Chapter 16
Leader Effects on Engagement

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ABSTRACT

Employee engagement is defined as an employee's emotional connectedness with an organization. One of the key levers that affects employee engagement is leadership support. Leaders who effectively manage are vital to all organizations as they play a key role in helping to establish relational networks which lead to higher levels of engagement for their employees. This chapter discusses how leaders can impact engagement. Furthermore, it outlines how leaders can grow and develop in their leadership practice. Leaders who focus on creating a culture of learning and engagement experience higher levels of performance.

WHAT IS EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT?

Human beings have a desire to achieve and form lasting relationships with others. Through establishing connections, humans create an environment that engages others and facilitates success. In the workplace, leaders play a key role in helping to establish relational networks which lead to higher levels of engagement for their employees. Engagement can be defined in many ways. Eldor and Vigoda-Gadot (2017) define engagement as creating a link between emotions, the people within the organization, and the work (Eldor & Vigoda-Gadot, 2017). Kruse (2012) defines engagement as an emotional tie an employee has to the organization. To expand upon this definition, engagement is an emotional connectedness with an organization that allows the employee to bring their whole self to work each day (Cooper-Thomas et al., 2018). Each of these definitions has a key element of similarity, the emotional connection of the employee. Leaders can have a direct effect on the emotional connectedness an employee feels. Additionally, leaders who understand this influence are more likely to have employees who are highly engaged (Smith et al., 2016).

Employee engagement occurs at the individual and organizational level. Organizations must understand that increasing engagement will help employees work at their maximum level (Byham & Wellins, 2015). By encouraging employees to bring their whole selves to work, employers are ensuring engagement begins from day one. Personal growth, leadership support, and communication are vital to engagement. The evidence proves that employees with higher levels of engagement are more productive. Organiza-

tions that ensure employees are emotionally engaged in their work will increase the probability of their length of service intention (Ormrod, 2020).

Employee engagement is the cornerstone of the relationship between the organization and the employee. Many professionals in the corporate space use the terms engagement and satisfaction interchangeably, but they are not the same concept. Employee satisfaction is how content an employee is with the organization. Satisfaction is a part of the engagement, but engagement encompasses much more. Engagement is how content an employee is with their position but also includes the level of commitment and discretionary effort employees place into their role. Discretionary effort is the level of effort that employees put forth going above and beyond their normal workload. This level of effort stems from an intrinsic motivation that is internal to the employee of what they find enjoyable (Ormrod, 2020). Highly engaged employees regularly put forth higher levels of discretionary effort. However, most US employees are not within this space. Gallup cites that only 33% of US workers are highly engaged (Gallup, 2007). Employee engagement allows the employee to bring their whole selves to work in a trusting, supportive environment (Cooper-Thomas et al., 2018). When employees feel engaged in their workspace the individual employee and organization will experience success (Smith et al., 2016).

Leaders can affect employee engagement positively or negatively. As a result, leaders need to keep engagement top of mind. If leaders do not focus on engagement, the employee may disengage and leave. This can be costly to the leader, their team, and the organization. Employee turnover can be detrimental. Research confirms that twenty percent of new hires leave their role within the first 45 days on the job (Leung, 2018). Estimates cite replacing one employee can cost 90-200% of the employee's annual salary based on their role (Allen, 2008; Cascio, 2006). Heathfield (2019) asserts that exit interview data explains employees leave because of poor onboarding, lack of recognition, relationships with leaders, relationships with coworkers, and lack of contribution and meaningful work. Leaders can impact all these elements, leading to positive or negative levels of engagement. This chapter will first discuss how leaders can affect engagement levers of onboarding, ensuring employees are developing, making contributions, and engaging in meaningful work, recognition, and finally maintaining relationships with their leaders and co-workers. Secondly, the chapter will focus on how leaders must be taught the skills of creating engaging environments to incorporate into their leadership practice.

HOW LEADERS CAN AFFECT ENGAGEMENT LEVERS

Leaders' Engagement Effects on Onboarding

The definition of onboarding varies throughout the literature. However, most definitions include the element of integrating with the organization. Effective onboarding extends benefits to the new employee and organization by ensuring an emotional connection is established, thereby beginning the path to higher employee engagement. Onboarding programs are designed to acclimate the new employee to the culture and expectations of the organization. Onboarding is the program or process that assimilates new employees into the organization by creating a psychological contract between the organization and new employees based on the unique needs of the new employee (Caldwell & Peters, 2018). The most effective onboarding programs focus on "personal identity socialization" (Cable et al., 2013, p. 24). This concept emphasizes uncovering the new employee's strengths and interests to channel into their work for ultimate success (Cable et al., 2013). Research shows that onboarding is a vital part of establishing

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