



## Employee Engagement

The term employee engagement has become increasingly mainstream in the last decade and is used by many organisations to describe a range of concepts including levels of motivation, commitment and happiness at work. The term itself originates from the early 1990s. The terms 'employee experience' and 'job satisfaction' are also used to express very similar ideas.

High levels of employee engagement are seen as an aim for organisations as it is claimed that there is a link between engagement, productivity and financial performance.

Low levels of engagement are considered to be a business risk as disengagement may lead to high staff turnover, high absenteeism and the loss of talent.

In many respects, employee engagement is nothing new as there have been studies into motivation at work and the relationship between workers and their employers for decades.

An engaged employee would typically be committed to an organisation and its goals, enthusiastic about work, is keen to stay with that organisation for the long term and would be a brand advocate for it. It is believed that engaged employees will perform better than disengaged ones.

Research into employee engagement typically shows that a large percentage of the workforce is not engaged.

One criticism of employee engagement as a concept is the lack of precision about the term. What is it exactly that are talking about? Is it that employees are engaged with their job, their team, their manager or their wider organisation? Engagement can also change over time and be influenced by a variety of factors.

Many organisations attempt to understand the engagement levels of their workforce – usually through a mixture of qualitative and quantitative measures. Annual surveys are typical, as are focus groups and pulse surveys. To allow engagement to be tracked over time, it is typical to use surveys to generate an ‘engagement score’ although this will inevitably mean that there are a lot of factors included in one simple metric. The best approach to understanding engagement is to use surveys with range of other ways of listening to employees and encouraging their feedback. Most organisations will use information gathered during surveys to formulate action plans for improvement.

### **What drives employee engagement?**

According to Engage for Success, a leading organisation specialising in employee engagement, there are several factors that influence employee engagement. These are:

- effective leadership – providing a strong sense of direction about the organisation and where it is heading
- managers who motivate, empower and support their employees
- employee voice – the ability of employees to express their views, get involved in decision making and provide feedback
- organisational integrity – the sense of fairness and trust in the organisation
- recognition.

Other studies point to the following being an important factor in employee engagement:

- effective internal communication
- clarity of job expectations
- career advancement and learning opportunities
- quality of working relationships

Daniel Pink said that people are motivated at work by mastery, autonomy and purpose.

More recently research has pointed to the link between employee engagement and wellbeing at work.

## **The Role of the Manager in Employee Engagement**

Managers have a key role to play in day to day employee engagement. They can impact on employee wellbeing, support learning and development, provide clarity and direction and provide recognition.

Research from the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development has undertaken research into employee engagement. They state that manager behaviour is pivotal to both employee engagement and employee wellbeing. They suggest that engaging managers:

- are open, fair and consistent
- handle conflict and problems effectively
- build and sustain relationships with the people that work for them
- support personal development and career progression
- provide clarity, advice and guidance
- communicate effectively

Engaging managers also:

- check in with people to see if they are okay
- take the time to discuss careers
- address inappropriate behaviour
- provides advice when necessary
- take an interest in people
- welcomes feedback
- are open to challenges.