



How to maintain engagement and lucidity in the storm?

When the calm in the eye of the storm is... you!

Daniel Eppling and Grégoire Gatbois, April 2010



Figures can be frightening. Example: executives work on average 10 hours more per week than before the crisis, and 40% have more responsibilities. 4 out of 5 employees are not engaged with their organisation.

Engagement: the hot issue

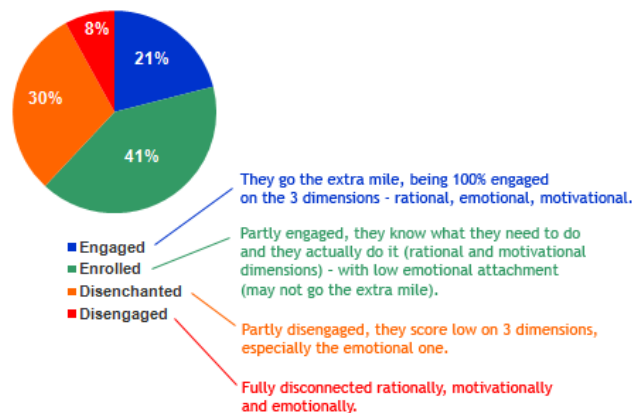
According to research conducted by McKinsey in 2009, most executives work longer than before the crisis started (from 45 to 55 hours a week). 40% have more responsibilities without this shift being reflected in their job title[1]. Some have been facing this overload in tasks and energy very well, while a majority of us is still struggling to find his/her best balance. And an increasing number of organisations are taking on measures to prevent stress and professional diseases - even promoting their employees' well being.

In our view, the crisis outlines a deeper long term trend - the risk of employees becoming disconnected - disengaged - from their organisation, thus from performance.

In a survey conducted in 2007-2008 with more than 90 000 employees[2], Towers Perrin defined engagement as "employees' willingness and ability to contribute to company success". In other words, engagement is the extent to which employees "go the extra mile" - contributing more of their energy, creativity and passion on the job. The intensity of the employee's engagement - or his/her connection with the organisation - is evaluated on 3 dimensions: rational, emotional and motivational:

- **Rational:** how well employees understand their roles and responsibilities.
- **Emotional:** how much passion and energy they bring to their work.
- **Motivational:** how well they perform in their roles.

The survey concludes that 4 employees out of 5 are not engaged, at least not as engaged as they could be.



Finally, Krauthammer's own annual survey, Krauthammer Observatory 2009, conducted in the Spring of that year, has revealed that only 41% of employees surveyed were highly committed to remaining in their organisation over the following twelve months.

Where do you stand? Where would you position your colleagues, your team, your unit? This is rather a key question as:

- Disengagement may be contagious: it tends to contaminate others.
- Disengagement carries costs for business - both in itself, and from its cause, personal instability.

The costs of disengagement

Disengagement hurts organisations, in terms of absenteeism, low employee retention, lower performance contributions. Whereas the average length of an employee's absenteeism is 6,1 days / year, this rises to 22,3 days for unsatisfied employees[3], according to Towers Perrin's research. Towers Perrin raised a possible correlation between employee engagement levels and financial results (fig. 1).

The costs of increased instability

Every year, 29% of the global population is affected by anxiety (25%), burn-out (19%), addiction (26%). Over our lifetime, on average we have a 48% probability of being affected - nearly 1 chance out of 2[4].

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*Sami Tulonen, Director
Institutional Affairs,
FORATOM, Belgium*

Article in the spotlight



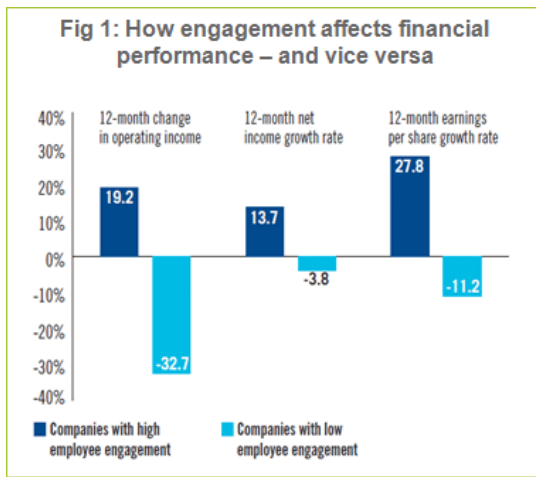
Informal learning in organisations

Organisations have long understood the importance of their formal learning initiatives and architecture. Yet informal learning - free knowledge exchange between employees - is as vital and in serious need of help.

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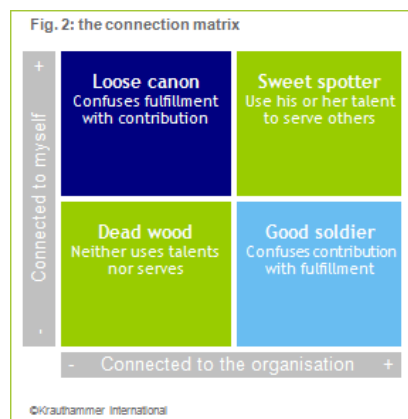
**Engaged to whom?
At the junction between myself and my organisation**

- Connected to myself = being consistently authentic, focused on my expectations and needs.
- Connected to my organisation = being adaptable, living in full symbiosis with the environment's needs and expectations.

Our conviction:

true, balanced, employee engagement stands at the junction - 'the sweet spot' - between a high connection to myself and a high connection to my organisation.

What are the risks of maintaining other positions in the matrix (fig. 2)?



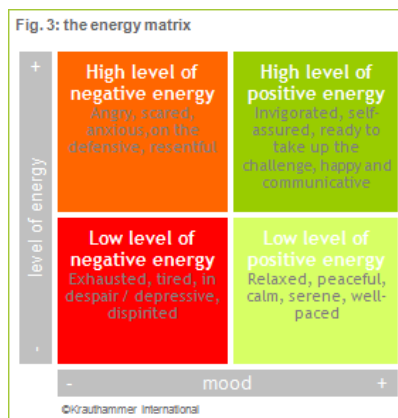
- The "loose canon" may underperform - or undercontribute - and in the long term s/he may jeopardise his/her career and break team spirit.
- The "dead wood" is in the worst situation: not only does he or she undercontribute to the organisation, but also underdevelops him or herself. His/Her professional life loses sense.
- The "good soldier" overadapts to his or her environment. He or she may become addictive to the organisational reward system (salary, gratitude...) and be vulnerable to possible changes in his or context such as a reorganisation of the company.

Engaged to what extent? Tuning energy levels

Does a marathon athlete run a 42 km race every day? The answer is obviously, no. Most strategic races are followed by periods of rest and progressive training. No one can maintain a 200% energy level all day, all year. Let's map out the different profiles we can adopt according to our energy and attitude towards the organisation (fig 3).

Four different situations are presented:

- High positive energy:** this is the ideal situation for an organisation, sought after from all its employees - and it is unsustainable long term.
- High negative energy:** excessive periods of high levels of energy, can lead to a frustration that leads to a negative, high energy reaction. This attitude, sometimes observed in someone qualified as "borderline", brings a toxicity risk (spreading to other colleagues).
- Low negative energy:** the fact that a high level of energy is unsustainable can carry a risk of collapse close to the "breaking point". The employee is at risk of burn out, anxiety, despair - and does not have enough energy to overcome these.



In reality, a single individual may navigate from situation 1 to situation 3 throughout his or her professional day to day. More worryingly, our 35 years' experience in training and coaching have led us to observe a possible point of no return in situation 3 (low negative energy), concluding this itinerary.

What is missing in the picture?

4. **Low positive energy**: a time to rest, recharge batteries, find new inspiration... Arguably, the best alternative to situation 1, which, we recall, is ultimately unsustainable.

[How to get there?](#)

Strategic disengagement:

our ability to withdraw / take distance from the busy, sometimes frenetic, day-to-day and re-connect with oneself.

Originally "strategic disengagement" was commonly used in Foreign Affairs to define a policy of non- intervention, consisting in planning troop withdrawal from local territories and in the meantime taking appropriate measures in this perspective. Our most common form of strategic disengagement is to take a holiday... provided we really succeed in disconnecting from work and continuous information flows. According to a 2008 AOL survey of 4,000 e-mail users in the United States, 46% were "hooked" on e-mail - nearly 60% checked their e-mail in the bathroom, 15% even checked it in church !

Taking a holiday once in a while certainly helps... and is not enough! At the root of strategic disengagement lie everyday micro-decisions and actions such as:

- Taking 30 minutes at lunch (or at some point during the day) for a walk outside
- Breathing and practicing relaxation
- Switching off our mobile phone for a few hours
- Closing our email inbox for a few hours
- Reading a good article, a great book...

The manager of the subsidiary of an international company, told us: "we don't think enough at work. We do, we do, we do, and we too often forget to take the necessary time for reflexion and creative thinking". His employees see him often making tours around the building, and... it works (according to him)!

Strategic disengagement is a question of giving oneself - and others - permission to temporarily disconnect from direct business activities... and restore the conditions for high performance.

[When will you next give permission to yourself/colleagues/team/organisation?](#)

[Daniel and Grégoire](#) were talking to [Carole Pailhé](#).

[1] For more detail, read our [article published in Inspiration dated November 2009](#)

[2] Closing the Engagement Gap: A Road Map for Driving Superior Business Performance, Towers Perrin Global Workforce Study 2007-2008

[3] SD worx, sept. 2007

[4] UK National Health Service and University of Louvain

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Client case



Creating the Warner Way of Selling

The purpose of the programme was to create a Warner Way of Selling that all commercial staff could identify with, embrace, put into practice and maintain in order to improve collective and individual performance...

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