

# Drivers of Sustainable Engagement

## What matters most

The logical question, then, is, what is required to shore up the unsupported and reconnect the detached, particularly among those employee groups with specific skills or roles most critical to business success?

Using statistical analysis, we tested the relative impact of a dozen workplace elements on sustainable engagement. *Figure 2* displays the five that have the greatest collective impact, and highlights an illustrative set of practices and behaviors that make a difference to employees in terms of traditional engagement, enablement and energy.

For employers under pressure to increase sales and revenue, but constrained by limited funds and resources, there may be no better step to take right now than to identify gaps in these areas that may be adversely affecting sustainable engagement and determine actions necessary to close those gaps.

Two points are important to note here. First, in contrast to many of the more reward-oriented elements that affect attraction and retention (see page 18), the drivers of sustainable engagement focus almost entirely on the culture and the relational aspects of the work experience. These include the nature, style and quality of organizational life, not the programs themselves. Second, the impact of these drivers is felt through thousands of interactions — positive and negative, large and small — that play out daily across an organization. Some of those interactions are interpersonal and local — between employees and their direct managers or inside a small work team. Others affect everyone across the organization.

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**Figure 2. Top five drivers of sustainable engagement**

Priority areas of focus	Behaviors and actions that matter to employees
<b>Leadership</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Is effective at growing the business</li><li>• Shows sincere interest in employees' well-being</li><li>• Behaves consistently with the organization's core values</li><li>• Earns employees' trust and confidence</li></ul>
<b>Stress, balance and workload</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Manageable stress levels at work</li><li>• A healthy balance between work and personal life</li><li>• Enough employees in the group to do the job right</li><li>• Flexible work arrangements</li></ul>
<b>Goals and objectives</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Employees understand:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The organization's business goals</li><li>• Steps they need to take to reach those goals</li><li>• How their job contributes to achieving goals</li></ul></li></ul>
<b>Supervisors</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Assign tasks suited to employees' skills</li><li>• Act in ways consistent with their words</li><li>• Coach employees to improve performance</li><li>• Treat employees with respect</li></ul>
<b>Organization's image</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Highly regarded by the general public</li><li>• Displays honesty and integrity in business activities</li></ul>

# A Look at Attraction and Retention

## Shifting elements in the deal

The same elements that drive sustainable engagement also underpin aspects of an employer's strategy for finding and retaining talent. We know from long experience that attraction, retention and sustainable engagement are best thought of as interrelated and overlapping phases in a fluid employment life cycle. And while core elements, like management, image and career, thread through all three phases, employees value them differently across the phases. It's important, therefore, for organizations to be nimble and flexible in designing and delivering their attraction, retention and engagement strategies, allowing them to shift the emphasis on relevant elements as their own goals and needs — as well as those of employees — change.

Let's start with attraction. As noted earlier, and as *Figure 9* confirms, our global respondents remain focused on security and the basics of the work

situation. While there are differences in attraction drivers from country to country (less in the mix than in their order of importance), these are things employers need to emphasize in their recruiting no matter where they operate. But these elements can and should be “flexed,” depending on the local labor climate, regulatory requirements, the prevailing culture and the nature of the work. If the organization is under pressure to hold the line on base pay, for instance, the ability to offer an alternative work arrangement can make the deal more attractive, especially if connected with meaningful training and career development options. If career paths are well defined and well documented, the prospect of advancement can help dispel concerns about long-term employment security.

However, for more traditionally focused employers, this kind of creative flexibility requires a new mindset that new hires or current employees can be as productive and engaged outside a conventional work location as in one. Revisiting long-held assumptions about work and people's work ethic is often an important first step in shaping a deal for the current environment.

The picture for retention is different from that of attraction. While salary remains critical, all other elements have to do with the nature and quality of the work experience and value proposition, which are closely aligned with the drivers of sustainable engagement. And as noted earlier, there is a clear link between engagement and retention, with highly engaged employees at reduced risk for voluntary departure.

In the current environment, retention is an area where the interests of employers and employees appear to be aligned. Over half of the global sample (52%) agreed they'd prefer to remain with their current employer, even if another job were available to them. And virtually the same percentage (53%) agreed they'd like to stay with their current employer until they retire. While some of these views no doubt stem from caution about the economy and the labor market in various countries, the restless mobility predicted a decade ago has not come to pass. In fact, we found very little variation in views about retention across all the generations in our sample.

**Figure 9. What it takes to attract and retain**

Driver	Attraction	Retention
1	Base salary	Base salary
2	Job security	Career advancement opportunities
3	Career advancement opportunities	Relationship with manager
4	Convenient work location	Trust/Confidence in leadership
5	Learning and development opportunities	Ability to manage/limit work-related stress

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