

# The 4 Es of Employee Engagement

workhuman\*



Gallup estimates that actively disengaged employees cost the U.S. \$483-\$605 billion each year in lost productivity.

What do we mean when we talk about “engagement” in the workplace? Quite simply, it’s the willingness of an employee to give discretionary effort to a job – to voluntarily do more than the minimum. It’s an attitude that manifests itself in behavior.

Engaged employees are aligned to organizational strategy and committed to delivering on both their own goals and the strategic goals of the company. The connection between engagement and higher workplace performance is obvious and well established in national and global studies.

Unfortunately, engagement in the workplace is all too rare. In his introduction to the latest “State of the American Workplace” report, Gallup CEO and chairman Jim Clifton observes:

“The American workforce has more than 100 million full-time employees. One-third of those employees are what Gallup calls engaged at work. They love their jobs and make their organization and America better every day. At the other end, 16% of employees are actively disengaged – they are miserable in the workplace and destroy what the most engaged employees build.

The remaining 51% of employees are not engaged – they’re just there.”

That same report delineates the mind-boggling cost of actively disengaged employees:

**“They are more likely to steal from their company, negatively influence their coworkers, miss workdays and drive customers away. Gallup estimates that actively disengaged employees cost the U.S. \$483 billion to \$605 billion each year in lost productivity.”**

According to Workhuman® CEO Eric Mosley, and Derek Irvine, senior vice president, client strategy & consulting, engagement is composed of four essential components: **enablement, energy, empowerment, and encouragement.** They believe that to create a workplace of truly engaged employees, each of these four elements must be alive and thriving in an organization.

# 1

## ENABLEMENT

Enablement is a subjective experience because the employee sees it from her context.

Let's say I'm an auditor and I want a desktop calculator because I work better that way. With a desktop calculator, I could type accurate calculations without having to look at a specialized keyboard. But my boss says, "You have a calculator on the computer, just use that."

Except that's not how I work best. With the computer calculator, I have to type the numbers along the top of my unwieldy computer keyboard. Sure, a desktop calculator might gain only a few seconds in efficiency and avoid the occasional inaccuracy, but it makes a big difference in my comfort and sense of efficacy.

And here's the real cost: my boss has just told me that an inexpensive item that will improve my productivity isn't worthwhile. What does that say about my value?

Mark Royal, senior director at Korn Ferry, believes that without employee enablement, even your most engaged employees might be frustrated, held back, and eventually disengaged. He explores this notion in his seminal book, "The Enemy of Engagement: Put an End to Workplace Frustration – and Get the Most from Your Employees." In an interview with Workhuman, he observed that, "if organizations want to get the most out of the engagement and motivation that they are working so hard to build, they also need to think about enabling employees, or putting them in a better position to succeed."



If organizations want to get the most out of engagement and motivation ... they also need to think about enabling employees."

MARK ROYAL  
Korn Ferry



# 2

## ENERGY

Energy is another subjective experience affected by work context. Writing in the Harvard Business Review, Tony Schwartz and Catherine McCarthy note that when organizations demand higher performance from their employees, those workers typically put in more hours at work. According to Schwartz and McCarthy, this is the wrong focus.

Instead, they contend that companies should direct their efforts toward managing each employee's physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual energy. As Schwartz, CEO and founder of The Energy Project, notes in a 2018 interview with Workhuman editor Emily Payne,<sup>1</sup> "Unlike machines, human beings require four separate sources of energy to operate at their best."

He defines those sources as:

- 1. Physical energy** – the quantity of energy available to an individual
- 2. Emotional energy** – the quality of energy, ranging from positive to negative
- 3. Mental energy** – the ability to focus on one thing at a time – a powerful way to get things done more efficiently
- 4. Spiritual energy** – the energy we derive from the knowledge that what we're doing really matters; when something really matters, an employee brings a lot more energy

Employees who excel in managing their energy demonstrate significant improvements in engagement and performance. As Schwartz explained in the interview, it makes more sense to help people manage their energy, rather than their time. He notes that, "time is a finite resource, and people don't have any left to invest. But demand is still increasing in a relentless way in their lives. Energy is something that you can expand, regularly renew, and use more efficiently."

# 3

## EMPOWERMENT


Empowerment is another element that nurtures and sustains engagement over the long run. Empowerment transfers the power to achieve results from the manager to the employee. Once equipped with the right resources, an employee is empowered to take responsibility, make decisions, and employ those resources. Empowerment is the foundation of accountability. It is the ability to deliver on commitments. Engaged and productive employees are, by definition, empowered to achieve results.

A March 2019 study<sup>2</sup> by the IBM® Smarter Workforce Institute and the Workhuman® Analytics & Research Institute identified empowerment and voice as key factors that create a positive work experience. Why is that important?

The study notes that, "When employees have the opportunity to recharge and work more flexibly, they can be empowered to work and connect in ways that best suit them. ... These human workplace practices ultimately contribute to a positive employee experience and, as this research shows, to potentially enhance financial performance."

The study further found that organizations that deliver a positive experience – in part by empowering employees – outperform their cohorts three-fold for ROA and two-fold for ROS.

This research demonstrates that when you empower your employees, you'll drive not only engagement, but organizational efficiency and sustained competitive advantage.



Employees who manage energy well demonstrate significant improvements in engagement and performance.

# 4

## ENCOURAGEMENT

Encouragement is another of the human factors that helps drive an engaged workforce. In its simplest form, encouragement costs practically nothing – a word, a bit of recognition, a gesture of appreciation, or a display of gratitude. And while it might not cost much, you can't overestimate the impact of encouraging employees through gratitude.

Encouragement is an act of recognition or an expression of gratitude that literally "gives courage" to an employee to act, go beyond the minimum, break out of the sterile job requirements, and take risks. It liberates employees to make the extra effort that defines engagement in the first place.

According to Dr. Robert A. Emmons, professor of psychology at University of California, encouragement as manifested in gratitude has the power to heal, energize, change lives, and drive cultural change in the work environment. Companies that infuse encouragement and gratitude into their culture through social recognition are creating a more human workplace. And that, in turn, motivates and empowers employees to do the best work of their lives. Being recognized by managers, peers, and direct reports makes employees feel acknowledged for who they are and what they do, and makes them more enriched, fulfilled, and productive.

By empowering  
your employees,  
you'll drive  
engagement,  
organizational  
efficiency,  
and sustained  
competitive  
advantage.



Companies that have a culture of encouragement and gratitude report nearly 3x the return on assets and 2x the return on sales.

## THE FORMULA FOR EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

Engagement has long been viewed as a “holy grail” – a barometer by which HR executives gauge the health, vitality, and happiness of employees. It’s easy to see why.

Engaged employees are happier, more productive, and more likely to stay at an organization. And numerous studies have shown that an engaged workforce has a real and measurable impact on an organization’s bottom line.

And yet, as we have seen, achieving employee engagement can be elusive. According to Gallup, just 33% of employees can be considered “engaged.”

That’s why it’s important that organizations understand and embrace the four “Es” – the cornerstones that drive employee engagement: **enablement, energy, empowerment, and encouragement.**

Only then will companies have the key elements they need to make their workplace more human. A place where employees are motivated and empowered to do the best work of their lives. A place where employees are truly engaged.

**Transform your culture and bring a new level of employee engagement to your organization.**

**Check out Workhuman® Cloud today.**

### Sources

1 <https://www.workhuman.com/resource-center/#ufh-i-416502456-employees-need-to-renew-the-energy-they-use-q-a-with-tony-schwartz>

2 <https://www.workhuman.com/resource-center/#ufh-i-441013595-the-financial-impact-of-a-positive-employee-experience>

