

Chapter 4

What Is Employee Engagement? How We Can Work Together to Retain a Workforce That Wants to Be There

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ABSTRACT

Employee engagement is everyone's business. The chapter examines several topical issues that impact organizations and are antecedents to employee engagement. Recognizing that disengagement costs companies in the United States more than US\$350 billion annually is a good start. Retention is key. The author defines employee engagement and examines the elements that comprise it, as defined by Kahn. Factors in the workplace that contribute to disengagement are examined. There is discussion about why engagement matters and how it relates to the organization's culture, public image, and customers. Stemming from this, another key question is: What is disengagement? Is it the opposite of engagement? Organizational determinants like corporate social responsibility (CSR) and communication are mentioned. Suggestions are offered to integrate the workforce in the post-pandemic world. Leadership is an integral part of an organization's success. Does leadership style facilitate engagement?

SETTING THE STAGE

In this chapter on Employee Engagement, we will explore employee engagement from the first time it appeared in the literature and cover the topic under the following sub-headings:

- Defining Employee Engagement
- The importance of Employee Engagement
- What is disengagement?
- How we can work together
- A leader's role in employee engagement

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What Is Employee Engagement?

The learning outcomes (L.O.) for this chapter are as follows:

- L.O.1** – Define employee engagement
- L.O.2** – Identify employee engagement in your own organization
- L.O.3** – Discuss why employee engagement is important
- L.O.4** – Define disengagement
- L.O.5** – Identify potential areas of disengagement in your own organization
- L.O.6** – Identify different groups that work in your organization
- L.O.7** – Highlight the role a leader plays in employee engagement
- L.O.8** – Describe at least three different leadership styles
- L.O.9** – Identify organizations where different leadership styles would fit

INTRODUCTION

In addition to employees changing their behavior with rewards and motivation, Pekaar et al. (2023) suggested that research should investigate potential organizational or institutional top-down processes that may influence the (bottom-up) engagement. This indicates that in several cases we are still missing the mark for what our employees need to be engaged. In the course of this chapter, there are several ways that leaders can utilize the existing top-down processes to that would facilitate the bottom-up engagement. Employee engagement or the lack thereof, is not unique to any specific sector. In fact, all sectors strive to ensure their employees are engaged, Lidman et al. (2023) referring to municipal employees, noted that, taking employee engagement for granted may lead to insufficient support strategies, such as training employees in procedural techniques for developing innovations and then expecting all employees to eventually catch on and fully incorporate them into their daily work, creating a self-perpetuating and lasting movement.

Dwivedi et al. (2022) supported the concept from the private sector angle, using banking research, indicating that employees are like strong pillars for every business, regardless of the nature of business and the management of this key resource is the most critical key success factors for every organization. Further, Dwivedi et al. (2022) indicated employee engagement is a sophisticated and challenging task and with the changing workforce demographics, it is even more complex task and also very important for the organization.

If we consider the fact that an employee could identify multiple conditions within an organization that gave rise to their disengagement, as leaders we could provide a clearer pathway that helps avoid the pitfalls and perhaps minimizes the challenges that employees face. Getting employees to the place of wanting to remain engaged is mutually beneficial.

DEFINING EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

While the concept is not new, there is still some disparity about what the term means. The lack of consensus stems from a paucity of research on the subject compared with other concepts that affect us in organizations. Employee engagement as a concept became trendy and started to gain traction after the widespread remote work phase that was thrust upon us by the Covid-19 pandemic.

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