Employee engagement: 10 best practices for improving your culture - cio.com

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Executive Summary

This article addresses the challenge of employee disengagement in modern organizations, referencing the phenomenon of 'quiet quitting' and its estimated $7.8 trillion cost to the global economy in 2022 as cited by Gallup. The author's central argument is that intentional leadership behaviours — recognition, psychological safety, meaning-making, and growth facilitation — are the primary drivers of employee engagement. Evidence is drawn from a combination of Gallup survey data and practitioner interviews with IT and operations leaders from organizations including Datasite, 1Password, Informatica, Next PR, Growthspace, and Arvest Bank. Key findings include that only 23% of the world's employees report being engaged, that 41% of disengaged employees attribute this to leadership and workplace culture, and that Arvest Bank reported a 21-point jump in employee engagement following a reskilling and transparent change communication initiative. The article concludes that engagement is achievable across remote, hybrid, and in-person settings when leaders are deliberate and consistent in their people-focused practices.

Key Insights

1. Gallup estimates global employee disengagement cost the economy $7.8 trillion in 2022, with only 23% of the world's employees reporting active engagement at work.

2. 41% of surveyed employees in the Gallup State of the Global Workforce 2023 Report attributed their disengagement to leadership quality and workplace culture, positioning leader behaviour as a primary lever.

3. Arvest Bank reported a 21-point increase in employee engagement following transparent communication about organizational transformation and the provision of upskilling and reskilling resources for employees.

Practical Takeaways

• Personalizing recognition to individual employee preferences — rather than applying uniform reward mechanisms — is identified by practitioners as more effective for sustaining engagement.

• Regular pulse checks using a single Net Promoter Score question ('Would you recommend this company to family and friends?') are described as a lightweight method for monitoring engagement sentiment between annual surveys.

Critical Analysis

Strengths: The article integrates practitioner perspectives from a range of senior IT and operations leaders, providing concrete behavioural examples rather than abstract principles. It references identifiable external data sources including Gallup reports and a Gallup/Workhuman survey, lending partial credibility to its statistical claims. Limitations: The article is structured as listicle journalism rather than rigorous analysis. The Arvest Bank 21-point engagement increase is cited without methodology, timeframe specificity, or causal attribution. Practitioner quotes are self-reported and unverified. The McKinsey statistic (89% of employees believe psychological safety is a workplace essential) is cited without naming the specific report or year. Culture Amp is quoted as a source without disclosure of any commercial relationship with the publication or contributors. The article does not present counterevidence or acknowledge conditions under which these practices may be ineffective. Bias: The piece is oriented toward leadership optimism and implicitly assumes that disengagement is primarily a leadership failure, without accounting for structural, economic, or industry-specific factors. Several named contributors represent vendors or consultancies with commercial interests in engagement solutions.

Organizational Practice

Practices described include: quarterly virtual hackathons at 1Password to encourage cross-team connection and experimentation; biannual ask-me-anything sessions and skip-level one-on-ones conducted by the CTO of 1Password; blameless postmortem reviews following incidents or failures; annual employee engagement surveys supplemented by Net Promoter Score pulse checks; leader-level review and aggregation of open-text survey feedback at Arvest Bank; a monthly virtual 'Transformation Talk' webinar at Arvest Bank attended by approximately 500 employees; and a reskilling programme at Arvest Bank that provided time and resources for employees in non-technical roles to transition into technical functions such as cloud architecture.

Strategic Implications

The article reflects a practitioner consensus that engagement is increasingly treated as a leadership accountability rather than a standalone HR function, with measurement mechanisms (surveys, NPS pulse checks) becoming embedded in operational rhythms. The emphasis on personalized recognition and individual growth pathways suggests a movement away from standardized, organization-wide engagement programmes toward more differentiated, manager-led approaches. The Arvest Bank case illustrates a pattern where transparency during organizational transformation, combined with upskilling investment, is associated with measurable engagement recovery — a dynamic relevant to organizations undergoing technology-driven change. The article also signals that remote and hybrid work environments are not inherently incompatible with high engagement, provided intentional connection practices are maintained.

Validation Status: passed
