

E X P L O R I N G

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E N G A G E M E N T

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How to be a better leader, or a happier person, or both.

People lie at the heart of most of the problems we face. When we change something, the human factor is often the most complex and frustrating element of the solution. Leaders at all levels of an organization, and even each of us personally, often struggle to figure out what’s wrong with our teams, or ourselves, or what we can do to make things better.

Over the past several years, we have developed a framework we find extremely useful in diagnosing problems and designing solutions that involve people. We call it the Engagement Framework (shown in Figure 1).

At the center of our framework lies “Engagement.” While the term is somewhat worn and ragged, it’s clear that at the core, an engaged human being is happy, productive, energized, and fulfilled. The concept of engagement applies to groups of people, too, including teams and organizations, and can even apply to an entire society. Engaged people and engaged organizations are happier and more productive. Companies full of engaged people are more profitable. Countless books have been written and presentations given on the need to increase engagement within our workforces and personal lives. But how? What matters? What truly drives engagement?

ENGAGEMENT DRIVERS

The wedges around the center of our model are the six categories

of engagement drivers: growth, relationships, autonomy, fairness, well-being, and security. Each of these drivers can be positive or negative for people at any time. Any change a person experiences can enhance or diminish engagement.

Indeed, each individual values each of these drivers differently, and at different times one driver may factor higher or lower than the others. Our research has shown, however, that collectively, there is a balance across each of these drivers in a large group of people. They all matter, and they matter in relatively equal proportions across a large group of people.

- GROWTH

Accomplishing a goal, receiving a compliment, learning something new, achieving a personal best, winning a contest, outperforming your peers, and receiving a promotion are all examples of growth. Striving for that next achievement, that pursuit, or chase, is at the core of the growth driver.

- RELATIONSHIPS

Social relationships are a key source of engagement. Human beings are social creatures, and we need to be connected to others. Deep relationships, where we care about others and others care about us, are an important element of engagement. Happiness research shows that we need at least one or two intimate (not necessarily romantic) relationships in our lives to be truly happy, and the more relationships and connectedness we have, the happier we are. It’s meaningful relationships that are important here, not the number of social media “friends” we have. Doing things for others is highly

engaging. If you can accomplish a stretch goal that someone else appreciates, think of how powerful that act can be: creating growth and relationships at once—a double dose of engagement!

- AUTONOMY

Choosing the work we do, the people we do it with, and how and when we do it is engaging. Conversely, we resent being micromanaged or having to perform tedious work that keeps us

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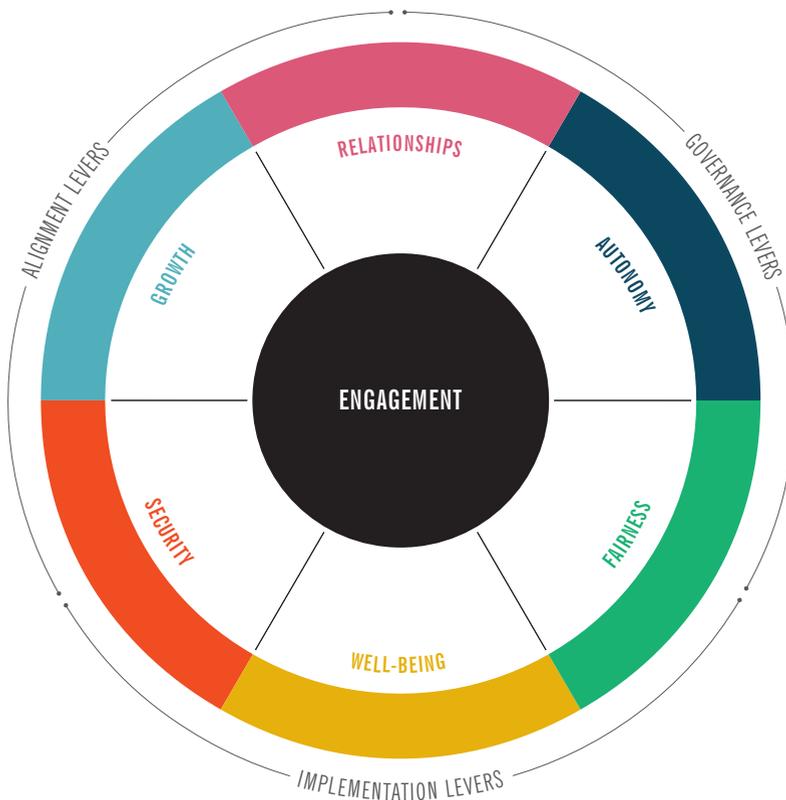
from doing things we really love to do, or being tied to arbitrary and unnecessary schedules that prevent us from having the flexibility to balance hectic work and family commitments. Autonomy is usually one of those drivers that we don’t notice until it’s diminished. Recognizing the triggers of decreasing autonomy in yourself, and understanding the amount of autonomy your employees desire, is crucial to maintaining positive engagement levels.

- FAIRNESS

Fairness is very important. Those who feel they, or someone they work with, are being treated unfairly will inevitably be distracted by that unfairness, and may even be motivated to actively protest and push back. Perceived

ENGAGEMENT FRAMEWORK

Figure 1



ENGAGEMENT DRIVERS

GROWTH

- Status
- Accomplishment
- Learning
- Progression
- Promotion
- Celebrating Success

RELATIONSHIPS

- Company
- Leaders
- Peers
- Team Members
- Friends at Work
- Loyalty

AUTONOMY

- Flexibility
- Decision-making
- Control
- Freedom

FAIRNESS

- Ethics
- Equality

WELL-BEING

- Pace
- Fun
- Health
- Enjoyment

SECURITY

- Certainty
- Clarity
- Safety

INFLUENCERS OF ENGAGEMENT

ALIGNMENT LEVERS

- Purpose
- Strategy
- Goals
- Capacity
- Belief

IMPLEMENTATION LEVERS

- Process
- Technology
- Communications
- Training
- Policy
- Compensation
- Organization Design
- Infrastructure

GOVERNANCE LEVERS

- Control
- Measurement

unfairness will create friction and spreads throughout organizations, becoming a drag on engagement until the perceived unfairness is eliminated. Fairness has an upper limit, however, unlike the other engagement drivers. Once something is perceived to be fair, you can't make it more fair.

• WELL-BEING

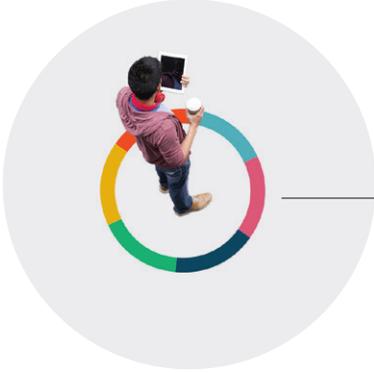
This driver encompasses health, both in mind and body, and incorporates rest and fun. We can't be engaged if we're tired, unhealthy, in pain, or running at such a fast pace that we can't catch our breath. Laughter and fun also fall into this bucket. Having a healthy dose of humor and levity in our interactions throughout the day reduces stress and improves our overall sense of well-being.

• SECURITY

Comfort in knowing that what happens next will not harm us drives engagement. Different levels of security exist, of course. At the most basic level, we have to feel we will not be physically harmed, and that we will have shelter and food. Once those basic security needs are covered, this driver is most influenced by knowing our position is secure, how the latest initiative will affect us, and that we have a good idea of what everyone important to us is thinking, including coworkers and bosses. Transparency helps to create security; it makes our world more predictable.

INFLUENCERS OF ENGAGEMENT

So, if growth, relationships, autonomy, fairness, well-being,



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and security are the six drivers of engagement, how can you influence them? We have identified three categories of levers you can use to influence the six engagement drivers. Those appear in the outside ring of the Engagement Framework. The three categories of levers we've identified are Alignment Levers, Implementation Levers, and Governance Levers.

ALIGNMENT LEVERS

Alignment of purpose, goals, strategy, capacity, and belief is the first key to maximizing engagement. Deliberately addressing these key elements prior to starting any endeavor will help maximize successful outcomes. The reason we call them "alignment" levers is that the key to maximizing engagement is to align each of these at the individual, team, and organizational levels. The goal is to eliminate any dissonance between what matters most to the individuals working in an organization and the organization itself. Aligning these elements maximizes intrinsic motivation and creates coherence across the organization.

PURPOSE

Purpose is the "why" behind what you do. Why does your organization exist? What is your personal passion and purpose? Why do you do what you do? Aligning the purpose of each individual and each level of the organization creates a shared purpose that amplifies the efforts of each individual. Shared purpose builds closer relationships among people and creates clarity about how people will behave within the organization, which improves the relationships and security.

STRATEGY

Strategy builds on purpose. It lays out the higher-level, long-term mission and vision. It sets the long-term target for what individuals seek and what an organization strives for. It increases security because we know there is a plan for the future. Strategies that align with purpose are inspiring. They motivate people to accomplish great things and grow, personally and organizationally, in pursuit of that strategy.

GOALS

Goals define what you are working toward in the shorter term. Goals get accomplished; accomplishments influence growth. Goals also clarify priorities, which increase security. It's important to involve

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people in setting goals, which improves autonomy. Make sure goals are achievable and realistic, lest they be interpreted as unfair or decrease the growth driver. Shared goals among team members will also improve relationships as teams gel and individuals help each other achieve the goal together.



STRIVING FOR THAT NEXT ACHIEVEMENT, PURSUIT, OR CHASE IS AT THE CORE OF THE GROWTH DRIVER.



CAPACITY

Without the right level of bandwidth or capacity to fulfill a purpose, execute a strategy, or meet a goal, burnout and failure are inevitable. Aligning the capacity of individuals and teams within an organization will contribute to the well-being driver.

BELIEF

People must believe success is possible. Belief is the opposite of cynicism. Aligning the belief that the organization can be successful is a prerequisite to attempting anything, and aligning the belief that the organization must be successful at the individual and team levels can supercharge the energy of an organization. Conversely, insidious cynicism can kill any initiative or culture.

IMPLEMENTATION LEVERS

The implementation levers at the bottom of the framework are the tools available to support the people who do the work in an organization. Process, technology, communications, training, policy, compensation, organization

design, and infrastructure are all levers that influence the engagement drivers. They are the tools we usually turn to first to get things done.

PROCESS

Processes define the step-by-step “how” behind our work. Processes create clarity and improve our certainty about completing a task, which improves security. Processes also help us accomplish tasks, which is a key to the growth driver.

TECHNOLOGY

Technology is about the tools we use to get our work done. Technology amplifies our capabilities. Tools can improve autonomy by eliminating tedious, repetitive, and boring tasks, freeing time to do things that are more interesting, and allowing us to work where and when we want. They can also save us physical effort, which improves our stamina, influencing the well-being engagement driver.

COMMUNICATIONS

Communications transmit knowledge. Without communications,

we’re operating in the dark, which creates fear and uncertainty that drags down security. Instead, communications create awareness and understanding, providing us with a sense of security. Communications also help us build relationships. The more open, deep, and transparent the communication, the better the connection between individuals and groups, and the stronger the relationships within the organization.

TRAINING

Training builds skills. Skills are critical for growth and the accomplishment of tasks. Without the right skills, security takes a hit as we begin to worry about our ability to satisfy our own expectations and those of our organization. Training can also influence the fairness driver. Putting someone into a role where he or she inherently lacks the skills to be successful is unfair. The resulting stress can also affect well-being.

POLICY

Policies are the rules we live by, both personally and within an



organization. Policies generate security. They clarify expectations and boundaries for acceptable behavior. Policies can improve fairness and autonomy (think “work-from-home” policy). Policies can also restrict autonomy by imposing rules that restrict decision-making and control. The right policies and rules create a balance among security, fairness, and autonomy, which then drives engagement.

COMPENSATION

Compensation is a special form of policy worthy of its own place on the Engagement Framework. It’s important to note that compensation itself is not a driver of engagement. It’s not in the center of the framework. Compensation,

rather, influences each of the engagement drivers. Getting a raise affects the growth driver. It is an accomplishment and maybe even a new personal best. You can spend compensation on others, by doing nice things for people you love, or paying for education for your children, improving your relationships. You can save for the future, improving your security. You can pay off debt, which increases your autonomy and freedom to do other things with your money. A change to your pay might repair an inequity if you felt unfairly compensated previously. Compensation can also be used to fund well-being activities such as vacations, health club memberships, massages, or even a fun night out on the town.

It’s not compensation that drives engagement—it’s what you do with it that matters.

ORGANIZATION DESIGN

Organization design is another special form of policy worth calling out on its own. Organization design simply tells you where you fit into a hierarchy, who you report to, and who you are expected to interact with. An organization design clarifies roles and co-workers, improving security and encouraging relationships.

INFRASTRUCTURE

The physical space in which we work can significantly affect relationships, well-being, autonomy, and growth. An open workspace will encourage more interaction with others, improving relationships, and perhaps leading to collaboration that drives growth. Bright and open environments can also improve our sense of well-being and happiness. Being stuck in a basement office with no windows can have the opposite effect. An open workspace can also restrict autonomy by exposing our activities for everyone to see; meanwhile, a closed-office environment can create privacy and sometimes offer the focus required to complete

a complex task in a distraction-free space, which impacts the growth driver.

GOVERNANCE LEVERS

The last two levers we include in the Engagement Framework are the governance levers of control and measurement. They allow us to confirm everything is working as planned, that goals are being accomplished, that purpose is being met, and that we're all holding each other (and ourselves) accountable for work that needs to get done.

CONTROL

The control lever is a special kind of process that provides oversight to a project or initiative to make sure it's going as planned. By checking in periodically, we improve security and ensure we're making progress on our goals and influencing growth. At the individual level, we should step back regularly to make sure we are on track toward meeting our goals and accomplishing our tasks. Teams and organizations should conduct periodic status checks and readouts to review progress.

MEASUREMENT

Measurement allows us to objectively assess whether we're being

successful. It's easy for people to subjectively feel like they're making progress, even though measurable improvement hasn't happened. Did it really improve then? Maybe, but it's more likely we're just not facing the facts: Things are not getting better. Measurement allows us to gauge progress fairly, serving as a clear indicator of growth.

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BUT WHAT ABOUT LEADERSHIP?

So, where is leadership in the Engagement Framework? Isn't good leadership the key to engagement? Of course it is. Leadership is, quite simply, the effective application of each of the levers on the outside of the Engagement Framework to maximize engagement within the organization.

The Engagement Framework is a tool to diagnose why your organization is struggling, how to

manage a major transformation, how to improve the effectiveness of your team, how to move from good to great, or how to make yourself happier and more engaged. It applies at the individual, team, and organizational levels, and it applies when analyzing a steady-state organization or an organization going through a major change.

Step back to figure out what is improving or diminishing the Engagement Drivers in your situation. Then look around the outside of the circle and ask yourself which levers you can pull to influence the Engagement Drivers. Pull the right levers at the right times, and you'll drive better engagement. Drive better engagement for yourself, and you'll be happier. Drive better engagement for your team or organization, and you'll be a better leader. ■

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