FROM DATA TO DIRECTION

DEFINING AN EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT PLATFORM FOR THE MODERN WORKFORCE

SHOULD WE START WITH A LITTLE LANDSCAPING?

There used to be a time when it needed to be shown that employee engagement could have a seriously positive impact on business outcomes. As you now know, that day is done. Today, it's hard to find any HR professional who hasn't fully embraced the conclusions reached by Gallup's research into the subject, such as:

- **Companies scoring in the top half on employee engagement nearly double their odds of success compared with companies in the bottom half.**
- **Business units in the top quarter outperform those in the bottom by 10 percent on customer ratings, 22 percent in profitability, and 21 percent in productivity.[1]**

Also gone are the days when engagement laser-focused on rewards and recognition (do some X; get a little Y) as the top tactic to move the employee engagement needle. The focus now is wider—much wider. We'll spend the rest of this guide examining why it needs to be, and how you can use this expanded vision to your company's best advantage when selecting the right employee engagement platform for your business.

So that was then. What about now?

Now, sophisticated enterprise-level employee engagement takes its cue from behavioral research that gathers all the global enablers of engagement. It collects and sorts multiple sources of employee data. It identifies the relationships among the many areas affecting employee behavior, like motivation, organizational culture, personal and professional growth, employee health, and total wellness. And then it recommends what an HR professional, elbow-deep in all this information, ought to do with it.

That said, there's still this push-pull thing going on. On one hand, we're seeing this evolution of behavioral research into employee motivation and appreciation. And we're witnessing the increasing acceptance of cloud-based technology that seamlessly integrates with various employee programs and data sources. All to the good.

On the other hand—and this is the reason this guide exists—far too many vendors of enterprise-level solutions continue to focus only on their own small piece of the employee engagement experience. Reward vendors are all about rewards, survey providers are all over their surveys, and wellness vendors will supply you with all the pedometers you can possibly imagine. Also good, so far as it goes. But it doesn't go all that far.

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1 Gallup. How Employee Engagement Drives Growth. June 20, 2013.
   Accessed at http://www.gallup.com/businessjournal/163130/employee-engagement-drives-growth.aspx

And that's a problem. It's a problem because such platforms won't be able to tie engagement to business results, based on behavioral and motivational science rather than rewards and games. They won't be able to clearly identify the connection between your customer experiences and your employee engagement.

They miss the big picture, and therefore some big opportunities.

Because really, there's little point in exerting a lot of time and resources on engagement initiatives if you can't find out if they're actually doing anything. You'd much rather have a fully integrated platform that's sophisticated enough to meet your culture-building needs, but that can also be efficiently launched and begin returning measurable results right away.

And measurable, actionable results are the whole ballgame. It's why there is such a thing as employee engagement.

This document is a guide that describes the three primary challenges facing the employee engagement market today, the opportunities those challenges create, and what to look for in a platform that would allow you to meet those challenges and fulfill those opportunities.

Spoiler alert: What you're looking for is a comprehensive, new-generation, data-driven, outcomes-based global solution to employee engagement. The good news is that's not nearly as hard to find as it sounds.

LET'S GO...

NO DEFINITIVE MODERN MODEL FOR GLOBAL EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

A quick Google search for "models of employee engagement" will yield over a hundred results. So at least you know there are plenty of ideas knocking around out there.

Unfortunately, they can range from the white noise of self-serving consultants to the complicated, unwieldy formulas of academicians that bear little resemblance to anything that ever actually happens in a workplace. More to the point, many of these models are either outdated or significantly limited, focusing on just one element of engagement or on one geographic region of the world.

That just doesn't make sense anymore when you consider the radical changes occurring in global business, in populations worldwide, and in the way work gets done today. Most enterprise-level workplaces are now fully global and multicultural. They support flexible work environments. Crazy as it sounds, they may even have five generations of employees working side by side!

Further churning the mix, all these developments are occurring against an endlessly changing technological backdrop that's transforming how companies and their employees relate to each other.

It's a new employment world. Multiple workplace and demographic changes have permanently altered the engagement equation.

- Employees operate in a transparent job market. In-demand workers can easily find new opportunities.

- Organizations are flattened and disperse. People spend less time in direct contact with managers and supervisors.

- Millennial and Generation Z employees want more job crafting, continuous feedback, timely recognition, and accelerated leadership than their older co-workers ever thought possible.

- The work environment continues to grow in complexity. People who once worked with a team in an office now work 24/7 with email, instant text messages, conference calls, and mobile devices.

- That's a lot going on, and a continual challenge for even the most savvy and experienced HR professional. To bring about effective global employee engagement going forward, employers need to rethink the very nature of their workplace, and to keep on rethinking it.

Fortunately, the sciences of workplace behavior and decision-making have also evolved. They can provide a much more nuanced definition of the characteristics of highly engaged employees than ever before.

The next step is for this science to support a definitive model of employee engagement. What might it look like?

THIS: It would be a blueprint for creating a truly magnetic and attractive organization. It would help companies create high levels of performance and passion that are sustainable, and provide ways to monitor progress and adjust strategies on the fly. More on this later.

HR IS DROWNING IN DATA

Most organizations today conduct some form of engagement surveys. Studies by CEB (now Gartner) show that:

- 92 percent of companies run employee engagement surveys.

- 80 percent of senior leaders believe good employee engagement is a critical part of achieving their business objectives.[2]

So there's plenty of data. Trouble is, quantity doesn't equal quality. Most companies are still in the earliest stage of maturity when it comes to leveraging the full potential of data measurement and engagement survey results. They're struggling with turning data into direction.

There's a reason for that. Companies usually conduct annual or other point-in-time surveys —and stop. One and done. That's ineffective, because these types of surveys often:

- Fail to monitor the trends in sentiment in an organization's culture

- Fail to regularly check the pulse of an organization's culture

- Fail to provide an opportunity to micro-measure specific organizational events, initiatives, or programs, leaving management unable to assess immediate impacts or results

- Aren't supported with tools for plans that can provide practical, immediate, and responsive solutions

- Can't correlate investments in initiatives directly to an impact on engagement measures

So, HR and talent management folks continue to drown in data, while lacking an easy way to:

1. **Navigate planning and effective action**

2. **Measure the correlation between those actions and their outcomes**

In other words, despite the mounds of data at their disposal, today's HR and talent management professionals can't harness the power of behavioral and decision sciences, merge them with HR technology, and then drive effective employee engagement.

It may sound silly, but think of a rain dance: Maybe it rains, maybe it doesn't, but how can you tell if the dance had anything to do with it? Today's employers need a modern platform with truly consolidated and integrated capabilities.

2 Iliyana Hadjistoyanova. The 9 Questions That Should Be in Every Employee Engagement Survey. CEB (now Gartner). May 4, 2016. Accessed at https://www.cebglobal.com/blogs/the-9-questions-that-should-be-in-every-employee-engagement-survey/

HR TECHNOLOGY IS STRUGGLING TO KEEP PACE WITH WORKPLACE MOTIVATION SCIENCE

As noted above, most of today's engagement vendors still maintain a single focus on one of three areas:

- Rewards and recognition
- Engagement surveys
- Health and wellness programs

Yet research by The Aberdeen Group found the most effective strategy for improving employee engagement is an integrated rewards and recognition initiative.3 The finding has spurred tremendous growth among rewards and recognition vendors. That would seem to make sense; these types of programs originate from the time-honored theory that positive reinforcement gets results.

But then things get a little off course. Typical rewards and recognition programs struggle to deliver a direct line of sight to business impact. And that clear line of sight and measurable effect on outcomes is exactly what engagement leaders need to justify their solution investment. Without it, employee engagement is just another line item asking to be whacked for the next fiscal year.

THE MISSING LINK IN REWARDS AND RECOGNITION MODELS

Also as noted previously, the aging concept of employee engagement surveys is also holding enterprise companies back. But here, it's not an avalanche of data that's the problem. The problem is that the approximately $1 billion marketplace of survey providers is largely staffed by industrial psychologists who have built statistical patterns that correlate turnover and engagement with any of several employment variables.

That sounds pretty spiffy. But here's where things slip off the rails again. Engagement survey vendors usually support their surveys and benchmarks with—surprise!—their own models. Although none of these models are "wrong," they too often fail to go any further. They don't prescribe actionable results. Nor do these models suggest client-specific interventions to influence the impact of any actions.

It's sort of like, we've discovered a virus in your company. What to do about it? Well, you'll figure it out.

3 The Aberdeen Group. The Power of Employee Recognition. 2013.

THE MISSING LINK IN HEALTH AND WELLNESS MODELS

Health and wellness vendors promote the concept that healthier, happier employees are more productive and engaged. And it's true; they are. Companies, however, still pursue wellness solutions with the primary goal of reducing healthcare costs.

That's why so many enterprise organizations approach wellness challenges with quick-fix solutions that support heavy monitoring. Or they choose models that have a penalty/incentive approach, which employees feel is invasive or manipulative. (And it's true; it is.)

What's needed are solutions that:

1. **Go deeper into uncovering and identifying the root causes of employee behavior**

2. **Help employees build better habits in a sustainable way**

The common thread of what's missing in these models is recognition of the changes that have occurred in the science of workplace motivation and behavior. Business leaders need a solution that's more comprehensive and more integrated than what they have. They need a solution that can also leverage data for common-sense plans for action.

Companies need to move from the "what" of employee engagement to the "why." Once you know the whys, the whats will become much clearer.
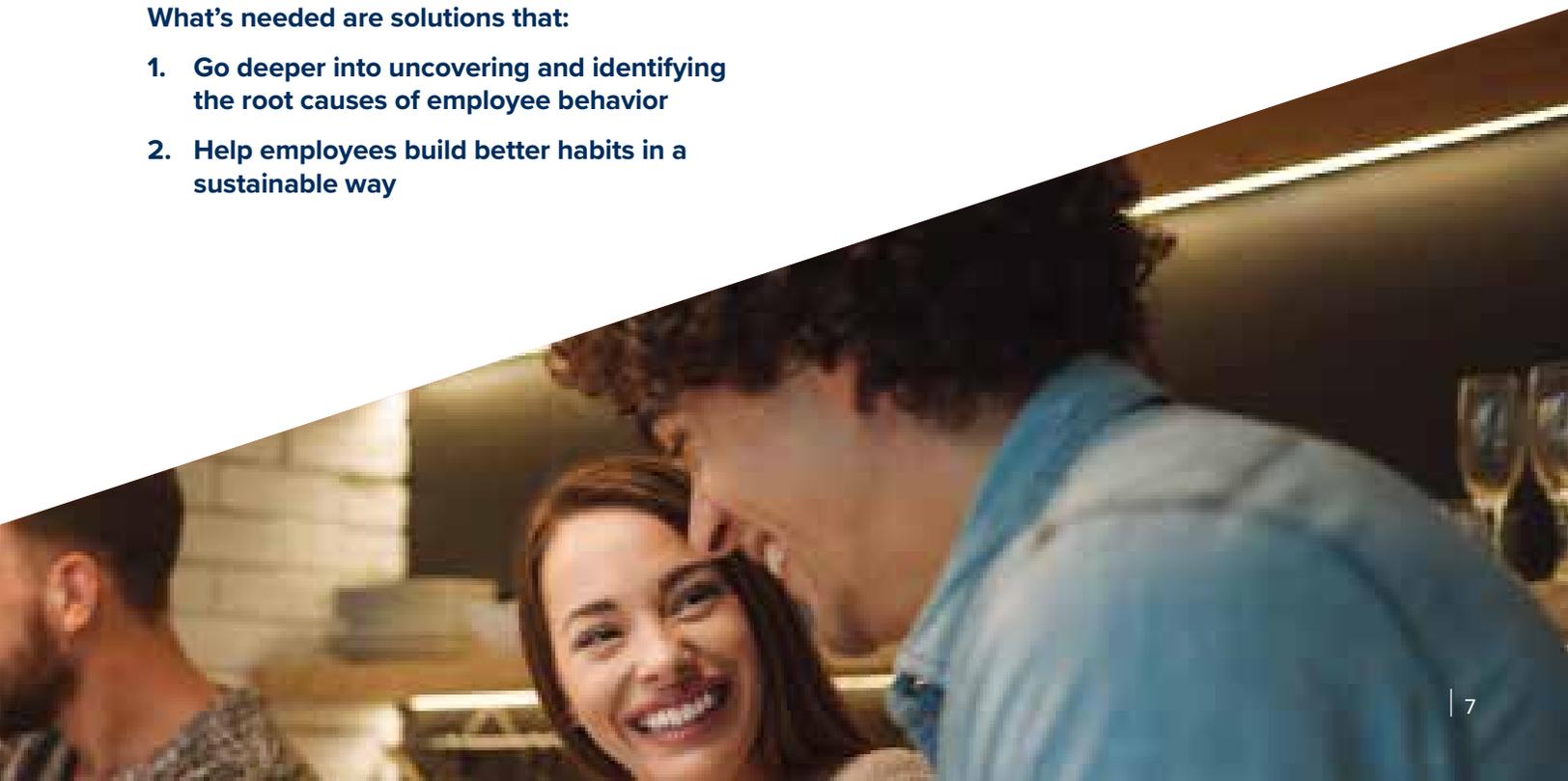
FROM CHALLENGES TO OPPORTUNITY:
POWERFUL, ADAPTABLE, AND PRACTICAL DATA INTEGRATION

So those are the challenges, and to be sure, they can be formidable. Formidable, but by no means insurmountable. Where do we start?

We start by asking what a modern, optimal engagement solution would look like. What characteristics would it have? The challenges began with a model, so let's pick up from there.

A new-generation employee engagement solution would have a proven global model. It would be supported by an expansive platform, with a complete portfolio of programs across:

- Recognition
- Performance
- Health and wellbeing
- Learning
- Career growth

That seems pretty ambitious. It needs to be. The only way for enterprise-level organizations to overcome today's employee engagement challenges is to change the entire employee engagement ecosystem.

Equally important, this engagement ecosystem would be supported with integrated data monitoring and dashboards. It would have tools that go beyond delivering insight and go into program participation and outcomes. It would also be able to demonstrate the impact of implementing that insight on engagement scores and business outcomes. We can't emphasize it enough: real time, real world. Actions and outcomes. Here and now.

Rich data across all programs will provide the foundation for additional data mining:

- Showing the impact of program effectiveness on engagement scores
- Identifying high-potential talent based on feedback, performance, and program data
- Reducing churn by uncovering at-risk employees
- Creating an individual learning path for managers to improve their coaching and recognition skills

What you'd see is a truly flexible and integrated employee engagement platform that would help drive true shifts in company culture. It would help you generate organic increased employee engagement, by which improved internal efforts lead to improved external results:

- Higher performance (measured by better-qualified sales leads or shorter closing runways, for example)
- Stronger talent acquisition (measured by faster time to hire, shorter time to performance, and lower early turnover)
- Better leaders (measured by 360-degree scores and lower employee churn rates)

WHAT'S BEEN STANDING IN THE WAY?

It's not like there's been a shortage of vendors and thought leaders in the employee engagement marketplace talking about big data, dashboards, and ROI metrics. What there has been a shortage of is giving HR and talent management leaders a way to wrap their heads around it all. Never mind giving them a way to translate all that data into outcomes, results, and insights.

We here at Maritz have worked to demystify these concepts. Allow us to give you a quick example of how HR professionals might start bringing these lofty notions down to earth.

We've broken down the measurement of engagement programs into four zones that are progressively more challenging and strategic. The approach is based on proven research that applies economic significance—as real-life as you can get—to programs of workforce engagement and motivation.[4]

4 Kimberly Lanier. Future of Workforce Recognition: Recognitionomics Takes Zoned Approach to Data. Maritz Motivation Solutions. May 21, 2015. Accessed at https://www.maritzmotivation.com/blog/employee_engagement/future-workforce-recognition-recognitionomics-takes-zoned-approach-data/

ZONE 1
Participation Measurement —
Platform Engagement

ZONE 2
Program Measurement —
Program Data and Insights

ZONE 3
Results Measurement —
Business Impact

ZONE 4
Predictive Analytics Measurement —
Modeling Insights

At its core, this system provides a highly flexible framework for enterprise organizations to manage engagement and motivation programs not as "something we're just expected to do," but as business assets with four distinct zones of impact.

An optimal employee engagement platform offers powerful, adaptable, and practical data integration. It gives HR and talent management professionals the opportunity to move their company through the four zones in a systematic, coherent way.

A NEW EMPLOYEE ENGAEGMENT MODEL
THE BLUEPRINT FOR AN INTEGRATED SOLUTION

Earlier, we complained about vendors forcing companies into their preconceived models. We're not going to break our own rule here, but we would like to present a global model for your consideration as a new framework. (It's an example. We're not shoving it on you; promise.)

In 2016, Maritz and Employee Engagement Awards (EEA) in London undertook a two-year effort to understand the common enablers of employee engagement around the globe. We reviewed research, interviewed individuals, and conducted focus groups with HR leaders and academicians in North America, Europe, Asia, South America, and Africa.

That effort has resulted in a global engagement framework. We regard it as a blueprint for a modern integrated solution, based on seven identified enablers of engagement.

Engagement enablers are powerful markers for informing and supporting specific company programs and initiatives that can improve processes and practices at companies worldwide.

With this kind of blueprint, emerging engagement platforms can provide a single destination for HR leaders to plan, support, monitor, and measure the effectiveness of their portfolio of programs.

Purpose	Work Design	Social Systems	Personal Growth	Contribution Awareness	Advocacy	Wellbeing
Why we exist	How we work	Inclusions and connections	Realizing potential	Appreciation for effort and achievement	Taking action to support or recommend	Be comfortable, healthy and happy
Company Programs and Initiatives						
Mission/ purpose/ values statement	Physical environment	Onboarding/ reboarding	Technical training	Feedback systems	Media strategy	Health programs
Shared identity efforts	Goals and accountability	Diversity and inclusion	Leadership development	Recognition portfolio	Employee groups	Job security
	Innovation	Networking opportunities	Social skills	Performance management	Measurement plans	Happiness
						Mindfulness

SIX CRITICAL CAPABILITIES FOR A NEW-GENERATION ENGAGEMENT MODEL

Now we can finally get down to specifics. We've identified six foundational capabilities your engagement platform should provide. Find a platform that meets these standards, and you'll have a solution that will enable you to take your programs from "nice to have" to "need to have," and from there to the happy partnership between engaged employees, satisfied customers, and a growing business.

1 SIMPLICITY

It's one thing to say today's software presents the opportunity for a powerful, integrated, and flexible employee engagement platform. Turning that opportunity into results is something else entirely. And another thing yet for it to be done easily.

Nonetheless, the first capability that a solution should offer is simplicity. Specifically, it should be easy for the administrator or researcher to gather and use the wealth of data the system can generate.

As just one example of simplicity, an optimal employee engagement platform should streamline procedures through customizable templates, such as:

- Fast-start survey templates
- Reports that run from those templates
- Program templates based on those reports

Now, all the talk about big data is nice, but it's way too easy to get bogged down in attempts to develop a comprehensive metric, or wrapped up in impractical webs of surveys, reports, and recommendations. Companies need to simplify by using a single, integrated, and easy-to-use platform for core engagement solutions, rather than choose from a fleeting menu of snack-size solutions yielding different experiences, disparate data, and unquantified returns.

Keeping it simple will ensure the behaviors and attitudes you're focusing on to determine effective recognition and engagement can be efficiently measured, tracked, and closely related to profitability.

2 PROGRAM FRAMEWORK

"Framework" doesn't follow "program" here by accident. When people hear the word "program," the first thing that comes to mind is often "rules that have to be followed," because that's just what you do with programs and rules and such. That can surely be part of it. Yet program more accurately should connote a structure, or a logic, or a process, designed to lead to a specific goal. Or hey, a "framework" that serves as an environment in which culture building can take place.

In our model presented earlier—the one we're not pushing on you—we defined seven dimensions of engagement. These dimensions can be thought of as your big-picture employee engagement rooms, which then need to be filled up and furnished with programs.

In other words, how do you take dimensions like work design, contribution awareness, and wellbeing, for example, and turn them into tangible, everyday things? Well, you do it by thinking of programs, in turn, as interventions. They're the specific vehicles by which you're intentionally influencing engagement across your entire organization.

And that's the foundation for a robust program portfolio, which can consist of up to a dozen or more different programs. Think community engagement, diversity, and employee advocacy, just to name a few. The result is many structures for many people providing many opportunities to communicate your most important initiatives and drive specific behaviors. That's what your platform will need to offer.

We realize this concept can seem a little tougher to master than many of the others presented here, but the main point is to go beyond a simple "if we build it, they will come" approach to getting the type of employee culture you desire. They will indeed come, but identifying your dimensions of engagement is only the start, and not the end, of the process. You really do have to build it. "Program" and "framework" mean "no shortcuts."

3 PERSONALIZATION

As you've probably noticed, humans are social creatures, and they don't leave that innate drive in the parking lot when they get to work each morning. And that's good, because this is why your employees look for personal connections to their organizations, teams, and missions. People crave meaning at work, and want work that's worthy of their personal, emotional investment.

In this context, personal means "personalized." In a world that gets more personalized by the day, the workplace is obviously no exception. Personalized content is critical to engagement— facilitating the delivery of meaningful, contextualized communications with the specific information they need, when they need it, and in a way they can make the most use of it.

In terms of a platform, you want one that allows your employees to tailor their experience by setting personal preferences. This could mean sharing how they prefer to be recognized, being able to view our others' preferences, and filtering company-wide activity to include only their most meaningful connections. Or perhaps even better, it could mean offering multiple device/access options, or allowing UX personalization, where they can choose how they prefer to view their data.

The right culture will encourage every employee to believe they have the potential to drive change, whether large or small. The right platform will empower them to grow personally and professionally, work creatively, form more valuable relationships, and take ownership of their company's success—precisely in the ways that work best for them.

4 MONITORING

In a perfect world, you'd set up your employee engagement programs, and then sit back and watch them thrive for the next decade. Unfortunately, in this world, you'll need to keep a little closer eye on them than that. In fact, you'll need to monitor them. Constantly. And intervene. A lot.

The right reporting tools can't stop at simply collecting point-in-time data and delivering sporadic measurements. These tools should include methods for regular, ongoing monitoring to ensure that what you think will work for your culture is actually working.

This means having the right support to monitor programs in a way that's valid, repeatable, and effective, and do it anywhere in the organization. Listening programs and monitoring tools enable HR leaders to keep in lockstep with the pulse and performance of the organization, to be

able to accelerate or intervene as appropriate by identifying trends or potential trouble spots. Think of these listening programs and monitoring efforts as quick, crucial conversations with your employees that never end.

A vendor in today's employee engagement market should offer you the ability to connect the dots of attitudes, actions, and outcomes throughout your organization to identify trends and quickly act on them, whether good or bad. With the right technology, you can easily quantify program engagement, individual and team performance relative to rewards, and even predict which employees are more likely to leave or more likely to stay.

New-generation solutions are converting advances in behavioral and decision sciences into an even more sophisticated set of tools that enable:

- Building a broader program portfolio that supports not only foundational corporate-wide recognition programs, but also supports programs that focus more holistically on performance and wellbeing

- Embedding behaviorally based game mechanics that provide triggers to prompt or cue action

- Offering a much more expansive set of reward options that go beyond merchandise or gift cards and target individual motivational preferences

- Gathering more data about individual, personal motivational preferences and drivers to target program accessibility, learning, and communications

As every HR professional learns—usually through hard experience—it's much better to be proactive than reactive. And being proactive is a lot easier when you have hard data to back you up.

5 STRATEGIC SERVICES

It's hard to overemphasize the value of strategic, consultative services. Employee engagement is a very simple concept. Effectively implementing and living out that concept isn't simple at all. To get the most from your platform investment, it's likely you're going to need some degree of help, whether low- or high-touch.

The larger an organization, the more complex enterprise-wide engagement solutions can seem across teams, business units, countries, and cultures. Professional, strategic services shouldn't come in and attempt to squeeze your company into a generic blueprint. Rather, they should work to understand where you are, what your organization's assets and resources are, where you want to go, and then collaborate with you on a roadmap to success.

Such services should help navigate:

- *Strategic assessment and planning:* Ensure you have the right expertise and resources to help you assess your current state and then develop the right road map for success.

- *Program operations:* In today's resource-constrained environment, knowledgeable support for survey administration, program launch, reporting, and management can provide your internal teams with valuable bandwidth.

A vendor that installs your platform, winds it up, and then walks away will be of quite limited use to you. Select a vendor willing and able to provide expert guidance and support from day one through the last day of your programs

6 MEASURING AND OUTCOMES ASSESSMENT

We'll say it one more time: What's the use of having mountains of data if you don't do anything with it? The Maritz EX Employee Engagement and Benchmark Study by Maritz found that while 80 percent of companies surveyed believe their recognition programs are at least moderately effective, fewer than half actually measure the program success they claim they're earning.[5]

Kind of astounding, isn't it? An engagement platform needs to put the right measuring tools in your hands. The science of building a great culture involves a cyclical discipline of measurement, action planning, program interventions, communications, monitoring, and adjustment, followed by: more measurement. These tools should be able to provide data quantitatively and visually to enable convenient analysis and definitive actions for improvement.

Measurement capability also means having a vendor that can help you determine which measurements are most important for your culture and goals in the first place. So, as you can see, it's a matter of much more than rewards, recognition, and surveys. It's about partnering with a vendor that has a deep understanding of motivation and how to apply behavioral science to the workplace—your specific and unique workplace.

If you measure the impact that your interventions and actions have on the pulse and performance of employees and business units, you'll join a small group, but one that can give you a large competitive advantage: Only 20 percent of respondents to the Maritz benchmark study said they tie engagement and recognition program investments to business outcomes. A disappointing 5 percent said they incorporate program data into predictive models and measures.[6]

What an opportunity for a company that knows what it's doing.

The right vendor will make sure an outcomes assessment is the final, definitive stop on the path to achieving your stated business goals.

Maritz Motivation Solutions. Employee Engagement and Recognition Benchmark Study. 2017. Download at http://go.maritzmotivation.com/benchmarks_study?_ga=2.204912592.1336609548.1504795165-413463136.1500391670

WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN AN EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT PLATFORM

We've covered quite a bit of ground in this guide. What should you expect in an engagement platform? What features would be essential to deliver the capabilities of simplicity, program framework, personalization, monitoring, strategic services, and outcomes assessment?

In the end, you want a solution that integrates all your data in a centralized way, helps you measure and monitor that data, and leads you to connect the dots across your organization to be forward-oriented and outcomes-focused.

A solution that includes:

- **An end-to-end platform with all-inclusive functionality**

- **A vendor with expertise in motivation and decision sciences, and the ability to apply it to engagement-related data**

- **A platform that can deliver an increased focus on standard integrations and flexible applicant program interfaces (APIs)**

- **Support from strategic services and with targeted measures**

These effects are realized with collecting more data, incorporating personal preferences, implementing game mechanics, integrating outcome data, and applying decision sciences and artificial intelligence that not only give actionable insights, but go well beyond to provide prescriptions and predictions for future success.

There's now a science to highly engaged employees. Ask your vendor if they have the formula for an entire ecosystem of engagement that's held together through culture.

AND NOW, A WORD FROM OUR SPONSOR

Maritz Motivation offers a truly comprehensive approach to culture management and engagement. It's a flexible, easy-to-use, and fully integrated platform that provides a unique suite of capabilities, from culture building through effective recognition to culture monitoring through targeted engagement surveys, leading to actionable, data-driven insights for achieving real-life business results.

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