

Tackling the common myths of employee engagement

Engaged employees are better for business. Yet research has uncovered a series of myths that people associate with employee engagement – evidence to suggest why many don't address the idea of engaging employees.

Uncover your thinking and actions about engagement with this guide.

BergHind Joseph in association with David Zinger Associates

A powerful blend of creative intelligence

BergHind Joseph is a leading, independent creative communications agency that helps ambitious businesses with an international outlook to build stronger reputations. Our work includes branding, employee engagement, stakeholder communications, annual and CSR reports, corporate websites, events and research-led consultancy. To every project, we contribute our knowledge of the challenges facing business and society's changing demands.

Our values: We conduct our business in accordance with our core values: imagination, collaboration, flexibility and honesty. We work closely with our clients throughout the project cycle and build long-term relationships based on trust, transparency and mutual respect.

International perspective: We enjoy working across borders and with companies that share our international outlook. We have worked with companies from many different countries, and many business people whose cultures differ from our own.

David Zinger: is the founder and host of the 4000 member global employee engagement network with over 500 forums, 250 videos, 37 special groups and 2000 blog posts. Working with the network, David has created 7 informative and well-designed community free e-books on engagement with over 500 contributors.

David taught counselling and educational psychology at the University of Manitoba for 20 years while also being the employee assistance counsellor and career development coach for Seagram Ltd.

David is currently working on a 3 year project on engaging honey bees in co-created artistry with workplace objects, computers, and a 2012 project that will insert live social media computers installed in the hive with the bees having Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, Webinar and other accounts. At the end of 3 years there will be an exhibition, book, and presentation on the connections between honey bees, artistry, social media, and engagement.

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Preparing for the voyage

This guide will outline why today employee engagement is so important, and the myths that are associated with it – as created by David Zinger.

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Why employee engagement?

The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) says employee engagement is 'a combination of commitment to the organisation and its values and a willingness to help out colleagues.' It goes beyond job satisfaction and is not simply motivation, says the CIPD. Engagement is something the employee has to offer to the company: it cannot simply be 'required' as part of the employment contract.

As with any relationship, if you want employees to become more engaged, you have to begin by talking to them. A statement of the obvious perhaps – but corporate communicators are often fixated on external audiences, forgetting that employees play a vital role (according to some commentators, the most important role) in building and maintaining brands and reputations.

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67% of engaged employees advocate their company or organisation – compared with only 3% of the disengaged. A total of 78% would recommend their company's products or services, against 13% of the disengaged.
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So what's the evidence for employee engagement? Here's a sample:

- A survey carried out by the CIPD in 2006 found that 70% of engaged employees indicate that they have a good understanding of how to meet customers' needs, while only 17% of non-engaged employees say the same.
- A Gallup survey conducted in 2003 found that 67% of engaged employees advocate their company or organisation – compared with only 3% of the disengaged. A total of 78% would recommend their company's products or services, against 13% of the disengaged.
- According to a Corporate Leadership Council survey carried out in 2004, engaged employees are 87% less likely to leave the organisation than the disengaged. The cost of high turnover among disengaged employees is significant; some estimates put the cost of replacing each employee at equal to a year's salary.
- In 2010 the CIPD reported that organisations increasingly recognise the importance of their corporate brand. Engaged employees will help promote the brand and protect the employer from the risks associated with poor service levels or product quality. Similarly, a strong employer brand will help to attract and retain employees.

Are you “mything” out on work?

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Joseph Campbell believed that if myths are to continue to fulfill their vital functions in our modern world, they must continually transform and evolve.
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When is the last time you spent 30 minutes thinking about employee engagement?

What myths surround employee engagement and how do they influence your outlook and actions?

David Zinger’s research highlights a series of myths that are associated with employee engagement – evidence to suggest why many don’t want to address the idea of engaging employees?

Joseph Campbell believed that if myths are to continue to fulfill their vital functions in our modern world, they must continually transform and evolve as older mythologies, untransformed, simply do not address the realities of contemporary life, particularly with regard to the changing cosmological and sociological realities of each new era.

The question therefore needs to be asked: Are we operating from an old engagement mythology?

As in the *Odyssey* our engagement myths open **in medias res** (in the middle of things), meaning that our focus begins in the middle of the overall story of engagement. We have been at engagement for well over 10 years and still have a lot to address. But, do we need to create new myths for engagement that lead to healthier and more robust actions to create, support and sustain engagement?

Tackling the 21 myths of employee engagement

To begin your journey in uncovering your thinking and actions about engagement, take a look at David Zinger’s 21 myths of employee engagement. These myths aren’t supported or debunked but act as touch stones or steps for you to look at engagement from a unique perspective.

To tackle these myths of engagement, work through each one individually using the following approach:

- Take one minute to work with each myth.
- Scan the title at the top of each box to frame the myth.
- Read the statement of the myth within the box.
- Ponder the questions following each myth to trigger your thinking.
- Enliven the myth by jotting down your own thought, reaction or response within the box of each myth.
- Move on to the next myth.
- At the end of the workbook conclude by determining your next step to improve employee engagement based on your responses.

Myth 1

Engagement is a noun not a verb.

Do you believe this myth? What are the implications of viewing engagement as a noun, rather than the verb, engage?

In regards to this myth I believe...

Myth 2

Engagement is just a new word for motivation.

Is the term engagement just being used as a new way to dress up motivation for this decade? What are the similarities and differences between motivation and engagement?

In regards to this myth I believe...

Myth 3

Engagement is best coupled with the term employee.

Do you believe engagement should be attached to employee or would you couple the word with other elements of the workplace?

In regards to this myth I believe...

Myth 4

There are “drivers” of engagement.

Are employees engaged when they are driven to engagement? What is the impact of using the term “drivers” in relationship to engagement?

In regards to this myth I believe...

Myth 5

We need to create a singular definition of engagement.

What are the advantages and disadvantages of a singular definition for engagement?

In regards to this myth I believe...

Myth 6

The range of engagement in an organisation is shaped like the proverbial bell curve.

Will engagement always come out shaped as a bell curve from highly disengaged to highly engaged regardless of what an organisation does?

In regards to this myth I believe...

Myth 7

Engagement is a problem to be solved.

What do you see as the implication for employees and organisations when we frame engagement as a problem?

In regards to this myth I believe...

Myth 8

There is a them in engagement.

What happens to connection when we refer to employees or managers as “them”?

In regards to this myth I believe...

Myth 9

Engagement is an organisation, leader, or management responsibility.

Are new difficulties created when we remove responsibility for employee engagement away from employees? What happens to managers when they are told they are responsible for engagement?

In regards to this myth I believe...

Myth 10

Engagement is something extra we do.

Is there such a thing as discretionary effort or is all effort ultimately discretionary? Is discretion a key component of engagement?

In regards to this myth I believe...

Myth 11

Surveys are engagement and surveys are engaging.

Do you believe surveys engage employees? Are surveys a valid measure of engagement?

In regards to this myth I believe...

Myth 12

Anonymity of employees is key to learning about engagement.

What are we unconsciously communicating in an organisation with anonymous surveys? Does authentic engagement require a name and a face?

In regards to this myth I believe...

Myth 13

Disengagement is a punishable offence.

Should disengagement be a punishable offence or a trigger for a dialogue between the employee and the organisation?

In regards to this myth I believe...

Myth 14

To learn about engagement we must rely on external experts and consultants.

Who best understands or should understand engagement within an organisation?

In regards to this myth I believe...

Myth 15

We can have enduring improvement in engagement.

Can engagement be ultimately achieved so that we can move on to something else?

In regards to this myth I believe...

Myth 16

What is in it for me (WIIFM) trumps what is in it for us (WIIFU).

The word “me” and the word “us” are both two letter words. Should engagement be more focused on self or community?

In regards to this myth I believe...

Myth 17

Data trumps story.

Is data the most important thing in employee engagement research? Does engagement become too much of a soft skill if we focus on stories?

In regards to this myth I believe...

Myth 18

Executives, leaders and managers are not seen as employees.

What happens if we neglect to see that executives, leaders, and managers are employed by the organisation when we talk about employee engagement?

In regards to this myth I believe...

Myth 19

Engagement is about the future versus right now.

Is the primary focus of engagement strategic and long term or tactical and short term?

In regards to this myth I believe...

Myth 20

Engagement work is an expensive endeavour.

Do you believe that engagement comes with an expensive price tag, high priced consultants, and expensive programs?

In regards to this myth I believe...

Myth 21

Employee well-being is outside of employee engagement.

Do you believe well-being is something found outside of work and that it does not have a place in employee engagement?

In regards to this myth I believe...

Let's talk

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