

# Engagement and Team Size:

## Effects of Team Size and Attention on % Fully Engaged



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## Introduction and Key Findings

Though we can measure engagement using a rather simple approach (i.e., StandOut's Engagement Pulse survey), understanding what engagement means is more complex because *engagement does not exist in a vacuum*. Understanding engagement survey results for any team requires first understanding that team results are an aggregate representation of individual results. Individual results are, in turn, a reflection of the experiences each team member (TM) is having within the org, within the team, and in relation to their own work. Thus, *engagement is complex in that it must be understood within the context of organizational, team, and individual influences*.

It is generally appropriate to assume, when thinking about engagement within a single organization, that the contextual influences of the organization impact all teams in similar ways. The individual influences on engagement vary by person and cannot be captured in their entirety, because there is no way to account for all the professional and personal factors that may influence a person's engagement at a given moment. In contrast, team influences on engagement can be measured, because they impact all members of a team in a relatively consistent way.

Since 2018, StandOut data has periodically been used for research focused on understanding the contextual effects of a team on the engagement of its members. Most of these efforts have included an examination of the relationship between team size and engagement or between team size and attention. The purposes of this brief are to help leaders and practitioners (a) appreciate the relationship between team size and engagement, and (b) understand how that relationship is influenced by leader attention.

Here are the key takeaways from this work:

- In the absence of meaningful intervention, engagement tends to remain consistent over time for teams of all sizes.
- As team size increases, it becomes increasingly difficult for a high percentage of TMs to be Fully Engaged (FE).
- Frequent team leader (TL) attention can lessen the negative effects of large team size on engagement by more than 50%.

## Team Size Definitions

Careful examination and exploration of two years of StandOut data (2018 – 2019) resulted in the identification of 6 team sizes that consistently and systematically yield different results: *micro*, *small*, *medium*, *large*, *super*, and *mega*. These theoretical team size groups have been empirically tested each year against StandOut data collected in 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023, and 2024, and have been found to remain both relevant and meaningful. The box below presents the operational definitions for each of these team sizes.

**Micro Teams:** 1 – 2 team members reporting to a single team leader

**Small Teams:** 3 – 5 team members reporting to a single team leader

**Medium Teams:** 6 – 10 team members reporting to a single team leader

**Large Teams:** 11 – 15 team members reporting to a single team leader

**Super Teams:** 16 – 39 team members reporting to a single team leader

**Mega Teams:** 40+ team members reporting to a single team leader

## Data Collection and Sample

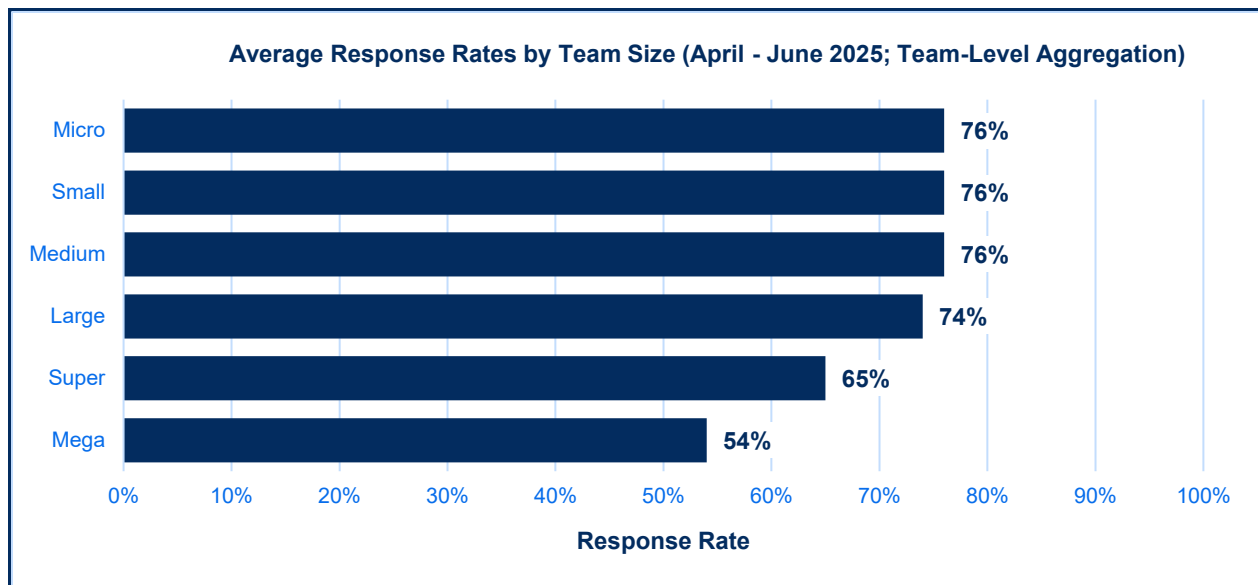
The data for this project were collected between January 2024 and June 2025. Person-level data were aggregated by calendar quarter, then aggregated at the team level. The data selected into this study included teams that (1) had consisted of the same TMs for a minimum of four consecutive quarters between January 2024 and June 2025, (2) had been invited to participate in at least one Engagement Pulse (EP) during each of four consecutive quarters, and (3) had at least one TM who responded to the EP each quarter (not necessarily the same TM during all 4 quarters). Thus, the complete data set included a year worth of EP data for each team. Quarterly Check-In data were also included in the data set for all TMs who were eligible to submit Check-Ins. Thus, this data set includes 61,923 TMs who were members of 5,914 static teams from 17 StandOut client organizations (11 – 4,095 teams per organization). Unless noted otherwise, the results reported here are based on this sample and rely on team-level aggregation of the data.

A second data set was also constructed for this project to provide a point-in-time comparison sample. This data set included EP data for all TMs who were invited to participate in an EP during the second quarter of the 2025 calendar year (i.e., April – June, 2025). The static team structure of the 161,121 TMs (on 19,134 teams) selected into this sample was preserved to allow for both person-level and team-level aggregation during the analysis phase of the project.

The table below provides the numbers of teams, numbers of TMs, and the range of EP response rates associated with teams of each size in the primary sample.

Sample Sizes and Response Rates by Team Size			
Team Size	<i>n</i> of Teams	<i>N</i> of Team Members	Response Rate Range
Micro (1-2 TMs)	713	1,584	94% – 95%
Small (3-5 TMs)	1,647	8,471	87% – 88%
Medium (6-10 TMs)	2,298	21,759	85% – 86%
Large (11-15 TMs)	813	12,129	83% – 85%
Super (16-39 TMs)	374	11,249	71% – 72%
Mega (40+ TMs)	69	6,731	45% – 55%
Total	5,914	61,923	85% – 86%

Response rates for the teams who meet the inclusion criteria are reported above as a matter of good practice, but it is important to keep in mind that these response rates are not representative of the overall StandOut population of teams. These response rate values are biased upward given that only teams with at least one response each quarter were included in the sample. The figure below provides the response rates for all teams who were invited to participate in an Engagement Pulse during the second quarter of 2025. During this quarter, the minimum response rate observed for all 6 team sizes is 0%; the maximum response rate is 100% for micro (4,603 teams), small (5,471 teams), medium (5,103 teams), large (1,786 teams), and super teams (492 teams); the maximum response rate for mega teams is 98%.



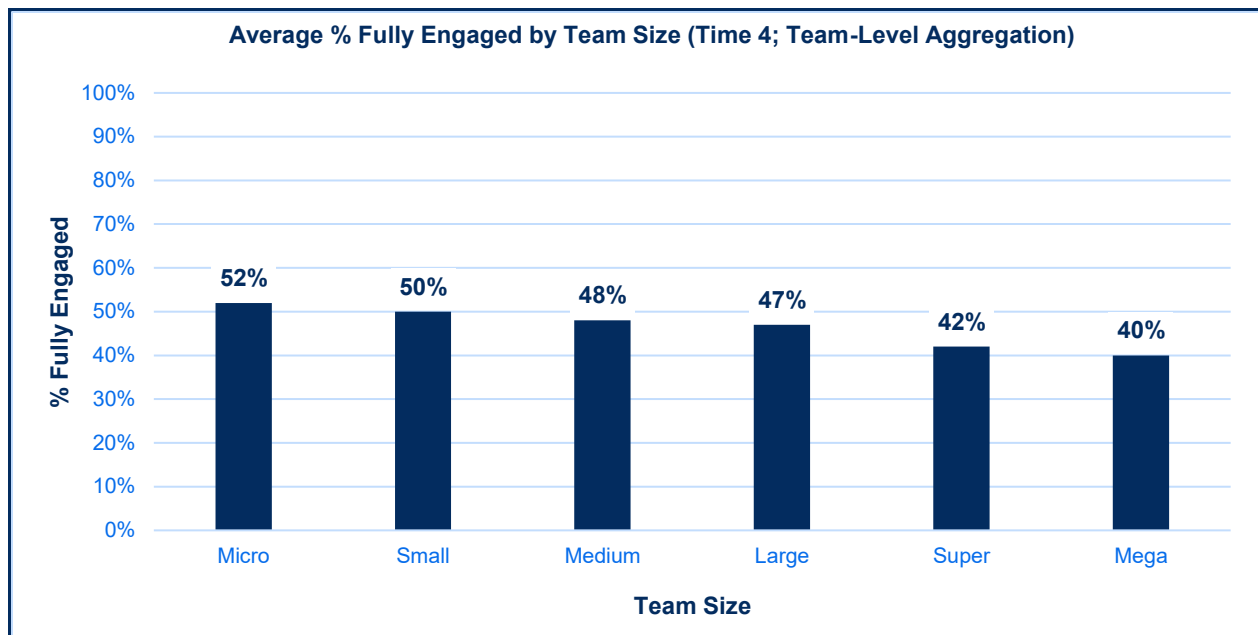
## Team Size and Engagement

As noted above, people's engagement is influenced by their personal experiences and individual characteristics, the experiences they have at work (including their interactions with others), and the contextual factors in which their work time is spent. The contextual factors of the team to which a person belongs is an important part of this equation. While many characteristics of a team are specific to the team itself and rather difficult to measure (e.g., the individual characteristics of one's teammates, the energy surrounding one's interactions with their teammates), there is one characteristic of teams that is particularly constant: teams are made up of a TL and some number of TMs. The exact number of direct reports on a team varies for any number of reasons, from an organization's desire to limit the number of vertical levels within their hierarchy / matrix to having the right number of people to complete a specific volume of tasks. Regardless of the reasons for a team's size (or the mission of the organization, or the industry in which they participate), teams of different sizes pose different challenges to their leaders.

One thing that most teams struggle with at least sometimes is engagement. And, typically, larger teams struggle with engagement more than smaller teams. The table below shows average % FE by team size over 4 consecutive quarters. At all time points, members of smaller teams are more likely to be FE, with a consistent and linear relationship observed between team size and engagement. Generally speaking, members of small teams are 1.6× more likely to be FE than members of mega teams and more than 1.4× more likely to be FE than members of super teams.

% Fully Engaged by Team Size Over Time (Team-Level Aggregation)				
Team Size	Time 1	Time 2	Time 3	Time 4
Micro (1-2 TMs)	53%	52%	53%	52%
Small (3-5 TMs)	50%	51%	50%	50%
Medium (6-10 TMs)	49%	49%	49%	48%
Large (11-15 TMs)	47%	47%	46%	47%
Super (16-39 TMs)	41%	42%	41%	42%
Mega (40+ TMs)	39%	38%	41%	40%

The figure below provides a visual depiction of the negative linear relationship between team size and engagement at Time 4, with % FE decreasing from 52% to 40% as team size increases.



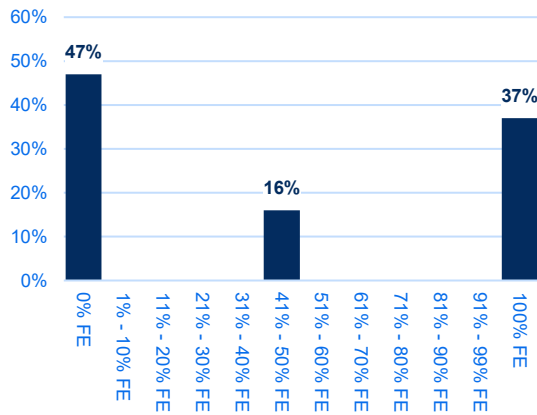
**Consistency.** Percent FE remains consistent over time for teams of all sizes, ranging from 52% – 53% for micro teams, 50% – 51% for small teams, 48% – 49% for medium teams, 46% – 47% for large teams, 41% – 42% for super teams, and 38% – 41% for mega teams.

**Distributions.** The results above illustrate the differences in average % FE by team size, but they do not offer insight to the distribution of % FE for teams of any size. To fully understand how teams of different sizes struggle differently with engagement, it is important to examine the distributions of % FE values when aggregated at the team level. For this purpose, values were calculated based on the sample of all teams who have EP data during the second calendar quarter of 2025. The figures below provide summaries of the distributions of % FE for teams of each size. The distribution for micro teams is trimodal, as teams with 1-2 TMs only have 3 possible values for % FE: 0%, 50%, and 100%.

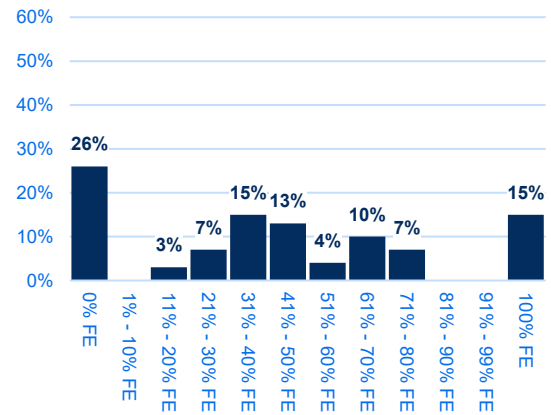
As the number of TMs increases to 3 or more, the distribution of % FE does not begin to take the shape of normal distributions (i.e., bell curves) for any team size, but more and more of the possible ranges of % FE values are used. A trend toward a positively skewed distribution begins to emerge with medium-sized teams, becomes more prominent among large teams, and takes clear shape for super and mega teams. A positively skewed distribution means that if you visualize a line connecting the tops of the bars of each graph, you would see that the high point of the curve is toward the left side of the graph and there is a longer tail to the right of that high point. The values within the distributions cluster into ranges that fall at the lower end of the range of possible % FE values. The fact that this imaginary curved line becomes more and more off-center reinforces the idea that as team size increases, average % FE tends to decrease. In fact, it is 15.2× more likely for 11% – 20% of TMs on a mega team to be FE than for 51% – 60% of TMs on a mega team to be FE. Compare this to super teams, where it is only 4.8× more likely for 11% – 20% of TMs to be FE than for 51% – 60% of TMs to be FE.

## Distributions of Teams by % Fully Engaged Group (April – June, 2025; Team-Level Aggregation)

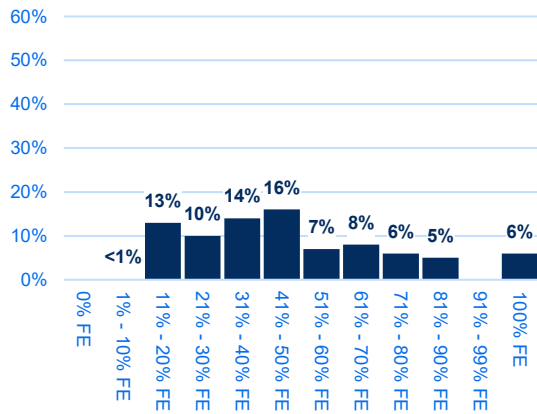
**Micro**



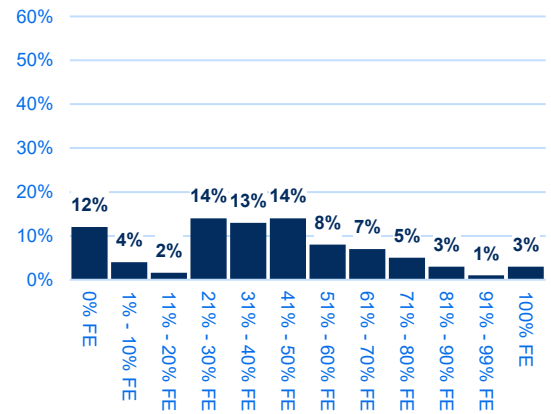
**Small**



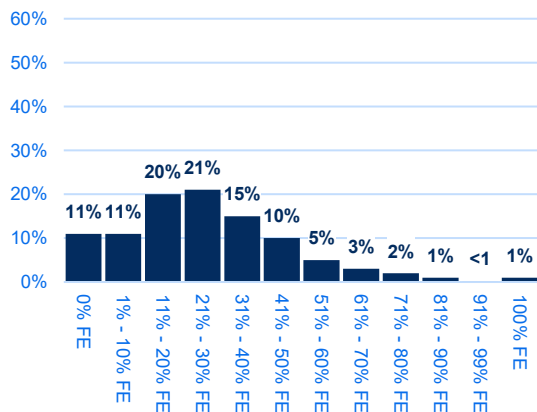
**Medium**



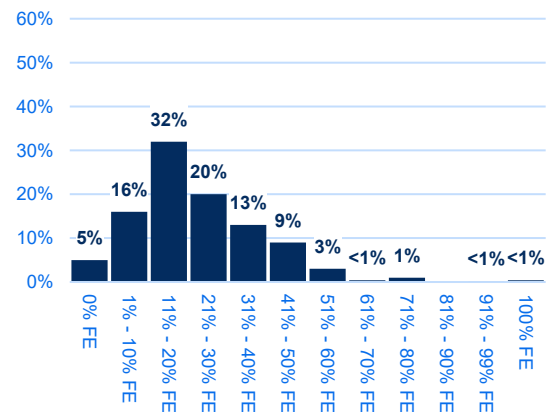
**Large**



**Super**



**Mega**



The table below provides a selection of percentile values of % FE by team size. Note that large, super, and mega teams do not reach 100% FE until past the 95<sup>th</sup> percentile of their respective distributions. Here is what the top 5% of the % FE distribution looks like for mega teams:

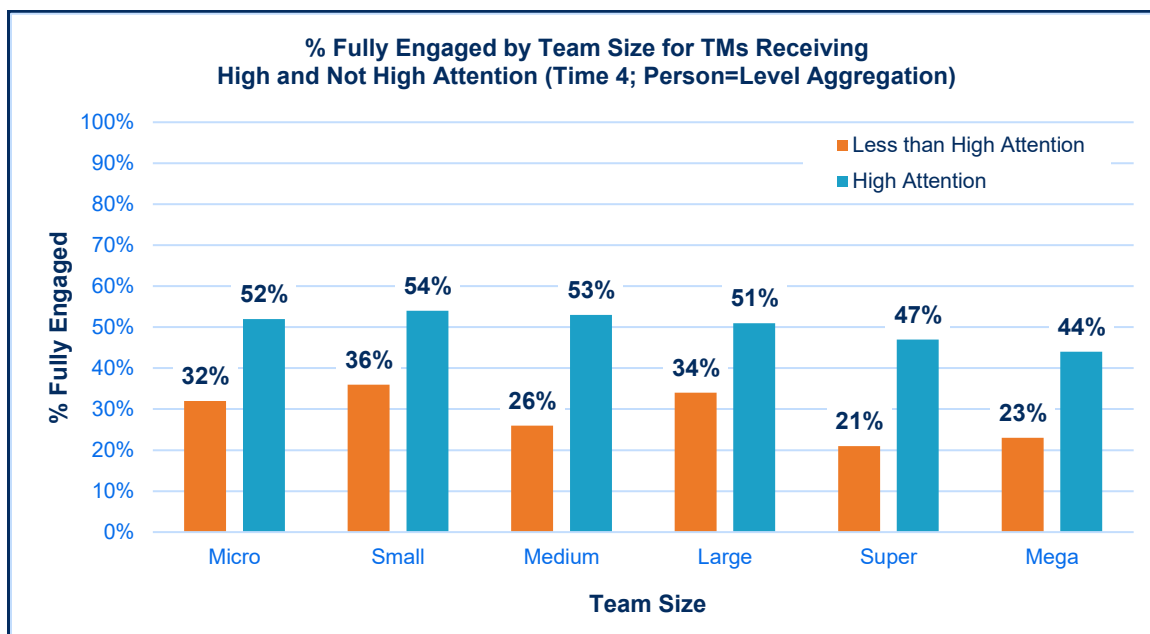
- 1.4% of teams have 51% – 55% of TMs FE,
- 1.8% of teams have 56% – 60% of TMs FE,
- 1% of teams have 61% – 80% of TMs FE,
- 0.2% of teams have 93% of TMs FE, and
- 0.4% of teams have 100% of TMs FE.

Taken together, these findings indicate that as team size increases, it becomes increasingly difficult to reach the ideal state of 100% FE. While it is possible, it is extremely unlikely to occur among larger teams and is likely not feasible.

Team Size	% Fully Engaged									
	Min	10 <sup>th</sup>	25 <sup>th</sup>	50 <sup>th</sup>	75 <sup>th</sup>	80 <sup>th</sup>	85 <sup>th</sup>	90 <sup>th</sup>	95 <sup>th</sup>	Max
Micro (1-2 TMs)	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Small (3-5 TMs)	0%	0%	0%	33%	67%	75%	80%	100%	100%	100%
Medium (6-10 TMs)	0%	0%	17%	38%	61%	67%	75%	83%	100%	100%
Large (11-15 TMs)	0%	0%	17%	33%	54%	60%	67%	73%	83%	100%
Super (16-39 TMs)	0%	0%	13%	25%	38%	43%	48%	54%	64%	100%
Mega (40+ TMs)	0%	5%	12%	20%	32%	36%	39%	43%	50%	100%

## Attention Moderates the Effects of Team Size on Engagement

The value of receiving frequent attention from one's leader is documented elsewhere and outside the scope of this brief, but one thing we know intuitively — and our research has consistently demonstrated — is that attention from one's TL is important for all teams regardless of size. The ability to give not only *frequent* attention but *high-quality* frequent attention to all of one's direct reports becomes more and more challenging as the number of TMs increases. For those TLs who find ways to make it happen, ***frequent attention has the potential to offset the effects of team size on engagement.***



The figure above presents the average % FE by team size for TMs who report receiving attention with “high” frequency (i.e., at least 80% of the time) compared to TMs who report receiving attention less frequently (i.e., 0% - 79% of the time). The differences in % FE are significant for teams of all sizes. In fact, for all team sizes, TMs who receive frequent attention are more than 2× more likely to be FE than TMs who receive attention less frequently. More importantly, the values depicted in this figure speak to the potential of TL attention to offset the effects of team size on engagement. Among TMs who do not receive frequent attention, those on micro and small teams are nearly 2× more likely to be FE than TMs on super and mega teams. Among TMs who receive frequent attention, those on micro and small teams are less than 1.5× more likely to be FE than TMs on super and mega teams. This finding indicates that while attention alone cannot overcome all the effects of team size on engagement, **frequent TL attention can lessen the effects of team size on engagement by more than 50%.**

## Summary of Findings

Engagement varies by team size. The larger the team, the less likely it is to have all TMs be FE.

- In the absence of meaningful intervention, engagement tends to remain consistent over time for teams of all sizes.
- As team size increases, it becomes increasingly difficult for a high percentage of TMs to be FE.

Despite these facts, the reality is that it is very difficult or even impossible for many organizations to restructure their workforce to create smaller teams. In the absence of this option, organizations can support their TLs to increase the number of employees who are FE using a variety of approaches that make sense within the context of the work they do. For example, organizations can make a concerted effort to understand the rituals of their best TLs and help to introduce those rituals to TLs across the organization. Another approach is to encourage the formation of ad hoc teams (a.k.a., dynamic teams or project teams) that represent how the work gets done, and support the leaders of those ad hoc teams with the tools to do all the things the best TLs do, regardless of their title or position in the org chart. Whatever other approaches an organization employs, all practitioners should strongly encourage TLs to provide attention to their TLs frequently and consistently. This not only contributes to the health of teams and the organization more broadly, but **frequent TL attention can lessen the effects of team size on engagement by more than 50%.**

For more research on the importance of high-quality, frequent TL attention, refer to these StandOut research briefs:

*Power of Attention: Point-in-Time and Longitudinal Looks at the Attention-Engagement Relationship* (2025)

*The Check-In Experience: The Human Side of High-Quality Connections at Work* (2025)