

## Employee Engagement

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### What is Employee Engagement?

Employee engagement can be defined as the level of commitment and involvement of an employee towards their organization and its values (Zondo, 2020). Perrin's Global Workforce Study (2003) defines it as employees' willingness and ability to help their company succeed, largely by providing discretionary effort on a sustainable basis. Another definition is by Gallup organization which says that it is the involvement with and enthusiasm for work. Robinson et al. (2004) define employee engagement as a positive attitude held by the employee towards the organization and its value.

### Importance of Employee Engagement

Prioritizing employee engagement increases the competitiveness of an organization. Employee engagement directly impacts employee performance and therefore predicts productivity. If employee engagement is above average, an organization is twice as likely to become successful (Farouk, 2014). When employees feel that they are performing meaningful work, it improves their engagement and productivity. As a result, their performance soars and they propel their team to better levels of success and quality results (Harter et. al, 2020).

### Factors that affect Employee Engagement

Gallup organization's survey on employee engagement is based on four categories – i) basic needs, ii) individual needs, iii) teamwork needs, and iv) growth needs of employees (Harter et. al, 2020). These categories can therefore be viewed as factors affecting employee engagement. The survey makes use of set questions in these categories that employees can respond to and use to determine levels of engagement. More specific factors that determine the level of employee engagement are:

- Transformational leadership (Zondo, 2020)
- Compensation (Zondo, 2020)
- Training and development (Zondo, 2020)
- Workplace well-being (Zondo, 2020)
- Teams and co-workers (Zondo, 2020)
- Work environment (Zondo, 2020)
- Satisfaction (Jose and Mampily, 2012)
- Commitment (Jose and Mampily, 2012)
- Loyalty (Jose and Mampily, 2012)
- Performance (Jose and Mampily, 2012)
- Communication (Berdaka and Pandita, 2014)

- Work-life balance (Berdaka and Pandita, 2014)
- Leadership (Berdaka and Pandita, 2014)

Absenteeism can also be a predictor of employee engagement (Zondo, 2020). Engaged employees are less likely to miss work and more likely to take on more responsibilities at work.

## Key Facts and Statistics

Past research has shown the following results:

- Only 32% of employees are engaged in the United States (Ariani, 2013)
- 9% of employees are engaged in South Africa (Moletsane et al, 2019)
- 45% of South African employees are actively disengaged (Moletsane et al, 2019)
- The cost of disengaged employees is approximately US\$16 billion per year
- Improvement in employee engagement levels could result in a 21% increase in organizational profitability
- Companies with higher levels of employee engagement have higher levels of profits (Jose and Mapily, 2012)
- 20% of South Africans surveyed in the Engagement survey felt no connection to their work

The majority of South African employees believe that they do not have opportunities or power to contribute to issues about their work.

- A study on 100 best places to work by Aritha (2014) shows that engaged employees have a low employee turnover rate of 13%.
- A study by Gallup Organization showed that:
  - 16% of US employees are disengaged
  - 51% are neutral and
  - 33% are actively engaged.
- The 2020 study by Gallup organization shows that 50% of disengaged employees are willing to change their jobs (Harter et. al, 2020).

A study was carried out by Towers Perrin in 2003, 2005, and 2007. The data used in the survey was collected from more than 85,000 employees from 16 countries. These results showed that overall,

- 24% of employees worldwide were disengaged
- 62% of employees were moderately engaged
- 14% of employees were considered to be highly engaged (Towers Perrin, 2006).

This study also showed the results of different countries and continents, in the percentage of their workforce who were highly engaged. It showed that

- Mexico had 40% highly engaged employees

- Brazil had 31% highly engaged employees
- The United States had 21% highly engaged, employees
- Canada had 17% highly engaged employees
- Europe had 11% highly engaged employees
- Asia had 7% highly engaged employees

The wide range in engagement levels across countries suggests that cross-cultural differences might have an effect on employee engagement (Ram and Prabhakar, 2011).

Shoko and Zinyemba (2014) give a presentation of findings of a research carried out to explore the impact of employee engagement on organizational commitment among workers at national higher education institutes (HEI) in Zimbabwe. The respondents were from a sample of employees from three universities. Results of the study revealed that

- 33.8% of the employees were actively engaged
- 66.2 % showed low levels of engagement
- There is a positive correlation ( $r = .607, p < .05$ ) between employee engagement and organizational commitment.

Markos and Sridevi (2010) state that employees who are disengaged are costly;

- Miss an average of 3.5 more days per year
- Are less productive
- Cost the US economy \$292 to \$355 billion per year

Further, research has shown that, in general, organizations in Southern Africa have poor performance, which is a result of disengaged and demotivated employees (Mafini, 2015).

The meta-analysis study by Gallup Organization in 2020 showed that for their selected companies, business units that performed better in terms of employee engagement had 94% higher success rates in their own organizations and 145% higher success rates across business units in all companies studied. Business units with employee engagement levels that were higher than 99% of companies in Gallup's database had an 83% chance of having above-average performance. Those that had engagement lower than 1% of the database had a 17% chance of achieving high performance. This study shows that it is possible to achieve good performance with poor engagement levels, however, only a few companies manage to achieve this (Harter et. al, 2020).

### **Employee Engagement Strategies**

Markos and Sridevi (2010) propose strategies that can be used to improve employee engagement. These are:

- Start it on day one

Most organizations lack employee retention strategies. Managers have to ensure role-talent fit when placing an employee in a certain position and exert all managerial efforts needed to retain that talent in the organization. This should be done starting from the first day an employee becomes a member of the organization.

- Start it from the top

In order for this to be taken seriously by all levels of management, the top managers have to adopt employee engagement strategies and pass them down to lower-level employees.

- Enhance employee engagement through two-way communication

Good communication for example one-on-one methods is important as it is necessary to keep employees engaged (Jose and Mampily, 2012).

- Give satisfactory opportunities for development and advancement
- Ensure that employees have everything they need to do their jobs
- Give employees appropriate training
- Have a strong feedback system

Organizations can also listen to employees' concerns as a way of improving communication and encouraging employees to participate in work discussions.

- Give incentives
- Build a distinctive corporate culture
- Focus on top-performing employees

## **Conclusion**

This shows the importance of employee engagement in organizations. When employees are engaged, the higher the chances of the organization performing excellently. Therefore, companies should continuously work on improving the engagement of their employees. Management should invest in programs that improve engagement and employee satisfaction. The strategies suggested above could be a starting point for management to address employee engagement.

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