



Trends in State Courts

Leadership & Technology



Getting Beyond Satisfaction to the Engagement of Court Employees

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*Are satisfied employees the most productive employees?
Illinois's Nineteenth Judicial Circuit set out to measure not only the satisfaction of their employees but also their engagement with working in a court organization.*

There remain a lot of misperceptions in the human resource (HR) industry around employee satisfaction and engagement. HR professionals have long sought to measure satisfaction accurately, but more recently the focus has shifted to engagement. Is employee engagement just a new buzzword for job satisfaction? The answer is no. Satisfaction and engagement are two important, yet distinct measurements that provide valuable and actionable insights into workplace dynamics. The problem is that too many organizations still view them as the same thing. As a result, they may be missing critical opportunities to foster the kind of workplace engagement that drives innovation and boosts performance.

Common Components of Employee Surveys

Satisfaction Surveys	Disaffection	Sense of discontentment & dissatisfaction
	Satisfaction	Enjoyable work & relationships
Engagement Surveys	Motivation	Meaningful activity & autonomy
	Engagement	Identification & commitment

While the exact definitions of satisfaction and engagement may differ from organization to organization, HR professionals would generally agree that satisfaction refers to how employees feel (their happiness) about their job and conditions, such as compensation, benefits, work environment, and career-development opportunities. Engagement, on the other hand, refers to employees' commitment and connection to work as measured by the amount of discretionary effort that they are willing to expend on behalf of their employer. Highly engaged employees go above and beyond the core responsibilities in their job descriptions, innovating and thinking outside the box to move their organizations forward—they are truly passionate about their jobs (Satyendra, 2013).



Knowing how employees perceive their workplace is an important element for the court manager/leader in evaluating teamwork, management, and supervision styles, which ultimately can facilitate organizational development. From 2006 to 2010, the Circuit Court of Lake County (Nineteenth Judicial Circuit), Illinois assessed employees' attitudes and experiences using the National Center for State Courts' *CourtTools: CourTool 9—Court Employee Satisfaction Survey* (Administrative Office of the Nineteenth Judicial Circuit Court of Lake County, 2010). The core items on that survey assessed employees' level of satisfaction in areas such as communication, recognition, organizational cooperation, and resource allocation. Over those years, numerous

improvement activities developed at the organizational and divisional levels had a negligible impact on employee perceptions of the workplace and, more importantly, on employee performance. The axiom found in some contemporary management literature—satisfied employees are not necessarily high-performing employees—seemed to hold true.

Correlation of Employee Research with Business Performance



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The Nineteenth Judicial Circuit’s senior management team was determined to better understand court employees’ workplace experiences and the relationship that those experiences have with employees’ commitment to the values, mission, and objectives of the court organization. The team decided that change was needed to better measure indicators that have the potential to increase performance and were under the influence of employees’ supervisors—which led to the Court Employee Engagement Survey.

A number of survey instruments have, over the years, been used to assess workplace and organizational engagement with employees of various professions and job settings within both private- and public-sector organizations. The senior management team reviewed several of these tools, including the National Center for State Courts’ CourTools Employee Satisfaction Survey, version 2.0 (National Center for State Courts, 2011); the Gallop Q12 (Harter et al., 2006); and the Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey, or FEVS (United States Office of Personnel Management, 2014). Many items on these surveys overlap, which facilitated the item-selection process and provided multiple opportunities for comparisons. The senior management team chose a hybrid model based on those items that were 1) important to the entire court organization and 2) under the influence of court managers to effect change. The goal of the survey is to better integrate all employees into the process of organizational performance and improvement; simply stated, people support what they help create.

The Court Employee Engagement Survey provides a useful tool for understanding how employees view their workplace, relations with managers and coworkers, their job, senior managers, and the court organization. The results provide

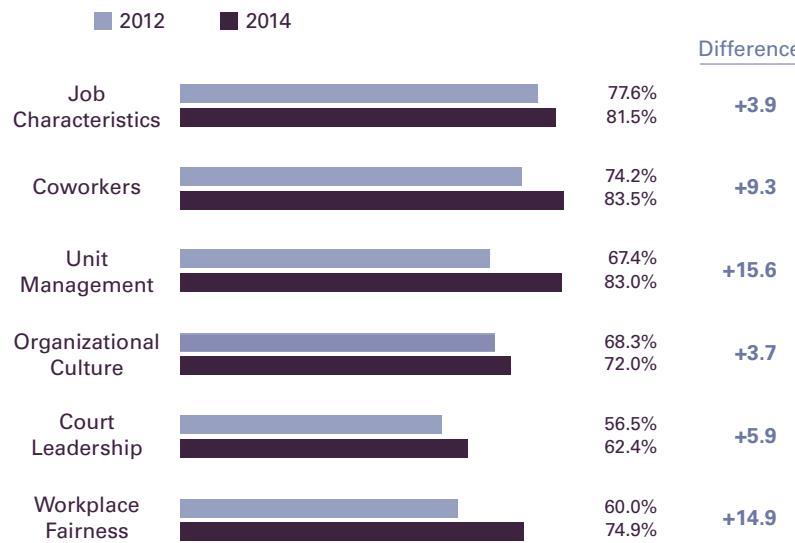
a snapshot of the court organization that can be used to identify where court managers might best focus their efforts to influence change. Using this survey provides insights and suggestions to court leaders and senior managers on how best to increase engagement among the workforce with the mission and objectives of the court organization. Features of the Court Employee Engagement Survey include:

- providing a forum for receiving helpful and practical suggestions from staff members
- identifying strengths and weaknesses and targeting improvement programs to meet priority needs to enhance organizational performance
- helping court staff members feel valued by showing concern and respect for their views
- providing benchmarks for measuring improvements
- enabling employees to express valid concerns.

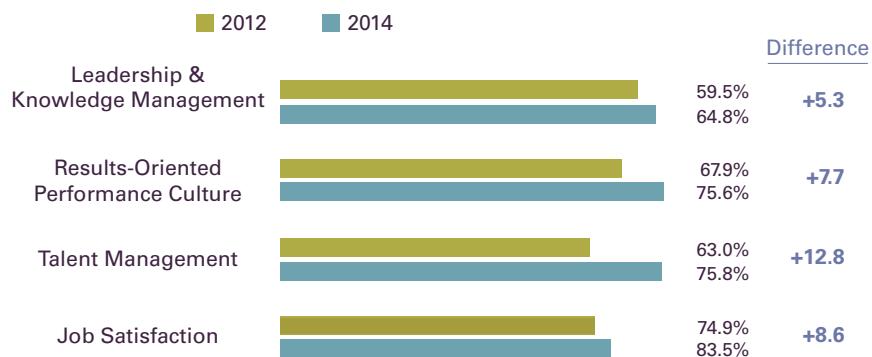
The Circuit Court of Lake County’s Employee Engagement Survey is a multilayered assessment tool. In addition to demographic information provided by the employee (e.g., supervisor or line staff, division, tenure, and age—split among four categories), the survey is composed of six primary clusters (42 seven-point Likert-scale items) and an open-ended comment section for each cluster representing the employees’ work experiences in areas such as job characteristics, relationships with coworkers, unit management, organizational culture, court leadership, and workplace fairness. Certain items, embedded within these clusters, highlight particular HR practices: leadership and knowledge management, results-oriented performance culture, talent management, and job satisfaction. In addition, several items are considered to be drivers of employee engagement—leadership practices, direct supervision, and intrinsic work experiences.

More than 82 percent of Lake County Circuit Court employees in 2014 expressed their opinions regarding their jobs, their supervisors, leadership, and the court organization. Court-wide results reflected a workforce focused on achieving the mission and objectives of the court organization and producing high-quality work. Most employees expressed feeling their jobs are important (94.2 percent) and gave them a feeling of accomplishment (84.5 percent); they also conveyed concern about the quality of their work product—the programs and services provided on behalf of the court. These findings, however, were not surprising. Traditionally, findings regarding court employees’ perceptions of the importance of their work are high.

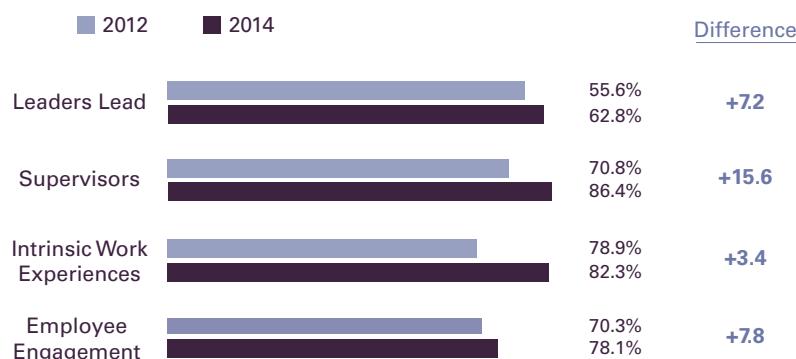
Comparison of Scores by Court Employee Engagement Survey Cluster (% Agreement)



Comparison of Scores by Human Capital Assessment and Accountability Framework (HCAAF Index) (% Agreement)



Comparison of Scores by Employee Engagement Conditions & Index (% Agreement)



The Court Employee Survey

The Court Employee Survey contains 42 Likert-style questions. Each section below is followed by an open-ended question asking respondents their opinion on conditions related to that section. Eleven items deal with employees' general, day-to-day work experiences over the past 18 months. Items in this cluster were designed to assess the opinions of court employees on whether they felt that they have the materials, motivation, direction, sense of mission, and commitment to do quality work.

Court Employee Survey—Work Experiences Cluster

Work Experiences	CourTools	Gallop Q12	FEVS
I understand the connection between the work that I do and the mission and objectives of the court organization.	x	x	x
I have enough job-related information to do my job well.	x		x
I feel encouraged to come up with new and better ways of performing my job.	x		x
My work assignment gives me a feeling of personal accomplishment.			x
I know what is expected of me to be successful at doing my job.	x	x	
I have sufficient resources to get my job done.	x	x	x
My workload is reasonable.			x
I feel that the work I do is important.			x
My working conditions and surroundings enable me to do my job well.	x		x
I am held accountable for achieving results.			x
My talents are used well in the workplace.	x		x
I am able to do my best on the job every day.		x	

Court Employee Survey—My Work Unit Cluster

These items address employees' opinions regarding cooperation, quality, and knowledge sharing within their work unit. The work unit is defined as that group of coworkers with whom the employee primarily interacts and works jointly with on a regular basis. For line staff and unit managers, this is the primary work unit; for directors, assistant directors, and staff in smaller divisions, this would be the division in which they work.

My Work Unit	CourTools	Gallop Q12	FEVS
The people I work with cooperate to get work assignments done.	x		x
Employees in my work unit share job knowledge with one another.			x
My coworkers care about the quality of services and programs that we provide.		x	

Court Employee Survey—My Immediate Supervisor Cluster

These items address employees' perception of their direct supervisor. Employees were asked to consider their experiences with the person who acted as their immediate supervisor over the past 18 months. For example, this section asked whether supervisors/team leaders provided opportunities to demonstrate one's leadership skills and promoted a workplace culture that supported staff development.

My Immediate Supervisor	CourTools	Gallop Q12	FEVS
Discussions with my immediate supervisor (direct report) about my performance are worthwhile.	x		x
My immediate supervisor (direct report) provides me with constructive suggestions to improve my work performance.			x
My performance appraisal is a fair reflection of my job performance.			x
My immediate supervisor (direct report) provides me with opportunities to demonstrate my leadership skills.	x	x	x
My immediate supervisor (direct report) supports my professional development.		x	x
My immediate supervisor (direct report) listens to what I have to say.		x	x
My immediate supervisor (direct report) treats me with respect.	x	x	x
In the past 12 months, outside of my annual performance appraisal, my immediate supervisor has talked with me about my performance.	x	x	x

Court Employee Survey—Our Court Organization Cluster

This section covers agency policies and practices related to performance management, as well as perceptions of employees' personal empowerment, safety, and preparedness. The court organization for the purposes of this survey is defined as the Administrative Office of the Circuit Court of Lake County, which comprises the six operational divisions and all nonjudicial court employees.

Our Court Organization	CourTools	Gallop Q12	FEVS
Employees in the court organization have a feeling of personal empowerment with respect to work processes and services.	x		x
Employees in the court organization are recognized for providing high-quality services.	x		x
Employees in the court organization are protected from health and safety risks on the job.			
Our court organization is successful at accomplishing its mission.			x
I would recommend our court organization as a good place to work.			x

Court Employee Survey—Court Leadership Cluster

This section asks about the overall effectiveness of the court organization's senior managers in motivating employees, maintaining high ethical standards, communicating organizational policies, and promoting performance management practices. Court leadership for the purposes of this survey is defined as the directors, assistant directors, and senior managers of the Circuit Court of Lake County. Employees were instructed that the decisions of and interactions with the judges of the circuit court should not be considered when answering these items.

Court Leadership	CourTools	Gallop Q12	FEVS
In our court organization, directors and managers generate high levels of motivation and commitment to the workforce.	x		x
Our court organization's directors and managers maintain high standards of honesty and integrity.			x
Directors and managers work well with employees of different backgrounds.			x
Directors and managers effectively communicate the objectives and priorities of the court organization.			x
Directors and managers regularly review and evaluate the organization's progress toward meeting its objective and strategic goals.			x
Directors and managers promote communication about projects, resources, and outcomes among different work units and organizational divisions.			x
Directors and managers support collaboration across work units and divisions to accomplish organizational objectives.			x

Court Employee Survey—Overall Satisfaction Cluster

These items address employee satisfaction with various aspects of their jobs over the past 18 months, including job training, recognition for work well done, job satisfaction, and pride working within the judicial system.

My Overall Job Satisfaction	CourTools	Gallop Q12	FEVS
I am satisfied with my level of involvement on the decisions that affect me at work.	x		x
I am satisfied with the amount of information that I receive from management about what's going on with the organization.	x		x
I am satisfied with the recognition that I receive at work for doing a good job.	x		x

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A common theme found throughout this survey is that the court organization must continue to focus on employees' intrinsic motivation and what can be done at the managerial level to enhance employee engagement and satisfaction.

The employees' attitudes regarding their supervisors were more surprising. As noted, around the time of the second survey, unit managers had been in place for nearly two years, giving them plenty of time to adjust to the demands of the job and to be responsive to the needs of employees. More than eight out of ten employees felt their immediate supervisor listened to what they had to say (86.5 percent) and treated them with respect (89.4 percent). Significantly fewer, however, felt that discussions with their supervisors were worthwhile (81.2 percent) or that their supervisors provided them with constructive feedback to improve their work performance (79.7 percent). Despite this, a strong majority of employees expressed that they understood the connection between the work that they do and the mission and objectives of the court organization (92.8 percent) and knew what was expected of them to be successful on the job (87.4 percent). The results presented here are only the beginning—each court division's leadership must carefully review their results and translate these results into actions.

These survey results indicate several areas that must be addressed to continue to build an effective and efficient workforce. For example, less than two-thirds felt that senior court managers inspired high levels of motivation and commitment (59.7 percent) and were satisfied with the information they received from senior leadership about what is going on within the organization (65.3 percent). Considerable problems also existed in performance management; fewer than two-thirds of employees agreed with (or are aware of) the level of commitment demonstrated by senior management regarding regular review of progress made by the organization in achieving its strategic goals (58.7 percent) or in communicating project outcomes among work units and organizational divisions (61.7 percent). As an organization, the Circuit Court of Lake

County stands committed to searching for the right solutions to address these issues.

The first year (2012) had been a challenging one for Lake County court employees. In addition to budget shortfalls due to the national economic crisis, the court organization was likewise in the midst of a major restructuring of the workforce at the time the Court Employee Survey was administered. Since that time, the budget has stabilized, and unit managers have had nearly two years under their belts. The immediate-supervisor cluster rose 15.6 percent, with “my immediate supervisor supports my professional development” (+19.2 percent); “my immediate supervisor provides me with constructive suggestions to improve my work performance” (+18.9 percent); and “in the past 12 months, outside of my annual performance appraisal, my immediate supervisor has talked with me about my performance” (+18.1 percent) showing the largest improvements. Over 90 percent of employees who responded to the survey indicated that they were proud to work in the judicial system (90.6 percent), a rise of 12.1 percent.

A common theme found throughout this survey is that the court organization must continue to focus on employees' intrinsic motivation and what can be done at the managerial level to enhance employee engagement and satisfaction. The survey is based on the idea that paying attention not only to job satisfaction but also to the drivers of employee engagement, and making these top priorities, creates a significant opportunity for improvement in the workplace. This may necessitate possible reform efforts, which will require that old jobs be redesigned and that staff learn new skills.

This survey serves only as a measuring stick; the real work lies ahead as the court organization embraces the results and moves forward toward continual improvement. Courts seeking high performance need to develop human resource and information strategies that complement their overarching goal of quality service to the public. This is a court-wide initiative that will benefit from involvement by individuals throughout the court organization. In this way, a court's capacity to identify and create a learning organization will emerge from ongoing interaction and close coordination between court divisions and across functional areas. The court's performance management approach must fully and usefully involve employees at all levels as improvement efforts, knowledge sharing, and decision making become larger parts of the job. If seen as a true priority by court leadership, more and more employees will develop the ability to identify gaps in performance and participate in finding and implementing solutions.

As the Nineteenth Judicial Circuit prepares for the next round of employee surveys, it is mindful that these surveys are

only part of the picture. Efforts at measuring and enhancing engagement and satisfaction must be coupled with performance measures and training opportunities. The court took an initial assessment in 2012. This assessment gave us a baseline measurement for our improvement efforts. After this assessment, a new level of supervision was put into place—unit managers represented a level of direct supervision to line staff. After an appropriate period and a round of performance evaluations, the next survey was conducted in 2014. This survey showed marked improvements in relations with immediate supervisors, but had little impact on perceptions of senior staff and employees' performance-related attitudes. Efforts such as the Strategic Planning Maturity Model (Balanced Scorecard Institute, 2010) and Group Development Assessment (Jones and Bearley, 1993) for court managers and related training (Kouzes and Posner, 2003; Wilson, 2008); reorganization of the court's approach to mentoring; development of an in-house training program; and an update of the court's Performance Management Program (Verborg and Zastany, 2010) are ongoing.

For court managers and leaders, it is essential to have an engaged workforce with meaningful work measures and training to sustain them. For this reason, the Nineteenth Judicial Circuit is revitalizing its own training, mentoring, and performance management systems. The results may not be fully realized for some time, but it is the small steps and a willingness to learn along the way that make a court organization grow. ▶

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