

What are the Energy Files?

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.

Energize and Engage Lock and Load What's Next?

Theresa M. Welbourne, Ph.D.

In writing and speaking about employee energy, I am often asked the question about how energy and employee engagement are connected. Are they the same thing? Are they different constructs? Is one better than another? It would be nice to have a simple answer to these questions. However, having just completed a literature review on the topic, I found no agreed upon definition for employee engagement. This makes it difficult to succinctly answer the query about energy vs. engagement.

It seems that employee engagement has become a catch-all term for all that is good about people at work. Some authors have suggested that employee engagement is a “mega construct,” encompassing much of what we think of when we talk about the big fields of organization behavior or even human resource management. Thus, it seems that employee engagement is the big “thing” about employees that drives high performance. There are numerous avenues to improve performance, thus, there are a multitude of paths to understand employee engagement. With that somewhat vague sense of the term, next let’s review what we know about employee energy at work and then come back to putting energy and engagement together.

Energy = internal force, the ability to do work

The definitions for energy come from physics, motivation work in management, sales and marketing, and from sports physiology. Employee energy is all about potential to do work. It’s the internal force employees have that moves them forward. How people measure energy may vary a bit; however, the core idea is about motion.

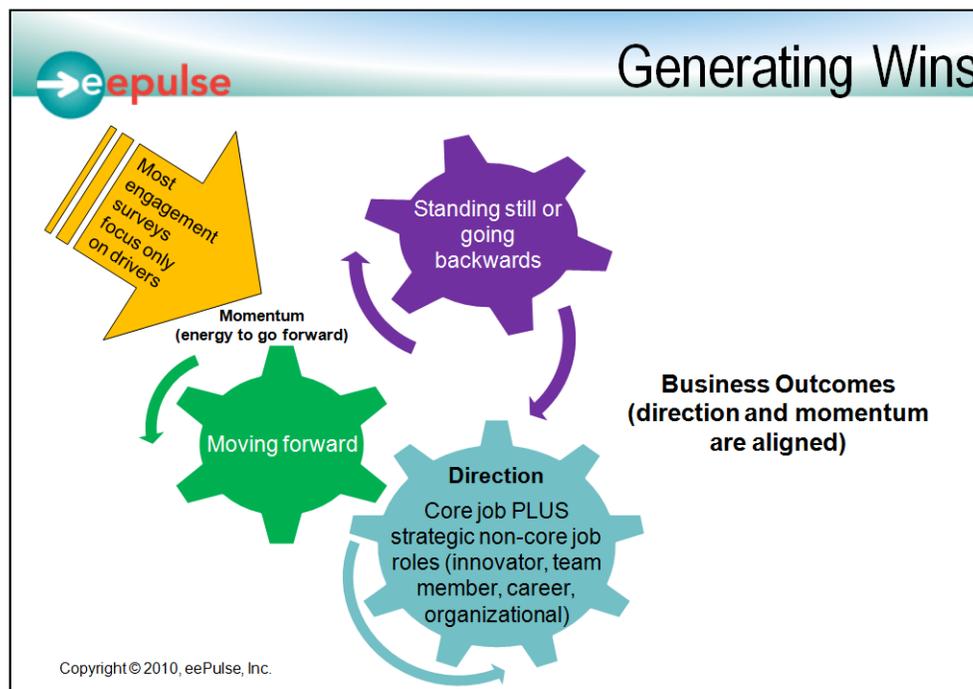
In the employee survey and measurement projects done at eePulse and in the Leadership Pulse, we assess employee energy at work. The measurement process behaves a lot like taking your body pulse. We find out how employees are doing (one quick number is obtained), and the results provide one validated indicator variable. To

understand what's affecting energy, however, one needs further diagnostics. That additional information can come from open-ended comment data, additional measurement work or from dialogue.

Lock and Load?

Using the terms “energize and engage,” reminds me of the infamous saying “lock and load.” Ready, set and now what? What both energy and engagement alone or together are missing is the target of the force that is being propelled forward. Thus, a complete model of business effectiveness must focus on direction or the target.

In several other articles, the use of roles as a lens to understand employee energy has been introduced. Below is the model that puts together traditional employee engagement, energy and direction using roles at work (to learn more, a presentation and diagnostic tool are available at: http://ceo.usc.edu/news/engaged_in_what.html).



Energy is about motion. Note in this picture that “moving forward” (green cog) is connected to direction (teal cog); however, standing still and going backwards (purple cog) is out there on its own. Knowing the percent of employees who are moving forward vs. not is critical for assessing potential to meet business targets. Measuring energy provides data on the number of employees who are moving forward or standing still; it also gives information on the pace at which employees are moving (to assure they are not going at a pace that will lead to burnout).

What we find in most employee engagement surveys are the drivers of employee energy or movement; however, questions are not targeted at measuring energy. The

typical employee engagement survey assesses aspects about the employee's work, manager, leadership, culture, rewards system, customer experience, teamwork and more. These drivers or detractors of energy are important; with these data one can diagnose the things that help convert potential energy into work.

However, knowledge of energy itself is needed to understand the impact of drivers and detractors on employee performance. In addition, data on direction or the target of energy is critical for a complete link between employee engagement efforts and business results. For example, employees can report being very happy with their managers and rewards, but both can be leading employees in the wrong direction. Alternatively, employees can be very happy with their manager and rewards under conditions where they are acting as "detractors" and lowering energy at work (reinforcing the status quo).

Lock and load is a fine term; it denotes being ready. However, what organizations also need to know is "where's the target?" A complete high performance or employee engagement initiative, then, requires understanding of:

- Drivers and detractors of both energy and direction
- Employee energy
- Direction (target of energy)

The roles lens as a way to study direction

The roles lens provides a succinct way to study direction (write to info@eepulse.com for access to research reports). Via numerous studies, both academic and practitioner focused, our research team has validated five roles employees occupy at work; they are:

- Core job role (what's likely in the job description, functional job requirements)
- Team member role (being part of a team, helping other teams)
- Entrepreneur or innovator role (developing new ideas, implementing and supporting new ideas or innovation processes)
- Career or learner role (devoting energy and time to learning new skills, new process)
- Organization member role (doing things that are good for the company overall, often referred to as organization citizenship behaviors).

By specifically calling out what one means by "going above and beyond" and "expending discretionary effort" (terms used in the employee engagement literature) via the roles lens, the path between energy and engagement to business success becomes clear. What also is quickly noticed is the fact that asking employees to spend time and energy on non-core job roles takes time away from the core job.

The question for any leadership team to answer is which roles are important for the organization to achieve its business objectives. Said differently, how should employees expend their energy at work to optimize business results?

Energy taking does not have to be done with surveys

Energy taking can be done via surveys or what we call “Pulse Dialogues,” and it also can be done with zero technology, through a myriad of other processes. One example I read about years ago was providing employees with three buckets of marbles red, green and yellow. At the end of the day, the employer asked employees to drop in a marble that represented how their day was (good = green; yellow = average; red = bad). The management team would look at the marbles and use that data for the next day’s morning briefing.

The key to success with energy taking is to pay attention and look for change. Swings in energy are bad. Also, being busy is not equal to being energized. Employees often report being very busy working at things that are de-energizing them at work.

Our research shows that frequent dialogue with employees about their energy and learning more about the small things that can be done to energize and assure that energy is being expended on the right work that drives your firm’s success.

To learn more, keep reading *From the Energy Files* or write to info@eepulse.com and ask for the research on employee energy.