



ENGAGEMENT AND VOLUNTARY DEPARTURES

Prepared by: Tanis Abuda

Released: March 2017

Work Environment Survey (WES)

Background

This research explores the extent to which employee engagement (i.e., satisfaction and commitment) and work environment experiences (i.e., engagement model drivers) play a role in voluntary departures from the BC Public Service over time. To explore these relationships, BC Stats analyzed the employment status of a cohort of employees who provided results on these measures in the 2011 *Work Environment Survey (WES)* cycle. The cohort was split into two key groups of interest based on their employment status five years later:

- respondents still employed in the BC Public Service as of January 31, 2017 (n=11,936) and
- respondents who voluntarily left the BC Public Service between October 1, 2011, and September 30, 2016 (n=4,491).¹

Respondents who voluntarily left were further classified into those who resigned (n=1,576) or retired (n=2,915).² The analysis assessed *WES* results across these groups over time and tested the relationships between their results and employment status.

¹ Data sources available at the time of analysis left some small time gaps between the linked data sets (i.e., between May and October 2011 and between October 2016 and the end of January 2017).

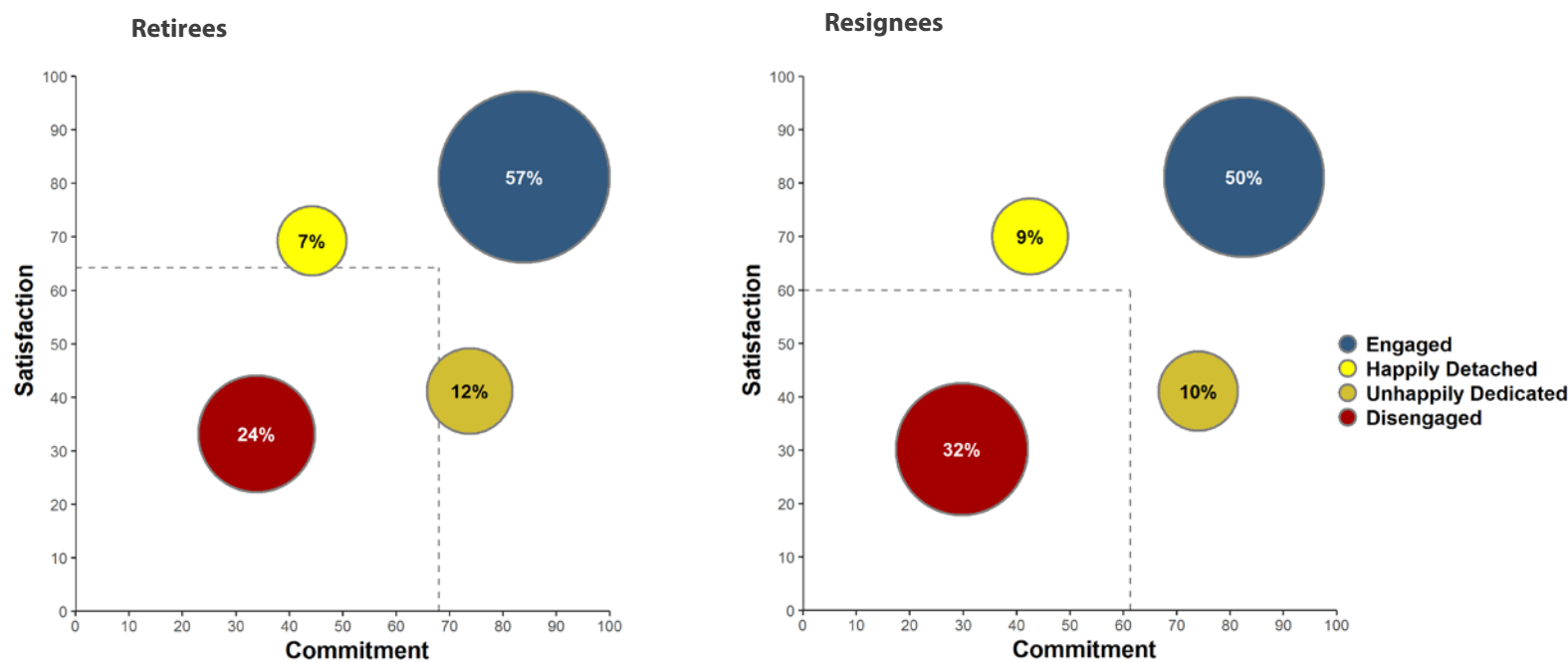
² There was a substantial number of employees from this cohort that were excluded from further analysis (n=3,904). Five retirees and 145 resignees had returned to the BC Public Service. The rest (n=3,750) were excluded because they were on leave the time the data was extracted from CHIPS (January 30, 2017), they exited the BC Public Service involuntarily or during a time not covered by the data (i.e., between May and Oct 2011 or between Oct 2016 and January 2017), or their records were incomplete. Given the number excluded employees from this cohort, caution is advised in generalizing these results of this analysis to the entire population.

Key Findings

Resignees were more likely to have been disengaged

To begin exploring the relationship between the engagement characteristics and employees’ decision to resign from the BC Public Service, resignees were compared with those still employed to see how each was distributed across the four states of engagement in 2011.³ As shown in the charts below, one in three employees who resigned were disengaged, compared to one in four of those who were still employed five years later.

States of engagement in 2011



Although employees who resigned were less engaged than those still employed five years later, neither engagement nor its drivers were strong predictors of their leaving

The below table lists the engagement model scores as well as the differences between groups in this cohort. In general, the 2011 WES engagement model scores were the same between retirees and those still employed, with the exception of three drivers. In these cases, Physical Environment & Tools, Pay & Benefits and Staffing Practices were rated higher by those who retired from the BC Public Service compared to those still employed five years later.

³ Engaged State: scores ≥ 75 points on satisfaction and commitment, Disengaged State: ≥25 points on satisfaction and commitment, Unhappily Dedicated: highly committed (scores ≥ 60 points), but not satisfied (scores < 60 points), Happily Detached: highly satisfied (scores ≥ 60 points), but not committed (scores < 60 points).

Respondents who resigned not only reported lower levels of commitment to the BC Public Service in 2011 compared to those still employed, but they also reported lower levels of satisfaction with their jobs and their organization, and reported lower scores in Empowerment and the items that measure Job Suitability.⁴

Engagement Model	Still Employed (A)	Retired (B)	Difference (B-A)	Resigned (C)	Difference (C-A)
Engagement	65	65	-0.3	60	-5.3*
BC Public Service Commitment	68	68	0.3	61	-6.7*
Job Satisfaction	67	68	0.8	62	-5.2*
Organization Satisfaction	60	59	-1.5	58	-2.5*
Empowerment	65	66	0.7	63	-2.3*
Stress & Workload	56	57	0.7	57	0.7
Job Suitability ³	75	76	0.7	73	-2.3*
Vision, Mission & Goals	57	57	-0.4	57	-0.4
Teamwork	75	76	1.2	74	-0.8
Physical Environment & Tools	65	67	2.2*	65	0.2
Recognition	59	60	0.9	59	-0.1
Professional Development	58	58	-0.1	57	-1.1
Pay & Benefits	50	54	4.4*	49	-0.6
Staffing Practices	56	58	2.2*	57	1.2
Respectful Environment	71	72	0.7	70	-1.3
Executive-Level Management	53	54	0.6	52	-1.4
Supervisory-Level Management	67	67	-0.1	67	-0.1
Total Respondent Count	11,936	2,915		1,576	

* T-test differences are statistically significant, with $p < 0.05$.

Regression analysis was conducted to explore whether engagement and its drivers could provide valuable information for predicting resignations. Analysis tested these drivers and discovered a few of the drivers and engagement characteristics were statistically significant predictors; however, the overall explanatory value was very low. For example, just four percent of resignations could be explained by their engagement scores from the 2011 cycle.⁵ Such conflicting information suggests a more sophisticated methodological approach may be necessary for examining this relationship among those who resign.

⁴ Job Suitability was not a part of the 2011 WES engagement model, but the question items measuring this construct as identified during the model enhancements in the 2013 WES cycle were asked of respondents and therefore reconstructed and tested as a part of this analysis.

⁵ Linear regressions of engagement and drivers on resignation status while controlling for age had an adjusted R² value of no larger than .039.

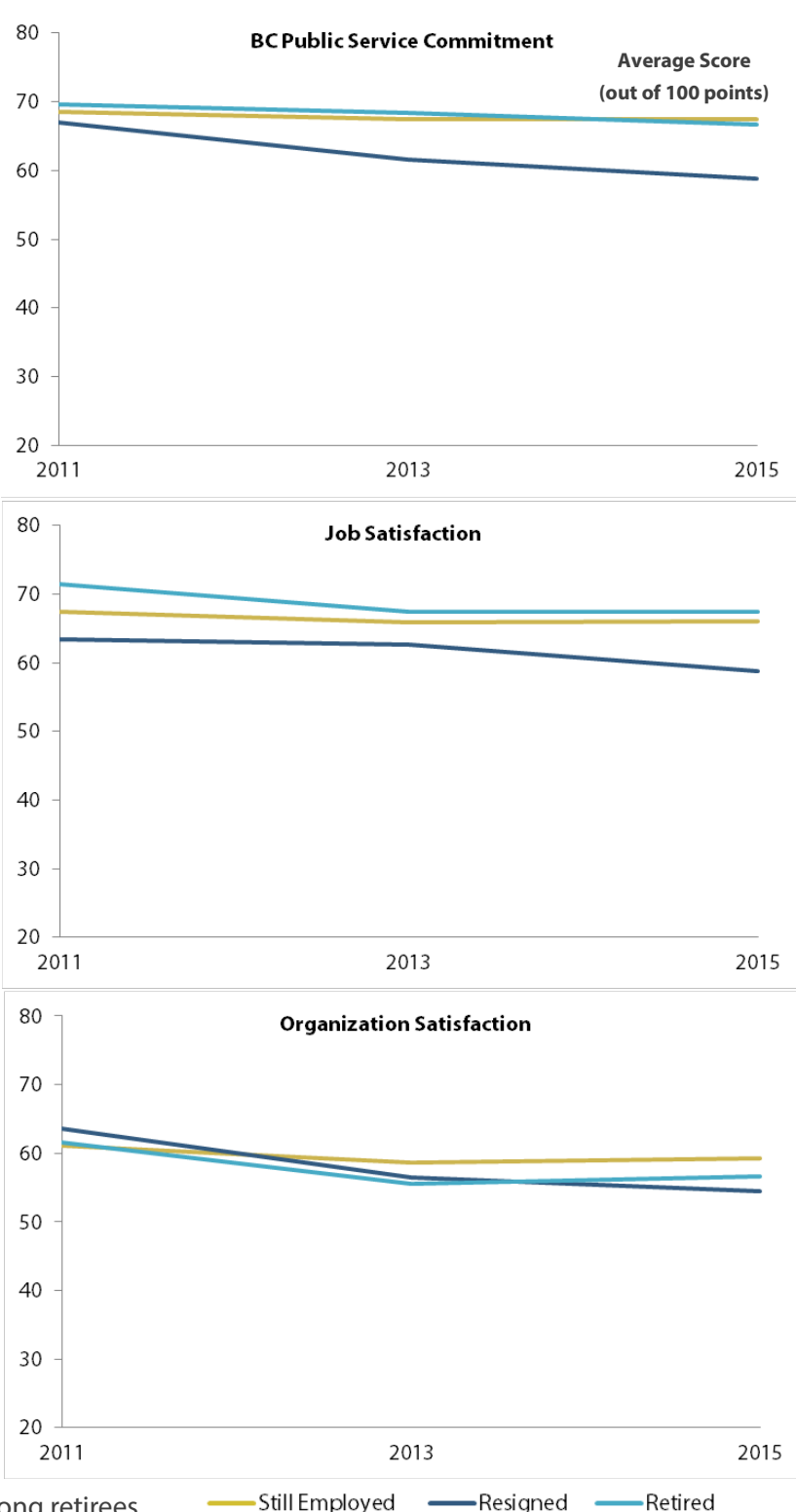
Over time, engagement scores decline more among those who leave compared to those still employed

A preliminary analysis was conducted of the cohort who completed three WES cycles (2011, 2013 and 2015) to further explore the trends of turnover over time. However, only 12% of the cohort that exited remained in the sample, therefore trends should be interpreted with caution.⁶ The findings show that while engagement scores changed very little over time for those still employed, notable declines in all three characteristics of engagement were observed for those that left the BC Public Service. Overall engagement dropped by six points for resignees, and four points for retirees, compared to a one point fluctuation among those still employed five years later.

Among those who resigned, commitment scores dropped by five points between the first two cycles and then another three points by 2015, for a total drop of eight points while both retirees and those still employed showed much smaller declines.

While Job Satisfaction remained the same for those still employed, the average score gradually declined by four points over the same period and those who resigned showed no change between 2011 and 2013, followed by a five point drop the following cycle just prior to their leaving. Although there was a slight decline among retirees, as a group they still reported higher job satisfaction than those still employed.

Of the three engagement characteristics, organization satisfaction dropped the most for those who left compared to those still employed. A nine point drop was observed among resignees and a five point drop among retirees while the still employed only dropped two points during the same period.



⁶ Only 114 resignees and 432 retirees remained in the sample compared to 8,404 of those still employed (i.e., 12% of leavers and 70% of those still employed).

Conclusion

Overall, this exploratory research confirmed a relationship between engagement and turnover. However, none of the model drivers, nor any of the engagement characteristics were identified as strong predictors based on the tests conducted. The preliminary findings on employees' engagement states over time suggest changes to commitment and organization satisfaction may hold greater potential to predict an employee's decision to leave the BC Public Service rather than scores per se. Furthermore, while this analysis focused on analyzing the relationship between engagement and turnover at the individual employee level, it may be more appropriate to examine this relationship at the work unit level. For example, recent research by Quantum Workplace found work units with no turnover also had a higher proportion of engaged employees compared to the units with turnover.⁷

As a result of these findings, the following are recommended as next steps in this important research:

- Replicate this analysis on additional cohorts using more robust datasets and conduct survival analysis, which takes both the duration until turnover and the event of turnover into account.
- Although not part of the 2011 WES model, the question items that make up the Job Suitability driver were available for analysis and therefore included, and were significantly lower for resignees. It may be worthwhile to explore the new, improved model constructs resulting from model enhancements made in 2013 and 2015 to confirm if similar patterns or even stronger results can be replicated over time.
- More in-depth analysis by groups known to be at higher risk of turnover (younger employees, those within the first three years of service, specific job classification groups, etc.)
- Consider analyzing the relationship between the engagement model and turnover among the top and bottom work units to better understand the complexities of the relationship between these organizational factors.

⁷ Quantum Workplace Ebook. *How to Increase Employee Engagement*. Downloaded from <http://www.quantumworkplace.com/>

