

# Employee Engagement Solutions Starter<sup>®</sup>

This Solutions Starter provides strategic and tactical ideas to consider when starting an improvement project. The Starter is organized by the standard survey sections and questions of the Press Ganey Employee Engagement Survey.

Press Ganey research scientists developed questions to meet the specified definitions using a combination of cognitive and psychometric testing, literature reviews, and client and respondent feedback. The suggestions are based on literature reviews of industry best practices, top-performer experience, and Press Ganey thought leadership.

Solutions Starters support your ability to build an organizational culture and purpose-driven workforce to achieve exceptional patient-centered care. Improvement requires selecting tactics that are aligned with goals and implementing them consistently across your organization. For assistance, please contact your Press Ganey Account Team or partner with Press Ganey Strategic Consulting to design and implement a tailored action plan.

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# Engagement Indicator Items

# Engagement Indicator Item

**I would stay with this organization if offered a similar position elsewhere.**

## QUESTION DEFINITION

This item measures whether employees would choose to leave the organization if a similar opportunity arose elsewhere. This item is one of two Engagement items that focus on retention. In this case, the conceptualization is more of a short-term consideration. It addresses the likelihood that an employee is looking to do a similar job as their current role but for another organization.

Retaining employees helps the manager in three ways. First, the “intellectual value” of the work unit will be greater, so more and better work can be done. Second, the internal and external customer groups being served will be more satisfied. Third, the high cost of employee turnover can be avoided.

**Note:** Engagement items measure the employee's emotional attachment to, identification with, and involvement in the organization. Although the score is an indication of how engaged employees are with the organization, Engagement items are not easy to address directly. Often, the best way to act on an Engagement item is to focus on work units with a low-scoring Leader Index. The items in this metric represent the relationship a team has with their leader. Items in this metric are directly actionable, and improving performance on them will improve the performance of Engagement items as well. Key Driver Analyses will also reveal other areas that impact Engagement if the relationship between the employee and their leader is already strong.

## VOICE OF THE EMPLOYEE

- 🗣️ “I like the culture that is cultivated here. The staff are nice to each other, both up and down the ladder (MD to RN to CNA). That, above all else, is why I would stay here.”
- 🗣️ “I used to think this was the best place I have ever worked but now I'm not so sure. The constant overtime, PTO freezes, lack of communication, and constant change of management have taken a toll on me and my views of this organization. Two years ago, I planned to work for this organization till I retired. I enjoyed my job, admired my manager, and felt that she respected me. Now I dread coming to work.”

## IMPROVEMENTS

### Champion purpose.

- Purpose is a very important influence on job satisfaction and retention.
  - Employees who derive meaning and significance from their work and can see how they contribute to the organization are more likely to stay.
  - Show staff how they touch the lives of patients. Help them see how they work to eliminate suffering.
- Provide new opportunities. Encourage employees to participate in special projects such as hosting a 5K fundraiser or creating a video on “meaningful work” for employees, showing them doing what they love with patients and all the positive outcomes.

- Ask employees for their point-of-view and listen to their voices. Ask them what's working, what's not, what new direction should be explored, if there's a new way of doing the work and so on.
- Encourage, pay attention to, and use employee input and feedback.
- Don't micromanage. For example, you assign an employee to a special project such as coordinating your "give back to the community" day. Define your expectations, minimize your input, give her control, and check-in once during the project. Giving your employees autonomy gives them a sense of accomplishment.
- Work with your employees and together help develop career paths with them. Don't simply ask, "What would you like to be doing 1 year from now, 5 years from now...." Make sure your employees are gaining the skills and building the relationships that will lead them in that direction. For example, an emergency department nurse would like to become a unit manager. Help him or her identify the skill set necessary to succeed. You might suggest taking a management course or meeting regularly with a mentor who is a current unit manager.
- Conduct exit interviews when employees leave the organization. Use this feedback to improve your culture and retention.

### **Ensure employees have what they need to do their jobs efficiently and effectively.**

- Institute leader rounds on staff.
  - Rounds provide real-time feedback on how the organization is meeting patients' and families' needs as well as identifying opportunities for improvement. Effective leaders know that organizations can only get better if they listen to patients and to the caregivers on the front line.
  - Leaders should ask the following questions during rounds on staff:
    - What are we doing well?
    - What are we not doing well?
    - What can we do to improve staff engagement and patient experience?
    - Do you have all the resources you need to do your job?
  - It is essential to follow up on issues identified during leader rounds.
    - Document identified issues during every round.
    - Track and review trends recognized through rounds.
    - Ensure that you have timely follow-up on employee requests. Keep staff informed of progress on issues of interest to develop the trust that makes leader rounds effective.
    - Don't make promises to employees that you cannot keep. Failure to follow-through reduces trust and can engender feelings of disrespect.

### **Personalize employee recognition.**

- Identify each team member's preferences, including how he or she likes to be recognized.
  - Have each team member fill out a form that identifies his or her preferences.
  - Here are some example questions you can include:
    - What work accomplishments would you like to receive recognition for?
    - Working on special projects

- Contributing innovative ideas
- Improving existing processes
- How would you like to be recognized?
  - Verbally
  - Lunch with your supervisor
  - Note card
  - Emails
- Would you like to be recognized privately or publicly?
- What are some of your favorite things?
  - Favorite snack
  - Favorite restaurant
  - Favorite candy bar
  - Favorite sports team
  - Favorite store
  - Favorite flower

#### **Give frequent and actionable feedback on job performance.**

- Employees become frustrated when there is a lack of feedback because they don't know how to improve. To eliminate this source of frustration, think about the following:
  - When offering performance feedback, how much information do you supply?
  - Do you deliver the monthly patient experience scores to your staff with the directive to "get better," but no direction as to what should change or how?
  - Eliminate employee guesswork with specific improvement suggestions. This enables employees to improve performances that drive exceptional patient experience outcomes.
  - Share patient comments that single out specific performance behaviors like, "Nurse Jane always stopped everything she was doing and looked me in the eye when I shared my concerns."
  - Conduct routine observations of staff to provide immediate feedback on their performance.
  - Low performers need to be reassigned, coached to success or, in some cases, they need to be removed from the organization. Leaving low performers or disruptive employees in place is a sure way to hurt morale among the rest of the team.

#### **Build bonds between all members of a team.**

- Create ways for employees to interact on a social level and learn more about each other.
  - Have fun together with lunch or other activities shared by your team. Employees who can connect with their peers on a personal level are more likely to feel they belong.
- Be alert to your own biases.

- Managers are people and it's human nature to like some employees better than others. Look inward and strive to treat all employees equally.
- Respect and leverage the diversity of your work unit. Be intentional about making all employees feel they belong.
- Check in with your employees regularly and ask for feedback. Don't wait until the next employee survey.
- Participate beyond the role of "leader" by working side-by-side with employees in carrying out the work of the team. These efforts can help you both better understand the day-to-day work of the team and help build more effective bonds with individual team members.

#### **Provide competitive pay and benefits.**

- Work with Human Resources to understand how the organization's pay scale and benefits compare to other organizations in your region, state, and at the national level.
- Ask your Human Resources representative to share total compensation information with your employees.
  - Employees may be focusing only on pay, but the total compensation they receive includes other benefits as well. Employees may feel more fairly compensated if they understand the whole package.

#### **Help reduce stress among your staff.**

- Offer on-site and virtual stress management classes.
  - Make sure these classes are offered at a variety of times, are relatively short and that they make sense for busy employees.
  - Tailor strategies and techniques that are applicable to the health care environment, such as deep breathing that can be performed during a quick meal break.
  - Encourage staff to participate by raffling off gift certificates for massages, spa treatments, and so forth.
- Provide a place for staff to come together.
  - Breakrooms and staff lounges can be more than just a place to eat a quick lunch.
  - Social interaction can help reduce stress, encourage staff to take breaks together when possible to build a sense of community.
- Develop a mentor program. Pairing staff together can boost engagement and helps in long-term retention and professional development.
- Employees who feel competent in their jobs are less likely to feel anxious. Minimize job stress by offering continuing education programs and frequent training.

#### **Conduct stay interviews.**

- Stay interviews are structured 1:1 discussions led by a manager or other leader to learn ways to strengthen an employee's engagement and retention and to build trust.

- These should be held separately from annual reviews with a sole focus on what leadership can do for the employee.
- Common questions for a stay interview include:
  - What keeps you working here?
  - What are your favorite parts of the job?
  - If you could change one thing about your role, what would it be?
  - What does meaningful recognition look like to you?
  - How do you see your career evolving in the future? How could the organization support your career goals?
  - What could I start, stop, or continue doing to better support you as your manager?



# Engagement Indicator Item

**I would like to be working at this organization three years from now**

## QUESTION DEFINITION

This item measures how employees feel about their likelihood to remain with the organization for the next several years. In short, employees who say they would like to stay with the organization are more likely to stay with the organization. This is the second retention-focused Engagement item and examines more long-term intentions to remain with the organization. The specificity of 'three years' is there to anchor the respondent's frame of reference into the future. Asking about periods too far into the future can introduce additional error into measures on this topic due to general uncertainty of what the future may bring. Similarly, leaving the measure to an open-ended, generalized reference of 'the future' can also lead to difficulties interpreting and responding to the question.

Retention has three clear benefits. First, the "intellectual value" of the work unit will be greater, so more and better work can be done. Second, the internal and external customer groups being served will be more satisfied. Third, the high cost of employee turnover can be avoided.

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## VOICE OF THE EMPLOYEE

🗣️ "The reputation that this institution has throughout the community makes me proud to say that this is where I work, and I have been working here for the past 25 years. In addition, I plan to work here for another 3–5 years."

🗣️ "They went directly to cutting the pay of all the worker bees. This action communicated to me that they don't really respect or value us, especially because I didn't hear of the CEO or CFO or higher up people offering to take pay cuts. This changed my responses to the question whether I would like to be working here in three years and whether I would stay with this company if offered similar benefits and pay elsewhere. They're not giving people any incentive to stay."

## IMPROVEMENTS

**Communicate clearly and respectfully.**

- Be supportive and helpful. Institute an "open-door" policy. This will ensure that employees from all levels of the organization understand that they can come to you with any work issue. Help with issues when they arise—manage conflict and assist with tasks to ease the workload.

- Keep your employees informed through e-mail updates, individual and team meetings, casual conversations, newsletters, bulletin boards postings, and so on.
- Be appreciative. Reward success appropriately, send a quick thank you e-mail, recognize employees during team meetings, etc. Employees who feel appreciated and successful are less likely to leave.
- Avoid interrupting employees; it is a sign of disrespect.
- Practice active listening skills. Lean forward, nod, and use phrases such as, "I understand" or "Can you tell me more."
- Communicate the organization's vision and values. When the organization's vision is communicated, employees feel informed and respected.
- Respond politely, always maintain professionalism, avoid telling jokes or making off-handed remarks that could offend others, and apologize promptly if you make careless comments. Even teasing "in fun" can be construed as disrespectful and may lead employees to think you don't value them.

#### **Trust your employees with responsibility.**

- Give all employees a sense of importance and responsibility.
- If employees understand exactly how their work is essential to the organization's success, they'll have added motivation to succeed in their jobs.
  - For example, a member of environmental services might not think emptying the trash can in a patient's room is important. But keeping the room clean and free from trash can promote a peaceful and healing environment. It sends a message to patients and families that the organization cares about cleanliness and safety.

#### **Provide advancement opportunities.**

- Employees want to feel that their hard work is being rewarded. Reward exceptionally smart, resourceful, and hard-working employees by promoting them. A nurse who started as a CNA and has advanced into a management position through hard work is much more likely to be loyal to your organization.
- It's not enough to simply "offer" the potential for advancement—it's also important to make sure that employees understand how they can advance. Help them understand the step-by-step process.
  - Invite a Human Resources representative or career counselor to meet with your team and discuss advancement.
- Try to promote from within your workforce rather than recruiting outsiders into management roles.
  - Hiring an outsider to fill a management position when there are qualified employees with years of experience who could do the job can give the impression that you don't care about your employees' accomplishments.

#### **Improve hiring practices.**

- Hire selectively. Ensure the people you hire are right for the job in the first place. Picking employees that have the right qualifications and experience for the job you're hiring for increases the chance that they will learn more quickly, perform better, and feel more confident in their new roles.

### **Organize for employee retention.**

- Consider alternative roles for unhappy employees. Sometimes, otherwise productive employees just aren't a great "fit" for the job they've been given. Although they may work hard, their personalities or skill sets may keep them from reaching the full potential of their roles. In these cases, try to avoid dismissing these employees until you've considered other roles or duties for them.
- Avoid frequent reorganization, as these events can lead to a culture of fear and uncertainty in your workforce and encourage employees to seek out stable jobs.
  - If a major company-wide reorganization is unavoidable, minimize the morale damage by clearly communicating to your remaining employees why the reorganization had to happen. Though there will probably still be some lingering unease, good communication can help minimize the impact.
- Don't be afraid to dismiss poor-performing employees. Employees who perform poorly, have a negative attitude, or are grossly incompetent can contribute to loss of morale and spread negativity to others on your team.
- Regularly review and assess employee concerns. Merely asking your employees what makes them unhappy isn't enough—to keep them feeling valued, you'll need to make a reasonable effort to address their concerns and show them that you're making this effort. If your employees can see that their comments and suggestions are being taken to heart, they'll feel like they're being listened to and that their opinions matter.
- Encourage teamwork. Employees that are part of a strong team are less likely to leave your organization.

### **Develop an organization-level strategy for addressing burnout.**

- If an employee's work is stressful, monotonous, or extremely difficult, different jobs with comparatively easy workloads will start to look more attractive.
- Excessively long hours can cause burnout. Employees who are burned out take longer to perform the same tasks as they normally would, deal poorly with problems requiring critical thinking or creativity, and make more mistakes. Organizational leaders should:
  - Understand and communicate the importance of burnout, accept responsibility for addressing the external stressors that contribute to it, and offer resources to help employees cope with the inherent stressors.
  - Measure employees' engagement and resilience.
  - Increase awareness and experience of inherent rewards. Inherent rewards include the joy that comes from helping people at their most vulnerable and the pride of doing meaningful work.
- Caregivers can experience some level of suffering and compassion fatigue after giving their all and spending long hours caring for patients. It is often difficult for managers to recognize when an employee is experiencing the symptoms of burnout: emotional exhaustion, detachment from one's work, loss of fulfillment, and a reduced sense of accomplishment.

- Recognize employee burnout by demonstrating empathy and addressing the issue. For example, a manager might say the following to a direct report: "I appreciate you putting in all of these hours over the holidays. I can imagine it is tiresome and tough to spend so much time away from your family. I just want you to know I appreciate all you do. Let's talk about how we can get your workload back in balance."

### **Conduct exit interviews.**

- Consult with your Human Resources department to conduct exit interviews when employees leave the organization. Exit interviews are a chance to learn why employees are leaving and what can be done to improve the employee experience. Some common questions asked in an exit interview are:
  - What is your reason for leaving?
  - Did something trigger this decision?
  - Did you have the proper training to do your job effectively?
  - Were you satisfied with pay and benefits?
  - What would you do to improve the workplace?
  - What did you like most about this organization?
  - What did you like least about this organization?
  - What was your favorite/least favorite part of the job?
  - Was there anything that made it difficult for you to perform your duties properly?
  - In the future, how could we avoid the types of challenges you faced in your job?
  - Is there anything you wish the organization had done that it didn't do?

# Engagement Indicator Item

**I would recommend this organization as a good place to work.**

## QUESTION DEFINITION

This item measures employees' likely presentation of the organization to other people. By representing it as a good place to work, a degree of loyalty to or advocacy for the organization is shown. Not only does this serve as an indicator of Engagement, it also provides insight into the word-of-mouth reputation of the organization.

Low scores on this item can also indicate the potential risk of the employee leaving the organization. Because this survey item reflects a composite of employees' feelings about a variety of issues, taking action to improve other low-scoring survey items will help improve the overall opinions that employees share of the workplace.

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## VOICE OF THE EMPLOYEE

👍 "I have confidence in our leadership's abilities. I would recommend this organization as a good place to work. I enjoy working with my coworkers. This is a great place to work."

👎 "When I started here 5 years ago, I was very proud to say I worked here. I felt the organization treated the employees well and respected them. Things have changed and, in the past year, we as employees seem to matter less and less. I would not recommend this organization as a good place to work."

## IMPROVEMENTS

**When soliciting employee input, demonstrate that you are listening.**

- Minimize external distractions. Stop what you are doing. Put away your phone or other mobile devices, look up from your computer or paperwork, and acknowledge the employee.
- Face the employee. Sit up straight or lean forward slightly to show your attentiveness through body language.
- Be engaged. Respond appropriately to show that you understand. Nod and raise your eyebrows when appropriate. Use direct prompts, such as: "Tell me more about that."; "Can you give me an example?"; "What other thoughts do you have?"; "What do you think would happen if...?"; and "Is there anything else you would do?"

- Focus solely on what the employee is saying. Try not to think about what you are going to say next.
- Engage yourself. Ask questions for clarification but wait until the employee has finished. That way, you won't interrupt their train of thought. After you ask questions, paraphrase their point to make sure you didn't misunderstand. Start with: "So you're saying ..."
- Monitor your listening to talking ratio; strive to achieve an 80/20 ratio of listening/talking.
- Understand that not all employees will be comfortable sharing information in a face-to-face manner. Encourage more introverted employees to write down their ideas prior to your meeting.
- Treat all employees fairly and equally. Avoid the perception of "playing favorites" or always asking the same individuals for input.
- It's OK to have fun. Include fun and humor in your work environment.
- Be personal and engaging. Develop meaningful relationships with your employees so you can better understand what's on their mind.
- Encourage open dialogue. For example, learn to be a good storyteller. Humans remember narratives better than discrete and unrelated facts. Look for ways to communicate key ideas in storyline formats.

#### **Highlight the organization's strengths.**

- Speak positively about the organization. Take opportunities to highlight the organization's strengths with employees, patients, and family members. Do so both within the walls of the facility and out in the community.
- Specifically talk about what your organization is doing well. Highlight examples of work units or areas in your organization where perceptions of quality care and service are positive.
- Identify examples of high-quality care across the organization.
- Give back to the community. Act as a responsible corporate citizen by supporting local charities, being active in the community, conducting business in an environmentally safe fashion, and providing time for employees to volunteer in the community.

#### **Develop an organization-level strategy for addressing burnout.**

- Organizational leaders should:
  - Understand and communicate the importance of burnout, accept responsibility for addressing the external stressors that contribute to it, and offer resources to help employees cope with the inherent stressors.
  - Measure employees' engagement and resilience.
  - Increase awareness and experience of inherent rewards.
  - Inherent rewards include the joy that comes from helping people at their most vulnerable and the pride of doing meaningful work. Help employees feel a sense of personal accomplishment in the work they do. Too often, employees perform their jobs without really knowing how well they are helping the organization achieve its goals, improve the patient experience, save cost, improve quality, and so forth.
- Communicate to employees how their efforts are translating into the organization's success.

### **Review, update, and improve orientation and onboarding activities for new team members.**

- Ask employees to help develop a recruitment program for new employees. Ask the team to identify the selling points of your organization.
- Establish/maintain mentor relationships at the department level throughout the first 90 days of employment, and through the entire first year if needed.
- Conduct structured new hire check-ins at 30, 60, and 90 days of employment to understand the employee's level of engagement, social support, knowledge gaps, and current needs.
  - The 30-day check-in could include topics like assessing if the job meets their expectations, how welcome they feel in their department/team/unit, awareness of job expectations, level of support, etc.
  - The 60- and 90-day check-ins could include topics like current satisfaction/job stress, level of comfort asking for help, how they feel the integration into the organization is going, etc.
  - Continue to meet with new hires throughout the first year to assess performance, engagement, job stress, flight risk, etc. This will allow you to get a sense of how the employee is deriving joy from their work and understand what motivates them to stay engaged.

### **Conduct exit interviews.**

- An exit interview is your chance to learn why an employee is leaving. Some common questions asked in an exit interview are:
  - What is your reason for leaving?
  - Did something trigger this decision?
  - Did you have the proper training to do your job effectively?
  - Were you satisfied with pay and benefits?
  - What would you do to improve the workplace?
  - What did you like most about this organization?
  - What did you like least about this organization?
  - What was your favorite/least favorite part of the job?
  - Was there anything that made it difficult for you to perform your duties properly?
  - In the future, how could we avoid the types of challenges you faced in your job?
  - Is there anything you wish the organization had done that it didn't do?

# Engagement Indicator Item

**Overall, I am a satisfied employee.**

## QUESTION DEFINITION

Employee engagement is influenced by many factors. The Press Ganey employee survey measures many of the variables that impact employee satisfaction, such as the work itself, the manager, the team, and the organization. Satisfaction is important as it generally serves as a prerequisite for high performance on other Engagement indicators. Dissatisfied employees are less likely to remain with the organization, recommend it to others, or do more than the bare minimum that their job requires of them.

Overall, Press Ganey's research shows that employees feel satisfied when they are appreciated and respected—and when they enjoy their work, their coworkers, and their relationships with managers. In addition, organizational and managerial support of employees' work/personal life balance influences employee engagement. Finally, employees want to take pride in the organization's services and products.

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## VOICE OF THE EMPLOYEE

🗣️ “I really enjoy working for this organization because I feel appreciated. I know that my manager cares about what I think because I'm asked for input and recognized for top performance. I love working with and taking care of patients' needs and goals.”

🗣️ “I used to be very satisfied with my job in every aspect. However, during this past year, I have felt that our organization is taking a huge step backwards instead of moving forward. This has truly impacted my job satisfaction and made me question the direction our organization is going.”

## IMPROVEMENTS

**Create a culture of respect and appreciation.**

- Encourage respectful dialogue and the sharing of different opinions during meetings.
- Ask senior management to meet periodically with your employees to reinforce the connection between their job and the organization's success.
- Share why you work for the organization and thank employees for choosing to work at the facility.
- Ask your team to share positive stories they experienced in the past week.



- Recognize employees for their good work during staff meetings.
- Send thank you emails to your employees.
- Send thank you notes to employees in other departments who have made your department's work easier or better.
- Post appreciation notes on a bulletin board or on an employee's computer.
- Immediately address any concerns about bullying, rudeness, or unprofessional behavior that may undermine how well employees work together.
  - When unhealthy interpersonal dynamics develop within teams—such as competitiveness, large authority gradients, or bullying—employee engagement and patient care suffers.
  - Teams in “survival” or “self-protection” mode have a difficult time fully focusing on their patients, see more absenteeism and turnover, and have more employee relations issues.
  - Speak up when colleagues are rude. It puts them on alert that somebody is watching and cares how everyone is treated.

**Ask employees for their input before final decisions are made.**

- Establish a block of time at regular team meetings to allow for employee input and discussion of decisions that will affect them. Review employee input as a team and discuss the pros and cons of each idea.
  - Record employee ideas. Consider using a flip chart or Excel spreadsheet. Review the list periodically so that all ideas are considered and discussed.
  - Don't forget the introverts on your team. They are less likely to speak up unless they've had time to process the information beforehand. Consider adopting a pre-communication strategy. Email employees before team meetings to explain that a decision needs to be made regarding topic XYZ. Ask staff to come prepared to discuss.
  - Set clear expectations. Let employees know that you expect their full participation and make participation in team problem-solving a performance requirement. Give employees feedback periodically.
  - Consider using an online survey to gather staff input.
  - For example, you'd like your team to decide what key pieces of information should be included on patient whiteboards. Set up a survey to see how employees prioritize that information (e.g., “On a scale of 1–10, rate the importance of including pain level, employees contact information, daily goals, etc. on the whiteboard”). Review results during your team meetings and encourage discussion.
  - Hold a monthly brainstorming session. This gets everyone on your team involved in the decision-making process. Each month, make a list of the problems that need solutions, ongoing projects, and areas where your team could improve. Then conduct a meeting to gather your employees' opinions.
  - Consider creating a rewards program for those ideas or solutions that are chosen and successful. Be creative, consider a quarterly contest. Award the best ideas with a gift card or a special lunch.

### **Create an employee interview selection team.**

- Invite current employees to evaluate potential job candidates. This allows them to participate in the selection of new coworkers, a factor that impacts their jobs daily.
- Train employees in legal and effective interviewing. If your organization uses a formal process, make sure the employee is familiar with it and understands what's expected of them.
- When considering new hires, ask the selection team to compare potential candidates and provide feedback to the hiring manager and Human Resources (e.g., feedback can include whether the candidate is a good cultural fit and should be invited back for a second interview).
- It is important to emphasize that "fit" doesn't necessarily mean "like everyone else." Selection decisions should be made with current and future state in mind, and with consideration for the value of diversity in skill, knowledge, culture, background, and perspective.

### **Support work/life balance.**

- Encourage the use of vacation and sick-leave time.
- Be familiar with your formal leave policy for employees with dependents. Recognize and encourage employees to use programs like the Family Medical and Leave Act (FMLA) when they need to care for sick children or elderly parents.
- Be aware of how often your employees take work home. Although this is sometimes necessary, it shouldn't be the norm.
- Work with employees to understand the importance of getting work done at work. Develop plans, schedules, and prioritization methods (if necessary) to ensure success. The line between work and home lives tends to blur when employees regularly take work home.

# Engagement Indicator Item

**I feel like I belong in this organization.**

## QUESTION DEFINITION

A strong sense of belonging to the organization is a key component of Engagement as it speaks to how well an individual feels they fit in with the overall organizational culture and work atmosphere. While many consider this topic to be focused on diversity-related factors, that is not always the case. Managers playing favorites, organizational leaders not recognizing the contributions of certain job roles, coworkers forming exclusionary social cliques, etc., can all impact an individual's sense of belonging.

**Note:** Engagement items measure the employee's emotional attachment to, identification with, and involvement in the organization. Although the score is an indication of how engaged employees are with the organization, Engagement items are not easy to address directly. Often, the best way to act on an Engagement item is to focus on work units with a low-scoring Leader Index. The items in this metric represent the relationship a team has with their leader. Items in this metric are directly actionable, and improving performance on them will improve the performance of Engagement items as well. Key Driver Analyses will also reveal other areas that impact Engagement if the relationship between the employee and their leader is already strong.

## IMPROVEMENTS

- Facilitate focus groups with employees to assess their alignment with the organization's vision/mission/values. Invite employees to share perceptions of how things have changed. Be alert to any differences between how long-term and newer employees feel.
- Solicit input from employees on behaviors that make them feel they belong. Model these behaviors consistently.
- Increase employees' involvement in decision-making.
- Communicate openly and often. Often employees lack a sense of belonging when they feel they don't know what's going on or when they feel information is being withheld from them.
- Incorporate rounding as part of your management routine. Spending time with employees, even a few minutes, increases their sense of value and belonging.
- Have fun together with a lunch or other activities shared by your work team. Create ways for employees to interact on a social level and learn more about each other. Employees who can connect with their peers on a personal level are more likely to feel they belong.
- Evaluate your recognition program/activities to be sure all deserving employees are recognized for their contributions. Make sure the same people are not recognized consistently, causing others to feel left out.
- Invest in employees' professional development. When employees feel the organization cares enough to invest in its employees, they feel more a part of that organization.
- Be alert to your own biases. Managers are people, and it's human nature to like some employees better than others. Look inward and strive to treat all employees equally. Respect and leverage the

diversity of your work unit. Be intentional about making all employees feel they belong. Check in with your employees regularly and ask for feedback. Don't wait until the next employee survey.

# Leader Index Items

# Leader Index Item

## The person I report to treats me with respect.

### QUESTION DEFINITION

This item measures the extent to which employees perceive they are respected by their manager. This perception is often influenced by specific events or interactions, decisions, or habitual behaviors of the leader. Being treated with respect is a foundational aspect of psychological safety.

A low score on this item could be caused by many factors, such as an overly controlling leadership style, a managerial approach that emphasizes “telling” over listening, an autocratic decision-making style, or other similar behaviors. Lower scores in this area could also be an indicator of a manager with good intentions, but whose behaviors are not conveying those intentions effectively. Leaders who do not give employee input, concerns, or recommendations due consideration, or other behaviors that minimize an individual's tenure and experience, can also result in a relationship that is perceived as disrespectful.

### VOICE OF THE EMPLOYEE

- 🗣️ “We have a great supervisor that's been with us for several months. She treats us fairly and follows through when we ask questions and make requests.”
- 🗣️ “My supervisor is always talking about staff behind their back with other staff members. This is unprofessional and disrespectful. I can't trust him.”

### IMPROVEMENTS

#### Get to know your team members and gain an understanding of their perspectives.

- Try to get to know all your employees as individuals, including something about their personal interests so that you make a connection with them. Employees are more likely to feel they are respected if you take the time to get to know them.
- Once you have an idea of how someone might feel, take a moment to ask an open-ended question such as, “How do you feel about X?” to confirm your assumption. Doing this exercise over time helps improve insights and empathy skills.
- Work side-by-side with employees in carrying out the work of the team. These efforts can help you both better understand the day-to-day work of the team and help build more effective bonds with individual team members.

#### Seek input from employees and respond constructively to their feedback.

- If employees are asked for input prior to decisions, clarify the type of input you are seeking and whether their ideas will be incorporated into the decision.
- Treat all employees fairly and equally. Avoid the perception of “playing favorites” or always asking the same individuals for input.
- Respond to feedback in a neutral manner. Constructive responses include: “Thank you for sharing that with me,” “I appreciate knowing that,” and “Thank you for your feedback.”

- If you disagree, take the time to format your response and lead with points of agreement—such as, “Here’s what I like about that idea and here’s where I have a concern.”
- Avoid the appearance of disrespect. Respond politely, always maintain professionalism, avoid telling jokes or making off-handed remarks that could offend others and apologize promptly if you make careless comments.

### **Improve employees’ perceptions of how you show respect in the workplace.**

- Compare your score on this survey item with the score for the item, “This organization treats employees with respect.” Use this information to assess how respect is viewed from an organization-wide perspective. Set goals for change as indicated.
- Establish dedicated and routine quarterly meetings with your supervisor to review your progress and discuss any obstacles to improvement.
- Solicit immediate feedback from a colleague or your direct report(s) to improve behaviors that demonstrate respect. For example, if you learn you commonly interrupt others during staff meetings (which signifies disrespect), ask someone to keep track of how many times you interrupt others and to provide you with feedback immediately after the meeting about how many times you interrupted others and what could have been said (or not said) instead.
- Ask trusted people in your personal life whether they feel you treat them with respect. Ask for specific examples that illustrate how you have shown/not shown respect to them or others. Take appropriate actions to improve behaviors perceived as disrespectful.

### **Improve and maintain positive verbal and nonverbal communication.**

- Keep facial expressions positive or neutral, make culturally appropriate eye contact, and employ active listening techniques.
- Avoid crossing your arms, violating personal space, or interrupting others as you speak.
- Incorporate more “we” statements and fewer “I” statements.
- If you find yourself in an emotional encounter, consider taking a time-out. It’s OK to say, “I’d like to continue this conversation in 10 minutes when we’ve had a chance to cool down.”

### **Institute leader rounds on staff.**

- Leaders round on their staff and patients to connect teams’ work to outcomes and to improve the patient experience. Rounds provide a time to not only build relationships, but also to be a role model, assess employee morale, recognize wins, and identify and remove barriers that prevent staff from doing their jobs. In addition, rounds provide real-time feedback on how the organization is meeting patients’ and families’ needs as well as identify opportunities for improvement. Effective leaders know that organizations can only get better if they listen to patients and to the caregivers on the front line.
- Leaders should ask the following questions during rounds on staff:
  - What are we doing well?
  - What are we not doing well?
  - What can we do to improve staff engagement and patient experience?

- Duration and length of rounds will vary by area but should be scheduled on a consistent basis per predetermined guidelines. It is important to establish a calendar for leader rounds to ensure it is practiced on a regular basis. Schedule leader rounds so as not to surprise staff and physicians.
- It is essential to follow up on issues identified during leader rounds.
  - Document identified issues during every round.
  - Track and review trends recognized through rounds.
  - Ensure that you have timely follow-up on employee requests. Keep staff informed of progress on issues of interest to develop the trust that makes leader rounds effective.
  - Don't make promises to employees that you cannot keep. Failure to follow-through reduces trust and can engender feelings of disrespect.



# Leader Index Item

## The person I report to encourages teamwork.

### QUESTION DEFINITION

This item measures employees' perspectives of their managers' ability to foster team collaboration. Do managers encourage others to pitch in, help, and support each other? Do managers notice, recognize, and demonstrate acts of teamwork? Do leaders organize tasks and work such that teamwork is encouraged? Many employees are highly motivated by collaborating with others and receiving support from others. They are also looking to see how their direct manager models behavior through actions.

### VOICE OF THE EMPLOYEE

- 🗨️ "I like that my manager encourages teamwork. If I need help with something, she is always first to point out team members that are willing to help. She even pitches in if we are swamped."
- 🗨️ "I feel we should have better support from our managers and that there should be more teamwork instead of everyone pointing fingers at someone else about a problem. I feel problems that are brought to the attention of higher management are overlooked and nothing ever gets done."

### IMPROVEMENTS

#### Help establish and align team vision, responsibilities, and goals.

- Involve individuals and the group in establishing goals, priorities, deadlines, and processes as much as possible. For example, when preparing a new project, invite employees who will work on the project to brainstorm with you.
- Establish ground rules. How will decisions get made? When does the team make decisions, and when do they escalate issues to management?
- Be sure tasks and roles are clearly defined and assigned. Which tasks will be shared? By whom? Who will be responsible for which projects? Who needs to attend which meetings?
- Talk as a group about how the work will get done. Agree on deadlines and a work plan.
- Discuss how differences will be expressed and resolved. Establish and agree upon ground rules together. For example, your team might agree that "We won't sulk or go behind one another's backs when there is a problem in the group. We will try to talk through our differences together."
- Work with each team member to set individual goals that will also help the team reach its shared goals.
- Promote idea sharing by subtly managing discussions so that everyone participates. You'll notice that team members will be outgoing according to their personalities and confidence level. Don't be afraid to call on your quieter employees: "Linda, what are your thoughts about the changes we're proposing to the new hourly rounding process? Do you think we should do something differently?"
- Make teamwork a criterion on annual performance reviews.

- Ask employees to provide specific examples of how they helped foster teamwork in your department.

#### **Involve the team in the new hire selection process.**

- Conduct peer interviews to ensure that new employees fit with the culture of your organization and possess the right skill set for the job.
- It is important to emphasize that “fit” doesn’t necessarily mean “like everyone else.” Selection decisions should be made with current and future state in mind, and with consideration for the value of diversity in skill, knowledge, culture, background, and perspective.
- Select a few employees who will interview potential candidates. Remember, candidates are evaluating your organization during the hiring process. Therefore, employees conducting peer interviews should be genuinely enthusiastic about your organization.
- Provide interview training. Make sure employees understand what they can ask and what is inappropriate, illegal, or unprofessional.
- Set a time limit for each interview. Ideally, you want to set aside 30 to 60 minutes.
- Create a skills evaluation checklist for employees to use. Consider using a quantitative approach. For example, you’ve identified the desired skill set that is required of the candidate. Create a checklist that lists each skill and ask the employee to rate the candidate’s knowledge in each area on a scale of 1–10.

#### **Spend time building team relationships.**

- Bring people together in a more casual atmosphere. Consider:
  - Celebrating birthdays.
  - Team outings. Get together for breakfast or dinner as a team once a month or once a quarter.
  - Volunteer opportunities. Come up with an opportunity together and decide when and where you’d like to complete your project. Some organizations support a company-wide initiative. If this is true of your organization, take advantage of the opportunity, and ask your team if they’d like to participate.
  - Annual team retreats.
- Plan for the upcoming year. Create your department’s mission and agree on goals and objectives that support your organization’s strategy. Participation in goal setting can help employees understand how their work contributes to the organization’s success.

#### **Identify conflicts among team members and assist in resolution.**

- Train employees in conflict management. Give them the tools to resolve issues together, on their own, without the help of a manager.
- Coach individuals on how to handle conflicts when they arise. Make suggestions such as: “Stay calm, take a step back, and look at the whole picture.”
- Ask a Human Resources representative for support.
- Give appropriate feedback. Let employees know when they are working well together and when they are not.

- Hold employees accountable by making teamwork a part of annual performance reviews.

**Evaluate your influence on the relationship dynamics of the team.**

- Think about recent interactions with your direct reports. Ask yourself the following questions:
  - Do I encourage teamwork in a clear, compelling, open, and consistent manner?
  - Have I appropriately invested in training the team to be effective and productive?
  - Have I provided the team with a set of clear expectations as it relates to teamwork, and am I holding all team members consistently accountable for meeting these expectations?
  - Does the team have goals? Are the concepts of coordination of effort, communication, planning, and other important behaviors included in department goal statements?
  - Do I overemphasize winning and competition at the expense of collaboration and teamwork?
  - Do I enable unhealthy triangles in communication? When employees have issues with each other, do they come to me first to vent their frustrations, or do they seek to work out issues with each other first?

# Leader Index Item

**The person I report to is a good communicator.**

## QUESTION DEFINITION

This item measures employee perceptions related to how supervisors communicate. Employees want to understand their own role in fulfilling the organization's mission, their performance expectations, the organization's future, and their own future should they meet or exceed expectations.

Further, the supervisor must interpret and share organization-wide policies, strategies, tactics, events, changes, and news. Most employees want to see greater levels of communication on all matters large and small. This kind of communication helps employees make sense of the complex world of health care organizations.

Good communication includes the successful delivery of information in a way that is transparent and understood by employees. It also includes appropriate reception of information and input from employees, making listening skills an important consideration of this measure.

## VOICE OF THE EMPLOYEE

- 🗣️ "Mike is very involved with the employees and is very good communicator, easy to talk with, and truly seems like he cares. He is exceedingly kind and understanding of our needs."
- 🗣️ "My manager often stands at the front desk discussing employee (co-worker) information that I personally don't believe should be shared with staff. She does not communicate work information effectively because she usually relays incorrect information or only part of the information."

## IMPROVEMENTS

### Communicate clearly.

- Be patient and helpful when giving instructions or explanations.
- Ask team members what form of communication they prefer to receive news (e.g., verbally at team meetings, e-mail, bulletin board postings, etc.).
- Some people are visual learners, while others might be auditory learners, etc. You may have to try explaining information in various ways. For example, for a visual learner, use the whiteboard to illustrate key points.
- Always ask for confirmation of understanding when you're done giving instructions. Never assume your employees understand immediately.
- Learn to be a good storyteller. Humans remember narratives better than discrete and unrelated facts. Look for ways to communicate key ideas in storyline formats.
- Craft your messages so they are simple and concise rather than complicated and confusing. Make each word count.
- Repeat yourself. Whether in large groups, small groups, or one-on-one, repetition increases retention.

### **Listen with the goal of increasing understanding.**

- Don't be defensive. Communicate with an open mind. Your goal should be to understand employees' perspectives, even when they disagree with you.
- Engage employees in meaningful conversation. Repeat back to them what they said to let them know that you heard their concerns or ask clarifying questions to better understand their position.
- Read between the lines: Hone your ability to understand what is not said, witnessed, or heard.
- Be personal and engaging. Develop meaningful relationships with your employees so you can better understand what's on their mind.
- Use active listening techniques to demonstrate to your team that you are listening and considering their input and suggestions. Behaviors that demonstrate active listening include making culturally appropriate eye contact, head-nodding, as well as saying, "Let me see if I understand you," followed by paraphrasing their comments.

### **Communicate with empathy and caring.**

- Provide empathy and support when an employee is anxious or upset. For example, "Thank you for sharing that with me. That experience sounds frustrating."
- Express confidence in the person when there is a difficult task. For example, "I know you can do this."
- Ensure that your message is authentic and transparent. For example, an employee comes to you with a concern. Stop what you are doing, give them your full attention, practice active listening skills and respond using empathetic statements such as, "I understand," "I'm sorry" or "I know this isn't an ideal situation."
  - Maintain culturally appropriate eye contact and look employees in the eye. If they are sitting, you should sit as well.
  - Avoid interrupting employees; it is a sign of disrespect and disregard.
  - Show you are actively listening by leaning forward, nodding, and using phrases such as "Can you tell me more?"
  - Pay attention to your pace and tone of voice.
  - Speaking too quickly can be misconstrued as lack of concern.
- Use electronic communication appropriately.
  - Make sure that you are not over-relying on electronic communication. Face-to-face communication is still the most effective method of connecting with your staff.
  - Avoid communicating emotions or expressing different opinions electronically. For these discussions, talking face-to-face is the best option. A phone conversation is the next best option.

### **Collaborate with your team to develop and agree upon common communication standards for your department.**

- If your organization has communication standards in place, implement them, and make sure your employees are aware of and using them. Some items to consider:

- Acceptable response time to questions, concerns, complaints, etc. For example, respond to all e-mails from patients and patients' families within a specific timeframe.
- Don't make assumptions.
- Take responsibility.
- Ask for help and understanding.
- Strive for transparency.
- Be open to suggestions.
- Use simple, direct, positive messages.
- Stick to the facts and company policy.

**Serve as the communication bridge between your employees and the organization.**

- Ensure that employees are aware of your organization's communication mediums (e.g., newsletters, intranet, bulletin boards, etc.).
- Send out an e-mail with information on important announcements. Do not assume that because something was announced in a newsletter, on the intranet or elsewhere, that employees have received the message. Even if employees read organization-wide messages, they may not understand or correctly interpret the message.
- Set aside time during your team meetings to discuss recent organization-wide communication.
  - Encourage everyone to ask questions. Employees must feel comfortable asking questions whenever they need clarification without the fear of appearing incompetent or angering the supervisor. Explicitly ask for questions and reward, at least verbally, those who do ask questions.

# Leader Index Item

**The person I report to gives me useful feedback.**

## QUESTION DEFINITION

Effective and regular feedback is crucial to an employee's development. Giving effective feedback to employees is one of the most critical responsibilities a manager performs. Feedback should be timely, accurate, and constructive. The way you give feedback can mean the difference between a defensive, argumentative employee and one who appreciates and learns from it.

Note that feedback can be given in both formal and informal ways. Daily interactions can provide opportunities for small coaching sessions or even expression of appreciation or recognition for handling a specific task or function well. Useful, actionable feedback is also necessary during official performance evaluations or reviews, where the goal of the manager is to help their employees improve or excel in their roles.

## IMPROVEMENTS

- Set clear expectations for each employee's performance by following these steps:
  - Ensure that employees understand the specific functions and responsibilities of their job. Review each employee's job description with them and answer any questions they may have.
  - Develop specific standards of performance for each job. Review it with your employees and get their agreement.
  - Establish performance measurements for each employee or position and get agreement with each employee.
  - Observe employees' performance on a regular basis and compare it to the established performance measurements.
  - Provide specific feedback where the standards of performance are and are not being met. Provide feedback immediately in a constructive, positive way.
- Meet regularly with employees to discuss performance feedback. When meeting with employees, organize your thoughts and make yourself reminder notes so that you cover the key points.
- Supplement your observations with performance feedback from patients or internal customers. Written feedback is best, but if you receive verbal feedback, document the patients' or customers' comments in writing so that you can share the information with your employees as accurately as possible.
- Be discreet when providing performance feedback. Do not give feedback in front of others or where others can hear the conversation. Acknowledging accomplishments in front of others is fine but keep performance feedback private.
- Give feedback routinely and informally. Feedback should come from both the regular formal performance management process as well as informal day-to-day feedback. Do not overly rely on one method of feedback.

- Keep an electronic and/or paper file on each employee. Place notes of informal and formal feedback there and use it to prepare your annual performance appraisal.
- Ask employees to assess your feedback style on a regular basis. Make sure that you are providing feedback effectively and in a non-threatening manner. Ask your employees how you can improve the process to make it more meaningful to them. Feedback should be accurate, timely, and communicated in the most effective way possible.
- A good test of your ongoing feedback approach is to ask employees if there are any surprises on their annual performance appraisal. If you've done a good job along the way, there will be no surprises.
- Coach your employees on how to receive feedback. Employees can become defensive or argumentative, which can result in their receiving less feedback over time. Help your employees appreciate the value of feedback in their development. Encourage them to seek feedback voluntarily from you and others.



# Team Dimension Items

# Team Dimension Item

**My unit works well together.**

## QUESTION DEFINITION

This item measures the extent to which employees perceive an effective coordination of effort between members of their work group. Units create their own unique social cultures over time based upon shared assumptions of how to operate, solve problems, and resolve conflicts. These assumptions are reflected in the day-to-day rituals, values, and behaviors exhibited by leadership; the team as a whole; and individual team members.

## VOICE OF THE EMPLOYEE

🗣️ "The best thing about working here is the team of people I work with. The people are great and communicate well and make patients' lives a little better."

🗣️ "I wish our team worked better together. It always seems that the left hand doesn't know what the right hand is doing. There are people in my department that don't provide updates and change shift reports don't always happen. When we don't communicate well with each other, it delays patient care and workflow."

## IMPROVEMENTS

**Create a team culture of respect and appreciation.**

- Encourage respectful dialogue and the sharing of different opinions during team meetings.
- Allow for space on the meeting agenda to discuss teamwork and communication.
- Lead with listening and ask open-ended questions. A question such as, "How can we improve our coordination?" will offer more collaboration and buy-in than a statement such as, "We need better communication, and I think we should do X."
- Do not rush to obtain consensus or follow a natural tendency to avoid disagreements. Allow healthy dialogue and the sharing of different perspectives.
- Look for opportunities to celebrate positive interactions. Begin or end team meetings with "kudos" so staff can point out behaviors of other team members who helped them out.
- Model good behavior by muting your phone during meetings, paying attention to questions, and following up on promises.
- Employ active listening techniques when others are speaking. For example, put down whatever else you are working on, make culturally appropriate eye contact, and use phrases such as, "I see," to show you are listening.
- Encourage open exchanges of information for the betterment of the team.
- Discourage politics, secrets, cliques, and information hoarding.

- Set up a shared network drive or SharePoint site to facilitate coordination and information exchange within and across teams.
- Establish whiteboards/unit boards (i.e., visual management) to keep pertinent information in one place and to evaluate the progress of tasks, initiatives, and ideas that have been implemented.
- Immediately address any concerns about bullying, rudeness, or unprofessional behavior that may undermine how well employees work together.
- When unhealthy interpersonal dynamics develop within teams—such as competitiveness, large authority gradients, or bullying—employee engagement and patient care suffers. Teams in “survival” or “self-protection” mode have a difficult time fully focusing on their patients, see more absenteeism and turnover, and have more employee relations issues.
- Speak up when colleagues are rude. It puts them on alert that somebody is watching and cares how everyone is treated.

### **Solicit ideas for improving teamwork.**

- Hold a quarterly team-building session to share ideas for improving teamwork. The goal of the meeting is to improve performance based on what works, not what's going wrong.
  - Prior to the session, have employees confidentially vote for a teammate who contributed to building or modeling teamwork and support for others in the workplace.
  - Announce the name of the winner during this meeting. Budget permitting, give the employee a reward that is meaningful to him or her—or provide some tangible form of recognition.
  - Ask this employee (and other employees who do a good job building teamwork) to share best practices with the group on soliciting and incorporating others' preferences and ideas to improve collaboration.
  - Encourage open dialogue and discussion regarding new ideas but avoid allowing naysayers to derail the meeting.
  - Identify successful behaviors and processes that the team would like to implement as a department standard. Make this a performance metric and hold staff accountable.
- Use Appreciative Inquiry to identify positive examples of teamwork. Appreciative Inquiry is a model for analysis, decision making, and the creation of strategic change. Unlike problem solving, which often focuses on problems and limits innovation, Appreciative Inquiry seeks to discover “what's going right” within an organization. Appreciative Inquiry promotes ownership of the change process and draws on a group's collective experience, wisdom, and resources to develop solutions in four phases:
  - Discover. Identify what is currently working well. For example, discuss successful collaborative processes. Your work unit might conduct excellent bedside shift reports that result in care that employees are proud of.
  - Dream. Envision the ideal process. Dissect the existing process to learn which characteristics are most important to create a clear vision of the future. If, for example, whiteboards are underutilized, dissect the process to better understand barriers. Maybe employees are not clear about what information to include on patient whiteboards, or maybe they don't understand the importance of this task. Taking this into consideration, what does the new process look like?

- Design. Work together to construct a process where the ideal becomes routine. For example, if you are designing a new process for using whiteboards, gather input from the team. Consider asking employees to provide performance metrics. Employees that are involved in the design are more likely to embrace the new process and change their behaviors.
- Deliver. Implement the envisioned future. Use Appreciative Inquiry to reevaluate and continuously improve.

### **Create standard processes to optimize team coordination.**

- Implement an annual gap analysis to understand team training needs and identify common training programs.
- Establish an annual review of the core workflow/process of the team to understand inefficiencies, training/talent gaps, and so on.
- Review patient experience data to understand patient needs and determine if the way patients are assigned is optimally aligned with the strengths of your team(s).
- Encourage peer-to-peer mentoring for new staff and others who want to learn new skills.
- Review, update, and improve orientation and onboarding activities for new team members.
  - Establish/maintain mentor relationships at the department level throughout the first 90 days of employment, and through the entire first year if needed.
  - Conduct structured new hire check-ins at 30, 60, and 90 days of employment to understand the employee's level of engagement, social support, knowledge gaps, and current needs.
  - The 30-day check-in could include topics like assessing if the job meets their expectations, how welcome they feel in their department/team/unit, awareness of job expectations, level of support, etc.
  - The 60- and 90-day check-ins could include topics like current satisfaction/job stress, level of comfort asking for help, how they feel the integration into the organization is going, etc.
  - Continue to meet with new hires throughout the first year to assess performance, engagement, job stress, flight risk, etc. This will allow you to get a sense of how the employee is deriving joy from their work and understand what motivates them to stay engaged.

### **Provide the team with opportunities to learn teamwork skills and best practices.**

- Provide the team with skills training opportunities. These include negotiating skills, dialogue and conflict management, collaborative problem solving, meeting facilitation, and creative ways of using differences in opinions.
- Engage an organizational development specialist to conduct team-building exercises or take time off to perform team-building activities outside work.
- Seek out best teamwork practices from other departments, share them with your employees, and use them in your work group.
- As a manager, share what you have done to foster teamwork within or across departments. Encourage employees to do the same. For example, "Team, I brought your feedback on the current process to the leaders of radiology, EVS, and lab. We've identified a new process that we think

should be a time-saver for each of our departments. Here's what we're proposing. What additional feedback do you have?"

### **Set clear expectations and accountabilities for teamwork and performance.**

- Coach and consistently provide feedback to all employees, with a focus on those who have the greatest room for improvement.
- Clarify expectations for teamwork and performance and if necessary, initiate your organization's performance management process. When performance standards are clear and consistent, employees who are underperforming are likely to either improve performance or leave the unit or organization.
- How well a team works together is influenced by the effectiveness of your processes and the clarity of expectations.
  - Evaluate the effectiveness of collaborative practices in which there are handoffs among team members (e.g., shift reports, huddles, interprofessional rounds). It is not enough to simply have these practices in place. Assess how well the practices are functioning.
  - Identify process gaps by asking questions like, "How do you know who does what? How do you know this will be addressed?"
  - Create or clarify processes that would address areas of confusion or lack of information among team members.
- Set measurable and realistic performance goals for your group, and clearly point out the connection between the goals and your organization's overall mission and goals. Overarching purpose and goals help to lift the focus to a collective effort, rather than concerns with day-to-day disagreements.
  - Have employees work together on developing lists of actions to accomplish group goals.
  - Hold employees accountable and provide individual as well as group feedback.
  - Celebrate successes together and discuss ways to improve.

### **Evaluate your influence on the relationship dynamics of the team.**

- Think about recent interactions with your direct reports. Ask yourself the following questions:
  - Do I encourage teamwork in a clear, compelling, open, and consistent manner?
  - Have I appropriately invested in training the team to be effective and productive?
  - Have I provided the team with a set of clear expectations as it relates to teamwork, and am I holding all team members consistently accountable for meeting these expectations?
  - Does the team have goals? Are the concepts of coordination of effort, communication, planning, and other important behaviors included in department goal statements?
  - Do I overemphasize winning and competition at the expense of collaboration and teamwork?
  - Do I enable unhealthy triangles in communication? When employees have issues with each other, do they come to me first to vent their frustrations, or do they seek to work out issues with each other first?

# Team Dimension Item

**There is a climate of trust within my work unit.**

## QUESTION DEFINITION

The foundation for trust is building good relationships and understanding what motivates others. Trust is gained through keeping promises, being consistent in words and action, maintaining a high ethical standard, and being always as honest as possible. Trust is also an important facet of psychological safety and is vital to building strong relationships between coworkers.

## IMPROVEMENTS

- Avoid the perception of favoritism toward any employee. When employees feel others have an unfair advantage, trust among employees deteriorates.
- Trust others. Trust builds trust, so be a role model and encourage others to trust and be trustworthy.
- Make sure your actions are consistent with your words. Inconsistencies cause distrust. Encourage employees to behave similarly.
- Conduct regular rounds with staff and create meaningful connections to see how people are doing in their day-to-day and how you can help as a leader.
- Communicate and celebrate employee and patient successes to promote community (e.g., share news and positive feedback/comments during rounding, team meetings, kudo boards).
- Consider a team-building session for your employees that includes a discussion about trust. Talk to your manager and/or HR representative about possibly using an external facilitator.
- Tell the truth and encourage others to do the same. If you have information you cannot share, explain the reason for withholding information. Acknowledge others when they are forthright. When employees see that they can speak openly without fear of retribution, they will communicate openly and build trust among each other.
- Admit mistakes and encourage others to do the same. No one trusts a person who tries to hide their errors.
- Make commitments only if you can keep them. If you agree to do something, do it. Meet deadlines consistently. Acknowledge and reward the same behavior in others.

# Team Dimension Item

**My work unit provides high-quality care and service.**

## QUESTION DEFINITION

The members of a work unit are the “first to know” the quality of service being provided by that work unit. Low scores on this item may indicate a high number of minor issues with service quality or regular patterns of more significant issues. In either case, you need to identify the root cause of the low-quality issue – e.g., challenges originating outside the work unit, or those originating within the work unit.

Often, when work units provide unfavorable responses on any quality item, they have the perception that the quality of care and service provided by other work units within the organization is lacking. However, this item focuses on how employees feel about their own work unit, which is a more difficult conversation than focusing on what others do, as they are now talking about their coworkers—or themselves.

## IMPROVEMENTS

- Gain a better understanding from employees as to why they would respond to this item unfavorably. What specifically does the work unit do/not do that makes them feel that the unit does not provide high-quality care and service? Is their perception based on an isolated issue, or is it based on chronic issues they have heard about from other employees and/or patients? Consider having this discussion in a series of smaller focus groups.
- Engage other departments in identifying solutions. Ask them to provide feedback on ways your work unit can improve its quality and customer care.
- Look for previous solutions that were never implemented. Perhaps, in the past, issues regarding quality of care have been acknowledged and solutions identified but not implemented. Often when employees give unfavorable responses to this item, they are expressing their frustration with the lack of progress implementing high-quality care and service improvements.
- Follow through on solutions your work unit agrees upon. Do not let solutions fail because they were not implemented. Periodic updates will help keep the team enthusiastic about the work unit's commitment to quality.
- Consider forming a standing team within your work unit that focuses on quality improvement and customer care. Ask them to meet monthly or quarterly to review the status of new processes being implemented and to make recommendations for needed changes. Keep the entire work unit informed on the team's activities.
- Recognize and reward employees who suggest changes that result in improved quality and customer care. Create an award that is meaningful and acknowledge them publicly.
- Be a role model. Look for ways to improve quality and customer care. Be sure to implement your ideas.

# Team Dimension Item

**I enjoy working with my coworkers.**

## QUESTION DEFINITION

Employees like to have a positive reaction to the people they work with. Other than family members, coworkers represent most of the social interaction during any given working day. Employees may or may not maintain close social relationships with co-workers but tend to form collegial bonds which significantly affect their satisfaction with their work and workplace. When this item is unfavorable, it may be an indicator of many issues that need to be addressed among your employees to improve their working relationships. A lack of positive social relationships with the people each employee spends the most time working with can ultimately have significant negative effects on their level of engagement.

## IMPROVEMENTS

- Immediately address any concerns about bullying, rudeness, or unprofessional behavior that may undermine how well employees work together. Consult with your Human Resources department for support.
- Improve communications in your work unit. Poor communications are often the cause of conflict and disruption. Check with your manager or HR representative to see what communication skills courses are available for your work group.
- Pair people in new ways for training and projects. Allow people who have not gotten to know each other yet a chance to work on something together.
- Incorporate team-building into your regular staff meetings. For example, beginning each meeting with a quick social activity that allows people to get to know each other better can have a positive effect.
- Communicate the achievements of your team to your management or senior leadership in a visible way, demonstrating pride and support for your team.
- Set measurable and realistic performance goals for your group, and clearly point out the connection between the goals and your organization's overall mission and goals. Have employees work together on developing lists of actions to accomplish the group goals. Regularly review progress with your team.



# Organization Dimension Items

# Organization Dimension Item

**This organization supports me in balancing my work and personal life.**

## QUESTION DEFINITION

This item measures the extent to which employees feel that the organization puts the appropriate emphasis on meeting work needs and caring for employees' personal needs. The term "balance" implies that there is a give and take and that consideration is given both to the needs of the organization and to the employee's personal life. Work/life balance is one of the deciding factors for choosing a job or leaving a job. Organizations that support work/life balance have increased commitment and reduced turnover. An imbalance in this area can lead to fatigue and burnout, which can result in a loss of productivity even if an employee doesn't resign.

## VOICE OF THE EMPLOYEE

- 🗣️ "The flexibility this organization offers, their ability to help us balance work/life issues with our schedules, and the overall support they give to those of us in the field has far exceeded any of my previous employers."
- 🗣️ "We need better work/life balance. My direct leader and her leader try to help us have a work/life balance, but it isn't always possible for us or them due to the expectations of senior leaders and/or other departments. Other organizations have work from home options and summer hours. When will this organization get with the program?"

## IMPROVEMENTS

**Ask employees for input on ways the organization can support a healthy work/life balance.**

- Begin by asking your employees for specific ways to improve and/or maintain a healthy work/life balance.
  - In some cases, their dissatisfaction will be because of organizational policies/issues.
  - In other cases, it will be because of unique personal circumstances.
  - It could also be because of the amount of work and pressure you or others put on employees (individually or as a team).
- Invite your senior manager and/or Human Resources representative to attend a staff meeting to hear from employees.
- Recommend policy or strategy changes to senior management. You and your team may come up with valuable ideas to increase employee work/personal life balance throughout the organization.
- Be sincere and forthright with employees when telling them what is possible or not possible.
- Ask for your employees to help identify processes that could be streamlined, made more efficient and less wasteful. Link improvement work with efforts to improve work/life balance for employees.

**Set expectations and standards for a healthy work/life balance.**

- Managers and senior managers need to model the work balance they'd like to encourage for their employees.
  - For example, when a manager uses PTO to take a vacation, yet responds to e-mails as if she is in the office, this sends a powerful message to employees about whether they need to answer e-mail while on vacation. The actions of senior leaders are heard and observed by employees.
- Establish the expectation on your team that when an employee leaves for vacation, they set an email auto-reply directing people to a back-up contact. Honor the employee's time off by not contacting them unless it is truly an emergency.
- During unavoidable peaks in workload, explain when staff can expect to see their schedule or workload lighten. Communicate the steps you are taking to ensure this happens. For example, "I am working with Human Resources to hire two new employees." or "The process change we're making is designed to free up some time during this busy season."
- Actively encourage your team to ask for help when needed rather than trying to take on everything by themselves. Praise those who ask for help and share examples of how team members have helped each other.

#### **Help employees disconnect from work responsibilities.**

- Encourage the use of vacation and sick-leave time.
- Be familiar with your formal leave policy for employees with dependents. Recognize and encourage employees to use programs like FMLA when they need to care for sick children or elderly parents.
- Be aware of how often your employees take work home. Although this is sometimes necessary, it shouldn't be the norm.
  - Work with employees to understand the importance of getting work done at work. Develop plans, schedules, and prioritization methods (if necessary) to ensure success. The line between work and home lives tends to blur when employees regularly take work home.
- If there is an excessive need to contact employees who are off shift, evaluate where communication breakdowns are occurring that may burden employees when they are not at work. For example, in clinical areas, consider the effectiveness of bedside shift reports, chart notes, and whiteboard communication. In non-clinical areas, consider how consistently team members are saving information/documents in predefined locations for others to access easily when they're out.

#### **Share information about your employee assistance program (EAP) with staff.**

- Be familiar with your EAP and share this information with employees.
  - An individual employee's concerns with work-personal life balance may have to do with health issues or with problems at home, and an EAP may help.
  - The issues for which EAPs provide support vary, but examples include major life events, health care concerns, emotional distress, work stress, or family/personal relationship issues.

# Organization Dimension Item

**This organization provides career development opportunities.**

## QUESTION DEFINITION

This statement measures the extent to which an employee feels the organization provides them with opportunities to expand their career. One of the keys to high performance and satisfaction at work is fulfilling the human need to be self-directed, learn and create new things, and move forward in the world.

Many employees see career development as a way to make a higher income, obtain promotions, and become a more valuable employee to the organization. However, career development also fulfills employees' needs for professional growth and personal fulfillment.

A low score on this item could mean that employees do not have enough information about the organization's career development efforts, or it could mean the career development program needs improvement.

## VOICE OF THE EMPLOYEE

- 🗣️ "I like how this organization treats both the employees and patients. I am also proud to work in an environment that promotes career development and innovation."
- 🗣️ "Even before the temporary hold on the nursing ladder progression, there was no clear opportunity for career coaching, advancement, or development. Any opportunity gained beyond direct unit education is due to an individual seeking it out on their own."

## IMPROVEMENTS

### Create a culture that values learning.

- Encourage employees to read industry publications. Make suggestions and ask the team for input. Ask if your employees have a favorite blog, forum, website, or magazine that they frequently read.
- Provide recognition for those who seek training and development opportunities. Model this behavior and seek opportunities for yourself.
- Make knowledge sharing a part of your weekly or monthly meetings. Ask team members to share something they've learned during the last week or month.
- Support the transfer of knowledge from experienced employees to new hires and junior staff by providing opportunities for collegial interaction. This can be through personal mentoring by matching more experienced, respected employees with newer ones, through casual discussions over lunch, or by allocating extra time at staff meetings.
- Invite Human Resources to provide a learning session focusing on career development, training opportunities, job posting processes, and other topics relevant to career growth within the organization.

- Hold staff accountable. Make learning a part of your annual performance review. Ask employees to provide you with specific examples of how they kept up with industry news.

#### **Work with employees to create individual development plans.**

- Recognize natural abilities and strengths within each of your employees.
- Encourage employees to develop skills in areas of interest. Help develop employees that are good at what they do and love what they do.
- Provide candid feedback to each employee about their relative strengths and developmental opportunities. Ask each employee to define career goals and the skills they are working to develop.
- Provide suggestions for development activities.
- Put employees in touch with other departments or leaders to learn more about what they do and to explore different career paths.
- Encourage employees to conduct informational interviews or help them obtain shadowing opportunities with other departments or roles within your department.
- Help them set realistic time frames.
- Help them troubleshoot potential obstacles.
- Schedule periodic (quarterly or semi-annual) meetings to monitor their progress.
- Revise their plan as appropriate and acknowledge results.

#### **Ensure employees are given time and resources for training.**

- Support training and education. Set aside time during individual and team meetings to discuss new or upcoming opportunities.
- Ask your employees what training interests them, what skills they would like to develop, and how they would like to advance.
- Create flexible work options to allow employees to take classes or outside training, even if your organization cannot fund them. This is most effective when employees identify specific educational opportunities in which they would like to participate.
- For budgeting purposes, it is helpful to discuss training needs and assess the cost before budget deadlines. This will ensure that the appropriate funds are set aside for the upcoming year. This helps you avoid the conversation, "I wish I could support that training, but we just don't have the funding ...". If budgets are already set and funding is not possible, be honest. Tell employees that you support ongoing training, and it will have to wait until funding is available.
- After an employee has attended a training course, it is important to follow up to ensure that he or she has an opportunity to put the training to good use quickly before the new knowledge and/or skills become a distant memory.

# Organization Dimension Item

## I have confidence in Senior Management's leadership.

### QUESTION DEFINITION

Employees have confidence in and trust leaders when employees feel they can rely on consistent, direct, transparent communications on issues affecting organization challenges and success, job security, and working conditions. Confidence in leadership can include faith that those with the most influence in the organization will direct it effectively as well as employees feeling secure in the organization's growth and/or economic stability.

As a manager, recognize that your behavior and attitude may be construed as representative of those at higher levels. Having accepted a leadership role, you have an obligation to be an effective ambassador for those above you. You are expected to translate policies, goals and outcomes for your employees and ensure that accurate messages are passed down to the frontline in a timely manner.

### IMPROVEMENTS

- Conduct a brainstorming session with employees to identify the actions and behaviors that would instill more confidence in the leaders above you. Identify those actions with the greatest potential for changing employees' perceptions and respectfully share this information with more senior leaders.
- Partner with your boss and members of the senior team to conduct effective and purposeful rounding across the units you manage. During these rounding sessions, build relationships and invite interaction.
- Advise leaders at higher levels when special recognition is due to individuals or teams, so the leaders are able to convey their thanks for a job well done.
- When organization-wide policy changes or fiscal challenges must be communicated to your employees, clearly understand the intent of the change and the potential unfavorable outcomes if the changes were not to occur. Communicate the information to employees in a way that does not point fingers or place blame.
- Be responsible to both senior management and your employees. Avoid placing blame on or "passing the buck" to senior leaders. At the same time, do not give the impression to employees that you are so loyal to senior management that you are not open to hearing their concerns.
- Consider having your HR representative or someone else facilitate discussions with your employees. They may give more honest feedback to someone outside of management.
- Make sure you communicate senior management's activities to your employees frequently. Managers often assume that employees know more about what is going on in the organization than they actually do. It's better to over-communicate than to assume the employees know what senior management is doing to ensure the organization's success.

# Organization Dimension Item

**I get the tools and resources I need to do my job well.**

## QUESTION DEFINITION

Having the right tools in good working order and resources to do the best work is a significant contributor to effective operations and employee engagement. Making sure employees have tools and resources demonstrates the organization's concern for high achievement, both in patient outcomes and employee engagement. This item may cover a broad range of needs and concerns: workspace, availability of state-of-the-art equipment, break rooms, documentation and training materials, or having private areas where discussions regarding patients may be conducted confidentially.

## IMPROVEMENTS

- Ask employees to help you develop a list of all the tools, resources and/or process improvements they believe would help them do a better job. Take enough time to understand why they believe it is a need. If the discussion is in a group, encourage interaction and an exchange of ideas. Often, such a discussion will lead to other employees sharing ideas that may change the perceived needs. Or the discussion may only confirm the need. Either way, you will have a better understanding of employees' needs.
- Identify what you can do that does not involve cost, and act on it. While the cost of some tools and resources may prevent your being able to provide employees with everything they need, satisfying some needs will not require additional expense. Sometimes, what is perceived by employees to be a lack of tools and resources is due to solvable challenges related to planning, coordination, or communication.
- For top needs, build a good business case to present to upper management on how the identified tools and resources would improve care, service, safety, and employee working conditions.
- Keep employees informed about items that are expensive or that may not be available soon. Let them know what you are doing to request tools and resources and when they can be expected. If you cannot provide them, be sincere and forthright. Most employees recognize the organization does not have unlimited funds, but they want to know that their needs are legitimately understood and considered.
- Be an advocate for your team's needs by inviting others who control resources to attend a staff meeting to learn firsthand about why certain tools and resources are needed.
- Ask your team to help you develop alternate ways to meet their needs when you cannot acquire what they want.
- Ask the organization for alternate ways to meet the resource needs of your team.

# Organization Dimension Item

**This organization cares about employee safety.**

## QUESTION DEFINITION

Employees perceive programs and policies designed for their protection as a demonstration of respect for their well-being. Since most employees have the expectation that their workplace will offer a safe environment, everyone should be familiar with incident reporting policies, procedures, and emergency actions. Employees should be protected from hazardous elements as well as emotional, physical or verbal abuse or harassment from patients, colleagues and others in the healthcare setting.

## IMPROVEMENTS

- Create an open-door safety policy that encourages employees to report hazards or policy violations that could endanger staff, patients or families.
- When an employee comes to you with a safety concern, use phrases that clearly demonstrate your concern for the staff member. For example, "That must have been hard for you to see. What happened next?" Asking open-ended questions can often make it easier for the staff member to share additional information.
- Brainstorm during a staff meeting to identify employees' perceptions of what constitutes a safe work environment. Lack of tools and equipment, inadequate staffing, even lighting in the parking lot at night may cause employees to feel unsafe.
- Promote safety event reporting as an organizational tool for learning and improvement. Encourage reporting consistently and educate everyone about who should report, what to report and how to report.
- Incorporate safety discussions into regular team meetings to surface any concerns for employees, patients, or families. Share situations where safety events were properly reported and the positive outcome this had. Specifically, include situations in which staff members spoke up about safety concerns. Knowing that others have spoken up makes staff members feel safe about sharing.
- Show personal concern. When you personally encounter an unsafe situation for employees, get involved. Ask questions, get the specifics, find out if it is a recurring situation, ask for their ideas, and promise to do what you can. Most importantly, follow up.