# Employee Engagement:

## Tools for Analysis, Practice, and Competitive Advantage

**William H. Macey,**
**Benjamin Schneider,**
**Karen M. Barbera, and**
**Scott A. Young**

# Contents

# Preface

Rarely has a term that represents a "soft" topic resonated as strongly with business executives as employee engagement has in recent years. Part of the reason is likely an increased focus on human capital as a source of competitive advantage. As technology has quickly reduced or eliminated many operational sources of competitive advantage, the focus has shifted to human capital as an avenue to competitive advantage that is difficult to imitate.

In addition, the early part of this decade saw enormous increases in layoffs; "do more with less" was the mantra heard by employees in countless corporations. Executives in many organizations were not only looking for ways to increase the productivity of their workforces, but were also attempting to accomplish this with a leaner staff. Thus, much of the interest in employee engagement stems from a general concern for productivity. Further contributing to the interest are general concerns about the viability of today's workforce, particularly given the seeming lack of a long-term commitment by companies to their employees and the simultaneous control employees have taken for their work lives.[1]

This interest has led to a flood of ideas about what can be done to harness the "discretionary" effort of employees. The essential notion underlying these ideas is that employees will be more likely to direct their efforts toward things that matter for company success if they receive more of what management thinks will satisfy employees. Consistent with this line of thought, it has become common to regard

concepts such as employee satisfaction and employee engagement as equivalent. We take issue with that view and make it clear why such an approach leads organizations to misdirect both their time and resources.

Thus, this book takes a dramatically different approach and shows how satisfaction differs from engagement. Whereas satisfaction represents contentment or satiation, we define engagement in terms that connote energy and provide a simple and compelling set of principles on which any organization can create and sustain a more engaged workforce. Going further, we give practical guidance on how to establish the kind of culture that both drives and sustains engagement.

It is important to recognize that engagement is not about a zero-sum game of getting more from employees at less cost. Rather, focusing on employee engagement means facing the challenge of how both organizations and employees can simultaneously benefit – a "win-win" scenario of enhanced organizational effectiveness coupled with heightened employee well-being. It is our conviction that both are not only achievable but likely when a well-designed engagement campaign is defined and executed. In the chapters that follow we provide the essential background in concept and practice for HR professionals, management consultants, and others who advise organizations on how to achieve the full benefits of competitive advantage through employee engagement.

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## About the Authors

**William H. Macey** is CEO of Valtera and has 30 years of experience consulting with organizations to design and implement survey research programs. He has served as an advisor to the Mayflower Group since 1992 and is the co-author of several recent publications on employee engagement. He is a Fellow of SIOP, APA, and APS and is a SIOP past president. He received his PhD from Loyola University Chicago in 1975.

**Benjamin Schneider** is Senior Research Fellow at Valtera and Professor Emeritus of the University of Maryland. He has won Distinguished Scientific Contributions Awards both in Psychology and Marketing, he has published nine books and more than 140 journal articles and book chapters. He has also consulted widely with many Fortune 100 companies especially on issues concerning organizational service climate and employee engagement, and the way these link to customer satisfaction and financial success.

**Karen M. Barbera** is a Managing Principal at Valtera Corporation, responsible for overseeing the practice group focused on employee

engagement surveys and organizational diagnostics. She consults with numerous Fortune 100 level companies on the design, execution, and use of employee surveys to drive organizational improvement efforts, including the delivery of C-suite presentations of results. She is also the principal author of Valtera's feedback and action planning programs. She received her PhD in industrial and organizational psychology from Bowling Green State University.

**Scott A. Young** is a Managing Consultant at Valtera Corporation. He consults with the firm's organizational survey clients on content development and measurement, reporting and interpretation of results, research, and action planning. In addition, he has consulted with clients on multirater feedback and employee selection, and oversees the development of Valtera's proprietary employee survey normative data and research. He received his PhD in industrial and organizational psychology from Northern Illinois University.