

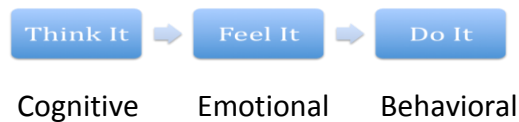
UWI Policy Briefs: *Employee Engagement*

Introduction

The UWI *Strategic Plan 2012-17* contains an HR Perspective entitled “Employee Engagement & Development. The sub-theme “Culture of Employee Engagement” has the following goal:

Create an organisational environment that promotes personal growth and development for employees and positive cognitive, emotional, and behavioural states directed toward optimum organisational outcomes.

Employee Engagement (EE) is a term used in the literature with its associated body of research and knowledge. The UWI goal reflects a prominent definition of employee engagement namely, *a positive cognitive, emotional, and behavioral state directed toward positive organizational outcomes”* (Shuck & Wollard, 2010). The relationship could be expressed logically as:



Why is EE important? Sustained worker productivity and quality of output directly depend on the level of engagement. Research in the USA reveals that--compared with disengaged staff--engaged employees (Shuck & Wollard, 2010, Slide 6):

- *Average 27% less physical absenteeism than their peers*
- *Save an average of 86.5 million days per year in lost productivity (USA)*
- *Are 87% less likely to leave an organization (5 times less likely than employees who are not engaged)*
- *Are 57% more likely to be involved in discretionary efforts*
- *Work 20% harder than those who are not engaged*
- *Score between 12% and 34% higher in customer satisfaction ratings*
- *Disengaged employees cost the US Economy between \$250-300 Billion annually in lost productivity*

A 2001 Gallup poll attempted to measure the amount of EE in US firms and estimated it to be slightly above a quarter as depicted in Figure 1. If rates are that high in a first world country, can they be any better in developing states? If they are that poor in the private sector, can they be any better in a bureaucratic organization?

In April 2011, UWI conducted a university-wide *Employee Engagement Survey*, and over a year later the results have not been made public, but they should provide an approximation of the state of EE regionally. The purpose of this policy brief is to explore what is known about EE and its implications for the UWI policy.

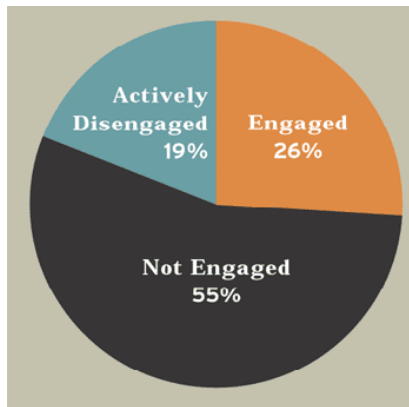







Figure 1: US worker engagement levels. Source: [Gallup Business Journal](#) (2001)

Literature Review

To provide a conceptual framework for the range of possible levels of engagement the Table 1 was developed when a review of literature revealed no consistent or standard continuum of engagement. The *Gallup* classification in the Figure 1 may be an oversimplification.

Table 1. *Five Levels of Employee Engagement*

ICON	LEVEL	TITLE	DESCRIPTION
	1	Ownership Engagement	Employee goes beyond what is required and takes ownership as if they have shares or behave the way the owner would in a given situation; passionate, innovative, self-starting, a champion, a leader in their area
	2	Positive Engagement	Employee fully meets most or all performance standards and shows strong positive emotions and commitment towards the job/enterprise
	3	Fragmented Engagement	Employee is doing well in some areas of their job but not in others; mixed emotions and motivations
	4	Passive Engagement	Employee is “working-to-rule,” just doing enough to get their paycheck, does not care about the customer or outcomes, sees the job as a way to pay the bills; does not like to come to work; will leave if offered a little more money somewhere else
	5	Negative Engagement	Actively acting out anger or unhappiness; disruptive, undermining, maybe engaging in outright sabotage

Source: (Gedeon, 2011)

Perhaps, the EE survey designers/analysts could link the results to this taxonomy so each level of UWI would know where it stands (on a scale of 0-5) with respect to EE levels. Of course, the task then becomes to move the average ever upward towards “Ownership Engagement.”

What causes EE to increase and what kills it? There are many theoretical perspectives that have answers for this question. Historically, EE surveys were called “Employee Satisfaction” surveys (ESS). The assumption is that a satisfied employee is a productive (or engaged) employee. Figure 2 diagrams the “Needs-Satisfaction” model (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1977), which makes the following assumption-linkages: an employee’s needs are supposedly satisfied by some type of job characteristics to some degree, and as satisfaction increases, job motivation will also increase, which will translate into increased productivity.

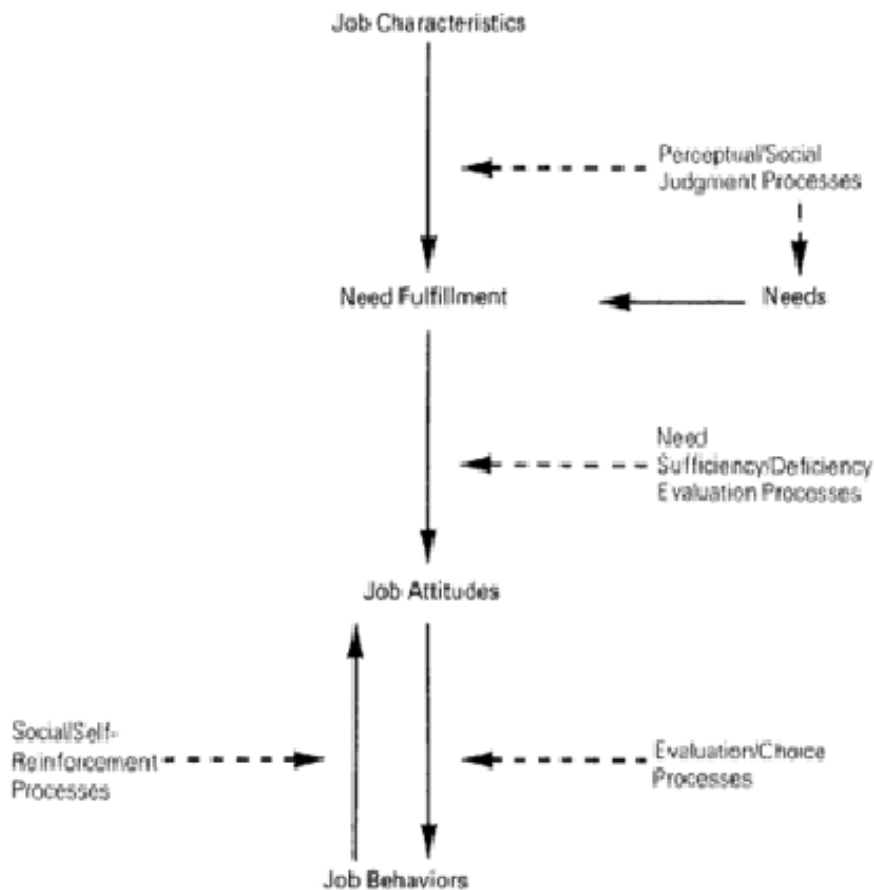


Figure 2: Needs-Satisfaction Job Model

Source: Salancik & Pfeffer, 1977

Bowling (2007) questioned whether a *happy worker is automatically a productive worker*. All the employees’ needs could be met in a ‘country club’ type environment but would that necessarily motivate higher levels of productivity? His research revealed that, “...the satisfaction–performance relationship was partially eliminated after controlling for either general personality traits (e.g., *Five Factor Model* traits and core self-evaluations) or for work locus-of-control and was almost completely eliminated after controlling for organization-based self-esteem” (p. 167). He therefore concluded, “Organisational efforts to improve employee performance by exclusively targeting job satisfaction are unlikely to be effective” (p. 180). In other words, personality and other factors played a significant role in performance.

Performance on the individual level is a function of both motivation and ability (skills), given the resources and supportive environment necessary to perform the tasks. A skilled employee who is not motivated will have weak performance just as an employee who is highly motivated, yet has inadequate skills. Much of the emphasis of ESS has been on the motivational side to the exclusion of the competency and systems components of performance. The following is a list of motivational theories in chronological order that have been applied to improve job satisfaction. Because of the complexity of human behavior and the amount of variables in operation, the literature still does not have a unified theory of satisfaction.

- 1954 - *Hierarchy of Needs* - Maslow
- 1957 - *Needs-Satisfaction Model* - Argyris
- 1959 - *Motivation-Hygiene Theory* - Herzberg
- 1963 - *Equity Theory* - Adams
- 1968 - *Expectancy Theory* - Porter & Lawler
- 1969 - *ERG Theory* - Alderfer
- 1975 - *Acquired Needs Theory* - McClelland
- 1976 - *Range of Affect Theory* - Locke
- 1980 - *Job Characteristics Model* - Hackman & Oldham
- 1983 - *Dispositional Theory* - Pulakos & Schmitt
- 1997 - *Core Self-evaluations Model* - Judge
- 2003 - *Importance-Satisfaction (I-S model)* - Yang

Therefore, one way to solve this problem of the “Satisfaction → Motivation” linkage is to focus more on the theories of *motivation* and what causes it instead of focusing exclusively on *satisfaction* (hoping that it is a driver). Closely related to motivation is a related construct of employee “engagement” as a variable that impacts performance, which appears promising. “Current research has suggested that organizations working to increase **engagement** and **commitment** among their employees positively influence productivity, turnover, profit generation, and ultimately create competitive market advantage. While many organizations believe cultivating engagement and commitment are promising strategies, research on exactly how to develop an engaged, committed workforce is remarkably undeveloped” (Shuck & Rocco, 2011).

There are several definitions of EE which involve the construct of “satisfaction:” “Employee engagement refers to the individual’s *involvement* and **satisfaction** with as well as *enthusiasm* for work” (Harter, Schmidt, & Hayes, 2002, p. 269); “a positive cognitive, emotional, and behavioral state directed toward positive organizational outcomes” (Shuck & Wollard, 2010).

Satisfaction is an emotional state, EE goes beyond emotion to involve thinking and action which is a more comprehensive theory, but it integrates all three areas. In summary, the *3E Model of Engagement* (Shuck & Wollard, 2010) is: Think it → Feel it → Do it! Satisfaction theories just say, “feel it.”

The Individual Process Model of Engagement (Figure 3) represents engagement as the person and their environment. “External Characteristics” are what others can see and include life conditions (demographical information, health, family, etc.) and behavior. “Internal Characteristics” are cognitive and affective states that are eventually expressed through decisions and behavior.

Kahn’s (1990) seminal grounded theory of employee engagement and disengagement posited that engagement is the concurrent expression of one’s preferred self and the promotion of connections to others. Disengagement is the withdrawal of one’s self and of one’s preferred behaviors, promoting a lack of connectedness, emotional absence, and passive behavior. The choice to express or withdraw one’s

authentic self is the emotional, social, and physical act of employee engagement. Humans become drawn into their work, physically and emotionally, in ways that display how they experience work. “Self-expression underlies what researchers refer to as creativity, the use of personal voice, emotional expression, authenticity, non-defensive communication, playfulness, and ethical behavior” (Kahn, 1990, p. 700). Workers chose to “express and employ their [authentic] selves...or withdraw and defend their [authentic] selves at work” (Kahn, 1990, p. 692).

Hiring the right person is important because of the need to align personality traits, needs, interests, goals, and competencies to the job and workplace, but once they are in the system, besides competency development, management really only has control of the work environment, which is comprised of two major areas:

1. “**Tangible Elements**” such as coworkers, supervisors, policies, procedures, access to resources, job descriptions, communication
2. “**Intangible Elements**” such as level of challenge, trust, collaboration, culture, perception of recognition, support, civility, authenticity and these can be seen to emerge from interactions of the Tangibles and perceptions of the individual

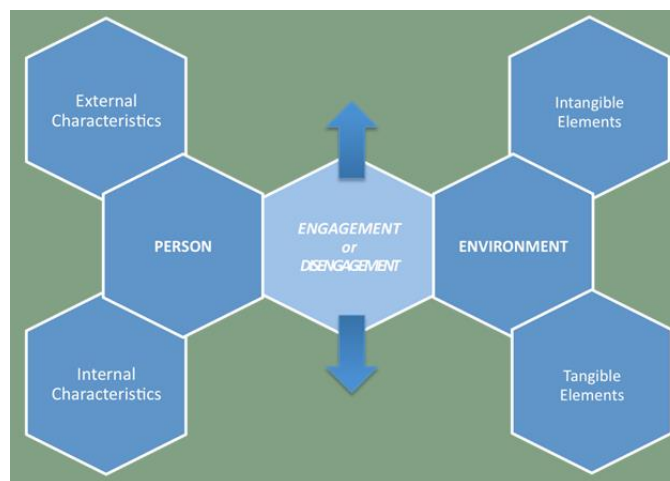


Figure 3: The Individual Process Model of Engagement

Source: Shuck & Wollard, 2010

For further information (beyond the scope of this brief) Thomas Gilbert’s *Behavior Engineering Model* (1978) provides a detailed classification scheme for Tangible and Intangible factors in terms of the individual versus the environment.

Performance can therefore be summarized by the following formula:

$$\text{Performance} = \text{Ability} + \text{Motivation} + \text{Supportive System/Culture/Conditions}$$

The importance of good systems cannot be understated: “If you pit a good performer against a bad system, the system will win almost every time” (Rummler & Brache in Chevalier, 2007). The overwhelming concentration of organizational problems--contrary to popular opinion--do not have to do with people (15%), but dysfunctional systems (85%) as researched by Hartt (2012) in the USA. Yet, few organizations have any department that ensures that systems are relevant, efficient, effective, designed for current

realities and provide the easiest way for the customer to conduct a transaction (online, or one-trip, one-stop-shop, no runarounds).

Having only the first two components (Ability and Motivation) of the “Performance” equation are necessary but not sufficient. Part of the “Supportive System” is management treatment of staff. Shun-Hsing Chen (2006, p. 497) found that, “As organisations focus on customer relationship management, they should not forget that employees are also internal customers. Organisations have satisfied their customers only if they have also satisfied their employees.” This has implications for a university that wants to be known for being both “customer-driven” and “student-centered.” Staff with low motivation rates or even hostile attitudes created by toxic management, supervisory practices, and dysfunctional systems will undermine this effort.

Comprehensive Employee Engagement Measurement Framework

There are many schemes to classify the topics, areas, attributes, dimensions, components, or domains of the job used in employee engagement surveys. Given the latest findings in the literature, a hierarchical structure is proposed to provide an overall conceptual map of the engagement territory (See Appendix). UWI survey items can be updated or generated using the “Survey Objectives” and “Attributes” column questions as a checklist.

Implications for UWI

Some organisations use the ‘chase-the-ratings-approach,’ where each year they try to improve their scores of the EE survey annually, by half-baked, piecemeal “improvements” that are not well thought out, strategic, or systemic. Instead management must ensure that:

1. Systems are updated--which is a whole Perspective (“Internal Operational Processes”) by itself, in the *Strategic Plan* but because of its technical nature it is not well understood by the average manager and requires assistance from organizational specialists and institutional support, as many processes that are used are not within the managers’ control to change
2. All HR ‘organisational capital’ (how we deploy and manage employees) processes are upgraded which is addressed in the *Strategic Plan’s* “Employee Engagement & Development” Perspective
3. UWI executive leadership and departmental management must win the trust of their staff or they will act in a “work-to-rule” manner and be very cautious and legalistic in their dealings with management; leaders must model the behaviour they want to see in staff and have management skills appropriate for their positions, as management is not just common sense; this is also being addressed in the *Strategic Plan* through training but that will not be effective until a 360-degree appraisal system is adopted to expose dysfunctional behaviour so that it can be addressed
4. Culture change, which can only come about when leadership and management change *first*
5. While staff competencies is sometimes the problem, (Hartt, 2012) as has been mentioned), only constitutes about 15% of the total of organizational problems, nonetheless, managers need to be trained to differentiate “system” problems from “people” problems so that the correct solutions are applied, as many times system problems masquerade as people problems
6. Many negative staff attitudes are an emergent property mostly driven by working conditions and culture (not a character flaw) and cannot, therefore, be addressed directly, but by improving all

aspects of engagement, especially placement (matching the employee with the job that is most appropriate for their talents, skills, interests, values, goals, personality, etc.)

Recommendations

System, culture, and leadership change, which was a strategic theme in the previous *Strategic Plan 2007-12*, was the weakest area of achievement, as revealed in the five-year *Review* of the *Plan*. So while The UWI has strategic objectives and is aware that these things need to be addressed there is probably a lack of understanding on how to approach these tasks in a systemic and strategic manner. HR tends to see itself as a “people” department which provides an individual focus which is only 15% of the problem (Hartt, 2012). 85% of problems are dysfunctional systems and HR staff are not trained to recognize or solve them and there is no other unit on most campuses dedicated to this task. It cannot be done by IT alone as business process reengineering requires organizational system design skills (not only IT system skills).

Given the literature, history, and capability of the UWI in addressing EE concerns, the following recommendations are tabled, in addition to the strategic initiatives already being pursued.

Long-Term:

1. To follow through on Implication #1, a systems (process) improvement unit should be established that will address both campus-wide systems and support those that are more local to the departments, it would also be a partner with the *Single Virtual University System* programme to execute some of the projects, many of which are attempting to make uniform systems across the campuses, IT has a major role but cannot do this single-handedly

Medium-Term:

2. Deficient areas revealed in the EE Survey should be made known to management in general and the strategic initiative teams so they can make adjustments in approach or priority
3. A 360-degree appraisal system should be adopted and assertive action taken on deficiencies that surface
4. Heads of Departments and their staff must monitor their level of performance in their routine functions relative to a standard (i.e., in addition to the *Operational Plan* reporting) in order know how to direct their improvement efforts by identifying both system and people causes of performance gaps—as both have an impact on EE--therefore, they should institute a performance reporting system based on plan-versus-actual data and not merely the traditional historical or ‘achievement’ reporting that just reports positive events

Short-Term:

5. The EE Survey should be modified to include all areas outlined in the Appendix table and administered at least every other year
6. For academic end-of-course evaluations, the lecturers must be aware of their shortcomings and be directed to the appropriate training or developmental activities to address them (CET&L)
7. More people skills need to added to Head of Department training so that the ATS do not feel so alienated. We are a very rank-conscious culture. The more rank the more superior, the less rank the

more inferior. Ranking dehumanizes relationships. ATS staff need to be brought in at each stage: problem identification, solution generation, and implementation. Their opinions must be valued, not only by superiors but by Senior Administrative and Professional staff. Some type of sensitization sessions may be helpful in this regard.

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APPENDIX

Employee Engagement Dimensions for Survey Design

#	Dimension	Attributes	Survey Objectives
1	Organizational Context	The organization as a whole, its mission, vision (direction), values, products/ services, history	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ How does the employee perceive the organization that they work for? ▪ How does the employee perceive the products and services the organization produces? ▪ How much is it aligned with employee’s personal values?
2	Leadership/ Management	The organizational leadership and management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ How well is the leadership/management team leading the organization to fulfill both its strategic and operational goals?
3	Culture	The norms, values, beliefs, attitudes, and practices, methods of communication, recognition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ How well does organizational culture enable the employee to perform well and feel accepted?
4	Development & Growth	Coaching, mentoring, career development, training, education, seminars, conventions, counseling, promotion, etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What are the opportunities for immediate and long-term development and growth? ▪ Examples: Achievement, power, affiliation
5	General Working Conditions	Compensation, benefits, financial & non-financial incentives, pay increases, promotion, working hours, safety, HR practices, policies, performance management/appraisals, regulations, non-work activities (sports day)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Do the general working conditions meet staff needs? ▪ Are there any working conditions that distract or de-motivate them from doing their job?
6	Supervision	Support of the direct superior via setting expectations, direction, priorities, coaching, feedback, recognition, fosters engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Does the direct supervisor provide a supportive work environment and relationship?
7	Immediate Job Support	Materials, information, equipment, tools, money, time, coworkers/team, and other support; environment is safe, clean, secure, & organized	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Are all the things that staff need to perform their job consistently available?
8	Process	Which process(es) does the job find their home in; degree of process, outcomes, and customer awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To what extent do staff understand the bigger (process) picture? ▪ To what extent do they go beyond the requirements of the job to ensure better outcomes?

9	Job	Duties, responsibilities, knowledge of procedures, performance standards & feedback, scheduling of work vs. employee readiness, opportunities for OJT learning, skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy, experienced meaningfulness-engaging, experienced responsibility for outcomes, authenticity, level of challenge, motivation, motives, right position, mastery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To what extent does the job match their talents, capacity, and skills? ▪ To what extent are they committed and passionate about their work? ▪ To what extent do they feel challenged?
10	Employee - Living Conditions	Living situation, family, residence, lifestyle, religion, distance from work, general health, etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ How does the job and working conditions align with work/life balance or quality-of-life?
11	Employee - Cognitive	Aptitude, education, knowledge, skills, experience behavior, and ability to learn	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To what extent does the job match their talents, capacity, and skills?
12	Employee - Emotional/ Personality	Motivation, commitment, attitudes, traits, emotional ability, adaptability, self-esteem, locus of control, and generalized self-efficacy. BIG-5 (OCEAN): openness (S v. N), conscientiousness (J vs.P), extraversion (E vs. I), agreeableness , and neuroticism (emotional stability)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To what extent are they committed and passionate about their work?
13	Employee - Physical	Age, gender, race, capacity, health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Do they have the physical capacity to execute their job?

Source: Gedeon, 2011