

# Employee Engagement in an Animal Research Facility

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## Abstract

Disengaged employees can compromise organizational growth. In this qualitative, single-case study, participants discussed their perceptions leading to engagement or disengagement while working at the facility. The characterization of the negative organizational and social effects of employee disengagement may lead to improvements in employee satisfaction, business growth, integrity, and animal welfare.

## Problem

Disengaged workers often exhibit **negative attitudes** and **uncooperative behaviors** that lead to poor financial performance (Bakker, Albrecht, & Leiter, 2011). **Employee disengagement** costs U.S. hospitals approximately \$29 million per year (Shuck, Reio, & Rocco, 2011; Waldman, Kelly, Aurora, & Smith, 2010). Employers or business leaders may have had limited knowledge regarding ways to engage employees or unite their workforce (Demerouti, Mostert, & Bakker, 2010). Therefore, employee disengagement might compromise the business growth and integrity of an animal research facility located in the US Midwest.



## Purpose

The **purpose of this study** was to gain an understanding of the perceptions and experiences of animal husbandry workers who participated in the Gallup (2010) surveys in 2011. An increase in the level of employee engagement will contribute to social change and business outcomes (Davies & Crane, 2012); thereby, improving animal welfare in medical research.

## Relevant Literature

**Employee engagement** is a persistent positive emotional state that improves work performance and business outcomes (Salanova, Schaufeli, Martínez, & Bresó, 2010).

**Personal engagement** exists when employees engage in behaviors that promote their connection to their work and to others (Kahn, 1990).

**Personally disengaged employees** are negative, unhappy, and unenthusiastic; and, they transfer that feeling of despondency to their personal lives (Demerouti, Mostert, & Bakker, 2010).

Luthans (2002) introduced the theory of **positive psychological capital** in a work setting. Researchers focus on positive constructs, such as happiness and individual satisfaction, in order to understand human behavior at work.

Luthans (2002) documented 4 qualities, when employees exhibit confidence (**efficacy**), establish and met challenging goals (**hope**), had a strong belief system (**optimism**), and overcame adversity (**resiliency**), the became engaged.

## Research Question

How might employee disengagement compromise an animal research facility's business growth and integrity?

## Procedure

**Sampling frame:** Purposeful sampling - 34 animal husbandry workers.

**Sample size:** 10 participants - employed in 2011. Interviews from 6 participants, with a stopping criterion of 2 interviews without new ideas or themes emerging.

**Data:** Semistructured interviews, fieldwork observations, and workplace documents.

**Case study protocol:** Steps taken in the data collection, analysis, and reporting process.

**Case study database:** Store, retrieve and inspect field notes, documents, and narratives.

## Data Analysis

**Peer debriefing \* transcript and member checking procedures.**

**Open coding and data reduction** were the primary data analysis techniques, using **ATLAS.ti qualitative** software. As codes emerged from the interview questions, customized, hierarchical **categories and themes** rose from visible and obvious meanings.

**Co-Occurrence** analyses helped me to explore relationships between codes.

## Findings

**Feeling engaged:** Engagement focused events, Gallup survey, networking/teamwork, and getting involved. **Sense of belonging:** Volunteerism, teambuilding, performance recognition, communication, and training opportunities.

**Feeling disengaged:** Timekeeping policy, favoritism, conflict resolution, employee quality. **Lack of support:** Management relations, opinions do not matter, lack of leadership.

## Limitations

An inability to **generalize to other populations** was the primary limitation of this study.

- The entire sampling frame of 34 animal care workers had the opportunity to volunteer for the study, and 10 employees agreed.

## Conclusions

**Change needed in focus of strategies to mitigate employee disengagement.**

- Purchase a system enhancement that will electronically track animal related health issues.
- Revise the current employee performance appraisal categories to differentiate worker performance.
- Provide stretch opportunities that engage employees.
- Revise the time and attendance policy.
- Conduct a workload analysis to statistically formulate quality and workload expectations.
- Improve the interactions of one manager.

## Social Change Implications

**Implementation of identified strategies and initiatives** might provide an opportunity for employees to share their lived experiences; and,

- Create a culture that allows staff members to transition to heightened cohesion.
- Improve performance and teamwork, ultimately improving animal welfare and increasing the likelihood of successful animal research, business growth, and integrity.

## Supervisory Committee

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