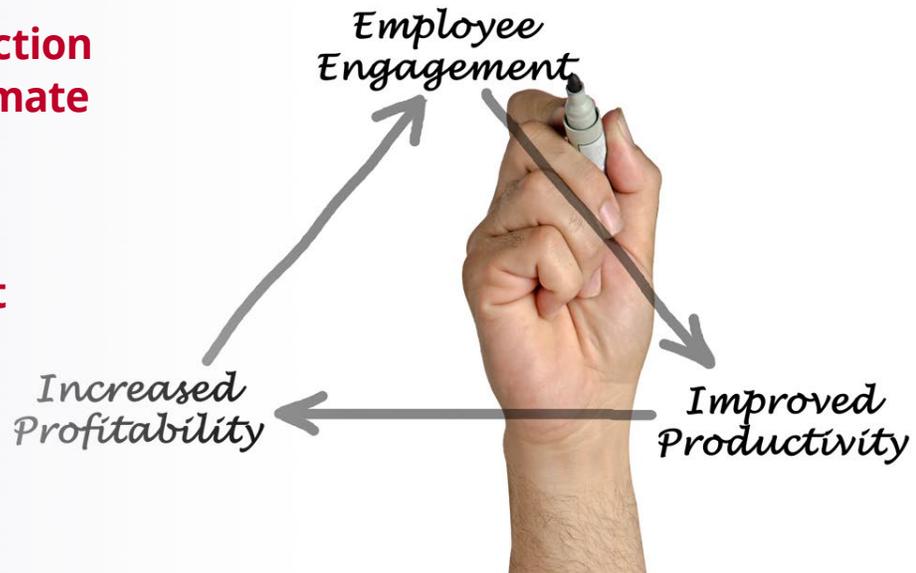


EMPLOYEE SATISFACTION – THE RIGHT MEASUREMENT FOR ENGAGEMENT?

- ▲ Surveys to improve satisfaction generally only measure climate
- ▲ Climates can easily change but rarely show long-term performance improvement
- ▲ Climate is an outcome of culture – Start with culture first



Employee satisfaction surveys abound; should they? We see post after post about employee engagement and articles that describe how important it is to have the right perks so that workers will be happy at work. Companies lavish workers with programs and offerings to retain employees, because they perceive “it’s a fun place to work.” If that is the case, why do Gallup’s recent Engagement surveys report that of the roughly 100 million full-time employees, **only 33% are described as “Engaged?”** **While world-class organizations generate engagement in 70% of employees,** the rest are struggling with “Actively Disengaged” or “Not Engaged” workers. What sets them apart? One thing is certain: Measuring workers’ contentment is not an effective way to deliver improved business outcomes.

What causes high performing enterprises to generate such an improved level of engagement? They have established the habits, attitudes, beliefs and expectations that create satisfaction and repeatable success. Called **“Organizational Culture”**, these commonly accepted ways of doing things in order to fit in effectively determine the behaviors and decisions of the members and thus their performance. The leaders in these organizations recognize that they have accepted the challenge to mentor and grow those who are responsible for the tasks that need to be performed. They understand that there is dignity in work and that people want to know that their work is meaningful. When team members become confident knowing that they choose to become accountable for their work, they become actively engaged.



Employers who seek to create “happy” environments are focused on the climate within the organization.

They look to create an environment in which work-life balance issues are addressed. Or they create an atmosphere within the workplace that is energizing, pleasing and comfortable. So we see workout facilities, yoga classes, ping-pong tables, snacks and other happiness perks. These are admirable steps, affect the internal “Net Promoter Scores” and generate high marks in satisfaction surveys. Establishing a proper climate is important. Unfortunately, climate can be highly transitory.

Leaders come and go. A new leader may come on board and announce, “We need a new culture here, and I am authorizing the following steps immediately.” This is followed by the initiation of some of the programs mentioned above or other climate shifting efforts. The leader’s efforts gain traction and climate scores rise. Unfortunately, despite the uptick in happiness and possibly better reviews on Glassdoor, it doesn’t necessarily translate into more traditional outcomes, productivity and profitability.

What happened? Although the leader declared a desired culture change, the efforts produced only climate changes. The underlying behaviors that people are implicitly expected to display were not affected. So although the leader engaged in well-meaning efforts, without the real culture changes underneath, real performance will remain the same. The climate changes will likely disappear with the leader’s departure to a different post or company.



I live in a part of the States where we only get 9 inches of rain a year. Immediately to the east, it rains even less. Yet, an hour’s drive in this direction leads to a highly productive farming region, renowned for its alfalfa and melons. Yet both crops require far more water than the average rainfall in the region can provide. In wet years, there might be enough water. In drier years, the crops would wither, hostage to the fickle climate of wet vs dry. So how do they do it? A permanent irrigation system that takes advantage of the snowfall that accumulates in the mountains to our west. The runoff, accumulated in reservoirs, provides a steady flow of water to the region and a prosperous farming community. Even if the climate changes and the area experiences a drought period, which happens occasionally, the irrigation system, channeled through the water from the reservoirs, maintains the crops.



MISSION **VISION** **VALUES**

What maintains performance, or improves it, in organizations is culture. The leadership that invests the time and energy to develop a robust “irrigation” system of Mission, Vision, Values and Purpose will yield consistent performance and a “climate” of success. Climate is an outcome of culture, not the other way around. When a good culture exists or leadership moves to install one, the efforts at climate are embraced as a confirmation of the culture.

Enlightened, high-performing organizations invest relentlessly in culture and track it continuously. Only then do their efforts in terms of climate yield meaningful results. We can capably show leaders the impact of their culture on their current results and where the opportunity lies for exponential improvement.