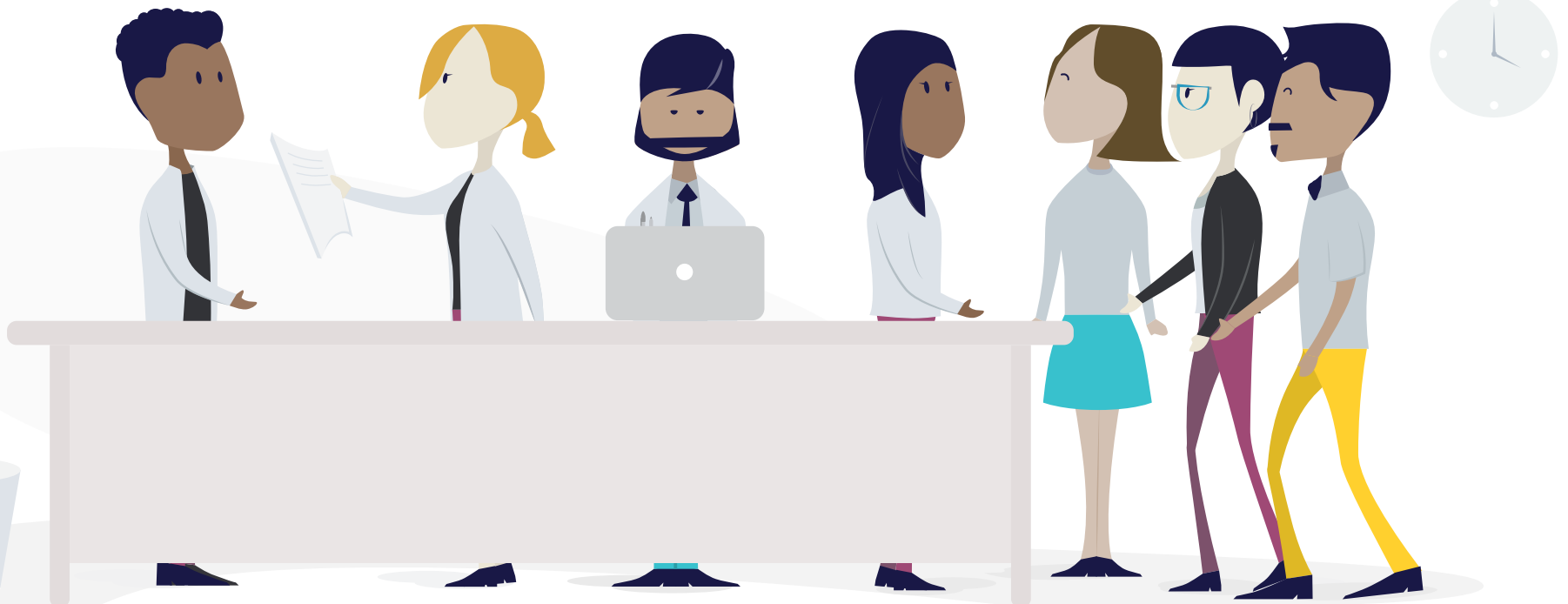




MCQUAIG PRESENTS

THE QUICK GUIDE TO EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT





Introduction

What's the key to running a successful business? There may be many factors at play, such as what industry you're in or what sort of service you're providing, but the heart of any company is its workforce. Your employees and how they interact with their work as well as each other impacts the momentum of your company. When everyone is excited and pulling together, you can accomplish weeks of work in days. But when employees are frustrated or bored, days of work can take weeks. Finding the right balance is where managing employee engagement comes in.

Employee engagement is a concept that tries to account for the relationship between an employee and an organization. Many companies view managing engagement

as trying to find the right conditions that motivate their staff to do their best work. When employees feel secure in their roles and curious about their work, productivity levels see a boost which benefits everyone. Keeping employees engaged enough to consistently achieve that high level of performance, however, is a trick every company tries to solve. In order to help, this eBook will look at some tactics managers or HR professionals can use to drive engagement on their teams. When staff is motivated to work together, there's no telling what can be achieved.

Did you know?

Gallup reports only 33% of US workers are engaged on the job.¹



What is employee engagement?

When thinking about what employee engagement is, sometimes it can be useful to clarify what it isn't. The term is sometimes used interchangeably with concepts like employee happiness or job satisfaction and that would be a mistake. Someone could be perfectly content with their job without being motivated to push harder to try new things. **Instead, think of employee engagement as the emotional investment people put into their work.**² Are people passionate about the work they are doing and motivated to keep doing it well? If the answer is yes, then you have an engaged workforce.

The concept of employee engagement is not new. In fact, it heralds back to 1990 when it was first introduced by Dr. William Kahn.³ He argued people do their work at three levels – physically, cognitively, and emotionally. The more levels you can engage with, the better your work. And likewise, the more levels you disengage with, the more your motivation levels will slip. The goal, then, becomes creating the right sort of environment where engagement at all three levels of work can thrive. It's not always an easy task, especially if you're starting out with disengaged workers, but you might see a ripple effect when you start actively trying to turn things around. The more workers re-engage, the more they'll motivate their fellow employees to follow suit. Eventually, when done right, companies who prioritize engagement find it becomes a central tenet of their company culture, which makes it easier to perpetuate and sustain change long term.

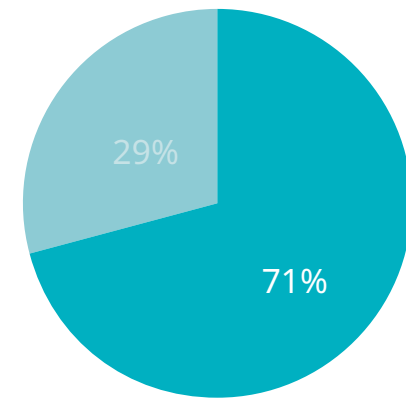




What do the numbers say?

What does some of the research into this area of talent management have to say? Employee engagement can be a hard concept to encourage in the office but when it's achieved, the impact can be far reaching.

- Highly engaged teams report a 21% increase in profitability⁴
- 43% of employees are ready to leave their roles for only a 10% pay increase⁵
- Employee engagement drops by 7% after an employee's first year on the job⁶
- Only 42% of workers say they look forward to coming to work in the morning⁷
- Disengaged employees have a 60% higher rate of making errors⁸



71% of execs count employee engagement as being critical to company success⁹

When employee engagement is high, turnover decreases, creativity increases, the overall quality of work improves. Workplaces even get physically safer with a decrease in accidents, injuries, and sick day being used. So in the debate of whether or not engagement matters, wise companies don't leave this concept to chance.



What can you do to improve employee engagement?

Hearing that employee engagement can recharge your company is great but talking about re-engaging your people is a lot easier than actually doing it. Turning engagement around can be a daunting task but there are a number of tactics you can try to get you started.

Embrace flexibility: One key learning coming out of the pandemic is the need for flexible schedules that work with employees' busy lives. When employees have the ability to work to a schedule that better fits their lives it improves their well-being and increases their job satisfaction and engagement levels. So consider how work is accomplished at your company and spend some time thinking about whether there is anything you can change to improve worker flexibility. This could include creating regular work from home days (or work from home roles), alternative schedules, project based work tasks, or any other option that works for both you and the employees. When employees have the freedom to balance both their work and life activities, they can keep their stress levels down which allows them to do their best work.

Invest in diversity and inclusion: Did you know companies that prioritize diversity and inclusion initiatives report higher levels of employee engagement? It makes sense when you think about it. Workplaces that make space for different ideas and people to come together are more respectful, creative, and open than places where everyone is the same. That openness feeds directly into the company culture that then reinforces the value of collaboration and fairness. In fact, companies who invest in D&I even report lower turnover rates and longer employee tenures as employees want to stay with companies who share their beliefs.¹⁰ Working in a place that values difference makes it easier to brainstorm new ways forward that can be achieved as a united community, rather than a divided one.



What can you do to improve employee engagement?

Listen and communicate: We've all heard the adage people don't leave jobs, they leave managers and a big piece of that is how a manager, and a team, communicates. Teams that have open communication models and a culture that encourages discussion often have higher engagement rates than those that don't. Employees want to feel like they're being heard and that their concerns, if they have them, are addressed. If you work somewhere that never takes you seriously when you speak, you learn not to contribute as much as you would have. That lack of communicating can spiral between team members and before you know it, you have a team that's all working independently instead of aligning on what needs to get done. That can lead to larger challenges like missed deadlines, incorrect work, or even overlapped tasks between employees. It's important to keep in mind, when communication stops, so does engagement.

Surveys and feedback: A great tool for tracking engagement levels is to ask the people you're working with. Feedback and surveys are an easy way to take the temperature of your team and identify any areas they might be struggling with. It's important that you think about how you want to collect feedback, however, before you start. If your team isn't used to feedback or is low on trust, consider an anonymous option instead in order to get their honest opinions. And think about making these kinds of surveys a regular event so you can track engagement on a monthly or quarterly basis. That way you'll know at once if engagement starts to slide. As an added bonus, using surveys can also improve communication as it provides employees with another channel they can use to alert their managers if anything is wrong or impacting their ability to work to their full potential.





What can you do to improve employee engagement?

The importance of empathy: Empathy is not a word that comes up often in regular business conversations but it is a key concept when thinking about engagement. Empathy is the ability to understand and share the feelings of others and you can see how that would be an important trait on a team or in a leader.¹¹ This again all ties back to the central idea that people want to be valued and respected and work harder when they are. Having empathetic leaders, and creating an empathetic environment or company culture, promotes the belief that everyone's feelings and opinions are valid and should be shared. Over time, this builds a community of workers who respect each other and are able to put themselves in each other's shoes which decreases conflict and increases communication. This paves the way to stronger interpersonal relationships on teams and within the company.

Psychological safety: People are more engaged when they feel safe and secure. That's where the term psychological safety comes into play. Psychological safety is the shared belief that members of the community can rely on each other to take professional or interpersonal risks.¹² Embracing this term allows a company to create an environment where mistakes are not treated with punishment but as a learning experience to better direct the next attempt. When employees don't have to fear reprisals or retribution for a slip, they are more likely to take larger risks, admit to mistakes, and ask for help when they need it. Workplaces without psychological safety often report higher stress levels, lower trust between employees, and, of course, lower engagement stats.



What can you do to improve employee engagement?

Volunteer as a team: When was the last time your team worked as a team outside the office? Leaving the workplace behind and entering the real world together can help employees learn more about each other and how their team mates work. A great way to do this is by spending a day volunteering together. This helps bond employees in a more natural way and injects new energy into the team. When you carry those learnings back to the workplace, you may find workers have a new sense of camaraderie and motivation. This works even better if you can relate your out-of-office activity to the values or mission of your organization. But what if there are no volunteer options available? Then consider getting your employees out of the office together in a different way such as with a social gathering. These breaks in the routine can help boost engagement and create stronger relationships between employees.

Consider the workspace: We don't often consider the physical space we work in but that, too, can have an effect on engagement. Consider a worker confined to a cubicle, perhaps in a windowless building with concrete walls. Now think of one surrounded by colleagues in a colourful space with different places to work such as couches, desks, and breakout rooms. Who do you think is going to be more engaged and more productive? Humans are visual creatures and the environment we work within can have an impact on our mood, which in turn can have an impact on what we produce. Take a walk around your office and see if there is anything you can do to improve working conditions. Consider options such as buying new desk chairs, turning empty offices into shared space, filling grey rooms with plants, or even embracing a new coat of paint.



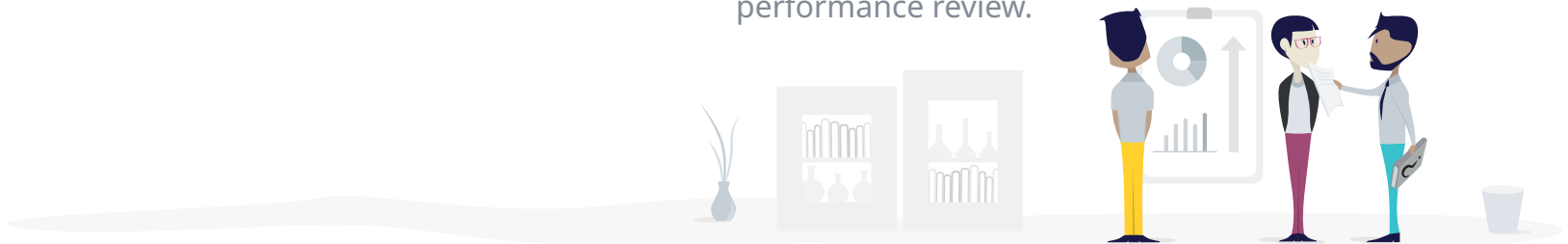


Leadership and employee engagement

What role does company leadership have in the mission to increase employee engagement and build a culture of trust and openness?

Company's role: Engagement starts at the top. If you want a culture that supports and embraces employee engagement then you need buy-in from the highest levels of your organization. Factors like psychological safety or giving honest feedback won't happen unless executives and company leaders set an example for managers and workers to follow. If you're an employee with an idea but your company leadership has made it clear your voice is not valued, odds are you're not going to speak up about your next great solution. But if HR and executives work together to create a workspace that upholds ideals like open communication and a culture of support, the work to raise engagement levels will be far easier to achieve. So when you start tackling the challenge of decreasing engagement, make sure everyone is on the same page before you begin.

Manager's role: While the company has the power to set priorities and values at the highest level of the organization, the daily employee experience is more directly tied to team leaders and managers. Companies who want to increase engagement might want to consider investing in manager level training on how to build strong teams or work effectively with others. Great leaders aren't born, they're made but many companies fail to provide any kind of management training for their people. This often leads to inconsistent or ineffective leadership which in turn stifles engagement and productivity. A better way to approach engagement is to gain managerial buy-in and then provide the resources to help them succeed. This could include training opportunities, clear behaviour expectations, or even engagement goals tied into a manager's performance review.





Employee development and employee engagement

Another way to improve employee engagement is to look beyond the team or company environment. Yes, everyone wants to work somewhere that respects them and gives them a voice. But you can go even further and think about the employee experience as a whole and how that impacts engagement.

One way to re-invigorate your team is to offer learning and development options. Many employees want to keep learning and growing their skill set and will respond favourably to companies who can make that happen. And just think of the benefits. It upskills your team members which improves your internal talent pipeline, it can teach communication skills useful for teams, and it can even drive down turnover as employees choose to stay in a company that shows how clearly their staff are valued.

Employee development can happen in many different forms but one way to approach it is with the help of assessments. Opting for an assessment solution can save companies time and money as tests can be taken quickly online and debriefed together with a manager. They can also help you target specific behaviours like leadership abilities or increased self-awareness. Once you identify the area you'd like your employee, or team, to work on, assessments can also be used to create an ongoing development plan with check-ins, goals, and perhaps even retesting dates to track any effective changes in behaviour.

If you're interested in learning more about employee development and assessment options, please visit www.mcquaig.com.



Conclusion

From retention, to productivity, to company culture, keeping employee engagement high has far reaching implications. People do their best work when they are motivated and feel secure. Companies that manage to create a culture of engagement see boosts in the speed and quality of finished work, not to mention an increase in company profitability. And it makes sense. Employees who have drive and are happy in their roles face fewer barriers to achieving their workloads. They're also more likely to ask for help when they need it and may rely more heavily on interpersonal interactions.

"The greatest asset of a company is its people."

- Jorge Paulo Lemann¹³

When engagement levels drop, that's when companies can get into downward spirals that are hard to course correct. A lack of engagement can lead to employees who are bored at work or merely showing up to earn a pay check. Work can be accomplished with a disengaged team but odds are it won't be done as thoroughly or as quickly as it could have been. Once a company falls into the bad habit accepting disengagement as the new normal, it can be hard to re-energize staff that have grown accustomed to the culture and work expectations already in play. So try to get ahead of employee engagement and keep it positive. When your staff is motivated to come together and do their best work, everyone wins.



Notes

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