

DEVELOPING HIGH-PERFORMANCE ORGANIZATIONS

The Culture Of Engagement

Every business owner or manager aspires to lead an organization that produces consistent and sustainable high performance. It is people who deliver performance, but just “telling” your employees to perform, perform, perform will not yield the results you crave. Creating a high-performance organization is a deliberate act of leadership. Only by crafting a delicate set of conditions and behaviours can your employees’ potential be unleashed. What would such an organization look like and how does one develop this?

The High-Performance Organization

Let’s start by understanding the behaviours of employees in a high-performance organization. Not only are these employees extremely competent in performing their jobs, they also are expert at team collaboration in creating innovative solutions. They are committed to the organization’s strategic priorities and understand fully how their performance contributes to its success. They are energized and highly motivated.

These employees continually strive to assist one another. They are eager to participate in Working Groups that are tasked with analyzing and solving problems, and then in successfully implementing those solutions. Innovation and challenging “how things are done around here” are not mere slogans – they are integrated into their jobs everyday. The employees have been trained and coached extensively in the knowledge, skills and abilities necessary to make these kinds of contributions. They come to work seeking opportunities for engagement, creativity and personal fulfillment.

An organization that has employees who reflect this description has developed a vibrant *Culture of Engagement*. Managers are not struggling under the mistaken notion that they alone are responsible for divining all the right answers. Instead, managers are systematically unleashing the incredible potential of their employees. By ceding discretionary power, managers have created the environment and conditions for employees to participate more fully in the organization’s most meaningful dimensions. Employees invariably respond to this with enthusiasm, commitment and quality efforts. Talent at all levels is recognized, nurtured, valued, and celebrated.

This is management of the brave and confident. In this dynamic, managers cannot be controlling. Rather, they understand their role to be one of directing, coaching, supporting, and inspiring the development of their employees.

Managers and employees are working together to achieve shared goals and outcomes. There is a palpable synergy that propels everyone to heightened levels of performance and achievement. There is excitement, creativity, measured risk-taking, daring thinking, and collaborative harmony. Everyone feels responsible for the organization’s success.

What does it take to create this kind of culture?



Conversations

Having ongoing, healthy conversations with employees is the foundation for developing a *Culture of Engagement*. Employees need to comprehend the context in which the organization operates and what contributes to its success. It is only by having them participate in formulating the organization's strategy that they will become truly committed to their jobs and to the organization's priorities.

In this description, *conversations* mean something very different from *telling*. Unlike a one-off statement, a conversation is a continuing discussion that creatively explores a wide range of ideas and options. It requires a respectful, safe environment for active listening, measured consideration, mutual learning, and a willingness to be adaptable. It is the role of the organization's Leader to model this approach and to exemplify this type of behaviour consistently.

Alignment

Translating the organization's strategic priorities into business operations is a process of development and alignment. This is how competitive opportunities are converted into products or services. Again, actively engaging employees in shaping what this means and how it will be implemented will yield better solutions and will result in embedded ownership of results at all levels.

Tight alignment throughout the organization eliminates inconsistencies and confusion. It creates a unified and harmonious work environment. This alignment cascades through the organization's core: from strategy to operations to departmental objectives to each employee's performance. These relationships are transparent and understood.

Existing business processes and operating methodologies need to be reviewed, so that improvement opportunities can be harnessed. Finally, where there are internal inconsistencies, they should be identified and resolved. If there are instances where those inconsistencies cannot be resolved, then they must be openly acknowledged as such and thoroughly discussed with the employees.

Training and Coaching

Extensive training and coaching of employees is essential in order to develop the competencies, knowledge and behaviours that are critical to their participating and contributing fully in a high-performance organization. Managers will need to invest significant effort over an extended period of time in the development of their employees.

In high-performance organizations, employees have superior technical expertise in performing their jobs and are cross-trained for other roles. Additionally, they will be competent in working effectively in teams; communicating with integrity; analyzing and solving challenging problems; crafting innovative solutions; mobilizing enthusiasm and participation; explaining and championing strategic priorities; and consistently modelling appropriate, professional behaviours.



Delegation and Accountability

For employees in a high-performance organization, being accountable is a fundamental principle. These employees are committed to their performance. They want to make significant contributions and they believe that it is essential that they receive feedback and be subject to evaluation. They know that these are the vital components of their personal growth strategy.

Because the employees have been properly and thoroughly trained and, therefore, are competent and motivated to perform their jobs, managers are eager to delegate to them. As standard operating procedure, managers assign responsibility and authority to the employees, thereby broadening the scope and richness of work throughout the workforce. Conversely, managers hold the employees to account for their performance.

Innovation

A bias of continuous improvement and innovation will result from engaging employees in collaborative problem-solving. Only when an organization has established a foundation that aggressively challenges its basic assumptions, core processes and operational methodologies, can new thinking have an opportunity to emerge and flourish. A *Culture of Engagement* is the necessary pre-requisite for fully harnessing the organization's ultimate potential and realizing its more perfect future.

Leadership

As stated earlier, creating a high-performance organization is a deliberate act of leadership. The Leader needs to have a clear sense of the directional culture and must communicate this relentlessly and consistently. The Leader's enthusiasm for the future and its undiscovered opportunities will become virus-like, infecting and infiltrating every aspect of the organization. To support this, the Leader must ensure that all managers also fundamentally believe in the direction and that their behaviours publicly reflect and support this.

A high-performance organization is an exciting and vibrant place to work. It becomes the preferred destination, wherein workers experience the opportunity to make meaningful contributions, grow as human beings and explore their full potential. In such an environment, incredible things can be accomplished.

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