

Fostering and Managing Engagement: A Framework for Managerial Leaders

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Given the value of engagement and the costs of disengagement, more accountability by managerial leaders for workplace engagement levels seems likely and desirable. With increased accountability, a practical perspective and framework for fostering and managing this process may help guide leaders in positively impacting workplace engagement to enhance well-being and performance. After reviewing engagement from a managerial leadership perspective, providing an engagement profile, presenting an Engagement-Management Cycle, and offering some benefits associated with this process, a stepwise approach to applying this process is presented. An example of this approach applied with an executive is offered. Some challenging issues are reviewed.

INTRODUCTION

Managerial leadership practices exert an important influence on happiness and well-being in workplace settings (Robertson & Cooper, 2011; Tuckey, Bakker & Dollard, 2012), which in turn have a positive impact on business outcomes. ¹ An element of well-being, workforce engagement, has also been shown to have positive influences on workplace outcomes in the work of the Gallup Organization and others. Conversely, disengaged workers can diminish well-being within an organization, which can be detrimental to the commercial value of an enterprise. The managerial leadership practice area of fostering and managing engagement of individuals, workgroups and an entire organization has received little attention in academic and practitioner oriented literature. Instead, sundry perspectives have focused on work and employee engagement outside the context of managerial leadership. The purpose of this article is to shed light on how a managerial leader can positively impact workplace engagement. A systematic framework is offered to help managerial leaders identify, better understand, optimize and evaluate the impact of their actions to enhance engagement on organizational results.

Robertson and Cooper (2011), Attridge (2009) and Wiley (2010) summarize some of the research showing the benefits for organizations in which employees are highly engaged, which include:

- Enhanced employee well-being
- Improved productivity
- Higher returns for investors
- Increased customer loyalty
- Increased operating income
- Employee optimism about positively impacting products, services and quality

Conversely, employee disengagement is connected to significant negative impacts as reported by Rath and Harter (2010) and Harter, Schmidt, Kilham and Agrawal (2009), including:

- Theft
- Low productivity
- Turnover
- Unhappiness
- Lower profitability

With a few exceptions, the study of how managerial leaders enhance and manage workplace engagement is sparse (Shuck & Herd 2012; Shuck, Rocco & Albornoz, 2010; Tuckey et al. 2012). Given the upside of engagement at work and the downsides of disengagement, this is an important area for managerial leadership practice and development. There is an opportunity for practitioners and applied researchers to enhance our knowledge about how managerial leaders influence the engagement levels of their people.

After synthesizing definitions and reviewing various historical backdrops and conceptual frameworks of employee engagement, Shuck and Wollard (2010) offered an emergent definition of the concept. In their formulation, engagement is connected to the achievement of desired organizational outcomes. In this article, employee engagement is viewed as a positive behavioral state where individuals, groups and/or an entire organization respond in ways to advance desired organization outcomes. Response modalities may include overt behavior, affect, sensation, images and cognition. From this perspective, managerial leadership actions are seen as an important antecedent for fostering and influencing employee engagement responses both on an individual and collective basis.

Even though the topic of engagement is of increasing interest in business, consultancy and academia, we currently know relatively little about the practice of fostering and managing engagement by managerial leaders. Looking at engagement from a managerial leadership perspective using a systematic framework may help advance the practice and study of fostering and managing engagement at work. The author and his colleagues encourage others to examine the role of managerial leadership in fostering and managing engagement.

This article is intended to extend the rather limited attention given to this area by offering an approach for practitioners to adapt, and for applied researchers to investigate further. This important topic is explored using information collected from the “real world” (Locke, 2007, 2000).² This paper is intended to help managerial leaders more effectively foster and manage engagement, and serve as a springboard for further investigation by applied researchers, which may include quantitative data and analysis.

ENGAGEMENT AND MANAGERIAL LEADERSHIP

There is increasing support for viewing workforce engagement as a competitive advantage for organizations (Christian, Garza & Slaughter, 2011). This advantage is eroded, however, in organizations which breed disengagement, where employees respond in ways that detract from achieving desired organizational outcomes (Wollard, 2011). Alarming, it seems that engagement levels among employees have consistently declined over the past decade and employees seem to lack confidence in their managerial leaders' skills to develop an engaged workforce (Martin & Schmidt, 2010; Czarnowsky, 2008). Yet recent reports offered by Shuck and Herd (2012) indicate that organizational leaders believe the development of employee engagement is a top priority. In light of these circumstances, it seems imperative to offer managerial leaders frameworks and tools to help them foster and manage workplace engagement.

Managerial leaders are encouraged to identify key action areas that will build engagement at work.³ Five key action areas of general applicability for the purpose of fostering and managing engagement would include:

1. Model key engagement behaviors, including vigor/energy, dedication and absorption.
2. Show interest in employee development, learning and well-being.
3. Manage work and job demands while recognizing and optimizing personal and job related resources.
4. Encourage matching skill levels with important and relevant challenges to move toward flow states.
5. Align individuals, groups and the organization on critical success factors including core values, strategic direction and meaningful metrics.

These five action areas or practices relate to various definitions, conceptualizations and research findings found in the literature on engagement. Schaufeli, Salanova, Gonzalez-Roma and Bakker (2002) see engagement as involving vigor/energy, dedication and absorption. Employee engagement levels have been shown to be impacted by the amount of interest shown to employees by managerial leaders (Rath & Harter, 2010; Schuck, et al. 2011). In connecting engagement to work performance, Bakker and Demerouti (2008) as well as Bakker (2011) show the relationship of personal and job resources to job demands. Encouraging the matching of skill levels with challenging work to advance individuals, groups and organizations toward flow states also relates to the managerial practice of engagement (Csikszentmihayi, 2003). Finally, the importance of levels of engagement, alignment and financial outcomes for competitive advantage have been put forth by Cascio and Boudreau (2011).⁴

Bakker, Albrecht and Leiter (2011) offer some key questions for practitioners and applied researchers to consider relating to the role that managerial leaders may play in influencing engagement levels. They underscore the need to examine effective interventions for engagement at organizational, job and individual levels, and to consider the influence that managerial leadership models and associated practices may have on engagement. The need to look at engagement across organizational levels and to focus on the practices managerial leaders execute in creating a culture of engagement are important areas for exploration by practitioners and applied researchers (Wiley, 2010).

While in practice the concept of engagement at work cuts across all organizational levels, the focus is often on engagement of individual employees. To broaden this perspective, the author suggests a more comprehensive view. Based on work with executives in the field, there are at least three organizational levels that managerial leaders need to be concerned about: individuals, work groups and the overall organization. Cole, Bruch and Vogel (2012) as well as Tuckey et al. (2012) underscore the need to investigate models, concepts and practices from a multi-level perspective, pointing out that places of work involve individuals aligning with groups and teams as well as the organization. The managerial leader needs to focus on his or her practices and the impact his or her behavior is having on individual employees, work groups and the larger organization. The recent exploration of employee engagement by Shuck et al. (2011) underscores the critical role managerial leadership plays in shaping engagement, workplace climate and opportunities for learning. Albert Bandura's (1986) work reminds us of the potent impact that managerial leadership modeling of behavior can have on an organization.

It seems clear that managerial leaders have considerable influence on work engagement and the amount of impact can vary across organization levels. Gallup's research, for example, underscores the influential role that managerial leaders have on engagement levels (Rath & Harter, 2010). More attention needs to be given to the role of alignment of engagement across organizational levels. Top management teams should consider spending more time designing, executing and assessing work engagement across their organizations (Wiley, 2010). As managerial leadership actions, including the five areas noted earlier, become part of an organization's operating environment, a culture of engagement will likely be enhanced.⁵

Assuming total organization engagement has not been achieved across all five action areas, managerial leaders should assess where they are in these areas and on two other dimensions (approachability and accountability). This assessment is reflected in the "Managerial Leader Engagement Profile" which is generically depicted in Table 1. Frequency of use, effectiveness and perceived importance can be assessed for each of the seven dimensions. An aspirational goal is for organizations to

become fully engaged and aligned across all organizational levels in each of these action areas in order to optimize engagement throughout an organization.

TABLE 1
MANAGERIAL LEADER ENGAGEMENT PROFILE

Dimensions (1-7):	Usage	Effectiveness	Importance	Observations/ Comments
1. Approachability	Low, Moderate, High	Low, Moderate, High	Low, Moderate, High	
2. Accountability	Low, Moderate, High	Low, Moderate, High	Low, Moderate, High	
3. Modeling engagement	Low, Moderate, High	Low, Moderate, High	Low, Moderate, High	
4. Showing interest	Low, Moderate, High	Low, Moderate, High	Low, Moderate, High	
5. Managing demands	Low, Moderate, High	Low, Moderate, High	Low, Moderate, High	
6. Skill-challenge matching	Low, Moderate, High	Low, Moderate, High	Low, Moderate, High	
7. Aligning critical success factors	Low, Moderate, High	Low, Moderate, High	Low, Moderate, High	

Enhancing happier high performance by fostering engagement is rooted in the work being done in the field of positive psychology and positive organizational scholarship (Cameron & Spreitzer, 2012). Martin Seligman, the father of positive psychology, and his colleagues have brought attention to the empirical study and conceptualizing of happiness/well-being (Diener & Diener, 2008; Schueller & Seligman, 2010; Seligman, 2011). In connection with this work is an increasing focus on engagement in the workplace (Bakker & Leiter, 2010; Schuck & Herd, 2012; Rampersad, 2008).

Considerable discussion has taken place concerning the definition and conceptualization of engagement in workplace settings (Schaufeli & Bakker (2010). These discussions include distinguishing between “employee engagement” (relating to the relationship of the employee with the organization) and "work engagement" (relating to the employee’s relationship with his or her work). In practice, however, these attempts to parse engagement likely strain attempts to look at this topic in applied settings, especially managerial leadership driven engagement, in a more integrated way across all organizational levels. While this article, especially as it relates to the five action/practice areas, draws from these previous conceptual formulations, it offers a more integrated organizational leadership perspective from which to view and study engagement across organizational levels. This approach is likely more useful in practice since the majority of workplace settings involve individuals linking with a project group, team and/or the organization (Mathieu, Maynard, Rapp & Gibson, 2008).

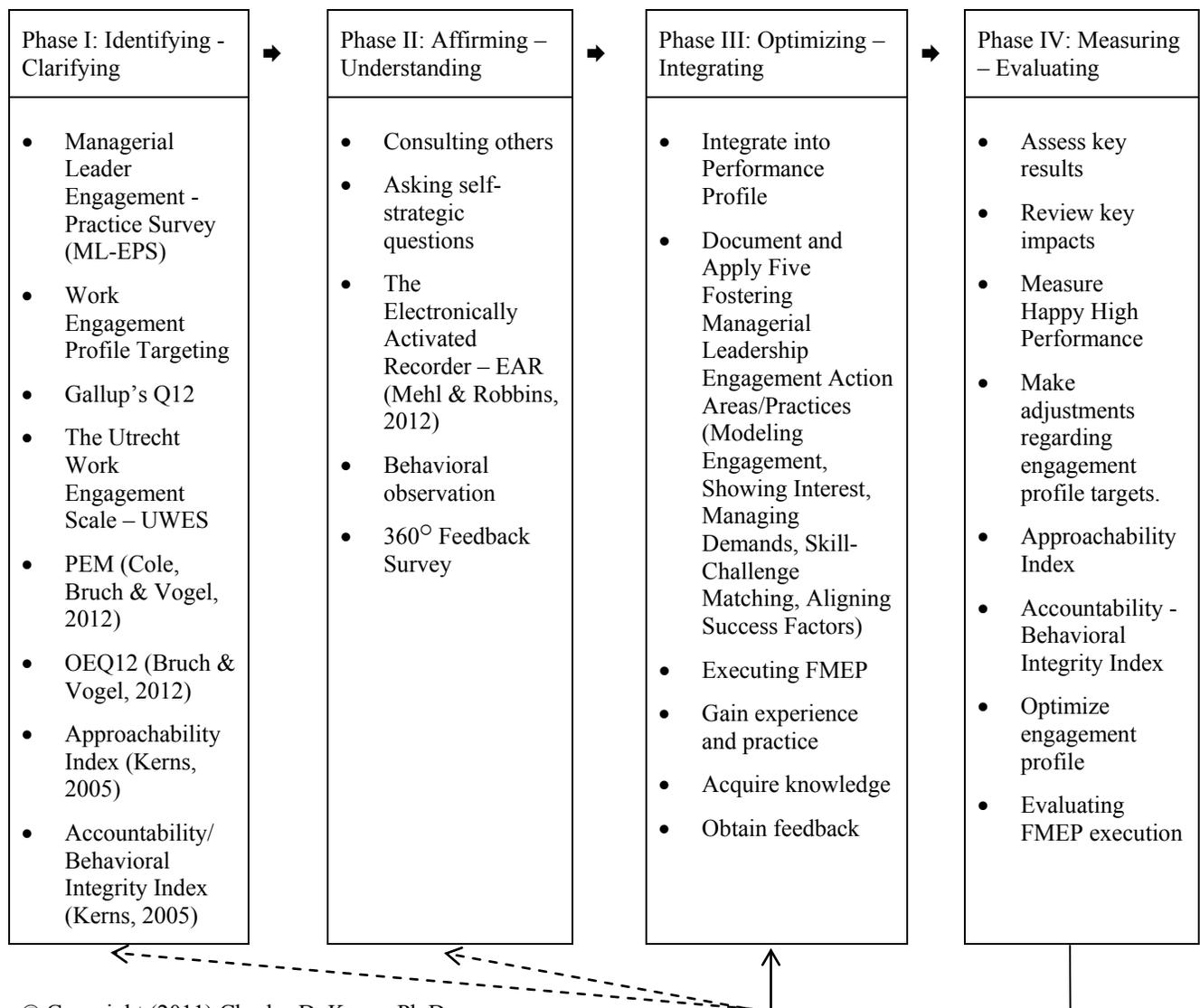
To this end, this article and related work (Kerns, 2008; Kerns & Ko, 2010; Kerns & Ko, 2013) consider the broader relationship between happiness and performance in workplace settings. In this effort, various practices to enhance happy-high performance are being explored, including the facilitation and management of engagement by managerial leaders. Connecting the role of managerial leadership in fostering engagement to positively impacting well-being is consistent with the recent work and findings of Tuckey et al. (2012), as well as Stuck et al. (2010).

THE ENGAGEMENT - MANAGEMENT CYCLE

The five practices focused on in this article reflect the various definitions, conceptualizations and research relating to engagement in workplace settings previously cited. With this context in mind, the author views managerial leaders as key antecedents of engagement within organizations. Managerial leaders' actions engage individuals, groups and the overall organization toward advancing desired organizational outcomes.

Engagement management seeks to help managerial leaders identify, better understand, optimize and evaluate the impact of their practice of engagement on important outcome measures including well-being, and quality (Rampersad, 2008; Kanji & Chopra, 2009). The Engagement - Management Cycle depicted below Figure 1 helps further operationalize this definition and process in a general way.

FIGURE 1
THE ENGAGEMENT – MANAGEMENT CYCLE



Phase I

When Identifying and Clarifying one's engagement at work in Phase I, one will assess his or her current engagement profile. Few instruments are available that focus on assessing specific managerial leadership engagement practices in workplace settings. With managerial leaders in mind, additional assessment tools are being explored such as the Managerial Leader - Engagement Practice Survey (ML-EPS) to help identify and clarify actions that foster and manage engagement at work to enhance happy-high performance. "Approachability and Accountability Indices" and other useful assessment frameworks are also being adapted for work with managerial leaders. The Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) as well as Gallup's Q12 have proven useful in helping to increase executives' awareness of specific aspects of engagement (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2010). The Organizational Energy Questionnaire (OEQ12) and the Productive Energy Measure (PEM) are being explored for their relevance in measuring engagement at work (Bruch & Vogel, 2011; Cole et al. 2012).

Phase II

Once one's engagement profile has been identified, this information must be affirmed and understood. The process of Affirming and Understanding involves seeking feedback from others to confirm the identified pattern of engagement. These consultations should be with trusted others who know the individual well and who are willing to give honest feedback. This exchange should assist the individual in more fully understanding how his or her engagement may be reflected in his or her managerial leadership behavior. In affirming the contents of the engagement profile, strategic questions such as, "How do I show interest in my people?" and/or "Do I effectively model positive energy?" should be asked. In addition to more traditional tools like 360° survey feedback, various technology assisted ambulatory assessment methods are being investigated to further help managerial leaders affirm and better understand their execution of engagement fostering practices (Mehl & Robbins, 2012).

Phase III

After identified patterns of engagement have been affirmed, many useful things can be done to help Optimize-Integrate the practice of fostering and managing engagement at work. Integrate actions that will foster engagement into one's performance based job description, then follow up to obtain feedback on how effectively one is executing actions against a plan for fostering and managing engagement at work. Feedback is especially useful when it focuses on the five action areas of modeling engagement, showing interest, managing resources and demands, skill-challenge matching and aligning critical success factors.

Phase IV

Measuring – Evaluating the impact that one's engagement enhancement practices have on the achievement of key results and other significant outcomes is a key component in the cycle, including measuring and evaluating performance and well-being in relationship to a managerial leader's effectiveness at fostering and managing work engagement. Data collected from approachability indices, key results, performance targets and behavioral integrity indices can also be helpful in assessing effectiveness. **This phase will become increasingly more important as managerial leaders are held accountable for workplace engagement.**

THE VALUE OF FOSTERING AND MANAGING ENGAGEMENT

The process of systematically fostering and managing engagement offers substantial benefits in many areas for managerial leaders and their organizations. Engagement is increasingly linked to well-being and happiness in the workplace (Wagner & Harter, 2006; Kanji & Chopra, 2009). Wiley (2010) convincingly connects an engaged workforce with leadership practices that enhance high performance in organizational settings. Using strategic employee surveys he shows the synergistic effect of performance excellence and employee engagement. This connection between managerial leadership practices, high performance and employee engagement was revealed in a sample of 158 organizations. The author's field work and applied

research in client organizations where managerial leaders practice the five actions noted earlier support this connection (Kerns & Ko, 2010; Kerns & Ko, 2013).

Robertson and Cooper (2011) report clear links between well-being/happiness and employee engagement. They offer a useful indexing of the key benefits to organizations along with supporting research evidence for the value of having engaged employees. Managerial leaders who can effectively manage an employee workforce for greater engagement are likely to realize the following benefits:

- Improved return on investment
- Increased productivity
- Reduced illness-absence
- Enhanced operating income
- Customer satisfaction and loyalty

By effectively managing engagement, managerial leaders can also aid the successful development, documentation and communication of an organization's performance management system. Managerial leaders who can get their people actively engaged in goal setting, action planning, feedback and executing mutually agreed upon plans will likely give their organization a competitive advantage while enhancing the happy-high performance of their people (Mone, Eisinger, Guggenheim, Price & Stine, 2011).

The modeling of key engagement behaviors by managerial leaders, especially vitality and energy, can help optimize engagement within an organization. Leadership pulse survey data show a connection between managerial leadership energy levels and employee engagement (Welbourne, 2007). The benefits of managerial leadership modeling optimal energy for others include being an attractive high impact management practice as well as a cost effective tactic. Managerial leaders who can energize themselves do not require the expenditure of additional organizational resources.

Successfully fostering and managing engagement can likely drive key results across all functional work areas and all organizational levels. When leaders are able to optimize and integrate their skill at fostering and managing engagement at work, they improve the likelihood of increasing happier high performance for themselves and their people. Executives who have applied the approach offered in this article have observed improved performance and enhanced happiness for themselves and other individuals and groups (Kerns & Ko, 2010; Kerns & Ko, 2013). While further support is needed, it is a promising prospect if practicing engagement management at work can help an organization and its people be more effective and happier.

A SEVEN STEP FRAMEWORK

The following seven step framework is offered as a specific adaptation of the Engagement – Management Cycle above. This framework, developed in the context of executive coaching, provides one approach by which organizational leadership may become, and/or lead their people to become, happier-high performers through engagement. To help clarify the approach, a real-world example of implementing the process follows.

Step 1: Positioning, Fostering and Managing Engagement

The first step in the seven step process is intended to serve as the motivating preamble to initiating an Engagement Fostering and Management Program. The coach should review some of the benefits of this approach, orient the client to this systematic and interactive process, and seek to gain commitment for using the approach from the participant being coached.

Step 2: Identifying and Clarifying “Engagement Profile”

Using appropriate assessment instruments, which may include those previously noted in the discussion of the Engagement - Management Cycle, the executive coach will facilitate the client in identifying and clarifying actions that he or she is taking to foster, sustain and manage engagement. The

Approachability and Accountability indices are proving to be especially useful in helping managerial leaders examine how their actions in these areas serve as an antecedent for the engagement behaviors of others.

Step 3: Affirming and Understanding “Engagement Profile”

Once the key aspects of engagement have been identified and are understood, ask the client to do at least three things to affirm his/her engagement profile. This affirmation process helps the individual better understand his/her approach to fostering and managing engagement. First, ask the client to answer a number of strategic questions relating to his/her tendencies to be engaging including, “How do you show interest in your people?” and “To what extent do you model high positive energy?” Second, review the “OEQ12” and related assessments to affirm with the client where he/she typically responds in terms of energy and engagement. This review helps the client understand his/her emotional, cognitive and behavioral reactions and gives him/her ways to define more fully these responses. Third, ask the client to reflect on how aligned his/her people are with critical success factors espoused by the overall organization. The goal for this step is for the client to (1) affirm his/her typical response pattern as it relates to fostering and managing engagement at work, and (2) understand those behavioral patterns and how they can be used to enhance his/her own and other’s happiness and performance.

Step 4: Develop Behaviorally Specific Examples of Personal Best Stories (PBS)

The client is asked to identify five to seven significant others who are in turn asked to document one to three situations where they have observed the client effectively fostering and managing engagement. This step is important in helping individuals further affirm and understand their engagement practices as well as to optimize and integrate their profile. The “best-self feedback” tool from which the “PBS” process is adapted was developed at the University of Michigan and is being used in a number of applied settings (Roberts, Spreitzer, Dutton, Quinn, Heaphy & Barker, 2005).

Step 5: Develop and Document Fostering and Managing Engagement Plan (FMEP)

In order to further optimize and integrate the practice of fostering and managing engagement, in consultation with his/her coach, the client develops a one-page “Fostering and Managing Engagement Plan” (FMEP). This typically consists of six to twelve bullet points which index key actions that the client will do to enhance his/her practice of fostering and managing engagement. These actions usually reflect the five key action areas previously discussed.

Step 6: Design a Performance Profile or Performance-Based Job Description

Facilitate the client in developing a one to two page performance profile or performance based job description for his or her current position (Kerns, 2001), integrating the individual’s key actions to enhance engagement into this performance management document. This step helps to focus and further optimize the individual’s work in fostering and managing engagement. It especially helps in the integration of engagement practices into the current work role.

Step 7: Execute, Coach and Connect to a Happy-High Performance Organizational Culture

Using a self-coaching or executive coaching approach, each individual is introduced to the Engagement-Management Cycle and asked to regularly review and evaluate how well he or she is developing and executing actions to foster and manage engagement. This evaluation includes a review of the progress in executing the personalized Fostering and Managing Engagement Plan (FMEP), attaining key results and in achieving status as a happy-high performer (Kerns, 2008).

APPLYING THE SEVEN STEP FRAMEWORK – AN EXAMPLE

To illustrate and assist in putting the Seven Step Framework into use, the following example is offered.⁶ Mark is the President of a marketing and sales oriented division within a multi-national

corporation. He has six key reports and he reports to the CEO for North America Territories. In the context of executive coaching, what follows is the adaptation of the Seven Step Approach to Engagement Management to Mark's situation in his role as division President. This program was part of a larger organizational consulting assignment within Mark's area of responsibility.

Step 1: Positioning, Fostering and Managing Engagement

The executive coach oriented Mark to the overall Seven Step Approach and highlighted a number of benefits that this approach offered him, which included:

- Mark would be able to identify his "engagement profile" and have a systematic way to focus on fostering and managing engagement.
- This is an innovative approach to applying and practicing the art and science of engagement to the practice of managerial leadership.
- With coaching, Mark could learn to apply this approach with his six key reports.
- This approach would help directly drive his key result of increasing the number of happy-high performers in his division, starting with himself.
- The research based support, especially from the field of Positive Psychology and Positive Organizational Scholarship, provides credibility for the managerial leader's practice of fostering and managing engagement.
- An engaged workforce may contribute to his organization gaining a competitive advantage.

After reviewing each of the program steps, Mark was probed for his level of commitment for completing this program. His commitment level was quite high and he was particularly motivated to connect this practice to his overall key result of increasing the number of happy-high performers in his division, starting with himself.

Step 2: Identifying and Clarifying "Engagement Profile"

Mark was asked to complete the Managerial Leader Engagement Practice Survey which included assessing his behavioral tendencies to engage in the five previously noted action areas. He also discussed his self-report observations from the Approachability and Accountability/ Behavioral Integrity indices, and reviewed the frequency and nature of his modeling of engagement to a variety of workplace situations. In consultation with the executive coach, Mark identified the following areas as part of his engagement profile:

- Little experience in explicitly modeling engagement behaviors but recognized how modeling could positively impact one's people to be engaged.
- Displays relatively few approachability behaviors and is weak at expressing interest in his people.
- Is effective at securing resources for his people to help them get projects completed.
- Tends to have a high accountability/behavioral integrity index, but follows up infrequently with his people in his managerial leadership role.
- Needs to more frequently practice skill-challenge matching with his people.
- Needs to more explicitly communicate and track organizational alignments of critical success factors.

Step 3: Affirming and Understanding Engagement Profile

Mark was confident that he had identified relevant and important behavioral patterns associated with his fostering and managing of engagement. However, to strengthen his understanding and affirm these areas, he was asked to do three things. First, he identified several trusted individuals who knew him well to comment on his engagement profile including the items noted in Step 2 above. He sought input from each of his six key reports, the CEO and three peers from other divisions. Second, using the OEQ12, ML-EPS and UWE Scale he found himself to be enthusiastic, driven and generally liking his role. While he

was aligned with the organization's key results areas and mission, he was unclear about the level of alignment of his division with the overall organization. Mark described himself based on these various engagement assessment tools as being fully engaged with his work but uncertain about how his people saw his skills at engaging others. Third, Mark completed the Approachability and Accountability/Behavioral Integrity indices in consultation with his executive coach. These two reviews focused on behaviors Mark projected that encouraged others to make contact with him and with how consistent he was in matching his "words" with "deeds". These assessments showed that he did not consistently display behaviors that "welcomed" others to approach him and that he missed opportunities to show concern, interest and caring toward his people.

Step 4: Develop Behaviorally Specific Examples of Personal Best Stories (PBS)

Mark asked several people to provide behavioral examples of when he was demonstrating the fostering and management of engagement. Each of the four individuals who responded provided three examples. The observations suggested that Mark was most engaging when he was assessing work demands and resource requirements. Another theme that emerged was that while he frequently challenged his people with demanding projects, he did not always match the challenge with the individual's skill level.

Step 5: Develop and Document Fostering and Managing Engagement Plan (FMEP)

In consultation with his coach Mark reflected on the information gleaned in Steps 2, 3, and 4 to develop and document his FMEP. The key bullet point action areas intended to help him foster and manage engagement that were placed on his FMEP included:

- Increasing the number of times he explicitly models engaging behavior during executive committee meetings with his key reports.
- Tracking his approachability and other behaviors that show interest in others.
- More actively engaging his key reports in making final resource allocation decisions.
- Assessing the competence and confidence of individuals more fully before assigning them challenging work.
- Ensure that all individuals, work groups and strategic projects are aligned with critical success factors.

His FMEP was regularly reviewed at monthly coaching sessions. Mark also routinely asked his key reports for feedback on some of the relevant areas on his FMEP. He was, for example, encouraged to regularly ask his boss and key reports for feedback on how they perceived the alignment of the division with the critical success factors for the overall organization.

Step 6: Design a Performance Profile or Performance-Based Job Description

As part of a performance management system Mark and all other employees in his division had previously prepared a performance based job description. This tool specified the key results, key actions, people and technical skills for which each employee was held accountable.

As part of the Seven Step Approach, Mark took the earlier version of his performance based job description, and fine-tuned the description of a number of key actions that were aligned with his agreed upon key results. For example, he added "Proactively showing more interest in key reports' project work" and "Asking more open ended questions in meetings and in individual conferences" to his performance based job description as key actions designed to drive his key results. These two areas, in particular, helped strengthen his key actions associated with his key result of increasing the number of happy high-performers within his division.

Step 7: Execute, Coach and Connect to a Happy High-Performance Organizational Culture

Mark reviewed the Engagement-Management Cycle with his executive coach, emphasizing the “Optimizing and Integrating” and “Measuring and Evaluating” components. The coaching assignment was expanded to coach Mark to apply the Seven Step Approach with his six key reports. Mark particularly sought help when working with his key reports on identifying and clarifying their levels of engagement and on the development of their Fostering and Managing Engagement Plan (FMEP). As part of step seven, Mark and his coach regularly evaluated how he was doing in fostering and managing engagement and how these efforts were impacting his key result areas, especially relating to increasing the number of happy high-performers. These regularly scheduled feedback sessions served as an “accountability forum” for Mark as he practiced fostering and managing engagement.

This Seven Step Approach is straightforward and provides a logical process to enhancing a managerial leader’s performance in fostering and managing engagement. It is also emerging from work in the field that this process can be delivered in a “coach the coach” format, as was done with Mark as he worked with his key reports with support from his executive coach.

SOME CHALLENGING ISSUES

The practice of fostering and managing engagement by managerial leaders is not without challenges. To date, very little attention has been given to profiling and measuring engagement among managerial leaders. There is a need to have assessment instruments for executives to identify and clarify their engagement profile. In addition to being psychometrically fit, these tools must present engagement and their related dimensions in ways that have face validity for business practitioners. As Bakker et al. (2011) argue, leadership has a straightforward and positive impact on employee engagement. Assessment tools which help to index engaging practices of managerial leadership will likely advance practice and applied research in the field of managerial leadership as related to managing engagement levels at work. Assessment tools are being explored to further address this need and focus on the dimensions noted in Table 1. These efforts include the use of a single integrated assessment tool for managerial leaders to use for self-reflection and review of their effectiveness at engaging others at work. The author is hopeful that these exploratory efforts will continue to provide useful information for coaching managerial leaders to effectively foster and manage engagement as well as further applied research efforts.

Closely associated with the assessment issue is the need for a coherent conceptualization of engagement in workplace settings to help guide managerial leader action. In their review of engagement, Schaufeli and Bakker (2010) highlight both the treatment of the topic in academia as well as comment on some of the formulations offered by consultancies. After offering an extensive integrative review of engagement, Shuck (2011), challenges us to focus on the “usability” of this concept in everyday practice. He underscores the current gap between researcher and practitioner when conceptualizing about workplace engagement. The current work attempts to offer a broader practitioner oriented perspective on the topic. It is suggested, from a managerial leader perspective, that by viewing engagement across organizational levels while including consideration of the “employee” and the “work”, that the practice of fostering and managing engagement will be advanced. From this view, the managerial leader is charged with effectively executing practices that impact the nature of the work being done, individual employee differences and the operating culture. From an empirical research perspective, separating the engagement construct into “work” and “employee” domains may continue to have utility.

Another challenge is for managerial leaders and applied researchers to look beyond the individual when exploring the role of engagement in the workplace. The alignment of engagement across individual, group and organization levels is likely important in helping to influence happier high performance. This situation is supported by the finding relating to the crossover or emotional contagion seen among work teams and how this engagement enhances performance (Bakker, Westman & Van Emmerik, 2009). Bakker’s et al. (2011) observations regarding categorizing engagement interventions by organizational levels helps to underscore the need to examine engagement beyond the individual level. It will be especially useful to pay attention to the practice of engagement throughout an organization and to assess

the level of alignment it enjoys within a particular entity. More fully examining the alignment of individual, group and organization wide engagement will likely help managerial leaders in their efforts to engage others at work and advance the research efforts in this area of study. Looking at engagement across an entire organization may also be important in light of evidence pointing to an engaged workforce as being a source of competitive advantage.

There is also a need to provide a balanced perspective when practicing and researching workplace engagement. Most of the attention in the literature surrounding engagement focuses on the benefits (Bakker, et al. 2011). However, excessive engagement may lead to detrimental work-life balance and possible physical well-being issues (Geurts & Demerouti, 2003). Extending the exploration of engagement beyond the benefits, can help practitioners and researchers better understand the possible downsides of fostering excessive engagement at work.

Employees who are either passively, or worse, actively, disengaged present an additional challenge for managerial leaders and their organizations. Some estimates put the level of disengagement as high as 70% globally (Saks, 2006). According to Blacksmith and Harter (2011), American workers are not engaged or actively disengaged at a rate of 71%, leaving less than 30% of the workforce engaged. They report that this trend was relatively stable throughout 2011. Wollard (2011) offers evidence that disengagement has enormous economic and psychological costs for individuals and organizations and wisely calls for managerial leaders and their organizations to seek a better understanding of the process and dynamics surrounding disengagement. It seems that addressing important questions like "How do fully engaged employees differ from actively disengaged personnel?" and "What are the most significant antecedents of workforce disengagement?" will advance our understanding of this concept. The issue of disengagement and the challenge to address this situation is further underscored by findings that low quality work can be more detrimental to well-being than unemployment (Butterworth, Leach, Stazdins, Olesen, Rogers, & Broom, 2011).

Practitioners and applied researchers are also challenged to focus more on the role of the managerial leader in fostering and managing engagement in the workplace. Further examination of managerial leadership interventions and practices which positively impact performance is needed (Reichard, Serrano & Wefald, 2013; Serrano & Reichard, 2011). Managerial leaders who foster workplace environments that enhance employee engagement can advance desired organizational outcomes. The work showing how managerial leadership practices can positively impact different organizational levels needs to challenge practitioners and researchers to look more closely at a managerial leader's impact on engagement at work. The Linkage Research Model (LRM) or the "Managerial Leadership Practices of 12 O'Clock" framework may prove very useful to both applied researchers and practitioners in exploring the impact of managerial leaders engagement practices on important outcome measures (Kerns , 2005; Wiley & Campbell, 2006). As managerial leaders become more accountable for engagement levels, the importance of connecting engagement enhancing practices with organizational outcomes will likely magnify.

Addressing the challenges of assessment, conceptualization clarity, organizational alignment, work-life balance, disengagement and managerial leader focus will advance the practice of fostering and managing engagement at work. As more attention is given to this area of managerial leadership, additional challenges for practitioners and opportunities for applied research will surface. This is an exciting area and provides hope in helping to increase the number of happy high performers found in the work place

SUMMARY STATEMENT

The development and execution of frameworks and tools to help managerial leaders effectively foster and manage engagement will be beneficial to individuals, groups and organizations. With a logical approach including the adaptation of research findings from positive psychology, positive organizational scholarship, human resource development and other relevant disciplines, managerial leaders' efforts to foster and manage workplace engagement will be advanced. As this work progresses there will be a need for practical assessment methods supported by conceptual clarity including a better understanding of how

organizational alignment, work-life balance and managerial leadership practices relate to fostering and managing engagement at work. These pursuits and related actions will likely enhance managerial leaders' and their people's efforts to achieve high levels of workplace well-being/happiness and performance. With evidence growing to show the impact of engagement on organizational functioning, these endeavors will be especially valuable and will address the call for increased accountability of managerial leaders for workplace engagement.

ENDNOTES

1. A debate comparing and contrasting management and leadership has occurred over more than thirty years. In this article the term managerial leadership is used as a synonym for management and/or leadership. Currently there is also a lively discussion concerning the differences and similarities between happiness/happy and well-being. However, in this article these terms are used interchangeably.
2. Locke and Cooper (2000) and Locke (2007) highlight that qualitative data gleaned from a variety of available sources, including interviews, field observations and other less quantitative methods of inquiry, can legitimize an approach which is based on the integration of real world facts.
3. In identifying key action areas, let a set of criteria be the guide. Criteria might include practicality, match with leader's style and personality, consistency with research evidence, coachable/teachable, and having face validity with practitioners.
4. For a more extensive review of the definitions, conceptualizations and research relating to engagement in workplace settings, see Shuck, B. (2011). Four emerging perspectives of employee engagement: An integrative literature review. *Human Resource Development Review*, 10(3), 304-328; Bakker, A.B., & Leiter, M.P. (2010) *Work Engagement: A Handbook of Essential Theory and Research*; Rothbard, N.P. & Patil, S.V. (2012). Being there: Work engagement and positive organizational scholarship. In K. S. Cameron & G. M. Spreitzer (Eds.), *Oxford handbook of positive organization scholarship* (pp. 56-69). New York: Oxford University Press; Attridge, M. (2009) Measuring and managing employee work engagement: A review of the research and business literature. *Journal of Workplace Behavioral Health*, 24, 383-398.
5. For a more extensive review of the definition and conceptual underpinnings of "organizational levels and alignment" refer to Zaccaro, S.J., Ely, K., & Nelson, J. (2008). Leadership processes and work motivation. In R. Kanfer, G. Chen & R.D. Pritchard (Eds.), *Work motivation: Past, present, and future* (pp. 319-360). New York: Routledge; Mathieu, Maynard, Rapp & Gibson (2008). Team effectiveness 1997-2007: A review of recent advancements and a glimpse into the future. *Journal of Management*. 34, 410-476; Mathieu & Chen (2011). The etiology of the multi-level paradigm in management research. *Journal of Management*, 37, 610-641.
6. This example is drawn from the author's work as an executive coach with a key executive. For confidentiality purposes, identifying information has been changed.

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