

## What is employee engagement and how does it link with culture change? Is it the latest corporate jargon or is there real business value in it? Finally, what will it take to engage your employees and where do you start?

In the last two decades there has been significant change in the culture of many organisations, a shift in the way employees are valued and treated and recognition of the impact employees have on business success.

Most organisations attempt to create a culture and environment that reflect their values, mission and goals and some actively focus on engaging their employees as a key driver of success. My area of expertise is 'culture change', I have spent 14 years within an organisation driving it and another 15 years working with large organisations to promote it. I have worked with organisations to develop their leaders' understanding and belief in the importance of inspiring, including, developing, and engaging their employees and I have supported them to create a culture where people want to come to work, are enthused and inspired, feel proud of their company and take accountability and ownership for the business as if it were their own.

Of course, the term 'culture change' could mean any change in organisational culture, from recruitment strategies to working from home, but what 'culture change' meant to the organisations I worked with was in fact 'employee engagement' and the reason they have been so successful in engaging their employees is because they invested the time, energy and commitment to create a change in their culture.



Employee engagement isn't a quick fix and it can't be accomplished with a staff survey, a change in process or procedure, a motivational training course or an HR initiative, it requires an investment in time, energy and commitment from every leader within the organisation to drive and sustain it. Only a change in the way an organisation thinks, behaves and acts will achieve a culture of employee engagement.

### What is employee engagement?

Employee engagement is the emotional commitment employees feel towards their organisation and the actions they take to ensure the organisation's success; engaged employees demonstrate care, dedication, enthusiasm accountability and results focus.

When employees care - when they are 'engaged' - they use **discretionary effort**. They stay behind to get a job done because they are committed and feel accountable and want to, they pick up the cups left behind on the table in the meeting room or the rubbish that missed the bin because they care about their workplace. They stand up for their company because they are proud to be a part of it, they find solutions to problems and create ideas to improve; they are emotionally engaged with their organisation and they care.

How an organisation treats its employees has a direct impact on its employees' engagement.

**'In the United Kingdom 17% of employees are engaged, 57% are not engaged and 26% are actively disengaged' (Gallup 2011-2012).**

Actively disengaged employees outnumber engaged employees by nearly 2-to-1.



**Engaged** employees work with passion and feel an emotional connection to their company. They drive innovation and move the organisation forward. They are characterised as being loyal, committed, productive and deliver results.

**Not Engaged** employees come to work and do what is asked of them but have little energy or passion for their work. They feel no meaningful attachment to their job or company. They can easily be tempted by job vacancies elsewhere.

**Actively Disengaged** employees aren't just unhappy at work; they actively show their unhappiness. These employees demonstrate negative, uncooperative and sometimes hostile behaviours and attitude. They undermine their teams and their business.

Gallup research reveals that eliminating active disengagement from the workforce would result in a significant increase in productivity per employee. This increase, applied against the current average output per U.K. worker, would amount to between £52 billion and £70 billion in productivity gains nationwide per year.

### Is 'employee engagement' just the latest corporate jargon?

Will 'employee engagement' gradually disappear alongside 'blue sky thinking' 'touching base', and looking at a 'helicopter view'? There is always that possibility, terminology changes, but the difference is that employee engagement does what it says and

even if the words change the philosophy is here to stay. This isn't a complicated science, it is a simple equation - how an employee feels about their job and company has a direct impact on how he or she performs which has a direct impact on business success.

### Is it a survey or communication process?

Although many leaders recognise the key role employee engagement plays in driving profit and business growth, most still fail to provide a clear vision of how to embed this in their culture. If leaders portray employee engagement simply as a survey or another HR initiative little will change.

Search online for 'Employee Engagement' and you will find survey solutions, analysis experts and communication gurus who promise help to engage your employees. Conducting a survey will tick a box to demonstrate that your organisation has an interest in establishing how your employees feel and it may flag potential problems but rarely will it identify solutions and never will it deliver them.

I have seen countless organisations conduct surveys but not deliver change and sadly this only serves to further disengage people.

### Is it the same as employee happiness or satisfaction?

Work parties, team activities, company outings and events can be great fun and good for morale; they serve a purpose, but happiness alone does not engage people. Job satisfaction whilst important, is not enough. Satisfaction equates to happily coming in and doing the job but potentially nothing more.

### And most importantly ...

### Is it an HR led activity or initiative?

Employee engagement is the accountability of the leadership team, led by the leadership team. It is not

an activity or an initiative, it is a change in culture – a change in how leaders lead, what they do and the decisions they make. It is not the accountability of the HR department nor is it an initiative or a project that a focus group or a specialist team can deliver. Unless employee engagement becomes a fundamental part of an organisation’s philosophy and ingrained within the attitude and behaviour of the leaders, then it will become ‘just another initiative’ with little effect.

## So what will it take to engage your employees, where do you start?

It starts with an understanding and belief that engaging your employees is vital to the success of your organisation. It then takes just one committed, inspired leader to start to drive forward the change, then, everything is possible and we can support you where you need it most.

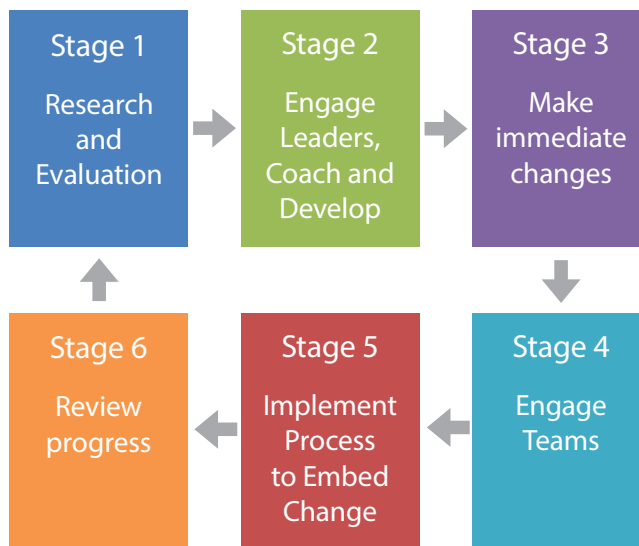
We follow a process which has been incredibly successful. It is not a quick fix, a one-off training programme or a series of motivational communication events; it is a process of continuous change and improvement. It deals with hearts and minds, motivating people to want to change and behave differently and implementing new ways of working to embed the change.

An effective change programme delivers not just a mindset shift; it also delivers a plan and process for behavioural change to enable sustainable results.

### The Change Process

#### Stage 1- Research & evaluation

What is currently working well and what isn’t? What are your people saying? You probably don’t need to do another survey unless you think you need to ask different questions. Look at the data from the annual survey, what is it telling you? If that doesn’t give you the information to understand



© Copyright People Results Ltd

what needs to change then use our key drivers of engagement to establish how you are doing. I suggest less questionnaires and more focus groups and interviews.

#### Stage 2 - Engage leaders, coach and develop

There is no point trying to engage your people if your leaders aren’t engaged. Engage with your leaders, show the findings, don’t blame, don’t justify, be honest.

Establish the gaps in understanding, belief or skill within your leadership team and agree solutions to address those. You need all of your leaders to want to engage their employees with the understanding and skills to do so. The majority of the drivers for engagement are around ‘how’ you lead. Expert leadership coaching and skills development can help your leaders to have the confidence and competence to lead in a different way.

#### Stage 3 - Make immediate changes

Start making changes immediately - show your people they have been listened to and you are

taking action, don't just talk about it. There are many who complete research, identify what needs to change but then stop at the most difficult part, the actions.

#### Stage 4 - Engage your teams

Let your people know you will be doing things differently - they should have already noticed some changes from Stage 3, so you will already have more credibility. Let them know what they can expect of their leaders and managers; involve them in the change process. Be honest about the results and the changes you need to do. Discuss expectations for change, not just on your part but on their part too. For example, if your people have never been given the opportunity to be accountable before, they will need to understand how to do this and how they will be supported.

#### Stage 5 - Implement the process to embed change

Ensure you have a process, a way of embedding new behaviours. We create behavioural standards and suggest a system where leaders are coached on a fortnightly basis against those behavioural standards, they then coach their leaders and so on to enable and deliver change. Unless there is a system of ongoing management and measurement, new behaviours are likely to be dropped and old ways take over once again.

#### Stage 6 - Review progress

Review, measure progress, and follow up. At approximately 6 months intervals re-interview to establish how you are doing; what is working well and what still needs to change and communicate again. There should be no surprises because if you are engaging with your people and coaching on a fortnightly basis you will already know what progress you have made. Remember to celebrate improvements and successes along the way and keep reviewing how you are doing.

## Conclusion

Employee engagement is a change in culture – a change in how leaders lead, what they do and the decisions they make. It is not the accountability of a single department nor is it an initiative or a project that a focus group or a specialist team can deliver. Unless employee engagement becomes a fundamental part of an organisation's philosophy and ingrained within the attitude and behaviour of the leaders, then it will become 'just another initiative' with little effect.

So, before you spend time and money on commissioning the next employee survey, establishing the next process or launching the latest communication event, ask yourself - did I spend time with my team today, did I listen to them, did I make them feel valued, did I tell them they did a good job and coached them when they didn't and most importantly did I help them to feel engaged?

### About the author

Melanie Allen

Managing Director of People Results Ltd  
[www.peoplereults.co.uk](http://www.peoplereults.co.uk)



Melanie is an experienced consultant, facilitator and coach with expertise in leadership development, team development, employee engagement and organisational culture change.

Melanie specialises in change management, enabling and sustaining personal and organisational change. She and the People Results team have worked with many organisations and leaders to support them to develop their culture to one of employee engagement.

Melanie is a qualified executive coach and has been an associate consultant and distributor of Insights Discovery since 2002.