Can Technology Solve the Employee Engagement Crisis?
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The Employee Engagement Crisis

The Two-Way Nature of True Engagement

Engaging the Entire Workforce - with Help from Technology

Measuring Engagement with the Right Tech Tools

Future Insights
Employee engagement—defined in Forbes as “the emotional commitment the employee has to the organization and its goals”—is a critical part of any human resources or internal communications’ strategy. Engagement enables businesses to reach their full potential by helping to create open communication channels, improve productivity, and retain talented staff. On the employee side, engagement helps workers fulfill a wide range of personal and professional needs that can ultimately lead to feelings of life-changing self-actualization and desire to make a social impact. (See Figures 1 and 2 below.)

“Of the trends in this year’s report, the “future of work” will likely accelerate the fastest in the next five years. This is simply a function of where we are in the evolution of technology.”

Deloitte Human Capital Trends Report 2017
Yet surprisingly, according to Gallup, only 13 percent of employees worldwide are actually engaged at work. The situation is slightly better in the U.S. but not much—less than one-third (32 percent) of American workers report feeling involved and enthusiastic about their job. And research by Temkin Group shows that as company size increases, engagement decreases.

With these dismal statistics in mind, it makes sense that many organizations are starting to understand the strategic importance of building a business case for engagement, recognizing how the employee experience (EX) of company culture links to bottom-line corporate profits. Deloitte reports that nearly half (48 percent) of businesses surveyed called out engagement as “very important.” Research bears out this business case, showing that companies with engaged employees outperform those without them by 202 percent. What’s more, the Bureau of National Affairs reports that $11 billion is lost each year due to employee turnover, which is a big risk of disengagement.

EX—which is based on employees’ positive and negative associations and opinions about a company based on their interactions with it—is more than just the latest HR buzzword. The experience that an employee has with a company is now rated as the fourth most important global trend for business leaders to address, according to the Deloitte Human Capital Trends Report 2017. Yet despite management’s growing admission of the importance of EX, Deloitte found that only 22 percent of companies report excellence in building a differentiated employee experience.

Companies with engaged employees outperformed those without by 202%

Dale Carnegie

Herein lies the crux of the employee engagement crisis: in order for companies to rise to the challenge of increasing engagement levels companywide, a sea change must occur in the way that organizations approach creating and delivering the employee experience. To make this vision a reality, HR professionals need to undergo a shift from being talent experts, to becoming employee experience facilitators. This same type of shift is important for senior-level managers and all internal communicators.

Only 22% of companies report excellence in building differentiated employee experience

Deloitte

In a world that’s increasingly digitally driven and focused, the key to making this happen is integrally connected to technology. To be successful and drive engagement, organizations must embrace new mobile-enabled technology.
that facilitates adoption by employee users via personalization, an engaging user experience, and a strong perceived utility that the platforms and applications being utilized truly support getting the job done faster and smarter, with greater efficiency and convenience. But more than this, organizations need to employ technology platforms that allow them to effectively measure engagement, so that they can use this information to make cultural shifts toward improving their employees' experience of the company.
The Employee Engagement Crisis

“Business units with higher employee engagement = 22% more profitability, 21% more productivity & much less turnover”

Gallup

In citing statistics about the high level of disengagement currently seen in employees worldwide, Gallup describes the situation as a “crisis.” Is the situation really that dire? When employers understand the consequences of disengagement and its impact on the modern enterprise, the answer is an unequivocal yes. As more and more evidence uncovers how lack of worker engagement is affecting the overall success of organizations around the globe, it’s clear that engagement needs to be escalated to a board-level issue. Here are some of the key reasons why:

• Financial impact

The easiest way to understand how employee disengagement hurts companies and impacts shareholder value is to zero in on the bottom line. As with all areas of the business, activities that can demonstrate a clear ROI have a better chance of getting buy-in from senior management and the board. A study from Towers Perin reveals that businesses plagued by poor engagement levels experience a 33 percent decrease in operating income and an 11 percent decrease in earnings growth.

Highly engaged employees are 38% more likely to have above average productivity

Workplace Resource Foundation

• Employee productivity and retention

Highly engaged employees are 38 percent more likely to have above-average productivity, according to the Workplace Resource Foundation. What’s more, employees who aren’t truly engaged often end up feeling dissatisfied with and disconnected from their work, so they are more likely to leave the company as a result. Gallup found that business units with higher employee engagement not only outperformed lower-engagement units by 22 percent in profitability and 21 percent in productivity, but also experienced much less turnover and absenteeism. High staff turnover can create a domino effect and negatively affect recruiting new talent.
Another damaging potential outcome of employee disengagement is the emergence of social divides between senior management and staff. This ‘us versus them’ fracture can negatively impact working relationships, distancing employees from the company’s mission and goals. When employees feel out of the loop with no way to be heard, it becomes harder for managers to address cultural issues within the business that may be contributing to disengagement, such as negative attitudes or communication gaps. If management doesn’t know what’s going on beneath the surface in their teams because they’ve failed to provide people with a platform through which to communicate, it can create a vicious cycle that leads to problems with productivity and retention that can ultimately have a negative financial impact on the company.

Another important factor to understand about the current employee engagement crisis is the increasingly significant role played by brand advocacy. It’s no secret that many disgruntled employees make an effort to spread the news about bad experiences they had at an old company, sharing it with their peers and professional contacts. While in the past these comments could only travel so far person-to-person, today negative comments can quickly spread via employee feedback sites and social platforms, multiplying throughout large networks within seconds.

With the power of omnipresent social media and feedback-collecting sites like Glassdoor, which allow people to review companies for better or for worse, employers who want to remain competitive must pay closer attention than ever before to their corporate branding. A lack of engagement within your organization can lead current and former employees to post negative reviews online, which can significantly damage an employer’s efforts to recruit new staff and attract top talent. Figure 3 below, published in Forbes, analyzes data from Glassdoor that shows overall employee ratings of employers follows a bell curve, averaging out to a grade of C minus, with some companies doing considerably worse than that. This is a

![Engagement Remains a Global Challenge](image-url)

Figure 3. Source: Deloitte
dramatic visual that reinforces the need for organizations to step up their response to employee engagement in order to protect their brand and reputation.

With all of this in mind, it’s clear that efforts to improve employee engagement need to start at the top. Senior management is in the most influential position to make a real difference in how a company engages with its staff to affect the employee experience, change perceptions for the better, and create a culture of change by approving investment in technology and tools that can help facilitate this shift.
The Two-Way Nature of True Engagement

“Employees who say their organisation's values are “known and understood” are 51 times more likely to be fully engaged than employees who report the opposite”

Modern Survey

Before employers can understand how to create better engagement, it's important to first examine the core reasons why people often become disengaged. Much of the challenge comes down to the fact that successful engagement requires convenient and reliable two-way communication between employers and employees. This may sound straightforward enough, yet the reality is that many organizations struggle in this arena. If your organization is experiencing disengagement, here are some factors that may be to blame:

- Poor reach to remote workers
- Disconnection from company mission

Inadequate reach to non-desk employees (NDEs) can go hand-in-hand with a shift toward a more mobile workforce via the gig economy and a subsequent increase in remote working. In fact, Emergence Capital reports that 80 percent of the global workforce consists of NDEs working offsite, which presents a huge challenge in facilitating communication to and from everyone in the company’s distributed network. While telecommuting need not lead to out-of-the-loop employees if the right technology tools and platforms are used, many businesses haven’t prioritized a systematic approach to facilitating reliable two-way communication with their remote staff that can increase engagement. Often NDEs don’t have a company email address or access to a mobile intranet, leaving them disadvantaged in retrieving company information and communicating with their colleagues and managers—so they need a more effective tech solution.

80% of the global workforce are NDEs (non-desk employees)

Emergence Capital

Another factor that commonly leads to disengagement is an employee’s lack of understanding of corporate strategy, mission, and goals—and knowing how these relate back to his or her role in the company. When employees feel a personal stake in helping the company achieve its mission, it helps to create the type of meaningfulness that leads to engagement. Yet according to a recent study by Chris Zook of Bain, only 40 percent of the workforce know about their company’s goals, strategies, and tactics. This is a problem, since
Modern Survey found that employees who say their organization’s values are “known and understood” are 51 times more likely to be fully engaged than employees who report the opposite.

- No platform for employee give-and-take

Because of the importance of two-way communication with in-house employees and distributed workforces alike, it’s vital to provide employees with a channel that allows them to share their thoughts and ideas, as well as receive information from senior management to keep up with what’s going on in the company. Without such a platform, employees may not only lose interest in the work they are doing, but also in the company and its customers. Accumulate reports on research showing 65 percent of all lost customers can be traced back to a disengaged employee. To avoid this fate, technology needs to facilitate interaction with and feedback from the workforce. The right mobile-enabled application can help management provide this type of interaction-and-feedback loop with a one-point solution that gives everyone access to a communication platform wherever they may be located, improving the collective motivation to do well.

65% of all lost customers can be traced back to a disengaged employee

Accumulate

In short, it’s important for employers to facilitate two-way engagement within the entire organization—even when employees work outside of the traditional office space. New mobile technologies allow for an integrated engagement solution that makes it easier to encourage staff to share their thoughts, while helping management identify what is and isn’t working before it leads to disengagement. The best mobile platforms also allow for engagement-related measurement, as we’ll learn more about in the next section.
Employee engagement is the emotional commitment an employee has to the organization and its goals, resulting in the use of discretionary effort.

Kevin Kruse, New York Times bestselling author of Employee Engagement 2.0

As previously stated, poor reach to employees who aren’t desk-bound can lead a significant portion of the workforce—perhaps the vast majority of it—to feel disengaged. Many businesses focus only on solutions for communicating with those in the office and neglect those who aren’t—yet this hurts the business as well as workers left out of the loop.

But with today’s mobile technologies, there’s no reason for remote staff or those who travel to have to rely on sporadic email updates or out-of-date message boards to get the information they need. Why mobile and not other technologies such as intranets or enterprise social networks (ESNs)? Intranets offer limited capabilities that include only static posting of tools and information. They are not designed for feedback or short-form communication, can quickly become overloaded, and are too heavy to deliver effective mobile communication with employees. ESNs or messaging services such as Yammer and Jive are similarly incomplete solutions in that they can’t be measured, are typically only peer-to-peer, and can’t be used by offsite staff without email. By contrast, mobile applications have the ability to reach the entire workforce, facilitate feedback, and generate engagement-related insights and reports.

This means that employers now have the option to give telecommuting and traveling staff more effective tech tools and resources to have a voice and remain engaged in the company alongside office-based workers. With an integrated engagement platform, distributed teams can receive information, share feedback, and collaborate via an app even if they aren’t co-located. Employee mobile apps such as StaffConnect allow all staff (including NDEs) to access continuous updates of company news any time, any place since they are designed with the capability for employers to broadcast important announcements directly to employees. Employees can also use mobile apps to access company video feeds from external sites such as YouTube or Vimeo.

Since they’re designed with the user in mind
and can quickly configure to a personalized look and feel, powerful engagement platforms like StaffConnect can become “sticky” for employees, delivering critical information and company news that they need to know and thus want to consume regularly. These mobile-enabled apps additionally provide users with the ability to share, discuss, and interact with this information while connecting and working with their defined communities. If that’s not enough, StaffConnect also allows for:

- Access to key reference information for knowledge attainment
- Calendaring and the ability to quickly know what company events are planned
- Directory services to access employee profiles and contact information
- Gamification through quizzes, surveys, and polling that allows for a “temperature-check” of employee opinions and attitudes
- Social media interactivity
- Connection to senior management via asking questions and viewing responses
- Measurement tools to help employers make sense of gathered data to use to increase engagement

Tech tools can’t solve every problem related to driving workforce engagement and collaboration. But as Figure 4 shows, technology can assist in many key areas, including giving employees a voice and recognition, improving co-worker alignment and the workplace environment, and providing tools to support work and productivity. For these reasons, it’s clear why a growing number of businesses and industry leaders are turning to this specific type of new technology—employee feedback apps and engagement platforms—to tap the potential of engagement for their entire workforce. As Josh Bersin wrote recently in Forbes: “These tools are powerful and disruptive, and they have the potential to redefine how we manage our organizations.”

Some employers may worry that providing their staff—particularly NDEs—with these apps will prove to be more of a distraction than a tool. Yet as employees become more connected to their company via the platform, their engagement itself will help fuel their willingness to use the technology to enhance their performance, earn revenue for the business, and stay with the company longer. It’s a classic win-win.
Measuring Engagement with the Right Tech Tools

“It should be no surprise that technology-led automation is surfacing in engagement measurement.”

Global Focus Magazine notes that “Technology-led automation is something that is happening across society and it should be no surprise that it is also surfacing in engagement measurement.” Yet trying to accurately and efficiently measure employee engagement has presented HR professionals with an age-old, ongoing challenge. As mentioned previously, engagement is an issue that must concern the board and senior management, since it has been proven to impact operating profit. At the board level, senior leaders not only need a way to find answers about the organization’s level of employee engagement, but also require ongoing insight and measurement of engagement to make informed business decisions.

But how can senior managers and HR professionals know their organization’s current level of engagement, and how can they tell when engagement improves or decreases? Traditional paper-based employee questionnaires, feedback forms, and performance reviews can help employers garner some insight into engagement, but these tactics can only produce limited results since these types of measurements fail to provide a visual of employees’ day-to-day experience and performance.

Because of the flexibility that mobile offers employees—giving them the ability to provide feedback any time including before work, during lunch, and even in the evening—Global Focus reports that "mobile has become the dominant channel for employees to take surveys." But mobile technology can help with more than just recording and reporting; this technology can also add value via its measurement capability in the engagement space. There are a number of clear reasons why this is so.

For example, the mobile app from StaffConnect can:

- Effectively measure interaction with content and capture feedback on many types of corporate messages and initiatives
- Simplify ongoing management and analysis of surveys and data insights
- Allow behavioral insights across two-way digital engagement to help organizations begin to build a profile of workforce engagement across regions and functions
- Harness the future analytical power of big data and artificial intelligence to create dashboards and engagement “scores” with real-time insight, mapping workforce engagement at any point in time
Not all employee mobile apps have equal capabilities, however, when it comes to zeroing in on the winning formula to increase engagement. While there are a myriad of tech platforms on the market designed to help employees communicate more easily, such as Slack and the new Google Hangouts Chat, most of these tools don’t get at the heart of employee engagement since they don’t offer measurement functionality. To this end, the best mobile tools offer not just the ability to improve team collaboration, but the option to understand how to use engagement metrics to actually increase engagement and business performance over the long term. In other words, to really affect engagement, organizations must be prepared to do more than just provide the latest collaborative platform. They must seek a tool that helps them solve the problem of how to measure engagement, and then use that feedback to make needed cultural changes.

The StaffConnect app is unique in providing a 360-degree view of both individual performance and the achievements of specific departments and teams, giving HR and senior management engagement-related insights as well as suggestions for improving engagement. This particular mobile app also has project-tracking functionality to allow staff and managers to look for collaboration opportunities, which offer another route to better engagement. Since these tools can be accessed remotely, managers can reach out to non-desk based staff and provide instant, accurate, tailored performance feedback.

StaffConnect is also unique in the field of workplace apps in that its design reflects the knowledge that measuring performance is only one part of measuring engagement. Because of engagement’s complexity, it's not enough to just ask a few questions or assume a snapshot vision of how motivated someone appears to be. Instead, for an accurate picture of engagement in an organization, employers must look at engagement on an individual, team, and entire company basis. This is difficult, if not impossible, to achieve without sophisticated mobile technology that can monitor work and feedback from the top down. While manual methods of reporting cause managers frustration because they are time consuming, resource-intensive, and don’t provide enough detail and other tech solutions lack the needed measurement capabilities, StaffConnect can illuminate engagement metrics much more easily and intuitively.

All in all, the StaffConnect app is about helping employers and leadership build an emotional, two-way connection with employees. When all employees feel a part of something greater than themselves via their experience with the platform and feel proud to be a part of it, then they are more likely to not only actively connect but to engage and positively promote the organization, helping to build brand leadership.

In this new era of employee listening and workforce data, mobile technology and engagement measurement have emerged as perfect partners. These powerful new platforms give rise to a new generation of HR reporting. This is because employee engagement technology enables organizations not only to help engage the entire workforce by giving them a platform through which to communicate wherever they are, but also to run engagement surveys and then analyze the results of these efforts, which in turn reduces the administrative burden on HR professionals. With access to real-time analytics, processes can constantly be adapted and improved to meet employee needs, increasing engagement and decreasing turnover. It's an integrated approach that brings all of the critical components necessary to increase engagement together into one tidy solution that is mobile-enabled and ready to go.
Future Insights

“Companies need to update their tools to engage employees on an ongoing basis to help HR teams and line leaders understand more fully what the talent they employ expects and values.”

Deloitte

As organizations look to the horizon to define and prepare their engagement strategy, it’s clear that not only is the way employers engage with staff changing, but also HR’s role is becoming far more complex. It’s less about people organization and more about creating employee experiences that drive engagement, increase productivity, and decrease turnover. And it’s not just HR and internal communications that need to care even more about engagement—this is a critical board-level issue that impacts operating income. Engagement solutions must thus become part of the business case for every forward-thinking senior leader.

Companies can no longer rely on guesswork and incomplete solutions to try to piece together engagement data and metrics. We’ve reached a point in time where technology needs to become a key component of a defined engagement strategy for every competitive organization. That technology needs the capability to:

- Work across multiple touch points in the employee experience, since true engagement is two-way and can’t be meaningfully measured without employee interaction
- Reach the entire workforce including NDEs, not just employees in the office
- Help create better engagement in the enterprise by opening up new channels of communication between employees and managers
- Enable HR and senior management to stay in touch with staff no matter when or where they work
- Accurately measure and analyze workforce engagement via insightful reports on employee engagement, productivity, and satisfaction

Mobile technology is the only tool that can currently offer a single-point solution that encompasses this plethora of needs, transforming how companies reach, communicate, and engage with their employees. By empowering workers to both feel and be a part of something meaningful, cloud-based mobile platforms like StaffConnect are unique in being able to deliver the insight and reporting functionality that HR professionals and senior leaders alike can use to begin to accurately measure and analyze employee engagement. By doing so, these mobile engagement
Mobile technology is the only tool that can currently offer a single-point solution to transform how companies reach communicate and engage with their employees.

StaffConnect Group Ltd

solutions can help organizations overcome the complexities involved with capturing engagement-related data.

Ultimately, inspiring employee engagement is about creating an emotionally connected organization where the entire workforce is empowered to interact, share, and collaborate with their peers and leadership—no matter what they do or where they work. With the assistance of a well-platformed, human-designed application that is mobile first and caters to the intricate communication challenges inherent in any organization, employers can finally reach down into the heart of engagement, helping to shape and redefine how employees see and experience the entire company.

Sources:

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StaffConnect is about Inspiring the Emotionally Connected Organization. Transforming the way you reach, communicate and engage with your workforce.