

# Measuring and Influencing Employee Engagement



It is understandable that healthcare organizations would want to focus on loyalty. After all, loyal employees recommend your organization as a place to work and loyal physicians are more likely to admit or refer patients to your facility, directly impacting market share and the bottom line.

It has been PRC's goal for more than 30 years to help healthcare organizations increase loyalty among its physicians and employees. We have conducted millions of interviews and provided detailed priorities to help department managers focus on ways to build a more loyal workforce. This system has proven time and again to make a positive difference for organizations who take the time to focus on those aspects most predictive of making hospitals better places for employees to work and for physicians to practice medicine.

## A New Focus: Engagement

Until now, the relationship between loyalty and engagement has been largely overlooked. Perhaps it is because, simply put, it is intuitive to think that your "on board" employees are also most likely to be supportive of your organization and its goals. But in its simplicity lies some deeper truths.

PRC has uncovered some compelling evidence that suggests that engagement and alignment are more influential than anyone ever knew in determining the ultimate success of healthcare organizations. Moreover, we believe the engagement paradigm has far-reaching implications for the ultimate experience of patients under your care. Taking it one step further, considering the importance of patient experience on potential hospital revenue under new healthcare reimbursement guidelines, you simply can't afford to take employee engagement for granted anymore.



We have long known that healthcare organizations with strong physician and employee perception scores are significantly more likely to also garner loyalty from these same stakeholder groups. What has perhaps been overlooked is the important role that employee engagement plays in the successful delivery of healthcare services, as well as the ultimate impact on patient experience.

## How is Engagement Defined?

There are many definitions of “engagement” as it pertains to employees. PRC uses the same definition as the Baldrige Performance Excellence Program:

***“Workforce engagement refers to the extent of workforce commitment, both emotional and intellectual, to accomplishing the work, mission and vision of the organization. In general, members of the workforce feel engaged when they find personal meaning and motivation in their work and when they receive positive interpersonal and workplace support.”***

– Baldrige Performance Excellence Program

## What Does an Engaged Employee Look Like?

Engaged employees tend to not only work harder, but also smarter. They are strategic in the way they plan. They are innovators and take personal interest in seeing the organization succeed. Highly-engaged employees are most desirable because they are advocates for their organizations, recommending others to seek care at their facilities, which can eventually impact market share. These employees are dedicated to the organization, remaining through good and bad times, and thereby reducing turnover.

The definition of engagement is rather straight forward. What isn’t so clear is how to accurately identify which of your employees are highly engaged and which are not. And, if they are only minimally or moderately engaged, is there anything that can be done to improve their commitment to your organization’s mission and goals?

## Healthcare Employees are Inherently Engaged

It is important to first acknowledge that employee engagement, as it relates to the healthcare setting, is unlike that of any other industry. Comparing your employees’ and physicians’ perceptions against those in other industries is simply not a useful or reliable way to measure engagement in your hospital.

Using an eight-item index constructed by doctoral-level researchers, PRC examined engagement levels in more than 51,000 employees of healthcare facilities in 2010 and 2011. The results revealed that, contrary to some claims, engagement is actually higher

than average among workers in the healthcare field. This may be explained by the underlying motives that compel individuals to seek a healthcare career in the first place. The personal fulfillment that comes with caring for others may be considered rewarding enough to concurrently ensure some level of engagement.

## Predictors of Engagement

While it is evident that healthcare professionals are already engaged to some extent, it is also clear that increasing the number of highly engaged individuals is important and beneficial to healthcare organizations who seek not only to maximize reimbursement but to also ensure the best experiences for their patients.

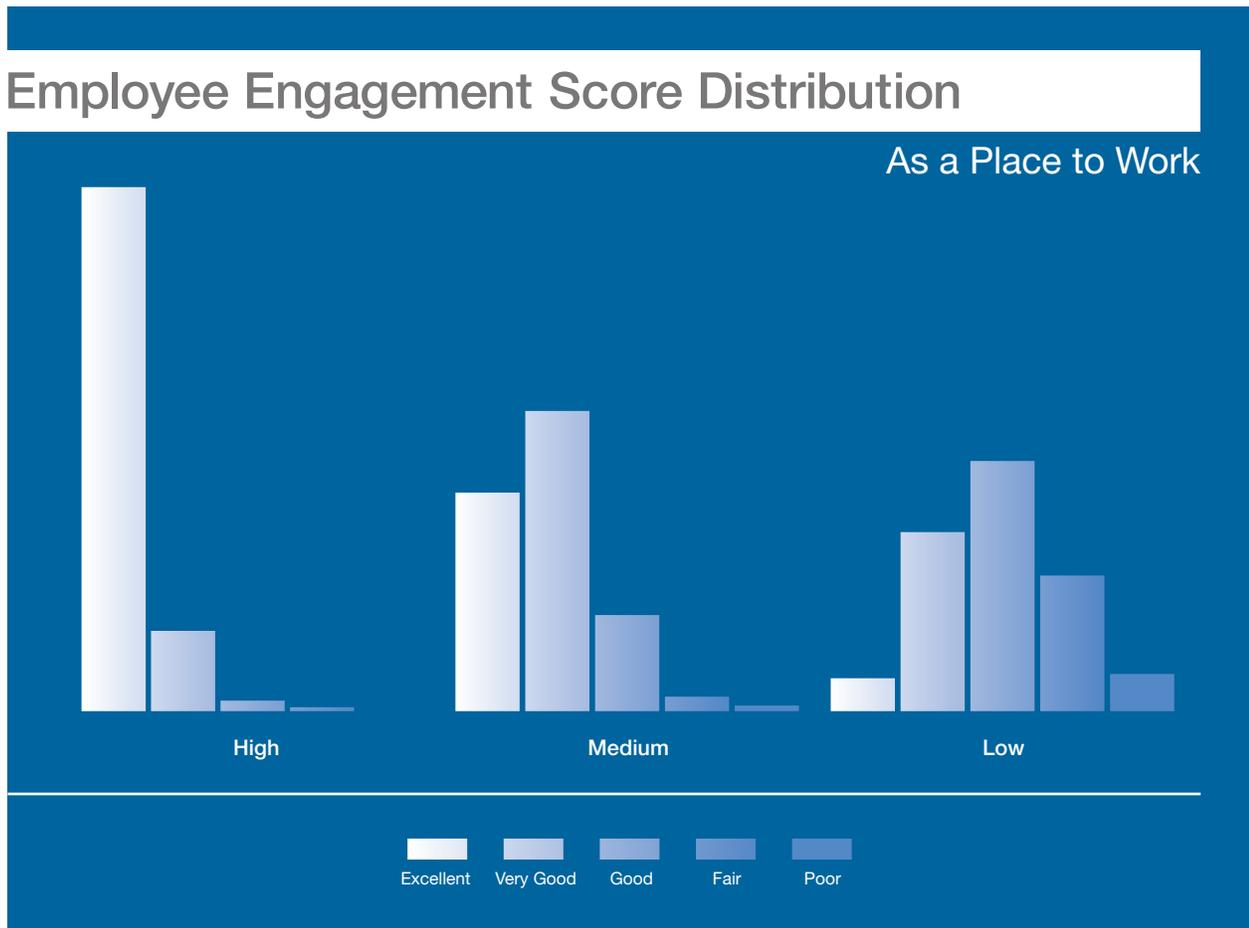
From the sample of 51,000 healthcare workers, PRC's research on engagement found the number one predictor of engagement to be an **employee's perception of the overall work environment**. In fact, employees with high levels of engagement are more than two times more likely to rate their work environment "Excellent," as compared to employees with medium levels of engagement, and

are more than 15 times more likely than employees with low levels of engagement. Across all hospitals studied, a consistently strong positive relationship between engagement and overall perceptions about the work environment was observed.

## Understand What Can and Cannot Be Controlled

When employees are not engaged, it is tempting to place blame on aspects that cannot be controlled. A rural hospital may rationalize their low engagement scores by pointing out they're the only hospital in town; their caregivers have no choice but to work for them. At the same time, a large hospital may attribute their low engagement scores to being too large to create the close-knit community needed to develop engagement.

There are always going to be uncontrollable aspects of the work environment that could potentially affect engagement levels, but none of these preclude a hospital from taking a hard look at





aspects that can be changed to improve engagement.

The reality is that most people want to find meaning and purpose in their work and will respond positively to an environment that provides opportunities to succeed. PRC has found that when highly engaged employees choose to leave their jobs, it is most often because of reasons outside the hospital's control, like a spouse who was relocated, retirement or furthering their education.

## Focus on What Can Be Changed

Engagement, as we define and measure it, is a self-focused attribute. It is a psychological construct comprised of an individual's beliefs. The personal aspect is assessed in the PRC survey via the Engagement Index, but that's only one piece of the puzzle. The other part is the "positive interpersonal and workplace support" piece.

Because of its strong correlation with employee engagement, the "Overall Place to Work" question is where PRC directs hospital leadership to begin when embarking on strategies to increase engagement. Although it may not be as easy to effectively change an employee's individual beliefs, there are ways that healthcare organizations can increase engagement through focusing on the

external work environment, where action plans and management efforts have proven to be effective.

## PRC Study Provides Focus, Benchmarks and Planning Tools

PRC's approach to employee engagement provides insight into the real perceptions and engagement levels of those working inside your organization. More important, the study's results include engagement priorities for improving those aspects of the work environment that can be controlled and are most predictive of not only increasing perceptions, but also engagement and loyalty.

Keep in mind that it doesn't benefit your organization to be compared against employees in other industries. The PRC Employee Engagement study identifies just how engaged employees are, categorized by department and in comparison to thousands of other hospital employees in our database. In addition, your organization will receive specific engagement priorities which identify where focus should be placed, as well as robust and easy-to-use action planning tools to assist with monitoring and tracking improvement efforts.

**It is really quite simple: as more employees perceive their work environment as excellent, engagement will increase.** PRC can help you retain engaged, loyal employees by providing you with the tools necessary to create a working environment that cultivates and promotes engagement. The ultimate outcome of these efforts is a culture where excellent patient experiences result.

Find out how a PRC Employee Engagement Study can provide focus and guidance in making your hospital an excellent place for employees to work and for physicians to practice medicine. Call **800-428-7455** and ask to visit with a Client Organization Development specialist today! •

