarding social media use are the security of confidential information, time and productivity loss, and reputation exposure.

Major Concerns Company Has Regarding Social Media Use

Management Survey - Multi-pick

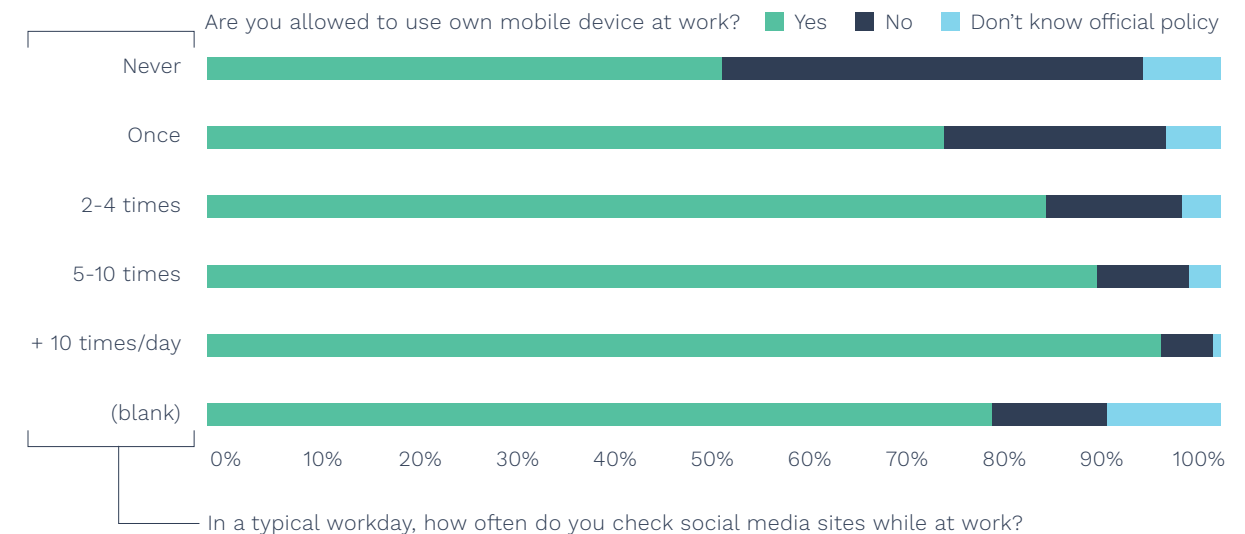


Whether socially sanctioned in the workplace or not, platforms for social networking are increasingly promoting the real-time sharing of thoughts and experiences, further blurring the work versus personal divide. For digital natives, social media is a way of life, the way they interact and engage with the world. But even older generations have gone digital; Facebook has now become a social space for the middle-aged, as younger generations have moved on to new pastures (e.g., Instagram, Snapchat, etc.)

On average, we spend almost three hours per day on social platforms.¹⁵ Our findings indicate that *nearly half* of this use occurs in the workplace, with employees reporting they spend on average 1 hour and 22 minutes a day on social media. If companies either require or allow their employees to use their own mobile devices at work, then many are checking it over ten times a day.

Checking Social Media at Work

Employee Survey



As employees continue to renegotiate a balance between their private life and work responsibilities through their digital personas, so too will employers need to adopt policies that balance the boundaries of their employees' online work and personal activities.

+ The Case for Tribal Engagement

Engaged employees do more than spend their time at work.

Prompted by passion, as well as a profound sense of connection to their company, they invest their “self” in their work. It is an investment with dividends for companies. **Engaged employees drive innovation, increase productivity and enhance customer satisfaction.**¹⁶ Overall, this impact is exponential: organizations with high employee engagement outperform those with unengaged employees by 202%.¹⁷

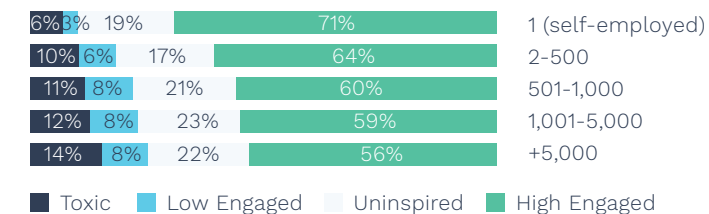
Productivity gains and reduced attrition are the most commonly cited benefits of engaged employees. Despite these apparent advantages, many organizations struggle with the operationalization of engagement strategies. Even those who manage to design the conditions in which engagement flourishes face the additional challenge of strategically harnessing the power of engaged employees to advance business priorities. The answer to this problem is clear: engaged employees are excellent ambassadors for their companies, and one way to harness their power is through employee advocacy. Engaged employees with digital connections are ideal Employee Advocates.

The State of Employee Engagement

Employees have an overall positive view of their employers, with almost two-thirds of the workforce rating their experience as *Very Good* or *Excellent*, indicating that they make a *Positive* or *Very Positive* recommendation of their employer, and stating that they are *Likely* or *Very Likely* to continue working for their employer. However, this proportion decreases as organization size increases, suggesting that maintaining engagement in a large organization comes with a unique set of challenges.

Employee Engagement Compared with Enterprise Size

Employee Survey



Canadian employees are less likely to rate their experience as *Excellent* (22%) than their American counterparts (31%). The latter finding is consistent with Gallup’s 2016 State of the Workplace report which found that some 33% of U.S. employees report high engagement.¹⁸

Companies also need to be cognizant of threats to their reputations from disenfranchised workers, although the size of this risk is small versus the size of the opportunity to amplify positive voices. Across workplaces in Canada and the United States, 5% of employees report a *Very Negative* or *Negative* overall experience when asked about their company as a place to work. Half of these expect to leave their business within the next six months.

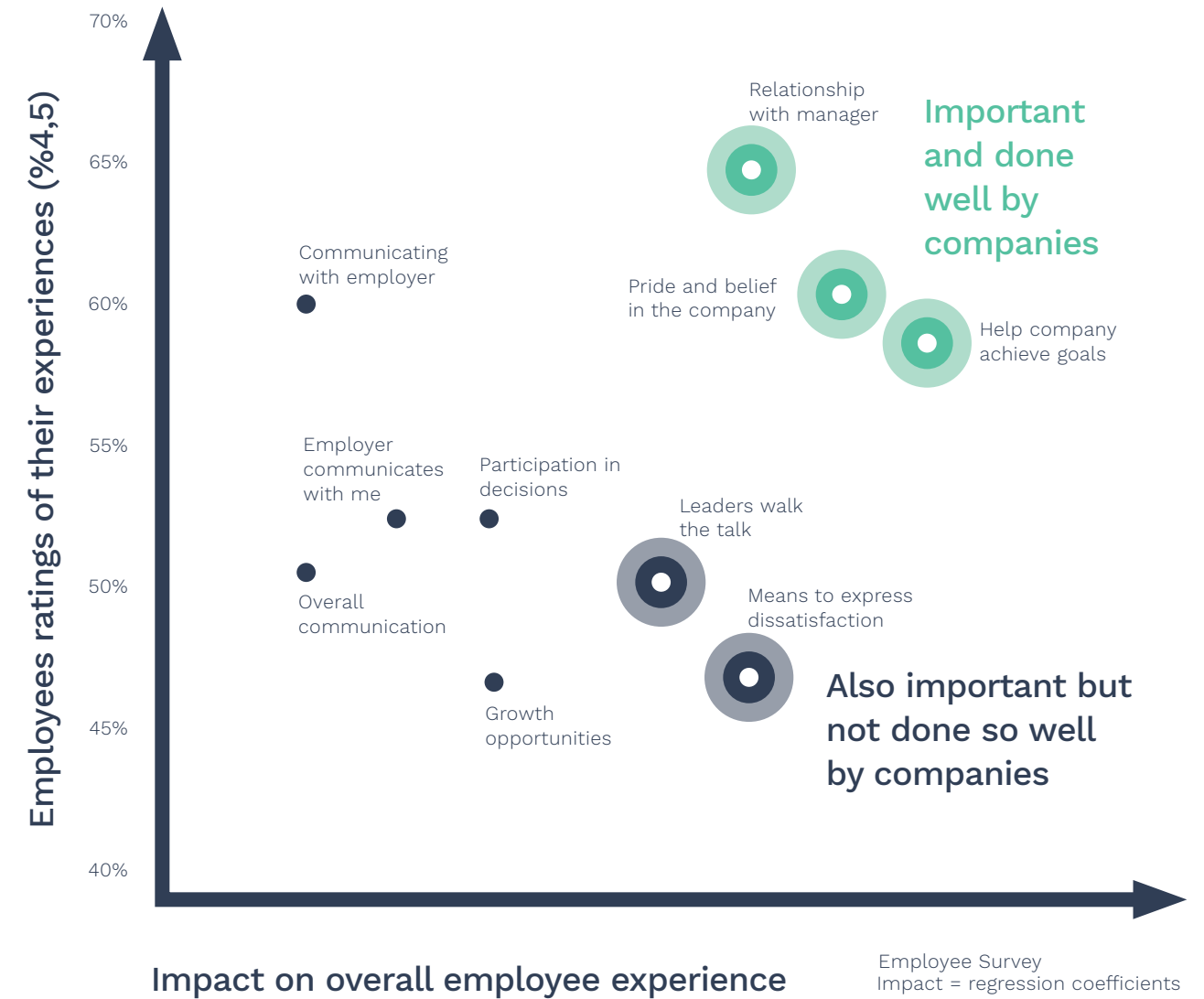
What Drives Engagement

“Employee engagement” is a nebulous term. With varying definitions by academics and business practitioners alike, it is difficult to operationalize and measure. Furthermore, like social media usage, it does not lend itself well to a command and control process.

Nonetheless, there is a good deal of evidence on how to drive employee engagement. Engaged employees do not exist in the absence of elevated levels of trust and pride;¹⁹ a finding corroborated with the current research.

Pride refers to employee perceptions of the organization they work for, as well as of the work they do. For employees, both factors were significant drivers of an overall positive employee experience at the organizational level (pride and belief in the company) and the individual level (feeling that their efforts help the company to achieve its goals). Overall, employees reported that organizations are doing a respectable job at fostering this pride.

Engaged employees trust their superiors and their organization.²⁰ Our findings are consistent with Gallup’s ongoing research on the topic that an employees’ relationship with their immediate manager has a very high impact on overall employee experience. However, a positive relationship with a direct supervisor is only one element of trust.



Our research also identified aspects of trust that almost half of organizations are not providing, including a belief that leaders “walk the talk.” Other studies have identified similar deficiencies: only 46% of employees have ‘a great deal of trust’ in their employers²¹ and just 43% believe they have an organizational culture of trust and empowerment that supports employee engagement.²²

Advocacy as the Next Step in Engagement

We define Employee Advocates as workers who not only have a positive overall experience at work, but those who are also unequivocally positive in the recommendations of their company. Using this criterion of individuals who rated their work experience as *Very Good* or *Excellent* and stated that they would be *Very Positive* in their recommendations of their company, 30% of employees are identifiable as Employee Advocates (25% in Canada compared to 35% in the United States).

To further our tribal thesis, the relationship between ratings of “Pride and Belief in the Values of an Organization” and “Employee Advocates” are quite telling. Employees who rate their pride and belief as a “5 – Excellent” are *50% more likely* to be advocates than if they rate them as “Very Good.”

Relationship between Pride & Beliefs in Values of Organization and Employee Advocacy



Overall, 30% of employees claim they would be Very Positive in recommending their employer. This percentage jumps dramatically to over 70% among those who rate their experience of pride and belief in the values of their organization as “Excellent.”

Work-life integration through and across social media is already unusually high with engaged employees. Among employees who follow their company on social channels, 75% rate their *pride and belief in the values of their organization* as *Very Good* or *Excellent*. Among those who do not follow their company on social channels, this percentage drops to 47%. Similarly, 71% rate their experience of being able to *help achieve the value of their organization* as *Very Good* or *Excellent*; among non-followers, this drops to 48%. **Social media is thus the primary medium for employee advocacy.** Yet only 41% of employees are encouraged to share their company’s social postings on their social networks.

How Most Companies Internally Communicate Versus What the Best Do

Just as technology has changed the relationship between company and consumer, it is also affecting the employer-employee relationship. Internal communication and employee engagement closely align with Employee Advocacy. The importance of communication with employees should not be underestimated.

Many employers are using internal social media networks to enhance communication and employee engagement by reducing the gap between leaders and employees, getting employee feedback, and providing a workplace community. However, despite the benefits of building internal social networks, most employees rate their companies as doing only a “so-so” job at workplace communications. Just over half rate digital technology adoption for internal communications as Very Good or Excellent.

Indeed, according to Management, only half of companies have a digital strategy that includes peer-to-peer communication tools, such as intranets or Enterprise Social Networks.

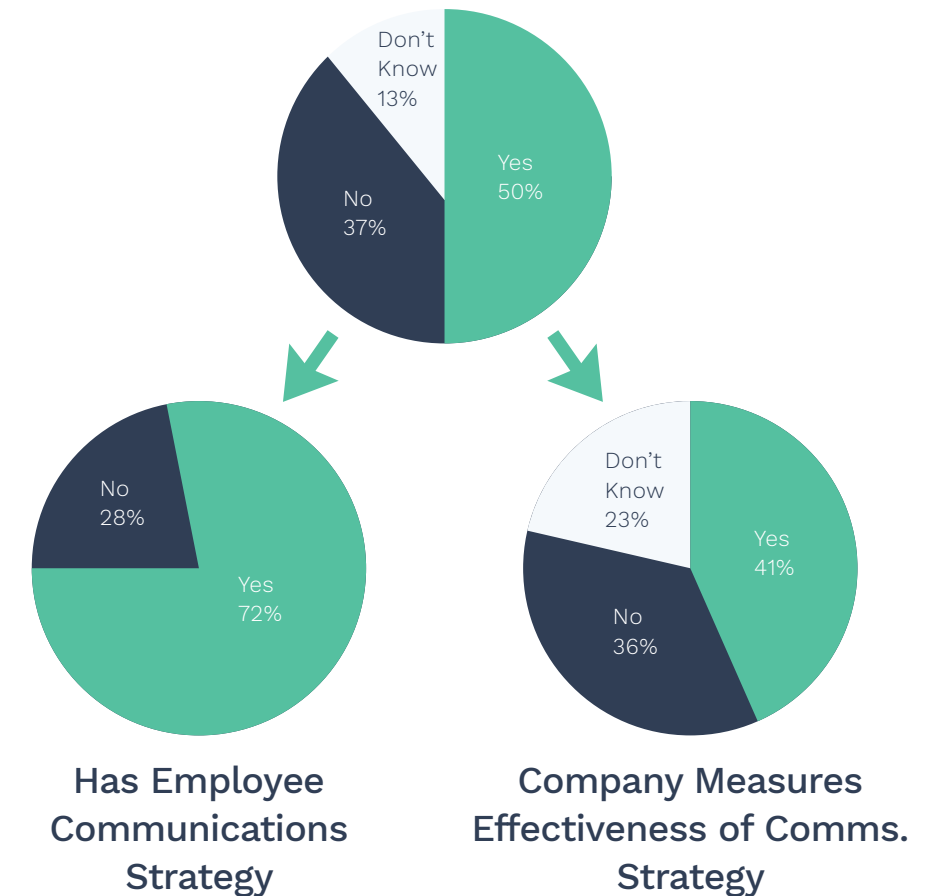
Management reports that over a quarter of companies do not have an employee communications strategy and less than half measure the effectiveness of their communications strategy.

One of the reasons for this mediocrity is that email retains the highest ranking of what companies do best. Content Communities rank much lower (just 44% doing it well) as do external social network tools (at 42%).

Employees Ratings of Digital Technology Adoption for Internal Communications

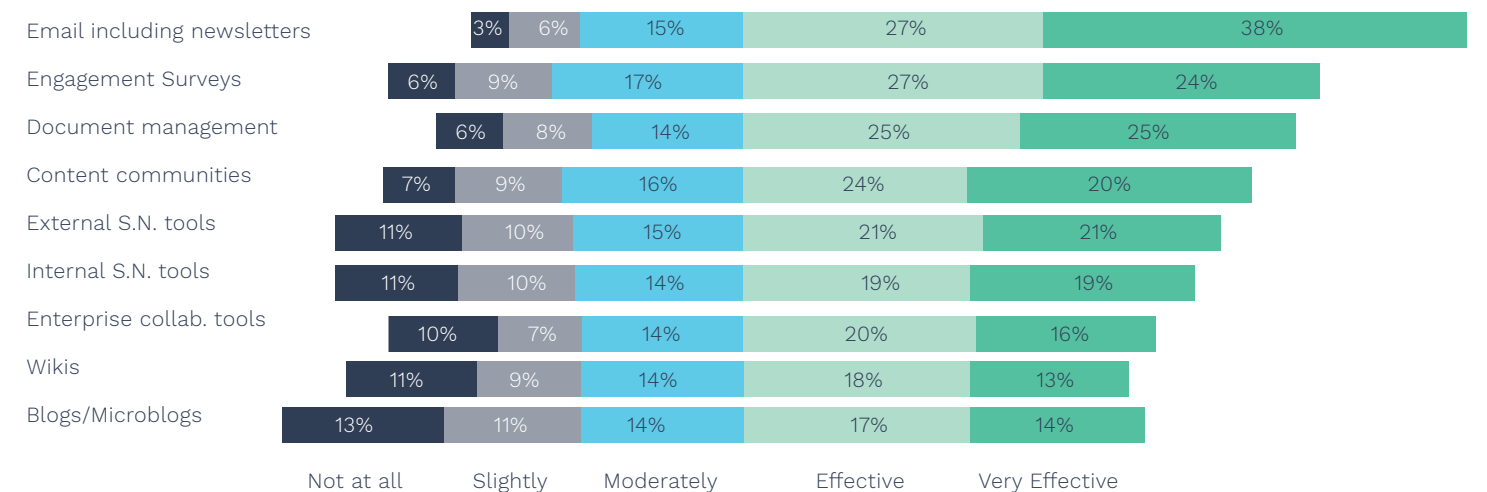


Company's Digital Strategy Includes Integration of Peer-to-Peer Comm. Tools



Employees ratings of communication effectiveness

Note: charts don't include "Don't know" and "NA"



Engagement Levels by Communication Effectiveness

Employee Survey



When we look across workplace communication practices, the difference effective versus ineffective in employee engagement is dramatic. Almost two-thirds (61%) of highly engaged employees rate their company's communications practices as useful across all communication practices versus only 39% of low engaged employees. Conversely, companies viewed as consistently poor at communication practices have just 19% highly engaged employees.

High-quality internal communication not only fosters strong employee-organization relationships, but it also promotes a positive brand message. Employees who identify with their employer are more likely to align individual-level choices with broader organizational objectives, be loyal to the organization, and speak positively about the

group.²³ Internal communications, like all other vital functions, need to be well thought through as proactive and strategic endeavors.

The way you encourage employees to communicate - both internally and externally - has an enormous impact on your ability to buy in to the company mission. Effective communication is always in the employer's best interest. A study from Opinion Research Corporation suggests that employees are two times more likely to go the extra mile for the organization and almost four times more likely to recommend their company when satisfied with how their business communicates tough decisions. Positive perceptions around company communications boost employee motivation, and ultimately, fosters employee advocacy.

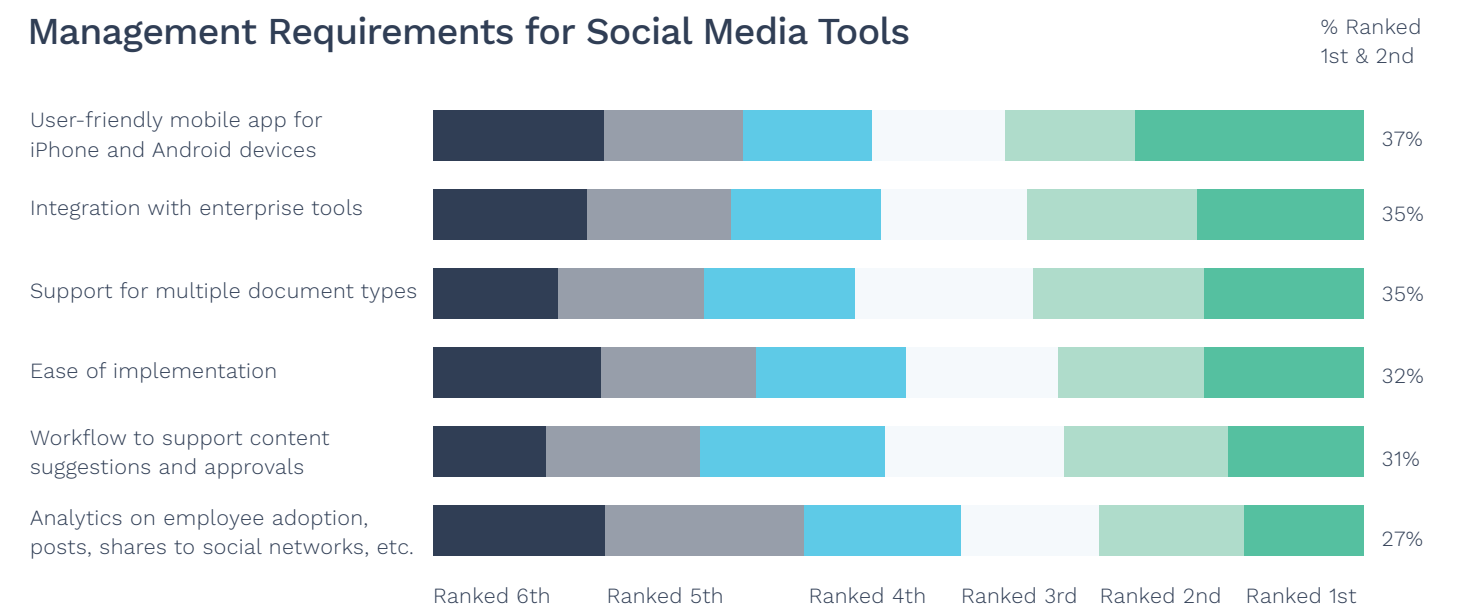
Guidelines for the New Frontier

Make Social Media Advocacy Easy, Accessible and Compelling

Making social sharing easy requires the latest social technology management. Efficient corporate social advocacy applications have several requirements: they must be mobile user-friendly, integrate with enterprise tools, support multiple document types, have intelligently designed workflows for content suggestions and approvals, all while providing analytics on their effectiveness. Employees need to be able to share company content and add their commentary easily. Again, less than half of employees are currently doing so.

It is also essential to ensure that there is a steady stream of new and interesting content available. Software platforms make it easy for employees to share this content through the social media channel of their choice, regardless of the individual's social savviness. Providing numerous options for sharing increases accessibility. The number of mechanisms available to employees positively correlates with the number of expressions of employee voice.²⁴

Management Requirements for Social Media Tools



Have a Pressure Valve

The very best employee advocacy, social media, and internal communications programs amplify positive messages in the public domain while managing negative messages internally. This ability to funnel employee concerns to an appropriate (offline) and responsive mechanism is why having an effective internal communications system is critical. Employees need outlets for negative messages and personal grievances. If these venues do not exist, or are ineffective within the organization, social media provides an easily accessible public forums for employees to work through these issues. Internal mechanisms for listening and responding to employees must be in place and must be effective.

Be Patient, Understand the Process

On average, approximately **30% of employees have immediate potential for acting as Employee Advocates** due to their high engagement and indication that they would provide a very positive recommendation for their employer. However, even among these employees, it is essential to understand their differences and to know who are your watchers, sharers, commenters, producers, and curators.²⁵

Do not rush the setup of a program. Start with a small group or department and track their performance. It will help determine the needs of other employees and for planning a company-wide implementation. The first team of employees from the pilot launch can then help the beginners and act as mentors.

Initially, with the introduction of an employee advocacy program, the majority are likely to be watcher. This circumstance does not indicate disinterest, however. At the opposite end of the spectrum are creators, representing the highest level of engagement. These employees, whether by nature or by job

design are likely to “spend countless hours as community and discussion board moderators or wiki editors, not only helping make sure that the content is well organized for the site’s users, but also making sure that people are participating well in the community.”²⁶ In this way, the goal of maximizing the value of internal voice mechanisms by progressively moving employees through the various levels of engagement occurs.

Guide, Not Command

Establishing policies, guidelines and practices for social media and employee advocacy is important, not only for employers to manage risk, but also to enhance trust among employees. Guidelines commonly outline approaches to content creation, content sourcing, and content sharing. Posting work content on personal social media can be intimidating to some employees, and organizations will need to instill confidence first.

While top-down strategies driven by management tend to be more common than strategies where employees have more autonomy it is important to keep in mind that too much control can make messaging seem inauthentic. Having a ‘single voice’ online may seem less credible by the company’s stakeholder groups, especially to prospective new customers.

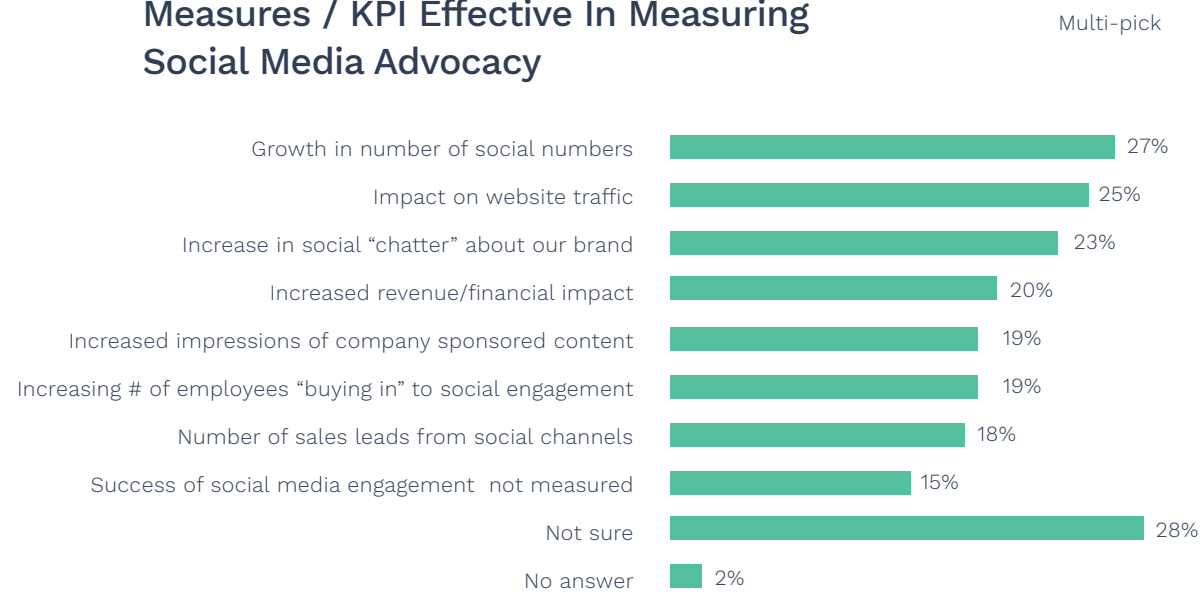
Organizations that instill employees with company values and brand messaging through good communications can ultimately trust and allow them to add a personal touch to their employee advocacy.

Training and employee partnerships are another way to increase both employee engagement and employee advocacy. Dell, for instance “has trained 10,000 employees to use social media to augment their jobs.”²⁷ Nationwide used reverse mentoring to train senior executives on the benefits and use of social media and other internal communications.²⁸

Measure and Evaluate

As with other business-critical functions, social media deserves efficient measurement and objective evaluation. According to management, most companies do not measure the effectiveness of their social media advocacy as a Key Performance Indicator. Indeed, over a quarter of them (28%) are unaware of any measurement. Of those pursuing KPIs, growth in the number of social followers is the most frequent measure.

Measures / KPI Effective In Measuring Social Media Advocacy



We Are as Strong as Our Tribe

Great leaders understand that their job is to create the conditions for performance to improve versus a much narrower view of simply managing performance. Creating the right organizational context for success to flourish is critical. Nowhere is this more evident than in "managing" the new digital world of social media. Rather than being lonely or threatened by what social media is capable of doing, great leaders are seizing the strengths they have in numbers to directly reach their audiences in a matter more authentic than ever before.

Endnotes

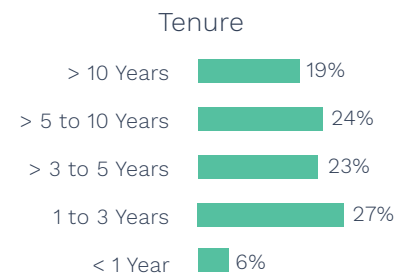
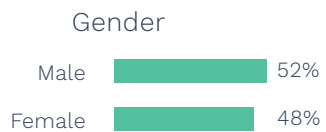
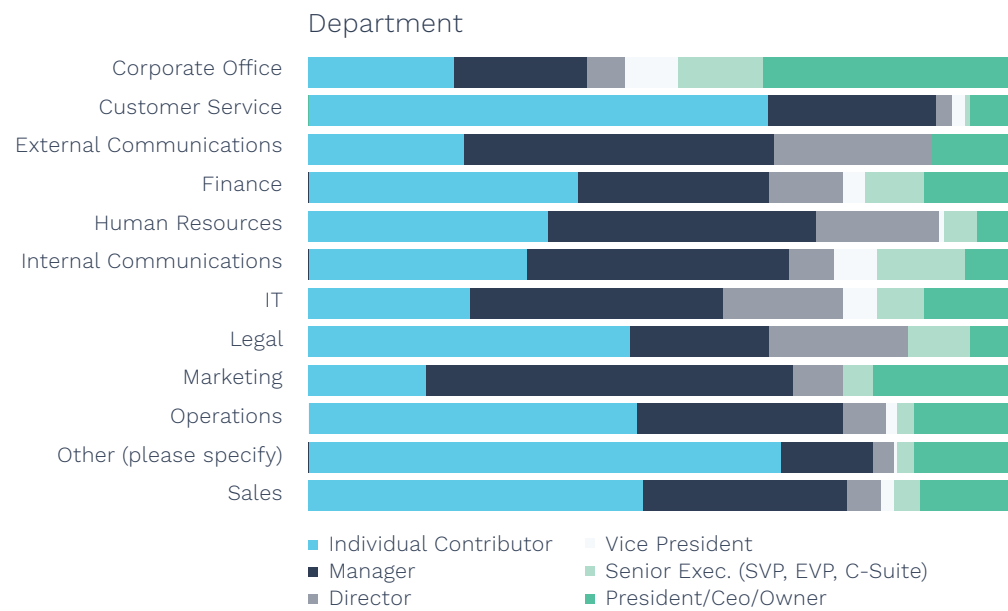
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Research Methodology

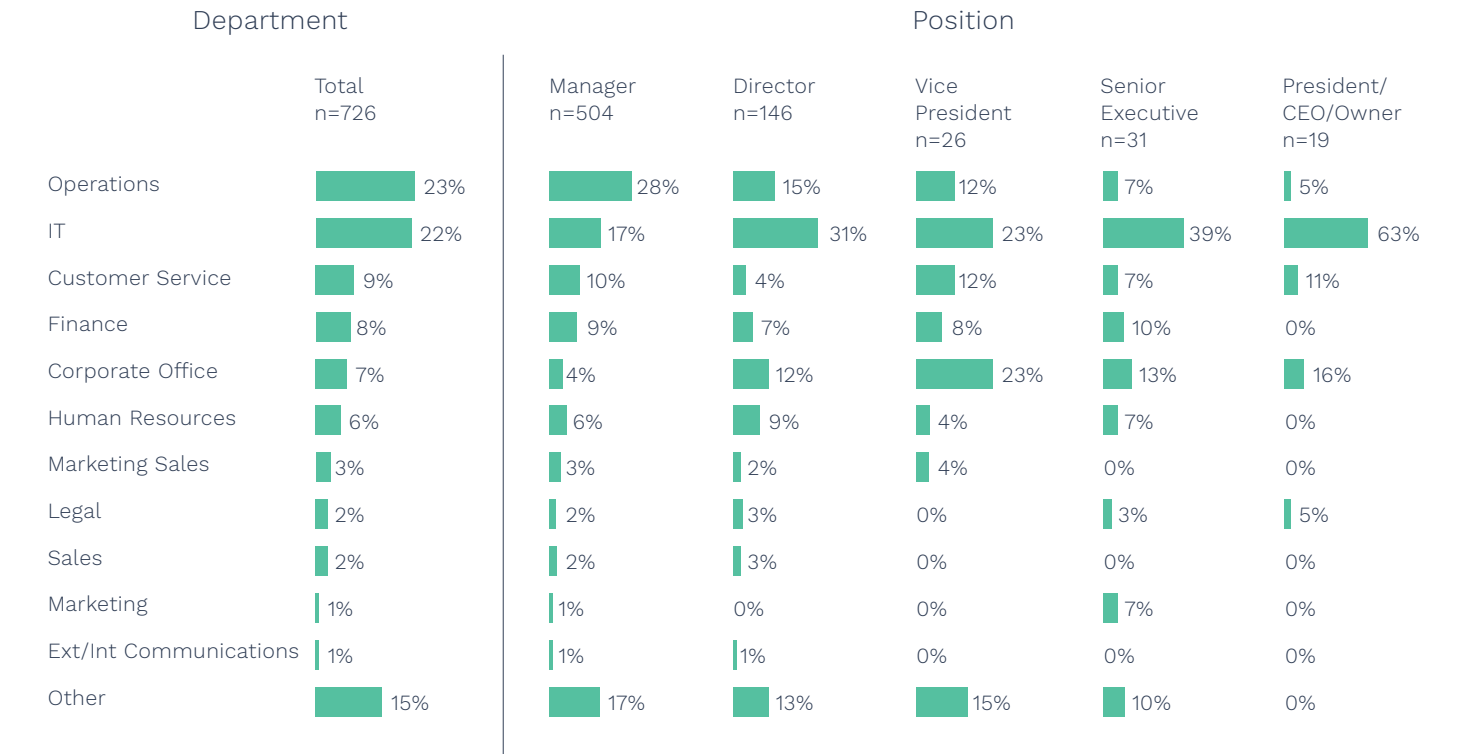
Primary research of management throughout Canada and the US on their usage, perceptions, and policies regarding social and mobile communication technologies in the workplace.

- Survey conducted utilizing a subscription-based survey platform branded as Golfdale (3rd party, independent research)
- Fieldwork access through Panels, ensuring representativeness in the US and Canada based on respective census information (i.e., region, age, gender)
- 350 US management; 350 Canadian management
- Defined as full time employees or owners, management level or above
- All surveys conducted online

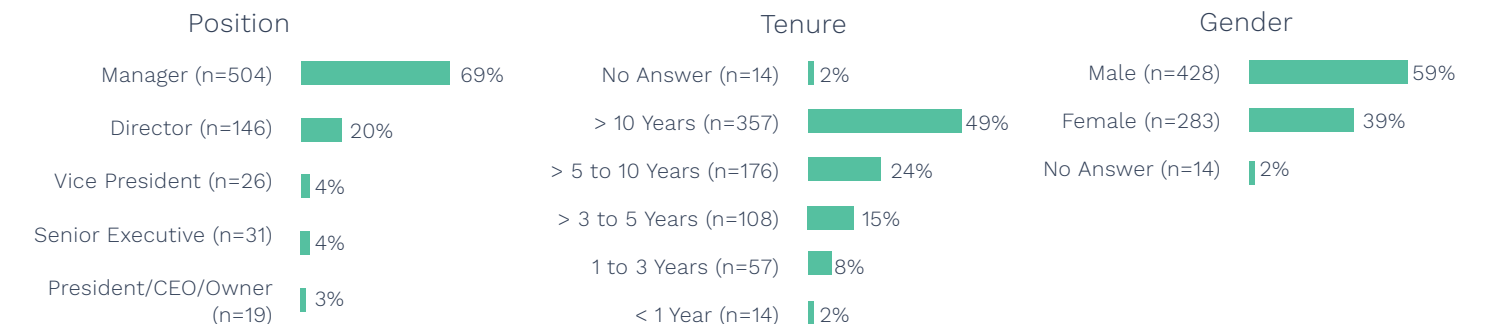
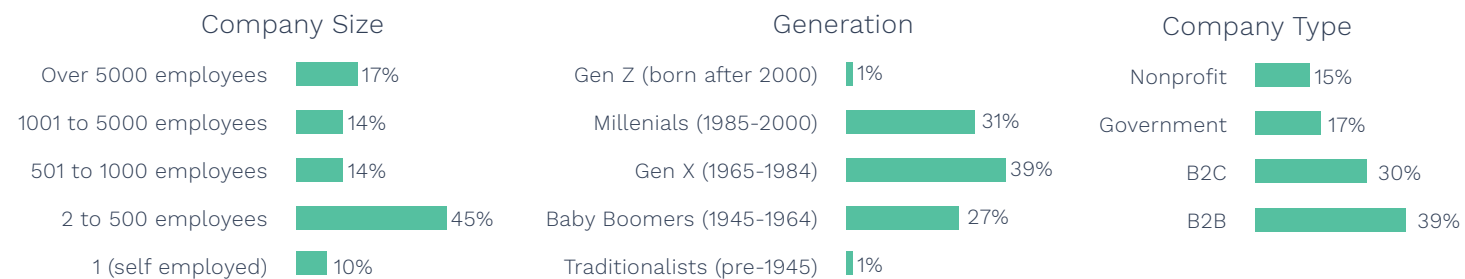
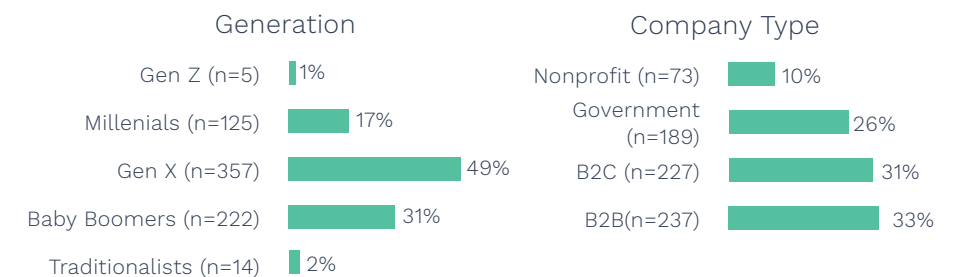
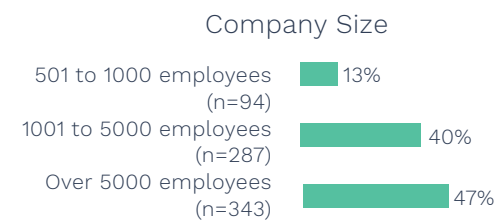
Employee Demographics



Management Demographics



Note: * Sales, Marketing, Ext/Int Communications are only options on the US survey





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