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Employee Engagement: Restoring Viability to a Corporate Cliché

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CLAREMONT McKENNA COLLEGE

**EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT:
RESTORING VIABILITY TO A CORPORATE CLICHÉ**

SUBMITTED TO
PROFESSOR JAY A. CONGER
AND
DEAN NICHOLAS WARNER
BY
MADELINE GRACE CRAWFORD

FOR
SENIOR THESIS
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Author Note

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ABSTRACT

Employee engagement has taken over the corporate world. Whether it is the media, consulting firms, business leaders or human resources, everyone is talking about it. Despite the buzz in the corporate world and millions of dollars pumped into the industry, employee engagement has remained relatively unchanged and our comprehension of it is hazy. Examining the concept of employee engagement from conceptualization to present day helps provide a solid understanding of its foundation and where major evolutionary failings occurred. Prompted by Gallup's takeover of the concept – from packaging, selling, measuring and intervening – the essence of employee engagement has been lost in overdrive and is now focused on statistics rather than people. The purpose of this paper is to identify the major flaws in the current state of employee engagement using its past as a basis of restoring viability to the concept.

Employee Engagement: Restoring Viability to a Corporate Cliché

In recent decades, the evolving concept of “employee engagement” has gained traction in the business world. Leaders from all industries are preaching the importance of employee engagement in the workplace. Jack Welch, former CEO of GE, stressed this mindset stating: “There are only three measurements that tell you nearly everything you need to know about your organization’s overall performance: employee engagement, customer satisfaction, and cash flow” (Haydon, 2014). The concept has quite rapidly transformed from being virtually undefined in 1989 to the most prominent corporate cliché of our time. Deloitte Global Human Capital Trends (2014) found that 79% of organizations rated retention and engagement as “urgent” or “important.” It is clear employers are infatuated with the idea of measuring and improving their own employees’ engagement, but do they truly understand the essence of the concept or do they crave “engagement” simply to stay on trend?

The term “employee engagement” was first defined in 1990 by William Kahn as, “the harnessing of organizational members’ selves to their work roles [by which they] employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances” (Kahn, 1990, p. 694). Kahn’s original definition emphasized the importance of fostering employees’ engagement in their work roles by allowing them to bring their personal skills and interests to the job. In comparison, modern definitions of employee engagement are much more far-reaching in order to include as many engagement factors as possible, hence the lack of an agreed-upon definition.

Though Kahn was the first to define employee engagement, it was not until a decade later that the concept gained a following thanks to Gallup’s *First, Break All the*

Rules (1999). Gallup capitalized on the chaotic, desperate state of the workplace by packaging and selling a convenient employee engagement package complete with extensive marketing, persuasive statistics and a one-of-a-kind employee engagement measurement tool. Ever since Gallup's resurrection of employee engagement, employers around the world are investing millions in hopes of being one of the lucky organizations that can call their employees "engaged."

Led by Gallup, consulting firms were no doubt successful at increasing the recognition and relevance of the concept, but they also contributed to its rushed evolution. Despite the inflated interest and buzz in the corporate world, our comprehension of the drivers and outcomes of engagement remains relatively limited and, further, what we think we know about engagement is likely inaccurate due to the manipulation of weak data. Consulting firms account for the majority of the existing data, but, unfortunately, the bulk of their employee engagement research is correlational. This means the vast majority of existing data is solely descriptive, which is alarming considering Gallup is marketing the data as if there is a causal relationship between employee engagement and performance. This lack of academic backing highlights the major methodological blockade that is preventing both the advancement of our understanding of the concept and the enhancement of employee engagement levels in the workplace.

Millions of dollars have been spent in hopes of improving organizations' engagement scores, but for what? Engagement scores across the workforce remain relatively unchanged despite all of the marketing, measuring and hype that have been invested in the concept. The deficiency of results combined with the lack of

understanding of what engagement is illustrates the ambiguous state of employee engagement. It is time to critically evaluate the evolution of the concept, identify the flaws and establish rehabilitation strategies in efforts to restore viability to employee engagement.

Chapter I: Constructed & Evolved

Conceptual Evolution

The modern interpretation of employee engagement is the culmination of theories, concepts, research and definitions that have built upon each other over time, as illustrated in Table 2. The roots of employee engagement are seen in the human relations school of management. The human relations approach was the third strand of development in modern management coming after scientific management and financial control (“The Human Relations Approach,” 2014). The theoretical beginnings of an ethical approach to management are seen post-World War I in the works of UK’s Charles S. Myers and B. S. Rowntree. As the director of the National Institute of Psychology, Myers promoted studies of employee problems with an emphasis on fatigue in effort to resolve the many existing work issues (“The Human Relations Approach,” 2014). In his work titled *Mind and work, the psychological factors in industry and commerce*, Myers argued that “of the four main determinants of industrial and commercial efficiency – the mechanical, the physiological, the psychological, and the social and economic – the psychological is by far the most important and fundamental” (Myers, 1920, p. 5). His status as the director of the National Institute of Psychology and strength of argument in his various works prompted the beginning of a professional body of research concerning the “mind in work.” During the same period, B. S. Rowntree wrote *The Human Factor in Business*, in which he argued for five undisputable conditions, which must be secured for workers – a national minimum wage, fair work hours including breaks and holidays, greater economic security and good working conditions (Rowntree, 1921, p. 7). Rowntree briefly mentions importance of engagement of employees in his work saying, “his (the

employment manager) duties begin with the engagement of the workers” (Rowntree, 1921, p. 47). The importance of engagement is stressed both at the start of a workers career – “The interview on engagement is a valuable means of giving the new worker, at the very beginning, the right kind of personal environment, and the right outlook” (Rowntree, 1921, p. 48) – and if an employee is transferred to a different department of the organization. Rowntree’s insights marked the theoretical beginning of the human relations approach but highlight how far psychology had to go – he stressed the importance of engaging employees, but only at critical shifts in the individual’s career. In addition, he mentions the role people have to play in engaging the employee, but only through human resources professionals, not the manager himself.

Though Myers’ and Rowntree’s work showcased the theoretical beginnings of the human relations approach, the human relations school of management that has remained to this day was kick-started by Elton Mayo’s Hawthorne Studies. These influential studies were conducted from 1927 to 1932 at the Western Electric Hawthorne Works in Chicago, Illinois (“The Human Relations Movement,” 2012). The impetus for Mayo’s research was a routine study of the effect of lighting on productivity from 1924 to 1927 (“The Human Relations Movement,” 2012). No correlation between the two variables was found which prompted further research as to what variables actually do affect worker productivity (“The Human Relations Movement,” 2012). The longest running of all of the Mayo’s Hawthorne experiments concerned the output a group of six female assembly workers who were picked out from the rest of the Western Electric workforce solely for the experiment’s purpose (“The Human Relations Movement,” 2012). Two major findings came about from this study: the experimenter effect and the social effect (“The

Human Relations Movement,” 2012). In regards to the experimenter effect, when the workers realized the management was paying extra attention to their work, their morale was boosted and their output was positively affected. This finding was coined the Hawthorne Effect – “the stimulation to output or accomplishment that results from the mere fact of being under observation” (Merriam-Webster). Similarly, the social effect had a positive influence on worker productivity (“The Human Relations Movement,” 2012). The workers who were picked out from the masses as the chosen subjects developed a special bond; the special attention increased the productivity of those in the in-group due to their common purpose. Mayo reasoned that “the six individuals became a team and the team gave itself wholeheartedly and spontaneously to co-operation in an experiment” and concluded that mental attitudes, proper supervision and informal social relationships experienced in a group were critical for productivity and job satisfaction (Mayo, 1945, p. 64). These findings were revolutionary in the 1930s – no longer was it the dominant school of thought to view employees as a single cog in the machine. The solution was clear: if employers wished to increase worker productivity and output, they must switch their focus from the mechanical to the personal.

In 1943, Abraham Maslow’s article *A Theory of Human Motivation* was published, which resulted in his theory of human motivation and the beginning of humanistic psychology. Before Maslow, a valid theory of human motivation did not exist that explained the lack of legitimate motivational data (Maslow, 1943). Maslow summarized his findings saying, “There are at least five sets of goals, which we may call basic needs. These are briefly physiological, safety, love, ‘esteem, and self-actualization. In addition, we are motivated by the desire to achieve or maintain the various conditions

upon which these basic satisfactions rest and by certain more intellectual desires” (Maslow, 1943, p. 394). Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs provided a sound framework to consolidate previously existing research. For example, in respect to Mayo’s assembly workers, which demonstrated a situation where social affiliation was the dominant need being met, based on Maslow’s hierarchy, if Mayo were to continue his study for a year or two more he would observe actions that would suggest a desire to be more than just a member of the group, the women’s needs would move onto the next level – self-esteem and recognition from others. Not only did Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs provide a sound framework to rationalize and merge previously existing research, but it also created the foundation for the future research of motivation in the workplace, particularly concerning self-actualization which served as the beginnings of empowerment, engagement and strengths-based development – “Even if all [one’s basic] needs are satisfied, we may still often (if not always) expect that a new discontent and restlessness will soon develop, unless the individual is doing what he is fitted for. A musician must make music, an artist must paint, a poet must write, if he is to be ultimately happy. What a man *can* be, he *must* be” (Maslow, 1943, p. 392).

A practical application of Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs emerged in 1960 with Douglas McGregor’s Theory X and Theory Y. McGregor outlined these two fundamental approaches of managing people in his book titled *The Human Side of Enterprise*. Main assumptions of Theory X, also known as authoritarian style management, are 1) the average human being has an inherent dislike for work and will avoid it if he can 2) because of their dislike for work, most people must be controlled and threatened before they will work hard enough and 3) the average human prefers to be directed, dislikes

responsibility and desires security above everything (McGregor, 1960). Based on these assumptions, Theory X aligns with the first two levels of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs – physiological and safety – known as the lower-order needs. On the other hand, the assumptions of Theory Y or participative style management are 1) if a job is satisfying, then the result will be commitment to the organization 2) man will direct himself if he is committed to the aims of the organization and 3) the average man learns not to only to accept, but to seek responsibility (McGregor, 1960). These assumptions align with the later three levels of Maslow's hierarchy – social, esteem and self-actualization – known as the higher-order needs. McGregor notes that management can use either theory to motivate employees, but Theory Y will produce better results in comparison to Theory X (McGregor, 1960). McGregor's Theory X and Y align with Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs in that they both focus on human behavior and motivation as the main priority in maximizing output in the workplace.

In the 1960s, David McClelland proposed the Acquired Needs Theory, which further built upon Maslow's original theory of needs in respect to motivation in a managerial context. According to McClelland, all humans have three motivators – achievement, affiliation and power (McClelland, 1961). Based on our life experiences, one of the three motivators acts as the primary, or dominant, motivating driver of the self (McClelland, 1961). Those who are achievement-dominant have a strong need to set and accomplish challenging goals (McClelland, 1961). Affiliation motivated individuals want to be a part of a group, want to be liked by others and favor collaboration above all else (McClelland, 1961). A strong power motivator indicates the desire to compete and win, control and influence others and, finally, receive recognition and status for their

accomplishments (McClelland, 1961). Those who are characterized by a dominant power motivator fall into one of two categories: personal and institutional (McClelland, 1961). Personal power suggests a desire to control others, while people with strong institutional power like to control and organize teams. In respect to the practical application of McClelland's theory, each person is motivated by one of the three needs and if managers are able to identify which need drives their employee, they will be able to better tailor their management strategies and training programs. McClelland soon began to focus on power motivation and, in 1975, he wrote a book titled *Power: The Inner Experience*. McClelland's interest in power motivation was initially sparked in 1950 by Joseph Veroff's attempt to develop a valid measure of power motivation, but it was David Winter's book, *The Power Motive* (1973), that stimulated McClelland to dive more fully into the subject (McClelland, 1975). In his book concerning the experience of power, the accumulation of power and the expression of power McClelland included a small section titled "Helping Followers Feel Powerful." McClelland laid out three main ways to increase a follower's feelings of power: present appropriate, desirable goals, provide the means of achieving these specified goals and express faith in the follower's ability to act as initiator and solve his/her own problems (McClelland, 1975). These actions highlight "the ultimate paradox of social leadership and social power: to be an effective leader, one must turn all of his so-called followers into leaders" (McClelland, 1975, p. 262).

Building upon McClelland's concept of developing followers into leaders, Kanter's study of industrial organization – *Men and Women of the Corporation* – occurred during a time when women were considered 'tokens' because their severe lack in numbers (Kanter, 1977). Kanter found that women at the Industrial Supply

Corporation struggled at advancement because of their lack of access to “power tools” (Kanter, 1977). Kanter later identified these “power tools” as information (data, technical knowledge, political intelligence, expertise), resources (funds, materials, staff, time) and support (endorsement, backing, approval, legitimacy) (Kanter, 1983). Kanter’s findings served as the foundation for the social-structural perspective of empowerment research that stressed the importance of providing lower-level employees, including women at Industrial Supply Corporation, with access to these “power tools” in order to boost empowerment. Kanter’s emphasis on meeting the employee’s basic needs ties back to Rowntree’s five undisputable conditions that must be met first in order for the employee to flourish (Rowntree, 1921).

It was quickly discovered that empowerment was not solely reliant on the access of information, resources and support. Even if an employee had access to all of Kanter’s “power tools,” if they lacked a sense of self-efficacy, there would be little to no visible effect on the employee’s performance, because “efficacy expectations determine how much effort people will expend and how long they will persist in the face of obstacles and aversive experiences” (Bandura, 1977, p. 194). This limitation prompted a new wave of empowerment research – the psychological perspective. Bandura’s (1977, 1986) studies on self-efficacy were the theoretical basis for the change in direction for the study of empowerment in the workplace. According to Bandura, the sources which inform self-knowledge about one’s efficacy include, “performance attainments; vicarious experiences of observing the performances of others, verbal persuasion and allied types of social influences that one possesses certain capabilities; and physiological states from which people partly judge their capabilities, strength, and vulnerability to dysfunction”

(Bandura, 1986, p. 399). Bandura's (1986) ideas regarding sources of self-efficacy inspired Conger and Kanungo to include self-efficacy in their definition of empowerment and develop a five-stage empowerment model that both conceptualized empowerment in motivational terms and utilized these sources. Conger and Kanungo (1988) defined empowerment as "a process of enhancing feelings of self-efficacy among organizational members through the identification [and removal] of conditions fostering powerlessness" (Conger and Kanungo, 1988, p. 484). Conger and Kanungo (1988) switched empowerment researchers' focus to the psychological states that are necessary for individuals to feel a sense of control rather than focusing on managerial practices. Not only did Conger and Kanungo redirect empowerment research from extrinsic to intrinsic factors, but also provided a model explaining how exactly the empowerment process works.

Building upon Conger and Kanungo's findings, Thomas and Velthouse (1990) noted the specific type of motivation that empowerment is related to – intrinsic task motivation which is defined as "those generic conditions by an individual, pertaining directly to the task, that produce motivation and satisfaction" (Thomas & Velthouse, 1990, p.668). Thomas and Velthouse found four task assessments (impact, competence, meaningfulness, choice) that, if changed, will affect motivation in workers (Thomas & Velthouse, 1990). The importance of self-efficacy stressed in Conger and Kanungo's paper is presented in the competence variable – "Competence refers to self-efficacy specific to one's work, or a belief in one's capability to perform work activities with skill" (Spreitzer, 2008, p. 57). Later on, Thomas and Velthouse's four task assessments were confirmed to be not only satisfactory, but also compulsory – "the experience of

empowerment is manifested in all four dimensions – if any one dimension is missing, then the experience of empowerment will be limited” (Spreitzer, 2008, p. 57). In other words, employees’ empowerment can only be maximized when all four task assessments are satisfied. In summary, while the psychological perspective of empowerment is limited because of its focus on the individual, the social-structural perspective is lacking as well because it is centered on the organization. A complete understanding of employee empowerment requires the integration of both the social-structural and psychological perspectives.

Around the same time Thomas and Velthouse were defining the cognitive elements of empowerment, Kahn (1990) was defining a similar, yet separate concept – employee engagement.

William Kahn’s study titled *Psychological Conditions of Personal Engagement and Disengagement at Work* (1990) was the impetus for the surge in curiosity regarding employee engagement. Before Kahn’s study, researchers focused on “person-role relationships,” meaning the general, supposedly permanent, state of the employee. Kahn saw a hole in the existing research, specifically, he saw the absence of a “theoretical framework explaining how psychological experiences of work and work contexts shape the processes of people presenting and absenting their selves during task performances.” Kahn began by defining personal engagement as “the harnessing of organizational members’ selves to their work roles [by which they] employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances.” . . . Kahn also included a definition for personal

disengagement – “the uncoupling of selves from work roles [where people] withdraw and defend themselves physically, cognitively, or emotionally during role performances.” Based upon “discrete moments of role performances that represent microcosms of the larger complexity,” Kahn developed a conceptual model that identified three key conditions that explain the variance in people’s engagement at work – meaningfulness, safety and availability. May et al. (2004) found that, out of these three conditions, meaningfulness displayed the strongest relation to personal engagement. Kahn’s qualitative study played an important role amplifying interest in the concept of engagement within the field of psychology and researchers began exploring different lines of work-related engagement research in order to pin down a definition of the ambiguous concept (See Appendix, p. 74-75).

It was not until the late 1990s and the early 2000s that scholars began to build upon Kahn’s work. Two main drivers served as impetus for reopening the research on employee engagement: the war for talent and the 2001 recession. The war for talent, a term coined by Steven Hankin of McKinsey & Company in 1997, was a result of the dot-com bubble and subsequent exodus of smart, young employees from large companies to small startups. The increased competition for talent led to retention and engagement becoming the utmost priorities for employers, but no one knew exactly how to counteract such a fundamental change in the workforce. In 2001, McKinsey & Company consultants Michaels, Handfield-Jones and Axelrod expanded on Hankin’s groundbreaking study with *The War for Talent*, a book outlining five years of research “including surveys of 13,000 executives at more than 120 companies and case studies of 27 leading companies”

(Michaels, Handfield-Jones & Axelrod, 2001). Based on their findings, the authors proposed a new way of talent management highlighting a “talent mindset – a deep conviction shared by leaders throughout the company that competitive advantage comes from having better talent at all levels” (Michaels, Handfield-Jones & Axelrod, 2001). The authors were arguing for a refocus on human capital. The declaration of the national recession in 2001 also amplified employers’ interest in how to get the most out of their dwindling employee population. Though the early-2000 recession was “barely a recession at all,” in retrospect, it marked the end of a ten-year expansion making it a harsh wakeup call for employers who were coasting through the prosperous ‘90s (“What Kind of Recession was 2001?,” 2009). The combination of necessary layoffs and top talent bolting to startups resulted in employers desperately searching for an answer – how were they supposed to increase employee productivity and retention in a time of crisis?

Two groups, burnout researchers and consulting firms, revived Kahn’s research in search of the answer to employer’s pressing questions (Welbourne & Schlachter, 2014). In respect to academic research, Leiter and Maslach headed the charge. Leiter and Maslach (1998) used Kahn (1990) as a basis for their definition: “[employee engagement is] an energetic state of involvement with personally fulfilling activities that enhance one’s sense of professional efficacy.” Leiter and Maslach (1998) had some academic followers and received some publicity for their work because burnout was a hot topic in the early 2000s due to the recession. Though they experienced a hint of success, it quickly became evident the other side of the research spectrum, epitomized by Gallup, was gaining unparalleled momentum.

Famous for its public opinion polls, Gallup has been conducting research about the attitudes and behaviors of people around the globe for more than 80 years (“George Gallup”, 2014). Beginning as an exclusively politically-focused organization, Dr. George H. Gallup made it a point to continually broaden the scope of Gallup, Inc.’s research, stressing that “there were billions of ways to live a life and that each one should be studied” (“George Gallup”, 2014). Gallup’s research eventually expanded to surveying the workplace, which led to the topic of employee engagement. First introduced by Marcus Buckingham’s research published in Gallup’s *First, Break All the Rules* (1999), the employee engagement movement began. Consulting firms such as Corporate Leadership Council, Towers Watson, Mercer and Corporate Executive Board quickly followed in Gallup’s footsteps. These firms were attempting to answer the same question as burnout researchers and other academics, but with a different goal in mind – profits. Consulting firms, first and foremost, want to make a profit, both for themselves and their customer. Because of this, their research was presented in a glamorous way to hook the organization rather than a scientific way focused on the individual. In 2004, the Corporate Leadership Council defined employee engagement as “the extent to which employees commit to something or someone in their organization, how hard they work, and how long they stay as a result of that commitment” (Corporate Leadership Council, 2007, p. 3). Mercer defined employee engagement as “a psychological state in which employees feel a vested interest in the company’s success and are both willing and motivated to perform to levels that exceed the stated job requirements” (Mercer, 2007, p.1). Clearly, consulting firms were not sticking with the premise of Kahn’s original definition. Organization-centric phrases like “commitment

to their organization” and “vested interest in the company’s success” began to replace individual-centric phrases such as “state of fulfillment” and “ability to express themselves.” The trajectory of the definition of employee engagement is changing ever so slightly, but this slight reworking had a major effect on the foundation and purpose of employee engagement as a whole. As Welbourne and Schlachter note: “the nuance is important because employers were not asking employees to bring more of themselves and their interests to work; they were motivating employees to put more of themselves into the company” (Welbourne & Schlachter, 2014, p.10).

Development of the Definition

In order to understand the implications of this nuance, one must critically evaluate the development of its definition as illustrated in Table 1 (Welbourne & Schlachter, 2014). Kahn’s original conceptualization defined as, “The harnessing of organizational members’ selves to their work roles; in engagement people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances” will be used as the basis of comparison (Kahn, 1990, p.694).

The carryover from the original conceptualization throughout its evolution is intriguing in that modern definitions have incorporated more elements of Kahn’s original definition than those immediately following its conception. The three definitions following Kahn’s on Table 1 primarily stress one of the three degrees of the self noted in the original – emotion. Phrases such as “energetic state” (Leiter & Maslach, 1998), “positive affective-motivational state” (Maslach, Schaufeli & Leiter, 2001), “pleasure” (Maslach, Schaufeli & Leiter, 2001), “satisfaction...as well as enthusiasm” (Harter, Schmidt & Hayes, 2002) are the focus of these definitions. It appears as though

researchers in the late 1990s and early 2000s were chiefly concerned with the feelings of the employee, which is a valid reaction considering the state of the American workplace at that time. Employers wanted to figure out how to avoid losing their top talent in response to recession-induced pay cuts or a career at one of the many new startups. This was a simplistic response – though happy employees are ones that tend to stay with companies, positive emotion is not the only factor keeping employees engaged. Cognitive is briefly alluded to – “one’s sense of personal efficacy” (Leiter & Maslach, 1998) and “individual’s involvement” (Harter, Schmidt & Hayes, 2002) – but not as concretely or outright as emotion in these definitions. The next two studies listed took the opposite approach in defining employee engagement, completely excluding emotion, but capitalizing on the physical and cognitive aspects. Towers Watson (2003) proposed measuring employee engagement based upon the “discretionary effort” they exhibit, while Corporate Leadership Council (2004) based engagement upon “how hard they work and how long they stay as a result of [their] commitment.” It is clear that both sets of definitions were missing a crucial element. It was not until 2006 that researchers reconnected to all three of Kahn’s suggested degrees of the self. The definition posed by Saks (2006) is almost an exact replica of Kahn (1990), stressing behavioral (physical), cognitive and emotional in respect to the “individual role performance.” Gibbons (2006) and Towers Watson (2009) follow a similar composition to Saks (2006) including all three degrees of the self. The definition proposed by Towers Watson (2009) differs slightly from the other two in that it does not use the exact same terminology as Kahn (1990). For example, instead of physical, Towers Watson (2009) uses motivational as an umbrella term that covers “how willing they are to invest discretionary effort to perform

their roles well.” In general, throughout the evolution, the definition of employee engagement stayed fairly connected with its roots. Though the presence of the physical, cognitive and emotional elements varied definition to definition, they persisted throughout the first couple decades of the concept’s existence.

Moving onto the new dimensions appended throughout the years, there have been three fundamental additions to the definition of employee engagement: the organization itself, relationships and organizational goals and values. Before the addition of these factors, the original definition was hyper focused on individuals and their specific job role. This individual-focus persisted until the mid-2000s when the definitions began to acknowledge that the individual employee is a part of something bigger – the organization. Corporate Leadership Council (2004) was the first definition that included the word “organization,” but it is important to note that the organization solely served as the scene. The next addition to the definition, relationships, was also first mentioned by Corporate Leadership Council (2004). Though not specific, this definition acknowledged the importance other human beings have on an employee’s engagement stating: “[employee engagement is] the extent to which employees commit to something or someone in the organization.” It was not until a couple years later that Gibbons (2006) actually defined with who the relationships are with saying: “Employee Engagement is a heightened emotional and intellectual connection . . . an employee has for his/her job, organization, manager, or co-workers.” The inclusion of “or” rather than “and” is noteworthy. Did Gibson (2006) believe attaining “a heightened emotional and intellectual connection” with all four types of associations to be impossible or just unnecessary? Finally, the most recent appendage to the definition of employee engagement is the

organization's goals and values. Macey, Schneider, Barbera & Young (2009) stressed that all of the employee's effort should be "directed toward the organization's goals." This focus of energy marks a big distinction from Kahn's original definition that placed the focus solely on the employee's work role. Towers Watson (2010) added the organization's values to the mix as well – "the extent to which employees share their company's values, feel pride in working for their company, are committed to working for their company and have favorable perceptions of their work environment." The definition presented by Towers Watson (2010) highlights how far the definition has come. No longer is the focus solely on the individual, in fact, this definition does not include the word "self" or "individual" or even "employee" as a singular noun. By referring to "employees" generally (always in respect to the organization), Towers Watson (2010) highlights the official switch from an individual-centered to organization-centered employee engagement definition.

A cursory glance over Table 1 gives the impression that Kahn's original three pillars have been completely extinguished by organization-centric terminology, but critically evaluating the definition's progression clarifies that these pillars have persisted, but the definition itself has been diluted. Modern definitions of employee engagement are by no means incorrect; they are simply more far-reaching than the original. The construct has expanded beyond the individual's job role in hopes to encapsulate as many facets as possible: company culture, personal outcomes, co-workers, work environment, success, etc. Unfortunately, this does not bode well for the creation of one single agreed-upon definition. As Welbourne and Schlachter (2014) note: "there are limitless factors that will affect engagement. One survey company we interviewed spoke of having identified 700

key drivers of engagement present in a particular client's organization." Though there is value in uncovering all of the elements that compose employee engagement, it is detrimental continuing trying to incorporate every single one of these elements into its definition. The definition of employee engagement has become too broad, so broad that not one aspect is meaningful anymore. Unlike current conceptualizations, it is easy to grasp employee engagement when using Kahn's definition. Being able to quickly comprehend and concisely communicate the concept is essential in order for it to have potency in the workplace. The lack of a single, succinct definition is holding the concept back. No matter how many factors identified and incorporated, employee engagement efforts will be in vain until this definition is realized.

Chapter II: Packaged & Sold

It's creative repackaging of stuff that's been around for a long time – one of the most successful marketing efforts of the last decade.

—Dr. Edward Lawler (as cited in Kroll, 2005)

Employee engagement was a savior for both employers and consulting firms during the early-2000s crisis. The combination of the recession and dot-com bubble dramatically increased stress on organizations to deal with the major switch in economic conditions. Gallup saw great potential in this commotion and chose to capitalize on a relatively new and unheard of term – employee engagement. Gallup viewed this concept as a solution for the employers' unease. During times of crisis, people tend to overlook the details and put their faith in whatever gives them comfort and hope for a quick solution and, in this particular instance, employee engagement was the remedy. Employee engagement was swiftly adopted, spruced up and manufactured by Gallup and employers were immediately sold. Gallup led the takeover but firms such as Towers Watson, Hewitt Associates and Development Dimensions International were quick to follow. The burnout researchers, such as Leiter and Maslach, were no match to the publicity, resources and marketing of consulting firms. The lack of strict research methodology made it easy for consultants to quickly summarize their soft data, transform that data into something practical and sell 'employee engagement' to an eager public. Consulting firms have successfully crafted the concept into a convenient package, which typically includes a measurement tool and some form of post-survey resources. Coupled with convincing statistics of past successes and the horrific state of engagement in the workplace, these packages have persuaded employers around the world to invest millions

in improving their employee engagement and, ultimately, their organizations' performance.

The Takeover: Gallup, Inc.

Serving as a model for all that followed, Gallup's packaging strategy effectively bundles the concept of employee engagement using three main components – convincing data, the Q¹² engagement survey and post-survey resources. Introduced to the public via the release of Buckingham's *First, Break All the Rules* (1999), the product took off and employers all over the nation wanted engagement for their organization. Though there was no succinct definition, people harmoniously agreed that, regardless of what it actually meant, employee engagement was an indispensable factor for the success and growth of their organization.

Gallup opens its sales pitch with attention-grabbing statistics coupled with persuasive language that together are extremely powerful at hooking potential clients. Today, Gallup's employee engagement information page begins by stating: "A staggering 87% of employees worldwide are not engaged at work" ("Employee engagement," 2014). After dropping this bomb on their inquisitive potential clients, Gallup then explains their discovery of the "powerful links" between employee engagement and important business outcomes including: "41% fewer quality defects, 48% fewer safety incidents, 28% less shrinkage, 65% less turnover (low-turnover organizations), 25% less turnover (high-turnover organizations) [and] 37% less absenteeism" ("Employee engagement," 2014). In general, Gallup's research has found positive correlations between employee engagement and both the individual and organization as a whole. Gallup researchers studied the differences in performance between engaged and actively disengaged

employees. They found that employees scoring in the top half of employee engagement nearly doubled their odds of success compared to those in the bottom half. Even more impressive, workers at the 99th percentile had four times the success rate of those at the first percentile. In regard to the organization as a whole, high engagement capital drives higher business performance. In a recent study, Gallup examined 49 publicly traded companies with recent earnings per share and Q¹² data available in its database. They found that companies with engaged workforces have higher earnings per share. More specifically, “companies with an average of 9.3 engaged employees for every actively disengaged employee in 2010-2011 experiences 147% higher earnings per share compared with their competition in 2011-2012” (Sorenson & Garman, 2013).

In regard to the specific language used in its promotional materials, Gallup labels employee engagement as a crisis – “the world has a crisis of engagement – one with serious and potentially long-lasting repercussions for the global economy” (“Employee engagement,” 2014). By labeling their product as a solution for a global crisis, a crisis that is not going away any time soon, Gallup successfully instills a sense of urgency in its customers that causes them to purchase the package. Gallup’s pitch has convinced organizations from all industries – including banking, retail, healthcare and transportation. Of these clients, Gallup labels the organizations with the highest employee engagement scores as the winners of the Gallup Great Workplace Award. Gallup annually recognizes an elite collection of “exceptional organizations whose leadership understands that employee engagement drives real business outcomes and who have mastered how to engage their workforces” with the Gallup Great Workplace Award (“Employee

engagement,” 2014). By labeling the clients with the highest engaged to not-engaged ratio as their “best clients,” Gallup takes credit for the organization’s success, when actually Gallup’s role is to measure the existing engagement. True, the selected organizations may have utilized some of Gallup’s other resources, but that is not clarified and the lack of information in itself is manipulative.

These hand-selected, convincing, yet somewhat manipulated statistics came from none other than Gallup’s own researchers and engagement survey developed in-house. Returning to *First, Break All the Rules* (1999), Buckingham introduced the Gallup Q¹² Engagement Survey in 1999 as a way to measure an organization’s engagement. When a company purchases Gallup’s Q¹² Engagement Survey, it purchases 1) the survey itself, 2) a survey implementation guide, 3) the overall report and up to six group-level reports, 4) “a customer user dashboard featuring real-time survey participation rates, reports and other valuable resources” and 5) examples to assist in effectively communicating the survey results with your employees (“Gallup’s Q12 survey features,” 2014). The survey has its strengths. For example, it provides employers with a tool to measure their levels of employee engagement at any moment, but it also has some major drawbacks. Particularly, the majority of employee engagement data is correlational and, as anyone who has taken an introductory psychology course would know, correlation does not imply causation. This lack of academic backing highlights the major methodological weakness behind employee engagement. Unlike most viable human resources concepts, whose timelines consist of an, “intermixing of research reports done by consultants and by academic . . . the work on engagement has been, unlike work in other areas, dominated by the

consulting firms” (Welbourne & Schlachter, 2014, p.11). Because employee engagement came about during a period of crisis with little time to check the facts, employers jumped on the employee engagement bandwagon, blindly accepting Gallup’s discovery of “powerful links” as legitimate when, in fact, to this day it has not been proven which comes first – the high engagement or the organization’s success. Though additional details concerning this survey will be discussed in the next chapter, it is important to note its role as one of the key elements of Gallup’s employee engagement package and also the pitfalls of the industry’s reliance on the results of solely correlational data provided by surveys such as the Q¹².

The final component of the employee engagement package is Gallup’s post-survey resources. After an organization is swept away by Gallup’s striking statistics and enlists help to improve upon employee engagement within the workforce, Gallup synthesizes the data collected from the Q¹² using both overall and group-level reports. Also, Gallup provides employers with communication examples and templates to assist in the presentation of results to managers and the rest of their employees (“Gallup’s Q12 survey features,” 2014). In addition to the resources provided in the Q¹² package, Gallup provides various kits, workbooks and textbooks to assist managers with the integration of the Q¹² results and implementation of successful management strategies into the workplace (“Employee engagement,” 2014). The only face-to-face resource Gallup provides is their High Performance Management Course, which is not directly related to the Q¹², but does give managers the opportunity to communicate directly with a Gallup consultant over a two-day course (“Employee engagement,”

2014). The lack of personalized, in-person follow-up with organizations is a weakness on Gallup's end.

Coupled with the firm's convincing survey data of past successes and the horrific state of engagement in the workplace, packages created by firms like Gallup have successfully persuaded employers around the world to invest millions in improving their employee engagement and, ultimately, their organizations' performance. Through Gallup's website, employers purchase the Q¹² according to the number of employees they want to survey. "Gallup standard programs range from \$5 to \$50 per employee depending upon the unique demands of your organization" which may seem a small price to pay, but when multiplied by 1,500 employees, for example, the organization could potentially be paying \$75,000+ depending on the decided price per employee and how many additional resources the organization purchases after their employees complete the survey ("Gallup's Q12 survey features," 2014). In 2005, it was estimated that Gallup's "engagement surveys and consulting fees represent 25% of its \$240 million in revenues" (Kroll, 2005).

In respect to the industry at large, Deloitte concludes in its report titled *Employee Engagement: Market Review, Buyer's Guide and Provider Profiles* that, "organizations currently invest approximately \$720 million annually in engagement improvement, including both outsourced and internally developed programs" (Kowske, 2012). As Deloitte alludes, employee engagement packages are not exclusively outsourced by consulting firms, internally established programs have arisen as well. The Coca-Cola Company is an example of a successful internally developed program. Coca-Cola has created its own comprehensive employee engagement program intertwined with the

company's missions, vision and values. There are two main components of Coca-Cola's engagement program: encouraging open communication and rewarding and developing employees ("Employee Engagement," 2014). In respect to communication, Coca-Cola stresses employee input at all levels of the organization in order to "solicit and leverage innovative ideas" ("Employee Engagement," 2014). The importance of regular dialogue at Coca-Cola is epitomized through the company's annual Employee Insights Survey – "In 2010, the results of [their] global Employee Insights Survey showed improvement across almost all survey categories, including an 84% associate engagement score – a 2 point increase over 2008" ("Employee Engagement," 2014). Turning to the reward and development part of the package, Coca-Cola has many developmental opportunities for their associates including Coca-Cola University, where high performers are sent to learn and develop ("Employee Engagement," 2014). In addition, Coca-Cola is known to have one of the best employee compensation and benefits packages in the world, which highlights how much the company cares about the health, security and happiness of their employees ("Employee Engagement," 2014).

To conclude, it is apparent that Gallup sparked one of the most successful human resources marketing campaigns ever created. Gallup's efforts are impressive – its persuasive strategies, language, data and impeccable timing came together to not only create, but also sustain a prosperous business over a relatively short period of time. It is hard to ignore Gallup's sales pitch, especially coming from a company that is leading a mass movement, but taking a closer look, it becomes clear there are some holes in its package. First, Gallup's strategy is heavily front-loaded in that most of their efforts are directed toward attracting new clients rather than developing existing clients, thus

scamming organizations that think they are paying for boosted engagement when in fact they are only getting a measurement of their engagement levels. Next, Gallup's presentation of its data and statistics is incorrect. If Gallup is not using correlational data to imply causation, they are simply leaving out any data that deters from their sales pitch. Particularly, there is one key statistic missing: by what percentage has nation-wide employee engagement increased over the past decade? Despite consulting firm's extensive research and the persistent corporate attempts to improve it, there has been no indication that these efforts have successfully caused a boost in employee engagement levels. Coca-Cola may have the right idea – build an internal engagement program based upon the company's missions, vision and values. That way, it is impossible to be manipulated by firms conveniently leaving out any important data or information that would deter from their sales pitch.

Chapter III: Measured & Deployed

Measurements

Employee engagement is measured using assessments and scales. As Welbourne and Schlachter note, “it is impossible to come to a conclusion on exactly how many measurement systems exist for engagement as the amount of vendors creating them and redesigning them is in constant flux and overall on the rise” (Welbourne & Schlachter, 2014, p.15). Despite the countless systems in existence, there are a few measures that have been particularly successful in part to their connections with previous employee engagement research.

Gallup was the first vendor to introduce a tool designed to measure employee engagement and business performance at any given organization titled the Q¹² Employee Engagement Assessment. The assessment consists of twelve questions that are answered using a five-point Likert scale (“Gallup’s Q12 survey features,” 2014). The discrete results of each employee are combined to form an overall engagement score for the organization as a whole. Figure 1 illustrates a breakdown of the Q¹² questions, which function similarly to Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs in that the basic demands must be met before the individual can develop (Kampf, 2014). Questions one and two concern the basic needs of the employee: Are my expected outcomes defined? Are the materials and equipment necessary to reach these outcomes provided? (Kampf, 2014) Though “basic needs” for an employed adult do not necessarily correspond with the physiological base of Maslow’s hierarchy, safety in the workplace, including health benefits, reasonable pay and the necessary resources, do correspond closely with level two of Maslow’s hierarchy. These basic needs also

correspond with Rowntree's five undisputable conditions in the workplace (Rowntree, 1921). Questions three through six are focused on the individual level: Do I have the opportunity to do what I do best every day? Do I receive recognition for my work efforts? Does someone at work care about me? Does my boss encourage my development? (Kampf, 2014) Gallup's individual level seems to skip over love and belonging focusing rather on esteem. Questions seven through ten revert back to the relationship need addressing the team environment: Are my opinions heard and taken into consideration? Does the mission of my company add importance to my work? Are my team members producing quality work? Is there someone at work I consider to be a best friend? (Kampf, 2014) Finally, self-actualization takes precedent in questions eleven and twelve concerning the employee's growth: Has someone touched base with me concerning my growth at this company over the past six months? Have opportunities for growth arisen over the past year? (Kampf, 2014) In addition to the results of these core twelve measures, the Q¹² final report includes an additional gauge of employees' overall satisfaction with the company.

The Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003), as illustrated in Figure 2, is based upon the work engagement definition provided by Schaufeli, Salanova, González-Roma and Bakker – “a persistent and positive affective-motivational state of fulfillment characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption” (Schaufeli, Salanova, González-Roma & Bakker, 2002, p.74). The original Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) was a 17-item survey including six vigor items, five dedication items and six absorption items (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003). Each item was answered using a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 0 (*never*) to 6 (*every day*)

(Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003). Employees with high engagement were identified by a high score on all three factors. In 2006, Schaufeli, Bakker & Salanova released the UWES-9, an abbreviated version of the UWES. The researchers were able to narrow down the number of items based upon an iterative technique used on “a database...of 27 studies that have been carried out between 1999 and 2003 in 10 different countries” (Schaufeli, Bakker & Salanova, 2006, p.4). After narrowing down the items as much as possible while still maintaining a high correlation with the original 17-factor model, UWES-9 includes three vigor items, three dedication items and three absorption items (Schaufeli, Bakker & Salanova, 2006).

The Motivation and Engagement Wheel is a “multidimensional conceptual framework that represents salient cognitive and behavioral dimensions relevant to motivation and engagement” and the Motivation and Engagement Scale (MES) is its associated instrument (Liem & Martin, 2011, p.3). The wheel is comprised of eleven first-order factors, which fall under one of the four higher-order factors: adaptive cognition, adaptive behavior, impending/maladaptive cognition and maladaptive behavior (Liem & Martin, 2011). Adaptive cognition, defined as “attitudes and orientations facilitating learning,” consists of self-efficacy, valuing and mastery orientation (Liem & Martin, 2011, p. 5). The self-efficacy dimension of the MES is ground in the works of Bandura (1977) and his self-efficacy and agency perspectives (Liem & Martin, 2011, p. 4). Looking closely at the MES operational definition of self-efficacy – “[Workers’] belief and confidence in their own ability to do well in their learning” – the overlap between Bandura’s and Liem and Martin’s definition is evident (Liem & Martin, 2011, p. 5). Adaptive behavior, defined as “behaviors and engagement facilitating learning,”

consists of planning, task-management and persistence (Liem & Martin, 2011, p. 5). Impeding or maladaptive cognition, defined as “attitudes and orientations impeding learning,” consists of anxiety, failure avoidance and uncertain control (Liem & Martin, 2011, p. 5). Finally, maladaptive behavior, defined as, “behaviors and engagement maladaptive learning,” consists of self-handicapping and disengagement (Liem & Martin, 2011, p. 5). Taken together, the four higher-order factors “seek to represent an encompassing set of motivation and engagement constructs” (Liem & Martin, 2011, p. 4). The Motivation and Engagement Wheel and Scale, as illustrated in Table 3, were originally developed to measure and evaluate motivation and engagement in an educational domain, but were created with the intention of being transferred to different domains “on the basis that there are core motivation and engagement factors relevant to human performance and evaluation settings” (Liem & Martin, 2011, p. 5). This ability to function effectively across domains is a distinctive characteristic of the MES that the competing models do not possess. The Motivation and Engagement Scale-Work (MES-W) is a branch of Martin’s original Motivation and Engagement Wheel and Scale. The MES-W “is a framework and instrument that can be adapted to the workplace and career/employment counseling and development setting” (Martin, 2009, p. 238). The only difference between the MES and the MES-W is a change of wording to fit the workplace rather than school. Using the anxiety subscale as an example, the MES sample item would read: “When exams and assignments are coming up, I worry a lot” (Liem & Martin, 2011, p. 5). On the other hand, the MES-W sample item would read: “When important or challenging work is coming up, I worry a lot” (Martin, 2009, p. 232). Both

scales are answered using a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*) (Martin, 2009; Liem & Martin, 2011).

Mercer's *What's Working* surveys are a series of studies conducted across 22 nations to gauge employee engagement levels and drivers (Mercer, 2007, p. 4). The survey is based upon Mercer's Human Capital Strategy Model – “a research-based model of the six factors that represent the system within which employees function and which are significant predictors of productivity” (Mercer, 2007, p.4). The model is built upon the notion that every organization is composed of a unique combination of the six-factors: rewards, people, work processes, managerial structure, information/knowledge and decision-making (Mercer, 2007, p.4). The *What's Working* survey is composed of over 130 questions that vary across 12 topics: work processes, quality and customer focus, communication, job security and career growth, teamwork and cooperation, ethics and integrity, immediate manager, performance management, rewards and recognition, leadership and directions, training and development and work/life balance (Mercer, 2007, p.4). The *What's Working* survey results led to the design of a new measurement of engagement called the Employee Engagement Index, which calculates employee engagement based on the individual's response to five questions: 1) I feel a strong sense of commitment to this company, 2) I am proud to work for this company, 3) I would recommend my organization to others as a good place to work, 4) I am not considering leaving this company in the next 12 months and 5) I am willing to go “above and beyond” in my job to help this company be successful (Mercer, 2007, p. 3). The inclusion of “above and beyond” ties back to the proposition made by Towers Watson (2003) to measure engagement based on “discretionary effort” – if the individual consistently puts

forth more effort than required, according to both the Employee Engagement Index and Towers Watson (2003), they should be characterized as a highly engaged employee. An individual's responses to each of the five measurement questions are combined to categorize the person to one of four stages that represent "increasing levels of engagement within the organization and correspond to particular psychological states" (Mercer, 2007, p. 10). The four stages are on a continuum, as seen in Figure 3 (Mercer, 2007, p. 10).

These four measurements – The Q¹², UWES, MES-W and Employee Engagement Index – have a few key distinctions as previously noted, but also theoretical and structural overlap. The most significant commonality between these distinct measures is their strong connection to Kahn's original definition: "The harnessing of organizational members' selves to their work roles; in engagement people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances" (Kahn, 1990, p.694). All four measures include physical, cognitive and emotional expression within their questions. Though some were more blatant in their inclusion of Kahn's pillars, like the UWES, it is obvious they all measure an employee's physical, cognitive and emotional connection to their work somewhere within the questions. This re-emphasizes the fact that Kahn's definition has not disappeared in modern conceptualization – his pillars are still pervasive despite the change in terminology and broadening of focus. The existence of Kahn's original definition also validates the legitimacy of these measures; to a certain extent, each of the four utilizes previous engagement research as a foundation. Three other intersections between the measures

were particularly noteworthy – additional target concepts, question formatting and resulting classification.

The additional targeted constructs varied from measure to measure, but there were two that were mentioned in multiple measures – motivation and satisfaction. All of the measures were selected because of their focus on measuring engagement, but both the Employee Engagement Index and, not surprisingly, the Motivation and Engagement Scale-Work examined motivation as well. While the MES-W measures engagement and motivation in conjunction, as though they can be measured fairly by the same construct, the Employee Engagement Index includes motivation as one of the four stages an employee is categorized in based upon their results. This is also true of Employee Engagement Index for the other common construct – satisfaction. Both motivation and satisfaction are the lower of the four levels on the Employee Engagement Index's engagement scale. The Q¹² also includes satisfaction in their measure, but as a supplementary question to gauge employees' overall satisfaction with the company. Gallup claims this additional question is for the organizations' sake, so it can have a general understanding of employee satisfaction, but why satisfaction? Why not pride or loyalty? The focus on motivation and satisfaction is perplexing since the two fall below committed and advocate on Mercer's engagement scale. In addition, Dicke (2010) compiled a list of concepts that were most prevalent in existing definitions of employee engagement and neither motivation nor satisfaction were included. Commitment and involvement were two of the most prevalent concepts with 11% usage out of the 18 definitions included in the compilation (Dicke, 2010). The lowest

percentage on the chart was 5.5%, meaning that motivation and satisfaction must have less than a 5.5% usage rate since they were not included (Dicke, 2010).

Another commonality between the majority of the measures was the formatting of the questions. The UWES, MES-W and Q¹² all followed a similar design in that they had a few overarching question topics with multiple other questions under that broad category. For example, the UWES strictly categorizes its questions into three groups – vigor, dedication and absorption. Even when Schaufeli & Bakker wanted to decrease the total number of questions, they kept the format of three overarching categories. On the other hand, the Employee Engagement Index is composed of five separate questions. Though less specific, Mercer’s approach to engagement measurement is much simpler to complete (as a subject) and analyze (as a researcher). Of the two approaches, the former is more comprehensive and allows for the researcher to target and scrutinize the specific components of engagement, which is more practical especially if this measurement is to be used in an intervention.

In regard to classification, the measures are split half and half between scales and stages. The UWES and the MES-W utilize a scale method of classifying employees, meaning that an individual is labeled ‘high,’ ‘medium’ or ‘low’ on engagement based on their responses to the measure’s questions. On the other hand, the Q¹² and Employee Engagement Index categorized employees into stages of engagement. The Q¹² parallels Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs almost perfectly, basing an individual’s placement on which need is most pertinent to the individual at the time of assessment. The Employee Engagement Index followed a slightly different form of categorization in which each employee is placed in one of four stages – satisfied, motivated, committed or advocate –

of engagement. Mercer's outline is an interesting approach to the stages of employee engagement, but it only allows for categorization of positive engagement since satisfied is the lowest possible stage to be placed in. Despite this fault, the stage approach is a useful tactic since it provides managers with a clear idea of where each of their employees stands which could be helpful in developing a personalized intervention.

The Q¹², Utrecht Work Engagement Scale, MES-W and Employee Engagement Index are a few of the stand out measurements of employee engagement existing in the workplace. These scales and assessments lack power on their own, but when combined with the supportive strategies of interventions, an employee engagement program is formed.

Interventions

The next logical step in the employee engagement progression is the intervention: what do employee engagement providers do after compiling the data from their measurement tools? One would assume the firm sends a representative or two in to speak with the CEO, managers, maybe even a few teams that showed especially weak engagement scores, right? Astoundingly, the amount of meaningful follow-up after providers distribute their measure is minimal.

As previously mentioned, after Gallup synthesizes an organization's Q¹² data in the form of overall and group-level reports, the actual "intervention" comes in the form of generic communication examples and templates that are supposed to assist human resources in presenting the results to managers and employees ("Gallup's Q12 survey features," 2014). It is one thing to measure engagement levels, analyze them and develop a strategy moving forward with the new information in mind, but all Gallup

is doing is measuring then abandoning (unless, of course, the organization is willing to fork over some more cash for a few workbooks). The generic follow-up provided by Gallup leaves the work to the organization's human resources employees who, depending on the organization, may do a wonderful job, but, realistically, they will utilize the communication templates (aka PowerPoints) provided by Gallup because the company paid a lot for the consultation, why pass up on the only intervention strategy offered? What it all boils down to is that organizations are investing in a relationship with Gallup and Gallup is not delivering. Unfortunately, as the leader of employee engagement movement, Gallup has many followers who undertake this data-driven, PowerPoint-centric approach.

Fortunately, not all interventions have opted to follow this typical intervention model initiated by Gallup. A few pivotal interventions have parted from this vicious reliance on consulting firms to lead that has existed ever since 1999. The interventions that have "broken all the rules" in respect to blindly following Gallup's lead include Hay Group's work with the National Australia Bank, Ouwenel, Blanc and Schaufeli's online positive psychology intervention and Welbourne and Schlachter's reward and recognition program. These programs have identified the key factor to an essential intervention: people. Each case demonstrates a unique approach to improving employee engagement levels based upon an attachment with the real human beings at the organization.

According to Kevin Kruse, author of *Employee Engagement for Everyone*, "Companies measure engagement, but then don't share results. Typically, when an engagement survey is completed, the results are scrutinized by the C-level executives and

HR professionals. Rarely are all the results shared throughout the company” (Kruse, 2014). Hay Group has successfully broken this typical results sharing paradigm, exemplified by their employee engagement intervention at National Australia Bank (NAB). In 2010, Hay Group was hired by NAB to assist in the implementation of an updated strategic direction, which was defined by a set of core Enterprise Behaviors (“Employee engagement as a driver for success,” 2010). In respect to the background of the company: “NAB is a global financial services organization of 40,000 people and more than 450,000 shareholders. Their global operation covers Australia, the United Kingdom, New Zealand, the United States and Asia” (“Employee engagement as a driver for success,” 2010, p. 1). Within a relatively short time frame, four months, Hay Group was able to develop a survey, roll out the survey, present the results and suggest an action plan moving forward (“Employee engagement as a driver for success,” 2010). First, Hay Group worked closely with the NAB Working Committee to develop a survey to measure employee engagement while also tackling cultural issues at large (Hay Group, 2010). Keeping NAB’s new strategic direction in mind, Hay Group created a core questionnaire with slight flexibility in respect to teach separate NAB business units, all of which had the opportunity to add their own area-specific questions to the survey (“Employee engagement as a driver for success,” 2010). Next, Hay Group developed a unique system to administer the questionnaire to NAB’s 40,000 employees spread throughout the world (“Employee engagement as a driver for success,” 2010). The finished product consisted of a database, which served as the foundation for the online survey option with an automated telephone survey as a secondary option (“Employee engagement as a driver

for success,” 2010). Hay Group’s Head of Insight Pacific, Sam Dawson, explains the process as follows:

“Establishing a representative organizational hierarchy was particularly important in enabling us to provide individual reports for the 3,000 managers across the business. Establishing a workable database for a project of this size is a large and often complex piece of work. Interestingly, the survey was offered online to all participants, with the exception of the UK. Here, to navigate around internet availability issues for branch-based staff we developed an automated telephone survey. This was made available to approximately 4,500 people which met local market needs and we were all very pleased with flexibility this approach gave us” (“Employee engagement as a driver for success,” 2010, p. 2-3).

After completing the survey and rolling it out to all 40,000 NAB employees, Hay Group combined and processed the data from the online and telephone (“Employee engagement as a driver for success,” 2010). Using a multi-layered system for results reporting, Hay Group presented the data to three groups within the organization in three different ways (“Employee engagement as a driver for success,” 2010). First, Hay Group met with the CEO of the organization to walk through all of the survey’s results (“Employee engagement as a driver for success,” 2010). Next, they compiled the data into a presentation form for the executive management team (“Employee engagement as a driver for success,” 2010). This comprehensive presentation was then tailored for each of the 15 business units in order for the units to understand their specific results, but also the implications of their results on the organization as a whole (“Employee engagement as a driver for success,” 2010). The last step of the multi-layered presentation system involved

presenting the findings to each of the NAB managers: “All 3,000 received a unique interactive Excel results tool which enabled them to conduct their own data cuts, plus they could click on a button and output a tailored Power Point presentation to take directly to their teams” (“Employee engagement as a driver for success,” 2010, p. 3). Finally, after all results were presented, Hay Group shared an online action-planning tool titled ‘Insight to Action’ with the managers, which “enabled managers to logon and network with others around their specific improvement actions. The tool also contained an action planning resource library, designed specifically for the NAB managers, to help set them on the road to success in terms of impactful improvement action (“Employee engagement as a driver for success,” 2010, p. 3). Hay Group’s engagement and culture intervention at NAB is a successful example of a custom-made intervention that facilitated leaders’ understanding of how to optimize levels of engagement and performance within their teams. Referring back to Kevin Kruse, the NAB case is proof for his book’s conclusion: “Engagement improves from the grass roots. Each front-line manager needs to be given their own team scores and held accountable for improving them” (Kruse, 2014).

Ouweneel, Blanc and Schaufeli (2013) utilized the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003) in an employee engagement intervention rooted in positive psychology. The viability of this intervention is tested in a study titled *Do-it-yourself: An online positive psychology intervention to promote positive emotions, self-efficacy, and engagement at work*. The researchers’ goal was to determine whether or not a work-place intervention rooted in positive psychology could successfully be applied to enhance three aspects of employee wellbeing: positive emotions, self-efficacy and work

engagement (Ouweneel, Blanc and Schaufeli, 2013). Regarding the flow of the intervention, the participants began by self-registering online at one of two possible interactive websites. Next, participants completed a pre-assessment prior to completing the intervention. The online self-enhancement program was broken down into three types of assignments: increasing positive experiences at work (10 assignments), on goal setting (10 assignments) or resource building at work (5 assignments) (Ouweneel, Blanc and Schaufeli, 2013). These 25 assignments typically consisted of a movie clip, written assignment and performing a behavior in the workplace (Ouweneel, Blanc and Schaufeli, 2013). After completing all assignments at the end of the eight-week intervention period, participants were asked to complete a post assessment. It was found that the intervention positively affected positive emotions and self-efficacy, which showed that “a positive psychology intervention can actually initiate the building process towards engagement” (Ouweneel, Blanc and Schaufeli, 2013, p. 189). Of the three aspects of employee wellbeing, work engagement (which was assessed with the UWES-9) was the only one that was not affected, at least in the short-term (Ouweneel, Blanc and Schaufeli, 2013). Proximity could be the reason why effects were shown on antecedents of work engagement (positive emotions and self-efficacy) but not on engagement itself (Ouweneel, Blanc and Schaufeli, 2013). “According to B&B theory (Fredrickson, 1998), well-being follows positive emotions and resources, so a follow-up assessment measuring the long-term effect of the intervention would probably have resulted in an increase in work engagement as well” (Ouweneel, Blanc and Schaufeli, 2013, p. 189). In addition, Schaufeli et al. (2013) found that positive psychology interventions will only affect wellbeing at work when the employee is committed to the intervention and believes the

intervention will positively affect his/her work and, “it is up to supervisors, HR managers, trainers, and coaches...to convince these employees that they can benefit from positive interventions” (Ouweneel, Blanc and Schaufeli, 2013, p. 192). The advantage of an intervention rooted in positive psychology compared to typical interventions that focus on what is wrong is that it approaches employee engagement from a preventative rather than diagnostic tactic.

Welbourne and Schlachter (2014) proposed an intervention based on a reward and recognition system at Cleveland Clinic, a non-profit academic medical center. The success of this particular intervention was because the tailored “reward and incentive programs were strategically used to align employee engagement with their organizations goals” (Welbourne & Schlachter, 2014, p. 45). At the start of the intervention, the Cleveland Clinic determined the organization’s initial employee engagement score through Gallup’s Q¹² Employee Engagement Assessment. This is a perfect example of how the Q¹² should be used, not as a program in itself, but in combination with a comprehensive intervention strategy. From there, the clinic began a “total rewards approach” in effort to boost employee engagement throughout all levels of the organization (Welbourne & Schlachter, 2014). The first rewards program implemented by the clinic was the Caregiver Celebrations initiative, an online program with multiple tiers in order to reach all 43,000 employees in a meaningful, relevant way (Welbourne & Schlachter, 2014). The initiative is composed of four different types of rewards – appreciation award, honors award, excellence award and caregiver award (Welbourne & Schlachter, 2014). The scope of rewards ranges from non-monetary, peer-to-peer (appreciation award) to one individual hand selected by the CEO to

receive \$10,000 (caregiver award). All four types of rewards are grounded in the organization's core values and goals and were added on top of a solid foundation – salaries at current market levels and a comprehensive health care program (Welbourne & Schlachter, 2014).

“What we see at Cleveland Clinic is synergy between values, vision, goals, mission, daily behavioral expectations and engagement – all pulled together with their rewards strategy. The connections are what have led the many changes that have dramatically improved patient satisfaction scores, engagement scores and the work done at the Cleveland Clinic” (Welbourne & Schlachter, 2014, p. 52)

Specifically, this “synergy” boosted the clinic's overall engagement from 3.80, which was their initial score in 2008, to 4.25 in 2013 (Welbourne & Schlachter, 2014). To conclude, Welbourne and Schlachter's suggested intervention program is based upon the idea of “linking engagement to behavioral targets of engagement, which then [leads] to attaining organizational goals” (Welbourne & Schlachter, 2014, p. 54).

Lastly, it would be unfair to leave out a unique intervention rooted in strengths-based development titled Clifton StrengthsFinder that was created by Gallup in 2001. The purpose of the StrengthsFinder assessment is to identify “areas where an individual's greatest potential for building strengths exists” (Asplund, Lopez, Hodges & Harter, 2007, p. 1). This knowledge is extremely informative and helpful to managers in developing their leadership strategies. According to Gallup's 2013 State of the American Workplace, 61% of employees with a supervisor who focuses on their strengths or positive characteristics are engaged compared to only 45% of employees with a supervisor who focuses on their weaknesses or negative

characteristics. This is because “people have several times more potential for growth when they invest energy in developing their strengths instead of correcting their deficiencies” (Rath, 2007, p. i). In addition to aiding supervisors, the StrengthsFinder results are advantageous for the employee as well.

“Most people think they know what they are good at. They are usually wrong . . . And yet, a person can perform only from strength.” This quote by Peter Drucker is the reason behind taking the Clifton StrengthsFinder assessment – to discover your strengths and learn how to utilize them to perform the best you possibly can . . . Looking at the specifics, the StrengthsFinder assessment consists of 180 items of paired up statements. Each individual is given twenty seconds to choose which of the two statements best describes themselves. The time constraint is a unique element of the assessment and is built-in because researchers found that “instinctual, top-of-mind responses are more revealing than those you’d give if you sat around and debated each question.” At the end of the assessment, you are given your top five strengths based on your responses. These five come from a list of 34 themes that “represent [their] best attempt at creating a common language or classification of talents” (See Appendix, p. 84-85).

Along with the individual’s top five strengths, the respondent is given specific suggestions for personal development based upon their top five strengths. “As the identification and integration stages of strengths development unfold, behavioral change is encouraged. Specifically, the strengths-based development process encourages individuals to build strengths by acquiring skills (i.e., basic abilities) and

knowledge (i.e., what you know, including facts and meaning making from experiences) that can complement their greatest talents in . . . application to specific tasks” (Asplund, Lopez, Hodges & Harter, 2007, p. 11-12). According to *The Clifton StrengthsFinder 2.0 Technical Report: Development and Validation*, “Among those employees receiving a strengths intervention, engagement improved by 0.33 relative to employees without the intervention.” StrengthsFinder is a Gallup program that targets the unique qualities of each individual and provides meaningful follow-up in the form of specific suggestions for personal development based upon a combination of the individual’s top strength.

Interventions vary widely – from academic to vendor-produced, prevention to amplification-focused and general to customized for the specific organization. What becomes apparent from these drastically different interventions is that personalization to the unique organization and a focus on people is necessary for success. The Hay Group developed a multi-layered system for results reporting that caters to the status and function of each employee. This personalized results sharing model with a focus on educating managers illustrates Hay Group’s care in considering how to impact the most people in a meaningful way possible. The online positive psychology approach presented by Ouwenel, Blanc and Schaufeli (2013) found that interventions’ success relies on the employees’ commitment to the program and beliefs that the intervention will actually work. This approach explains the success of Hay Group’s multi-layer, manager-centered reporting strategy because it is up to supervisors to convince their employees that they can benefit from positive interventions or else the intervention will be futile. Unlike the Q¹², StrengthsFinder personalizes not only the survey but the follow-up process and this

focus on the human being rather than the data is what makes the StrengthsFinder assessment a much more meaningful program. Finally Welbourne and Schlachter's intervention with the Cleveland Clinic is a model for future research and interventions. The use of the Q¹² simply as a measure to gauge employee engagement levels without trying to make it into something it is not by tacking on PowerPoints, demonstrates an effective use of the tool. In addition, the synergist effect of the reward and recognition program that incorporates the "values, vision, goals, mission, daily behavioral expectations and engagement" demonstrates the importance of meaning and sustainability in interventions. If there is no tie between the specific desired employee outcomes and some sort of reward or recognition, companies will not see results. Human beings "cannot be engaged in everything [and] the success of any employee engagement program will be the degree to which employees know which behaviors are critical for them to be engaged in performing" (Welbourne & Schlachter, 2014, p. 57). To reiterate, interventions targeting engagement as whole will be weaker than those that target specific employee engagement outcomes and incentivize the presence of those outcomes in the workplace. Unfortunately, few organizations have been as fortunate as the Cleveland Clinic in finding an intervention that produces results. The next chapter will outline strategies for restoring the viability of employee engagement as a concept in hopes of every organization finding a way to create a passionate, stimulated and productive workforce.

Conclusion

Strategies for Restoring Viability

Employee engagement findings have consistently shown that employees with high engagement scores produce positive outcomes, but why is it that 70% of U.S. workers still are not engaged or actively disengaged at work and only 33% of U.S. workers strongly agree that, at work, they have the opportunity to do what they do best every day (“Gallup state of the American workplace,” 2013)? Jim Harter, Gallup's chief scientist, attributes the lack of results to “a gap between knowing about engagement and doing something about it in most American workplaces” (Sorenson & Garman, 2013). It is time to refocus engagement – it has become exclusively a hyped-up annual measure when it should instead be a “continuous, holistic part of an entire business strategy” (Bersin, 2014). There are two crucial strategies – one at an organizational level and one at an industry level – that need to be implemented in order to restore employee engagement’s viability as a concept. First, organizations need to switch their focus from statistics to people – people at all levels of the organization: leaders, managers and human resource professionals. People are the key to positive business outcomes. The current “crisis” of employee engagement is a result of companies wasting their time, energy and resources worrying about the results of engagement measurements. While measurements of engagement are extremely helpful in assessing the status of the workforce, once understood, companies must switch focus from the rigidity of data to the flexibility of people. Moving forward, organizations must take control of their own employee engagement initiatives, because at the end of the day, no one knows employees like the people themselves. In respect to the academic side of the employee engagement

industry, empirical research must replace theoretical research. The descriptive data produced by consulting firms and practitioner literature has been successful at promoting the concept to the public, but it has offered little more. Evidence-based research produced by academic institutions is needed to solve the unanswered questions and discover aspects of employee engagement that have yet to be considered.

People engage people. “We can’t retain people, we can only attract them. We can’t engage them but we can inspire and support them. We can’t only train them but we can enable them to learn and give them the opportunities to develop” (Bersin, 2014). Currently, organizations’ mindsets across the world are opposite of Josh Bersin’s insight. Organizations’ method of getting the most out of their employees is domineering – “We must retain, engage and train our employees.” – rather than cultivating – “We must attract, inspire, support and enable our employees.” This mentality is counterproductive – people are beings that possess a boundless potential for growth, which, unfortunately, is currently not being developed. According to Insync Surveys (2011), “just one in nine employees strongly agree that their skills and talent are being used to their full potential. More than half of the respondents (55%) are either neutral or disagree that their skills and capabilities are fully utilized.” Moving forward, if organizations want a return on investment for their employee engagement efforts, it is imperative that leaders, managers and human resources nurture their employees’ development through a variety of tactics specific to each group’s role in the organization. Regardless of role, the proposed strategy is built upon the idea of “finding ways to signal what behaviors are important for engagement” (Welbourne & Schlachter, 2014, p. 43).

According to a study of tech teams conducted by McPherson (2013), leadership is responsible for 28% of employee commitment levels, which is more than the effect of the direct manager (12%) and pay (11%) combined. Though distinct, commitment and employee engagement are related constructs that complement each other, describing different aspects of positive attitudes towards work (Kanste, 2011). Understanding how to best utilize the 28% of control leaders have over their employees' commitment and presumed relevant constructs, like employee engagement, is imperative moving forward. The role of an organization's figurehead is to inspire. They must clarify the company's mission, values, goals, and ethical standards. By personifying these pillars of the organization, the leader serves as a role model for each and every employee. Workers have been programmed to have a narrow sense of responsibility in respect to their work role, which is dangerous because it isolates and limits potential. Leaders must go beyond solely modeling the mission by imparting a sense of commitment to the company's mission, thus broadening employees' sense of responsibility at work. When everyone in an organization has a sense of responsibility to the mission rather than simply their role, the efforts will be synergistic rather than simply combined or even contradictory. Along the same lines, it is important that executive management encourages leadership from all levels of the organization. According to a Gallup study of 32 "exemplary" companies, seven characteristics are inherent to stand out companies, one of which was a leader that models and encourages curiosity and a passion for personal development is more likely to have a followership of engaged employees compared to a leader that does not exercise these traits or make visible these traits (Flade, Harter & Asplund, 2014). While still controlling the reins, inviting

employees to exercise curiosity and participate in a vision-level way will cause motivation and productivity throughout the workforce to rise. Why? Because individuals will begin to think more creatively about the organization, understand personal impact on outcomes and discover new ways to exercise talents and abilities to their fullest extent.

“A 2012 Towers Watson survey of 32,000 employees across the globe found that immediate supervisor relationship ranked fourth as a predictor of engagement behind leadership, stress/workload and goals” (McPherson, 2013). Though it has been found that managers themselves are not as powerful of an indicator of employee engagement as leadership, managers still remain an essential tool in boosting an organization’s engagement. For example, front-line managers are the CEO’s eyes and ears; they are an invaluable connection to the employees. According to Kevin Kruse (2014), “The secret to engagement is that it comes from the relationships front-line managers have with their direct reports. Only action planning at the individual team level will generate the ideas that will move the needle.” Allowing teams to problem solve their issues without interference from executive leadership creates more trust in direct managers and innovative ideas that can powerfully impact the organization from the ground up. Referring back to Gallup’s study on exemplary companies, organizations that “trust, hold accountable, and relentlessly support managers and teams” are those with engaged workforces (Flade, Harter & Asplund, 2014). Once managers are given the accountability to run their own team, managers should personalize and stay away from traditional, one-size-fits-all leadership techniques. According to Buckingham’s findings based upon a collection of responses from more than 80,000 interviews, the best

managers are "revolutionaries" who assign the right people to the right roles based upon the traits they already possess (Buckingham, 1999). By developing managers to take on this "revolutionary" approach perhaps by incorporating the StrengthsFinder assessment into the engagement strategy, in addition to providing performance feedback and mentorship, organizations may see a boost in engagement. "Having a good manager added an additional 10% of commitment among teams with good development ratings. Managers can help employees learn, develop, and connect with the company's leadership and mission – but they can't do it all alone" (McPherson, 2013).

Human resource's role in an organization's engagement strategy is to join with company executives and managers to develop a succinct framework for reward and recognition programs in addition to clearly defining employee job descriptions and desired outcomes. A distinctive characteristic of organizations with high employee engagement is a powerful HR department that utilizes employee recognition and performance management techniques (Flade, Harter & Asplund, 2014). Employee recognition has been present in the most successful companies even before the term "employee engagement" was defined. In 1969, the second president of IBM, Thomas J. Watson Jr., noted: "Each of us must periodically stop to remember how important personal appreciation and recognition are to every person" ("Quintessential Quotes," n.d., p. 8). According to Gallup's study on exemplary companies, it is important to "have a straightforward and decisive approach to performance management. The companies in our study with the highest engagement levels know how to use recognition as a powerful incentive currency" (Flade, Harter & Asplund, 2014). For example, Cleveland Clinic's rewards and recognition program, Caregiver Celebration, is an excellent model of a

simple, straightforward program. Made up of four types of awards varying in prestige, but all grounded in the clinic's core mission, goals and values, Cleveland Clinic's program is "a powerful means to develop and stretch employees to new levels of capability" (Flade, Harter & Asplund, 2014). Effective performance management, like the Caregiver Celebration has both visible and measurable results. As noted previously, the clinic's overall engagement jumped from to 4.25 in just five years because of their reward and recognition program (Welbourne & Schlachter, 2014). In addition to a reward and recognition program, it is important that HR clearly defines each employee's job description and desired outcomes. "When employees know what is expected of them, have what they need to do their jobs, are good fits for their roles, and feel their managers have their backs, they will commit to almost anything the company is trying to accomplish. Conversely, if these basic needs are not met, even the most exalted mission may not engage them" (Flade, Harter & Asplund, 2014). Also, a clearly outlined career path is beneficial to both the employee and the organization since the employee has a better idea of what exactly they need to do in order to succeed in the organization and the organization benefits from the increased motivation, productivity and growth which results from the employee's understanding ("Global Workforce Study," 2012). For example, HR could provide all entry-level employees with a defined career path in the form of a flow chart, thus increasing employee retention through both short-term and long-term goal setting for advancement within the company. As addressed in Towers Watson's Global Workforce Study: "If career paths are well defined and well documented, the prospect of advancement can help dispel

concerns about long-term employment security” (“Global Workforce Study,” 2012, p. 18).

“The employee engagement crisis has gone on long enough” (Kruse, 2014). The workforce’s reliance on consulting firms to solve engagement problems is not producing any results. It is time for organizations to take control of the “crisis” by developing internal initiatives and strategies to improve employee engagement. The organization should direct its focus on the employees. In order to foster the highest employee engagement possible, organizations should proceed by deciding on one single definition and employee engagement program specific for its own use. Instead of trying to juggle all of the existing definitions, measures, outcomes and predictors of engagement, organizations should move forward by defining what engagement is for them, thus increasing the relevance, meaning and power behind the concept. Leadership from all functions and levels of the organization should collaborate in order to determine the most important factors for their particular circumstance using Welbourne and Schlachter’s work with The Cleveland Clinic as inspiration. The key is to develop a definition and program that are tailored to fit the people in the organization. As Les McKeown, president and CEO of Predictable Success notes: “People aren’t engaged by programs, they’re engaged by people” (McKeown, 2013).

Research methodology modification. Current conceptualizations of employee engagement are saturated with research conducted by consulting firms. The existing research on employee engagement has resulted in primarily correlational outcomes produced by descriptive methodology. The lack of academic, evidence-based research using experimental methodology has created a relaxed process that has yet to achieve any

high-quality, significant evidence (Briner, 2014). No longer is it acceptable to feign ignorance and simply accept the statistics practitioners are presenting in their sales pitches, it is time for an overhaul of the research methodology. Two main changes need to be enacted. First, the primary researchers of employee engagement need to switch from consultants to academics. Second, experimental methods need to be put into action in place of descriptive methods. These strategies should naturally come in the same package, but it is necessary to clarify the inclusion of both since “lower quality evidence about employee engagement is used to make very strong general claims [in both practitioner and academic contexts]” (Briner, 2014, p. 15). If the concept has a future in the workplace, employee engagement needs a methodological overhaul.

Academic researchers need to approach employee engagement in a way that it has not been studied before – by prioritizing methodical, evidence-based research ahead of speed. Before Gallup’s takeover of the concept, the evolution of employee engagement was thoughtful. From Mayo to Maslow, Bandura to Conger and Kanungo, each step of the way was not planned; the research had a logical flow and no steps were skipped along the way. Ever since 1999, when Gallup published *First, Break All the Rules*, the evolution went into overdrive. The pressure of the dot-com boom and recession combined made for a hurried beginning. With only the theoretical framework for employee engagement laid out by Kahn (1990), Gallup had little academic research to base its research upon. Regardless, Gallup ran with it and hastily built an entire industry from scratch. The existing knowledge of this industry was summarized in the 2013 edition of *Engage for Success*: “Despite there being some debate about the precise meaning of employee engagement there are three things we know about it: it is

measurable; it can be correlated with performance; and it varies from poor to great. Most importantly employers can do a great deal to impact on people's level of engagement. That is what makes it so important, as a tool for business success" (MacLeod & Clarke, 2013, p. 10). For these to be the only three things known to be true about employee engagement after investing millions of dollars and years of research, it would be imprudent carrying on relying on the research methodology utilized thus far especially considering how weak the three points are. Like anything, the growth of the employee engagement industry can only progress in overdrive for so long before its legitimacy is called into question. Moving forward, consulting firms need to take a step back and let academics conduct studies to 1) identify what we do and do not know about the concept, 2) test the validity and reliability of existing measures and 3) examine the existing definitions in effort to discover one agreed upon definition (Briner, 2014).

Regarding the suggested methodology, "sole reliance on descriptive data" and relaxed methodology is no longer acceptable (Heid & Sims, 2009, p. 14). Descriptive methods can only provide correlational outcomes meaning that any relationships found are just that, relationships. One cannot claim that one variable is "causing" another only "may be causing." As Welbourne and Schlachter (2014) note: "This means that researchers cannot attribute changes in engagement to changes in performance" (Welbourne, 2014 p. 3). Unfortunately, it has become common practice for consulting firms to twist these vague results in order to convince an uninformed audience of an untrue statistic. In addition, the relationship between the predictors of engagement and engagement itself have transformed into a circular exercise in logic because of the lack of longitudinal research (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008 as cited by Welbourne, p. 23).

Moving forward, academics must focus on experimental methods that can identify causal links between employee engagement and performance. By conducting experimental studies, researchers will prevent the blatant manipulation of correlational data.

In summary, the future of employee engagement relies on the separation of the organization from the research. Currently, both are mashed together by way of the consulting firm. This combination of the three functions – academic, consultant and business – is not ideal for producing results. The organization should direct its focus on people. The academics should focus on the research. The consultants should take a step back, let the other two functions own their respective roles, and focus on honing their measures and interventions based upon the experimental data released by the academics. When creating the organization's employee engagement definition and plan of action, the guidelines of Kahn's original definition should be included. Though seemingly outdated due to its narrow focus, Kahn (1990) has served as an anchor throughout the modern development of the concept and, though it may not be considered sufficient, the pillars of physical, cognitive and emotional expression in the workplace will always subsist in employee engagement conceptualization.

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Table 1

Definitions and sample items from the Motivation and Engagement Scale-High School

No.	Scale/subscale	Operational definition	Sample item
Adaptive cognition			
1.	Self-efficacy	Students' belief and confidence in their own ability to do well in their learning.	"If I try hard, I believe I can do my schoolwork well"
2.	Valuing	Students' belief about the usefulness, importance, and relevance of the academic work they engage in.	"Learning at school is important to me"
3.	Mastery orientation	Students' orientation to developing competence and knowledge in their learning.	"I feel very pleased with myself when I really understand what I am taught at school"
Adaptive behaviour			
4.	Planning	The extent to which students plan their academic work and tasks.	"Before I start an assignment I plan out how I am going to do it"
5.	Task management	The ways students use their time, organise their timetable, and choose and arrange where they work.	"When I study, I usually study in places where I can concentrate"
6.	Persistence	The extent to which students sustain their engagement.	"If I can't understand my schoolwork at first, I keep going over it until I understand it"
Impeding cognition			
7.	Anxiety	Attitudes and orientations impeding learning The extent to which students feel anxious when they think about or do their academic work.	"When exams and assignments are coming up, I worry a lot"
8.	Failure avoidance	The extent to which students' motivation to do their work is to avoid failure, doing poorly, or disappointing others.	"Often the main reason I work at school is because I don't want to disappoint my parents"
9.	Uncertain control	The extent to which students are uncertain about how to do well or how to avoid doing poorly.	"I'm often unsure how I can avoid doing poorly at school"
Maladaptive behaviour			
10.	Self-handicapping	Behaviours and engagement maladaptive for learning The extent to which students compromise their chances of academic success so they have excuses if they do not do well.	"I sometimes don't study very hard before exams so I have an excuse if I don't do as well as I hoped"
11.	Disengagement	Students' inclination to give up in their academic work or in achievement setting more generally.	"I often feel like giving up at school"

Note. From "The Motivation and Engagement Scale: Theoretical framework, psychometric properties, and applied yields," by G. Liem & A. Martin, 2011. Copyright by Australian Psychological Society.

Table 2

Contributions to Current Employee Engagement Model

Author(s), Year (sorted in chronological order), Theory or Concept	Outcome(s)
Myers, 1920, "Mind in Work"	The importance of the psychological in determining workplace efficiency
Rowntree, 1921, <i>The Human Factor in Business</i>	Safety and comfort in the workplace is essential Engage employees at critical points in their
Mayo, 1927-1932, Hawthorne Studies	Productivity is reliant on the personal not just the mechanical (mental attitudes, supervision, social relationships)
Maslow, 1943, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs	Created a foundation for future research of motivation in the workplace Self-actualization is the goal
McGregor, 1960, Theory X and Theory Y	Participative management style is more effective than an authoritarian management
McClelland, 1961, Acquired Needs Theory, "Helping Followers Feel Powerful"	The three basic needs (achievement, affiliation and power) To be a successful leader, you must turn your followers into leaders
Kanter, 1977, 1983, "Power Tools"	All levels of employees need access to information, resources and support to be empowered
Bandura, 1977, 1986, Self-Efficacy	Prompted the psychological perspective of empowerment research The importance of performance evaluations
Conger & Kanungo, 1988, Empowerment	Redirected empowerment research to focus on internal motivation rather than external Five-stage empowerment model based on enhancing feelings of self-efficacy
Thomas & Velthouse, 1990, Four Task Assessments	Empowerment can only be satisfied if impact, competence, meaningfulness and choice are present
Kahn, 1990, Employee Engagement	Defined the concept of 'employee engagement' for the first time Employee engagement is expressed physically, cognitively and emotionally Work must be meaningful, safe and
McKinsey & Co., 1997, 2001, <i>The War for Talent</i>	Talent mindset Refocus on human capital
Leiter & Maslach, 1998	Led academic research on employee engagement
Gallup, 1999, <i>First, Break All the Rules</i>	Spread the word of the importance of engaging employees in the workplace Developed an accurate measurement of employee engagement (Q12)

Table 3

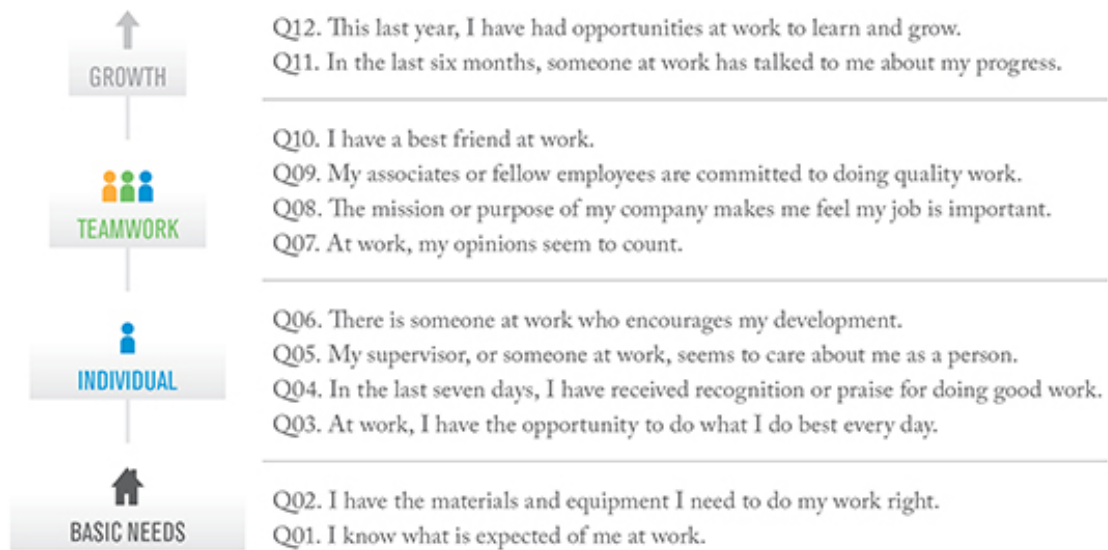
Sample Definitions of Employee Engagement

Definition of Employee Engagement	Author(s), Year (sorted in chronological order)
The harnessing of organizational members' selves to their work roles; in engagement people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances	Kahn (1990)
An energetic state of involvement with personally fulfilling activities that enhance one's sense of professional efficacy (from burnout literature)	Leiter & Maslach (1998)
A persistent, positive affective-motivational state of fulfillment in employees that is characterized by high levels of activation and pleasure	Maslach, Schaufeli & Leiter (2001)
The individual's involvement and satisfaction with as well as enthusiasm for work	Harter, Schmidt & Hayes (2002)
Employee engagement is the amount of "discretionary effort," in the form of time, brainpower or energy, that employees exhibit at work	Towers Watson (2003)
The extent to which employees commit to something or someone in the organization, [and] how hard they work and how long they stay as a result of that commitment	Corporate Leadership Council (2004)
A distinct and unique construct that consists of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral components that is associated with individual role performance	Saks (2006)
Employee Engagement is a heightened emotional and intellectual connection that an employee has for his/her job, organization, manager, or co-workers that, in turn, influences him/her to apply additional discretionary effort to his/her work	Gibbons (2006)
The employee's sense of purpose and focused energy that is evident to others through the display of personal initiative, adaptability, effort, and persistence directed toward the organization's goals	Macey, Schneider, Barbera & Young (2009)
Employee engagement encompasses three dimensions: rational (how well employees understand their roles and responsibilities), emotional (how much passion they bring to their work and their organizations), and motivational (how willing they are to invest discretionary effort to perform their roles well)	Towers Watson (2009)
The extent to which employees share their company's values, feel pride in working for their company, are committed to working for their company and have favorable perceptions of their work environment	Towers Watson (2010)

Note. Adapted from "Engaged in what: Creating connections to performance with rewards, recognition and roles," by T. Welbourne & S. Schlachter, 2014. Copyright by The Incentive Research Foundation.

THE 12 ELEMENTS OF GREAT MANAGING: THE EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT HIERARCHY

Gallup's research shows that the order in which these 12 employee engagement items are asked is important. When discussing these elements with their teams, managers should focus first on employees' basic needs, then align their employees' and teams' efforts with the company's mission, culture, and brand. This alignment helps companies maximize employee engagement as a key driver of business performance and success.



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Figure 1. The 12 Elements of Great Managing: The Employee Engagement Hierarchy.

From “Can You Really Manage Engagement Without Managers?,” by E. Kampf, 2014.

Retrieved from <http://www.gallup.com/businessjournal/168614/really-manage-engagement-without-managers.aspx>. Copyright 2014 by Gallup, Inc.

Work & Well-being Survey (UWES) ©

The following 17 statements are about how you feel at work. Please read each statement carefully and decide if you ever feel this way about your job. If you have never had this feeling, cross the '0' (zero) in the space after the statement. If you have had this feeling, indicate how often you feel it by crossing the number (from 1 to 6) that best describes how frequently you feel that way.

	Almost never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very often	Always
0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Never	A few times a year or less	Once a month or less	A few times a month	Once a week	A few times a week	Every day
1. _____	At my work, I feel bursting with energy* (V11)					
2. _____	I find the work that I do full of meaning and purpose (DE1)					
3. _____	Time flies when I'm working (AB1)					
4. _____	At my job, I feel strong and vigorous (V12)*					
5. _____	I am enthusiastic about my job (DE2)*					
6. _____	When I am working, I forget everything else around me (AB2)					
7. _____	My job inspires me (DE3)*					
8. _____	When I get up in the morning, I feel like going to work (V13)*					
9. _____	I feel happy when I am working intensely (AB3)*					
10. _____	I am proud on the work that I do (DE4)*					
11. _____	I am immersed in my work (AB4)*					
12. _____	I can continue working for very long periods at a time (V14)					
13. _____	To me, my job is challenging (DE5)					
14. _____	I get carried away when I'm working (AB5)*					
15. _____	At my job, I am very resilient, mentally (V15)					
16. _____	It is difficult to detach myself from my job (AB6)					
17. _____	At my work I always persevere, even when things do not go well (V16)					

* Shortened version (UWES-9); V1= vigor; DE = dedication; AB = absorption

© Schaufeli & Bakker (2003). The Utrecht Work Engagement Scale is free for use for non-commercial scientific research. Commercial and/or non-scientific use is prohibited, unless previous written permission is granted by the authors

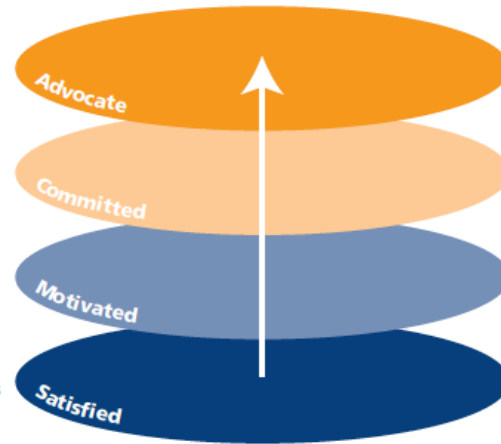
Figure 2. The Utrecht Work Engagement Scale. From "UWES Manual," by Schaufeli, W. B., Bakker A., 2003. Copyright 2003 by Schaufeli & Bakker.

Mercer's Employee Engagement Model[®]**Committed:**

- Loyal to organization, optimistic for the future
- Sees the bigger picture, with a sense of how job fits in
- Collaborates to achieve team goals
- Openly ambitious for self, team and company
- Believes the organization will enable his/her good performance
- Has a sense of belonging to organization; feels valued and involved at work and expresses views freely

Motivated:

- Contributes energetically
- Strives to achieve personal goals
- Values achieving personal goals more than team/organizational goals
- Focused individual contributor
- More loyal to personal professional goals than to the organization

**Advocate:**

- Contributes discretionary effort
- Proactively seeks opportunities to serve the mission of the organization
- Speaks positively about the organization's products and services
- Recommends organization as an employer
- Is willing to withhold criticism and/or be constructively critical for the good of the organization
- Resilient to short-term dissatisfiers

Satisfied:

- Enjoys job
- Is not dissatisfied with terms and conditions
- Content to work alone
- Does not go "above and beyond"
- Not necessarily a team player
- Often externally focused

Figure 3. Mercer's Employee Engagement Model. From "Engaging employees to drive global business success: Insights from Mercer's What's Working Research." Mercer, 2007. Retrieved from https://www.mmc.com/knowledgecenter/Engaging_Employees_To_Drive_Business.pdf. Copyright 2014 by Mercer.

Appendix

Research Paper

Maddie Crawford

INT 199: Internship

Summer 2014

This paper will outline the existing research regarding employee engagement and millennials in the workplace in attempt to lay the foundation for employers and HR professionals to increase engagement in their soon to be predominately millennial workforce.

The Beginnings of Employee Engagement

“The more people draw on their selves to perform their role..., the more stirring are their performances and the more content they are with the fit of the costumes they don.”¹ William Kahn’s study titled *Psychological Conditions of Personal Engagement and Disengagement at Work* (1990) was the impetus for the surge in curiosity regarding employee engagement. Before Kahn’s study, researchers focused on “person-role relationships,” meaning the general, supposedly permanent, state of the employee.¹ Kahn saw a hole in the existing research, specifically, he saw the absence of a “theoretical framework explaining how psychological experiences of work and work contexts shape the processes of people presenting and absenting their selves during task performances.”¹ Kahn began by defining personal engagement as “the harnessing of organizational members’ selves to their work roles [by which they] employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances.”¹ Kahn notes a specific example of personal engagement in one of his subjects as follows:

A scuba-diving instructor at the summer camp taught a special class to advanced divers. He spent a great deal of time with the students both in and out of class and worked to share with them his personal philosophy about the ocean and the need to take care of its resources. In doing so, he experiences moments of pure

¹ Kahn, W. A. (1990). Psychological conditions of personal engagement and disengagement at work. *Academy of Management Journal*, 33, 692-724.

personal engagement. He described one diving expedition in which he employed his self physically, darting about checking gear and leading the dive; cognitively, in his vigilant awareness of divers, weather, and marine life; and emotionally, in emphasizing with the fear and excitement of the young divers. He also expressed himself – the dimensions of himself that loved the ocean and wanted others to do so as well – during that expedition, talking about the wonders of the ocean, directing the boat drivers toward minimally destructive paths across the coral reef, showing his playfulness and joy underwater. The counselor was at once psychologically connecting with the campers and to a task that deeply tapped what he defined as important. In doing so, he was simultaneously fully discharging his role and expressing a preferred self.¹

Kahn also included a definition for personal disengagement – “the uncoupling of selves from work roles [where people] withdraw and defend themselves physically, cognitively, or emotionally during role performances.”¹ Based upon “discrete moments of role performances that represent microcosms of the larger complexity,” Kahn developed a conceptual model that identified three key conditions that explain the variance in people’s engagement at work – meaningfulness, safety and availability.¹ May et al. (2004) found that, out of these three conditions, meaningfulness displayed the strongest relation to personal engagement.² Kahn’s qualitative study played an important role amplifying interest in the concept of engagement within the field of psychology and researchers began exploring different lines of work-related engagement research in order to pin down a definition of the ambiguous concept.

Defining Employee Engagement

After Kahn posed his definition of engagement in 1990, scholars have continued to build upon and develop definitions of engagement. Engagement at work

² May, D.R. Gilson, R.L. and Harter, L.M. (2004) ‘The psychological conditions of meaningfulness, safety and availability and the engagement of the human spirit at work’, *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, Vol 77, p. 11-37.

has been defined in respect to burnout. Leiter and Maslach (2004) believed employees fell into one of two mental states while in the workplace – burnout or engagement. They defined burnout as “a psychological syndrome characterized by exhaustion, cynicism, and inefficacy, which is experienced in response to job stressors” and engagement as “the direct opposite of burnout...exist[ing] on a continuum with engagement on one end and burnout on the other.”³ This definition does build upon Kahn’s idea of being present at work, but defines engagement as the exact opposite of burnout, which sparked a debate between those who believe engagement is directly tied to burnout and those who view the two concepts as simply related. Harter et al. (2002) defined employee engagement as “the individual’s involvement and satisfactions as well as enthusiasm for work.”⁴ Though this definition is in agreement with Kahn’s personal engagement definition, Harter adds another element - emotional connectedness to others and cognitive vigilance.⁴ Harter et al. (2003) measures employee engagement upon four antecedent elements – clarity of expectations and basic materials and equipment being provided, feelings of contribution to the organization, feeling a sense of belonging to something beyond oneself, and feeling as though there are opportunities to discuss progress and grow.⁵ Around the same time

³ Leiter, M. P., & Maslach, C. (2004). Areas of worklife: A structured approach to organizational predictors of job burnout. In P. Perrewé & D. C. Ganster, (Eds.), *Research in occupational stress and well being* (Vol. 3, pp. 91-134). Oxford, UK: Elsevier.

⁴ Harter, J.K., Schmidt, F.L., & Hayes, T.L. (2002). Business-unit-level relationship between employee satisfaction, employee engagement, and business outcomes: a meta-analysis. *Journal of Applied Psychology* 87 (2), 268–279.

⁵ Harter, J.K., Schmidt, F.L., & Keyes, C.L.M. (2003). Well-being in the workplace and its relationship to business outcomes: a review of the Gallup studies. In: Keyes, C.L., Haidt, J. (Eds.), *Flourishing: The Positive Person and the Good Life*. American Psychological Association, Washington, DC, pp. 205–224.

period, Schaufeli et al. (2002, p.74) defined work engagement as “a persistent and positive affective-motivational state of fulfillment characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption.”⁶ Schaufeli defined vigor as “high levels of energy and mental resilience while working, the willingness to invest efforts in one’s work, and persistence even in the face of difficulties,” dedication as “a sense of significance, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride, and challenge” and absorption as a “state of being fully concentrated and deeply engrossed in one’s work, where by time passes quickly, and one has difficulties with detaching oneself from work.”⁶ To test individual engagement levels, Schaufeli had each participant complete a questionnaire that was designed to measure vigor, dedication and absorption. Employees with high engagement scored high on all three factors selecting “At my job I feel strong and vigorous” for the vigor scale, “I find the work that I do full of meaning and purpose” for the dedication scale and “I feel happy when I am working intensely” for the absorption scale.⁶ In 2009, Kim et al. utilized this three-factor model to define engagement as a “positive, fulfilling and work related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication and absorption.”⁷

Overlap exists between engagement and various related constructs such as flow and satisfaction. It is important to identify the key disparities between these highly related constructs in order to better understand the essence of engagement.

⁶ Schaufeli, W. B., Salanova, M., Gonzalez-Roma, V., & Bakker, A.B. (2002). The measurement of engagement and burnout: A two-sample confirmatory factor analytic approach. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 3, 71-92.

⁷ Kim, H.J., Shin, K.H., Swanger, N., 2009. Burnout and engagement: a comparative analysis using the Big Five personality dimensions. *International Journal of Hospitality Management* 28 (1), 96–104.

According to Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, flow in the workplace requires: clear goals, immediate and unambiguous feedback, challenges that match the worker's skills, a sense of control, few distractions, intrinsic motivation and feeling a part of something larger than the self.⁸ The majority, if not all, of these factors are also necessary for engagement, making the difference between the two difficult to pinpoint at first. The definition provided by Schaufeli et al. – “rather than a momentary and specific state, engagement refers to a more persistent and pervasive affective-cognitive state that is not focused on any particular object, event, individual, or behavior” – helps in distinguishing engagement from flow.⁶ According to Schaufeli et al., “flow is a more complex concept that includes many aspects and refers to rather particular, short-term ‘peak’ experiences instead of a more pervasive and persistent state of mind, as is the case with engagement.”⁶ Flow is essentially “being in the zone.” An example of flow in the work place would likely occur when the employee's skill level is high and the challenge presented is high as well. Satisfaction, on the other hand, is defined as “a pleasurable or positive emotional state that results from an appraisal of one's job and job experiences or from the perception that a job fulfills one's needs and important job values.”⁹ It is clear that engagement and satisfaction both have an affective element to their definition, but the main difference between the two is that “engagement emphasizes the cognitive aspect of involvement with job tasks, whereas

⁸ Craemer, M. (2010). Finding Flow in the Workplace. *Seattlepi*. Retrieved from <http://blog.seattlepi.com/workplacewrangler/2010/05/10/finding-flow-in-the-workplace/>

⁹ Locke, E. A. (1976). The nature and causes of job satisfaction. In M. D. Dunnette (Ed.), *Handbook of industrial and organizational psychology* (pp. 1297-1349). Chicago: Rand McNally.

satisfaction focuses on affect.”¹⁰ Looking exclusively at the similarities between engagement and similar constructs makes it somewhat difficult to conceptualize, but examining the key differences between the constructs is critical to understanding engagement itself.

Employee Engagement in Context

Regardless of its definition, research has shown the positive effects of employee engagement for both the individual and organization as a whole. First, looking at the individual, Saks (2006) found that “work engagement had a positive relationship with employees’ job satisfaction and a negative relationship with turnover intention.”¹¹ The Corporate Executive Board Company (CEB) confirms these findings, stating both employee performance and retention are positively correlated with employee engagement.¹² Gallup researchers studied the differences in performance between engaged and actively disengaged employees. They found that employees scoring in the top half of employee engagement nearly doubled their odds of success compared to those in the bottom half.¹³ Even more impressive, workers at the 99th percentile had four times the success rate of those at the first percentile.¹³ CEB found a correlation between the actions of engaged employees and their

¹⁰ Wefald, A. J. & Downey, R. G. (2009). Construct Dimensionality of Engagement and its Relation with Satisfaction, *The Journal of Psychology: Interdisciplinary and Applied*, 143:1, 91-112.

¹¹ Saks, A.M., 2006. Antecedents and consequences of employee engagement. *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, 21 (7), 600–619.

¹² The Corporate Executive Board Company 2011

¹³ Sorenson, S. (2013). How Employee Engagement Drives Growth. *Gallup Business Journal*. Retrieved from <http://businessjournal.gallup.com/content/163130/employee-engagement-drives-growth.aspx>

perceptions of the past, present and future of their organization. Employees with favorable perceptions of past events are more likely to refer new job candidates, advocate for the organization as a great employer and not seek employment elsewhere when labor market improves.¹² Employees with favorable perceptions of present events are more likely to balance current responsibilities, volunteer for additional responsibilities and help a colleague.¹² Finally, employees with high expectations for the future of the organization are more likely to accept additional workload, own their individual development and not apply to positions outside the organization.¹⁴ In regards to the organization as a whole, high engagement capital drives higher business performance when business performance. In a recent study, Gallup examined 49 publicly traded companies with recent earnings per share and Q¹² data available in its database. They found that companies with engaged workforces have higher earnings per share. More specifically, “companies with an average of 9.3 engaged employees for every actively disengaged employee in 2010-2011 experiences 147% higher earnings per share compared with their competition in 2011-2012.”¹⁴

Case Study – Employee Engagement at Pottery Barn

My internship this summer was with Pottery Barn’s merchandising department, but I was able to speak with Shestin Swartley, Human Resources Manager for the brand, to learn about Pottery Barn’s employee engagement strategy. Ms. Swartley was able to share her extensive knowledge of the brand’s employee

¹⁴ Sorenson, S. & Garman, K. (2013). How to Tackle U.S. Employees’ Stagnating Engagement. *Gallup Business Journal*. Retrieved from <http://businessjournal.gallup.com/content/162953/tackle-employees-stagnating-engagement.aspx>

engagement strategies over the past two and a half years she has worked for Pottery Barn's human resources department.

Throughout Ms. Swartley's time working for Pottery Barn, HR has developed multiple new programs to boost employee engagement. Two years ago, HR developed a new parent program that takes place once a quarter. This program helps coordinate leaves of absence for soon to be parents. In addition, the new parent receives a gift, informative booklet and card with Sandra Stangl's (president of Pottery Barn brands) signature. This program is very relevant and necessary for Pottery Barn because 78% of their corporate employees are females of childbearing age. Not surprisingly, this new parent program is off to a great start with 28 employees company-wide currently utilizing this resource. Within the past two years, HR has also developed an On the Spot Award program. This program exists exclusively within the Pottery Barn brands and is based upon employee identification. Each month, fifteen gift cards are awarded to employees who have been identified by their coworkers as going "above and beyond" in their work. This program has low administrative need and is easy to manage, making it a great addition to the existing engagement base. Another recent addition to HR's effort to increase employee engagement is their mentoring program. Their program connects new employees with mentors cross-brand. HR sent a company-wide email informing employees of the opportunity to act as a mentor and mentee. Those employees who were interested in participating completed a survey and, based on their responses, employees were paired up. Currently, 44 pairs are involved in the program. HR is using a hands-off approach to this program and encourages each pair to make the mentorship their own in order to get the most out of

the program. HR's main form of communication with the pairs is a check-in survey every six months. Finally, HR began hosting optional brown bag sessions once a month to discuss hot topics in the employee community. For example, the recent removal of over time was discussed at the most recent session.

One of Pottery Barn's main engagement strategies is the StrengthsFinder assessment. HR has developed a program centered on the StrengthsFinder book and internet-based assessment which they apply to intact teams who work together on a daily basis. Each member of the team completes the online assessment that identifies their unique top five strengths then reads the StrengthsFinder book prior to meeting up with their group. A member of HR leads the meeting by first having each member of the team stand up in front of the group and define their top strength. Next, the team's director leads a discussion based on questions provided by HR. The goals of the StrengthsFinder assessment and subsequent group session are for each employee to discover his or her top strengths, learn about strengths-based development and implement some ideas for action. So far, 25 teams throughout the Pottery Barn brands have completed the StrengthsFinder assessment and participated in the team activity. Even the Pottery Barn executives completed the assessment and team activity. The Pottery Barn executives' top five strengths are strategic, positivity, maximize, achiever and competition. A potential next step for the HR's StrengthsFinder program is engaging the employees *after* they have left the session. Currently, HR does not have any type of follow up plan in place to keep in touch with employees after they have completed the session. I see great potential in the creation of a follow-up or

check-in after the completion of the team activity to make sure the employees are actually utilizing the valuable information learned.

More recent additions to the employee engagement initiative at Pottery Barn include a monthly development course in which every employee at Pottery Barn corporate completes a 45-minute activity once a month aimed at strengthening the employee's work expertise. The activity's topic is based on a three-month cycle. For the first month, the course focuses on performance management like coaching or some sort of career development activity. Next month, the topic concerns engagement and could come in the form of a TED Talk or discussion group. The third month in the cycle is a business topic so, for example, the activity might be a speech from a business leader outside of Williams-Sonoma, Inc. To gauge the program's effectiveness, HR gives each employee a pre-course survey and compares the pre-course responses to survey responses further along in the program. HR has also developed a new form of onboarding based upon a 30-60-90 day plan. This plan lays Pottery Barn's goals for the new employee at each of the three deadlines. As time progresses, the goals become more and more function-specific. Pottery Barn does not utilize a corporate-wide employee survey. Instead, an anonymous exit survey is given to every employee who leaves the company. The survey asks for the employee's top five bad and good things about working at Pottery Barn. Based on the survey responses, HR has a solid idea of their top three opportunities to increase employee engagement and, because of this; they see no point in stirring the pot by enacting a corporate-wide employee survey until they are able to act upon these three opportunities. HR does keep in touch with current employees by conducting one-on-

ones with each and every Pottery Barn employee manager level and below. The most recent addition to HR's employee engagement strategy is the creation of an inclusion and diversity program.

While at Pottery Barn this summer, I was able to attend the 2014 Williams-Sonoma, Inc. Associate Conference. In previous years, the associate conference included food trucks, fun games and activities, information booths and raffles. This year was the first year that the executives gave speeches in front of all the associates. Their speeches were centered upon the theme "dream" and were not only incredibly inspirational, but also very informative. From an intern's perspective, of all of the employee engagement strategies used at Pottery Barn, I found the executive speeches at the associate conference the most influential. Hearing directly from the heads of the company is very powerful, especially when you feel so distant from them working in an entry level position – it is inspiring, motivating and reassuring.

Strengths-Based Development

"Most people think they know what they are good at. They are usually wrong...And yet, a person can perform only from strength."¹⁵ This quote by Peter Drucker is the reason behind taking the StrengthsFinder assessment – to discover your strengths and learn how to utilize them to perform the best you possibly can. After completing the StrengthsFinder assessment at Pottery Barn myself, I decided to research the topic more in-depth in order to fully understand the power of playing to employees strengths. Looking at the specifics, the StrengthsFinder assessment consists of 180 items that are paired up and you are given 20 seconds to choose which

¹⁵ Rath, T. (2007). *StrengthsFinder 2.0*. New York, NY: Gallup Press.

of the two statements best describes themselves. The time constraint is a unique element of the assessment and is built-in because researchers found that “instinctual, top-of-mind responses are more revealing than those you’d give if you sat around and debated each question.”¹⁶ At the end of the assessment, you are given your top five strengths based on your responses. These five come from a list of 34 themes that “represent [their] best attempt at creating a common language or classification of talents.”¹⁶

Looking at strengths-based development from a work perspective, as a manager, it is much more beneficial to focus on your employee’s strengths rather than stressing the importance of improving upon their weaknesses because “a strengths-based approach improves your confidence, direction, hope, and kindness toward others.”¹⁶ Welch et al. (2014) provides a useful simile that helps illustrate the effect of utilizing our talent:

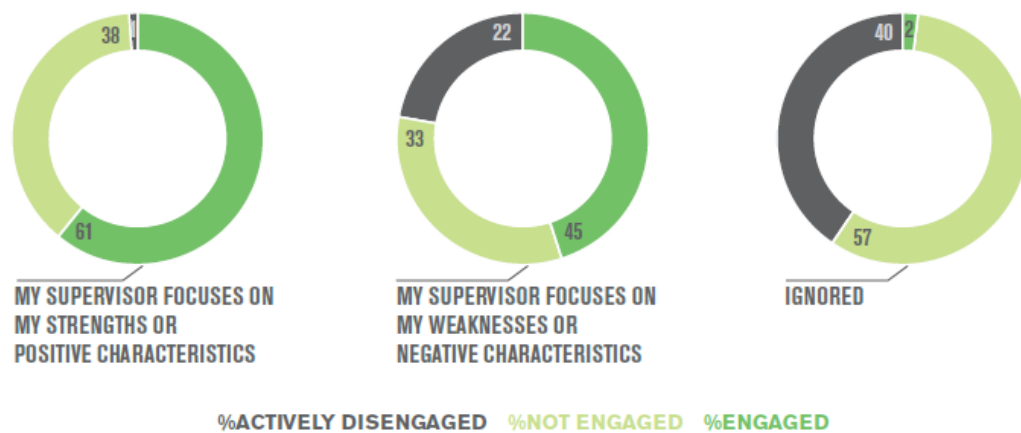
We create interference for ourselves or we create interference between ourselves and others and we know that interference is there the same way as if you’re driving your car cross-country and you want to hear the radio, and you got a station but there’s static. And so you keep tuning and tuning until the static disappears and you can hear the station. Well the interference is like static to this high state of energy; the lighting up that we have when we’re using our gifts and talent on behalf of what really matters to us.¹⁶

The benefits of a strengths-based approach can help build a cohesive, positive, productive team. In addition, “people have several times more potential for growth when they invest energy in developing their strengths instead of correcting their deficiencies.”¹⁶ This means the effort managers invest in their employees will not be

¹⁶Welch, D., Grossaint, K., Reid, K., & Walker, C. (2014). Strengths-based leadership development: Insights from expert coaches. *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice And Research*, 66(1), 20-37.

in vein, they will see positive results. This concept is illustrated in the figure below.

Even further, the more effort and energy leaders invest in their followers' talent development, this is illustrated in the strength equation provided by StrengthsFinder - talent (a natural way of thinking, feeling, or behaving) multiplied by investment (time spent practicing, developing your skills, and building your knowledge base) equals strength (the ability to consistently provide near-perfect performance).¹⁶ To conclude, incorporating a StrengthsFinder program is an example of a great employee engagement technique organizations should utilize.



Measuring Employee Engagement

Gallup developed a tool titled the Q¹² Employee Engagement Assessment as a standard to measure employee engagement and business performance.¹⁷ This assessment has each individual employee answer 12 questions on a scale of 1 to 5 in order to determine the overall engagement score for the individual and organization in

¹⁷ Gallup's Q12 Survey Features. *Gallup, Inc.* Retrieved from <https://q12.gallup.com/Public/en-us/Features>

addition to Gallup Database comparisons to other workgroups who have utilized the Q¹².¹³ Gallup conducted a meta-analysis using the Q¹² in 2012 to calculate the “work-unit-level relationship between employee engagement and performance outcomes.”¹² This research pooled data from 192 organizations, which consisted of 1.4 million employees total.¹² They found a strong connection between employee engagement and nine performance outcomes – customer ratings, profitability, productivity, turnover, safety incidents, shrinkage, absenteeism, patient safety incidents and quality.¹²

Each year, the Gallup Organization recognizes an exclusive group of “exceptional organizations whose leadership understands that employee engagement drives real business outcomes and who have mastered how to engage their workforces” with the Gallup Great Workplace Award.¹⁸ “These organizations average a ratio of nine engaged employees to one actively disengaged employee, which is more than five times the ratio in the U.S. and more than 16 times the ratio for workforces globally.”²⁰ For three of the 2013 Gallup Great Workplace Award recipients – ABC Supply Co., Inc., Hendrick Health System and Winegardner & Hammons, Inc. – this was the eighth year they earned such recognition. Gallup selected these organizations eight years in a row because they integrate engagement into four key areas of their business: strategy and leadership, accountability and performance, communication and knowledge management and development and ongoing learning.

Managing Employee Engagement

¹⁸ O’Boyle, E. & Harter, J. (2014). 36 Companies That Set the Standard for Workplace Excellence. *The Gallup Blog*. Retrieved from <http://thegallupblog.gallup.com/2014/03/35-companies-that-set-standard-for.html>

Research has shown that engaged employees produce positive outcomes, but why is it that 70% of U.S. workers still are not engaged or actively disengaged at work and only 33% of U.S. workers strongly agree that, at work, they have the opportunity to do what they do best every day?¹⁹ According to Jim Harter, Gallup's Chief Scientist, "there is a gap between knowing about engagement and doing something about it in most American workplaces."¹⁵ After conducting a study of 32 "exemplary" companies, Gallup researchers identified seven key characteristics that are inherent to these stand out companies that are lacking in their counterparts with significantly lower employee engagement.²⁰ First, regarding leadership, Gallup found that involved leaders who model curiosity and a passion for improving themselves play an influential role at improving employee engagement throughout the company.²² Leaders' actions, attitudes and values have a powerful effect on their subordinates and their organization as a whole. These "exemplary" employers share the pursuit of engagement for the purpose of achieving the outcomes they need, not simply for the sake of measuring engagement levels. Even though "more than 90% of organizations conduct an engagement survey,"¹² only a percentage of these companies are actually utilizing the data for the purpose of learning what is going wrong, fixing the problems and moving forward with outcomes in the forefront of their mind. In addition to applying engagement data, exemplary companies "trust, hold accountable, and relentlessly support managers and teams."²² Allowing teams to problem solve

¹⁹ State of the Global Workplace 2013, Gallup

²⁰ Flade, P., Harter, P., & Asplund, J. (2014). Seven Things Great Employers Do (That Others Don't). *Gallup Business Journal*. Retrieved from <http://businessjournal.gallup.com/content/168407/seven-things-great-employers-others-don.aspx>

their issues without interference from the CEO makes for strong teams and more trust in direct managers rather than creating a negative reliance on the CEO. Gallup also found that these companies make sure basic engagement requirements are met before stressing the company's mission.²² Once an employee is engaged in their role and day-to-day responsibilities, they are then able to commit their efforts to the company's mission. In addition, exemplary employers never use the state of the economy as an excuse for declining performance or a negative workplace.²² Instead, these companies use economic downturns as an opportunity to build a stronger company culture by "making changes swiftly, communicating constantly, and providing hope."²² Finally, in regards to human resources, a powerful, influential HR team that utilizes employee recognition and performance management is a defining characteristic of companies with exemplary employee engagement.²² Companies that have secured a HR team with the ability to hold executives accountable and teach leaders how to develop their employees' strengths more likely than not have high employee engagement. Gallup's intensive research culminates with these seven characteristics, characteristics that, if utilized, could lead to an increase in employee engagement levels.

Like Gallup, Jay Gilbert conducted a study titled *The Millennials: A New Generation of Employees, A New Set of Engagement Policies* that explored the topic of engagement in respect to the millennial generation. For this study, Gilbert noted that engagement driver can be identified when "an increase in the perception of the

driver generates an increase in engagement.”²¹ On the other hand, an engagement threat can be identified when “a decrease in the perception of the driver generates a decrease in engagement.”²³ The drivers and threats measured in the study were career opportunities, corporate social responsibility, employee health and well being, employer reputation, learning and development, managing performance, senior leadership and work-life balance.²³ Now that I have outlined my research regarding employee engagement, I will narrow my focus and look specifically at millennial engagement in the workplace.

Millennials versus Baby Boomers

The baby boom generation, born between the early 1940s and mid-1960s, is the largest generational cohort in history due to the post-World War II baby boom.²² They have had a strong influence, socially and economically, on the United States workforce and society at large. Baby boomers were raised in economic prosperity, but also lived through some dramatic changes including the civil rights movement, the Vietnam War, Watergate and the assassinations of JFK and Martin Luther King Jr. In regards to work life, the boomer generation values work more than younger generations – viewing it as more central to their lives.²³ Boomers identify their strengths as “organizational memory, optimism, and their willingness to work long

²¹ Gilbert, J. (2011). The Millennials: A Generation of Employees, a New Set of Engagement Policies. *Ivey Business Journal*. Retrieved from <http://iveybusinessjournal.com/topics/the-workplace/the-millennials-a-new-generation-of-employees-a-new-set-of-engagement-policies#.VBe6EVbmngI>

²² Sessa, V., Kabacoff, R., Deal, J. & Brown, H. (2007). Generational Differences in leader values and leadership behaviors. *The Psychologist-Manager Journal*, (10)1: 47-74.

²³ Family and Work Institute, 2006

hours.”²³ In the work place, boomers are described as achievement oriented,²⁴ respectful of authority,²⁵ loyal and attached to organizations,²⁶ and driven by goals and results in the workplace.¹⁹ Finally, boomers tend to be competitive and measure success materially.²⁷

The millennial generation, born between 1980 and 1999,²⁸ is the largest age group to enter the workforce since the baby boomers.²⁰ The millennial generation has been shaped by globalization, “parental excesses, computers, and dramatic technological advances.”²⁹ Their personal values include “happiness, passion, diversity, security and experiences.”³⁰ Millennials have a strong sense of morality – they want to understand the intention and motivation behind an organization’s actions, especially in regards to philanthropy. In regards to being raised in an age of globalization, millennials are extremely receptive to and engaged in global issues. According to David Jones’ research, 84 percent of millennials believe it is their generation’s duty to improve the world.³¹ In regards to work life, millennials value

²⁴ O’Bannon, G. (2001). Managing our future: The generation X factor. *Public Personnel Management*, 30, 95.

²⁵ Allen, Paul. (2004, September) Welcoming Y. *Benefits Canada*, 28 (9), 51 (3).

²⁶ Hart, K. A. (2006), Generations in the workplace: Finding common ground. Retrieved from www.mlo-online.com

²⁷ Eisner, S. P. (2005). Managing generation Y. *S.A.M. Advanced Management Journal*, 70, 4-15.

²⁸ Crampton, S. M., & Hodge, J. W. (2006). The supervisor and generational differences. *Proceedings of the Academy of Organizational Culture, Communications and Conflict*, 11, 19-22.

²⁹ Tolbize, A. (2008). Generational different in workplace. *Research and Training Center on Community Living*.

³⁰ CHRO Quarterly, Second Quarter, 2014

³¹ David Jones, *Who Cares Wins: Why Good Business is Better Business*, Pearson, 2012.

teamwork³² and flexibility,³³ have high expectations about work environment and accommodations³⁴ and value diversity. Employers must find ways to immediately engage a millennial employee, because if they do not feel as though their efforts are making a significant difference, they will not hesitate to leave and explore other options available to them. For example, place a millennial in a position that challenges them and matches their talents while also incorporating them into the company culture so they are able to understand their impact on the organization as a whole. In regards to their high expectation about work environment, millennials not only crave but also expect constructive performance management. Millennials value a work-life balance with an emphasis on vacation time and flexible hours. Because of their tech-savvy nature, millennials do not want to be tied down by a nine to five when they could easily produce just as high quality work from home using their laptop or tablet. For example, compared to baby boomers, millennials are 12% more likely to check their work e-mail outside of the work environment.³⁵ Technology is arguably the most powerful influencer of the millennial generation and it will undoubtedly continue to shape what they value and how they live their lives.

In their study titled *Managing Millennials: A framework for improving attraction, motivation, and retention*, Thompson et al. (2012) address the negative stereotypes assigned to the millennial generation and how these negatives can

³² Zemke, R., Raines, C., & Filipczak, B. (1999). *Generations at work: Managing the clash of veterans, boomers, Xers, and nexters in your workplace*. AMACOM, New York.

³³ Martin CA. From high maintenance to high productivity: What managers need to know about Generation Y. *Industrial and Commercial Training*. 2005;37:39–44.

³⁴ Park, J. & Gursoy, D. (2012). Generation effects on work engagement among U.S. hotel employees. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*.

³⁵ The Corporate Executive Board Company 2014

potentially be transformed into positives in the workforce. In addition, they touch upon the benefits of a strong employee-manager relationship in respect to millennials:

We expect that managers who are able to adapt to this management paradigm will see the largely negative stereotypes of Millennials transform into valuable strengths. Suddenly the disloyal employee is entrepreneurial and externally-focused (a valuable characteristic in today's market). The needy 20-something is eager to learn and open to developmental feedback that will help him take his skills and performance to the next level. The entitled recent graduate is ambitious, confident, and open about her expectations for reward in exchange for strong performance. The causal, informal young attorney forges genuine relationships with clients that lead to client retention and increased referrals. Additionally, the manager who is able to develop a strong and genuine relationship with his or her Millennial employees will reap the benefit of their loyalty and commitment. Hershatter and Epstein (2010) note that Millennial employees who feel looked after and like they are receiving ample personalized attention cultivate loyalty to the organization and, particularly, to their manager.³⁶

The distinct social, historical and life experiences of the millennial and baby boomer generations creates a predicament for employers especially since millennials currently comprise 25% of the world's population and are quickly becoming the largest employee segment in the workforce.³⁷ Because of this dramatic shift in the composition of the workforce, employers must develop new engagement models to fit the needs of the millennial generation.

Millennial Engagement

"Few millennials (14 percent) put forth high levels of discretionary effort at work and just 26 percent have high levels of intent to stay. Both these numbers are about one-third less than the global averages for all other employees."²⁷ One possible explanation for these alarming statistics is presented by Park and Gursoy (2012) who

³⁶ Thompson, C., & Gregory, J. (2012). Managing Millennials: A framework for improving attraction, motivation, and retention. *The Psychologist-Manager Journal*, 15(4), 237-246.

³⁷ World Economic Forum, 2013

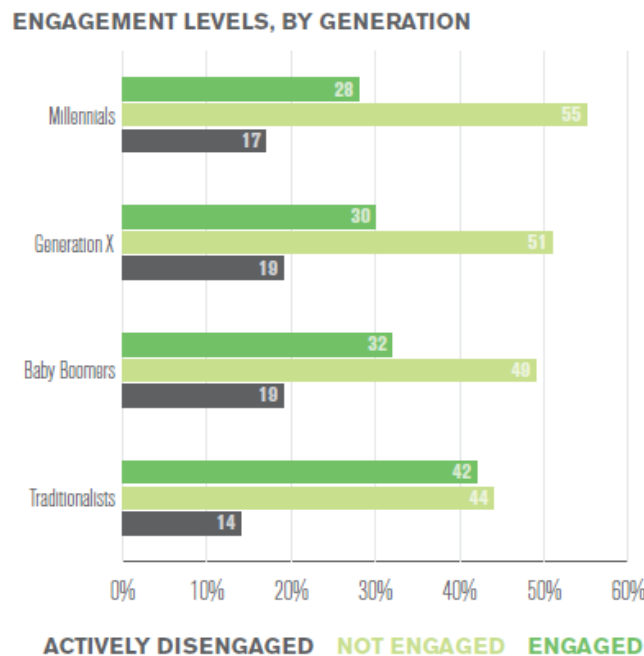
found that “millennial employees feel significantly higher intention to leave their organizations than do older generations when experiencing a lack of vigor and deterioration of mental health in the workplace,” but “when they find their job fulfilling and meaningful, thereby being deeply engaged, millennial employees are less likely to leave their organizations than engaged Gen X and Baby Boomer employees.”³² These findings suggest that only 26 percent of employers have successfully been able to provide fulfilling and meaningful positions to millennial employees and that an overwhelming 74 percent of employers are not able to create an experience that deeply engages millennials. Twenge (2010) found that, compared to older generations, millennials tend to be more satisfied in their job, but have similar turnover intention.³⁸ This suggests the existence of a generation effect on work-related behavioral measures that had previously been thought of as highly correlated.³² Smart employers will take these findings seriously, they need to leave their previously held assumptions concerning work-related behaviors in the past because data now exists suggesting that millennials do not fit into the same mold as older generations.

Taking a closer look at Jay Gilbert’s study on millennial engagement, one of his main goals was to determine the key engagement drivers and threats for millennials.²⁰ Gilbert found that millennial’s top engagement drivers are “managing performance” and “career opportunities” while their top engagement threats are “employer reputation” and “managing performance.”²⁰ These findings stress

³⁸ Twenge, J. M. (2010). A review of the empirical evidence on generational differences in work attitudes. *Journal of Business and Psychology*, 25(2), 201-210.

millennial's desire for performance management and constructive feedback from their managers. If employers wish to increase the stereotypically “job-hopping” millennials' productivity and loyalty, they must utilize this knowledge.

Below is a figure³⁹ breaking down engagement levels by generation. Compared to generation X, baby boomer and traditionalist employees, millennials have a lower “engaged” percentage and a significantly higher “not engaged” percentage. This illustrates how much work employers have to do in respect to engaging the millennial generation. The longer employers procrastinate in enacting new engagement strategies directed at the millennials, the lower their chances of securing the best and the brightest from this young generation becomes.



Developing Millennials into High-Performing Employees

³⁹ State of American Workplace Report 2013, Gallup

Knowing how organizations' specific engagement strategies fit into the employee life cycle is critical. Looking at these strategies in respect to the employee experience as a whole is much more powerful than simply looking at them in isolation – it allows HR to assume greater control over their employees and increase awareness regarding what is going wrong and what is going right in the process. The CEB developed a five-step plan to transform millennials into high-performing employees, including one step focused on engagement. CEB's plan is based on the employee life cycle: attraction, engagement, development, performance management, and rewards.

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Step one of CEB's engagement plan – attract – is to highlight the opportunity for “multiple” careers. As noted earlier, flexibility and change are of great importance to millennials – “more than one-quarter of millennial workers left their employer last year to change careers or industries, relocate, or go back to school.”²⁷ HR professionals can take advantage of millennials desire for a job with “future career opportunity” by highlighting the multiple career options available through entry-level positions. Career maps are used to illustrate the potential career paths an entry-level position can lead to within the organization, highlighting the breadth of opportunities available to the individual.²⁷ Because this knowledge of internal opportunities is given to employees at the very beginning of the employee life cycle, organizations may be able to decrease the statistic that “millennials are 18 percent more likely to say they were satisfied in their current role, but left for a better opportunity” compared to other departing employees.²⁷ When attracting millennials, it is essential that employers utilize creative techniques like the career map since millennials “spend

less than half as much time learning about potential employers before deciding whether to apply.”²⁷

Step two of CEB’s plan – engagement – focuses on strengthening worker networkers. “The pursuit of better opportunities makes millennials less settled in their jobs than their peers are.”³⁰ Because of the lack of absorption caused by millennial’s restless pursuit to improve upon their current title, the chance of high engagement is low. To increase millennial absorption and engagement in general, CEB suggests that employers quickly connect millennials with the right colleagues. By building an engaging network within the organization immediately after being hired, the millennial’s mindset will focus on finding ways to fulfill their career goals through their current role.³⁵ Another engagement strategy suggested by CEB is to promote workflow shadowing. This is another technique whose goal is to build upon the employee’s network to include a wide range of coworkers whose skills and functions differ dramatically from the employee’s. In addition, workflow shadowing can also teach the employee how their role fits into the organization as a whole. Once the individual understands the organization’s workflow on a grand scale rather than just their minor function, they will be better equipped to troubleshoot problems and collaborate with other departments.³⁵

Step three – development – highlights the importance of continuous network learning. “One in four millennials recognize continuous learning as a top skill to have” and they prefer network learning to virtual learning. CEB defines network learning as “learning that is relationship-based, reciprocal, and work-relevant.”³⁵ An effective way to play upon this desire for continuous learning is by holding speed

feedback sessions.³⁵ Not to discount their appreciation of peer-to-peer feedback, it is important to note that millennials would prefer feedback from their superior rather than their equals.

Continuing on the note of performance management, step four of CEB's plan – performance management – stresses “ongoing, future-focused feedback on individual task performance” as a way to show millennials that acting on feedback is critical to moving upward in the organization.⁴⁴ In general, millennials enjoy cultivating positive, constructive relationships with their supervisor and “they are 17 percent more likely to ask a manager for feedback on their work than their peers.”³⁶

Finally, step five – rewards – is all about transparency. Millennials have an inflated expectation about how much their compensation should increase each year.³⁶ CEB offers three ways to remedy this gap between expectation and reality. First, employers should implement a pay transparency strategy where the manager sets a standard of exceptional work performance that warrants a pay raise and then rates each of their employees against this standard.³⁶ Second, employers should have all of the necessary information regarding compensation somewhere readily accessible for all employees.³⁶ For example, if the organization has a home page, they could have a tab that is dedicated solely to workers compensation. Third, organizations should encourage senior leaders to communicate the current state of organizational performance and its effect on compensation to all levels of employees.³⁶ These three strategies will decrease the probability of a strong negative reaction to compensation changes. The CEB's five-step plan to transform millennials into high-performing employees effectively demonstrates how engagement fit into the employee life cycle.

Closing Thoughts

High engagement drives higher business performance. Knowing this straightforward statistic and others like it, why is it that an overwhelming “70% of U.S. workers are not engaged or actively disengaged at work and [only] 33% of U.S. workers strongly agree that, at work, they have the opportunity to do what they do best every day?”¹⁹ It is time that employers trust the facts, go out of their comfort zone and make fundamental changes in their employee engagement strategy. If they do not, the impending millennial invasion of the workforce will leave them out to dry.

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