



Employee Engagement Fundamentals

PEOPLE GEEK GUIDE

We know engaged employees are more likely to perform better and improve organizational success. Beyond measures like employee attentiveness and satisfaction, employee engagement also has a real impact on an organization's bottom line. Industry and scholarly studies reveal that the [impact of employee engagement](#) is significant and affects:

- Staff turnover
- Absenteeism
- Inventory shrinkage
- Innovation
- Productivity
- Profit

With all this at stake, it's important to all managers and professionals. As a practical introduction to the management of employee engagement, this People Geek Guide will explain:

- what engagement is
- the behaviors through which employee engagement can be measured
- how you can monitor and manage engagement in your organization.

What is employee engagement?

There are a few common misconceptions about what employee engagement is. For this reason, it's important to explain both what engagement is and what it isn't.

What engagement isn't

Engagement is **not**:

- just satisfaction
- just happiness
- just motivation
- just empowerment.

In fact, it is significantly more than any single one of those.

What employee engagement is

Engagement is:

- a combination of feelings, attitudes and behaviors
- a mixture of connection, commitment and motivation
- an outcome.

In some ways, engagement can be thought of as the polar opposite of burnout. Burnout is a state that some employees reach wherein they feel cynical about and emotionally exhausted by their work. Conversely, engaged employees feel dedicated to and invigorated by their work[1].

A more formal definition

The [Chartered Institute of Internal Auditors](#) defines engagement as:

...the way people behave at work and how the employer and management influence that. An 'engaged employee' is someone who sees their job as worthwhile or interesting and is therefore more likely to be fully involved in and enthusiastic about the things they do.

This goes beyond commitment and job satisfaction as it refers to the additional effort an employee puts into his or her work that delivers high performance, often referred to as ‘going the extra mile’.

...

Employee engagement is also about the way an organisation listens to, builds trust and improves relationships with its staff. It’s about sharing a common purpose through a culture of communication and involvement that enables improvements in staff morale, retention and performance.

Behaviors linked to engagement

For engagement to be a concept that is practically useful, it’s good to be able to measure it. To measure it effectively, we need to understand engagement in terms of common day-to-day behaviors. So, let’s take a look at some of the behavioral traits that often identify an engaged employee.

Proud and willing to recommend

Engaged employees are often proud to work where they work. They feel connected to their organization and its success. When asked by family and friends, they’ll talk mostly fondly about their work and their employer in general.

Engaged employees are often eager to recommend their organization to others as a great place to work. This kind of behavior is an expression of positive personal identification with their organization.

Motivated to put in discretionary effort

When people are engaged at work, they often show a willingness to go the extra mile. Whether working that little bit longer to get a key project over the line, or assisting their colleagues above and beyond their own duties, they are happy to make the extra effort to help the organization succeed.

Crucially, engaged employees are not workaholics. They aren't merely responding to negative pressures or high demands. Rather, they are genuinely energized by, dedicated to and absorbed by their work.

Committed to the organization

Engaged employees tend to be genuinely committed to their organization. They rarely consider looking for employment elsewhere and feel personally connected to their organization and its goals.

They often envisage their own future, both shorter and longer term, in terms of their organization's success. When asked where they see themselves in a few years time, they're likely to express their willingness to stick with their current employer. This kind of behavior is an expression of the positive energy and identity they derive from being engaged at work.

Outcomes of high employee engagement

Working to improve the levels of engagement in your company goes beyond the behaviors described above. Growing engagement can have valuable benefits.

Boost your bottom line

Employee engagement is not an end in itself. [Research shows](#) that engagement levels affect staff turnover, absenteeism, inventory shrinkage, innovation, productivity and, importantly, profit.

Even the most hard-nosed manager can see value in those sort of metrics.

Engagement is contagious

Once you get the ball rolling, engagement has a tendency to develop its own momentum. Positive behaviors of engagement are contagious. When people see others showing behaviors of engagement, they're more likely to adopt them too.

Leading organizational psychologist Wilmar Schaufeli calls it an 'upward gain spiral'. When communication and interaction is high, engagement crosses over to work partners. In fact, engagement in one partner can even affect performance in the other partner. A similar phenomenon can often occur at team levels, too.

Why do engaged employees perform better?

Schaufeli says that engaged employees perform better because they:

- are proactive; they take initiative
- set higher goals; they feel competent
- are intrinsically motivated; for them work is fun
- show pro-social behavior; they are friendly and cooperative
- experience positive emotions; they process information better
- are healthy; they are present, not absent.

Engaged employees not only take to their own tasks with more enthusiasm and dedication, they frequently go the extra mile to be helpful and courteous to their colleagues and more involved in general organizational matters.

Customer spotlight: Box

“We want to sustain high performance over a long period of time. If people in the organization are less and less energetic over time, that’s a sign of a problem.” Evan Wittenberg, SVP of People, Box

[Read the case study here](#)

Study engagement in your organization

Now that we’ve established an understanding of what engagement is, its measurable behaviors and why it is important to improve, let’s look at how you can actually assess—and improve—engagement within your own organization.

Above all, it’s important to remember that engagement is an outcome. It can be improved by understanding and taking action. There is no single lever that propels engagement in the right direction. Rather, a number of things—if properly understood—can be used to improve engagement to where you need it and where you want it.

Take the first step to understanding employee engagement and the unique levers that impact engagement at your organization by conducting an [employee engagement survey](#).

Why use an engagement survey?

Quality employee engagement surveys provide actionable insights that you can use to boost employee engagement. Depending on your priorities, you can use engagement surveys to:

Get a baseline: Understand your organization’s engagement performance in

the context of industry benchmarks and your own historical data.

Drill down and assess: Take a closer look at the key drivers of engagement at your organization. Slice and dice the data by your demographic variables to determine where employees are having a different experience.

Test assumptions: Determine what truly drives engagement for your employees. Back up your conclusions with verifiable data.

Prioritize your efforts: Identify opportunities for improvement and allocate resources with confidence.

Implement a survey strategy: Establish a survey strategy based on broad engagement survey results. Identify key issues that need to be monitored regularly with shorter but more frequent pulse surveys. Investigate important issues that require deeper inquiries.

What engagement surveys should ask

To understand employee engagement in your organization, ensure you measure:

- Pride and willingness to recommend
- Present and future commitment
- Employee motivation

Choosing an engagement survey template

A good [engagement survey](#) template asks questions that will help identify the factors that impact engagement. A platform like [Culture Amp](#) enables you to focus on the areas that are most important to your employees using [impact analysis](#). This is done in real time, so no more waiting for weeks or

months to understand what your people really care about.

The engagement template measures which factors most impact engagement:

- Company performance
- Leadership
- Management
- Collaboration and communication
- Teamwork and ownership
- Enablement, alignment and involvement
- Work/life blend
- Innovation
- Service and quality focus
- Social connection
- Feedback and recognition
- Learning and development
- Action

Frequency of surveys

While every organization has differing resources and strategic priorities, it's important that your engagement data is up-to-date and reliable.

- **Full engagement surveys:** conducted at least annually, twice a year if practical.
- **Pulse surveys:** conducted every 3-6 months.

Your survey cadence should also be influenced by your cadence of action from the survey insights; if people don't see that you've taken action from their feedback, they'll be less willing to complete more surveys.

Before launching a survey

For an engagement survey to provide dependable data, it's important that your employees are as comfortable as possible with the feedback process. You don't want to catch people off-guard, make them feel like they're being put on the spot, or have them suspicious or wary of motives.

So, before launching any employee survey, it's important to first explain why you're doing it. Share why you're doing the survey and when people can expect to receive the survey invitation.

Let employees know:

- What an engagement survey is
- Why you're running it
- What you're trying to achieve
- How feedback will be collected and reported
- Who is eligible to take part
- What to expect next

Discuss any upcoming surveys with employees at an all-hands meeting (or similar). That way, people know it's coming and have an opportunity to raise any concerns or queries before it's launched.

Then, a few days before the survey launches, send out an email reminder that the survey is coming.

Why the pre-survey communications?

Good pre-survey communications lead to more actionable results from the subsequent surveys. Pre-communicating the details and aims of the survey and actively soliciting questions or concerns about the survey in advance have been shown to lead to a higher participation rate. Providing these early heads-up can also facilitate more open and honest feedback.

Get help with pre-survey communications

Here's a [template for pre-survey communications](#) that you can tailor to fit your company's voice.

Benefits of understanding engagement

Strong employee engagement is the outcome of an ongoing process. Now that you understand the impact of engagement on individual and organizational performance, as well as the measurable behaviors of engagement, you are well positioned to undertake your own investigations.

Listening to employees will help you identify areas for improvement. Quality engagement surveys reveal what drives engagement and let you assess what's working and what's not. They give you actionable insights to help grow overall engagement and thereby improve your organization.

References

[1] González-Romá, Schaufeli, Bakker & Lloreta, Burnout and Work Engagement: Independent Factors or Opposite Poles? 2006



How can we help?

We built Culture Amp, the world's most powerful employee feedback and analytics platform, so that professionals like you have the insights they need to help employees succeed at their fingertips.

www.cultureamp.com