

Employee Engagement: Soccer and the Power of Culture, Belonging - Mexico Business News

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Executive Summary

This article examines the concept of employee engagement through the lens of soccer fan culture, arguing that conventional corporate engagement strategies — perks, wellness programs, and HR-managed initiatives — are fundamentally misaligned with how deep loyalty and belonging are actually constructed. The author contends that soccer clubs such as Real Madrid, Boca Juniors, and Manchester United have achieved a form of identity-based engagement over decades that most corporations fail to replicate because they treat engagement as a transactional HR program rather than a shared cultural responsibility. Drawing on Gallup's State of the Global Workplace Report 2026, which reports a decline in global engagement to its lowest level since 2020 and an estimated US\$10 trillion in lost productivity, the article proposes replacing the traditional HR lifecycle model with a culture-first sequence centered on belonging, living values, and legacy. Examples from Patagonia and NVIDIA are cited as illustrations of identity-aligned organizational culture. The author concludes that sustainable engagement emerges when employees and former employees voluntarily become ambassadors of organizational identity — a condition achieved through symbolic rituals, trusted leadership behavior, and meaningful onboarding rather than incentive programs.

Key Insights

1. Global employee engagement declined for a second consecutive year to its lowest point since 2020, costing the world economy approximately US\$10 trillion in lost productivity, according to Gallup's State of the Global Workplace Report 2026.
2. The author argues that engagement is rooted in identity and pride rather than satisfaction or compensation, using soccer fan loyalty as an empirical analogy for what sustained psychological attachment looks like in practice.
3. Culture maintained exclusively by HR is described as fragile; the article posits that self-sustaining culture emerges only when all employees — including former ones — become voluntary guardians of organizational values.

Practical Takeaways

- Organizations may consider redesigning onboarding experiences to emphasize organizational history, purpose, and identity rather than administrative processes, drawing on the way new soccer fans are initiated into club culture.
- Measuring manager effectiveness by talent development outcomes — such as internal promotions and high-performer retention — rather than solely by evaluation compliance is presented as a potential

lever for strengthening team culture.

Critical Analysis

Strengths: The article offers an accessible and rhetorically effective analogy between soccer fan culture and employee engagement, and the Gallup 2026 statistic provides a credible empirical anchor. The proposed shift from transactional HR models to identity-based culture frameworks reflects themes present in legitimate organizational behavior research. **Limitations:** The article is primarily opinion-based and does not cite empirical studies supporting the soccer analogy or the proposed engagement model. The examples of Patagonia and NVIDIA are asserted without evidence of engagement outcomes. The proposed HR lifecycle replacement model is the author's own construct and has not been tested or validated. The article does not address counterarguments, such as evidence that material incentives do influence engagement, or that identity-based cultures can produce exclusion and conformity pressures. **Biases:** The piece takes a strongly critical stance toward HR departments and traditional compensation-based engagement, which may reflect the author's professional perspective. The tone is prescriptive despite the absence of supporting data, and the framing favors a specific cultural-identity philosophy without acknowledging alternative engagement models.

Organizational Practice

The article describes organizations using perks, wellness programs, remote work, and paid time off as engagement tools. It also references identity-aligned cultures at Patagonia and NVIDIA, where employees associate strongly with organizational mission and values. Additional practices described include legendary onboarding experiences, alumni community-building, ritual and celebration-based culture reinforcement, and measuring manager performance by talent development rather than evaluation activity.

Strategic Implications

The article's framing suggests a growing dissatisfaction with transactional engagement models and points toward identity and belonging as emerging focal points in PMS discourse. The Gallup data, if accurate for 2026, indicates that current engagement investments across industries are producing diminishing returns, which may accelerate interest in culture-architecture approaches over program-based HR interventions. The proposed reconceptualization of former employees as lifetime ambassadors reflects a broadening definition of the organizational boundary relevant to engagement measurement.

Validation Status: passed
