

# EXECUTIVE EDGE

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## The Changing Face of Employee Engagement: 7 Trends Part 2 - The Trends

By Joe Hunt

With so many organizations focusing on engaging their employees, why aren't engagement levels across the world increasing? In part 1, we identified the barriers preventing ideal engagement. In part 2, we investigate the current trends around engagement and how to leverage those trends to spur organizational change.

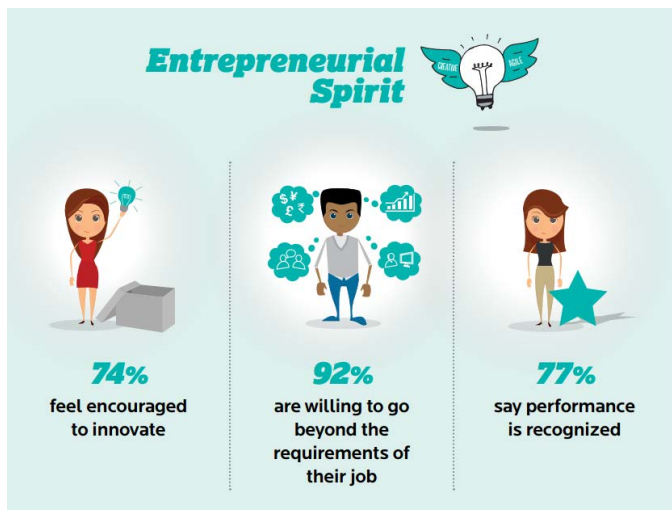
### 1. Engagement will go up (but just a little).

According to [\*Gallup's latest poll\*](#), employee engagement has been pretty stagnant. Only 32% of U.S. workers were engaged in their jobs in 2015, compared to 31.5% the previous year. Given the other trends below, and the fact that engagement has risen from 29% in 2011, we can expect to see the needle move in 2016. But probably not more than a point or two.

### 2. Millennials will (still) provide a challenge.

In 2015, millennials became the [\*largest generation\*](#) in the US workforce. That number will rise dramatically as more boomers retire and more graduates start their careers.

Whatever the specific number, millennials are now the majority. Businesses seeking to engage employees in their work will now have to tailor their approaches to this younger group. Research suggests that they are driven by open communication, a great company culture, involvement with causes, and achieving purpose and fulfillment.



### 7 Future Trends in Engagement

In his blog, [\*7 Fascinating Employee Engagement Trends for 2016\*](#), David Mizne lists the following engagement trends for the coming year, and writes about how to create a more engaged workforce:

### **3. More compassionate leadership.**

People don't quit their jobs, they quit their bosses. It turns out that the opposite is also true. An inspiring manager creates more engaged teams. According to [\*research\*](#) by leadership development experts Dr. Brad Shuck and Maryanne Honeycutt-Elliott, "higher levels of engagement come from employees who work for a compassionate leader—one who is authentic, present, has a sense of dignity, holds others accountable, leads with integrity and shows empathy."

### **4. More employee feedback more often.**

In 2014, Mizne conducted an [\*employee engagement study\*](#) and found that the vast majority of employees who received little or no feedback were actively disengaged. Engagement went up dramatically when employees received feedback about their weaknesses, and even more so when they received feedback about strengths.

### **5. Work/Life Balance will become Work/Life Blend.**

The Society for Human Resource Management found that the best companies are embracing flexibility. For many job functions, it is no longer a necessity to require people to come into the office between 9am and 5pm. More companies will continue to provide job flex-time as long as the numbers prove it's working.

### **6. People analytics will grow.**

In his article [\*The Two Sides of Employee Engagement\*](#), published in Harvard Business Review, Sean Graber argues that it's important to look at employees' perceptions and behaviors and their impact on performance. Managers can then decide how to shift things to increase engagement.

Josh Bersin writes in [\*The Geeks Arrive In HR: People Analytics Is Here\*](#), about the shift towards "big data in HR" which began in 2011 and exploded rapidly. He predicts that people analytics will be its own department that will look at productivity, turnover, and the people-issues that drive customer retention and satisfaction.

### **7. Technology will focus on the employee.**

One of the biggest trends we are seeing is the arrival of a "new breed of pulse tools, feedback apps, and anonymous social networking tools." These advanced methods for having regular check-ins with employees to understand where they are being challenged will eventually replace annual performance reviews.

## Hope for the Future

In 2016, leadership has more tools at its disposal to predict and improve employee engagement. Perhaps in 2017, Gallup's survey will report a positive radical shift in how people show up to work.

- Giordin Castle of Appirio writes that, in May of 2015, Fortune reported that a record 86% of employees were happy with their jobs — the highest percentage in over a decade.

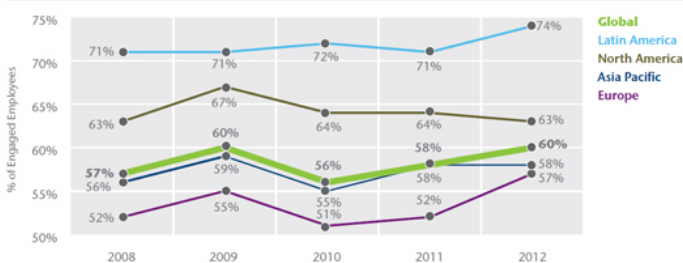
- The Society for Human Resource Management reported that employees felt respected, trusted senior management, got along with their bosses, and felt motivated at work.

- However, in a survey by Monster.com which reported similar positive findings, 73% of employees polled also said that they were “thinking about another job.” 43% even said they were more likely to consider a new job than they were a year earlier.



Castle writes, “While there are several factors for the uptick in employee happiness and attrition, the following predictions about the year ahead shed light on 3 things: What employees want, why they leave, and what you can do to get them to stick around.”

Global Trends in Employee Engagement Scores



### These predictions include:

- Employee engagement will become a key HR objective.
- Gamification will drive corporate goals and planning (at its core, gamification is the use of gaming components to accelerate learning).
- The despised annual performance review will finally die. • Peer-to-peer recognition will increase.
- A new attrition risk will emerge: low commitment employees.

Annamarie Mann and Jim Harter sum up the employee engagement crises with this thought:

*“Creating a culture of engagement requires more than completing an annual employee survey and then leaving managers on their own, hoping they will learn something from the survey results that will change their daily behavior. It requires a company to take a close look at the critical engagement elements that align with performance and with the organization’s human capital strategy. Managers and leaders should keep employee engagement top of mind — because every interaction with employees can have an impact on engagement and organizational performance.”*

Overall, studies have shown that in just about every business, the more attention given to employee engagement and employee well-being, the better the business performance.

*“Business is more about emotions than most businesspeople care to admit.”*  
~ Daniel Kahneman, Ph.D, Nobel Prize Laureate and Behavioral Economist

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Joe Hunt is a Managing Partner at Hunt Executive Search/The Hunt Group, a boutique executive search firm that provides human capital solutions to consumer goods, retail, life sciences and diversified industrial markets.

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## Contact Joe Hunt:

212.861.2680 | 800.486.8476 | [info@huntsearch.com](mailto:info@huntsearch.com)

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