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Engagement to Activation
A Guide for the Employee Communications Professional

Moving From Engagement to Activation

A Guide for the Employee Communications Professional

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Understanding Employee Engagement

Employee engagement is a metric that organizations have been tracking for decades. And especially in the last several years, it has become a hot topic in employee communications.

But...we don't always agree on what it really means.

Gallup defines an engaged worker as someone who is "involved in, enthusiastic about, and committed to their work and workplace."

But how we measure that commitment and enthusiasm can differ. To some, engagement means if your people are happy. Others define it as participation in events and work functions. And then some think of it as how productive someone is.

Confusing, right?

## Why We Care So Much About Engagement

The one thing about employee engagement that we do seem to agree on is that it's important. And a big part of that is because high engagement has been tied to some really important business factors:

41% LOWER ABSENTEEISM

58% FEWER PATIENT SAFETY INCIDENTS

24% LOWER TURNOVER (in high-turnover organizations)

59% LOWER TURNOVER (in low-turnover organizations)

28% LESS SHRINKAGE

70% FEWER SAFETY INCIDENTS

40% FEWER DEFECTS (quality)

10% HIGHER CUSTOMER RATINGS

17% HIGHER PRODUCTIVITY

20% HIGHER SALES

21% HIGHER PROFITABILITY

Source: Gallup's Employee Engagement Meta-Analysis

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Employee Engagement

Naturally, companies are going to care about employees being engaged when it's associated with saving A LOT of money. But when you see stats like this, you start to worry about the state of the workplace:

15% of global workforce is engaged

35% of U.S. workforce is engaged
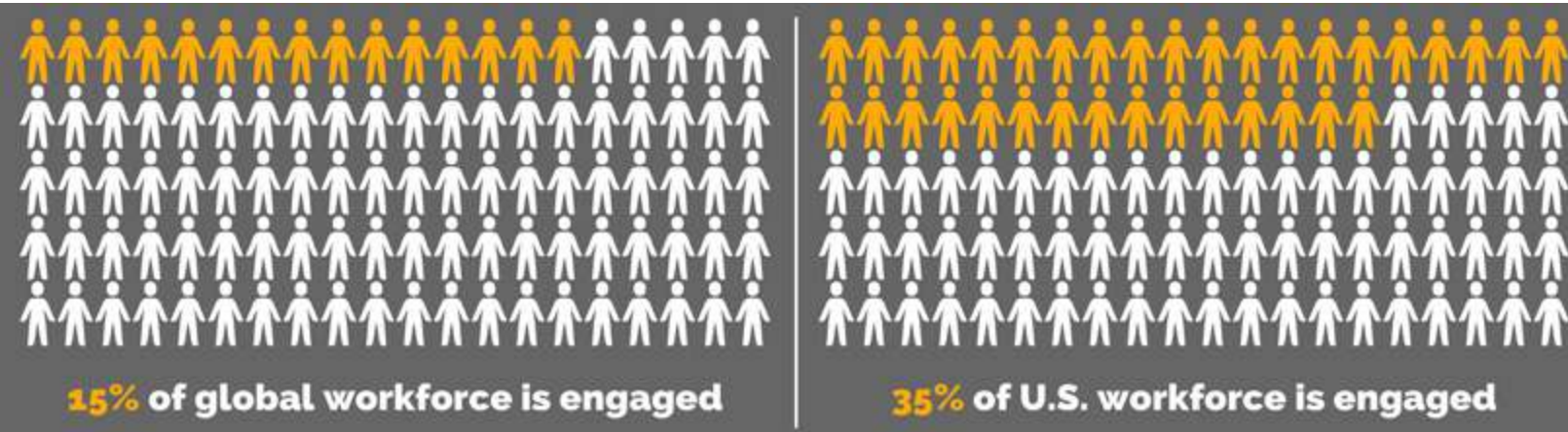
Source: Gallup

Despite our obsession with employee engagement for many years, we aren't really moving the needle. Is that because our focus is too singular and not representative of the whole employee experience? Or is it because we're measuring the wrong things, which in turn has a huge impact on where we invest our time, focus our strategies, and spend our money?

Changing Our Focus

It's been so skewed as far as what employee engagement means and how you get there, we feel as communicators that we need to shift from focusing on measuring an engaged employee to **focusing on measuring the activation of those employees**.

When communicators start to measure engagement, they often do it by a survey score or by looking at how many people read an email, clicked on a video, and so on. The focus has been heavily placed on whether or not employees "engage" with content (e.g. likes, clicks, comments, etc.). And that's all well and good, but that doesn't measure the results that come from those actions.

And so that's where we're talking about moving from being engaged or being kind of committed to a central purpose to actually doing something because you feel that way because you have that sense of commitment.

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What is Employee Activation?

We define Employee Activation as employees taking the desired action as a result of a campaign or message.

And the key to activating your employees towards a specific result is to always start with the objective of each message you send. This goes beyond vanity metrics—like hoping 50% of employees open an email versus the 25% that opened the last one. Instead, you want to focus on the action within that email that you expect someone to take.

Marketers do this very well. On every message, they have a clear Call to Action (CTA):
- Sign up for our newsletter for free tips!
- Register Here
- Buy now and save $100!

And then marketing professionals measure how many people actually took that action. Of course, they care about opens and clicks too, but at the end of the day, success to a marketer hinges on someone signing up, registering for their event, making a purchase, etc. Because that's the ultimate goal of their message. And they use their results to continuously test and change tact to get more people taking the desired action.

Internal communications isn't different. Every message we send has a desired effect. So, why are we caught up in measuring clicks?

Do, Say, Think, Feel

But to be successful measuring your activation, you need to ground every message and campaign in SMART goals. A model we find very helpful for shifting towards this way of thinking is the **Do, Say, Think, Feel Approach**. The idea here is that every message should result in employees doing, saying, thinking, or feeling something particular. Watch this episode of Internal Comms TV to learn more about this method.

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Changing Your Strategy

Moving your focus from engagement to activation means you'll need to adjust your strategic approach to comms. And that makes sense—when you think about trying to activate an employee towards a certain action versus engaging that employee with your message, the approach is going to be different at the message and campaign level.

Leveraging Employee Influencers

Employee influencers are the people within your company who have sway over other employees. Sometimes they are leaders, but they don't have to be. The real criteria here is that other employees look to them for advice and follow their lead.

If you're just looking at how many people engage with a piece of content, you're not looking at what those individuals do with that information afterwards. What if that person is an influencer or leader at your organization? Are they compelled to help support that message and drive further activation? You just don't know if you aren't measuring your campaigns in this way.

And so understanding who within the organization can help carry forward and lead by example can be used to your advantage. You can send messages all day long, but if the employees look around and don't see anybody else acting upon what was just said, you've lost trust. You've lost momentum. And so, adjusting your approach to include targeted information to influencers, you may then see more employees taking the desired action in your communications.

Change Management

Whenever you expect action to be taken, it's important to consider that a change, where Change Management Best Practices will be invaluable. Whether it's a large-scale change or behavior you're hoping to adjust (e.g. adopting a new work process or technology) or a micro change (e.g. taking a survey or enrolling in benefits), consider the Prosci ADKAR® Model.

- **Step One: Awareness.** Communicate what's going on, including the context and "the why."
- **Step Two: Desire.** What motivates your employees? What concerns will they have? Answer these questions and find out how you can overcome push-back.
- **Step Three & Four: Knowledge & Ability.** Sometimes people don't take action because they don't have the tools or knowledge needed to feel confident doing so. Focus on educating employees on a course of action even if it seems obvious.
- **Step Five: Reinforcement.** Some people may take action immediately, no questions asked. But not everyone is like that. Keep reinforcing your message and take a page from Marketing's playbook: test and learn.

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Changing Your Strategy

What's In It For You

When you're putting together communications plans with activation and results as a focus, you present yourself as a strategic partner within your organization versus just being the writer, the editor, the email sender. You become the strategic communicator within the organization that knows how, when, and why to deliver messages a certain way in order to achieve business results.

And that's a big shift for a lot of people within their organizations. Today, many of you may have departments coming to you last minute and asking you to send a message out ASAP. But when you position yourself as a strategic advisor, you can take a step back and say, why next week? What happens if I don't send it today and I wait until our regular cadence? You show stakeholders that it's not just about the delivery of the message. It's about the results.
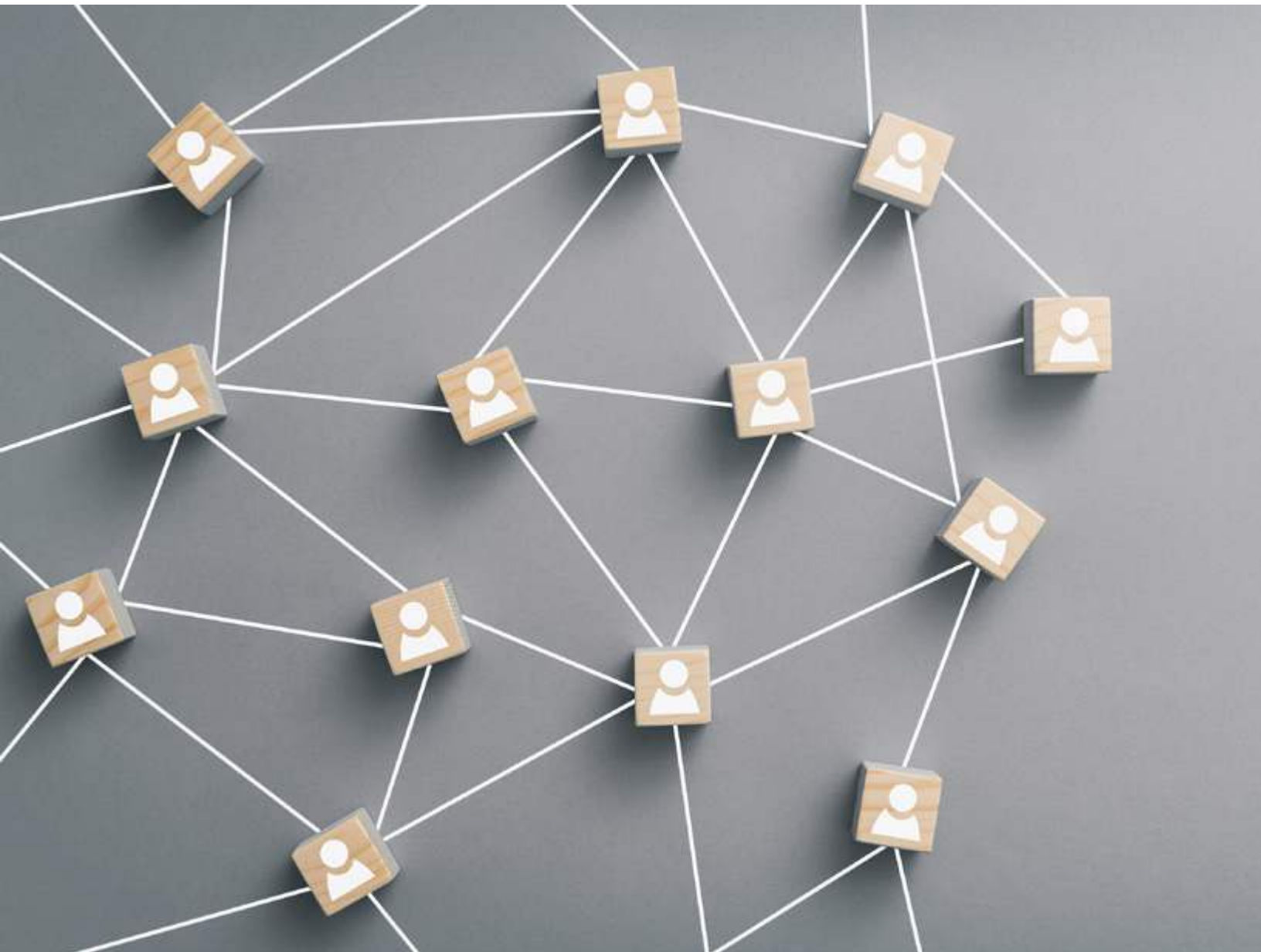
Example: Moving From Engagement to Activation

So, let's walk through an example of how you might change your communications and approach to measurement to focus on activation rather than engagement.

The Situation: It's time for employee open enrollment! HR comes to you with the particulars that year—the deadline and the new benefits offerings.

An Engagement Focus: You schedule a cadence of messages and key deadlines for your team to create any educational materials and then you count message opens, clicks, time spent on each message, and report back to HR.

An Activation Focus:

☐ **Clarify HR's goals.** Are they hoping more employees enroll in a specific plan? Are they wanting to improve the percentage of employees who enroll on time? Who enrolled at all? Or are they really hoping to get ahead of the questions more so their team isn't bogged down with questions and getting overtime?

☐ **Identify key groups in the organization who will help support the message and drive action.** In this case, maybe it's HR Business partners on site, managers, and a few key influencers in each region. Can you do a focus group with these employees to give them some extra information? Can they help you understand the hangups that typically keep registration rates low or late?

☐ **Try something new.** Do you have a new channel to send this message through? Or is there a new medium you can send the message out as? Can you make enrollment fun? Embrace your inner marketer and try something that might not work—document the results and then try again!

☐ **Measure continuously and not just at the end.** Measuring activation is an active process. You want to be able to be agile and course-correct if your campaign isn't going well. Check in with HR weekly to get the numbers based on whatever their goal is.

☐ **Measure the right things.** Keep an eye on those opens and what people are clicking on in your message. That gives you a sense of your reach. But simultaneously, measure those HR goals.

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About theEMPLOYEEapp

theEMPLOYEEapp was created by communications and HR professionals to address the challenges organizations face communicating with a dispersed and deskless workforce. theEMPLOYEEapp is an internal communication and engagement solution that allows workers to have fast and easy access to the information, documents, and resources they need to succeed in their work.

Our app allows you to target information to your employees when and where they need it on their smartphone, tablet, or computer, and empower leaders and frontline managers to engage and activate employees across the organization. Unlike most traditional communications channels, theEMPLOYEEapp creates a customized, branded experience for employees, encouraging your workforce to join together in a single, centralized channel.

Our Mission is to enable the effortless flow of meaningful information for organizations driven by frontline workers.

Request a Demo

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