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Over 1 million data points on employee energy at work and open-ended comment data on what is making energy increase and decrease. The raw data, the research studies, and case studies make up the Energy Files. To learn more go to www.leadershippulse.com or www.eepulse.com.

Employee Energy in the Health Care Industry

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You have to applaud the dedication and hard work of people who are in health care. I am thinking about the doctors, nurses, and staffs that patch us all up when we head to the emergency room and that will be struggling with all the changes in their jobs and organizations over the next year.

In the midst of a very serious situation, I hope you do not mind my interjecting one small humorous story. We were doing short energy pulse surveys every two weeks at a hospital, and most of the internal marketing used the "pulse" word. Signs were posted with words such as "don't forget to take your pulse" or "we care; do the pulse." Two nurses, incredibly diligent and wanting to help and do their part, called the eePulse office and wanted to know where to record their numbers. They received a pulse survey via email; and typically, someone opens it up, clicks a link, and then types in a number from zero to 10. The help desk team is picturing the nurses looking at the survey on their computer, wondering why they could not understand the instructions. After much discussion, they all realized the two nurses were physically taking their body pulse (each helping the other) and wanted to know how to record the medical reading and where to send it.

These nurses were willing to stop and take their body pulse and send it in even though it probably made absolutely no sense to them at all. They were dedicated and so were the other employees who provided numbers and incredibly rich open-ended comment data on what was working, where improvement was needed, cost cutting suggestions and much more.
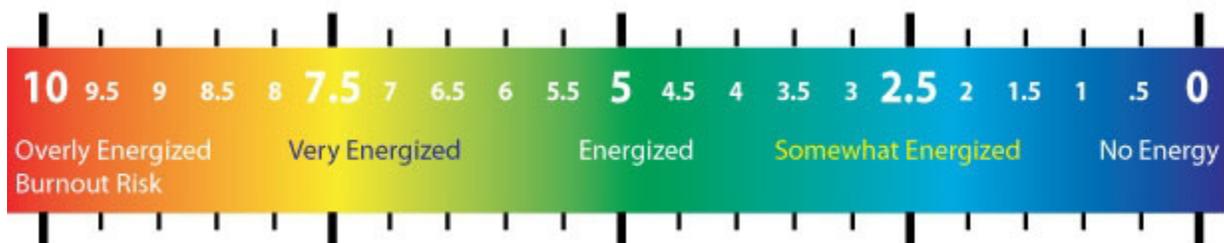
Energy Pulse at Work

The energy work has been done since 1996. The first set of research studies used very long surveys (some up to 200 questions), and from this work the research team validated the metrics and over time shortened the core items. The study findings showed we could adequately collect valid and predictive data using just one question. Since 1996, the energy pulse question has been used within organizations around the world, in over 50 countries, with numerous languages and in multiple industries and sizes of organizations.

The energy pulse question uses the color-coded energy scale (below), and employees are asked to rate their current energy level, the energy level where they are most productive, and they answer open-ended comment questions. A productivity zone, which is part of the reports managers receive, is generated via a formula that links energy to productivity, tenure, absenteeism, customer satisfaction and other performance outcomes.

Individual employees receive personal reports, showing their own energy trend vs. where they are most productive (for self-regulation of their own energy). Summarized data are provided for regular business reporting, quarterly reports and annual reports. Open-ended comment data use an auto categorization process so that comment themes too can be trended. The energy metric is supplemented with other questions during the year, as part of an overall, customized metrics strategy for each organization.

Figure 1: Energy Pulse scale

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Several health care projects started out with nurses because the hospitals that employed them were working to lower turnover. What the project showed was that not only could the organization lower turnover of nursing staff by working on their energy, they also could improve patient satisfaction and save money while doing both.

On the next page (in Figure 2), are examples of energy trends for two teams. It includes employee ratings of their own energy at work, their estimate of the energy of others on their teams and the productivity zones for the teams. It is obvious by glancing quickly at the data which group is doing well and which is not.

Team comparisons

Team 1 is not doing so well. The team's overall personal energy level is below the productivity zone, with scores ranging from 4.3 to 6.4 over this period. The red line is never in the zone. Patient satisfaction scores and job satisfaction scores are significantly low for this team.

Figure 2: Energy trends from two teams within a hospital
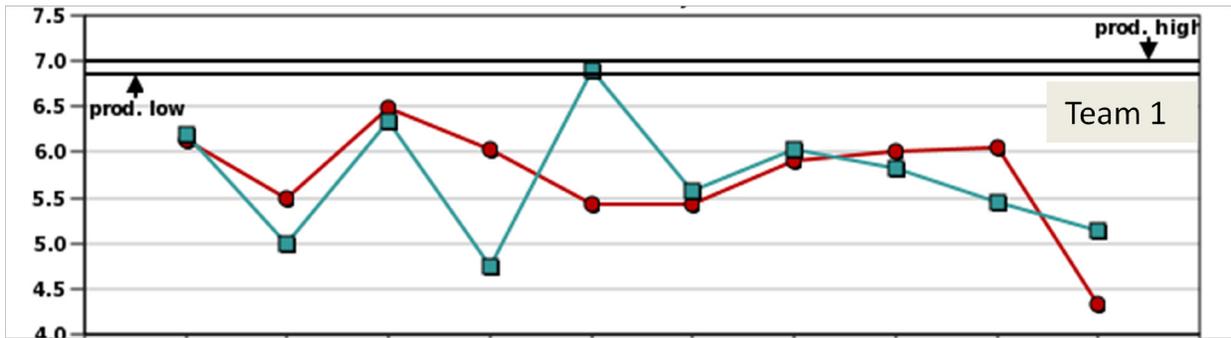
Red line = personal energy; Teal line = rating of "others" energy; Prod low = lower
bound of the productivity zone; Prod high = upper bound of the productivity zone
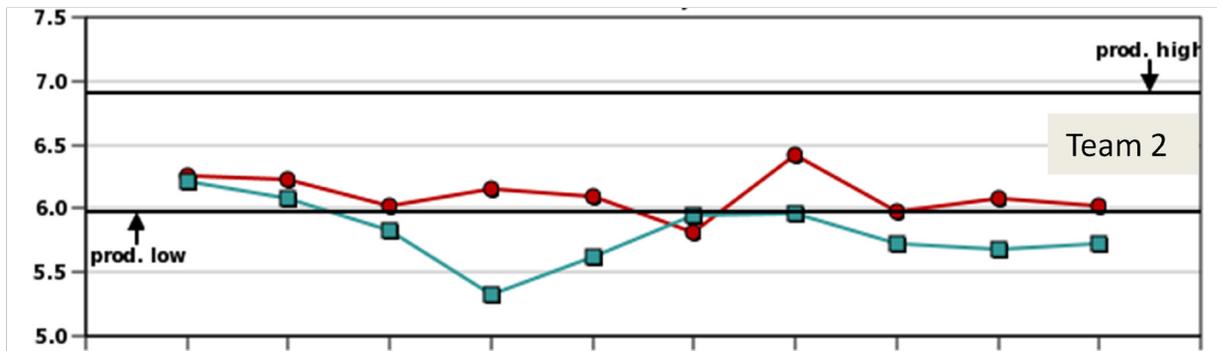
Team 2 is a high performing group. Their scores on all counts are at the top of those in the organization. Their red (self-energy) line is consistently in the zone, and note the red line is higher than the teal one. The energy research shows that teams are in "good shape" when their own personal energy level, as a group, is higher than their ratings of their team overall. It would take a long discussion to explain why, but generally speaking, this trend is associated with higher performance groups.

The key to success in changing team one is for the manager in charge to engage the team in dialogue and work on making improvements. The story here is that the manager was reluctant to face up to the fact that the team needed help. Single, point-in-time data was being dismissed as a function of the "event of the day." When confronted with the trend data, it was extremely difficult for the manager to deny what was happening. With the help of the HR team, these data eventually led to dialogue and the types of improvements that led to improved morale, higher scores and cost savings.

Patient satisfaction outcomes

When measuring employee energy at work, two numbers are required. The first is the employee's current energy level, and the second is the number where the employee is most productive. Both numbers are used to customize a productivity zone (seen in Figure 2) for each group receiving reports. Being "in the zone" is a good thing, and being "out of the zone" is bad. An employee can be out of the zone by being below where most productive or equally by being above where most productive. At very high energy levels, employees start to approach burnout.

The energy data tell the story. In a 6-month period, research showed the following:

Table 1: Energy and patient satisfaction scores

Hospital Unit	Number of weeks in the productivity zone (6 months; collect data every other week)	Change in patient satisfaction over 6-month period of time (time 1 and time 2 patient satisfaction administration data used)
Group #1	70%	Significant and positive
Group #2	30%	Low scores, negative and no change

In groups that had energy scores "in the zone" 70% or more of the time, patient satisfaction scores increased. In other groups, where their scores were in the zone only 30% or less of the time, patient satisfaction scores decreased dramatically. In the two units described in Table 1, the group with 70% of their weeks in the productivity zone also had significantly higher job satisfaction scores, 10% higher than those in the lower group.

When nurses were busy, but not burned out or near burn out, they felt a sense of accomplishment. By taking their own energy pulse regularly, they began to learn what helped them be more or less productive at work, and then the nurses started helping each other out and creating the kind of environment that made them feel better about work and that helped improve the patient experience. No one wants care takers who are so frazzled they can't think straight, and also, there isn't a patient or patient advocate who wants a medical professional that's slow and de-energized, not able to quickly assistant in a situation when needed. Thus, it was obvious to all involved in the work optimizing energy in health care was a critical and important goal for hospitals and other health care organizations.

Cost savings

At the same time, as we were tracking nurse and other hospital staff energy, we also asked open-ended comment questions soliciting ideas for saving money. The comments that came in resulted in numerous ideas that the hospital was able to implement. Employees have ideas; they are in the middle of the day-to-day activity that generates costs. When given an opportunity and under conditions when survey respondents trust the confidentiality of a system,

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employees provide new ideas for cost savings that would not be easily found by a committee or management group. The ideas range from small wins (e.g. recycling paper, buying less expensive equipment, saving time by changing process) to larger scale items that can have significant savings (e.g. changes in how a software program is working, reallocating resources to improve efficiency).

Boosting morale

While doing frequent energy taking work, morale improves because the "act" of data collection, engaging in dialogue about the data and then sharing results of actions create a large-scale intervention. Employees feel more valued because they have a new opportunity for voice, and even more important they learn that someone is listening. The energy pulsing process enhances sense of ownership of jobs. Employees want voice; they highly value the ability to present ideas to management, and by making employee sensing and listening part of a regular process employees see it as a benefit.

Secret to success in health care

The secret to success was not magic interventions. The act of measuring led to the habit of listening and making employee data and dialogue part of the everyday business of managing a hospital. Here is how it works:

- Collect data from employees every 2 weeks or monthly.
- Merge this employee data into other data that are shared at hospital leadership staff meetings and employee staff meetings.
- Post the data on walls where other hospital data are posted.
- Get everyone involved in taking action from the data.
- Teach managers to have quick, short conversations about the data and the outcomes of the data with their employees – as part of the regular staff meetings they hold.
- Celebrate the wins, the cost savings and the ideas that are implemented.

The secret to success in health care or any business that employs people is blending the data and data collection process into the rhythm of the institution and the way the organization does business. Do not make it an event like an annual employee survey. Merging in the employee energy data with the mix of other data serves to demonstrate to employees that they are as important as all the other assets tracked by the leadership group.

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