Executive Interview

with **Dan Harrison, Ph.D.,**
Founder and Developer,
Harrison Assessments

Why Everything You Know
About Engagement Is Wrong

About Inkling

Harrison Assessments was founded in 1990 with a single vision and purpose — to help companies optimize their human capital by leveraging their deep understanding of human resources and psychology.

The company focuses on providing the most trusted and accurate employee assessment tools in the industry. The tools help managers throughout the entire HR process, helping companies become more productive and efficient, leading to increased profitability.

Recognition

A Brandon Hall Group™ Smartchoice® Preferred Provider, Harrison Assessments earned a Silver Brandon Hall Group™ Excellence in Technology Award for Future of Work in 2022.

EXCELLENCE IN TECHNOLOGY AWARDS

Future of Work	**1** Silver Award

The Brandon Hall Group Preferred Provider Program is specifically designed as a single source of truth that can validate your technology selection decisions.

Learn More

About Dan Harrison, Ph.D.

Dan Harrison, Ph.D. is the founder and developer of Harrison Assessments and originator of Paradox Technology as used in Harrison Assessments. His diverse background in Mathematics, Personality Theory, Counseling Psychology and Organizational Psychology has enabled him to make a unique and exceptional contribution to assessment methodology.

His 30 years of experience in Psychology and Assessment have enabled the Harrison Assessment tools to fulfill practical needs for recruitment, development and assessment. Dr. Harrison's ongoing research gives him direct involvement with the needs of Harrison Assessments' clients and exposes him to the appropriate practical application in a wide variety of cultures.

About Rachel Cooke

Rachel Cooke is Brandon Hall Group's Chief Operating Officer and Principal HCM Analyst. She is responsible for business operations, including client and member advisory services, marketing design, annual awards programs, conferences and the company's project management functions. She also leads Advancing Women in the Workplace and Diversity, Equity and Inclusion initiatives, research and events. Rachel worked in the HCM research industry for 20+ years and held several key management and executive positions within the Talent and Learning Research, and Performance Improvement industries.

RACHEL

Q What are your thoughts on tying training and engagement data to business objectives?

DAN

A Most efforts around engagement have been through engagement surveys. Engagement surveys have two important qualities: One is that they're anonymous, so they only look at the data as a group of people; and two, they're focused on the manager as the key engager of their employees. The premise is that the manager is primarily responsible for engaging employees.

What I did is I looked at the situation from a different angle and thought about what engagement really is. I look at what's the psychology of engagement. How does somebody get engaged in the first place? The problem is engagement is not personalized. Engagement efforts are on a group level. If the manager's responsible, the employee is a passive recipient of engagement. What makes people engaged is that they're getting what they want out of employment. Every employee comes to work with a set of desires or goals that they want from employment that could be, I want to earn money, or I want to earn X amount of money. That's one idea, but it's not even the most important one.

Some people want meaning out of work, they search for meaning. Some people want personal help, some people want to work remotely, some people want to have flexible work, and some people want to have just their boss be nice to them. Some people want to learn from a boss and be able to respect their boss, and that's very important to them. In fact, there are 20 different factors that we look at that people want from their work. People get engaged because they get what they want out of employment, or at least in the process of getting what they want out of employment.

It's really no different than if you have a customer. The first thing you have to ask your customer is what do you want? What's important to you? The problem with having surveys be anonymous is you never can get to that level. If you make it their manager's responsibility, there's this other problem because they don't want to rat on their manager. You never get down to the personalized issues of the person.

In my case, we have programmers working out of Hong Kong. What usually happens in Hong Kong is people end up working 12 hours a day. What I said is, "Okay, I'm looking for programmers who want to have a good family life and want to be able to go home after eight hours of work and be done with work and not have to deal with anything else." Our program is very complicated and it takes a long time to learn, so it's essential that we retain them.

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I created this thing where I said, "Okay, well, what I'm going to give you is basically your life. I'm going to give you freedom outside of work, and I'm not going to ask you to work overtime. I'm not going to ask you to work on the weekend or any of that stuff." And as a result, I got really good programmers and they stay with us for essentially 15 or 20 years, which is unheard of in technology. That's a good example of how you can hone your offering for a specific thing. Understanding what people want is the key to then getting people engaged.

So as the employee develops, they can be paid more and more. What the organization needs to do is to point them toward that development but in the context of their goal. That's the critical factor. In other words, if you're working on your goal, you're going to be engaged. What organizations do is they expect you to be working on our goals and be engaged. But if you're working on your goals while you're simultaneously achieving our goals, then you're engaged and that's the whole key to the process.

Q **RACHEL**

How can employees take responsibility for engagement?

Q **RACHEL**

What are some of the career fulfillment factors that need to be measured?

A **DAN**

Employment is a relationship between the employee and the employer. It's a business relationship, a little bit like a supplier. The employee supplies their talent, and the organization uses their talents and pays them for their talent. The employee keeps getting more and more talented hopefully, and things change.

A **DAN**

One of them is wanting frankness — wanting somebody to be direct and straightforward and to the point. How do you create frankness at work? You can actually go out and get it. You can be asking for feedback, and you can be responding to feedback in ways that make people want to give it to you more. What we do is shift people from that passive recipient mentality to the active process in which they're doing it.

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Some people want personal help. Some people want meaning in their work, they want to be able to subscribe meaning to what they do. We have a process for people looking at how to create meaning out of their job and how to understand the meaning that your job actually has. When people feel like you care about what's important to them, then you have a completely different relationship. The truth is, there's very little competition out there for employers who are able to take the time to look and see what the person wants, what's important to them, how we work with them to help them get what they want, and at the same time, we get what we want.

Q **RACHEL**

What do managers need to learn to support this personalized strategy?

A **DAN**

What we give them is training on how to deal with each of the 20 most popular factors. If the person wants a stable career, how do you deal with that? For example, if they want to do remote work, how do you deal with that? How do you determine if it's even possible? How do you work through those issues? Each one has a

set of issues that you have to work through. We actually give the employees a program where they can work through it themselves. It's not all on the manager, but the manager just has to be there to facilitate that process and understand the process of what that entails. It's not actually a huge training. It's a relatively short training.

We have an employee app that we're just getting ready to release. Employees can work on it themselves basically. When they feel like they're ready to bring the manager in on the conversation, then they can.

Q **RACHEL**

How does all this impact retention?

A **DAN**

We have almost no turnover in our company because we work on the basis that we want retention. You build loyalty with people. If you think about it from their point of view, they're going to be thinking, "If I go somewhere else, are they going to be able to deal with me like I've been dealt with for the last X number of years?" Probably not. There's just this goodwill that happens when you build this connection.

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Occasionally, somebody wants to go for whatever reason. Their spouse moves or however that happens. But for the most part, people create a loyalty with you when you're actually doing when you're saying, "Hey, I care about you and I care about what's important to you, and let's work together to try to make this a really good relationship where you can get what you want out of it and we get what we want out of it." That's the fundamental basis of it.

I think that's extremely appealing, especially when it's so tempting to make people a cog in the wheel and just say, "Okay, well this is the process. This is what we're doing, and now we're going to do this thing on engagement where we're going to ask you a few questions and you're not going to know what the heck happened as a result of that."

It is just ethical to make engagement personalized. It's just the right thing to do because people are investing their time and their effort and their talent with you, and they have certain things that they want. If I say, "I want you to do this and I want you to do that," it's like — well, wait a minute. If you imagined a spousal relationship in which you were the only person saying what you wanted, it probably wouldn't last too long, would it? In many ways, it's not

that much different because people are saying, "Okay, well this is what I want." Obviously, that's going to create a longer-term relationship just like it does in any kind of spousal relationship. I did marriage counseling work for a while as well.

It's a learning experience for the employee. Most employees, for example, have no idea how to ask for a raise. They actually have no idea. They do it completely wrong. They don't know how to then create a case for themselves. They don't know how to make sure that they're visible in the process, and that their contributions are visible. They don't know how to build a case for the raise that they think they should have. They don't know how to keep the feedback loop going to build that relationship with the manager and sort of thing.

There are these key things that you need to do if you want to earn more money in an organization. Most employees think, "I'm just going to ask for a raise." But in truth, that isn't how it works in organizations. They have their own process, and most people have no idea what that process is. And that's true for almost everything, even for people who say, "I want more autonomy." Well, no, there's a process for getting more autonomy.

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If the person feels that they're making progress toward their goal, that's the key thing. That's what they're looking for. If they never have the discussion with the manager in the first place, they have no idea if they're making progress. In other words, once I know that my manager or the organization knows what I want and that we've had discussions about how to get there, and I get feedback about how I'm doing, I know I'm making progress. I don't have to sit there and say, "Oh, I don't know if it's ever going to happen, so maybe I'll go onto this website and see if somebody else will give it to me."

Here are some ways to listen to the interview on Brandon Hall Group's Excellence at Work Podcast:

iTunes   Spotify   YouTube

Brandon Hall Group
EXCELLENCE AT WORK

About Brandon Hall Group™

With more than 10,000 clients globally and 30 years of delivering world-class research and advisory services, Brandon Hall Group™ is focused on developing research that drives performance in emerging and large organizations, and provides strategic insights for executives and practitioners responsible for growth and business results.

SOME WAYS WE CAN HELP

Membership
Individual and Enterprise Membership Options: Includes research assets, advisory support, a client success plan and more.

Professional Certifications
Self-paced certification programs. Virtual group sessions for companies. In-person conferences and summits.

Advisory Offerings
Custom Research Projects, including surveys, focus group interviews and Organization Needs Assessment for Transformation, Technology Selection and Strategy.

Excellence Awards
Two annual programs recognize the best organizations that have successfully deployed programs to achieve measurable results.

ORGANIZATIONAL EXCELLENCE CERTIFICATION PROGRAM
recognizes world-class HCM programs that transform their organization and achieve breakthrough results. This designation is the next step beyond the HCM Excellence Awards, which focus on a single program, and looks at the department as a whole.

SMARTCHOICE® PREFERRED PROVIDER PROGRAM
uniquely places HCM service and technology companies at the top of organizations' consideration list of vendors. It adds an unmatched level of credibility based on BHG's twenty-eight-plus years of experience in evaluating and selecting the best solution providers for leading organizations around the world.