

# At the Intersection of Leadership and Engagement Stands HR

By Stephen P. Hundley and Daniel B. Griffith

**T**oday's institution of higher education, whatever its size, constituent focus, and teaching, service and research goals, requires ongoing commitment and exceptional contributions from its employees if it is going to be viable tomorrow. Ensuring the institution's continued growth amidst significant challenges in today's social, political, economic and global environments requires effective leadership and engagement strategies for attracting, motivating and retaining talent.

Human resources plays a vital role in developing, implementing and facilitating such strategies on behalf of the institution. Not only must appropriate HR processes be in place, but also HR must ensure that the institution and its executive leadership embrace systemic approaches that support these efforts and that its managers and supervisors make such efforts an operational priority every day. HR stands at the corner of leadership and engagement to ensure employees are meeting the challenges for moving the institution forward today and tomorrow.

## **HR's Unique Position to Facilitate Leadership and Engagement Strategies**

HR professionals have the ability to translate leadership and direction into concrete strategies and supports to help executive leaders, managers and individual contributors achieve optimal performance. To do so, HR must first be at the forefront in supporting the institution's efforts to provide effective, sustained leadership. Such leadership relies on understanding, communicating and championing the broad strategic directions of the institution; setting the tone at the top; establishing a culture of high performance; and garnering commitment, trust and buy-in from employees and other stakeholders throughout the organization.

Concurrently, HR must assume its own leadership role in driving the institution's workforce engagement agenda, which relies on three equally important and interdependent components. These components are identified in the Workforce Engagement Model in Exhibit 1 and described below.

## Exhibit 1 - Workforce Engagement Model

### Strategic Issues in Workforce Engagement:

Effective Senior Leadership  
Reputation Management  
Ethics, Diversity and Safety  
Stakeholder Input

### Core HR Processes in Workforce Engagement:

Workforce Selection  
Organizational Orientation  
Training and Development  
Rewards and Recognition  
Work/Life Balance

### Operational Components in Workforce Engagement:

Performance Management  
Tools and Technology  
Opportunities for Advancement  
Daily Satisfaction

Excerpted from *Workforce Engagement: Strategies to Attract, Motivate, and Retain Talent*, 2nd Edition, Stephen Hundley, Frederic Jacobs, and Marc Drizin, WorldatWork, 2009.

Download a checklist of specific Workforce Engagement Strategies at [www.cupahr.org/hew/Engagement.pdf](http://www.cupahr.org/hew/Engagement.pdf).

### **Strategic Issues in Workforce Engagement**

HR must work with executive leadership to ensure the institution adopts top-level, organization-wide approaches that support workforce engagement. In our research, top drivers necessary for ensuring systemic, sustained workforce engagement are effective senior leadership, reputation management, ethics, diversity and safety, and stakeholder input. HR must therefore insert itself in top-level conversations and decisions to ensure the institutional leadership defines and sets the tone for workforce engagement for the campus.

### **Core HR Processes in Workforce Engagement**

HR must, of course, continue to do the work it has always done to support workforce engagement. These core processes are the activities that help the institution acquire, orient, develop and reward an engaged workforce. These activities are workforce selection, organizational orientation, training and development, and rewards and recognition. The placement of core HR processes in the middle of the model makes sense as such processes are necessary upward within the institution to provide senior leadership a solid workforce base from which to drive organization-wide workforce engagement strategies and downward to give managers and

supervisors the “raw” material with which to develop employees into vital contributors who reflect true commitment to the institution and its mission and values.

### **Operational Components in Workforce Engagement**

HR must also take a leadership role to ensure appropriate operational components involving managerial and supervisory responsibilities are in place so that workforce engagement is a daily preoccupation of managers and supervisors in their work with employees. The key drivers here are establishing effective performance management processes, providing the tools and technology necessary for employees to perform their jobs, providing opportunities for advancement, and seeking to provide meaningful work and positive work environments and relationships that may lead employees to experience daily satisfaction.

### **Engaging Each and Every Employee**

It is easy to think that retention of employee talent is the sole measure of workforce stability. If that were true, HR’s role might be confined to overseeing the HR core processes outlined above without an expectation for providing deliberate support to senior leadership with strategic issues and to managers and supervisors with operational components for workforce engagement. While retention is important, turnover rates do not tell the entire story of the level of commitment employees have concerning their jobs and fit within the institution. Commitment means an employee will work hard, stay longer, help out teammates, and engage in discretionary efforts to support organization-wide, department-specific and team success.

Meeting the challenges outlined earlier will require ongoing commitment and exceptional contributions from employees throughout the institution. The institution must create a culture of high performance that compels employees to perform beyond minimum expectations and that stretches people toward goals that leverage their strengths. Yet, this presents a whole new set of challenges for HR, as each employee is different and has a different set of expectations the institution must attempt to satisfy if it has any hope of realizing true commitment to rather than mere compliance with institutional goals.

For purposes of employee engagement efforts, employees may be broadly categorized into 10 types based on their position in the employment lifecycle. These types are listed in Exhibit 2. As is clear simply by its variety, the institution and HR as employee champion will need to

develop specific employee engagement strategies for each of these 10 types. Further, HR's responsibilities to each employee type connects back to HR's responsibilities for facilitating an overall workforce engagement strategy for the institution as discussed above and illustrated in Exhibit 1.

That is, HR is challenged for each employment type to consider how senior leadership must develop

must consider, and must encourage senior leaders and managers to consider, as part of its overall workforce engagement strategy.

### Strategies and Processes to Maximize Effectiveness

As HR professionals work upward with senior leaders on strategic issues, downward with managers on operational

## HR professionals have the ability to translate leadership and direction into concrete strategies and supports to help executive leaders, managers and individual contributors achieve optimal performance.

organization-wide approaches that support that group of employees. HR will need to assist managers and supervisors to utilize operational practices that support daily engagement and commitment of employees within that group. And HR must ensure its core processes are adaptable and flexible as it selects, orients, trains and rewards employees representing different employee types.

components and within its direct purview on core HR processes for workforce engagement, they must identify, implement, measure, improve and champion solutions focused on leadership and engagement at all levels of the campus.

#### Identify

HR can identify leadership and engagement problems and opportunities through gap analysis between current and desired results. A problem gap analysis will rely on data from across the institution that signals at present sub-par performance in a given area. An opportunity gap analysis recognizes that while certain functions and operations may be performing sufficiently well, there are nevertheless ways to optimize performance for even greater outcomes.

Ways to identify learning and engagement opportunities include feedback from performance appraisals, employee opinion surveys, data from operational and institutional functions, and feedback from managers, leaders and other advisory groups. Once data is collected, HR will need to synthesize, summarize and prioritize to determine the best implementation strategy. As an example, at our institution, we identified a gap in leadership development capacity for faculty, staff and even students, and recognized an opportunity for HR professionals to partner with an academic unit to develop an experiential learning program, Leadership in Dynamic Organizations, which uses the word "leadership" as the organizing theme and involves a variety of institutional leaders as guest speakers in the program to provide both content and context for leadership issues on campus.

### Exhibit 2 - Types of Employees to Engage, Based on Their Position in the Employment Lifecycle

- New Employees
- Mid-career Employees
- Underperforming Employees
- Superstar Employees
- Returning Employees
- Transferred or Promoted Employees
- Long-term Employees
- Temporary Employees
- Distance-based Employees
- Employees With Special Needs or Circumstances

Excerpted from *Employee Engagement Fundamentals*, Marc Drizin and Stephen Hundley, WorldatWork, 2008.

Download a checklist of specific Employee Engagement Strategies at [www.cupahr.org/hew/Strategies.pdf](http://www.cupahr.org/hew/Strategies.pdf).

The engagement needs between and among these employee types are quite different. As a cursory example of this, refer to Exhibit 3. This example – comparing new employees, superstars and long-term employees – merely scratches the surface of the kinds of issues HR

**Implement**

Implementation requires the ability to determine the problem to solve or opportunity you are seeking to leverage. In implementation, it is often best to involve those for whom the implementation will directly impact and to consider the positive or negative consequences, intended or otherwise, that might emerge in implementing a given intervention. Continuing the example from above, the Leadership in Dynamic Organizations class was developed and implemented to meet the leadership needs of faculty, staff and students. Refer to Exhibit 4 (p. 43) for an overview of the content covered in this program.

**Measure**

It is important to identify the qualitative and quantitative sources of information that can speak to the effectiveness of leadership and engagement interventions that have been implemented. Both the HR profession and the higher

education industry have developed a series of useful metrics that can be used to measure such effectiveness. In our example, some of the metrics that we have used to evaluate the effectiveness of the Leadership in Dynamic Organizations program include quality and nature of learner projects; end-of-program evaluations from participants; feedback received from supervisors on employee transferability of program content to the job; and retention and/or promotion of talent as a result of program participation.

**Improve**

Inevitably, the measurement of a given intervention will provide opportunities for ongoing improvement of learning and engagement. Thus, HR professionals must work with colleagues across the institution on continuous improvement efforts. In doing so, it is necessary to recognize that such improvements are rarely done in isolation of or support for a single

*continued on page 43*

**Exhibit 3 - Example of Engagement Strategies for Specific Types of Employees**

Workforce Engagement Model/Type of Employee	New Employees	Superstar Employees	Long-term Employees
Strategic Issues	Ensure creation and modeling of mission and values to promote a welcoming, ethical culture that prospective employees will want to join.	Engage in work and contributions that are meaningful and rewarded appropriately and that, in turn, enhance the institution's reputation.	Tap into their institutional knowledge as a special stakeholder group from which input is sought. Ensure that climate for diversity and inclusion respects older workers' values and contributions.
Core HR Processes	Develop onboarding programs to attract new workers and ensure their initial success. Provide training and coaching programs that help them acclimate quickly and successfully to the culture.	Identify and provide mentors from other superstar employees at higher levels. In the wake of fiscal constraints, identify other reward and recognition processes that truly differentiate superstars from others.	Involve in special projects that utilize their institutional knowledge and job-specific expertise. Realign job duties among team members so they can serve in advisory and mentoring capacities.
Operational Components	Ensure they are clear about job expectations upfront and receive consistent feedback from manager. Ensure that they receive on-the-job training as necessary to perform jobs. Encourage managers to be "high touch" initially until they become acclimated.	Encourage managers to provide autonomy and independence to work on significant projects. Seek to minimize amount of rote duties. Advocate for title and status changes when possible based on acquisition of new responsibilities, particularly when promotional opportunities are scarce.	Ensure long-term workers remain current on new technologies and, therefore, can be considered for new opportunities that might otherwise go to newer workers. Connect regularly with them to assess current job satisfaction and determine interests for new assignments.

*continued from page 35*

intervention. It is therefore necessary to ensure there is a culture of continuous improvement and that individual interventions are viewed in an increasingly holistic manner so that transformative change can ultimately occur. In our example, we have continually improved the content, learning objectives, speakers and learner projects and resources in the Leadership in Dynamic Organizations program, based explicitly on an analysis of the various measures used to gauge the program's effectiveness.

#### **Exhibit 4 - Content Covered in Leadership in Dynamic Organizations Program**

Leadership Overview  
Employee Engagement  
Accountability  
Diversity  
Ethical Decision Making  
Resource Allocation  
Service  
Human Relations  
Innovation  
Planning and Process Improvement

Excerpted from "IUPUI's Leadership in Dynamic Organizations Program: Translating Leadership Into Application for Staff and Students." Daniel B. Griffith, Marilyn, H. Bedford and Stephen P. Hundley, *CUPA-HR Journal*, Spring/Summer 2008, 59(1).

Download the full article at [www.cupahr.org/hew/Leadership.pdf](http://www.cupahr.org/hew/Leadership.pdf).


#### **Champion**

HR's role at the intersection of leadership and engagement provides a vantage point for the profession that is in many cases unmatched on campus. By recognizing the leadership priorities coupled with the employee engagement challenges, HR can emerge as a value-added internal consultant to and champion of processes and resources that contributes to performance individually, collectively and institutionally. Champion roles include broker of information regarding resources, best practices, opportunities and constraints for implementing various solutions; planner of such solutions; negotiator, internally and externally; and cheerleader to keep

motivation and momentum going during the long haul. From our experiences with the Leadership in Dynamic Organizations program, championship of leadership development emanated from HR, but necessarily relied on additional involvement, support and sponsorship from senior leaders, managers, program graduates and others with a stake in enhancing leadership capacity at IUPUI.

#### **Conclusion**

Despite the many challenges and unique characteristics of higher education institutional contexts, one universal principle remains: employees desire to be treated as individuals and with dignity and respect. Cultivating engagement — not merely retention — requires an ongoing commitment by senior leaders, HR professionals, managers/supervisors and even individual contributor employees. HR, of course, serves as the intersection point where leadership and engagement converge.

The ability to influence without authority and invest in developing leadership talent focused on employees remains a necessary and invaluable agenda item for HR professionals. The models, examples and resources presented in this article (and the associated content available online) can help facilitate enhanced awareness of and action toward creating climates where leadership and engagement thrive. 

*Stephen P. Hundley, Ph.D., is associate dean for academic affairs and associate professor of organizational leadership in the Purdue School of Engineering and Technology at Indiana University–Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI). He will be presenting a keynote session on employee engagement at CUPA-HR's 2012 Midwest Region conference. He can be reached at [shundley@iupui.edu](mailto:shundley@iupui.edu).*

*Daniel B. Griffith, J.D., SPHR, is an associate faculty member in the Purdue School of Engineering and Technology and manager of training and organization development at IUPUI. He can be reached at [dgriffit@iupui.edu](mailto:dgriffit@iupui.edu).*