

Why your best employees are leaving and how to stop it - Culture Amp

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Executive Summary

This study examined voluntary turnover among over 300,000 employees across 15 months to identify key departure predictors. Culture Amp's research team found three primary drivers of attrition: lack of career growth opportunities, misaligned role expectations, and insufficient inclusion. The analysis revealed that employees most valued by organizations (regrettable exits) were significantly more honest about their dissatisfaction in engagement surveys. The study's most significant finding was that asking employees directly about their future commitment ('I see myself still working at [Company] in two years') proved 2.7 times more predictive of turnover than other metrics. The research challenges conventional wisdom that employees primarily leave due to managers, instead pointing to systemic issues around growth, role clarity, and belonging. A 2021 update incorporating 100,000 additional exits during the Great Resignation confirmed these patterns while identifying enablement and access to information as an emerging driver.

Key Insights

1. Career growth remains the top reason for departure across all tenure levels, encompassing formal progression, learning opportunities, and stretch projects
2. Employees flagged as 'regrettable exits' score 10 points lower in overall favorability and are more honest about dissatisfaction than other departing employees
3. The question 'I see myself still working at [Company] in two years' is 2.7 times more predictive of turnover than other engagement metrics

Practical Takeaways

- Filter engagement survey results by performance ratings to identify how high-performing employees' experiences differ from others
- Include future commitment questions in regular engagement surveys to predict attrition risk before exit interviews

Critical Analysis

Strengths include the large sample size (300,000+ employees) and longitudinal methodology comparing pre-exit engagement data with actual departures. The study benefits from real organizational data and clear statistical relationships. Limitations include potential selection bias toward Culture Amp clients and the challenge of defining 'regrettable' exits consistently across organizations. The research relies heavily

on self-reported survey data, which may be subject to response bias. The 2021 update strengthens credibility by replicating findings during a different labor market period.

Organizational Practice

Organizations conduct engagement surveys and exit interviews, with People teams flagging certain departures as 'regrettable' based on performance and retention value. Companies track tenure, manager status, and various engagement metrics to understand turnover patterns.

Strategic Implications

The findings suggest organizations may be focusing retention efforts on manager relationships when the actual drivers are career development, role clarity, and inclusion. The predictive power of future commitment questions indicates organizations could implement early warning systems for high-performer attrition. The emergence of enablement issues during remote work periods suggests retention strategies need to adapt to distributed work environments.

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