



Recognizing the need to increase and improve employee engagement isn't enough. Threading engagement throughout an organization's culture is key. Learn about the paradigm of Engagement Around the Work, how it differs from traditional efforts...and why it is successful. As Dr. Deming said, "All anyone asks for is a chance to work with pride."

Mary Jane Conway-King

Engagement Around The Work

by: Ellen Kendall, Senior Associate

Employee Involvement. Empowerment. Teamwork. Open Communication. Lifelong Learning. You've heard all the right things to do to help employees do a good job and how "doing right" by your employees can improve your business performance. And now there's Engagement.

There is lots of research showing that increasing engagement is a good thing:

- Gallup: Only 30% of American employees are engaged at work and the 70% not engaged costs the nation \$450 billion to \$550 billion per year in lost productivity
- Towers Perrin: Companies with engaged employees have 6% higher net profit margins
- Kenexa Research: Engaged companies have 5 times higher shareholder returns over 5 years.

Additional documented positive benefits of engaged workers include lower turnover, better safety, fewer product defects and shrinkage, reduced absenteeism, higher productivity, and higher profitability with better customer satisfaction metrics.

But in spite of the proclaimed benefits of engagement and the efforts made to increase engagement have often not paid off. (\$1 Billion spent annually to try to recoup the \$500 Billion that disengagement costs companies.)

Why? There are several reasons:

1. Lack of Clear Definition of What Engagement Is/Is Not

The first reason for unsuccessful engagement efforts is because people fail to understand what engagement is and what it is not.

Stephen Wendel from HelloWallet, offers a commonly used definition of engagement: "Engagement means having an emotional attachment to work."

With this definition, employees emotionally care about their work and their company. He further describes employee engagement as a mental state — it's something in our heads and hearts that represents the attachment we feel to our work. The definition also includes an element of discretionary effort. "Engaged workers don't work just for a paycheck or just for the next promotion, but work on behalf of the organization's goals."

We Know Engagement When We See It

Engaged employees are willing to go "above and beyond" what is expected of them. You can call it "being all in" "or doing 110%". Whatever we call it, we know it when we see it. An engaged employee can be clearly labeled engaged.



We Know What Engagement is Not

On the other hand, unengaged employees are unlikely to “go the extra mile” or even go the first mile. They do the minimum or sometimes even less. They take more sick days, are tardy more often and sometimes even undermine the work. And some actively disengaged employees actually bring about a documented increase in customer complaints.

2. Confusing Engagement With Satisfaction And Happiness

Some engagement efforts fail because people confuse engagement with satisfaction and happiness. They are not the same. While both satisfaction and happiness have positive emotional rings to them (as does engagement), they are not the same as engagement. One can be satisfied or happy at work without being engaged.

If someone is satisfied with their work, they perform adequately, but they don't necessarily have the emotional commitment of an engaged employee. Engagement also includes an element of performance. It's the difference between being satisfactory vs being excellent.

It's also possible to be happy at work and not be engaged. Wendel further states, “Happiness is a current emotional state that is often related to many factors that have nothing to do with employment – the weather, family life, personality, etc.” There are happy employees who enjoy their workplace and their colleagues. They are happy to talk with anyone who passes by or maybe they are happy surfing the web all day, but happy employees may or may not be involved in doing productive work.

Without understanding the distinction between happy and engaged employees, organizations have taken a variety of paths to try to increase engagement. Some have focused on “engagement programs” by such things as allowing jeans on Fridays, putting in vending machines with healthier snacks, or creating a work place with state of the art work-out facilities and a great latte bar. Those things might be nice – they might make for physically healthier and maybe even happier employees. But, there is plenty of evidence that these things do not increase engagement.

3. Misunderstanding The Link Between Engagement And Productivity

Another reason for failed engagement efforts is a lack of understanding the link between engagement and productivity.

There is considerable research about what truly motivates people. Hands down, intrinsic motivation trumps extrinsic motivation! People are motivated primarily by an intrinsic desire to do a good job, to be considered a valuable asset to their organization and in Deming's words, “To have joy in work.” Deming was very clear about how to make sure that employees have “joy” in work – by enabling them with the training, tools, and resources they need to do a good job; to listen to their ideas for improvement and to continuously improve the work of everyone.

A New Paradigm: Productivity yields engagement, not the other way around.

Many organizations focus on engagement as the strategy. It's the wrong focus. Productivity yields engagement – not the other way around!

By increasing employees' productivity, you get increased engagement, and that engagement, in turn, increases productivity, and the other positive and measurable results that come from increased engagement.



“Employee happiness and morale is NOT the critical path to employee productivity. but productivity and employee achievement are the critical path to high morale and a happy work environment. Morale and employee happiness aren’t the means to the end – they are the end itself.” –[Morale and Motivation Myth...No Strings Attached](#)

The question is: *How do we increase productivity and thus engagement?*

And the answer is: **Focus on the one thing we all have in common – the work!**

Though the specifics of each person’s daily work may be quite different, work is what everyone does at their workplace! Increasing productivity means getting rid of waste (the errors and complexities in our work processes) and improving all that we do. It means getting rid of the frustrations that result from those errors and complexities. It means working smarter, not harder.

“Improving our work is what ultimately captures the mind, the heart and the spirit of employees.”

–[Results From the Heart by Kyoshi Suzaki](#)

In an interview, Robin Gee, Director of Employee Engagement at Coca Cola, said, **“Our ability to demonstrate the tangible impact of engagement...on key business outcomes...enables us to capture the attention of those managers that may have been skeptical about the business benefits of employee engagement.”** —Development and Learning in Organizations, [vol. 25, Issue 3 \(2011\) pages 34-35](#). Emerald Publishing Group

4. Seeking A Quick Fix

Engagement efforts fail because we wishfully think and hope that a few superficial suggestions and tips for increasing engagement will actually result in substantive change. It’s a classic case of one of Deming’s truisms: “I didn’t say it would be easy. I just said it would work.” There is no magic bullet for engagement. It requires fundamental culture change and that requires commitment and the required resources.

This is a culture change in which engagement is the byproduct of having everyone involved in the continuous improvement of everything! It’s an approach we call: Engagement Around the Work! And it has two parts:

- 1) **CPI - Continuous Process improvement** – improving all that we do through improving all our work processes multiplied by
- 2) **2) CPI - Continuous People Involvement** – providing the tools, resources and environment for people to be critically involved in all aspects of improvement.

CPI² Model provides a clear structure for transforming any organization into a culture in which engagement is a primary byproduct. It will enable any organization to focus on the right things: things that will improve performance, resulting in a culture of continuous improvement – which, in turn, yields all the worthwhile benefits of engagement.