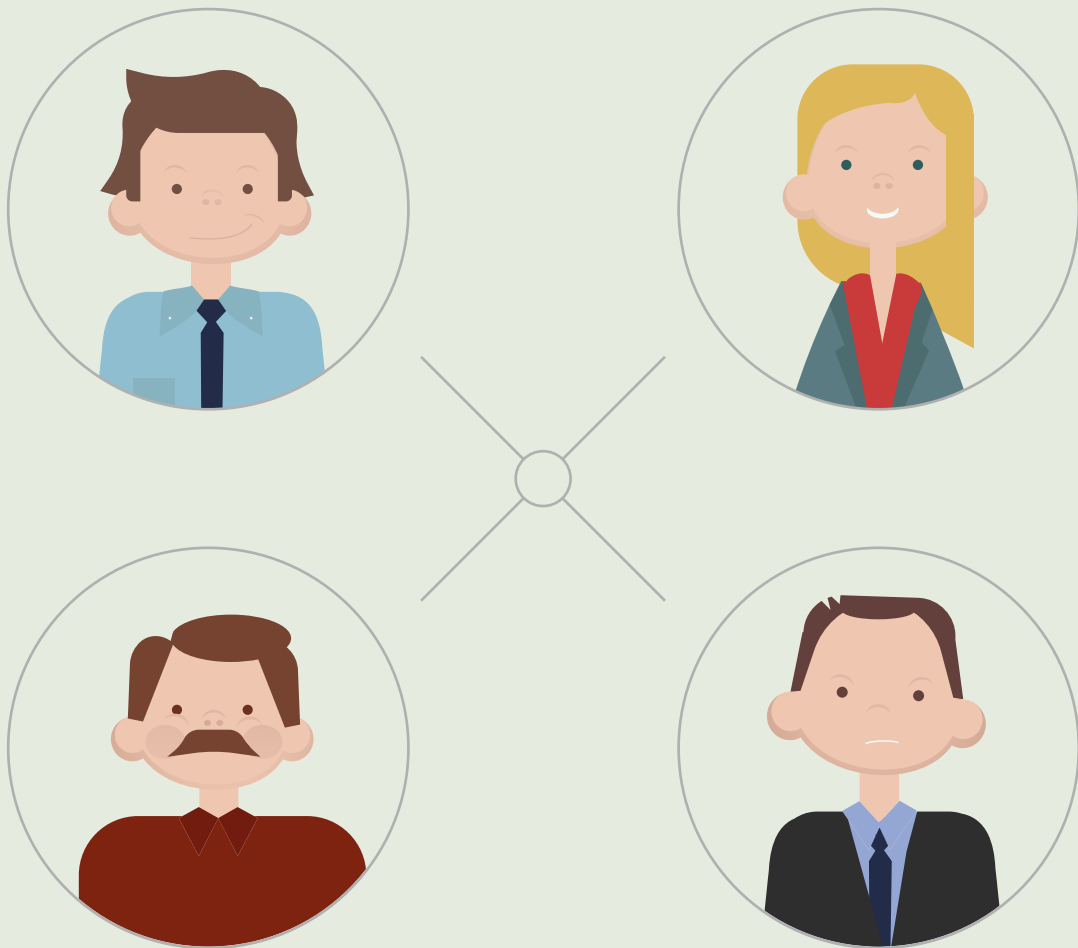


# REAL STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT





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# What Are the Obligations of Managers?

In a world that is rapidly approaching eight billion people, rarely do organizations around the world face the exact same challenge at the exact same time. Yet, that is exactly what's happening when it comes to people being engaged in their work.

Here are some telling statistics from Gallup:

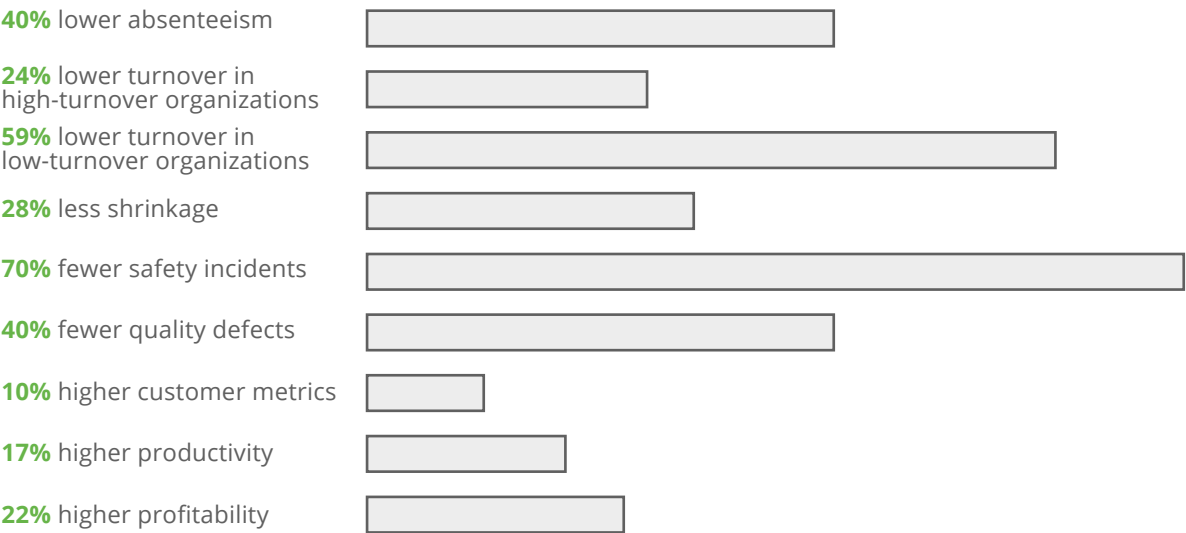
In France, an abysmal 6% of all employees are actively engaged. In the UK, that number nearly doubles to 11%. Here in the U.S., we boast above-average employee engagement levels with 15% of employees reporting that they are actively engaged.



That means 85% of US workers are disengaged or actively disengaged in their work.

Employee engagement is a global dilemma, and it's not to be ignored – there are high costs involved with a workforce of disengaged employees. To prove how valuable engaged employees are, Gallup has identified nine key performance outcomes of elevated engagement.

Organizations with the highest employee engagement report:



These statistics are indicative of the Pareto principle at work.

The Pareto principle states that 80% of outcome is created through 20% of your effort – in the case of businesses, 80% of your output can be traced back to roughly 20% of your workforce. We're willing to bet the 20% of **productive** employees have significant overlap with the 15% of **engaged** employees.

Because higher engagement means higher profitability, it should be obvious why companies would want to be invested in increasing employee engagement. In fact, it would be nearly impossible to find a well-reputed company who would not want to increase their employee engagement.

According to Statista, the global gross domestic product will surpass \$87 trillion in 2018! There is no shortage of global capital to be invested in solving the engagement crisis, yet the problem of low employee engagement persists.

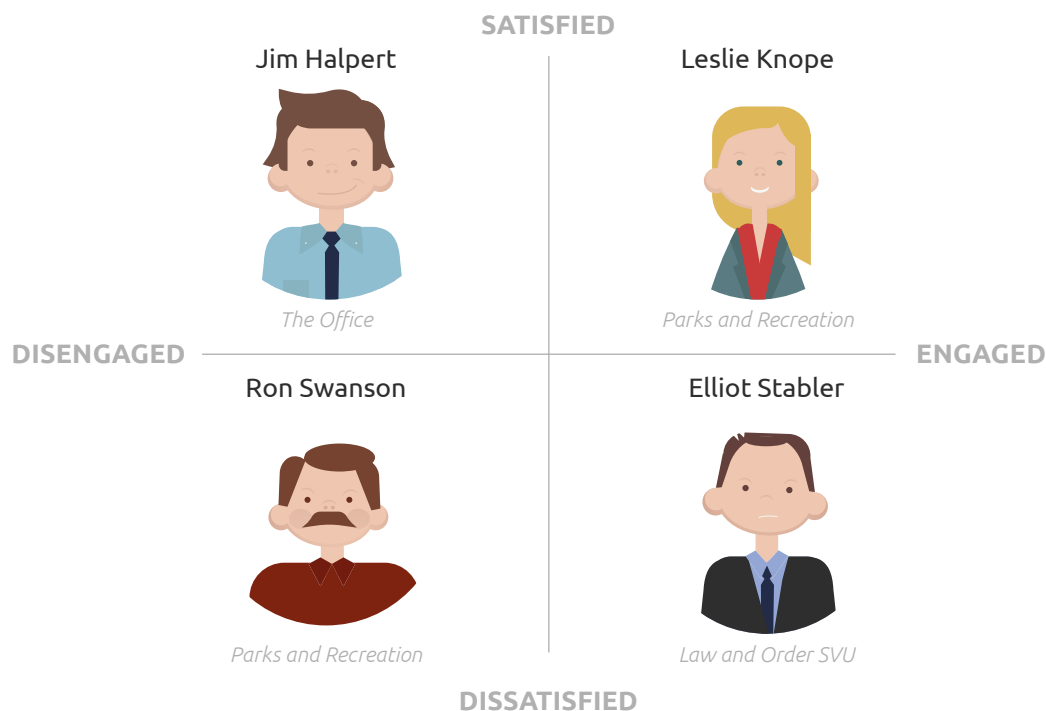
If trillions of dollars aren't enough to fix this problem, is there hope for the workplace? Are companies doomed to suffer as unengaged employees offer lackluster work?

In this ebook, we will examine at length what an engaged employee is, what research tells us about engaged employees, the relationship between an organization and an employee, and we'll determine if employee engagement can indeed be solved.

## What is an Engaged Employee?

An engaged employee is not the same thing as a satisfied employee. Vice versa, a satisfied employee is not necessarily an engaged employee.

Let's look at a few popular TV characters as examples of "Engaged vs. Satisfied" employees.





Detective Elliot Stabler is an archetypal “anti-hero” in the long-running crime drama *Law and Order: Special Victim’s Unit*.

Detective Stabler often tiptoes the line between law and vigilante justice, showing his disgust with the criminals and crimes that he investigates. Nothing will get between Detective Stabler and justice, though the bureaucratic powers that be often try to make his job harder.

Angered by this, Detective Stabler must often reign in his will and play by the rules, much to his chagrin.

**Detective Stabler is an engaged employee, but he is far from satisfied.** He is dedicated to his job, focused on outcomes, but frustrated by forces that he perceives to work against him as he works for his desired outcome.



On the opposite side, we have Jim Halpert, a paper salesman in the award-winning NBC comedy, *The Office*.

Jim shows up to work every day, sometimes even showing effort to close sales. There are aspects of his job that he enjoys: he gets along well with some of his coworkers, he is free to goof off, and he sells enough paper to ensure his job security.

However, Jim rarely goes above and beyond. A major story arc in *The Office* is Jim’s apathy towards his job. He believes he has the potential to work on things he finds more important than the paper trade.

**Jim Halpert is satisfied with his job, but he is definitely not engaged.**

Many corporations have invested thousands of dollars into creating satisfied employees. To do that, they’ve created state-of-the-art lounges complete with ping pong tables, fully-stocked snack bars, and even retro video games.

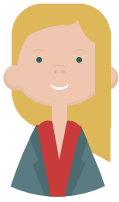
The problem with this approach, is that **while it might increase satisfaction, it does not increase engagement.**



Engagement is a separate issue from satisfaction, but they often work together. In a worst case scenario, an employee is both dissatisfied and disengaged, and is liable to leave their position at any moment.

For this example, we can use Mr. Ron Swanson, from the popular television sitcom *Parks and Recreation*.

Mr. Swanson expresses his contempt for his job at every available opportunity, and purposely gives no effort to be effective at it. **Mr. Swanson is neither engaged nor satisfied.**



Thankfully, Mr. Swanson's coworker, **Leslie Knope, serves as a great example of an engaged and satisfied employee.** Ms. Knope goes above and beyond the scope of her role to deliver results for her employers.

Satisfaction aside, engaged employees will always feel the need to be great at any given time.

It's important to understand that while there are plenty of benefits that come with increasing employee satisfaction, it's not the multi-trillion dollar problem that we are going to address today.

Custom Insight has done an admirable job of defining employee engagement for us:

**"Employee engagement is the extent to which employees feel passionate about their jobs, are committed to the organization, and put discretionary effort into their work."**

In other words, an engaged employee is dedicated to their work, believes in the product or service that their company provides, and is willing to work extra hard to see a desired outcome. The value of an employee with these traits can't be overstated.

We know that such employees are rare, but we also know they do exist. **The question at the center of this challenge is simple: is engagement an inborn trait, or can it be cultivated?**

A Business Journal survey of 800 entrepreneurs discovered four distinct types of entrepreneurs:



#### **PASSIONATE CREATORS**

who start their business out of a love for what they do



#### **FREEDOM SEEKERS**

who value the ability to control their work experiences



#### **LEGACY BUILDERS**

who want to bring something new to the marketplace



#### **STRUGGLING SURVIVORS**

who are often sole proprietors, and struggling to keep their doors open

The latter excluded, passionate creators, freedom seekers, and legacy builders all have elements of engaged employees. These types of entrepreneurs do prove that being engaged with your work is possible, but entirely circumstantial.

Thus, it is up to HR to create workplaces where employees can become engaged. To understand how that can be done, let's look at more factors of employee engagement.

# The SHRM Model

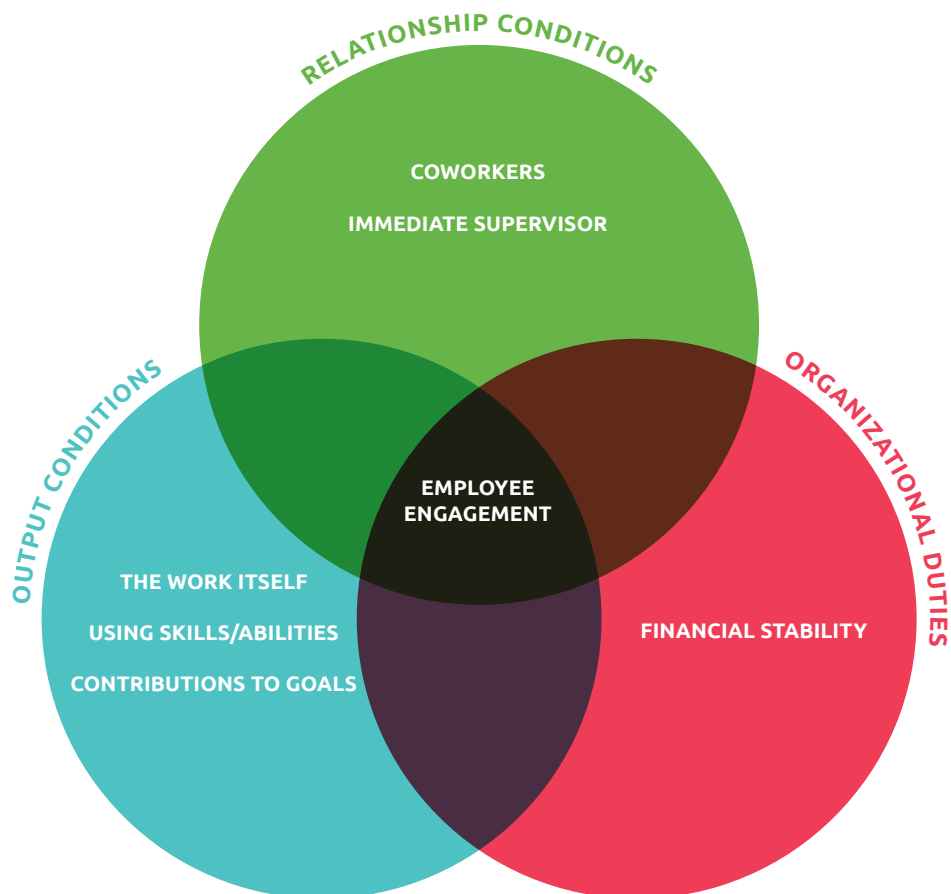
A SHRM study that was conducted in 2015 found some valuable data about employee engagement.

This study was able to identify the top conditions of engaged employees, which are:

- Relationships with coworkers
- Contribution of work to the organization's business goals
- Meaningfulness of the job
- Opportunities to use skills and abilities
- Relationship with immediate supervisor
- The work itself
- The organization's financial stability

These conditions create a perfectly good structure to model employee engagement in your organization.

We can further categorize these conditions into three groups – relationship conditions, output conditions, and organizational duties.



## Relationship Conditions

We've been preaching the value of emotional intelligence and soft skills training for years, and this data shows why: an engaged employee is one who has strong relationships.

Employees who are engaged like the people they work with. Note that this is a factor in both engagement and satisfaction – like our example, Jim Halpert, having good relationships does not necessarily equate engagement, but a lack of good relationships is a key sign of disengagement.

There are a few ways that organizations can improve relationships between peers, including soft skills training, team outings, team building activities, and offering opportunities for collaboration.

Employees who are engaged also have good relationships with their supervisors. This requires employees to be treated fairly and to have a high degree of trust in their managers. Lack of experience in new managers can lead to higher turnover and disengagement among team members. The importance of training your managers cannot be understated.

## Output Conditions

Output conditions are the work that the employee is producing for your organization. While some elements of this condition can be influenced by the organization, much of this condition falls on the employee themselves.

Employees want work that is meaningful to them, they want their skills and abilities to align with their work, and they want a chance to further the goals of the organization.

This condition is very much related to an employee's passion for their work. When employers recognize an individual contributor's unique skills, let them develop and utilize those skills, and articulate why the employer's work matters, the employee has the conditions to optimize their output for engagement.

## Organizational Duties

The organization has a single condition to maintain if they want to keep employees engaged – maintaining financial stability.

Employees will only invest their time and effort if they think there will be a payoff – and if there is to be a payoff, then the organization must be in operation.

Consider how various events in an organization might affect an employee and be transparent with your employees about major changes in the organization before they happen.

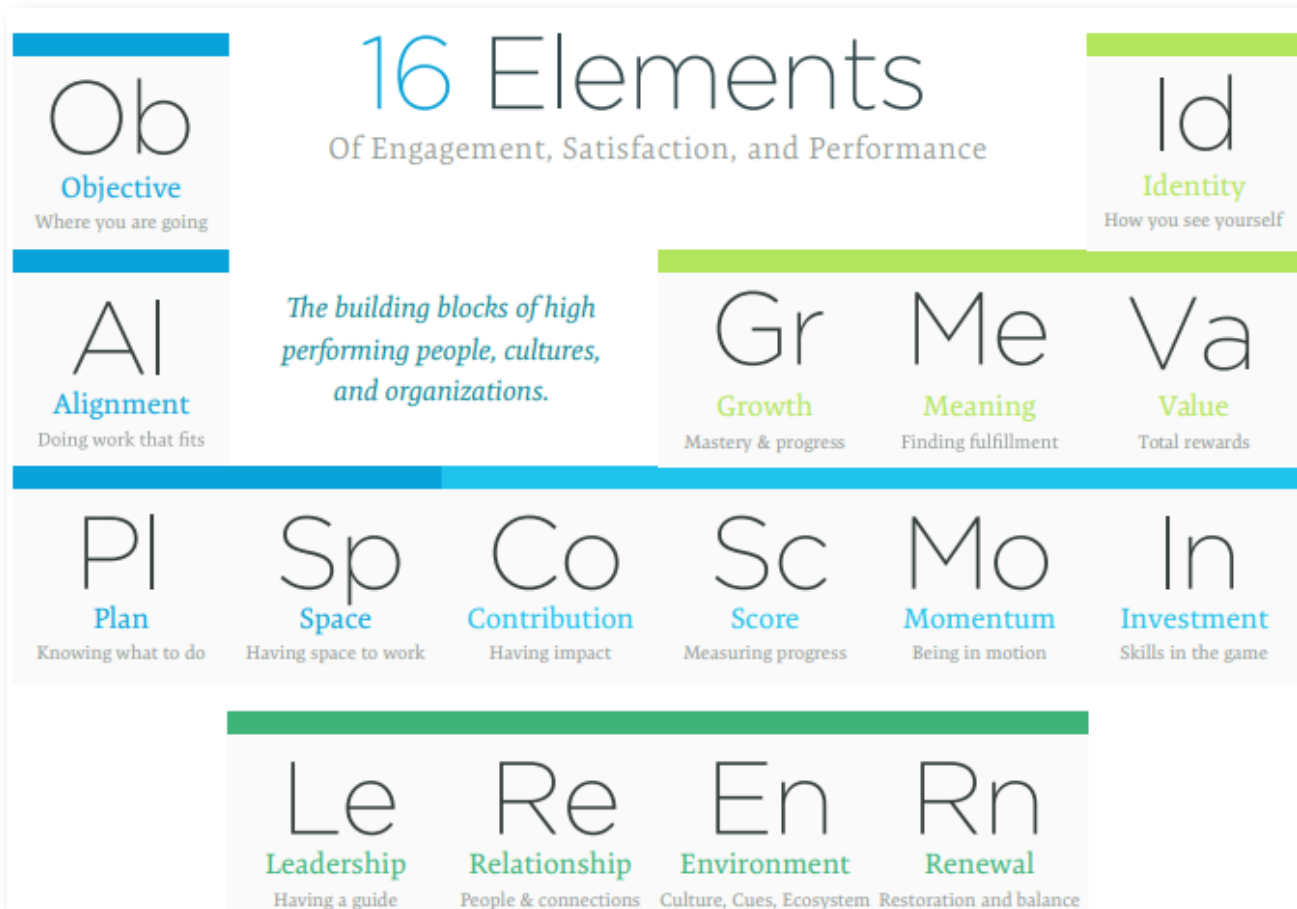
This framework works great for many organizations, and optimizing these three conditions may very well increase engagement to your desired level. However, some organizations (particularly larger ones) may find that more detail is necessary to foster employee engagement.



# The Lindquist Model

Rusty Lindquist, a researcher and thought leader in human capital management, spent over a decade developing a comprehensive model of elements for engagement, which scales for different-sized organizations.

The Lindquist model of employee engagement, satisfaction, and performance outlines 16 elements to optimize engagement.



This model expands on the three conditions outlined in the previous section, and includes four segments:

**Input:** What the employee needs to get work done

**Output:** What employees get from their work

**Action:** Things that help the work get done

**Influencers:** Factors that fuel or enable that work

You'll notice significant overlap between this model and the three conditions model, with some additions.

In this model, more is expected from the organization beyond financial stability.

**In an engaging environment, an employer provides:**

- A well-defined purpose of the work an employee is tasked with
- Assignments that align with an employee's skillset
- A strategy for the successful completion of the company's business goals
- A great work environment, whether physical or virtual

**Leaders bear responsibility for helping employees stay engaged by:**

- Guiding the employee toward the fulfillment of their goals in the context of greater business goals
- Caring about employees enough to develop genuine relationships and connections
- Establishing a healthy culture, with open access to crowd-sourced information
- Occasionally "mixing things up" so work stays manageable and avoids monotony

**An engaged employee should:**

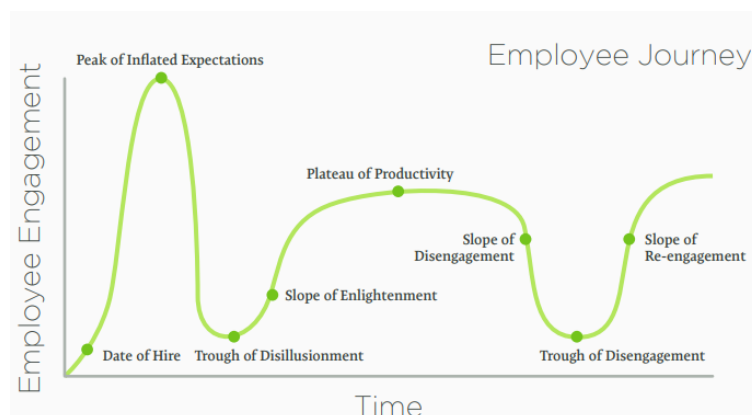
- Complete work and projects that have an impact on the company's business goals
- Maintain their focus on important projects
- Have some sort of skin in the game, in the form of time and effort
- Measure or have access to measurements of their performance, through metrics, coaching, and feedback

**An engaging company should:**

- Has an identity, and can provide an emotional response to why they exist
- Is dedicated to growing and developing within the market
- Offers genuine value to the world
- Has an impact on the world

## A Quick Note on Recognizing At-Risk Employees

One of the most important skills your leadership team has is the skill to identify when an employee is at risk of becoming disengaged at work. To help with identifying these times, Mr. Lindquist illustrates the natural stages of engagement for employees:



Over time, it's normal for an employee's engagement to wax and wane. This is where "momentum" plays a role – an at-risk employee is nearing a slope of disengagement.

This most likely happens at the end of a project. When employees lose momentum, they risk falling out of engagement. However, when employees do hit those lower moments, there are several strategies to help them re-engage with their work.

## How to Cultivate Engagement in Your Organization

After looking over these models, it's natural that you might wonder where to begin. We've created this handy checklist for you to begin optimizing your workplace for engagement.

### Step One: Define Your Company

- ☐ Has your organization created an emotional reason for why you exist?
- ☐ Have you defined how your solution brings a net positivity to the world?
- ☐ Can your organization eloquently explain the value you bring in dollar terms?
- ☐ Does your company have a well-defined plan to grow in the market and provide opportunities for employees to grow?

### Step Two: Develop a Strong Leadership Team

- ☐ Are your leaders and managers strong coaches?
- ☐ Do your leaders affect your culture in a positive way?
- ☐ Do your managers and leaders have the skills needed to develop strong and genuine connections with employees?
- ☐ Are your leaders able to identify when employees are at risk of becoming disengaged?

### Step Three: The Things You Provide

- ☐ Do the job descriptions and liberty you provide your employees give them opportunities to use their skills to the best of their abilities?
- ☐ Does most of the work you ask of employees have a direct impact on business goals?
- ☐ Does your building, décor, and spatial planning impact your culture in a positive way?

### Step Four: Who You're Hiring

- ☐ Are your employees motivated to find new ways to contribute to your business goals?
- ☐ Do your employees know when they've done a good job, and do they know where they can improve?
- ☐ Are your employees held accountable to deadlines and standards of quality in their work?
- ☐ Are your employees invested and bought into your mission? Do they willingly give of their time and their effort?

# The Root Challenges Behind Engagement Issues

What you'll notice about these models is that they're both multi-faceted. Any way you chop it up, engagement isn't in itself a business challenge, it's a symptom.

For instance, in the Lindquist model, if an employee is missing any of the 16 elements, they risk becoming disengaged. It's up to the employer to optimize the workplace for engagement by identifying the root issues in the organization that may be causing disengagement.

Some common causes of low engagement are:

- *Poor leadership*
- *Low employee retention, leading to low morale*
- *Skill gaps that prevent efficient work*
- *Managers lacking soft skills*
- *No succession plan, or unclear career paths*
- *Dispersed and/or virtual workforce mismanagement*

Thankfully, these very real challenges are root causes, and can be overcome with a good plan and the right tools.

## Engagement is a Symptom

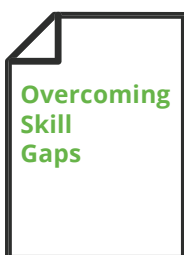
Low engagement indicates a problem somewhere, but attempting to fix engagement without identifying what factors are influencing your engagement wastes time and resources.

At BizLibrary, we often see companies come to us looking to solve engagement issues in their organization, but they haven't identified the deeper challenges creating those issues. Our consultants ask specific questions to help unearth the organization-wide factors leading to low engagement, and work on plans to address those areas.

**There is no one-size-fits-all solution** for making employees more engaged because there are so many underlying issues affecting a disengaged employee. The good news is that many of those underlying issues can be overcome through strategic employee training.

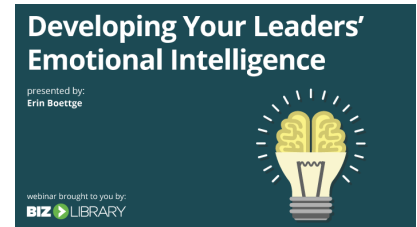
As a training professional, you can align your training goals to the identified causes of your engagement issues and start seeing employees' level of engagement rise.

Here are a few articles on the various business challenges that may be contributing to low engagement in your organization:



Since this is a wide-ranging issue, we've compiled several in-depth resources to help you address the root causes of low engagement in your organization. Learn from these ebooks and webinars how you can work on overcoming these challenges:

## Recommended Resources



BizLibrary is a leading provider of online learning for growing organizations. Our award-winning microlearning video library engages employees of all levels, and our learning technology platform is a progressive catalyst for achievement. Partnered with our expert Client Success and Technical Support teams, clients are empowered to solve business challenges and impact change within their organizations. To learn more, visit [www.bizlibrary.com](http://www.bizlibrary.com).

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