

Engagement matters for healthcare.

Drive performance, boost organizational equity, increase value, broaden organizational capacity, and build brand equity.



Commit to Engagement

Gone are the days when engagement was a “nice-to-have”—it is now a business imperative. Countless studies have shown the connection between an engaged workforce and value-driven outcomes. Healthcare organizations with high employee and physician engagement are winning—they have better outcomes, such as quality and patient experience, stronger margins, and lower readmissions. They are also gaining and retaining people as an employer of choice. In contrast, organizations with low engagement are literally losing, and they have the narrow margins to show it.

An engaged workforce is one of the most impactful levers at healthcare leaders’ disposal. By fostering organizational commitment to engagement, healthcare leaders can positively impact outcomes.

Measure Engagement

To address the true drivers of engagement within an organization, it is important that healthcare leaders first understand the data. Most organizations do not invest sufficient time and resources required to build robust engagement-measurement processes. Optimal engagement measurement provides an ongoing view to key data points, which yield meaningful information, resulting in actionable insights. Leading organizations are re-thinking how they measure engagement, but that is only the first step.

Improve Engagement

The results are in. Now what? Although every organization is different, there are certain strategic levers that can drive engagement and lead to better outcomes in any organization. Organizations that focus on mission and purpose, instill confidence in senior leadership, generate growth and development opportunities at all levels, and create a strong value proposition that resonates with their people set themselves up for success.

Simply put: Engagement matters.

Commit to engagement.

In today's healthcare environment, leaders are challenged to do more with less when implementing strategy. With considerable challenges staring them down, leaders often overlook or sub-optimize one of the most impactful levers—the advantage of having engaged employees and physicians.

Engagement is empirically proven to drive outcomes. Countless studies have shown the connection between an engaged workforce and value-driven outcomes, such as: increased patient experience scores, more positive quality outcomes, lower readmissions, and decreased turnover. In fact, the most highly engaged organizations achieve 4.5 times greater revenue growth. Additionally, leaders want to boost organizational equity, increase economic value, drive performance, strengthen organizational capacity, and build brand equity. All of this can be enhanced through stronger engagement of the workforce.

Successful organizations lead from the top—senior leaders need to be role models and champions for engagement. Engaged leaders build engaged teams, and engaged teams are flexible, adaptable, and agile—all of which equips them to deal with the continual change in the healthcare market. When engaged leaders set the tone, others follow. Eventually, everyone can own engagement.

A 2017 Korn Ferry survey of Chief Human Resource Officers (CHROs) shows that two of the top factors keeping CHROs up at night involve employee engagement and retention, along with aligning talent strategy to business strategy. As healthcare continues to change rapidly, leaders need to step up their game when it comes to business insights and achieving results. The top way to meet long-term, bottom-line goals is to create a culture where people are most engaged.

Measure engagement

Engagement measurement should be designed to inform engagement strategy and to create change.

Most organizations do not invest sufficient time and resources when designing an engagement-measurement approach. An optimal approach is one that is robust and provides powerful data, yielding meaningful information that translates into actionable insights. To build an impactful engagement strategy, leaders must understand engagement throughout the organization—both overall and at the work-unit level.

Like patient-experience data or quality metrics, engagement should be measured and monitored continually. Any metric that is critical to the operational improvement and efficiency of the organization is monitored frequently. Why would an annual engagement survey, a single point-in-time measurement, provide enough information to drive an ongoing, integrated effort to improve engagement across an organization?

While there are multiple ways to measure and monitor engagement—there is not a single approach that is right for all organizations—more important is how leaders manage the process. There are five actions to consider:

1. Set Accountability for Engagement. It is often said, “When everyone owns something, nobody owns it.” This is certainly true as it relates to

taking ownership of engagement within an organization. Yes, everyone needs to take responsibility for helping to make his or her work environment and work experience the best that it can be. However, until the CEO and the senior leadership team formally take accountability for engagement, putting their own time and attention and an organizational investment forward, they can’t expect others to take individual responsibility. In fact, many successful organizations have senior-level financial incentives aligned to the engagement of their people.

2. Market Engagement. Organizations that are succeeding with engagement are bold in their marketing efforts to improve engagement. They use engagement surveys and pulse checks as a way of ensuring the employees’ and physicians’ voices are heard. They celebrate their success. They are aggressive about letting their employees and the community know why their organization is a terrific place to work.

3. Build Macro and Micro Views of Engagement. Combining macro and micro views is critical to the long-term success of an impactful engagement strategy. Too many organizations drive ownership and accountability for engagement-survey implementation and follow-up solely through the front lines of their organizations. In some organizations, this is the

full extent of their engagement strategy. A truly impactful engagement strategy must include both top-down, organization-wide strategies as well as individual team/department strategies.

4. Measure Annually. While not sufficient on its own, the annual survey provides a comprehensive snapshot and deep data that other survey methods generally can't provide; this includes robust statistical analysis using large-scale data. An annual survey also provides full work-unit and departmental breakdowns. This allows all segments of the organization to understand their engagement in depth and to develop a strategic plan that will be the foundation of their ongoing engagement work. Many complaints regarding an annual survey center on the time to transfer the data to the front-line leader. This drawn-out process should be rethought. Create efficiencies around process and make the regular survey less of an "event"—get the data in the hands of the people who can proactively do something with it more quickly.

5. Measure the Engagement Pulse. Organizations need more than an annual view of engagement levels. They need to know if engagement starts to slip. They need to know if their strategies and initiatives are having a positive impact. New technology is making it easier and more cost effective to attain more timely information. Ongoing measurement demonstrates to the organization that leadership is interested in and serious about creating an environment that enables employees to do their best work.

Improve engagement

In addition to measuring and monitoring engagement, the following four actions, when working well within an organization, will establish a solid engagement foundation:

1. Connect Organizational Mission to Individual

Purpose. When an employee sees a straight line between the organizational mission and his or her own work, an extremely strong engagement bond is created. This bond is the key to increased loyalty, retention, individual performance, and ultimately better outcomes for the patients and customers of the organization.

Challenge: Is your organization doing all that it can to effectively communicate and reinforce the organizational mission, vision, and core values and directly connect them to each employee's individual purpose?

2. Increase Confidence in Senior Leadership.

In organizations where confidence in senior leaders is high, the following straightforward practices are visible: Leaders are truly invested in visiting with employees in their work environments in a meaningful way; they are transparent and authentic in their interactions with employees; they are creating real opportunities for employees to interact with them one-on-one and in small groups; and

they are role-modeling the characteristics of an engaged, loyal worker. Getting this right could be the most cost-effective and, at the same time, the most impactful strategy an organization could employ to increase engagement.

Challenge: Are your senior leaders emulating these characteristics within your organization?

3. Create Opportunities for Growth and

Development. Efforts taken to invest in the selection, assessment, and development of your people pays dividends. Too many leaders in healthcare are promoted into those positions without any previous leadership experience or any development provided on how to be an effective leader. When this is done properly, the engagement of the leader increases, as does the engagement of the leader's team, as the leader is now more equipped to be effective and engaging. Although this situation can be particularly acute at the front-line level within healthcare, there are growth and development challenges at all levels of leadership and across all job levels.

Challenge: How much training and development do your front-line supervisors and managers have access to prior to being promoted into their leadership positions?

4. Build an Attractive Employer Brand and Employee Value Proposition.

The stronger the brand image, the more pride people have in working there. Employee Value Propositions are designed to impact current employees by defining for them the value they receive by being part of the organization. The more an employee feels he or she “gets” from an organization, the more inclined he or she will be to “give” that discretionary energy and willingness to go above and beyond that so often defines engagement. Branding and value proposition work needs to be well thought through, as it can only be impactful if done correctly.

Challenge: Does your organization have a strong brand in your marketplace? Do your employees have a clear sense of what the value proposition is for them, as members of your organization?

Once strategies are put in place, measuring employee and physician perceptions of progress builds accountability at all levels to stay focused and stay the course on engagement efforts. It also exposes leaders who are not focusing as they should in this area. Be sure to build an approach that measures the effectiveness of system level, local facility level, and work-unit level plans. Also, linking incentives to progress in certain areas can be impactful. If there is leader accountability linked to progress and outcomes, there is more ownership in driving performance. When organizations link a portion of compensation to these results, it is common to see that what gets measured gets focus.

Top organizations sustain high levels of engagement by adopting measurement techniques and ambitious strategies to support the

overarching goals of their operations.

They understand that engagement needs to be an ongoing, continual part of each leader’s focus. It is all about creating and sustaining a winning culture, relentlessly committed to the people taking care of your patients.

Conclusion

Korn Ferry partners with clients to transform engagement data into impactful organization and people strategies. Our experience in healthcare informs our approach. Every organization is unique. We know that organizations that meaningfully engage and enable their employees and physicians will create exceptional outcomes. Korn Ferry helps healthcare organizations tap into the full power and potential of their people.

Authors



Shannon Libbert
Associate Client Partner



Brian Noble
Associate Client Partner

About Korn Ferry

Korn Ferry is the preeminent global people and organizational advisory firm. We help leaders, organizations, and societies succeed by releasing the full power and potential of people. Our nearly 7,000 colleagues deliver services through our Executive Search, Hay Group, and Futurestep divisions. Visit kornferry.com for more information.

About The Korn Ferry Institute

The Korn Ferry Institute, our research and analytics arm, was established to share intelligence and expert points of view on talent and leadership. Through studies, books, and a quarterly magazine, *Briefings*, we aim to increase understanding of how strategic talent decisions contribute to competitive advantage, growth, and success. Visit kornferryinstitute.com for more information.