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The *new* employer brand as a key to business performance

It's hard to overstate the enthusiasm that my colleagues and I at Charter have encountered as we've been preparing for our first summit on the new employer brand. That was something of a surprise. Employer branding has traditionally been largely an afterthought at many companies—they're often performative efforts out of sync with what really makes people want to work at a company, or to recommend it to their friends and family as an employer (which are simple ways of thinking about what an employer brand achieves.)

But what we've noticed is that the most successful organizations view their employer brand as a powerful lever for performance. There's been a quiet investment in employer brand efforts that truly move the needle for a business—and our efforts to convene some of the most forward-thinking practitioners and experts tapped into their under-discussed progress and energy.

This research playbook explores one assumption that is at the core of the new employer brand, that having a strong employer brand is correlated with business outperformance.

To do this, we surveyed workers about a set of Russell 1000 technology and finance companies that they either worked for, had previously been employed by, or knew well and would consider working for to develop an understanding of the strength of those organizations' employer brands and the most critical components of them. We then mapped that against Glassdoor ratings and revenue growth and stock market performance for each of those companies.

The result is a firmer understanding of how investing in an employer brand ultimately delivers financial and shareholder results over time. And, through an extensive survey of employees of different public companies, we've been able to develop a gameplan for how you might target such an investment.

This playbook also includes highlights of the other seminal academic and corporate research in this area, interviews with expert researchers, and a case study of how one well-known company, Cisco, is in the middle of refreshing its employer brand to better align with where its business is heading.

Charter has partnered on this playbook with Welcome to the Jungle, the employer branding and jobs platform which you can read more about in the coming pages. And we've worked with the expert team at Panoplai, the AI-powered research platform, to construct, field, and analyze the survey of workers.

We see this first research playbook on employer branding as just the beginning of our efforts in this important area. Please be in touch with us as you have feedback and additional research and examples that others might learn from. You can reach us at hi@charterworks.com.

KEVIN DELANEY
CEO and editor-in-chief, Charter

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Research findings

The link between a strong employer brand and business performance

Illustration by Charter · Photo by Welcome to the Jungle

What an employer brand is, and the ways that it relates to business performance

An employer brand is the perception and reputation of a company as a place to work, shaped by its values, culture, employee experience, and how it communicates those externally and internally. It's how employees feel about their experience working there and how potential candidates and the public view it as an employer.

A strong employer brand leads people to want to work at a company and, once employed, remain there and recommend it as an employer to friends and family.

> An employer brand is how employees feel about their experience working at a company and how potential candidates and the public view it as an employer.

So it's logical that having a strong employer brand supports business performance. That manifests in the following ways:

- **Making it easier to attract and retain great talent.** Research shows that job candidates are attracted to companies with favorable reputations and less likely to leave such firms once employed there. That translates into lower recruitment and replacement costs and greater ability to recruit sought-after workers.
- **Supporting higher employee engagement.** Workers who view their employer as a desirable place to work are more likely to be engaged, which results in greater productivity and reduced absenteeism.
- **Improving the customer experience.** Engaged workers provide better customer service.
- **Enhancing the overall brand.** Consumers, partners, and investors consider whether a company is viewed favorably as an employer when deciding whether to do business with it.

It's worth noting that, in addition to the actual experience of an organization as an employer, how it communicates about its employer brand ultimately plays an important role in how it's perceived internally and externally, similar to how public relations can contribute to shaping the public's perception of a business.

How our new research probed the connection between brand and business outcomes

We set out to see how the link between employer brand strength and business performance plays out in practice, surveying over 800 US workers about the employer brands of companies they currently work for, had previously worked for, or would consider working for. To narrow our field, we selected a set of 20 tech and finance firms that are the largest employers among the top and bottom of the Just Capital rankings of Russell 1000 public companies for worker-related issues. We also compiled revenue growth data and total stock performance for each of the companies over 10 years, and ingested Glassdoor employee review scores as part of our analysis.

Working with our research partner Panoplai, we used an AI-powered tool to analyze the employer brands of specific companies based on our worker survey results and Glassdoor ratings and examined how brand strength manifests in the performance of the businesses.

To be sure, there are many factors that go into the revenue and stock-market performance of a company and performance can also influence an employer brand in the other direction as well. But our research explores the impact an employer brand could have on a business and, at the very least, how it correlates with organizational performance.

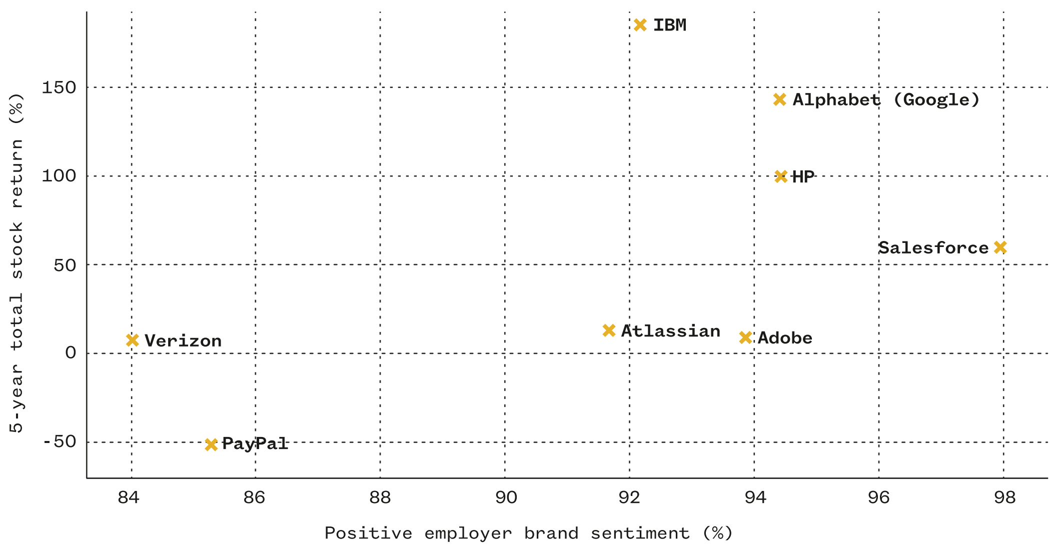
KEY FINDINGS

Companies with stronger employer brands generally exhibit greater revenue growth and stock market returns over time.

A specialized AI analysis of the worker sentiment in our surveys found that the companies with the most positive sentiment—including Salesforce, HP, and Alphabet—demonstrated consistently strong revenue growth and significantly higher stock market returns over time than other companies we examined.

In contrast, companies with less positive sentiment—including Atlassian, PayPal, and Verizon—had weaker stock performance despite some strong revenue growth (especially in the case of Atlassian.) In PayPal's case, negative five-year total stock returns despite moderate revenue growth align with its less favorable worker sentiment.

Employer brand and stock-market performance for select companies



Source: Charter New Employer Brand Survey 2025

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The correlation was observed across both tech and finance firms. In the financial sector, for example, JPMorgan Chase and Bank of America had 86% and 84% positive worker sentiment respectively compared to 77% for Citigroup and 74% for US Bancorp. The banks with the higher worker sentiment also had significantly greater revenue growth and total stock returns over 10 years. We asked workers about their views several different ways—including whether they perceived the company to have a "strong reputation as an employer"—and the findings looking at each were very similar.

It's worth noting that sentiment ratings in our worker survey were generally consistent with the Glassdoor employee ratings for the same firms. Companies with higher Glassdoor ratings (above 4.0 out of five) consistently exhibited higher positive sentiment in the Charter survey (above 90%). Companies with Glassdoor ratings below 4.0 generally had lower Charter survey sentiment percentages, reflecting similar worker concerns, such as communication, flexibility, and leadership.

95%

The percentage of workers who say companies with a strong employer brand are more likely to attract top talent

There is also a correlation between higher Glassdoor ratings and business performance, as companies with stronger Glassdoor ratings across categories—especially "Culture & Values," "Recommend to a friend," and "CEO approval"—tend to exhibit stronger financial outcomes such as revenue growth and stock returns.

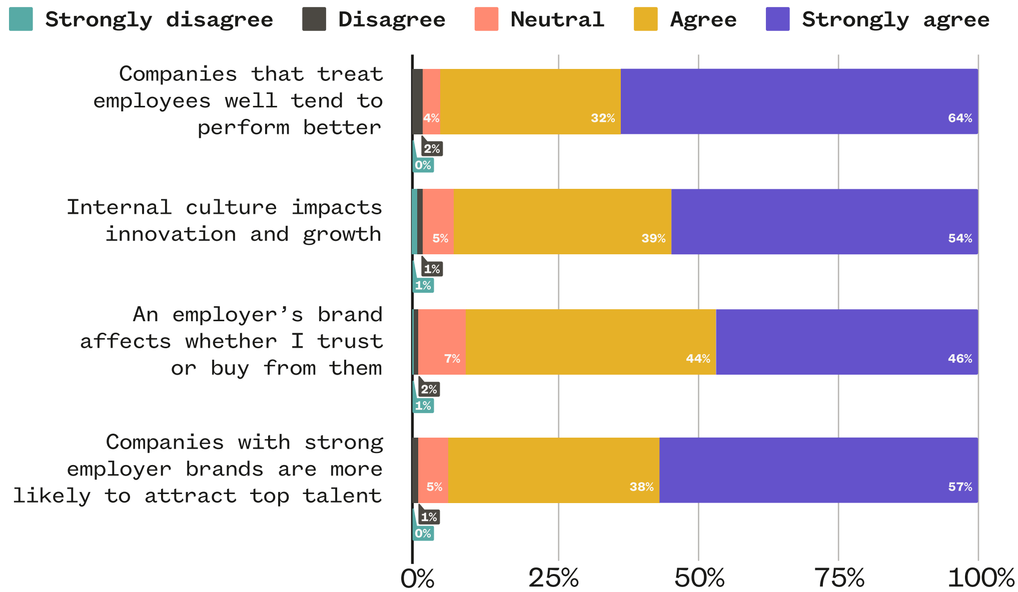
- **Culture & Values:** This Glassdoor employee review category generally showed the strongest correlation with business performance. Companies like Alphabet (4.2 out of five) and Adobe (4.2) have high scores in this area, directly linked to what workers in our survey described as their innovation and customer-focused growth strategies.
- **Recommend to a Friend:** Companies with scores above 80% (e.g. Alphabet and Adobe) in this Glassdoor measure of the percentage of workers who would recommend an employer demonstrate stronger stock and revenue growth compared to peers.
- **CEO Approval:** Leadership ratings correlate with financial success. For example, JPMorgan Chase (82%) and Salesforce (83%) generally outperformed companies like PayPal (62%) and Atlassian (67%) in stock market returns and revenue metrics.

> **Companies that treat employees well tend to perform better."**
>
> OVER 95% OF WORKERS AGREED OR STRONGLY AGREED WITH THAT STATEMENT.

Several specific areas that we surveyed workers about show correlations with business performance:

“Companies that treat employees well tend to perform better."
Over 95% of the workers we surveyed agreed or strongly agreed with that statement. Among the companies we studied, JPMorgan Chase is one example of this, with high positive sentiment (86%) when workers were asked to describe the company and strong revenue and stock-market returns.

Employer brand impacts professional and consumer choices



Source: Charter New Employer Brand Survey 2025

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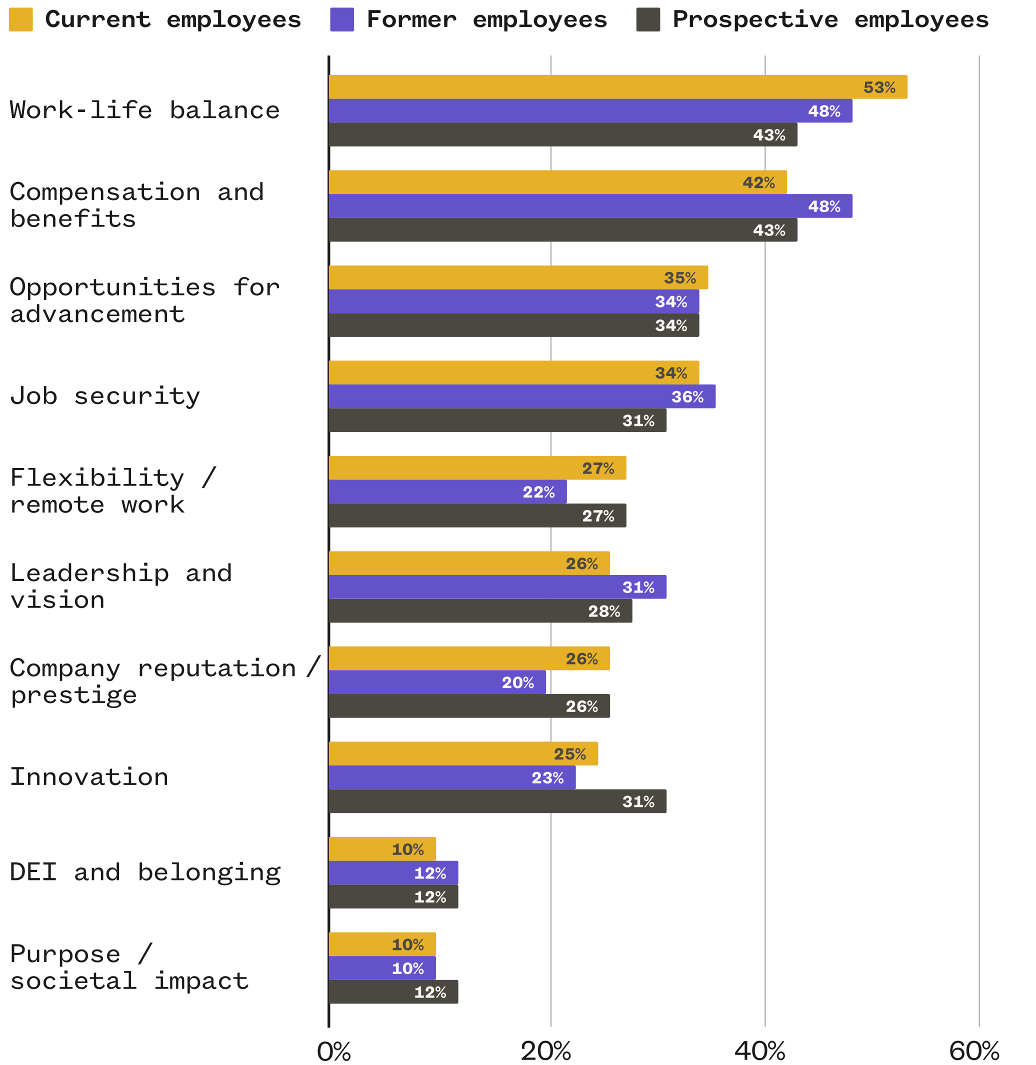
Career growth opportunities are critical for employees. When asked which factors most shape their perceptions of a company as a good employer, a top worker response was "opportunities for advancement." Companies in our survey with strong worker sentiment for supporting professional development and providing clear career growth pathways include Adobe, IBM, Salesforce, JPMorgan Chase, and Bank of America. This focus generally correlates with higher revenue growth and stock market performance. Conversely, firms like Citigroup with more moderate ratings for career growth had weaker financial outcomes.

90%

The percentage of workers who say that an employer's brand affects whether they trust or buy from it

Charter New Employer Brand Survey 2025

What most shapes perceptions of a company as a good employer



Source: Charter New Employer Brand Survey 2025 (up to three responses allowed)

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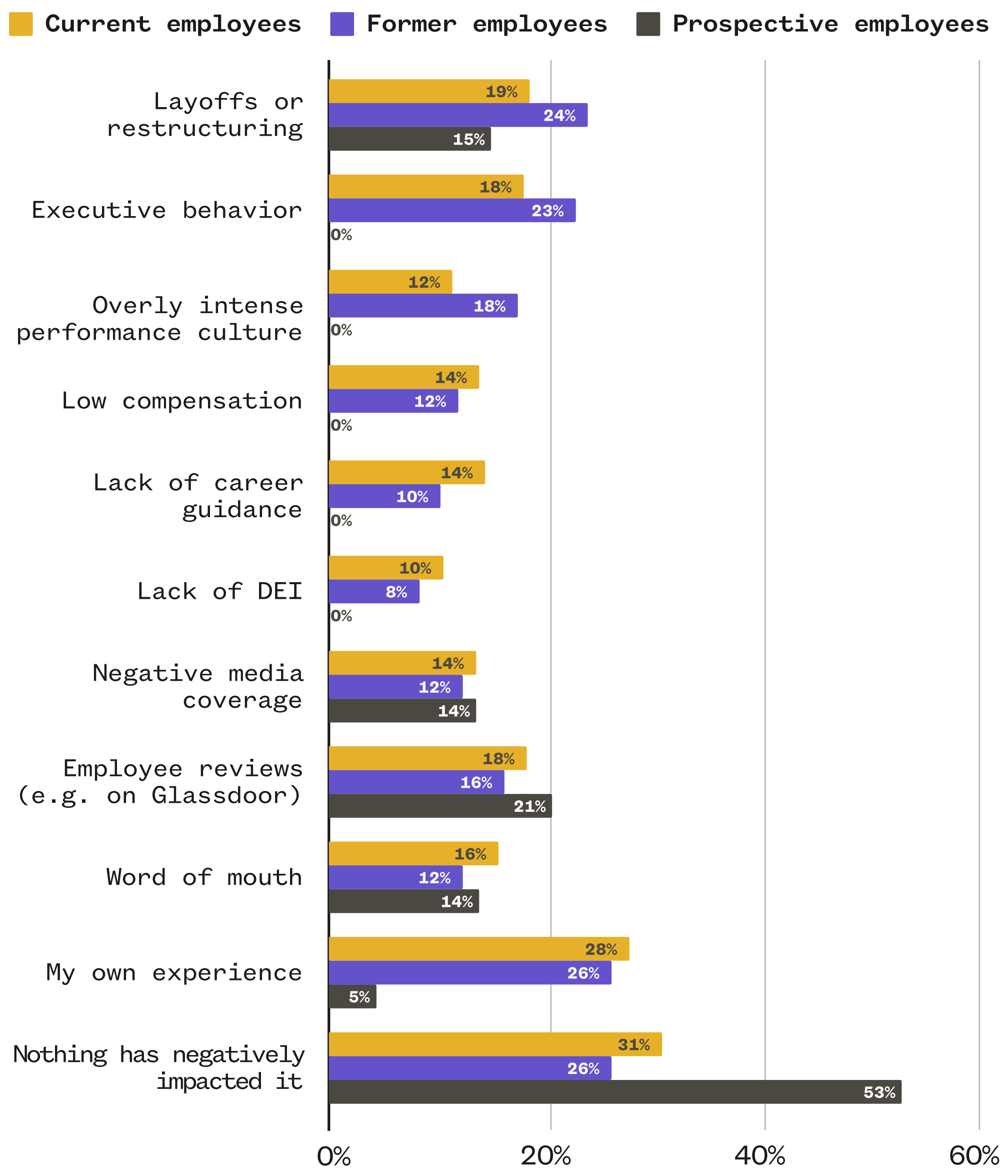
Leadership and executive approval matters. Companies with high scores for "communicates a clear mission" (e.g. Alphabet and JPMorgan Chase) consistently outperformed peers financially. This suggests that leadership clarity furthers alignment between employees and organizational goals, which in turn supports sustained growth. As one prospective US Bancorp employee responded to our survey: “They have great executive leadership that cascades down to supervisors down to analysts to motivate employees to do their best every day." Strong leadership ratings for retaining top talent (e.g. Salesforce and Bank of America) correlate with strong financial performance. Some 8% of workers cited poor executive behavior as a negative driver of employee brand.

14%

The percentage of current workers who cited lack of career guidance as a negative driver of employer brand

What negatively impacts people's view of an employer brand



Source: Charter New Employer Brand Survey 2025 (multiple responses allowed; prospective employees were not asked the questions where their responses are listed as 0%)

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"Internal culture impacts innovation and growth." Some 93% of the workers we surveyed agreed or strongly agreed with that statement. Salesforce is rated highly among workers for enabling innovation and flexibility (such as flexible schedules and locations), and its three-year stock returns are strong. Bank of America scores well in worker sentiment (83.6% positive), with comments about how its employee empowerment contributes to both innovation and customer satisfaction—and its five-year revenue growth (105%) is strong. It's "such a large organization and has an employee-centric culture," one survey respondent noted. In contrast, US Bancorp exhibits lower positive sentiment (73.5% positive) and lower revenue growth and weaker stock performance. Our survey questions about culture consistently show that companies emphasizing innovation, inclusivity, and employee empowerment perform better financially.

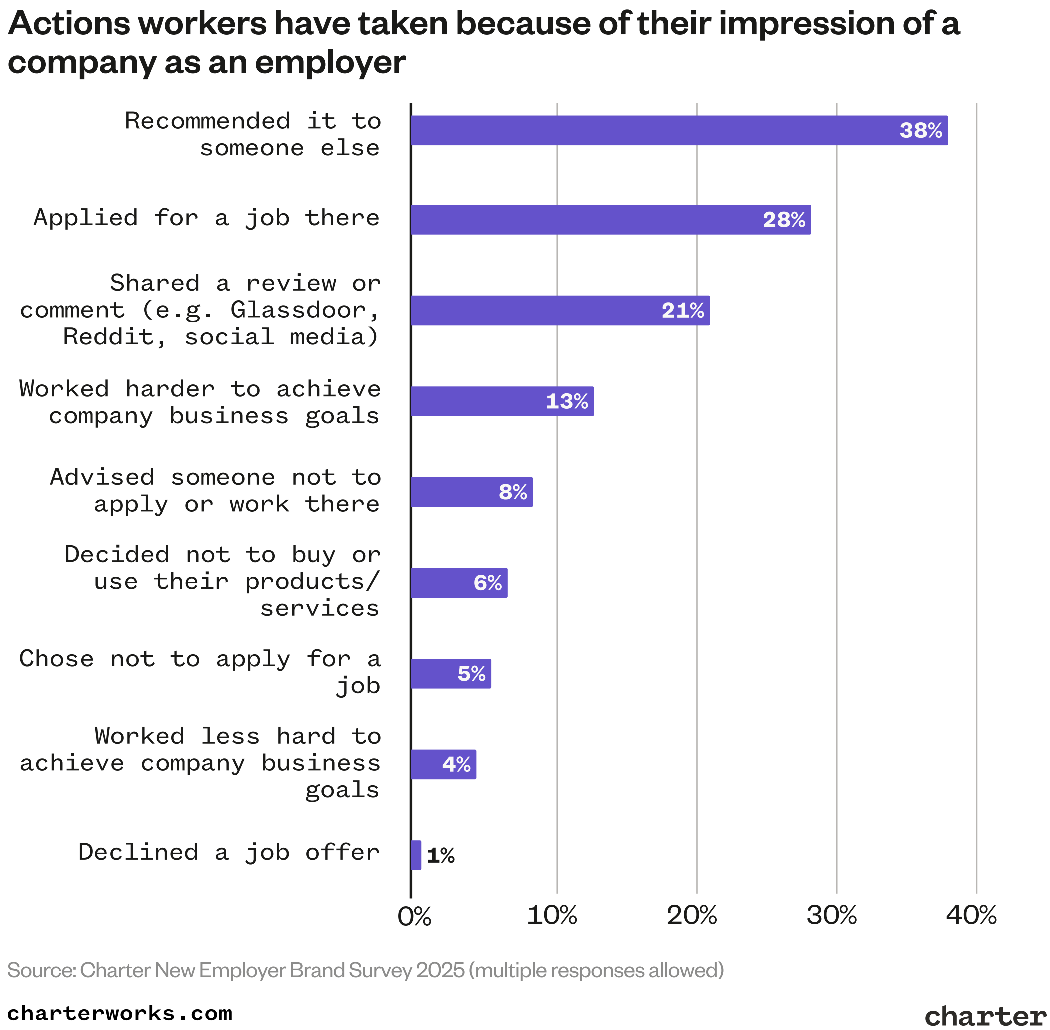
Layoffs and generating negative media coverage are relatively sure ways to damage an employer brand. Some 17% of people we surveyed selected layoffs or restructuring as having negatively impacted employer branding, and some of the companies where workers cited such concerns had lower positive sentiment and financial returns than their peers. This makes sense, as frequent layoffs or organizational changes create perceptions of instability and job insecurity. About 13% of people we surveyed said negative media coverage was a major negative driver of employer brand.

Our survey also highlighted some additional ways in which employer brands impact business performance. Some 38% of workers we surveyed have recommended a company due to a positive impression of it as an employer, while 6% decided not to purchase a company's products or services due to a negative employer brand.

38%

The percentage of workers who have recommended a company to someone else thanks to a positive employer brand

Charter New Employer Brand Survey 2025



There are differences in what prospective employees, current staff, and former employees value in an employer brand, according to our survey. Prospective employees emphasized external reputation and diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives, and were more likely to be influenced by word-of-mouth or employee reviews. Current employees value work-life balance, leadership, and career growth and are more likely to cite low compensation as a negative factor for an employer brand. Former employees are more critical, citing issues such as overly intense culture, executive behavior, and concerns about DEI initiatives, reflecting on compensation, recognition, and inclusivity.

When considering all of our survey responses alongside Glassdoor and financial performance data, technology and financial firms alike demonstrate that an employer brand that's strong in areas such as leadership, culture, and career growth often correlates with revenue growth and stock returns. Financial firms such as JPMorgan Chase and Bank of America are among those we looked at that exhibit this correlation, reinforcing that investments in culture, employee satisfaction, and career opportunities contribute to financial success. Technology companies including Alphabet, Adobe, and Salesforce got high marks in our survey in areas such as innovation, employee satisfaction, and leadership, components of employer brand which are correlated with business performance.

For this research, we used a constrained set of large employers in the tech and finance industries, and a limited number of workers (at least 45 for most of the companies.) Our ambition is to further expand the size and scope of this employer brand research in future editions.

RELATED RESEARCH SPOTLIGHT

A 2024 study of service-sector employers reveals a key insight: employer branding investments deliver stronger performance gains through current employees than new hires. This finding challenges the notion that employer branding mainly serves recruitment, and has particular relevance for high-turnover service jobs.

What works for these workers? Comprehensive career development with clear advancement paths and mentoring opportunities; flexible scheduling and family emergency support; and regular communication to share employee success stories, recognize achievements, and provide company updates.

Pay special attention to long-tenured employees whose daily tasks rarely change—they need ongoing recognition strategies to stay motivated and engaged. The study's authors found that service employees become brand ambassadors, and their satisfaction directly drives customer experience and organizational reputation.

Takeaways for employers on what moves the needle

Our research suggests some key levers for employers looking to improve their brand in ways that enhance business performance. Organizations could consider both focus and investment in these areas, as well as efforts to communicate and market more clearly internally and externally in connection with them.

- **Strengthen leadership and communication.** Employee sentiment and Glassdoor approval ratings show that strong leadership correlates with higher satisfaction and performance. Workers indicated in the survey that they value leaders who articulate the organization's goals, align team efforts with the mission, and provide clear direction. They also said that they appreciate leaders who maintain transparency about business challenges, decisions, and successes. Another best practice is to make sure the employer brand promises match the employees' actual experience.

- **Invest in employee wellbeing and support.** Asked about the factors that most shape their perceptions of a company as a good employer, workers emphasized work-life balance and employee care. Flexible schedules, remote working, and unlimited paid time off are among the practices they cited. (Survey responses pointed to the importance of having clear expectations around flexibility, as vague rules can lead to confusion and inequality.) Robust health insurance, retirement benefits, and wellness programs are frequently noted as critical to fostering wellbeing, and companies offering mental health resources are praised for caring for employees. (See the interview with Oxford's Jan-Emmanuel De Neve elsewhere in this playbook for steps leaders can take to improve both worker wellbeing and employer brand.)

> Workers we surveyed highly praised leadership that fosters a culture of innovation by empowering employees and supporting risk-taking.

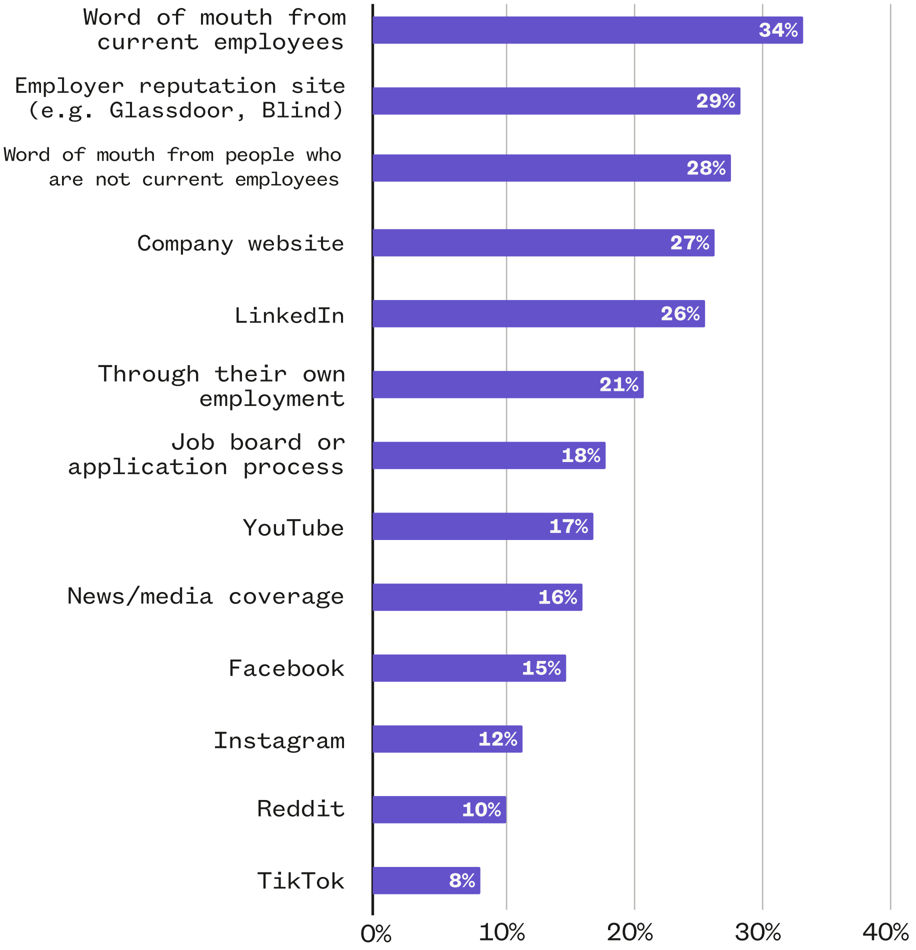
Create a culture of innovation. Workers we surveyed highly praised leadership that fosters a culture of innovation by empowering employees and supporting risk-taking. Companies that equip employees with cutting-edge tools, technologies, and dedicated R&D budgets receive higher innovation ratings. Companies that encourage cross-functional collaboration and invest in employee learning (e.g. workshops, certifications, and mentorship programs) are cited as fostering a forward-thinking, innovative culture. (See the case study elsewhere in this playbook on Cisco's employer brand refresh anchored in innovation, agility, and impact.)

Ensure career-growth opportunities. Career advancement was cited as a key driver of employer brand perception and workers we surveyed value companies that have transparent promotion criteria and provide clear pathways for advancement. They frequently cited leadership development programs, mentoring, coaching, and training resources. And they praised company efforts to prioritize internal hiring and lateral role opportunities. This is consistent with other research finding that such opportunities are key to employee retention and it aligns with HR best practices for people-centric investments for the long-term.

Promote diversity, equity, and inclusion. Commitment to DEI was linked to positive perceptions by workers and strong financial performance. Workers we surveyed cited diverse hiring panels, equitable pay reviews, representation across all levels of leadership, executive promotion of DEI, as well as employee resource groups. They also viewed positively organizations that link DEI to broader social responsibility efforts, such as community outreach and scholarships for underserved groups, and those that engage in open discussion of DEI challenges and improvements, creating a culture of accountability and alignment.

Work to build a positive external reputation. Companies that authentically convey their internal employee culture in external campaigns (e.g. through employee testimonials and success stories or inclusion initiatives) gain trust and attract top talent, enhancing their employer brand. It's also important to have consistency between an organization's internal and external brand. Executives can easily communicate to employees, prospective employees, and others simultaneously on platforms such as LinkedIn.

Where workers hear the most about a company's work culture



Source: Charter New Employer Brand Survey 2025 (multiple responses allowed)

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02

PARTNER CONTENT BY Welcome to the Jungle

Turning culture into a competitive advantage

Illustration by Charter · Photo by Welcome to the Jungle

The strongest employer brands do more than attract talent—they build belief.

Employer branding is no longer a nice-to-have—it's a strategic lever for attracting, engaging, and retaining top talent. In a market flooded with curated messaging, what resonates with candidates is clarity, credibility, and lived experience.

As work becomes more transparent and values-driven, candidates, employees, and even customers look beyond polished messages. They want to know: Can I trust this company?

Culture often provides the answer. It's a barometer of organizational trust—and a powerful recruitment tool when done right. But how do you harness it for more impactful employer branding?

Here are three ways to turn culture into a competitive advantage:

1 Walk the Talk: Prove Your Values

Trust is built when values are not just stated—but consistently lived and visible, inside and out. That starts with understanding your own culture: why people stay, what needs to evolve, and how values show up day to day. And it matters—according to a 2024 Welcome to the Jungle study, 87% of young professionals are more likely to apply to companies actively working on diversity, and 89% to those taking concrete environmental action.

> We must strive to demonstrate actions by example, not just promises."
>
> **JESSICA GUYON**
> VP of people, iAdvize

Earning that trust means showing, not just saying. As Jessica Guyon, VP of People at iAdvize, puts it: "We must strive to demonstrate actions by example, not just promises." At Theodo, employees lead "guilds" focused on accessibility and green IT—an example of values in action.

2 Let Employees Lead the Narrative

When employees share their own stories—through testimonials, videos, or articles—it builds trust and attracts better-fit applicants. On Welcome to the Jungle, company profiles with 10–12 videos see engagement rates nearly 5% higher than those with fewer than three. These bring values to life in a way no job description can.

Marie Gripina at Nespresso says, “Over 90% of our candidates check our company profile, so they come to interviews better informed.” Tanguy Roblin at Ideuzo adds, “Video formats allowed us to present who we really are, with transparency and authenticity.”

3 Focus on Consistency and Measurement

An impactful brand starts with a culture you can track and align. Decathlon conducts annual reviews to ensure internal culture matches external messaging. Burger King monitors applications and site traffic after campaigns to see what resonates. “It plants a seed,” says Chloé Lemercier, Employer Brand Manager at Burger King.

THE BOTTOM LINE:
The best employer brands are built from the inside out. When your brand reflects—rather than constructs—the employee experience, you don’t need to compete for talent. You attract it.

03

Q&A

Research-backed ways to strengthen your employer brand to improve business performance

Illustration by Charter · Photo by Welcome to the Jungle

Glassdoor, the site where workers review and rate their employers, has a particularly large-scale view into the effectiveness of employer branding and employees' expectations of organizations. Daniel Zhao, the site's lead economist, has published research showing a correlation between employee well-being and customer satisfaction, among other things. We asked him recently about whether research supports the broader link between employer brand and business performance, and what the most effective levers are for organizations to achieve that. Here are excerpts from our conversation, edited for space and clarity:

Daniel Zhao
Lead economist, Glassdoor

Is there a correlation between a strong employer brand and business outperformance?

The short answer is yes, because fundamentally an employer brand is how you market the employee experience. So you can't really have a strong employer brand without a strong employee experience. Then ultimately how employees feel and how they are able to perform on a daily basis is the underlying reason why your business works or doesn't.

The link to business performance is that employee engagement is connected to it?

Yes. That connection tends to be stronger. There's just been more evidence about how employee engagement, including satisfaction, links to a whole host of business performance indicators, whether you're talking about financial outperformance down to some of the more negative outcomes like misconduct or fraud, which is an interesting connection because it's really about culture and building integrity into your culture. There are clear benefits for employer branding as well, but they tend to be more obvious on the recruitment side. So if you have a better employer brand—a higher Glassdoor rating—that tends to make it easier to recruit candidates. It's pretty clear why being able to recruit better candidates is good, but that's where a lot of the research shows the more direct linkage.

> If your customer service staff are not satisfied, that is going to spill over into how customers feel they are treated by your company."
>
> DANIEL ZHAO
> Lead economist, Glassdoor

Is there any specific research that's most salient for you on this question of linkage between a strong employer brand and business performance?

My favorites are on the employee engagement channel or mechanism. When we look at employee satisfaction and see the impacts on customer satisfaction, on business outperformance, it just makes it very clear why creating a positive employee experience is good for the business overall and then the financials follow that. This is very clear in examples where employees are engaging with customers or users a lot, so in high-touch industries or high-touch roles. For example, if your customer service staff are not satisfied, that is going to spill over into how customers feel they are treated by your company. It's just a very, very clear direct line to how that impacts the business. That set of research is most interesting to me, but there's definitely a lot of other stuff more around what information employees have about the finances of the company and what can you predict with that sort of thing. But there's something very tangible about, well, if a customer service agent is having a bad day at the call center and takes it out on a customer, of course that's going to have a bad impact on your business.

Glassdoor is interesting because with your employer ratings, you have different components that refer to aspects of the employee experience and the company. Are any of those components particularly strong indicators of the strength of the employer brand? Are any especially important levers for strengthening employer brand?

There are certain components of the employee experience that are more impactful for employee satisfaction and engagement. When we look at Glassdoor data, the three most important workplace factors are culture, senior leadership, and career opportunities. It's interesting, that actually hasn't really changed compared to pre-Covid. If you think back to a few years ago, people were talking about how the pandemic has really shifted how people think about work and relate to work and everybody's prioritizing different things. In our data, those numbers barely shifted at all in terms of what factors drive employee satisfaction. Now, people's definition of some of these things might change. For example, work-life balance actually tends to be not necessarily that important for employee satisfaction, but how people talk about work-life balance has changed. There are more conversations about remote work, for example, as the obvious case.

> The three most important workplace factors are culture, senior leadership, and career opportunities."
>
> DANIEL ZHAO
> Lead economist, Glassdoor

But, in particular, career opportunities and senior leadership are the two drivers that I always keep an eye on. For career, ultimately why do people work? For a lot of people it is about getting that paycheck, but to be fulfilled at work requires growth. So career opportunities are really, really important for employee satisfaction. I don't want to say that they can paper over problems per se, but people are willing to sacrifice other parts of their employee experience because of those career opportunities. That's why you see people entering these industries or these entry-level jobs that might not pay well or might have really long hours, but they know that it's setting them up for the long term. The senior leadership and culture aspects are kind of tied together in the sense that senior leaders are visible, they're the ones who set the culture. So even though you might not be interacting with a senior leader every day, ultimately how they operate and how they establish a culture will trickle down to an individual experience.

If you were to suggest some principles, frameworks, or ideas for employers looking to strengthen their employer brand in ways that are coherent with business performance, what comes to mind?

I'll start with the most obvious thing, which is you need to understand how your employees are feeling. That feels like a very, very basic statement, but there are a lot of companies that don't have a good grasp on how their employees are feeling—what challenges are they facing, what are they excited about? So getting a lay of the land is absolutely the most important first step. Once you have an understanding of that, you can start to build a plan or a strategy beyond that. Because every company is different. Something that works for company A might not work for company B, and so you need to understand where your particular problems are. From there, I would say maybe two more specific tips.

> **You need to understand how your employees are feeling. That feels like a very, very basic statement, but there are a lot of companies that don't have a good grasp on how their employees are feeling–what challenges are they facing, what are they excited about?"**
>
> DANIEL ZHAO
> Lead economist, Glassdoor

What I mentioned earlier, the way that employee engagement impacts business performance is through employees. That feels like a very obvious statement, but that's why, for example, customer service-staff engagement matters for customer satisfaction. That's a very clear mechanism for how employee engagement impacts customer satisfaction impacts business performance. But, on the other hand, maybe you're a tech company that doesn't necessarily have a lot of consumer customers, maybe you're a B2B tech business. In that case, maybe employee engagement for software engineers is really important for product development and innovation. It's just really important to think about what the mechanism is that I'm expecting employee engagement to impact business performance through.

Then the last thing I'll mention here is just about taking a long view. There are a lot of people who chase the latest trend or the latest fad or who are constantly shifting strategies. To some extent, it's important to step back and recognize what your values are as a company, what your strengths and opportunity areas are as a company, and then figure out how to craft your long-term strategy against that. Because you always want to be able to come back to something and use that as a foundation for your decision making rather than just chasing this new perk or this new policy. Obviously people like those things, but it's not actually driving. Or if it doesn't actually relate back to your values and your employer brand, they can become distractions ultimately.

RELATED RESEARCH SPOTLIGHT

Workers can struggle to find honest information about company culture because employees fear retaliation for posting critical reviews on platforms like Glassdoor. When they do share negative experiences, they often obscure details to avoid identification by management. This creates an information problem for job seekers, who according to a 2020 University of Pennsylvania and University of Minnesota study, actually value negative reviews more than positive ones when making employment decisions. Bad reviews that steer candidates away from poor employers are considered more useful than glowing ratings. While employers understandably want to protect their brand, creating channels for authentic workplace feedback could ultimately benefit them by expanding their candidate pool, since workers often choose to stick with the devil they know rather than apply elsewhere when they lack honest information about what other companies are really like.

04

CASE STUDY

Cisco's new employer branding refresh and how it connects to business performance

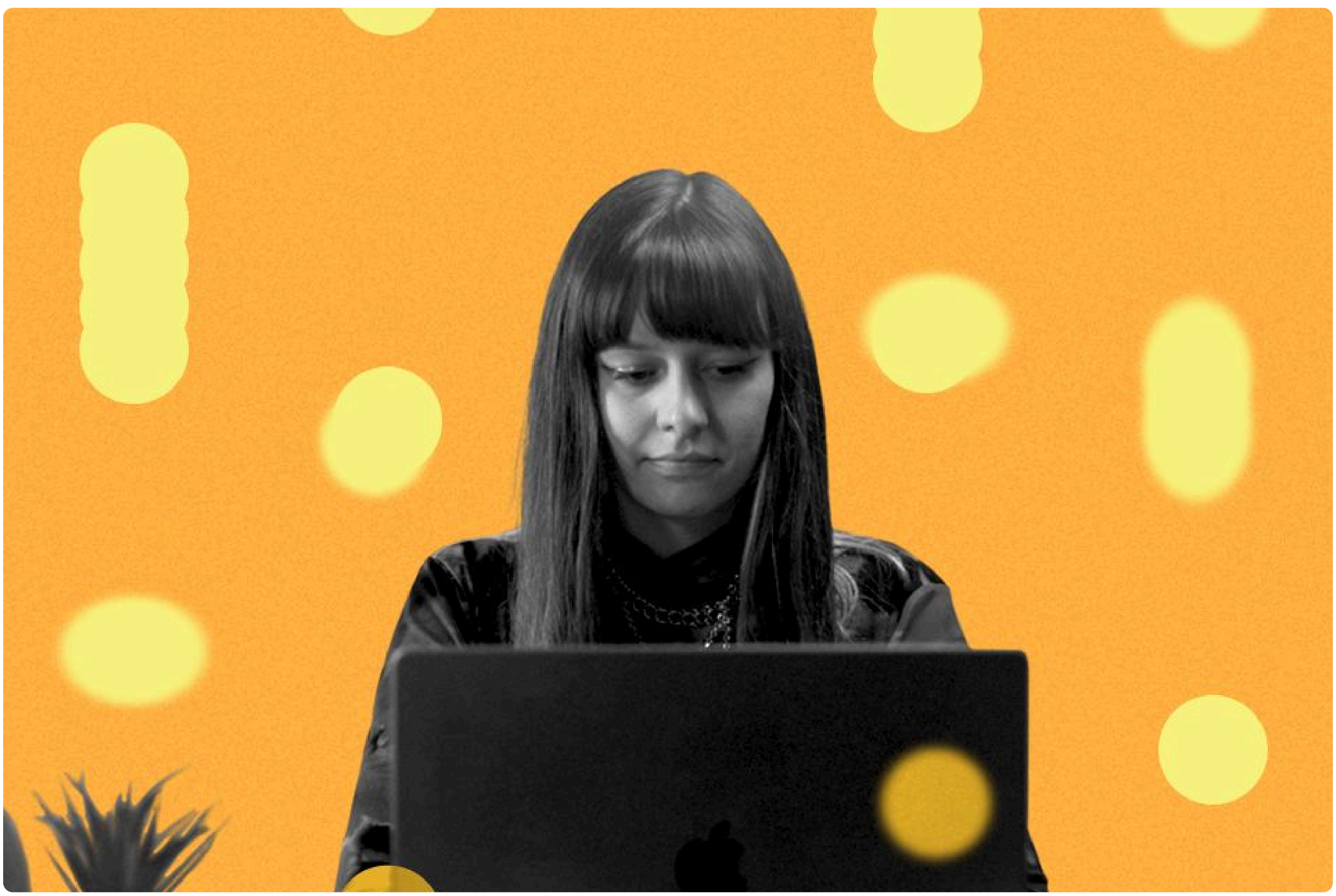

Illustration by Charter · Photo by Welcome to the Jungle

In the face of sweeping workplace changes—from the rise of AI to shifting worker expectations—Cisco is in the midst of a major refresh of its employer brand to better align with the demands of today's talent and its broader business strategy. Crucially, Cisco sees its employer brand not just as a communications or HR artifact, but as a lever for business performance. A strong brand, in Cisco's view, improves recruitment, increases retention, and boosts employee engagement—outcomes that directly support the company's long-term success.

"It's really powerful," said Francine Katsoudas, Cisco's chief people, policy, and purpose officer.

Francine Katsoudas
Chief people, policy, and purpose officer, Cisco

Scott McGuckin
Vice president of global talent acquisition and internal movement, Cisco

Why Cisco decided to refresh its employer brand

Cisco's leadership recognized that the brand it projected to employees and job candidates needed to evolve. "It just became apparent that a talent brand refresh would be necessary to ensure that we're attracting and retaining the best talent," said Scott McGuckin, Cisco vice president of global talent acquisition and internal movement.

Their internal and external research showed that while Cisco was widely known as a reliable, purpose-driven employer, the brand didn't fully reflect the company's evolution into a player in AI, software, and cutting-edge infrastructure. "We heard, based on our own market research, that we are seen as a leader in networking, security, trusted and reliable and purpose-driven—all the things we want to be known for," McGuckin said. "But we also found there were things that weren't getting called out and we weren't getting credit for what we really wanted to spend a little bit more time promoting."

This brand perception gap was particularly problematic in attracting top-tier technology talent. Prospective hires knew Cisco as a stable employer, but too often overlooked its innovation agenda. "We don't want to be the best kept secret," McGuckin emphasized.

> A strong employer brand is a critical strategic asset that enhances recruitment, retention, employee engagement, customer satisfaction, and long-term business success."
>
> A Cisco overview of research on employer branding

More importantl, the refresh was not just about reputation—it was about performance. A strong employer brand, Cisco's team believes, supports the business by reducing cost-per-hire, improving quality of candidates, enhancing engagement, and ultimately contributing to productivity and revenue. "The data overwhelmingly demonstrates that a strong employer brand is a critical strategic asset that enhances recruitment, retention, employee engagement, customer satisfaction, and long-term business success," according to a Cisco document discussing third-party research on employer branding. "Cisco is investing in our tech talent brand so that we are better positioned to attract and retain top talent, improve customer perceptions, and reduce costs."

The research-driven, cross-functional employer branding effort

Cisco's refresh began with wide-ranging qualitative and quantitative research. It conducted interviews with over 60 internal leaders, hosted feedback sessions with current employees, and surveyed potential candidates to understand how the company was perceived. It benchmarked employer branding practices across its talent competitors, AI leaders, and other legacy firms undergoing reinvention.

Cisco also brought in macro social and economic context. A culture and branding trends deck prepared for Cisco's internal use outlined key shifts in the workforce, including the surge in demand for flexible work, the erosion of long-term employment expectations, the importance of autonomy, the desire for work to be meaningful, and fears of skill obsolescence with the spread of AI.

Four core ideas emerged as the foundation for the updated employer brand, according to McGuckin:

- **Speed with scale**—The message: You don't have to choose between agility and global reach. At Cisco, you can innovate quickly while making an impact at enterprise scale.
- **Work with impact**—Cisco positions itself as solving global problems with both technical and human intelligence, prioritizing local relevance alongside global influence.
- **Limitless opportunities**—With its "one company, many careers" approach, Cisco emphasizes mobility, continuous learning, and internal career pathways.
- **Winning culture**—Rather than just celebrating its accolades, the company is working to link its employer brand more directly to performance and innovation.

> We're put in a lot of structure around this, a lot of measurement so that we know that we're living up to what we're talking about."
>
> FRANCINE KATSOUDAS
>
> Chief people, policy, and purpose officer, Cisco

Before releasing it more broadly, Cisco's executive leadership team needed to spend time with the branding refresh and "go back and forth and ensure that we were solving some of the biggest issues that we have," said Katsoudas. She described three core messages of this newest employer branding: 1) Think really big. 2) Drive durable growth. 3) Play to win.

The company has involved its marketing team and is now starting to use the new themes to inform everything from external-facing recruiting materials to internal communications. It's working on spelling out specific expectations for every employee about "how you know that you're living up to the brand of who we want to be," she explained. And it plans to measure the impact, Katsoudas said: "We're put in a lot of structure around this, a lot of measurement so that we know that we're living up to what we're talking about." Among the questions that Cisco asks employees quarterly is whether they're proud to work at Cisco, a data point that helps quantify the relative strength of employer brand at any time.

> The primary driver is just competition for talent, making sure that we're attracting the right talent to Cisco."
>
> **SCOTT MCGUCKIN**
>
> Vice president of global talent acquisition and internal movement, Cisco

A decade of employer brand evolution

In her people leadership role, Katsoudas has been a central figure in Cisco's brand and culture transformation for about a decade. She described the current refresh as the third major chapter in a longer story—each phase reflecting broader organizational priorities and external realities.

PHASE 1

"The people deal"

Ten years ago, Cisco's employer brand was due for a reset. The initial focus was internal and introspective. "We absolutely did this bottoms up," Katsoudas recalled. "We studied what it meant to be a Cisco employee. And from that we created pillars and a manifesto about who we were." This phase included what Katsoudas called "the people deal." "We were very clear with what we offered and then what we expected in return," she explained.

PHASE 2

Inclusion and winning culture

In the years that followed, Cisco leaned into its reputation as being a good employer and accolades as a great place to work. The brand included a focus on inclusion and community impact. "It started to really call out the role that each of us play in shaping the culture of the company," explained Katsoudas. By last year, Cisco felt this brand needed refreshing to, in addition to its great workplace, better emphasize the attributes such as impact, innovation, global scale, and career opportunity. "The primary driver is just competition for talent, making sure that we're attracting the right talent to Cisco and us being able to tell our story effectively," noted McGuckin.

PHASE 3

Opportunity to innovate

The current phase is about connection to results, innovation, and individual potential. “One of the realizations that we had is that you don't have something for the outside and something for the inside. It's one and the same,” she explained. “Your talent brand is based on how your people feel. So if you address how your people feel, just know your brand will take care of itself to a certain extent.”

If people feel like it's not authentic, then it's a bad experience.”

SCOTT MCGUCKIN

Vice president of global talent acquisition and internal movement, Cisco

Connecting employer brand to business performance

Cisco’s view is that a strong employer brand is not discretionary—it’s strategic infrastructure. It compiled third-party research that supports this view:

- Companies with strong employer brands enjoy 50% lower cost-per-hire. (LinkedIn)
- They see up to 28% lower turnover rates. (LinkedIn)
- They are rated higher by customers. (Harvard Business Review)
- Highly engaged teams see 23% higher profitability. (Gallup)

These data support Cisco's investment in the brand refresh. McGuckin said the company is deliberately connecting its brand strategy to talent performance and organizational agility. "If they want to make a meaningful impact at scale, then Cisco is a great place to be,” he explained, referencing the updated message the brand aims to convey to recruits.

Takeaways from Cisco's approach

1. **Employer brands require refreshing over time.**
"It's important to recognize that it's going to evolve and it's going to evolve based on where your people are starting from and where you're trying to go as a company," explained Katsoudas.

2. **Every refresh should retire something.**
Cisco is effectively starting with a clean slate with its current brand. "We're hitting a reset button," is how Katsoudas put it, and that includes leaving behind some components of its earlier "people deal" employer brand. Some of the focus has moved to professional impact, innovation, and velocity.

3. **Don't let legacy DNA dilute future ambition.**
Cisco confronted a challenge: how to acknowledge its infrastructure heritage while positioning itself as a place for AI talent. The answer wasn't to hide its past, but to reframe it as a launchpad for what's next.

4. **Talent wants transparency, not perfection.**
Cisco's research showed that candidates and employees valued honest depictions of challenge and complexity. Stories of iteration and ambiguity helped humanize the brand. "If people feel like it's not authentic, then it's a bad experience," said McGuckin. "They're going to feel like they weren't greeted fairly or honestly. And so we really want to make sure that what we are presenting is an authentic side of Cisco."

5. **Help employees understand what the branding means for them.**
"What we've done is for every employee, team leader, and executive, we are building out the expectations that we have around how you do these three things," said Katsoudas, referring to the three core messages of the latest employer branding.

50%
lower cost-per-hire

The percentage companies with strong employer brands enjoy, according to LinkedIn

Cisco's refreshed employer brand is still being rolled out, but Katsoudas said it's already generating enthusiasm among company executives. At the same time, it's a lens on the team's ability to learn, flex, and grow. "We know we're not there, but we want to be and we're going to focus and we're going to get there," she said. Importantly, if Katsoudas and her colleagues succeed, the refreshed employer brand will be another lever for business performance.

RELATED RESEARCH SPOTLIGHT

A 2022 study examined what happens when job seekers were randomly exposed to company happiness data on Indeed. The experiment tracked over 23 million job seekers who were shown information about worker wellbeing at 20,000 companies. When presented with happiness information, job seekers actively redirected their applications away from less happy companies and toward happier employers, effectively screening out poor-culture firms from their job searches. Follow-up studies confirmed that companies able to improve their happiness scores attracted significantly more applications from Indeed users, showing that transparency about employees' job satisfaction influences candidate behavior and application volume.

05

Q&A

How worker wellbeing fuels your employer brand

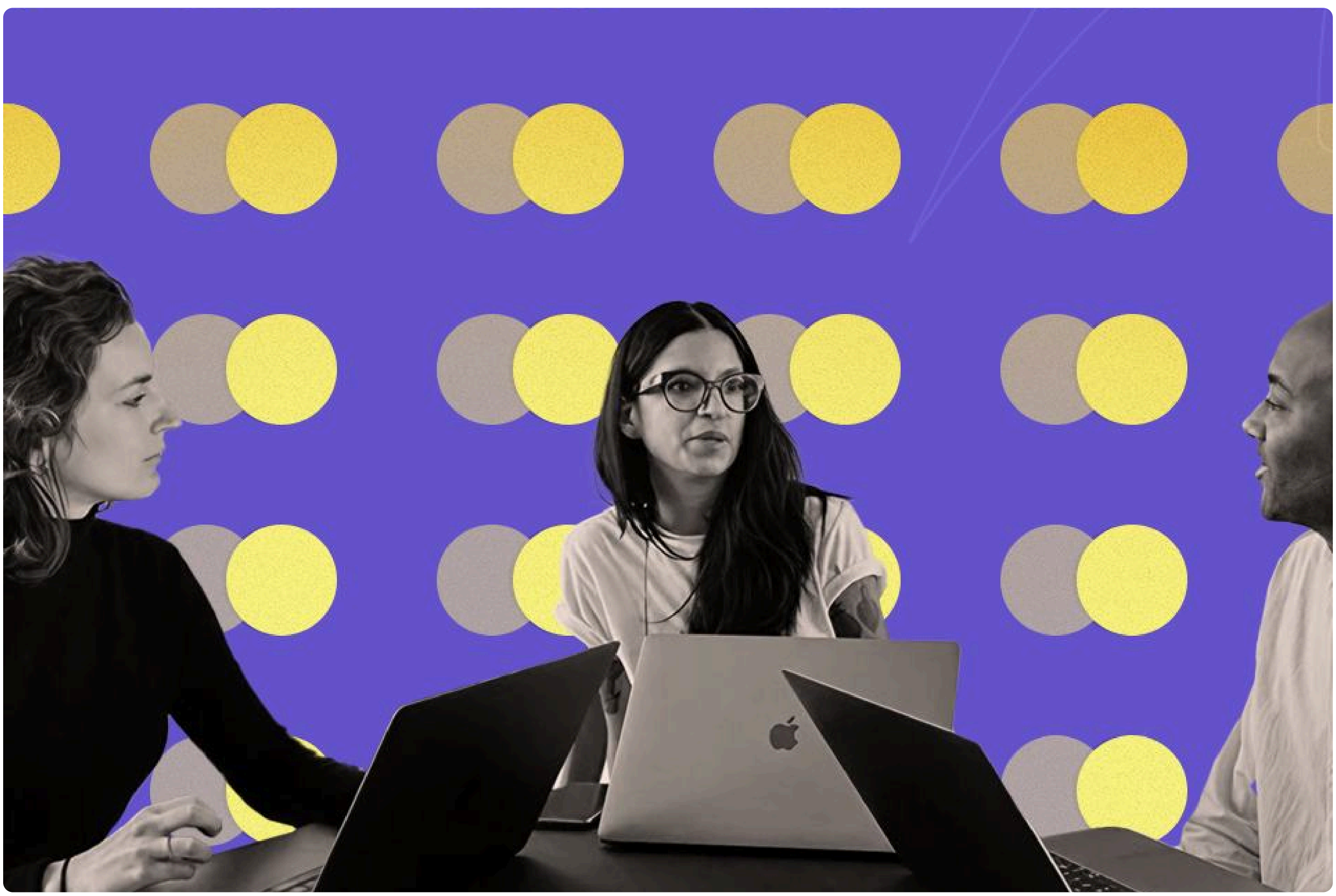

Illustration by Charter · Photo by Welcome to the Jungle

Jan-Emmanuel De Neve, an Oxford University professor and editor of the World Happiness Report, has spent years examining the factors that drive job satisfaction and the benefits of a happy workforce. Using millions of employee-reported wellbeing scores on Indeed and cross-indexing them with company performance, De Neve and his research partner George Ward, an incoming professor at INSEAD, make the data-backed case that companies with high employee wellbeing scores enjoy stronger retention, recruiting, and business results.

Jan-Emmanuel De Neve
Oxford University professor and editor of the World Happiness Report

In Charter's survey for this report, workers similarly identified factors related to their wellbeing, such as work-life balance and employee care, as critical requirements for a strong employer brand.

We recently spoke with De Neve about wellbeing and employer brand, and steps leaders can take to improve both. Here are excerpts from our conversation, edited for space and clarity:

What role does workplace wellbeing play in an employer's brand?

If you are known as a good place to work, then you will get more applicants to apply for positions, and those are probably the applications you actually want.

What we found over the years is that if a company moves in terms of workplace wellbeing score, and job seekers see it, it moves their job-search behavior. So the reputation backed up by these crowdsourced numbers on Glassdoor or Indeed is one way of showing that reputation has real consequences for talent attraction. I'll give you a very simple number. The work wellbeing score runs to 100. With every point increase over time, we see a 1.3% increase in job applications to the company.

What do you say to executives and managers who might categorize employee wellbeing as part of their wellness initiatives or marketing?

The impact of what a CEO does on the workforce, there's only one way to figure it out, and that's asking [workers] directly whether they're feeling good. Stuff like ENPS [employee net promoter score] and engagement are downstream proxies for how people feel. The nice thing about measuring work wellbeing is that it's what people themselves care about.

1.3%

The percentage job applications rise by for every 1-point increase in a company's work wellbeing score

In an American context, when people think about wellbeing, they're really collapsing it into wellness, or individual-level interventions. By all means, these aren't going to be bad. Yoga, meditation apps, and coaching all focus on the individual, as if it's only the individual who is responsible for their wellbeing at work. We know that more than half of the variance [in wellbeing] is explained by the context in which an individual works. Yet interventions under the wellbeing budget are not around the environment. So if there's bullying in the workforce, or people are underpaid, or there's just too much work, asking them to take an hour out of the day for wellness is counterproductive. You can't yoga your way out of these structural issues.

Apart from increasing worker compensation, what other steps can leaders take to boost wellbeing and the company's reputation as a good place to work?

If you take wellbeing seriously, it ranges from pay to a culture of belonging, flexibility, and managerial support. And when people hear pay, they think it can be pretty expensive, but it can pay off, no pun intended.

Other things may not cost anything. Job-crafting interventions, where you ask people to sit down with their line manager and think through the way they work or opening up town halls, a culture of belonging from the top. These things may not cost anything, and they'll generate a lot of value for the organization downstream. It's interesting when people say, 'Oh, only companies that are doing well can invest in their people.' But the reality is the big drivers tend to be belonging, and flexibility policies.

You've found that job applicants place a high value on working at companies with good work culture, potentially even higher than pay. Explain what's happening there...

People truly do care about being at a good workplace to the extent that they might be willing to forego a better-paying job in a bad environment for one in an environment where they're flourishing as humans–even if it doesn't quite pay as much. When we look at the variance in how people feel at work, pay and flexibility are important, but they're middle of the pack. Obviously people need to be paid fair and living wages, but what stands out is a sense of belonging, feeling like the company cares about you as a person, having friends at work. If that goes, then people are out the door.

People are probably willing to stick with a job despite knowing they might be paid more competitively elsewhere, provided they really enjoy where they're working, because of the people there, the friends they make, and the support from management. So there is a bit of a trade off.

> We find a very strong correlation with wellbeing and return on assets and profits. More than that, it's a leading indicator of future financial performance, stock-market performance. You take care of your people, they'll take care of your business."
>
> JAN-EMMANUEL DE NEVE
>
> Oxford University professor and editor of the World Happiness Report

If I want to persuade my CEO to invest in workplace wellness as a way of improving employer brand, how would you advise me to make the case?

Every pathway to performance–productivity, retention, recruitment– will make their way to your P&L as an organization, in the short run to the long run. Productivity is immediate, if you feel better today, you will be performing better today. If as an organization you improve workplace wellbeing, you'll become a more attractive employer, which in the long run will feed into your creativity, your competitive advantage. If workplace wellbeing improves, you'll retain your talent for longer, which is huge cost savings in the mid- to long run. You'll have to recruit fewer people.

We've literally mapped the average workers' wellbeing in the listed companies in the New York Stock Exchange and NASDAQ, and we find a very strong correlation with wellbeing and return on assets and profits. More than that, it's a leading indicator of future financial performance, stock-market performance. You take care of your people, they'll take care of your business.

RELATED RESEARCH SPOTLIGHT

Since October 2019, Indeed has collected self-reported employee wellbeing data from workers at their current and former companies. A 2024 study of millions of Indeed surveys makes a compelling business case for satisfied workers: higher employee wellbeing predicts higher firm valuations, better return on assets, increased gross profits, and superior stock performance. Investing in the top 100 companies for job satisfaction returned 14.84% over three-and-a-half years, outperforming the S&P 500's 13% return. Despite this evidence, there's a disconnect around employee wellbeing investment. Surveys show that while 87% of managers consider it important, only one-third view it as a strategic priority. Companies with positive cultures consistently outperform competitors in sales growth, profitability, and market valuations and rising wellbeing scores serve as a predictor of future performance.

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Methodology

In May 2025, we surveyed 811 US workers about the employer brands of companies they currently work for, had previously worked for, or would consider working for.

To narrow our field, we selected a set of 20 tech and finance firms that are the largest employers among the top and bottom of the Just Capital rankings of Russell 1000 public companies for worker-related issues.

The survey was fielded by Panoplai, the AI audience discovery platform, and was administered using a non-probability-based sample. Quotas were used to ensure a representative sample. Researchers reviewed all responses for quality control.

In the survey, we had 48 or more worker responses for each of a majority of the companies. We asked questions with constrained answers, such as "How likely are you to recommend this company to a close family member or friend?" and also open-ended questions such as "What words, phrases, or experiences come to mind when you think of this company as an employer?" We used Panoplai's AI-powered tool to analyze the open and closed-ended responses and the worker emotion and sentiment for specific companies.

We also compiled revenue growth data and total stock performance for each of the companies over one-, three-, five-, and 10-year periods, and ingested Glassdoor employee review scores, including nine principal and component ratings, for each of the companies as part of our analysis.

Using the Panoplai AI platform we were able to “chat” with, we analyzed the employer brands of specific companies based on our worker survey results and Glassdoor ratings and examined how brand strength manifests in the performance of the businesses.

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About Charter and Welcome to the Jungle

About Charter

Charter is a future-of-work media and research company. We're designing new frameworks for work so that people and organizations thrive. Charter's sophisticated journalism, actionable research, and advisory services empower leaders to transform their workplaces.

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About Welcome to the Jungle

Traditional approaches to recruitment are too noisy for the world of work today. It's harder than ever for great companies and great candidates to find each other.

Welcome to the Jungle is a global platform transforming how companies and candidates connect.

Trusted by thousands of companies across North America and Europe, our employer branding and talent acquisition solutions help you cut through the noise, tell your story, and match with experienced, mission-driven candidates.

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