Building an Engaged Workforce: The Impact of Organizational Leadership and Strategic Internal Communication

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“What Does an Engaged Workforce Look Like?”
Employee Engagement

1. Fully and actively present, immersed, and bring all aspects of selves to the performance of the work roles

2. Demonstrate high levels of energy; feel strongly involved, absorbed, and engrossed in their work

3. Exhibit passion, pride, and enthusiasm in what they do; and find meaning, inspiration, and purpose in their work
Why Does Engagement Matter?

Engagement

- Task/job Performance
- Org. Citizenship Behavior
- Customer Satisfaction
- Job Satisfaction
- Org. Commitment
Matters for the Bottom Line…

- Work units with high employee engagement outperformed units with low engagement by 10% on customer ratings, 22% in profitability, and 21% in productivity (Gallup, 2012).
- Disengagement costs $243–270 billion worldwide per year.
What Drives Employee Engagement?

- Work Environment
- Organizational Leadership
- Strategic Internal Communication
- Organizational Culture

An Engaged Workforce
Leadership as the Engagement Driver: CEOs

- Define the DNA of the company and shape corporate character and culture
- Enabling role; set the tone for communication
- Paint a compelling vision for the future; build a sense of shared purpose among employees
CEO Visionary Communication

“The understanding and alignment an individual employee has about the organization and its vision, mission, values, strategy, and competitive reality.” (IPR Organizational Clarity White Paper, p. 7)

Strategy alignment and clarity starts from the top.
CEO Credibility, Organizational Reputation, and Employee Engagement (Men, 2011)
CEO Communication Styles and Channels

- An online survey of 545 employees who work for a variety of medium and large-sized corporations in the U.S. (Men, 2015)

- **Key findings**
  - Responsive CEOs are perceived as better communicators.
  - Better CEO communication $\rightarrow$ higher employee engagement
  - **Social CEOs** are perceived as better communicators. *face-to-face* matters; *visual* storytelling (personalized)
Social CEOs: Personal, Authentic, and Engaging...

Source: http://www.xinfu.com/the-top-100-ceos-on-social-media/
Implications for Practices

- **Top leaders should…**
  - Build thought leadership and leader credibility
  - Recognize their internal communication role
  - Communicate a compelling vision and talk about strategies
  - Develop a personalized and responsive communication style
  - Embrace new technologies and directly engage with employees by talking “with” instead of talking “to” them

- **Communication managers should…**
  - Equip CEOs with a strategic **public relations mindset**
  - Provide CEO **communication training** on what (i.e., content), how (i.e., channels), and when (i.e., timing) to communicate with employees
Leadership as the Engagement Driver: Supervisors

- Communication competence, style, channels, and effectiveness of supervisors influence employee engagement and performances.
  - With an increased use of a motivating language by a leader, employee self-efficacy was 34% higher and employee performance increased by 20% (Mayfield & Mayfield, 2012)
  - Supervisors’ transparent communication → the supervisors’ behavioral integrity → employees’ work engagement (Vogelgesang et al., 2013)
- Leadership shapes communication climate.
Leadership Style and Employee Engagement

- **Supervisory Leadership Style** (Men, 2014, 2015; Men & Stacks, 2014)

  - **Transformational Leadership**: Appealing to employees’ higher order needs; charismatic, visionary, relationship-oriented, empowering, and innovative

  - **Authentic Leadership**: Authenticity; self-awareness, integrity, genuineness, consistency, transparency, and balanced decision-making

  - **Ethical Leadership**: Ethical guidance; fair treatment, power sharing, role clarification, people orientation, integrity, and concern for sustainability
Leadership Influence on Internal Communication

- When transformational, authentic, and ethical leadership styles are prevalent in the organization, the communication climate tends to be symmetrical and transparent, which in turn, drives employee engagement.
Communication as the Engagement Driver

Strategic Internal Communication (Corporate)

- Symmetrical Communication Climate
  - Two-way information flow, listening, feedback
  - Reciprocity and genuine concern
  - Inclusion, employee empowerment, and participation

- Transparent Communication Practice
  - **Substantial information**: accurate, timely, balanced, and complete
  - **Participation**: Incorporate employees’ voices to determine what information they really need and how much information they need
  - **Accountability**: Open to criticisms, and admitting the problem

- Communication Channels
  - **Face-to-face** meetings
  - **Social media** channels on the rise for community building and employee engagement
  - “Conversation,” “interactions,” and “dialogues”
Implications for Practice

- Communication managers should...
  - Advocate a two-way, employee-centered communication worldview accompanied by transparent communication practice
  - Mobilize resources to develop an optimized and digitized employee communication platform
  - Provide trainings to leaders to equip them with strong communication skills and technological competencies
  - Build a cross-enterprise communication force that involves leaders at different levels
  - Act as organizational strategists with business acumen and communication specialists and experts
Moving Forward…

Characteristics of Today’s Workforce

- Diversity
- Globalization
- Multi-Generation “Millennials”
- Work-Life Balance
- Powered by Technology
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