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Employee engagement, or 'passion for work', involves feeling positive about your job, as well as being prepared to go the extra mile to make sure you do your job to the best of your ability. Perhaps not surprisingly, high levels of engagement have been found to be associated with a whole range of beneficial outcomes, including high levels of performance. It has come to be seen as one of the most important ways of measuring how employees feel about their work today.

Engagement has three dimensions:

- **emotional engagement** – being very involved emotionally with one's work;
- **cognitive engagement** – focusing very hard while at work; and
- **physical engagement** – being willing to 'go the extra mile' for your employer.

In order to assess how well organisations are engaging with their employees the CIPD conducted research across the country across many different types of organisation.

What emerges from this survey of 2,000 workers of all levels and trades is that what turns them on, makes them more engaged and intending to stay working for their organisation is effective relationships and behaviours, rather than just their experience of HR practices.

Some organisations are good at this; others seem fractured not just in an 'us and them' sense but between groups and across occupational boundaries. The idea of organisations as communities, with different perceptions between older and younger workers, between men and women and among ethnic groupings (there is good evidence here from the survey), means that it's not just what managers do that's important. Relationships among fellow workers, for example, come out importantly as a factor explaining job satisfaction. There are big variances between people in reports of relationships with managers, in trusting senior management and in rating the quality of employee relations. These variances tend to be greater than those found in perceptions of the quality or utility of particular HR practices, even when we compare employee responses in the same firm. This points to big differences in such things as management styles and leadership.



Two critical messages stand out from the survey from the perspective of the link with performance and the quality of relationships. First, engagement is important and can't be taken for granted. It links clearly with employees in their willingness to stay working with their employer and their advocacy – a disposition to spread the word about what a good place the organisation is to work in and for and to do business with.

Where does engagement come from? The answer is the second key message from the survey. We find strong associations with employees having a voice – being able to express their opinion upwards to their manager and beyond. We also have it confirmed here that communication – knowing what's going on, what's planned and why – is crucial. Both of these rely on line managers, as does coaching and guidance and even the minimal discussion of training and development needs.

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There is a need, too, for trustworthy and visionary senior management: attributes the survey finds are far from universal. Other attributes commonly found associated with high levels of engagement are 'respect' and 'fairness'. The common denominator in all of these is the quality of management, especially, but not exclusively, the front-line manager who works on a daily basis with staff in the mundane production of goods and services. This is where the importance attached to relationships with fellow workers as a key factor linked to engagement comes in. Team leaders have to create well-functioning teams, and senior managers have to build a strong, positive climate of employee relations

This research has drawn the following main conclusions:

- three in ten employees are engaged with their work
- levels of engagement among the under-35s are significantly lower than those in older age groups
- engaged employees perform better than others, are more likely to recommend their organisation to others, take less sick leave, and are less likely to quit
- engaged employees also experience increased job satisfaction and more positive attitudes and emotions generally towards their work, suggesting that enhanced levels of engagement are of benefit to the individual as well as their employer.

The main drivers of employee engagement are:

- having opportunities to feed your views upwards
- feeling well informed about what is happening in the organisation
- thinking that your manager is committed to your organisation.

We also found that:

- women are more engaged with their work than men
- older employees are more engaged than younger employees.

The breadth of the research enabled us to conclude that demographic variables alone are not predictors of levels of engagement or performance. A positive working environment and sound management practice are the key to fostering high levels of engagement and performance for everyone. However, differences have emerged between groups of employees.

Gender:

- Women are more engaged with their work than men and more satisfied; they feel more positively about their senior management team and are more loyal.
- Women are more likely to act as organisational advocates than men.
- Women work shorter hours, are happier with

their work-life balance, and feel they get more support in this than do men.

- Women experience more bullying and harassment than men.
- Women report higher performance appraisal ratings than men.

Age

- Workers aged 55 and older are more engaged than younger employees and also take less sick leave.
- Employees aged under 35 are the least engaged.
- Workers under 25 have more trust and confidence in their senior management team than older workers.

Disability

- Employees with a disability tend to work a shorter week but tend to be less happy with their work-life balance.
- They experience more bullying and harassment than others and feel less supported if they have a problem.
- They are also more likely to say that they are not listened to, are less satisfied with their work, and are more stressed and pressured than others. They feel less control over their work and report being more anxious. They are also more critical of their organisation than others.
- They are less likely to have been rated good or excellent in their performance appraisal, and less likely than employees without a disability to remain in their job.
- Employees with a disability rate their own performance lower than those without a disability and also report higher instances of long periods of sick leave.

Managers

- Managers work longer hours and tend to take less holiday than other workers. They also feel less happy about their work-life balance but earn more than non-managers.
- Managers feel more positive about communication and involvement and feel they have more support and recognition and are listened to more than non-managers.
- More managers have had an appraisal during the past year than other employees, and are more likely to report they are treated fairly at work.
- However, they are less likely to believe senior managers have a vision.
- Managers find their work more important and more meaningful than non-managers.
- Overall, they are more satisfied with their work, but also report they are more stressed and anxious. They report more loyalty to their organisation than non-managers and are more likely to look forward to coming to work
- Managers are also significantly more engaged with their work than non-managers.
- Managers report higher performance appraisal ratings than non-managers and rate

their own performance more highly. They say they are less likely to leave their organisation than non-managers, and also are more hopeful of promotion.

Workers on flexible contracts

Those on flexible contracts tend to be more emotionally engaged, more satisfied with their work, more likely to speak positively about their organisation and less likely to quit than those not employed on flexible contracts. However, there are no differences in terms of reported performance. Flexible workers tend to feel that they get help from their employer in managing their work-life balance. However, they also have much more positive views about their immediate manager than those not on flexible contracts, and are more loyal to their organisation as well as more likely to act as organisational advocates.

Employees on flexible contracts are more likely to report that their work is important and meaningful to them than those not on flexible contracts. They feel they are treated more fairly and listened to more than other workers and they are also more likely to take part in discussions about their training and development needs. Flexible workers are more likely to stay with their employer and to rate their chances of promotion highly.

Given the clear association between engagement, job satisfaction, advocacy and performance, there is every incentive for managers to seek to drive up levels of engagement among the workforce. We recommend employers should consider the following:

- Allowing people the opportunity to feed their views and opinions upwards is the single most important driver of engagement.
- Keeping employees informed about what is going on in the organisation is critical.
- Employees need to see that managers are committed to the organisation in order to feel engaged.
- Having fair and just management processes for dealing with problems is important in driving up levels of performance.
- Different groups of employees are influenced by different combinations of factors, and managers need to consider carefully what is most important to their own staff, beyond the more general messages contained in this report.

For more information on this study please visit www.cipd.co.uk/subjects/emplreltns/general/_hwn/gdbrempt.htm You can also listen or download a podcast on this topic at www.cipd.co.uk/podcasts/_articles/article6.htm

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