

Weaving sense into employee engagement: Measuring the feeling of staff satisfaction

Is working in a knowledge-based industry all about knowledge?

In today's knowledge economy, are staff truly engaged with and fulfilled by their work with data and insights? Tapestry Works recently sought to find out how it really feels to be a market researcher in Asia. We wanted to understand if those who work in market research, consumer insight and data intelligence are motivated to feel smart, intelligent and insightful, or do their goals go beyond the rhetoric of most agencies?

TapestryWorks partnered with Asia Research magazine to conduct their annual Staff Satisfaction Survey using the StoryWorks® Emotional Profiling tool to capture the feelings of staff through a simple visual card sort. Emotional Profiling is based on 12 motivational segments that capture the most fundamental human goals: courage, creativity, discovery, freedom, fun, love, belonging, nurture, innocence, control, knowledge and mastery.

In the survey, staff selected as many cards as they wanted from a set of 24 images, based on two separate questions. Firstly, participants were asked to choose those cards that best expressed their current feelings about their employer. Secondly, they were asked to choose those cards that they associated with the ideal employer.

Making online research more visual

Fieldwork was conducted in December 2015, via Toluna's online survey platform. The screenshot example below shows how the visual card sort appeared to survey participants.

Which of the following images sums up your feelings about your current employer? Select as few or as many as you like.



Figure 1 Screenshot of online survey card sort

The choices of cards have been mapped back onto 12 motivational segments to create an Emotional Profile of the goals of staff and the feelings associated with those goals (both positive and negative) and a measure of overall sentiment. Current and ideal profiles were compared to understand the gap between aspirations and current reality.

Images are better than words at capturing implicit associations and emotions, giving participants the opportunity to react spontaneously to pictures before their conscious brain gives a more rational and self-censored response. Experience in using imagery rather than words shows that they are particularly powerful in helping people express their true feelings.

As you will see below, more than 40% of associations with current employer showed negative sentiment, perhaps revealing the true feelings of those working in the market research industry? This is something that is difficult to capture with rational words, especially in Asian cultures where it is difficult to express negative feelings.

How does it feel to be a market researcher?

How do the employees we surveyed feel today (or at least in December 2015)? Overall, the strongest feelings were motivated by the thirst for knowledge and the need for control (both equally important). In both cases around 60% of staff reported positive feelings ('in control' and 'intelligent') and around 40% of staff reported negative feelings ('chaotic' and 'ignorant'). This balance of positive and negative feelings matched the overall sentiment levels across the sample (with positive sentiment 20% higher than negative sentiment).

The next most important feelings were those of belonging and discovery (individualism), although sentiment around these goals was more positive. The need to feel individual is something that is more strongly reflected in future aspirations for many staff, along with the need to feel creative. These are the two areas that show the biggest gap between current feelings and future aspirations.

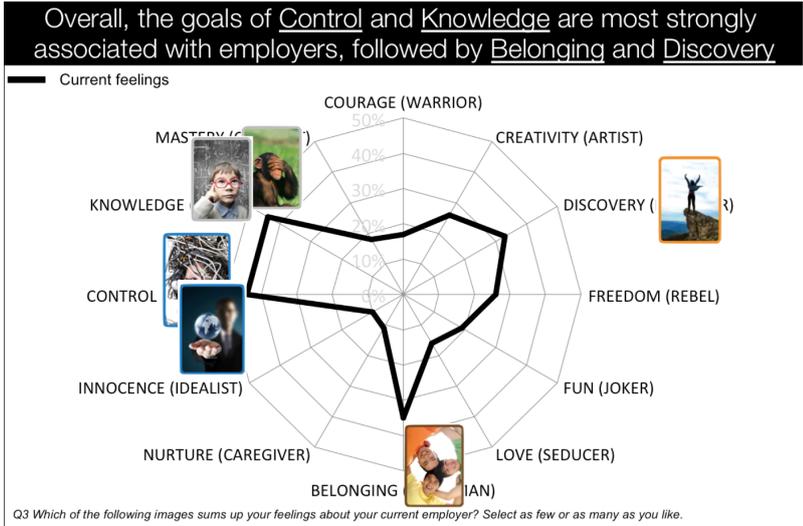


Figure 2 Current feelings of market researchers (n=270)

The results show a very consistent priority of feelings across different types of market research agency (including global and Asian based companies), although some differences were also apparent.

Do all researchers feel the same?

Staff in Greater China had the highest levels of negative sentiment and also the strongest associations with control and knowledge. Indian staff feel more courageous, while Indonesian staff choose images relating to rebelliousness more often than other countries. Indonesians and Singaporeans are more likely to associate their employer with freedom.

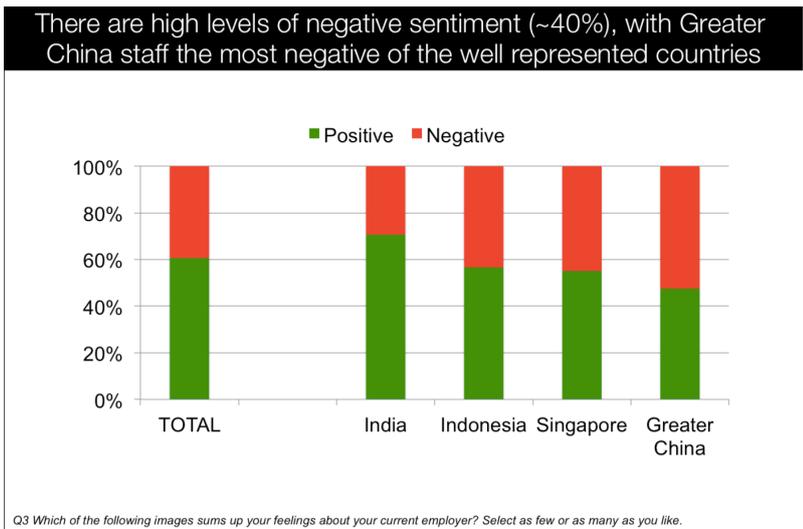


Figure 3 Positive and negative sentiment by country

Chinese researchers have a stronger association with Control and Knowledge, Indonesians with Appreciation and Freedom

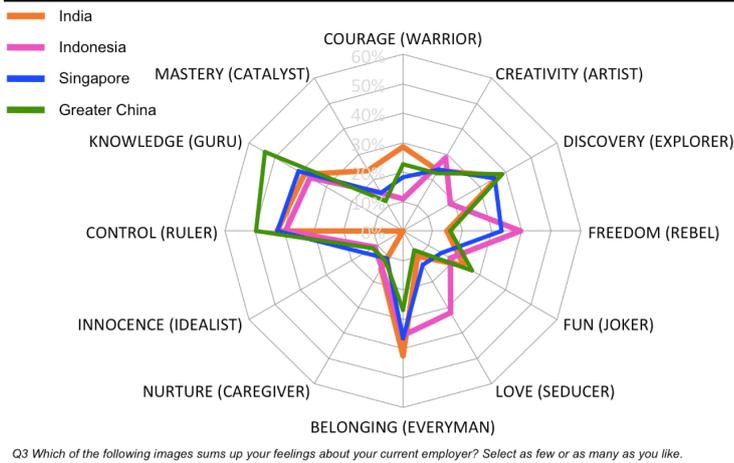


Figure 4 Current feelings for four countries

The differences across job levels are particularly interesting, as those at the top of the research ladder have a lot in common with those starting on their climb up. Research Executives (and Senior Research Executives) along with Managing Directors (and CEOs) show the strongest associations with feelings of creativity and rebelliousness (i.e., feeling different).

The need to belong is stronger at middle levels of seniority (from Project Manager to Research Director level) but is lower for those less senior and more senior. The need for knowledge is also stronger at middle levels (particularly for Associate Directors and Research Directors, whereas the need for mastery only appears at Director level and is strongest for Managing Directors).

Seniority and experience brings more feeling of Mastery and brings back the Freedom that you have as a starter in the industry

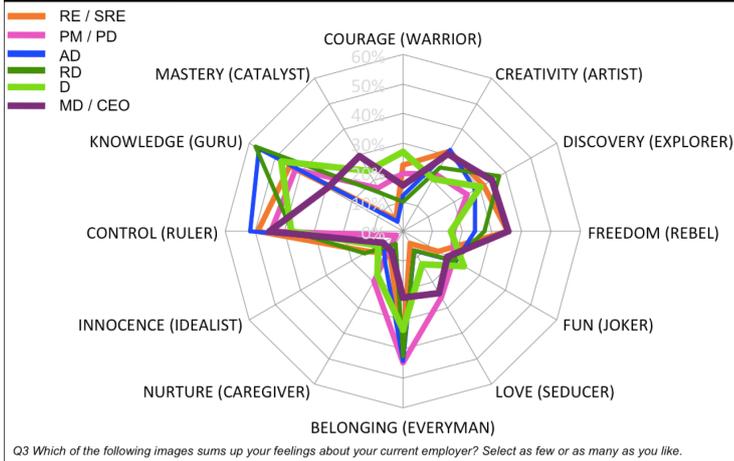


Figure 5 Current feelings by level of seniority

What do employees aspire to feel?

Overall, the aspirations of staff (the second profiling question) are quite consistent in showing the desire to move a little away from feelings associated with control and knowledge and towards more feeling of creativity and discovery (associated with exploring the world and exploring the mind).



Figure 6 Current feelings versus ideal feelings

However, there are some differences. The most striking is the strong desire of those who have just started their career to be creative and innovative (twice as important as any other goal and much higher than for any other job level). Perhaps this is something for companies to consider in recruiting graduates and entry-level employees?

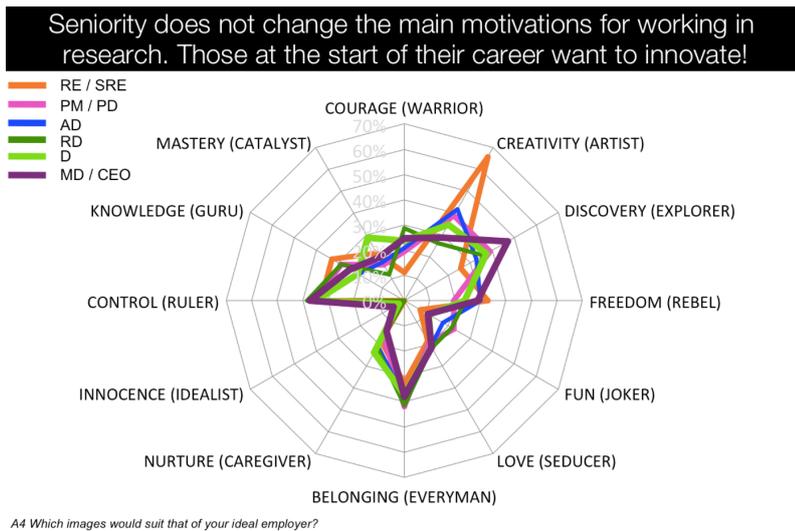


Figure 7 Ideal feelings (aspirations) by level of seniority

There are also some differences between countries in terms of aspirations from an ideal employer. Singaporeans show the strongest urge for more creativity and discovery. Indonesian researchers have a greater need for belonging and love (appreciation) of any country and researchers in Greater China want a little more freedom (perhaps to break away from the tyranny of their current feelings of control?). Indian researchers express the greatest need for courage and independence.

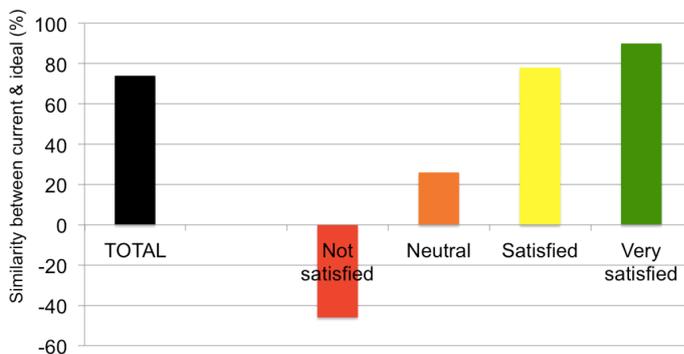
Mind the gap

The aspirations of researchers are also helpful in understanding the gap between what they feel now and how they would like to feel. The simplest way to measure this is to look at the correlation between the cards chosen across the two questions, representing a measure of the similarity or alternatively the difference between current reality and future aspirations.

Using this measure of similarity, TapestryWorks looked at the relationship between the “gap” in feelings and the results based on the more conventional metrics used in the survey. These findings show that the Emotional Profiling provides highly predictive feedback on staff sentiment as well as a highly granular break down of staff feelings and employer challenges.

We first we looked at staff satisfaction (measured on a 10 point scale), breaking ratings down into four categories: Not satisfied, Neutral, Satisfied and Very satisfied. For those “not satisfied” with their current employer the similarity between their current employer and ideal employer was -46% (a correlation of -0.46). For those “neutral” the similarity is 26%, for “satisfied” 78% and for “very satisfied” 90%.

Employees who say they are not satisfied show a strong negative correlation between their current and ideal feelings (card choices)



A3 Which of the following images sums up your feelings about your current employer?
A4 Which images would suit that of your ideal employer?
B1 On a scale of 1 to 10, how would you rate your satisfaction with your current employer?

Figure 8 Similarity of current and ideal feelings by Satisfaction rating

Why would anyone want to leave?

We then looked at a question about intention to stay or leave employer in the next 12 months. Again the relationship was very strong, with those who “will not stay” having a similarity score of -30%, those “not sure” at 2%, “quite likely to stay” at 65% and “very likely to stay” at 92%.

| Intention to stay | Similarity between feelings of current employer and ideal employer |
|----------------------|--|
| Will not stay | -30% |
| Not sure | 2% |
| Quite likely to stay | 65% |
| Very likely to stay | 92% |

Emotional profiling in the Asia Research staff satisfaction survey shows that the gap between feelings about current employer and those of an ideal employer are very revealing of levels of satisfaction and intention to stay, without the need to ask these questions directly.

More importantly, Emotional Profiling breaks down these feelings in a highly granular way. The key finding of the Asia Research staff survey is that employers looking for higher levels of staff satisfaction and retention should communicate more about the opportunities to be creative and individual and less about the importance of knowledge and control. The results show that this might be particularly important for recruiting new talent, perhaps the greatest challenge currently facing the market research industry in Asia.

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REFERENCES

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This is the ninth in TapestryWorks’ series of case studies and white papers. TapestryWorks decodes people and culture to build consistent meaning into brand experiences. We help build culture sense for brands.