

# LEARNING'S ROLE

## IN EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### OF AN ASTD RESEARCH REPORT

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The *ASTD–Dale Carnegie Training–i4cp Learning and Employee Engagement Study* (the Study) found that employee engagement is one of the most important workplace issues of the day. Despite this finding, only a third of the workforce studied here can be characterized as highly engaged. Most of the workforce, about four in 10, is moderately engaged, while a fourth of the workforce is minimally engaged or disengaged.

Engaged employees are defined as those who are “mentally and emotionally invested in their work and in contributing to their employer’s success.” Engagement evidences itself through employees who are willing to go the extra mile, speak well of their company, and make sure that customers are satisfied.

The discrepancy between the perceived importance of engagement and the level of engagement that exists in organizations today represents an opportunity to learn more about the strategies and other organizational factors that are most responsible for influencing employees to become more engaged. The Study found four main areas to be targets for improvements that can lead to greater engagement: leadership and management, learning practices and processes, practices related to communication and values, and engagement-focused practices and processes.

### UNDERSTANDING LINKS BETWEEN ENGAGEMENT AND ORGANIZATIONAL SUCCESS

Engaged workers contribute to their employers in many ways, all of which support organizational effectiveness and long-term success. To identify some of the primary ways that engagement affects organizational success, the Study asked about many of the reasons typically given for seeking a more engaged workforce. The three main responses were to

- *enhance customer service and help drive customer satisfaction*
- *improve organizational productivity*
- *improve the bottom line.*

Additional factors identified as important reasons to seek higher levels of engagement related to talent management and included improving teamwork and morale, reducing turnover, aligning employees with strategy, attracting new employees, and building a succession pipeline.

### TACKLING THE MEASUREMENT CHALLENGE

Measuring engagement is important to enable organizations to manage their engagement programs systematically. However, measurement can also be a challenge because no consensus exists about how to do it. The most frequently cited methods were exit interviews, turnover rates, and regular employee surveys. A survey tool that adequately measures variables such as job satisfaction, understanding of organizational objectives and strategy, understanding of contributions to strategy, alignment with organizational values, and rates of retention may be an effective way to capture data on engagement.

### DRIVING ENGAGEMENT THROUGH LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

Organizations that assign responsibility for engagement to all managers or all employees report greater rates of success. This underscores the importance of the role of immediate supervisors, who can make or break engagement programs.

Some effective leadership and management practices identified in the Study included focusing on core objectives related to organizational strategy, applying metrics, ensuring that employees understand their role in the organizational strategy, ensuring that employees have the resources they need, and building relationships.

Other effective practices include

- holding managers accountable for engagement
- evaluating and building managers’ ability to coach workers

- building manager credibility
- rewarding managers for improving engagement.

## LEVERAGING LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES TO OPTIMIZE ENGAGEMENT

Both the quality and quantity of learning opportunities affect employee engagement to a very large extent. Two specific strategies found to raise engagement levels relate to the critical role played by managers: training supervisors how to coach their employees and training managers in the skills they need to engage employees.

General learning practices that were found to have a positive effect on engagement included fostering a learning culture, improving onboarding and orientation practices, designing learning with engagement in mind, and linking learning and performance management.

## CONNECTING EMPLOYEES TO THE ORGANIZATION THROUGH COMMUNICATION AND VALUES

More than three-quarters of Study respondents said clear communication drives engagement to a high or very high degree. Clarifying and communicating organizational mission and goals were the most widely used communication practices related to engagement.

Although the practices that most organizations use in this area are those that respondents felt they should use, significant gaps exist between the extent to which they are used by organizations and the extent to which respondents felt they should be used. Improvements in these areas could help boost overall engagement levels. This was especially true in the areas of

- actively promoting a culture of engagement
- providing employees with flexibility to achieve work-life balance
- ensuring that engagement strategies are well understood by everyone in the organization.

## ESTABLISHING ENGAGEMENT PRACTICES AND PROCESSES

A variety of engagement practices and processes are currently undertaken in organizations, including

- engaging workers via reward and recognition programs
- ensuring that engagement is an integral part of corporate success strategies
- using benefits programs to engage employees
- ensuring formal engagement assessment processes are in place
- recruiting and selecting for factors that predict employee engagement.

Of these, making engagement an integral part of the organization's success strategy, using appropriate rewards and recognition, and recruiting and selecting for engagement seem to hold the most promise for improving employee engagement.

## OVERCOMING OBSTACLES TO ENGAGEMENT

Although many factors can boost engagement in organizations, a few can hinder progress in this area. The number one obstacle to engagement is poor management. Lack of accountability and skills causes managers and leaders to lose sight of engagement and to fail to develop the skills required to enhance it. Furthermore, some leadership behaviors, such as viewing workers as expendable in the face of economic challenges and failing to recognize employee contributions to the organization, can have a negative effect on engagement.

Other barriers to engagement include lack of development opportunities, poor performance assessments and performance appraisal systems, employee stress, and lack of opportunities to use new skills.

## | ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTING ORGANIZATIONS |

### THE AMERICAN SOCIETY FOR TRAINING & DEVELOPMENT

The American Society for Training & Development (ASTD) is the world's largest association dedicated to workplace learning and performance professionals. ASTD's members come from more than 100 countries and connect locally in 136 U.S. chapters and 25 Global Networks. Members work in thousands of organizations of all sizes, in government, as independent consultants, and suppliers.

ASTD started in 1944 when the organization held its first annual conference. ASTD has widened the profession's focus to link learning and performance to individual and organizational results and is a sought-after voice on critical public policy issues. For more information, visit [www.astd.org](http://www.astd.org).

### DALE CARNEGIE TRAINING

Dale Carnegie partners with middle market and large corporations as well as organizations to produce measurable business results by improving the performance of employees with emphasis on leadership, sales, team member engagement, customer service, presentations, process improvement, and other essential management skills. The programs are available in 29 languages throughout the world; they cover the entire United States and reach more than 70 countries. Dale Carnegie includes as its clients 400 of the *Fortune* 500 companies. Approximately 7 million people have experienced Dale Carnegie Training. Dale Carnegie Training's corporate specialists work with individuals, groups, and organizations to design solutions that unleash employees' potential, enabling client organizations to reach the next level of performance. Dale Carnegie Training also offers public courses, seminars, and workshops, as well as in-house customized training, corporate assessments, online reinforcement, and one-on-one coaching. For more information, please visit [www.dalecarnegie.com](http://www.dalecarnegie.com).

### THE INSTITUTE FOR CORPORATE PRODUCTIVITY

The Institute for Corporate Productivity (i4cp) improves corporate productivity through a combination of research, community, tools, and technology focused on the management of human capital. With more than 100 leading organizations as members, including many of the best known companies in the world, i4cp draws upon one of the industry's largest and most experienced research teams and executives-in-residence to produce more than 10,000 pages of rapid, reliable, and respected research annually, surrounding all facets of the management of people in organizations.

Additionally, i4cp identifies and analyzes the upcoming major issues and future trends that are expected to influence workforce productivity and provides member clients with tools and technology to execute leading-edge strategies and "next practices" on these issues and trends. For more information, visit [www.i4cp.com](http://www.i4cp.com).

## **ASTD** RESEARCH

ASTD Research tracks trends, informs decisions, and connects research to practice in the field of workplace learning and performance. ASTD Research conducts a wide variety of ongoing studies on topics of interest to the learning profession. Recently released studies include:

- Annual State of the Industry Report
- Learning's Role in Employee Engagement
- Learning's Role in Globally Dispersed Workforces
- Tapping the Potential of Informal Learning
- Talent Management: Practices and Opportunities
- Executive Development: Strategic and Tactical Approaches
- The State of Sales Training

For more information about each study, as well as ASTD Research's comprehensive benchmarking services, visit [www.astd.org/research](http://www.astd.org/research).

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