Personal Tracking – An engagement enhancing tool

What if we offered employees a device to help them with their daily engagement, a device that measures what matters & acts like their own engagement version of Jiminy Cricket?

By **David Zinger**

I define employee engagement as: good work done well with others every day. I believe employees are personally responsible for their own engagement while each of us is accountable for the influence we have on the engagement levels of other employees.

Our antiquated methods of survey data and analytics in employee engagement do little to help us measure and master engagement. The bi-annual or annual survey of engagement is a data anachronism resembling a flip phone in the age of smart phones and pulse surveys are at best bandages losing their stickiness to halt the haemorrhaging of useful data.

What if we offered employees a device to help them with their daily engagement, a device that acts like their own engagement version of Jiminy Cricket, which measures what matters?

Let's imagine a day in the life of an employee connected to a personal engagement device:

Prabir wakes up and checks his E-Zone (Engagement Zone) watch to determine his rest and recovery overnight because he wants to know his physical readiness for the day ahead.

His device takes his heart rate and other bio-measures to give him a baseline of physical energy for the day as he arrives at work. Based on the measures, it offers Prabir two suggestions to sustain his energy and engagement for the day.

His engagement monitoring device helps him determine his engagement zone, the period of work between 5 and 90 minutes that is ideal for him to stay fully engaged with a task. It tracks his level of vigor, absorption, and dedication for each task based on the work of Arnold Bakker on work engagement and suggests the length of time Prabir should stay on task before switching to something else. Prabir does this because it helps him stay in the flow and assists him in doing more vital 'deep work' as outlined by Cal Newport, Georgetown professor and author of Deep Work.

When Prabir is working with a team, he gets measures of honest signals based on the work of Sandy Pentland, to determine how effectively his team is working. His device monitors overall psychological safety at work and notifies him when safety may be at risk for himself or others.

The devise both triggers and keeps a measure of Prabir's high-quality interactions based on the work of Jane Dutton and the contributions of these interactions to his energy and the energy of the overall workplace

The next step in employee engagement for individuals and organizations is to fully engage the quantified self
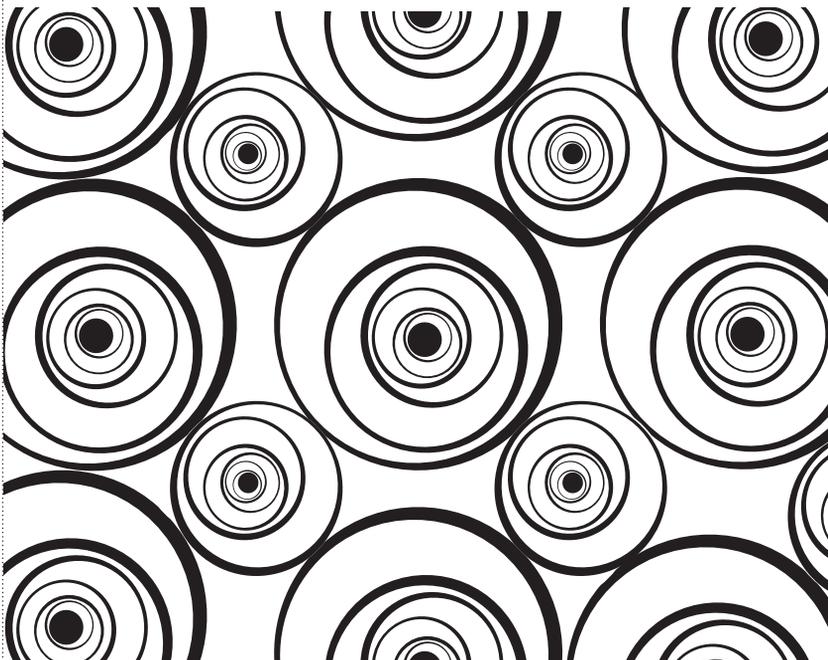
Throughout the day the device takes measure of his engagement. Prabir has his own engagement dashboard, including a personal profile of his engagement strengths and challenges. The device can be configured by Prabir to give him engagement nudges at appropriate times.

Prabir owns his own data but he has the option to aggregate his engagement data with the teams he works with, his department, and the larger organization.

There are additional social and gamification options that he can choose to activate if they help him to be more engaged.

Prabir's engagement device is loaded with notifications and recommendations to enhance and enliven engagement. Over time, Prabir's interaction with his engagement device has created customized and personalized analytic recommendations that guide him in being more effective, efficient, and engaged.

We do not have to imagine most of what was offered in Prabir's day as the technology and research behind it is already available or will be through rapid development and refinement. The current use of health tracking and smart phones demonstrates how engaged people are with mobile technology and tracking devices. According to a research by Deloitte, on an average, people look at their phones over 40 times a day while those in the age group 18-24 years, look at their phones over 80 times a day. And the number of "looks" has been steadily increasing. Moreover, a GfK survey that studied 20,000 people in 16 countries reveals that 1 in 3 people track their health and fitness already with an app or device.

Data is part of the essential lifeblood of an individual, and it should be owned by the individual with an option to share with the organization. It should not be a resource we pay survey consultancies with large fees, only to be returned as slick PowerPoint slides and a generic list of drivers and levers. We need to create and sustain real-time and relevant engagement benchmarks laced with immediate measurement and feedback.

When we make data more personal and owned first by the very person creating it, we need to step up fully and address issues of honesty, trust, and psychological safety in organizations where we no longer hide behind anonymous data gathering approaches. New engagement technologies will function as a trigger to focus on building bonds of trust between individuals and organizations because the organization will not have access to the data without trust. The new currency for data collection for employee engagement will be human trust not large survey consulting fees.

In 2009, roughly when the first Fitbit appeared, I wrote about Sandy Pentland's work on "honest signals"[1] and the application of social measures to determine real-time social and team engagement. His group measured elements like synchrony and mimicry to measure unconscious channels of communication between people.
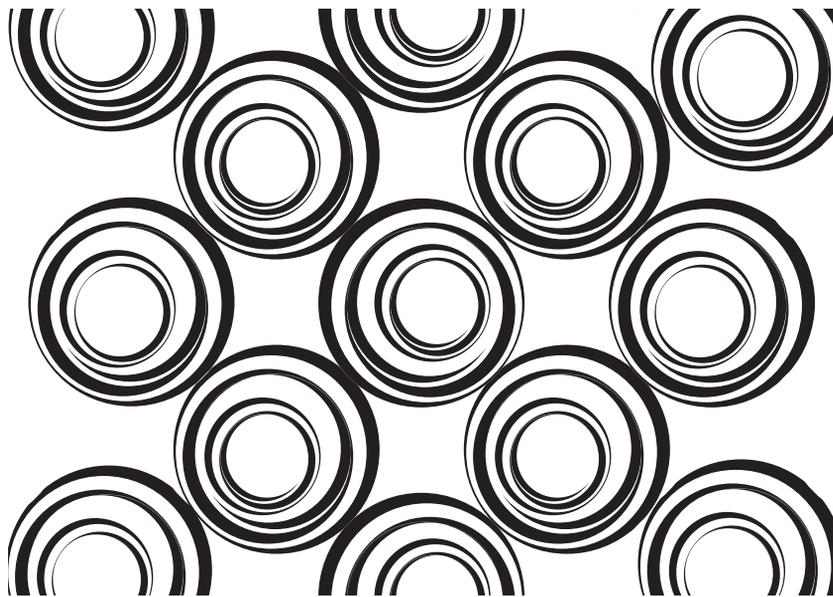
New engagement technologies will function as a trigger to focus on building bonds of trust between individuals and organizations

In the near future, we envision a new generation of management tools that are enabled by the sociometer's capability to produce real-time maps of an organization's information flow and function. These sensible organizations will use these new sensing capabilities to make sure that the sales department really is talking to the marketing department, and that employees aren't overloaded and miserable.

The next step in employee engagement for individuals and organizations is to fully engage the quantified self. Technology challenges in doing this may be less than the ethical and psychological safety challenges that will be required for this to work. This technological opportunity might not only transform metrics and analytics, it may contribute to increased levels of trust and safety for individuals and organizations. Sandy Pentland alluded to this in 2009,

To achieve this, it will take special care to strike a balance between the "big brother" nature of such information and the benefits that can be reaped. We believe that this balance can be achieved by giving employees control of their own information, creating a transparent system with immediate benefits to everyone.

So, how are you preparing for the next big thing in employee engagement? 🔴

References

[1] http://www.davidzinger.com/honest-signals-and-employee-engagement-part-1-2138/

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

DAVID ZINGER is an employee engagement speaker, educator, author and consultant. He is the founder and host of the 7200-member global Employee Engagement Network. He taught Educational Psychology at the University of Manitoba for 25 years. david@davidzinger.com/ www.davidzinger.com.