

**A Research Report
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The “Wildfire” That Is *Employee Engagement*

Employee engagement initiatives have spread like wildfire. They have become incredibly popular, and by all accounts, their presence as organizational interventions seems to be expanding.

What we know about wildfire is that it is "necessary" for forests, but also a threat to them, so strong policies and management are imperative to make sure wildfire is working for our forests instead of against them.¹ The same can be said of the work involved in employee engagement: It is necessary for organizations to grow; however, gone unchecked or developed in an incomplete manner, engagement work can be confusing and lead to problems. We argue that it is imperative to assure that employee engagement-related programs are working for our organizations instead of against them. How do we accomplish this goal?

Accomplishing Employee Engagement Goals

We suggest that the key to making employee engagement positive for an organization is to identify and direct the role-related behaviors in which employees are engaged.

¹ American Forests website (November, 2013)

Through a deep analysis of the literature on employee engagement we conclude that **engagement programs can enhance firm performance when the energy generated from engagement is directed on the path needed to achieve organizational goals.**

Engagement, purely for the sake of being "engaged" may lead to unanticipated results in the same way that wildfire, gone unchecked, can result in unexpected and unwanted consequences. Thus, in this report, we focus on answering the "engaged in what" question to ensure that employee engagement is managed in ways that meet the needs of the organizations that implement these programs.

What's Covered Here?

In many ways, the arguments we will introduce support the concept of the employee value proposition, although we are taking it one step further to investigate the **employee value exchange proposition** or what the employees receive in exchange for what they give. We apply role theory, and specifically, the application of **five work-related roles** to help organizations understand how to take their employee engagement plans to a higher and more productive level. In order to do this, we find that effective use of rewards and recognition can provide the links between engagement, roles, value exchange relationships and performance.

Readers of this report will learn the state of employee engagement, both the known and unknown, as well as be introduced to a new paradigm for examining engagement. In addition, we present a **Case Study** of the world-renowned health care organization, Cleveland Clinic. They are an exceptional example of focusing engagement energy on the specific role-based behaviors needed from employees in order for the organization to achieve its strategic goals. The

Clinic's purposeful and innovative applications of several types of rewards and recognition systems has helped them through their journey. The Cleveland Clinic story will be examined in some detail, followed by suggestions for organizations that are trying to use strategic engagement.

Why Another Report On Employee Engagement?

After reviewing a sampling of the employee engagement readings, one may wonder why an additional piece of work is necessary. Most of the literature on this topic extols the positive achievements made in the area. And while these accomplishments are certainly worth examination, it is important to note that in addition to the numerous claims of engagement improving organizational performance, there are still many unanswered questions and several areas where new knowledge is warranted:

- **There is no agreed-upon definition of employee engagement.** (*Bakker, 2011; Gruman & Saks, 2011; Shuck & Wollard, 2010*). At present, consulting firms, as well as many individual organizations, all have their own definitions of the term. How can learning be accumulated if what we are studying in each business is somehow different?
- **It has been suggested that engagement, along with other attitude variables, may be tapping into an overall "mega construct" that encompasses all that is good about organization behavior and management.** Per *Harter and Schmidt (2008)*:

"...many of the traditional attitudinal variables (including satisfaction, commitment, engagement, and well-researched composites of work conditions) are, in fact, measuring the same general construct."

Although this type of approach may be appealing, it leads to many problems because the claim does not hold up under scrutiny. For example, one can be very satisfied with a job that pays well but be not at all committed to the

organization. Thus, if the attitudes are swinging in different directions, it would be difficult for them to be part of the same overall construct.

- **Researchers do not agree on what predicts employee engagement.** (*Saks, 2006; Mercer, 2007; Bates, 2004*). This may be due, in part, to the lack of a concrete definition of engagement. How can one study predictors of a phenomenon that lacks an agreed-upon definition?
- **The research on employee engagement, although widely cited, is troubling as much of the work is not causal but correlational.** This means that researchers cannot attribute changes in engagement to changes in performance; the opposite may be true. High performance may lead to high engagement survey scores (not vice-versa). Also, with study after study using different definitions of what employee engagement is, even with the best science and most robust research methodology, it is difficult to bring results together.

This is all to say that although the news reports tremendous successes around employee engagement initiatives, there is still more work to be done in order to understand **the rules of engagement**. We need to more clearly know the conditions under which engagement, in each form, works or does not work. In this report, we provide a road map for improving the broad area of work that falls under the employee engagement label. In the next sections of the report, we will answer the following questions:

- Engaged in what? The black box of employee engagement must be clearly articulated to take this concept to the next level. In order to address this issue, we introduce a roles-based approach to employee engagement. By focusing on five distinct roles (e.g. core job role, innovator or entrepreneur role, career or learner role, organizational member role, and team member role), organizations will have language necessary to link engagement to bottom-line business strategy.
- So what and the signaling role of rewards and recognition. If employees become engaged, what's in it for them? With all the talk about engagement, the subject of the link between rewards

and engagement seems to have taken a back seat on the journey. However, employees get important clues about what's really important from the design of the rewards and recognition system. Thus, a business can have a robust and stellar engagement plan in place, but if the rewards and recognition system is sending conflicting signals about the behaviors employees should be engaged in performing, then the engagement plan may be in jeopardy. The ideal link between rewards, recognition, engagement and strategy needs to be understood in more detail.

Moving from Engagement to Performance

In this report, we first lay the groundwork for understanding the state of employee engagement today by summarizing the academic and practitioner literatures. After reviewing what is known, we provide a theoretical foundation for moving engagement to the next level. By using role-theory, we demonstrate how the current work on engagement is limited. We then specify the opportunities that can be pursued to take a more rigorous approach to the link between engagement and performance. Lastly, we will specifically discuss how rewards and recognition systems can be the lynch pin between engagement and firm performance. Incentives and recognition send signals, and those communication vehicles can focus engagement in the right direction to drive individual, team and firm performance.

History of Employee Engagement

Widely cited as the beginning of the concept of employee engagement is the work done by *Kahn* in 1990. He drew out the concept of engagement from his first study of counselors at a summer camp in the West Indies and at an architectural firm in the northeastern United States. He studied both organizations in an effort to understand the phenomenon of bringing the self to work. The architecture firm was hierarchical and formal, while the summer camp was very loosely organized and temporary. What is interesting about Kahn's early work is that the core theoretical underpinnings focused on bringing oneself to work. He started out by using the theory of roles and self at work, and by hypothesizing that people would be more engaged when they could bring more of themselves to the job. In his summer camp study, for example, a scuba dive instructor was much more engaged when he could talk about his passion for the ocean during his scuba class. Engagement, as originally defined, was all about bringing one's personal skills and interests to the job.

Since this original conceptualization of employee engagement, however, the work has changed to be less focused on the individual bringing his/her own interests and preferred roles to work and more about making the organization and work the central focus. Engagement now seems to be about going "above and beyond," and it is not so much about helping employees bring their multiple skills and selves to the organization. It may seem like a small definitional concern, but the difference in meaning and in how engagement has been operationalized may very well be the reason that some engagement programs are running into problems.

Thus, the movement away from the original concept of employee engagement may be an important lens to use as we go forward in this report. As we explore the "engaged in what" question and attempt to link new engagement concepts with this original notion of bringing one's whole self to work, we also will be

suggesting that the "so what" issue be brought to the forefront of engagement work. If employees do go "above and beyond," how is this defined and what is in it for them?

In order to understand how employee engagement has evolved from its roots in the early 1990s through today, we will explore five topics: (1) the timeline or history of employee engagement; (2) the definition of employee engagement; (3) the determinants of employee engagement; (4) the measurement of employee engagement; and lastly (5) the outcomes of employee engagement.

Many other authors have done complete literature reviews on engagement, and we will include references to their work. Our goal is to provide the reader with a thorough understanding of how employee engagement has been conceptualized, studied and applied in organizations with the purpose of moving employee engagement to the next level. We are not proposing this is an all-inclusive review but a representative sampling.

Timeline or History of Employee Engagement

Through his empirical research, Kahn derived the notion of the "preferred self." He believed that people had different dimensions of themselves that they would choose to use in different circumstances (*Kahn, 1990*). Although much of today's research refers to Kahn's work as the theoretical underpinning of employee engagement, it would not be until the late 1990s and 2001 that the theoretical ideas received significant support.

Two groups brought employee engagement to the forefront of business: researchers who study burnout, and the consulting work initially done largely by Gallup. In relation to the first group, Kahn's original engagement work was revitalized by *Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter* who stated that engagement was the

antithesis to burnout (*Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001*). It is interesting to note that the phenomenon of burnout was receiving quite a bit of attention in 2001, and it is at this time that the economy experienced some significant changes. Per the Washington Economic Trends research brief number 15 (published in July, 2002):

"The National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER) has officially declared that the national recession started in 2001, ending a 10-year expansion of the U.S economy."

Over the next decade challenging economic conditions put more stress on individuals and organizations and the effects of 9/11 and the dotcom bubble burst likely also contributed (*Ketter, 2008*). Layoffs, resistance to hiring even when needed, concern over political and social problems, a visible threat of homeland terrorism and more led individual citizens to extraordinary circumstances. Businesses turned financially conservative, and as part of the new reality they were facing, getting more productivity from employees was seen as a necessary part of doing business. Jobs were not abundant, so holding back on pay increases, asking employees to work more hours, and providing fewer benefits and other types of financial incentives became common. *Watson Wyatt (2009)* reported in 2009 that 56% of the organizations they polled had made hiring freezes, 15% had made salary reductions, and 56% had made salary freezes. Employees were not leaving their employers because there were no alternative jobs to obtain.

At the same time, as the economy presented significant challenges to organizations, Gallup, in 1999, published the book by Marcus Buckingham and Curt Coffman titled *First Break all the Rules*. This book introduced the world to the Q12, which were Gallup's employee engagement survey questions. The book, presentations, the 12 survey questions and the training associated with it expanded exponentially during this period of time after the book was published. The promise of employee engagement spread quickly, with only a few people questioning the body of work, primarily skeptical about how engagement was

different from other bodies of established research. For example, Dr. Edward Lawler, from the University of Southern California, published a comment on the work in a Forbes article:

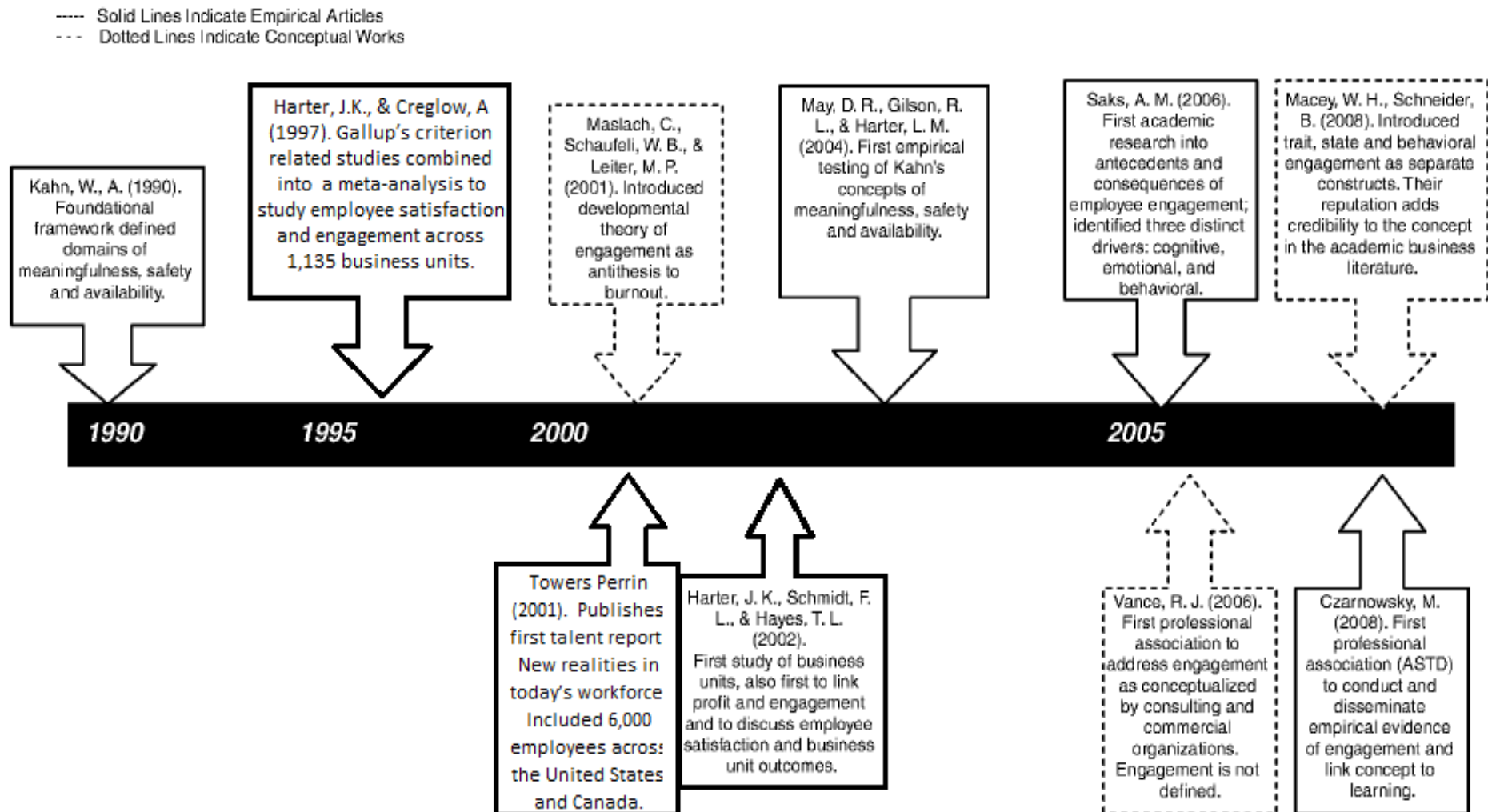
"It's (engagement is) creative repackaging of stuff that's been around for a long time-- one of the most successful marketing efforts of the last decade started by Gallup."

From the same Forbes piece, Randall MacDonald, who was IBM's head of personnel, was quoted as saying:

"This stuff makes a lot of consultants very rich and helps authors get published ... soon we'll be talking about marrying all of those employees to whom we've engaged."

The naysayers, however, have been far and few between. In general, employee engagement became a successful and huge industry. Gallup alone was able to build a \$50 million business in just a few short years (*Jones, 2002*). Figure 1 lays out a visual timeline of the early employee engagement work.

Figure 1: Timeline adapted from Shuck & Wollard (2010).



Gallup was not alone in the employee engagement survey data collection and consulting work. Rather quickly other firms such as Towers Watson, Hewitt, Hay Group, the Corporate Leadership Council, Corporate Executive Board and a number of firms that grew out of Gallup (e.g. *Kenexa*) all moved to add employee engagement to their practices. It was not until later, however, that the topic cycled back to the academic arena. Some of the academic work grew out of consulting firms' data sets (e.g. William Macey and Benjamin Schneider work for Valtera, an employee engagement survey vendor later bought by the Corporate Executive Board).

The timeline shows that employee engagement work evolved similar to how other areas in the human resource management field have progressed (e.g. selection, training). Ultimately, a cycle is created, as organizations use academic knowledge to improve their businesses, and then, data collected by consultants or business professionals are utilized for research. Thus, in many timelines one will see an intermixing of research reports done by consultants and by academics. However, the work on engagement has been, unlike work in other areas, dominated by the consulting firms. In addition to the consultants, research has been done and reported by several professional associations. Examples include the work done by the Conference Board, Society for Human Resource Management and Melcrum.

As practitioners began to learn about employee engagement and the tie to surveys, they also began to take advantage of the technological leaps in the survey market. Firms like Survey Monkey and Zoomerang provided organizations with inexpensive and often free surveys. In addition, office software has started to come with survey technology as part of their overall software packages (Microsoft Share Point for example). Technology vendors put the ability to do surveys in the hands of just about anyone, and as a result, any

practitioner could read a book or article that describes engagement, conduct their own survey and "voila" become an employee engagement expert.

In recent years engagement has taken a significant step forward in relevance for many organizations. The work by several consulting firms from the late 1990s through today promotes ongoing surveys of employee engagement, action planning on employee engagement, training about employee engagement and linking engagement scores to executive scorecards. Boards of directors are asking about employee engagement scores as one method of understanding the CEO and leadership team's performance. Gallup has expanded into the healthcare industry and claims "hospitals with higher levels of employee engagement also receive higher HCAHPS² domain performance" (*Gallup Consulting, 2009*). Likely organizations from all industries will soon be utilizing some version of industry benchmarking and standards, if they have not already done so. What we learn from the timeline is that engagement started in the 1990s, and it has quickly grown and spread. It is a topic of interest to many and used by even more. Next, we go into a core issue of a seemingly obvious question associated with employee engagement: What is it?

The Definition of Employee Engagement

Kahn's (1990) original conceptualization of the term of employee engagement was "the harnessing of organizational members' selves to their work roles" (p. 694). As his work evolved, the term engagement seemed to have taken on a somewhat different lens. For example, Mercer's *"What's Working"* research

² From Medicare.com (2013) The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS), along with the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ), developed the HCAHPS (Hospital Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Providers and Systems) Survey, also known as Hospital CAHPS®, to provide a standardized survey instrument and data collection methodology for measuring patients' perspectives on hospital care. The HCAHPS Survey is administered to a random sample of patients continuously throughout the year. CMS cleans, adjusts and analyzes the data, then publicly reports the results.

(2007) define engagement as “a psychological state in which employees feel a vested interest in the company’s success and are both willing and motivated to perform to levels that exceed the stated job requirements.”

This second definition may or may not be an outcome of an employee bringing more of his/her self to work. In fact, we would argue that the idea of bringing more of the self to work has become lost, as the construct has evolved over time. This may be due to necessity, given that engagement work became very popular in the middle of a dramatic recession and political unrest. Organizations were laying people off while desperately trying to maintain or grow with a smaller workforce. Therefore, improving productivity of the same or less people was a critical goal for many leaders. They were less interested in helping employees become more fulfilled at work and more focused on survival. The nuance is important because employers were not asking employees to bring more of themselves and their interests to work; they were motivating employees to put more of themselves into the company.

Thus, we speculate that Kahn's idea of engagement, focused on the employee being able to express him/herself at work, became somewhat fuzzy as the definition evolved. Simply put, having employees do things they want to do at work would not sell.

Another sample definition is provided by the *Corporate Leadership Council* (2004). They define engagement “*as the extent to which employees commit to something or someone in their organization, how hard they work, and how long they stay as a result of that commitment*” (p 3). This definition is not about the employee being able to do more than the core job and bringing other talent to work; it's about the employee working harder and staying with the company.

Another definition is provided by *Harter, Schmidt, & Hayes (2002)* who say that engagement is the employee’s “*involvement and satisfaction with as well as*

enthusiasm for work.” Table 1 illustrates how varied the definitions for employee engagement can be.³

Table 1: Sample Definitions of Engagement

Definition of Engagement	Author(s), Year (sorted in chronological order)
The harnessing of organizational members’ selves to their work roles; in engagement people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances	<i>Kahn (1990)</i>
An energetic state of involvement with personally fulfilling activities that enhance one’s sense of professional efficacy (from burnout literature)	<i>Leiter & Maslach (1998)</i>
A persistent, positive affective-motivational state of fulfillment in employees that is characterized by high levels of activation and pleasure	<i>Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter (2001)</i>
The individual’s involvement and satisfaction with as well as enthusiasm for work	<i>Harter, Schmidt, & Hayes (2002)</i>
Employee engagement is the amount of “discretionary effort”, in the form of extra time, brainpower or energy, that employees exhibit at work	<i>Towers Watson (2003)</i>
The extent to which employees commit to something or someone in their organization, [and] how hard they work and how long they stay as a result of that commitment	<i>Corporate Leadership Council (2004)</i>
A positive attitude held by the employee towards the organization and its values. An engaged employee is aware of the business context, works with colleagues to improve performance within the job for the benefit of the organization	<i>Robinson, Perryman and Hayday (2004)</i>

³ Note: Many articles use a series of definitions. In the case of multiple definitions, the paper was either omitted from the chart or was agreed upon to have a principle definition that the researcher had concluded was the most relevant. Additionally, as with many works, a simple sentence or two definition does not encompass the true breadth of what the researcher meant to completely suggest and by no means should these definitions reflect on the conclusions that each published work ultimately came to.

A distinct and unique construct that consists of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral components that is associated with individual role performance	<i>Saks (2006)</i>
Employee Engagement is a heightened emotional and intellectual connection that an employee has for his/her job, organization, manager, or co-workers that, in turn, influences him/her to apply additional discretionary effort to his/her work	<i>Gibbons (2006)</i>
Employees are mentally and emotionally invested in their work and in contributing to their employer's success	<i>Czarnowsky (2008)</i>
The employee's sense of purpose and focused energy that is evident to others through the display of personal initiative, adaptability, effort, and persistence directed toward the organization's goals.	<i>Macey, Schneider, Barbera, & Young (2009)</i>
Employee engagement encompasses three dimensions: rational (how well employees understand their roles and responsibilities), emotional (how much passion they bring to their work and their organizations), and motivational (how willing they are to invest discretionary effort to perform their roles well)	<i>Towers Watson (2009)</i>
The extent to which employees share their company's values, feel pride in working for their company, are committed to working for their company and have favorable perceptions of their work environment	<i>Towers Watson (2010)</i>

The many and varied definitions of employee engagement are a major problem with this area of work. It is incredibly difficult to conduct empirical research on a construct that is defined differently by everyone who talks about or uses it (*Bakker, Schaufeli, Leiter, & Taris, 2008*). Note that our review of definitions is certainly not complete; other authors created similar summaries (e.g. *Shuck & Wollard, 2010; Zigarmi et al., 2009*). Given the wide range of definitions, there have been several calls to move beyond the competition for the best definition.

The sample definitions, ordered by year introduced, show a pattern of moving away from Kahn's original conceptualization that engagement was about the individual bringing more of the self to work toward a more organizationally-centered term.

Although certainly not a perfect sampling, a quick glance at these definitions show the evolution of thought. Also, as the definitions become more inclusive and general, it becomes even more difficult to focus on what engagement is and move toward a common understanding of the process behind the phenomenon.

These more inclusive definitions spurred concern of engagement's overlap with other established constructs. However, *Christian, Garza, & Slaughter (2011)* proposed that the term has individualistic characteristics that differentiated its use from previous constructs. Supporting evidence was further provided by *Hallberg & Schaufeli (2006)* who found work engagement, job involvement, and organizational commitment to be three empirically distinct concepts. Finally, *Halbesleben & Wheeler (2008)* found differentiation between engagement and embeddedness.

These papers support *Macey and Schneider's (2008)* argument that engagement simply isn't "old wine in a new bottle," but rather a combination of new criteria with old established constructs. *Dicke (2010)* took eighteen definitions of employee engagement and noted the percentages showing certain phrases or concepts to illustrate that although using different definitions, people were inherently talking about relatively similar ideas; Table 2 reports the findings:

Table 2: Definitions of Employee Engagement

(From Dicke (2010) – Table 1-1 – based on 18 definitions of employee engagement)

Concept	% Used
Commitment – cognitive, affective, behavioral	5.5%
Commitment – rational and emotional	5.5%
Discretionary Effort – going above and beyond	11%
Drive innovation	5.5%
Drive business success	22%
Energy, involvement, efficacy	11%
Passion and profound connection	5.5%
Positive attitude toward company	5.5%
Psychological presence – attention and absorption	5.5%
Shared meaning, understanding – active participation	5.5%
Stay, say, strive	5.5%
Think, feel, act, during performance	11%
Translate employee potential into performance	5.5%

In addition to not agreeing on a definition of the broad concept itself, researchers have attempted to separate employee engagement into sub-categories. *Macey & Schneider (2008)* and *Saks (2006)* take the approach of separating the construct in their work into the three sub-categories: cognitive, behavioral, and emotional engagement. This approach has also been used in a

more recent study by *Kumar & Kumar Sia (2012)*, though with the substitution of the term “physical” for “behavioral”. The latter define cognitive engagement as “the extent to which employees are focusing very hard whilst at work”, physical engagement as “the extent to which the employees are willing to go the extra mile for the employer”, and emotional engagement as “the extent to which employees are involved emotionally while doing the job.” This distinction into sub-categories is not wholeheartedly embraced by researchers for fear of measurement issues and further elaborating the term into a construct that lacks specific meaning (*Dalal, Brummel, Wee, & Thomas, 2008; Saks, 2008*).

Engagement Defined as What it is NOT

Due to the extensive amount of disagreement about what employee engagement is, an alternative route is to define it by establishing what it is not. This has been done by addressing engagement via the topic of burnout (*Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004*). This approach establishes engagement as a positive dimension of well-being, while burnout is negative. Burnout involves low levels of energy and identification with an individual’s work, suggesting that engagement provides high levels of each (*Schaufeli & Salanova, 2007*). Burnout is a psychological syndrome that involves a prolonged response to chronic interpersonal stressors and leads to feelings of cynicism and detachment, exhaustion, a general sense of ineffectiveness, and can be seen as the erosion of engagement (*Maslach & Leiter, 2005*).

Adding Energy and Burnout

Welbourne, Andrews & Andrews (2005) published an article that was the start of a larger body of their work on employee energy at work. Their conceptualization of energy merges the concepts of engagement with burnout in a unique way.

Using theory from sports physiology and protection motivation theory, they conceptualize energy as an optimization construct, with an ideal level of energy being a state where the employee is stimulated and motivated but not at risk of burnout. By monitoring energy, in a way similar to how one measures the body's pulse (blood flowing through the body) or financial resources (frequent measurement and assessment of trends), their research and subsequent work discovered that individual, team and firm performance were predicted by energy trend data. Energy is used as a leading indicator, with data collection being more frequent than what is done with employee engagement (e.g. every other week, monthly, quarterly).

Other firms are also moving away from the perhaps overly simplistic term of engagement. *Towers Watson (2012)* is suggesting a new term, "sustainable engagement" which "describes the intensity of employees' connection to their organization, based on three core elements" (p. 5) composed of being engaged, being enabled, and feeling energized. *Zigarmi et. al (2009)* argue for the replacement of employee engagement with the refined term of employee work passion, which "*is an individual's persistent, emotionally positive, meaning-based, state of well-being stemming from reoccurring cognitive and affective appraisals of various job and organizational situations that results in consistent, constructive work intentions and behaviors*" (p.310). Adding to the confusion, many authors tend to change the word that precedes engagement, replacing (or using multiple forms of) the term "employee" with "organizational" engagement (*Ellinger, Musgrove, & Ellinger, 2013; Saks, 2006; Fleck & Inceoglu, 2010*), "job" engagement (*Ellinger et. al, 2013; Saks, 2006; Fleck & Inceoglu, 2010*), and "work" engagement (*Christan et. al, 2009; Karatepe & Olugbade, 2009; Bakker & Schaufeli, 2008*), which likely all transformed in time following Kahn's initial use of "personal" engagement.

Flander (2008), in an interview with industry experts of the commercialization of engagement, comes to the conclusion that each firm has its own definition, but

agree that *"a truly engaged worker will go above and beyond what is expected and, in so doing, will help make the company successful."* Obviously this is an extremely broad conclusion, but it encompasses much of what other researchers likely believe. One could easily conclude employee engagement is something like "motherhood and apple pie" from the employer's perspective. We cannot conclude that employee engagement always is about employees bringing something about their personal selves to work. Also, there is nothing in most definitions about the employee benefits of engagement, which appear to be the original concern of Kahn's work. We may need to ask what the benefit is to the employee of going above and beyond? To date, the economy still is not thriving. Employees are working long hours, taking work home with them in their mobile, laptop computers and smart phones and at risk of burnout.

The Measurement of Employee Engagement

Although researchers do not agree on what employee engagement is, they have moved on to the measuring of employee engagement. Unfortunately, this process is also not without debate, and further clarity is needed on what is being measured to move the engagement construct forward (*Masson, Royal, Agnew, & Fine, 2008*). Additionally, although *Macey & Schneider (2008)* may have attempted to provide definitional clarity with their separation of engagement into three pieces, they may have inadvertently caused measurement confusion (*Saks, 2008*). Although *Macey & Schneider (2008)* refer to engagement as a state, it has been largely measured as a trait (*Dalal et. al 2008*).

It is impossible to come to a conclusion on exactly how many measurement systems exist for engagement as the amount of vendors creating them and redesigning them is in constant flux and overall on the rise. In addition, many measurement models are considered proprietary and not published (*Wefald & Downey, 2009*). However, there are a number of commonly used forms that have

become ingrained in the engagement literature. Next, we review some of these more established methods of measurement.

One of the most prominent measures of employee engagement, namely by academics, is the *Utrecht Work Engagement Scale* (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003). The seventeen-item scale measures engagement divided into the categories of vigor (six questions), dedication (five questions), and absorption (six questions). These responses are rated on a seven-point frequency rating scale ranging from six (always) to zero (never), with higher scores indicating higher vigor, dedication or absorption. The scale has been used in numerous engagement studies (Hallberg & Schaufeli, 2006; Salanova, Agut, & Peiro, 2005; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004; Siu et. al., 2010; Soane et. al, 2013; van Beek et. al, 2012; Ni, 2013).

Used in Schaufeli & Bakker's (2004) definition, vigor refers to high levels of persistence, energy, and mental resilience while working, and the willingness to invest effort in one's work. Dedication refers to being strongly involved in one's work, and experiencing a sense of significance, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride, and challenge. Finally, absorption refers to being fully concentrated and deeply engrossed in one's work, whereby time passes quickly and one has difficulties with detaching oneself from work. Shortened versions of the scale have also been used.

A promising measure is one drafted by Rich, Lepine, & Crawford (2010). Their job engagement scale attempts to return to Kahn's (1990) definition, which draws on work from Brown & Leigh's (1996) measure of work intensity, Russel & Barrett's (1999) research on core affect, and Rothbard's (2001) measure of engagement. By modifying these scales the authors were able to construct a measure that more properly reflected Kahn's (1990) conceptualization of engagement developing from physical, cognitive, and emotional energy. Researchers also have utilized the Motivation and Engagement Scale developed by Martin, which comes in different forms dependent upon the interviewees

(e.g., *MES-W*; *Martin, 2006; Martin, 2007*). Direct questions (*Lee, 2012*) and individually crafted and adapted scales have also been utilized (*Saks, 2006; James, McKechnie, & Swanberg, 2011*) to measure engagement in varying forms.

Lastly, there are the numerous vendor created measurement scales that are proprietary information. According to *Attridge (2009)*, “some of these consulting organizations include *Blessing White, Gallup, Hewitt, Sirota, Towers Watson, Valtera, and Watson Wyatt Worldwide*.” However, a couple are predominantly mentioned, namely the Gallup Workplace Audit, also known as the GWA or Q12. The first version of the GWA first appeared in the 1990s to judge workplace attitudes. In 2003 the Q12 had been validated by 285,314 workgroups “*drawn from teams and industries from around the world*” (*Gopal, 2003*). By 2009, a published report claimed the Q12 had been administered to “more than 15 million employees in 169 different countries and 65 languages” (*Harter et. al, 2009*). That year marked the seventh iteration of the Gallup meta-analysis (*Harter et. al, 2009*).

As noted earlier, one can measure engagement using a burnout scale and there has been some empirical support to tie burnout to outcomes (e.g., *Taris, 2006*). Understanding that burnout is the opposite of engagement, it should stand to reason that the results can simply be reflected to demonstrate the positive rather than the negative. This conclusion is not wholeheartedly supported. *Schaufeli, Salanova, Gonzalez-Roma, & Bakker (2001)* and *Schaufeli, Taris, & Rhenen (2008)* confirm that burnout and engagement, to a large extent, are antipodes, acting as each other’s opposites. However, *Demerouti, Mostert, & Bakker (2010)* feel that each dimension should be addressed separately, rather than collectively, as the energy dimensions appear to represent highly related constructs.

Determinants of Employee Engagement

In order to move employee engagement beyond an intellectual exercise in measurement and definitions, most organizations have conducted some type of research to determine what predicts engagement. By understanding the things that drive engagement, the assumption is that organizations can then create interventions, raise engagement scores and then improve firm performance. In this next section, we focus on what researchers and consultants have suggested are the determinants of employee engagement. Although some of the work is empirical, most is not.

There are numerous models and suggestions of what determines high engagement, but it is difficult to make conclusions for a few reasons. First, the definitions of engagement vary from study to study; thus, it is almost impossible to generalize across the research that has been done. Second, most of this work is not longitudinal in nature, making the relationship between the predictors and engagement a circular exercise in logic (*Bakker & Demerouti, 2008*). Essentially, it is not possible to know if engagement causes the predictors or if the predictors cause engagement. Third, the models of predictors require, in many cases, leaps of faith. Many are not based on detailed theory or research.

Table 3 provides a sampling of models and research that focus on the determinants of employee engagement:

Table 3: Predictors of Employee Engagement

Predictors of Employee Engagement	Author(s), Year (sorted in chronological order)
Family roles	<i>Rothbard (2001)</i>
Day-level recovery	<i>Sonnentag (2003)</i>
Connection between work and organizational strategy, Importance of job to organizational success, Understanding of how to complete work projects	<i>Corporate Leadership Council (2004)</i>
Confident can achieve career objectives, Sense of personal accomplishment, Confident organization will be successful, Quality is a high priority	<i>Mercer (2007)</i>
Supervisor support, Positive appreciation, Collaborative organizational climate, Innovative problem solving	<i>Bakker, Hakanen, Demerouti, & Xanthopoulou (2007)</i>
Discipline of free-loaders, Accountability, Fairness	<i>Wagner & Harter (2007)</i>
Reduced role conflict, Proper training, Personal autonomy, Effective utilization of expert, referent and exchange power by managers	<i>Cozzani & Oakley (2007)</i>
Coping and buoyancy	<i>Parker & Martin (2009)</i>
Effective and caring leadership, Appealing development opportunities, Interesting work, Fulfilling tangible and intangible rewards	<i>Towers Watson (2009)</i>
Professional status, Interaction, Thinking of quitting	<i>Simpson (2009)</i>
Communication and knowledge sharing, Opportunity to provide input and exercise independent action, Opportunity for growth and learning	<i>Towers Watson (2010)</i>
Competence, Meaning, Impact, Self-determination	<i>Stander & Rothman (2010)</i>

Predictors of Employee Engagement	Author(s), Year (sorted in chronological order)
Coworker cohesion, Supervisor support, Autonomy, Work pressure (negative), Control (negative)	<i>Kumar & Kumar Sia (2012)</i>
Job role, Rewards & recognition, Leadership & planning	<i>Gujral & Jain (2013)</i>
Hire right people, Develop employee strengths, Enhance employee well-being, Company size, Amount of work done off-site, Age, Gender	<i>Gallup Consulting (2013)</i>

As can be seen from Table 3, similar to the definitions of engagement, the antecedents vary just as widely. After reviewing all of the antecedents to engagement, the definitions, and the many types of instruments used to collect this information, we conclude that there is a strikingly obvious fact – that engagement is often a term configured to fit the needs of a particular study and not a concrete item with obviously discernible qualities.

The "So What" Question: Outcomes of Employee Engagement

Many could argue that the most important point of investigating, defining, and measuring engagement is to understand the outcomes of increasing or decreasing it amongst individuals or groups and then using that knowledge to create interventions to improve engagement. This is where the research has moved.

There are a number of notable outcome studies, though predominantly in the consultant literature. For example, *Towers Watson (2012)* analyzed fifty global companies using engagement (with their newly defined term of sustainable engagement). Their working definition is “*the intensity of employees’ connection*

to their organization, based on three elements” centered around “the extent of employees’ discretionary effort committed to achieving work goals (being engaged), an environment that supports productivity in multiple ways (being enabled), and a work experience that promotes well-being (feeling energized).”

They found that companies with low traditional engagement had an average operating margin just under 10%, while those with high engagement were around 14%, and those with high sustainable engagement had an operating margin just over 27%. They also found that highly engaged employees had lower absenteeism (lost productivity at work, which computes to 7.6 days per year for highly engaged compared to 14.1 for the disengaged) and absenteeism (3.2 days for the highly engaged compared to 4.2 for the disengaged), along with lower intention to leave. These data are very interesting; however, the studies are not causal in nature (not looking at changes in performance related to changes in engagement). Thus, it may be that higher performing firms happen to have higher engagement scores; the causal linkages are not yet made.

In an earlier *Towers Watson study (2003)*, they used data collected from over 360,000 employees from forty-one companies throughout the world’s ten largest economies. They found that, over a three-year period, companies with low engagement demonstrated a -2.01 percent operating margin compared to a 3.74 percent operating margin for those with high engagement. Similarly, net profit margin showed results of -1.38 percent and 2.06 percent respectively. Gallup’s meta-analysis in 2010 of more than 152 organizations showed that companies with world-class engagement had 3.9 times the EPS growth rate than companies without (*Gallup Consulting, 2010*). Again, it’s not clear to the reader if these studies are causal or correlational in nature.

In the “State of the American Workplace: Employee Engagement Insights for U.S. Business Leaders” report done by *Gallup (2013)*, Gallup reemphasized its findings from its research done since 2000. In their research for the years 2010-2012, the group came to the conclusion that engagement showed positive and

relevant findings through meta-analysis in nine performance outcomes: customer ratings, profitability, productivity, turnover, safety incidents, shrinkage (theft), absenteeism, patient safety incidences, and quality (defects). In addition, the study found that “teams in the top 25% versus the bottom 25% incur far less in healthcare costs” (*Gallup, 2013*). Naturally, this research was performed using Gallup’s Q12 using 263 research studies across 192 organizations in 49 industries and 34 countries (*Gallup, 2013*).

Departing from some of the research done by consultants, *Sonnentag (2003)* found that individuals who received ample day-level recovery time were more likely to experience a high level of work engagement during the subsequent day. That level of work engagement ultimately led to those individuals taking more initiative and further pursuing their learning goals. *Medlin & Faulk (2011)* found that engagement predicted optimism amongst university students, which in turn predicted performance and turnover intention, as well as perceived individual performance. *Soane et. al (2013)* found that meaningful work led to higher levels of engagement, further strengthened by well-being, which transferred to lower levels of absenteeism. *Rich, LePine, & Crawford (2010)* surveyed firefighters to discover that engagement created customer helpfulness/courtesy, as well as a stronger dedication to being involved in organizational matters.

Table 4 on the next page summarizes some of the reported outcomes of increasing engagement among eighteen studies (assume all beneficial, i.e. absenteeism = lower absenteeism amongst engaged employees).

Table 4: Outcomes of Engagement

Outcomes of Engagement	Author(s), Year (Sorted Chronological Order)
Customer satisfaction, Productivity, Profit, Employee retention, Employee safety	<i>Harter, Schmidt, & Hayes (2002)</i>
Operating Margin, Net Profit Margin	<i>Towers Watson (2003)</i>
Pursuit of learning, Personal initiative	<i>Sonnentag (2003)</i>
Lower Turnover	<i>Corporate Leadership Council (2004)</i>
Work life benefits physical/mental health and stress level at home	<i>Crabtree (2005)</i>
Safe patient care	<i>Laschinger & Leiter (2006)</i>
Job satisfaction, Organizational commitment, Intention to quit, Organizational citizenship behavior	<i>Saks (2006)</i>
Customer loyalty, Profitability, Productivity, Turnover, Safety incidents, Absenteeism, Shrinkage, Patient safety outcomes, Quality (defects)	<i>Harter et. al (2009)</i>
Absenteeism, Turnover, Shrinkage, Safety incidents, Patient safety incidents, Quality (defects), Productivity, Profitability, Earnings per share (EPS), Hope, Diagnosis of depression, Diagnosis of anxiety, Involvement in wellness programs	<i>Gallup, State of the American Workplace Report (2010)</i>
Customer helpfulness/courtesy, Involved in organizational matters	<i>Rich, LePine, & Crawford (2010)</i>
Burnout, Workaholics	<i>Van Beek, Taris, & Schaufeli (2011)</i>
Optimism, Turnover intention, Perceived individual performance	<i>Medlin & Faulk (2011)</i>
Lower absenteeism	<i>Soane et. al (2013)</i>
Operating Margin, Lower absenteeism (lost productivity), Lower absenteeism, Lower intention to quit	<i>Towers Watson (2012)</i>
Lower Turnover, Fewer sick days/missed days, Higher company commitment, Less poor behaviors in non-work roles	<i>Gallup Consulting (2013)</i>
Organizational citizenship behavior, Employee commitment, Employee satisfaction	<i>Gujral & Jain (2013)</i>
Job performance	<i>Ali, Hussain & Azim (2013)</i>

Outcomes of Engagement	Author(s), Year (Sorted Chronological Order)
Service climate	<i>Ellinger, Musgrove, & Ellinger (2013)</i>

As shown in Table 4, the outcomes associated with employee engagement are numerous and varied. This is because: 1) the various different measurement methods used and 2) the numerous definitions that are used to create those measurement systems. There likely is significant appeal to the term because it theoretically addresses the problems of motivation and performance (*Little & Little, 2006*). At the same time, the confusion in terms and studies has made many people skeptical about the true value of the engagement concept and corresponding research largely due to these two reasons as well as a lack of designs that test causality (*Bakker & Demerouti, 2008; Taris, 2006*).

Some of the more passionate conversations and case studies to support engagement come from service-focused companies. The link between engagement and customer satisfaction (or patient satisfaction in health care) is supported by the companies doing this work. Also, these within-company case studies appear to have higher quality research behind them (causal research, inclusion of control variables in the data analysis). The studies that link engagement with firm performance are weaker in that they are often not causal but correlational, and they do not include adequate control variables in the analysis.

Given the broad range of findings, numerous types of analysis conducted, lack of common definitions, excitement about engagement linking to outcomes and ongoing research, we will take a step to propose the following:

Proposition 1:

Some notion of employee engagement is necessary, but not sufficient, condition for high organizational performance.

There is not enough high quality data to confirm that engagement alone drives high organizational performance, but we are suggesting there is enough data to show that engagement is better than disengagement. We will propose in the next sections of the paper how to move from the baseline of engagement as the first step to high performance to linking engagement to roles as a way to move those engagement infinitives forward.

Skepticism Around Engagement

Another body of literature suggests that engagement can only do so much and that the other piece of the puzzle, enablement, can be the true determinant of many of the positive outcomes. Employee enablement “refers to the ability of individuals and teams that are already engaged to make maximum contributions” (Royal & Agnew, 2011: 58). Enablement is divided into two key components: optimizing employee roles and creating a supportive environment (Royal & Agnew, 2011). Simply put, although engagement is important to foster, it is a two-way street that requires providing employees with the resources needed in order to meet the maximum potential of their engagement. This goes back to the original definitions of engagement that focused on the employee bringing the self to work.

In addition, reports on the money making involved with engagement are casting some suspicion on this body of work. Kroll (2005) points out that Gallup’s “engagement surveys and consulting fees represent 25% of its \$240 million

(estimated 2005) in revenues.” As noted earlier, other firms compete with Gallup, including Development Dimensions International, Hewitt Associates, International Survey Research, and Alpha Measure, with fees typically running from \$5 to \$25 per employee surveyed and additional fees for consulting afterwards (*Kroll, 2005*). Companies like Best Buy, International Paper, Wells Fargo, and A&P have spent \$1 million for Gallup’s employee testing and advice (*Jones, 2002*). Of course, Gallup is not the only vendor of engagement surveys, as each company attempts to have its own approach to build an individual brand to gain a strategic advantage (*Flander, 2008*). This is likely the cause of much of the difficulty around defining engagement itself and the variance in antecedents.

Finally, some researchers have attacked the concept for its methodology and ambiguity. Peter Hutton in his book *“What Are Your Staff Trying to Tell You”* suggests that it’s foolish to ask agree/disagree questions and then make such large claims from it (*Crush, 2009*). *Thornham & Charmorro-Premuzic (2006)* believe that organizations need to shift their focus from vague questions about generally desirable practices “to specific questions about key actions the organization is taking.” Their point is that organizations can fail for a number of reasons. Cornell University HR professor Christopher Collins says that engagement studies are inherently misleading since they don’t show which came first – the engagement or the company’s success (*Flander, 2008*).

By no means is engagement a clean subject, but it’s hard to simply ignore all of the possible benefits associated with increasing it. As *Shaw (2005)* puts it:

“Realistically, everyone knows that there are limitless factors that will affect engagement. One survey company we interviewed spoke of having identified 700 key drivers of engagement present in a particular client’s organization. The pursuit of engagement is endless because everything about employee’s corporate life will feed into and affect their engagement: Who they are, their work group, their supervisor, the CEO, the company values, their own values, their recognition, how easy it is

for them to do their job, their age, their experience, their tenure with the company, etc. This perhaps, is why the whole thing is staying at the vision level, because to go any deeper would be to open a can of worms. It would require reduction of both the objectives and the drivers to a few core aims – and we don't want a few good things, we want them all."

Engaged in What? Role Theory to Link Engagement and Performance

There is a lot to learn on the topic of employee engagement and we think it's impossible for anyone to come away from reviewing this literature with a clear indicator of what engagement is or how it works. Thus, we suggest it's time to move forward, and that is what we will do in this next section of the report. We use role theory to link employee engagement to firm performance.

The critical question that will be asked is "engaged in what?" Engagement alone is not enough; in order to understand how engagement might drive firm performance through people, one must understand how it works. Vague notions of being "emotionally attached" or "going above and beyond" are inadequate. Using the concept of roles, we bring the idea of "above and beyond" to a new level. When specific language and definitions are used to classify and measure behaviors, then the link between engagement and performance can be mapped. When this logical flow is established, then leaders have the power to plan how to change firm performance through the role-based behavior of employees.

A role-based model also provides a path to return to the roots of employee engagement. We can define the parts of the self that the employer values at work, allowing the employee to then discuss making time to do more than just the job. We think the roles-based approach to engagement provides an avenue

for taking this topic to the next level, which can help both employees and employers.

The promise of using the roles work to link engagement to performance is to make the confusing notion of employee engagement tactical and something that can be managed. The role-based work also allows leaders to clearly see the potential negative effects of expecting everything from employees. Individuals only have so many hours in a day, and if we ask people to go "above and beyond," there are consequences. Employees do not live at work; they do other things in their lives. Thus, employers need to be mindful of what they are asking employees to do. The language of roles allows leaders and managers to:

1. Engage in intellectual, fact-based discussions about what employers really want employees to do differently when they are 'engaged' at work.
2. Use levers to reward, incent and encourage behaviors in the right roles. Rewards and recognition can provide a fair exchange for the types of behaviors employers are seeking.

Role-Based Performance

Welbourne, Johnson and Erez (1998) introduced the role-based performance scale in an article published in the Academy of Management Journal. In this body of research, they defined five distinct roles that employees engage in when at work. These five roles have been used in subsequent studies of performance, and the original validation work has been extended. These five roles were chosen by examining the types of work employers allocated resources (money) for employees to do when at work. Thus, the linkage between incentives, roles and performance was established.

The five roles are defined as:

Core Job Role

The work performance in this role is usually described in the traditional job description. The core job role focuses on what one is hired to do.

Career Role

When engaged in this role, employees are doing things to help advance their careers. They are improving skills through attending training, taking courses, mentoring or being mentored and working to keep up their level of skills.

Team Role

This role focuses on actions within a team (one's own team or other teams at work). The individual is doing work to support a team, helping support team members and overall doing work that is not part of the core job but associated with a team effort.

Innovator Role

In this role, employees are taking time to not just make big innovations but to improve how work is done overall. It can be small and big innovations, and also employees can support the new ideas and innovations of others vs. doing the work on their own.

Organization Role

In the organizational member role, employees are engaging in citizen-like behaviors to help the company. They are doing things for the firm that are not part of their core job but that help the organization overall. An example often given is a janitor turning off lights to save money.

Role theory comes from a body of work on identity theory, and there is one core learning from this work that's critical to build into the work we propose, namely that all of the roles cannot be equally important. As you make one more critical, others move down in the hierarchy. Employees engage in the roles that are the highest ranked; in other words, people have limited time.

Employees have to make choices about how to spend their time, and they will engage in the roles that the employer communicates are the highest priorities.

Ask employees what "above and beyond" means, and they will (in many cases) tell you it's about doing more work, spending more hours at work, etc. The core job role is prominent. Although we talk about "above and beyond" being things like teamwork, innovation and the organizational member role, in reality, in many firms, it's all about the core job. This is because most employers do not specifically say what "discretionary effort" and "above and beyond" mean. The roles' language allows employers to think strategically about what employees need to do in order to drive business performance.

The often-used example is Google, which allocates 20% of an employee's time to innovation and idea generation. They realized that to get innovation you have to make space for innovation, and it has to count.

In numerous studies and consulting work done by Dr. Welbourne, leadership teams in organizations around the world have used the role-based work to diagnose what's important for the firm to succeed and then outline what roles they are incenting and rewarding. In every case, there is a significant disconnect. Discussions go something like this:

- "We think innovation and career are critical for our growth. Of course, core job is important too - but it's not really as important as innovation."
- "What do we pay for? Hours and the job role"
- "What do we punish? Innovation and career"

Spending time in the innovator and career roles can be perceived by employees as punishment (vs. a reward) when the firm's processes lead to negative consequences to the employee. This can occur because innovative behaviors often involve risk taking, and non-job role work takes time away from the job.

Consider the case of Google vs. Microsoft. It is widely reported that Google provides employees with 20% of their time for innovation while Microsoft was criticized for discouraging innovation, and many think this is why Google's performance has soared while Microsoft has struggled. Rewards, recognition and incentives send the signals about how to spend time at work. These can be formal or informal. They are the messages about what people should be engaged in to succeed at work.

What Are Employees Engaged In At Work?

In the next section, we review a set of empirical studies to explore patterns of the types of role-based performance outcomes that researchers have been investigating in the employee engagement arena. In other words, what role-based outcomes are being studied to date? Table 5 provides a summary of the research. Note that we are not including every single study conducted due to time constraints given the extensive body of literature. Additionally, we only included studies that met a set of criteria discussed in the next section. Across the top of the table are the five roles discussed earlier in addition to one overall role that captures non-work roles (e.g. mother, father, child, coach for track team, etc.).

Table 5: Role-Based Outcomes in Employee Engagement Studies

Author(s), Year (sorted in chronological order)	Career	Core Job	Innovator	Organization	Team	Non-Work
Harter, Schmidt, & Hayes, 2002		X				
Sonnentag, 2003	X		X			
Corporate Leadership Council, 2004		X				
Crabtree, 2005 (Gallup data)						X
Salanova, Agut & Peiro, 2005		X				
Saks, 2006		X		X	X	
Laschinger & Leiter, 2006		X				
Harter et al, 2009		X		X		
Rich, LePine, & Crawford, 2010		X		X		
Medlin & Faulk, 2011		X				X
Van Beek, Taris, & Schaufeli, 2011		X				
Towers Watson, 2012		X				
Gallup Consulting, 2013		X		X		X
Soane et al., 2013		X				
Ali, Hussain, & Azim, 2013		X				
Totals (15 papers)	1	13	1	4	1	3

Paper Selection Process

Papers included were chosen based on the following process:

- First, we conducted a literature review of published articles using multiple keywords (e.g., engagement, employee engagement, etc).
- Second, we included only papers that studied outcomes of employee engagement. Although there is much published on the topic, the majority of papers are not empirical, and of those that are, very few link engagement to outcomes. Many more papers

examine the predictors of employee engagement, and even more are case studies without data.

The result was a total of 15 papers for the analysis, and of those 15, six were either published by consulting firms in their reports (thus not peer reviewed) or used consultant firm data. The papers' outcome variables were then coded into the roles following the descriptors laid out by *Welbourne et al. (1998)*. Final determination of the role categorization was done by both authors, using a scheme that required agreement by both to be included. Next, we review each of the role categories and the types of studies and/or outcomes included by authors.

Role Categories - Outcomes

Career Role – Only one paper was categorized as studying outcomes that are focused on career-role behaviors. This study suggested that day-level recovery, roughly defined as the time an employee has for him/herself after work, had a positive impact on both work engagement as well as day-level proactive behavior, which is an overarching term boiled down into personal initiative and pursuit of learning (*Sonnentag, 2003*). Including this outcome as a career-focused outcome is tenuous because the measurement alludes to learning, but it does not directly measure that aspect of behavior.

Core-Job Role – The majority of studies, a total of 13, are focused on studying job-related behavior as an outcome. The types of behaviors studied ranged from performance appraisal scores to absenteeism and turnover (all focused on some aspect of doing the core job). The outcome variables can be determined via self-report or manager reported instruments.

Innovator Role - The role is defined as taking the time to make or discuss any improvements to how work is done overall. We classified only one paper examining the innovator role, and that was perhaps a stretch. In the previously

discussed *Sonnentag (2003)* paper, the author looked at not only pursuit of learning but also personal initiative. It appears that the questions tap into aspects of problem solving and innovation (e.g., “I actively attack problems”), which is why we included it in the innovator role.

Organizational Member Role – The organization role consists of those behaviors that an employee may engage in that are not necessarily part of the job description, but rather help the organization as a whole. These activities are not contractually obligatory, but considered in a similar scope of importance to maintaining organizational success. These attributes are often measured in terms of variables that connote organizational citizenship behaviors (*Saks, 2006; Rich, LePine, & Crawford, 2010*). *Saks (2006)* provides an example of this self-report measure: [I] “Take action to protect the organization from potential problems” (*Lee & Allen, 2002*). Although all of the selected readings in our group specifically assesses organizational citizenship behaviors as an overarching construct, *Rich, LePine, & Crawford (2010)* use various pieces of definitions (*Organ, 1988; Motowildo et al., 1997*) to suggest that these types of behaviors can include “helpfulness, sportsmanship, conscientiousness, and civic virtue” (p. 620).

Team Member Role – Only one paper discussed team member role behaviors. Similar to the organizational role, these tasks are not obligated by the job description necessarily, but connote actions taken to help a team or support other team members. *Saks (2006)* used a scale for organizational citizenship behavior, which was divided into two sections of OCBI and OCBO, with the former asking questions on behavior directed towards the individual and the latter towards the organization. Two example questions in the OCBI section read: “willingly give your time to help others who have work-related problems” and “assist others with their duties” (*Lee & Allen, 2002*). This highlights a key distinction between the team member role and the organizational role.

Non-Work Roles – These roles encompass all the tasks and attributes of the individual outside the scope of the workplace. *Crabtree (2005)*, writing for the Gallup Management Journal, found that engaged employees, compared to those who weren't engaged, viewed their work lives as positively influencing their physical health.

It is important to note that we were very liberal in our definition of outcomes studied. Many of the criteria included as outcomes are really attitude variables, and the data come from surveys. Few papers study what we will call "real outcomes." These would be data on behaviors that are not collected in surveys. Safety, turnover, absenteeism, training program attendance, idea submission and implementation and sales are objective measure of individual outcomes.

The lack of clear empirical outcomes is discouraging; however, at least these data demonstrate how researchers are thinking about employee engagement. We can conclude the following:

- Most of the work focused on outcomes is concerned with the core job role.
- Researchers are starting to examine other role-based behaviors.
- No one study examines all five roles simultaneously.
- There is virtually no research to show what behaviors may be decreasing as a result of employee engagement. Remember that the hierarchical nature of role-based behaviors suggests that raising the importance of one role and the associated frequency in which that role is performed will lead to a decrease in other role-based behavior.

Table 6 shows that there is tremendous opportunity to spur our knowledge on the topic of employee engagement by elaborating on the engaged in what question. By deliberately thinking through and planning which roles are needed, engagement initiatives can be much more purposeful and successful. Also, by using the roles language, employees have a better chance of engaging in work

that does indeed allow them to bring more of themselves and their personal interests to work.

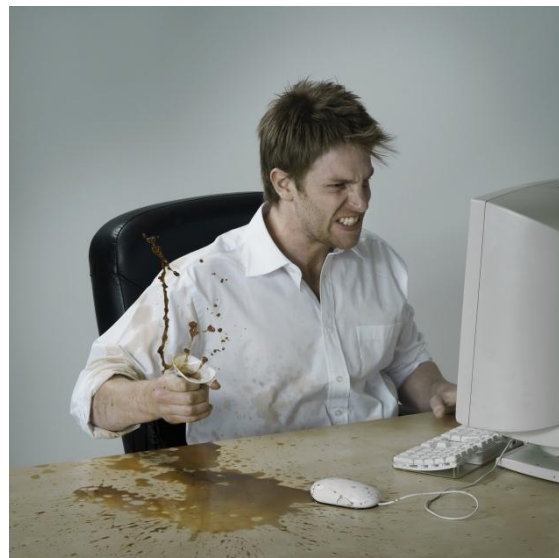
Summary

The definitions of employee engagement are scattered; the drivers of employee engagement are not agreed upon, and outcomes are difficult to understand because they are, in most cases not studied, and when they are, the causal nature of the relationship is not specified. Even with these problems, engagement continues to be popular, and according to many studies, engagement is declining and more people are disengaged. One example, from the *June, 2013 New York Daily News* reads:

"Workplace morale down; 70% of Americans negative about their jobs, Gallup study shows."

The picture included with this article does a nice job of portraying the key messages:

Figure 2: Picture from headline article in New York Daily News



SIMON WINNALL/GETTY IMAGES
A newly released Gallup report shows that 70% of Americans polled either hate their job or are "disengaged" from their work, and even perks don't work if they're unhappy with management.

One has to question why the money invested in engagement since the 1990s is not making more of a positive difference. We speculate that there are a few reasons for the disconnect in the body of work called employee engagement and overall firm performance:

- The definition and approach to employee engagement has evolved. It was once about employees bringing their whole self to work, and today it's about the employer directing employee behavior in a new way (which is not well articulated in many firms).
- The behavioral changes needed when engagement improves are not specified. Vague terms, that are difficult to measure, are used. Thus, confirmation of the engagement process is impossible. The "engaged in what" question has not been adequately asked or answered.
- The role-based approach to work provides five specific sets of behaviors that can be examined with employee engagement. Hypotheses about engaging employees in specific roles can be studied and linked to firm performance. The roles-based work brings new learning about the hierarchy of roles. When one role is encouraged and made more important, the others will suffer (or lower in their relative importance and in the amount of time allocated to them). Thus, engaged in what should be a serious strategic choice made by organizations.

The Missing Links: Roles, Rewards, Recognition and Firm Performance

In this report we suggested that the “engaged in what” question is critical for obtaining a return on investment (ROI) for any employee engagement work. Our hypotheses are supported by a growing body of work linking recognition systems to employee engagement. For example, World at Work recently conducted a survey of members and reported that three different programs appeared to be linked to results: (1) above-and-beyond performance recognition, (2) peer-to-peer results and (3) recognition programs that motivate specific behavior (*World at Work, 2013*)⁴. This type of work supports the notion that finding ways to signal what behaviors are important for engagement may be the link to success.

In order to dive into this topic in more depth, in the next section we report on one company's experience in using their rewards and recognition system to supplement the engagement program. Cleveland Clinic's innovative program is an example of what can be done when an organization is more specific about their engagement goals. This example is designed to help introduce an example of how rewards can close the gap between engagement, roles and high performance.

⁴ Read full report at www.worldatwork.org/rdp

Application: Cleveland Clinic Case Study

Methods: Introduction to the Cleveland Clinic was provided by David Chittock of Incentra, Inc. The case study was developed through two interviews. One was conducted via phone, and the second was done via an on-site visit. The individuals who were sources of the data and who helped us develop the case are:

*Matthew E. Majernik, Executive Director,
Total Rewards, Workforce Planning and HRIS*

*Marilyn J. Collings, Director, Total Rewards,
Human Resources*

As part of the on-site interviews, we were provided with several pieces of data that were quite informative and helpful in putting together the case study. We reviewed presentations on the incentive system, fact sheets on the Cleveland Clinic and a new white paper on the rewards and recognition plan written by Matthew Majernik and Joseph Patrnochak.

We also accessed information from two published articles: (1) *Jennifer Robinson, November 20, 2012: Leading the Way to Better Patient Care, Gallup Business Journal*, (2) *Joseph M. Patrnochak, 2013, Building an engaged workforce at Cleveland Clinic, Journal of Healthcare Leadership*.

Introduction

Cleveland Clinic is ranked as one of the top hospitals in America by U.S. News and World Report in their 2013 report. In December, 2013 Cleveland Clinic had 43,890 employees who are spread out in multiple locations including Ohio (with 16 full service health centers), Nevada, Florida (within the US), Canada and Abu Dhabi. Cleveland Clinic is a growing organization. Their success was greatly supported by their employee engagement work that began in 2008. A key part of

that initiative was an innovative, multi-tiered recognition program that was part of the overall rewards strategy. This brief case study is a review of how their reward and incentive programs were strategically used to align employee engagement with their organizational goals.

A key lesson learned from using the role-based approach to understanding engagement is that behavioral choices need to be prioritized to lead to desired outcomes. The Cleveland Case study is exemplary in showing how an organization chooses the behaviors that engagement should target and then aligning mechanisms under the control of both headquarters and managers to not just send the message about the behaviors needed but also to consistently reinforce the message. The link to key behaviors is what led to the Cleveland Clinic's success in driving higher organizational performance.

Walking The Halls: Meet Cleveland Clinic

The hospital is a massive structure that resembles a small city sprawling over 167 acres and includes 46 buildings. In the core of the facility one finds a hotel. This is where I (Theresa) met both Marilyn and Matthew. As we ventured to other parts of the hospital we used wide covered skyways (bridges over streets) that connect hotels to restaurants to stores to various hospital buildings. The buildings are held together by the buzz and energy of employees, patients, art and visitors. The art - it's everywhere, and it's always changing. We saw numerous places where volunteers were changing the art. Colors are everywhere; interactive kiosks were installed in high traffic areas which include a talking avatar named "Eve" that responds to questions. To ensure patients do not get lost, the kiosks also allow users to print directions, send directions to their phones, and estimate walking times. Additionally, Cleveland Clinic is developing a mobile application for directions around its main campus. As you move from building to building, service centers in various forms are everywhere. You run into welcome stations with "Redcoats," caregivers in bright, red coats

who offer assistance to any patient or visitor in need. We also found a center for international patients who need language assistance with interpreter services for over 180 languages. Cleveland Clinic is a modern, technology-driven, people savvy organization. If I were a patient there, I would feel confident entering into the mosaic of knowledge and caring exhibited by the people and the place.

History

Cleveland Clinic embraced employee engagement in 2008 as part of a major change initiative designed to transform how every employee delivered patient care. In fact, a hallmark of their change is an initiative whereby every employee was focused on becoming a caregiver. The tag line used and currently being used is: "we are all caregivers" - the identity is not just for doctors and nurses but for every single employee. The overall change to building a more "patient-centric delivery model" started in 2006 with expansion (more buildings, people), restructuring, and the appointment of a chief patient experience officer in 2007.

Employee Engagement Drives Vision, Values And Mission

Cleveland Clinic used the Gallup Q12 employee survey to establish a baseline set of employee engagement metrics. At the same time, while rolling out the "we are all caregivers" initiative, the team also explored leadership education. The group taught and built a model based on service leadership, which was a variant of servant leadership (*based on book by Robert K. Greenleaf*). These initiatives were all to complement the Cleveland Clinic's traditional mission, vision and values, with the motto being *"Patients First: To provide better care of the sick, investigation into their problems, and further education for those who serve."*

A new vision statement was *"striving to be the world's leader in patient experience, clinical outcomes, research and education."* Lastly, new values were adopted, adding "compassion and integrity" to the list that already included quality, innovation, teamwork and service.

Total Rewards And Recognition Programs

Cleveland Clinic took a total rewards approach to their plan. The organization assured they had comprehensive and adequate health care, including wellness programs, pension / investment, tuition reimbursement, adoption help, an Employee Hardship Fund in which employees apply for financial support based on emergency needs; home purchase assistance; employee discounts for purchases such as computers, sporting and theatre event tickets, cell phones services and other local venues (employees saved over \$2 million dollars annually on discount purchase programs). Lastly, they adjusted jobs to assure that they were paid at current market levels. It was on top of this solid foundation that they added their Caregiver Celebrations program, which started in 2010.

The Caregiver Celebrations initiative was the first enterprise-wide rewards and recognition program for the organization. The program went through extensive planning and development. The individuals who created the program were influenced by research and new writing on the topic, including research done by *Towers Watson and Gallup*.

This initiative was rolled out to 43,000 employees and customized to support Cleveland Clinic's values. The online program had several tiers, which allowed participation from managers, doctors, patients and all employees, each of whom

had a personal Caregiver Celebrations recognition website. Below is a summary of the key components of their program.

1. Appreciation Award - This is a non-monetary award, which is administered peer to peer, by manager or physician to employee or from patient to employee to say “thanks” to a caregiver for a job well done. The purpose is to reinforce behaviors that support Cleveland Clinic values and to build a patient-centric culture.

2. Honors Award - This is individual and team recognition by managers for outstanding actions and performance that leverage the Cleveland Clinic values and patients first culture. The average award is \$25 per employee per year. Recognition gift denominations range from \$10 to \$100. Since Cleveland Clinic wants the caregiver to receive the full value of the award, the value is adjusted upward or “grossed up,” which results in the caregiver receiving the full value of the award after taxes. The overall program awards can be approved or denied by the institutes, divisions and hospitals. This level of flexibility was important in creating recognition plans that support the goals of the business as the organization changed. The ability to utilize a fully automated, global system brought more people into the program. Rather than creating their own recognition systems in pockets throughout the organization, institute leaders could take advantage of the global recognition system and make decisions on individual and team awards in their own institutes. The result was building the core values and culture, through financial and tangible symbols of achievement and institute participation.

3. Excellence Award - This award recognizes individuals or teams that demonstrate exceptional effort or initiative resulting in a significant impact on Cleveland Clinic’s patients, business, innovation, etc. A total of 4% of employees overall can be awarded a monetary gift certificate or cash award. There is a quarterly nomination process, and the goal is to recognize significant

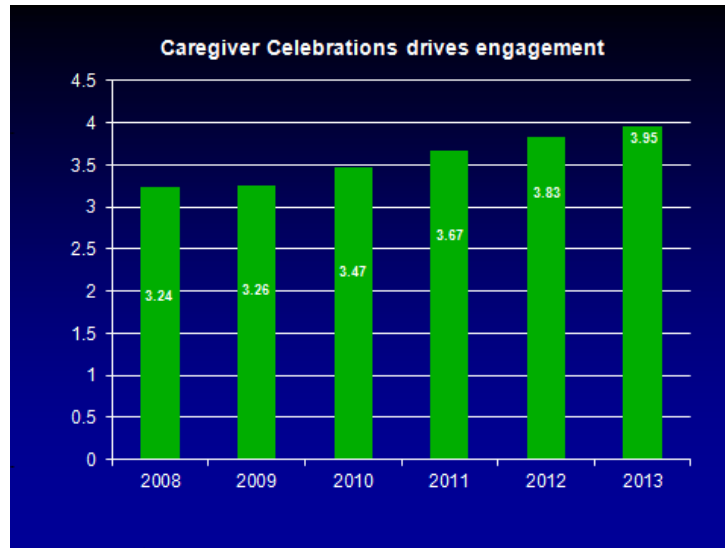
achievements. In addition to the monetary awards, recipients receive a symbolic desktop award that is presented in front of peers.

4. Caregiver Award - This is Cleveland Clinic's enterprise award, presented to those individuals or teams that demonstrate the highest achievement, initiative, or behaviors resulting in the greatest positive impact on the organization, and who show the upmost support of mission, vision, and values. A total of 200 finalists lead to 50 recipients. Recognition includes a symbolic desktop award and monetary award presented at a gala awards banquet. Individual recipients of this award receive \$2,000 and teams split \$2,000 amongst their members. One individual and team are chosen annually for the top CEO Award, which is the "best of the best." The CEO individual winner receives \$10,000 and the CEO winning team receives \$10,000 to split amongst its members.

Results

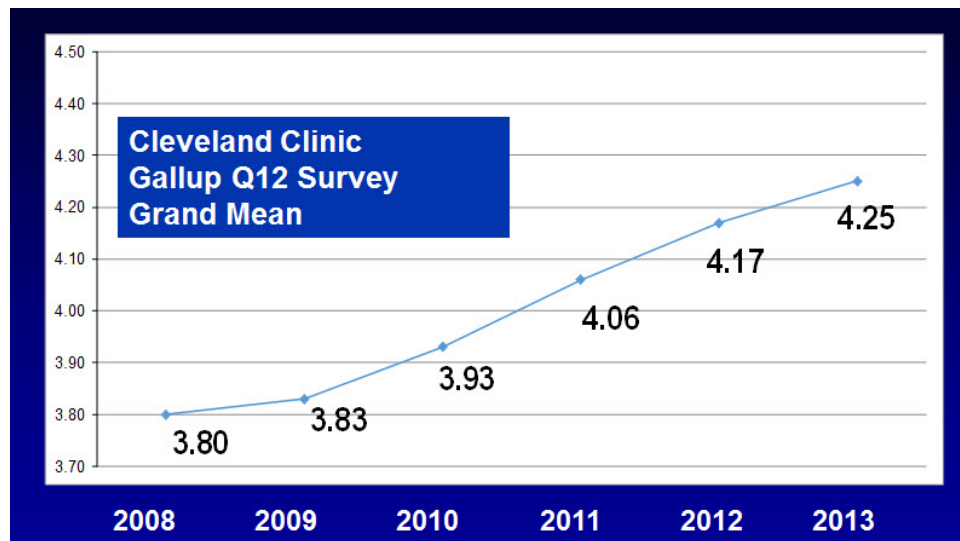
From 2008 to 2013, the institution's scores on Gallup's employee engagement question regarding "received recognition" have increased (from 3.24 to 3.95; the highest increase in the 12 Gallup categories). Perhaps the better gauge of success is the degree to which the program is being used. From 2010 to 2013 the average number of awards per month has moved from 6.44 to 18.42. Since inception more than 575,000 awards were generated (see Figure 3).

Figure 3: Employee Engagement Overall Scores For Q12 Score (From Gallup) - Employee Received Recognition Or Praise In The Last Seven Days.



We speculate that the most powerful part of Cleveland Clinic's reward and recognition process is the intentional linkage to core values. They went beyond engagement per se to develop a strategy focusing on the 'engaged in what' question, with the answer being 'engaged in patient care.' The result is success in improving patient care and overall engagement. Cleveland Clinic's overall engagement score has continually improved from 3.80 in 2008 to 4.25 in 2013 (See Figure 4).

Figure 4: Employee engagement overall scores from 2008 to 2013.



Role-Based Lens: Cleveland Clinic provides an example of the role-based work, combined with employee engagement, can lead to achieving firm-level success. One can analyze their overall rewards strategy as follows, using the role-based lens:

Core Job Role - Cleveland Clinic shows that the core job is important through their overall market-level base salary and benefits programs. Health insurance, retirement and other core job benefits (given to people when they are employed) provide a signal that they are willing to pay what it takes to bring in top talent. They provide benefits designed to keep those individuals. The package they provide sends a message that the organization wants to create a high quality compensation package to retain the best people. Their base package is designed to incent, be fair and keep people working at their best in their core job roles.

Career Role - The tuition reimbursement program signals that learning new skills is important. The Cleveland Clinic's tuition reimbursement program is one of the best in the market, according to benchmark studies conducted by the organization. Cleveland Clinic's mission emphasizes the importance of "further education of those who serve." Although the Caregiver Celebrations rewards program focuses on recognizing those who demonstrate the organizations' values, tuition reimbursement, especially for key areas like nursing, remains integral for supporting the mission.

Team Member Role - The recognition system allows for nominations of both individuals and teams, supporting the importance of being a team member. It's very clear from reviewing the descriptions of the programs that the plan was very intentionally designed to reward both individuals and teams, and this focus came out of the fact that one of the core values is teamwork.

Entrepreneur Or Innovator Role - Innovation also is a core value, and they have found that individuals who are nominated for recognition often are done so based on their ideas or innovations that have been used. The link to the mission and values would generate more reward for innovations targeted at improving the patient experience.

Organization-Member Role - this role involves doing things important for the company. The emphasis on "everyone being a caregiver" brings the organization-member role front and center. Employees think about being part of one organization -all with the same daily goal. This is a very powerful message that is not only delivered but reinforced by actions and the rewards program.

What we see at Cleveland Clinic is synergy between values, vision, goals, mission, daily behavioral expectations and engagement -- all pulled together with their rewards strategy. The connections are what have led the many changes that have dramatically improved patient satisfaction scores, engagement scores and the work done at Cleveland Clinic.

Summary

We applaud the employee engagement efforts at Cleveland Clinic. Their vision in building a recognition plan linked to specific goals led to the strong support for the program and for the wins. We were particularly encouraged by the plans access to everyone. In an organization with over 43,000 employees, it's difficult to predict the future. By providing flexibility for managers, and even patients, to use recognition to reinforce the organization's goals, their recognition strategies can be both strategic and tactical, and we think that's a key for success.

Cleveland Clinic did a lot very well, and we recognize them as an exemplary organization in using recognition and rewards to answer the "Engaged In What?" question.

Proposed Model for Future Research and Learning

Figure 5: Rewards, roles and performance linkages

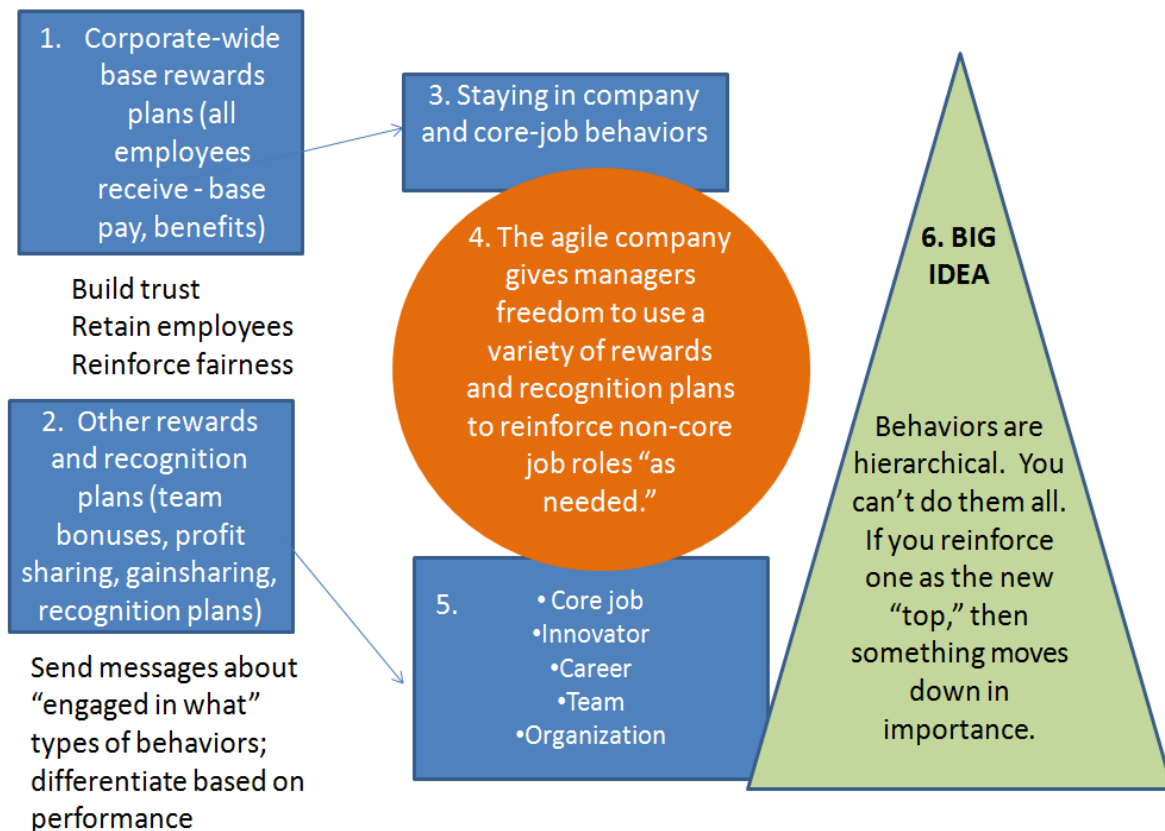


Figure 5 illustrates the model we propose using to link engagement to behavioral targets of engagement, which then would lead to attaining organizational goals. On the left side of the model are two categories of rewards. The top left box is corporate-wide rewards (box 1), which are set up by organizations to attract and retain people in specific jobs. Programs such as base compensation and benefits, administered universally to all employees for joining, are in this bucket (see *Welbourne et. al., 1998* for a more complete

description of the various compensation programs in each role). Using Cleveland Clinic as an example, one can see how this model works. Market-based base compensation and benefits bring high quality people to Cleveland Clinic. But alone, these corporate-wide rewards are not enough. They do not send signals about what non-core job role behaviors are important or what is uniquely expected from employees at Cleveland Clinic. Organizations differentiate themselves in markets not by paying more for base pay but by signaling and rewarding the behaviors that make their firm unique in the market. Defining which non-core job roles are important leads to decisions that can be used to shape a recognition program.

Other types of rewards, noted in box 2 on the left side of Figure 2, are used to incent, reward, communicate and differentiate. The programs that signal what non-core job behaviors are important are the ones that provide competitive advantage in the market. There are numerous programs that have been used to signal what, beyond the core job, the firm values. These various rewards and recognition plans vary in their cost to administer, the degree to which they are perceived as fair, the expense associated with them and the flexibility in delivering to meet ever-changing strategic and tactical goals. We saw at Cleveland Clinic a directive to invest in recognition plans. Given the cost conscious and changing nature of health care, this is not surprising. It would be difficult to set up adequate team-based bonus plans, profit sharing or gain sharing in a world where government regulation is changing the rules dramatically. The use of recognition plans not only allowed Cleveland Clinic to roll out a program that met their budget constraints, but it also provided flexibility.

Proposition 2:

Corporate-level compensation systems can be aligned with the five roles described in this research report. Through that alignment, organizations communicate what role-based behaviors are more or less important. Alignment can drive strategy while misalignment will inhibit achieving strategic goals.

As can be seen in the center circle (#4), agile organizations, or firms that build capability for change, are better served when their rewards and/or recognition systems can be administered by managers. Consider the difference in the first level recognition plan at Cleveland Clinic compared to a standard gain sharing plan. Gain sharing requires much consideration about what goes into the formula; it is scrutinized by all stakeholders. In some cases, organizations pay out gain sharing bonuses when the firm is not profitable. These larger group-based rewards systems can be powerful, but they are difficult to manage, and they have very little flexibility. Changing a gain sharing plan formula can lead to negative outcomes as employees think the plan is being altered to avoid paying out a bonus. However, recognition systems come with much more flexibility. When managers can "own" the plan, it means they can reward what's needed today vs. what was determined important by leadership last year.

The ability to be flexible with the recognition plan means managers can provide recognition for innovator role-based behaviors in the first quarter and team-based behaviors in the second quarter -- IF that is what's needed to support the firm's needs. To summarize the discussion of the first two columns in Figure 2, corporate-wide, all employee rewards plans support core-job behaviors. However, other types of rewards and recognition systems reinforce not only the core job but the non-core job roles. When these plans are created to be flexible,

as is the case with recognition systems, then managers can signal which roles are important, and they also can communicate effectively how the importance of these roles change.

The ability to signal change is critical because employees cannot be engaged in everything equally. The last column, shown as a triangle and #6, shows what we call the big idea. One may argue it's not really so dramatic of a new concept; however, when we communicate this to managers, we do get many an "aha" moment. Thus, we're going out on a limb and calling it a big idea. When you raise the importance of one role, it means the others are less important.

Roles And Role-Based Behavior Are Hierarchical

The key message here is that employees cannot be engaged in everything. The success of any employee engagement program will be the degree to which employees know which behaviors are critical for them to be engaged in performing. Engaging in all will result in burnout and frustration.

Proposition 3:

Managers can use formal and informal recognition systems to align employees to the roles that are needed, at the time in question, to pursue business goals and objectives. Recognition systems are more flexible and easier to change; when implemented by managers, their use can be the link between engagement and role-based behavior.

The importance of the various roles for firm performance can change based on new customer demands, competition or economic conditions. These environmental changes pose problems in organizations trying to manage direction or alignment of engagement with roles. We suggest that giving managers the flexibility to administer recognition systems that can reinforce changing priorities will foster the type of engagement needed to continually drive high performance.

Being able to manage priorities is critical because, as noted earlier, employees cannot do more of everything. Choices need to be made, and those decisions may need to be flexible. Informal rewards and recognition plans are the options that allow managers to manage the "engaged in what" question.

Studying the Linkages: Phase Two

In this research report we laid out the state of employee engagement. We also described new opportunities for moving engagement forward, and we introduced a new model for improving the firm performance through engaging employees in role-based behaviors. Our next step is to test the model and then use the knowledge gained from this work to help organizations and employees both improve the experience at work.

We want to bring back Kahn's notion of engagement and help put the employee and his/her preferences into the employee value exchange equation. We think that the best companies can balance both the needs of the employees and the financial requirements of the organization. The roles-based work can provide an impetus for this dialogue.

Proposition 4:

Employers can use the role-based work to encourage conversations with employees and subsequent actions that will help employees bring more of themselves to work. This will happen by agreeing what non-core job role-related behaviors are most important to the employee and the employer. Through a matching process, time for non-core job roles that help the business and employee can be negotiated.

The next phase of this work will be action research. We are seeking the partnership of companies interested in testing the work they are currently doing and/or implementing new types of engagement work and using this experience as an action research project. By using the action research process, we are learning while also helping the partners in this work improve their firm's performance.

Be Part of the Phase Two Project

If you are interested in learning more about part two of this work and being part of the next phase of research, contact Dr. Theresa Welbourne at theresa.welbourne@unl.edu.

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