

specialists in engaging people

Changing attitudes to engagement

Why the effective engagement of internal employees is essential to the effective engagement of external stakeholders.

Many organisational leaders are now talking about "engagement." It is discussed as the latest universal cure for improved effectiveness in times of turbulence and uncertainty. HR managers talk about it as a way to retain employees. CFO's now believe it is important in increasing return-on-investment. Politicians and public servants talk about engaging the community in their deliberations. Developers and utility companies espouse the importance of engaging in community consultation. **Yet how can something that everyone wants be so difficult to achieve?**

Twyfords reviewed more than 60 academic studies (from 30 universities, over 2000 organisations, and more than 250,000 participants) examining the complexities of engagement at

work. In these studies engagement was measured using four different instruments in 16 countries across most industries. While there was significant variation in the parameters of these studies (diversity of instruments, industries and culture) there was a strong agreement that only a minority of employees (between 12 and 29 percent) are actively engaged at work (see diagram "Twyfords Study of Global Research into Employee Engagement"). **This confirms that, in general, regardless of national boundaries and industry, only one-in-five employees are "actively engaged" while another one-in-five are "actively disengaged."**

The Twyfords study defined and examined employee engagement on three levels:

Twyfords summary of global research into employee engagement



characterised by:

exhaustion, disconnection, cynicism and ineffective performance

organisational outcomes

include more:

- employee turnover
- inventory shrinkage
- absenteeism
- workplace accidents
- customer complaints
- employee health problems
- employee family conflict
- workplace team conflict

characterised by:

showing up but not really "there" and tends to do the minimum required to get by

organisational outcomes:

- average performance by all internal and external measures

Passively disengaged employees can be inspired to re-engage through effective management practices

characterised by:

being fully present – attentive, connected, integrated and focused on job performance

organisational outcomes include improved:

- employee productivity
- shareholder return
- customer retention
- employee retention
- client satisfaction
- community engagement

This summary combines Twyfords research (114 organisations in Australia and New Zealand) with the findings of over 60 research studies (from 30 universities, over 2000 organisations, and more than 250,000 participants). Engagement was assessed using four different instruments in 16 countries and most industries. The highest level of active engagement in these studies was 29% and the lowest was 12%.

Someone is **actively engaged** if they are “fully present.” The whole person: head (cognitive, thinking) heart (emotional, feeling) and hands (physical, doing) is absorbed in what they are doing. They are wholehearted in their involvement. Like a good player on a sports team their full attention and focus is fully **“in the game.”**

Organisations and communities generate better outcomes when people within them are engaged and involved.

Someone is **passively disengaged** if they are showing up but not really “there.” They tend to do the minimum required to get by, not working against the organisation, but not working for it either. If this was a sport they would be in uniform but

sitting **on the sidelines** watching the game - sometimes active, sometimes not.

In contrast a person who is **actively disengaged** tend to be cynical, disconnected, have low energy and perform ineffectively. This person is actively working against the organisation. They are **in the crowd** watching the game from the cheap back seats – usually an expert on what should have happened, always willing to criticise or blame those on the field for what they are doing wrong.

Twyfords found that there were significant positive correlations between active employee engagement and positive business outcomes in the following areas: employee productivity; shareholder return; customer retention; employee retention; client satisfaction; and employee health.

Internal Engagement and Community Engagement

There is little, if any, research on positive links between employee engagement (internal) and community engagement (external). This is of particular significance for any organisation that attempts to engage the public in collaborative efforts such as: federal, state and local governments; utility providers; organisations with volunteer governance such as many charities, associations, and religious

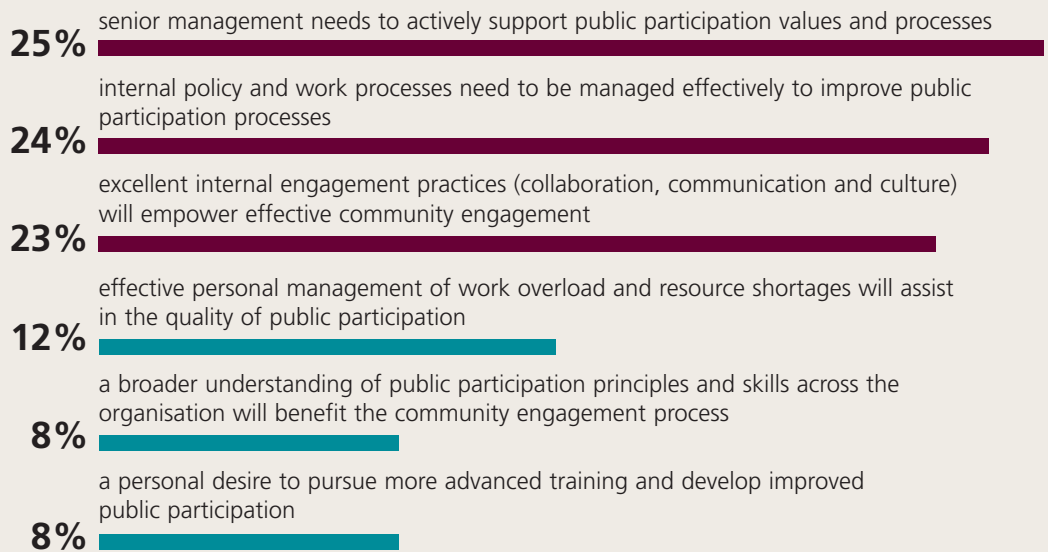
institutions; as well as directors of public companies who attempt to inform and engage their public shareholders.

To provide input to this **research gap** Twyfords asked community engagement practitioners the question, “What issues need to be addressed in your organisation to apply what you have learned about public participation.” Of this group (of 330 respondents representing 114 organisations

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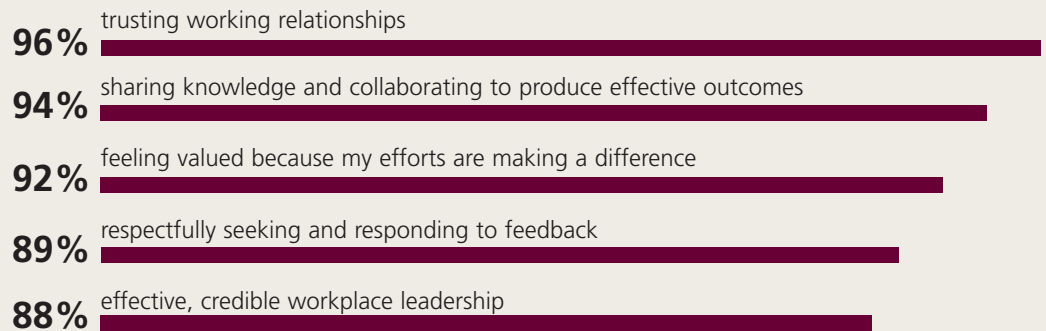
72% believe internal processes make a significant contribution to effective community engagement

Twyfords study of 330 community engagement practitioners from 114 organisations in Australia and New Zealand



“Indicate the Importance of the Following Factors in Bringing About Effective Internal Engagement”

Top five factors that can build internal engagement



These are the top five responses of participants in a Twyfords study that requested input from 152 community engagement practitioners when provided with a list of possible contributing factors that may bring about effective internal engagement

in Australia and New Zealand) **72% believed that internal processes are key to effective community engagement.** (This included: 25% who believed senior management need to more actively support public participation values and processes; 24% who believe that internal policies and work processes must be supportive of public participation projects; and 23% who believe that excellent internal engagement practices - collaboration, communication and culture - are key).

90% believed that an organisation is more capable of achieving effective community engagement outcomes when they practise effective internal engagement processes

A second study involved 152 attendees of the 2007 International Association of Public Participation Australasia Symposium. These were community engagement practitioners, policy makers and project managers. **90% of participants believed that an organisation is more capable of achieving effective community engagement outcomes when they practise effective internal engagement processes.** Of particular note was that 75% believed that effective interdepartmental communication is very important in bringing about effective community engagement. This study found that actively engaged employees increase the effectiveness of community engagement (with the potential to inform better decision making). This means that **if an organisation wants to improve its ability to engage the community – then it is essential to actively engage their own employees.**

This study also identified factors that contribute to effective internal engagement. Provided with a list of options, the top five factors that support effective internal engagement were selected by this group as: effective credible leadership; trusting working relationships; collaborating and sharing knowledge; effective feedback processes; and feeling valued for my contribution. Addressing these may provide a starting point for practitioners wishing to engage employees across their organisation.

While much is being written about engagement there remains considerable room for more solid research in the field. The purpose of this Twyfords study was to identify some knowledge gaps and to inform the development of sound theory and practice in the field. This link between internal and external engagement is of great significance to those wishing to remove barriers that stand in the way of effective community engagement.

75% of practitioners believed that effective inter-departmental communication assists effective community engagement

This qualitative study sought to harvest the knowledge of experienced community engagement practitioners. However, there is a need for more research to quantitatively measure any correlation between employee engagement and the quality of outcomes in community engagement.

A list of references for this work can be downloaded from www.twyfords.com.au/twyfords/publications/Twyfords-research-reports.html