

Switched on or switched off?

WHAT EMPLOYEE DISENGAGEMENT LOOKS, FEELS AND SOUNDS LIKE,
AND WHAT IT CAN TEACH US ABOUT IMPROVING EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

insync[™]





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Introduction

What is employee disengagement?

This research paper reveals what some of the worst examples of employee disengagement look, feel and sound like. And it's not pretty. Everything about it feels alarming and out of place. It should make all of us very uncomfortable and determined that disengagement be stamped out. Disengagement at its worst is typified by the statement made by an employee in one of our focus groups who said; "Coming to work has been like torture over the past few months... I was engaged but my spirit has since been broken by my manager."

You can feel the emotional pain and agony that was being experienced by that employee. And those were only their spoken words. You can probably also imagine the extremely negative inner dialogue that must have been going on, over and over, inside that person's head. And it shouldn't surprise you if those negative feelings and inner dialogues were causing an increase in stress at best and at worse, depression and a poor state of mental health.

This paper illustrates 20 of the most negative employee comments we've heard or read over the last decade together with a related image as "a picture can tell a thousand words". Also included are 20 comments and a related image that depicts the opposite. The comments and images are presented within our RAMP framework of employee engagement shown on page 5. The comments have been sourced from the hundreds of interviews, focus groups and workshops that we have conducted and from the comments made by the many hundreds of thousands of employees that have responded to our employee surveys.

Employee disengagement is not the same as a lack of employee engagement. Most organisations will have employees who are not engaged but they are not necessarily disengaged. Those employees are normally regarded as being passive. They are not actively working to promote the organisation's interests, but they are also not working against the organisation's interests either. Disengagement is at the other end of the scale. Disengaged employees are actively negative and this is reflected in the way they think, feel and act.

Disengaged employees dislike coming to work each day, are not proud of their workplace, feel little or no sense of belonging, are unlikely to put in any extra discretionary effort and in fact may work to undermine the organisation's activities. Consequently, they are likely to talk in a derogatory manner about their employer.

And disengagement can be contagious. Small pockets of disengagement can spread like a disease to other areas of an organisation, contaminating those areas too.

Is employee disengagement visible?

Most leaders are somewhat oblivious to what people are really thinking and feeling in their workplaces. They think they are in touch and they often ask the right questions but their employees rarely share the unvarnished truth with them. Most cultures prioritise harmony over hard conversations and most employees are conditioned to do all they can to keep the boss happy and tell them what they think their boss wants to hear. Many leaders don't deal with bad news well which further reinforces that culture.

Many of us have walked through someone else's workplace and felt something was not quite right but it has been hard to put a finger on what or why. And even if we had a sense that it was a result of disengagement we wouldn't be able to explain the extent of the disengagement. Those working in a workplace are less able to see what an outsider might see or feel. They become accustomed to the idiosyncrasies of those around them and explain things that go on as the culture or just the way things are done around here.

That is why most organisations carry out a regular employee survey to measure the extent that their employees are engaged and to determine what things they could do to improve engagement.

What are the consequences of employee disengagement?

Disengagement can be very damaging. It can build up anger, resentment and mistrust which puts a massive handbrake on an organisation's ability to achieve outcomes. The stress, depression and poor mental health associated with disengagement is very costly both financially and psychologically including increased absenteeism or presenteeism. At its worst it can also result in the sabotage of your efforts.

Other Insync research has shown that disengaged employees are at least six times less likely to contribute to increased productivity and more than seven times less likely to innovate than engaged employees. That should be no surprise. Why would you expect disengaged employees

to be productive, innovative, or try to positively advance the organisation's interests?

The concept of reciprocity is alive and well in our workplaces. I'll scratch your back if you scratch mine. If you don't care for and look after me why should I do that for you? This is borne out beautifully in a written comment by an employee at the end of an engagement survey who said, "Employees are already undervalued... and you expect a safe and productive workplace as a result! Yeah right."

Many organisations across the globe are implementing cultural change programs to become more customer centric. Not enough of those same organisations recognise that their efforts to achieve customer centricity will be sabotaged if they don't engender a highly engaged workforce. Organisations can't expect to have happy customers on one end of the phone line if they have unhappy employees on the other.

The evidence is clear. You will not be able to develop a productive and innovative workplace, robust risk and safety culture, or strong collaboration and accountability with a high level of disengaged employees. Introducing lots of new training sessions on risk or safety, how to collaborate better or how to innovate will be money down the drain if too many of your employees are disengaged.

But what causes employee disengagement?

Is it all the employee's fault? Or is their disengagement the result of something your leadership team or the managers

of those employees have been doing or not doing? Or at a deeper level is it more about who your leaders and managers really are deep down and is that impacting what they do? For example, is it about the authenticity of your leaders and managers and whether employees think they are genuinely cared for and can reasonably expect their support for their careers and future?

These are hard questions and can be quite confronting. The easy answer and the easy way out is to blame your employees. But in all likelihood the answer is that we as leaders and managers of employees are a large part of the problem. The good news is that we can be a large part of the solution. We have a significant capacity to deal with disengagement in our workplace.

Engagement and disengagement are outcomes. You can't teach someone to be more proud or to have a stronger sense of belonging to your organisation. Those are measures of engagement. Engagement will be driven by and depend on how well you are able to RAMP up your employee engagement as explained overleaf.

What can employee disengagement teach us about employee engagement?

When we feel and empathise with the disconnection and distress experienced by a disengaged employee, it can help us to focus on what the opposite of that might be, and to think about how we can help model and live the opposite in our workplaces. A disengaged employee said that their employer "sells the dream but delivers the

nightmare." That sounds like a pretty dark and terrible place to work, where promises are made and the opposite is delivered.

As we ponder this comment it should make us recognise the importance of not over-promising and under-delivering to our employees. Why shouldn't our employees expect us to be true to our word? And if we do let them down albeit when we hadn't planned to do that, then why wouldn't we apologise and do what we can to make the situation right?

How about the comment, "our managers are not helping each other and try to make each other look bad." That's not hard to envisage as it happens much too often. But can you envisage the opposite? Can you envisage managers going out of their way to make others look good and to heap praise on them? What sort of difference would that make in your workplace if it became embedded in your culture and it was lived every day?

An engaged workplace is typified by the following employee comment, "amazing place to work that allows us to work with inspiring people who are totally 100% committed to what they do and making a difference."

We encourage teams to meet together to discuss the comments and images on pages 6 to 17 to determine what they can learn from them and what they might change in their workplace.

How can you RAMP up employee engagement?

What does all the research say about how you can RAMP up your employee engagement? Or put another way, what are the main levers you can pull to drive an increase in your employee engagement? What are the intrinsic motivators of employees and what will have the most impact on their engagement?

Some of the most important research on intrinsic motivation was done by Edward Deci and Richard Ryan¹. They created their Self Determination Theory where they identified three things as intrinsic motivators: Autonomy, Competency and Relatedness.

Daniel Pink drew on more than 40 years of evidence in his book, *Drive: The Surprising Truth about What Motivates Us*², to conclude that the three main intrinsic motivators are: Autonomy, Mastery and Purpose.

Insync has drawn on Deci, Ryan and Pink’s research and its own research based on hundreds of organisational surveys involving hundreds of thousands of employees to determine the four main intrinsic motivators and therefore drivers of engagement (shown in table 1). Insync’s RAMP model of engagement is shown on page 5 and in more detail at www.insyncsurveys.com.au.

The descriptions under each of the four headings are under constant review. They have been slightly adapted since Insync developed the RAMP model in early 2015 based on ongoing research and experience and feedback from clients.

1 Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2000). Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being. *American psychologist*, 55(1), 68.
2 Pink, Daniel H. (2009) *Drive: The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us*. Riverhead Books, New York, New York.

TABLE 1. THE FOUR MAIN INTRINSIC MOTIVATORS AND DRIVERS OF ENGAGEMENT

<p><i>Relationships</i></p> <p>As human beings, we have a deep need to belong and to feel closely connected to others.</p> <p>Managers of engaged teams live the organisational values, build genuine relationships with team members, understand their people’s goals and aspirations, know their strengths and development needs, and provide support to perform at a high level.</p>
<p><i>Autonomy</i></p> <p>As human beings, we have an inbuilt desire to be in control of our own lives.</p> <p>Managers of engaged teams empower their people to be innovative and accountable, foster mutual trust, focus on outcomes and results, and provide a flexible work environment.</p>
<p><i>Mastery</i></p> <p>As human beings, we have a deep desire to learn and create new things.</p> <p>Managers of engaged teams nurture a high performance culture, provide challenges and opportunities for growth, encourage ongoing learning and development, and provide constructive feedback.</p>
<p><i>Purpose</i></p> <p>As human beings, we yearn for meaning and purpose and to contribute to something greather than ourselves.</p> <p>Managers of engaged teams are authentic leaders with an inspiring vision and purpose, help team members understand how their roles contribute to the organisation’s strategies and goals, and celebrate success.</p>

The RAMP model

	1. RELATIONSHIPS	2. AUTONOMY	3. MASTERY	4. PURPOSE
	R	A	M	P
LIVE & CHAMPION	Organisational values	Flexible work environment	High performance culture	Inspiring vision/purpose
ROLE MODEL	Genuine care	Mutual trust	Continuous learning	Authentic leadership
PROVIDE	Recognition and thanks	Empowerment and accountability	Ongoing feedback	Clear strategies and goals
FOCUS ON	Others	Outcomes	Challenges and opportunities	Linking roles to strategies and goals
CELEBRATE	Diversity and inclusion	Innovation and resilience	Development and growth	Incremental success

Relationships

AS HUMAN BEINGS, WE HAVE A DEEP NEED TO BELONG AND TO FEEL CLOSELY CONNECTED TO OTHERS.

Managers of engaged teams live the organisational values, build genuine relationships with team members, understand their people's goals and aspirations, know their strengths and development needs, and provide support to perform at a high level.

DISENGAGEMENT

looks, feels and sounds like this...



“Stop condoning bad behaviours and cultures that are contrary to the organisation values”

Live and champion organisational values

ENGAGEMENT

looks, feels and sounds like this...



“Upholding values, it is shown everyday on and off the job”

“Pretending they care about us while trying to rip us off”



Role model genuine care

“I have not received any positive feedback ever”



Provide recognition and thanks

“I see that management care about their people and are willing to provide support or assistance in time of need, even if it is not work related”



“Looks after staff really well. From awards nights to financial incentives to very competitive salary and with the salary packaging on top, it’s fantastic”



"I've been made to feel so insignificant"



"Unless you are a caucasian male it is not likely that you will progress in the company"



DISENGAGEMENT

looks, feels and sounds like this...

Focus on others



"The work environment is very uplifting and I feel that the managers really want to see us do well"

Celebrate diversity and inclusion



"Giving everyone a fair go. They are taking in school leavers, seniors without discrimination. Everyone is taken seriously for the job"

ENGAGEMENT

looks, feels and sounds like this...

Autonomy

**AS HUMAN BEINGS, WE HAVE AN INBUILT
DESIRE TO BE IN CONTROL OF OUR OWN LIVES.**

Managers of engaged teams empower their people to be innovative and accountable, foster mutual trust, focus on outcomes and results, and provide a flexible work environment.

Disengagement

looks, feels and sounds like this...

"We're treated like battery hens as opposed to free range hens – you still get eggs, but how happy are the hens?"

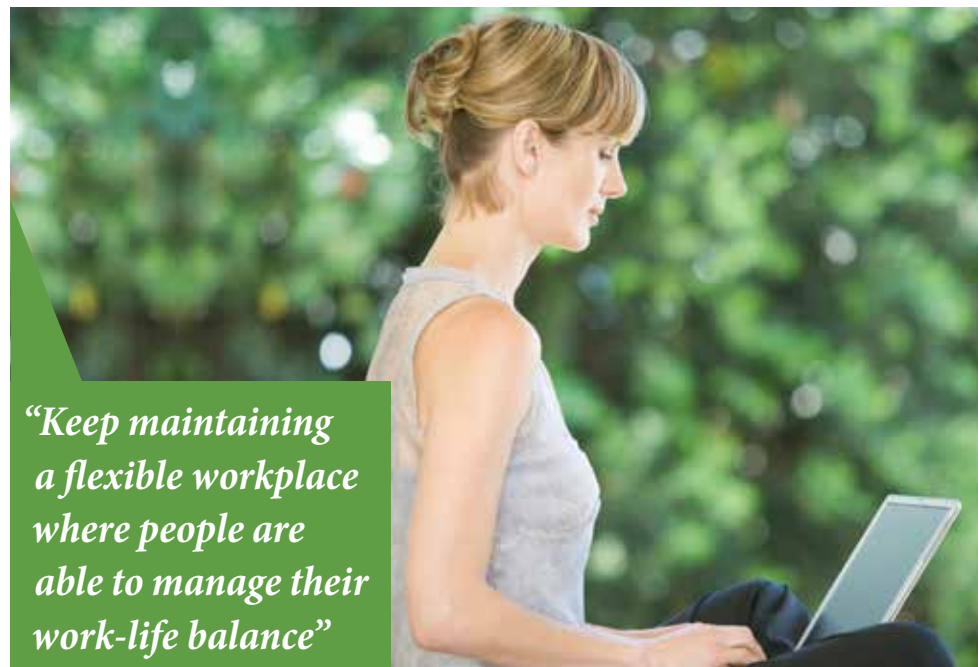


Live and champion flexible work environment

Engagement

looks, feels and sounds like this...

"Keep maintaining a flexible workplace where people are able to manage their work-life balance"





“Our tracking systems make me feel like I’m being stalked”



“It’s demoralising. I have to get sign off for the simplest things”

Role model mutual trust



“I want to be the best I can and do a great job to prove I am worthy of the respect and trust my manager has displayed in me”

Provide empowerment and accountability



“Pushes the employees to get the best out of themselves and provide the necessary tools to do so”

"Our managers are not helping each other and try to make each other look bad"



"Driving a fear based culture"

DISENGAGEMENT

looks, feels and sounds like this...

Focus on outcomes

Celebrate innovation and resilience



"Safety performance and focus is excellent. Everyday, everything we do has a major component focused on safety"



"When someone needs a hand, everyone is willing to pitch in and help out regardless of the department they're in"

ENGAGEMENT

looks, feels and sounds like this...

Mastery

**AS HUMAN BEINGS, WE HAVE A DEEP DESIRE
TO LEARN AND CREATE NEW THINGS.**

Managers of engaged teams nurture a high performance culture, provide challenges and opportunities for growth, encourage ongoing learning and development, and provide constructive feedback.

DISENGAGEMENT

looks, feels and sounds like this...



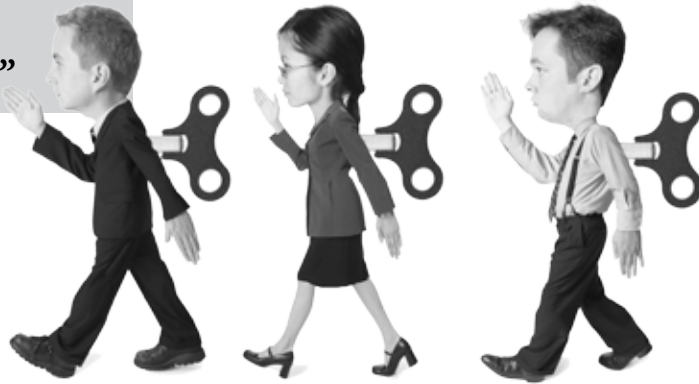
Live and champion high performance culture

ENGAGEMENT

looks, feels and sounds like this...

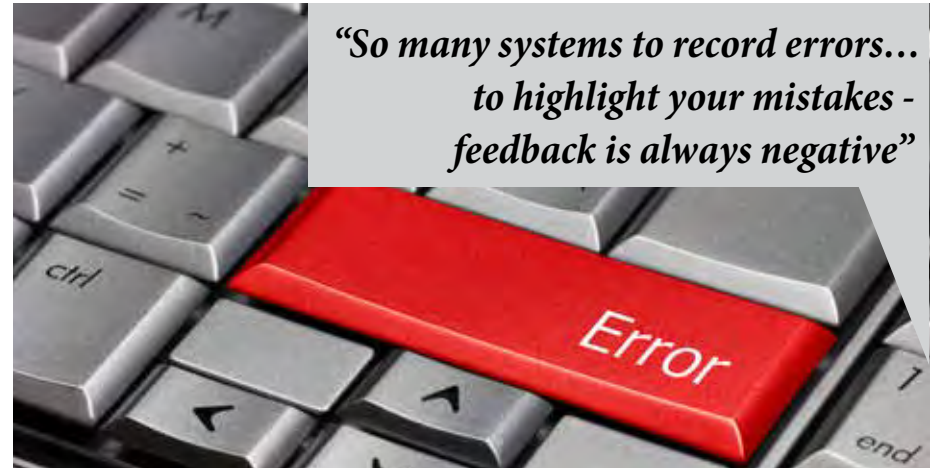


*"I am under-employed
and work on
automatic pilot"*



Role model continuous learning

*"So many systems to record errors...
to highlight your mistakes -
feedback is always negative"*



Provide ongoing feedback



*"It is an organisation that encourages
one to better their skills by holding
quite a number of informative and
educational sessions"*

*"Excellent open communication
with everyone and they always
express their willingness to speak
with them about any concerns"*



“There is no incentive to excel – everybody is treated as being average”



Focus on challenges and opportunities

“I’m constantly lied to about future career development”



Celebrate development and growth

DISENGAGEMENT

looks, feels and sounds like this...



“Gives everyone a fair chance at opportunities and progression”



“There are a lot of opportunities to develop personally – it’s wonderful to work for an organisation that is taking action”

ENGAGEMENT

looks, feels and sounds like this...

Purpose

**AS HUMAN BEINGS, WE YEARN FOR MEANING
AND PURPOSE AND TO CONTRIBUTE TO
SOMETHING GREATER THAN OURSELVES.**

Managers of engaged teams are authentic leaders with an inspiring vision and purpose, help team members understand how their roles contribute to the organisation's strategies and goals, and celebrate success.

Disengagement

looks, feels and sounds like this...

*"We can't be proud
because we don't know
where we are going"*



Live and champion inspiring vision / purpose

Engagement

looks, feels and sounds like this...

*"I'm constantly driven and inspired
knowing that my work is having a
meaningful impact on people's lives"*





“My manager makes me feel useless and only cares how much money he can make for himself”

Role model authentic leadership



“We don’t know why we’re doing what we’re doing, we’re mice in wheels, just doing stuff”

Provide clear strategies and goals



“Executive Management seem focussed, professional and provide a great vision for the company”



“They articulate to staff their short and long term strategic goals”



“Why should I put in the extra effort when my manager will benefit from the bonus”

Focus on linking roles to strategies and goals



“In-fighting ruins any chance of having a remotely good day”

Celebrate incremental success



“My team has far greater alignment and visibility on what is expected and why we are doing what we do”



“Brings everyone together to celebrate success of its employees and show positive outcomes”

DISENGAGEMENT

looks, feels and sounds like this...

ENGAGEMENT

looks, feels and sounds like this...

About Insync

**INSYNC HELPS YOUR ORGANISATION ACHIEVE SUSTAINABLE
HIGH PERFORMANCE BY IMPROVING YOUR EMPLOYEE AND
CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT.**

With over 25 years' experience, we're experts in employee engagement surveys, customer research, exit interviews, 360 feedback and leadership team and board evaluations. We also assist clients with focus groups, action planning, change management and developing and reviewing EVPs and CVPs.

We've conducted over 1,000 employee, customer and board research projects in the last five years. We have helped ACCC, ASX, Cathay Pacific, Country Road, Chevron, CSIRO, GrainCorp, IOOF, John Holland, KPMG, Metro, Mitsui, Newcrest Mining, Nufarm, QBE, Salvation Army, Swire, Sydney Water, Toll, Visy, YMCA, federal and state government departments and agencies, many local councils and most universities.

We have delivered surveys, research and consulting projects in around 100 countries and 40 languages. We have made significant investments in our people, processes, culture and technology to ensure that we provide cost-effective and actionable insights to clients that make a real difference to their organisation.

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