

Insight Employee Engagement Framework



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Introduction

Only 33% of U.S. employees are engaged at work.¹ Additionally, only 56% of companies have an employee engagement program.² Unfortunately, even those with employee engagement programs are utilizing software or frameworks that may not address how leaders can positively influence employee engagement.³

As explained in the SHRM report *Business and Human Capital Challenges Today and in the Future*:

While many vendors are focusing on differences in measurement approaches (pulse surveys, one-item daily surveys, shorter surveys, more action-based items) to enhance engagement, little attention has been paid to the execution side of the equation. Better equipping supervisors and managers with knowledge of how to confront real issues within the workplace and problem solve with peers and subordinates could go a long way in fundamentally enhancing the workplace. Once problems are identified, managers are expected to miraculously know how to address sometimes complex and systemic issues without much training or guidance. Providing tangible best practices and training to confront real workplace issues are key supports needed for effective action downstream.³

The Insight Employee Engagement Framework is designed to address this problem of engagement education in company leadership. Specifically, we determine which engagement factors matter most to each employee as well as their perception of the company's performance against those engagement factors. This information is then used to construct individualized action plans for each employee. Supervisors and managers reference these plans for concrete, guided actions. Actions are prioritized by their potential impact on the individual's level of engagement.

What is Employee Engagement?

Employee engagement is an employee's strength of emotional connection and commitment to their organization.

Commitment has multiple aspects, as described in *The Drivers of Employee Engagement*. First, commitment describes an affective emotional attachment towards an organization—that is, how an employee feels about the company (affective commitment). Second, there is a recognition of costs associated with leaving an organization (continuance commitment). Finally, commitment is a moral obligation to remain with an organization (normative commitment).⁴

The strength of engagement is dependent upon the ability of the company to define a purpose that resonates with the person (affective commitment), to provide value to the person's personal and professional life (continuance commitment), and to facilitate relationships that foster a sense of belonging and teamwork (normative commitment).

Just as the impact and importance of these themes can change over time, so can an employee's overall engagement. This is why our definition of employee engagement includes the strength of commitment to the organization. Consistent, long-term measurement and investment in engagement efforts is necessary to sustain a highly engaged workforce.

Approaching engagement as a business strategy yields clear and better results.

State of the American Workplace (p.67, Rep.). (2017). Gallup.

We measure a person's level of engagement by calculating an engagement score. An employee's engagement score is an average of their perception statement responses for all engagement factors, normalized to a range of 0 to 100. While the engagement score number can be an indicator of high or low engagement, Insight's focus is on the trend seen in engagement scores over time. As our framework is designed to measure engagement as defined above, we focus on improving engagement rather than reaching a specific ideal state.

The Insight Employee Engagement Framework

Our employee engagement framework identifies twelve engagement factors known to best influence engagement. Engagement factors are elements of organizational behavior that influence an employee's overall engagement.

Engagement Factor Criteria

We assess certain criteria for each engagement factor to ensure: (1) factors are impactful enough to influence engagement; and (2) factors are specific enough to enable company leaders to influence engagement.

Factors must be impactful

Each engagement factor is derived from widely accepted research in the fields of behavioral psychology, organizational psychology, and business management. Selected factors are believed to most strongly influence overall employee engagement. That is, improving an engagement factor should result in a corollary improvement in overall employee engagement.

Ancillary factors such as employee perks are not measured by our framework, as they have a smaller or less direct influence on employee engagement compared to our selected factors. For example, greater perks alone are not acknowledged by current research to consistently increase engagement.⁵ In fact, attention to perks without any focus on essential engagement factors runs the risk of being perceived as a *pro forma* action:

Engagement is a critical part of the benefits and perks discussion. That is, if employees don't have great managers, if they don't know what's expected of them or if they are not in roles that match their talents, then the longest possible list of perks is not going to be a cure-all. Employees who are already on the fence in terms of engagement may actually regard pingpong tables and free meals as an empty gesture — a Band-Aid fix for a much bigger problem.⁶

Factors must be actionable

Our employee engagement framework gives leaders concrete, guided actions they can take to most positively influence engagement on an individual level. This means each engagement factor is only valuable within the framework if analysis of an employee's survey responses can result in action.

Any factor which can not drive action within the organization is either broken down into actionable constituent factors or omitted from the framework. For example, job satisfaction is not influenced in isolation: satisfaction is the outcome of adequately fulfilling other factors, not an atomic factor in itself. Since a job satisfaction metric does not drive specific action, it is not an acceptable engagement factor.

Engagement Factor Qualities

We measure two qualities for each engagement factor. Our quantitative measure of these qualities are used to determine: (1) which factors are most likely to influence engagement for the employee; and (2) which factors the employee believes are best demonstrated by the company.

Importance

Importance is the significance of an engagement factor in an employee's day-to-day work.

Employees are asked to assess the importance of an engagement factor through statements that are agnostic to their current company experience. In other words, our framework attempts to identify the general value a person currently holds for each engagement factor, not how they feel about the company's current engagement efforts.

Perception

Perception is the company's demonstration of an engagement factor as experienced by the employee.

This is not to be confused with company performance. Perception is solely an employee's assessment of which engagement factors have the highest focus in the company's current engagement efforts.

Survey Statement Criteria

Our employee engagement survey has importance and perception statements for each engagement factor. Employees indicate the degree to which they agree or disagree with each statement. Statements were selected according to the following criteria.

Statements are qualitative in nature

Employee engagement is an employee's strength of emotional connection and commitment to their organization. Therefore, our survey statements are designed to quantify a qualitative aspect of work: the beliefs a person holds, not the performance of a person or organization. While we value improvements in employee engagement levels, we avoid using purely quantitative metrics as variables in our engagement score calculations.

Purely quantitative metrics such as revenue, production efficiency, and customer service response times may correlate to the level of employee engagement. However, these metrics do not share a causal relationship: a high-performing company is not necessarily more engaged than a poorly-performing company, and vice-versa. High production efficiency, for example, may be a symptom of a highly engaged team, but is not the cause behind high engagement. The intent of Insight's survey statements are to determine the causal factors that most directly influence employees' engagement.

Importance statements measure an engagement factor's value to an individual

Each engagement factor has at least one survey statement that measures the importance of the factor in the eyes of the employee. We measure the importance of engagement factors on an individual level in order to determine which engagement factors most likely contribute to the employee's engagement level.

Perception statements measure the demonstration of an engagement factor to an individual

Each engagement factor has at least one survey statement that measures the perception of the factor in the eyes of the employee. We measure the perception of engagement factors on an individual level in order to determine the level to which an employee experiences each engagement factor. These statements indicate—from the perspective of the employee—the prominence of actions taken by the company to influence each engagement factor.

Attributable Survey Responses

Most employee engagement surveys rely on anonymous responses. Anonymous responses are often asserted to encourage more candid feedback,⁷⁻⁸ an important consideration when surveys assess the performance of a supervisor or company.

Insight, however, relies on attributable responses. Attributable responses maximize the impact of actions leaders will take to increase engagement.⁹ The context gleaned from attributable responses offer leaders insight into the rationale behind prioritized actions in employees' action plans.

To mitigate concerns regarding attributable feedback—that a leader may view low-engagement responses as an attack or judgement on their performance—our survey statements are designed to assess perceptions instead of performance. Employees rate their perception of where the company best demonstrates engagement, not their assessment of the performance of the company.

Perception is subjective, a reflection of what an individual sees and feels about current engagement efforts. Therefore, leaders should accept the perception for what it is, rather than consider it a review of their actual performance.

Trust is a Necessary Condition for Employee Engagement

Organizational psychologist Roger Schwarz points out, “If team members are reluctant to have their names associated with their responses, then you’ve already identified what is probably the most significant problem in your team — lack of trust.”⁹

Rogers and Riddle further explain the necessity of trust:

Simply put, trust means confidence—confidence that others’ actions are consistent with their words, that the people with whom you work are concerned about your welfare and interests apart from what you can do for them, that the skills you have developed are respected and valued by your coworkers and the larger organization, and that who you are and what you believe truly matter in the workplace.¹⁰

Trust is required for any effective long-term improvement to employee engagement. Leaders and employees alike must be open and honest to create positive change in the organization.

Employee Action Plans

Gallup research finds that “the best retention strategies are those that take into account *every* aspect of what matters most to employees.”⁶ Our framework applies this philosophy on an individual level, enabling leaders to most effectively influence employee engagement.

What matters most to an employee is dependent upon their individual values and personal needs, based on where they are in both their personal and professional lives. Our framework translates employee engagement survey results into individualized action plans. These plans focus on influencing the engagement factors that currently matter most to the employee.

A great manager is one who understands how to trip each person's trigger.

Marcus Buckingham

An action plan is an employee-specific list of actions the team leader can take to facilitate higher engagement. Actions in the action plan are prioritized by importance and perception measurements from the employee's assessment of each engagement factor. That is, the most impactful actions a leader can take to increase the employee's level of engagement are at the top of the action plan.

Actions are catalogued in our Employee Engagement Playbook. Each action positively influences one or more associated engagement factors, as outlined by research referenced in the action content.

An employee's responses to our employee engagement survey questions are analyzed to determine which actions will most positively influence their overall engagement score. Each engagement factor is assigned an internal impact score based on the employee's survey response. Relevant actions are then prioritized based on engagement factor impact scores.

Engagement Factors

Based upon the aforementioned engagement factor criteria, we have determined that the following engagement factors are most likely to influence employee engagement. Research on these factors has demonstrated that they have a significant impact on overall employee engagement. Further, employee perceptions of these factors can be directly influenced by leaders taking actions specified in our Employee Engagement Playbook.

Advancement Opportunity

Advancement opportunity is the availability of attainable promotions within the company.

83% of employees describe career advancement opportunities as either important or very important. Only 54% of employees, however, are satisfied with upward mobility in their organizations.¹¹ One-third (33%) of employees who seek employment at other companies cite better career advancement opportunities as their reason for departure.¹²

Importance Statement for Advancement Opportunity

I am motivated by the prospect of career advancement opportunities.

Perception Statement for Advancement Opportunity

Someone at work encourages me to pursue new positions I desire within the company.

All that is valuable in human society depends upon the opportunity for development accorded the individual.

— Albert Einstein

Autonomy

Autonomy is the freedom and responsibility to be self-directed; a prioritization of results over compliance.

A Cornell University study found companies that offer autonomy grow at four times the rate of control-oriented firms.¹³ Other research has found a strong correlation between autonomy and effectiveness. Employees feel more engaged and produce unexpectedly positive results in autonomous (context-oriented) work environments versus control-oriented work environments.¹⁴

Importance Statement for Autonomy

I prefer being responsible for day-to-day decisions instead of having decisions made for me.

Perception Statement for Autonomy

I feel free to complete my work as I see fit, so long as I meet my supervisor's goals and objectives.

Freedom consists not in doing what we like, but in having the right to do what we ought.

— Pope John Paul II

Communication

Communication is the clear, concise sharing of thoughts, plans, and expectations within the company.

Regular conversations with managers about goals and success lead to higher levels of engagement in employees. Employees who have had such a conversation in the last six months are 2.8 times more likely to be engaged than other employees.¹⁵ Additionally, positive feedback is known to be effective at encouraging creative thought.¹⁶

Beyond supervisor feedback, communication about company goals and how they relate to an employee's day-to-day work can increase engagement. Employees who strongly agree that their job description aligns with the work they are asked to do are 2.5 times more likely to be engaged at work.¹⁷

Importance Statement for Communication

Clear, unambiguous communication with my team and my leadership is essential to my role.

Perception Statement for Communication

At work, I receive the communication and clarity I need to be successful.

Tell me how you measure me, and I will tell you
how I will behave.

— Eliyahu M. Goldratt, *The Haystack Syndrome*

Compensation

Compensation is adequate payment for work, including pay, benefits, and time off.

41% of employees consider a significant increase in compensation to be very important when considering a new job.¹⁸ Compensation is also one of the top five reasons employees voluntarily leave their jobs.¹⁹ 96% of employees regard their compensation as important (35%) or very important (61%) to their job satisfaction.²⁰ High performers who believe their coworkers are not committed to quality work also believe they should be paid more than their coworkers. That is, employees will feel less engaged at work if they do not feel adequately compensated for their performance.²¹

Importance Statement for Compensation

I feel that pay and benefits can have an impact on my job performance.

Perception Statement for Compensation

I feel fairly compensated for my work.

Effective organizations compensate people in amounts and ways that allow individuals to mostly forget about compensation and instead focus on the work itself.

— Daniel Pink, *Drive: The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us*

Leadership

Leadership is the competency of leaders in fulfilling the company's mission or purpose.

77% of HR professionals believe trust in company leaders is the top driver of employee engagement.²² Further, 64% of surveyed U.S. employees find trust between employees and senior management to be very important to their job satisfaction.²³ More highly engaged organizations have leaders who build trust by being fair, communicate clear expectations, and take the time to listen to employees.²⁴

Importance Statement for Leadership

Good leadership is essential for me to do my best work.

Perception Statement for Leadership

I believe that company leadership enables me to do my best possible work.

When the best leader's work is done the people say,
"We did it ourselves."

— Lao Tzu, *Tao Te Ching*

Mastery

Mastery is the company's facilitation of improving existing skills or learning new skills.

Employees strongly desire employers who are committed to mastery. The desire to be challenged intellectually—to master something difficult and engaging—was found to be the best predictor of productivity in a study of 11,000 industrial scientists and engineers.²⁵ 90% of U.S. employees describe professional development within their current role as important (48%) or very important (42%).¹¹

Importance Statement for Mastery

I value the ability to learn new skills or further develop existing skills as part of my job.

Perception Statement for Mastery

At work, I believe I have opportunities to learn and grow.

I am always doing that which I cannot do,
in order that I may learn how to do it.

— Pablo Picasso

Purpose

Purpose is the organization's desire to produce something transcendent or to serve something meaningful beyond one's self.

Companies whose purpose resonates with employees will experience significant reductions in absenteeism and safety incidents and an improvement in quality.²⁶ Companies that develop and communicate a strong sense of purpose see 30% higher levels of innovation and 40% higher levels of retention.²⁷

Importance Statement for Purpose

Having a purpose behind my work greatly increases the quality of my work.

Perception Statement for Purpose

I feel my work is meaningful in helping the company achieve its mission.

If you want to build a ship, don't drum up the men to gather wood, divide the work, and give orders. Instead, teach them to yearn for the vast and endless sea.

— Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, *The Little Prince*

Rapport

Rapport is the close and harmonious relationship shared by team members; a shared understanding of each other's feelings or ideas.

Fostering close personal relationships among team members builds a stronger emotional connection with the company, leading employees to use their discretionary time to benefit the company. Gallup research has found that having a best friend at work is a strong predictor of performance. "When employees possess a deep sense of affiliation with their team members," they say, "they are driven to take positive actions that benefit the business."²⁸ They also find that great managers of highly engaged teams will: look for event opportunities for the team to get together; encourage team members to share stories about themselves; and plan time to socialize when it will not disrupt work.²⁸

Importance Statement for Rapport

I am happier at work when I am a member of a close-knit team.

Perception Statement for Rapport

At work, I feel connected to my team.

The most basic human desire is to feel like you belong.
Fitting in is important.

— Simon Sinek

Recognition

Recognition is the appropriate and frequent appreciation of good work by supervisors or peers.

Employee recognition programs are known to positively influence employee satisfaction and employee engagement. 61% of companies who institute an employee recognition program witness an increase in employee engagement. 51% of companies also see an increase in employee retention. The impact of a recognition program also extends into individual and company performance. 63% of companies observe an increase in productivity, and 58% realize a return on profit margin.²⁹

Importance Statement for Recognition

I feel motivated and appreciated when someone recognizes my good work.

Perception Statement for Recognition

I believe I will be recognized if I contribute to the company's success.

Employees who report receiving recognition and praise ... show increased productivity, get higher scores from customers, and have better safety records. They're just more engaged at work.

— Tom Rath

Systems & Tools

Systems and tools are the equipment, processes, and other resources that support employees in producing quality work.

Having the right tools and materials for the job can result in an 11% increase in profitability, 32% reduction in safety incidents, and a 27% improvement in quality. Furthermore, not having adequate resources to do the job is the strongest indicator of job stress.³⁰ Providing appropriate equipment, materials, office supplies, and other resources will alleviate this stressor and better enable employees to do great work.

Importance Statement for Systems & Tools

I feel less stress when I am given all of the resources I need to do great work.

Perception Statement for Systems & Tools

At work, I have the equipment, materials, and processes I need to do my job well.

I like to work fast. I despise not having the right tool or, worse, knowing I have it but not being able to find it. It's a pointless delay that wrecks my pace - and mood.

— Adam Savage

Teamwork

Teamwork is the cooperation among employees to achieve a common goal.

How people feel about their team, their team's work, and the organization as a whole is a top motivator for employee engagement. Teamwork has a "very positive effect" on overall employee engagement.³¹ 94% of employees feel that teamwork within their department is important (51%) or very important (43%).³²

Importance Statement for Teamwork

I believe helping colleagues perform more effectively is an important part of my job.

Perception Statement for Teamwork

I believe the people I work with are committed to our shared success.

Team members need to learn to leverage one another, and that doesn't happen over a golf game or on a phone. It happens by getting together and taking the time to know each other.

— Patrick Lencioni

Work Environment

Work environment is the physical space and general working conditions where work is performed.

A company's office environment has significant effects on the behaviour, perceptions, and productivity of employees. Studies show that productivity can increase up to 15% when employees can concentrate on their work.³³ Highly engaged employees are more likely than their disengaged counterparts to agree that their work environment allows them to: concentrate easily; feel relaxed and calm; and feel a sense of belonging to the company.³⁴

Importance Statement for Work Environment

I feel my performance is affected by how comfortable or uncomfortable I am in my work environment.

Perception Statement for Work Environment

My work environment is comfortable and enables me to do my best work.

It's incredibly hard to get meaningful work done when your workday has been shredded into work moments.

— Jason Fried

Conclusion

In constructing the Insight Employee Engagement Framework, we identified the shortcomings of existing frameworks—namely, an absence of meaningful action to drive employee engagement—and devised a method to determine what will best motivate individual employees to become more engaged at work. By focusing on the needs of the individual, leaders can take concrete actions to influence engagement.

By analyzing the top drivers of engagement—our 12 engagement factors—we identify the most impactful actions a leader can take to best engage each person. These actions are derived from our Employee Engagement Playbook, which classifies each action based on the engagement factors the action can influence. Actions are prioritized in an action plan catered to the specific needs of each employee.

By consistently measuring and responding to feedback, leaders positively influence engagement. Insight enables leaders to assess and respond positively to engagement issues, increasing the productivity, satisfaction, and retention of the entire company, building a high-engagement culture and a great place to work.

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