

Q¹²® ELEMENT: Q07

At work, my opinions seem to count.

Surprisingly, Gallup's extensive research of employee engagement and successful workgroups finds no significant correlation of compensation and bonuses to either productivity or employee engagement. Having "opinions that count" does correlate to these outcomes, however. Managers who value an individual's opinion will receive a higher return than managers who establish a salary or "price" relationship between the employee and the organization.

Team members who give this element high scores feel they have access to channels of communication across different levels or divisions of the organization, and their managers work to maintain those channels. Groups do not function well when team members feel insignificant or irrelevant.

A typical "production and operations management" manual gives plenty of advice on the steps to be timed and formulas to be calculated, but it tends to treat workers as cogs in the machine, whose rate of production can be improved by "behavioral modification in quality control" or through a "behavior-performance-reward-satisfaction sequence." Although there is always a need for expertly designed systems that help maximize production, nearly every system depends to a huge degree on the motivation of the people who run it. That motivation, it turns out, requires workers strongly agree that "At work, my opinions seem to count." This is the Seventh Element of Great Managing.

The mechanism that connects this element with better business performance appears to be a greater sense of responsibility for or psychological ownership of those things over which one has a say. No matter how strong the external incentives, they never seem to measure up to the internal drive of advancing something that is at least partially one's own idea. Nearly half of employees who say their opinion counts at work also feel their current job brings out their most creative ideas. Among those who are neutral or negative on the Seventh Element, only 8 percent feel their creativity is well employed.

In this element as with all 12, many modest, discretionary actions by employees create meaningful differences in the enterprise's metrics. For example, when manufacturing plants in one large organization were ranked by their scores on the "opinions count" statement, those in the

top quartile averaged one in three employees strongly agreeing, while plants in the bottom quartile averaged only one in seven. Accidents later that same year were more than twice as likely to occur in the bottom-quartile plants as they were in the top-quartile plants. On a larger scale, improving the proportion of employees with high Seventh Element scores from one in five to one in three has a substantial impact on customer experience, productivity, employee retention and safety, all of which create, on average, a 6-percent gain in profitability.

Incorporating employee ideas pays back twice. First, the idea itself often is a good one. Second and equally powerful, that the idea comes from the employees themselves makes it much more likely they will be committed to its execution. Welcoming employee opinions also produces greater feelings of inclusion among workers. When the 12 Elements are compared against a number of statements to test perceived racial or gender bias, the "opinions count" statement is most highly correlated with feelings that employees are always treated with respect, that the company treats its workforce fairly.

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This summary is a revised excerpt on this Q¹² element from 12: *The Elements of Great Managing*.