

Monitoring Workforce Engagement on a Daily Basis

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ABSTRACT

Workforce engagement, also noted as workforce well-being is a contemporary topic of interest. Research shows that engagement can have an impact on quality customer service, work meaningfulness, customer loyalty, performance quality, systemic growth, productivity, safety, psychological availability and ultimately organizational success. Thus, there is a genuine interest to explore ways to improve upon engagement and measure the impact of any intervention to enhance this activity. With the multiple survey instruments now available as well as vendors willing to aid in capturing this feedback, many of these methods are after-the-fact and serve as a lagging indicator. The more timely the collection, the faster an organization can react. Finding and utilizing methods to capture timely feedback in this area allows an organization to be proactive in dealing with both normal operations and any anomalies.

It is for this reason that the use of a daily good/bad voting method is recommended to complement any of the survey instruments meant to capture and track workforce engagement. The benefit from early notification as well as the demonstration by organizational leadership to show concern for staff well-being serves as a means to reinforce the commitment of genuine interest. This demonstrates leadership's ongoing commitment that people are an organization's most valued asset.

INTRODUCTION TO THE ORGANIZATION

Facilities Planning & Management (FP&M) is an internal service branch of Iowa State University with a mission to collaborate with our university partners to develop, operate, and maintain high quality facilities. FP&M exists to provide Iowa State University of Science and Technology (ISU) services that supports campus departments in achieving their objectives of the land grant mission to create, share, and apply knowledge, and to make Iowa and the world a better place. FP&M is the largest department within the Office of the Vice President for Business and Finance (VP B&F) and is a service organization comprised of more than 400 full-time employees (including trades, support, and professional staff). Although our skills are very diverse, we all work together towards the same objective, to serve the university community.

FP&M strives to provide the university community with a safe, comfortable, and usable physical environment. Within that group are the support services who assist the organization in fulfilling the charter and communicate to our key customers and other FP&M units through timely collection and delivery of information. Services include dealing with costs, billing, surveys, benchmarks, and reports using an integrated suite of computerized maintenance management system (CMMS) and other tools to be customer responsive. Business Services, an operating unit within FP&M, is responsible for FP&M's budget planning, analysis and management, administrative services, and personnel administration. Business Services develops, coordinates, and implements policy affecting business and personnel matters.

The Business Services Accounting group provides financial information and services on behalf of FP&M. These services include paying internal and external vendors and billing internal and external customers. They also provide financial information requested by FP&M staff, auditors, and customers. They are the back office operations providing the assistance and help allow the FP&M organization to provide its services within the guidelines, policies and procedures of the institution. They play a dominate role in closing out the daily transactions and dealing with the paperwork so that others in the organization can complete their tasks in a timely fashion.

STATEMENT (RESTATEMENT) OF THE PROBLEM/INTIATIVE

With the increased use of technology to conduct business via contemporary methods to improve effectiveness and efficiencies, the ongoing need to measure success (individual, unit, and organization) continues to be of importance. There is an ongoing interest to measure an operation's success in accomplishing their goals while being customer responsive. The Business Services Accounting Group has attempted to measure their customer responsiveness through several methods. These methods have included the use of multiple survey instruments sent out to a random sample of patrons as well as surveying inter-operational groups to measure interactions and perceptions.

The concern with these methods is that their use and any other survey instruments provide feedback that is always viewed as a lagging indicator. These instruments provide a sense of what has happened and in some cases an evaluation based on the most recent past rather than a comprehensive evaluation of the entire time frame to be evaluated. They provide feedback on

what has happened, often referred to as the near past, without taking into account any current actions dealing with daily issues occurring right now.

Recognizing the importance that the workforce has on organizational success and the impact on customer service, a case can be made that an engaged workforce is imperative to maintain the organization's customer responsiveness. There is a need for organizational staff to be more than just satisfied in the work place. People need to be engaged in their job(s). A review of contemporary literature shows an alignment between engagement and quality customer service and ultimately organizational success. Links have also been found between engagement and work meaningfulness, customer loyalty, performance quality, systemic growth, productivity, safety and psychological availability. Thus, measuring workforce engagement is paramount for organizations who are not only dealing with ongoing change, but have an interest to maximize workforce potential by optimizing engagement as a means to support a sustainable future.

DESIGN

Workforce engagement is often defined as the commitment, both emotional and intellectual, to accomplish one's work as well as the mission and vision of the organization. It is the effort beyond the bare minimum. With the understanding that measuring workforce engagement is vital to organizational success, there are multiple means to accomplish this endeavor. Companies like Gallup, Kenexa, Aon-Hewitt, Hay Group, Perceptyx, BlessingWhite and Performance Programs can for a fee conduct an exercise and/or provide the tools to measure an organization's workforce engagement. There is also a well-known survey instrument, Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) that allows one to conduct an evaluation per nine thought provoking

questions. Regardless of which instrument and/or method one opts to use, the metric is still a lagging indicator unless it is routinely administered.

On this basis a simplified daily good/bad voting method is offered as a means to lessen the potential lag time in measuring engagement and allow organizational leadership to respond to situations proactively as they actually occur.

This method requires each participant to cast their vote at the end of each work day via a simple method to communicate how their day went. This process does not eliminate the lag time completely, but does reduce it dramatically allowing a reaction by management as early as the next morning. Upon completing the tally, if opportunity permits, the respondent group can be gathered in a huddle to discuss and go over any prominent deviations from the operating norm. This daily tracking allows the organization to not only capture data on daily activities, but also serves as a first-alert to any minor and/or significant deviations.

Information can be shared daily to all participants and any intervention, if necessary, can occur in a timely fashion if so desired.

IMPLEMENTATION

With the start of Fiscal Year FY13, the Iowa State University Facilities Planning & Management Business Services Accounting group implemented the daily voting process.



Each member of the group was given a single token to place in a voting box (see Figure 1) at the end of their work day. Initially, the manager did the tally first thing in the morning. Now the first person to arrive in the morning from the group does the tally and posts the results on a community viewable calendar. The process is intentionally simple and anonymous so as to encourage full participation with daily feedback.

It was also understood from the beginning that the group would not specifically define good vs. bad day allowing each individual to formulate and cast their vote based on a personal interpretation. Instead of a formal discussion and determination of good vs. bad, some opted to talk with colleagues, others did a self-determination. Some even raised the question of having an intermediate between good vs. bad. This option as well as formal discussions did not happen so as to allow each individual to give serious thought about how they evaluate their day. In some side discussions there was talk of how much the external factors should influence one's day. There were discussions and speculation on who voted the minority the previous day. It was also determined that sufficient time would need to pass in order to establish a baseline for the group. Once sufficient data has been collected, the results could now be graphed to show how the group voted overall (periods of time) and identify trends of interest.

The results showed that overall, the group routinely had more good days than bad. This confirmed the findings from the survey (UWES – see Figure 2) that was administered in late 2011 prior to implementing the daily voting process. The evaluation also showed that there was usually at least one vote daily on the bad side, so a pattern for the norm was established. As time

progressed, the group was allowed to see daily tracking and eventually a monthly graphical display of unit responses (see Figure 3).

BENEFITS

Recognizing that the use of technology has indeed made organizations more efficient and effective, but it has also changed the nature of daily interactions with staff as well as increased our dependency upon the contemporary technology that the organization routinely uses. Personal interactions are now more inclined to be ones dealing with problems and issue resolution. They are less likely to be upbeat dealing with routine business. Any single incident and/or an accumulation of many events can influence an individual and sometimes an organization's performance, and recognizing these for what they are, can be helpful to staff in dealing with this mode of operations. The functionality of equipment, performance of online applications, receipt of instantaneous information, interactions with colleagues, supervisor(s), & friends, and the implementation of change can all influence the daily mood.

In most cases, the individual is expected to absorb these inputs (good and bad) into one's daily routine. In some cases the feedback is gratifying and allows a person to actually thrive. In other cases, depending upon the nature of the information, it can be disconcerting and/or distracting. In some situations the mood of the day can be determined from the onset with a bad experience just in getting to the workplace. Thus, there is the potential for many external and internal factors that could be happening to influence an individual's mood for the day.

It should also be recognized that there are issues and factors that cannot be resolved in the work environment. Incidents involving a personal nature may be out-of-bounds for full discussion let alone resolution. However, even the offer to listen to an employee can have a significant impact.

Regardless of the cause, there is still an interest to address the concerns of the staff in trying to maintain and improve the engagement of each individual and the overall workforce. The benefits to the individual and the organization demonstrate a caring nature and can certainly impact not only how the individual performs, but also how the organization does as well. If the staff are indeed the most valued asset of the organization, any attempt to improve upon the work experience and increase workforce engagement is a win-win situation.

It behooves leadership and management to explore methods to capture immediate feedback from their staff so as to be proactive in dealing with work environment influencing situation(s).

Dealing with incidents immediately prevents the possibility of allowing the issue to fester and proliferate. The daily voting process also allows the group to experience next day action/reaction on issues affecting the organization with an attempt to ease overall impact as well as demonstrate a sincere interest in staff well-being.

RETROSPECT

Any process that attempts to address staff concerns in a timely fashion will have a positive impact on organizational performance. If an issue is singular and affects only a select few, then actions can be initiated to discuss these concerns within a small group setting. If the incident(s) involves the entire work group, then a huddle the following morning can serve as a mechanism to not only address the issue, but also serves as a means to demonstrate a caring environment.

This method in conjunction with other tools such as surveys to review engagement after-the-fact will help the organizational leadership deal with staffing concerns and issues in a proactive manner.

Participation does not have to be mandatory, but should be highly encouraged with the understanding that if one does not cast a voting token at the end-of-the-day, there is a message of uncaring. There is an indication of not being team responsive and/or a lack of interest to either maintain or improve the work environment. If there is an interest to be of assistance to staff in dealing with issues that affect organizational performance, then everyone is expected to participate so as to communicate the concern and determine how much influence the incident has in the organization. Dealing with the negative incident(s) is not just a management/leadership problem, but rather an organizational issue that in some cases must be dealt with as a collective.

Recognizing that the issue and/or incident can be of any nature, personal and/or professional, there is always a potential impact on the individual as well as on organizational performance. Whether the issue can be addressed or resolved in a timely manner will have further impact, but one should not discount the fact that just bringing attention to the matter may go a long way to demonstrate a caring organization.

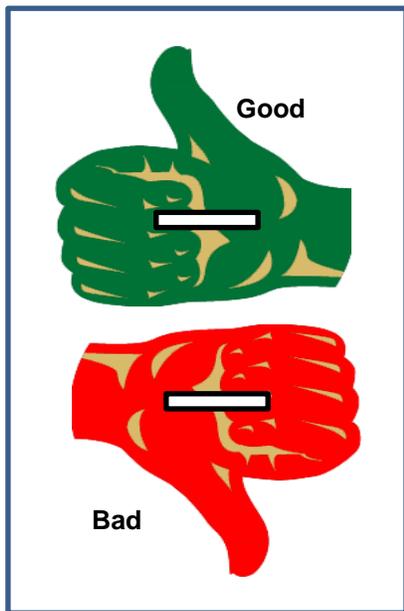


Figure 1. Voting Box Cover and Actual Voting Box

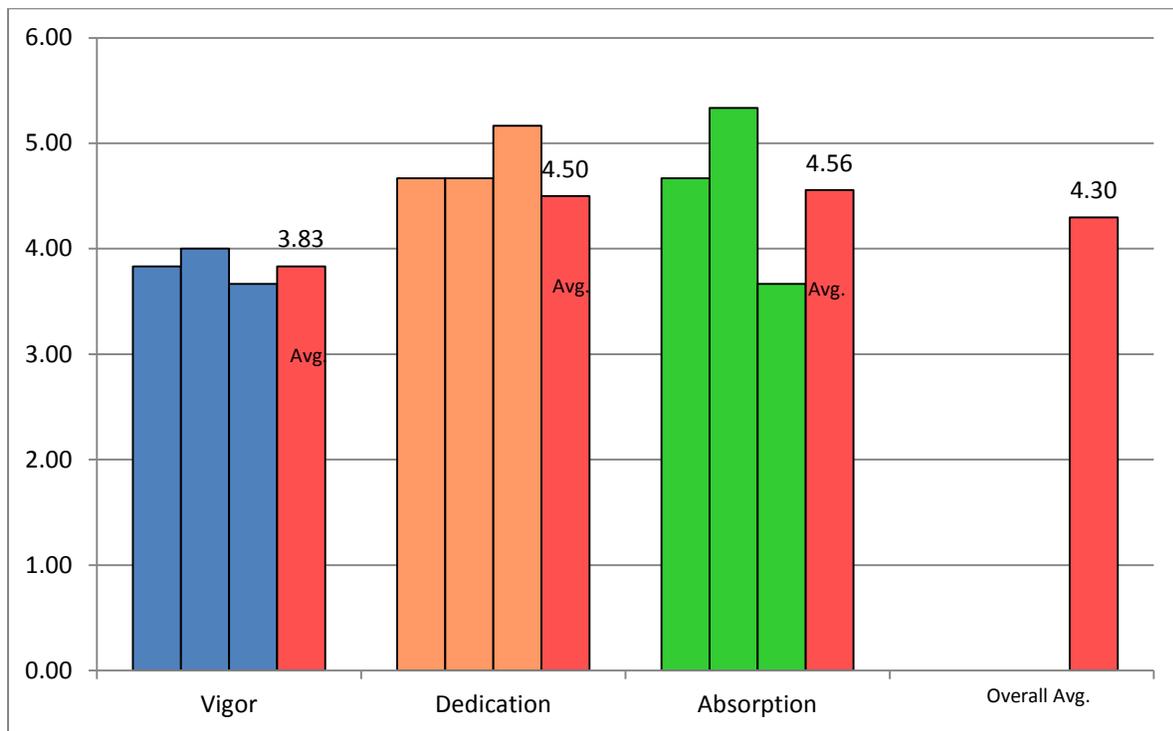


Figure 2. UWES Group Survey Results (scale 0 [never] to 6 [always])



Figure 3. Posted Recording Calendar and Tracking Charts