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November 1, 2019

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Abstract

Employee engagement, as a humanistic approach to personnel management, is a powerfully influential model and philosophy that harnesses the full potential of employees by satisfying their higher order of motivational needs. The purpose of employee engagement is to fully align an employee’s professional interests and goals with the organization’s mission and strategic plan in order to ensure organizational success. This is an explanation of employee engagement and its many facets, and how employee engagement has been implemented at the Tampa-Hillsborough Public Library.

An Introduction to Employee Engagement

The employees that facilitate library activities are a library’s most valuable resources, and as such, interpersonal processes that take place in the work environment cannot be ignored when engaging in management strategies. Incorporating a humanistic approach to library management can bring about vast improvements to an employee’s morale, efficiency, and effectiveness. This approach to management focuses on individuals and informal groups within the organization in order to promote the integration of people into their work environment. Managers can achieve high levels of productivity from their employees by concentrating on their employees’ behavior and quality of life within the organization while simultaneously focusing on the needs of the organization itself. This requires that organizations prioritize the creation of workflows and placement of employees in positions that fulfill higher levels of motivational needs thereby
tapping into an employee’s full potential. The most effective way for managers to accomplish this is through the development of a comprehensive employee engagement program.

There are many definitions offered to explain employee engagement, but the vast majority of these definitions describe an engaged employee as opposed to expanding upon employee engagement as a management model. For example, researchers Macey, Schneider, Barbera, and Young define employee engagement as “an individual’s sense of purpose and focused energy, evident to others in the display of personal initiative, adaptability, effort, and persistence directed toward organizational goals.” The Governing Institute describes employee engagement as “an employee [who] is enthusiastically and proudly involved in his or her organization and day-to-day job responsibilities…” and The Conference Board describes employee engagement as “a heightened emotional connection that an employee feels for his or her organization, that influences him or her to exert greater discretionary effort to his or her work.” Gallup defines employee engagement as “being involved in or enthusiastic about and committed to one’s work and workplace,” and researchers Schaufeli, Salanova, Gonzales-Roma, and Bakker have defined employee engagement as “a state of mind, in which vigor and energy are applied to the work role resulting in various forms of fulfillment and absorption.” Other researchers, such as Macey, Schneider, Millar, and Marchington, describe employee engagement as “an attitude, or series of attitudes and responses to relationships, policies, programs, and forces both inside and outside of organizations,” and Felix defines employee engagement as “the harnessing of one’s self to the work role, fully expressing one’s self physically, cognitively, and emotionally.”
So far, research into employee engagement has revealed only one description that explains employee engagement rather than describing an engaged employee. Bob Lavigna, the director of the CPS HR Consulting Institute, says, “Employee engagement is about improving the level of commitment that our employees have to their organization so that we can deliver better, high quality performance and services to the citizens we serve.” In light of this, the author of this article would like to offer the following definition for employee engagement: employee engagement is the series of actions through which management is able to align the personal and professional interests and goals of employees with the mission and strategic plan of the organization for the sake of product and process improvement. In the case of libraries, this means increased productivity among staff leading to better customer service for library users. Furthermore, staff members benefit from an improved work environment, and a sense of fulfillment in their work. The following will continue to expand upon the various aspects of employee engagement strategies and discuss how employee engagement has been applied at the Tampa-Hillsborough County Public Library.

**Designing and Implementing Employee Engagement Surveys**

The first step to understanding the status of employee engagement in any organization is to survey the employees. It is important to understand that employee engagement is not the same as employee satisfaction. Staff members can be disengaged from the organization, feeling disconnected from their work and indifferent about being a contributor to the organization, but they may still feel satisfied by going to work each day and receiving a paycheck for services rendered. Employee engagement, on the other hand, focuses on how motivated employees are to
contribute to the overall success of the organization, and if they find fulfillment in knowing that their actions further the organization’s mission and strategic plan. Recognizing the difference between the two ensures that the questions written for the survey will accurately measure employee engagement as opposed to employee satisfaction.

Surveys should be written using a Likert scale featuring the following four responses: strongly disagree, disagree, agree, and strongly agree. Each response should then correspond to the following point values: 0 for strongly disagree, 1 for disagree, 2 for agree, and 3 for strongly agree. It is important that a choice for unsure or indifferent not be included because this gives employees an option to be indecisive about how they feel about a certain issue. The more definitive staff members are regarding their employment, the more accurately the survey will reflect the status of employee engagement in the organization. Before administering the survey to the entire staff, it is important to deliver it to a test group first to collect feedback about the survey and to determine if changes are necessary. The survey can then be distributed to all employees after making any needed revisions.

There exists multiple kinds of surveys based on the frequency surveys are administered. One of the most common surveys is an annual survey. This kind of survey is made up of a number questions that “measure a multitude of workplace dimensions… which allows a company to fulfill an apparent organizational need… and measure employee perceptions.” At the other end of the spectrum, there exists a kind of survey method which allows managers and administrators to gather information about their employees’ experiences in real time called a pulse survey. This
kind of survey is a short questionnaire and “assessment designed to quickly elicit feedback from employees to address [specific] work-related topics and employee needs… which provides valuable data to companies that want the ability to respond quickly to change or increase employee feedback as company initiatives evolve.” The Tampa-Hillsborough County Public Library currently surveys its staff on an annual basis in order to track changing employee attitudes towards a broad spectrum of issues and initiatives without causing survey fatigue among its employees. In the future, the library system intends to conduct its survey biannually in order to increase employee feedback about organizational changes.

When this study was conducted at the Tampa-Hillsborough County Public Library, 298 out of 350 employees responded to the survey. The average point total was found for every survey submission, and then, the average point total for all submissions was calculated for each question. By doing so, the library system was able to discover how important individual issues were to each employee surveyed in addition to the overall status of employee engagement. An average point total of 0 to 24 would have revealed a highly disengaged employee, and an average point total of 25 to 49 would have revealed a moderately disengaged employee. Likewise, an average point total of 50 to 74 would have revealed a moderately engaged employee, and an average point total of 75 to 100 would have revealed a highly engaged employee. The same method was applied for individual survey questions. Because the desired response for all survey questions was strongly agree (3 points), the lower the average score for each survey question, the higher the issue reflected in the question was prioritized on a list of concerns to address. In addition, the survey conducted at the Tampa-Hillsborough County Public Library included a free response textbox for employees to voice concerns that the survey may not have addressed, and
then, these responses were analyzed to determine whether or not there were any patterns revealing additional areas for improvement. Finally, the number of highly engaged, moderately engaged, moderately disengaged, and highly disengaged employees were tallied, and the total for each category was depicted in a pie chart to represent the state of employee engagement for the library system.

In addition, a series of interviews conducted in the Tampa-Hillsborough County Public Library’s branches accompanied the data acquired from the survey. A sampling of 70 out of 350 employees were interviewed to determine if there was consistency between the results of the survey and the feedback received from employees. This analysis showed that the results of the survey were indeed consistent with the feedback received during these interviews. Conducting interviews also had the added benefit of offering employees an alternative if they did not participate in the survey. Having survey results and reports from the interviews gave administration both qualitative and quantitative data about the status of employee engagement.

The next step is to begin preparing and implementing changes based on the results of the survey and/or interviews. Issues that an organization may find that it needs to address may include, but are not limited to: staff not understanding how their role contributes to organizational success, staff feeling as though they are underprepared for their job duties, staff feeling alienated from administration, staff feeling that upper management is somehow out of touch, staff feeling as though they have little to no impact on change in the organization, staff feeling uncertain about their future as stakeholders and internal customers, staff feeling at odds with their supervisors,
and staff feeling unrecognized for their efforts. Discovering such issues, as a manager, may feel surprising and even overwhelming, but many strategies exist to address these issues and boost overall employee engagement.

**Internal Marketing**

One of the most significant and influential strategies managers can use to drive employee engagement is internal marketing. Much research was done to determine exactly what internal marketing is; however, it seems that most definitions and descriptions of internal marketing concern themselves with the desired outcome, or are too ambiguous to be of any real help in understanding how internal marketing works and can be applied. Perhaps this is because internal marketing and employee engagement are so intertwined that sometimes elements from employee engagement as a business philosophy spill over into definitions for internal marketing as a business strategy. Despite this, three definitions were found that do provide useful information. Ballantyne and Payne describe internal marketing as “any form of marketing within an organization which focuses staff attention on the internal activities that need to be changed in order to enhance external marketplace performance.” Hogg, Carter, and Dunne define internal marketing as “activities that improve internal communications and customer-consciousness among employees, and the link between these activities and external marketplace performance.” Finally, Varey and Lewis describe internal marketing as “a goal-oriented social process, and a conceptual system for continually creating rapid strategic organizational change in response to the macro-environment (society) and the microenvironment (the community which constitutes the organization).”
For the sake of simplicity and for the purposes of this article, though, the author of this article would like to offer the following definition for internal marketing: internal marketing is the method by which management conducts organizational communications concerning institutional matters in such a way that it puts a focus on the mutual benefits to employees in regards to their professional activities and the organization in regards to its mission and strategic plan. Internal marketing can be done through written and interpersonal communications. Executing internal marketing using both methods ensures that a full cycle is developed in the creation of a robust internal marketing plan.

At the Tampa-Hillsborough County Public Library, internal marketing is primarily used in promoting training, initiatives, programs, and staff events in the Division of Public Services which oversees branch activities. The first step in the internal marketing cycle for a training event is the creation of a training announcement as an e-mail notification. The announcement is divided into three parts. The first part explains what needs are going unaddressed and why the training is necessary. The second part is a description of the training event and explains how these needs will be addressed. The third part explains how addressing these needs will impact the success of the organization. Branch managers and supervisors then reinforce the message in staff meetings by discussing how the training will impact activities in their specific branches.

While not all training events that staff attend are produced by the Tampa-Hillsborough County Public Library, those that do feature proprietary training content continue to promote how the information learned from the training session will impact organizational success. For example, the library system is in the process of producing a number of original training videos using its
own staff members as the cast and crew. Topics for these videos include training for customer service, facilities management, in-charge responsibilities, and utilizing the integrated library system (i.e. Polaris and Polaris Leap). Each video includes footage of the library system’s branches, incorporates imagery that remains consistent with the look of the library system’s theme and branding, and promotes how individual success contributes to organizational success at the end of each video. As each video is completed, they are sent to management for review and approval. Once approved, the videos are uploaded to Niche Academy, an online learning environment designed for libraries, along with accompanying materials such as policies, sections from the employee manual, and other training documents where staff members can freely access them when needed.

The cycle comes to a close when the employees who attended the training events meet one-on-one with their supervisors to discuss their job performance and how the training benefited both the employees as well as the branches. The cycle begins again with the next training announcement. By doing this repeatedly, employees feel better prepared to fulfill their daily responsibilities and understand how their roles contribute to the success of the organization which improves their confidence while dealing with customers. This leads to an improved work environment for staff, and better customer service for library users.
Another employee engagement strategy that is very effective is the creation of staff events. Staff training days, staff appreciation days, staff-wide meetings with the managers and/or director, and other such events that focus on staff engagement and development are excellent opportunities for addressing corporate social responsibility and upper management visibility. Of course, as mentioned before, these events also provide an opportunity to continue the internal marketing cycle. Upper management visibility is a reflection of how often the management team is seen by branch staff, or better yet, how often they interact with branch staff. It is important that managers engage their staff members in a casual setting in addition to a formal work setting in order to establish a relationship built on trust and understanding.

Corporate social responsibility, simply put, is a business indicator that monitors an organization’s impact on its community and environment which also includes the treatment of its employees. While corporate social responsibility pertains more to private businesses, two aspects reflecting positive corporate social responsibility can be borrowed from the private sector for the benefit of libraries. One is the existence of a board of directors that regulates the decisions of its CEO, and the other is affording opportunities for employees to impact organizational change. Many libraries already have something similar to a board of directors in place called a library board ensuring that the library director does not have the power to make unilateral change to the library system. Providing opportunities for employees to impact organizational change, though, is another matter.
The Tampa-Hillsborough County Public Library addresses this aspect of corporate social responsibility as well as the impact of upper management visibility through the creation and organization of a variety of staff events. Library In-Service Training Days are facilitated by managers and offer opportunities for employees to deliver feedback about the current state of the library, and it allows employees to voice concerns and make suggestions for future changes. In addition, opportunities are taken to introduce employees to the possibility of new, upcoming changes, and then, gauge how receptive they are to these new changes. Likewise, Staff Day, a day-long event focused on staff development and engagement, also allows for opportunities for employees to engage with managers and the director. Finally, the Tampa-Hillsborough County Public Library is also in the process of hosting Director Town Hall Meetings at which the library director will meet any employees able to attend to discuss the current state of the library system, address employee concerns, present upcoming changes, and receive feedback about past and future changes to better the library system for both customers and employees in an open forum.

**Exit Interviews**

Another way the Tampa-Hillsborough County Public Library collects feedback from employees and provides an opportunity to impact organizational change is through the implementation of exit interviews. Once a letter of resignation is received from an employee, it is forwarded to the librarian who helps oversee the development and implementation of the library system’s employee engagement initiatives. This person was chosen for the following reasons: he does not directly supervise any of the other employees ensuring that all exiting employees may speak
candidly; he has slowly but surely gained the trust of the other employees, which includes managers and administrators, through his work in employee engagement; and he has direct access to second-line and third-line managers which ensures that feedback will be reported to upper management and action will be taken when necessary. The librarian then contacts the employee in question and sets up a one-on-one meeting at a location of the exiting employee’s choice to ensure comfort and privacy. The exiting employee is made aware that the exit interview is voluntary, information is collected to help improve the work environment and employee relations, and that what is said during the exit interview will remain confidential. Every four months, a summary report of all exit interviews conducted during that time is created and submitted to management for review. These reports include the following: a list of names and dates of resignation for employees who accepted and declined to be interviewed, a general statement that denotes the commonalities among all answers given for each question, and a summary of reasonable, actionable changes that can be made to address areas of concern revealed during the interviews.

**Onboarding and Orientation**

Another important employee engagement strategy is the creation and implementation of a robust onboarding process. Onboarding is a long term process of integrating and immersing new employees into the organization, and providing them with the tools, resources, and knowledge to be successful and productive. This is different from an orientation which is typically a single-day, standalone event which is facilitated entirely by Human Resources, and delivers to new
employees an overview of job duties, benefits, and policies. Many onboarding models include a day-long orientation followed by a series of trainings, benchmarks, and meetings with supervisors and managers throughout an employee’s first year to ensure that employee’s success and integration into the organization. A successful onboarding model features a strategic focus on goals, requires interdepartmental collaboration, and addresses an employee’s needs for success. All of which yields a highly engaged employee.¹⁶

As with all things, change is difficult, and people are especially reluctant to change when they are set in their ways. As such, it is easy to boost engagement among employees when they are first hired. On the other hand, it is much more difficult to boost engagement among employees once they are decidedly disengaged. This is what makes onboarding so important. The Tampa-Hillsborough County Public Library will be taking it one step further by beginning employee engagement not during the onboarding of new employees, but during the recruitment of new candidates. Each candidate, when invited to an interview, will receive an information pamphlet in advance that explains how the open position fits in the library system’s organizational structure, the salary range and benefits for the position, information about the history of the library system and list of recent awards, and information about the library system’s mission and strategic plan. Not only will this engage new potential employees long before they reach their start date, but it also clearly defines the expectations for the position. Doing this improves job readiness and connects the open position to the strategic plan which promotes how individual success contributes to organizational success.
Currently, when new employees begin their first day of work at the Tampa-Hillsborough County Public Library, they are required to attend a day-long orientation facilitated by Hillsborough County’s Human Resources Department. At this orientation, County employees engage with one another, meet department administrators, and learn about policies and job benefits. Because this event takes place at the Hillsborough County Center building in downtown Tampa, it isn’t until new employees’ second day of work that they step foot in their home branch and meet their supervisors and co-workers. Their supervisors then take them through a long list items that need to be covered before new employees can begin carrying out their normal, day-to-day responsibilities. This often includes, but is not limited to: an overview of the organizational structure of the library branch and library system, an overview of the library system’s intranet (i.e. LibNet), an overview of policies and procedures with a focus on what is most relevant to each employee’s position and responsibilities, a planning meeting with the direct supervisor to discuss projects and scope of work, and registering for training seminars which include both training specific to the library and training mandated by Hillsborough County.

In the near future, the Tampa-Hillsborough County Public Library will implement a day-long orientation of its own in addition to the orientation facilitated by the Hillsborough County Human Resources Department. The library system’s orientation event will be similar to the County’s orientation event. It will cover many of the elements that employees ordinarily go over with their supervisors like policies, procedures, training, and the library system’s mission and strategic plan, and it will serve as an opportunity for new employees to engage with one another as well as meet the management team. All of which facilitates internal marketing and upper management visibility.
In addition, the library system will institute a year-long onboarding process which will be broken down into six phases. The first phase, “Day 0,” which occurs between the employee’s date of hire and the employee’s first day of work, will include a welcome letter from the leadership and management teams, a memo discussing first-day logistics, paperwork required to be completed and submitted prior to the start date, and steps taken by staff to prepare the new employee’s office space. The second phase, “Day 1,” consists of the two full-day orientations facilitated by the Hillsborough County Human Resources Department and the library system as described above. The third phase, “Week 1,” ensures that by the end of the first week, new employees will have received ample support from their supervisors, defined parameters for their scope of work and projects, and that new employees have been successfully registered for all library specific and Hillsborough County mandated trainings.

The fourth phase, “Month 1,” ensures that by the end of the first month, new employees have established and acclimated to their regular routine, are comfortable with their scope of work and assigned projects, and gives their supervisors an opportunity to assess and deliver constructive feedback on new employees’ work habits and daily activities. The fifth phase, “Month 6,” ensures that by the middle of new employees’ first year, new employees have been provided with additional opportunities for training and professional development, supervisors may deliver formal evaluations of new employees’ work and progress towards completing projects, and at this point, new employees will be asked to take a new hire survey to collect information on how well new employees are being integrated into the work environment. The sixth and final phase, “Year 1,” ensures that by the end of the first year, new employees are recognized for their contributions, formally documented performance evaluations are conducted by their supervisors,
and that career development plans are put in place so that new employees can meet their professional goals while furthering the library system’s mission and strategic plan.

**Career Development**

The final component to the Tampa-Hillsborough County Public Library’s employee engagement program is a comprehensive career development plan. A career development plan “documents the goals, required skills, competency development, and objectives a staff member will need to accomplish in order to support continuous improvement [in one’s career],”17 and it “provides employees with an ongoing mechanism to enhance their skills and knowledge that can lead to mastery of their current jobs, promotions, and transfers to new or different positions.”18 At this juncture, the library system is preparing to create a career advancement policy, a career framework, talent profiles for all library employees, and a formal mentorship program in order to facilitate career development activities.

The career advancement policy, as the first component, would define and expand upon what managers are looking for in candidates who have applied for transfers and promotions, and it explains in detail the promotion and transfer processes and procedures. It will act as a guideline facilitating career advancement in the library system, and it allows managers to cultivate home grown talent. This will also provide additional structure to the recruitment and hiring processes, and it will lead to improved psychological security for employees.
The second component, a career framework, would act as a navigational tool mapping how employees can move vertically (i.e. promotions) and laterally (i.e. transfers) within the organization. A career framework features comprehensive descriptions of each job position within the organization which would include defined job families and job levels, and a list of skills required for each position. Most employees view career advancement only through the prospect of being promoted, but ignore the possible advantages of transferring to other branches, divisions, or departments within a library system to facilitate job growth. A career framework promotes the benefits of both vertical and lateral trajectories in career development, and shows employees how to poise themselves for promotions and transfers. A career framework will also help managers place employees in more suitable roles where their personal and professional interests better align with the library system’s mission and strategic plan.\(^\text{19}\)

Creating talent profiles for all employees and hosting them on the library’s intranet, also known as LibNet, will be the third component. A talent profile would showcase an employee’s knowledge, skills, experiences, and projects. It would, in essence, act as an abridged version of an employee’s work portfolio. In addition, it would feature a headshot of an employee as well as an employee’s job title and home location. Talent profiles would inform managers about who would be best suited to work on various projects, and they would serve as records of experience gained while working for the library system. As such, they would depict growth and readiness for new challenges and advancement.\(^\text{20}\) Furthermore, because these profiles can be viewed by any employee, they would serve as excellent employee engagement tools in the sense that employees can learn more about one another. This is especially advantageous in a large library system where it’s difficult for everyone to meet each other.
The final component to the career development plan is the mentorship program. Employees who exhibit initiative and motivation, and demonstrate a clear desire to grow and advance in the library system would be selected to be mentored by managers in an effort to help them advance their careers. To assist in the selection process, managers would consider the career framework and each candidate’s talent profile among other factors. After the completion of the mentorship program, participants would be able to list the mentorship program in their talent profiles. They would then be able to prepare for advancement, whether it be through a transfer or a promotion, by consulting the career framework and career advancement policy. This shows employees that their supervisors are invested in their success, and it is another way to increase upper management visibility.

**Gearing Up for Success**

One last thing to consider when designing an employee engagement program is how to name the program and each of its components and initiatives. At the Tampa-Hillsborough County Public Library, those involved with the employee engagement program’s creation, development, and implementation felt that branding was an important part to the image management and administration wanted to promote to current and new employees. A recurring motif in the library system’s external marketing and promotional materials is the imagery of gears, cogs, machinery, and engineering. As such, it felt appropriate to call the employee engagement program *Gearing Up for Success*. The developers of *Gearing Up for Success* then named each initiative using the
“Gearing Up…” tagline. In any marketing campaign, whether it be internal or external, it’s important to remain consistent with the organization’s branding.

**Conclusion**

This article has explored many facets of employee engagement, and how they have been implemented in a large library system. Employee engagement is the most impactful humanistic approach to helping employees meet their needs for esteem and self-actualization. By doing so, employees are entirely motivated to contribute to the organization’s mission and strategic plan because they see themselves as stakeholders, benefactors, and partners in the organization’s success. Employee engagement has many benefits which include, but are not limited to: boosting efficiency and effectiveness, improving customer service, improving employee relations and employee retention, creating a healthier work environment, and it can bring stability to organizations that have undergone extreme change. 21 With detailed descriptions of the different components of employee engagement and how to implement them, perhaps this article can persuade its readers towards incorporating employee engagement in the design and execution of personnel management strategies.
Notes


