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# The importance of structured employee connect in controlling attrition

**Abstract:** The IT industry relies on people as one of its most important core assets. With Agile becoming more of a norm and one of its core values as “Individuals and Interactions Over Processes and Tools”, it has become even more important to have highly engaged teams for high project performance. An effective project manager requires a high focus, skills and time to lead their project teams to high performance. Every organization is working on devising new employee engagement measures to improve retention. This white paper tries to introduce a model “MEET” for structured employee connects which can help improve the employee engagement and hence employee retention. The information would be helpful for all project managers looking for effective ways to control attrition.

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## 1 Introduction

The IT industry scenario is very dynamic and the rate of attrition is amongst the highest across different industry domains. The cost of employee turnover is substantial enough to impact the profitability of the IT organizations in a major way.

The IT projects do have people as their core assets and the impact of employee turnover on the projects is extremely high. One of the most common risks in IT Projects “Personal Shortfall” also clearly advocates the importance of resource attrition on project performance.

A lot of efforts and energy has been invested by the organizations for devising innovative ways and means to control attrition. It is also the top priority and focus of every project manager to have engaged team members for effective project management especially in the agile context where individual motivation is one of the key attributes for team performance and hence project performance.

Employee connects has come up as one of the important considerations for improving employee engagement and retention. This paper goes a step further and suggests devising a structured engagement model using connects.

The subsequent section focuses on the Employee Connect Model MEET (**M**odel for **E**mployee **E**ngagement with **C**onnect**T**s) - a structured employee retention model based on employee connects, which can be applied to any IT organization and help in controlling attrition.

## 2 Why Employee Retention?

The Employee Retention can be understood as the ability of an organization to retain its employees.

Employee retention is extremely important and one of the key metrics for IT organizations and following are some of the primary reasons<sup>1,2</sup> –

1. **The cost impact:** The impact due to a new hire can be huge, sometimes as big as upto six months of productivity loss of one position.
2. **Impact on teams:** Even a single person leaving a team can have an high impact on team morale and hence the productivity of the team.
3. **Can lead to a chain reaction:** A chain reaction can be triggered with one person leaving, leading to a much larger set of people leaving subsequently.
4. **Secondary Impact on Customers or Stakeholders:** People leaving a team or an organization can have a negative impact on the credibility of the organization and hence the business.

The above factors are some of the factors that are good enough for us to understand the importance of retention.

## 3 Why Employee Engagement?

An engaged employee can be understood as an employee who is enthusiastic about his work and enjoys being part of the current organization, is connected with the organization

and works with positive energy towards making organization better.

The engagement of the employees is critical in my view for controlling attrition<sup>3</sup> following are some of the reasons –

1. Disengaged employees are the employees at highest risk of leaving.
2. Disengaged employees are demotivators for others and even if they do not leave can be reason for others leaving the organization.
3. Once a decision to leave is made by an employee, the probability of retaining becomes very less.
4. Sometimes it can be a very small point/low cost timely action needed to be able to retain an employee.
5. The trigger for an employee leaving can be an issue requiring immediate attention. An engaged employee will share it upfront.

## **4 The Need**

Although there has been a lot of focus on employee engagement activities in IT organizations, structured employee connects have not got its due importance.

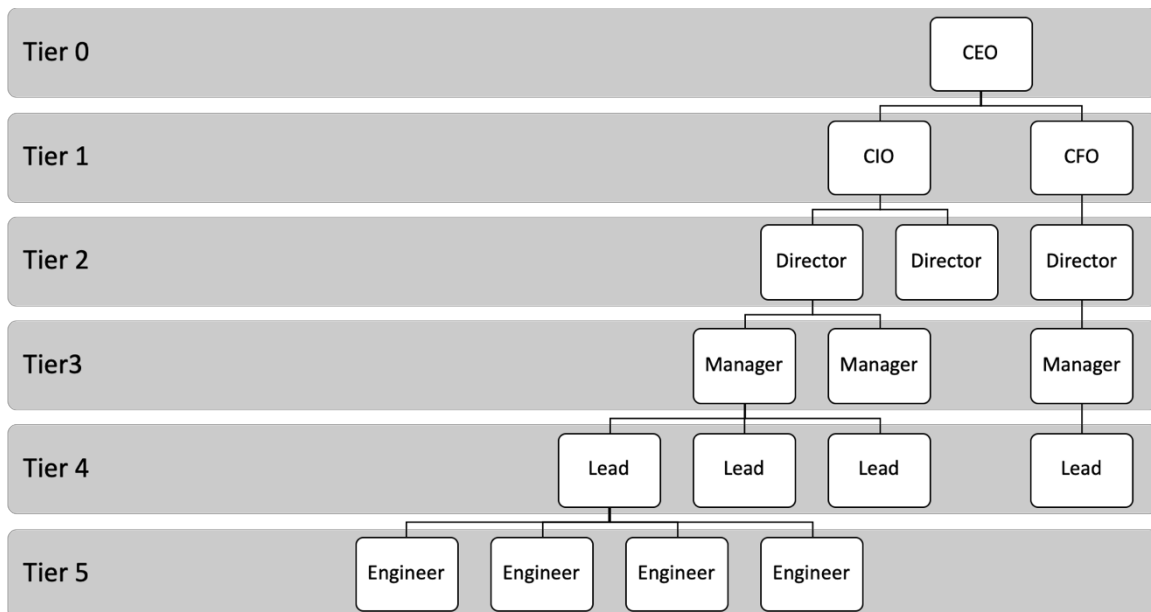
The employee connects in my view, are one of the most easy, low cost yet very effective ways to get higher employees engagement. With MEET as a structured model organizations can have an easy and effective path towards higher employee retention.

## 5 The Model

Following is the step by step approach that can be followed by any IT organization to build up the MEET model.

### **Step 1: Prepare Organization Chart**

Draw an organization chart for the complete focus organization and add names with roles and responsibilities. Following is an example organization chart. Every organization may have a different organization structure and number of levels.



### **Step 2: Identify Relation Types**

Identify the exhaustive list of combination of relations from the organization chart and identify these as the engagement levels. These engagement levels should cover all tiers of the Hierarchy. Following is the matrix for the above organization chart.

MEET – Model for Employee Engagement with connectTs

|        | Tier 0 | Tier1 | Tier2 | Tier3 | Tier4 | Tier5 |
|--------|--------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Tier 0 |        | 1     | 2     | 3     | 4     | 5     |
| Tier1  | 1      |       | 1     | 2     | 3     | 4     |
| Tier2  | 2      | 1     |       | 1     | 2     | 3     |
| Tier3  | 3      | 2     | 1     |       | 1     | 2     |
| Tier4  | 4      | 3     | 2     | 1     |       | 1     |
| Tier5  | 5      | 4     | 3     | 2     | 1     |       |

Following are the definitions of the engagement levels -

| Engagement Level (EL) | Reporting Type   |
|-----------------------|------------------|
| 1                     | Direct Reporting |
| 2                     | Skip-Level-01    |
| 3                     | Skip-Level-02    |
| 4                     | Skip-Level-03    |
| 5                     | Skip-Level-04    |

The reporting types listed above can be understood as follows -

- **Direct Reporting** – This means that there is direct reporting relationship between the individuals.
- **Skip Level** – This means that there are one or more skipped levels in the reporting lines

### ***Step 3: Get the Meeting Type and Frequency***

For each engagement level refer the following chart for meeting type and frequency.

| Engagement Level (EL)                 | Frequency* (Group Meeting) | Frequency* ( 1-1) |
|---------------------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------|
| 1                                     | Weekly                     | Weekly            |
| 2                                     | Monthly                    | Quarterly         |
| 3 and Above (Include 1 and 2 as well) | Quarterly                  | On Need Basis     |

*\*The frequency can be increased or decreased based on the organization need and willingness of time investment.*

The meeting types listed above can be understood as follows

-

- **1on1 Meetings** refers to meetings that are conducted between 2 individuals
- **Group Meetings** refers to meetings conducted with a group.

How to conduct<sup>4,5</sup> these meetings effectively is a topic in itself and outside the scope of this article.

#### ***Step 4: Get the Meeting Type Counts***

Consolidate the meetings into a tabular format and come up with the summary of meeting types along with the count of meetings for any manager/supervisor.

As an example for the CEO in the organization chart above, following is the matrix of meetings.

| Engagement Level (EL) | Team Size (B) | Count (Group) | Count (1-1) |
|-----------------------|---------------|---------------|-------------|
| 1                     | 2             | 1             | 2           |
| 2                     | 3             | 2             | 3           |
| 3 and Above           | 11            | 1             | 0           |

#### ***Step 5: Identify the time available***

Identify the time available from the supervisor. The time considered should be not less than 10% of the management time available to start with can be configured based on experience.

Time available = t hrs (per week). As a starting value lets take it as 10% of 40 hrs = 4 hrs (C).



**Step 6: Define the weightages for different engagement levels**

| Engagement Level | % weightage (D) |
|------------------|-----------------|
| 1                | 60%             |
| 2                | 30%             |
| 3 and Above      | 10%             |

*\*The weightage can be increased or decreased based on the organization need.*

**Step 7: Calculate the time required**

Based on the people in the hierarchy of the manager/supervisor, the duration of the meetings can be derived, following tables lists the time investment w.r.t. engagement level -

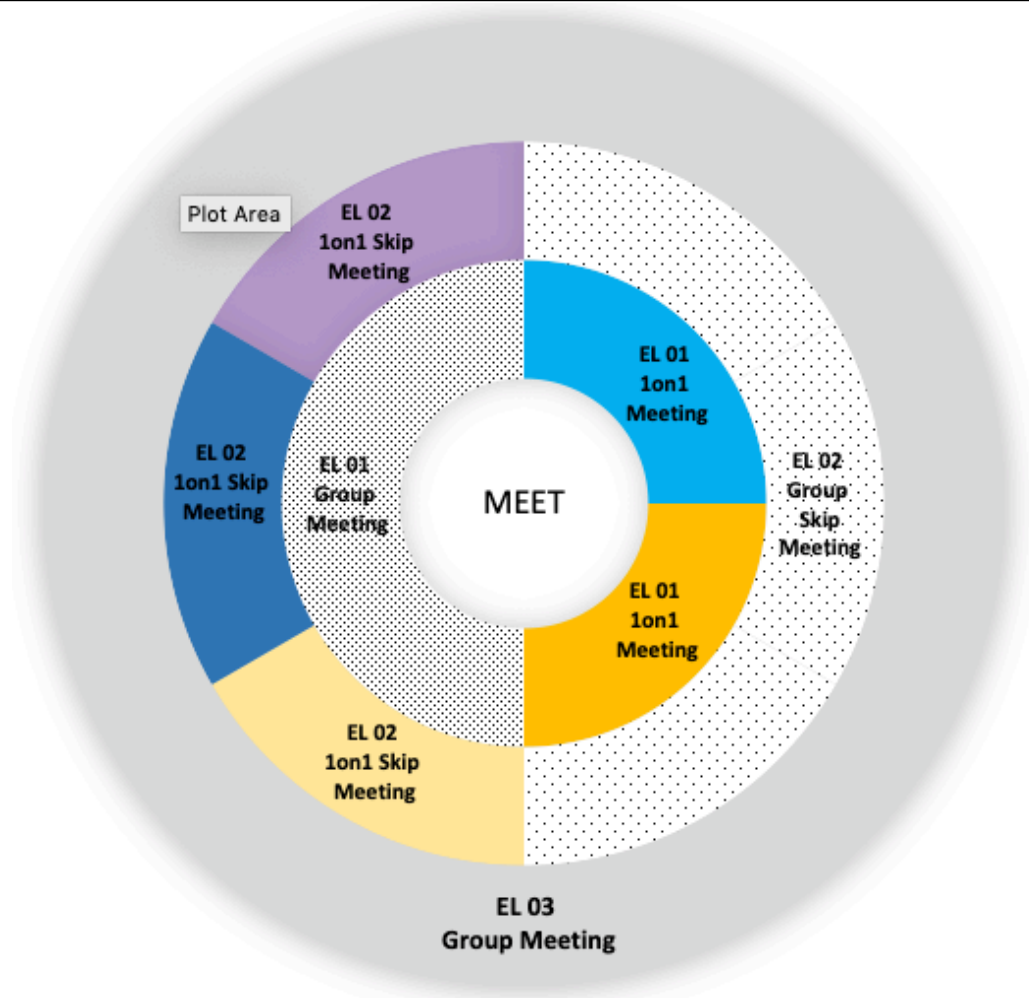
| Engagement Level | Total Weekly Time Available (C*D*60) (Min) | Average Weekly Time Invested (C*D*60)/(B) (Min/Person) |
|------------------|--------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|
| 1                | 144                                        | 72                                                     |
| 2                | 72                                         | 24                                                     |
| 3 and above      | 24                                         | 2                                                      |

The time investment suggested above should get translated into the meeting schedule.

**Step 8: Create the Employee Connect Model for each manager**

MEET – Model for Employee Engagement with connectTs

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Feel free to adjust the frequency and duration to meet the available time need.

| Meeting             | Frequency | No. of Meetings | Duration | Weekly Time investment |
|---------------------|-----------|-----------------|----------|------------------------|
| EL 01 Group Meeting | Weekly    | 1               | 60 mins  | 60 mins                |
| EL 01 1on1 Meeting  | Weekly    | 2               | 45 mins  | 90 mins                |

| <b>Meeting</b>                    | <b>Frequency</b>                     | <b>No. of Meetings</b> | <b>Duration</b> | <b>Weekly Time investment</b> |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------------|------------------------|-----------------|-------------------------------|
| EL 02<br>Group<br>Skip<br>Meeting | Monthly                              | 1                      | 120 mins        | 30 mins                       |
| EL 02<br>1on1 Skip<br>Meeting     | Monthly<br>(Instead of<br>Quarterly) | 3                      | 45 mins         | 30 mins                       |
| EL 03<br>Group<br>Meeting         | Monthly<br>(Instead of<br>Quarterly) | 1                      | 120 mins        | 30 mins                       |
| <b>Total</b>                      |                                      |                        |                 | <b>240 mins<br/>(4 hrs)</b>   |

***Step 9: Publish the Employee Connect Model***

Call for a combined team meeting and percolate down the model to the entire team in a common forum.

***Step 10: Execute the Employee Connect Model***

Execute the model and refine it based on the organization need.

***Step 11: Repeat for different levels***

Repeat the steps to derive the model for any other level of supervisor. For this the full hierarchy below the supervisor should be considered.

## 6 The Results

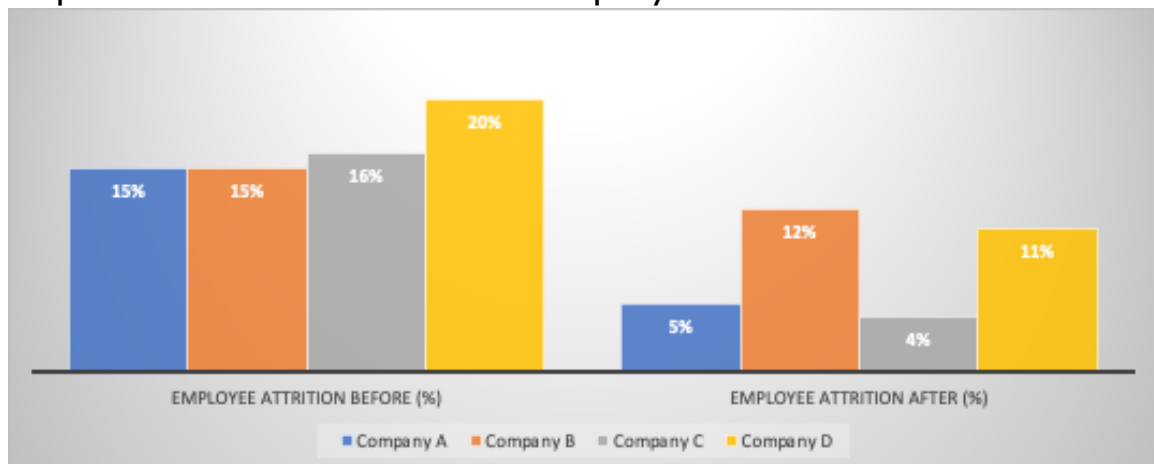
Some of the example applications of the model are described in this section. All these examples are based on practical implementation of the model in different organizational contexts.

| Organization * | Size of Department/ Group | SDLC Model       | Organization Type | Team Location         |
|----------------|---------------------------|------------------|-------------------|-----------------------|
| Company A      | ~60                       | Waterfall        | Hierarchical      | Co-Located            |
| Company B      | ~100                      | Iterative/ Agile | Hierarchical      | Partially Distributed |
| Company C      | ~50                       | Agile            | Hierarchical      | Partially Distributed |
| Company D      | ~200                      | Agile            | Agile             | Fully Distributed     |

*\*Actual names of the organizations are not listed due to confidentiality reasons.*

Interestingly the results of the model implementation have been encouraging in very different organizational contexts.

Following graph demonstrates the outcome of the implementation in terms of Employee Attrition Score.



The improvement in attrition rate has been between 20% to 75% which is substantial. Even conservatively considering 50% of above effect due to other engagement measures by HR, it still remains a substantial improvement and clearly demonstrates the effectiveness of the model.

## 7 Conclusion

Application of the standardized engagement model is the key to better employee engagement leading to low rate of attrition.

The model described above has been developed based on practical experience and successful application in an IT context. Organizations can utilize the model and apply to their respective organizations and benefit from the same.

The model is simple and generic enough to be customized and applied in any IT scenario.

Although the model has been designed for with IT in focus, application to non-IT might also be successful but should be done with caution.

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