

Today's Building Blocks for Employee Engagement

A GUIDE FOR LEADERS





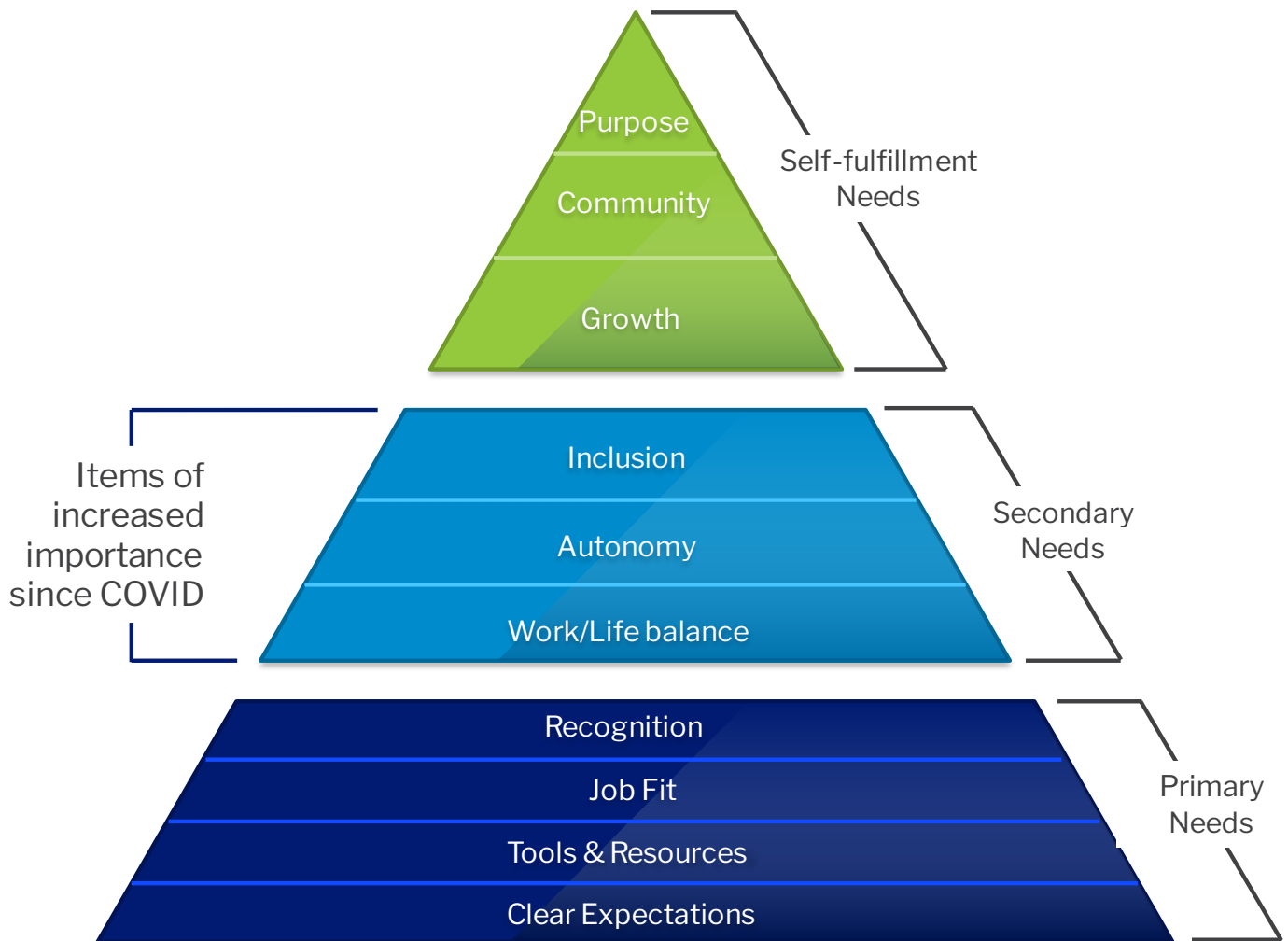
Since COVID, the world of work has changed forever. Employees are rethinking how they work, where they work, and even reevaluating why they work. Suddenly managers are forced to recognize this once-in-a-generation shift. While traditional measures of engagement—job fit, recognition, adequate resources—still hold strong, we need to look toward other factors that resonate with the new reality of work, particularly in the areas of remote work, work-life balance, autonomy, equity and purpose.

Based on global research conducted in 2021–2022, Second Wave Learning has formulated a new framework to help leaders clarify what employees want most in their work. We consider these to be the building blocks of employee engagement



Hierarchy of Employee Needs

A Framework for Employee Engagement



What Employees Want

Level I: Primary Needs

Clear Expectations

Employees need to know what is expected of them at work. A job description is never a comprehensive view of the many nuances of a role. This “mismatch” often results in resentment and disengagement. Plus there are company culture expectations, practices and norms that are introduced that can’t be known until someone is doing the job. This requires tight cycles of feedback from front line managers.



Tools & Resources

How does a carpenter work without her tools? The answer is... not that well. People need adequate tools to help them do their job. This could be updated software, a working camera for video calls, or printer. Climbing walls and latte machines are nice, but not necessary. Focus on the basics. During 1:1’s with team members managers should always ask, “do you have everything you need to accomplish your tasks?”

Job Fit

Every person comes to work with their own unique interests, talents, and skills. But are they a match for the interests, talents and skills required by their role? One of the top reasons employees leave their job is a bad fit for the role. As a manager, pay attention to where the energy is going. Ask yourself, “where is it really working for my team member and where is it not?”

Recognition

Is there such a thing as giving someone too much recognition? No, not if it is earned. Studies show that lack of recognition leads to a feeling of cynicism and ineffectiveness, and ultimately burnout. Recognition sounds like its easy to do, but managers need to pay attention and be intentional in their efforts to recognize good performance when it happens.

Level II: Secondary Needs

Work-Life Balance

Remote work has led to a blending of work and life as employees juggle the daily demands of work from their homes. It has become harder to separate the two and managers are suddenly drawn into the personal lives of their employees. This requires a shift for managers to be more emotionally supportive. Increasing the capacity for empathy is now a new imperative for managers.

Autonomy

Remote work has taught us that when people are given more autonomy (and less day-to-day management), productivity actually increases. 2020 was the beginning of the transition from work being an 'Adult-Child' relationship between managers and employees to an "Adult-Adult" relationship. Managers are realizing they don't have to be hands-on-all-the-time, and employees are grateful for it. The key to good management is touching base with your employee about the right thing at the right time, then, just let them do their work.

Inclusion

If people feel they don't fit into the culture of the organization, they are more likely to leave the organization. Companies have learned the hard way that hiring people that are a fit for their culture sometimes stymies diversity goals. Leaders should embrace the inherent dignity and worth of the people they hire, be curious about them, and be open understanding their point-of-view. Embrace the idea of together but different.

Level III: Self-Fulfillment Needs

Growth

Employees want to learn new things and grow professionally and personally at work. Making high quality, easily accessible training available is an imperative to retain strong talent. But beyond that, managers need to invest time into getting to know their team members on a personal level so they can understand their employees' professional as well as personal growth priorities. The wall between work and life has tumbled into rubble, so managers' new imperative is to go one level deeper to understanding their team members.

Community

It is estimated that community involvement through volunteering increases employee engagement by 71% (United HealthCare, 2019). We are in the era of corporate social responsibility where employees want to see and participate in tangible ways to give back to their communities. The rise of affinity groups, like LGBTQ+, Women Leaders, Working Parents, etc. are not just about advocacy but about ways to be part of and give back to the larger community.

Purpose

People want to contribute their talent to something that makes a difference in the lives of others and the community around them. Increasingly, employees are looking to work for companies whose values reflect their own. Alignment of an employees' beliefs, passions and values is a precursor to higher levels of engagement. Research has shown that having a sense of personal purpose at work reduces stress and increases overall life satisfaction. Managers can better understand their employees' values and beliefs through powerful questions and a deeper dialogue in a setting of trust and shared vulnerability.

The Role of The Manager

According to Gallup, the quality of managers and team leaders are the single biggest factor in organizations' long-term success. We cannot understand true engagement without understanding the manager's role. Our research has identified three key areas that drive engagement. Each of these areas requires managers to change the way they think about their role to be more like a coach than a manager. Here are three key things to consider in this post-2020 work environment:



Active Listening

being intentionally receptive to employees' opinions

One of the most important things managers can do today is listen to what their employees have to say. And not just listen, but actively listen. Active listening is the practice of preparing to listen, observing both verbal and non-verbal messages being sent, and then demonstrating attentive feedback on what was heard. Asking powerful questions is a way to prompt a deeper discussion. Sometimes it helps to add powerful questions like, "What seed might we plant today that could make the most difference to the future of (your situation)?" Based on what you hear, co-build solutions with your employees or supplement gaps with training.

Coaching

the ability to use coaching skills to improve performance

Employee's value being coached by their managers. In fact, most employees would prefer to having a coach more than a boss. Really, who wants a boss? Bosses supervise production, measure progress, and provide correction when necessary. A coach of the other hand encourages development, focuses on strengths and tweaks recommendations that are personalized to the employee. The best coaches practice active listening in regularly schedules 1:1's. The best coaches also serve in a mentorship capacity, guiding employees to greater autonomy.

Professional & Career Development

providing hands-on guidance and advice on what is important

Helping employees with their professional and career development requires active listening, coaching, and ideally, a genuine interest in the growth and wellbeing of their employee. Newly hired worker are particularly interested in hands on guidance in these areas. Being the preferred coach in these areas will deepen the relationship and instill a sense of loyalty that will encourage employee retention—which is particularly important during this period of ‘The Great Resignation’.



2022 U.S. Engagement Levels

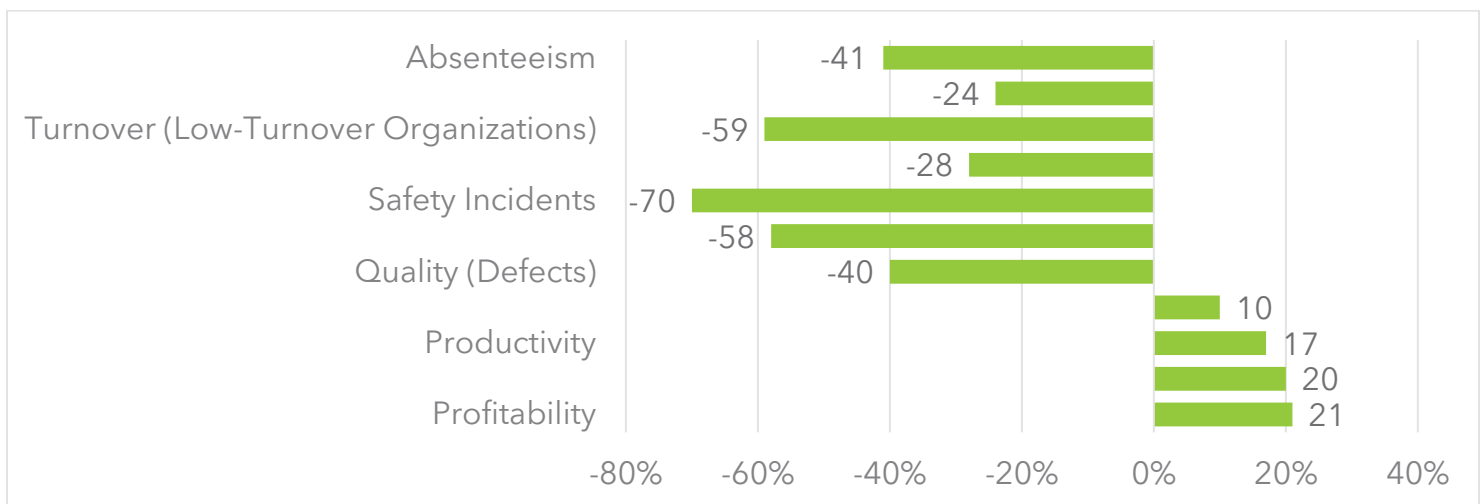
According to our latest survey, only 33% of employees are fully engaged globally. U.S. employees are slightly more fully engaged at 35%. However, this leaves 67% of global employees and 65% of U.S. employees that are either partially or engaged or not engaged.



Source: Second Wave Learning Global Engagement Survey, 2021.

Why is Employee Engagement Important?

Organizations that have high employee engagement perform better on over 10 indicators compared to lower engaged organizations including productivity, absenteeism and quality of work.



Source: Gallup meta-analysis, 2021

