

## Employee Engagement and positive work

**K**ansas State University research has found support for the view that employees who are engaged in their work, including higher levels of vigor, dedication and absorption in daily activities, also have better moods and are more satisfied at home.

The research was presented by Clive Fullagar, professor of psychology, Satoris Culbertson, assistant professor of psychology, and Maura Mills, graduate student in psychology, Manhattan, at this year's Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology annual conference in New Orleans. Satoris Culbertson said:

"Our research indicated that individuals who were engaged in positive experiences at work and who shared those experiences with significant others perceived themselves as better able to deal with issues at home, became better companions and became more effective overall in the home environment."

The study followed 67 extension agents over two weeks to determine the relationship between daily work engagement and work-to-family facilitation. The participants completed two surveys each day - one at the end of the working day and the other before going to bed for the night. They also undertook a separate survey at the start of the two-week period and another at the end. According to Satoris Culbertson, stress at work and stress at home interact in both directions. The results suggest that engagement is significantly related to daily mood, and that mood also positively correlates with work-family facilitation. Both work engagement and work-to-family facilitation vary considerably from one day to the next.

"Just because an employee might not be invigorated or dedicated to his or her work on a Monday doesn't mean he or she won't be engaged on Tuesday or vice versa," said Culbertson. "Additionally, one's work can facilitate things at home to a different extent depending on the day and what has happened on that particular day."

Stressing that engagement refers to positive work involvement rather than more negative forms of job involvement like workaholicism and work addiction, which have different effects on home lives, Culbertson said: "Work addicts, or workaholics, have been shown to experience higher levels of work-family conflict. On the contrary, our study showed that higher levels of engagement were related to higher levels of work-family facilitation rather than conflict." She believes that organizations can build on these findings and intervene in the workplace arguing that it is important for organizations to help employees balance work and personal lives.

"Practically, our results indicate that engagement is controlled by situational factors that are manageable by the organization," Culbertson added. "Generating high levels of engagement among workers has a positive impact on the work-family interface."

The meaning of employee engagement William H. Macey and Benjamin Schneider of the Valtera consultancy firm wrote an article published in Industrial and Organizational Psychology in 2008 in which they discussed the meaning of 'employee engagement'. They noted its increasing popularity among HR consultants and the relatively recent interest in the notion among academics. However, they also considered that the notion, although compelling on the surface, was unclear in its meaning.

Macey and Schneider considered that employee engagement refers to positive feelings held by employees about their jobs and also the motivation and effort they put into work. Engagement leads to positive employee behaviors that lead to organizational success.

According to Macey and Schneider, engagement should not be confused with satisfaction or commitment. They identify two components of employee engagement: ■ feelings of engagement

(focus and enthusiasm), and ■ engagement behavior (proactivity and persistence).

So, they distinguish between engagement and satisfaction: ■ engagement connotes energy and not satiation

■ satisfaction connotes satiation and contentment but not energy

They argued that employees come to work ready to be engaged but organizations need to create the conditions that will release that energy

They believe that employees will feel and act engaged when managers create the right conditions that allow them to do so. The essential condition for feeling engaged, they contended, is fair treatment leading to a feeling of trust which, in turn, allows them to feel safe to be engaged.

According to Macey and Schneider:

■ Our framework places an emphasis on the management of human resources in ways that respect the energy people bring to the work place, and it puts the responsibility on management to create the conditions for employee engagement. Management is responsible for creating the conditions at work that will facilitate employee engagement."

### Employee engagement and manager behavior

A telephone survey conducted for Lynn Taylor Consulting has shown that - rather than helping to create the conditions for employee engagement - manager behavior is seriously worrying employees across the country. When bosses stay behind closed office doors, workers begin to fear for their jobs. No fewer than 76% of respondents to the survey said that the 'closed door scenario' triggers thoughts of being laid off.

According to Lynn Taylor, author of the forthcoming book, Tame Your Terrible Office Tyrant™ (TOT); How to Manage Childish Boss Behavior and Thrive in Your Job (John Wiley & Sons, July 2009):

"In today's economic environment, employees are searching for every clue to determine their job fate. Too often, not enough direct input is given to employees, and so non-verbal cues are heavily relied upon. Managers working behind closed doors may be shutting out more than noise - they may be shutting down productivity."

The U.S. telephone survey of 1,000 respondents, 18 years of age or older, was conducted by a national independent research firm. The study concluded that employees averaged 2.8 hours (168.8 minutes) a day worrying about personal job concerns, such as mass lay-offs or losing their own jobs. Respondents were deeply suspicious of boss behaviors such as keeping office doors closed. When asked how often they think a boss's closed door was a signal of lay offs, the respondents said:



"Changes in manager behavior, such as a closed door, more private conferences, or less direct communication all represent potential 'exit signs' to many employees," said Lynn Taylor, adding that while managers have to deal with more sensitive personnel issues today than in previous decades, they can counter employee concerns at a critical time with more proactive communication.

"Acknowledging the astounding impact a small gesture can have on corporate productivity in tense times is a good first step. Providing your team with reassurances whenever possible will mitigate unnecessary panic and help them stay focused," she said.

"Many employees may also avoid speaking up to their bosses for fear of being shown the door, when, in fact, their ideas might boost a company's bottom line at a time when that is sorely needed. Opening your door literally and figuratively might not only mean greater profitability. In some cases, it might also help keep the doors of your business open," Lynn Taylor concluded. -hrmguide.net

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