Employee engagement and internal communications

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Effective internal communication is critical to an organization's well-being. Even the most compelling vision for the development and growth of a statistical organization cannot inspire or motivate employees unless it is shared with every staff member in a form that resonates with them both individually and collectively. An inspired and motivated workforce, in turn, is the decisive element that enables a statistical organization to achieve its mission.

1.1 What is employee engagement?

Employee engagement is a relatively new concept coined around 1990 by William Kahn, a professor at Boston University´s Questrom School of Business. His research, presented in a paper entitled "Psychological Conditions of Personal Engagement and Disengagement at Work"[1], argued that the problem was less about employees being the right "fit," or lacking financial rewards, but fundamentally it was about how they *felt.* Figure 1 below describes the elements of Kahn's employee emotion: meaningfulness; safety and availability.

Figure 1 – Elements of employee emotion (based on Kahn)

As the result of ever-changing social environments within organizations, defining employee engagement today goes beyond Kahn's theory and has become a more complex term. Some authors still conceive employee engagement as a psychological concept while others believe it to be a concept related to performance or attitudes. Gallup suggests that engaged employees are "psychologically committed to their work, go above and beyond their basic job expectations, and want to play a key role in fulfilling the mission of their organizations", whilst disengaged employees were are said to be "uninvolved and unenthusiastic about their jobs and love to tell others how bad things are"[1]. Kevin Kruse defines employee engagement as "the emotional commitment the employee has to the organization and its goals."[2]

We define employee engagement as the extent to which a staff member's personal goals and interests align with the vision and goals of the organization where they work

[1] Rick Blizzard, "Engagement vs. Satisfaction Among Hospital Teams", https://news.gallup.com/poll/10903/engagement-vs-satisfaction-among-hospital-teams.aspx

[2] Kevin Kruse, "What Is Employee Engagement", https://www.forbes.com/sites/kevinkruse/2012/06/22/employee-engagement-what-and-why/#22098ff47f37

1.2 Benefits of engagement

An engaged workforce produces measurable organizational benefits. According to Gallup research, engaged employees are ten times more likely to strongly agree that they can take creative risks at work than actively disengaged employees.

 "compared with disengaged teams, engaged teams show 24% to 59% less turnover, 10% higher customer ratings, 21% greater profitability, 17% higher productivity, …, 70% fewer safety incidents and 41% less absenteeism". [1]

It makes intuitive sense that staff with high levels of dedication and enthusiasm will gain greater satisfaction from their jobs. It is worth highlighting a possibly less intuitive finding from Gallup, though: customers react positively to engaged employees.

We conclude that statistical organizations' data users and respondents will be better served, and will place higher value on our organizations, if their contact is with well-informed and motivated staff.

In short, some of the benefits of having committed employees are:

1. Increased productivity
2. Lower costs
3. Faster problem solving
4. Higher quality of goods/service
5. Promotion of better practices
6. Increased trust between employees and leaders
7. Understanding and support in critical times
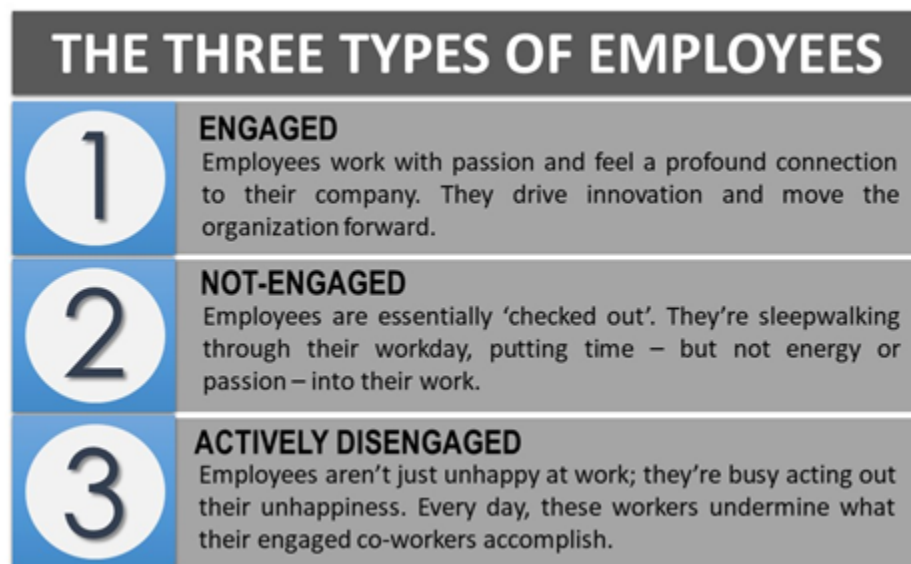8. Embracing a culture open to change

1.3 Types of Employees

Knowing one's employees is a critical first step. Employees are critical to the organization's success as they both influence one another and influence external audiences' perceptions, especially those of customers.

The Institute for Employment Studies (IES) proposes that employees can be divided into three types with regard to their level of engagement: the engaged, the not-engaged, and the actively disengaged (see Figure 2 below for definitions). The actively disengaged are the biggest threat to an organization's brand due to the sharing of their discontent with co-workers and the outside world.

The goal of a high performing organization is to move its employees along the spectrum in the hope that all of them will become engaged employees.

Figure 2 - Three types of employees[2]

THE THREE TYPES OF EMPLOYEES

1 **ENGAGED**
Employees work with passion and feel a profound connection to their company. They drive innovation and move the organization forward.

2 **NOT-ENGAGED**
Employees are essentially 'checked out'. They're sleepwalking through their workday, putting time – but not energy or passion – into their work.

3 **ACTIVELY DISENGAGED**
Employees aren't just unhappy at work; they're busy acting out their unhappiness. Every day, these workers undermine what their engaged co-workers accomplish.

[1] https://news.gallup.com/businessjournal/200108/damage-inflicted-poor-managers.aspx:

[2] Gemma Robertson-Smith and Carl Markwick, *Employee Engagement: A review of current thinking*, https://www.employment-studies.co.uk/system/files/resources/files/469.pdf

1.4 Strengthening engagement

Numerous academic studies have explored what drives employee participation. By knowing the three types of employees, organizations can improve employee engagement by developing strategies to move employees along the continuum so that they become fully engaged. Another IES report[1] lists seven key drivers of employee engagement:

1. Managers listen to employees
2. Employees are involved in decision-making
3. Employer demonstrates concern about employees' health and well-being
4. Senior managers show employees they value them
5. Employees feel able to voice their opinions

6. Good suggestions are acted on
7. Employees have the opportunity to develop their jobs

[1] D Robinson, S Perryman, S Hayday, The Drivers of Employee Engagement, https://www.google.com/url?
sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=17&ved=2ahUKEwiTmPH-x-LlAhUnq1kKHQ-ABj4QFjAQegQIBhAC&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.
employment-studies.co.uk%2Fsystem%2Ffiles%2Fresources%2Ffiles%2F408.pdf&usg=AOvVaw38ceSydVDtzV9XePD9vgdY

Figure 3 - The engagement model
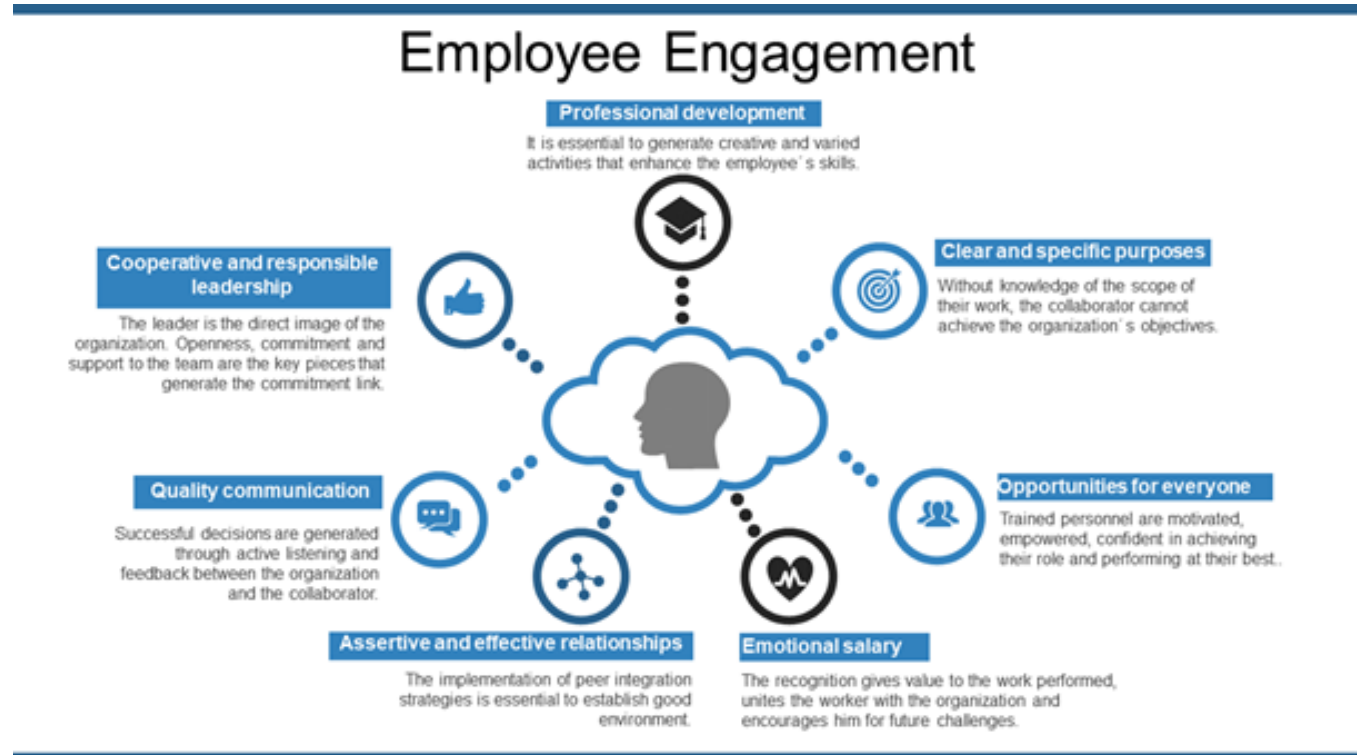
1.5. Measuring engagement

In order to develop an effective employee engagement strategy using the seven key drivers described in Figure 3 above, an organization must have a reference point. To develop this reference point, an organization needs to measure its current state of affairs.

Personnel assessment tools give the project manager and the project team insight into areas of strength and weakness. These tools help project managers assess the team preferences, aspirations, how they process and organize information, how they tend to make decisions, and how they prefer to interact with people (see Chapter 6: Assessment and monitoring for more detailed information on how to conduct employee assessments).

Creating a corporate culture that values its employees through a commitment to strengthening feedback and communication creates added market value and can help establish the national statistical institution as an employer of choice.

1.6 Internal communications

Internal communications can be defined as the sharing of information and culture within an organization for business purposes. Though this is not identical to employee engagement, the two concepts are very closely connected. Effective internal communication is one of the primary tools management has to engage meaningfully with staff. We explore the tools used to develop an internal communications strategy in Chapter **Strategic Planning and Tools**.

1.7 Pyramid model

One model of internal communication is built on a simple vertical principle: managers convey information and direction to subordinate employees. The head of the organization has a management board under her or him and communicates with it. The management board has individual department heads under it, the heads of departments have employees under them. In time-critical crisis situations the pyramid model of communications fulfills its role well. It does not matter if the information is positive or negative. Communication has a clear and formal vertical flow.

The pyramid model has severe shortcomings, though. Exclusively top-down communications in an organization prevents management from obtaining essential information from staff and, in the medium to long term, demoralizes staff and diminishes employee engagement.

Thus, top-down communication must be accompanied by equally formal and well-structured bottom-up and peer to peer interaction (Figure 4).

1.8   Bottom-up and horizontal communication

Well-organized communication in an organization should be as open as possible. The objective in all communications should not only be to convey information, but also to receive information and responses. Each employee, according to their level of responsibility and the confidentiality of certain data, will benefit from receiving as much information as possible. An informed employee who knows the goals and plans of the organization, the current situation, and also understands the environment and common challenges, is much more effective.

Figure 4 – Internal communications flows
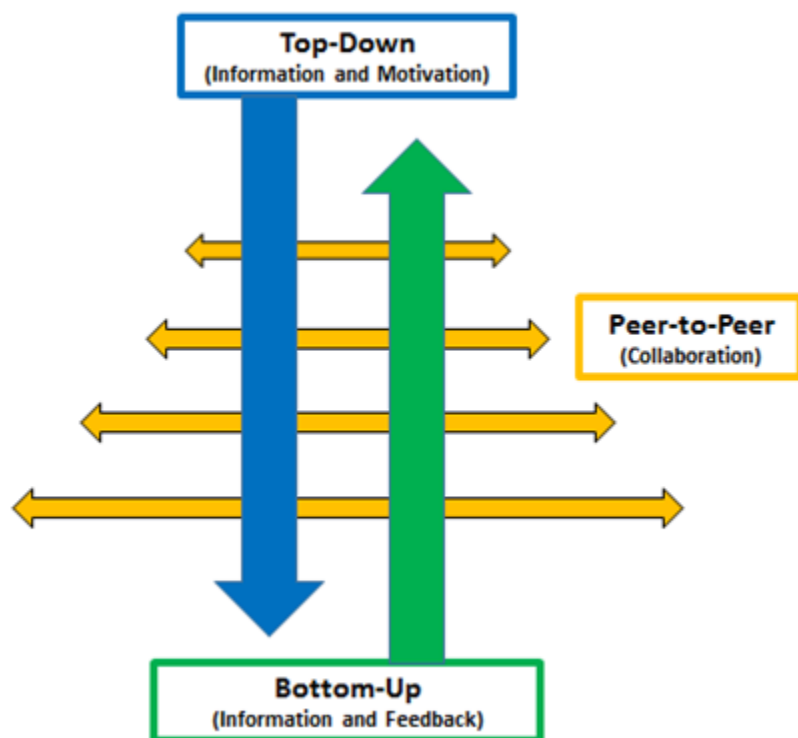
Bottom-up communication is the vehicle through which employees share their intimate knowledge of the day-to-day operations of an organization with senior management. Bottom-up communication unveils the detailed successes and roadblocks in production processes as well as customer interactions. Bottom-up communication is also the vehicle through which employees react to management proposals, indicating their approval or concerns with new policies, procedures, or strategic decisions so that these issues may be addressed.

Horizontal communication between peers enables collaboration. Horizontal communication inevitably takes place between staff in the same workgroup but may have the most value when structures are in place to promote communication between employees and their peers in different workgroups and occupational specialties. Facilitating broad peer-to-peer communication across all levels of the organization leads, among other things, to effective innovation.

The most important task of internal communication is to ensure that everyone who is associated with the organization receives complete, accurate and reliable information at the right time, and can add their knowledge and understanding to the corporate information flow. Ensuring proper communication within an organization is the simplest and most efficient method to succeed.

All staff, from the most senior executives to the newest recruits, are participants in effective internal communications. See Chapter 5 for the various institutional roles in communications.

1.9 Strengthening engagement through communication

The nexus between employee engagement and a robust internal communications program is clear.

An effective internal communications strategy must be grounded in the reality of an organization that is genuinely driven by its mission and values. Deloitte's *Becoming irresistible: A new model for employee engagement*[1] has identified five key drivers of employee engagement:

1. Make work meaningful
2. Foster great management
3. Establish a flexible, humane, inclusive workplace
4. Create ample opportunities for growth
5. Establish vision, purpose, and transparency in leadership

The Qualtrics XM Institute Bruce Temkin and Aimee Lucas, *Employee Engagement Competency & Maturity Insight Report 2018*[2] proposes five employee engagement competencies for management

> ⓘ **Inform** - Provide employees with the information they need to understand what's expected.
>
> **Inspire** - Connect employees to the company's vision and values.
>
> **Instruct** - Provide employees with the knowledge and skills to succeed.
>
> **Involve** - Allow employees to participate in making decisions about how they work.
>
> **Incent** - Deploy appropriate systems to measure, reward, and reinforce desired behaviors.

In order to meet the competencies described by Qualtrics, internal communications must go well beyond simply disseminating information from the top down, to facilitating multi-directional interactions, forging partnerships across silos, building strong relationships deep in the organization, and promoting trust in leadership.

Today's employees need to feel part of the organization and to clearly see and understand how their role contributes to the fulfillment of institutional goals.

High performing organizations include communication skills in evaluations, track the performance of managers, and publish the results.

Leadership within an organization plays a key role in employee engagement. Some leadership characteristics that foster a favorable working environment and consequently increase employee engagement are:

- Presenting and adhering to organizational values and principles
- Acknowledging achievements
- Supporting talent
- Promoting fairness
- Motivating employees
- Involving employees in new projects
- Respecting diversity
- Having a humanitarian sense
- Listening to employees
- Detecting skills and talents
- Looking for growth opportunities

In summary, leaders must foster a strong and transparent organizational culture that provides employees with a line of sight between their work and the vision, mission and values of the organization. See Chapter 3 for more detailed information on organizational culture, mission, vision and values.

[1] Deloitte Review Issue 16, https://www2.deloitte.com/insights/us/en/deloitte-review/issue-16/employee-engagement-strategies.html

[2] Employee Engagement Competency & Maturity Insight Report 2018, https://www.qualtrics.com/xm-institute/employee-engagement-competency-and-maturity-2018/