

# **CREATING A CULTURE OF EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT**

by

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## **Abstract**

Building a culture of employee engagement is essential for all organizations that wish to be innovative and successful while decreasing employee burnout. This project examines the need for an employee engagement plan and then lays out the core components of creating a plan in any sector.

The literature outlines the way employee engagement started as a business trend and then matured to become a vital aspect of any workplace. Giving employees a sense of belonging and community in their workplace, connection to co-workers and superiors, as well as, allowing them to have autonomy and growth opportunities creates higher productivity, better financial outcomes and a happier, healthier workplace. Internal communications and recognition are also vital components of creating a culture of employee engagement. Through effective and regular communication, employees feel they are part of the organization. Recognition has been shown to positively effect not only the person being recognized, but also the other members of the team, and is a simple and effective way to increase employee morale.

Through a Deming Cycle process of continuous improvement, I have created an Employee Engagement Plan that can be adapted for implementation in any sector. This plan was created by building specific initiatives and activities that focus on creating and building community, including charitable initiatives, enhancing employee communications, promoting recognition, empowering employee leaders, and encouraging professional and personal growth of employees. As part of the purpose of this project, components of this plan have been launched in the Faculty of Health Sciences at Queen's University including a survey to measure engagement levels, appreciation initiatives, an internal communications strategy, and a number of events to bring people from all levels of the organization and various units together. It is

through these initiatives that we are creating a culture of employee engagement leading employees to feel connected and supported to the organization they work for.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

*“Returning from work feeling inspired, safe, fulfilled and grateful is a natural human right to which we are all entitled and not a modern luxury that only a few lucky ones are able to find.”*

— Simon Sinek

I have had a variety of jobs in my career, each having the common theme of career development and growth through employee engagement and education. My undergraduate degree is a Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in Communications, with a specialization in organizational communications. Throughout my career, I have worked on developing educational programs in both public and private organizations including The Hospital for Sick Children, Human Resources Professional Association, the Rotman School of Management at the University of Toronto, Rogers Communications, and finally, Queen’s University.

I feel a sense of accomplishment and success in my career by helping others grow, and I find meaning and enjoyment in their workplace. This comes both from working with leaders and employees to create a culture of empowerment, appreciation, and growth. As duly noted in a tweet by Sinek (2010), “the responsibility of leadership is not to come up with all the great ideas, but to create an environment in which great ideas can happen.” In my work, I strive to create an environment where people want to come to work, not only for their pay cheques, but also for the community of their co-workers, the impact they are able to have on the work they do, and the career growth they can clearly see in their future.

In each position I held, I have worked on building internal career progression plans as well as external college and association accredited career development initiatives. My passions

have always been centred around lifelong learning, bringing people together, and a strong desire to make those around me feel part the company or organization they work for. In addition to a wonderful career opportunity, one of the main reasons I moved back to Kingston and accepted a position at Queen's University was to ensure that my children could grow up in a community with grandparents and cousins close by. In the same way that I want to create a community around my family, I want to create a community in the place where I work. Hence, this project reflects my goals and aspirations for employee engagement in the workplace.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this project was to design an employee engagement strategy for the Faculty of Health Sciences (FHS) at Queen's University. The goal of the initiative is to promote a culture of engaged employees in the Faculty of Health Sciences through a deliberate and faculty-wide effort. The initiatives will focus on five key areas of employee engagement:

- 1) building community across the faculty
- 2) enhancing employee communications
- 3) promoting recognition
- 4) empowering employee leaders
- 5) encouraging professional and personal growth of employees

These areas of focus will then be linked to specific actionable programs and projects.

The following questions will guide this project:

1. What are the necessary key pieces of an employee engagement initiative in a post-secondary educational institution?
2. How can aspects of employee engagement strategies designed for a business environment be applied to an academic institution?

3. What is the potential impact of a faculty-wide intentional employee engagement strategy on the workplace culture?

### **Context**

The Employee Engagement Working Group in the Faculty of Health Sciences at Queen's University was created as a spin-off of the Marketing and Communications Working Group. At the working group meetings, it was realized that development of a shared marketing and communications strategy for external audiences regarding the Faculty of Health Sciences should also include communications strategy aimed at the internal employees.

Initially, the Employee Engagement Working Group was formed with the mandate to create an employee communications plan in order to build a sense of connection between the three schools that are part of the Faculty of Health Sciences – the School of Nursing, the School of Rehabilitation Therapy and the School of Medicine, as well as between staff and leadership. However, it soon became clear that it should encompass other aspects of employee engagement to support this goal. The Faculty of Health Sciences has over 700 staff in a variety of positions from research to administrative to leadership that work in multiple locations, both on campus and within hospitals and clinics. Although many teams conduct appreciation and team-building activities, there is no cross-faculty strategy to build a culture of connection and engagement. I will use this project as the basis for an action plan to achieve this goal.

### **Rationale**

The rationale for this project is based on three main premises. First, having an engaged workforce is a strategic and intelligent business decision. Second, building connections across the Faculty will lead to collaboration and innovation that is not possible if units work as stand-alone entities. Third, adding happiness and satisfaction to an employee's life is a valuable

pursuit, especially in a Faculty of Health Sciences, as a faculty that focuses on health and wellness for society. Although my official position is based in continuing education for health professionals, I initiated this project to bring community and connections across the faculty. I wanted to start a cross-faculty working group to collect ideas and solve problems that face the Faculty.

Much research has been done on the importance of having an engaged workforce. “Workers who are highly engaged can increase a company's innovation, productivity, and bottom-line performance all while reducing costs related to hiring and retaining talent” (Cohn, 2016, para. 1). Employees are the first customers and brand ambassadors of any organization and yet are often seen as liabilities rather than assets (Cohn, 2016). In my experience, Employee Engagement strategies are sometimes seen as fun extras, but not part of the core business or research strategy. When I presented the initiative to the Faculty leadership, it was very exciting to see it being well received. Although this type of Faculty-wide committee had not existed in the past, the leadership was very supportive of the plan for the initiative and even more importantly offered to find ways to help within their very demanding schedules.

Employee engagement and connections with teammates and colleagues outside of their own units help to break down historical silos across the Faculty. Due to organizational context, funding models, and perceived discrepancies of values of one unit over another, units have historically worked and grown in silos, sometimes unaware of what other groups are doing and other times competing with each other and only occasionally working on projects together. This is usually unintentional and is a result of how each school and unit has grown. Although each school and unit has its own portfolio and areas of responsibilities, there are many potential places for collaboration and sharing of resources. Through an employee engagement program, people

across the Faculty will learn more about what each unit does, build relationships with each other, and find places to collaborate on new and existing projects. An example of such collaboration would be building a managers' group that would connect all managers across the faculty for training and connection. This would give people with similar positions a place to learn from and with each other, share problems and advice, and not only make them better managers of people, but also establish a network across the faculty so that collaboration and innovative ideas could emerge.

As many Gallup surveys have concluded, work fulfillment has a huge impact on people's personal feeling of overall happiness and fulfillment (Harter, Schmidt, & Keyes, 2003). Up to a quarter of overall life satisfaction can be attributed to work fulfillment (Harter, Schmidt, & Keyes, 2003). People need to feel a sense of community in their lives and as Cartwright and Holmes (2006) stated, "with the decline of neighborhoods, churches, civic groups and extended families in developed societies, the workplace is now being seen as a primary source of community and a place to feel connected" (p. 200). When the potential to impact employees' life satisfaction is combined with the positive impact on an organization's innovation and productivity, the need for an employee engagement plan becomes a clear choice and an exciting opportunity.

### **Definitions of Key Terms**

The following are the working definitions of some key terms in this project:

*Community* – a group of people connected through shared values and goals

*Employee Engagement* – "the extent to which employees commit to something or someone in their organization" (Corporate Leadership Council, 2004, p. 3). Commitment, is broken down into two components rational commitment and emotional commitment.

*Rational Commitment* – for the purposes of this project is defined as: “The extent to which employees believe that managers, teams, or organizations are in their self-interest (financial, developmental, or professional)” (Corporate Leadership Council, 2004, p. 3).

*Emotional Commitment* – for the purposes of this project is defined as: “The extent to which employees value, enjoy and believe in their jobs, managers, teams, or organizations” (Corporate Leadership Council, 2004, p. 3).

*Internal Communications* – as defined in this project are communications that occur with an employee target audience.

*Workplace Culture* – as defined in this project are the norms and expected behaviours in an organization.

### **Overview of the Project**

This project on employee engagement in a postsecondary institution contains five chapters. The first chapter outlines purpose, context, rationale, and key terms. The second chapter explores the literature on drivers and barriers to employee engagement. The third chapter details the approach to employee engagement program design and development, including potential benefits and constraints. The fourth chapter outlines the implementation plan for the Faculty of Health Sciences. Chapter Five summarizes the intended and actual outcomes of the program implementation, as well as my personal reflections on the project’s journey.

## **Chapter 2: Project Context and Literature Review**

*“Research indicates that workers have three prime needs: interesting work, recognition for doing a good job, and being let in on things that are going on in the company.” – Zig Ziglar*

In this Chapter, I examine the literature on the topic of employee engagement as well as build on the context and history for this project and its practical application and rationale. Research has overwhelmingly found that “people rate purpose, fulfillment, autonomy, satisfaction, close working relationships and learning as more important than money” (Cartwright & Holmes, 2006, p. 200). This review of the literature examines the aspects included in the notion of employee engagement and its various components.

### **Employee Engagement: A Brief History**

Employee engagement has been studied for many years, and its value has been demonstrated across various industries. Welch (2011) summarized the research on employee engagement as occurring in four waves. She defines employee engagement as a “dynamic, changeable psychological state which links employees to their organisations, manifest in organisation member role performances expressed physically, cognitively and emotionally, and influenced by organisation-level internal communication” (p. 328). The first wave started in the 1990s and was dedicated to peoples’ individual needs for personal engagement. The term employee engagement was coined by Gallup during this period and was emphasised as an indicator of company success (Welch, 2011).

The second wave took place from 2000-2005 and can be summarized as an increase in research from academics and a demonstrated link between engaged workforces and the success

of organizations (Welch, 2011). It emphasized that it is an organization's responsibility and in its best interest to build employee engagement. The term was defined as "a positive employee attitude towards the organisation and its values, involving awareness of business context, and work to improve job and organisational effectiveness" (Welch, 2011, p. 333).

The third wave of thought on employee engagement occurred in the period from 2006 to 2010. It is characterised by an increase in interest and publications from academics (Welch, 2011). Employee engagement officially moved from being a buzz word to being a scientific concept. It was seen as the opposite of, and antidote to, employee burnout. Schaufeli and Bakker (2010) wrote, "work engagement is the psychological state that accompanies the behavioural investment of personal energy" (p. 22).

Welch (2011) described the fourth, and current, wave of employee engagement as focusing on leadership and internal communication. Research and academic writing now looks at engagement from a personal level as well as an organizational level and examines the link between employee engagement, and organizational culture. The field has evolved from a simple indicator of organizational success to one that examines the workplace as having its own culture.

### **Focus Areas**

Building and expanding upon the extant literature, this chapter will follow the areas of engagement that I have chosen to focus on for implementation in my organization:

Focus Areas:

1. Building community
  - 1.1. Creating employee connections across the faculty
  - 1.2. Creating employee connections to leadership
  - 1.3. Focusing on inclusivity and diversity

2. Employee communication
3. Recognition
4. Support for employee leaders (managers / directors)
5. Professional and personal growth of employees

Through this examination, I will demonstrate the need for and value of employee engagement.

By looking at employee engagement through the five focus areas identified, I have been able to build a practical plan with a foundation in research and demonstrated results.

### **Building Community**

The first area that I will focus on is building community. As with a neighbourhood, religious or interest-based communities, a sense of belonging is important in all areas of life including the workplace. Baumeister (1991, p. 202) identified four driving needs for all people: a) a sense of purpose; b) a set of values to provide a sense of ‘goodness’ and positivity to life and as a means of justification for action; c) a sense of efficacy; and d) a sense of self-worth. For people to feel a true connection and engagement to the organization they work for, these needs must be met. “When people are financially invested, they want a return. When people are emotionally invested, they want to contribute” (Sinek, 2012). By bringing the component of emotional investment into the workspace through nurturing a strong workplace community, true innovation and productivity can exist.

### **Importance of a Community at Work**

Building community at work leads to an engaged workforce by identifying shared values and common goals. A community is what makes us dedicated and motivated. It brings joy and value to our lives. Employees build friendships, respect and a sense of belonging: “Motivation comes from working on things we care about. It also comes from working with people we care

about” (Sandberg, 2013, p. 88). Employees who feel a sense of community at work are more committed to and passionate about their organization (Sinek, 2009). In a Faculty of Health Sciences, the common goal of improving health through education and research is a goal that is easy to feel committed and connected to. However, this does not mean it does not require effort to build the connections across the Faculty between new and long-standing employees alike. Challenges exist when building communities across various locations and job types. Various schools and individuals can feel connected to their direct peers but not to the organization as a whole. Although connecting with the people you work with directly is important, a sense of community that reaches the whole organization benefits the organization and individual employees alike. “As individuals are spending more and more time at work, they are also turning to work as a focal area in providing meaning, stability and a sense of community and identity in their lives” (Cartwright & Holmes, 2006, p. 202).

### **Connection to Senior Leadership**

To build a cohesive work community, all employees must feel connected to senior leadership. As noted, “leaders exhibiting idealized influence inspire followers to espouse and focus on the leader’s vision and goals” (Shuck & Herd, 2012, p. 169). The further away an employee is geographically and hierarchically from senior leadership, the more difficult it is for them to feel connected to leadership. However, it is vitally important for employees at all levels and locations to “feel connected to be at their best” (Corporate Leadership Council, 2004, p. 34). Senior leadership must represent the organization and build confidence and commitment. They must lead by example and value openness and community, “contemporary leadership requires a focus on restoring confidence, hope and optimism at work, which also enables individuals to display resilience and to bounce back after disastrous events and actively helps individuals in

their search for meaning and connection” (Cartwright & Holmes 2006, p. 205). Senior leaders must see and value how each employee is connected to the success of the project they are working on and the organization as a whole.

As the Corporate Executive Board has found, senior executive team members foster success when they care deeply about employees, are open to new ideas, make employee development a priority, teach about organizational vision and strategy, and are strong in leading and managing people (Corporate Leadership Council, 2004, p. 26). Through building connection to leadership, a work community can be created and nurtured.

### **Inclusivity and Diversity**

Building a culture that is truly innovative and engaged must value inclusivity and diversity. Organizations should strive for diversity of thought, diversity of background, diversity of race and gender and to create an environment that is open to and inclusive of different perspectives. Just like in neighbourhood communities, diverse communities are more creative, innovative and sustainable.

It has been found that, “diversity is a recognizable source of creativity and innovation that can provide a basis for competitive advantage” (Bassett-Jones, 2005, p. 169). Although the easiest choice is often to work with people who have the same thought patterns and background as oneself, valuing diversity will “improve productivity, spur innovation, enhance robustness, produce collective knowledge, and, perhaps most important in light of these other effects, sustain further diversity” (Page, 2011, p. 3). Organizations must help all employees learn the skills to “acknowledge others and to take the perspective of another without necessarily surrendering one’s own perspective” (Deane, 2013, p. 142). Finally, for organizations to reap the rewards of employee diversity, diversity should be valued and represented at all levels of the organization.

“While organizations have often stressed representation, in terms of sheer numbers in the organization, they have often overlooked the issues of upward mobility and glass ceilings” (Kossek, & Zonia, 1993, p. 77). For all employees to feel engaged, valued and committed to an organization, a culture of inclusivity and diversity must be created.

### **Employee Communication**

Employee communication touches all areas of employee engagement from connection to leadership and each other, to understanding where they sit in the organization and how their work directly ties to the larger vision for the organization. Although employee communication is known to have a positive and vital impact on employee engagement, it is often overlooked or done poorly (Ruck & Welch, 2012). The focus of employee communication design and content, needs to be the employee, although, it is often a second thought. Ruck and Welch (2012) found in their review of twelve studies, including academic and consultancy studies, there was a “predominance of the assessment of processes, channels, and volume of communication, not employee needs for content” (p. 297). In other words, the process and communications tools were of higher priority than meeting the actual needs of the employees.

Employee needs must be considered in order for the communication to have a positive impact. As Schaufeli and Bakker (2010) indicated, employee communication should foster connection to senior leadership, it should create a sense of belonging and awareness within the organization and it should help employees to have an understanding of the goals of the organization. Welch (2011) further explained the need for communication by stating:

Communication is one form of employee psychological need which organisations have to meet to maintain and develop employee engagement. Aspects of internal corporate communication are positioned as mediating antecedent engagement variables on the one

hand (promoting commitment and a sense of belonging), and as communication engagement outcomes on the other hand (awareness and understanding). (p. 340)

In their study of internal communication executives, Mishra, Bynton and Mishra (2014) found that the most important purpose of internal communication was to build trust within the organization. They also emphasised that face-to-face communication is an important part of meeting this goal.

In Ruck, Welch and Menara's 2017 literature review and study, they gathered data from 2066 people in five United Kingdom organizations to look at the power and prevalence of the employee voice in internal communications and its effect on employee engagement. Although the authors emphasised the great need for more research, including those of qualitative methods, they found "upward employee voice and senior manager receptiveness to voice as valuable areas for internal communication scholarship" (Ruck et al., 2017, p. 912). They further recommend that senior leadership be highly skilled in communication and that increasing direct two-way communication, and building employee voice goals into the development of strategic plans will result in higher emotional employee engagement, where emotional engagement was measured by an employee truly caring about the organization they work for.

Karanges, Johnston, Beatson, and Lings (2015) also pointed to the value of internal communications to employee engagement. They developed a survey to measure the validity of this claim and distributed it to 2000 people in organizations with more than 50 employees. Responses were filtered for usability and 200 were deemed valuable to their study. The study made three conclusions, each supporting the need for employee communications and the value it brings. First they found value in both supervisor and organizational communication and the importance of supporting these. Second, they found that internal communications led to more

personal relationship between co-worker, which in turn connects work to meaning and personal worth. Finally, they found that internal communications created a way to “spread internal values and goals” (Karanges et al, 2015, p. 130).

Thus, when employee communication focuses on the employee needs, specifically a sense of community and personal value in an organization, and bringing awareness of larger organizational goals and trust, employees will feel more connected and engaged.

### **Recognition**

Recognition is one of the simplest and most cost-effective ways of increasing employee engagement. Mary Kay Ash, a prominent American business owner famously stated “Everyone wants to be appreciated, so if you appreciate someone, don't keep it a secret” (as cited in Gentry, Cullen, Deal, & Stawiski, 2013, p. 6). In many organizations, however, it is a missed opportunity, and many employees feel unappreciated and unrecognized. Although the pay rate and benefits offered by an organization is important, recognition and the feeling of being valued is often rated higher than traditional pay and benefits. As Luthans (2000) noted, “research has supported the notion that non-financial rewards can be a potent leadership tool which can have a significant, positive relationship with organizational performance” (p. 34).

Recognition can come from senior leadership, direct supervisors, co-workers or direct reports. It should follow Nelson’s (1995) four guidelines of good recognition, which should be: specific, timely, personal and valuable to the recipient (p. 32).

First, recognition should be given for a specific positive action or behaviour. Employees should know why they are being recognized and it should be genuine and specific. In this way, the recognition will reinforce the positive behaviour.

Secondly, recognition should be given immediately after the desired behaviour. This will reinforce the desired behaviour and be acknowledged as a true appreciation. When a large amount of time passes between the action and the recognition, it can leave the employee feeling confused and unsure about what the acknowledgement is for (Nelson, 1995).

Thirdly, recognition should be done personally. The person giving the recognition should take time to personally thank the direct-report or co-worker they wish to recognize. This adds credibility to the recognition by putting in personal time to acknowledge another's work. "Time taken by a peer to recognize a colleague has an equal or greater effect in that it is both unexpected and not required of the colleague" (Nelson, 1995, p. 32).

Finally, recognition should be valuable to the individual. Some employees would prefer to be thanked privately, while other would prefer a more public appreciation. The person giving the praise should take the time to learn how the recipient would prefer to be praised and follow their desires if possible. This will avoid making the person receiving praise feel uncomfortable which would defeat the desired effect of the appreciation.

Bradler, Dur, Neckermann, and Non (2016) found that "in a controlled workplace context, ...unannounced provision of public recognition to employees causes a statistically and economically significant increase in performance" (p. 3095). They also noted that performance increased even more for those around the recipient who hear the recognition of their co-worker. Finally, they also found that performance increases for the whole group, when the group is recognized as a team.

In addition to work productivity, employee appreciation and engagement has also been linked to a reduction in employee burnout. In a study, which consisted of both qualitative interviews and a large scale questionnaire, Bakker, Erasmus van Emmerik and Euwema's (2006)

found that “burnout at the team level is primarily related to the individual-level burnout dimensions, whereas team-level engagement is primarily related to the individual-level engagement dimensions” (p. 474). In other words, not only is individual burnout contagious, but engagement is also contagious and can be spread through a culture of appreciation and gratitude. In their interviews, authors noted that engaged employees were able to pass their engagement on to other employees through “positive feedback in terms of appreciation, support, and admiration” (p. 469).

Employees who receive recognition are more engaged, happier in their position and perform better as individuals and have a secondary positive impact on the performance of the whole team (Bradler, Dur, Neckermann, & Non, 2016). Recognition can be a simple act, a complex program or both. It can be done by a supervisor or a co-worker. Either way it is valuable both for engagement and for performance.

### **Support for Employee Leadership**

Employee leaders, be they managers, team leaders or directors, are in a vital role to effect employee engagement. They have the most direct influence over how employees feel about their day to day work, and if they feel empowered and appreciated for the work that they do. It is worth mentioning that “high engagement behavior emerges when leaders influence environmental factors conducive for engagement to develop” (Shuck & Herd, 2012, p. 175). In order for leaders to have the greatest impact on the culture of the organization, they must demonstrate a number of leadership characteristics as well as the ability and desire to link each employee’s position to the greater mission of the company.

According to Quinn (2005), the key attributes of an effective leader are:

1. increased honesty about what meaningful results leaders want to create

2. the display of behaviors which are congruent with their inner core values this increasing integrity, authenticity and confidence
3. acting in a way which puts the needs of the organization as a whole above their own, resulting in greater trust and an enriched sense of community
4. more adaptive and creative in response to wider external influences and less inclined towards followership relative to other organizational leadership. (p. 205)

This is not a simple list to bring to fruition with each employee leader. However, as Cartwright and Holmes (2006) emphasised, authentic leadership is vital for employees to feel connected and supported by their manager and organization. This type of leadership “emphasizes the importance of developing transparent, trusting and genuine relationships” (p. 205).

People leaders must not only foster genuine supportive relationships with their employees, but must also demonstrate to their team how each position is connected to the larger mission of the organization. Personal connection to the overarching mission of the organization will help employees feel connected and engaged in the work they do. Harter, Schmidt, and Hayes highlight that “supervisors can help people see how their work connects to a broader purpose, reminding them about and helping them to see the larger context of their work” (p. 276).

Breevaart et al.’s (2014) leadership study examined the personal reflections of 61 navel cadets in diary format for 34 days. They asked followers to immediately reflect on their leadership and how it, in turn, affected their work. The researchers made two very practical and powerful findings. First, they were able to demonstrate the immense impact leaders have on employees’ engagement levels. This finding “highlights the importance of daily leadership for followers’ daily work engagement” (p.138). They were also able to demonstrate the value that feedback from employees to leaders has on the employee’s ability to grow and lead effectively.

Bedarkar and Pandita's (2014) systematic review of the literature on employee engagement, among other findings, revealed further support for the large effect leadership has on employee engagement levels. Authors reinforced the finding that leaders who are able to bring employees emotionally closer to the goals and values of the organization will make the largest impact. They also found that leaders who focus on relationship related behaviours create "teams of employee with higher levels of engagement" (p. 111).

Due to the fact that employee leaders have such a large impact on the engagement levels of the whole organization, development programs and supports should be put in place to help these individuals excel in their leadership roles. The expectation that employee leaders will increase and foster employee engagement should be stated, supported and developed during the hiring and orientation experience and throughout their careers. This can be done by focusing on employee leader's own engagement with the organization, and creating peer support and development opportunities specifically designed for this group.

### **Professional and Personal Growth**

Creating opportunities for professional and personal growth is an important part of employee engagement. As Cartwright and Holmes (2006) indicated, employees are becoming "increasingly disenchanted and disillusioned with work and fatigued by the constant demand to change and to be flexible in response to organizational needs" (p. 206). They went on to state that it is the employer's responsibility to correct this, specifically that "employers now need to actively restore the balance, recognize the meaning and emotional aspects of work and move towards creating a more energized, fulfilled and engaged workforce" (p. 206). Grawitch, Gottschalk, and Munz (2006), in their synthesis of research since 1990 on the link between employee well-being and organizational improvements, concluded that personal satisfaction in

an employee's career leads to organizational commitment, and that "organizational commitment has been associated with lower turnover and higher performance" (p. 135). Employees need to feel empowered in their own career development and in the mastery of their work. They also need to feel supported and personally part of the larger organization through a strong orientation and mentorship program. These aspects are detailed in subsections below including the importance of personal empowerment and mastery, orientation and mentorship programs.

### **Empowerment and Mastery**

In order for employees to feel engaged, they must feel empowered in their own career development and mastery of the tasks that they perform. In a survey of 574 participants, Fairlie (2011) found that meaningful work created a strong link to employee satisfaction, engagement and a lack of turnover. In this study, he defined meaningful work as "having a purpose or goals, living according to one's values and goals, autonomy, control, challenge, achievement, competence, mastery, commitment, engagement, generativity or service to others, self-realization, growth, and fulfillment" (p. 509). Among other recommendations, he concluded that organizations should "ensure that opportunities for meaningful work are clearly communicated and understood within organizations" (p. 518). Employees must feel that they have (at least some degree of) control over their career path, confidence that they have the abilities to do their job effectively and the support of the organization to allow them to continue to grow.

Grawitch et al. (2006) found that "training and internal career opportunities to be significant predictors of organizational effectiveness and job satisfaction" (p. 137). Employees must see opportunities for career growth within an organization as well as see opportunities to grow and learn the skills needed for new opportunities. When employees feel mastery in their

career and empowered to make decisions for their own development and that of their position, they will be engaged.

## **Orientation**

Orientation is an important part of career development and can set the culture of the organization from the first day of work. Orientation should not only be done when a new employee joins an organization, but also when an employee joins a new team or has a new position. In their study, Ragsdale and Mueller (2005) found that orientation was vital in influencing how employee felt about the organization: “unlike training, which emphasizes the technical component of job performance, orientation often stresses the why. Orientation is designed to influence employees’ attitudes about the work they will be doing and their role in the organization” (p. 268). In a study of 17 University Library onboarding programs, Graybill and colleagues (2013) concluded that most organizations, should improve their orientation programs and that this would have a large impact on ongoing employee engagement, “employee engagement is partially influenced by the new employee’s handling of the job during the first 30-90 days of employment” (p. 202). The orientation program should help to support and engage the employee in those first days to set the stage for ongoing engagement.

## **Mentorship**

Mentorship is an essential way to grow talent within an organization. In a study on measuring employee engagement conducted by Kumar and Pansari (2015), it was found that mentorship programs have a large impact on personal identification with the organization, which in turn increases employee commitment and engagement (p. 71). Ehrlich, Hansford, and Tennent’s (2004) synthesised studies on the impact of formal mentoring programs in different contexts such as medical, education, and business organizations. They found that positive

outcomes included collaboration and networking, personal reflection, encouragement and friendship (p. 523). Although not every study considered had positive results, overwhelmingly organizational mentorship programs had a very positive effect on both the mentor and the mentee. Underhill's (2006) review of mentoring literature also found a link between mentorship relationships and employee engagement. Although she calls for more studies with comparison groups of employees who were not mentored, she found "protégés have higher job satisfaction and self-esteem, greater organizational commitment and perception of promotion opportunities, lower work stress, and lower work-family conflict than those not mentored" (p. 298).

### **Summary**

Employee engagement has gained prominence and focus over the years, and it is clear that organizations who can achieve a high state of employee engagement are at an advantage over their competitors. As evident from this literature review, employee engagement depends on the processes of building community, ensuring good employee communication, providing recognition, supporting employee leadership development, and enhancing the professional and personal growth of employees.

Building a productive, supportive and innovative organizational community will help employees to feel engaged, valued and committed. By emphasising the need for community at work and having senior leadership embody it and by building a community of diversity and inclusion, employees will be more loyal and committed to their organizations and feel more self-fulfilled as a result.

Good employee communication is also a key ingredient to an engaged workforce. It not only helps to build a community around shared goals and values, but also creates valuable two-way communication opportunities. Good employee communication creates meaningful

relationships and connections across the organization which is the foundation of an engaged workforce.

Employees who are recognized feel more valued and perform better as individuals, and teams that see recognition, even if not directed at them personally, also perform better. Recognition has a huge impact and can be very simple to implement. It is an essential part of all effective employee engagement plans.

Research has shown the huge impact that employee leaders have on employee engagement levels. It is therefore imperative that this group have support and training to be able to deliver the essential skills to create a culture of employee engagement. This group must themselves feel connected and supported in order to pass that on to employees.

If employers empower employees, encourage mastery of their work, and create a strong orientation and mentorship program, their employees will feel empowered through their professional and personal growth opportunities and become engaged and committed to the organization of which they are a part of.

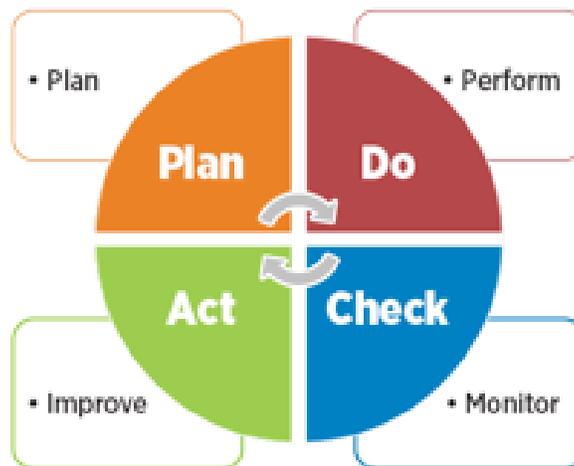
Stemming from this review, and as concluded by Little and Little (2006), it is clear that the field would greatly benefit from additional research on defining and measuring employee engagement. Bedarkar and Pandita (2014) outlined that “organizations and employees are both dependent on each other to fulfil their goals and objectives. Therefore, employee engagement should not be a one-time exercise but it should be integrated in the culture of the company” (p. 113). Through focusing on building community, employee communications, recognition, support for employee leaders and professional and personal growth for all employees, a positive impact can be made on the work environment. Macey and Schneider (2008) reminded us that is not easy to create an engaged workplace, “there seems to be no silver bullet. The beauty of this

conclusion is that companies that get these conditions right will have accomplished something that competitors will find very difficult to imitate” (p. 26). In the following chapters, I will identify components of a successful employee engagement plan as well as the continuous improvement model.

## Chapter 3: Methodology

*“For companies to win in the marketplace they must first win in the workplace”* (Conant, & Norgaard, 2011, p. 15).

In this chapter, I will discuss how the Queen’s Faculty of Health Sciences Employee Engagement program was created and executed. The goal was to build an engaged and connected faculty. A modified Deming Cycle, illustrated in Figure 1, was used to create a process of continuous improvement as well as flexibility to change as we grew and learned. The Deming Cycle, also known as the PDSA Cycle, is a continuous quality improvement model consisting out of a logical sequence of four repetitive steps for continuous improvement and learning: Plan, Do, Check (Study) and Act (Murray, 2008).



*Figure 3.* Plan, do, check, act cycle. Retrieved from: <http://asq.org/learn-about-quality/project-planning-tools/overview/pdca-cycle.html>

Following this cycle, we first created a plan, implemented it, and then observed and monitored each initiative to see if they were achieving the desired results. Finally, we made improvements and changes to each initiative and to the overall plan in order for it to have the overall desired outcome of building an engaged and connected faculty.

### **Plan**

At the time of writing, the Plan stage has been worked on and developed in detail. In the Plan stage of development, I followed four steps: first engaging key stakeholders, then, doing a collection and review of programs and initiatives offered in other faculties and a committee brainstorm session, followed by the establishment of focus areas for the committee and finally, prioritizing initiatives.

Engaging key stakeholders is an important part of any program development. For this project, I identified two main groups of key stakeholders: the senior leadership team and the employees. The leadership team's endorsement and commitment to the program was vital. I was asking for not only their support to develop the program, but also their time in participating in various initiatives, their staff's time, and, of course, financial support. This buy-in was successful as a result of continuous email communication, and presentations at leadership meetings, and consistently linking the program to the Faculty's Strategic Plan and soliciting feedback and new ideas.

The second key stakeholder group is the employees. The Queen's Faculty of Health Sciences consists of three schools - the School of Nursing, the School of Rehabilitation Therapy, and the School of Medicine. It was vital that the committee was set up in a way to have representation from all three schools. To encourage staff participation, the committee has a guaranteed spot for each school, but is also open to anyone who would like to be on it, or even

just work on one specific project. At the time of writing, the committee has remained representative yet small, including one representative from each school. These terms may need to be revisited if the committee become too large.

The second task in the Plan stage was to collect ideas through a collection and review of what other faculties and groups were doing , as well as a brainstorming session. The review of what other groups at Queen's were doing was completed by contacting key personnel at each of the other faculties across Queen's to find out what types of initiatives other faculties were carrying out. In addition, each of the committee members reported on what their school was doing to support employee engagement. It was discovered, that although individual teams and units had created isolated small-scale employee engagement initiatives, there was a lack of consistent faculty wide programing. Not only did this collection and review demonstrate the need for the committee and the program, but it also identified many ideas for potential implementation. These ideas were combined with those collected in a brainstorming session with the committee to create a master list of potential programs. As with the cycle of continuous improvement, this list is never a finished product or finalized plan, it is always being added to and edited.

The third stage in our planning process was to create focus areas for the committee. The focus areas were identified and outlined by reviewing each school's strategic plan and by considering and reviewing the literature outlined in Chapter 2 about the key components to create an engaged workforce. Some of the final focus areas were an adaptation of school's strategic plan, such as support for employee growth and leadership as well as a focus on diversity and inclusivity. Others, such as building communities, were implied but not specifically addressed. We also addressed the key recommendations in the literature with adding recognition

and added highlighting the benefits of working at FHS as a way to bring people together and highlight areas they could feel proud and grateful for.

These focus areas were:

1. Building community
  - 1.1. Create employee connections across the Faculty
  - 1.2. Create employee connections to leadership
  - 1.3. Focus on inclusivity and diversity
2. Employee communications
  - 2.1. Highlight benefits of working in FHS
3. Recognition
4. Support for employee leaders (managers / directors)
5. Professional and personal growth opportunities for employees

Each initiative was mapped back to one or more of these focus areas. Outlining focus areas helps to ground the Employee Engagement Plan and provides a framework with which to evaluate each new idea and initiative that is brought forward.

The final step in the Plan stage is to prioritize initiatives. Prioritization was done through consensus of the committee and was based on a number of factors. These factors are: likely impact; resources needed; and timeframe needed to complete the initiative. Time of year and how initiatives complement and support each other was also taken into consideration. The impact of an initiative was evaluated based on its impact on the five focus areas. Resources needed included leadership time, committee time, and financial support from the Faculty. As this is an entirely volunteer committee, the time it would take to carry out each initiative was also a large

consideration. Finally, the amount of time to run an initiative and how that would fit within the academic schedule and employees' work schedules were also taken into consideration.

Through the planning phase of the initiative, the committee was able to brainstorm and identify many great initiatives for the Employee Engagement Plan. These initiatives were then mapped to the focus areas as well as evaluated based on resources. It was concluded that five large initiatives could be planned and implemented in the first year of the committee, as outlined in chapter 4.

### **Do**

In the Do stage of the PDSA cycle, the committee focused on implementation of the identified first year priority areas. This stage “involves implementing the plan, monitoring for problems and unexpected observations, and analyzing data” (Murray, 2018, p. 1). This is an exciting part of the cycle, where the brainstorming and planning can be put into action and results can begin to be seen. With a strong foundation created by the Plan stage, the employee engagement committee is continuing to implement new and innovative programs to engage employees.

At the time of writing, the first year of the program is three-quarters complete. Five initiatives have been implemented so far: a fall staff appreciation, a holiday fundraiser, an engagement level survey, a celebration and capacity building event, and a health and wellness program. Each of these initiatives is being monitored and reflected on by the staff, the leadership and the employee engagement committee.

With a focus on continuous improvement, this stage of the process is done with purpose and reflection on the larger cycle. Although it can be exciting to start implementing programs, a purposeful and strategic foundation is imperative.

## **Study**

In the Study phase of the PDSA model all aspects of the program are evaluated for their effectiveness. With the current Employee Engagement Plan this will be done through 1) post-program evaluations for programs such as the large staff appreciation and capacity building day, 2) participation in optional events and initiatives, 3) collecting unsolicited anecdotes from staff and 4) continued support from leadership. In this stage, “the outcomes of the change are monitored for success or areas that need improvement, data analysis is completed, and findings are summarized” (Murray, 2018, p. 2). Other points of data that could be used in the Study phase are attrition rates, monitoring of the number of projects schools choose to work together on and the number of applications to posted positions to the Faculty. An interesting and unexpected point of data that has already occurred early on in the program development is that other faculties within Queen’s University have heard about the initiatives implemented in the Faculty of Health Sciences and have reached out to gain more information with the intention of implementing similar programs based on the FHS program.

The Study phase of the PDSA cycle is an imperative step to confirm that the program is meeting a need of the target audience and going in the right direction. The data collected here leads to the fourth step in the cycle, the act stage.

## **Act**

In the Act stage of the PDSA cycle, the committee will review the first year of the program and evaluate the individual programs to see if they made a positive impact and are worth repeating in the second year. The committee will also review the program as a whole to evaluate if it is having the desired impact and if the direction needs to be adjusted. As noted, “in the final step, act, learning generated by the process is used to determine if modifications are

needed.” (Murray, 2018, p. 2). The Act stage is where improvements to the program will be made and will set up the committee to begin the cycle again with the planning stage.

### **Summary**

This chapter has outlined how the PSDA model has been and will be used in the future to create, implement, monitor, evaluate and continuously improve the culture of engagement in the Faculty of Health Sciences at Queen’s University. Once the Act stage of the cycle has been completed, the Plan stage begins again. This cycle is followed not only for the development of the Employee Engagement strategy, but also for each individual program. The Deming or PSDA cycle of quality improvement is designed to continuously raise the bar for the quality of the program. If the Engagement strategy is successful in creating a more engaged workforce, that then becomes the standard and the next PSDA cycle becomes focused on further improvements.

## Chapter 4: Implementation Plan

*“Working hard for something we don't care about is called stress: Working hard for something we love is called passion.” — Simon Sinek*

In this chapter, I will describe the current FHS Employee Engagement Plan including initiatives that have been started as well as those planned for the future. As mentioned in Chapter Three, in the planning phase of the program development, the committee brainstormed and came up with a variety of possible initiatives. Each initiative was then mapped to one or more of the focus areas to help us to achieve our stated goal: *To promote a culture of engaged employees in the Faculty of Health Sciences through deliberate actions and initiatives.*

The following topics served as the focus areas:

1. Building community
  - 1.1. Create employee connections across the faculty
  - 1.2. Create employee connections to leadership
  - 1.3. Focus on inclusivity and diversity
2. Employee communications
  - 2.1. Highlight benefits of working in FHS
3. Recognition
4. Support for employee leaders (managers / directors)
5. Professional and personal growth of employees

At the time of writing, five initiatives have been launched in the Faculty of Health Sciences, a faculty-wide appreciation initiative, a holiday charity collection, an employee

engagement survey, an appreciation and capacity building one-day event, and a health and wellness initiative. There are also a number of other initiatives listed in Figure 2, that are being considered for initiation in the near future.

Name	Description	Resources Required	1. Building community	1.1 Connection to colleagues	1.2 Connection to leadership	1.3 focus on inclusivity and diversity	2 Employee communication	2.1 Benefits of working at FHS	3 Recognition	4. Support for employee leaders	5. Professional and personal growth
Employee Improvement Portal	A portal where employees can submit ways to improve FHS (workflows, new project ideas, etc.) A committee reviews and selects a few to implement, the employee is included in new project	Depending on the project > employee resources > finances	✓	✓	✓				✓		
Engagement Survey	To collect feedback and benchmark the engagement levels					✓	✓				
Town Halls	Regular meetings with all staff to discuss the direction of the FHS	> Decanal time > employee time > low financial cost	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓		
Recognition	Design a way to recognize an employee or team for a job well done in a public forum. Includes co-worker recognition, manager to direct report, or team to team.	> development of a platform to display public recognition > Dean could highlight some at the town hall > \$\$ could be attached	✓	✓	✓				✓	✓	
Social Committee	Plan fun events for the FHS, perhaps around the holidays or at less busy times	> employee time > decanal time > financing events	✓	✓		✓			✓		
Mentorship Program	Create a formal program for interested employees to be matched with a mentor	> employee time > development and research time to develop the program	✓		✓	✓			✓	✓	✓
Onboarding process for FHS	Create a process for all new FHS employees	> development time > ongoing updating > Welcome event	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Manager home page	Place for managers to check for FHS news and updates before team meetings	> development time > time to keep it updated	✓		✓		✓	✓		✓	
Manager group	1) to provided all FHS managers with knowledge of best practices and a network of support 2) increase inter-school collaboration and efficiencies 3) to support new manager in their transition to their role 4) to provide consistent management best practices (performance reviews, one-on-one meetings, recognition )	> staff time	✓	✓			✓			✓	✓
Breakfast with Sr. Leadership or employee focus groups	A selected group of employees is invited for breakfast / a coffee break with a member of the decanal team, with a goals of 1) Building connections to sr. leadership and 2) inciting discussion on what is working well and what could be improved in the FHS from the front line	> decanal team time > employee time > low financial contribution	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓		
Skip level meetings	Ideally held quarterly or bi-annually, a front line employee meets one on one with their manager's direct supervisor to discuss their own career and the direction of the office	> Employee time > Leadership time	✓		✓		✓		✓	✓	
Career mapping	Create a task group to map out potential career paths within FHS and the requirements at each level. Link to courses to help reach desired position.	> Development time > Maintenance time							✓		✓
Volunteer Day	Employees are paid for a regular day of work but spend it at a volunteer location such as building a Habitat for Humanity house.	> Employee time away from the office > Leadership time	✓	✓	✓				✓		
Give back: Holiday fundraiser	a charity is chosen to support as a faculty for the holidays	>Employee time	✓	✓					✓		
Large staff appreciation or strategic planning event	A day of networking, learning and celebration	> Financial > Employee time > Leadership time		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Thank you baskets	a food basket / snack drop to all offices	> Financial > Leadership time			✓				✓		
Fitbit challenge	Focus on wellness, personal and team-based fitness	> Financial > Employee Time	✓	✓		✓					✓
Wellness for Staff with help from students	Yoga, drop-in clinics etc.	> Employee Time		✓		✓					✓

Figure 4. Employee Engagement Program mapping. This figure shows how specific initiatives are linked to core priority areas

## **Employee Appreciation Baskets and Thank You Postcards from the Leadership Team**

As described in Chapter 2, appreciation and recognition are vital components to the creation of an engaged workforce. During the fall months, academic institutions are particularly busy welcoming new students and facilitating a variety of educational programs. As an inaugural initiative, a faculty-wide thank you card was created. The key message was “We know you are working hard and we appreciate you.” As a thank you for the hard work during this busy time, gift baskets were given out to each unit across the Faculty with a thank you postcard from the decanal team. Each basket was delivered by either a member of the decanal team, a team manager or director, or a member of the employee engagement team. This personal delivery allowed for an additional thank you to all staff.

This initiative was originally going to be an individual thank you card and cookie package, but due to the specific nature of the Faculty of Health Sciences with many teams comprised of university and hospital staff, it was decided that a team basket would be more inclusive and help to build the team environment. This also mitigated the potential risk of missing new employees while also being much simpler logistically.

This initiative not only recognized employees (focus area 3) but also created a stronger connection to the faculty leadership (focus area 1.2). The baskets were relatively low in cost and low in time involvement for staff. The need for leadership involvement was vital and the teams who received their baskets personally delivered by the decanal team were the most positively impacted. This initiative was deemed a success and will likely be repeated in future years.

## **Holiday Fundraiser**

Social responsibility and a design to improve the lives of others is at the core of every health sciences faculty. It is clearly embedded into the culture at Queen’s University Faculty of

Health Sciences. As highlighted in the literature, it is vital for social responsibility to be embedded into an organization's culture in order for it to have a positive effect on employee engagement (Slack, Corlett, & Morris, 2013).

It is common during the holidays for organizations to support a variety of charitable missions. Although some units in the Faculty regularly organize group fundraising within their teams, this initiative was organized to be faculty-wide creating a visible impact. The charitable organizations to be supported were chosen by the Employee Engagement Committee. As this committee has representation from each school of the Faculty, it was decided that this was the right team to make the decision. For the first year of this initiative, the committee decided that a local charity should be chosen. During our planning phase, many local charities were considered. Eventually the committee decided that a collection of personal care items for local Kingston shelters would be the initiative for the first year. This was an optional unit-based faculty initiative, in which teams could choose to join or not. Many teams that had never previously participated in a workplace charitable initiative joined and worked together to collect toiletries, hats and mittens for three local shelters.

This initiative helped employees in the faculty to feel like part of something larger than their team, making a real impact on people living in Kingston. This supported focus area 1 to build a strong community, including 1.1 - to create employee connections across the Faculty as well as 2.1 - to highlight benefits of working in FHS. In the monitoring phase of this initiative, we found that the units that participated were very engaged and happy to do so; however, in the evaluation phase we identified some key changes that could be made to improve the program. First, we could begin planning earlier, so units have time to join and communicate the plan with their team members. Second, we could consider charities that some individual groups have

supported consistently for years, and build a plan to incorporate these groups. Finally, we could improve the logistics of collecting all of the gifts from various locations. Although the charities supported may change each year, this initiative is expected to grow in number of teams that participate each year.

### **Employee Engagement Survey**

In order to benchmark where the Faculty of Health Sciences was in terms of employee engagement levels, an employee engagement survey was created. It is important to “recognize and consider how organizations should respond to the changing needs of their employees” (Cartwright & Holmes, 2006, p. 200). The creation of an employee engagement survey is a first step to responding to the needs of employees.

The Survey was created by the Employee Engagement Committee, in consultation with various department across Queen’s University, as well as a review of recommended questions areas in the literature. The survey contained four types of questions. The first set of questions were designed to measure the current level of engagement with their specific team. Participants were asked to assign a ranking based on their level of agreement between 1, strongly agree and 5, strongly disagree, to statements such as “At work, my opinion counts,” “I feel encouraged to pursue professional development opportunities,” and “my supervisor seems to genuinely care about employees.”

The second set of statements concerned personal connection and satisfaction with the FHS. These statements included, “I would recommend the Faculty of Health Sciences as a great place to work to a friend,” “I can see a clear link between my role and the Faculty’s strategic direction” and “I regularly collaborate with units outside of my own.”

The third set of questions were designed to collect information about the types of initiatives specific units were implementing and to gather ideas for future programs from the whole staff population. This gave employees a way to help create and share ideas about what would engage them personally.

The final set of questions dealt with demographics. This allowed us to separate the data by gender, years of service, age group, and unit, among other items. The ability to see the data from different demographic groups allowed us to identify if there were any large differences depending on various criteria.

This survey was distributed to all employees. Ideally, this same survey or a similar one will be given every two to three years to measure change, to assess the value of programs that have been launched and to gather more ideas. This initiative supports the priority of employee communication, giving employees a place and encouragement to give feedback and suggest solutions to problems. Having an employee engagement survey allows leadership to see the value and progression of employee engagement initiatives and is a way to collect new and innovative ideas from a broad population.

### **Employee Engagement Day**

With the help of the small but efficient employee engagement committee, an employee engagement day was created to celebrate faculty-wide and unit successes, to bring people together to meet each other and to dedicate time to employee growth and development. The day was comprised of two keynote speakers. One discussed innovation through diversity and the second spoke about how to bring humour into difficult situations, and large team building activities. There were also a number of capacity building and personal development workshops which attendees could select depending on their interests. The Dean made a presentation,

recognising key accomplishments in the Faculty and outlining plans for the future. Finally, there was a significant amount of time dedicated to networking and bonding among teams.

This initiative covered all of the key focus areas of our engagement plan from building community through networking opportunities, to professional and personal growth through in-depth workshops. Although this program was logistically complicated and required financial investment, the value to employee attendees, even those who attended for only part of the day, far exceeded the cost. We received feedback from both attendees and leadership that this was a valuable experience and that new connections had been formed. This event was a huge success with recognition across the University. At the time of writing, two other faculties have consulted on how they can replicate the event.

### **Internal Communications Plan**

Internal communications are important in all organizations to build collaboration, a sense of connectedness and engagement. “Communication is a complex phenomenon that appears to be linked to almost all other aspects of organizational functioning” (Rodwell, Kienzle, & Shadur, 1998, p. 289). Although it is an easy item to undervalue and do only when time permits, it is actually a vital tool in all organizations.

In the Faculty of Health Sciences, we implemented two key areas of internal communications. The first was to schedule regular face-to-face town hall meetings with the Dean or the decanal team. These will happen at the annual employee engagement event, and at one other time during the year. The focus of these touchpoints will be to celebrate the successes of specific units with the whole FHS staff as well as to describe the direction in which the Faculty is heading. These town halls will bring a sense of connectedness across the faculty and inclusion in

a shared vision. This initiative not only supports priority 2 of employee communications, but also builds community through connection to leadership (focus area 1.2).

The second internal communications initiative included the creation of a bi-weekly newsletter and a commitment to a greater focus on internal communications on our faculty website and social media. The bi-weekly newsletter focuses on upcoming employee events, employee wins, employee profiles, lesser known employee benefits and connections to leadership including the Dean's blog. The faculty website and the social media accounts also highlight those areas, and include photos from the events and teams working together. This bi-weekly newsletter supports focus area 2 and 2.1, communications and highlighting the benefits of working at FHS, as well as builds community by connecting people across the faculty through common stories.

The next line of communication that we will be focusing on initiating is the direct line between the FHS Dean's office and people managers, with direct communication around the Faculty's direction and strategic plan updates, empowering people managers to be informed and prepared when running their own staff meetings and one-on ones with employees.

### **Health and Wellness Challenges**

Due to the fact that we are a faculty of health sciences, improving societal health is at the centre of everything we do. The shared mission of the three schools is "Ask questions, seek answers, advance care, inspire change" (Faculty of Health Sciences, 2017, p. 18).

Employee health is vitally important for the well-being of an organization as well its bottom line. It is known that "organizations that foster employee health and well-being are also profitable and competitive in the marketplace" (Grawitch et al., 2016, p. 135). The Employee Engagement Committee wanted to find a fun way to help FHS become healthier. We chose a

fitness tracker. Employees had the option of purchasing their own device at a reduced cost, or joining the program using their smart phone as their fitness tracker. Once employees had joined the program we were able to create competitions, both individual and team-based. We had intended this initiative to meet focus area 1 and 1.1 – to create employee connections across the faculty and focus area 5 – professional and personal growth, however, it also contributed to focus area 1.2 to create connection to leadership, with specific competitions designed for each individual employee to compete against a member of the leadership team. The competitions were based on low impact activities that most employees could participate in, such as number of steps taken each day, and total minutes of activity. During one of the competitions, we saw an increase in employee steps from an average of 8000 steps per day to 12,800 steps per day, a 60% increase. Using a pre-created program and linking it to wearable technology and smart phones, was a fun way to engage with staff and teammates. Other health initiatives focusing on mental health and building resilience have been incorporated into the larger plan including workshops at the Employee Engagement Day.

### **People Leaders' Group**

Employees need to be committed and inspired by the decanal and executive leadership team, but they also need to feel connected and supported by their direct supervisor. As we know, “two factors which are positively linked with engagement, namely, management and mentoring behaviours such as imparting confidence to followers, power sharing, communication, providing role clarification and articulation of vision which could be characterized as inspirational, visionary, decisive and team-oriented” (Pandita & Bedarkar, 2014, p. 111). Direct supervisors can have the largest effect on whether or not an employee feels engaged and connected to their work. These managers and directors, in turn, need to be supported by the faculty. The people

leaders group will be created with three areas of emphasis; First, to offer training to people managers, both in their position to help their employees grow their careers and also to look at their own leadership skills and desired career paths. Secondly, as a tool for faculty communications. As many employees appreciate hearing faculty updates and news from their direct supervisor rather than reading it in an email or on a website, this group will act as a flow through for communication from the faculty to all staff. Thirdly, and most importantly, this group will be created to act as a community of peers who share advice, support and best practices. This community will not only help existing people leaders, but will be a great place for new managers. This initiative, which will launch shortly, addresses focus area 1.1- creating employee connections across the faculty, bringing leaders from across the faculty together to support and learn from each other. It will also support focus area 1.3 - focusing on inclusivity and diversity, 4 - support for employee leaders as well as 5 - professional and personal growth of employees.

### **Employee Improvement Portal**

The Employee Improvement Program is a way for employees to drive large and small changes across the Faculty. It is using the full workforce, instead of a select group, to notice areas that could be improved and suggest improvements. As Pandita and Bedarkar (2006) explained, most organizations understand the value of engaged employees, however, “what is less commonly recognized is that employees want to be engaged in work where they feel that they are contributing in a positive way” (p. 107).

This program will operate as an online suggestion box with all employees having the ability to fill out a form to suggest any change or improvement for the faculty. All suggestions will be reviewed and evaluated on the effort it would take to implement and the likely impact to

the Faculty. The employee who makes the suggestion will be invited to be on the project team should the suggestion be chosen. This program has not been launched as of the date of writing. Of Course, there will be some costs associated with the program implementation and execution. Resources will need to be committed in order to create a place on the website to host a suggestion portal. Efforts will need to be made to communicate and encourage participation. Finally, resources will need to be allocated not only to review suggestions, but also to implement those that are deemed worthy of implementation. The Employee Improvement portal contributes to focus area 1.2, and 1.3, building community through adding a way for employees to connect directly to leadership and opening the opportunity to suggest improvements to all employees. This will also give an employee a place to be recognized for their ideas (focus area 3) and give them an opportunity to grow professionally by becoming part of a team to implement the idea they suggested (focus area 5).

### **Summary**

Our purpose includes a need to create a culture through *deliberate actions and initiatives* so as to increase the chances that the culture of employee engagement will be one that covers all employees in the Faculty of Health Sciences and has sustainability regardless of leadership and employee change. The description of the above programs is a start to creating the culture of employee engagement that we desire. However, it is also important that this not be considered a final list. Through employee surveys, further readings, hallway discussions and ongoing meetings, new ideas will always be generated and will need to be evaluated and incorporated into the ongoing plan.

## Chapter 5: Implications for Practice and Reflections

*“Work is about a search for daily meaning as well as daily bread, for recognition as well as cash, for astonishment rather than torpor, in short for a sort of life rather than a Monday to Friday sort of dying” – S. Terkel (1972)*

In this chapter I will describe the organizational and social benefits of creating a culture of employee engagement, as well as the challenges of bringing an employee engagement program to life. I will also provide my personal reflections on the completion of my graduate work.

### **Benefits of Implementation**

Creating a work environment where employees feel appreciated, empowered and valued is important for both emotional and financial reasons. Creating a culture of engagement has proven time and time again to be a smart and valuable decision for an organization. Numerous studies have pointed to the real and tangible benefits of employee engagement: “workers who are highly engaged can increase a company's innovation, productivity, and bottom-line performance all while reducing costs related to hiring and retaining talent” (Cohn, 2016, para. 1).

An employee's moral and personal well-being is essential in order for them to be productive, collaborative and innovative. As stated earlier, engagement has been seen as the opposite of and remedy for employee burnout. The sense of personal ownership and control over projects and work has led to better engagement levels. In their meta-analysis, Crawford, LePine, and Rich (2010) examined the relationship between demands, resources, burnout and engagement. They found that “individual employee engagement is positively associated with

perceived resources and that individual burnout is positively associated with perceived demands” (p. 845). Interestingly, they also found that when the demand was seen as a challenge, for example a new project, rather than a hindrance, such as additional paperwork, engagement levels were increased. Engagement levels have also been linked to higher levels of innovation and creativity. Zhang and Bartol (2010) found that the personal feeling of empowerment was strongly linked to employee creativity and leaders who supported empowering their employees had teams who were not only were able to find creative solutions to problems, but were also intrinsically motivated.

Engagement levels have also been positively linked to bottom-line profits and financial success of organizations. Kruse (2012) declares that “employee engagement is the secret ingredient that actually leads to a higher stock price. The most engaged companies had five times higher total shareholder return over five years than the least engaged companies” (para. 5). In a large longitudinal database study, including 2178 business units in ten large organizations, Harter, Schmidt, Asplund, Killham and Agrawal (2010) noted that employees’ perception of their work had a direct and causal impact on the future outcomes of their organization: “the relationships observed in this meta-analysis provide evidence that employee work perceptions predict important organizational outcomes” (p. 386).

As organizations strive to excel in both financial results and innovation, employee engagement offers a tangible solution to both of these goals. Therefore, engaging employees must become a strategic imperative: “one that will become a key source of competitive advantage for organizations who develop a passionately committed employee base, not because they are paid to be committed, but because they choose to be committed” (Shuck, Rocco, & Albornoz, 2011, p. 320).

## **Challenges of Implementation**

Despite the research supporting the value of a highly engaged workforce, the two greatest challenges to implementation are: a) the current climate or culture of the organization, and b) achieving widespread buy-in.

As with any change management program, when implementing a program to change the culture of an organization, the human factor can be unpredictable and can help facilitate success or failure. Shuck et al. (2011) suggested that the unique characteristics of employees as well as the physical space and resources available greatly affect the psychological climate of an organization, and that this impacts the success or failure of employee engagement initiatives. They concluded that “a positive psychological climate emerged as important to fostering engagement at work, such workplaces are hard to find and even harder to foster” (p. 313).

Cartwright and Holmes (2016) agreed that many organizations operate in an environment that does not support engagement, and therefore an employee engagement initiative will not be successful if the larger culture of the organization is not open to the initiative. They stated, “contemporary workplaces provide ample cause for cynicism among its employees, especially as economic and extrinsic business rewards are often put ahead of employee well-being” (p. 201). Engagement activities and programs are often thought to be nice to have, but not essential; fun, but not business savvy.

Finally, in order of an employee engagement program to be successful, it must have senior leadership and participant support and be seen as a needed initiative. Knight, Patterson, and Dawson (2017) stated, “without the strong support of senior management and a perceived need for change by participants, change is unlikely to occur” (p. 795).

There is an interconnectedness of the likelihood of success of each specific initiative with each of the other initiatives and the current and desired future culture of an organization. It is for this reason, that I have created an employee engagement plan not as a series of small separately established programs, but instead with the goal of creating a culture of employee engagement.

### **Implementation Strategies**

A good strategy to overcoming the above challenges is to find a champion at the executive level to help bring ideas and momentum to the leadership. I am encouraged by the creation of the executive level position of Chief Cultural Officer (CCO) that is now an essential role at some progressive companies such as Google, GitLab, and MailChimp. The CCO is the “champion of all that is good in an organization. Whether it’s philanthropy efforts, a commitment to high ethical standards, community outreach and even sustainability programs, the CCO creates a workplace of which employees can be proud” (Fayad, 2014, para. 4). New and established companies choosing to hire a CCO demonstrates the high value that these organizations place on workplace culture. In addition to assuring executive level support, input and leadership from representatives of the target audience is needed. It is essential to have support and commitment from various units to be able to create and implement a plan that is valuable and impactful to the employees.

For organizations which are able to create engagement programs and find a person or team who are genuine and authentic in their leadership of the programs, rewards both in terms of emotional well-being of the workplace and financial well-being are inevitable.

### **Reflections on Graduate Work**

Having the opportunity to go back to school to complete a graduate degree was a personal dream of mine. I have a real passion for continuing education and have worked on

developing educational programs for professionals for many years. Completing graduate work while working full time and raising a young family, however, was definitely been challenging. Many nights were spent staying up much too late reading or writing only to have my children wake up just as I was ready to go to bed.

Creating efficiencies and overlap between my work, school, and home life was essential. I found the course work portion of my degree manageable and often a nice challenge with an achievable sense of accomplishment, especially while I was on maternity leave. I greatly enjoyed the opportunity to have three hours a week dedicated to connecting with classmates over readings and inspirational ideas, as well as, short deadlines to complete personal projects and weekly readings. I used the course work portion of my graduate degree to investigate many areas in my field of interest including continuing professional education, ethics in medical education, education through storytelling, leadership in educational institutions, workplace relationships, conflict management and employee engagement. This choice allowed me to personalise my education to what I was interested in, as well as to what was applicable to my career at the time. I made this choice on purpose with the goal of enjoying and getting the most out of the educational journey instead of focusing on the degree completion. Although I believe that this was the right choice for me and I feel that I have personally grown from each project I worked on and each paper I have written, when it was time to complete this final project, I needed to start from scratch as opposed to having some sections completed during my course work.

I found the switch from short deadlines and weekly classes, to long deadlines with little connection to other students a hard transition. I am personally motivated by the opportunity to connect with and share ideas with other people, so I found the large amount of time working alone on writing was difficult. I found that it was very helpful to break the project up into very

small achievable sections, sometimes breaking down each paragraph and setting my own due dates. I was also able to use this project to launch an active employee engagement plan in my workplace, the one that continues to evolve and receive remarkable positive feedback. Being able to see the results of the premise of this project enacted in my workplace has been very motivating and self-affirming. Through this project I was able to find the justification and proven value of an engagement program and the vital aspects that needed to be implemented.

I am deeply appreciative of the many people who have supported and encouraged me, both in my personal life and in my workplace. My colleagues and supervisors as well as the faculty members and students at Queen's University Faculty of Education have assisted me greatly. I have grown and developed both personally and professionally through this project and my graduate work. I will continue to pursue continuing education and employee engagement in the future. I look forward to investigating and incorporating work-life integration as an evolution of workplace balance and to reviewing and investigating new ideas and best practices from various organizational structures.

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