THE DYNAMICS OF ENGAGEMENT:
A Culture That Works

For Leaders Who Learn
WHY IS EVERYONE TALKING ABOUT ENGAGEMENT?

The world of work is becoming increasingly complex and competitive. At the same time, the labor force is shrinking as a result of shifting generational patterns and a widening skills gap. This combination of variables has created an unprecedented set of dynamics in almost every business environment. Ever-changing technology, globalization, environmental concerns, resource constraints, and a host of other issues are escalating complexity and competitiveness such that achieving business results is increasingly challenging. Meanwhile, talent pools are shrinking.

Ten thousand baby boomers (born 1946-1964) will turn 65 every day until 2029.¹⁸

Economists generally expect the labor force participation rate to continue its gradual downtick as more and more boomers retire and more young adults delay entering the workforce in favor of undergraduate and postgraduate studies.²³

Out of 2,300 surveyed, 63% of employers are concerned about the skills gap in the United States; 49% said that they have experienced a negative impact on their business due to their job vacancies, and 25% said they have lost revenue.³
There is little doubt that over the next several decades the business environment will continue to become more challenging, and based on fundamental demographic patterns, the amount of available talent will continue to decrease. In the face of the dynamic tension caused by these factors, attracting and retaining top talent is of critical importance.

Another game-changer on this shifting playing field is that most of the talent being attracted and retained comes from the millennial generation (born 1980-1996). This generation’s beliefs and expectations related to work and life are fundamentally different from those held by previous generations. Gallup reports that these differences are so profound that millennials are “altering the very social fabric of America and the world.” As a generation, millennials seek work situations that offer attributes such as connection to meaning and purpose; access to developmental opportunities; close connection to mentors; active coaching; ongoing performance conversations and short feedback loops; and tight integration between work and other aspects of life. According to a recent study, more than 70 percent of millennials expect their employers to focus on societal or mission-driven problems; 70 percent want to be creative at work; and more than two-thirds believe it is management’s job to provide them with accelerated development opportunities in order for them to stay.

The development of high-engagement work cultures has emerged as a strategic response to address both shifting workforce demographics and the need to achieve results in a challenging environment. High-engagement work cultures have been linked to the ability to attract and retain top performers, and an increase in the percentage of engaged employees has been closely linked to the ability to achieve business results.
What is a high-engagement work culture?

A high-engagement work culture engages the hearts, minds, skills, talents, and best efforts of its personnel.

An engaged employee is a consistently high performer who is committed to the organization and willingly invests his or her talent and discretionary effort.², 6, 13, 15, 17, 19, 25

Numerous studies have identified attributes related to a high-engagement work culture,², 6, 10, 15, 17, 19, 20, 21, 22, 25 with strong common themes cutting across frameworks. For example, high-engagement work cultures often:

- Foster close connections between individuals and those to whom they look for leadership.
- Provide employees with clear expectations coupled with the support necessary to achieve them.
- Recognize the importance of, and strive for, effective person-job fit.
- Are recognition-rich.
- Provide ample access to development opportunities and career growth.
- Give opportunities for “having a voice” or influence.
- Draw a meaningful line of sight between daily work and larger mission.
- Have a strong two-way flow of feedback.
WHAT ROLE DO MANAGERS PLAY IN CREATING HIGH-ENGAGEMENT WORK CULTURES?

At ADVISA, we believe that people can make or break an organization and that leaders determine which it will be. One key impact area is employee engagement. While a variety of core attributes of engaged workplaces have been identified, a fundamental theme present in virtually every framework is the ability of the local manager to create a relationship-rich work environment. In fact, Gallup reports that managers account for fully 70 percent of the variation in employee engagement scores across business units. At ADVISA, we call this ability “connective competence,” and we believe that it provides the foundation for increased feelings of engagement and enhanced business results. The steps for building from connective competence to enhanced business results are mapped out in the Connection Circle model.

In 2015, Gallup found that only 32 percent of U.S. workers were engaged.

Companies with employee engagement programs achieve 26 percent greater year-over-year increases in annual company revenue, compared to those who do not have formal programs.

Employees who are engaged are 87 percent less likely to leave than those who are disengaged.

Every 10 percent improvement in commitment can increase an employee’s effort level by 6 percent. Every 6 percent improvement in effort can increase an employee’s performance by 2 percent.

In 2016, 85 percent of executives ranked engagement as a top priority.
At the center of the Connection Circle is self-awareness. Self-awareness involves fundamentally understanding who we are and how we are wired. It involves having as close as possible to an in-the-moment awareness of what we are thinking and feeling, as well as having a heightened understanding of how the behaviors that emanate from our thoughts and feelings land on others. The power of increased self-awareness comes from the greater capability for self-management. Self-management is all about making choices in how we show up. Instead of always going with our hardwiring, or what is sometimes called our “default mode,” we can become more intentional, fine-tuning and adapting our approaches based on the needs of a specific individual or a specific situation. In other words, we increase our available range of behaviors and responses. As we broaden our range and self-manage more effectively, we develop our potential to engage others more fully. Rather than interacting based on our own default mode, we are able to treat others the way that they want to be treated, creating, in effect, a customized approach. This leads to deeper feelings of connection, taps into intrinsic motivation, and unleashes positive energy.
Engaging others more effectively leads to an increased ability to achieve business results. This plays out in many ways, including increased proactivity and productivity, lowered absenteeism and turnover, and improved decision-making. The impact of employee engagement can be seen in service quality, product quality, and capacity for innovation — all key drivers of customer satisfaction. Levels of customer satisfaction, in turn, have a major impact on business results.

At ADVISA, we call these linkages the *Strategic Relationship Chain*. This chain is driven by a leader’s ability to build relationships and create an effective work environment.
We conducted a survey in which 250 front-line through midlevel managers representing various business units of a global Fortune 500 company were asked to identify the attributes of a high-engagement work culture. The attributes identified through our survey are consistent with those found in other engagement frameworks. These attributes provide a roadmap for building relationships and creating an effective work environment.

- Opportunities to participate
- Meaningful work
- An environment of mutual trust and respect
- Recognition and appreciation
- Clear goals and expectations
- Opportunities for skill and career development
- Feeling valued and known as a person
- Having the resources necessary to do the job
- Being part of a team
- Leaders who are role models
- Person/job fit
- Transparent information-sharing
- Developmental feedback
HOW CAN WE TUNE OUT THE NOISE AND TURN UP THE VOLUME ON ENGAGEMENT?

Based on our own research, combined with the research of others, and our experience with more than 300 client companies, we have organized attributes associated with high-engagement work cultures into four key categories. At ADVISA, we call these engagement dials because they represent the focus areas and actions that managers and companies have at their disposal as they work to turn up the volume on engagement. The following list provides some specific examples of actions related to each engagement dial. The dials don’t stand alone and there is no “right” mix that works for every organization. Each organization must tune the dials to create a unique formula for engagement.

1 JOB DESIGN AND PERSON/JOB FIT
2 WORK/LIFE BALANCE POLICIES AND PROGRAMS
3 RELATIONSHIP WITH MANAGER AND LARGER TEAM
4 INTENTIONAL CULTURE
1 JOB DESIGN AND PERSON/JOB FIT
- Use information from the Predictive Index Behavioral Assessment™ to align people and jobs.
- Use our Job Assessment (formerly called the PRO) to define behavioral competencies for each job.
- Provide opportunities for people to take on formal and informal leadership roles.
- Offer ample opportunities for people to participate in decisions related to their work.
- Make sure the connections are clear between daily work and the big picture.
- Provide opportunities for meaningful interaction with key customer groups.
- Set clear goals and expectations and provide frequent feedback.

2 WORK/LIFE BALANCE POLICIES AND PROGRAMS
- Support involvement in wellness programs.
- Offer some sort of flexibility in the structure of jobs (work-from-home options, flex scheduling, job sharing, etc.).
- Provide mentorship programs.
- Customize benefits to meet varying individual and generational needs.
- Provide ample formal and informal processes for appreciation and recognition.

3 RELATIONSHIP WITH MANAGER AND LARGER TEAM
- Get to know people as individuals and share information about yourself.
- Have frequent (at least monthly) informal conversations about performance.
- Identify and build on people’s strengths through training, job assignments, special projects, and volunteer opportunities.
- Train and encourage managers to actively use the Predictive Index Behavioral Assessment™, or another behavioral assessment, as a management tool in order to proactively connect with employees.
- Develop a code of conduct that defines standards for positive interaction, communicate it broadly throughout the organization, and hold people accountable to it.
- Engage in formal and informal team-building activities.
- Put systems in place to support managers in actively engaging people in long-term career planning.

4 INTENTIONAL CULTURE
- Provide opportunities to build informal social connections at work.
- Contribute to and share information about social causes that are important to people in the company.
- Provide opportunities for meaningful company-supported volunteerism.
- Provide ample opportunities for personal and professional development.
- Be transparent by sharing information internally regarding business goals, results, and how key decisions are made.
- Make sure that the vision is broadly communicated and clear to everyone.
- Use pulse surveys to drive culture, engagement, and performance.
- Clearly articulate cultural values and communicate them broadly.
IN CONCLUSION

Given the dynamics of the shifting playing field, it is clear that competition for talent will continue to heat up, further amplifying the strategic importance of engaged work cultures. Even organizations with high engagement can’t stand still — the field will continue to move, and the bar will continue to be raised. The good news for managers and organizations interested in turning up the volume on engagement is that small actions can have a large impact, especially when applied consistently. At ADVISA, we say that your employees make or break your organization, and that leaders have the opportunity to determine which it will be. We encourage you to take action now to turn up the volume on engagement in order to achieve enhanced business results.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Fredricka F. Joyner, Ph.D., is a Senior Leadership and Organization Development Consultant at ADVISA. She brings a deep background of expertise, extensive practical application, and personal passion to business coaching, leadership development, and emotional intelligence assessment and training. Her resume includes more than 15 years in academia, three decades in business consulting, and many published works, as well as prestigious international conference presentations — all of which combine to provide a robust foundation in both theory and practice.
References


ADVISA: WHERE LEADERSHIP LIVES AND PEOPLE THRIVE

For over 30 years, ADVISA has delivered insightful data, training, and consulting services to growing businesses and leaders. We’ve made it our life’s work to improve people performance to make your workforce work better. We leverage proven science and technology to provide reliable data that empowers you to:

- Hire the right talent.
- Engage your people.
- Develop future leaders.
- Grow your business.

BIG CLIENTS. SMALL CLIENTS. WE LIKE THEM ALL.

ADVISA acts as a trusted partner and advisor to over 300 clients across the country, ranging in size from 10 to 130,000 employees.

Each of our clients works with a dedicated management consultant and a client service team that advises and supports the client journey from the launch of a new project through its implementation and evaluation. How do we do this? Three key strategies (and lots of big thinking).

1 DATA

We have a deep understanding of behavioral analytics. We are experts in the Predictive Index® system — including the new Predictive Index Learning Indicator™ cognitive assessment; the EQ-i® 2.0 emotional intelligence assessment; and the Customer-Focused Selling™ system. We empower leaders with the data, skills, and insight they need to play to their strengths, create high-performing teams, and build healthy work cultures.

2 TRAINING

We customize materials, training, and coaching sessions to meet your needs. No client is exactly the same, and therefore no project is exactly the same. We train groups of all shapes and sizes to improve people performance. We’re nimble enough to customize our work to be directly applicable to your team, and we’re smart enough to know when to pivot if something isn’t going exactly right.

3 CONSULTING SERVICES

We’ve gathered a talented team. No matter the project, ADVISA takes a team approach to our partnership with your organization. Whether you’re working one-on-one with an executive coach, meeting with a consultant, being trained by a training specialist, or being helped by a client service member, we’re all committed to client success. Our team represents decades of business experience and a wealth of knowledge and skills that are at your fingertips. We offer high-touch learning and development opportunities and real-time support.

READY TO TALK ABOUT YOUR BUSINESS?

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