

Reclaiming Engagement: Staff-Led Innovation That Transformed PACU Culture

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Abstract

Faced with declining engagement across perioperative nursing teams that includes addressing incivility, bullying, and workplace violence, our PACU unit launched two unconventional, frontline-driven initiatives that reversed the trend and improved engagement across all domains: **Reverse Questions** and **Gamified Unit Challenges**.

Introduction

Team engagement is vital to achieving safe, high-quality postoperative care and maintaining strong collaboration within the PACU. Rising patient acuity and workflow demands have made it increasingly important to sustain a supportive, communicative, and well-engaged team. This abstract highlights targeted strategies to improve communication, professional growth, and shared accountability among PACU staff. These initiatives aim to strengthen team performance and enhance both clinical and operational outcomes.

Methods

REVERSE QUESTIONS: redefined traditional leadership communication by empowering staff to lead the dialogue. Nurses were invited to ask leaders reflective, accountability-centered questions such as:

- “What does accountability look like to you?”
- “What does trust in a leader mean to you?”
- “How would you like to improve the unit?”

This role-reversal encouraged transparency, deepened psychological safety, and fostered a shared sense of responsibility for cultural improvement.

GAMIFIED UNIT CHALLENGES: was introduced under the theme “Level Up Engagement.” These monthly challenges awarded points for positive engagement behaviors—peer recognition, submitting improvement ideas, cross-team collaboration, and wellness participation. Winners chose department perks, sparking organic interest and friendly competition among staff, including those initially hesitant to participate.

Figures/Images

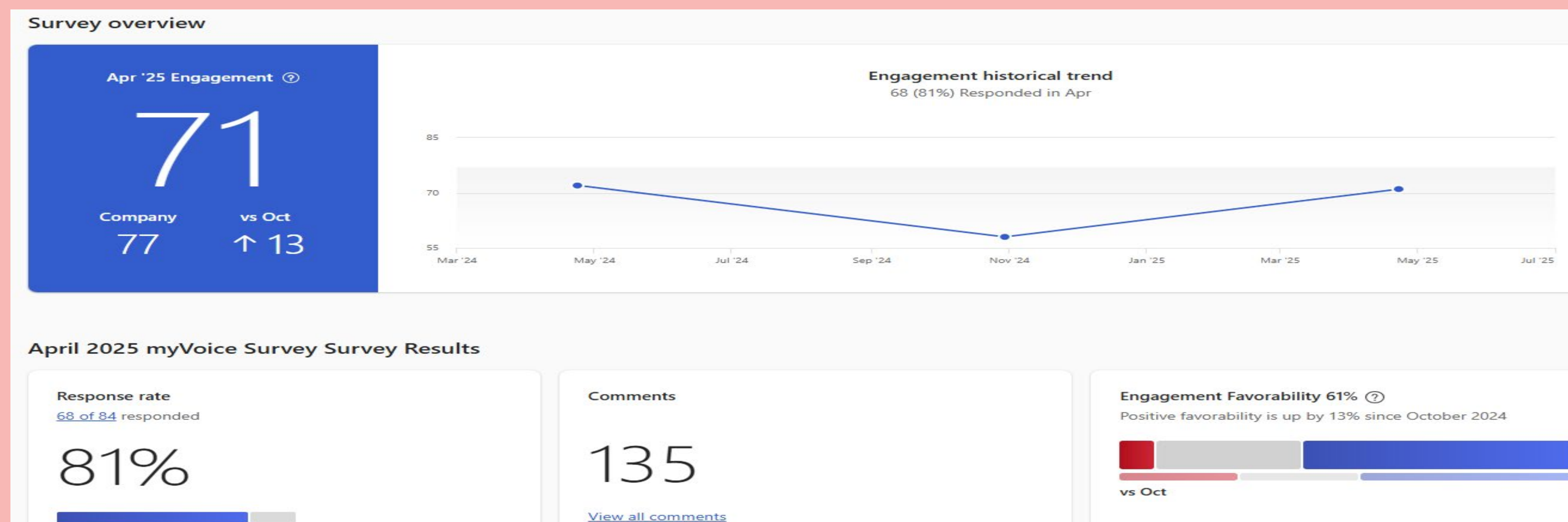


Figure 1 April 2025 Survey Overview

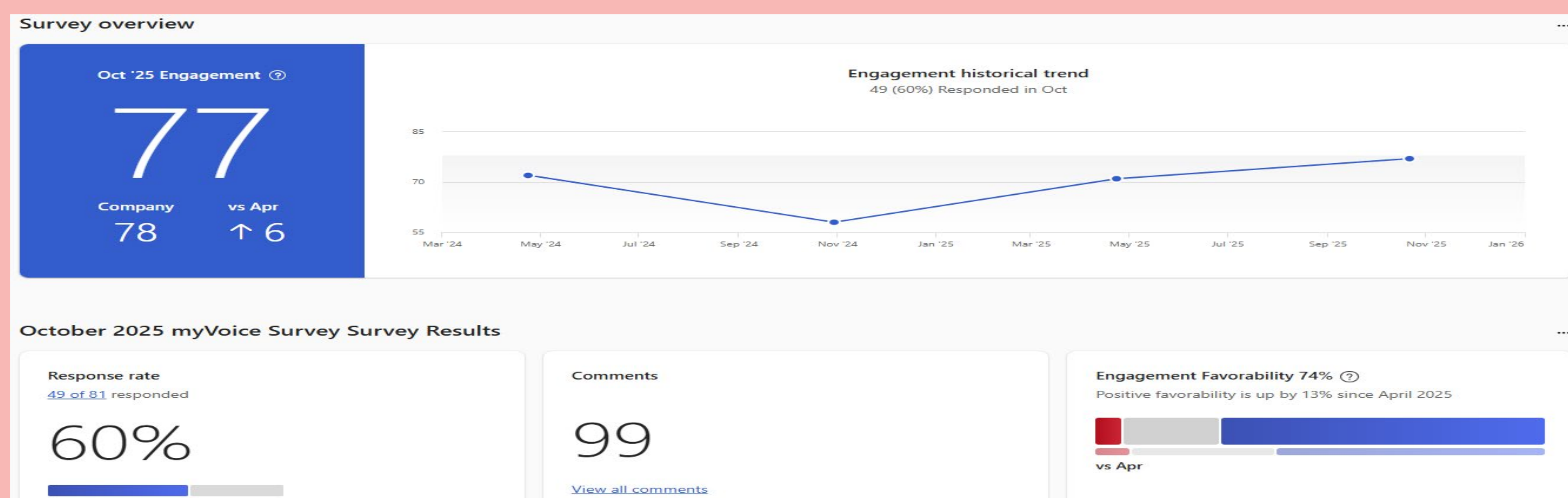


Figure 2 October 2025 Survey Overview

Area	Improvement Noted
Feedback	(+1%)
Care	(+16%)
Respect	(+14%)
Belonging	(+13%)
Intent to Stay	(+13%)
Leadership Confidence	(+21%)

Figure 3 April 2025 Overall Engagement Results by Area



Image 1 PACU Team Members

Results

Overall engagement improved by 13% from 48% to 61% with measurable increases in key areas. All 17 survey items either improved or held steady, with no declines. This success underscores that when staff are trusted to lead the charge, engagement becomes collaborative, meaningful, and sustainable.

Conclusion

Our approach offers a scalable model for perioperative settings aiming to boost morale, retention, and shared accountability—by flipping the script and putting engagement back into the hands of those who live it every day.

References

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- Jankelová, N. (2021). Communication Skills and Transformational Leadership.

Acknowledgements

Lauren Loncarevic, BSN, RN Assistant Director of Nursing
 Main PACU Staff



Image 2 PACU Team Members