

## The drivers behind employee engagement



To date, there is no single and generally accepted definition for the term employee engagement. This is evident if one looks at three different definitions by three leading researchers in employee engagement:

- Robinson, Perryman and Hayday define work engagement as “a positive attitude held by the employee towards the organisation and its values. An engaged employee is aware of the business context and works with colleagues to improve performance within the job for the benefit of the organisation.”
- According to Schaufeli and Bakker work engagement is “a positive work-related state of fulfilment that is characterised by vigour, dedication, and absorption“ and has been described as the opposite of burnout.
  - Vigour is explained as high levels of energy and mental resilience while working even during difficult times still productive, unlike people with burnout who are likely to be less productive;
  - Dedication refers to being strongly involved in one’s work and experiencing a sense of significance, enthusiasm, pride and challenge; and
  - Absorption can be described as being engrossed and fully concentrated in one’s

work.

- Gallup organisation defines employee engagement as the involvement with and enthusiasm for work.

Looking at all these definitions, it is clear that employee engagement is the result of a two-way relationship between the employer and employee.

Studies have demonstrated that work engagement is positively related to performance outcomes such as retention and productivity. Employee engagement has been found to positively correlate with productivity, for example in a study of professional service firms, the Hay Group found that offices with engaged employees were 43% more productive than companies without engaged employees. According to another study employee engagement should result in enhanced concentration levels and a greater sense of job satisfaction.

In South Africa, Gallup's 2016 Employee Engagement survey suggested a bleak engagement outlook. Of the 91% participants who were disengaged, 45% were actively disengaged, meaning that they were very negative about their job and work environment, and likely to spread that negativity to co-workers.

Maslach, Schaufeli and Leiter argued that a lack of work engagement is likely to lead to employees wasting time on tasks that are unimportant, not putting in the maximum effort into tasks and leaving their jobs often. Much evidence exists that points to the importance of employers making employee engagement an important focus within companies.

Many researches have tried to identify factors leading to employee engagement and developed models to draw implications for managers. Their diagnosis aims to determine the drivers that will increase employee engagement levels. According to Quantum Workplace's 2018 Employee Engagement Trends Report, the following top three drivers were identified. The survey was conducted on 600,000 employees from over 8,000 American organisations. These reflect other research conducted in the engagement arena.

- 1. *Meaningful work:*** Forty two percent of respondents who have been seeking new employment believe their job does not make good use of their skills and abilities. Furthermore, surveyed employees who are planning to switch companies cited the lack of career progress (37%) and challenge in their jobs (27%) as the two top factors influencing their career decisions. It's impossible to be engaged at work if you feel like the work you're doing is not engaging. Situations like these create strong feelings of unhappiness, inadequacy and frustration. Nearly one-half (43%) of employees surveyed reported that meaningfulness of the job was very important to their overall job satisfaction.
- 2. *Management/Leadership:*** In the survey, the following four statements ranked highest in importance:

- *The leaders of this organisation are committed to making it a great place to work.*
- *I trust the senior leadership team to lead the company to future success.*
- *The leaders of the organisation value people as their most important resource.*
- *The leaders of this organisation demonstrate integrity.*

Research by Deloitte found that more than 62% who plan to stay with their current employees reported high levels of trust in their corporate leadership, while only 27% of employees who plan to leave express that same trust. Moreover, 26% of those who plan to leave their jobs in the next year cited lack of trust in leadership as key factor.

**3. Relationships with co-workers:** Good relationships with co-workers have proven to be essential in the workplace. In fact, one of Gallup's Q<sup>12</sup> reputed employee engagement survey statements is "I have a best friend at work". The reason is that when you have a close friend at work, you feel a stronger connection to the organisation, and you are more excited about coming into work every day. In 2016, the Society for Human Resource Management Job Satisfaction & Engagement survey, two out of five employees felt that relationships with co-workers were very important to their job satisfaction, and 77% of employees were satisfied with these relationships.

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