

Engagement at work?

Aaah, commitment! Parents look for it in their kids, partners seek it from each other, and employers like to think they have it from their staff.

Another term for it in the world of work is 'engagement'. Employee engagement has become something of a holy grail in HR and management circles.

One reason is that retaining workers for long enough to recover the investment in recruiting and training them makes a huge difference to an organisation's chances of succeeding. And highly engaged workers actually turn up (most days at least!), and when they turn up, perform at higher levels than staff who are disengaged.

As a consultant, I'm sometimes asked "how can we make our staff more committed (or engaged)?"

When we are invited in to assist, as a first step, we usually check in directly with staff to see how they are travelling. We typically use either a survey or interview format – the latter one-to-one or with groups. It can be as simple as asking questions like "How satisfied overall are you with your employment with us?", "How committed are you to your role, team, and organisation?", and "Do you expect to be still with us in a couple of years?"

These factors add up to particular measures of commitment to the organisation and its values.

Another important form of engagement is "affective engagement". This is a positive emotional attachment, where people identify strongly with the organisation's goals and feel like remaining a part of it all. This is commitment because a person "wants to". While it is important to all people, it's a particularly big factor for many Gen X and Gen Y staff. To track this can use questions like:

- How much is your organisation focused on customers rather than just profits?
- Are you empowered to take ownership?
- Are your workplace improvement ideas listened to and actioned?
- Would you volunteer to work with your organisation?
- Do you believe that customers value your personal efforts?
- How much does your work feel like play?



There's also "continuance engagement". The individual commits because they see high costs in leaving, including economic costs (long service leave or other entitlements) and social costs (friendship ties with co-workers). They stay because they "have to". This has been a factor for the "baby boomer" generation, though they are looking increasingly at work-life balance issues.

Speaking of which, there are also variations globally in "engagement factors":

- Australian and French workers increasingly place a premium on work/life balance.
- US workers seek respect and expect opportunities for career advancement.
- In India (which scores highest for engagement) the type of work and promotion opportunities are the biggest motivators.
- Chinese employees place a premium on benefits (but are increasingly dissatisfied with them).
- Mexican employees value structured development activities to prepare them for moving up (and leave more frequently for greener pastures).

What about other types of engagement? One is "normative", staying because you feel you "ought to" conform to organisational or social expectations of loyalty. This less inspired approach is fading, as old beliefs in loyalty have slipped away for both the employers and employees.

Engagement is vital in today's workplace, and the information produced through a well-designed research approach looking at engagement factors will show where it's most productive to adjust benefits or build the culture.

I invite you to take a quick look at your workplace. Perhaps it's time now to get answers about commitment and engagement, and build your organisation's ability to engage its people.

You are welcome to contact me to discuss the best way to move forward.

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