

Management impact on Employee Engagement – Statistical Programmers in Focus

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ABSTRACT

The term management has a long list of different definitions, components and principles; but at the heart of effective management are employees. For managers to be successful, the needs of employees need to be met, both individually and as part of a collective, in order to achieve high levels of employee engagement and motivation. Unfortunately, the needs of two individuals or two separate teams are often not the same and managers have their work cut out for them to successfully identify and meet the needs of their teams and employees. Similarly, the needs of people from different industries or departments may differ, and self-help books may not always be universally applicable.

This paper will show the effects that management has on employee engagement and motivation with reference to performance management, respect and recognition and overall perception of management within a Statistics and Programming department.

INTRODUCTION

Employees are arguably the most important asset for any business. Without employees, a business can not and will not function. All the more important are employees who are motivated, satisfied and engaged – employees that care about the success and growth of their companies and that are proud to work for and be associated with the companies that they work for. Engaged employees are less likely to change jobs often and are willing to go the extra mile for their companies and as such, having engaged employees will increase the success of any organization. Engaging employees and keeping employees engaged is not an easy task however and there are various factors that impact the engagement of employees and the needs of employees may differ across different departments and industries.

Managers work closely with their direct reports and are often responsible for catering to their needs, and as such the performance of a manager is likely to significantly impact employee engagement levels. Similarly, other factors that managers are responsible for or closely related with such as performance management as well as respect and recognition factors may also influence employee engagement.

This paper will investigate the effects that a manager and the management structure have on employee engagement with specific reference to performance management, respect and recognition as well as the overall perception of management, herein referred to as the Manager Index. A literature review will be conducted on employee engagement and the factors that commonly impact employee engagement. This will be compared to recent employee engagement survey results at ICON (2022) in order to show the impact of management on employee engagement in a Statistical Programming department.

LITERATURE REVIEW

DEFENITION

The importance of Employee Engagement is becoming more important in both theory and practice. There are however various definitions of employee engagement. Employee Engagement is defined as a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication and absorption (Schaufeli and Bakker, 2004). The opposite of Engagement is said to be Burnout (Maslach and Leiter, 1997; Schaufeli and Bakker, 2004), where Burnout is a description used to express a state of mental weariness or fatigue (Schaufeli and Bakker, 2004). An engaged employee is an employee that produces results, does not change jobs often and is an ambassador of the company that employs them (Chandani, *et al.*, 2016). Abraham (2012) highlights the fact that engagement is different than mere satisfaction, and as such employee satisfaction alone is not enough to engage an employee or keep an employee engaged. Investopedia defines employee engagement as a human resources concept that describes the level of enthusiasm and dedication that an employee feels toward their job (Smith, 2022).

In a recent Employee Engagement Survey conducted at ICON (2022) engagement results were collected by asking employees to confidentially and anonymously respond to the following statements in either favorable, neutral or unfavorable terms:

- I would recommend the company as a good place to work
- I feel motivated to do more than is required of me
- I feel proud to work for the company
- The company motivates me to do more than is required

For the purposes of this paper, the focus will be on the survey conducted by ICON (2022), and as such employee engagement will be defined as: "A sense of pride toward the company, a motivation to perform well and a willingness to go above and beyond what is expected." An engaged employee, therefore, is an employee that is proud of their company and would recommend the company to other prospective employees, that is motivated to do their daily work and is willing to do more than what is expected of them.

DRIVERS OF ENGAGEMENT

Employee Engagement is influenced by a wide variety of different factors. These factors are also referred to as drivers of engagement (Chandani, *et al.*, 2016). Chandani *et al.* (2016) have identified a few of these drivers of engagement:

- Career Development
- Effective management of talent
- Leadership or Management
- Clarity of company values, policies and practices
- Respectful treatment of employees
- Company's standard of ethical behavior
- Empowerment
- Fair treatment
- Performance appraisal
- Pay and Benefits
- Health and Safety
- Satisfaction
- Family Friendliness
- Talent Recognition
- Communication
- Nature of Job
- Organization Politics
- Emotional Factors
- Productivity
- Personality Factors

In the Employee Engagement survey conducted by ICON (2022) some key drivers of engagement were investigated, namely:

- I have good opportunities for learning and development at the company
- I have opportunities to have my ideas adopted and put into use
- The company is effectively managed and well-run
- I have trust and confidence in the company's senior leadership team
- The company is innovative in how work is done (using new technologies or creative approaches to continuously improve)

The survey (ICON, 2022) further investigated various other factors that may have an impact on engagement such as strengths, opportunities, agility factors, authority and empowerment, collaboration, clear and promising direction, confidence in leaders, development opportunities, integrity, manager index, performance management and respect & recognition.

It is clear that many of the factors investigated by both ICON and Chandani *et al.* (2016) are related to management or are factors that may be within a manager's control and as such, it can be seen that a manager will likely have a big impact on the engagement of an employee. For the purposes of this paper, the focus will be on factors, or drivers of engagement, that are directly related to the performance and impact of managers in a Statistical Programming department and factors that are likely within the control of these managers, namely: Manager Index, or the overall perception of the manager, performance management and respect and recognition.

ICON SURVEY PURPOSE

The Survey is aligned with ICON's strategic ambition to become the CRO employer of choice, and therefore the company places an emphasis on the feedback and experiences of employees to gauge where the company is doing well and to identify areas of improvement with the goal of creating the best employee experience in the industry. ICON aims for their employees to be proud to work for ICON, feel challenged in their roles, connected to the values of ICON and to be excited about the future with ICON.

The employee survey measures employee engagement, how proud and passionate employees feel about ICON and employee enablement as well as how supported employees feel in their role. ICON have aligned the survey with their core values of integrity, collaboration, inclusion and agility, which together form ICON's 'own it culture'.

The survey will be conducted biannually with a leading 3rd party to ensure the confidentiality of the data and these results allow ICON to create top down and bottom up action plans to improve on the areas of improvement and further improve the strengths. Following the survey a new training program within Programming team has been implemented and a greater focus on internal promotions and career growth and development has been implemented.

There is a strong board and CEO focus on the results and the progress being made to address the action items with regular updates provided by the leaders within ICON. ICON's corporate action plan will also focus on some key areas for improvement as ICON continues to pursue the ambition of becoming Employer of Choice.

PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

Over the course of the investigation, I have had various informal conversations with colleagues within my programming team as well as informal discussions with former colleagues within the industry and friends from other industries or departments. Along with these discussions, I have also given the topic a lot of thought from an emotional and subjective standpoint and the following conclusion was drawn:

Having a direct manager, supervisor or leader that is approachable, reachable and helpful and that has the best interest of their direct reports at heart; does create a sense of belonging within the company and does motivate the individual to do more than the bare minimum and is willing to take on additional responsibility.

Informally, it does become clear that a manager does indeed have an impact on employee engagement.

ICON SURVEY RESULTS

As mentioned above, this paper will focus on the engagement factors that are directly related to the performance and impact of managers on the engagement of employees in a Statistical Programming environment. These drivers of engagement have been identified as Manager Index, Performance Management and Respect and Recognition. The overall result of each category will be presented as well as the detailed results of the underlying factors of each of these drivers of engagement. The overall results of employee engagement will also be presented. The results will be presented and discussed for both a programming team working closely together, as well as an overall programming department, to which the team belongs.

MANAGER INDEX

The Manager Index is an indication of the overall perception of an employee's direct manager and hence these results are a direct result of the performance of a manager. The ICON Employee Engagement survey (2022) gauged this manager index by having respondents respond in favorable, neutral or unfavorable terms to the following statements:

- My immediate Manager values having individuals in my team with diverse backgrounds and perspectives [1]
- My immediate manager supports me in achieving a reasonable balance between my work and personal life [2]
- My immediate Manager lives our core values (Integrity, Agility, Collaboration, & Inclusion) [3]
- My immediate Manager supports me in my learning and development [4]
- I receive recognition when I do a good job [5]

While it is important to note that different employees may require different input and actions from their manager, this list comprises some important factors that may be applicable to a wide variety of employees.

The following table will represent the percentage of favorable responses for each factor and for each of the response groups. The numbers in the table below correspond to the numbers in the list above.

ENGAGEMENT FACTOR	PROGRAMMING TEAM (%)	DEPARTMENT (%)
[1]	100	92
[2]	100	92
[3]	100	91
[4]	100	91
[5]	89	79

PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

Performance Management and employee's perception towards it is also investigated by the survey (ICON, 2022). This engagement factor is influenced in part by the direct manager of each employee and as such it is included in this investigation. This factor was gauged by the ICON survey (2022) by having respondents respond in favorable, neutral or unfavorable terms towards the following statements:

- I understand the results expected of me in my job [1]
- Employees are held accountable for results (e.g., delivering on commitments, deadlines, targets, quality standards) [2]
- I receive clear and regular feedback on how well I do my work [3]

The following table will represent the percentage of favorable responses for each factor and for each of the response groups. The numbers in the table below correspond to the numbers in the list above.

ENGAGEMENT FACTOR	PROGRAMMING TEAM (%)	DEPARTMENT (%)
[1]	100	97
[2]	78	89
[3]	78	85

RESPECT AND RECOGNITION

Respect and Recognition is another driver of engagement that is investigated by the survey (ICON, 2022). Since a direct manager is largely responsible for the respect and recognition given to an employee, this factor is included in this investigation and it will be seen that there is some overlap with the Manager Index as discussed above. The ICON Employee Engagement survey (2022) gauged employee perception towards respect and recognition by having respondents respond in favorable, neutral or unfavorable terms to the following statements:

- My immediate Manager values having individuals in my team with diverse backgrounds and perspectives [1]
- My immediate manager supports me in achieving a reasonable balance between my work and personal life [2]
- I receive recognition when I do a good job [3]
- I am treated with respect as an individual [4]

The following table will represent the percentage of favorable responses for each factor and for each of the response groups. The numbers in the table below correspond to the numbers in the list above.

ENGAGEMENT FACTOR	PROGRAMMING TEAM (%)	DEPARTMENT (%)
[1]	100	92
[2]	100	92
[3]	89	79
[4]	100	93

EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

As mentioned in the literature review section, employee engagement was gauged by having respondents respond in favorable, neutral or unfavorable terms to the following statements:

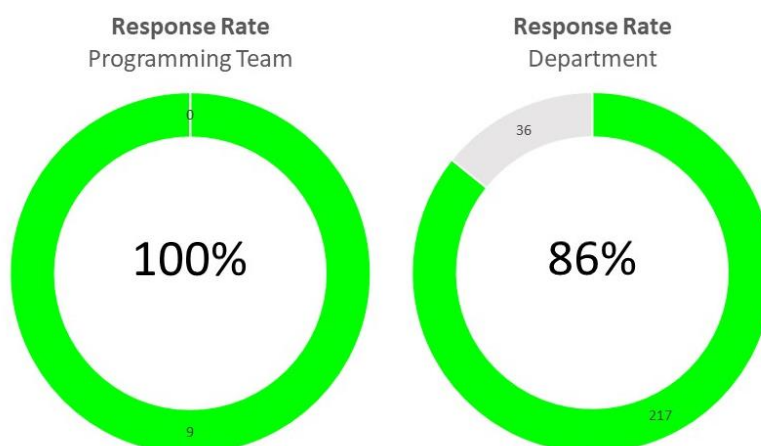
- I would recommend the company as a good place to work [1]
- I feel motivated to do more than is required of me [2]
- I feel proud to work for the company [3]
- The company motivates me to do more than is required [4]

ENGAGEMENT FACTOR	PROGRAMMING TEAM (%)	DEPARTMENT (%)
[1]	100	84
[2]	78	77
[3]	100	76
[4]	33	49

From these results it can be seen, that while motivation to do more than is required has quite a favorable response across both groups, it does not seem that this motivation stems from the company as a whole as can be seen by the results of the 4th factor. This would suggest that the statistical programming employees are motivated by other factors, quite possibly by the impact and performance of their direct managers.

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The combined results of the factors above as well as overall employee engagement will be presented below for a programming team, a larger account group and finally the overall results of the entire department. The results include response from a wide variety of programmers across various geographic locations including North America and Europe, Middle East and Africa as well as China and India, and as such will be a good summary and representation of the average programmer and their attitude towards the above-mentioned factors and their level of engagement. The response rate was quite good, with a response rate of 86% across the department as can be seen in the images below.



The following table summarizes the scores (percentage of favorable responses) for each of the identified engagement drivers across the three respondent groups as well as the overall engagement score for the employees of each group. It is noteworthy that the programming team is a subgroup of the account group, which in turn is a subgroup of the overall department.

SUMMARY OF FAVOURABLE SCORES

GROUP	ENGAGEMENT DRIVER	SCORE (%)	OVERALL ENGAGEMENT SCORE (%)
Programming Team	Manager Index	98	78
	Performance Management	85	
	Respect & Recognition	97	
Department	Manager Index	89	72
	Performance Management	90	
	Respect & Recognition	89	

From the results in the table above, it can be seen that there is a positive correlation between the engagement drivers and the overall employee engagement score. Higher scores for the three drivers of engagement, or engagement factors, are associated with higher scores for employee engagement overall.

The survey results from ICON (2022) does support the statement that management does have an impact on employee engagement. This is also supported by the literature review as Chandani *et al.* (2016) has identified leadership or management as a driver of engagement.

LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE INVESTIGATION

For this investigation, I was limited to secondary summary results and as such a statistical analysis could not be performed. A positive correlation can be seen between the employee engagement factors under investigation and the overall employee engagement score, but this does not necessarily prove causation. It might be worthwhile re-doing this investigation by including respondents from other departments as well as from other industries to draw comparisons and identify whether the findings could be generalized, as well as perform a statistical analysis such as a linear regression on the results in order to test the significance of each driver of engagement as well as the overall significance of management impact on employee engagement.

It might also be worth investigating which drivers of engagement has the biggest effect on employee engagement on a team-by-team basis and the management style could be adapted to best suit each team.

CONCLUSION

Employee Engagement is a very important aspect of business success. Engaged employees are proud of the company they work for and would recommend the company to potential employees. Engaged employees are motivated to perform their daily duties and do more than is expected of them. Engaged employees are not burnt out, and as such are likely to deliver better results and as such the company will be more successful. There are various factors that influence employee engagement, known as drivers of engagement. From the literature review and the ICON (2022) survey results, it can be seen that management has an impact on employee engagement and this rings true in a statistical programming environment. Higher levels of satisfaction towards the performance of a direct manager and higher scores for respect and recognition and performance management correspond to higher employee engagement levels. While it is clear that there is room for further investigation on other potential factors, or the significance of the factors investigated in this paper – it is clear that a manager will have an impact on the Engagement levels of their direct reports.

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