

Maximizing Employee Engagement Job Aid

Engagement Strategy Techniques and Examples

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Strategies for Assessing Employee Engagement

Use Employee Viewpoint Survey Results

If your Agency is not currently providing you with team-level Employee Viewpoint Survey (EVS) results, ask that the results be provided to you so that you can see how your team is doing and monitor their engagement over time. Pay specific attention to the Employee Engagement Index.

Agencies have different methods of analyzing and distributing their EVS results. If your agency is not currently providing you with team-level EVS results, ask that the results be provided to you so that you can see how your team members are doing and monitor their engagement over time.

Some agencies at the top of the “Best Places to Work in the Federal Government” rankings use their results to develop Action Plans at all levels of the organization. You can ask your group to identify areas for improvement and to develop an Action Plan to address them. The plan becomes a living document among the group and they update it regularly to reflect progress in achieving their goals. In addition to addressing engagement, this exercise is also an important team building activity.

For more details on developing an Action Plan, see the Guide for Interpreting and Acting on Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey Results located in the course Resources, or contact your agency’s EVS coordinator.

Observe Behaviors Associated with Engagement

Observe your direct reports for engaged behaviors:

- Shows interest in improving performance
 - Provides ideas and options for solving organizational challenges
- Makes an effort to build relationships with coworkers and supervisors
 - Volunteers to help someone who is facing a big deadline
 - Mentors a colleague
- Talks with you to create individual career development plans
- Actively finds ways to work smarter or more efficiently
 - Identifies solutions to problems he or she encounters
 - Participates in decisions that affect his or her work
- Seeks to understand agency mission and goals

Strategies for Maximizing Engagement in your Direct Reports

Lead by Example

Lead by example by modeling engaged behavior.

Techniques for increasing your own engagement:

- Capitalize on your strengths.
 - Consult your training office about assessment tools such as “360” assessments or style indicators.
- Seek learning opportunities.
 - Solicit feedback from direct reports and peers in addition to feedback from managers.
 - Seek out mentoring or support from your peers.
 - Attend agency sponsored learning events and encourage staff to attend.
- Take control of situations.
 - Do not wait to be told what needs to be done. See the need, and approach your manager with solutions.
- Maintain work-life balance.
 - Take advantage of your organization’s work-life programs and resources, such as
 - Telework
 - Flexible schedules
 - Employee Assistance Program
 - Childcare and elder care subsidies
 - Parenting Support Group
 - Smoking cessation programs
 - Gym membership discounts
 - Respect your employees' personal time (for example, refrain from sending emails late at night or on weekends)

Leverage Emotional Intelligence

Deliver on employee expectations by building and demonstrating the components of emotional intelligence:

- Self-awareness: the ability to be aware of one’s thoughts and feelings and to articulate them
 - Be aware of how your actions impact your employee’s engagement.
 - Be open; self-disclosure.
 - Take time to self-reflect and take corrective actions where necessary.
 - Work with a coach/mentor to help you address areas of weakness.
 - Be intensely curious.
 - Ask for feedback.
- Self-management: the ability to control impulses and channel heightened emotions when dealing with difficult situations
 - Recognize emotional triggers.

- Understand where your emotions are coming from and why.
- If you feel you are in an emotionally charged situation, take a 20 minute break (or more) to compose yourself.
- Verbalize how you feel and make requests of others.
- Empathy: caring about what others are going through and being able to imagine what it must be like in their shoes
 - Understand without necessarily agreeing with another's position.
 - Understand your employees' emotions, needs and concerns and how these could be affecting engagement.
 - Demonstrate empathy by:
 - Listening without interruption
 - Asking thoughtful questions
 - Being curious and interested in their story
 - Validating what you are hearing
 - Suspending judgment
 - Showing compassion
- Relationship Management: communicating effectively and encouraging diverse perspectives
 - Develop relationships with your direct reports to help you recognize signs of decreased engagement.
 - Diffuse conflict and interpersonal tensions.
 - Be a positive influence.
 - Inspire and developing others.
 - Deliver difficult messages without leaving people feeling damaged.

Foster Job Autonomy

Job autonomy is the amount of control, choice, and discretion that an employee feels they have in how their job is done. Employees with more autonomy feel a greater sense of responsibility in their work. Foster job autonomy in your employees whenever you can.

Techniques:

- Ensure new hires have the skills and abilities to do the job and that opportunities exist for skill development.
- Match tasks to employees with the appropriate qualifications or interest, or to employees who will benefit developmentally from the new assignment.
- Increase employee participation in problem solving, decision making, and planning processes.
 - Encourage employees to take ownership of their work by trusting them with appropriate decision-making authority and holding them accountable.
 - Organize projects where there is not a hierarchy and team members are able to act as equals. This will give employees an opportunity to stretch and grow. Supervisors and managers do not have to be responsible for everything.

- National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) management solicits employee input on work processes through a number of means including focus groups, team recommendations, and employee surveys.
- Provide challenging work assignments and give employees opportunities to learn, grow, and make significant contributions.
 - Delegate work assignments.
 - Ensure that the most knowledgeable people are present during important meetings, not just the most senior people.
- Involve employees in determining how their work is performed.
 - Give employees the opportunity to select work assignments.
 - Ensure that Individual Development Plans (IDPs) are not rigid. Employees should know that an IDP is a living document that can be changed as needed. Thought should be given to what employees want to accomplish each year.
- Create an environment that fosters creativity and innovation.
 - The MSPB survey reports that 78% of fully engaged employees agreed that their organization rewarded creativity and innovation.
 - People want to be recognized for their contributions. One agency recognizes extraordinary contributions by putting the name and picture of those individuals on TV screens around the building.
 - A more modest effort might be to set aside a public space inside your department to place photos of employees who have accomplished something truly special, along with the details of what they did to earn their place on the wall.
 - Personalize rewards to their recipients. By personalizing the reward, you can anchor the meaning of the achievement more deeply than if you simply treat the reward as a mechanical administrative task.
 - Ask senior leaders to write a personal note to employees who deserve recognition. The note can be a simple thank you, being sure to include the action that merited the recognition.
 - Involve your employees in identifying solutions to problems. They are the people most aware of the goals to be achieved and the resources available to reach them.
 - Rather than focusing on “doing more with less,” reframe the problem to “how to do something different with less.” “Different” might include reengineering work processes to ensure they are aligned with changing work demands, clarifying priorities to focus on essential value-added tasks, clarifying the scope of employees’ authority so that fear of overstepping boundaries does not become a disincentive to taking risks.
 - At least one agency set up an “Idea Factory” based on the TV show Shark Tank. Employees can pitch ideas to senior management for review. If a champion is found, the idea moves forward and the employee is recognized for the idea.
- Recognize ideas that lead to efficiency enhancements and increased productivity.

- Work with your group to set goals, and then recognize those who exceed those goals. Invite them to share the “secret to their success” with the rest of the group.
- Encourage employees to nominate their co-workers for recognition.
- People value different types of recognition. It is important to match the type of recognition to the individual’s preference. Some people might greatly appreciate recognition of their efforts at a public forum, while others might be more comfortable with a certificate given in private.

Align Performance Expectations with Agency Mission

Ensure that your direct reports understand how their jobs apply and contribute to the agency’s mission.

Techniques:

- Live and work by your agency’s values.
 - Show accountability by being willing to accept responsibility for your actions.
 - Show integrity by matching your behavior to the principles advocated by the organization.
 - Treat employees fairly and consistently.
 - Ensure that performance objectives are tied to the mission so that employees see their contributions.
- Make the agency’s values and mission visible.
 - Post them in highly visible places.
 - Reinforce them by incorporating them into monthly staff meetings.
 - Ask your direct reports what the agency’s values mean to them. Use their responses to relate the values and mission to the work they do; strengthen their understanding of the alignment, contributions, and importance of their work to the agency’s mission and goals.
 - Communicate to employees that the agency is accomplishing its mission.
 - Share your executive’s performance plan with your employees.
 - The United States Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO) uses its social media sites to help employees connect to the agency’s work and its impact on the country and society.

Enhance Communication

Communication is one of the biggest keys to establishing and maintaining employees’ relationships with their supervisor and their feelings of connection to the organization.

Techniques for enhancing communication:

- When you are hiring employees, ensure a good job fit by clearly communicating what will be expected of them on the job.
 - Have current employees participate in candidate interviews to explain what it is like to work in the organization and to develop a rapport with the candidates. This will help both parties determine whether there is an appropriate fit.

- Make sure to clearly define all job expectations.
- Share information about what is going on in the organization with your direct reports. They want to know what is going on and how their jobs might be affected. Sharing this information will build trust.
 - Hold meetings with your direct reports soon after management meetings. If they do not hear it from you, they will hear it through other sources.
 - Talk with your direct reports, individually or as a group, when new policies or procedures are implemented to help them understand the impact and the rationale behind them.
- Provide ongoing informal and formal feedback about performance in the context of performance management.
 - Improve the cycle of regular formal progress reviews.
 - Create performance goals that are clear, accountable, measurable, and focused.
 - Commit to helping your direct reports fulfill actions and goals on IDPs.
 - Make sure your direct reports have the resources to complete their goals. If the resources are not available, help your direct reports set goals that are achievable.
 - Set milestone reviews to gauge progress.
 - Monitor employee performance and hold employees accountable to demonstrate the importance of the employee's work and that the manager is interested in helping the employee succeed.
 - Talk with employees to identify training needs and ensure the training is provided, emphasizing the importance of the employee to meeting organizational goals.
 - Have informal meetings with each of your direct reports on a regular basis just to ask "How are things going?"
 - Ensure that feedback sessions are focused on quality and not quantity. Make sure that both you and your direct reports are getting what you need from the meetings.
- Use the virtual work environment to promote a feedback culture through email, social media, online videos, and events.
 - Use an online collaboration/crowdsourcing approach to enhance two-way communication and promote knowledge management. The Office of Personnel Management (OPM) developed this approach in cooperation with the MPSB.
 - OPM uses a crowdsourcing tool to get ideas from employees on how to improve the work and environment at the agency.
 - Idea Factory, mentioned earlier, is one type of crowdsourcing that provides open idea generation. At the Transportation Security Administration, senior leaders identify specific problems which are then sent out to the employee community as a challenge. Employees whose ideas are accepted receive a certificate and a Challenge coin in recognition of their effort.
- Seek out opportunities to improve your communication and coaching skills to more effectively interact with your direct reports and help with their development.

Create a Positive Work Environment

Techniques:

- Demonstrate to employees that they are a valued part of the organization.
 - Invest in a strategic onboarding program that begins before the employee arrives and extends for several months after.
 - Ensure meaningful work is available.
 - Introduce each new employee to coworkers and chains of command.
 - Praise your direct reports when deserved. A simple thank you can go a long way. These two words can make employees feel appreciated and show that you recognize the work they are doing.
- If your employees are interested, develop a mentoring program between junior and senior staff. Mentoring across generations can lead to improved performance, higher levels of synergy and enhanced career development opportunities. Mentoring can help assimilate new employees, allowing them to discover their personal fit and role within the organization.
- Build relationships with your direct reports. Strong relationships with your direct reports can lead to increased trust, better communication, and an enhanced understanding of your direct reports' needs. Research has suggested that the single most important contributor to the feelings of employee engagement, empowerment, and satisfaction is the relationship they have with the leaders of the organization.
 - Drop by employee meetings. This will help you better understand how your team is accomplishing the agency's mission. Ask questions about what they are discussing and offer your insights.
 - Hold listening sessions with employees regularly. This will give you insights into their perspectives. After they have shared with you, it is important that that you respect this by telling them how you will use the information to change or improve your own performance.
 - "Walk the halls." Make time every week to talk with each of your employees informally – greet them and ask how things are going. Take the time to get to know your employees and allow them to get to know you.
- Recognize and acknowledge difficulties.
 - Financial resources for training and development can always prove challenging. The problem will likely arise in discussions with your employees. Acknowledge the difficulties in finding traditional developmental opportunities; discuss this with your employees and work together to find other methods of development, such as job shadowing.
 - It is important to recognize performance problems. You may find this uncomfortable at times, but it is important to the development of the individual. It is also important that your strong performers see that there are consequences for underperforming; not doing so may reduce their motivation.
- Make work fun.
 - Create a "Morale Group" which plans events to motivate staff and boost morale.

- Host a monthly birthday celebration for employees with a birthday that month.
- Organize team-building activities such as bowling.
- Encourage employees to take advantage of flexible work arrangements and work-life policies, such as telecommuting or flex hours. One simple way to do this is to use these policies yourself. Seeing you take advantage of these opportunities to improve your work-life balance will assure them that it is acceptable.

Use the Human Capital Framework

It's important to remember that employee engagement is one piece of strategic human capital management. The five systems that comprise strategic Federal human capital management are outlined in the Human Capital Framework: Strategic Alignment, Leadership and Knowledge Management, Results-Oriented Performance Culture, Talent Management, and Accountability.

These systems are interrelated to serve a common purpose of producing a world-class and engaged workforce.

Access the Office of Personnel Management website on Human Capital Management to learn more about the Human Capital Framework:

<http://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/human-capital-management/>

The Reference Materials link provides a variety of resources on the human capital systems to assist supervisors and managers in achieving their desired outcomes, including increasing employee engagement. You can use these resources to help you implement engagement strategies.

Strategies for Executives

This previous sections describe actions that can be taken to foster a culture of employee and supervisor engagement. It is the responsibility of executives to ensure that policies, procedures, and resources are in place to support these actions.

While supervisors and managers are most often directly involved in monitoring performance, executives should provide the mandate and resources:

- Reinforce the need for effective communication; all leaders should demonstrate two-way communication themselves to demonstrate commitment to the agency goal of enhanced communication
- Create the expectation for continuous informal feedback as a shared responsibility between supervisors and employees
- Train supervisors on diversity, generational differences, and personality types for effective methods on giving and receiving feedback.
- Encourage adoption of technology as a means to allow supervisors and employees to stay engaged working in a virtual environment. The agency should promote a feedback culture from executive leadership

One of the key facets of engagement is career development. Here are some of the practices that executives should support and reinforce:

- Support and sustain a learning environment that drives continuous improvement in performance, and provide a means to share critical knowledge across the organization.
- Promote continuous learning for both supervisors and employees.
- Provide resources to support supervisors in their efforts to develop the ability of others to perform and contribute to the agency by providing opportunities to learn through formal and informal methods.
 - Encourage employees to take advantage of training and professional development opportunities by making them aware of upcoming professional events (conferences, training) and approving attendance where possible.
 - Work with your employees to identify the type of additional training they would like to have to enhance their job skills. This discussion should be part of formal performance management plans, as well as part of ongoing communication with the employee.
- Create an environment for mentoring generations to allow knowledge sharing, higher levels of synergy, and career development.
- Emphasize the benefits to managers of coaching in order to help employees achieve individual and organizational goals.
- Train both employees and supervisors on effective verbal and written communication.

Executives must support the use of workplace flexibilities as a means of helping all employees achieve a work-life balance. Encourage your employees to take advantage of the agency's work-life balance and family friendly policies such as:

- Telework
- Alternative Work Schedules or Flex time
- Employer sponsored wellness/health promotion programs
- Employee Assistance Program

Executives can support engagement within human capital management using these strategies:

- Support and sustain a learning environment that drives continuous improvement in performance, and provide a means to share critical knowledge across the organization.
- Ensure the agency has a process for sharing information and ideas about the organization with all employees, including eliciting employee feedback and involvement so all employees play an appropriate role in planning and executing the mission.
- Promote a system that addresses competency gaps, particularly in mission-critical occupations, by implementing and maintaining programs to attract, acquire, develop, promote, and retain quality talent.