

Driving Strategic Employee Engagement

*Strategy without an engaged workforce has no momentum.
Engagement without strategy has momentum with nowhere to go.*



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What is Strategic Employee Engagement?

As Human Resource professionals know all too well, employee engagement surveys face the danger of being seen as a check-the-box, HR initiative. However, when done right, feedback from engagement surveys can have a major impact on the execution of strategic objectives. In this paper we describe the Newmeasures' approach to strategic engagement and provide practical tips to help organizations get more out of their employee engagement initiatives.

Most organizations have come to recognize the value of employee engagement. Engaged employees are more loyal and productive. However, not all engagement is created equal. The energy of engaged employees must be focused in a way that creates a competitive advantage for the organization. In other words, the enthusiasm and commitment of engaged employees must be targeted on strategic organizational goals.

For example, if your organization is focused on delivering an exceptional customer experience, then employees need to be engaged in delivering service excellence. If your competitive differentiator is to be the leader in delivering high quality products, then employees need to be engaged in meeting and exceeding quality standards.

While there are common engagement principles that apply to any organization, the key to accelerating your organization's mission is to channel engagement toward its strategic goals (hence the name strategic engagement).

Consider the two sides of this coin at an organization in which innovation is a strategic priority.

Scenario 1: The workforce is engaged, but employees are not focused on innovation.

Why might this happen? Often, the policies and procedures of the organization are not aligned with the strategy. For example, imagine that employees are rewarded for adhering to processes and procedures that historically helped the organization to be more efficient. This encourages employees to stick to the status quo. In this case, employees are working hard, but not on the right things that drive the innovation strategy.

Scenario 2: The workforce is focused on strategy, but employees are not engaged.

Scenario 2 happens when barriers get in the way of executing strategy. For example, let's say employees have a clear understanding of the innovation strategy, and as a result they speak up with new ideas. However, leaders do not provide the support, time or resources to explore these new ideas. The result is that employees get frustrated and stop using their time to be creative or share new ways of doing things. In the end, the organization is no closer to achieving its strategy because otherwise engaged employees are discouraged by barriers.

Given the impact of these two scenarios, we encourage organizations to stop taking a generic view of employee engagement and consider how to align it with business strategy. This allows the organization to identify barriers that get in the way of execution and take action on the topics that will have the biggest impact on the success of the organization.

2. Focus follow-up efforts by applying the survey feedback to operational goals

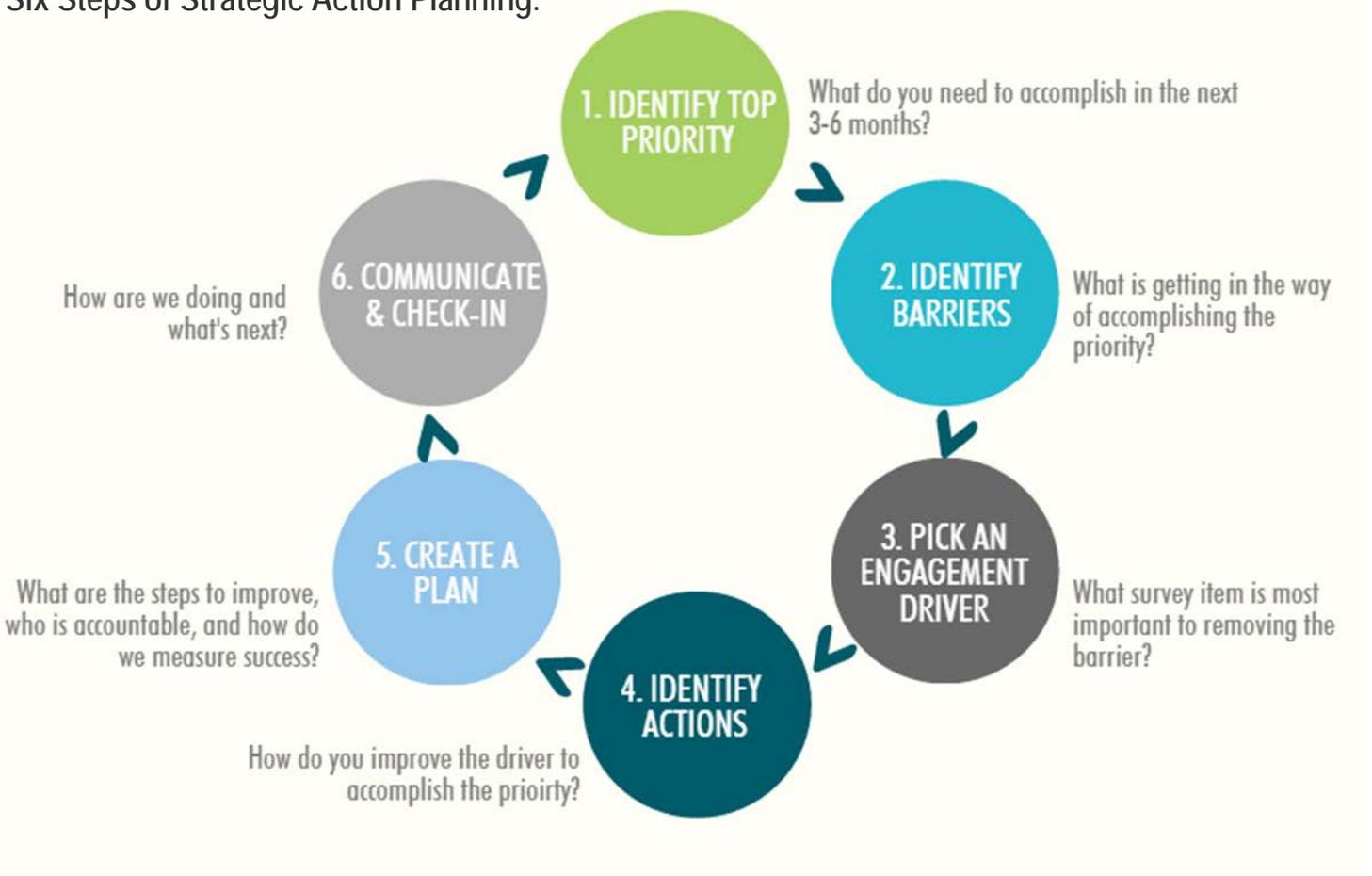
Once data have been collected, the real work begins. The most important part of the survey process is taking action on the feedback. And yet, leaders and employees are busy and rarely are excited about adding another process to follow or action plan to create. In our view, feedback from an engagement survey should be viewed as business intelligence that helps leaders be more effective and get results. In other words, the **results from the survey should not give leaders more work to do, but should help leaders do the work they are already focused on better.**

The Newmeasures approach is to teach organizations how to connect feedback from the engagement survey to operational goals so that the organization gets better at execution while also impacting employee engagement. An overview of this process can be seen below:

An important component of tying feedback to operational goals is allowing all employees to be involved in sharing ideas for removing barriers that get in their way of effectiveness. Organizations that make the most progress do so by:

- > **Taking a top-down, bottom up approach.** Each leader should speak with his or her own direct reports and connect the feedback to business goals.
- > **Involving employees in idea generation.** The people who are closest to the problem often have the best ideas for improvement. Simply asking for input can go a long way to demonstrate that employee opinions and expertise are valued.

Six Steps of Strategic Action Planning.



3. Integrate survey feedback with other business metrics

The last major step of strategic engagement is linking employee feedback to business metrics. Based on the focus of the organization, this could mean connecting engagement data to turnover, performance, quality, productivity, customer/patient satisfaction, or ROI metrics. The goal of this type of analysis is to break down data siloes to better understand where to focus to have the biggest impact on key organizational outcomes.

When conducting a linkage study, be sure to:

- > Focus on the metrics that are most meaningful to the organization
- > Leverage an Industrial Organizational Psychologist or statistician to ensure the use of proper statistical techniques
- > Use the right level of analysis (e.g., link unit-level results to other unit-level engagement, individual results to individual engagement)

THE VALUE OF INTEGRATED DATA

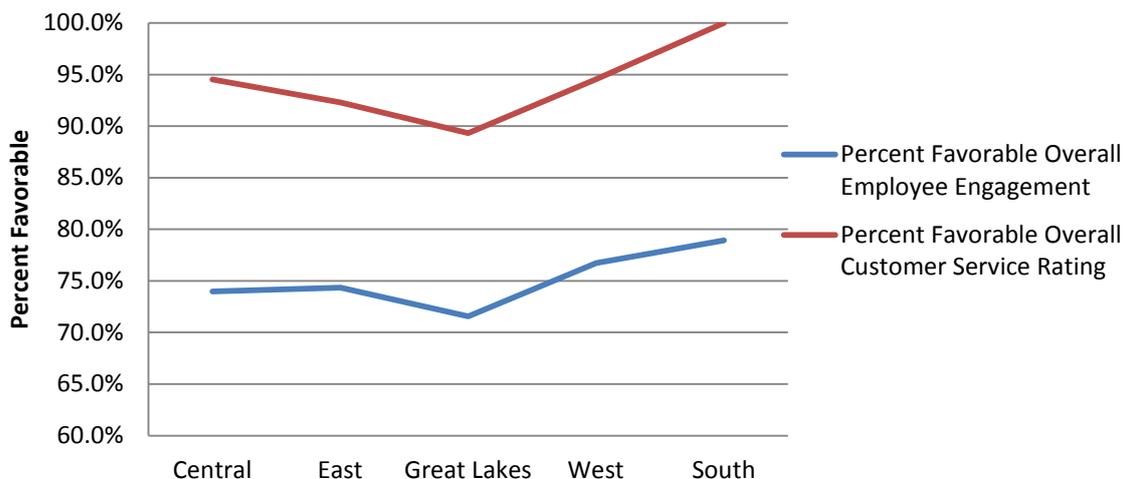
- > See a more complete picture of the organization
- > Make predictions for improved decision making
- > Breakdown data siloes

SOURCES OF INTEGRATED DATA

- > Employee engagement
- > Customer/Patient Surveys
- > Turnover
- > KPIs/Performance Goals
- > Employee Performance Ratings
- > ROI metrics
- > Safety Surveys
- > Leadership Development Tools

Data Linkage Example: Engagement & Customer Ratings by Region

Relationship between Engagement and Customer Service Ratings



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Strategic Engagement: Keeping Momentum

Many organizations do a good job reviewing and taking action on employee engagement feedback when it first comes in. However, change will only happen if the organization keeps its eye on employee engagement throughout the year. Here are some best practices for keeping momentum:

- > **Have regular one-on-one conversations.** Engagement is about people and surveys will never replace the importance of one-on-one conversations. Managers should regularly talk to members of their team to discuss: 1) Are you feeling valued by me, the team and the organization? 2) Are you able to be effective in your role and get results? 3) How can I help?
- > **Connect the dots.** Organizations often do a great job at implementing changes to respond to feedback, but they forget to connect the actions they are taking to the feedback from employees. In the end, it's all about communication. Take every opportunity to say, "we heard your feedback and so we are doing X, Y, & Z." You may feel like a broken record but employees will appreciate that they have been listened to. Nothing kills engagement faster than giving feedback and feeling like it was ignored.

- > **Incorporate engagement into existing methods for tracking performance.** Focusing on engagement is an important responsibility for any leader. Managers should be held accountable for engagement via the same methods that are used to track other key performance indicators. That could mean a goal on a performance evaluation, regular report outs on progress, or how people are considered for raises and promotions. When engagement is incorporated into how leaders are evaluated, it gets more attention.
- > **Quarterly team check-ins on action plans.** In addition to regular one-on-one conversations, leaders should revisit the topic of engagement with the team at least quarterly. Ask: 1) How are we doing against our plan for improving engagement? 2) What should we be thinking about next?
- > **Dig deeper with pulse surveys.** The annual employee engagement survey is great for understanding big picture trends that can spur action. To understand if change efforts are effective and to be proactive about monitoring new challenges, use short pulse surveys to check in on key issues.
- > **Tell stories.** Senior leaders should check in with teams to hear about how changes that have been implemented have had an impact. As leaders, sometimes we forget to ask, "What's going well?" Share these stories with others throughout the organization. This is also a great opportunity to connect the work that is happening to the organization's vision and values.
- > **Share best practices.** Often, leaders throughout the organization are working to solve the same problems. Be sure to share creative solutions so that other leaders can benefit as well.





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