

Feature

Cutting Through the Culture of Measuring Metrics

How activating employee engagement changes your company culture for good



Eddie Lemoine

You decide to survey your company to understand the level of employee engagement. You hire a firm to create the survey. You prepare your employees to take the survey — and voilà, several months later you have the results. The evolution of surveying employees started back in the 1970's when companies surveyed workers to understand if they were predominantly happy. I am of the belief that when organizations received the results, they did know what to do with them. In turn, companies came up with all kinds of gimmicks to try to make employees happy. This uncertainty brought about stunted happy solutions like "Pizza-Fridays", Smurf guns and ping-pong tables. While employees were happy participating in these activities, these band-aid solutions did little to change the overall happiness of the employee *at* their work. In 1990's and early 2000's, the metrics of capturing motivation in the workplace became the next popular trend as companies started to survey their employees to see if they were motivated. Again, I hold the viewpoint that companies did not know how to implement meaningful change based on these results. This would lead to retreats where executives learned how to climb trees, build bridges from the papier-mâché, strings and bobby pins and work together as a team. Yet again, this held no long-term impact on the company's performance.

Why would an employee engagement survey net us different results? Simply put, employee engagement is completely different from employee satisfaction, happiness or motivation. Employee engagement occurs when you align the individual strengths and purposes of your employees with the short and long-term goals of your organization. When comprehension and activation of this fundamental transition takes place, it is like magic because it produces discretionary effort. When engaged, your employees become purpose-driven and consequently, extremely productive.

What does an engagement survey tell us? In my travels, I often read the engagement surveys of the companies I am going to address. The survey findings always provide me with an essential sense of the company's efforts. The result of engagement surveys are what we call *trailing indicators*. They are a result of the activities you did in the past to net the results you are seeing today. To see the benefit of the survey you need to change the *leading indicators* going forward. Trailing indicators provide a pulse of the company and surveys garner a sense of the organization's health. However, what is of the utmost importance is what you do with those results. We simply cannot instruct people to increase engagement — you have to change the leading indicators to get ahead of your results.

In my last several years of working with hundreds of organizations, poor communication has become one of greatest concerns with most of them. Therefore, the leading indicators organization should explore would revolve around creating programs to communicate effectively

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across multiple generations, multiple cultures, genders and forms of communication. These could include measures to increase and encourage different mediums of communications that address the current gaps. Ultimately, by changing the leading indicators, you will achieve the results you are looking to accomplish in the future.

The bottom line is that companies should survey their employees. However, before you provide the survey, you need to be prepared to make the necessary changes to improve the company's productivity and engagement levels. I see many organizations share the results with their staff and then do nothing concrete to make the imperative improvements. This contributes to an even higher level of disengagement since the weakness of the organization was revealed and no necessary steps were taken to make a change.

Before you survey, make sure you have a clear understanding of the trailing indicators that will create your survey results. Most importantly, go forward with a proactive comprehension of what the leading indicators are — which will change your next survey's outcome.

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