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eBook

# Designing Employee Engagement Activities For Your Business





While many managers have come to realize the importance and the necessity for employee engagement, not many know where to start. It's often this blockage that leads to inaction and the continuous disengagement curve that affects not only employee morale, but productivity, workplace environment and, eventually, business outcomes.

At Hppy, we've had the opportunity to talk to different managers in different industries, from top-level executives to line managers, and we've identified a need for more practical, structured information on how an employee engagement strategy should be planned and the type of activities it ought to include.

We designed the following eBook for this exact purpose, to dive into the tangible aspects of employee engagement and how they apply to day-to-day management and employee interactions. We really hope it will become a reliable ally for your talent strategy and we look forward to hearing from you, to see which ideas worked for your team and any improvements you found that could make it even better.



Vlad and the Hppy Team

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## THE CONTEXT OF ENGAGEMENT

**B**efore you start spinning numbers and planning activities, you need to realize that employee engagement is a mindset. The only way that an engagement strategy will yield results is if you start with the “why” of the matter, with each activity and event you plan.

Start by looking at your team as real people, with ideas, aspirations, accomplishments and challenges, within the workplace and outside of it. These people are not a means to generating business results, they are a formidable resource that needs to be understood and nurtured in order to deliver on what’s expected of them as workers.

Get to know your employees, be available for them and connect by simply asking how they feel and what’s happening in their lives. Try to understand the challenges they’re facing and the long-term goals they’ve set out for themselves, and how you can help. Be authentic and let employees know what you really care about who they are as individuals and how they want to evolve as employees.

This new management mindset will allow you to build trust and real commitment, as the base of engagement. Without this base, without the context of why you’re doing what you’re doing, you only have disparate activities that won’t produce results.

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## DIFFERENT TYPES OF ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

Employee engagement has been defined in many ways, some more people-centric, others business-oriented. In our experience, employee engagement is a pervasive concept that intertwines both human resources as well as business processes. In order for it to yield results, it has to become a starting point in your talent management strategy, focusing on attracting the right talent, managing and retaining it, as well as offering a challenging workplace that provides learning and development opportunities, under engaging managers.

There are different types of employee engagement activities, ranging from more traditional ones such as team buildings and office happy hours, to communication-oriented ones, recognition activities and business transparency activities.



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## TRADITIONAL ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

### Teambuildings

This has been a preferred engagement activity because it can serve several purposes, from boosting employee morale, to introducing new employees, improving work relationships and bringing managers closer to their team members. It's a great activity to encourage better teamwork and build trust.

### Office parties and celebrations

Celebrations can be a great opportunity to have people interact on a more personal level, share and take pride in their achievements, and even bring their families to get to know their working environment. Annual summer and winter parties are common, along with Halloween parties, Thanksgiving dinners, birthday events and project celebrations.

### Internal competitions

Encourage a stimulating work atmosphere where team members push themselves to outperform their peers in friendly competitions, and everyone can benefit from the end-goal. You can use this type of activities to generate valuable ideas for clients, set learning goals and encourage collaboration.

### Charity events and fundraising

A company's involvement in charity work and social activities is becoming more important for employee attraction and retention with each passing year. One of the key takeaways at the third [Global Public Relations Summit in Miami](#) was that the newcomer Gen Y cares less about corporate philanthropy and stories of big cash donations, and more about the ways in which corporations are solving social problems.

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## COMMUNICATION-FOCUSED ACTIVITIES

### Internal discussion channels

Having an internal communication channel is a great tool to encourage and improve workplace relationships, which is a key engagement driver. In fact, the [Simply Talent study](#), which polled around 1,500 workers across Europe, found that the majority of employees polled (42%) felt their peers were the biggest influence on engagement levels. Also supporting this finding is the [2015 Millennial Impact Report](#), which reveals how Millennial employees are most influenced by peers, and not by their supervisors.

These channels also serve as a link between management and team members, offering an open communication space where people can feel comfortable pitching new ideas, expressing opinions or concerns, and offering relevant feedback. Group channels can support culture-related discussions and ideas exchanges, while individual and even anonymous communication channels can be a great resource in offering feedback to

management and team members.

### Feedback/suggestion box

This is perhaps one of the first employee engagement initiatives, focused on encouraging an open communication policy that would allow employees to make their ideas and concerns known to their managers. Although technology has come a long way from the suggestion box, this is still a common practice in many offices, mainly because it's cost-effective, practical and easy to implement.

### Surveys

Traditional employee surveys are among the most common employee engagement activities, focused more on collecting relevant data than on reaching engagement KPIs. Managers create hypotheses and try to confirm or infirm the state of their employees' engagement levels. These types of surveys range from the dreaded annual

survey to day-to-day short surveys designed to capture the pulse of the organization.

### Internal newsletters

Company newsletters vary from extensive updates on a wide range of topics, from business objectives to department updates, new hires, recognition programs, corporate social responsibility and upcoming opportunities for employees, to short and funny updates on how people spent their last vacation and the new office redesign scheduled next month.

While their format varies from company to company, they serve the same purpose - to keep employees up to date with the latest information and make them feel part of

something bigger than just their task list. They're also a great way to reduce email overload, which is a real issue considering that 63% of emails received at professional email accounts is employee-to-employee internal communication, according to [MimecastNew](#) research.



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# RECOGNITION ACTIVITIES

## Employee-of-the month programs

Frequently used in larger companies, EOM programs have been the go-to activity when it comes to employee recognition. Recognizing employees has been proven to increase morale and motivate workers to try harder, especially if they have a chance to earn a reward. However, the program has gained somewhat of a bad reputation in HR circles, due to some unfortunate practices such as “everyone has to win” policies, hazy criteria and the fact that some companies are betting all their employee engagement credit on this sole program.

## Celebrating birthdays and work anniversaries

Probably the most common form of recognizing an employee’s year-long contribution and getting people together to express support and appreciation. Birthdays and work anniversaries are a great occasion to bring one employee in front and thank

them for their efforts and hard work.

Make sure that you’re consistent in giving all employees their moment, or else you risk bringing down morale and creating unwanted friction between co-workers. Here are some useful [do’s and don’ts of office birthday celebrations](#).

## Thank You notes

Thank You notes and cards are a personal way of expressing appreciation for your team members. They’re a great option for every time of the year and they can be used in any work scenario, from product launches, new client acquisitions, birthdays, new hires or retirements.

They provide ample space to express sincere gratitude and appreciation for someone’s hard work, they’re easy to write and they can be used as that small but important pick-me-up in times of need. It’s best to use them as the moment presents itself, instead of saving

them for a later time. [A handwritten note or letter](#) can be a really pleasant surprise in the digital age.

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## BUSINESS TRANSPARENCY ACTIVITIES

### Downscaling meetings

Top-level decisions and initiatives are often left in the conference room, leaving employees to put together bits and pieces in order to get a sense of what was discussed and what decisions have been taken. Downscaling meetings are a great way to bridge the information gap between team leaders and team members.

Their main goal is to transmit information and decisions taken at a higher level, but also to detail and explain how these decisions impact day-to-day activities. Such meetings can also be used as a platform to generate more ideas or gather feedback for future discussions.

### Having a visual roadmap

One of the easiest way to keep employees informed and connected to your business objectives is to have a visual roadmap of the foreseeable future, with timely updates as you come closer to reaching those goals. It can be a physical roadmap or a digital one; the main goal is to circle back to it from time to time and check your progress against the main goals.

### Availability to company data

While this may be seen as a radical approach to company transparency, it is in fact a smart business practice. Employees are much more committed and motivated to fulfill the company's mission and goals when they have

a clear overview of the performance expected and delivered. When you know how each contribution impacts the final outcome, you can take control of your own performance and feel motivated to go the extra mile.

Having access to company data, especially financial information, offers a sense of

fairness and openness. Everyone is benchmarked against known numbers and people can gain a stronger sense of autonomy, leading to higher engagement.

## LINKING EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT TO YOUR BUSINESS BOTTOM-LINE

Employee engagement is the lifeblood of a healthy, high-performing organization. Despite its essential role, it still fails to become the norm, with only 32% of US engaged employees in 2015, according to [Gallup](#). A worrying number, compared to 65.9% of employees reportedly engaged in 2014 by [Quantum Workplace](#).

According to [SHRM research](#), the top engagement factors for employee engagement in 2014 were respectful treatment of all employees at all levels, trust between employees and senior management, benefits, compensation/pay and job security. The report also shows that:

- 79% of employees were satisfied with their relationships with co-workers.
- 76% of employees were satisfied with contribution of their work to their organization's business goals.
- 75% of employees were satisfied with the meaningfulness of their job.





# PRACTICAL IDEAS FOR ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

## ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

- Encourage employees to invest in their personal development - Use this [personal development framework](#) to check for values alignment with your company. Alignment with company values and vision is one of the main engagement drivers.
- Have a hack night - Break monotony with an ambitious working night where everyone gets involved to meet a specific objective. For example, a marketing team could have a hack night to design an entire campaign, in a single night. Make it fun with snacks, music and an informal working atmosphere to encourage creativity.
- Designate values ambassadors that can inspire and engage their peers. Have team members designate the employees who best represented a company value in the past months, and

have your new ambassadors organize activities and initiatives that focus on that particular value.

- Encourage experiential learning and lateral development. Instead of the traditional vertical trajectory of specialized expertise, lateral growth enables development in multiple areas of knowledge, empowering employees.
- Organize your own Office Olympics. Combine teams and departments and give them a set of challenges that can bring the whole company together in a friendly (and healthy) competition.
- Celebrate life events. Whenever someone has something important going on in their lives, they can't leave that event outside the door as they come into work every morning. It can be the birth of a new baby, a graduation ceremony or a wedding. Show that you care about who your employees are as people outside of work and what's going on in their lives. Also show your support during less happy times, with a simple email or telephone call just to see how they're doing.

## IDEAS FOR COMMUNICATION

- Organize a once-a-month lunch with the CEO. By getting to know employees and making himself/herself available, the CEO will instill trust and transparency, making employees feel valued and listened to.
- Use an impartial outsider who can have difficult/constructive conversations and help discover real feedback. If you're not comfortable having direct managers give and receive constructive feedback on important matters, try an outsider who specializes in internal

communication and talent strategy. See how it goes and try to transition towards the natural course of communication between managers and their teams.

- Try stand up meetings to improve time efficiency and break monotony. Software teams have been using this technique successfully, minimizing the time spent in meetings, increasing the attention of attendees and making it easier for people to engage in conversation. A daily 15-min stand-up meeting in the morning should do the trick.
- Use social media to showcase employee success stories, celebrate achievements and create an attractive employer brand. Your employees are already connected 24/7. Make them feel a part of something bigger and instill pride in your company by turning to social media networks to promote your talent.
- Celebrate project milestones. Every small victory counts and acknowledging everyone's hard work for each milestone will boost team energy and confidence, increasing transparency and improving communication both on the project and generally in the workplace.

## IDEAS FOR RECOGNITION

- Create a peer-appreciation program that rewards team members who display company behaviours. Create the rules of this activity together with your team and define which values can be represented in which ways. Benchmark everything you do against your company values.

- Celebrate and reward early success to demonstrate it is worth doing. Why not have a start-of-the-project team party?
- Create a Celebrations calendar in the office with employees' birthdays and work anniversaries. Find creative ways to celebrate that rely more on the workplace atmosphere than on spending money on expensive gifts.
- Practice "recognition by walking around", where managers put aside time in their schedule to go around the office and offer praise to their team members as they perform well. Put 15 minutes on your daily agenda and go around the office to interact with your team and praise their accomplishments.
- Stage a "recognition ambush" with the CEO or senior manager. Make sure the employee you want to surprise isn't too shy or is not against public displays of recognition. Surprise them with a sincere acknowledgement of their efforts.
- Create a development program for middle managers, where they learn how to recognize employees as part of their daily routine, and why recognizing achievements is not a threat to their own position.

## IDEAS FOR BUSINESS TRANSPARENCY

- Create a leadership community that encourages knowledge sharing and mentoring for less experienced employees. Have your most experienced employees share their success, their failures and how they perfected themselves over time, to inspire and engage newer hires.

- Involve employees in creating the company vision for next year or for the upcoming project. People will commit to something they created and feel a part of.
- Allow employees to select their next assignments. Flexibility is a key engagement factor. Empower employees by allowing them to prioritize their work, assess their efforts and have ownership of their workload.
- Have employees dictate their own salary and set their own working hours. Try self-management, a new way of running a company, where key responsibilities like setting direction and objectives, planning, directing, controlling, and evaluating are no longer in managers' hands, but in those of their employees. Read more about it in [Frederic Laloux's book Reinventing Organizations](#).
- Try open-book management with [The Great Game of Business](#), a management approach that promotes transparency and gamification in business to educate, empower and engage employees.

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# YOUR ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES CHECKLIST

- Before diving into the creation of an employee engagement plan, take a closer look at what engagement means to your company and how it manifests itself;
- Align your employee engagement plan with your overall business and talent strategy;
- Identify your company's engagement drivers and influencers;
- Define who are the people who should design and implement these activities;
- Set measurable employee engagement KPIs that these activities will help you reach;
- Create different types of activities for each engagement category and see which ones perform best;
- Constantly ask for feedback and improvement suggestions from employees.



## ABOUT HPPY

Hppy is an employee engagement insights platform, providing leaders and HR managers information, data and ideas for creating better workplaces.

We provide content and services that support leaders be more efficient in designing, implementing and understanding employee engagement strategies.

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## Resources used

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