# Section One

ENGAGEMENT FOUNDATIONS

1

THE CASE FOR EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT: CONNECTIONS VERSUS TRANSACTIONS

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For a while now, the employer/employee relationship has been deteriorating. Some might even say that this relationship no longer exists. Currently, studies estimate that only 11 to 29 percent of employees are fully engaged in their work.[1,2] See Figure 1.1 for a typical engagement spectrum.

What we find when we look at a typical distribution of employees across the employee engagement spectrum is that our organizations are being driven forward by a select few. The bar graph in Figure 1.1 reflects the actual distribution of one of

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Figure 1.1 Typical Employee Engagement Distribution
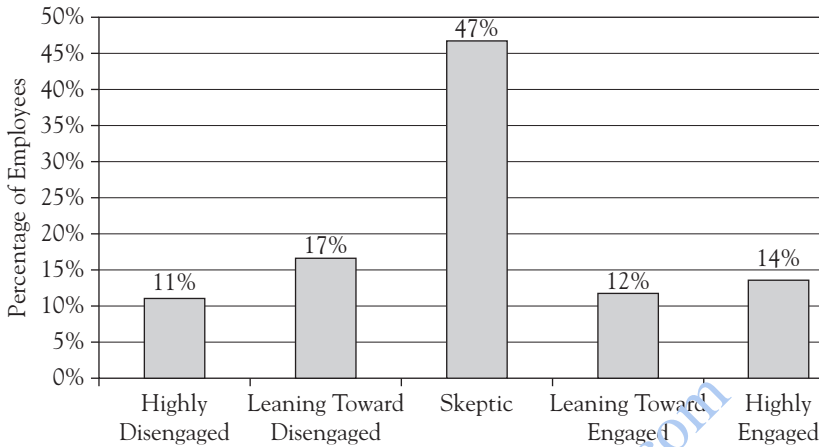
Source: Performancepoint, LLC

our clients and it is not atypical. Our organizations tend to look like a bell curve, with only a small fraction of employees clearly connected to their work and the strategy of the organization. Think about this for a moment. Would we settle for these types of numbers in any other area of our business? Would you be willing to have only 14 percent of your systems, copy machines, printers, or facilities functioning at full capacity? The answer is obviously "no." When we lose capacity in any other part of our business, we invest or reinvest—and we should do the same with our people.

We are challenged to locate qualified associates to meet the competitive standards of today's work environment. It is a struggle to find great employees, let alone keep them, even with only 3.6 million open positions in the United States alone.[3] When the economy falters, and we have an easier time hiring qualified employees because there are more candidates available, we do not hire and on-board them well. In a recent survey completed by Performancepoint, over 42 percent of respondents claimed finding qualified employees as one of their biggest challenges, yet only slightly over 10 percent of them claimed that their organizations excelled at selecting and on-boarding new employees.[4]
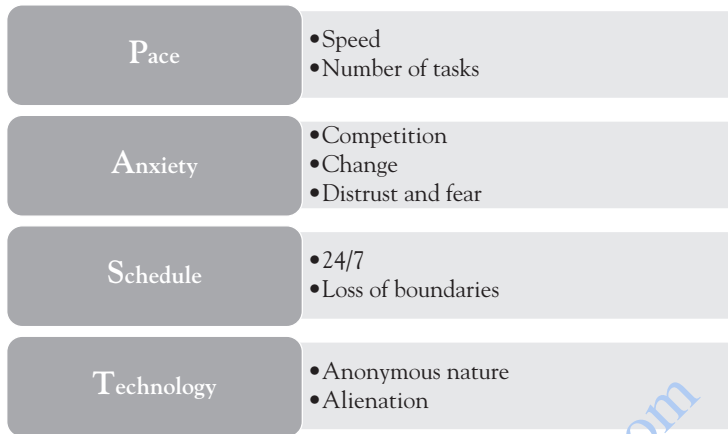
Even when we hire great employees, the complexities that come with managing today's diverse workforce can create difficult retention challenges. In the board room, executives talk about the new generation lacking in a work ethic and the desire of some employees to move up in the organization without paying their dues. To compensate, companies spend a great deal of money looking into the implications of generational differences in their organizations, sometimes forgetting that, while these generalizations can be productively made across larger populations, they cause problems when applied on an individual level.

We must remember that each employee is an individual, and these individuals do not necessarily conform to generalizations. A great example is the contrast between many baby boomers I have met who are tech-savvy and some of the young people entering the workforce who are not. It is even more ironic that some of my client contacts in human resources, charged with improving the current engagement situation at their company, have confided in me that they want to leave and don't feel engaged themselves—a strong signal of the current state of affairs.

On the other side, employees are tired of being taken for granted. They do not feel respected and included. Many employees want more transparency and question senior leadership's choices. Young, old, male, female; it does not really matter; everyone wants to feel more connected. But we have grown to lack trust in our organizations. Performancepoint notes that only 28 percent of employees truly believe in the strategic direction of their organizations and just over 38 percent trust their leadership.[5] We have either been laid off ourselves or know someone who has or we have been asked to be a good corporate citizen, only to watch as some of our fellow citizens are mistreated.

Engagement Factors

How did we get to this point? Will it pass? Or are we condemned to this new world where "everyone is in it for themselves" and it is just too hard to move forward with this drag?

Figure 1.2 Macro Shifts in the Employment Environment

Pace	•Speed •Number of tasks
Anxiety	•Competition •Change •Distrust and fear
Schedule	•24/7 •Loss of boundaries
Technology	•Anonymous nature •Alienation

Source: Performancepoint, LLC

Well, the bad news is that these challenges are not going to go away. The good news is that there are a number of ways to work within this new context. Companies that have figured this out typically experience a significant "leg up" when it comes to the numbers. But that is not the only benefit. To understand how we can work productively in this environment, we need to look at why these changes have occurred. See Figure 1.2 for a number of macro shifts that have caused these changes.

Pace

Everything is happening faster than ever. It is difficult for orga-nizations and individuals to keep up. Many of us are frantic and under pressure on a daily basis. In the last forty years, we have moved from typewriters and land lines to laptops and cell phones. We used to have conversations in the office anticipat-ing the ideal environment technology would bring. Now most of us can be overheard asking questions like, "Do our computers

work for us or do we work for our computers?" The truth is that technology has created two fundamental shifts in our work pace:

- We can process more information faster.
- It is no longer necessary for us to be present when certain work is taking place.

While this sounds great in theory, we are not any faster ourselves as human beings, and now we are straddled with the demand to keep up with more information, more data, and higher expectations of productivity. Specifically, the speed of our work has increased and the number of tasks we must accomplish in a given time period has increased as well. With all of this new capability, we feel the increased demands made by our organizations, leadership, and customers. One study in Europe that was completed over a fifteen-year period found a trend that more workers are experiencing a higher pace of work with an increase in the amount of tight deadlines.⁶ These rising expectations cause us to focus on the "little picture" rather than the "big picture."

In one of our training exercises, we ask participants to achieve a basic goal. We even allow them time to plan how they will approach the task. However, they rarely achieve the goal because they jump right into the task rather than planning, due to their perceived time deadline. Participants focus on the little details and tasks that they can quickly impact, and they just try to get the work done. Interestingly enough, when we review the task at a more strategic level, they quickly realize what high performance could look like and begin to explore why they did not even see the more powerful and productive approach.

When we arrive at work and we have fifty, one hundred . . . some clients complain to me that they have over two hundred or more emails in their inboxes at the start of the day, without being out of the office on the previous day . . . and we have several projects with which we are involved, and a supervisor who has just informed us of a new deadline, we have a difficult time

not getting caught up in that noise. All of us become distracted and overwhelmed at times. We find ourselves asking, "How can I get through all of this quickly?" or "What can I check off the list?" In many cases, we give up a strategic point of view just to complete more tasks, faster. Yes, we are productive, but are we always making a difference? Are we engaged in the right tasks? Are we driving the organization forward?

A great example of this is the numerous requests my organization receives regarding team building. Most of these requests involve one person or a team complaining about another person or team not involving them in their efforts. The paradox is that the other person or team feels like they cannot collaborate due to the time it takes, and they feel damned if they do, and damned if they don't. So the question becomes whether it is best to work strategically, involving others and leaving less time to complete tasks in a quality manner, or to get more things done in a less-collaborative manner.

One critical aspect of our work that suffers because of this overload is our relationships. We lack the time to take interest in others, and we certainly have a challenge exploring issues that are important to other people, including our employees. After all, these conversations feel like distractions from getting more tasks completed, faster. The implication is that this pace has caused many of us to focus on efficiency and treat even our relationships as transactional. Many managers cannot tell you what their employees' career goals are or how their employees prefer to be recognized. Why? The number-one reason I hear from managers is, "I don't have the time." They don't feel they have the time, and yet the definition of being a manager is all about making the time for your employees.

When I talk with employees, I am amazed at how much pressure they feel. I am even more amazed when they talk about how little they feel appreciated in comparison. These employees do not think about moving the business forward, how to reduce the pressure, or change the environment (although that

is a wish). These employees ask themselves: "Is this worth it?" or "Where else can I work?"

Anxiety

The pace of work alone gives credence to the fact that many people feel a significant amount of stress and anxiety, but that is not the only cause of anxiety in the workplace. The pressure to perform is significant. First and foremost, I can think of very few businesses that are not under pressure from *increased competition*. I know many of our clients struggle with increased costs, pricing pressures, and shrinking profits. Much of this competition is due to globalism, trade agreements, and technology.[7] It is amazing how much work is completed across borders.

I travel a great deal to Europe and the Middle East for clients whose engagement and productivity demands have increased as these boundaries have diminished. Most people outside the Middle East region would not recognize the changes creating increased demand to engage employees in that workplace. First of all, many people are not aware of the economies that are being built outside of the oil industry. And the majority of individuals are not aware of the region's challenges in building engagement of locals, or "nationals" as is the case in Kuwait, where the engagement of expatriates is higher than that of locals. This creates challenges related to employment, immigration, efficiencies, and economic stability.[8]

Technology has not only allowed us to service customers globally, but it has opened up markets to competition they have not experienced before. This forces businesses operating in these markets to be more competitive. There are many things that a business cannot easily change, such as the environmental or employment regulations of a particular country. Many businesses work instead on innovation or increasing efficiencies. Other corporations focus on off-shoring, use of expatriates, and leveraging contract workers. Regardless of the strategy, movement across borders, individual

assignments, and increased job competition leave individuals with a "Me" attitude. Why shouldn't they feel that way? These employees want to make their marks and make as much money as they can when they can. Who knows what tomorrow will bring?

Another area that creates anxiety is *change*. We are constantly asked to do things differently than we have in the past. Part of this phenomenon has to do with the increased pace in our workplaces. Another aspect has to do with the lack of consistency in leadership. With the median CEO tenure of 5.5 years[9] and turnover of CEOs at its highest rate ever over the last two years,[10] we barely have enough time to execute one strategy before another one is being introduced. One of our clients had six CEOs in four years. Every time a new CEO walked in their door, employees were asked to buy into a different strategy. Talk about whiplash.

The last area that contributes to anxiety is all about *security and trust*. Layoffs have become commonplace. Ethics and integrity seem optional until someone has to pay the piper, as in the case of Enron. Choices made by boards of directors or executives based on greed, as well as inequities in compensation systems, make many employees feel slighted at best. It is startling how many times I work with people who quit a company only to return six months later in order to be paid more. How can we have compensation systems that ignore productive, knowledgeable employees and reward unproven workers who present a learning curve and increased risk?

Another area that has come under fire in recent years is *executive pay*. There are a number of recent examples of executives receiving bonuses when their companies have been losing money and laying off workers. In the United States, we have seen this debate occur even when companies have received bailout money from the government. Jack Welch has even weighed in on the debate saying:

> "I think without question once the federal government has to step in to bail out the private enterprise, you've got to modify the private enterprise pay packages."[11]

The point is not about whether or not executive pay is fair, which of course is situational. The point is about trust. Consider another headline "Where Bribery Was Just a Line Item,"[12] refer-ring to Siemens business practices, or "The Party's Over"[13] quot-ing Attorney General of New York Andrew Cuomo on AIG's over-the-top executive expenditures.

Are we running organizations in a transparent manner, communicating well enough with all of our stakeholders, with clear reasonable choices? Perception is powerful. When we lose sight of how our employees, our customers, and the general pub-lic perceive our actions, we have created a significant problem. When pressure overrides good judgment and forces unhealthy choices, we all pay.

Risk also takes on new proportions in the *global marketplace*. A war in Lebanon starts and everyone evacuates. Hugo Chavez threatens to seize control of private business, some of which is owned and operated by companies outside of Venezuela. Rebuilding Iraq remains a pressing agenda in a conflict-ridden region. We take risks doing business globally every day.

The more unstable the world becomes, the more reaction-ary many of us become. Organizations hedge their bets. Some organizations lack necessary disaster recovery plans. These orga-nizations become driven by short-term thinking because the opportunity exists now. We live with more fear and uncertainty, which limits trust and increases insecurity.

Each time I go to the Middle East, I am curious about the differences between cultures—business and personal. One of the interesting things I have noted in my travels there is the ability of individuals to cope with conflict and uncertainty from day to day. Some of these wonderful people travel to neighbor-ing countries where I would not dream to go. I would not put my life at that much risk. However, I also note that many of these same people seem to lack trust in others and lack a sense of security in their work environment, so they find security in themselves. Fear causes us to go inward. Fear causes us to take fewer risks, and when we do take them, the risks are based on

fear, not opportunity. Unfortunately, this has become a major issue in our workplaces.

According to the Human Resources Workplace Stress Survey completed in 2007[14]:

- Seventy percent of HR professionals feel stress is a problem in their organization;
- Over 50 percent believe stress has become a larger issue in just one year; and
- Only 10 percent of line managers are aware, to a great extent, of what signs to look for to identify stress.

Many of the solutions the research pointed to were reactive. Organizations sometimes utilize workplace stress policies as a solution to the problem. Other organizations utilize employee assistance programs (EAPs), which are reactive in nature and usually come into effect when the problem looms large. As a whole, we are behind in our efforts to provide the skills necessary to keep up with the anxiety and stress in today's workplace.

Schedule

Because we are working across the globe, business truly is twenty-four hours, seven days a week for many organizations. That type of effort creates interesting lifestyles for employees of those organizations. Many of these individuals are facing constant jet lag from traveling to places like China one week, and then to the United States the very next. Even if we are not one of those individuals who must fly to the ends of the earth, we are wired. Most people have PDAs and can be reached wherever they are. More importantly, we have become dependent on these devices, even addicted. Our boundaries have all but disappeared.

The larger concern regarding this stressful workplace revolves around expectations and balance. When does work stop? How

do I find balance? What if not taking a call costs the organization money? If I do not work at odd times, will I be left out of the loop? What impact will that have on my career? The fact that these questions are on employees' minds tells us a great deal. Many employees suffer from a struggle with work/life balance.

I, myself, could work all of the time. I know I can't find balance; I can only work toward it. It has become a process composed of choices, not an outcome. This is like having an additional responsibility that comes along with work. If we do not pay attention to ourselves, it usually leads to burnout. And if we try to unplug when others around us do not, other stresses may result.

The results of the 24/7 workplace can be quite traumatic. Many negative results occur because of this lifestyle, including sleep disorders, health problems, parenting challenges, marital discord, household chore difficulties, and minimized family time. It has been argued that this issue needs to become a publicly debated topic and that social and business reforms are necessary in order to support the expansion of the 24/7 work environment.[15] Regardless of whether there are policy changes or not, one thing is certain: employees have new challenges due to a global schedule and demand that has both positive and negative consequences, blurring the line even more between personal and professional life.

Technology

It is interesting that all of this technology has not made our corporate or personal lives easier. Businesses struggle because they hire professionals; many highly educated, and then put these associates into boxes. We call these boxes, collectively, an organizational chart. Then we put in place *limits* known as policies. The more we try to regulate our employees, the more we create a parent-child relationship. Our employees feel as though they are wearing shackles. I worked with one company that made all employees submit a purchase order for approval on everything

regardless of the amount or purpose. Needless to say, the organization had a backlog on approvals, sometimes up to two months. They had service technicians in the field who had to make a choice—buy a part using their own money and risk not being reimbursed, or choose to make the customer wait for an unacceptable amount of time. A number of these service technicians chose to forgo reimbursement in order to service customers. They did not submit reimbursement forms because they were afraid of the potential repercussions.

Our organizational charts are based on the demands of the industrial age and a traditional military structure or hierarchy. This structure was created for a time when we did not use computers, networks, PDAs, and other Internet-based technologies. Most employees were hired to function as labor—and not highly skilled labor at that.

To compensate for this discrepancy, organizations have utilized or experimented with various structures such as the matrix organization and skunk works. There have been some limited successes, but overall we are still struggling. Corporate structures are shifting, and they should continue this shift in keeping with the new work environment. Until we create a new, more adaptable and accepted model, we can expect continuing sub-optimization of talent and resources, creation of conflict, or worse.

At a conference at which I recently spoke, a discussion developed around this very topic. Some people attending the conference spoke of their employers' policies limiting use of social networks such as LinkedIn. There was clearly frustration with policies limiting the use of the Internet, new technologies, and structures that function more like a network than a traditional hierarchy. Of course, organizations that support these types of shifts will lose a sense of control, but what might they gain?

Jeff Howe in *CrowdSourcing*[16] shares numerous examples of organizations large and small that have utilized these new structures and technologies to improve products, the customer

interface, and their business. He relates some key principles behind why *CrowdSourcing* is successful:

- Communities can organize labor more effectively than organizations;
- The most appropriate person to complete the work is the one who is passionate about the work; not necessarily the person with the job title;
- Evaluation is most helpful and productive when coming from peers; and
- When work is organized through these types of networks, people join in eagerly to help out their friends or collegial peers.

To a lot of people this will sound like anarchy. What about going through the proper structure or channels? What about the rules? How can you bypass your boss or supervisor? How can we include outsiders (people not in the company) in these projects? What about copyrights, patents, confidential information? How can we protect ourselves? This is too risky. Or is it too risky not to figure out a way to make new structures work? Think about Procter and Gamble, the Linux operating system, open source programming, or Wikis. Each of these is an example of an organization or project that has benefited from these new structures and ways of working. It is happening right now, whether we like it or not. The question is how we can use it to our advantage and engage our people more.

The current environment also encourages employees to multi-task, which might be appropriate when we keep in mind the second half of that word—TASK. Unfortunately, we as a society also include people in multi-tasking. All this does is allow us to treat each other superficially, as if we were on a checklist. The consequence of this is interruption and isolation. Many employees utilize email and text messaging as a replacement

for dialogue. We even see email utilized as a vehicle for airing our conflicts. Consider the impact on our relationships when we do not have to look the other person in the eye or hear his or her voice, and all we have to do to conclude our dialogue is to press "send" or "delete." One manager with whom I was working had two cell phones, a computer, and a land line. He would talk with one person, keep another person on hold, check email on the other line, and answer the phone on the desk. How do you think his employees felt? Unfortunately, I know how he felt—productive.

The average number of minutes employees have to focus on a project prior to being interrupted is eleven minutes.[17] Think about the time it takes to shift your thinking and then to shift back to the project; to review and figure out where you left off. How much aggravation do we develop over interruptions? Or if you are the one waiting . . . how do you feel? We have all become too comfortable with instant gratification. We want answers quickly, and unfortunately life does not usually work that way. More importantly, the recent trend toward multi-tasking actually slows us down and limits our focus. Kathleen Nadeau, Ph.D., says, "Multi-tasking is really a misnomer, since your brain is unable to focus on two tasks at once." And another expert, Rene Marois, Ph.D., explains why we are less efficient based on research she has completed, "A kind of bottleneck occurs and you become less efficient than if you were to finish one task before starting another."[18] The ramifications are huge. We are slower, yet we have the opposite perception; we are not present and available for our colleagues, yet we feel we are meeting everyone's needs.

As productive as we may think we are, we are not there for each other. We are alone even when we are with people. We feel like a bother to others or are frustrated with those who try to treat us like just another task. It is easier to isolate ourselves and hide behind text messages and emails.

In the last several years, we have seen increased job competition and movement. We used to take assignments as a development rotation. Many people now must take positions on a contract basis or across the globe, due to the new nature of work. While exciting, this dynamic creates a transient work population. Teams have difficulty forming; we can begin to have a loss of institutional or department memory; relationships only develop to a limited degree; and people do not have to live with the consequences of their decisions because they have left before those consequences materialize.

All these forces lead us to be transactional and efficient. To hide inside ourselves. However, high-quality human relationships are much more consultative and collaborative. They are based on trust and value. We work with people and organizations in which we have faith, and that help us become successful and better than we are when we work individually. Those organizations that build processes, systems, and relationships based on these principles are winning in the marketplace. See Figure 1.3, The Current Dichotomy.

What do we mean by winning? Lower turnover, higher productivity, stronger customer loyalty, and a better bottom line.

Figure 1.3 The Current Dichotomy

Current Forces
Transactional
Efficient
Superficial

Needed Efforts
Consultative
Collaborative
Supportive
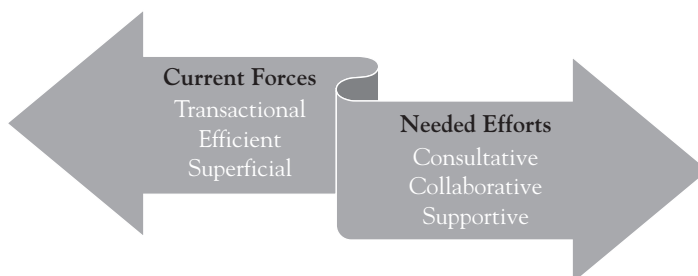
Source: Performancepoint, LLC

Turnover

We would all like to have more control over the turnover rates in our organizations. This is not to say we want to eliminate turnover altogether. After all, some turnover is productive and has a positive impact for individuals and organizations. However, in my work, I rarely come across companies keeping every associate they want to keep and removing those they do not want to keep. More times than not, organizations would like to reduce the amount of turnover they are experiencing. Interestingly enough, turnover and engagement are interrelated.

Take for instance, the Fortune 100 Best Places to Work[19] list, which are considered companies with high employee engagement levels. The turnover rates for these organizations are much lower than the industry average, sometimes by as much as 71 percent, as in the case of the healthcare industry.[20] See Figure 1.4 on the relationship between engagement and turnover.

Figure 1.4 Engagement and Turnover
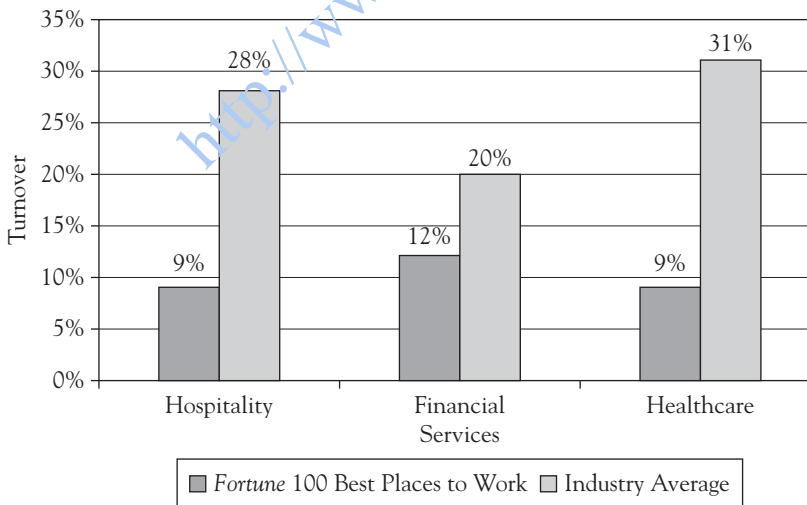
Source: Performancepoint, LLC, created using U.S. Department of Labor Statistics/Fortune magazine 2006

Even more concerning is the practice of keeping employees who have already left, but remain in the building. There are a number of employees who skate by or have their minds occupied by other things. Only 62 percent of employees say they are regularly creative and resourceful, and only 38 percent say they are going to stick around in their current workplace. One of the most striking things we found in the Performancepoint survey is that 50 percent of the respondents said they are at 60 percent or less utilization of their capabilities in their performance on the job. Imagine the millions in payroll we are wasting.[21]

Productivity

Everyone is working harder these days, and no one doubts that work is more stressful. It most certainly is. So why ask how productive we are? Well, productivity is about a lot more than the number of hours people work or the number of tasks checked off a to-do list. Productivity relates to how connected each employee is to the mission of the organization. Are they working on the right stuff? Productivity is also about driving the business forward, taking educated risks, and being resourceful. Over and over again, we find organizations that have cultures hindering this type of productivity. It is a shame when employees and leaders are more concerned, literally and figuratively, with punching the time clock than with the quality of their work.

On one of our interventions it became clear that people were not working on the right things, even though they felt busy. (See Figure 1.5.) The employees at this company were stretched for time and wanted more support. Leadership was disappointed with the current performance of the sales group. There were a number of reasons why this client was not performing at a higher level. However, we found that the salespeople were not focused or proactive in their sales activities. We were able to identify, with the client, what would make the difference in sales and help the sales group shift their time to

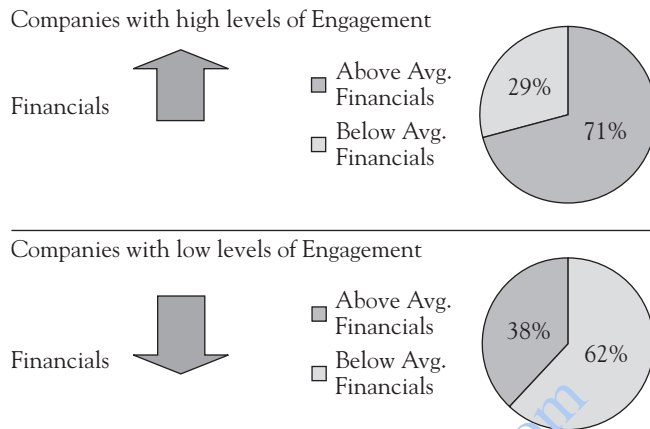**Figure 1.5 Percentage Change in Key Activities at Client Organization**
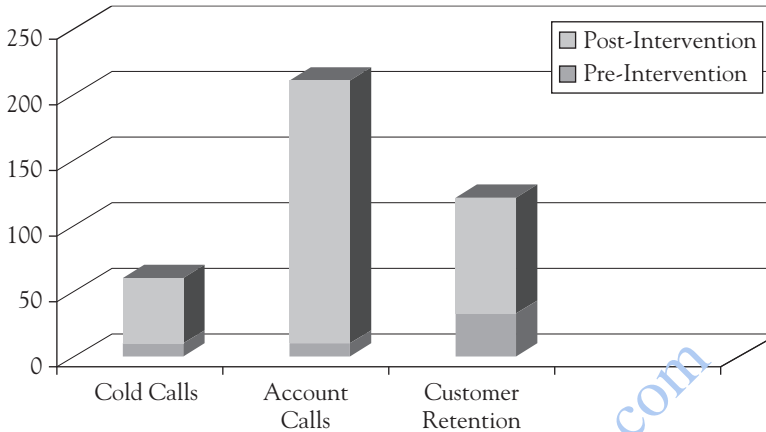
Source: Performancepoint, LLC

those activities. After working with the client, we were able to document significant changes in their productivity. Specifically, we saw significant increases in the number of cold calls and existing account calls, and an increase in customer retention rates.

Revenue and Profitability

The bottom line is that businesses need to make money. Executives are concerned with financials and we are driven by those financials, sometimes to our detriment. We can forget that we have been successful because we met a client or customer need. We were successful because our employees were motivated to meet the customer need. When we see the financials as the indicator of our success, we are too late. Financials are like the rearview mirror in our car. Once we look at our financial statements, we are looking at a picture of the past. These numbers represent earlier actions as an organization. The moment

Figure 1.6 The Bottom Line

Companies with high levels of Engagement

Financials

☐ Above Avg. Financials
☐ Below Avg. Financials

29%   71%

Companies with low levels of Engagement

Financials

☐ Above Avg. Financials
☐ Below Avg. Financials

38%   62%

Source: Adapted from Corporate Leadership Council, a division of The Conference Executive Board Company, 2004 Employee Engagement Study

we react (or often overreact) to our financials, we make short-term decisions to achieve fiscal responsibility, forgetting that the very reason we have come to this place is because we took our eyes off of our real business and that reducing expenses will not create that connection again. Let me share with you an example of just how connected employee engagement is to success. More importantly, it is the significant lead indicator to success, as seen in Figure 1.6.

As you can see from the research completed by the Conference Board shown in Figure 1.6, companies with high levels of engagement outperform their competitors. These results have been proven over and over again based not only on revenue, but also on stock price[22] with an increase of 64 percent versus 21 percent, based on the company's ability to be employee friendly. One study demonstrated that people practices determined the likelihood of an IPO to survive past five years.[23]

In *engaged* organizations employees:

- Focus on getting the job done, but also on what is next;
- Feel a part of a team and something larger than themselves;

- Feel sharp and have less pressure to make employment jumps; and

- Work through change and approach fear in a mature manner.

Why do employees feel differently in some organizations versus others? The reason has to do with the organization's perspective of what employee engagement is and how it is prioritized.

When my company, Performancepoint, first started working on employee engagement issues, we were struck by how many different ways engagement was defined. Many organizations still look at employee engagement as satisfaction or a happiness rating, while others see it connected to issues such as union activity and absenteeism. Our concern with these approaches had to do with the fact that employee engagement was not seen as a business driver. These old definitions are tactical, stop-gap measures, and in the case of employee satisfaction can be seen as soft.

After much deliberation and research, we have defined employee engagement as:

> The **degree** to which a **person commits** to an organization and the **impact** that commitment has on how profoundly they **perform** and their length of **tenure**.

It is important to note that engagement is not an on/off switch. It is a continuum, and we will have employees who fall in various places on the continuum. The key to engagement is to move employees further along that continuum over time, as seen in Figure 1.7.

We are not talking about moving mountains. Small percentages of people moving toward stronger engagement levels can make significant differences in the workplace. Unfortunately, opportunities for movement are typically overlooked. One of the challenges we face as employers is that it is easier to focus on labels rather than on movement. When we view a picture of our

Figure 1.7 Client Year-Over-Year Employee Engagement Distribution Change
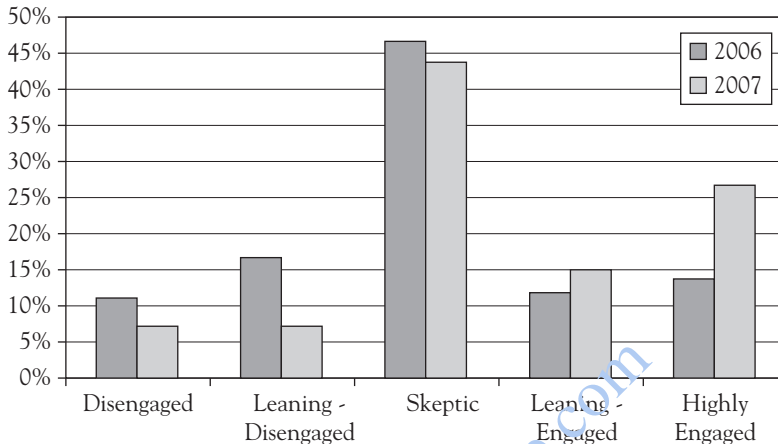
Source: Performancepoint, LLC

employee population and notice how few of our employees are engaged, we can become disappointed, even upset. Then when we zero in and see portions of our employees as disengaged, we may react even more. It is not uncommon to hear some clients say, "If those employees don't like working here, they can leave" or "These people will never change. They are just wired that way." There is nothing wrong with acknowledging when we have a less than stellar fit between an employee and the organization or arguing that a particular employee is just not wired for high engagement, yet that is not what we are discussing here.

Many organizations rest their success on the shoulders of a few, leaving room for a stronger commitment from a majority of the organization; in some cases 85 percent or more. Even the truly disengaged portions of an organizational population can reach upwards of 15 percent in many organizations. When we do not personalize the issue and we try not to connect individual faces to the feedback, we begin to see the data differently. We no longer see challenging people as the issue and we can start to

see significant portions of the population as being left behind or not included. When we reexamine the issue from this perspective we can begin to ask, "What systemically is going on?" and "Are we okay with the current situation?" Now we are making a conscious choice. And when we make conscious choices like this, most of the time we choose movement rather than labels. The next question we should ask to create movement is: "How can we create more commitment?"

According to Wikipedia, commitment means duty or pledge to something or someone.[24] Other words or synonyms we could use to describe commitment might be "dedication," "devotion," or "responsibility." Commitment is all about engagement and accountability. The more committed we are, the more engaged and accountable we are. People make commitments to themselves, to others, and to ideas. Those commitments are sometimes implicit and other times explicit. We even make unconscious commitments. The most important idea behind commitment is that there can be many commitments made at any given time. We can commit to our work, career, team, the business strategy, the vision or mission, senior leadership, an idea, a project—and the list goes on.

Unfortunately, organizations have typically focused on one commitment—the commitment between the employee and the manager. However, the more commitments an employee has with an organization, the more likely the relationship will be stronger and last longer. Every commitment we make as employees, or in life for that matter, is based on a set of connections. A connection means "a joining or being joined; a relationship; association; the relation between things that depend on, involve, or follow each other."[25] Synonyms for connection are "link," "reciprocity," or "attachment." So a commitment is a dedication based on a connection(s), which represents a mutually beneficial bond. The big question for organizations then should be: "How do we create an environment that encourages connections or mutually beneficial bonds?"

If we look at the idea of connections from a different angle, it illustrates the point well. Each of us lives in a city, a place we call home, that may be temporary, or for some fairly permanent. It is precisely because of this willingness or unwillingness to move that one of the first questions recruiters ask usually has to do with a candidate's willingness to relocate for a particular position. Why is there a difference in preference between individuals? The answer is based on the number and strength of the connections the individual has with the city in which he or she lives. (See Figure 1.8.)

If I live in a city where my family lives, I have probably developed strong friendships. I may have a place of worship that

Figure 1.8 Connections
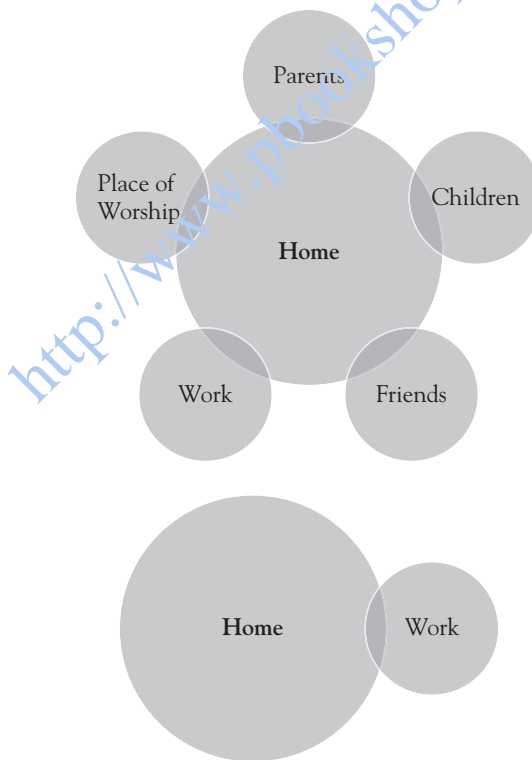
Source: Performancepoint, LLC

I attend where I am comfortable. And if I have a good job, then uprooting is difficult. If you add to that a sentimental liking of the area and a history, thirty years of experiences, I would have an even more thorny decision to make. If you then add in the additional detail that my children are in the crucial education years and moving them at this time would be more traumatic than when they were younger, then I have an intensely gruel- ing decision on my hands and probably will not uproot. On the other hand, if all I have keeping me in a certain place is my job; then moving to another location is a less complicated decision because jobs are easily replaceable; unless this job is my dream job. It is for this very reason that the number of connections a person has to a city is only half the picture. The strength of a connection is just as relevant, because one connection can trump just about everything else. For instance, if I lived in a city and had a number of connections, most of which were strong, and I could not imagine leaving at all because this was where I wanted to live, I might still move. I might make a sacrifice for my stron- gest connection—a spouse who has an important career oppor- tunity; a parent in need of physical assistance; a moral, ethical, or safety choice such as testifying in court and entering a witness

Figure 1.9 Commitment and Connections

Number of Connections/Commitments
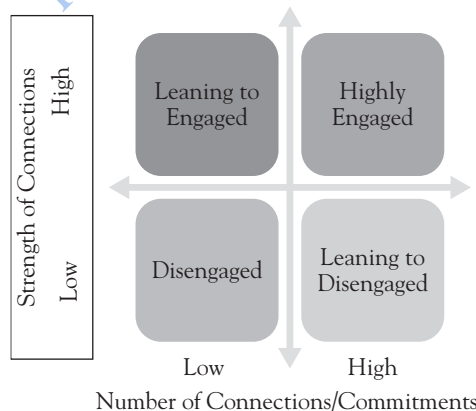
protection program; or maybe for children, to take advantage of an opportunity to improve their future. (See Figure 1.9.)

Impact is also very important. Most organizations attempt to measure employee engagement and rarely, if ever, tie it to their businesses. Some stop at some kind of a satisfaction measure. Unfortunately, satisfaction is a fickle measure that changes quickly and frequently. The reason satisfaction measures are fickle is due to the emotional nature of these types of measures. Feelings are quick to change and vary in intensity. Most importantly, feelings are based on connections and beliefs. If we measure bonds and the beliefs these bonds are made up of, then we are more likely to obtain a stable and more accurate reading of the environment. An example of the difference might be

Feeling Measure: "I like working at ABC Organization."

Connection Measure: "I believe my organization has a culture of integrity."

The first measure is interesting, yet tells us very little because it can change daily or hourly based on the most recent events. The second measure, the connection measure, begins to tell a story. What you can do as an organization is to ask both types of questions and use the correlation between the two to try to demonstrate cause and effect. However, an even more powerful approach, especially at the executive level, is to tie the measures to real impact.

We want to measure strong indicators of success: productivity, retention, customer loyalty, profitability, and revenue. When I use the word "productivity," I am not referring to the number of hours an employee works or how busy he or she is. I am referring to the person's creativity, resourcefulness, and ability to work on what counts. I do not mean to imply that employee satisfaction is not important. We want a happy and healthy workplace. I am just saying that if we create a company in which people stick around and are comfortable being creative and

resourceful, then we have created a healthy and accountability-driven environment. Accountability or ownership is essential; otherwise, our employees become victims and we develop an ineffective culture over time. Those organizations that worry about satisfaction become more interested in making employees happy, sometimes bypassing the necessary discomfort that comes with change and reducing accountability in the process. More importantly, when our measurement factors consistently lead to success, we have now created a hard financial reason for an organization to treat its employees with as much importance as it does marketing, advertising, financials, and other functions that reside at the executive table.

Questions to Ask Yourself

- What connections do we have with our employees?
- What reasons, emotions, and aspirations do we provide our employees with which they can connect?
- How could we create different types of connections with our employees?
- What have we done that would reduce the bond we have with our employees?
- How have we focused on movement toward stronger engagement levels?
- How have we focused on labels and lost sight of the bigger picture?
- What impact have our engagement efforts had on productivity?
- How have our engagement efforts improved customer loyalty?
- How have we improved the organization's results through our engagement efforts?