

# Employee Engagement: A Review on Engagement Models

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**Abstract:** Engagement is “the psychological state and behavioural outcomes (say, stay, strive) that lead to better performance”.

This paper highlights some of the important definitions of employee engagement coined by researchers and firms and also explains the important models in relation to employee engagement. These kinds of studies help companies to tap many simple and inexpensive opportunities to create an engaged work-force. The relationship of employee engagement with two important topics like Leadership and Talent management has been explained as a part of the paper. This study on employee engagement would foster to develop new practice strategies not to correct a deficit, but to help individuals to improve their capacity in order to maximize their non-functioning.

## 1. Introduction

Organizations are now facing a profound change and there is a need to respond to the various emerging challenges being imposed by the dynamic business environment. It is a daunting task for organization to face multifaceted challenges than ever. Engaging workforce along with a clearly enunciated strategy is a real challenge for both local and transnational organizations. In today’s business world, committed and motivated employees are the fundamental key to achievement. Routing and managing employee competencies for achieving corporate success and permitting change is not only an essential requirement, but is also linked with satisfaction of the employee. Thus the necessity to integrate and align technology, systems, processes, culture and strategy with people’s interest to energize their talents and help them search their self-interest and make work more engaging is essential.

### Definitions of Employee Engagement

Kahn (1990) had defined it as “...harnessing of organization member’s selves to their work roles: in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, emotionally and mentally during role performances. Individual disengagement as the uncoupling of selves from work roles; in

disengagement, people withdraw and defend themselves physically, cognitively, or emotionally during role performances” (Kahn, p.694).

- Hay Group expresses engaged performance as “a result that is achieved by stimulating employees’ enthusiasm for their work and directing it toward organization success. This result can only be achieved when employers offer an implicit contract to their employees that elicit specific positive behaviours aligned with organization’s goals...”
- Schaufeli, Bakker and Salanova (2006) states that “work engagement is a motivational psychological state with three dimensions vigour, dedication and absorption.”
- Loehr & Schwartz (2003) had stated that “Engagement is not only simple job satisfaction and high retention rates. Fully engaged workers are those who are physically energized, emotionally connected, mentally focused, and feel aligned with the purpose of the agency.”
- Engagement as mentioned by Maskch (2001) is “A persistent, positive affective, motivational state of fulfilment in employees that is characterised by high levels of activation & pleasure”.
- Effortory International states that “Engagement is an intrinsic attitude that denotes an employee’s enthusiasm for his or her job. Commitment, on the other hand, denotes an employee’s enthusiasm for the company he or she works for.”
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- Blessing White Global has conducted a study in 2013 and suggested that ‘employee engagement is the alignment of the goals and aspirations of the organisation with that of individual employees’.

There is no generally accepted and a single definition for the term till date.

## 2. Engagement Models

The below mentioned models have been taken for understanding the basic concept of engagement and has helped in creating further interest in the topic which led to the outcome of this study.

### 2.1. Maslow's Needs Hierarchy and its relation with Employee Engagement

The earliest, ever green and most widespread topic of needs hierarchy given by Maslow will help a great way in engaging employees. Abraham Maslow, who generated Needs Hierarchy theory, was an American psychologist and argues that the psychological health is dependent on the fulfillment of the needs in an order. He has put forward a thought that in order to achieve personal growth and development, humans' basic needs must be met.

This theory will give a good kick start to the engagement programs. Because it is only when the needs of the individual are met will they be ready to hear or involve in what management says. Concentrating upon the employees needs gives a sign that they are being cared for and thereupon helps in increasing employee's loyalty and motivation levels which will further lead to engagement.

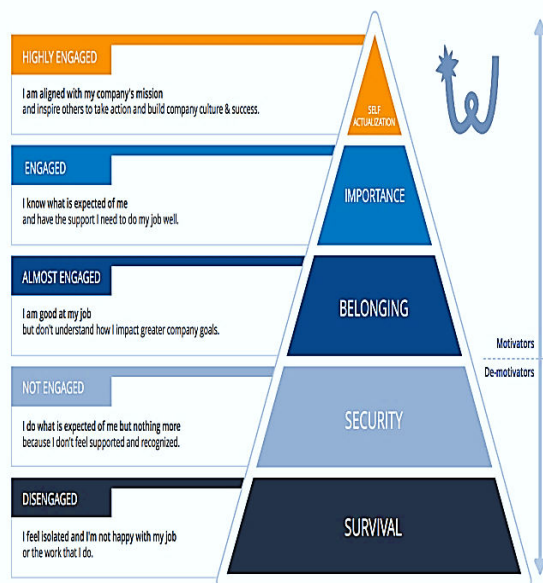


Figure 1. Maslow's Needs Hierarchy applied to EE

To explain the diagram in brief *survival* is the stage where employees require basic needs like job and financial independence. With the current job market conditions *safety* is the stage where employees want to be confident that their jobs are secure and are confident that they are doing their job properly. Even after having a suitable and secured job what any employee as a human being requires is a sense of *belonging* and 'esprit de corps'. They need to know

that they the part of bigger picture and therefore developing team spirit and team principles can go a great way long. Then next is the need of *importance*, which dovetails with the need of *belongingness*. Employees should feel that they are important in particular project and its achievement. For larger companies it is difficult is give importance and attention to each and every individual. The top most in the pyramid is the *self-actualization* need, which will be satisfied only when an individual achieves his ambitions and dreams. This need can be satisfied by giving growth opportunities, proper learning and development and leadership skills, which is like providing them with all the tools and making them self-actualize and remain within the company. Once this need is satisfied these employees will generate a ripple effect and inspire others to engage.

Due to the work pressure and other activities most of the employees gets hung up at the lower level of the pyramid and this is where the management can concentrate upon in order to draw the attention and hearts of the employees. This is a challenge to the management but is also a very vital step in engaging its employees. It is wrong on management's part to think that one idea will fit all and carry on with a blind plan or policy; instead it should be diverse offerings which will appeal to all the employees.

Every organizations goal is to create the stage of a team with highly engaged workforce who can achieve success, if not wonders to the organization. This can be done in the following manner:

Find out the engagement scores of your employees and the reasons both for engagement and disengagement.

Recognize the problems for *disengaged*. These are neither the people who can link with the goals of the organization nor the people they are working with. Therefore the focus of the management should be upon organizational structure, team building and deepening the connections with peers and other organizational members.

Next are the groups of *not engaged* employees. These people can be categorized as those who do just what is expected out of them and are not bothered to take an extra mile. For these kinds of people it is reward and recognition will help in emotionally connecting themselves with the work. Manager-employee relationship is of utmost importance for this category of employees.

Next in the hierarchy are the *almost engaged* group, whom if concentrated upon will give their best and goes an extra mile. But to get this they should be made to explain what their impact in achieving organization's goals is. This group should be given the autonomy to come up with innovative ideas. This can be called as empowering the employees by giving them a voice beyond their regular tasks.

The next is the *engaged* category who feel good about their job, community and company. It is not

just enough if they are engaged, they should also feel good about themselves which will make them work wonders which in turn will help the company. They should be provided with volunteering opportunities to help them find a great sense of purpose both at work and in life. Health and wellness programs are one more way motivate this group.

The highest in the hierarchy that every company wants to achieve is the *highly engaged* set of employees whose minds are deeply rooted in the company and helps in fostering the culture of the organization and they are incredibly beneficial. These should be provided with career growth opportunities and empowering programs like share ideas, run events etc. A highly engaged employee takes on the ownership and plays a leadership role. Their enthusiasm and attitude will further help in shaping the workforce that the company requires.

### 2.2. Gallup's Engagement Hierarchy

Gallup has conducted many studies on engagement and has given many suggestions. But the most common outcome of all the studies is learning and development, career opportunities and sense of belongingness are the major engagement drivers. They say that every employer should concentrate upon the strengths of employees and construct developmental plans basing upon them. For their strengths to be displayed employees must be satisfied with the factors shown in the figure below.

The below hierarchy model is the same as Maslow's hierarchy. To the left are the questions that Gallup had developed for their global studies. What matters to employees is not just receiving but what are they giving back to the organization or to the achievement of organizational goals matters a lot. When employees feel that their work is of no use and has no impact they may feel low and leave the job. Therefore it is unto the leaders to decide what they do with their employees and what they make them feel.

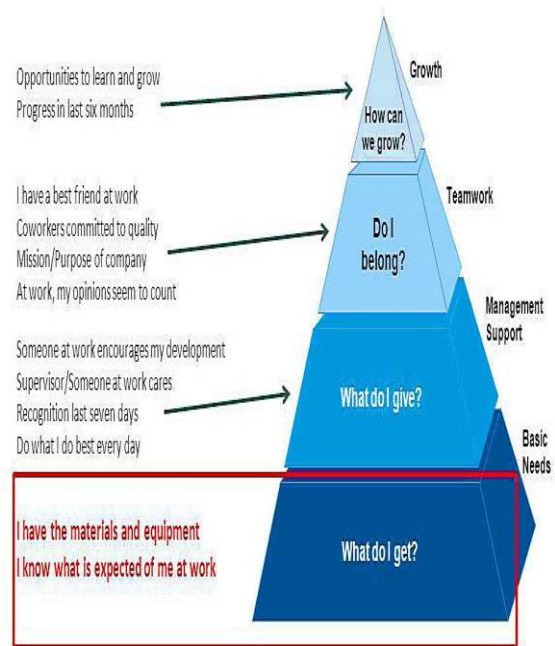


Figure 2. Gallup's Engagement Hierarchy

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Gallup had found that work units that satisfy these conditions or needs are having higher engagement levels than the one's which fail to meet them.

### 2.3. Aon Hewitt's Model of Engagement

Aon Hewitt is a global consultancy or an advisory firm who helps clients in human resources related issues. They help organizations to solve the complicated problems relating to talent, benefits and helps in improving their performance. They provide wide range of services like designing strategies related to human capital issues like talent management, compensation and retirement plans, investment management and health care.

After conducting many studies globally they have come up the following model which mentions the foremost engagement drivers. As shown in the diagram below they are self-explanatory.

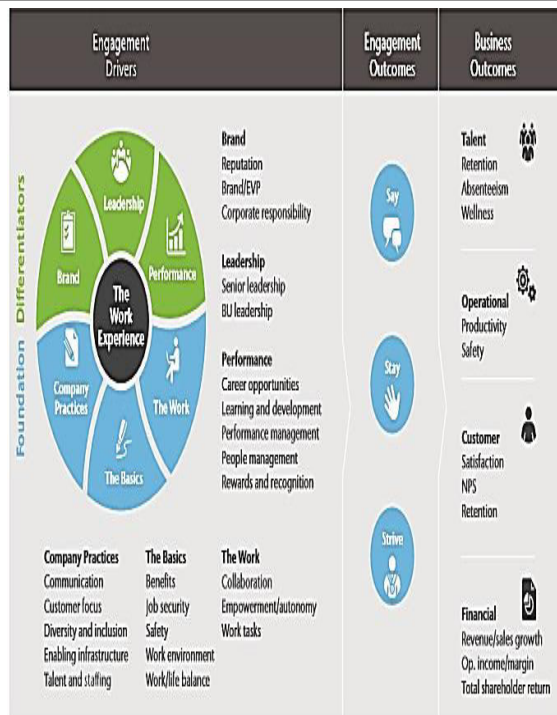


Figure 3. Aon Hewitt's Engagement Model

One's the drivers are set right and employees connect themselves with the organization they get engaged and exhibit the individual outcomes as mentioned as Say, Stay and Strive.

Say means employees speak well about the organization and gets the prospective employees through their words. Stay means interest and willingness to work with the organization and understands its goals and finds meaning. Strive is the situation wherein employees take an extra effort to reach both individual and organizational goals. Due to these behaviours of employees the business will also be benefited as shown in the last column and is explained below:

- Increased wellness, retention and talent thereby reduce the absenteeism.
- Therefore the safety and operational productivity increases.
- If internal customer is cared by the company then the external customers will be taken care by them. This results in retention of prospective customers, their satisfaction, and thereby, the net profits.
- As a result of these the revenues, operational income and shareholders returns increases.

Therefore it can be concluded that by providing all the factors that employees need to be engaged and by the collaboration of management and employees business outcomes will be much better than the one's without these.

## 2.4. Towers Watson Engagement Model

Towers Watson research has shown that “there are three measurable elements essential to sustainable engagement as shown in the capital ‘E’ in the diagram: • Traditional engagement – employees’ willingness to expend discretionary effort on their job; • Enablement – having the tools, resources and support (typically through direct-line supervisors) to do their job effectively; • Energy – having a work environment that actively supports physical, emotional and interpersonal well-being” (Towers Watson, 2014).

The main part of the model is the Feel, Think, Act part of it. Feel is the emotional part where employees feel a bond with the organization and have affective attachment with it and this will lead to becoming engaged. Think is the rational part where employee's uses their knowledge to outperform and understands the mission, goals and objectives of the organization and fits with it and gets enabled. Act is the motivational part wherein employees are motivated to put discretionary effort to go beyond their role for the benefit of organization and gets energized.

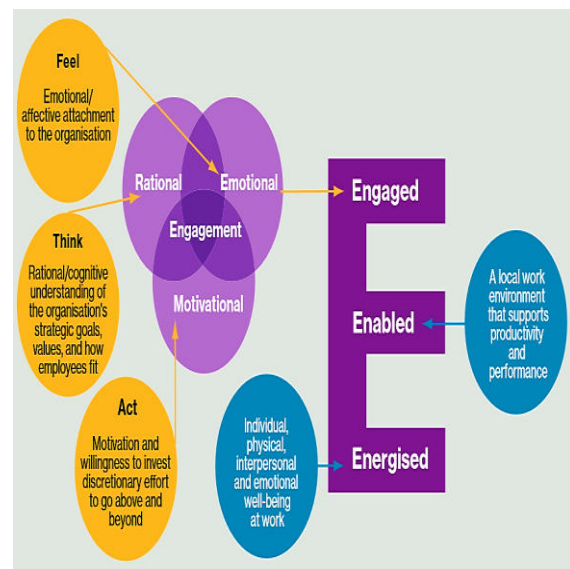


Figure 4. Tower's Watsons – 3E's of engagement

This is a simple way of explaining engagement but there is a lot to be done in order to achieve what is mentioned.

## 2.5. Leadership and Engagement

Towers Watson global study in 2014 has found leadership as a very important engagement driver and has given the following model. The model conveys that if the leaders are effective in their work and walk the talk then the employees will be

attracted and engaged. Different types of leadership theories can be discussed in this regard.

It is said that ‘a good leader seeks for employee’s happiness whereas a great leader values for employee engagement along with their happiness.’ Though it is a myth that employees’ will be satisfied with the benefits, perks and attractive work environment but the fact is, above all these employees’ engagement levels stems from the organizational leadership. According to the report published by Deloitte’s Human Capital in 2015, leadership is on the top of concern list and is followed by work culture. And as per the study conducting by Gallup in 2015, when employees are led by highly committed and engaged leadership then it leads to further increase in the engagement levels of the followers.

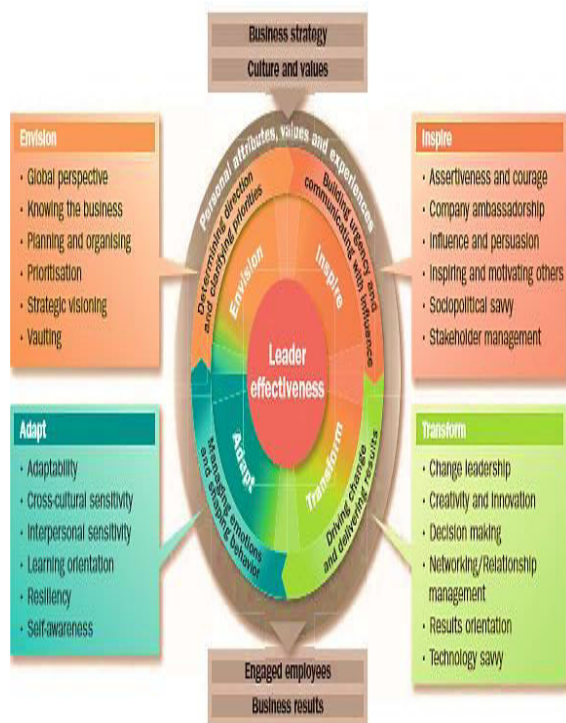


Figure 5. Towers Watson’s leadership effectiveness model

‘When leaders lack clarity, then followers lack commitment’, and this will result in low engagement. Leaders set the tone for engagement in the workplace. Following are the important leadership behaviours to boost engagement levels:

- **Set a goal for employees to reach:**

Engagement begins with having clear goals to work for and achieve. Goal setting drives employees to work hard and get anything done through done. If employee is not having clarity then he not only gets disengaged but also feels stressed and loses confidence. Although it should be kept in mind that setting job goal is not a single-person task and

requires lots of brain storming and joint effort between leaders and the followers. This helps in setting the SMART goals that are in align with the company’s goals. Heather Stockton, human capital leader at Deloitte, says that “Leadership and culture work in tandem. The decisions, behaviour and attitudes of leaders form an organization’s culture. When an organization’s values are in align with business goals, its culture inclines to drive better employee engagement leading to customer satisfaction and increased financial performance.”

- **Symbolize the company vision:**

Company’s vision statement is not just collection of some flashy words together. It should motivate, inspire and lead employees towards a common goal. It should summarize where the company wants to go – now and in distant future, and how is it planning to get there.

Instead of just explaining the vision statement if the leaders embodies the vision, it will go a long way in engaging employees. Leading by example managers and leaders should constantly remind their followers of what the company is intended to achieve and how.

- **Be involved in company’s culture:**

A leader in order to create an impact and inspire his followers should set aside some time and get involved in the various activities of the company. Leaders playing an active role will not only engage employees but will also create an enthusiastic work environment. An organization that acts together will stay together. Taking time to connect with people is the best key to engage them. Employees will like, appreciate and be dedicated to those leaders who care about them and knows them inside and outside the workplace.

- **Be transparent to inspire:**

Employees should be clear about what is happening within the organization to be able to contribute. This will motivate them to achieve their personal goals as well as allows them to contribute to the organizational goals. Updating employees relating to both informal and formal matters, gathering with employees at regular intervals will help in fostering transparency. This will also create a feeling of ownership and this where real engagement begins from.

- **Fake things till you make it:**

Any business has its own ups and downs. For a leader it’s important to keep up employees’ morale even in times of downturn. Sometimes it is essential to fake with employees so that their spirits will not go down. Since leaders are always approached for guidance during difficult times, it is very important for a leader to make everyone stay optimistic and

positive even though the leader himself doesn't feel so.

Giving and asking for help when required are the better ways to attract and engage followers.

## 2.6. Talent management and employee engagement

Employee engagement and talent management are the buzz words of the current corporate world, taking human asset management to a more integrated level. Having talented performers will increase customer satisfaction, marketing innovation, product development and revenues. It also contributes to cost reductions. Process redesign, employee retention and quality improvement are the results of generating talented workforce.

Talent management involves selecting the right people for the job, improving their talents and increasing their enthusiasm and commitment, and supporting them through times of change. Whereas employee engagement is the investment made by the employee in the organization in the form of energy, time, knowledge, skills and creativity as per the guidelines set by the organization. In simple terms talent management procures and provides higher levels of knowledge and skill; engagement upsurges the value application of knowledge and skills. Talent management helps in generating revenues and reducing expenses whereas engagement supports them in doing that more and in a better manner.

Therefore now businesses are giving more attention to both employee engagement and talent management. And this needs to be well-directed and well-developed. Succeeding are the links between engagement and talent management:

- *Improved On-boarding link:*

Introducing talented personnel to the business' engagement culture is the main outcome of an on-boarding program. It demonstrates the engagement as the business lifestyle and engages right from the start.

- *Link with Competitive Advantage:*

In current scenario there is a fierce competition for talent since it is a leading competitive advantage for any company. Recruitment, development and talent retention are the major tools that build competitive advantage. Employee engagement complements to retaining and development of talent and builds the value to the company.

- *Link with Performance Improvement:*

Talent gets attracted to the company's brand and products and engages more as its operations, assignments and appreciations grows. The commitment to quality increases as the appreciation increases. A talented employee's performance

increases when s/he is provided with an opportunity to do the work as they feel is valuable and appropriate.

- *Link with Customer Satisfaction:*

Naturally any customer will opt for quality products and services and employee engagement turns up that quality. Successful recruitment of talent is followed by increased engagement strategies which will enhance the quality of communication and commitment of employees towards the services they provide to customers. And these are the important characteristics that satisfy customers.

- *Link with Increased Retention and Reduced Turnover:*

After hiring talented personnel it is highly important to put in intense effort to engage them. Employee engagement is a vital element of the talent management. The more an employee is permitted and encouraged to engage and involve in his job, group and organization the more they value the company. If managers and employees engage themselves in continuous communication the more trust develops. Talent stays with the company that offers them better career opportunities.

Both talent management and employee engagement are relational. Though both the terms are related they are certainly not the same.

*"You must capture the heart of a supremely able man before his brain can do its best."*

— Andrew Carnegie

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