

## openspace

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## EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT RESEARCH EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Thompson Dunn has become increasingly aware of the interest surrounding employee engagement from both an academic and a business related point of view. As a consequence of this shift and its likely impact upon our clients, I undertook a piece of research to investigate this phenomenon, and identify practical steps that organisations can take to raise their employee engagement levels.



Employee engagement is associated with many desirable outcomes, such as job satisfaction, intention to stay and job performance. Companies with a greater number of engaged employees typically have lower operating costs, higher customer satisfaction and higher profits. There is a tangible monetary benefit to companies investing time and resources in fostering higher engagement within their employees.

The task of precisely defining employee engagement is still ongoing, but it is most often defined in terms of behaviours exhibited in the workplace. Engaged employees are prepared to go the extra mile in pursuit of workplace excellence. They are ambassadors for their organisations, who will speak highly of the company and its people, even when they are not in a work setting. An engaged employee is identifiable by workplace behaviours such as losing track of time as they are so absorbed in the task at hand. This is distinct from excessive overtime in order to give the impression of 'hard work.' Both look the same, but one is productive for the employer-employee relationship and one is not!

Academics would say that not enough is understood about what drives employee engagement as most research in the area has tended to focus on business outcomes without investigating underlying causes. As the impact of engagement on business has been positive and has been linked with higher profitability, practice has raced ahead of the underpinning research in pursuit of creating a more engaged and hence profitable workforce.

I designed and undertook research to aid understanding of the area by investigating the relationship between employee engagement and the culture of the organisation as a whole. At the same time I looked at the interplay between individual differences (as measured by a personality tool) and engagement levels. I hoped to discover whether the key driver of employee engagement was environmental, individual or both. Employee engagement had not previously been investigated using this methodology, which surprised me given that sound knowledge of its fundamental structure could lead to many common sense best practices.

Participants in the research were drawn from a range of backgrounds. The majority being drawn from a single public sector organisation that works with organisations, helping them to work more responsibly with their local community. Following collation and analysis of data from over 100 respondents, the outcomes of this research suggest the following:

- Employee engagement is much more associated with organisational culture than it is with personality. This suggests that interventions that measure engagement based solely on personality variables are conceptually flawed.
- The key factor in determining employee engagement was the degree of fit between employees' present view of their organisational culture and that which they desire long-term for the organisation. The bigger the disparity, the lower the level of employee engagement.
- Employee engagement appears to be an organisational specific phenomenon. One size fits all solutions appear to have no place in identifying its key drivers.
- Individual differences in age, position within the company and salary had only a minor association with employee engagement level.

## WHAT CAN COMPANIES DO TO DRIVE LEVELS OF EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT?

These findings suggest two practical steps that organisations can take in order to promote levels of employee engagement within their workforce:

- Set organisational culture objectives over the long term (around 5 years) and communicate these to employees. If the future vision of the company is in line with that held by staff, then employee engagement levels will rise significantly. Even where there is disparity, the act of identifying these differences allow for meaningful dialogue in finding ways of reducing the disparity.
- Give job applicants an accurate organisational preview before they join. At the recruitment stage there may be a certain amount of impression management on both sides, as companies seek to acquire the best talent and applicants seek to impress employers. Whilst this will always be the case to some degree, it is important to communicate accurately what the present organisational culture is and that which the company aspires to. Once this is out in the open, the employer can be more sure that the engaged employee they see at the interview stage is similarly engaged 6 months down the line.

With a proven track record in organisational assessment and creating integrated business solutions, Thompson Dunn are well placed to advise companies what they need to do in order to positively impact their levels of employees engagement. To discuss this further, please contact Lawrence Francis.



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