



who really owns employee engagement?

**Front-line Workers, Managers, and Leadership Differ on Who's Accountable
for Driving Employee Engagement**



modernsurvey



Abraham Lincoln said, “Give me six hours to chop down a tree, and I will spend the first four sharpening the ax.” Getting to the root of how to drive sustained engagement in any organization is a lot like that. You can go at the process willy-nilly, looking only at the superficial level of responses from employee satisfaction surveys. Or you can take the time and make the effort to sharpen your aim, take full advantage of the power of the tools at your disposal, and fine-tune your engagement strategies.

For example, you can get great value from deepening your understanding of how people in your organization actually perceive what engagement means, who they think is accountable for driving it in your organization, and why any of that matters. What you find may surprise you.

Employee disengagement among U.S. workers rose this spring to 32 percent, up four points from last fall and the highest level in the six years that Modern Survey has conducted its National Employee Engagement Study.¹ At the same time, the percentage of fully engaged employees fell to 10 percent this spring, down three points from last fall.

“That’s important information, absolutely; but it’s on the surface,” says Don MacPherson, co-founder and president of Modern Survey. “If you go deeper, sharpen your focus to ask what employees, managers, and leaders *think* about engagement, you get greater insight into what’s driving those trends ... and how to respond to them.”

Modern Survey’s human capital measurement software combines feedback, benchmarks, and data from enterprise systems to elucidate the correlation between employee performance and company success. Its twice-yearly National Employee Engagement Study gathers attitudes and opinions about drivers of employee engagement. The Spring 2013 survey included 1,000 participants from more than 750 companies with 100 or more employees.

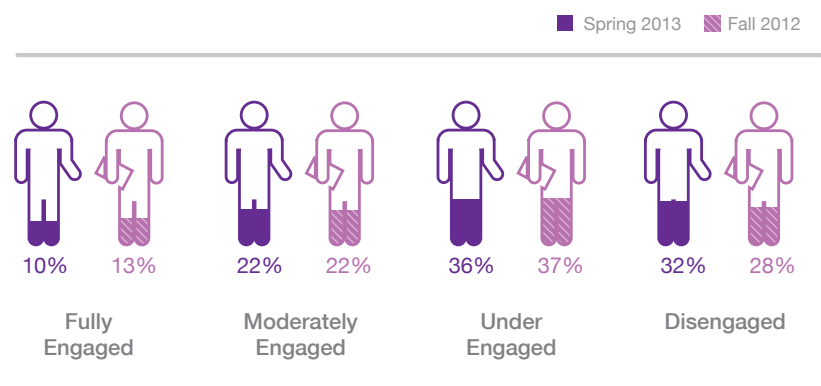
“We asked questions around perceptions of engagement — to find out whether people even think they know what it means — because there’s a lot of talk today about who owns engagement,” MacPherson says. “If it’s the manager, senior leadership, or the employee, it makes a difference.”

Engagement: Who’s In, Who’s Out, and What Drives Them

Modern Survey divides employee engagement into four categories: fully engaged, moderately engaged, under engaged, and disengaged. Each group will have different perceptions of what engagement means. As we mentioned above, disengagement has reached its highest level in at least six years, while the number of fully engaged employees has dropped.

“Those may only seem like numbers on a page, mere statistics,” MacPherson says. “But if you want a sharp look at how they can affect the health of your organization, you only need to ask a few more questions and look at what the answers tell you.”

Engagement Levels: Spring 2013 vs. Fall 2012



¹Modern Survey. State of Engagement: Unveiling Modern Survey’s Latest U.S. Employee Research. March 2013.

For example, Modern Survey asks employees several questions about their attitudes toward their employer. As the number of disengaged employees has risen and the share of fully engaged has fallen, 4 out of 5 indicators of Modern Survey's Employee Engagement Index also fell:

- The number of employees willing to refer their company to others
- The number who are proud of their company
- The number who said they feel they have a future with their company
- The number who are inspired by their company

Only the number of employees who said they intend to stay with their current organization rose — and that number inched up only one point and still remains at less than half of all employees.

If you dial in your sights a little tighter, you might ask: What drives people to be engaged? What moves the needle on that index? Why are some more willing to be

proud of the company or feel inspired by their organization?

Modern Survey's years of research have identified six primary drivers of engagement:

1. Confidence in senior management
2. A belief there is opportunity for personal growth and development
3. A sense of personal accomplishment from their work

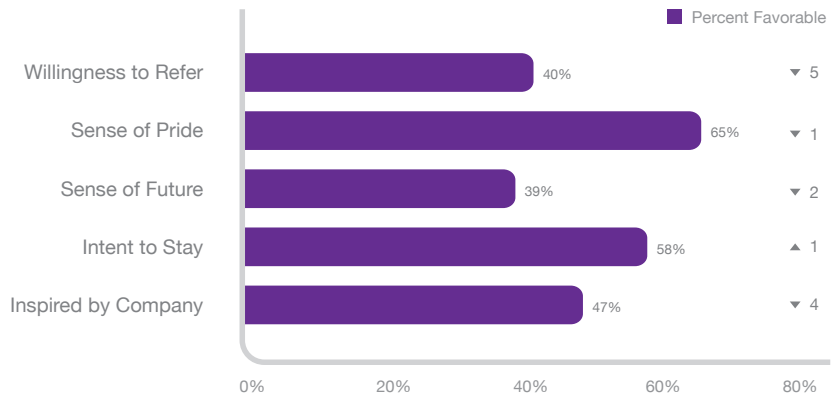
4. Confidence in the future of the organization

5. A belief that the company's values guide its behavior

6. Getting helpful feedback from managers

"Organizations that are trying to improve engagement need to fully understand these drivers and train leaders how to leverage them," MacPherson says.

March 2013 Employee Engagement Index



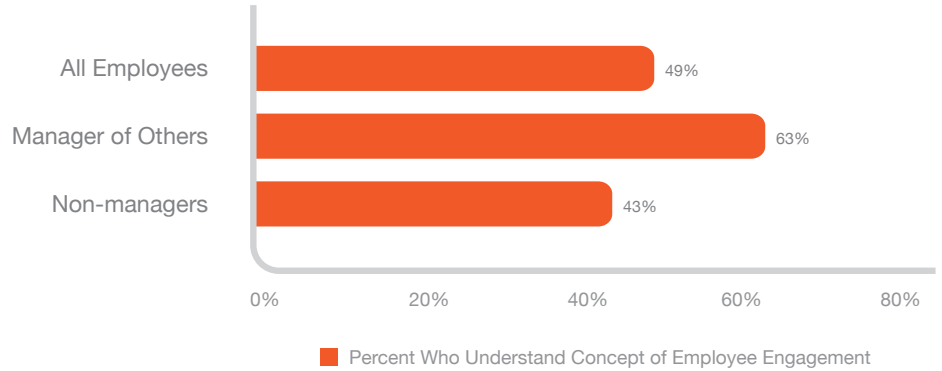
Who's Accountable for Engagement ... and What Does That Mean, Anyway?

Knowing what drives engagement — and seeing some of the effects of a lack of engagement — you can sharpen the ax a little more. "Now you move toward asking, 'How do I instill those drivers in my organization and make people accountable for engagement?'" MacPherson says.

First, you probably need to educate people about engagement. Surveys show it's a mistake to assume everyone understands what the word means, or that they share a common perception of engagement. Only 49 percent of all U.S. workers are familiar with the concept of employee engagement, and only 63 percent of managers know what engagement means, according to the Spring 2013 study.

Those numbers are incredibly revealing when you look at it this way: Nearly 40 percent of managers say they don't understand the concept of engagement, yet employees say that two of the six drivers of engagement are getting helpful feedback from managers and having confidence in senior management.

Knowledge of “Employee Engagement”



“With no understanding of what engagement is, managers can’t possibly be expected to know what the drivers of engagement are, or effectively engage their direct reports,” MacPherson says. “How can managers who don’t have a grasp of what engagement means be held accountable for doing those things that drive engagement? How can we turn over the responsibility of engagement to the employee if they don’t know what it is?”

Another reason to focus on educating the entire organization about engagement is because it can link directly to employee understanding of organizational values. And that’s a good thing.

“Employees who can say they know and understand their organizational values are 30 times more likely to be fully engaged than those who can’t say the same,” MacPherson

says. “A simple thing like well-communicated organizational values is foundational to creating a culture of engagement.”

Even if an employee says they are at least familiar with the concept of engagement, you can’t assume they’re primed to be engaged. Why? Because they have different attitudes about who is responsible for getting employees to be engaged.

Just over 1 in 3 employees said this spring that in their organizations, direct managers and supervisors are “most responsible” for engaging employees.

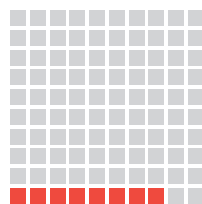
“That’s a sobering number when you bear in mind that barely 60 percent of all managers are familiar with the concept of what employee engagement means,” MacPherson says. “Furthermore, just because managers

say they know what engagement means, it doesn’t mean they know what the drivers of engagement are, or how to leverage those drivers.”

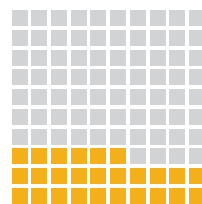
By comparison, only 17 percent of employees hold themselves primarily accountable for being engaged on the job, and 39 percent said direct managers and supervisors, senior leaders, and the employees themselves are equally responsible for employee engagement.

“The bottom line, really, is that everyone plays a role in being responsible for engagement in their organization,” MacPherson says. “The challenge is to improve your understanding of how that plays out in your organization and respond in meaningful ways.”

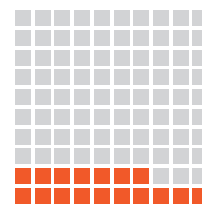
Who’s Responsible for Employee Engagement?



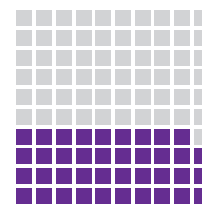
8%
Senior Leaders



36%
Direct Managers & Supervisors



17%
Employees



39%
Direct Managers and Supervisors, Senior Leaders, and Employees Equally

Conclusion

The engagement equation is simple, but not easy. Organizations need to do things that make it possible for employees to engage. That starts by having a clear set of values that employees know and understand. Leaders need to act on what research shows drives engagement. From there, with those examples of behavior and those drivers in place, it's up to individual employees to decide whether to be engaged.

But the process starts with knowing what you don't know, with taking the time to sharpen the ax and whittle away at the variables. You can't assume everyone in your organization is familiar with what employee engagement means, or that everyone has the same belief of who is responsible for driving engagement.

Using proprietary science-tested questions, Modern Survey's mThrive solution can

help organizations determine employee perceptions of engagement. Organizations can learn how engaged their employees are and identify and leverage the unique drivers of engagement within their organization.



about us

Modern Survey measures workforce intensity — that fire in your company’s belly that makes all things possible. Our human capital measurement software combines feedback, benchmarks, and data from enterprise systems to elucidate the correlation between employee performance and company success. We analyze the stuff your talent management system can’t — so that you know what to do next. We are Modern Survey. And we are relentless.

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