

## The Surprising Truth About Employee Engagement In Africa

Author: Fadzai Danha . May 2020

The African continent is plagued by negative perceptions and representations such as civil wars, hunger, corruption, greed, selfishness, diseases, and poverty. These have become defining characteristics of Africans in the eyes of the world. It comes as a shock that in studies on Employee engagement Africa consistently remains in the top 3 continents with the highest levels of employee engagement showing an unequivocal great ascent from the perceived status quo.

Over the years, employee engagement has become a major force in the global workforce. It has since established itself as a key component in the success and growth of a business. Most organisations in the past focused on traditional human resources activities such as compensation and performance appraisals but the present and future of work have been determined to evolve around the job performers themselves. This is part of the reason why employee engagement has become such a strong relationship with performance and commitment.

Employee Engagement is defined as a heightened emotional connection that an employee feels for his or her organisation that influences him or her to exert greater discretionary effort to his or her work. Employee engagement is rooted in how emotionally connected employees are with their organization and, in turn, how this connection translates into effective practices to work toward the organization's goals.

The value of having highly engaged employees is that they have a stronger organisational commitment, and put more effort into their work thereby boosting productivity. The days of receiving a gift for motivation after serving for long periods at one company are gone. Employees are now driven by a feeling of relevance, daily goals, and achieving both personal and professional growth in their organisations.

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This is despite all the factors working against the continent. Employee engagement has become an emerging global issue and taking a look at one of the world's leading employee engagement survey providers AON, the results were as follows: AON in its 2018 global employee engagement trends report found that global engagement has rebounded to an all-time high of 65%. The global trends are reflected in the graph below: **Zimbabwe 2019 vs AON Global 2017-2019 Employee Engagement trends**

Taking a look at Zimbabwe from our research it has a high employee engagement of 72%. This puts to

bed any significant relationship between employee engagement and economic problems, poverty, or the country's overall prevailing negative issues. This brings about the need to answer the questions of why and what is driving this level.

## **Why Zimbabwe and Africa record-high employee engagement results**

Every country's socio-cultural, political, and economic conditions are different and so are the attitude and behaviours of their employees. Employee engagement is a sensitive issue and highly influenced by the psychology of employees and the socio-cultural structure of the region. According to Shriram (2012), there exists a significant difference between the engagement levels of developing and developed economies, with developing economies having better engagement scores.

This indicates that an employee of a developing nation will be more engaged than their counterpart in a developed economy and also suggests that developing economies also seem to 'value the non-traditional elements' better. These include recognition and rewards for good work, opportunities for personal growth, and so forth. Africans are more generally appreciative of any good that is thrown their way given the fact that they are so used to things going wrong.

Price Water House Coopers ( 2012 ) stated that 'While advanced economies in the West face an era of heightened uncertainty, escalating debt, and ageing populations, emerging and fast-growth markets seem to be following a virtuous circle upward—despite their own sets of challenges—as they invest their newfound gains in education, technology, and infrastructure'. Due to the scarcity of key staff, depth of leadership skills, and a relatively slow pace of transformation companies in Africa are also appreciative of the current good key staff that they hold. This also drives the levels of employee engagement up.

Another perspective highlighted by Effectory (2012b) is the flexibility of African employees. It is suggested in the research that the engagement level of these employees may show improvement if their willingness to change is tapped properly. Harnessing their flexibility may give them a feeling of being important and bring about a change in their engagement level. Africans are prepared to go the extra mile, given that the facilities, infrastructure, and environment for them to achieve excellent performance are there.

Employees want to be recognised. They want to feel valued. The better an organisation fosters a culture of employee engagement the greater the benefits.

For more information, be sure to download the IPC 2019 National Employee Engagement Benchmarking report which is available for free on IPC Human Capital Hub.

Fadzai Danha is a consultant at Industrial Psychology Consultants (Pvt) Ltd a management and human resources consulting firm. Phone +263 4 481946-48/481950 or email: fadzai@ipcconsultants.com or visit our website at [www.ipcconsultants.com](http://www.ipcconsultants.com)

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