

Chapter 24

The Value of Employee Engagement to Enhance Work Performance and Customer Service in Public Libraries

Ashley R. Norris

Jackson District Library, USA

Sharon E. Norris

Spring Arbor University, USA

ABSTRACT

The organizational culture of a public library plays an important role in the successful achievement of its purpose and mission. Effectively serving patrons and the larger community is an overarching strategic goal of public library systems, and public library leaders who are supportive of workers and committed to promoting a culture of employee engagement hold the potential for enjoying numerous positive individual and organizational outcomes such as effective service work performance and increased customer service and satisfaction. This chapter highlights the benefits of fostering an environment of employee engagement and its enhancement on service work performance and customer service in public libraries.

INTRODUCTION

Employee engagement has been described as the level of involvement and commitment employees express in their roles within an organization. Engaged employees are committed, dedicated, motivated, energetic, enthusiastic, engrossed in their work, and they exhibit positive attitudes, pride in their organizations, and effective customer-oriented behaviors (Babcock-Roberson & Strickland, 2010; Pimpakorn & Patterson, 2010; Rana, Ardichvili, & Tkachenko, 2014; Rich, Lepine, & Crawford, 2010; Simon, 2011). Engaged employees connect with their work emotionally, cognitively, and physically (Kahn, 1990), and

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they exhibit high performance habits. High performing employees put in extra hours, speak highly of the organization, assist colleagues, share knowledge, and participate in organizational dialogue (Popli & Rizvi, 2017).

High levels of employee engagement are associated with a number of positive individual and organizational outcomes including improved service work performance, increased customer service and satisfaction, higher levels of customer engagement, customer loyalty, and customer satisfaction (Macey, Schneider, Barbera, & Young, 2009; Menguc, Auh, Yeniaras, & Katsikeas, 2017; Mone & London, 2010; Radda, Majidadi, & Akanno, 2015; Wantara, 2015). In contrast, disengaged employees not only lack the extra-role attitudes and behaviors that lead to exceptional individual outcomes, but they impact organizations negatively through their lack of vigor and productivity. Disengaged employees are disconnected, detached, and lack motivation and enthusiasm for their work, resulting in poor service performance, higher turnover rates, and decreased customer satisfaction (Abu-Shamaa, Al-Rabayah, & Khasawneh, 2015).

Understanding the benefits of employee engagement as well as the detrimental impact of disengaged workers is crucial for public library administrators and managers because of the implications on a wide range of individual and organizational outcomes including service work performance, customer service, and satisfaction. Public libraries are service-based institutions and as such, the employees at all levels of the organization need the capacity to build strong relationships with one another. Establishing effective and sustaining relationships with public library stakeholders is not possible without engaged employees who care about the organization, one another, and those they serve. Highly engaged employees approach challenges without fear of reprisal, willingly help customers and peers quickly, ask questions proactively, and listen carefully to determine how they can best serve others (Liao & Chuang, 2004). Engaged employees have a positive outlook and are more dedicated and enthusiastic when carrying out their job tasks as compared to disengaged workers (Menguc et al., 2017). Engaged employees go beyond in-role expectations to provide excellent service, make a positive impression on customers, and establish goodwill within a community. The most successful libraries have employees who display high levels of service work performance, and effective library administrators, directors, and managers are committed to creating a positive work climate for employees and service-minded culture for all stakeholders, including patrons.

Service work performance in a public library, or the ability to consistently meet the needs and expectations of patrons, is fundamental to the effectiveness of public libraries. While satisfied patrons may not be directly linked to increased profits in the library setting, excellent service performance can improve perceptions of effectiveness in serving the cultural and educational needs of a community (Casper & Lopez, 2018). Effective service work performance can also help to mitigate issues related to rising costs of public library services as well as meet the demands of changing expectations of library patrons (Macmillan, 2011). Excellent service work performance can also foster a spirit of lifelong learning (Miao & Mia, 2007), build an environment of organizational learning (Sinclair, 2017), and establish community by connecting individuals to each other and to the wider community (Goulding, 2009).

Public library administrators, directors, managers, and staff need to be responsive, strong in delivering core services, and adaptable enough to redirect efforts in response to changing conditions and expectations (Huber & Potter, 2015). Library workers, whether administrators, managers, or library service staff are more likely to display these characteristics and contribute positively to the vitality of the organization when they are engaged and satisfied in their work. In public libraries, Macmillan (2011) argues, “staff engagement has become essential for survival” (p. 5). Many members of the library staff work directly

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