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## Engagement Careers

By Allan Schweyer



## INTRODUCTION

In 2007, British business author and consultant Thomas Smythe coined the concept of Chief Engagement Officer, using it as the title of his book on employee engagement. While the title could suggest that every Chief Executive Officer should be the Chief Engagement Officer, it also begs the question: Is Enterprise Engagement a skill, a business field, or both?

Clearly, the successful CEO will have to understand Enterprise Engagement, but he or she surely won't be responsible for tactical implementation connecting engagement efforts to desired organizational results. Who then is responsible for implementation? And what types of solution providers will these people draw upon to design and implement engagement strategies? Will an industry of such solution providers emerge as it has in advertising, direct marketing, event marketing, etc. to create both a set of skills and a business field?

The answers to these questions have significant implications, not only for organizations struggling with how to make Enterprise Engagement part of their business plans, but also for people interested in mastering these skills and applying them for professional satisfaction and profit. While it's too soon to say exactly how the field of Enterprise Engagement will emerge, the history of other fields that have crystallized over the past decades, such as direct marketing, loyalty, event marketing, etc. provide some predictive insights.

## ENGAGEMENT MANAGEMENT

One sign that a field is emerging is the creation of new job positions related to it. In some cases, the CEO maybe believe that Enterprise Engagement is his or her role and that developing the overall engagement strategies and seeing that they're effectively implemented stops and starts at the executive's desk.

Others may create positions specifically related to engagement, and a few companies have begun to do so. Consistent with the tendency to create silos, many organizations create those positions specifically in customer, employee, or distributor realms. Because no one until the publication of this textbook has ever formally defined the concept of engagement from a strategic point of view, many companies define it in different ways.

In the consumer world, customer engagement almost always focuses on digital and social media, even though it's obvious that digital and social media aren't the only ways to engage customers. For example, how about engaging people by providing customer-friendly policies, or engaging employees to continually deliver the brand promise, or managing effective loyalty or referral programs, or event marketing? The budgets and power of the search engine advertising and social business fields have warped the conversation to focus on the mobile revolution, when in fact customer engagement is far more involved. Adding to the confusion, customer engagement also sometimes refers to the position as being in charge of onboarding new customers.

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## EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

In the human resources arena, the employee engagement manager position has a broader definition, more in line with the definition of this textbook, but still in many cases siloed from other key areas. Here's an example of a 2014 job posting for Employee Engagement Manager at the University of Minnesota:

*The Employee Engagement Manager will work with the OHR Service Teams and the unit HR Directors to create a University-wide engagement strategy. The manager will also work with those responsible for supervisor training to integrate engagement concepts into existing and future supervisor training so that strong supervisors become the primary conduit for increasing engagement. The manager will be responsible for the execution and overall communication as it relates to employee engagement initiatives.*

The job calls for a Master's degree, five years of human resources management or related experience (including five years of staff management experience), as well as strong communication, public speaking, financial analysis and event management skills – a combination that reflects many of the elements of Enterprise Engagement, with the notable exception of helping to develop an enterprise brand.

Ironically, the job doesn't require prior experience as an Employee Engagement Manager, probably because that would rule out most candidates.

It does appear that more and more management-level jobs with the term "engagement" in them are emerging in both marketing and human resources, but not exponentially at this point. PepsiCo has a Senior Vice President of Customer Engagement, but his focus appears to be on the social media side rather than defined strategically as in this textbook. A recent search on Monster.com yielded not one result in either category. To the extent that these positions exist, the best candidates will require an understanding of all of the potential engagement tools applicable to any particular organization and know where to find, and how to manage, the resources to implement them.

Clearly, people qualified for these jobs will need to have at least a four-year college education, traditional marketing or human resources experience and a grasp of as many tools of engagement as possible to obtain expertise through learning or, better yet, experience.

It is by no means clear that numerous organizations will be creating new job positions in enterprise-wide, customer, or employee engagement. What is much more likely is that traditional executives and managers in human resources, sales, distribution management and consumer marketing will be called upon to have an ever-diverse set of skills as organizations discover the wide variety of engagement tactics and how they work together to get the best results.

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#### **ENGAGEMENT SOLUTION PROVIDERS**

Because engagement involves so many different types of tactics, much like advertising, promotion, or direct marketing, it appears increasingly likely that a field of engagement solution providers will adapt their businesses to meet the demand. Traditional providers of leadership coaching, assessment, communications, learning, collaboration and innovation, rewards and recognition, and measurement will have to tailor their approaches to selling and implementation to better understand how what they do either integrates with or addresses all of the areas of engagement necessary to drive human actions. They will need salespeople and account management teams who have an equal understanding of engagement and how specific tactics contribute to success. Whether or not these various types of engagement solution providers will see enough common interest to coalesce into an industry, such as the advertising, direct marketing, or loyalty fields, remains to be seen.

As of 2014, it's safe to say that Enterprise Engagement is a valuable skill that can set any job candidate apart from others applying for a management position or a job with an engagement solutions provider.

Obviously, skills are what people need to perform specific tasks – writing could be considered a skill with very broad application; the ability to operate a lathe a much narrower one. Almost every skill has multiple educational opportunities associated with it. A skill becomes a field or industry when there are not only people who specialize in that skill, but when demand arises for a variety of businesses to support that skill beyond education, such as the design and manufacture of equipment or other products and services related to it.

History would suggest that Enterprise Engagement is not only a skill, but also a field, because it requires not only knowledge and expertise, but also the understanding of a variety of tools, tactics, products and services addressing everything from assessment and coaching to innovation, software, rewards and recognition, among others. Traditionally, these businesses have defined themselves within the narrow confines of their specialty. Only time will tell whether or not they will find common interest to define themselves under a new engagement umbrella.