Fluency: Leading in the Midst of Change

Some of you may remember the 1985 hit song, "We are the World," produced by Quincy Jones and an inspiring cast of musicians who sang about working together, past our differences. Or perhaps you remember the tremendously successful United Colors of Benetton ad campaign back in the 1980s, celebrating young faces of every color, signaling the look and feel of a world without borders. Media images like these showed us the world and nation, as we wanted ourselves to be -- pictures and soundbites of many races cooperating, communicating, and sharing opportunity and fortune.

If only it were that simple. Almost 25 years later, we are still struggling to make that vision real -- in our business practices, in the running of our cities, and, now, in the context of great cultural, demographic, and economic changes brought on by globalization.

As 21st century leaders, you know that building, guiding, and sustaining truly diverse communities is tremendously difficult work. Over the last decade, city populations and workforces have changed faster than at any point in history -- job relocation, mobile commerce and ease of travel have changed our cities' demographics quickly and often. Immigrant and new communities continue to influence and change the culture of our cities. Young families and children supplant the aging baby boomer generation, again, changing the character and priorities of a community.

At the same time as we become a more diverse, more prosperous nation, our cities have also become more segregated. In fact, studies from SUNY Albany, UCLA, and the Harvard Graduate School of Education have reported that segregation of our children has worsened over the last decade, even as we live in more integrated areas. As newcomer groups grow in critical mass, so does the tendency to organize along racial, ethnic, or other group-affiliated lines. Changing demographics and the growth of ethnic enclaves have made race awareness and identity politics an effective means of voicing the needs of some of our cities' otherwise marginalized groups.

Amid all of this, civic and corporate leaders are confronted with difficult choices every day. Worthy projects from different community sectors must compete for limited resources. Appointments and commissions must be assigned in ways that satisfy all the interests represented in our constituency groups, assuring each of them adequate representation. From time to time, leaders also face crisis-fueled change, forcing them to guide their communities quickly through controversies.

Does this sound stressful? Indeed, scenes of a diverse community can be those of chaos, fiefdoms, even balkanizing, as some futurists and scholars predict. Alternatively, some see these times as momentous, opening the door to the grandest and most inspiring of challenges.

How does one lead a community, whether local or global team, in the midst of huge demographic and economic shifts? How do leaders create communities where all constituents feel included, counted and equally receiving of the opportunities offered by a community? And how do we have difficult conversations that turn our best intentions into action and accountability, not only from our leaders, but from ourselves?

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Employee Engagement and posi—

Kansas 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 workaholism 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.

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Two recent reports offer guidance on motivating and developing talented employees in the current global economic downturn.

Motivating And Retaining Top Talent

A report from OnPoint Consulting identifies strategies for motivating and retaining top talent in the current economic climate when the emphasis on bonus payments is no longer

Motivating Top Talent

possible or appropriate. Previous research has found that earnings and benefits have a 2 per cent impact on job satisfaction and engagement compared to 70 per cent provided by job quality and workplace support.

The report suggests the following survival strategies:

■ Create a sense of purpose - Engagement and retention improves when people understand how they connect to the "Big Picture" and how they make a difference.

■ Provide meaningful work - Allowing people to do what they do best and make a significant contribution is key to engagement and retention.

■ Solicit ideas - Involvement in decisions gives people a sense of control in uncertain times, shows them their opinions matter, and improves decision acceptance.

■ Let people know where they stand - Setting tough but realistic goals is motivating even in a tough environment.

■ Enhance trust and communication - Trust is built when leaders improve credibility by being candid, demonstrate reliability by ensuring their actions are consistent with business objectives and values, and and are accessible.

Rick Lepsinger, president of OnPoint Consulting commented:

"Feeling connected to the people you work with also helps create a sense of purpose.... Providing opportunities to learn and grow is icing on the cake.... Clear goals are only part of the equation. People need regular feedback so they know when they are on track and recognition when they achieve key milestones....The more people feel you are focused on them, rather than on yourself, the more they trust you."

Employee Goals and Talent Development

A report from SumTotal® Systems Inc., a global provider of talent development solutions, argues that implementing effective, universally-accepted goal setting for employees, coupled with a system for managing and tracking these processes can enable HR managers to make a significant contribution to improved organizational performance.

Richard Oyen, director of HR and talent development said:

"With the current economic forecast, it is now more important than ever to make sure employees' goals reflect the organization's overall goals to ensure everyone is working toward the same mission. By helping to set organizational alignment, HR departments have the ability to impact their company like never before and create significant productivity improvements."

The report offers the following guidelines for the involvement of HR in employee goal setting:

1. Know the goals - HR should be involved when senior managers plan annual goals to be aware of underlying issues and challenges.
2. Get buy-in - The executive team should support HR's efforts to align goals and help communicate the importance of the program.
3. Cascade goals - Once goals are set at the top of the organization, they should work their way down to all employees.
4. Ensure consistency - As goals are established further down the organization, HR can assist by creating standards and monitoring consistency.
5. Hold everyone accountable - Managers should ensure goals are measurable with specific deadlines and then hold employees accountable.
6. Reinforce through development - Ensure that employees have skills and tools to achieve established goals using development plans monitored by HR.
7. Work the gaps - Managers can work with employees individually. HR should identify gaps in organizational provision and address issues proactively with the Learning team.
8. Encourage year-long communication - Initial goals may be agreed but paid no further attention. Sending reminders to update goals is one way for HR to encourage a culture of frequent manager/employee communication.
9. Monitor compliance - Managers should monitor progress and completion of employee goals HR should review overall process and report to executives and department heads.
■ Measure twice, cut once - Goals should be a major component of a company's annual performance appraisal where employees are measured and held accountable.