

# Leaping Ahead with Organizational Intelligence Surveys

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The organizational survey is one of the most prevalent and widely used methods for collecting data and information about employee thoughts, feelings, and behaviors in organizational settings. Surveys in general are commonly used for varied purposes in the context of workplace learning, performance, and management. Uses may include assessing training and learning needs, evaluating programs and solutions, measuring employee perceptions and attitudes, and conducting human capital and organizational research. But organizational intelligence surveys are an entirely different form of survey that account for strategic factors that enable or inhibit employee engagement, and other important performance outcomes.

## Competing definitions and confusing methods

The dot-com era from roughly 1995 to 2000, coupled with the war for talent, ushered in the concept of employee engagement. This led to the development and validation of a number of branded and competing definitions of engagement, survey instruments, and concomitant items and questions by consulting firms and research consortia and think tanks. Unfortunately, these varying definitions and measurement tools limited the extent to which research on employee engagement can be generalized beyond specific firms' practices. Moreover, many of the survey instruments available comprise merely a few items related to employee satisfaction, motivation, commitment, and retention. They omit important strategic and primary drivers that ultimately affect employee engagement. Hence, the lack of a standard definition and reliable measurement tools has left practitioners dazed and confused as to what employee engagement actually is, and how to accurately measure it.

## How do we leap ahead?

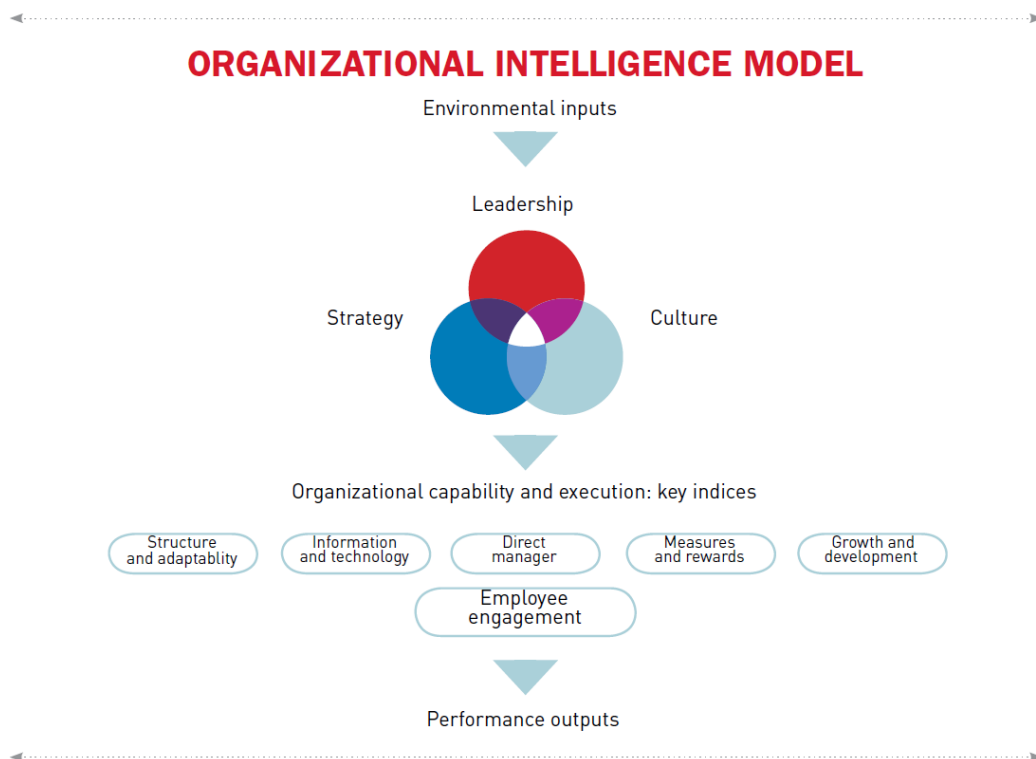
Survey consultants and practitioners are continuing to extol the value of employee engagement. However, the means of measuring and demonstrating its impact continues to lag behind. A comprehensive approach for measuring employee engagement at the cognitive, affective, and behavioral levels is sorely needed. Cognitive engagement refers to what employees think—their rational commitment to and beliefs about the organization. Engagement, at the affective level, refers to how employees feel about their organizations—their emotional attachment and connection to their jobs, direct managers, co-workers, and the organization. The behavioral domain refers to how employees act—the discretionary energy and effort employees exert on behalf of the organizations they serve.

Organizational intelligence surveys measure employee engagement at each of these levels and more. They are broader than employee engagement surveys, yet concise and more focused than traditional employee satisfaction surveys (i.e., those antiquated and ridiculously lengthy surveys with 100-150 items). In general, there are three tenets that underlie organizational

intelligence surveys, making them distinct from traditional employee and organizational surveys — they are:

**Evidence-based.** Organizational intelligence surveys are grounded in theory and empirical research and are tested for validity and reliability in different settings over time. Validity refers to the extent to which the survey items and questions truly represent the factor or variable of interest. In other words, they measure what they are supposed to measure. Reliability refers to the extent to which the survey instrument consistently measures the same characteristic or attributes over time.

**Model-driven.** Organizational intelligence surveys are based on a specific model or conceptual framework surrounding how people and organizations function. Model-driven survey efforts have been the mainstay in organization development circles for many years. Yet many of the models used today lack predictive utility in terms of measurement validity and reliability through which meaningful causal assertions (i.e., predictions) can be made. The organizational intelligence model below serves as a useful framework to facilitate the design and interpretation of most employee and organizational survey efforts.



The model includes 11 factors that affect employee engagement and performance. It depicts a top-down causal chain, making some tentative predictive assertions with respect to cause and effect. In many ways, the

organizational intelligence model can be thought of as a representation of an organization.

**Focused on action planning and change.** Organizational intelligence surveys focus on action planning and change. The action planning process involves identifying important issues for the organization to address. Through it, ideas and solutions are generated and appropriate solutions and best approaches to implementation are selected. For lasting change to occur, all levels of the organization—corporate, geographic regions, business units, functions, teams, and individual line managers—must participate in developing, implementing, and assuming ownership for continuous improvement.

In sum, organizational intelligence surveys that are grounded in science and that are model-driven can greatly enhance the analysis and interpretation of the survey results, and can provide a valuable framework from which to act and make organizational changes.

If you have any questions or are interested in learning more about organizational intelligence surveys, please contact Salvatore Falletta at [sfalletta@skylineg.com](mailto:sfalletta@skylineg.com) .