The
Power of Connecting
Purpose

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Contents

Abstract

Employee engagement is a critical determinant of organizational success, yet today's workplaces face unprecedented challenges in fostering meaningful connections between employees and their company's purpose. This paper explores the multifaceted dynamics of employee engagement, focusing on how aligning personal and organizational purpose can enhance individual well-being and organizational performance.

In recent years, societal and global events have intensified the disconnect between employees and their workplaces. From natural disasters exacerbated by climate change to social movements demanding racial justice and equity, these events have shaped a complex landscape where employees seek deeper meaning and alignment with their employers' missions.

The journey towards enhancing employee engagement requires a nuanced approach that goes beyond surface measures.

The concept of employee engagement encompasses more than mere job satisfaction—it reflects an individual's emotional commitment and connection to their work and organization.

However, pervasive disengagement statistics underscore the urgent need for organizations to address underlying issues that contribute to dissatisfaction and lack of alignment. Factors such as unclear expectations, limited growth opportunities, and a perceived lack of care contribute significantly to employee disengagement, costing organizations billions annually.

Central to the discussion is the role of People Managers in cultivating a supportive work environment. They play a pivotal role in shaping organizational culture and fostering engagement by listening empathetically, clarifying expectations, and celebrating successes. Importantly, their efforts extend

beyond superficial gestures to genuinely understanding and addressing the diverse needs and aspirations of their teams.

Leadership emerges as a critical determinant of organizational engagement. Effective leaders cultivate psychological safety, encourage open dialogue, and prioritize the well-being and growth of their team members. By aligning organizational goals with individual strengths and aspirations, leaders can create an environment where employees feel valued, supported, and motivated to contribute meaningfully.

Organizations themselves must adopt policies that promote work-life integration, prioritize employee well-being, and foster a sense of purpose and belonging. Embedding these principles into their core operations, organizations can enhance engagement, drive productivity, and foster a positive organizational culture.

The journey towards enhancing employee engagement requires a nuanced approach that goes beyond surface measures. It demands a commitment to deep listening, empathy, and genuine alignment of personal and organizational values.

By bridging the gap between individual aspirations and organizational purpose, companies can create a workforce that's not only engaged, but also empowered to achieve their full potential.

In conclusion, this paper advocates for a transformative approach to employee engagement—one that recognizes the complexity of human motivation and the power of purpose in driving individual and organizational success.

By investing in meaningful connections and aligning personal values with organizational goals, employees can thrive, innovate, and contribute to sustainable growth.

Perfect Storm of (Dis)engagement

Purpose is a crucial aspect of engagement for any organization.

However, more than ever before, today's knowledge workers feel more disconnected from their employers and their company's purpose.

Employee engagement is critical to organizational well-being and sustainability.

The statistics are dismal with the United States experiencing the lowest employee engagement rate since 2013; the lowest level in eleven years.

Societally, we are in this perfect storm—a sustained crisis—that's impacting every fiber of our social fabric.

Gallup's U.S. Engagement hits 11-year low.

There have been many critical events since 2013 including:

The Boston Marathon bombing.

Numerous natural devastations (such as tornadoes, hurricanes, and wildfires) that could be attributed to the climate crisis.
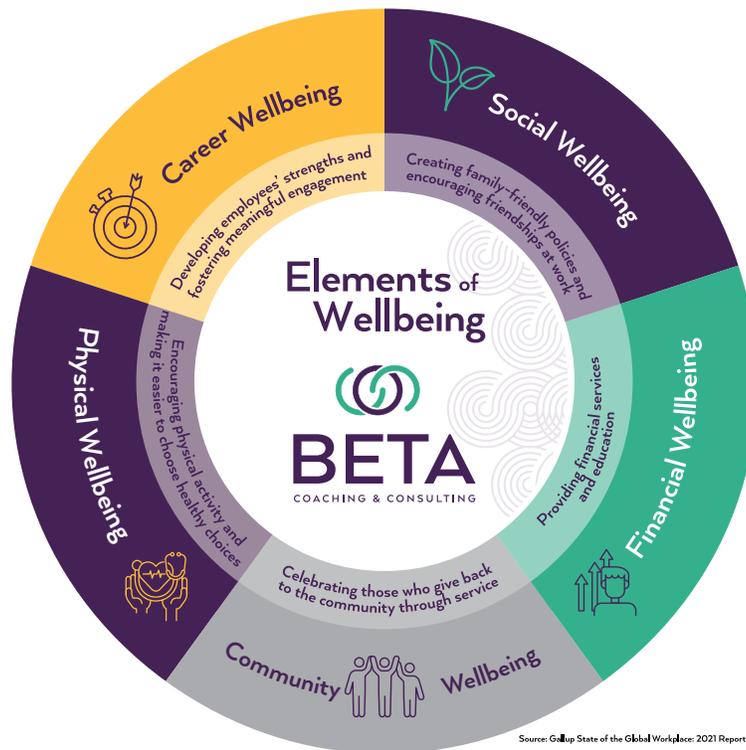
The emergence of Black Lives Matter and protesting against widespread racial profiling, police brutality, and racial inequality in the United States.

Mass shootings that occurred at Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church, Pulse nightclub, and the Parkland, Florida school shooting amongst others.

A global pandemic, global wars, and genocide.

The political polarization that culminated with the storming of the United States Capital and a looming, contentious election year.

Employees' experiences, both inside and outside of work, can significantly impact corporations. These experiences affect multiple aspects of employee well-being, including physical, emotional, occupational, community, and spiritual health. Ultimately, this well-being directly influences how employees engage with their work.

Elements of Wellbeing

Career Wellbeing — Developing employees' strengths and fostering meaningful engagement

Social Wellbeing — Creating family-friendly policies and encouraging friendships at work

Physical Wellbeing — Encouraging physical activity and making it easier to choose healthy choices

Financial Wellbeing — Providing financial services and education

Community Wellbeing — Celebrating those who give back to the community through service

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Source: Gallup State of the Global Workplace: 2021 Report

Who we are as individuals isn't separate from our work.

Let's explore factors of employee (dis)engagement and its impact on the well-being of the individual and the organization.

Engaged but Hindered: Systems Can Make or Break Employee Engagement

Having a sense of connection at work is critical, as work occupies a large part of our lives. This connection empowers every person to achieve their full potential in a way that aligns with their needs.

One element of employee engagement is the feeling of connection individual contributors have to the organization's purpose. Engaged employees are highly invested in the company's mission, vision, and values and see their work as vital to its success.

Engaged employees are "involved in and enthusiastic about their work and workplace."

However, even highly engaged employees can be hindered by inefficient systems within the organization. Let's explore how well these systems cater to employee needs.

When you think about employee engagement, how does your current organizational culture support the level of engagement your business desires? And more importantly, how do you measure success?

I ask that you keep these two questions in mind as you read through this paper.

The Engagement Slump: It's A Real Thing

Disengaged employees cost companies between $450 and $500 billion dollars annually.

Workers under age 35 and women reported the greatest decline in **engagement**.
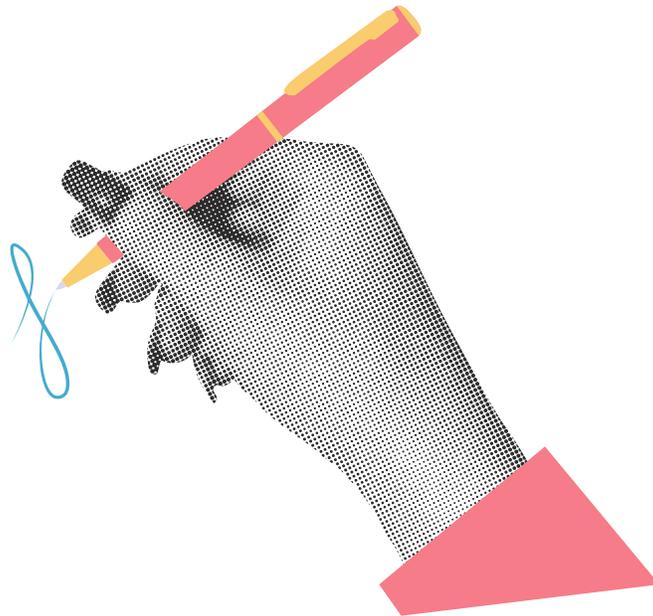
Actively disengaged employees lack commitment, and are typically unhappy in their roles and have no job satisfaction. Oftentimes, they resist change and express frustration when faced with certain tasks or new processes.

+ **Gallup** reported in the first quarter of 2024, 17% of employees were actively disengaged.

In contrast, **unengaged employees** display little commitment and lack enthusiasm. Disinterested in their work, along with a lack of accountability, deadlines may be missed and communication with management and co-workers likely suffers.

Distinguishing and understanding the nuances between different employee engagement levels is important. Each phase has an impact on your organization.

Gallup's **U.S. Engagement Hits 11-Year Low** report reveals a concerning decline. **Since many disengaged employees were previously engaged, understanding the root causes of disengagement is crucial.**
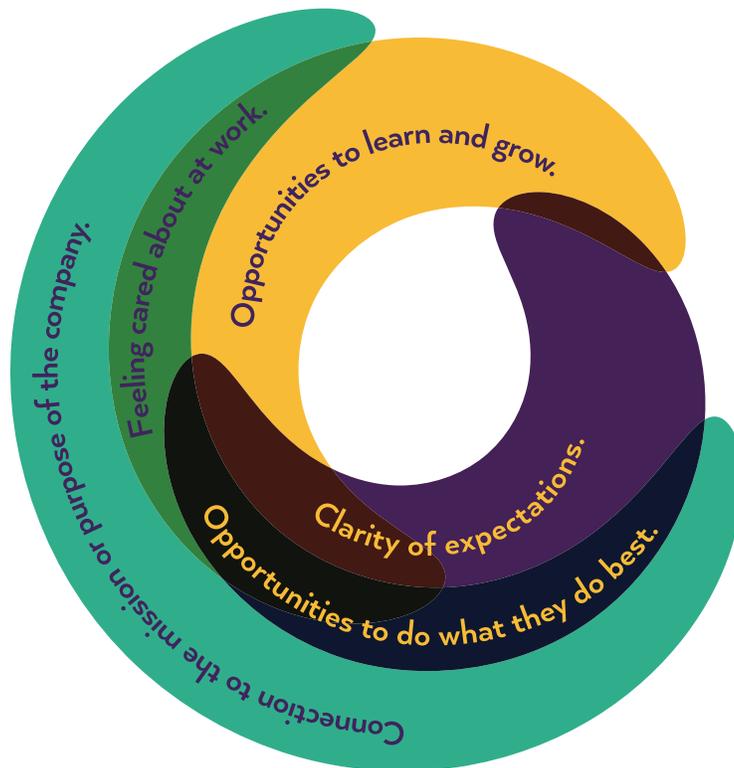
Unraveling the Complexities of Employee Disengagement

Though seemingly identical to their engaged colleagues, on the surface, **disengaged employees** lack the passion and commitment that fuel a thriving workplace.

Terms like "disgruntled," "disloyal," or "lazy" often describe disengaged employees. While these labels may hold some truth, they lack nuance and can be judgmental.

Further, they fail to express the full complexity of a disengaged employee, as well as address the root cause of disengagement.

Each organization is unique; therefore, no single root cause can explain the multiple reasons employees might become disengaged.

Since the onset of COVID-19, employees reported a steep decline in:

Opportunities to learn and grow.

Feeling cared about at work.

Connection to the mission or purpose of the company.

Clarity of expectations.

Opportunities to do what they do best.

These reasons have only helped fuel greater employee disengagement.

Digging deeper, we see workplaces with a high percentage of disengaged employees provide limited:

Social supportive work relationships: At the heart of building positive professional relationships is caring about people.

Professional development: Empowering employees with the proper resources and information to be successful.

Flexible and autonomous work environments: To create and sustain an environment in which individuals can thrive.

Employee experience surveys have limitations and mostly measure perceptions rather than root causes.

The employer's responsibility doesn't lie solely in determining the root cause of the disengagement, but rather in creating an atmosphere of mutual understanding and trust centered on good working relationships.

This is where People Managers come in.

Transforming Management: A Focus On Human Connection

People Managers hold a powerful role in helping to shape an organization's work culture.

Work culture is created by engaged employees who support the organization's purpose. Organizational culture runs deep, and collaboration is influenced by an organization's culture.

People Managers can enhance employee engagement by:

> Focusing on clarifying expectations.

> Asking for feedback and using it to create tangible change.

> Sharing and celebrating positive results among employees.

However, this isn't a "check-the-box" activity. Instead, these behaviors foster deep, trusting relationships that illuminate the needs and goals of both employees and the organization. **By aligning shared values, we create a foundation for mutual success.**

It's also worth mentioning performative behavior can cause more distrust and further disengagement, as it can often be manipulative and shallow.

Rather than defaulting to performative behaviors or feigning support, organizations should learn to listen deeply.
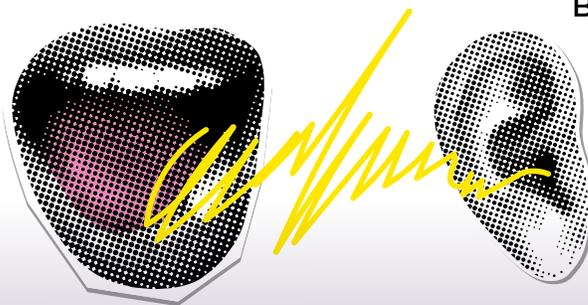
By actively listening to employees and understanding their unique work experiences, including challenges and motivators, managers can collaborate with them to create successful paths forward.

This collaborative approach empowers inclusive teams' participation to build and determine how work is accomplished, fostering connections, and moderating feelings of being overwhelmed.

People managers can empower employees through **job crafting**. This approach motivates employees to excel while prioritizing their well-being. By creating a tailored work experience, employees can establish a personalized "**social contract of engagement**" that can include:

Sharing their intent.

Expressing desired outcomes (needs/wants).

Inviting feedback when behaviors are misaligned with intent.

Setting the stage (a reciprocal roof) for a mutual process.

Abiding by (changing) the Social Contract as the relationship evolves.

42% **Forty-two percent** of People Managers face challenges in conducting effective development conversations with employees. This provides an opportunity for organizations to develop these skills.

Listening for actual or potential value alignment with employees allows them to feel seen and heard, which are different skills than those required for a tactical or strategic meeting.

Impact of a Leader: Creating a Positive Workplace Culture

Leadership is an improvisational art.

Psychological safety fosters open communication, respect for diverse perspectives, and a genuine interest in employee success. Organizations that prioritize psychological safety actively seek employee input on their needs and goals to support their growth.

As leaders, the key to curating a purpose-driven organization that effectively engages all employees begins with understanding **what your colleagues are really all about**.

To unlock employee engagement, leaders must first understand their team members' needs and aspirations. This involves creating a supportive work environment that offers meaningful work, clear goals and objectives, timely feedback, and demonstrated value placed on work-life integration.

When leaders prioritize their teams' needs, employee retention, motivation, and engagement will positively impact the organization, while also affirming the individual's agency.

Reimagine Work: Creating an Employee-Centric Organization

Employees feel more enthusiastic and engaged when they have opportunities to make a meaningful impact, collaborate with others, and receive fair, ethical, and equitable treatment. Recognition for their contributions further boosts morale.

Engagement adds cultural value, which helps shape energy, behaviors, and the attitudes of stakeholders influencing the organizational culture.

There's no universal formula for engaging employees; however, organizations can help amplify engagement and serve as a bridge to employees by exhibiting specific **leadership behaviors**:

Organizations that have a deep sense of purpose and have achieved alignment with their employees' purpose have a more engaged, fully involved workforce. They also cultivate an inclusive well-being mindset, listening to and investing in their employees.

Putting policies and procedures in place that support holistic well-being strategies, tailored to the needs of their workforce, is also a must.

Employee-Centric Organization

- Focus on helping team members see themselves in a very positive light.
- Excel in creating a positive, safe work environment.
- Ask for feedback from others and work to make improvements.
- Communicate well and provide clear direction.
- Inspire and generate loyalty, commitment, passion, and enthusiasm.

Organizations can significantly boost employee engagement by empowering people managers. This involves equipping managers to foster open communication, provide consistent support, understand employee strengths and needs, recognize achievements, and create opportunities for growth and involvement.

Listen to Lead

Few skills are as critical to leadership as **listening**.

Building good relationships and strong organizations requires listening with empathy and practicing **deep listening**. Understanding work from the perspective of the people doing the work can reveal what's broken and how it impacts them.

Employee feedback can provide important insights and context, deepening the C-suite's understanding and aligning the enterprise's purpose with colleagues.

Connecting the company's purpose to environmental, social, and enterprise goals can also be a valuable way to support the organization's talent.

Listening well requires attunement, attention, appreciation, and affirmation.
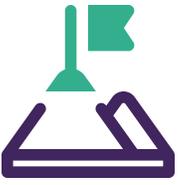
Engage to Excel

There's no single definition of employee engagement, and translating science into practice might require something more nuanced than just implying that seemingly happy employees are naturally engaged.

An organization must go beyond thinking that a happy employee (based on a survey result) is an engaged employee. At the heart of engagement is choice—employees can say yes to an organizational value because it aligns with their personal values.

Designing a workplace environment focused on well-being and engaged employees is in your hands.

> **"The most important asset in any organization is its people. By choosing to center their voices, we can make sure everyone has a platform to thrive."**
> —Vivek H. Murthy, U.S. Surgeon General

The journey to employee engagement is ongoing.

It requires both individual commitment and organizational support.

To learn more about BETA Coaching & Consulting services visit our website or contact Novelette A. DeMercado at novelette@betacoachingconsulting.com.

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