



Best Practices

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Employee Engagement Studies Target Managers as Key Connection

Daily satisfaction is the top engagement driver among U.S. workers, and engagement “soars” when their daily experience includes positive relationships with direct supervisors or managers, according to the latest [National Workforce Engagement Benchmark Study](#).

Nearly six out of 10 workers are not fully engaged, according to findings based on interviews conducted in April and May 2008 with 2,368 part- and full-time employees working in public, private and not-for-profit organizations. That statistic hasn’t changed much in studies conducted by various organizations in recent years.

The new study points to “the vital need to focus on the employer-employee relationship” and the four Rs of [recruitment](#), [retraining](#), [rewarding](#) and [retaining](#), said Marc Drizin, founder and CEO of Employee Hold'em, which conducted the study.

Fair treatment of employees encompasses an organization’s policies and procedures, job evaluations, pay and benefits, providing adequate training to do a good job, and treating employees with respect, according to the study.

It breaks employees into three groups: the fully engaged (43 percent, up from 4 percent in 2006-2007, when the study was last conducted); the reluctant, who stay because they have to (25 percent, barely unchanged from 24 percent); and the unengaged (32 percent, down from 36 percent).

The report on the findings suggests the following factors influence engagement:

- Employees enjoy a good relationship with their supervisor, 77 percent.
- Employees have equipment to do the job, 73 percent.
- Employees have authority to accomplish their job, 73 percent.
- Employees have freedom to make work decisions, 73 percent.
- Employer’s products or services are highly regarded.
- Employee’s skills and/or interests are a good fit with the organization.

Personal accomplishment and being provided tools that are easy to use scored the highest (69 percent) among employees as factors affecting their engagement.

Other factors included viewing their employer as a good corporate citizen (64 percent), as an industry leader (63 percent), and as highly ethical (63 percent); feeling valued as an employee (61 percent); enjoying coming to work (61 percent); and working for an organization that treats them well (60 percent).

Steps the study suggests that organizations can take to improve employee engagement include:

- Using biannual early intervention surveys targeted to individual employees as a way to understand the causes behind turnover and to stop it before it occurs.
- Coaching front-line supervisors and managers on the important role they play in employee retention and improved performance.
- Reviewing the organization's selection process and making changes to the recruiting procedure, if necessary.
- Conducting exit interviews.

More on Employee Engagement

Another employee engagement study, [The State of Employee Engagement 2008](#) by BlessingWhite, found that North American organizations struggle to create a workforce of engaged employees—workers who contribute to the organization's success and take personal satisfaction in the role they play. While the study found that a majority of employees liked their work and planned to stay with their employer, they were not especially focused on what mattered most to their employers. Moreover, the study found that greater than 50 percent of senior executives have “less than ideal emotional connection and alignment” to their organizations.

BlessingWhite's 2008 report was based on findings from 7,508 respondents—49 percent of whom were supervisors or above—from a cross-section of job titles, functions and industries in North America, Europe, India, China and Australia/Southeast Asia that were followed by 40 backup interviews with HR and line leaders.

Key Implications and Recommendations

There is a clear correlation between engagement and retention, with 85% of engaged employees indicating that they plan to stay with their employer through 2008. An effective employee retention strategy is based on an understanding of engagement.

Engaged employees are not just committed; they are not just passionate or proud. They have a line-of-sight on their own future and on the organization's mission and goals. They are “enthused” and “in gear” using their talents and discretionary effort to make a difference in their employer's quest for sustainable business success.

Engaged employees stay for what they give (they like their work); disengaged employees stay for what they get (favorable job conditions, growth opportunities, job security). Factors influencing engagement are (1) opportunities to use talents, and (2) career development and training.

Employee engagement is a complex equation that reflects each individual's unique, personal relationship with work. As such, there are limits to what organizations can do with broad-brush workforce processes or communication programs. At a macro level, you need to provide resources, tools, and the overall workplace environment that supports engagement. Ultimately, at a micro level, employees, with the help of their managers', need to establish a thriving personal connection with their work and carve out a satisfying future in the organization.

The most successful organizations make engagement an ongoing priority, not a once-a-year event. They take a multi-faceted approach to address problem areas and improve engagement scores organization-wide.

Steps the study suggests that organizations can take to improve employee engagement include:

- **Maximize managers** – they are the main connection in employee engagement
- **Align, align, align** - clarify strategy and organizational goal
- **Redefine career**-employees need line-of-sight on their future to be truly engaged
- **Pay attention to culture** - culture and employee motivation go hand-in-hand
- **Act more** - don't rely purely on an engagement survey to drive your strategy

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Excerpts of this article by Kathy Gurchiek, associate editor for HR News, Society for Human Resource Managers, September 2008 and the Executive Summary for the BlessingWhite survey at http://www.blessingwhite.com/EEE_report.asp.