



*of* Employee  
**ENGAGEMENT**

**H**ow is it that the installation of a piece of software or the implementation of a business process can be completely successful at one location, but an abject failure at another? It doesn't make sense. The software is the same; the business process is the same. So what is the difference?

The difference is that people aren't the same (and the people who manage them aren't the same).

When installing software or implementing a process, you need to take into account that your people are as much a factor in the success of your rollout as the software and/or process. More so, it is the engagement of all the employees that is critical to the success of your initiative.

The secret to that success isn't so secret. Success is built upon a set of tenets that have been around for years, and it is up to the management teams to allow/promote/install these tenets to obtain the desired level of engagement. Those tenets are:

- Commitment
- Collaboration
- Creativity

## ***Commitment***

The first tenet of employee engagement is commitment. We no longer live in the Theory X days where managers felt that people had an inherent dislike for work and would avoid it if at all possible. We've all heard the stories of hotel personnel chasing people down the street or to an airport to give back a dropped piece of luggage, paper, phone, etc. These employees aren't doing it because they were directed to do it. They do it because they are committed to doing



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their job the best that they can. The question is how you get people to be that committed. The first answer is "involvement". Are you dictating the terms of the initiative, or are you involving the team to define the parameters? Too often, we impose our thoughts on others without giving them a say in what happens. You want to build a better mousetrap? Ask the people building it how to do it better. You want to provide better service, or want a more efficient way to clean a room, ask the Front Desk Agent or Room Attendant.

People want a say in what they do and how they do it. Managers can make this happen by

recognizing that there are three types of "power" and how each can be utilized.

1. Ego-centric - to satisfy their own ego,
2. Affiliative - to be liked by their teams,

*or for the good of the organization:*

3. Socialized - to involve teams in the decision making process and gain their commitment.

Gaining the employee's commitment and getting them involved will lead to the second tenet of engagement, **Collaboration**.

## Collaboration

As human beings, we all want to be part of a group. This is true in a family, socially, and at work. We want to share our experiences with others. This doesn't mean that people don't like to do things on their own. It means that people still want to be a part of something bigger than they are. Fostering an environment where people get to be part of a group makes them more engaged.

While we all want people to take responsibility and accountability for their actions, a cliché like "two heads are better than one" doesn't become a cliché unless it is true. Study after study has shown this to be a quantifiable fact.

Group decision-making is when individuals collectively make a choice from the alternatives before them. With this in mind, consider these five methods for effective decisions making:

1. Individually Decided: one person makes the decision
2. Minority Control: a smaller percentage of people make the decision
3. Statistical Average: based on a mathematical equation

4. Majority Vote: a democratic vote is taken
5. Consensus: an acceptable resolution even though it may not be the favorite

As you move from “Individually Decided” to “Consensus”, the strength of the engagement increases. So not only are two heads better than one, sometimes 1 + 1 equals something greater than 2.

In my 20+ years of experience, I have found that more collaboration leads to better decision making. So ask yourself this question: “Are my decisions always based on what I think, or do I use others to help in the decision making process?” If the answer is that you do involve others, are you getting all the way to consensus, or do you invoke the less time-consuming, but also less effective decision making methodologies? This isn't to say that every decision requires consensus. However, if nothing is ever decided

at that level, then research (and quite possibly your own experiences) will prove that your decisions aren't as effective as they could be. How we come up with the different options is in the third tenet of engagement, **Creativity**.

## Creativity

Humans, by their nature, are creative people. Otherwise, we would still be living in caves without a wheel, let alone a cell phone. Abraham Maslow recognized this in defining his *Hierarchy of Needs*, as he put the notion of creativity in the upper most level (Self-Actualization). Maslow surmised that what a person can be, he or she must be. While painters paint, and singers sing, it is not just the artist that has a need for creativity. Everybody thinks “if they would only listen to me, I can show them how to do it better”. So,





if it is that simple, then why aren't we always finding new and better ways to do things? The reason is as simple as the question. Look at it this way: If necessity is the mother of invention, then conflict is the mother of creativity. If we all thought the same way and believed the same things, there would be no conflict. However, without conflict, there is no creativity, and without creativity, there is no improvement.

How often do we find ourselves sacrificing engagement when people are lined up on the opposite side of an issue with each side not willing to budge? As managers, employee engagement doesn't mean avoiding conflict, it means encouraging conflict in such a way that the creative side of people can emerge. If accomplished, employees will be engaged and come up with a solution that enables both sides to "win". Think of it in the following way: Good managers manage conflict, great managers encourage it.

Ideas in a company get stale, not because managers don't want to make things better, but because they don't know how to manage the resulting conflict when people with different ideas try to solve problems or improve upon an existing successful process.

Identifying how a manager deals with conflict is essential to achieving effective creativity and engagement. Do they avoid, accommodate, compromise, compete, or collaborate?

Looking at it from a holistic perspective, these tenets are intertwined. To really be creative and lead improvement, you must allow for creativity. To really get people engaged, you must allow them to be who they want to be. To do so, you must foster commitment, collaboration and creativity. In the end, not only will they become engaged, they will make your company better. 