Impact of Work from Home Status on Hospital Administrative Staff Engagement

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Abstract

Health systems are being challenged more than ever to develop policies that stress employee health and well-being at the forefront in the post-shutdown world. Healthcare has prioritized care for its patients. It must now look inward and focus on the well-being of the staff that makes it run. UPMC has faced this challenge head-on by implementing more opportunities for teams to work from home. Initially, starting as a means to align with COVID-19 protocols, it has evolved into an avenue to boost engagement. Leadership is now faced with returning staff to onsite or keeping a hybrid to remote blend. Analysis was performed on employee work from home status surveys and compared with employee engagement results. This paper found no relationship between work from status and engagement for the administrative members at UPMC Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh. Additionally, this paper serves to examine the relationship of engagement for employees, the implications increased working from home can have on employee engagement, and the risks to consider when evaluating this route.

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1.0 Background

The stress caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has been one of the biggest challenges to organizations in terms of economically maintaining their ability to compete and plan down the road. This has led to an increase in the adoption of remote work. The pandemic forced hospitals to adapt quickly to everchanging guidance from federal and internal sources. The clinical transformations have been at the forefront of news and headlines. However, an area that is often overlooked is how the changes impacted the administrative teams in hospitals. Dealing with new social distancing mandates and the initial uncertainty of staff-to-staff infection, hybrid and fully remote work has been accelerated to allow staff to work and not come into the office (Lund et al., 2021). Despite implementing a vaccine and ramping down physical distancing mandates, administrative employees at UPMC Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh (CHP) have continued to work from home. Understanding this current state has opened many doors to better utilize non-clinical spaces within hospitals.

1.1 Staff Shortages

Another component that further highlights the need to understand space usage is the staffing crisis in the healthcare industry. Hospitals are dealing with staffing shortages across the country (Valdez, 2022). While much of the need is on the clinical side, administrative positions must be maintained to support them. Health systems need to get creative in recruiting and retaining employees other than offering higher levels of compensation, which can be detrimental to the

organization's long-term growth. One avenue is to offer remote positions and allow current staff to maintain their remote status. Remote jobs are in high demand, and if this work status can be used to support staff engagement, it can shed light on cost-effective ways to boost employee happiness (Lund et al., 2021). Remote employees can work from any location they choose, they no longer must deal with commuting to work, and people have grown accustomed to meeting virtually. Hybrid positions can get the best of both worlds by having face-to-face interactions, which are vital for staff cohesion but work home occasionally.

Hospitals can benefit from remote employees. Before the pandemic, space was finite, and hospitals would spend vital resources to maintain their administrative areas. Now space is more available to be used. Hospitals can cut down on expensive construction by refurbishing administrative space to add more employees without fearing they will not have offices or workstations. Additionally, administrative areas can be converted into more clinical space, further generating revenue for the hospital.

1.2 UPMC Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh

UPMC Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh (CHP) is a level-1 pediatric trauma center located in the Lawrenceville neighborhood of Pittsburgh, nationally recognized for its primary and specialty care. As of 2021, they are ranked as the ninth-best children's hospital in the country by the U.S. News and World Report. The hospital has been in the UPMC health system since 2001. The campus was initially part of UPMC Presbyterian's hospital. The standalone hospital has been in what was St. Francis Medical Center since 2009. CHP employs over 3,000 staff, with an

additional 700 physicians providing care across a wide array of pediatric specialties. The hospital

has 313 licensed beds, with nine inpatient and outpatient care areas floors. Their campus is home

to the John G. Rangos Sr. Research Center, which is at the forefront of clinical trials in advancing

medical technology for treating pediatric patients (CHP History).

Figure 1 UPMC Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh

1.3 Author's Role

The author was responsible for conducting the utilization survey of the Faculty Pavilion, a 130,000-square-foot building adjacently attached via a walkway bridge used for administrative office space from November to January of 2021-2022. The author worked with the division leaders and practice managers to collect the usage for each department in the eight-floor building. The purpose was to understand the utilization of the departments and identify potential areas that could be consolidated to open room for hoteling and space for more clinical staff. The project was done under the guidance of the Vice-President of Facilities and Support Services and the Executive Administrator over the Department of Pediatrics.

2.0 Literature Review

Since 2021 the number of fully remote employees has been steadily decreasing while onsite and hybrid employees have increased (Saad & Jones, 2021). As companies navigate through the vaccination phase of the pandemic, UPMC has been encouraging its employees to come back to the office while still allowing people to maintain a hybrid or remote status. At UPMC, employees have been shifting back to the workplace with the trend to increase their time onsite. The amount of remote and hybrid employees is still much more significant than pre-pandemic. In June 2021, 30% of employees reported hybrid status, and 35% reported working remotely (Dingel, J., & Neiman, B. 2021).

Shifting to remote work prompted due to the pandemic changed how many view the workplace. The pandemic has turned mindsets about the productivity and engagement of remote employees, making remote and hybrid work better accepted around the globe (McFeely, 2021). Remote work can satisfy many employees' needs by boosting work-life balance, employee engagement, and performance. The popularity of remote work is likely to remain apparent well after the pandemic (McFeely, 2021). The quicker organizations can adjust to this reality, the faster they will attain a high-performing organization that continues to grow and succeed.

There are challenges to remote work as every system has positives and negatives. Concerns revolve around goal collaboration and communication, overwork and burnout, and conserving the organizational culture.

Organizations are worried about having fewer in-person interactions and what effect that can have on employees and their ability to collaborate. Social connection is another critical piece that is detrimental due to not having non-meeting interactions that one experiences when working

onsite. Working remotely or not, managers can ensure employees set clear goals to increase positive outcomes. According to Gallup's research, when goals and responsibilities are clear, employees are 2.8 times more likely to be engaged (McFeely, 2021).

Remote and hybrid employees report working over 50 hours a week compared to their onsite co-workers. This issue can happen with onsite employees, too, and is easier to limit when you are in person. It can be hard to separate yours "free time and "work time" when working at home. Additionally, there can be higher burnout frequencies because people do not have the proper boundaries between being home and being at work. Generally, remote and hybrid make it more difficult to designate specific work times and cause a sense of being overworked.

Human resource leaders were polled on the most significant challenges they face when managing work culture; 23% said a rapid change in their work environment could be attributed to the new standard with people working from home. As employees begin working from home more, companies are challenged with maintaining their work cultures digitally, impacting the connection the employee has with them. Human Resource consulting firm, Mercer, found in 2021 that more than 40% of businesses experienced a moderate to high impact on how their infrastructure handled the culture and workplace change to working virtually. Still, many employers prefer their employees to come into the office occasionally. According to PricewaterhouseCoopers, 68% of executives say a typical employee should go into the office three days a week to maintain a distinct company culture (PwC, 2021).

Although there are challenges to continuing remote work, there are many benefits. 77% of employees report they were more productive working from home in terms of productivity. This factored in having the right technology and equipment at home, which could be a limiting factor

for organizations to move forward with more remote work. Hybrid employees scored the highest when surveyed on engagement, followed by remote and onsite.

Another factor to consider is that remote work removes any geographic limitations and allows employers to recruit from a more talented and diverse talent pool. In some jobs, Harvard Business Review found that applicants who live over 5 to 6 miles away are given one-third fewer call-backs. A limitation is possible inclusion issues, as managers often give onsite employees bigger promotions and higher raises.

Organizations can save substantial money on office space by employing remote and hybrid employees. But, to save on office space, organizations may have to spend more on technology to ensure their employees have the right tools to remain productive at home. 89% of remote and hybrid employees say they have the technology needed to perform effectively in their homes. 89% of remote and hybrid employees say they have the technology required to function effectively in their homes (McFeely, 2021).

Meeting the needs of the employee boosts the ability to retain employees. Employees want a job that allows flexibility to balance their responsibilities outside of work effectively. According to a Gallup study, 54% of employees would leave their job for one that offers more flexible time. Allowing employees to choose where they work is a relatively "free" benefit, aside from tech costs (McFeely, 2021). Given its high demand, organizations can attract top talent by offering remote work. Many employees have grown accustomed to the realities of remote work and don't want to go back to the office.

3.0 Employee Engagement

Employee engagement is a developing area for companies that serves as a foundation for maintaining high motivation and productivity. Behavioral psychologists Stairs & Galpin defined employee engagement as; "The extents to which employees thrive at work, are committed to their employer, and are motivated to do their best, for the benefit of themselves and their organization." Without having a standard in place, organizations would have no basis for making decisions. Therefore, employee engagement is necessary because it measures how the staff is doing. Engagement impacts many drivers that lead to a successful organization. Only 30% of employees in America are engaged at work (McFeely, 2021). The U.S. Joint Commission on the Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations referenced engagement and described a healthy work environment where workers can provide quality care. The ability of a worker to provide such care is bolstered when their own health is prioritized. According to research done by England's National Health Service, engaged employees provide quality and timely care to patients and increase financial performance for the organization. They estimated that disengaged employees cost U.S. organizations between $250 and $350 billion a year. There has been much research on how to measure employee engagement. However, there are limited studies on implementing methods to improve it.

4.0 Utilization Survey

The survey took place over the course of two months spanning from November to January of 2021-2022. The author was provided blueprints of the entire building with the departments color-coded per floor. Additionally, the names of the departmental leaders were provided as resources to assist with collecting the data. Twenty-minute meetings were scheduled, and two pieces of information were collected during the calls. The first objective was to ask how many physical spaces were in the department. These were broken into offices or workstations, which were meant to be an umbrella term encompassing desks and cubicles. Secondly, and the focus of this paper, personnel utilization was inquired about. Four categories were established for reporting employees' work status: onsite or 40 hours per week in the office, 80% onsite or 32 hours in the office, 50% onsite or 20 hours, and hybrid, which was anything less than 20 hours on location. Data was gathered for all of the departments in the building.

5.0 UPMC MyVoice Survey

UPMC releases an annual survey to their staff to understand their employee engagement. UPMC uses this anonymous feedback to implement initiatives and monitor their effectiveness. Starting in 2016, UPMC began focusing on increasing their participation in the survey and getting everyone to buy in and legitimize the efforts. They could increase participation from 59% to over 85% (UPMC, 2019). Despite these ambitions, the survey is not mandated by UPMC and remains optional for the staff. The surveys were developed by the company DecisionWise which specializes in surveys meant to measure engagement (DW, 2022). It consists of 19 questions which are recorded through multiple classifications and themes. The responses are simplified into four categories; Fully Engaged, Key Contributor, Opportunity Group, and Fully Disengaged. Fully Engaged means the staff is pleased with how they are being managed and enjoy what they are doing at work and Fully Disengaged represents dissatisfaction with their job and how they are being handled. The remaining two categories fall between the ones mentioned above, with Key Contributor being more positive and Opportunity Group being more negative (DW, 2022). The departments are not placed into a single category; instead, they are stratified based on the responses of each employee belonging to the group. Also, the engagement or percent of employees that participated is displayed for each department.

Fully Engaged	Key Contributor	Opportunity Group	Fully Disengaged
This highly-motivated group of employees is characterized by strong discretionary effort, organizational pride, and innovation.	This satisfied group of employees can be considered the "strong and steady" population heavily represented in most organizations.	This highly neutral group is on the fence with regard to the company. This group represents an opportunity to increase engagement.	This group is generally bored and frustrated with work, speaks poorly about leaders, and blames others.

Figure 2 MyVoice Survey Engagement Category's Description

UPMC's survey for 2021 had 19 questions separated into two themes (Appendix). The two themes were Culture of Safety and Team Engagement. The respondent had five options for the survey: Strong Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree. Based on the measured results, UPMC can then work with the disengaged units and address the problems they are experiencing. Additionally, the data can identify what is working to emulate it across the other groups.

6.0 Results

Six departments, totaling 166 staff members, located in the faculty pavilion were compared based on their engagement survey results and utilization survey. The overall engagement or number of staff from the departments participating in the MyVoice survey was 63%-90%.

Key takeaways from each department:

Department A

- Lowest total responses with eight

- Lowest response rate, with 63% of the department completing the survey

- The highest percentage falling within the Opportunity Group category

Department B

- Middle performer across all metrics

Department C

- The lowest percentage of Fully Engaged employees with 17%

Department D

- Highest total response with forty-nine

Department E

- Highest response rate with 90%

- The highest percentage of Fully Engaged employees with 70%

- The highest percentage of Fully Disengaged employees with 10%

- The lowest percentage of Key Contributor employees with 20%

- The lowest percentage of Opportunity Group employees with 0%

Department F

- The highest percentage falling within the Key Contributor category, with 64%

Looking at the MyVoice results, the rate of fully disengaged employees is low overall, with 15% falling into this category among all the departments. Five departments had the majority of their staff fall within "Key Contributor." Figure 3 illustrates the engagement based on work from home status.
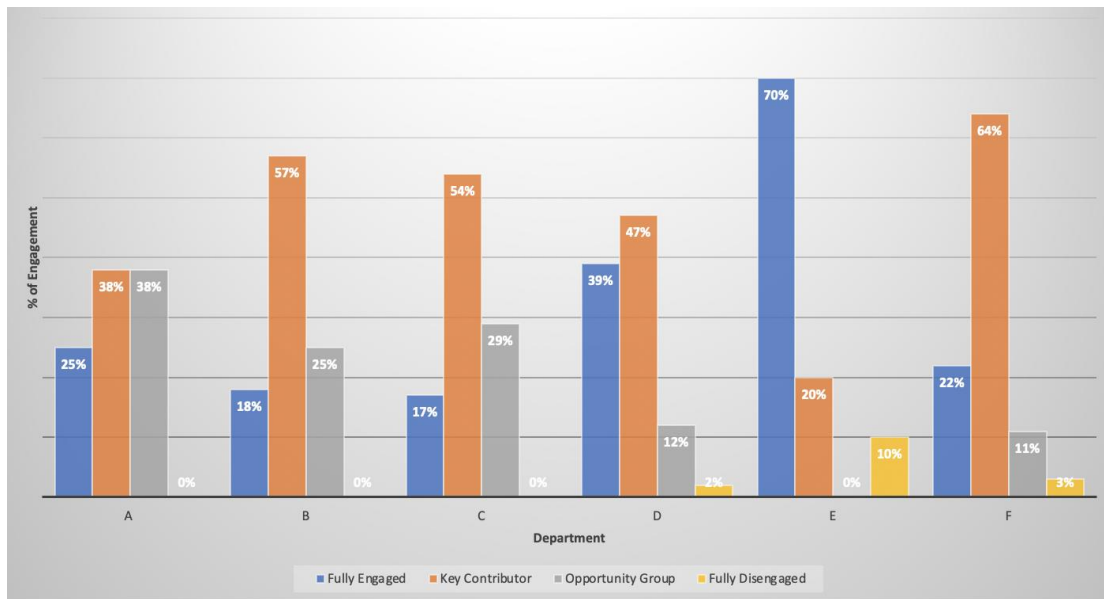

Figure 3 Department Engagement Breakdown

Of the surveyed departments, 166 staff members were identified in the spaces of the Faculty Pavilion. The further work breakdown from status was 46 onsite, 35 80% onsite, 49 at 50%, and 36 hybrid.

A chi-square test was done to analyze if there was a difference in engagement between the departments (Appendix). The results found a statistically significant association between the departments and their engagement scores (p = 0.02), although there were very few Fully Disengaged responses overall and sample size imbalance across the departments so the results should be interpreted with caution. Similarly, a chi-square test was performed to examine the

association between work status and engagement, which did not find a significant association ($p =$ 0.29, Appendix).

7.0 Discussion

We did not observe a relationship between working status and engagement overall. While this result is surprising, there are still questions regarding the validity of metrics. The MyVoice results for the recent survey were provided by the Executive Administrator who sponsored the space survey. There were several limitations to the comparison. The main one was that the administrator who provided the MyVoice survey results did not oversee every department in the building, leading to gaps in comparing employee engagement and onsite employee status. Comparisons were only possible for departments having both MyVoice metrics and space utilization complete. Another issue that could have led to the skewing of results was external pressures. During interviews, leaders were wary of the possibility of losing space, and many directors did not want to give up highly coveted offices. The fear of losing an office or workstation would cause leaders to overreport how frequent staff would be onsite. Generally, leaders would quickly follow up with the employees who would be working onsite more momentarily as social distancing measures lessened. Also, complications on how to report hours arose from leaders. Sometimes staff worked more hours onsite depending on the week, and while they were advised to average the usage doing so could lead to an oversimplification, thus skewing the data. The survey took place during significant holiday months, and again, leaders were asked to respond to normal operating conditions, which could have led to confusion.

In the future, identifying other attributes of the employee work environment will provide more insights for UPMC. Using the MyVoice survey results as a guide, they can answer questions about what leads to Department E having the highest number of Fully Engaged staff. This should include as much information surrounding the employee as possible, researching other areas, and

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gauging their impacts on the employee. An example could be the managers. According to the State of the American Manager report, "Managers account for at least 70% of the variance in employee engagement scores (Beck & Harter, 2022)." By tracking the manager's age, length in the role, staff turnover of manager, and adding this to increase the scope of information. Another piece outside of this project's scope was the department's role. The responsibilities of the staff were wide-ranging and could play a role in the engagement of the employees. Further analysis of historical trends of the engagement scores for the departments would provide needed context.

The working hours of the remote employees and the departments is another component UPMC can measure. According to a Gallup survey, 17% of hybrid employees work over 50 hours a week, while only 11% remote and 8% onsite (McFeely, 2021). UPMC needs to be aware of the working hours to reduce burnout and employee exhaustion. Furthermore, they should encourage their staff to prioritize their health and well-being. 87% of remote employees say their job gives them the flexibility to balance their work and personal life. 88% of hybrid employees agree, along with 78% of onsite employees (McFeely, 2021). Maintaining a low-stress environment comforts employees and increases their engagement in work.

8.0 Recommendation

Leadership needs to address several areas of concern to establish accurate information and encourage proper space usage. First, using security swipe-ins through the employee ID will provide data on which employees are entering the building and provide a form of verification. The current system can only capture swipe-ins from the past 60 days, meaning the holiday months would alter how many people are inside the building because of holiday and vacation days.

UPMC needs to address its stance on working from home. Currently, there is no policy in place, and 89% of remote and hybrid employees surveyed through Gallup say their manager will support their decision to return to the workplace or stay at home (McFeely, 2021). This highlights how other organizations feel about their staffing working from home and their support for it.

Another aspect to balance is what impact having face-to-face interactions has on employees. While people want to be working from home, having in-person interactions can help unite teams and create a sense of unity. A survey conducted by Aetna International found that 40% of employers say they're concerned that a lack of social interaction among colleagues will negatively impact some employees' mental health (2020). 83% of remote employees say the senior leaders at their organization value people as their most valuable asset. 85% of hybrid employees agree, followed by 74% of onsite employees. Ensure all employees feel supported by leadership by continuously building upon relationships and recognizing employees for their work (McFeely, 2021). UPMC should prioritize having one-on-ones between managers and their staff; whether virtually or in person, the benefit is still there. Gallup reports that 45% of remote employees and 43% of hybrid employees have weekly one-on-ones with their managers compared to higher onsite rates (McFeely, 2021).

Another option to keep track of space is through a master seating chart. The seating chart should be open for all managers to access in the building to update it in real-time. A centralized seating chart is currently maintained, but it needs to be manually updated. The building houses a few hundred employees and can be outdated quickly with how often staff changes occur.

Ideally, a shift in culture needs to take place mainly for offices. During the survey, it was evident that everyone would like to have a dedicated office. However, if one is not going to be in it every day, it should be readily acceptable to either share the space or give it up. Offices are being used as positional statements rather than as a functional necessity such as a place for confidential conversations.

9.0 Conclusion

The purpose was to assess employee engagement levels based on work-from-home status. This survey was initiated to understand space utilization. However, it allowed for an opportunity to observe the relationship between work from home status and employee engagement. While working from home can be initially what attracts employees, its impact as a source of engagement is not as evident. Utilization surveys are intended for their cost savings and ability to avoid expensive construction projects. As previously mentioned, drivers of engagement are factors such as managerial style, autonomy within their role, and employee benefits. UPMC, specifically CHP, can use this learning experience as a starting point to channel their direction. Moreover, maintaining a living document to measure space, creating a culture that does not require having a permanent office, and investing in other areas of employee life that are not based on whether they can work remotely.

Furthermore, UPMC needs to acknowledge differences between the flight risk of remote and hybrid employees. According to the Quantum Workplace survey, hybrid employees are more likely to report wanting to stay at their current organization. 72% of hybrid employees say that it would take them a lot to leave their organization. In addition, only 73% of remote employees say they will be at the organization one year from now (McFeely, 2021). This is information organizations will need to adapt to within the changing working environment and attune themselves to the needs of their employees.

Appendix A MyVoice Survey Questions

Culture of Safety

1. My supervisor/manager says a good word when he/she sees a job done according to established patient safety procedures.

2. My supervisor/manager seriously considers staff suggestions for improving patient safety.

3. Whenever pressure builds up, my supervisor/manager wants us to work faster, even if it means taking shortcuts.

4. My supervisor/manager overlooks patient safety problems that happen over and over.

5. My Business Unit leaders provide a work climate that promotes patient safety.

6. The actions of my business unit leaders show that patient safety is a top priority.

7. My business unit leaders seem interested in patient safety only after an adverse event happens.

8. We are given feedback about changes put into place based on event reports.

9. We are informed about errors that happen in this department.

10. In this department, we discuss ways to prevent errors from happening again.

Team Engagement

1. My work provides me with a sense of meaning and purpose.

2. I consider my work to be challenging and exciting.

3. Most days, I look forward to coming to work.

4. My talents and abilities are used well in my current position.

5. I would like to remain with UPMC, even if a similar job were available elsewhere.

6. I would recommend UPMC as a great place to work.

7. UPMC cares about employees.

8. I work in an inclusive culture where I feel I belong.

9. I feel that my leaders will take action based on the MyVoice survey responses.

Appendix B Chi-Square Test Results

Appendix Table 1 Chi-Square Test Between Departments and Engagement

Department	Fully Engaged	Key Contributor	Opportunity Group	Fully Disengaged	Total
A	2	3	3	0	8
B	5	16	7	0	28
C	6	19	10	0	35
D	19	23	6	1	49
E	7	2	0	1	10
F	8	23	4	1	36
Total	47	86	30	3	166

The chi-square statistic is 28.30. The p-value is .0197. The result is significant at $p < .05$.

Appendix Table 2 Chi-Square Test Between Work from Home Status and Engagement

Work Status	Fully Engaged	Key Contributor	Opportunity Group	Fully Disengaged	Total
Onsite	14	21	10	1	46
80% Onsite	6	19	10	0	35
50/50	19	23	6	1	49
Hybrid	8	23	4	1	36
Total	47	86	30	3	166

The chi-square statistic is 10.83. The p-value is .2875. The result is not significant at $p < .05$.
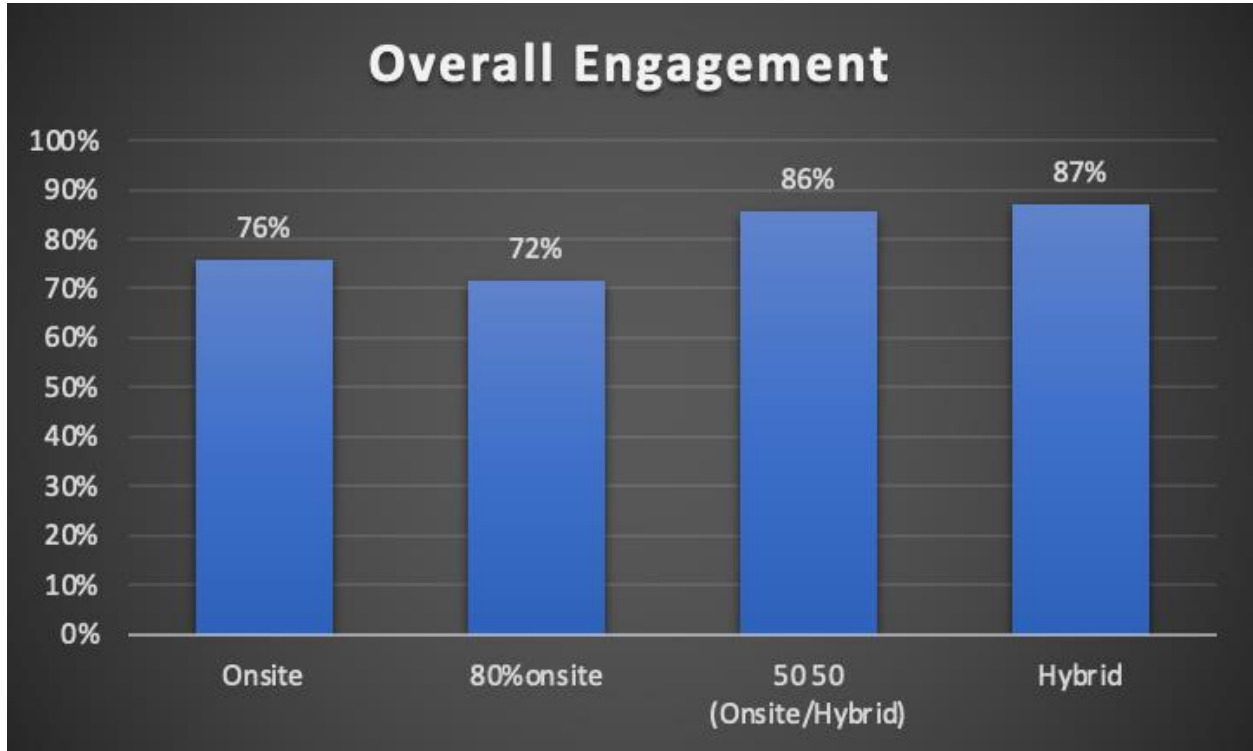
Appendix C Department Engagement

Figure 4 Combined Employee Engagement

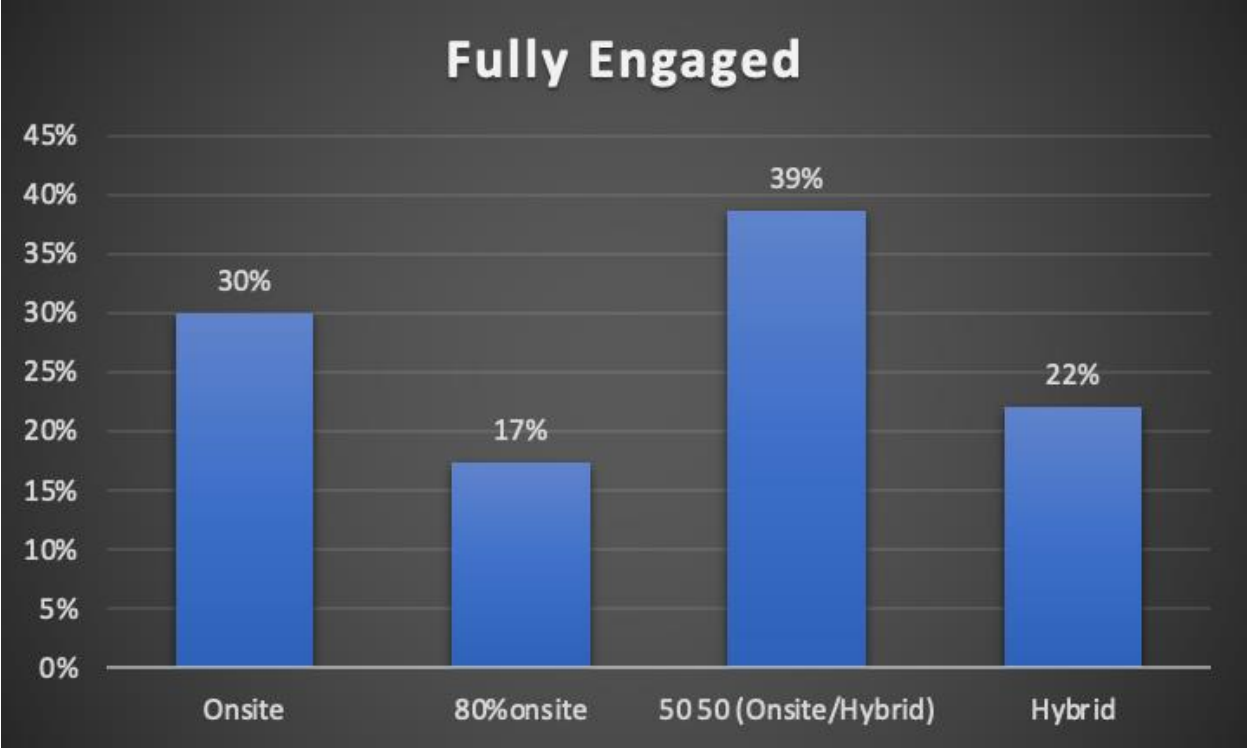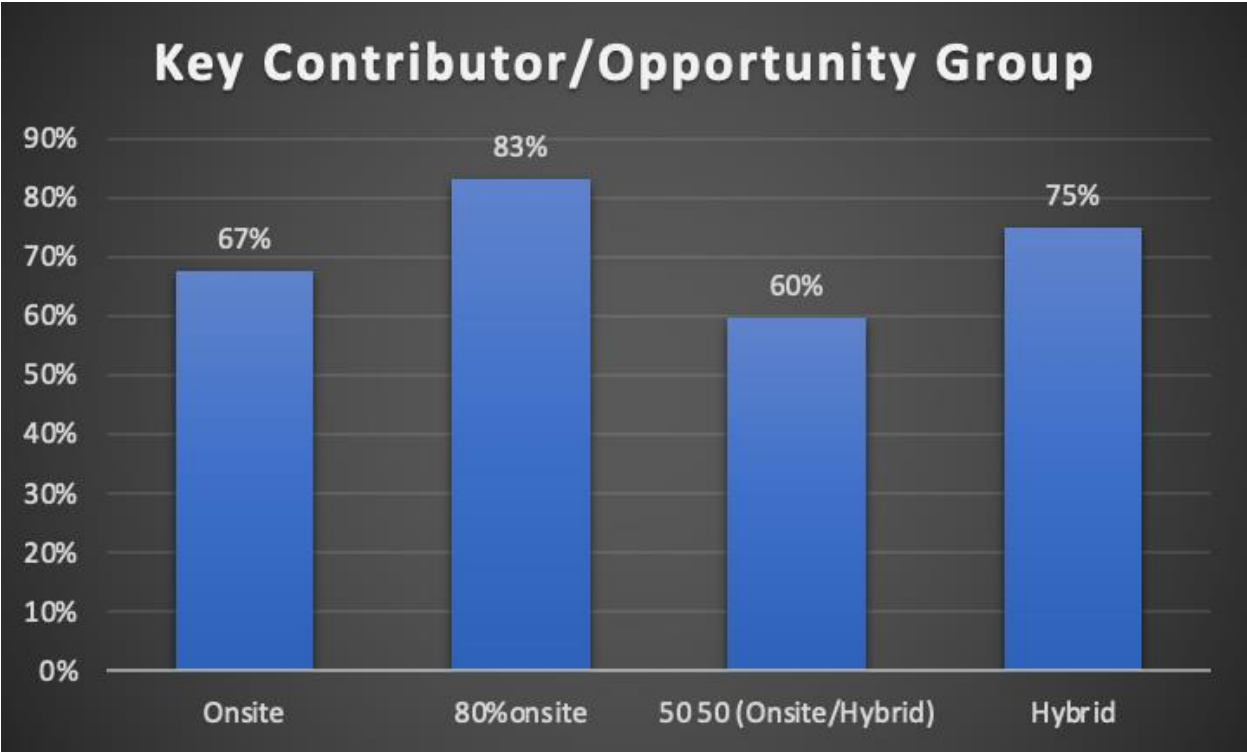**Figure 5 Percentage of Fully Engaged Employees by Work Status**

Figure 6 Percentage of Key Contributor and Opportunity Employees by Work Status
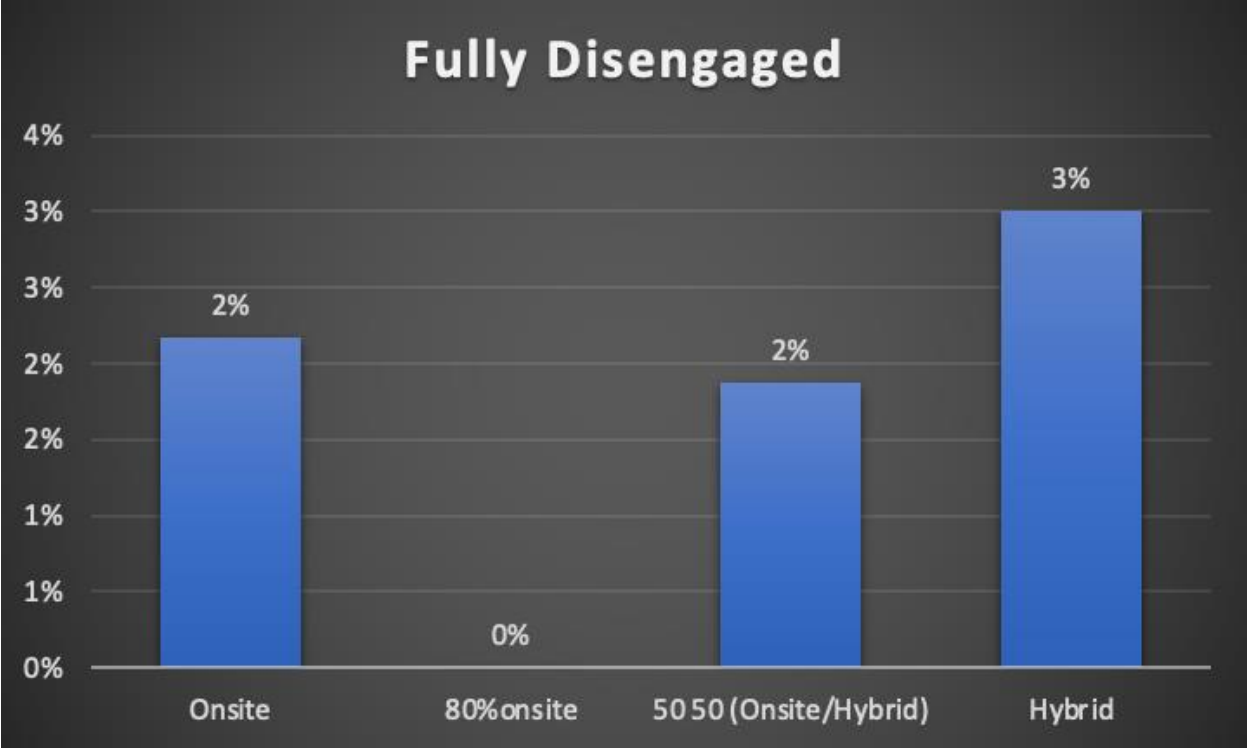
Figure 7 Percentage of Fully Disengaged Employees by Work Status

Appendix D Department Breakdown

Appendix Table 3 Department Breakdown by Engagement and Work Status

Department	N	Overall Engagement	Fully Engaged	Key Contributor	Opportunity Group	Fully Disengaged
A	8	63%	25%	38%	38%	0%
B	28	75%	18%	57%	25%	0%
C	35	72%	17%	54%	29%	0%
D	49	86%	39%	47%	12%	2%
E	10	90%	70%	20%	0%	10%
F	36	87%	22%	64%	11%	3%
	N	Overall Engagement	Fully Engaged	Key Contributor	Opportunity Group	Fully Disengaged
Onsite	46	76%	30%	46%	22%	2%
80%onsite	35	72%	17%	54%	29%	0%
50 50 (Onsite/Hybrid)	49	86%	39%	47%	12%	2%
Hybrid	36	87%	22%	64%	11%	3%

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