

People matters – no. 2

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Employee Engagement – Is it worth your attention?

Employee engagement goes beyond the basics of employees feeling positive and satisfied in their jobs. While satisfaction is about being happy at work, engagement is about commitment and fulfillment. It is a higher level measure of action, accountability and commitment by employees to their library. More engaged employees, clearly make for better service delivery as employees more readily adapt to meet new challenges, strive to improve services, and ensure that the library delivers continuous quality. This is why, especially in a time of transformational change, library leaders are paying it particular attention.

But what is a better or more engaged employee? Research by some leading HR companies can help library leaders understand this. In Canada, Hewitt Associates, define engagement as “*employees **striving** to do their best, **saying** positive things about the organization, and **staying** to learn, grow and develop their careers*”. Gallup, has developed the “Gallup 12” questions which together define and measure engagement:

1. Do I know what is expected of me at work?
2. Do I have the materials and equipment I need to do my work right?
3. At work, do I have the opportunity to do what I do best every day?
4. In the last seven days, have I received recognition or praise for doing good work?
5. Does my supervisor, or someone at work, seem to care about me as a person?
6. Is there someone at work who encourages my development?
7. At work, do my opinions seem to count?
8. Does the mission/purpose of my company make me feel my job is important?
9. Are my co-workers committed to doing quality work?
10. Do I have a best friend at work?
11. In the last six months, has someone at work talked to me about my progress?
12. This last year, have I had opportunities at work to learn and grow?

Hewitt research shows that once an organization does the basics well (such as pay, benefits, policy, flexibility, etc.) then leaders leading and managers managing are the two key elements to improve engagement. This includes things like giving clear direction, treating others with respect, demonstrating values, keeping promises, helping clarify expectations, giving feedback, dealing with poor performers and fixing processes or procedures that don't work

Through regular employee opinion surveys, it is possible to calculate an employee engagement baseline score, and then track progress over time. Having an employee metric around engagement can also help library leaders assess the success, or otherwise, of specific initiatives or programmes.

This has been our approach at the University of Saskatchewan over recent years. Through a number of initiatives we have increased our employee engagement from a 2005 baseline of 54% to 65% in 2009. Our target is to be within the 70 percentile range. Top employers have high seventy to eighty percentile scores.

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