



Engagement, ownership, accountability: Which is it?

Are is the corporation that doesn't want more engagement from its workforce. Problems arise when the organization has yet to clearly define what engagement means, what it would look like if it had it or devise a clear strategy to achieve it.

Within a series of strategy development meetings recently, after hearing senior

executives discuss the need for more engagement and how it is essential to expanding market share and improving bottom-line performance, I was curious. Are they on the same page with something as simple as the definition of engagement?

Prompting for a break, I individually pulled the top four leaders aside and inquired

into what they meant by engagement and what it would look like if they had it. My curiosity was satisfied and my speculation was, unfortunately, correct.

As we deviated to define engagement specific to this organization's culture and objectives, and what it would look like if in place, conversations navigated from involvement to commitment (voiced and behaviors), compliance behavior to discretionary behaviors, ownership of results to ownership of personal behaviors, and holding others accountable for their behaviors and results. This discussion allowed for a much better understanding of the individual leader's perspectives and overall goals and strategy.

Once an agreed upon meaning was arrived at, we defined what it would look like at the key levels within the organization, including major contractors. Following this, a highly insightful conversation was led with two desired answers to arrive at: 1. What are we currently doing to facilitate and motivate our definition and observations of engagement? and 2. What are we currently doing to demotivate and/or hinder this?

If you want more out of people, first discover and neutralize the demotivators hindering them. For example, if involvement on a team is the goal, what are some reasons why people wouldn't join? Are they aware of the success, leadership support and appreciation of those currently involved?

To help identify the influences on your ideal observations and definition of engagement, and to understand what to do or stop doing to improve, use these two additional questions: 1. Are we as efficient as we could be with the existing efforts we already require participation in? and 2. Are we capturing and delivering value to those already engaged? Perceptions of efficiency and value-add are either significant demotivators or motivators in all facets of operational performance.

When senior leaders aren't clear and in agreement with each other regarding specific, vital terminology, how long it will take and the needed resources to achieve it, it is no wonder multiple cultures are created when visions, values and edicts are cascaded throughout the business.

You do want a healthy degree of autonomy to exist within the culture, but there should also be a healthy degree of consistency and standardization. Where to allow for flexibility and what to control are key decisions that must be agreed upon.

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Sometimes employees already view themselves as engaged. This means we need to recalibrate on how engagement is defined and what a higher level would look like. This starts with agreement at the top. Then we should take the questions posed in this article directly to those we are seeking engagement from. Asking the right questions and following up on the responses with those we are seeking more from is one of the most effective enablers of engagement. This doesn't come from a new program; this is simply good communication.

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