

# Employee Engagement: Does it really matter?

Report summary

June 2014



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## Employee Engagement: Does it really matter?

**Recent reports indicate that only 20% of us feel truly engaged in our work. The rest are just going through the motions or actively sabotaging.**

We gathered an international group of good thinkers to reflect on the topic and draw some shared conclusions.

All items in *italics* are verbatim comments that achieved at least 40% support. Those in **bold** were supported by at least 60% of the people in the discussion.

### Group dynamics

Consensus was higher than average in this debate at 37% (vs Thinking Tank benchmark of 29%) and showed typical level of activity (average 14 messages per person). There was a little more engagement and consensus building than average with 29% of statements building on prior comments by another participant (compared to benchmark of 26%).

### Key conclusions

The theme of employee engagement struck a chord with participants – both as employees and employers. It is seen as fundamental to strong business performance and a function of a clear strategy, leadership style / activities and the state of the organisation's reputation.

#### 1. A privileged group

We started by checking out how engaged the group felt in their own work. 65% majority answered “very” so we need to bear in mind that the conclusions are based on this profile of participant. Nobody said that they were not at all or not very engaged.

***I'm engaged because I enjoy it and it matters.***

And there was widespread support for the importance of engagement at a personal level given the major role work plays in our lives.

***I really need to be inspired by what I do at work.***

***Work is part of my life – not only for earning money***

***I can't imagine it is possible to work without engagement.***

#### 2. Ready to step up as employers

80% of the group felt that employers should put “a lot” of effort into staff engagement – and many counted themselves among this number. There was no doubt in their minds that this is a factor that makes a difference.

Their reasons were around business performance as well as humanitarian concerns.

***When you're allowed to play to your strengths it helps you put in peak performance.***

***Engagement has an impact on performance.***

***Much happier employees for a start but also better results on every metric you care to measure.***



3. What does engagement mean?

Participants discussed elements of being engaged and concluded that meaning and purpose are key. Employees want to make a difference.

***Being engaged comes from a feeling of being able to play an active role in shaping what happens next.***

***Meaningful conversations are key to helping us to start to feel more engaged.***

***I have to feel that I'm making a contribution to something really useful.***

However there was a note of caution:

***Too much engagement also has it's downsides. Highly engaged employees often have also high expectations which are sometimes hard too manage. If these expectations were disappointed the high engagement can easily turn into disengagement or destructive behaviour.***

4. Necessary conditions for engagement

This is a subject that is readily hijacked by employers and the group are sensitive to the authenticity of the engagement.

***The company's best intentions can lead to disengagement if not carried through in a visible, reasonable way: lip-service.***

***Disengagement can also be a consequence of the working environment.***

And it is seen as something that can, and should, be measured.

***Engagement is motivation, so companies need really to evaluate the engagement level of their staff.***

***Need to find the job that fits, or influence in such a way that all factors engage him/her.***

5. What goes wrong? Barriers to engagement

There was strong consensus on factors getting in the way of engagement. Namely: lack of trust, lack of empathy/interest, narrow focus on financial results, unclear strategy, a poor corporate reputation, lack of focus or clarity from leadership and of course silos.

***Focus only on financials and not on people.***

***Frantic scramble for results or firefighting, no time to act decently.***

***Barrier: Overload of agenda by endless new initiatives.***

***Barrier: bad feedback from clients, colleagues.***

6. Tips for engaging employees

Lastly in terms of actions all of us could take in support of this shift, the following ideas achieved support from the group:

- Build external reputation:  
***Organize events with external stakeholders to show the impacts of the job done by the company.***
- Be consistent and personal – not one size fits all:  
***Engagement requires a lot of instant and continuous recognition, not only of the employees' results but also of their personalities***

***Allow work from home.***

- Leadership style can be improved including planning ahead, providing good feedback and listening well:  
***Authentic leadership.***

***Work on values and behaviours and not only on the bottom-line.***

***Role modelling - also showing***

*emotion, humbleness and empathy*

- And run more online discussion sessions!

Create a listening culture that builds on trust and empowerment with clear objectives.

I can see how this tool could help with engagement, I've felt very engaged in this conversation!

Thanks, was good to reflect as both an employee and as employer.

5. ***Engaged - I have to feel that I'm making a contribution to something really useful***
6. ***Engagement requires a lot of instant and continuous recognition, not only of the employees' results but also of their personalities***
7. ***Barriers - uncertainty in business direction resulting in just focussing on the here and now***
8. ***Create a listening culture that builds on trust and empowerment with clear objectives***
9. ***Barrier: not having an empathetic manager.***

**Top 10 statements scoring over 65% support (ranked strongest first)**

1. ***Engagement has an impact on performance***
2. ***Line managers having & demonstrating a real interest in their people's development is key***
3. ***I'm engaged because I enjoy my work and it matters.***
4. ***Focus only on financials and not on people***

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