

# The Employee Experience Index

*A new global measure of a human workplace and its impact*



## Introduction

We are in the midst of a major transformation in the workplace. In the industrial era, the focus was on task-oriented labourers whose primary output came from their hands. In the information age, knowledge embodied in employees became a central component of the economy.

Now we are entering the cognitive era. In this new era, in which machines are able to learn, reason and interact with humans naturally,<sup>1</sup> the boundaries between people and technology become blurred.

Rather than diminishing the role of people, in the cognitive era people are at the forefront of working with and realising the benefits from new technologies to achieve more than was ever possible before. In fact, the cognitive era is just as much the human era. It is a time when work can be a more rewarding experience for employees.

Recognising that ‘the battle for the hearts and minds of employees is played out daily through their workplace experiences,’ organisations are now reexamining their employees’ experience at work<sup>2</sup> as a path to improved job performance<sup>3</sup> and sustained competitive advantage.<sup>4</sup>

So what is the ideal employee experience at work? The IBM® Smarter Workforce Institute and Globoforce’s WorkHuman Research Institute joined forces to conduct a major, global research study to find out. As a starting point, we conceptualise employee experience as a positive and powerful – and ultimately human – experience, in which employees are able to invest more of their whole selves into the workplace.<sup>5</sup>

We then aimed to answer three questions:

- What is the ideal employee experience in today’s workplace?
- What impact could a positive employee experience have on key outcomes?
- How can organisations drive more positive and human employee experiences?

The answers to these questions resulted in the development of a new Employee Experience Index alongside a set of leadership and organisational practices to create more positive employee experiences. These new tools will enable HR and business leaders to inspire and energise their workforces towards greater well-being and performance.

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*‘Now we are entering the cognitive era. It is a time when work can be a more rewarding experience for employees.’*

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## Development of the new Employee Experience Index

### Our research study

To understand and measure what makes an optimal working experience for employees, industrial-organisational psychologists and experts in HR consulting from both IBM and Globoforce undertook a three-phase research study:

- **Phase 1: Literature review and construct identification**

Using scientific literature in positive psychology, humanistic psychology and behavioural science as our starting point, we identified a number of constructs that relate to a more positive employee experience and created a large pool of survey items to measure those constructs

- **Phase 2: Construct measurement**

To measure the employee experience constructs, a global survey of more than 23,000 employees in 45 countries and territories across many different industries and job functions was conducted. The resulting data were then subjected to a series of statistical analyses to assess and validate the psychometric properties of the survey items and related constructs

- **Phase 3: Index and driver definitions**

Finally, the constructs and associated items were summarised into (1) an index reflecting employee experience and (2) key leadership and workplace practices that can be leveraged to positively affect employee experience.

### The Employee Experience Index

Following our review of the literature, we define the employee experience as:

*A set of perceptions that employees have about their experiences at work in response to their interactions with the organisation.*

With this definition as a guiding framework, we developed a 5-dimension, 10-item index to capture the core facets of employee experience. The Employee Experience Index measures:

- **Belonging** – feeling part of a team, group or organisation
- **Purpose** – understanding why one’s work matters
- **Achievement** – a sense of accomplishment in the work that is done
- **Happiness** – the pleasant feeling arising in and around work
- **Vigour** – the presence of energy, enthusiasm and excitement at work.

Having built the Index, our study went on to look at what drives employee experience and what outcomes organisations can expect when they create a more positive and human organisation. The framework for these relationships is shown in Figure 1. As the framework shows, employee experience has its beginnings in the direction and support of leaders and managers, who drive organisational practices that create the employee experience. Ultimately, a positive employee experience is associated with improved employee outcomes such as better job performance, increased discretionary effort and higher retention.

Figure 1. A framework of drivers and outcomes of employee experience at work



### Employee experience linked to performance and retention

Our research reveals that employees who experience a sense of belonging, purpose, achievement, happiness and vigour are more likely to perform at higher levels and contribute ‘above and beyond’ expectations. They are also less likely to quit.

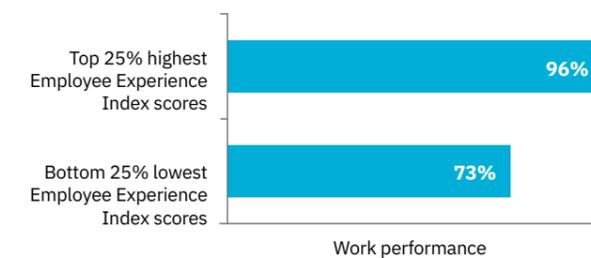
#### Positive employee experience linked to better work performance

Workers with Employee Experience Index scores in the top quartile are more likely to report high levels of work performance<sup>i</sup> than those whose scores are in the bottom quartile (23 percentage points higher) (Figure 2).

#### Positive employee experience linked to more effort

More dramatically perhaps, employees with more positive experiences at work are much more likely to report significantly higher levels of discretionary effort<sup>ii</sup>. In fact,

Figure 2. Employee experience is positively associated with work performance



Source: WorkTrends 2016 Global sample for the IBM/Globoforce Employee Experience Index Study (n=23,070)  
Note: The scores are reported as percent favourable, the average level of agreement across the three items that measure work performance.

<sup>i</sup>Self-reported work performance was measured by respondents reporting that, in the last three months, they had been very productive at work, worked hard to get the job done on time and completed work to a high standard.

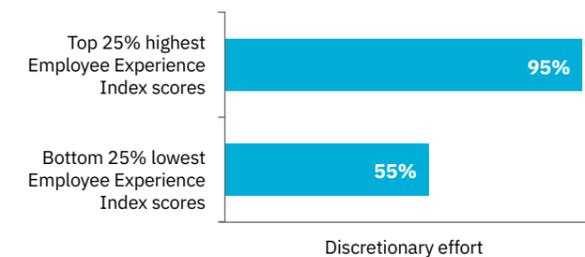
discretionary effort is almost twice more likely to be reported when employee experience is positive (95 percent compared to 55 percent) (Figure 3).

The results of these analyses suggest a positive employee experience can contribute to higher motivation to apply extra effort at work and go ‘above and beyond’ typical job responsibilities.

#### Positive employee experiences linked to retention

Talent retention is a challenging issue for many organisations.<sup>6</sup> The good news is that a more positive employee experience could help. Our analysis reveals that employees with low Employee Experience Index

Figure 3. Employee experience is positively associated with discretionary effort at work



Source: WorkTrends 2016 Global sample for the IBM/Globoforce Employee Experience Index Study (n=23,070)  
Note: The scores are reported as percent favourable, the average level of agreement across the three items that measure discretionary effort.

scores are more than twice as likely to say they want to leave compared to those with more positive experiences. The difference is more than 20 percentage points (44 percent vs. 21 percent) (Figure 4) and means that employees with positive experiences are 52 percent less likely to intend to leave their organisations.

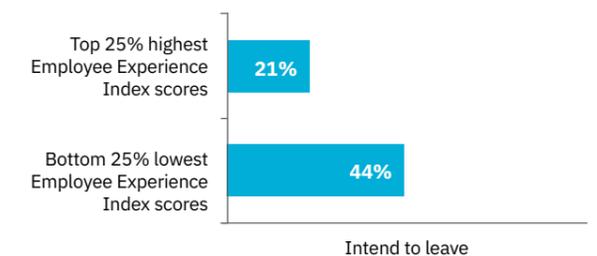
<sup>ii</sup>Discretionary effort refers to employee activities that are beneficial to the organisation but not necessarily part of the job. It was measured by respondents reporting that they were always willing to give more effort to get the job done, they enjoyed devoting a lot of extra effort to their work and consistently went above and beyond what is expected of them at work.

<sup>iii</sup>Turnover intention was measured by respondents reporting that, within the next six months, they were seriously considering leaving their organisation and planning to look for a new job.

### Creating the ideal employee experience

Our study has clearly made the case that employee experience matters. The question that naturally arises is ‘what can organisations do to improve employee

Figure 4. Positive employee experience is associated with lower turnover intention



Source: WorkTrends 2016 Global sample for the IBM/Globoforce Employee Experience Index Study (n=23,070)  
Note: The scores above are reported as percent favourable, the average level of agreement across the two items that measure turnover intention.<sup>iii</sup>

experience?’ We examined two primary sets of driving factors – leadership and workplace practices – that can provide organisations with the tools and insight they need. A preliminary exploration of these workplace behaviours and practices is provided below.

#### Leadership sets the stage

Leaders and managers play a powerful role in setting the overall tone and direction of an organisation, effectively setting the stage for a more positive employee experience.<sup>7</sup> This begins with a high level of clarity around future direction and why employees matter in successfully moving the organisation forward. Our data suggest there is room for improvement. For instance, 44 percent of employees do not feel their senior leaders are providing clear direction about where the organisation is headed. Providing more clarity would help senior leaders to more fully align employees and their behaviours with organisational goals.

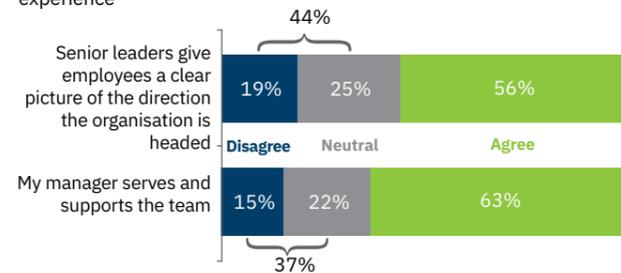
Managers also play a crucial role in creating a positive work environment, by providing a level of personalised support and commitment to their teams. More than one third (37 percent) of employees in our sample do not feel their managers were effective in serving and supporting the team.

**Human workplace practices make the experience**

Leadership initiates momentum towards a positive employee experience, while workplace practices carry that momentum forward.

Organisations are paying closer attention to the employee experience as a source of competitive advantage. At the

Figure 5. Leader and manager practices linked to employee experience



Source: WorkTrends 2016 Global sample for the IBM/Globoforce Employee Experience Index Study (n=23,070)

same time, employees are bringing much higher expectations to the workplace and making greater demands of their work experiences.<sup>8</sup> Practices that acknowledge the uniquely human qualities of the workplace address these new expectations. These practices can be viewed across multiple levels: **environment, work and person.**

**The Environment**

Employees increasingly expect to trust their organisations to be responsible and act with integrity in dealing with all manner of stakeholders, including employees themselves. When those expectations are met, a full 83 percent of respondents describe a positive employee experience, 46 percentage points higher than when those expectations are unmet. See Figure 6.

Supportive coworker relationships are also an important driver of a positive work experience. When those relationships are present in the workplace, employees report a much more positive employee experience than when that support is absent (77 percent compared to 35 percent). (Figure 6).

**The Work**

The drivers of employee experience also extend to the work itself. Meaningful work ensures that employees' skills and talents are being fully utilised and there is greater alignment to shared, core values. According to our data, the presence of these features is related to a 50 percentage point increase in employee experience (Figure 7). Employee experience is just 29 percent when employees do not report their work is consistent with organisational values, compared to an employee experience index score of 80 percent when employee work is consistent with those core values.

Figure 6. Organisational integrity and co-worker support are associated with a positive employee experience



Source: WorkTrends 2016 Global sample for the IBM/Globoforce Employee Experience Index Study (n=23,070)  
Note: The scores above are reported as percent favourable, the agreement level of the survey question.

Also critical to positive employee experiences are **feedback and recognition** of performance, as well as opportunities for professional development and **growth**. Eighty-three percent of employees who receive recognition of their performance and 80 percent of those receiving feedback, reported a positive employee experience, compared to 38 and 41 percent, respectively, of employees who did not (Figure 8).

**The Person**

Shifting the focus to practices that impact individuals themselves, a positive employee experience emphasizes the benefits of greater freedom through **empowerment**

Figure 7. Meaningful work associated with a positive employee experience



Source: WorkTrends 2016 Global sample for the IBM/Globoforce Employee Experience Index Study (n=23,070)  
Note: The scores above are reported as percent favourable, the agreement level of the survey question.

**and opportunities for voices to be heard.** Also important is the time for employees to **pursue non-work activities and recharge.**

Within a human workplace employees are given the freedom to decide and opportunity to participate in, determining how work is best accomplished. Employees who feel their ideas and suggestions matter are more than twice as likely to report a positive employee experience than those who don't (83 percent vs. 34 percent). A similar pattern emerged among employees

Figure 8. Feedback, recognition and growth associated with positive employee experience



Source: WorkTrends 2016 Global sample for the IBM/Globoforce Employee Experience Index Study (n=23,070)  
Note: The scores above are reported as percent favourable, the agreement level of the survey question.

who have the freedom to decide how to do their work (79 percent vs. 42 percent). (Figure 9).

More positive employee experiences are also associated with employees' flexibility to manage their work and other aspects of their lives. We see a 31 percentage point difference in employee experience when work schedules are flexible (Figure 10). Similarly, there is a 35 percentage point difference in employee experience when employees have an opportunity to recharge when they are not at work (Figure 10).

**Employee experience and engagement**

Existing research on employee engagement has helped organisations better understand employees' desired state within the organisation.<sup>9</sup> Engaged employees have pride in and are satisfied with their organisation as a place to work and they advocate for and intend to remain with their organisation.<sup>10</sup> However, employee engagement may not tell the whole story of the employee experience at work. Alongside engagement, this new study introduces employee experience and advances a comprehensive and holistic view of the human experience of work.

Figure 9. Empowerment and voice associated with positive employee experience



Source WorkTrends 2016 Global sample for the IBM/Globeforce Employee Experience Index Study (n=23,070)  
 Note: The scores above are reported as percent favourable, the agreement level of the survey question.

In fact, employee experience and engagement go hand in hand to reflect employees' states at work. For example, as shown in Figure 11, when employees are positive about their experience at work and high in engagement, they are passionate about what they are doing; when employees are negative about their experience and low in engagement, they appear apathetic.

Figure 10. Work-life balance associated with positive employee experience



Source: WorkTrends 2016 Global sample for the IBM/Globeforce Employee Experience Index Study (n=23,070)  
 Note: The scores above are reported as percent favourable, the agreement level of the survey question.

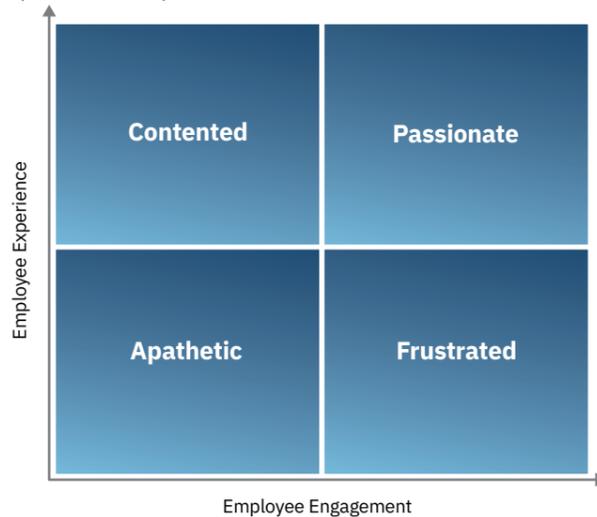
### Conclusion and recommendations

Our study identified five components of employee experience belonging, purpose, achievement, happiness and vigour and developed an instrument that diagnoses the level of employee experience based on the survey responses from 23,000 employees in 45 countries and territories. Our analyses reveal that more positive employee experiences are linked to better performance, extra effort at work and lower turnover intentions.

We also identified the key organisational practices that drive more positive employee experiences: organisational trust; coworker relationships; meaningful work; recognition, feedback and growth; empowerment and voice; and work-life balance. Additional insights about the drivers of employee experience will be described in a future paper.

Several recommendations emerge for cultivating more positive work experiences and achieving better outcomes:

Figure 11. The ideal of highly engaged employees who have a positive work experience.



Source: WorkTrends 2016 Global sample for the IBM/Globeforce Employee Experience Index Study (n=23,070)

### Diagnose

- Listen regularly to the voice of your employees (through platforms such as census and pulse surveys, social listening, etc.) to understand the nature of their experiences at work
- Conduct a drivers analysis to diagnose the culturally relevant workplace practices that are strengths to build upon or areas for improvement.

### Act

- Recognise the unique role that leaders and managers play in defining employees' work experience and enable managers to design experiences consistent with core values
- Ensure the organisation's actions are conveying the values intended and nurture an environment that reinforces mutually supportive coworker relationships
- Help employees understand the deeper meaning of their work and how it contributes to the wider organisational purpose and goals
- Treat performance as a continuous conversation, fuelled by social recognition, feedback and growth opportunities
- Offer employees opportunities to participate in decision-making and trust them with the autonomy they need to find the best paths to achieving success.

### Appendix: Demographic analyses of Employee Experience Index

#### Employee Experience Index scores by dimension

The global Employee Experience Index score from our research sample is 69 percent. This is positive, but leaves significant room for improvement. Of the five dimensions of the Employee Experience Index, happiness is the highest (74 percent) and vigour at work is the lowest (62 percent) (Figure 12).

#### Employee Experience Index scores by job level

It appears that the more senior you are, the more positive your employee experiences (Figure 13). Individual contributors (employees who do not manage others) report a lower level of employee experience (63 percent) than managers (79 percent), a gap of 16 percentage points.

In fact, such a gap is not unique to the concept of employee experience. In other studies of worker opinions, we often find that managers tend to answer a range of work attitude questions more positively than individual contributors. One possible explanation could be that managers are more likely to be involved in decision making in organisations and involvement is associated with positive attitudes.<sup>11</sup>

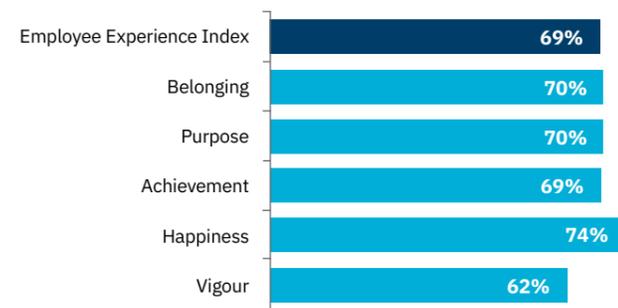
*'More positive employee experiences are linked to better performance, extra effort at work and lower turnover intentions.'*

### Employee Experience Index scores by generation

Despite the popularity of the notion of generational differences, scientific research suggests that differences in work attitudes are generally very small.<sup>12</sup> In fact, an IBM Smarter Workforce Institute study showed that only 0 to 2 percent of work attitude differences can be attributed to generation.<sup>13</sup>

In line with these previous findings, our research reveals no significant differences across generations in their employee experiences (Figure 14). All generations report similar levels of the employee experience dimensions.

Figure 12. Employee Experience Index scores



Source: WorkTrends 2016 Global sample for the IBM/Globoforce Employee Experience Index Study (n=23,070).  
Note: The scores are reported as percent favourable; that is, the Employee Experience Index score is the average level of agreement across the ten items in the Index. The score for each employee experience dimension is the average level of agreement across the two items that measure that dimension.

### Recognition and employee experience

The need to be recognised and appreciated is deeply ingrained in us.<sup>14</sup> As a result, we would expect that employees in organisations with recognition programs are more likely to receive acknowledgment and recognition for a job well done and consequently, to have a more positive employee experience.

Our research confirms this is the case (Figure 15). Employees who report that their organisations offer recognition programs and particularly those that provide rewards based on demonstrating core values, have considerably higher Employee Experience Index scores than those in organisations that do not offer formal recognition programs (81 percent vs. 62 percent).

Figure 13. Employee Experience Index scores vary by job level



Source: WorkTrends 2016 Global sample for the IBM/Globoforce Employee Experience Index Study (n=23,070).  
Note: The scores are reported as percent favourable, the average level of agreement across the ten items in the Index.

### Teams and employee experience

Social relatedness is a basic need of human beings<sup>15</sup> and that need is often met in people's work interactions with each other. And this is reflected in our Employee Experience Index; our research confirms that employees working in a team report more positive work experiences than those who work on their own (73 percent vs. 61 percent) (Figure 16).

In sum, our survey results reveal that Employee Experience Index levels vary by job level, whether employees work as part of a team or as an individual and whether the organisation offers recognition programs. A future report will examine cross-country differences of the employee experience.

Figure 14. No difference in employee experience across generations

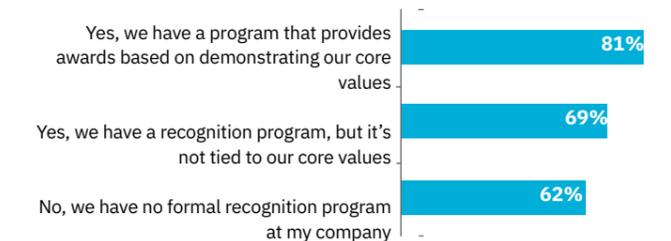


Source: WorkTrends 2016 Global sample for the IBM/Globoforce Employee Experience Index Study (n=23,070).  
Note: The scores are reported as percent favourable, the average level of agreement across the ten items in the Index. Millennials birth dates from 1982-2004, Generation X birth dates from 1961-1981 and Boomers birth dates from 1943-1960.<sup>16</sup>

### About WorkTrends

WorkTrends is a research program initiated in 1984, originally designed to track trends in specific workforce themes over time. WorkTrends has evolved to a large global online survey completed by workers from a cross-section of industries around the world, on a variety of contemporary topics of interest to HR and business leaders. In 2016, the WorkTrends survey was administered by the IBM Smarter Workforce Institute in 45 countries and territories, in a cross-section of industries, thousands of different organisations and all major job families. Globoforce was a key collaborator on the employee experience content of the 2016 WorkTrends survey.

Figure 15. Recognition programs linked to greater employee experience



Source: WorkTrends 2016 Global sample for the IBM/Globoforce Employee Experience Index Study (n=23,070).  
Note: The scores above are reported as percent favourable, the average level of agreement across the ten items in the Index.

### About IBM and the IBM Smarter Workforce Institute

Today's human resources organisations need to attract and grow top-performing talent, create engaging social and collaborative cultures and connect the right people to get work done. IBM solutions combine market-leading talent management and social collaboration tools with the power of workforce science and advanced analytics. We help organisations build impassioned and engaged workforces and deepen client relationships that can lead

Figure 16. Teamwork linked to a more positive employee experience



Source: WorkTrends 2016 Global sample for the IBM/Globoforce Employee Experience Index Study (n=23,070).  
Note: The scores are reported as percent favourable, the average level of agreement across the ten items in the Index.

to measurable business outcomes. To learn more about IBM Smarter Workforce solutions and services, please visit [www.ibm.com/software/smarterworkforce](http://www.ibm.com/software/smarterworkforce)

<sup>16</sup>The generations based on Strauss-Howe generational theory. For more information, see Howe, N. and Strauss, W. (2000). Millennials Rising: The Next Great Generation. New York: Vintage Books.

The IBM Smarter Workforce Institute produces rigorous, global, innovative research spanning a wide range of workforce topics. The Institute's team of experienced researchers applies depth and breadth of content and analytical expertise to generate reports, white papers and insights that advance the collective understanding of work and organisations. This white paper is part of IBM's on-going commitment to provide highly credible, leading-edge research findings that help organisations realise value through their people.

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### About Globoforce and the WorkHuman Research Institute

Pioneer of the WorkHuman movement, Globoforce helps make work more human for millions of people and organisations worldwide. Its cloud-based social recognition software helps build award-winning cultures where employees feel more appreciated and socially connected at work – driving a sense of belonging and inspiring the entire organisation to reach its full potential and achieve business success. Founded in 1999, the company is headquartered in Framingham, Massachusetts and Dublin, Ireland.

The WorkHuman Research Institute at Globoforce is dedicated to the understanding and application of global workplace practices that create more engaged, productive and ultimately more human work cultures. In collaboration with leaders in the human resource industry and global research experts, the WorkHuman Research Institute publishes original research on current trends that affect and influence the employee experience, culture management and leadership.

To learn more about Globoforce, visit: [www.globoforce.com](http://www.globoforce.com) or follow us on Twitter @Globoforce or LinkedIn: [www.linkedin.com/company/globoforce](http://www.linkedin.com/company/globoforce)

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<sup>11</sup>Driscoll, J. W. (1978). Trust and participation in organisational decision making as predictors of satisfaction. *Academy of management journal*, 21(1), 44-56.

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<sup>13</sup>Weiner, S. P. & Rasch R. (2016). Generational differences at work are much ado about very little. Retrieved from <https://www-01.ibm.com/common/ssi/cgi-bin/ssialias?subtype=WH&infotype=SA&htmlfid=LOW14315USEN&attachment=LOW14315USEN.PDF>

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