



Selection & Assessment

Employee engagement: Definition, benefits and evidence-based practices on how to improve your employees' engagement

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Executive summary

This CQ Dossier provides information on how to increase employee engagement. First, the dossier defines employee engagement and describes the benefits of having employees who are highly engaged. Then, the dossier provides recommendations on how organizations can implement strategies to increase employee engagement.

In today's fast-paced economy, it is important that organizations implement practices and policies that encourage employee engagement. Without employee engagement, organizations are unable to attain business strategy objectives that will improve organizational performance (Seijets & Crim, 2006). Therefore, employee engagement is an integral source of financial and organizational performance (Macey & Schneider, 2008). To be competitive, it is important that organizations and employees understand the nature of employee engagement and implement strategies that enhance engagement. This dossier describes employee engagement and suggests strategies to enhance employee engagement.

Defining employee engagement

There are several definitions of employee engagement yet one that captures all the elements of the term is: employee engagement is a desirable condition, has an organizational purpose, and connotes involvement, commitment, passion, enthusiasm, focused effort, and energy (Macey & Schneider, 2008, p4). There are three components of employee engagement: dedication, vigor, and absorption (Schaufeli & Baker, 2004). When employees demonstrate dedication, they are enthusiastic and feel pride for their work. When demonstrating vigor, employees are invested in their work, and persist despite challenges they might face. Absorption occurs when employees are very engrossed in their work. Employee engagement is related yet is distinct from employee attitudes like job satisfaction and individual/organizational commitment. All these factors are important in creating a positive organizational climate and can be catalysts for organizational performance in a variety of ways (Macey & Schneider, 2008). Moreover, employees tend to experience engagement in a variety of ways. Trait engagement is the extent to which employees have a general positive attitude towards work. These

employees tend to be happy and productive across a wide range of settings and jobs. State engagement is the extent to which employees feel engaged on a day-to-day basis so is a behavior rather than a trait. Behavioral engagement is shown through behaviors that go "above-and-beyond" typical performance, such as personal initiative, organizational citizenship behaviors etc. Because state engagement is a malleable state and behavioral engagement arises through empowerment, this gives managers the opportunity to implement practices and policies that engage and motivate employees.

Human resource management (HRM) practices that foster employee engagement

HRM practices can foster employee engagement through development of an effective work environment. In fact, there are certain aspect of the work environment that foster engagement. Autonomy and variety can foster employee engagement and so the HRM function within the firm can design job positions that provide high levels of autonomy and variety (Christian, Garza, & Slaughter, 2011). Challenging work is also a motivator for employees because individuals thrive when they are dealing with difficult yet manageable work. Challenge can also lead to employee engagement (Crawford, LePine, & Rich, 2010). Managers can also have an impact on the work environment through their practices and behaviors. One way in which managers can engage their employees is through being fair and ethical in their dealings with subordinates. This type of leadership is more likely to lead to employee engagement (Saks, 2006).

Outcomes and measurement of employee engagement

Employee engagement matters in workplace settings because when employees are engaged they are more likely to be effective performers. There is a plethora of research to support this hypothesis. When employees are engaged, they are more likely to perform better (Halbesleben & Wheeler, 2008). They are also more likely to be good organizational citizens and show commitment to the organization so they are less likely to leave (Saks, 2006). There is also research to show that in service environments employee engagement impacts customer satisfaction because employees are more

likely to treat customers more fairly when they are engaged in their work (Sherwood, 2013).

There are several ways in which to measure employee engagement. One of the most popular measures is the nine-item Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (Seppälä et al., 2008). This measure focuses on employee energy, dedication, and absorption. It is easy to administer and specifically focuses on employee engagement rather than on employee perceptions of the work environment.

How managers can drive employee engagement

Based on scientific research, there are several ways in which organizations can foster employee engagement. First, employee attitudes towards their job and the organization matter (Crim & Seijts, 2006). Managers can show employees how their particular job fits into the wider goals of the organization and this can lead to effective customer service (Hay Group). Managers should also provide employees with clear job expectations. If employees are not clear about the details of the job, then they are likely to become frustrated (Hay Group). When there is a climate of employee engagement, employees are more likely to be proactive in providing the organization with new ideas, when this innovation is linked to financial incentives such as commission or bonuses (Hulme, 2006). However, financial incentives are not enough. It is also important that managers provide employees with feedback and communicate with their employees on their progress. Many times, employees want to hear that they have done a good job rather than just being handed a financial incentive. Organizations that are successful provide their employees with feedback (Lofthouse; Hay Group). Employees with high levels of engagement also enjoy high quality working relationships with peers, superiors, and subordinates. It is important that managers foster [high quality relationships](#) with their staff because the relationship between the supervisor and subordinate is particularly important for creating a high-quality climate (Ryan & Deci, 2000). It is also important that employees respect and value the core principles of the organization. Employees are highly engaged when they are inspired by the leaders within the organization. When there is a lack of inspirational leadership, employees will not be engaged. Finally, organizations can foster high employee engagement through implementing an

effective communication system within the organization. This will provide employees with a clear and transparent picture of events within the firm (Harter, Schmidt & Keyes, 2003).

In conclusion, employee engagement is essential for organizations to be successful. There are several ways in which organizations can engage employees through creating jobs that provide autonomy and variety. Moreover, it is important that organizations implement strategies such as effective leadership programs so that managers are able to create interventions that engage their subordinates.

Key take-aways

- Organizations that actively engage employees are more successful
- The three components of employee engagement are dedication, vigor, and absorption
- When employees are engaged, they are more likely to perform better, be good organization citizens, and show commitment to the firm
- To increase employee engagement, it is important that leaders inspire their employees to do well

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