

BlissPoint Analytics
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RETENTION ANALYTICS FOR HR LEADERS

12 Early Warning Signs of a Retention Problem

The leading indicators in your own data that move months before people resign, read for teams and managers, never for individuals.

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blisspointanalytics.com/resources/whitepapers/retention-early-warning-signs

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The signals come before the resignations

Most organizations learn they have a retention problem from the annual turnover rate, which only moves after people have gone. The conditions that come before resignations show up earlier, in data most HR teams already hold, and they can be read for teams and managers without labelling any individual.

42%
of voluntary leavers said their manager or organization could have prevented it[1]

45%
had no conversation about their satisfaction or future in the 3 months before leaving[1]

70%
of the variance in team engagement is attributed to the manager, by Gallup[2]

What this paper gives you

- **Twelve leading indicators**, each with what to measure and where to see it, from first-year leavers to industry quit rates.
- **A group-level method.** Every indicator is read for a department, a manager's team or a tenure band of five people or more. BlissPoint Analytics does not score individual employees, and section 3 explains why.
- **A monthly review routine** that turns a moving indicator into an owner, an action and a date.

> The annual turnover rate tells you who has already gone. Leading indicators tell you where people are deciding.
>
> Anthony L. Hammock, M.Sc.

This paper answers a question HR leaders ask often: *what leading indicators in your data signal a retention problem before it becomes a crisis?* The short version is on the leading indicators question page; this is the long one.

THE CONTEXT

1 Why retention needs leading indicators

Turnover is expensive mostly because it is late. By the time a resignation lands, the replacement search, the lost knowledge and the strain on the remaining team are already set. Gallup's 2024 study of voluntary leavers found that 42% believed their manager or organization could have done something to keep them, and that 45% had no proactive conversation about their satisfaction, performance or future with a manager or other leader in their last three months.[1] The window is real, and it is often missed.

What voluntary leavers told Gallup (2024)



Source: Gallup, July 2024, survey of U.S. employees who voluntarily left an employer in the past year. Checked through search results.

The labor market sets the pressure

BLS's Job Openings and Labor Turnover Survey counted 3.4 million quits in September 2026, a quits rate of 2.1%, out of 5.3 million total separations.[4] BLS's January 2026 tenure survey put median tenure with the current employer at 4.1 years, up from 3.9 in January 2024; it is 3.0 years for workers aged 25 to 34 and 9.6 years for those aged 55 to 64.[3]

Median years with current employer, January 2026



Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Employee Tenure in January 2026 (released September 24, 2026). Read directly on bls.gov.

Leading versus lagging. The annual turnover rate is a lagging indicator. The twelve below lead it because they describe conditions that tend to come before resignations, and because they can be read for groups small enough to act on.

THE INDICATORS

2 Twelve early warning signs

Read each one for a group, against your own baseline. A change over two or three months, or a concentration in one team, matters more than any single number.

1 First-year leavers are rising

People who leave in their first year usually point to hiring, onboarding or the first manager, not the wider organization. BLS reports that 20.6% of U.S. wage and salary workers had been with their employer a year or less in January 2026, so early tenure is a large group in most workforces.[3]

MEASURE
Leavers under 12 months as a share of all leavers, by department, each month.

WHERE TO SEE IT
Turnover dashboard: tenure bands, first-year leavers called out

2 Resignations cluster under one manager

Several voluntary leavers under one manager within a few months is a stronger signal than the same number spread across the company. Gallup attributes at least 70% of the variance in team engagement to the manager.[2]

MEASURE
12-month resignations by manager, for teams of five or more, highest rate first.

WHERE TO SEE IT
Attrition analytics: turnover by manager

3 Exits spread within a team

Quitting is partly social. In a study of 45 bank branches and 1,038 hotel departments, coworkers' job search and embeddedness predicted individual quits beyond each person's own attitudes. One departure in a tight team can be followed by others.[5]

MEASURE
Second and third resignations in the same department within 90 days of the first.

WHERE TO SEE IT
Turnover dashboard: turnover by department

4 Resignations outpace other exits

A rising share of voluntary exits, against people let go, means more of the people leaving are ones the organization chose to keep.

MEASURE
Resigned versus let go, rolling 12 months, compared with the year before.

WHERE TO SEE IT
Attrition analytics: resignations against people let go

5 Intent to stay is falling

Thoughts of quitting and job search are among the strongest correlates of actual turnover in meta-analytic research, which makes a short intent-to-stay item one of the most useful survey questions to trend.[6, 7]

MEASURE
Agreement with "I expect to still be working here a year from now", by group, each pulse.

WHERE TO SEE IT
Pulse surveys: shown only for groups of 5 or more

6 Nobody is asking

In Gallup's 2024 study of voluntary leavers, 45% said neither a manager nor another leader had discussed their satisfaction, performance or future in the three months before they left.[1]

MEASURE
Share of each team reporting a career or stay conversation in the last quarter.

WHERE TO SEE IT
Manager and 360 surveys: upward feedback by area

7 Manager ratings are slipping

Upward feedback catches a struggling manager before the team's turnover does. A fall in a manager's scores since the previous cycle is a reason to offer support, not a verdict.[2]

MEASURE
Change in each manager's area scores since the last cycle, against the company average.

WHERE TO SEE IT
Manager effectiveness surveys, every 6 or 12 months

8 Spans are too wide, or too thin

A manager with far more direct reports than the work allows has little time for each person; one with a single report is often an extra layer. Both change what people experience day to day.

MEASURE
Managers with more than 10 direct reports, managers with one, and layers against company size.

WHERE TO SEE IT
Span and layers health check

9 Pay has drifted below range

People paid below their own role's range, or ranges nobody has reviewed in a year, are exposed the moment a competitor posts a range. Pay transparency laws make that comparison easy for everyone.

MEASURE
Headcount below range minimum, and ranges not confirmed in 12 months, by department.

WHERE TO SEE IT
Pay range review

10 Progression has stalled

Long gaps since a promotion or pay change for people in roles you need to keep tend to come before resignations, and they are easy to see in aggregate.

MEASURE
Median months since last pay change or promotion, by role family and tenure band.

WHERE TO SEE IT
Skills gap tracking and role requirements

11 Key roles have no successor

A critical role with no ready successor turns one resignation into a business risk. It is not a sign people will leave, but it decides how much a departure costs.

MEASURE
Critical positions without a ready-now or ready-soon successor.

WHERE TO SEE IT
Succession readiness

12 Your industry's quits are rising

Outside demand changes how easy it is to leave. BLS publishes quits by industry every month; in September 2026, 3.4 million people quit, a rate of 2.1%. Read your own rates against the trend in your industry.[4]

MEASURE
Your monthly voluntary exit rate beside the JOLTS quits rate for your industry.

WHERE TO SEE IT
HR analytics ROI calculator: value a lower quit rate

The twelve at a glance

#	Indicator	Type	Check
1	First-year leavers are rising	Movement	Monthly
2	Resignations cluster under one manager	Movement	Monthly
3	Exits spread within a team	Movement	Monthly
4	Resignations outpace other exits	Movement	Monthly

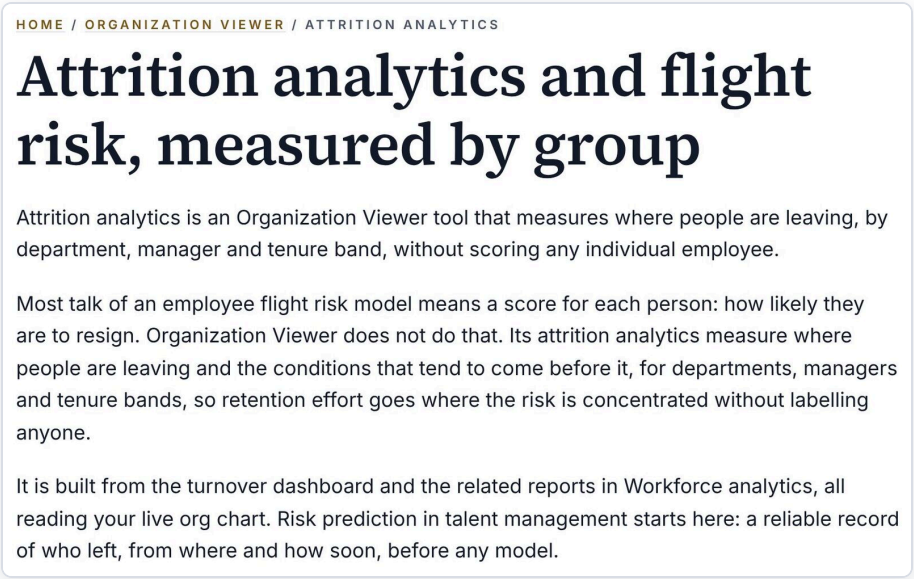
#	Indicator	Type	Check
5	Intent to stay is falling	Voice	Each survey
6	Nobody is asking	Voice	Each survey
7	Manager ratings are slipping	Voice	Each survey
8	Spans are too wide, or too thin	Structure	Monthly
9	Pay has drifted below range	Structure	Monthly
10	Progression has stalled	Structure	Monthly
11	Key roles have no successor	Structure	Monthly
12	Your industry's quits are rising	Market	Monthly (JOLTS)

Movement indicators describe who is leaving; voice indicators what people say; structure indicators the conditions around them; market indicators the pull from outside.

METHOD

3 Read groups, not individuals

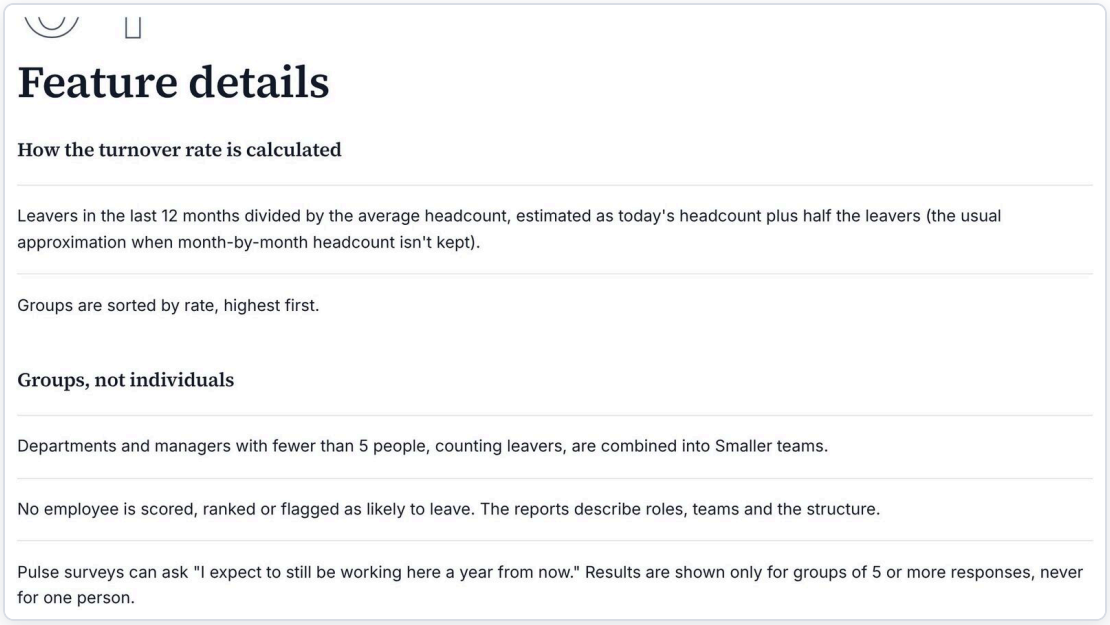
Most talk of an employee flight risk model means a score for each person: the probability that this employee resigns. Organization Viewer does not do that. Its attrition analytics measure where people are leaving and the conditions that tend to come before it, for departments, managers and tenure bands.



The attrition analytics feature page: turnover by department, manager and tenure band, with no individual scores. Live page: blisspointanalytics.com/org-viewer/flight-risk-and-attrition-analytics

Why not score individuals?

- **Labels stick.** A person marked "likely to leave" can be passed over for projects or promotion, which can make the prediction come true.
- **Small numbers mislead.** Turnover in any one team is a handful of events. Individual probabilities built on them look precise and are not.
- **It invites the wrong action.** The levers that work, such as a pay review, support for a manager or a fix to onboarding, act on groups and conditions.
- **Automated decisions about people are regulated.** Several jurisdictions now set rules for automated tools used in employment decisions; see the companion paper on AI workforce readiness. Not legal advice.



How the turnover rate is calculated, and the group-size rules that keep any one departure from being singled out. Live page: blisspointanalytics.com/org-viewer/flight-risk-and-attrition-analytics

> **The group-size rule.** Departments and managers with fewer than five people, counting leavers, are combined into "Smaller teams", and pulse results show only for groups of five or more responses, so no one's departure or answer can be singled out.

What the research supports

Turnover research has studied dozens of antecedents, from job attitudes to labor market alternatives.[7, 6] Thoughts of quitting and job search are among the strongest correlates of actual quitting, so trending intent to stay across a team is a sound early signal.[6] Quitting also spreads: coworkers' job search predicts individual exits beyond each person's own attitudes, which is why clusters in one team deserve attention quickly.[5]

For more on modelling, including what predictive attrition models can and cannot do, read decoding flight risk.

MANAGERS

4 The manager is the biggest lever

Gallup attributes at least 70% of the variance in team engagement to the manager.[2] Several of the twelve indicators (2, 6, 7 and 8) are about managers, and two tools make them visible without exposing anyone.

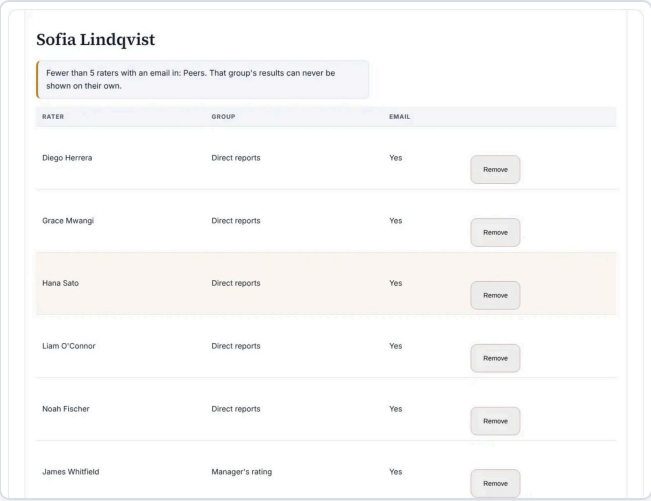
Manager effectiveness and 360 surveys

Manager and 360 surveys pick raters from the live org chart: direct reports for a manager survey; self, manager, peers and direct reports for a 360. Peers and direct reports appear only as groups of five or more, and no one, owners and admins included, can see an individual response. Repeat every 6 or 12 months to see the change since the last cycle.

Span and layers health check

The span and layers health check reports the share of managers with 4 to 10 direct reports, managers with a single report, managers with more than 10, and your layers against what a company your size usually needs. See the span of control glossary for the terms.

> **Use manager data to support, not to rank.** A falling score or a very wide span is a prompt for a conversation, coaching or a change in structure. Share each manager's own report with them, and act on patterns across managers before individual cases.



A draft 360 survey in the fictional sample company: raters picked from the org chart, with small groups hidden. Live page: blisspointanalytics.com/org-viewer/manager-360-surveys



What the span and layers health check reports, from the org chart's reporting lines. Live page: blisspointanalytics.com/org-viewer/workforce-analytics/span-of-control-analysis

ROUTINE

5 A monthly retention review

Indicators help only if someone looks at them on a schedule and acts. A 45-minute monthly review with HR, finance and two or three business leaders is enough for most organizations up to a few thousand people.

Step	What happens	Output
1. Scan	Look at turnover by department and manager, first-year leavers, resignations versus let go, and pay below range. Note anything that moved against last month or last year.	Two or three groups flagged
2. Confirm	Check group size, and whether one event explains the change (a reorganization, a site closure, a planned exit).	Real signals only
3. Diagnose	Look for the controllable driver: a manager change, a pay gap, a broken onboarding step, a span that grew. Read the latest pulse and manager survey for that group.	One likely cause per group
4. Act	Agree one action with an owner and a date: a stay conversation round, a range review, coaching, a hiring fix.	Owner, action, date
5. Re-measure	Check the same indicator at the next two reviews. Close the action or change it.	A record of what worked

Close the 45% gap first. The cheapest retention action in the evidence is a conversation. Ask managers in flagged teams to hold a stay conversation with every direct report this quarter, about satisfaction, development and what would make each person stay.[1]

Put a value on it

Finance will ask what lower turnover is worth. The free HR analytics ROI calculator estimates the value of a lower quit rate on your own headcount, pay and replacement cost assumptions, with a low and a high case.

WHAT TO DO NEXT

→ Put the evidence to work

Start with the data you have. A current org chart and a record of who left, from where and when, is enough for the first six indicators.

Attrition analytics
Turnover by department, manager and tenure band, without scoring anyone.

Turnover dashboard
The 12-month rate, resignations against let go, first-year leavers.

Manager and 360 surveys
Confidential upward feedback with raters from the org chart.

Span and layers health check
Wide spans, single-report managers and extra layers.

Pay range review
People below range and ranges not reviewed in 12 months.

HR analytics ROI calculator
What a lower quit rate is worth, on your assumptions.

Related free papers: Pay Transparency Compliance Guide 2026 and AI Workforce Readiness: A CHRO's Guide.

Free to start. Organization Viewer is free for companies of up to 50 people, with every feature; the live demo runs on a fictional sample company. What is BlissPoint Analytics? explains who it is for and what is included. For hands-on help, see workforce analytics consulting.

About BlissPoint Analytics

BlissPoint Analytics builds workforce analytics tools grounded in industrial and organizational psychology: Organization Viewer for org charts, costs and workforce planning, the free Occupation Atlas, and free calculators for HR leaders. It was founded by Anthony L. Hammock, M.Sc., a 20+ year Industrial and Organizational Psychology consultant, software developer, and Brandeis University graduate studies professor of Talent Insights and Workforce Metrics.

What is BlissPoint Analytics? · Pricing (free up to 50 people) · Occupation Atlas · Consulting

SOURCES

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References 1, 2, 5, 6, 7 were checked through search results quoting the publisher, because those sites were not reachable when this paper was built; the others were read on the publisher's own page.

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