

WHITE PAPER · OCTOBER 2026

How much do disengaged employees cost you?

Absenteeism, turnover, presenteeism: measure the hidden cost of disengagement and activate the internal communication levers that rebuild connection.

8%

of French employees are engaged at work

€120bn

estimated annual cost of absenteeism in France

×2

up to two years' salary to replace an employee

Disengagement makes no noise. It shows up in the numbers.

A disengaged employee doesn't necessarily resign. They show up, do the minimum, call in sick a little more often, and one day leave. Each of these stages has a cost, rarely measured and almost never traced back to its cause.

Since 2018, we have supported more than 200 companies with their internal communication: headquarters, but above all factories, branches, stores, construction sites and cooperatives, where many employees have neither a desk nor a work email address. Every day we see the same thing: **people don't commit to a company they never hear from.**

This white paper has a simple goal: to give you the figures to estimate what disengagement costs your organization, understand where it comes from, and identify the concrete, often simple levers that can reverse the trend.

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Disengagement: where things stand in 2026

Every year, Gallup surveys employees in more than 140 countries. Its 2026 report confirms a long-term trend: engagement is declining, and France is among the hardest-hit countries.

8%

of French employees say they are actively engaged

Gallup, 2026 — 36th of 38 European countries

20%

global engagement, the lowest level since 2020

Gallup, 2026

~9%

of global GDP lost to low engagement

Gallup — about \$10 trillion

Engaged, not engaged, actively disengaged

Gallup distinguishes three profiles. **Engaged** employees are involved and enthusiastic. **Not engaged** employees, by far the largest group, do what is asked of them without real buy-in. **Actively disengaged** employees voice their discontent and can hold back their colleagues' work. In France, the vast majority of employees fall into the second group: neither hostile nor mobilized. This is precisely the population internal communication can influence.

Managers are checking out too

The 2026 report flags a particularly worrying signal: manager engagement has dropped 9 points since 2022. Yet managers remain the primary channel for information and recognition. When they check out, or lack information to pass on themselves, their teams follow.

What the most engaged teams show

According to Gallup's meta-analyses, teams in the top engagement quartile show **78% less absenteeism** and **63% fewer safety incidents** than those in the bottom quartile.

Engagement isn't a comfort issue: it's an indicator of operational performance.

Europe as a whole remains one of the least engaged regions in the world, with about 12% of employees engaged. So the issue isn't unique to your company, but the gaps between organizations are huge: the best performers exceed 70% engagement.

Absenteeism, turnover, presenteeism: the three hidden costs

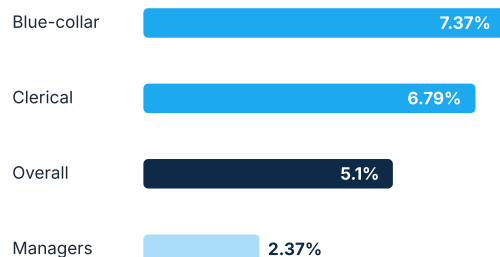
Disengagement doesn't appear on any line of the accounts. It spreads into three very real cost items that companies pay for without always connecting them.

1. Absenteeism

According to the WTW barometer published in September 2025, the private-sector absenteeism rate reached **5.1% in 2024**, up 3% year over year and 34% since 2019. Its cost to French companies is estimated at **more than €120 billion a year**. Psychosocial risks, led by stress and burnout, have become the leading cause of long-term sick leave.

A key point: the groups least connected to company information are the ones absent most often.

Absenteeism rate by category (2024)



Source: WTW, 2025 Absenteeism Barometer (2024 DSN payroll filing data).

2. Turnover

Gallup estimates that replacing an employee costs **between half and twice their annual salary**: recruitment, onboarding, training, ramp-up time, lost know-how. In France, the average turnover rate is around 15%. And according to Gallup, **42% of voluntary departures could be prevented** if the manager or company had spotted and addressed the early warning signs in time.

3. Presenteeism

This is the hardest cost to measure, and often the highest: employees who are physically present but withdrawn, who no longer suggest, report or buy in. It results in errors, delays, poorer customer service and reduced safety. Gallup also finds that engaged teams generate 10% higher customer loyalty.

Key takeaway: these three costs are linked. Presenteeism often precedes absenteeism, which often precedes departure. Acting early, at the first signs of withdrawal, costs far less than replacing an employee.

Calculating the cost of disengagement in your organization

No need for a costly study: three HR data points you already have are enough for a first order of magnitude.

Example: a mid-sized company with 500 employees

Starting assumption: average employer cost of €45,000 per employee, i.e. a fully loaded payroll of €22.5M.

COST ITEM	CALCULATION	ANNUAL COST
Absenteeism	Payroll × average absenteeism rate (5.1%)	€1,147,500
Preventable turnover	75 departures/year (15%) × 42% preventable ≈ 31 departures × €22,500 (50% of annual cost, low end of Gallup's range)	€697,500
Presenteeism	Conservative assumption: 3% of payroll lost in productivity	€675,000
Estimated annual cost		€2,520,000

≈ €5,000

per employee per year, or more than 11% of payroll

€252,000

saved every year by cutting these three costs by just 10%

Run the numbers for your company

- 1 Absenteeism:** multiply your fully loaded payroll by your actual absenteeism rate (available in your DSN payroll filings or HRIS).
- 2 Turnover:** multiply the number of voluntary departures by a replacement cost of 50% to 200% of annual salary depending on the role, then isolate the share you consider preventable.
- 3 Presenteeism:** use a conservative assumption of 2 to 5% of payroll, refined with your quality, safety and customer satisfaction indicators.

These amounts are an order of magnitude, not an exact measurement: not all absenteeism is linked to disengagement. The exercise helps size the issue and compare the cost of inaction with the cost of corrective action.

The root causes of disengagement

Pay is rarely the main cause. Employees check out when they no longer understand what is expected of them, when they feel neither informed, heard nor recognized.

Gallup identifies five main causes of disengagement: a sense of unfair treatment, an unmanageable workload, **unclear communication from leaders**, a lack of manager support and unreasonable time pressure. Gallup also notes that clarity of expectations, one of the best predictors of engagement, is the indicator that has declined most since 2020.

CAUSE 1

Information doesn't get through

In manufacturing, logistics, retail and construction, most employees have no work email address or workstation. Information travels via notice boards, word of mouth, or not at all. These are also the groups most exposed to absenteeism.

CAUSE 2

Too much information kills information

Office employees, by contrast, are drowning in email. Important messages, such as a safety instruction or a reorganization, get lost in the noise. Information that isn't read might as well not exist.

CAUSE 3

Communication is one-way

Companies inform, but rarely listen. Employees have no simple way to share their opinion, report a problem or ask a question. The feeling of not mattering sets in, and withdrawal follows.

CAUSE 4

The first months are neglected

A large share of departures happen in the first year. Onboarding reduced to handing over a badge and a laptop leaves newcomers alone with their questions, at the very moment they are forming their opinion of the company.

The common thread: internal communication. It cannot fix pay or workload issues on its own. But it directly addresses three of the five causes identified by Gallup: clarity, support and a sense of fairness. And it gives managers the means to play their role as relays.

The following chapters present three levers, and how the We Advocacy platform helps you activate them without multiplying tools.

Reach everyone, wherever they are

Before you can engage, you have to reach. The first lever is making sure every employee, at headquarters or in the field, receives the information relevant to them, on the channel they actually use.

Best practices

- **Target rather than blast:** a message sent to everyone is read by few. A message targeted by site, job or team is seen as relevant.
- **Multiply touchpoints:** email isn't enough. Mobile, the computer screen and SMS reach different audiences.
- **Set a regular rendezvous:** a weekly or monthly newsletter builds a habit and a sense of belonging.
- **Separate the important from the urgent:** a safety alert shouldn't look like an event announcement.

WITH WE ADVOCACY

One send, five channels: email, intranet, mobile app, Windows pop-up and SMS.

- **Mobile app and frontline:** the company in everyone's pocket, including employees without a work email.
- **Intranet:** a clear, branded employee portal connected to Google Workspace or Microsoft 365.
- **Internal newsletters:** polished newsletters in minutes, with AI-assisted design.
- **Messages and alerts:** Windows pop-up, push notification or SMS (text message) for information that can't wait.
- **Precise targeting:** by site, job, entity or manager, based on your automatically synced directory.
- **Email signatures:** consistent signatures and targeted banners that carry your key messages in every email.

Already have an intranet? We Advocacy can complement it rather than replace it. The platform promotes content published in SharePoint, LumApps or Jalios via email, pop-up and SMS, with no migration, so that content finally reaches those who never visit the intranet.

Listen, involve, onboard

Employees engage when they feel their voice matters and that they are supported. The second lever turns top-down communication into dialogue.

Listen regularly

Rather than a big annual survey whose results arrive too late, favor short, frequent questions: a mood check, feedback on a project, an improvement idea. Then share the results and what comes of them. A survey with no follow-up does more harm than good.

Check that the message got through

A three-question quiz after a memo on a new safety procedure tells you more than an open rate. Being playful, it boosts retention and participation. Light gamification creates friendly competition between teams and sites.

Get onboarding right

The first weeks are decisive. A structured onboarding journey, with the right information at the right time, reassures newcomers, speeds up their ramp-up and reduces the risk of early departure.

Example of a scheduled onboarding journey

D-7	Welcome message, practical info for day one
D1	Word from management, team introduction
D+7	Key tools and contacts, safety rules
D+15	Company discovery quiz
D+30	Survey: "How is your first month going?"
D+90	End-of-probation review

WITH WE ADVOCACY

Surveys, quizzes and forms

Listen to your teams and check that the message got through: mood surveys, retention quizzes, forms for ideas or incident reports. Questions can be sent on every channel, including mobile for frontline employees.

Onboarding and campaigns

Schedule journeys that support people over time: onboarding newcomers, rolling out a project, running a prevention campaign. Arrivals and departures update automatically thanks to directory sync.

Measure and manage: your 90-day plan

What isn't measured doesn't improve. The third lever is knowing who you're really reaching, and who you're missing.

Useful metrics aren't the most numerous. Start by tracking your **coverage rate** (the share of employees actually reached), then readership and participation by site and job. Gaps between groups say more than averages: a site that stops reading is often a site that is checking out.

Then compare this data with your HR indicators: absenteeism, turnover, survey results. This comparison is what lets you demonstrate the value of internal communication to leadership.

WITH WE ADVOCACY

Statistics and AI reports

Reads, clicks, responses: you see who received the message and follow up with the others on another channel. AI-generated reports summarize what worked, identify the audiences you aren't reaching and suggest next steps.

Your three-step action plan

DAYS 1 TO 30

Measure

- Calculate your cost of disengagement (chapter 3)
- Map your audiences and the channels that reach them
- Identify groups with no access to information

DAYS 31 TO 60

Reach

- Open a mobile channel for frontline teams
- Launch a regular editorial rendezvous
- Set up an onboarding journey

DAYS 61 TO 90

Engage

- Run a first survey and share the results
- Involve managers as relays
- Present a first review to leadership

A fast start. With We Advocacy's Newsletter and Broadcast plans, you can be up and running in a few weeks, just long enough to connect your directory and prepare your templates. For a full project with intranet migration, allow about two months.

The multichannel internal communication platform. Designed in France, hosted in Europe.

200+

client companies since 2018

100,000

users every day

5 channels

from a single send

- ◉ **Integrated with your environment:** Google Workspace, Microsoft 365, SSO, directory sync from Entra ID, Okta, Google Workspace or SAP SuccessFactors.
- ◉ **Modular:** start with the modules you need today, add others with no migration.
- ◉ **Secure and GDPR-compliant:** Hosted in Europe on Google Cloud, data encrypted in transit and at rest.
- ◉ **Supported:** guided rollout, France-based support, unlimited number of communicators.

"We Advocacy has helped us unify our communications for several years. We particularly appreciate their responsiveness and efficiency."

Mary Pifer, VP Marketing, 3SI

See what the platform can do for you.

In 30 minutes, we start from your audiences and tools to show you the modules that matter, and only those.

Book a demo →

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Sources

Gallup, *State of the Global Workplace*, 2025 and 2026 editions · Gallup, Q12 meta-analyses on engagement and performance · Gallup, *42% of Employee Turnover Is Preventable but Often Ignored* · WTW, *Private-Sector Absenteeism Barometer, 2025 report* (September 2, 2025). The worked example in chapter 3 is based on explicit assumptions and is an indicative order of magnitude.