



Improving Engagement by using Data Analytics and the Shared Responsibility Paradigm

Using Technology and Technique to improve Culture and Productivity

By Dan Harrison Ph.D .



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Although conventional personality "tests" are still heavily marketed, technology and advances in our understanding of what underlies human behavior has allowed significant advances in our ability to accurately profile people on a large range of traits, natural tendencies, preferences, motivations, styles and capabilities. This much more comprehensive and accurate alternative, has enabled a highly accurate ability to predict performance in specific jobs and situations. In addition, this information on human behavior coupled with research on job-specific performance factors, in the hands of an effective manager and/or coach has been demonstrated to produce large improvements in performance and productivity. This validated information offers a powerful capability for building high performing teams, succession planning, creating an engaged workforce and for dealing with performance issues far more effectively.



Introduction

Employee engagement is a hot topic—and for good reason. Research studies from Gallup®, BlessingWhite®, and many more continue to demonstrate that engagement highly impacts key organizational metrics including talent retention, mission achievement, growth and profitability.

In fact, Kevin Kruse, author of “Employee Engagement 2.0,” cites 28 studies that directly tie engagement to positive results in retention, customer loyalty, sales, safety, profits, and shareholder returns. Yet, in the United States, surveys reveal that only 29% of employees are engaged. As many as 24% are actively disengaged, contributing to significant financial losses. The numbers are far worse outside of the United States, where the average engagement level is only 13%.

Engagement surveys are commonly used to assess the organization’s level of employee engagement. Questions generally focus on levels of satisfaction or the degree to which managers effectively support employees. Management then creates strategies, programs, or policies in order to better engage employees. While this approach has proven valuable in many organizations, it has limitations in terms of improving individual engagement and creating a culture of engagement. This article will outline why this is the case and what is needed to achieve a greater impact on organizational performance metrics.

The types of questions used on engagement surveys identify, in general, what employees want and/or what the organization or manager is doing or not doing to help or hinder engagement. Individual employees’ answers are nearly always anonymous in order to encourage honest answers. Consequently, managers are generally not able to use the answers of specific individuals to help facilitate their personal engagement.



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Engagement Comes From Within the Individual

Since engagement surveys only focus on general levels of employee satisfaction and/or perceptions of the organization and management, they don't reveal the inner dynamics of engagement. Yet, insight into **individual** expectations, needs, priorities, aspirations, motivations, and important related behaviors, is required to increase engagement and retention. Managers must involve employees **individually** in discussions regarding how their needs can be aligned with the organization's objectives. As stated in the article entitled 'State of Employee Engagement 2014' by Modern Survey, *“Nothing will create high levels of engagement throughout the organization like candid conversations between managers and direct reports about what each employee wants and what engages them.”* Since engagement surveys can't help do this, managers need other tools to assist them in effective engagement conversations -- tools that map key related expectations, preferences, and behaviors that enable managers to easily understand individual engagement dynamics and facilitate targeted conversations aimed at increasing engagement and retention. We refer to these as engagement analytics tools.

The Crucial 3-Step Application of Engagement Analytics

The first step to increase engagement is to ensure an employee's interests and enjoyment tasks fit their current job. This is nearly always outside the scope of engagement surveys. However, without a reasonable fit, engagement is unlikely, no matter what else one does. It is unrealistic to expect someone to become more engaged in their work when they are not even interested in it. Engagement is a state of mind which requires having interest in the subject matter and having enjoyment of the related tasks. Investing time and money trying to engage someone who is disinterested in the job is not a good use of resources. In that case, the solution is to transfer the individual to a different role or shift the individual's responsibilities to ones that are



The Crucial 3-Steps Continued

better suited. This position or role fit is the foundation for engagement and is the reason why it is so important to apply engagement analytics during the hiring process.

The second crucial step to increase engagement is to understand and discuss the importance of various individual expectations in order to meet them. For example, one employee may give a high level of importance to career advancement while another employee may not care about it at all. The second employee may instead give great importance to flexible work hours or work-life balance. Understanding the value the individual employee places on each issue is a key prerequisite to effectively facilitating engagement and retention. Without addressing the expectations of high importance, engagement is extremely unlikely. Engagement cannot easily be increased from the outside because engagement relates to fulfilling individual goals and needs.

Once an employee is in the right role and his/her individual expectations are understood, the third step is to consider how those expectations can be achieved. In some cases, it may be as simple as outlining what a person needs to achieve to earn higher pay or working out a plan for flexible working hours that fits both the needs of the employer and the employee. In other cases, it may be more complicated because the individual's behaviors may not support their expectations. Examples of typical gaps between expectations and motivations or attitudes include employees who:

- **want career advancement but hesitate to take on the challenges related to such advancement.**
- **give high importance to career development but hesitate to embrace the self-improvement that would be necessary.**
- **desire higher pay but lack the self-motivation necessary to earn it.**
- **want social opportunities from the workplace but may be so introverted that such opportunities are hindered.**

In other words, there are internal barriers that are essential to understand and overcome if organizations really expect to facilitate engagement.



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Engagement Analytics is a Shared Responsibility

Engagement analytics focus on internal factors that need to be addressed in order to create a shared responsibility for achievement. In doing so, employee's and employers attain alignment that fulfills the employees expectations while at the same time creates employee motivation to achieve the organization's goals. Managers learn the internal dynamics of engagement for each employee and thus can enter an effective dialogue that sparks individual motivation. This focus on mutual needs leads to mutual respect, shared responsibility, and an employment relationship that is much more likely to be maintained over a longer period of time.



“Employers must take the initiative to hold meaningful conversations that create true win-win strategies.”

Employers must take the initiative to hold meaningful conversations that create true win-win strategies: employees make progress toward reaching personal goals while at the same time employers unleash exceptional motivation to achieve business results.

Armed with reliable engagement analytics, managers can initiate coaching discussions with an employee and create workplace opportunities that are highly aligned with the employee's needs, expectations, and motivators. This makes the manager's job much easier and minimizes wasted time and effort trying to second-guess the employee's expectations, points of concern, or internal barriers. The truth is that no organization or leader can entice or manipulate employees into being engaged in their work. And employees cannot reasonably expect any organization to meet their dreams and desires without becoming actively involved. Engagement analytics enable organizations and the employee to create a culture of engagement *together*.



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Engagement Analytics for Groups

The same tool used to analyze individual engagement dynamics can also be used to better understand the appropriate group dynamics of engagement. Engagement analytics for a group provide strategies based on a composite of the inner dynamics of engagement. Composite data can be analyzed for specific groups of employees enabling flexible approaches that consider the needs of various business units, age and gender sub-groups, cultural or ethnic sub-groups, or other distinct sets of employees with unique needs. Manufacturing plants, healthcare facilities, field offices, or geographic locations can also be grouped enabling the organization to analyze their collective indicators and develop flexible strategies at the local, job function, generational, and organizational levels that impact engagement for distinct groups.

Engagement analytics provide the precise data needed to create the right interventions for the right individuals and groups to achieve desired improvement in engagement and retention.

In fact, several organizational researchers have documented that expanded engagement analytics addressing the inner motivational, attitudinal, and behavioral dynamics for specific groups are the “next step” to advancing the value of engagement surveys traditionally focused on more external factors. The comprehensive SHRM analysis, *“The Evolution of Employee Opinion Surveys: The Voice of Employees as a strategic Business Management Tool,”* September, 2013, concludes: *“A ‘one size fits all’ approach to engagement will wane and interventions will happen increasingly at segment and even individual levels... it is what happens with the data between survey administrations that will differentiate organizations the most.”*



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Elusive No Longer

The elusive goal of achieving an engagement culture can be attained with engagement analytics. As with any intervention that involves employee information, engagement analytics require effective planning, communication, and a clear definition of purpose. When presented as a developmental process with no punitive implications, engagement analytics will be perceived to hold significant value for employees, giving them opportunity to identify key issues of career fulfillment and align their passions and talents with the needs of the organization. Naturally, employees will embrace the opportunity to meet their own employment needs and further develop a mutually beneficial relationship with the employer.

With engagement analytics, organizations can finally achieve a culture of engagement in which employees share the responsibility for desired outcomes. Using engagement analytics, organizations and employees can work together to fulfill mutual needs while improving performance and increasing profitability and growth.

About the Author

Dan Harrison, Ph.D. - Organizational Psychology. Dr. Harrison is the developer and CEO of Harrison Assessments and originator of ParadoxTechnology™ incorporated in Harrison Assessments. His diverse background in Mathematics, Personality Theory, Counseling Psychology, and Organizational Psychology has enabled him to make a unique and exceptional contribution to assessment methodology. His 30 years of research, innovation, and experience in psychology and assessment, has enabled Harrison Assessments to create and develop state-of-the-industry technology, tools, and systems that meet strategic business needs globally and provide effective solutions across the entire talent management life cycle.

About Harrison Assessments

Harrison Assessments was founded in 1990 and serves organizational clients in over 70 countries worldwide. Harrison Assessments focuses on providing the most accurate and effective assessments in the industry by dedicating a large portion of its resources to research, development, and user friendly software engineering. Their assessment systems provide decision analytics for talent acquisition, development, succession, team building, and career planning. Solutions include comprehensive and customizable recruitment, development, and talent readiness technology systems for organizations of all sizes and industries. Assessing 175 traits and competencies, the Harrison Assessment questionnaire is available in 29 languages with over 6500 job specific success templates.

Contact us for a no-cost demo and to learn more: 760-539-7412 or sg@optimizepeople.com

