

EXECUTIVE
BOOK
SUMMARY

Remember:

- Employee engagement can create competitive advantage (p. xv).
- Engagement is a sense of purpose and focused energy (p. 7).
- Employee engagement works best when strategic alignment exists (p. 15).

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Employee Engagement

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Introduction and Overview

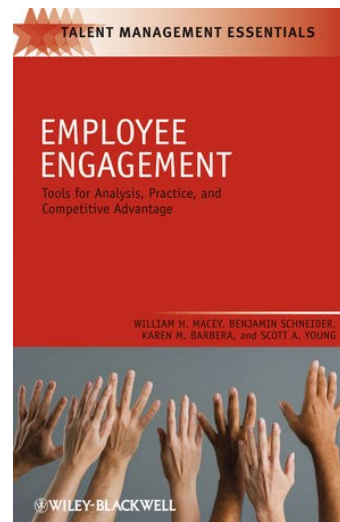
Macey, Schneider, Barbera, and Young’s book, *Employee Engagement: Tools for Analysis, Practice, and Competitive Advantage*, is a practical guide to begin the long and vital task of engaging employees, regardless of economic sector. Filled with real-life examples and helpful tips, the authors have produced a book that will be useful to any reader interested in increasing their knowledge and competency in the area of employee engagement.

“Rarely has a term that repre-

sents a “soft” topic resonated as strongly with business executives as employee engage-

ment has in recent years” (p. xv).

The authors remind us right to the end that employee engagement is not a ‘one-and-done’ initiative, but requires an organization and its leaders to continuously work at and towards employee engagement. Organizations will be rewarded with better performance and value as long as its leaders are willing to invest into finding the right balance of employee engagement.



<https://www.bookdepository.com/Employee-Engagement-William-H-Macey/9781405179027>

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Chapter 1 – Engaging Engagement



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“Employee engagement first. It goes without saying that no company, small or large, can win over the long run without energized employees who believe in the mission and understand how to achieve it” (p. 1).

Macey, Schneider, Barbera, and Young (2009) begin *Employee Engagement* by posing the questions of what engagement is and how it can be generated and released in an organization. Dismissing engagement as a non-serious concept would be foolish for an organization because return on assets, profitability, and shareholder value are all greater for organizations and corporations whose employees are engaged.

The authors make the important point that engagement is not a zero-sum game, but instead should be considered to exist on a spectrum. Engagement can, and most likely will, manifest itself in employees in stages and small increments.

Engaged employees will “think and work proactively,” will focus on achieving the goal without being tied to a job description, will see their growth of skills as benefitting themselves and the organization, will persist despite possible obstacles, and will have an ability to adapt to change. Specifically, as Macey, et al. (2009) point out, employee engagement occurs in the presence of four driving factors:

- “employees have the capacity to engage;
- employees have a reason or the motivation to engage

- employees have the freedom to engage; and
- employees know how to engage” (p. 10).

According to Macey, et al. (2009), the **capacity to engage** derives from an employee’s self-efficacy; the **motivation to engage** comes through work that is both challenging and provides opportunity for autonomy; the



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freedom to engage

develops through trust in managers and the organization’s ‘system’, as well as the feeling that taking a risk will not be punished; finally, **employees know how to engage** when they know what the organizations goals are and how the work that they are doing contributes to the attainment of those goals.



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“The four principles interact in complex ways to produce the fabric of engagement. ... [and] building an engaged workforce...requires attention to very specific issues...” (p. 16).

Chapter 2 – The “Feel and Look” of Employee Engagement

The “Feel”

So what does engagement feel like for engaged employees? Macey, et al. (2009) identify four important and powerful aspects to feeling engaged that help to set engagement apart from other concepts:

- “feelings of urgency;
- feelings of being focused;
- feelings of intensity; and
- feelings of enthusiasm” (p. 20).

Feelings of urgency comprise not just raw energy or drive, but rather, an energy that is expelled with determination in pursuit of a specific goal.

Macey, et al. (2009) point out that what they have termed ‘urgency’ developmental psychologists also call ‘agency.’ The **feelings of being focused** are centered around the



<http://www.revelian.com/blog/the-top-6-drivers-of-employee-engagement/>

fact that engaged employees are consistently focused on their work, especially the immediate task at hand, rather than focused only when absolutely necessary. For Macey, et al. (2009), the **feelings of intensity** manifest themselves in employees

who bring both their attention and energy to bear when completing a task, therefore completely tapping into all available resources in pursuit of the goal. **Feelings of enthusiasm** are experienced by engaged employees when their emotional state at work imbues them with a strong sense of positive well-being and passion.

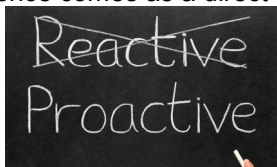
“...the engaged employee feels not only energized but competent...” (p. 27).

The “Look”

Macey, et al. (2009) identified four distinct ‘looks’ of engagement:

- persistence;
- proactivity;
- role expansion; and
- adaptability.

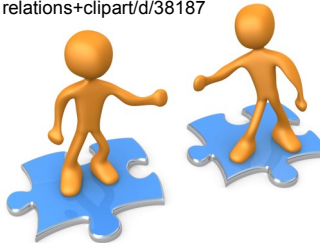
Persistence is displayed by engaged employees when they continue to work through adversities that they may face in order to accomplish goals they have set for themselves and which they believe will lead to the organizations success. This persistence comes as a direct result of



<http://www.teenbusinesscentral.com/proactivity/EmployeeEngagement>

the urgency discussed in chapter one. Engaged employees are **proactive** in their work, taking action as soon as issues become apparent

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and exercising initiative. Macey, et al. (2009) see **role expansion** occurring in two separate ways: a) the employee temporarily steps out of the assigned role to assist a colleague; or b) permanently augmenting ones assigned role by assuming new tasks. The authors consider role expansion to be a form of proactivity when it is employee initiated. Finally,

engaged employees are also more willing to **adapt** to changes in the workplace, allowing the organization to expend less energy and resources on ‘championing’ initiatives or workplace change.

Macey, et al. (2009) point out that the “feel and look” of engagement is not universally equal and that organizations should be responsive to cultural differences in the world or within their own workforce. A final caveat that the authors raise is that engagement is most easily accomplished with employees who are strategically aligned to the organization’s goals. When employees share the organizations goals and have internalized them as their own, value connections are formed that help employees become engaged.

Chapter 3 – The Key to an Engaged Workforce: An Engagement Culture

An employees work environment is an important aspect of their ability to engage, and the culture that exists in the workplace will either nurture employee engagement or hinder it. Macey, et al. (2009) define culture “as the way the people in an organization experience it... [and] what employees interpret as the key values and beliefs” (p. 45).



<http://www.executiveplacementsofva.com/2015/08/31/building-trust-in-the-workplace/>

In order to build an engagement culture in an organization there needs to be a culture of trust, which also returns to the third point that Macey, et al. (2009) laid out in chapter one: freedom

to engage. Because employees feel safe to take action on their own and have trust in their managers and the organization’s systems they are able to become engaged.

While trust is important to building an engagement culture, so is fairness from managers and the ‘system.’ Fair treatment of employees in combination with the employees’ perception that the manager has “upward influence and basic managerial competencies” was also important (p. 52).

Once an organization has established its culture, Macey, et al. (2009) also note that it is important that this culture is properly transmitted to new employees (on-boarding) in order for an engagement culture to persist. In fact, the authors

indicate that pay is a simple reward for showing up to work and that engaged employees are not motivated by pay, but



<http://ordinary-gentlemen.com/2015/04/14/creating-a-workplace-culture/>

instead thrive within an engagement culture and on the success of the company. The reason for this is because “[p]eople like to see positive consequences from what they do and those positive consequences lead them to feel good about what they do...and fosters engagement behaviors” (p. 71).

“[E]ngagement leading to success is not a one-way street” (p.71).

“Organizational culture is the sense people have about what their organization values, believes in, promotes, endorses, and stands for. ...Culture is not forever; it must be maintained and enhanced” (p. 73).



<http://blog.edgeworkconsulting.com/team-culture-get-the-most-out-of-your-workplace-culture>

Chapter 4 – Phase 1 of Creating and Executing an Engagement Campaign: Diagnostics and the Engagement Survey

Getting an employee engagement campaign started and beginning to see results takes time and a significant amount of effort. Macey, et al. (2009) remind us that the employee engagement campaign requires continuous “rethinking and retooling as successes and failures create momentum” (p. 77). If the expectation is that employee engagement will simply occur by making a few changes and that there will be no setback in the process along the way, then disappointment is virtually guaranteed.

An employee engagement survey can provide critical data that can help diagnose

what is going well and what is not going well in an organiza-



<https://flexsurveys.com/welcome-to-employee-engagement-survey-company/employee-satisfaction-surveys-frequency/>

tion. Macey, et al. (2009) caution though, that, while a “well-designed survey provides data,” it is what the “organization does with the data that matters” (p. 78). Important too is how the survey is constructed and executed, because if the engagement survey is not reflective of

what it is intended to diagnose and does not have full support from the organization’s upper-level management, it will very likely fail to be effective.

Since it is becoming ever more difficult and expensive to maintain or improve the proven drivers of job satisfaction such as job security, benefits, or promotion opportunities, engagement may well hold the key to targeting increased satisfaction within organizations while increasing costs more manageably. The engagement survey is, therefore, a vital tool to ‘get right’ if employee engagement is to be successfully implemented.

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Good to Know:
Common Survey Response Formats

The typical engagement survey includes a series of statements to which people can agree or disagree, often measured on a 5 point scale (strongly disagree = 1; disagree = 2; neither agree nor disagree = 3; agree = 4; strongly agree = 5). Questions may also be asked directly as to how satisfied they are with a particular component or outcome of their work (e.g., “how satisfied are you with ... ?”), or ask them to rate an object of opinion on a scale from poor to good, and so on.

Macey, et al. (2009), p.91.

Chapter 5 – Phase 2 of Creating and Executing an Engagement Campaign: Action Planning and Intervention

Once the groundwork for the engagement survey has been laid out, the organization’s emphasis must then shift to the process of administering the engagement survey and the engagement campaign. If the process is not handled effectively, the possibility of anything worthwhile coming from it will be slim.



<https://www.ixsystems.com/blog/lies-damn-lies-and-benchmarks/>

The interpretation of survey results is an important aspect of this process and often relies on benchmarks. Macey, et al. (2009) indicate that choosing these benchmarks must be

done carefully, as the chosen benchmark will influence how the survey results are interpreted and weighed for action emphasis.

One of the most important facets of the post-survey process is the sharing of the survey’s results with employees. This builds trust in upper-level management that the survey actually served a purpose and will counter survey fatigue among employees. Indeed, the implicit social contract between employees and the organization demands that results are disseminated and discussed with employees.

If the survey reveals areas that require action for improvement, these should be communicated to line-management. Any action plans

should be developed at this level since it is the line-manager who interacts with employees daily and will be in the best po-



http://www.discoverme.com.au/Be_Discovered/Website_Action_Plan1

sition to affect the necessary change. When areas of deficiency are addressed, it is important to not only expect improvement, but to also accept only small improvements. The key to building and then sustaining engagement is to remember that it is a long-term endeavor that will occur within small increments.

“...specific, difficult goals that are attainable and thus accepted have the best chance of being accomplished” (p. 122).

Good to Know:
Focusing on the Positives

It is too easy and too usual for consultants and executives to focus on the low scores, the bad scores, in surveys. That is, if a survey is used as a basis for making change, don’t we need to focus on what needs changing? Well, yes, but not only there. Guess what: Focusing on the negatives makes the survey a negative psychological experience for those taking it and for those charged with improving it. Most companies do many things right or they would not be in business. When providing feedback, emphasize the positive, too, and ask how you can use what you are doing well to make improvements where they are needed.⁶

Macey, et al. (2009), p.113.

Chapter 6 – Burnout and Disengagement: The Dark Side of Engagement

“Burnout is most often thought of as a state of exhaustion, of being overwhelmed with no way out” (p. 145).

When employees begin a new job they come with a pre-set baseline of engagement, which subsequently drops off over the course of the first



<https://www.zenefits.com/blog/how-to-avoid-employee-burnout-signals/>

few months at the new job. The question of why this occurs is nuanced in its answer. Often, employees will find a work environment that is too engaged or engaging, causing



<https://www.pauladavislaack.com/>

them to be relentlessly challenged in their work. Essentially, employees that burnout are too engaged, to the point where their engagement is causing debilitating stress for them.

Striking a balance of engagement is the key for organizations, yet this is very difficult to do. Social supports can help to alleviate engagement related stress, yet they can also contribute to stress by causing feelings of guilt or inadequacy in the employee.

“Burnout is not inevitable nor is it unique to specific occupations” (p. 147).

At its core, burnout is the end result of employees feeling that there exists a demand to be effective and engaged even though the employee continuously feels as though they are a failure.



<https://atmanco.com/blog/hcm/signs-of-employee-burnout-you-are-missing/>

The Burnout Syndrome:

- “(a) a state of exhaustion; subsequently followed by**
- (b) a sense of detachment — what we call disengagement — from work; and**
- (c) resulting in less overt behavior that is characteristic of engagement behavior” (p.146).**

Chapter 7 – Talking Points: Introducing or Rethinking Engagement in Your Organization

If engagement is something that is a driving passion for the reader and there is an interest in seeing it implemented in the reader's workplace, Macey, et al. (2009) have provided nine PowerPoint slides with notes and information to begin the conversation with managers and



<http://www.probiztechnology.com/picts/powerpoint-2010-logo.png>

executives. An overview of all of the topics discussed in *Employee Engagement*, Macey, et al. (2009) provide hints and warning signs to look for when presenting on engagement, a topic that many managers and executives already feel they know well and know plenty about.

“Our model is more than a psychological model; it is comprehensive in that it shows you what to do to take the energy that people want to give you and turn it into corporate competitive advantage” (p.163).

“...the emphasis should be on creating a culture that is consistent with building and sustaining an engaged employee workforce and, thus, corporate competitive advantage” (p. 164).



<http://assignmentforu.com/competitive-advantage/>

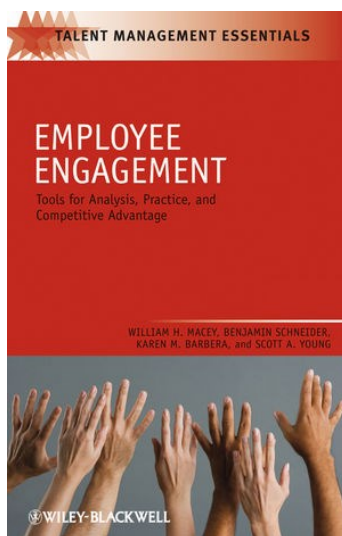
Application to Practice

While Macey, et al.'s (2009) *Employee Engagement* is solidly aimed at business managers and executives, there is still a plethora of valuable information for the education sector. For Human Resources departments or superintendents, *Employee Engagement* offers a how-to-guide to improve data gathering of vital employee information, from in-school administrators to teachers. The no-nonsense approach, helpful examples, and case studies are exactly what HR professionals would need to begin the process of engagement in their respective school divisions.

For in-school administrators, *Employee Engagement* offers a roadmap of how to begin to improve their own leadership and perhaps even re-route their energies to be more effective when interacting with staff members. In fact, it is in this exact aspect that I see *Employee Engagement* hold some of its greatest value for education leaders. With the significant amount of autonomy that schools do have in building positive co-worker relationships and engaging staff in accomplishing school goals, the lessons contained within *Employee Engagement* can be extremely valuable in helping to re-orient staff focus.

While chapters four and five are aimed much more concretely at HR professionals and higher levels of management, chapters two, three,

and six, can be more readily used in-school. Chapter two provides those valuable "feel" and "look" clues of engaged employees, while underscoring how important the strategic alignment of goals is if all employees are to be part of realizing those goals. I realized as I was reading this section that I have been guilty of not always being 'strategically aligned' with my school's goals.



<https://www.bookdepository.com/Employee-Engagement-William-H-Macey/9781405179027>

Chapter three's focus on the culture aspect of a workplace is also really important, and is something where the responsibility for it, and the change-makers of it, does not have to rest with administrators. While the leadership piece is important because the trust in leadership is vital for engagement to occur, I can also see it being a very organic and

grassroots effort that provides the initial impulse.

Chapter six is valuable in three separate aspects: a) **for self-reflection:** psychologically, where am I at every year. Is disengagement setting in because I am too engaged and stressed; b) **for colleague awareness:** am I noticing colleagues who have changed and are showing signs of disengagement. We can look out for one-another's well-being, especially in education, where we so often tend to isolate ourselves in our classrooms or departments; c) **as an administrator:** are there signs that staff are beginning to disengage or are suffering continuous, chronic stress. Early intervention and changes can help to stop or reduce stress levels before they lead to the loss of that staff member in the workforce.

References

Macey, W. H., Schneider, B., Barbera, K. M., Young, S. A. (2009). *Employee engagement: tools for analysis, practice, and competitive advantage*. Chichester, United Kingdom: Wiley-Blackwell.