



The Employee Experience Through Organizational Change

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Change in life is inevitable. Organizations are in constant change to keep up with competitors, new technology, new government policies and regulation – and to survive unforeseen challenges like the COVID-19 pandemic.

To adapt and come ahead of the change, all employees – from frontline employees to senior leaders – need to adjust to the new reality. This typically can mean anything from employees learning new ways of doing work to ways in which leaders coach and monitor the work. Buy-in is required from all stakeholders, and especially from frontline employees who actually do the work and usually have to make the changes.

So how can organizations create a workforce of employees who will ultimately support change?

The path to employee engagement is to carefully listen to

employee concerns and respond with meaningful actions to either mitigate or address them. This can only occur in a culture of engagement.

Culture of Engagement

A culture of engagement is about creating a culture where employees are engaged across the organization. Let's talk first about how a climate of employee engagement is created. It's a bit like the paradox of the "chicken or the egg." In other words, is employee engagement an input to a high functioning organization or is employee engagement a result of a high functioning organization?

To find the answer, let's review which elements create high functioning organizations.

The Elements that Create High Functioning Organizations



The categories of a functioning organization are split four ways. Each has a set number of elements that define each category.

Supervisor-Related Elements:

Procedural Justice:
“My boss is fair.”

Leader Member Exchange:
“My boss advocates for me.”

Upward Communications:
“I talk to my boss about safety.”

Management Related Elements:

Management Credibility:
“Management walks the talk.”

Perceived Organizational Support:
“Management cares about me.”

Organizational Value for Safety:
“Management cares about safety.”

Creating Organizational Citizenship Behavior:
“I give effort beyond job requirements.”

Teamwork Related Elements:

Teamwork:
“We get work done.”

Work Group Relations:
“We get along.”

Approaching Others:
“I talk to my peers about safety.”

Encouraging Incident Reporting:
“I report incidents.”

Human Performance and Reliability Related Elements:

Anticipation:
The organization seeks out weak signals of potential problems

Questioning:
The organization is open to different points of view and creates an inquisitive environment

Diligence:
The organization strives for flawless execution and minimizing error

Resilience:
The organization is ready and able to intervene during an upset

Learning:
The organization uses events to improve, learn and prevent future incidents

At its heart, employee engagement is the level of commitment an employee demonstrates to their organization, their leaders and their peers.

So how do you ultimately create a culture of engagement? Traditionally, leaders first strive for organizational excellence – excellence in supervisor relationships, excellence in executing the work, excellence in creating high performance and excellence in “running in control” (i.e. reliability).

But where leaders fail is when they treat employee engagement, or even safety, as discrete variables instead of part of a complex system that succeeds or fails as a whole.

Culture of Engagement: Two Examples

Example A:

Missed Opportunity to Engage: An employee raises concern about a noise he hears from a pump. The supervisor discounts the concern and tells the employee to wear earplugs.

Opportunity to Engage and Listen: The supervisor thanks the employee for his or her input and informs that person that maintenance will be called to look at the root cause of the noise. He or she is told that once identification is made, the employee and the group will receive communication of findings and actions taken.

Example B:

Missed Opportunity to Engage: A driver approaches a supervisor to state that he or she has an express delivery in the truck, but the trailer door is not working properly. The supervisor says: “The customer closes at 3 p.m. It is now 1 p.m., so take the delivery to the customer, and then come back and we’ll see what we can do.”

Opportunity to Engage and Listen: As part of his job, the supervisor proactively asks the employee if he or she has any concerns about safety. The supervisor listens to the story, goes with the driver to look at the situation and identifies the problem more accurately. The supervisor calls the garage to prepare them for receiving the vehicle and asks them to check it immediately. Even though there is an express shipment, the door of the trailer can get the driver hurt and it needs to be examined and repaired.

In both scenarios, the supervisor didn’t have to tell the employee that he was advocating or caring for the employee. The actions themselves spoke louder than words. These actions will not only affect the immediate employee, but every other employee who hears his or her story.

Our experience is that organizations can be better at creating engagement. The first step must be to first understand the importance of the elements referenced above and to identify how strong or weak the organization is on those same

elements. Generating actions for improvement is always possible once you know what exactly you should work on.

The following checklist will help the leader identify which areas need improvement in their organization.

Health Check for Employee Engagement:

- Do our employees perceive they are supported by their supervisors? How do the employees perceive the organization? Do employees have a good relationship with supervisors? And do employees feel their supervisor advocates for them?
- Are our employees confident that management will act on what they say? Do they believe leaders tell them the truth even when it’s tough?
- Are our employees confident that if they raise a concern, even if it is a weak signal, it will be listened to, treated respectfully and considered? Do we share back the decision about the concern?
- Can our employees approach coworkers with safety concerns? Will they be treated respectfully?
- Are our employees part of our learnings when execution failures occur? Is it a positive experience?
- Do our employees believe we embrace continuous improvement and treat errors as an opportunity to learn? Is the learning a positive experience?

Conclusion: Action Beats Intention

There is a principle in coaching that is often helpful, even if it’s a hard truth: Intentions are important, but what counts is what leaders do and say.

This also holds true for managing change. We often hear how companies want to be better at managing and leading change, and they are interested in engaging their workforce in this transformation. But too often they underestimate what it will take.

That thinking will get you in trouble every time. Organizations must create the actions needed to engage employees and sustain them over long periods of time. This is how perceptions of employees will ultimately change.

Engaged employees are a tremendous resource to any organization. Optimizing how organizations function will not only support employee engagement, but it will also facilitate the organizational journey towards excellence.

Connect with us: Interested in learning more about how you can better engage and sustain your employees? ”

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