

# INFLUENCES

## ENGAGEMENT

The 2007 ASTD Employee Engagement Survey answers the questions:  
How many workers are engaged? How much does it matter to the learning function?

By Andrew Paradise

**E**mployee engagement results from a host of workplace factors, such as compensation, quality of work, personality characteristics, and even the existence of a friend in the same work location. But maintaining worker satisfaction across such a wide array of domains can be a daunting task.

While it is widely accepted that employee engagement is vital to business success, there is no obvious path in pursuit of it. Many organizations have started to rely heavily on the learning function for engagement support. As a result, employee engagement has become a salient topic for many workplace learning and performance professionals.

Volumes of advice on increasing employee engagement exist because of its significance to organizational outcomes, but there is little quantitative data on the relationship between employee engagement and the learning function.

ASTD addressed the link between employee engagement and learning in an online survey conducted in October 2007 in conjunction with Dale Carnegie and Associates and the Institute for Corporate Productivity (i4cp). Learning executives, HR professionals, and other business leaders were asked to report on their organizations' practices related to measuring, facilitating, and supporting engagement among their workers.

Responses were collected from more than 750 people, with 84 percent being managers, directors, vice presidents, or CEOs. Thirty-eight percent of the organizations represented had less than 500 employees; 33 percent had between 500 and 4,999 employees; and 29 percent employed 5,000 or more people.

Fifty-two percent of respondents had operations in one country, while 48 percent were multinational. Thirty-five percent of the organizations had revenues under \$50 million, and an additional 35 percent had revenues between \$50 million and \$999 million. The organizational revenues of the remaining 30 percent were \$10 billion or more. Responding firms were evenly divided by industry sector.

### How many workers are engaged?

According to the executives surveyed, roughly one-third of their employees meet the criteria for high engagement, but nearly one-quarter are minimally engaged or disengaged.

The survey respondents tended to agree that engagement is important for multiple reasons that are crucial to business success, such as enhancing customer service, boosting productivity, and driving bottom-line results.

The factors organizations consider indicative of worker engagement and those that influence or drive engagement encompass a range of processes. The respondents agreed that learning plays a key role in shaping engagement, and they ranked learning activities high among the processes they now use—or should use—to engage their employees.

### Effects of engagement

Although perceived levels of employee engagement varied both within and across organizations, there was strong consensus on the significance engagement has on organizational health.

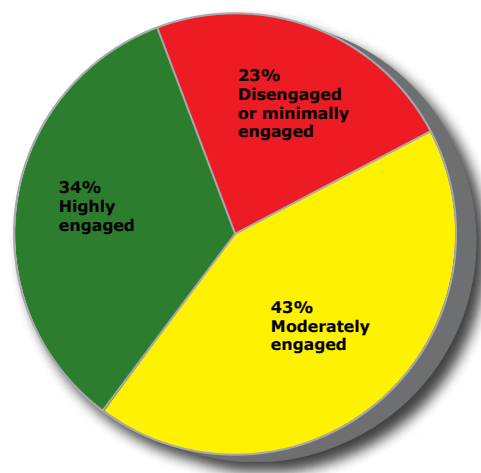
The majority of respondents rated engagement highly important (46 percent) or very highly important (36 percent) to their organizations. Only 4 percent of the executives surveyed did not consider employee engagement important.

A variety of positive organizational outcomes were linked to employee engagement. When asked to provide reasons why engagement is important, respondents from organizations with high levels of engagement cited enhancing customer service and driving customer satisfaction as the top factors. Other high-scoring reasons included improving organizational productivity and the bottom line, positively affecting teamwork and morale, and aligning employees with organizational strategy. These factors also rated high among respondents from organizations with low levels of engagement.

Reducing absenteeism was ranked the least important reason for supporting engagement among organizations with high levels of engagement. However, building a succession pipeline and helping workers live more satisfying lives was ranked the least important reasons by respondents from organizations with low levels of engagement.

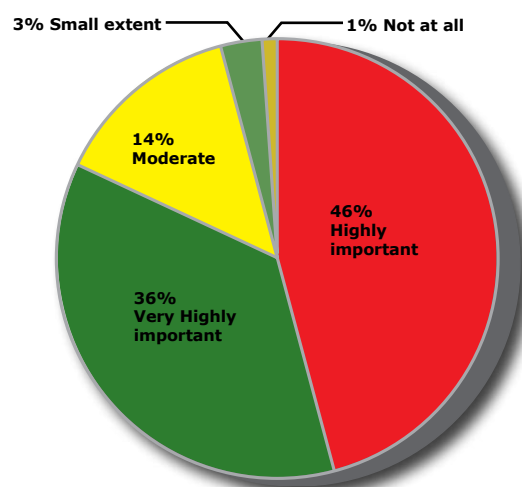
## Perceived Degree of Engagement Among Workers

Source: ASTD Employee Engagement Study



## Importance of Engagement in Organization

Source: ASTD Employee Engagement Study



LISTEN TO THIS FEATURE  
at [www.astd.org/TD/TDpodcasts.htm](http://www.astd.org/TD/TDpodcasts.htm)

## Factors signaling engagement

For organizations with more highly engaged employees, customer satisfaction scores topped the list of key indicators that employees are engaged in their work and employee willingness to contribute beyond the typical parameters of the job was the second-highest rated indicator of engagement for organizations with more highly engaged employees.

Meanwhile, having workers speak positively about their employers, enthusiasm for learning new skills, and apparent enjoyment of their work tied for third place. Market share and tenure were least likely to indicate engagement for organizations with more highly engaged employees.

Willingness to contribute effort beyond the typical parameters of the job was the highest rated indicator of engagement for organizations with more disengaged workers, followed by workers' speaking positively about their employers. The lowest rated indicators of engagement for organizations with perceived low levels of engagement were results from engagement-related surveys, workers' opportunity for advancement, market share, and focus on employees' strengths.

The results of the survey suggest that many organizations measure engagement after the fact. Nearly two-thirds of the respondents from organizations with high engagement levels use exit interviews with employees to measure engagement, while 60 percent use informal discussions with employees. Tracking turnover and regular employee surveys also were popular methods for measuring engagement in organizations with more highly engaged employees.

One of the most startling findings from the study was that only 16 percent of the organizations with more highly engaged employees fail to formally measure engagement, while nearly half of the organizations with low levels of engagement neglect to measure it.

## Learning's effect on engagement

Respondents reported on the impact of the learning function on employee engagement when asked about the factors that influenced engagement in their organizations. Quality of workplace learning opportunities ranked first among respondents from all organizations.

Learning through stretch assignments and frequency and breadth of learning opportunities also were highly

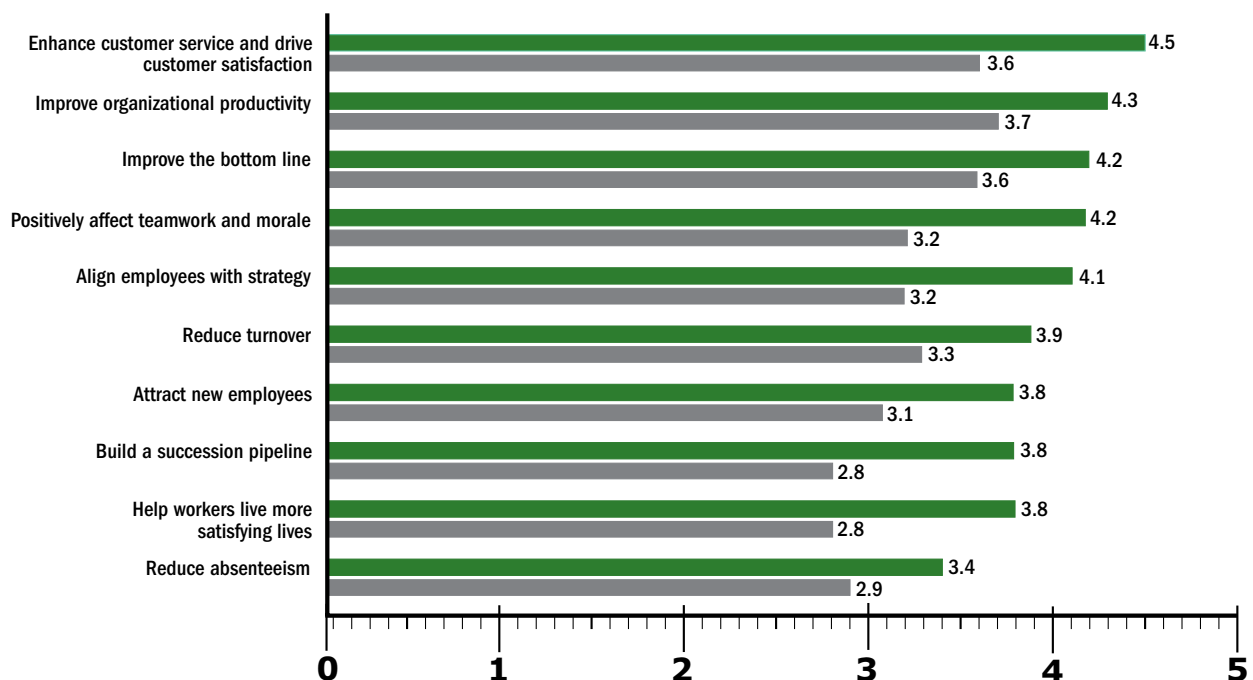
## Reasons for Engaging Employees

Source: ASTD Employee Engagement Study

■ More highly engaged employees

■ More disengaged employees

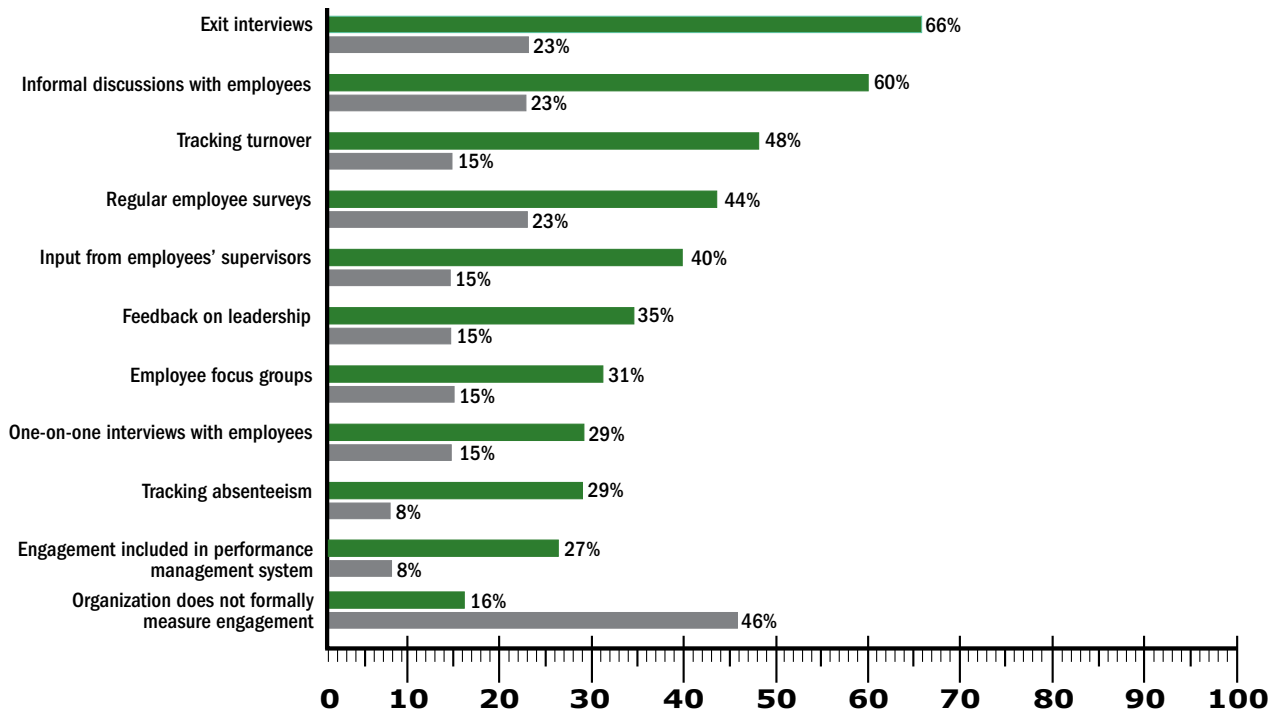
(1 = Not a Factor, 5 = Very Strong Factor)



## Measurement of Engagement

Source: ASTD Employee Engagement Study

■ More highly engaged employees  
■ More disengaged employees

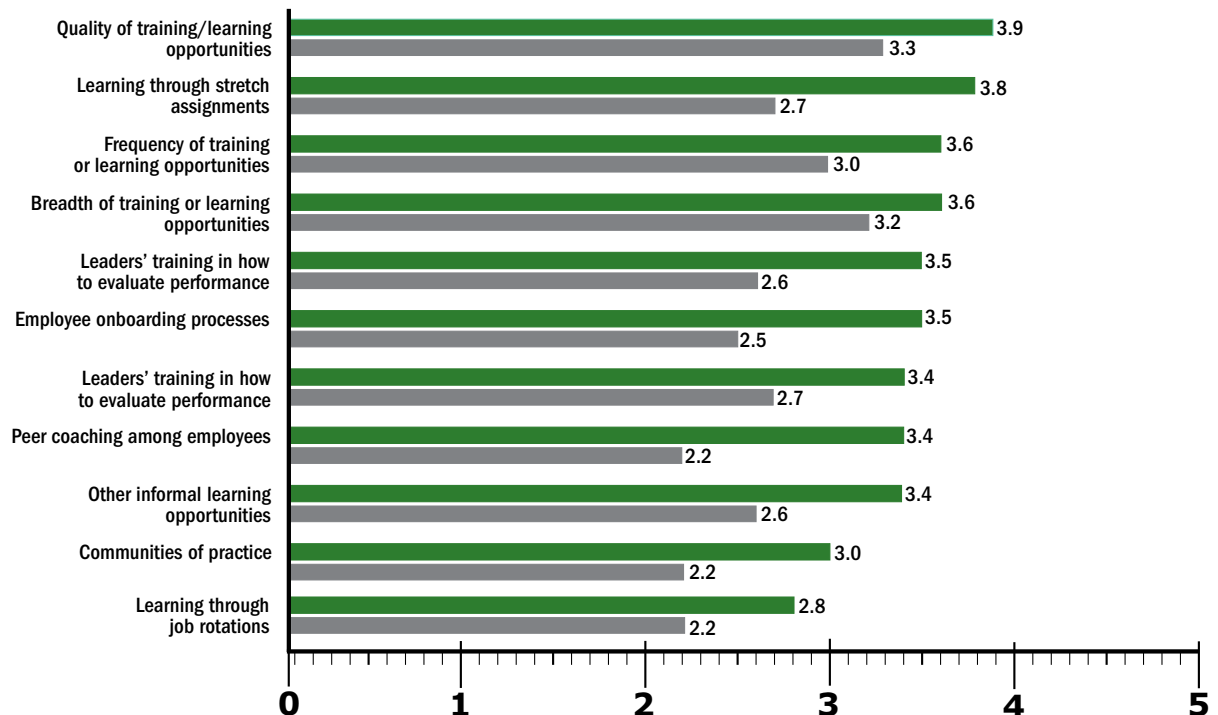


## Factors Positively Influencing Engagement

Source: ASTD Employee Engagement Study

■ More highly engaged employees  
■ More disengaged employees

(1 = Not a Factor, 5 = Very Strong Factor)



rated factors influencing engagement. Respondents from organizations with both high and low levels of engagement considered learning through job rotations and communities of practice as the least influential factors in engagement.

The results of the survey also reveal the relative importance of learning processes that organizations currently use, as well as ones that have the potential to improve engagement. Many of the executives who responded indicated that they rely on workplace learning and performance opportunities to drive engagement.

In addition, many of the organizations surveyed design learning programs with engagement in mind. Providing supervisors with training on how to coach and engage employees were recommended as learning processes that should be in place if they are not already implemented.

### Managing engagement and disengagement

More than one-quarter of the respondents identified all managers in their organizations as responsible for employee engagement. Twenty-two percent of the executives surveyed

stated that engagement was an HR responsibility, 16 percent reported that all employees in the organization were responsible for engagement, and 15 percent listed the executive team as responsible.

Despite other results from the survey linking the learning function and engagement, only 2 percent of the respondents identified their chief learning officers as responsible for engaging workers.

When forced to deal with disengaged employees, respondents from organizations with high levels of engagement rated discussion or counseling between the employee and manager as the top course of action. Determining the causes of disengagement and acting to resolve them was a close second option.

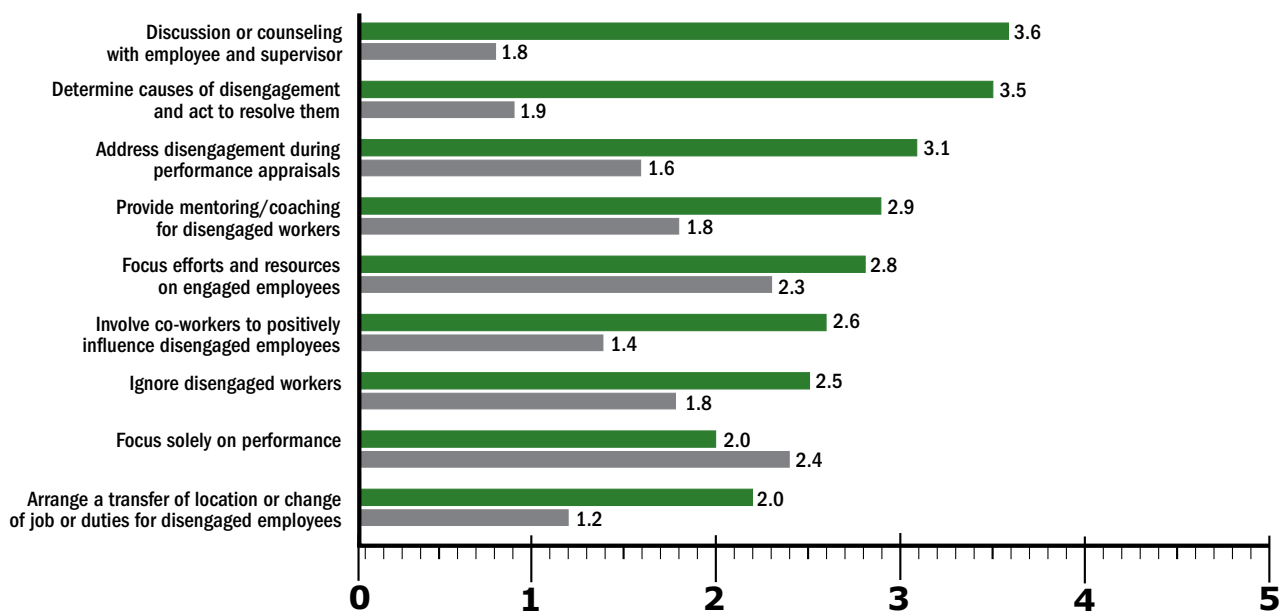
On the other hand, respondents from organizations with low levels of engagement reflected a passive approach in their responses. Ignoring disengagement and focusing solely on job performance ranked highest among organizations with low levels of engagement, followed by focusing efforts on engaged workers instead of disengaged ones.

## Actions to Deal with Disengaged Employees

Source: ASTD Employee Engagement Study

■ More highly engaged employees  
 ■ More disengaged employees

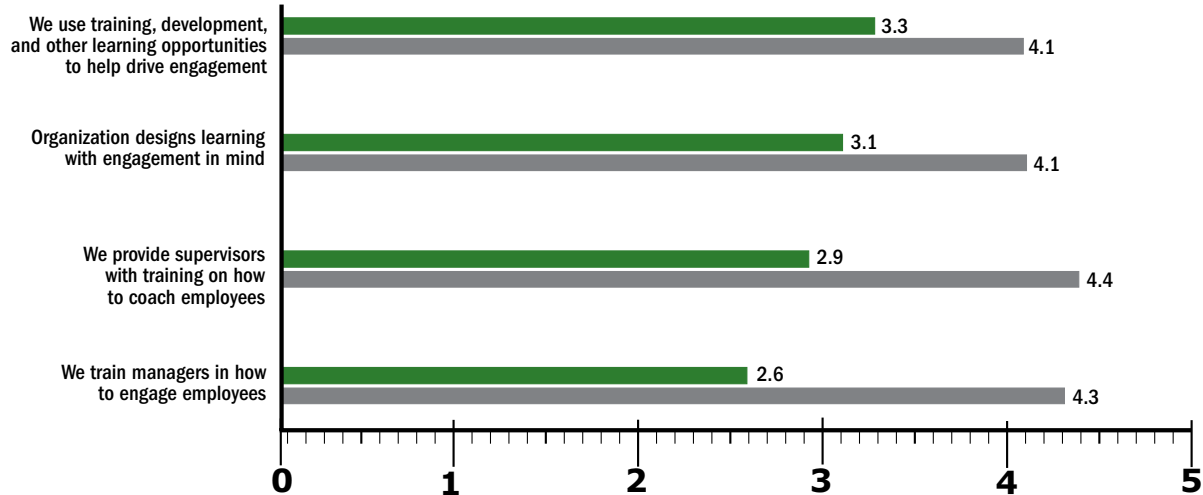
(1 = Not a Factor, 5 = Very Strong Factor)



## Learning Processes to Support Engagement

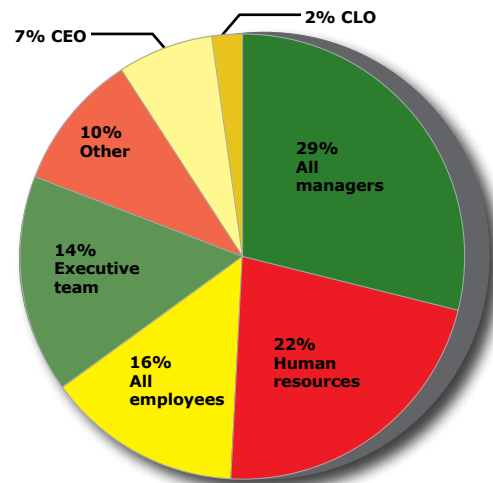
Source: ASTD Employee Engagement Study

■ In place  
■ Should use  
 (1 = Not a Factor, 5 = Very Strong Factor)



## Responsibility for Engagement in Organizations

Source: ASTD Employee Engagement Study



### Bottom line

Comments included in the survey clearly indicate that leaders within organizations strongly acknowledge the importance of an engaged workforce. The respondents agreed that workplace learning processes play an important part in their strategies to influence employee engagement.

However, respondents had a variety of ideas on the drivers of engagement, as well as the factors that interfere with optimizing engagement within their organizations. In particular, the variance in processes organizations are currently using to support engagement and those that they believe they should be using offers remarkable insight into practices that could be adopted to reinforce engagement efforts.

**Andrew Paradise** is a research analyst for ASTD; [aparadise@astd.org](mailto:aparadise@astd.org). For more information about this study and ASTD's other research products, please visit [www.astd.org/content/research](http://www.astd.org/content/research).

### WHAT DO YOU THINK?

T+D welcomes your comments. If you would like to respond to this article, or any article that appears in T+D, please send your feedback to [mailbox@astd.org](mailto:mailbox@astd.org). Responses sent to the mailbox are considered available for publication and may be edited for length and clarity.