



Human Capital Development: The Key to Safeguarding Your Organization In Any Economic Environment

By Lisa Wojtkowiak

Employee engagement is more than just a matter of job satisfaction. It can be loosely defined as the emotional connection an employee has with his or her job, organization, manager or co-workers that drives them to go the extra mile. Companies with engaged employees are attracting and recruiting the best new hires, successfully on-boarding them, accurately identifying their level of engagement or disengagement, and maintaining an environment to help retain the most valuable people.



Investing in an organization’s human capital is an investment in the future. Leveraging the knowledge that employee research can deliver in terms of learning about and being able to effectively respond to the needs of employees builds a culture of trust that contributes to the commitment employees make to

the organization. This in turn leads to the full engagement of the people who make companies survive and thrive.

Employee research is key to achieving a fully engaged workforce, and it is particularly effective when a “lifecycle” approach is incorporated into the process. A lifecycle approach allows for the assessment of attitudes and perceptions of the employee base over a period of time. This insight affords organizations a means of improving their employee brand, yields an understanding of what drives employee engagement, informs the process of managing change effectively, and helps determine the causes of employee turnover — all with the ultimate objectives of improving customer satisfaction and boosting productivity and profit.

As the economy continues to hit lows not seen in decades, the closure of many offices and facilities across the country are contributing to the highest unemployment rate in 14 years. With organizations being forced to choose which locations to shut down, it is a certainty that only the most productive facilities will be the ones to survive the present crisis.

Engaging Your Workforce

Understanding that a dedicated, committed workforce is the most productive one, how should an organization go about engaging its employees? First, it is important to realize that disengaged employees are not recruited, they are created. Employees have a voice and are dying to be heard, but all too often no one’s listening. Not surprisingly, poor communication

is one of the most significant contributors to disengagement. As the workforce population shifts from Baby Boomers to the younger Gen X and Y’ers, communication becomes increasingly important. The younger workforce wants to know that their opinions are encouraged, valued and respected.

The lifecycle approach that we apply to employee research solicits communication from the workforce over time. Once an organization realizes that present satisfaction with and commitment to an organization is not in itself an indicator of how engaged an employee will be in the future, they have taken the first step in addressing the issue of disengagement. An employee might be satisfied or committed to a company simply because they could not get an easier ride elsewhere, or might appear to be committed now, when the reality is that the job market does not support their desire to make a move.

We recommend that employee engagement surveys include an overall measure of engagement levels so that the questionnaire can be used to identify what the key drivers of engagement are within the organization. The overall measure can either be one or, ideally, a small group of questions that measure the effect of employee engagement. Our research has led us to conclude that employees who are highly engaged with an organization are those who will readily “Say,” “Stay,” and “Strive” to make their organization successful.

Say	I am proud to work for this organization
	I would recommend this organization as a good place to work
Stay	I intend to still be working for the company/ organization in 12 months time
	I feel a strong sense of belonging to this organization
Strive	Working here makes me want to do the best work I can
	I am committed to helping Company X succeed



HR Career Feature

We recommend including at least one question from each of the three areas illustrated in the diagram above within an employee engagement survey. Combined, these form an overall measure of engagement from the survey results, or an “engagement index”. These questions are all outcome-focused questions – in other words, *they seek to measure the current level of employees’ engagement or disengagement, as opposed to measuring factors* that might affect current levels of engagement, which is the purpose of a broader questionnaire. Once the current level of engagement within an organization is known, analysis can then be conducted using the survey data to find out what the key drivers of engagement are. This will ultimately help the organization prioritize areas for action where key drivers of engagement are not performing well.

Acting on these areas will not only improve levels of engagement with the organization, but will also have a positive impact on overall organizational effectiveness, and, ultimately, on the bottom line.

About the Author

Lisa Wojtkowiak joined the Employee Engagement Practice at Opinion Research Corporation in early 2008. Her experience in research spans over 12 years and touches numerous industries, including automotive, financial services, healthcare, media and retail. She has been responsible for managing research projects for employee engagement research, employer branding, consumer branding and customer satisfaction/loyalty initiatives.

Ms. Wojtkowiak is a member of the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) and Toledo Area Human Resource Association (local SHRM chapter). She is heavily involved with employee engagement initiatives and groups and has been invited to speak at SHRM chapters regarding employee engagement within the context of business performance and employer branding. She holds a BA in Management and Organizational Development and is currently pursuing her Senior Professional Human Resource (SPHR) certification through the Human Resource Certification Institute (HRCI).

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