



# Beyond Employee Engagement: Creating Enrichment

A white paper from the Forum  
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The great recession profoundly affected all aspects of the economy including the management of every organization's greatest asset: people. Talent pipelines, compensation, employee motivation and other human resource strategies designed to make the most of human capital are being re-examined in the light of new economic realities. After several years of frozen compensation and reduced workforces, employers are looking for better ways to attract and retain the right talent at the very time that many burned out employees are poised to jump ship for more promising opportunities. Without factoring in the recession, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics tells us that "the average American will have 10.8 jobs from age 18 to 42" and that, despite the reality that many workers anxiously clung to their jobs in the midst of the recession's high unemployment rates, "the overall turnover rate across all industries was 16.3 percent in 2009" (Shepherd, Leah. "Focusing Knowledge Retention on Millennials." Workforce Management August 2010: 6). There is no doubt that the competition for talent and loyalty will be fierce and critical to business survival.

## Dream Employers Foster Loyalty

The effects of the recession coupled with the emergence of a multi-cultural/multi-generational workforce and the added influence of globalization have helped turn the spotlight on innovative employers who seem to have magic formulas for attracting and keeping their employees happy and productive in spite of the economic forces around them.

Take the example of SAS Institute, Inc. This North Carolina software company has long offered personal employee perks at its headquarters campus that include: onsite child-care, a medical-care facility, a fitness center and natatorium, an extensive art collection and even a 1.8 mile "bluebird trail" with 25 birdhouses for employees to explore—"activities that have helped foster enduring loyalty

Although employee engagement and productivity are the bell weather concepts that have steered business principles for motivating people to do their best for their organizations, the great recession has undermined the foundation on which these human resource pillars are built. The challenges of an increasingly multi-generational, multi-cultural workforce connected in a virtual world have been further complicated by the frozen compensation, unhinged career paths and stretched employees that are the hallmarks of today's business realities. It comes as no surprise that business leaders find themselves struggling to attract and retain the very talent they must have in order to emerge from the grips of the recession.

Just in time, comes the emergence of a new people-centered concept called "Employee Enrichment"—a strategic approach that addresses both work and non-work factors in order to enhance employees' lives based on the expectation that the better a person's well-being, the better that person performs.

Citing examples of several businesses that are already using enrichment techniques, this paper highlights the key components of employee enrichment and encourages leaders to take actions designed to individually enrich employees' experiences and embrace the idea that employees are constituents to be served instead of simply being "managed" as the means to an organization's success.

and very low turnover" (Alsop, Ronald J. "All Work and No Play..." Workforce Management October 2010: 50).

Then, of course, there's the familiar image of Google Inc.

headquarters with its employee perks like massages, yoga, dance classes, employee piano and onsite ping pong, oil changes and dry cleaning—all perks that have “made Google the dream employer for many” (Alsop, Ronald J. “All Work and No Play...”).

SAS and Google are two examples of companies who, consciously or not, have tapped into new ways of motivating employees that could be labeled “employee enrichment.” Explained in its newest research paper, *Employee Enrichment: An Approach to Leadership and Management that Serves Employees*, The Forum, affiliated with Northwestern University, defines employee enrichment as a strategic concept that genuinely emphasizes the quality of people’s lives (Mulhern, Frank and Saxena, Deepti, January 2011). Employee enrichment addresses work and non-work life factors and attempts to enhance people’s lives on the expectation that the better a person’s well-being, the better that person performs. By allowing their employees to address both their personal and professional needs within the context of their everyday work environment, companies like SAS and Google are demonstrating their commitment to the quality of their employees’ lives. But, the concept of employee enrichment doesn’t end simply with additional employee personal life enhancements even though they are bona fide positive factors that attract, serve and support employees.

## Employee Enrichment Calls for Professional Development

The concept of employee enrichment also encompasses providing for an employee’s professional development through formal policies aimed at advancing the employee’s career progress and other aspects that improve employee skills, performance and earnings potential.

An excellent example of a professional development program is the Future Leaders Apprentice professional rotation program at Deloitte. In that program, employees are nominated or selected by committee and all new hires are eligible immediately. It offers several weeks of apprentice work at various organizations or departments within the company and, at the end of rotation, over three-fourths of the employees who participate in the program acquire a higher level position in the firm. Each new hire who

participates in the program receives a tuition payback as additional incentive to join the company (Mulhern and Saxena, 10).

In offering professional development aimed at employee enrichment, the critical element is that the better the organization provides resources that are tailored to, and have meaning for, the individual employee’s strengths and interests to foster personal growth, the more enriched he/she will feel.

## Employee Enrichment Needs Social Connectivity

Employee enrichment also takes into account the importance of social connectivity. Wise leaders understand that employees don’t perform in a vacuum, but are part of a comprehensive network of people who have a profound influence on their work, their lives and their ability to perform. Leaders know that social connectivity is a higher order contribution to the work environment because it is likely to have a greater impact on the quality of the employee’s life than other enrichment contributions, and because it is significantly more difficult to implement than merely enacting a set of programs.

Social connectivity can be influenced by workplace factors that range from culture to physical infrastructure. For instance, Google has designed themed zones such as mountain scenery, rainforests and space stations in some of its offices to counteract the sterility of ordinary cubicles

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(Mulhern and Saxena, 11). Another example of how social connectivity works is exemplified by the Walt Disney Company:

Disney administers a series of mandatory programs for its employees that are based upon social connectivity as a means to build great employee organizations. The events are

special episodes of a program that are filmed for an onstage performance in the company's entertainment centers. Various employees are cast members, experienced people are directors or producers, and all of the technical staff required for film making is provided by Disney's technical departments. Episodes have a goal to create an enjoyable experience. This type of event brings out the best in the employee's character as well as exposes him/her to cast members in ways that lead to good interpersonal bonds over the entire course of the shooting. At the end of each episode, the crew starts to get to know each other's strengths and points of appreciation and, by the time the complete program is shot, there is a heightened sense of confidence, trust, friendship, fun and camaraderie among employees. This type of practice in building social connectivity is one way Disney enhances its culture. Not surprisingly, Disney stands today as one of the most desired companies to work for (Mulhern and Saxena, 13-14).

## Employee Enrichment Leads to Thriving

Thriving is the final element of employee enrichment. It refers to a temporary state in which people experience positive feelings and a high level of energy in the context of their work performance. One dimension of this phenomenon is that it relates to learning and growth in which the activities are linked to a sense of progression in one's own development. As employees experience a sense of thriving, they perceive that their work and their lives are enriching. In order to achieve a sense of thriving, employees need to act "agentically," which is to say they are active and purposeful in what they do. Three behaviors that combine to promote thriving are:

1. **Task focus** which refers to the degree to which employees focus their behavior on meeting a defined work assignment, thereby generating energy from the sense of accomplishment.
2. **Exploration** which involves experimentation, risk taking, discovery and innovation that leads directly to learning.
3. **Heedful relatedness** with others at work which helps employees understand how their work, in concert with others, leads to the goal, also leading into vitality.

In today's communal world, the heavy use of social media among work colleagues for sharing experiences, opinions, feedback and appreciation provides a good example of agentic behavior that fosters greater trust among colleagues and contributes to a sense of thriving (Mulhern and Saxena,15).

## Employee Enrichment Is More Than Satisfaction or Engagement

Employee enrichment can be contrasted with employee satisfaction and employee engagement. Employee satisfaction is a psychological construct that depicts a level of contentment derived from the relationship between expectations and experiences. It is often considered limiting as it suggests that employees have the potential to simply feel "merely adequate" about their relationship with the organization. Employee engagement goes beyond satisfaction and connotes caring and passion with respect to how employees feel toward their employers. While stronger than satisfaction, both concepts are defined in

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the context of what an organization wants and expects, as opposed to what might best serve the employees.

With an enriched environment, leadership believes that as employee experiences with the organization contribute to meeting their own goals and developmental needs, the organization explicitly and implicitly benefits.

In reality, employee enrichment partially subsumes, but goes well beyond compensation and benefits. While some elements of enrichment might manifest themselves as "perks," the distinguishing factor is that providing the elements stems from, and adds up to, a serious management initiative to enhance people's lives. In contrast, traditional benefits have all too often been designed as ways to tangibly motivate employees to stay with organizations despite other factors that might drive them away.

## Positive Values Form the Foundation

A "prerequisite" for building employee enrichment is to begin with a culture of positive values. While the specific values may vary from organization to organization, they might include a sense of mission, open and transparent communications, encouragement of free expression, respect for individualism and more. Further, the more the leaders' actions and the employees' own beliefs are in alignment with these values, the stronger the resulting foundation. Employee enrichment is then expressed with the framework that emerges from that foundation of positive values and consists of implementing individualized personal and professional enhancements, social connectivity and attention to a state of thriving.

## Employee Enrichment Puts People First

The concept of employee enrichment departs from other human resource and management strategies by genuinely being a people-first approach (Mulhern and Saxena, 4).

The determining aspects of employee enrichment are not so much the exact practices that organizations undertake to serve employees as much as the attitude that things are done for the primary purpose of enhancing the lives of employees (Mulhern and Saxena, 16).

Companies such as Google, Microsoft, Wells Fargo, Deloitte, SAS, the Mayo Clinic and Cisco are just a few names frequently praised for their excellent treatment of employees. The common theme that can be seen across these companies is the level of loyalty and passion exuded by their employees, indicating something special is going on between the companies and their employees (Mulhern and Saxena, 2). What sets these companies apart is not so much the exact practices they use, but that their management approach is strongly centered on improving both the work and non-work aspects of employees' lives.

## Leader Responsibility and Results

In the end, leadership's responsibility in the scheme of things is to be thoughtful with the investments they make in employee benefits and resources, as well as the policies that frame the work environment. The more they are able to take actions that are designed to individually enrich and enhance employee experiences, with the idea that employees are constituents to be served as opposed to being simply a means to an end, the greater the payoff will be in increased productivity, engagement, loyalty and profitability.



The Forum for People Performance Management and Measurement ([www.performanceforum.org](http://www.performanceforum.org)) is a research center within the Medill Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) graduate program at Northwestern University. A central objective of the FORUM is to develop and disseminate knowledge about communications, motivation and management so that businesses can better design, implement and manage people-based initiatives for inside and outside an organization.

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