

Employee Engagement Surveys FAQs

What is employee engagement?

Many definitions exist, but the common core dimensions of engagement are logical commitment to the organization and its goals, emotional commitment to the organization, and discretionary effort. Engaged employees have passion, pride, and energy, are willing to “go the extra mile” for the organization and co-workers, take ownership of their work and performance outcomes, and are internally motivated to achieve excellence. In short, they are employees who make a difference.

Is employee engagement the same thing as job satisfaction?

No. For many decades, employee surveys measured employees’ satisfaction (happiness, contentment, being pleased) with their work and with the organization — and many employee surveys still do. Although employee satisfaction has been correlated with lower voluntary turnover, lower absenteeism, and other positive organizational outcomes, there is a consistent lack of relationship with performance and productivity. The transition from satisfaction to engagement was spurred by increasing research evidence that employee engagement is a powerful determinant of productivity, performance, and profit.

Why should we care about employee engagement?

Research has shown that increased engagement leads to improvements in organizational productivity, customer satisfaction and loyalty, market share, sustained revenue and profit growth, and sustained growth in shareholder value.

By contrast, it is estimated that disengaged employees cost the U.S. economy more than \$300 billion a year due to poor performance, low productivity, absenteeism, tardiness, illness, and other negative performance-related behaviors. Indirectly, the cost is much greater because of the potential negative influence of disengaged employees on co-workers, customers, and other stakeholders.

What issues can an employee engagement survey address or uncover?

In addition to assessing the overall level of employee engagement, a properly designed survey identifies the high-leverage organizational factors that can fuel increased employee engagement. Buck’s employee engagement model measures eight engagement drivers:

- *Leadership* – The degree to which leaders inspire confidence and trust, articulate an appealing vision, set strategic direction, and demonstrate concern for employees’ well-being
- *Rewards* – Perceptions by employees that their compensation and benefits are fair relative to the market, to the nature of the work they do compared to others, and to their performance
- *Communication and Involvement* – The extent to which the employer’s communication is open, honest, timely, and two-way, keeping employees informed, and creating a “web of cognitive involvement”
- *Advancement and Development Focus* – An expressed concern for employees’ learning, growth, and development and their opportunities for advancement and promotion, as well as a commitment to fair decisions regarding advancement and promotion
- *Immediate Supervision* – The relationship between employees and their immediate supervisors, especially elements of trust and support
- *Co-worker Relations* – Positive co-worker relations, perceptions of co-worker competence, informal collaboration, friendliness, and even having some fun at work
- *Job Characteristics* – Jobs that have variety, provide appropriate challenges, fully use employee skills and help develop new ones, and provide a sense of importance, accomplishment, and achievement

- *HR Policies/Practices* – HR practices that balance employer and employee needs, value employees as people, and recognize the contributions they make to the organization

Based on survey results, Buck can identify specific issues that have the greatest impact on employee engagement, enabling us to design appropriate follow-up programs, plans, and actions. Keep in mind, however, that the ultimate purpose of an engagement survey is not simply to move the needle on the engagement score. It's to solve business problems and raise performance.

Are all employee engagement surveys the same?

There are many types of employee surveys. Some are simply employee satisfaction surveys; others confuse the concept of engagement with its causes. Scales and scoring methods abound and the questions used to measure engagement differ greatly across different surveys.

The Buck Employee Engagement Survey has the advantages of:

- A sound definition of engagement derived from 20 years of academic and practitioner research
- A reliable set of questions, empirically tested to be indicators of the dimensions we define as critical to engagement
- Clear distinction between employee engagement (an outcome) and the drivers of engagement (the causes), and the ability to measure both
- A consistent approach to constructing engagement scores that results in high validity and reliability
- A framework and statistical model that enable us to assess the impact of the various engagement drivers and identify high-priority areas for action
- The flexibility to accommodate other potential influences on engagement that are unique to your culture, strategy, business philosophy, operating practices, and work environment

How long does a typical employee engagement survey project take?

An employee engagement survey is a process, not an event. A typical survey takes about three months, from initiation to final results. There are several phases in this process that are critical to the effectiveness of the survey and generally determine the time required:

- Initial project planning to define the scope of the project and responsibilities of each party, identify optimal data collection methods, develop a survey communications plan, and identify any organization-specific issues that should be integrated into the questionnaire
- Developing the questionnaire and tailoring the survey to your particular culture, business strategies, operations, and work environment
- Collecting the survey data, typically online or on paper — or a combination of both
- Tabulating and analyzing the data
- Producing final deliverables (e.g., written summary of key results, presentation to management) and providing recommendations for improving employee engagement

What involvement will our HR staff have in this survey project?

Although Buck's well-developed survey management process minimizes the demands on your key people, a successful engagement survey requires a partnership that combines our expertise in engagement and the survey process with your knowledge of your organization. Buck typically suggests that clients designate an Engagement Survey Liaison (or Team) to participate in important functions such as development of the questionnaire, identifying the best data collection methods, and facilitating communications throughout the process.

Once the survey is complete, what do we do with the results?

We have one goal: to provide you with action-oriented recommendations for increasing the engagement of your workforce. Following Buck's presentation of key findings and recommendations, your first step should be to communicate a summary of the results to your employees, along with your organization's plans to follow up on the results. A systematic action-planning process typically occurs at different levels of the organization — e.g., organization-wide, at the business unit level, and within departments — to address specific issues. A follow-up survey is usually conducted 12 to 18 months after the initial survey to assess the effectiveness of the action plans.

How can Buck help us with the action planning after the survey results are analyzed?

What sets Buck apart from most survey research firms is the depth and breadth of organizational consulting expertise that we bring to bear on the business issues uncovered in your survey. We have experienced consultants in human resource management, organizational behavior, organizational communications, compensation and benefits planning and program design, change management, and talent management. Buck can help you in the action planning process by:

- *Communicating the results to employees* – The credibility of the survey process depends on employees' belief that you've heard what they said. Buck communications consultants can help you develop a feedback plan that is right for your organization. Possibilities include PowerPoint presentations for groups of employees, newsletter articles, a focused publication with question-by-question graphs of results, a one-page summary of the major findings, or one-page "Management Briefs" that summarize department-specific findings. Paper and online summaries are available.

- *Developing your action planning process* – Buck management consultants can assist you in creating and implementing an action planning process to engage employees in solving problems uncovered in the survey. Such processes often involve focus groups with selected respondents to dig deeper into the reasons for the patterns of responses in the survey, uncover specific examples that illustrate how opinions were formed, and understand possible actions that might improve respondents' perceptions. Other stages can involve working with action-planning teams to identify priority improvement issues, develop concrete action plans, and design metrics to monitor progress on implementing the plans.
- *Engagement-related consulting services* – Often an engagement survey uncovers issues in areas such as compensation, communications, supervisory and leadership development, talent management, benefits, human resource management, and the like. Buck's subject matter experts can assist you in developing action plans to articulate a human resource strategy, activate culture change, improve employee communications, design a pay-for-performance compensation system, revamp your performance management system, or create strategic benefits programs — all with the overriding goal of maximizing employee engagement.

Does Buck offer other employee surveys in addition to employee engagement?

Buck has full survey capabilities in many areas. In addition to our Employee Engagement Survey, Buck's core Employee Listening Survey Suite includes the following surveys:

- Total Rewards and Benefits Optimization
- Health Care and Wellness
- Communication Effectiveness
- Organizational Culture
- Retirement Planning and Benefits

[an engaged workforce]

Buck also has considerable experience developing tailored surveys on other topics to meet your organization's business needs. For example, we can conduct market and customer surveys, assess an organization's readiness for technology change, evaluate training and development needs, assess the effectiveness of total rewards statements, or evaluate the climate for and effectiveness of diversity initiatives.

How do we get started?

If your company is interested in learning more about or executing an employee engagement survey, contact Don Strickland, Ph.D., principal, at 314.560.0320 or donald.strickland@buckconsultants.com, or Kate Van Hulzen, principal, at 713.658.3420 or kathryn.vanhulzen@buckconsultants.com.