

THE VALUE OF EMPLOYEE LISTENING:

ENABLEMENT AS A DRIVER OF ORGANIZATIONAL PERFORMANCE



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Organizations invest in employee listening to understand their people and make better decisions about employee experience and performance. Showing how those insights relate to measurable employee and business outcomes, across many organizations and over time, is more difficult.

Our research draws on Korn Ferry's largest listening outcomes study to date: nearly 1.4 million employees across 60+ organizations using Korn Ferry Listen, our employee listening platform. It provides new evidence at two levels: the individual employee and the organization.

At the employee level, we asked: Are stronger scores on employee listening dimensions linked to individual performance on the job? Across 176 organization-year survey groups and 1,389,894 people, employees with favorable responses had 1.32 times the odds of receiving an Exceeded Expectations rating, equivalent to about a 22% greater likelihood at the observed baseline rate. (Odds and likelihood are related but not identical measures; we explain the difference in "How We Know This.")

At the organization level, we asked: Are stronger scores on employee listening dimensions linked to overall organizational performance?

Across up to 60 client organizations tracked over multiple years, both engagement and enablement were positively associated with later employee retention and revenue per employee. All four relationships were statistically significant (see Table 1).

One finding stands out. **Enablement showed the largest observed relationship with both organizational outcomes.** Enablement—whether employees have the tools, resources, information, processes, and support they need to be effective—was associated with later retention ($r = .291$) and later revenue per employee ($r = .285$).

Knowing whether employees can perform may be as informative as knowing whether they want to perform.

That relationship has meaningful business implications. Based on the observed association, a 10-point difference in enablement corresponds to an estimated 2.42-percentage-point difference in attrition. For an organization with 10,000 employees, that is roughly 242 fewer employee exits. Using illustrative replacement-cost assumptions of \$25,000 to \$100,000 per exit, those exits could represent approximately \$6 million to \$24.2 million in replacement costs alone. This estimate captures only a portion of the broader costs associated with turnover.

Engagement matters, but motivation is only part of the equation. Listening can also show leaders where employees are constrained by tools, processes, information, resources, or management practices.

Organizations with longer listening histories showed stronger relationships on average, which suggests there is value in treating listening as an ongoing source of organizational insight rather than a one-time survey.

THE BUSINESS QUESTION

Most executives approve employee listening budgets without a clear answer to a simple question: What does this buy us? The logic has never been in doubt. When leaders understand what employees experience at work and act on it, business outcomes should improve. But logic is not evidence, and a single client success story is not a business case.

Korn Ferry Listen, our employee listening platform, measures four core signals: engagement, enablement, well-being, and intent to stay (we define each in “The Engaged Performance™ Framework” below). Korn Ferry Listen has enough history to examine that question at two levels:

- **Study 1** asks whether employee experiences captured in Korn Ferry Listen are related to individual performance ratings.
- **Study 2** asks whether organization-level engagement and enablement are related to two later business outcomes—retention and revenue per employee—across a multi-year panel of client organizations.

Looking at both levels matters.

- The employee-level analysis shows whether the survey captures experiences that distinguish stronger performers.
- The organization-level analysis tests whether those same signals are associated with outcomes that feed workforce and financial decisions.

Together, they provide a more complete view than a single client case or a single outcome measure.

WHAT WE FOUND

Finding 1: Enablement Showed the Strongest Association with Business Outcomes

Organizations whose employees reported higher engagement and enablement tended, on average, to retain more employees and generate more revenue per employee at the next available observation.

We measured two outcomes approximately a year after the Korn Ferry Listen survey: retention and revenue per employee. All four pooled estimates were statistically significant, though the size of relationships varied considerably across organizations (see Table 1).

Table 1: Meta-analytic correlations between Korn Ferry Listen predictors and organizational outcomes at the next observation ($t + 1$). Retention is reverse-coded annualized attrition, so positive correlations indicate lower turnover. k is the number of organizations contributing to each estimate.

Predictor	Outcome ($t + 1$)	r	P	k	95% CI
Enablement	Retention (lower attrition)	.291	< .001	57	[.147, .423]
Enablement	Revenue per employee	.285	.004	39	[.096, .454]
Engagement	Revenue per employee	.223	.030	40	[.022, .406]
Engagement	Retention (lower attrition)	.191	.025	60	[.024, .347]

Enablement showed the largest organization-level relationship with retention and revenue per employee. We did not directly test whether the enablement estimates were statistically larger than the engagement estimates, so we do not conclude that engagement is unimportant. Rather, enablement was most closely tied to later retention and revenue per employee in this sample. Engagement and enablement were also strongly related to one another at the organization level ($r = .881$). That overlap is expected, but the concepts are not interchangeable (see Table B1).

Engagement captures whether employees want to contribute; enablement captures whether they have the tools, resources, information, processes, and support to do so.

Employees who are motivated but blocked fall into the Frustrated segment of Korn Ferry's Engaged Performance™ framework (see Table 4). Listening can help leaders identify those barriers and decide where removing friction adds the most value.

Finding 2: Favorable Experiences Were Linked to Higher Performance

Employees who reported a better experience at work were more likely to be rated top performers.

The organization-level results establish the broader business outcome pattern, but much of employee listening is about the individual employee experience, so we took a second angle:

How are stronger scores on employee listening dimensions linked to on-the-job performance?

Across 176 organization-year survey groups, employees with favorable listening responses were more likely to receive an Exceeded Expectations performance rating. On average, favorable responses were associated with 1.32 times the odds of receiving that rating. At the observed baseline rate of Exceeded Expectations ratings, this corresponds to approximately a 22% greater likelihood. Breaking the results down by Korn Ferry Listen dimensions, these were the strongest patterns that appeared (see Table 2):

- **Enablement**, defined in this study as the tools, resources, information, processes, and support employees need to be effective.
- **Expectations**, defined in this study as clear job expectations and accountability, a transparent link between performance and compensation, and constructive feedback and recognition.
- **Well-being**, defined in this study as the physical, emotional, and psychological experience of work.
- **Influence**, defined in this study as employees having meaningful decision-making authority and voice, including seeing their ideas valued and adopted.
- **Supportive Culture**, defined in this study as psychological safety and inclusion—being able to speak up, be oneself at work, and learn from mistakes without fear of negative consequences.

At the item level, manager practices stood out, defined in this study as trust and confidence in immediate managers, along with coaching and support for learning and performance improvement.

Two of the strongest relationships involved employees' views that their manager reviews their performance fairly and values their ideas and opinions (see Table A1).

Table 2: Top five experience dimensions by median odds ratio, with illustrative value translations per 10,000 employees. Dollar values use the Study 1 conversion assumptions and should be read as order-of-magnitude estimates, not causal guarantees. Dimensions represented by only one or two items should be interpreted directionally.

Dimension	Strong positive items	Median OR	Highest item OR	Median item value per 10,000	Highest item value per 10,000
Enablement	6 of 6	1.49	1.58	\$8.0M	\$9.4M
Expectations	12 of 17	1.44	2.12	\$7.3M	\$16.1M
Well-being	2 of 2	1.44	1.49	\$7.2M	\$8.0M
Influence	10 of 14	1.34	1.99	\$5.7M	\$14.6M
Supportive Culture	18 of 22	1.33	1.63	\$5.6M	\$10.1M

Finding 3: Sustained Listening Showed Stronger Relationships

The longer an organization had been listening, the stronger the link between its Korn Ferry Listen scores and its business outcomes.

Organizations with more years of Korn Ferry Listen data showed stronger associations on average across all four predictor-outcome pairs. This does not establish that surveying more often produces better outcomes. It is consistent, though, with the possibility that repeated cycles of listening, action, and learning reinforce one another. As seen in Figure 1, an increase in past surveys administered increased the strength of the relationship between Korn Ferry Listen metrics with revenue per employee ($r = +.14$ increase) and Korn Ferry Listen metrics with retention ($r = +0.07$). As evidenced by the slopes in the graph, there is a positive, linear increase in relationships when survey depth is added as a moderator.

We also see this pattern in practice: organizations get more from listening when they sustain it and visibly act on what they hear.

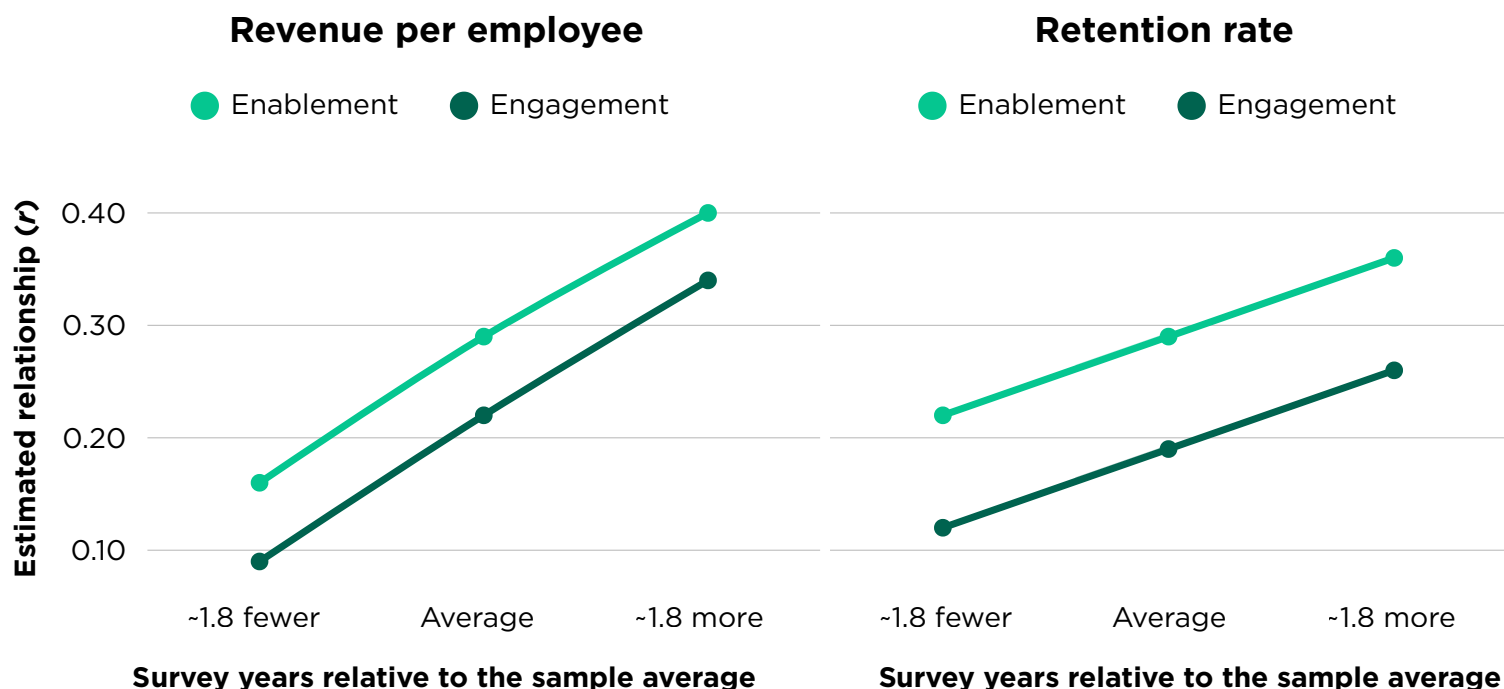
The pattern is consistent with how listening is intended to create value: through repeated cycles of feedback, prioritization, action, and learning.

Case Study: Keystart has used Korn Ferry Listen since 2017 to identify priorities, act on feedback, and track progress over time. Communication and resourcing concerns surfaced in earlier surveys became areas of focus and subsequently improved. Leaders reported similar progress in other areas prioritized through feedback. By 2022, after five years of listening, both engagement and enablement had improved, with enablement rising from 75% to 84% and reaching the 95th percentile against Korn Ferry's High Performing Norm.

Figure 1:

The estimated relationship strengthens as survey history increases

Model-based illustration, survey history is measured in distinct survey years



The center point uses the pooled relationship; slopes apply the meta-regression estimate on the Fisher-z scale. This is an associative pattern—not a causal estimate of administering additional surveys.

TRANSLATING THE RESULTS INTO BUSINESS TERMS

Statistical relationships are most useful when leaders can understand their practical scale. For retention, we therefore supplemented the correlation results with a direct meta-analysis of organization-specific raw slopes. This analysis estimates the average difference in the next-period annual exit rate associated with a 10-point difference in engagement or enablement (see Table 3).

A 10-point difference in enablement corresponded to an estimated 2.34-percentage-point lower annual exit rate, or about 234 additional employees retained per 10,000 (95% CI: 111 to 356). For engagement, the corresponding estimate was 1.04 percentage points, or about 104 additional employees retained per 10,000 (95% CI: 54 to 154).

The confidence intervals describe uncertainty around the average relationship. Prediction intervals included zero for both measures, indicating that effects are likely to vary across organizational contexts. Revenue per employee remains reported as a correlation in Table 1; because raw-unit revenue slopes were imprecise and heterogeneous, we do not convert that relationship into a dollar-impact estimate.

External benchmarks help put the retention estimates in context. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reported an average monthly total-separations rate of 3.3% in 2025, equivalent to 39.6% when the 12 monthly rates are summed. Among private-sector establishments with 5,000 or more employees, the 2025 monthly rates sum to 18.2%, or about 1,820 expected exits per 10,000 employees. Against that large-establishment benchmark, 234 additional employees retained is equivalent in scale to 12.9% of expected exits, while 104 is equivalent to 5.7%.

The BLS benchmark includes quits, layoffs and discharges, and other separations. It describes establishments rather than entire organizations and should therefore be treated as external context, not as a client-specific baseline. Table 3a also shows illustrative annual exit-rate scenarios so organizations can substitute a benchmark closer to their own experience.

Table 3. Direct meta-analytic slope estimates for later retention, per 10-point higher Korn Ferry Listen score in an organization with 10,000 employees. Estimates are associative, not causal.

Listen metric	<i>k</i>	Retention difference per 10-point higher score	95% CI	Additional employees retained per 10,000 (95% CI)
Enablement	57	+2.34 pp	+1.11 to +3.56 pp	234 (111 to 356)
Engagement	60	+1.04 pp	+0.54 to +1.54 pp	104 (54 to 154)

Table 3a. Scale of the direct meta-analytic retention estimates relative to expected annual exits in a 10,000-employee organization.

Reference scenario	Annual exit rate	Expected annual exits per 10,000	Enablement: 111-356 as share of expected exits	Engagement: 54-154 as share of expected exits
BLS total nonfarm, 2025	39.6%	3,960	2.8%-9.0%	1.4%-3.9%
BLS private establishments with 5,000+ employees, 2025	18.2%	1,820	6.0%-19.5%	3.0%-8.5%
Illustrative lower-exit scenario	10.0%	1,000	11.1%-35.6%	5.4%-15.4%
Illustrative midrange scenario	15.0%	1,500	7.4%-23.7%	3.6%-10.3%
Illustrative higher-exit scenario	20.0%	2,000	5.6%-17.8%	2.7%-7.7%

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Job Openings and Labor Turnover Survey*. The annual rates shown are the sums of the 12 published 2025 monthly total-separations rates. BLS series: total nonfarm annual average and attrition rates for total private establishments with 5,000 or more employees. Enablement and engagement percentage ranges are based on 95% CI as listed in Table 3.

WHAT LEADERS CAN DO

Four actions follow from the findings and from our broader research on what separates organizations that get value from listening versus those that simply measure.

Prioritize Enablement Barriers and the Drivers Behind Them

Enablement showed the strongest organization-level relationships with later retention and revenue per employee.

Use listening data to identify where motivated employees lack the tools, resources, information, processes, or managerial support they need to work effectively.

Internal Korn Ferry benchmark key-driver results point to practical areas such as organizational structure, whether employee ideas get adopted, access to job-relevant information, clarity about expected results, and support for work-life balance. Client-specific driver analysis can then show which of these experiences are most relevant within your organization right now.

Use Listening as an Early Signal of Retention Risk

Study 2 linked both engagement and enablement with greater retention. Intent to Stay adds a more direct retention-risk signal and showed a modest positive relationship with same-year retention in the supplemental analysis (see Table B1).

Korn Ferry research also shows that employees' stated intentions can provide useful lead time: in one case study, 56% of employees who left within two years had previously indicated plans to leave, compared with 13% of employees who stayed.

The attrition measure in Study 2 did not distinguish voluntary from involuntary exits, so intent to stay should not be expected to map perfectly onto that outcome. Use it alongside observed turnover, headcount forecasts, compensation reviews, succession planning, critical-role analysis, and the workplace experiences that help explain why employees may stay or leave.

Commit to Sustained Listening and Visible Follow-Through

A single survey diagnoses current conditions. Repeated cycles let leaders assess whether priorities are changing and interventions are having their intended effect. Establish a clear listening cadence, tell employees which issues you will address, and show employees what changed as a result. The goal is a continuous system of feedback and follow-through.

Embed Listening in the Business Rhythm

Listening creates value when action planning sits inside the operating cadence rather than beside it. Connect survey findings to business reviews, workforce planning, manager routines, talent decisions, and follow-up communications, so employee insight influences how the organization operates, and not only how it reports sentiment.

CONCLUSION

Employee listening is often discussed as a way to give employees a voice. The results of this research suggest that its value extends further.

Across nearly 1.4 million employees, favorable workplace experiences were associated with a greater likelihood of receiving high performance ratings. Across a multi-year panel of organizations, engagement and enablement were associated with later retention and revenue per employee.

The strongest organization-level signal in this study was enablement. That finding matters because it changes the question leaders should ask. It is not enough to know whether employees are engaged. Leaders also need to know whether employees have what they need to turn motivation into performance.

Employee listening cannot by itself establish what caused a business outcome. But when listening is sustained, linked to relevant outcomes, and followed by action, it can provide leaders with evidence about where organizational conditions support performance and where to address the gaps.

HOW WE KNOW THIS

Both studies use random-effects meta-analysis. We estimated the overall relationship while allowing the size of that relationship to vary across client contexts. That approach is useful here because the same employee-experience signal can behave differently across organizations, survey years, and business environments.

The Engaged Performance™ Framework

Korn Ferry Listen is organized around four core signals:

- **Engagement** captures motivation, pride, and emotional connection to work.
- **Enablement** captures the tools, resources, information, processes, and support employees need to be effective.
- **Well-being** captures the physical, emotional, and psychological experience of work.
- **Intent to stay** captures longer-term commitment and retention risk.

Crossing engagement and enablement produces four effectiveness segments (see Table 4).

Separate Korn Ferry validation work supports the retention relevance of these segments. In Korn Ferry's Engaged Performance™ data, 72% of short-term leavers fell into the Least Effective group, while 83% of long-term stayers were in the Most Effective group. These figures provide background for the framework; the two studies in this paper provide the primary evidence for our current conclusions.

Table 4. The four effectiveness segments defined by the intersection of engagement and enablement.

Segment	Engagement	Enablement	What it means
Most Effective	High	High	Motivated and supported; employees want to contribute and can do their best work.
Frustrated	High	Low	Motivated but blocked; employees care, but barriers get in the way.
Detached	Low	High	Supported but not strongly connected; employees can perform but may lack motivation or commitment.
Least Effective	Low	Low	Neither motivated nor well supported; employees may lack both connection and the conditions to perform.

Study 1: Employee-Level Performance Meta-Analysis

Study 1 examined whether favorable individual survey responses were associated with performance ratings across 176 client survey-year groups representing 1,389,894 employee survey records. We analyzed each group separately, estimating the relationship between favorable survey responses and the odds of receiving an Exceeded Expectations rating, then combined those group-level estimates using random-effects meta-analysis. The pooled odds ratio was 1.32. Because odds and probability are different measures, that translates to employees with favorable responses being about 22% more likely to receive the rating once the baseline rate of Exceeded Expectations ratings is considered.

Analyzing the client survey-year groups separately prevents the largest clients from dominating the results and shows whether the relationship is broadly present across contexts. The analysis also preserves between-contexts rather than assuming the relationship is identical everywhere.

Study 2: Organization-Level Outcomes Meta-Analysis

Study 2 estimated organization-specific relationships between engagement and enablement and two later outcomes: retention and revenue per employee. Depending on the outcome, 39 to 60 organizations contributed to the pooled estimates. Retention was measured by reverse-coding annualized attrition, so a positive relationship indicates lower turnover. Outcomes were taken from the next available observation after each Korn Ferry Listen survey.

The organization-level analysis works at the level where many business decisions are made: turnover cost, workforce risk, and revenue productivity. The financial analyses are more heavily weighted toward public companies because comparable external financial data is more readily available for those organizations.

Employee Listening and Performance Evidence

The broader evidence base points in the same direction. A [2023 meta-analysis](#) covering 166 independent samples reported a correlation of .37 between overall work engagement and job performance. A [2024 systematic review](#) of 43 studies found that talent-management practices generally aligned with higher employee engagement and lower turnover intentions. Meta-analytic research on voluntary turnover also identifies intention to leave as one of the strongest predictors of actual departure.

Those studies establish that employee experience, performance, and retention are connected in the broader literature. Our contribution is narrower and more practical: it tested whether [Korn Ferry Listen](#) signals show similar relationships across client survey groups, organizations, years, and business outcomes, using Korn Ferry's own instrument and linked outcome data.

Limitations

This research is observational. Lagged outcomes strengthen temporal ordering but do not establish causation, and unmeasured organizational differences may contribute to the observed relationships. Samples vary by outcome and the financial analyses are weighted toward public companies because that is where comparable data is available. The attrition measure did not distinguish voluntary from involuntary exits. Performance ratings reflect each client's own rating process, which varies across organizations. The dollar translations are illustrative scenarios and should be recalibrated with client-specific data before use.

Well-being was available for portions of the employee-level evidence but not consistently available across the historical organization-level panel. Its absence from Study 2 reflects data availability, not evidence that well-being is unrelated to outcomes.

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About Korn Ferry

Korn Ferry is a global consulting firm that powers performance. We unlock the potential in your people and unleash transformation across your business—synchronizing strategy, operations, and talent to accelerate performance, fuel growth, and inspire a legacy of change. That's why the world's most forward-thinking companies across every major industry turn to us—for a shared commitment to lasting impact and the bold ambition to *Be More Than*.

APPENDIX A: Item-Level Detail (Study 1)

Table A1. Top five listening items by pooled odds ratio. Odds ratios reflect the association between favorable responses and the odds of receiving an Exceeded Expectations rating.

Listening item	Dimension	Pooled OR	Added high performers per 10,000	Illustrative value per 10,000
SP13. My immediate manager reviews my performance fairly.	Expectations	2.12	1,614	\$16.1M
SP08. My immediate manager values my ideas and opinions.	Influence	1.99	1,462	\$14.6M
SP40. My immediate manager encourages teamwork and collaboration.	Collaboration	1.80	1,232	\$12.3M
SP09. My immediate manager encourages suggestions for improvement from me.	Influence	1.79	1,223	\$12.2M
DM20. I am involved in decisions that affect my work.	Influence	1.70	1,103	\$11.0M

Do not use any single item as a proof point or as a causal claim. These relationships are diagnostic signals that indicate where to investigate and where action planning is likely to be productive.

APPENDIX B: Supplemental Organization-Level Correlations

Table B1. Supplemental meta-analytic correlations involving intent to stay, engagement, enablement, and same-year retention. Retention is reverse-coded attrition, so positive correlations indicate lower turnover. k is the number of organizations contributing to each pooled estimate, and the prediction interval indicates the expected range of effects across comparable organizational contexts.

Relationship	k	Pooled r	95% CI	Prediction interval	p
Intent to Stay and Retention	39	.278	[.084, .451]	[−.226, .664]	.005
Intent to Stay and Enablement	114	.235	[.058, .398]	[−.800, .918]	.010
Intent to Stay and Engagement	117	.333	[.190, .462]	[−.534, .858]	< .001
Engagement and Enablement	126	.881	[.841, .912]	[.251, .987]	< .001

Study 1 estimated odds ratios within each organization-year survey group and pooled them using random-effects meta-analysis. Study 2 estimated organization-specific correlations between Korn Ferry Listen signals and retention or revenue productivity and pooled them the same way. Table B1 above reports same-year correlations involving intent to stay.