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The New Age of Employee Engagement Technology

Organizations must operate with agility to survive and thrive during periods of change and uncertainty. The modern business environment features fluid challenges and opportunities, particularly those related to the workforce and the organization's strategic business goals and priorities. Changing conditions might also stem from factors internal to the organization, such as launching a new line of business, pursuing a major digital transformation initiative or deploying labor and other corporate assets in different ways.

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daily experience of the organization's primary source of competitive advantage—its people. Knowing when and why worker attitudes and commitment levels are shifting, due to any number of factors, is simply good for business.

The need to understand what is impacting workers, whether during “steady state” times or in unpredictable business climates, has led HR leaders and people managers to increasingly sponsor multiple types of employee engagement initiatives. A primary method for measuring employee engagement for decades has been the use of employee surveys. Data from these surveys continues to be important, especially in modified working environments when teams are fully or partially remote. But as HR professionals have come to realize, surveys have limitations and can provide management with faulty or stale data, particularly if they are only conducted annually. There's even a possibility that these surveys will decrease engagement if employees sense they are an exercise in “lip service” because they don't ask meaningful questions or because

they are not followed in a timely way by appropriate, targeted actions and remediations based on the gathered intelligence.

Organizations should also note other potential pitfalls of relying too heavily on employee surveys to assess engagement levels. For example, there are employees who are generally enthusiastic and seemingly quite satisfied with their job, work or team. These individuals would likely express that enthusiasm in an employee engagement survey, but they may not be performing at their best. This



illustrates both that engagement is not the only condition to be assessed and that surveys can be improved by asking fewer questions that more closely correlate to performance. Other employees may not want to be completely forthcoming in a survey, but they might be more open in real-time interactions with a supervisor or manager once trust and positive motives have been established. These dynamics have led to the now common practice of “check-ins,” whereby managers endeavor to directly assess team member engagement levels and discuss challenges and work priorities year-round. And check-ins have in turn impacted how managers approach performance review discussions. These conversations often now address an employee’s personal goals and interests—not just what the organization needs from the employee—and they happen as often as weekly instead of once per year.

It is also important to realize that while organizations have made advancements in their efforts to bring more empathy to managing workers and knowing what they need to be successful and not overwhelmed, there remain important capabilities that must be deployed to achieve best outcomes from these engagement-focused initiatives. One significant example is the ability to uniformly apply a proven “engagement intelligence” approach, enabled by the right tools, and appropriately judge its efficacy. In the absence of such tools, efforts won’t be scalable to the entire organization and outcomes won’t be reliably predictable. Fundamentally, this approach should involve the combination of scientific methods and innovative technology to assess and optimize engagement levels. Ideally this includes the use of a digital, user-friendly, science-based survey tool designed to achieve maximum insight that can also personalize recommended best actions in response to survey answers.

The good news is that today’s employee engagement tools are growing increasingly sophisticated and are more clearly providing value and ROI payoffs to those organizations deploying them. Today’s technology leverages AI to personalize coaching at scale based not only on job, team and personal goal contexts, but also on what communication style will best resonate with a given individual. These tools utilize standardized, research-validated questions such as, “What did you love—or loathe—about your day at work?” and “Did you get to use your strengths today?” Questions such as these have demonstrated significant predictive value regarding engagement levels and any changes that should be anticipated. Modern HCM platforms also assess engagement in real-time at both the individual and team levels and can guide managers on the best course of action to take in response to these levels.

Recognizing that an HR department might only comprise a small percentage of an organization’s total headcount, and that only a few members of the typical HR team are in roles that involve direct consultation and guidance with line managers, it’s important that the right enabling technology to be deployed extends the reach of HR. And it can do so in a way that predictably and routinely elevates the effectiveness of managers and the engagement levels of employees. Modern times call for enhanced HR technology capabilities, and organizations looking to boost their agility along with engagement and productivity must consider deploying these solutions.



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Mark Smith is the CEO and Chief Research Officer of Ventana Research and leads the firm’s global market agenda for business and technology. Mark is a digital technology enthusiast who loves the art and science of market research and advisory for educating and inspiring technology buyers and suppliers. With over 30 years of experience in the technology industry, Mark is a subject matter expert in enterprise software and innovation for digital business.