

ENHANCING EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

By

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We accept this thesis as conforming
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ABSTRACT

This research study asked: What services, programs, or activities could be provided by Manitoba Quality Network (QNET) to enhance employee engagement within member organizations? The purpose of this research study was two-fold: to build a better understanding of how employees become and remain engaged, and to determine the specific leadership factors that enhance engagement. QNET's goal is to improve economic development, capacity, and sustainability for Manitoba companies. The challenges facing QNET member organizations include labour shortage, continued pressure to improve performance, and low morale and commitment by employees. Through utilizing an action research approach with focus groups and a world café as the data collection methods, employees of QNET member organizations participated in discussions about employee engagement. Ethical considerations, such as inclusion and confidentiality, were considered and incorporated throughout the study process. The conclusions include creating positive relationship, providing challenge opportunities through change initiatives, authentic leadership, and opportunities to contribute.

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CHAPTER ONE: FOCUS AND FRAMING

Introduction

This research study focuses on employee engagement. The specific purpose is two-fold: to build a better understanding of how employees of the member organizations of the Manitoba Quality Network (QNET) become and remain engaged and to identify activities, programs, and training needs directly related to building employee engagement with member organizations of QNET.

QNET is a not-for-profit organization that provides Manitoba businesses with opportunities for networking, building business awareness, education, and recognition. Its focus is on business quality and assisting Manitoba businesses to be competitive within their specific market. QNET has a vision that includes building a community of adaptive, effective organizations. It also strives to improve the advancement of individual and organizational performance.

A recent needs assessment, in which 600 QNET companies participated, identified employee engagement as a major concern for Manitoba companies (Cadence Human Systems, 2007). The needs assessment respondents were asked to identify the top five challenges facing Manitoba businesses. One of the top five challenges identified was low employee morale and motivation. A common theme highlighted throughout the 150-page report was the need for additional training or programs to assist companies to improve employee engagement and retention.

This information is important for two reasons: one of QNET's mandates is to provide training and services identified by members as important, and member organizations believe lower morale and employee engagement adversely affect

productivity (Cadence Human Systems, 2007). Monitoring the impact training could have on employee retention would take several years; therefore, this research addresses what factors enhance employee engagement and what activities, programs, or training could be developed and implemented by QNET. By identifying what specific factors enhance employee engagement and what activities, programs, or training could be developed and provided to QNET member organizations, QNET is addressing concerns identified by member organizations and responding to the recent needs assessment. My strong interest in leadership and what enhances employee engagement combined with the QNET Executive Director's desire to respond to Cadence Human System's needs assessment study made QNET an excellent sponsor for this major project.

As a result of the project, QNET now has access to research directly related to employee engagement within their membership. This research partially addresses the opportunities identified in the recently completed needs assessment. The Executive Director can now support and assist in bringing new opportunities and information to their members as a result of this research.

The Research Question

The research question was, what services, programs, or activities could be developed and provided by the Manitoba Quality Network to encourage and enhance employee engagement within member organizations?

The following four sub-questions assisted in answering the research question.

1. What are the indicators of employee engagement?
2. What are the key factors identified by employees that could improve their engagement?

3. What leadership factors encourage employee engagement?
4. What organizational programs or processes can make it easier for employees and leaders to improve employee engagement?

The Opportunity and Its Significance

QNET's recently released *2007 Needs Assessment* (Cadence Human Systems, 2007) identified low employee morale and motivation as a key challenge facing Manitoba businesses. In discussing Manitoba's challenges Cadence Human Systems stated:

Low employee morale and motivation was identified as a challenge facing Manitoba companies. Low employee morale and motivation looks like; no heart for the job; employees are not heard; different generations view loyalty differently; employees are overworked; employees don't know the long-term plans and why. (p. 73)

During a collaborative session on June 14, 2007, held during the needs assessment, member organizations identified low morale and motivation among employees as leading to a lack of interest in their jobs and employment; further, they identified that employees believed they were unheard and often did not know the long-term plans of the organization or, if they did, they did not know why the plans existed. The needs assessment report also outlined the desire by members for QNET to expand learning opportunities for its members relating to employee engagement through leadership.

In the needs assessment study, conducted by QNET in 2007, Cadence Human Systems identified that respondents were looking for improved knowledge and skills relating to leadership in an effort to improve morale and employee engagement. The needs assessment did not identify the specific leadership factors in terms of attributes, knowledge, and ability that encourage or discourage employee engagement. Nor did it

identify training, programs, or activities, which could enhance knowledge and abilities that would lead to greater employee engagement.

This research study assisted QNET in identifying the necessary training and activities related to the recent needs assessment (Cadence Human Systems, 2007). In addition there was an opportunity for QNET member organizations to participate in building new knowledge and be directly involved in finding solutions to identified opportunities.

Significance of the Opportunity

There are two primary stakeholders in this project. The first is the QNET organization along with its employees. Although on its own QNET is considered a small organization—one executive director and three part-time employees—QNET represents 200 member organizations and their employees. QNET provides their clients with opportunities for networking, building business awareness, education, and recognition. The second primary stakeholders are the individual member organizations and their employees. These organizations range from small, independent, privately owned companies to large crown corporations. The members represent all sectors, including private, public, and not-for-profit organizations, as well as government bodies and individuals.

This project provided the two primary stakeholders an opportunity to explore what factors encourage and enhance employee engagement. Identifying the elements and leadership factors that contribute to employee engagement was the first step to understanding what activities, programs, or training could assist member organizations.

Today's organizations are in need of engaged employees. This is not only illustrated by best-selling books that convincingly make this case, but also by the

fact the key word “employee engagement” yields far over 2 million hits on the World Wide Web. (Bakker & Schaufeli, 2008, p. 150)

This quote offers some indication of the level of worldwide interest surrounding employee engagement. It helps confirm the results of the *QNET 2007 Needs Assessment* (Cadence Human Systems, 2007) and underscores the necessity for QNET to clearly identify what enhances employee engagement.

Recent Study

The recent release of the *2007 Global Workforce Study* conducted by Towers Perrin and authored by Gebauer (2007) generated increased interest in how engaged employees help build sustainable organizations. The study connects attraction and retention of employees to employee engagement. Given the present labour shortage in Canada, organizations able to attract new talent and build employee engagement have increased opportunity for sustainability and capacity building. Gebauer (2007) stated,

The study, the largest of its kind, provides a comprehensive view of the workplace from employees themselves, and examines the elements of the work experience and the environment that attract people to a company and the job, keep them there and, most critically, engage them in their work. (p. 1)

Understanding the employee’s experience is important if we are to understand workplace engagement.

The Towers Perrin study, as reported by Gebauer (2007), also identified that it is the senior leadership—along with the reputation and culture of the organization, including learning and development opportunities—that are the primary influencers of engagement and retention. This study is important because the results of the study connect employee engagement to the ability for companies to retain and attract employees. This connection to employee engagement aligns with the results of the QNET needs assessment (Cadence Human Systems, 2007).

One of Towers Perrin's goals, as identified by Gebauer (2007) in the *2007 Global Workforce Study*, was to determine if there was a connection between employee engagement and company income. Towers Perrin (as cited in Klie, 2007) concluded that companies with a highly engaged employee group saw a 19.2% growth in operating income, while those with an unengaged employee group had a 32.7% decrease in operating income. The *2007 Global Workforce Study* draws a positive connection between employee engagement, retention, and productivity. Towers Perrin concluded that engaged employees remain longer with their employer, are more productive, and, therefore, have a positive impact on organizational income. The information provided from this study is important information for QNET member organizations, as they have identified employee engagement as a current challenge.

Some connections between the QNET *Needs Assessment* (Cadence Human Systems, 2007) study and the *2007 Global Workforce Study* (Gebauer, 2007), conducted by Towers Perrin, can be drawn. Cadence Human System's study clearly outlined an opportunity for both QNET and its members to enhance employee engagement for the purpose of improving retention, productivity, and sustainability. Towers Perrin's results show how employee engagement positively impacts profitability and the long-term sustainability of an organization. QNET's desire to understand what enhances employee engagement within their member organizations is driven by the *2007 Needs Assessment* (Cadence Human Systems, 2007) study, and is also supported by Towers Perrin's *2007 Global Workforce Study*.

Many large consulting practices are working in this area using assessment tools and identifying what improves employee engagement. Harter, Schmidt, and Hayes (as cited in Bakker & Schaufeli, 2008) stated:

Levels of employee engagement were positively related to business unit performance (i.e., customer satisfaction and loyalty, profitability, productivity turnover, and safety). The authors conclude that engagement is related to meaningful business outcomes at a magnitude that is important to many organizations. (p. 151)

The above information is in relationship to a meta-analysis that included measures from 8,000 business units and 36 companies. Through this research, Harter et al. were able to conclude that employee engagement has a significant impact on profitability, retention, and business sustainability. If employee engagement can have such an important impact on organizations, it is paramount to study what enhances employee engagement in organizations.

Both Cadence Human Systems (2007) and Towers Perrin's *2007 Global Workforce Study* (Gebauer, 2007) identified employee engagement as a significant need for businesses. Cadence Human Systems clearly outlined the importance of addressing employee engagement for the purposes of retention and profitability, while Towers Perrin identified the importance of employee engagement for the purposes of building capacity and sustainability. Improving sustainability through an increased understanding of what enhances employee engagement is a significant opportunity for QNET and its members.

QNET directly benefits from this project by receiving information that would assist QNET to continue to provide progressive programs that respond to its members' needs. It is important for QNET to respond directly to the results of its recent needs assessment (Cadence Human Systems, 2007), and particularly the significant concern relating to the identified low morale and employee engagement. QNET has a

responsibility to its members to respond to identified needs and opportunities and to continue to provide quality information, programs, and training relating to those needs. QNET could potentially be seen as unresponsive to its members if it did not take some action directly related to the results of its needs assessment.

Systems Analysis

As massive retirement begins and there are fewer individuals to replace retirees, it will be difficult for employers or business to maintain the same productivity. Employers may need to rely heavily on improved retention rates and increased performance and productivity from fewer employees. In an effort to fully understand the system in which QNET exists it is important to look at external factors and influences.

Virtual teams have become the norm, foreign employers are no longer unusual, and working abroad is a reality for many Canadian citizens. Canada competes globally for its workforce. Companies in every country around the world are competing with each other for qualified labour. “The shrinking availability of skilled talent is having a major impact on employers around the world. Talent is now being referred to as the world’s most sought after commodity” (Bouchard, 2007, p. 10). Cadence Human Systems (2007) concurred with this information, stating that one of the top five challenges for Manitoba organizations is “locating enough good new employees” (p. 1). As a result, it will be critical for Manitoba companies to improve retention rates of their good employees, while increasing attraction of new employees.

Recently, both Alberta and British Columbia took steps to address the significant labour shortage. The provincial governments in both of these provinces changed their rules regarding the processing time for foreign workers coming into Canada. These

changes are significant for two reasons: it indicates Canadian companies are experiencing the labour shortage, and both provincial governments identified worker shortage as a significant challenge and took action. “These changes are supposed to help employers find workers in occupations facing the most acute labor shortages” (Harder, 2007, p. 1). This type of initiative is important in recognizing the negative impact that the labour shortage has on organizations’ ability to be sustainable and profitable. If this initiative is combined with programs designed to enhance employee engagement, there may be an opportunity to improve retention and attraction of employees, while also increasing profitability and sustainability.

Although mandatory retirement has been lifted in Canada, a large exit from the workforce is anticipated within the next five to seven years. “By 2011, the first wave of Canada’s massive baby boomer cohort (people born between 1946 and 1964) will start turning 65 and retiring en masse. Shortly thereafter, there will be more workers leaving the workforce than entering it” (Young, 2008, p. 25). Engaged employees are more likely to be happy in their workplace and, therefore, less likely to look for work elsewhere. This means anticipated retirements and their impact could be lessened for those companies who focus on employee engagement. It is possible that those eligible to retire will choose to remain employed if they are engaged with their work and workplace.

Many Canadian organizations are struggling to find workers willing to fill their employee vacancies. It is predicted that by 2015 there will be less than one person to take the place of every person who retires (Macklem, 2005). Linda Duxbury (as cited in Macklem, 2005) stated, “How a company manages its workforce will be critical to its business success—something the best employers in Canada have already figured out”

(p. 26). As a result, the need to attract and, more significantly, retain employees is becoming increasingly important. Canadian employers cannot afford to incur the costs of recruiting and selecting new employees only to lose them to their competition shortly after hiring them.

Manitoba, like many provinces in Canada, is facing labour shortages. Higher wages and greater opportunities in Alberta continue to create additional labour shortages and concerns for Manitoba businesses. Each year, Manitoba experiences the migration of young people to Alberta. In response, the Manitoba government recently implemented a university tuition rebate for young people who have graduated and who remain living and working in Manitoba for five years (Government of Manitoba, n.d.). This initiative is a specific, targeted effort to encourage young Manitobans to stay and work in the province. The Manitoba government is well aware of the looming labour shortages and hopes that this new initiative will encourage young people to remain in Manitoba.

One of QNET's primary focuses is on business quality and assisting Manitoba businesses to be competitive and high performing within their specific market. QNET's member organizations are part of the Manitoba business community. For these organizations to be competitive and to perform well they must have the appropriate human capital. Their human capital must reflect their business demands and performance requirements. QNET member organizations are being impacted by the present labour shortage. If QNET member organizations need to attract and more importantly retain the employees they have if they are to sustain their performance requirements.

The labour shortage that presently exists and the anticipated future mass retirement is expected to have a significant impact on Manitoba businesses. QNET's

members are part of the Manitoba business community and as such are being negatively affected. Cadence Human Systems (2007), in the *2007 Needs Assessment*, confirmed that the member organizations are being adversely affected.

Organizational Context

QNET was incorporated in January 1995, as an independent, not-for-profit organization. QNET's goal is to improve economic development, capacity, and sustainability for Manitoba companies through four distinct areas: awareness, networking, education, and recognition. QNET currently runs programs under four distinct areas of interest: leadership and management, quality and effectiveness, board governance, and workplace wellness. QNET provides networking opportunities, awareness, and educational programs in each of these areas. Having served more than 11,000 clients since its inception, QNET has become a network of organizations and individuals focused on the pursuit of excellence.

Today, QNET has a staff of three part-time employees: an executive director, and two support staff. It also has a board of directors consisting of 13 people, including a chairperson, vice-chairperson, and secretary. Members of the board represent a wide range of business sectors such as education, private sector, manufacturing, and consulting. Bylaws are in place and an annual general meeting is held each spring. QNET has 550 members representing 200 member companies. QNET's services and educational programs are available to members and non-members alike. QNET wishes to be inclusive and, therefore, non-members are able to participate in their programs at an additional fee.

QNET's has a vision that includes building a community of adaptive, effective organizations. It also strives to improve the advancement of individual and organizational

performance. QNET works hard to be flexible and adaptive, while providing programs that meet the needs of the business community, in a way that advances both organizations and individuals who participate in their programs. One of the ways this small not-for-profit organization meets this vision is through its 200 company members, who participate, volunteer, and provide candid feedback on the programs and services. Through the contribution and commitment of its members, QNET has been able to provide quality services (Cadence Human Systems, 2007).

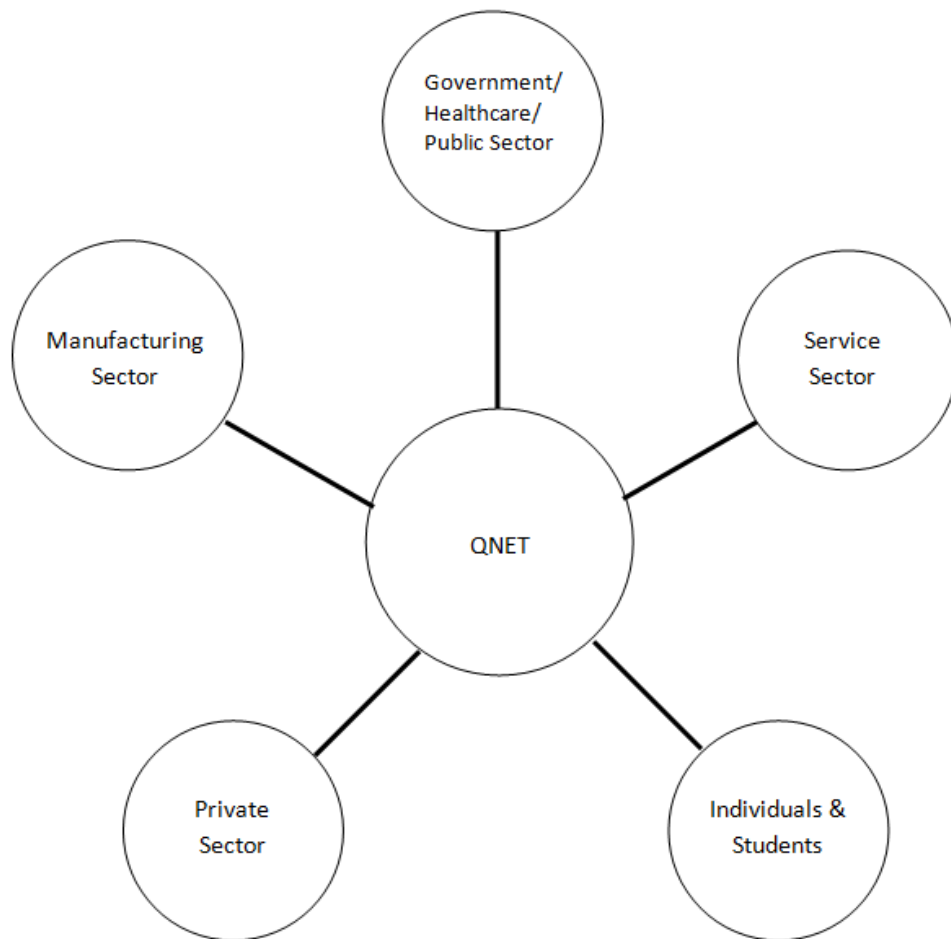


Figure 1. QNET membership.

QNET is unique in that it serves a broad range of clients, from individuals to organizations, from all levels, including front-line and senior executives, as well as

organizations from many sectors. QNET strives to represent and assist both organizations and individuals in their efforts to improve. QNET has a diverse group of membership (see Figure 1). QNET also permits non-members to participate in their services and activities.

QNET's membership is made up of almost equal thirds by the service sector, manufacturing sector, and the public sector—health care, government, and education (see Figure 1). A smaller number of members are independent consultants from the private sector and students. QNET values inclusiveness and is, therefore, available to all Manitoba businesses and individuals.

QNET serves its member organizations and non-member clients by providing networking opportunities, education, and business awareness relating to trends and current resources. QNET also has a significant library available to its members. QNET provides resources, education, business awareness, and networking opportunities for any business in Manitoba interested in seeking knowledge, tools, and programs to improve their organizational effectiveness.

The structure at QNET is very simple and flat; the small staff and board work from the perspective that less is often more. QNET is successful in providing services with very few resources and continues to operate in a very lean manner, thus ensuring maximum resources go into programs and services. It is a conscious decision to have only a minimum number of part-time, paid employees. QNET works closely with its members and, when developing and designing programs and activities, seeks outside contractors, who specialize in specific areas related to QNET's mission and interests.

QNET provides three educational certificate programs. These programs align with the distinct areas of interest, the organization's mission, and its vision. The three certificate programs are in Management Development, Leadership Development, and Six Sigma Green Belt—quality control in manufacturing.

The QNET Certificate in Management Development was launched in 2005. Since then, over 70 people have participated in the entire Certificate Program, and many more have attended individual courses. The courses provided within this QNET certificate are eligible for credit in the University of Manitoba's Extended Education Certificate in Applied Management and Organizational Effectiveness, allowing participants to pursue additional studies at the University. In 2007, QNET advertised Certificate in Management Development courses in Brandon, Manitoba and Dauphin, Manitoba for the first time. One course was presented in Brandon; seven courses were presented in Dauphin. Potential partners and facilitators in the Brandon area have been identified, and QNET plans to offer the complete program in Brandon in the future.

The second certificate program was launched in 2006 and focuses on leadership. To date, 35 people have participated in QNET's Certificate in Leadership Development program. The 35 participants deemed the program "excellent," as evidenced by participant evaluation form content. The courses are eligible for credit in the University of Manitoba's Extended Education Certificate in Applied Management and Organizational Effectiveness, allowing participants to continue on a course of study toward a university certificate.

The third certificate program offered is the Six Sigma Green Belt Certificate program. QNET manages and facilitates this certificate program under its quality and

effectiveness stream for its member organizations. Six Sigma is a business development strategy that focuses on identifying and removing errors and defects in manufacturing process.

The organization services a wide variety of clients representing all sectors. It provides education and, in particular, three certificate programs aligned with the needs of its member organizations and the University of Manitoba's continuing education program. The organization itself is small and is run efficiently with three staff and a board of directors. This research project aligns nicely with QNET's mandate and programs. The executive director and board of directors support this project and believe there is significant opportunity for positive change.

Conclusion

This chapter provided the framework and focus that surrounded the research project. Within this chapter, I addressed the opportunity and its significance to the stakeholders. I explored the alignment between QNET's mandate and the research project and how the results of the project could facilitate positive change for QNET and its members. The relevance for both QNET and myself was provided while clearly outlining the context in which the research was conducted. The following chapter reviews some of the past and present literature that addresses employee engagement and how it incorporates into this research project.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The purpose of the literature review is to examine key concepts and related research relevant to employee engagement. The following topics are identified as important: defining employee engagement and its importance, leadership factors such as behaviours and attributes that impact employee engagement, and organizational culture. Each of these topics is reviewed and critiqued relevant to employee engagement.

Employee Engagement

Introduction

Employee engagement is at the core of this research project; therefore, it is critical to explore employee engagement thoroughly. There are four subtopics that are key concepts relevant to employee engagement in this research. The first subtopic addresses interpretations and definitions of employee engagement. The second subtopic explores why employee engagement is considered important. The third topic addresses what meaningful work is and the importance of providing meaningful work to employees in an effort to improve engagement. Fourthly, an examination of relevant concepts regarding the catalysts of employee engagement is provided. Each element is reviewed in an effort to better understand what employee engagement is, the importance of employee engagement, and how and why employees become engaged.

Employee Engagement Defined

Defining employee engagement may not be simple. “Executives are beginning to realize that employee engagement doesn’t mean the same thing to everyone in every company” (Gibbons, 2007, p. 1). When John Gibbons began to work with numerous

employers in an effort to define employee engagement, he discovered that every representative at the table had a different view and concept of employee engagement. Ideas ranged from identifying human needs, to liking their direct line supervisor, to having a best friend at work. There are, indeed, differing views on the definition of employee engagement. In this section, I look at some of the confusion surrounding the definition along with some key perspectives regarding a common understanding of what employee engagement is.

Increased interest in employee engagement resulted in numerous consultants creating employee opinion surveys that represent the specific consulting firm's perspective and approach to employee engagement. These differing views created substantial confusion or, as Gibbons (2007) said, "Leaders on employee engagement represent backgrounds in all of these approaches and, therefore, their contributions have led to an unfortunate outcome known as 'conceptual bleed'" (p. 2). A conceptual bleed is understood as competing definitions that create significant confusion. In this situation, the significant confusion is around just what employee engagement means.

Despite the conceptual bleeds created by individual consulting firm perspectives, when Gibbons (2006) worked with authors, researchers, and opinion leaders, they were able to build a common understanding of what employee engagement is. "Employee engagement is a heightened emotional and intellectual connection that an employee has for his or her organization, manager, or coworkers that, in turn, influences him/her to apply additional discretionary effort to his/her work" (Gibbons, 2006, p. 5). Employees who have a heightened connection to their organization, supervisor, and coworkers, and who make additional effort in their work are considered engaged.

There is some confusion around the definition of employee engagement due to the number of consulting firms working in this area. However, researchers and opinion leaders provide us with a basic definition of employee engagement that is: the increased emotional and intellectual connection that an employee has to their employer, supervisor, and coworkers that results in an increased output of effort (Gibbons, 2006).

The Importance of Employee Engagement

The human resource profession in Canada has considered employee engagement one of the key focus areas over the past few years. “For the first time in the history of management, it is the human mind that is the primary creator of value. The quality of people and their engagement will be critical factors in corporate vitality and survival” (Ulrich, 2004, p. 1). This statement reflects the recent focus by human resource professionals and management on employee engagement and its connection to sustainability and profitability. In this section, I look at why employee engagement is considered important.

This new focus on employee engagement is driven by a labour shortage, which resulted in the need to attract and retain employees while continuing to improve performance and profitability. “Hiring top talent is one thing; keeping talent and getting its full engagement is another thing. Talent is mobile, and fully 58% of Canadian employees in Canada are open to move to other organizations” (Ulrich, 2004, p. 2). Employers able to engage employees are more likely to retain those same employees, while simultaneously increasing output. “Organizations must capture a bigger portion of the employee mindshare” (Ulrich, 2004, p. 2). The term mindshare describes the extent to

which the employee is engaged and provides output. It is this output and performance that will become increasingly important as the labour shortage continues.

Some human resource specialists consider employee disengagement a significant contributor to poor corporate performance and profitability. “Lack of engagement is endemic and is causing large and small organizations all over the world to incur excess costs, under-perform on critical tasks, and create widespread customer dissatisfaction” (Rampersad, 2008, p. 1). Extra costs and underperformance as a result of poor employee engagement negatively affects organizations and, over the long term, decreases profitability and as a result sustainability.

The *Gallup Management Journal* survey conducted in 2005 (as cited in Rampersad, 2008) found “of all U.S. workers 18 or older, about 19.2 million or roughly 14% are actively disengaged. Gallup estimates that the lower productivity of disengaged workers cost the U.S. economy about \$300 billion” (p. 12). This information is important, because it connects the disengagement of workers with low productivity and relates low productivity to negative economic implications. In turn, it is the productivity of the individual that affects the productivity of the organization and the overall financial performance and sustainability of the organization.

Meaningful Work

This section explores the concept of meaningful work relative to employee engagement. In the context of this research seeking information about how the provision of meaningful work to employees can impact engagement within the workplace is important.

While increased participation and information are important, they will not necessarily, on their own, result in meaningful work and, therefore, employee engagement. Other components are involved. “The work itself needs to offer opportunities for autonomy, influence, and intrinsic rewards” (Bolman & Deal, 2003, p. 144). This information reflects the importance for employees to have some influence over their work and autonomy in their work, while having an internal feeling of reward and personal satisfaction.

When an employee is offered opportunity for autonomy, they are given some flexibility in decision-making and creation of their work. Although autonomy is not directly connected to the creation of work, it implies that employees have expanded flexibility within their work. With the flexibility comes the ability to increase personal decision-making regarding work, and this flexibility creates opportunity for increasing personal meaning in one’s work.

Influence and intrinsic rewards are other factors that can impact the ability to create meaningful work (Bolman & Deal, 2003). It is this ability to influence the design of one’s work that can create meaningful work for that individual. Increasing an employee’s opportunities for influence can result in meaningful work. Further, when an employee has influence over their work they can feel a sense of personal satisfaction in that work; this can also be described as being meaningful. Intrinsic rewards, such as personal satisfaction and strong self-efficacy, are also components of meaningful work (Bolman & Deal, 2003). Making work meaningful is an important aspect of improving performance and employee engagement.

Wheatley (2006) connected creativity, innovation, and engagement to what interests and brings meaning to people. Wheatley believed that by watching how people spend their time and listening to what they talk about, we can begin to understand what's important to them.

Foremost among life's teachings is the recognition that human creativity and commitment are our greatest resource. As soon as people become interested in an issue, their creativity is engaged. If we want people to be innovative, leaders must engage them in meaningful issues. The simplest way to discover what's meaningful is to notice what people talk about and where they spend their energy (Wheatley, 2007). Wheatley said engaging individuals in issues important to them builds engagement. This provides us with some insight into the nexus between providing meaningful work and opportunities to invoke engagement.

Wheatley (2006) said in the employer–employee relationship it is important for employees to be able to co-create their work. “It's the fact that people need to be creatively involved in how their work gets done. We're seeing people exercising their inalienable freedom to create for themselves” (Wheatley, 2006, p. 87). Wheatley believed people support what they create, and stated meaningful work is directly connected to those who create and perform it. Engaged employees find their work meaningful, and the work is meaningful because they, in part, have created it.

The elements of meaningful work as outlined by Bolman and Deal (2003) and Wheatley (2006) included the ability to have autonomy, and to have intrinsic rewards to co-create one's work, to influence the structure and design of one's work. Meaningful

work occurs with provision of these elements. More importantly, meaningful work can result in employee engagement.

Catalysts of Employee Engagement

In this section, I explore two areas of the literature to describe some significant catalysts that enhance employee engagement. The first is the use of positive language in organizations and its impact on engagement. The second is leaders' genuine caring about their employees and the resultant increase in employee engagement. This section describes a number of factors that impact employee engagement, including positive language and positive approach to organizational life, and genuine caring for employees.

All too often, organizations focus on negative employee behaviours rather than their positive behaviours. In fact, in many areas of business, negative terminology is often used instead of positive language. Welsh, Webber, and Margolis (as cited in Bakker & Schaufeli, 2008) reported that, "In the business press over the last 17 years, compared to positive terms such as compassion and virtue, negatively biased words, such as beat and win have increased fourfold during the same period" (p. 148). From this, it seems an increase in negatively biased language may have a negative impact on employee commitment and productivity.

In contrast to this, a recent study by Fredrickson and Losada (as cited in Bakker & Schaufeli, 2008), *Positive Affect and the Complex Dynamics of Human Flourishing*, provided information about the nexus between positive organizational communication, encouragement, employee satisfaction, and output. Fredrickson and Losada's study linked attitudes, behaviours, and employee engagement with positive language. Fredrickson and Losada concluded that positive language has a direct impact on team

results and profitability. Fredrickson and Losada's study "empirically validated that positive communication and expressions of support among team members clearly distinguished flourishing teams from languishing teams ... 15 teams clearly produced better results as indicated by profitability and customer satisfaction based upon their speech acts" (p. 149). Teams who used positive communication and supported team members through positive expression produced higher results and had better customer service than those who did not use this positive communication approach. Simple, positive language has significant influence on people.

Furthermore, tapping into the potential of people through positive approaches focusing on the individual can have significant impact on engagement and resultant productivity. Founder and president of Kyocera, Kazuo Inamori (as cited in Senge, 2006) stated,

You require a new understanding of the subconscious mind, willpower, and action of the heart. You must have a sincere desire to serve the world ... duty as a manager starts with providing for both the managerial good and the spiritual welfare of employees. (Senge, 2006, p. 130)

The founder and president of this successful company spoke about the need to understand the spirit, willpower, and heart of his company and his employees in order to enhance employee engagement and productivity. Senge (2006) uses several examples like the foregoing one of Inamori's to describe and support his belief that one of the catalysts of employee engagement and the resulting organizational performance is the organizational leader's positive beliefs, values, and attitude towards employees. Senge referred to this positive values-based approach to employee engagement and increased productivity as the spirit of the organization. A positive approach that includes positive language can improve employee engagement.

There are similarities between the work of Senge (2006; Senge, Scharmer, Jaworski, & Flowers, 2004) and Wheatley (2006, 2007). Both Senge and Wheatley explored the connection between values, positive approaches, and the beliefs of leaders and their impact on employee commitment, loyalty, and performance. According to both authors, leaders must take their responsibility for employees and their well-being very seriously.

Senge et al. (2004) wrote about Hanover Insurance, which went from being one of the poorest industry performers in 1969 to consistently being in the top 25% of their industry, as measured by profit, by 1990. Both the company and Senge et al. attributed this exceptional performance to the commitment and engagement of employees, which are a direct result of company leaders' deep caring for employees' well-being. This information is important, as it leads to a better understanding of how caring for employees' well-being, along with the positive approach and values of the leader, is a significant catalyst for employee engagement.

Wheatley (2006) made similar references to values, beliefs, and spirit at work and with leaders:

Where do we find the courage to be leaders today? Courage comes from the old French word for heart, *coeur*. When we are deeply affected, when our hearts respond to an issue or person, courage pours out from our open hearts ... we have to be engaged at the heart level in order to be courageous champions. As much as we may fear emotions at work, leaders need to be willing to let their hearts open and to tell stories that open other people's hearts. (p. 129)

A catalyst to employee engagement includes the leader's ability to care deeply about employees, while seeing the interconnectedness and spirit of the organization.

Both Hanover Insurance and Kyocera improved performance due to the commitment and engagement of their employees. The chief executive officers and

presidents of these organizations recognize performance and productivity is a direct result of employee engagement. The leaders of these organizations also recognize employee engagement and commitment are a result of how leaders approach and care for their employees' well-being (Senge et al., 2004).

The Gallup organization conducted numerous studies over the years in an effort to determine which elements are required for high performance and employee satisfaction (Buckingham & Coffman, 1999). One such study was conducted with a large retailer in 1997. All stores were identical in layout, business planning, and process. Despite the store similarities the results were substantially different. Seventy-five percent of employees across the 300 locations completed a 12-question survey. Questions asked whether supervisors care for employees and recognize their contributions, and whether employees' opinions matter. Stores that scored high on these questions also had significant positive performance indicators. The survey discovered that supervisors who cared about their employees and recognized their contribution had more engaged employees than those that did not, leading to positive business performance. "The results revealed that this company was blessed with some truly exemplary managers. These managers had built productive businesses by engaging the talents and passions of their people" (Buckingham & Coffman, 1999, p. 39). The correlation between supervisors' care and recognition and store performance led Gallup to conclude that individual manager's approach to working with and enabling employees had a significant impact on commitment and employee engagement.

Buckingham and Coffman (1999) described building employee engagement in terms of climbing a mountain. They described a process individuals go through from the

early beginnings of their career at a company through the weeks and months that follow. Buckingham and Coffman described how employee engagement could progress and build over time. In the early days, employees are concerned with what they will get in return for their contribution. Employees are interested in what is expected of them, and what materials and equipment they will need to perform their job. As time goes on, employees move to wanting feedback on how they are doing on their job: “You are focused on your individual contribution and other people’s perception of it” (Buckingham & Coffman, 1999, p. 43). At the next stage of the climb, individuals are more concerned with whether “someone at work cares about them ... encourages their development” (p. 44). This indicates that once employees settle into an organization they begin to look for relationships and to see if people care about them

Over time, as employees continue their relationship with the organization, they begin to consider whether they belong. Employees want to connect to the mission and purpose of the company; they want their opinions to count and they begin to look at their coworkers’ commitment to quality work (Buckingham & Coffman, 1999). It is at this stage that employees are connected to their work and are beginning to evaluate commitment of other workers. “Your focus becomes clear. You feel a recurring sense of achievement, as though the best of you is being called upon and the best of you responds every single day” (Buckingham & Coffman, 1999, p. 45). In their analogy of mountain climbing, Buckingham and Coffman stated that as the employees reach the summit, they consider their personal growth within the organization and the opportunities afforded them for learning and development.

Buckingham and Coffman's (1999) work assists in understanding that catalysts of employee engagement may be different at different times in the employer–employee relationship, and that it is important not to assume employee engagement is static. Buckingham and Coffman's research also indicated that within any given organization, employees are at different stages in their engagement depending on tenure length. Therefore, employees are not engaged to the same extent at the same time.

There are many catalysts to employee engagement. The first is the use of positive language in organizations. This includes the use of positive terminology versus negative. The second element is overall positive approach to business. Finally the beliefs and values of the leader who has a clear focus on caring for employees and who enables them to be their best, is identified as a catalyst to employee engagement. All three of these elements are considered important catalyst of employee engagement.

Conclusion

Although confusion continues regarding what employee engagement is, experts defined employee engagement as, “Employee engagement is a heightened emotional and intellectual connection that an employee has for his or her organization, manager, or coworkers that, in turn, influences him/her to apply additional discretionary effort to his/her work” (Gibbons, 2006, p. 5). Meaningful work can be created through the provision of autonomy, influence, and intrinsic rewards. Meaningful work also includes the opportunity for employees to co-create their work. The ability for an employee to influence the structure and design of their work also assist in creating meaningful work. When employees are highly engaged organizational performance can improve. The

research clearly indicates that employee engagement has an impact on individual productivity, which, in turn, impacts overall corporate productivity.

Leadership Factors

Introduction

The focus of this research study is employee engagement; therefore, it is important to understand the connection between leadership factors and employee engagement. The leadership topics identified as relevant to this research are transformational leadership, leadership characteristics, and servant leadership. A review of each of these leadership topics assists in building a better understanding of how they impact employee engagement.

Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership includes four distinct transformational behaviours. Bass (as cited in Yukl, 2006) identified these behaviours as idealized influence, intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration, and inspirational motivation. Each is explored in an effort to better understand what they are and what their possible impact on employee engagement is.

The first behaviour, idealized influence, describes what happens when followers identify with their leader, and there is an emotional connection. "Idealized influence is behavior that arouses strong follower emotions and identification with the leader" (Yukl, 2006, p. 135). Idealized influence creates commitment and emotional connection to the organization and the work (Yukl, 2006). Idealized influence, when present, could enhance employee due to the increase in emotional connection. The definition of

employee engagement, previously discussed, identifies a heightened emotional connection to the organization, supervisor, and coworkers.

The second behaviour identified in transformational leadership is intellectual stimulation. This occurs when a leader's behaviour influences followers to be more aware of problems (Yukl, 2006). The leader encourages employees to view problems with increased curiosity and creativity. According to Yukl, "Intellectual stimulation is behavior that increases follower awareness of problems and influences followers to view problems from a new perspective" (p. 135). Intellectual stimulation provides employees an environment in which to become more engaged by expanding not only their awareness of problems, but also by encouraging creative problem solving and decision-making. This element of transformational leadership also connects to the definition of employee engagement, "heightened intellectual connection to his or her organization" (Gibbons, 2006, p. 5).

The third behaviour, individualized consideration, describes what happens when a leader considers each individual independently by offering unique support and encouragement. "Individualized consideration includes providing support, encouragement, and coaching to followers" (Yukl, 2006, p. 135). When leaders care for each employee, the employee's relationship with the leader improves. Individualized consideration includes a personal connection to the employee by the leader. The employee has sense of belonging.

The fourth behaviour espoused by transformational leaders is defined as inspirational motivation. It includes the ability to provide a clear vision and purpose for the organization while setting a good example by following the values and vision of the

organization. “Inspirational motivation ... includes communicating an appealing vision, using symbols to focus subordinates effort, and modeling appropriate behaviours” (Yukl, 2006, p. 136). The leader’s ability to provide a clear vision and purpose for the organization increases employee connection and commitment. Employees do not come in with the organizational vision and purpose. It develops over time.

Bass, Avolio, Jung, and Berson (as cited in Schaubroeck, Lam, & Cha, 2007)

stated:

Transformational leaders inspire followers to transcend self-interest and perceptions of their own limitations to become more effective in pursuing collective goals. They do this by engaging in several types of behavior. Transformational leaders articulate ambitious collective goals and encourage followers to accept them. They also support followers in working toward the goals, such as by acting as a role model, stimulating them to engage in analysis, showing concern for them as individuals, and encouraging teamwork. (p. 1)

Transformational leadership exists when leaders inspire followers with a clear vision, align their own behaviour with that vision, support followers with coaching and encouragement, and engage employees in problem solving.

Transformational leadership includes characteristics that enhance employee commitment and engagement. If employees believe in the values and vision of the organization, are supported by leaders, and are encouraged to engage in problem solving, they may have a stronger sense of belonging and feel empowered; in turn, this could enhance employee engagement.

Leadership Characteristics

The leadership behaviours and characteristics covered in this section are: risk-taking or challenging the status quo, building shared vision, sharing leadership, and connecting rewards to performance. These four characteristics are reviewed in an effort to find linkages between leadership characteristics and employee engagement.

Challenging the Status Quo

According to Kouzes and Posner (1995), one of the key behaviours of exemplary leaders is the ability to challenge the process. Leaders seek out opportunity and accept challenges as they are presented. “Leaders are pioneers—people who are willing to step out into the unknown. They’re willing to take risks, to innovate, and experiment in order to find new and better ways of doing things” (Kouzes & Posner, 1995, p. 40).

Challenging the process is about confronting and changing the status quo. This characteristic also includes the ability on the part of the leader to engage front-line workers in the challenge. This means they are able to challenge employees by raising expectations. According to Kouzes and Posner, “They regularly set the bar higher. However, leaders also appreciate that the challenge shouldn’t be so great as to be discouraging” (p. 40). Exemplary leaders challenge the status quo and encourage employees to do the same. They experiment and innovate in an effort to move organizations forward and engage employees in their work.

Challenging the process and risk-taking is closely linked to embracing change. The willingness of the leader to challenge the status quo ignites change. “The first thing that struck us as we analyzed the personal best cases was that they were about significant change” (Kouzes & Posner, 1995, p. 37). Another leadership expert links risk-taking to embracing change and links the importance of this characteristic to exemplary leadership. Sharma (1998) referred to this as surrendering to change and then embracing it: “Rigidly adhering to tradition and outdated ways of doing things will drive a stake right through the heart of your company. Be more flexible, more open, and more accepting. Begin to accommodate and align yourself with change” (p. 152). The ability of a leader to

challenge tradition and the status quo and to accept and encourage change is believed to be an important characteristic for exemplary leadership.

This leadership characteristic can be linked to transformational leadership in particular, intellectual stimulation where leaders encourage followers to problems and situations from a new perspective. It encourages creative and innovative problem solving.

Building Shared Vision

The second leadership characteristic is the ability to create a vision and to successfully share that vision with employees. “The vision provides hope for a better future and the faith that it will be attained some day” (Yukl, 2006, p. 168). A vision provides a picture of the future that includes values, hopes, and ideals. For leaders to create and share a vision they must be forward thinking and future orientated (Kouzes & Posner, 1995). Kouzes and Posner and Yukl agreed that vision is about the future and is forward thinking. A well-articulated vision allows the organization to see the future in a new way and to provide a defined point to look towards. De Pree (1987) described it slightly differently; he uses the term momentum to describe vision. Momentum builds from a clear vision where employees are enabled to participate; momentum is a result of a clear vision. “Momentum comes from a clear vision of what the corporation ought to be, from a well thought out strategy to achieve that vision” (De Pree, 1987, p. 18). A fundamental element of De Pree’s approach is that it includes everyone in the organization: Everyone becomes publicly accountable to achieve the vision. The momentum refers to the building of a desire by all employees to accomplish the vision. When this desire by employees to accomplish the vision is present employee engagement can exist.

A point of debate about creating a vision is whether the vision is best created by a single leader or by a group of constituents. If the vision is created by a group of constituents, is it more likely to be successful and does it result in employee engagement? Getting buy-in from employees regarding the future and the vision is important to success. “In most cases, a successful vision is not the creation of a single, heroic leader working alone, but instead it reflects the contributions of many diverse people in the organization” (Yukl, 2006, p. 171). Yukl believed it is unlikely a single leader would have the knowledge needed to develop a vision that appeals to most constituents. He argued that when constituents are involved in the development of the vision it will appeal to a wider audience and is more likely to build momentum and engagement.

Lance Secretan (2004) argued that this approach is flawed in that it looks for the lowest common denominator, is plagued with compromise, and results in mediocrity. It is the leader who is driven by a compelling cause and vision. “It comes from a deep place of knowing—some conviction that a richly imagined future could, in some way, dramatically and positively change the world” (Secretan, 2004, p. 48). This refers to a single leader who has a passion and deeply rooted cause. The leader then engages followers who are drawn to the cause and choose to engage in its mission. These two opposing positions require us to consider which comes first.

It is possible that both positions are correct depending on where the organization is at the time. A well-established organization could call upon its employees to assist in creating a new vision, whereas an individual leader with a compelling vision may seek out individuals who wish to follow. Both processes have the potential to engage employees in pursuing the vision: the first by engaging employees in the development of

the vision, the second by seeking out those who are naturally drawn to the vision. Either of these perspectives could result in employee engagement, as long as the employees believe in and support the vision.

Sharing Leadership

The third characteristic is the ability and willingness to share leadership, meaning the leader is able to let go, to allow others to lead as required. It is the recognition by the leader that individuals will step forward and lead as required in different circumstances. This characteristic of having the ability and willingness to share leadership also includes the ability to recognize individual leadership.

Leadership is not for them, nor is it limited to the person at the top, or the eldest. It is the responsibility of every human who is present ... none of us is exempt from the responsibility, nor unworthy of the opportunities to lead.
(Secretan, 2004, p. 189)

Each person takes a responsibility to lead, as required by the circumstances or situation and based on skill and capacity.

De Pree (1987) described shared leadership as roving leadership; these are the individuals who step forward and take leadership roles whenever called upon. "Roving leaders are those indispensable people in our lives who were there when we need them. Roving leaders take charge, in varying degrees, in a lot of companies every day" (p. 49). The formal leader recognizes the importance of roving leadership, encourages, and celebrates it.

If employees are given opportunities and encouraged to lead, their sense of value and contribution is increased, which may enhance their engagement in the organization and their work. Roving or shared leadership may increase autonomy and influence, which can enhance engagement.

Connecting Rewards to Performance and Motivation

The final leadership characteristic reviewed is the ability and willingness by the leader to connect rewards with performance. The exploration of the nexus between performance and rewards is important in understanding the development of employee commitment and engagement. Engagement in their work and organization may increase when employees receive extrinsic rewards for positive performance. This section looks at non-monetary extrinsic rewards as motivators and their possible connection to employee engagement.

The outcomes of our actions play a significant role in further actions (Kouzes & Posner, 1995). “People repeat behavior that’s rewarded, avoid behavior that’s punished, and drop or forget behavior that produces neither result. If especially hard work and long hours on the project go unnoticed and unrewarded, people will soon minimize their efforts” (p. 275). When employees feel appreciated for their efforts and positive performance, they are more likely to continue putting forward commitment and positive results. When employees continually perform at a high level and their efforts are not recognized, their motivation reduces. This could negatively impact their engagement in their work and organization.

Connecting job-related positive performance to rewards and recognition will assist in encouraging repeated behaviour and possibly lead to increased engagement. “One of the strongest prescriptions for influencing motivation is to tie job-related outcomes to job effort and/or performance” (Kouzes & Posner, 1995, p. 275). Rewarding employees for high performance is important to increasing motivation in the future.

Conversely, poor performers should not be rewarded or recognized until the desired results occur. “Low-quality performers shouldn’t be rewarded until they conform.

Today, we see performance-reward linkages everywhere” (Kouzes & Posner, 1995, p. 275). Kouzes and Posner cited examples where rewards and recognition for positive performance have been very successful in improving motivation and overall success. This may be a very simple approach to increasing and influencing motivation.

Sharma (1998) has taken a slightly different approach to rewards, performance, and motivation.

There is no such thing as an unmotivated person, only an unmotivated employee. You can take any member of your team who you believe lacks motivation and initiative and scrutinize his or her personal life and guess what you’ll see ... you will see that that person has hobbies that he loves, you will see that he has interests that excite him. (p. 57)

This perspective speaks to the natural desire of people to be connected and engaged in something whether it is a hobby or their work. In many cases people are connected and engaged in both personal hobbies and their work and workplace. Effective leaders find ways to associate pleasure with the daily work of their employees and the compelling purpose of the organization. “The purpose of life is a life of purpose” (Sharma, 1998, p. 248). Sharma wrote about connecting employees to purpose and then “praise progress and reward results” (p. 132). Sharma taught leaders to seek out good behaviour among employees that is connected to the organizational purpose and then to reward it relentlessly. Although this approach is slightly different than Kouzes and Posner’s (1995) the focus is the same: Reward behaviour you wish to see repeated. “The sooner you reward the good behavior, the more likely it is to be repeated. Keep rewarding the kind of behavior you want to see again and again” (Sharma, 1998, p. 125). Positive reinforcement, such as rewards and recognition improves motivation and performance, especially when performance is linked to purpose. Increased motivation and commitment is linked to increased employee engagement.

Servant Leadership

Servant leadership is leadership that serves others. It is a service first approach. When leaders serve in an effort to meet the priorities of others, is there a positive impact on employees, and does this impact improve employee engagement? This section reviews the factors that define servant leadership and the possible impacts on employee engagement.

Servant leaders are those who intentionally choose to serve their constituents in a genuine and authentic way. Greenleaf (as cited in Secretan, 2004) stated,

The servant leader knows that others yearn to be heard, to be engaged-not in debate, but in genuine dialogue-not mind to mind, but heart to heart-the dialogue that springs from a loving intent and thus inspires. The servant leader is servant first. It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve. (p. 136)

There is a conscious connection through service created between the leader and the employee.

One characteristic of servant leaders is an understanding of the importance of serving their constituents in such a way as to assist their personal growth and increase their autonomy and empowerment. These leaders truly care about the personal health, welfare, and growth of their employees (Secretan, 2004). The way to determine whether employees are being served by their leader is to examine whether employees feel freer, more autonomous, healthier, and are experiencing personal growth through their efforts at work (Secretan, 2004). De Pree (1987) confirmed this, “The signs of outstanding leadership appear primarily among the followers. Are the followers reaching their potential? Are they learning? Serving” (p. 12)? The impact and outcomes of servant leadership are defined and evident through the impacts on followers.

When employees are provided this type of personal service, their commitment and loyalty to the organization are affected. When leaders are employee-focused instead of self-focused, heightened motivation and commitment become evident (Secretan, 2004). This heightened commitment and motivation may be translated into enhanced employee engagement in their work and workplace.

Servant leadership is leadership focused on serving constituents. Servant leadership responds to the needs of employees, which results in the personal growth, health, and autonomy of employees. It is a servant-first approach that assists employees in bringing out their best talents while inspiring personal growth. Servant leadership results in employees feeling freer, healthier, and wiser.

Conclusion

The characteristics of transformational leadership, idealized influence, intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration, and inspirational motivation all have positive impacts on employees, their motivation, and their commitment. When employees are intellectually stimulated and involved in problem solving, have a personal connection to their leader, and are inspired by a vision, they become more motivated and committed. This positive impact on motivation and commitment also has a positive impact on their engagement in their work and their workplace.

Leadership characteristics, such as challenging the status quo, building shared vision, sharing leadership, and connecting rewards to performance, also have a positive impact on employees and their motivation. Taking risks and challenging employees is similar to intellectual stimulation, a characteristic of transformational leadership. It is the opportunity for employees to look critically and creatively at problems and opportunities.

When employees share the vision and purpose of the organization they are more likely to be committed and motivated. Their motivation and commitment to the organization may translate into increased employee engagement. When employees have the opportunity to step into leadership roles as required, they gain an opportunity to learn and grow, and they experience increased influence and autonomy. Linking rewards to performance has shown that motivation and commitment increase when recognition and rewards are present.

Servant leadership is defined as an individual being servant focused rather than leader focused. It is leadership that focuses on the needs of employees. Servant leaders ask the question, “How can I serve you?” When servant leadership is present, employees grow as individuals; they become healthier, wiser, and more autonomous. When employees grow as individuals and increase their autonomy, they become more committed and engaged in their work.

Organizational Culture

This section explores the subject of organizational culture and its impact on employee engagement. The culture of an organization may have a direct impact on the level of commitment, loyalty, and engagement an employee provides to the employer. This section provides a definition of organizational culture, describes the types of cultures, and describes the elements of a positive or effective organizational culture and what the possible connections are between organizational culture and employee engagement.

Organizational Culture Defined

The culture of an organization is created over time. It consists of the rules, beliefs, and behaviours that exist within those who have worked and remain working at the organization. “Culture can be defined as the customs, civilization, and achievements of a particular time or people” (Moir, 2008, p. 1). Culture reflects how things are done around the organization and can include the traditions, values, and accomplishments.

Culture has also been defined by McShane (2006) as, “The basic pattern or shared assumptions, values, and beliefs considered to be the correct way of thinking about and acting on problems and opportunities facing the organization” (p. 442). The significance of this definition is the reference to the correct way of thinking and acting. The culture is driven by values, beliefs, and assumptions and defines what is important to the organization.

With these definitions in mind, it is easy to see how varied the organizational culture can be from one company to the next. Indeed, there are likely as many organizational cultures as there are organizations. “When human behaviorists discuss organizational culture they are usually referring to the organization’s dominant themes most widely shared by its employees” (McShane, 2006, p. 128). The dominant themes emerge from rules, values, and norms, both written and unwritten. These themes can vary within an organization from one geographic region or occupational group to another; these are referred to as subcultures, which either align with the overall organization’s dominant culture or oppose the organization’s core values. When this latter happens, it is referred to as a counterculture (McShane, 2006).

Organizational cultures and subcultures develop from the core values, beliefs, traditions, and achievements of an organization. Dominant themes emerge from these values and beliefs and guide individuals in the way they think and act within the workplace. These dominant themes shape the organization's culture.

Culture Types

There are four major culture types identified by Cameron and Quinn (2006): the hierarchy culture, the market culture, the clan culture, and the adhocracy culture. Each one of these cultures will be examined in an effort to understand the behaviours, values, and specific characteristics associated with the culture and how they may impact employee engagement.

Hierarchy Culture

The Hierarchy Culture is the oldest and most structured organizational culture. Hierarchy culture evolved from the work of Max Weber, a German sociologist who studied organizations in Europe during the early 1900s (Cameron & Quinn, 2006). This culture evolved from a need to improve efficiencies for producing goods and services and, as its name suggests, is based on values and beliefs that are hierarchical and bureaucratic.

The characteristics of a hierarchical culture include clear lines of authority and decision-making, standardization that includes rules and procedures, and an impersonal and predictable style. This type of culture was developed intentionally as a means of increasing efficiencies reliability and consistent output (Cameron & Quinn, 2006). Mechanisms to ensure accountability are highly valued within this culture.

Hierarchical cultures are most often found in large organizations and government agencies where standardization, uniformity, and consistent output are highly valued.

There is little or no discretion afforded to individual employees. The attributes and values of a hierarchical culture are in stark contrast to the attributes described by Wheatley

(2007):

Communities form around specific standards, doctrines, traditions. Individuals are required to conform, to obey, to serve the greater good of the community. Thus inclusion exacts the high price, that of our individual self expression ... the price that communities pay for this conformity is exhausting and for its members it is literally deadly. (p. 48)

The loss of personal autonomy through hierarchical cultures means the loss of self-expression, co-creation of work, and self-determination. The characteristics of hierarchical cultures appear to be in direct conflict with our natural need for self-creation and expression (Wheatley, 2007). Does this conflict impact our engagement in the workplace? It may be argued that it is more difficult to enhance employee engagement within a hierarchical culture, such as the one described by Cameron and Quinn (2006).

Market Culture

The market culture is dominated by the core values of competitiveness and productivity (Cameron & Quinn, 2006). This culture focuses on external constituents such as customers, contractors, and regulators. Market culture does not have the internal focus of the hierarchy culture. Profitability and bottom-line results are primary objectives in the market culture. There is an outward focus towards improved competitiveness, premium returns, and customer-driven initiatives.

A market culture tends to have leaders who are results driven and demanding and goals and targets that stretch those who are charged with achieving them (Cameron & Quinn, 2006): "Success is defined in terms of market share and penetration" (p. 40).

Market leadership is very important; therefore, the organization values strong competition and bottom-line results.

It is difficult to determine whether a market culture would be conducive to enhancing employee engagement. There are some individuals who are highly motivated by competition and thrive on having new challenges. The market culture could be an excellent fit for these individuals. Those individuals who are less competitive and not as comfortable with significant challenge may find this type of culture less engaging.

Clan Culture

Clan cultures have a third set of values and beliefs different from those of the hierarchy and the market culture. The clan culture values shared goals, participation, cohesion, and teamwork. Employee involvement is encouraged and there is a strong corporate commitment to employees.

A number of researchers observed fundamental differences between the market and hierarchy forms of design in America and clan forms of design in Japan. Shared values and goals, cohesion, participativeness, individuality, and a sense of we-ness permeated clan type firms. They seemed more like extended families than economic entities (Cameron & Quinn, 2006).

Clan culture focuses on teamwork, relationships, and employee development. A dominant theme is that of providing a safe and trusting work environment, positive relationships, and opportunities for empowerment of employees. As described by Cameron and Quinn (2006), clan culture facilitates participation and employee engagement.

Clan culture aligns more closely with the work of Secretan (2004) and Wheatley (2007).

Strong relationships are inclusionary; that is, they seek to embrace rather than repel, compete, or exclude. Organizations, of any kind, cannot be relevant if they

seek to exclude by creating hierarchies ... the soul seeks to belong, to create relationships, and to be part of a community. (Secretan, 2004, p. 27)

Both Wheatley and Secretan identified the importance of organizational cultures embracing and engaging the whole person and creating holistic symbiotic relationships that result in growth and evolution for the individual and the organization. It would appear that the clan culture has a higher likelihood of resulting in engaged employees: “The clan culture is typified by a friendly place to work where people share a lot of themselves. It is like an extended family. Leaders are thought of as mentors” (Cameron & Quinn, 2006, p. 42).

Adhocracy Culture

The adhocracy culture values innovation, entrepreneurship, creativity, and risk-taking, and is future thinking. One of the primary advantages of this culture is its extreme flexibility and adaptability. “They have been characterized as tents rather than palaces in that they can reconfigure themselves rapidly when new circumstances arise” (Cameron & Quinn, 2006, p. 43). The ability to transform quickly while dealing with uncertainty in ambiguity is highly valued.

These cultures do not have a centralized power or authority, but have a flexible system that allows authority to move from one person to the next as tasks and teamwork require. There is typically no organizational chart, as it is difficult to map out. Procedures and policies are treated as temporary; jobs, titles, and structures change frequently.

The adhocracy culture takes many more risks than the other three cultures described. This culture attracts individuals who are visionary and risk-orientated. A core value of this culture is to be on the leading edge of products and services. Individuals who thrive on challenge and are comfortable with ambiguity, the adhocracy culture may

enhance opportunities for employee engagement. Individuals who prefer routine and clear structure and are not risk-orientated, this culture may not invoke engagement.

Elements of Positive Organizational Culture

Not all organizational cultures are positive and effective at creating engaged and loyal employees. It is important in the context of this research to examine some of the elements of positive organizational cultures that may impact on employee engagement and organizational performance. This section examines trust as an element of positive organizational culture.

One of the dominant themes of effective organizational culture is trust. Organizations that have a high level of trust produce better results than those that do not. Stated by Covey (as cited in Boomer, 2008), “Firms that assess internal and external trust will grow rapidly and avoid paying the taxes. Taxes are redundancy, bureaucracy, politics, disengagement, turnover, client churn, and fraud” (p. 1). When trust is low within organizations the culture usually includes high bureaucracy, repetition, and redundancy of workloads, high turnover, and disengagement of employees. These negative attributes of low trust result in poor performance of the organization (Boomer, 2008).

When trust is a dominant theme within an organizational culture, key behaviours and values include honesty, clear concise communication amongst employees and between leaders and employees, mutual respect, transparency, and accountability (Boomer, 2008). Loyalty amongst employees and loyalty from employees to the organization is also apparent. When trust is a high priority individuals demonstrate the above behaviours widely throughout the organization.

Higher levels of trust are developed when organizations value meaningful conversations between employees, suppliers, leaders, and community (Wheatley, 2007). “When people develop new levels of trust for one another, they become more cooperative and forgiving. People stop being so arbitrary and demanding when they are part of the process” (Wheatley, 2007, p. 70). When the organizational culture includes a high level of trust, people learn to think together and take initiative. This initiative and independence could be linked to employee engagement.

An environment that encourages independence and initiative has potential for higher levels of engagement. Trust, as a value and belief, that becomes dominant within an organizational culture can assist in creating an environment where behaviours include mutual respect, loyalty, transparency, and open communication. These behaviours can result in increased independence and a willingness to take initiative by employees, which can be linked to employee engagement.

Organizational culture has been defined as the values, beliefs, customs, and assumptions that exist within an organization. Organizational culture can also include behaviours, rules, as well as traditions. In an effort to understand the possible impacts of organizational culture on employee engagement it is important to have an understanding of what organizational culture is.

Cameron and Quinn (2006) identified four specific cultures. They are the hierarchy culture, the market culture, the clan culture, and the adhocracy. Each of these cultures has unique characteristics that can impact employee engagement. The hierarchical culture may negatively impact employee engagement as there is little or no discretion afforded to individual employees. It is difficult to determine whether a market

culture within an organization impacts employee engagement. The clan culture values shared goals, participation, cohesion, and teamwork. Employee involvement is encouraged and there is a strong corporate commitment to employees. This culture could have a positive impact on employee engagement, as it appears to be more employee-focused. The final culture described by Cameron and Quinn is the adhocracy culture. Similar to the market culture, it is difficult to determine whether the adhocracy culture would consistently impact employee engagement negatively or positively.

Boomer (2008) identified trust as a key element of positive organizational culture. Both Boomer (2008) and Wheatley (2007) agreed when organizational culture includes a high level of trust, people learn to think together and take initiative. An organizational culture that includes trust and a team focus can have a positive impact on employee engagement.

Conclusion

The literature review explored the topics that influence employee engagement. Three topics were covered. The first topic reviewed employee engagement directly and included a working definition, the importance of employee engagement, the nexus between engagement and meaningful, and lastly reviewed the catalyst of employee engagement. The second topic explored leadership factors such as transformational leadership, characteristics, shared leadership and servant leadership. The final topic covered was organizational culture. This section included a definition of organizational culture, types of cultures, and the positive element of trust within a culture. The next chapter outlines the research approach, tools, and methodology.

CHAPTER THREE: CONDUCT OF ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT

Introduction

This research project asked: What services, programs, or activities could be developed and provided by the Manitoba Quality Network to enhance employee engagement within member organizations? The research was approached using action research and appreciative inquiry. I conducted this research using two focus groups and one world café. The study included employees of QNET member organizations. I used software to assist in organizing the data. There were ethical considerations made throughout the project. This chapter provides details on the research approach and methods, the selection of participants, how the research was conducted, the data analyzed, and ethical considerations.

Research Approach

According to Calhoun (as cited in Stringer, 2007), action research requires the participation of stakeholders: “Disciplined inquiry seeks focused efforts to improve the quality of people’s organizational, community, and family lives” (p. 10). As the purpose of this research was to assist QNET in identifying services, activities, or programs that would improve people’s organizational lives through enhanced employee engagement, action research was the primary approach used to conduct this research project.

Action research is a collaborative approach to investigation, which engages people who have a direct stake and interest in solving a specific problem or question. “Those whose lives are affected by the problem under study should be engaged in the processes of investigation” (Stringer, 2007, p. 11). By involving representatives from the stakeholder groups, such as member organizations and their employees and the QNET

employees and members of the board, I was able to engage those who would be most affected by the subject investigated. The employees of the member organizations were the focus of the research, because they have direct knowledge about what engages them within their workplace. Further, since these are the people who could benefit from the research if the recommendations are acted upon, it was crucial to include them. It is the collaborative and inclusive approach that made action research an excellent fit for this project.

The cyclical nature of action research provided an opportunity for diagnosing, planning action, taking action, and evaluating action (Coghlan & Brannick, 2005). The first stage of the cycle consisted of diagnosing the problem. By reviewing Cadence Human System's (2007) QNET *Needs Assessment* study, I was able to determine that employee engagement was a key concern to member organizations. The next stage in the cycle was planning the action research, which included determining the appropriate research methods and approach. By conducting focus groups and a world café as the chosen research approaches, action occurred. Data analysis and evaluation was the final stage of the first cycle. QNET could continue to gather more information as a result of the recommendations, which would represent a new cycle. QNET could decide to move through another complete cycle by designing and developing programs, implementing, and evaluating them. Action research provides an opportunity for QNET to move through the cycle many times.

Generally, in data analysis there are both qualitative and quantitative outcomes; however, qualitative outcomes were the focus of this research. "Qualitative researchers assert that adequacy in the social sciences begins with acceptance of the more human

centered methodology, since social scientists are trying to understand human behavior” (Palys & Atchison, 2008, p. 7). This research sought to understand the human behaviour associated with employee engagement. Qualitative research is a philosophical approach that seeks to understand the truth of others (Palys & Atchison, 2008). While conducting the research and subsequent analysis of the data, I was seeking to understand what participants believed to be the true factors impacting employee engagement.

This research also employed an appreciative inquiry approach. “Appreciative Inquiry deliberately focuses attention on what works, what brings life and vitality to experience, and what’s possible for its evolution” (Brown & Isaacs, 2005, p. 7). This research project and the research question were phrased in a positive way with the intention to gather information about what has positively impacted employee engagement.

Appreciative inquiry follows what is described as the four D model (Watkins & Mohr, 2001), which identifies four stages: (a) discovery, described as appreciating that which gives life or identifying things that work well and bring positive outcomes; (b) dream, where the future is envisioned and possibilities are explored; (c) design, where plans are developed about how to construct the future and participants identify how dreams could be developed into reality; and (d) destiny, during which the design is implemented and evaluated.

This research employed the first two stages of the four D model: discovery and dream (Watkins & Mohr, 2001). The first stage of the research was to discover the factors of employee engagement. The second stage of the research was to dream about what types of programs, activities, or training in the future could be developed. The final

two stages, design and destiny, were not included within the scope of this project; however, they could be completed by QNET upon review and consideration of this project's recommendations.

Project Participants

This project included a project sponsor, project supervisor, editor, advisory committee, a small research team, the research participants, and myself, as the researcher. Each project participant played a unique and significant role.

The development and use of a project advisory committee was important to ensure there was inclusion of and direction from the sponsoring organization. The QNET executive director, my sponsor, Trish Wainikka advised the QNET board members of the opportunity to participate on the advisory committee. Two board members and the executive director volunteered for this role. Each month throughout the length of the project, we met to discuss progress, opportunities, and challenges. The review committee members reviewed and commented on my proposed study conduct and development of questions that would be used during the actual research implementation.

Research team members were selected based on their willingness to participate as observers. Research team members were neither QNET employees, nor employees of member organizations. A graduate of the Royal Roads University, Masters in Leadership and Training program and four other professional associates participated as part of the research team. Each research team member signed a confidentiality agreement (see Appendix A), which outlined their responsibilities.

The research team was created for four specific purposes: to observe during the focus groups; to act as table hosts at the world café, to review and comment on the

questions to be asked at both the focus groups and the world café, and to provide me with feedback on my conduct, approach, and objectivity.

The focus of this research project was the employees of QNET member organizations; they participated directly in the research through either a focus group or a world café. It was important that the participants be employees of the member organizations as these are the individuals most affected by the research.

In the quantitative studies, random selection of participants is the most common method for determining who will take part, but qualitative and action research studies require a different process, often called the purposeful sampling that consciously selects people on the basis of a particular set of attributes. In action research, that major attribute is the extent to which a group or individual is affected by or has an effect on the problem or issue of interest (Stringer, 2007, p. 43).

QNET's role was important during the invitation stage, as QNET assisted in identifying interested member organizations. QNET informed its members via email of the opportunity to participate in the research project three times over a three-week period. Recipients of the communications were asked to self-identify by return e-mail or telephone directly to the QNET office if they were interested in participating. By doing so, they had an initial opportunity to ask some general questions and to give QNET permission to pass their contact information to me.

The staff provided me with the contact information for the interested organizations via e-mail. I contacted each organization by phone and then followed up with an e-mail communication (see Appendix B). In the e-mail communication, I provided the organizational letter of invitation and consent form (see Appendix C).

During both telephone communication and the e-mail I advised employers of the importance to review the letter of invitation and organizational consent form. Each organization was invited to fax a signed organizational consent form to my fax line if they were interested in having employees participate.

I also provided each organization with the individual employee consent form (see Appendix D) and logistics information including date, time and location of the upcoming focus groups. During my e-mail (see Appendix B) or telephone communication I advised each organization that the individual employee consent forms would need to be read and signed by those wishing to participate (see Appendix D). The individual employee consent forms were received by fax.

I advised organizations that the focus groups were intended for front-line employees and not for managers or supervisors. I wanted to gather information from front-line employees about what engaged them in their workplace. At this stage, I did not intend to gather the perspective from supervisors, managers, or senior leaders. I advised each organization to provide the opportunity to all of their employees. Some organizations posted the invitation on employee bulletin boards; other organizations used e-mail to communicate with their employees about the opportunity.

As organizational consent forms and individual employee consent forms arrived I created a spreadsheet (see Appendix E) that would provide me a quick reference. The spreadsheet included the company name, employee name, and the individual identifier number that I assigned to each participant.

The same process was used to identify interested organizations and employees for participation in the world café. Organizations were informed of the opportunity via email

from QNET. This electronic communication went out to their members three times over a four-week period. Organizations who did not participate in the focus groups were provided the organizational consent form along with the individual employee consent form (see Appendix F). Those organizations that had participated in the focus groups were provided the individual employee world café consent form only.

A significant difference between the criteria for participation in a focus group and that of the world café was having all stakeholders participate. Organizations were informed that supervisors, managers, and senior leaders were welcome to participate in the world café. My intention was to include the broad community that would be affected by the results of the world café. I also needed to invite employees and board members of QNET. The only exception was I did not invite board members who were participating in the advisory committee or the executive director who was my direct sponsor. This exclusion was because they had intimate knowledge of the project, the process and the questions that would be asked. However, one board member who was also an advisory committee member requested to attend the world café as an observer only. I welcomed this opportunity, as he would provide feedback on my conduct and organizational ability.

Individuals wishing to attend the world café were required to fax or mail the individual consent form to me (see Appendix F). I received 23 of the 25 consent forms prior to the world café. Only two consent forms were received at the event. It allowed me to create in advance a second spreadsheet where I identified the organization, sector, employee name, and created a unique identifier for each participant. I created number tags prior to the event that participants would wear at the world café, which corresponded

to the unique identifier. This was done to identify specific contributions from participants where applicable.

Research Methods and Tools

The focus group was the first research tool employed. The tool was chosen because it provided an opportunity to capture more information than could be captured through individual interviews. A focus group is a group interview in which participants have the opportunity to share their opinions and perspectives with others in the group.

Fontana and Frey (as cited in Palys & Atchison, 2008) stated:

The focus group setting places opinions on the table where differences between perspectives can be highlighted and negotiated. This process allows participants to embellish on positions, discuss related dynamics, and articulate the rationale underlying their perspective. (p. 159)

The purpose of the focus groups was to gather information on employee engagement and the factors that influence individuals' engagement. The focus groups provided front-line employees an opportunity to share ideas, discuss opinions, and provide rationale from their specific perspective.

The questions posed at the two focus groups used an appreciative inquiry approach and were developed to elicit information and stories about when participants were excited about their job or work assignment and believed they were engaged in their workplace. Further, I wanted to uncover factors and conditions that were present at the time the participant felt that way. Finally, I wanted participants to explore what possible leadership factors or styles were present when they believed they were engaged; examples could be from their present employer or past employers. I was looking for common themes arising from specific stories participants would share.

The questions were discussed with the project supervisor, sponsor, advisory committee, and research team (see Appendix G). The advisory committee reviewed the questions and provided feedback. My intention was to ensure the questions were asked in an appropriate sequential manner, with one question building upon another. The questions were piloted with three employees from a small company. Each signed a consent form (see Appendix D). The three pilot group participants considered the questions (see Appendix G) effective and meaningful. The three pilot group participants also believed that the sequence of questions was appropriate and would stimulate thorough discussion.

My intention was to create a similar environment in both focus groups with identical questions in an effort to gather as much information as possible where common themes could emerge. The same questions were asked at both focus groups in the same order (see Appendix H).

The focus groups were audio-taped in their entirety. Using voice to text transcription software, I was able to transcribe the audiotapes verbatim. The verbatim transcripts were then forwarded via e-mail attachment to participants of the focus groups. Only the specific transcript from each focus group was sent to those who participated in that focus group, as they were the only ones who could authenticate the content. Focus group participants were asked to review the transcripts and advise if they had any concerns about the authenticity, content, or accuracy. Not all participants wanted a copy of the verbatim transcripts; therefore, they were sent to 6 of the 10 focus group participants. The information gathered during the focus groups was critical in the development of the questions asked at the world café (see Appendix I).

A world café is a conversational process focusing on collective intelligence that involves the larger system (Brown & Isaacs, 2005). The purpose of a world café is “to stimulate conversations that matter in which there is a deeper collective understanding or forward movement in relation to a situation that people really care about” (Brown & Isaacs, 2005, p. 4). In comparison to an interview or a focus group of 8 to 10 people from the same level within their organization, the world café represents the larger community.

The world café fulfilled the dream stage—the second stage—of the appreciative inquiry four D model (Watkins & Mohr, 2001). My goal was to provide an opportunity for participants to dream, with no limitations, about possible programs, activities, or training that could be developed and provided to member organizations.

All four world café questions (see Appendix I) were structured in the same manner: The questions were structured as follows: “If you could create, design, and implement programs, services, and/or activities within a workplace in an effort to provide positive relationships within organizations, what would they be?” Each question focused on a different theme that emerged from the focus group. All questions were constructed to address the primary research question: What services, programs, or activities could be developed to enhance employee engagement? The focus group identified factors relating to employee engagement, while the world café addressed what programs or activities could enhance those factors within member organizations.

My supervisor, project sponsor, and advisory committee reviewed the draft questions. The advisory committee provided valuable insight and discussion regarding the world café questions. We also discussed the process that would be used at the world café, and I received critical feedback and information from the advisory committee. I had

originally intended to ask for volunteers to participate as table hosts at the world café. The advisory committee had concerns regarding this process. They unanimously agreed that research team members would be a better choice to facilitate discussions. The advisory committee thought research team members could be provided orientation in advance and, as a result, be more objective and more confident in their role. I took this advice and invited research team members to act as table hosts. The research team members received a 30-minute orientation just prior to the event commencing. The research team members did an excellent job as table hosts and, from my observations, did not directly participate or influence the discussions.

Data was captured at the world café in two different ways: Notes were documented on flipchart paper and the discussion summaries were audio taped. Firstly, each table was covered in flipchart paper and participants were encouraged to document their comments and ideas in detail on the flipchart paper. A separate flipchart was created during the summary portion of the event. The report back to the larger group, which included a summary from each table, was audio taped and transcribed verbatim using voice to text transcription software. The verbatim transcript was forwarded to participants along with the notes from the flip charts for verification.

Two focus groups and one world café were the research tools used to gather the data. The sub-questions of this research project assisted in the development of the questions for the focus groups. The data analysis from the focus groups was crucial in the development of the questions for the world café. The data was transcribed and forwarded to participants for verification. The next section discusses the implementation of the study.

Study Conduct

This section reviews the research implementation as it occurred and is divided into two areas: the focus groups and the world café. QNET provided the contact information for each organization interested in participating in the focus groups. I contacted the organizations by phone or e-mail and discussed the opportunity, process, and logistics. Both the letter of organizational invitation and consent form and the individual employee consent form were forwarded via e-mail to those companies wishing to participate (see Appendices B, C, and D). All completed consent forms were either faxed or mailed to me. Participants were selected on a first-come basis.

A list of organizations and their attendees was created (see Appendix E). Each member organization was given a number and each employee from that organization was given a unique identifier. Number tags, which did not identify the participating companies or divulge the employee's identity, were made and used at the focus groups. Upon registration at the event each participant was given a number tag. Focus group participants were asked to refer to each other by number identifier.

A total of 10 participants representing four organizations participated in the focus groups. The first focus group consisted of six participants representing three organizations; the second focus group consisted of four participants, all from the same organization. Both focus groups included men and women. The public, manufacturing, and financial sectors were all represented. The employees were participating with the consent of their organization, and there were no additional costs being incurred by either the organization or the participants.

Both focus groups were held at a Winnipeg hotel in a meeting room and were 90 minutes in length. The first focus group was held on October 2, 2008; the second focus group was held on October 6, 2008. Each participant was provided location and time information via e-mail.

To begin each focus group, I introduced myself, and then the research team observer. I explained the purpose of the focus group, the intent of the research, their role and the importance of voluntary participation. I explained to the participants my ethical obligations regarding confidentiality and that I was merely there to facilitate and not to participate. Prior to beginning, participants were reminded, as indicated on their consent form, the focus group would be audio-taped. I reminded participants of their ability to withdraw from the research. I also explained the role of the research team member as an observer only.

All three questions (see Appendix H) were introduced at the beginning of each focus group session, although participants were directed to address one question at a time. The first two questions were explored thoroughly within the first hour; the final question and summary took place in the remaining 30 minutes.

Participants took turns responding to the first question. After each participant provided their examples and stories, the group began to build on each other's discussions and to add, confirm, or dispute statements presented by others. The discussion was respectful and deliberate. After a thorough exploration of the first question, the second question was posed and the process repeated. The final question was asked, followed by an invitation for each participant to summarize and conclude.

Each participant was invited to complete an anonymous evaluation (see Appendix J), which asked questions regarding informed consent and the extent to which the researcher had provided an inclusive and safe environment for open discussion. The participants were thanked for their participation and informed that, if desired, they would receive a copy of the raw data. Initially, the evaluation form included a place for participants to advise of their interest in receiving all raw data. Unfortunately, this would have required participants to identify who they were on the evaluation form. When a participant identified this oversight, I changed our procedure so that all future correspondence was done via e-mail and the evaluations were completed independently. Participants were also informed that they would be invited to a feedback and debrief session to be held in the near future. If they were unable to attend the feedback and debrief session a newsletter would be created and made available.

At the world café, a member of the research team greeted each attendee, confirmed receipt of the consent forms (see Appendix D), and provided them with their number tag. A number tag was created for each attendee. Two participants provided their consent forms just prior to the event. Their number tags were made at the event and provided to them. All other consent forms had been received in advance.

The world café was held on November 4, 2008, at the Norwood hotel in Winnipeg. The world café was attended by 25 individuals representing 15 organizations from the public, financial, manufacturing, communications, and health-care sectors. The individual participants represented executive management, senior management, supervisory, and front-line level employees.

The research team met 30 minutes prior to the commencement of the world café to review the process and receive direction from me. I instructed them, as a table host, they were not to participate directly in the discussion. Their role, as table host, was to introduce each question and to encourage participants to engage in a discussion, draw, write, or doodle their thoughts on the flipchart paper. The research team members were advised of the timelines and informed that they could take verbatim notes. As each round of the world café took place, the role of the table hosts was to brief the new group on the question and discussions that had previously taken place. The intention was to encourage the new group to build upon, debate, and add to previous discussions. Finally, the table hosts would facilitate the summary portion. With the assistance of the final group, at their table, they would draft a list of summary points from the discussions and report back to the larger group. The table hosts played an important part in the world café, by encouraging lively discussion, documenting verbatim notes, and facilitating the summary.

Four tables were set up, each one having flipchart paper, markers, and a world café menu. The world café menu (see Appendix K) provided information on the format of the event and was also intended to be a fun addition to the atmosphere. Each table was hosted by a member of the research team and had its own unique question.

I began the world café by introducing myself, and then each of the research team members. I also introduced the chairperson from the QNET board of directors. The chairperson made a brief statement outlining their commitment and support to the research project. I then explained my role and that of the table host. My role at the world café was researcher and timekeeper. At this time, I also advised participants of my obligation to confidentiality and inclusion. I reminded participants of their ability to

withdraw from the research. I also explained my ethical obligations regarding confidentiality. I reminded participants that the final round of the world café would be audio taped and that they were welcome to write and draw on the paper provided.

Participants were then given instructions, including an introduction to the questions, the world café process, and the timeline for each round. Participants were able to sit at any table for the first round, but were instructed to move individually through each subsequent round and not to move as a group. This instruction was given in an effort to mix the groups at each table during each round, so that ideas could be explored with as many different people as possible. Each participant was encouraged to write, draw, or both write and draw, on the flipchart paper on each table. The goal was to capture as much information from individual participants as possible. Some participants drew graphs and charts, others drew pictures, and some wrote their thoughts and contributions on the flipchart paper.

Participants engaged in discussion specifically relating to the question at that table. The first round lasted 20 minutes. Upon completion of the first round, participants were asked to move to a new table and discuss a new question. The second round also lasted 20 minutes; then participants were given a 15-minute break. Each participant started the third round at a new table and discussed the question at that table. After 20 minutes, the participants moved to their final table and their final question. After this 20-minute round, each table was given an additional 15 minutes to work with the table host to capture the key points of discussion on a new flipchart. The summary included notes and discussions from all four rounds. Each table was then given time to present their summary. The table hosts, along with participants from that table, presented back to the

larger group on the results of their question. Each table summary presentation was audio taped. During the presentation of each summary, all participants were able to contribute to ensure nothing was missed or inaccurately described.

Upon completion of the summaries, participants were thanked for their contributions and given an opportunity to provide any further comments. However, there were no further comments, so participants were invited to complete a participant evaluation, which was the same as the one used in the focus groups (see Appendix J). The research table hosts were asked to complete the research team evaluation (see Appendix L). The purpose of the evaluation was to confirm informed consent and ethical considerations, such as inclusion. The table hosts were asked to provide additional feedback on the process and my ability in facilitating the world café.

The flipcharts from each table were gathered separately, rolled, and marked to indicate which question or table they came from. The flipcharts containing the summary content were also rolled and marked. The verbatim notes taken by the table hosts were also given to me and were marked to indicate which question they addressed. The flipcharts, audiotape, and other notes were taken to my office and stored in a locked cabinet.

The audiotape was then transcribed using voice to text transcription software. I created four separate documents that contained the verbatim notes for each specific question, the notes directly from the flipcharts, and the verbatim notes from the table host. Each document contained the results from a specific question. It was now time to analyze the data.

Data Analysis

Prior to the data analysis, I listened to the audiotapes and read the transcripts several times to become familiar with the contents.

To minimize the propensity to conceptualize events through their own interpretive lenses, researchers should, wherever possible, apply the verbatim principal, using terms and concepts drawn from the words of the participants themselves. By doing so they are more likely to capture the meanings inherent in people's experience. (Stringer, 2007, p. 99)

It is important to work directly with the verbatim transcripts identifying key words or phrases. The files containing the verbatim transcripts were then loaded into qualitative research software. This software is specifically designed to work with qualitative data.

A hermeneutic unit file was created in the qualitative research software named focus groups. The hermeneutic unit represents the dialectic process (Stringer, 2007) that took place during the focus groups. Once the participants had verified the verbatim transcript from the October 2, 2008, focus group session, it was imported into the hermeneutic unit file focus group as primary document number one. The second focus group transcript was imported into the same file as primary document number two.

The next stage was to unitize the data, which required units of meaning to be identified. "A unit of meaning may be a word, a phrase, a sentence, or a sequence of sentences" (Stringer, 2007, p. 100). The qualitative research software allowed me to highlight these words, quotes, and phrases. Both primary documents were carefully reviewed to identify significant words, quotes, or phrases.

Once both primary documents one and two were reviewed and the significant words and phrases identified, I began to create codes. The qualitative research software provided the option to create a new code or to choose from the list of codes you have already created. When I identified a new idea or meaningful unit, I assigned it a new

code, but if I identified the same word or one very similar to a previous meaningful unit, I chose an existing code from the list. The primary advantage of this was the ability to easily see how often a word or phrase was used, as the software tracked code frequency.

I reviewed both primary documents again and reviewed my coding, language, and linkages. Some minor changes were made where I had overlooked a meaningful unit or coded incorrectly. When this review was complete, I began to create families. Several meaningful units and codes were similar and I could begin to see groupings or themes. The qualitative research software referred to these as families. I grouped codes together creating six unique themes or families.

Each family was given a unique name. Two of the six families had significantly fewer meaningful units attached. Although these meaningful units were repeated and confirmed by participants, there were significantly fewer of them and, therefore, they were not used in the creation of questions for the world café. It was the four significant families or themes that became the basis for the questions that were asked at the world café session.

I had initially created one hermeneutic unit containing all four transcripts from the world café in the qualitative research software, but realized that this could create challenges as each question was unique and may not have linkages to each other. As a result, I created four separate hermeneutic unit files, one for each question.

Each transcript from the four questions was imported into the software in its own file. The transcripts were reviewed carefully and meaningful units identified and coded. Themes emerged unique to each question, and it was these themes that became the basis of the findings and subsequent recommendations.

The analysis of information was systematic using the qualitative research software beginning with the identification of meaningful units, creating codes, and then grouping codes into families. The unique families became the basis for the questions asked at the world café. The results of the world café were analyzed individually as each question was unique.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were made and addressed throughout the process. This included considerations prior to conducting the research, during the research, and during the analysis stage.

Humanistic and Scientific Ethical Obligations

The development of methods, implementation, action, and subsequent reporting of this research study was built on the principles of research ethics outlined in Royal Road's University (2007) *Research Ethics Policy*. "Ethics cannot be set aside once one has satisfied the demands of institutional review boards or other gatekeepers of research conduct. Nor are they merely matters of isolated choices in critical situations" (Glesne, 2006, p. 129). Research ethics were considered throughout the process. This includes the early stages of consent form development to the implementation of activities, through to the final data analysis and report writing. Each stage of the research process had its own ethical considerations.

Ethical Considerations Prior to Conducting Research

It was important to address ethical considerations prior to the commencement of the research. Participants were informed that the research project had undergone an ethical review by Royal Roads University and the project had been granted approval by

the Ethics Board. Informed consent was critical to being able to undertake the research project. All participating organizations were given a letter of invitation that described the research study process and purpose (see Appendices B and C). Once organizations provided consent, individual employees were provided information on the research process and purpose. Individual employees were required to sign informed consent (see Appendix D). Participants were informed as to when and how they could withdraw.

Ethical Considerations During the Research Study

The key principles of research ethics were considered throughout the study. These important principles are based on the *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct of Research Involving Humans* (Canadian Institute of Health Research, Natural Sciences and Engineering Council of Canada, Social Sciences and Humanities Council of Canada [Tri-Council], 1998). While conducting the actual research, the ethical principles at the forefront of the study were: respect for human dignity, respect for privacy and confidentiality, respect for justice, and inclusion.

The first principle considered was respect for human dignity. When conducting this research the consideration of each participant's basic need for dignity was paramount. This included respecting opinions and providing an opportunity for each participant to contribute. Participants were reminded of the importance of being respectful and sensitive to the opinions of others. The research team was aware of, and attended to the need, to respect everyone during the focus group and world café.

Privacy, confidentiality, and anonymity were key components of this research study. Confidentiality of information relating to both individual participants and participating organizations was maintained. Each organization and participating

employee was provided a number identifier. All participating company and employee information will be kept in strictest confidence by the researcher. All supporting documentation will be locked in a secure filing cabinet and on a password-protected database until the completion of the project and final report, at which time all raw data will be destroyed by providing it to a confidential shredding company that provides certificates of destruction. Confidentiality and anonymity are important ethical considerations; the researcher is committed to ensuring the privacy of all participants, their identity, and their specific contributions.

To ensure inclusion and justice, it was necessary to request participating organizations agree that all interested employees within their organization have the opportunity to self-identify and participate. I informed each interested organization of the importance of broadcasting the opportunity to all employees. Although I am unable to confirm 100% that each participating company thoroughly informed all employees, I am confident that it was an open process. The ability for organizations and individual employees to self-identify their interest through the QNET network was important in ensuring opportunity for anyone interested.

As a researcher, I identified the importance of transparency and the need to be aware of my subjectivity. I have personal beliefs regarding employee engagement and the leadership factors that potentially impact this. It was important that my personal views did not infiltrate or manipulate the data. For the integrity of the research, it was important that my biases on the topic not affect the data collection. As a result, I did not participate in either the focus group conversations or any of the tables at the world café. My goal was to learn from the participants and to be open to their direct knowledge of the subject.

My conscious approach to this issue limited my influence on the research. I used a reflection log to document my thoughts, opinions, and progress throughout the research project. I solicited regular feedback from the advisory committee and research team members. My reactions to and reflections on this feedback were also recorded in my reflection log. This process allowed me to be aware of my biases and to improve objectivity.

Summary

This research project employed action research and appreciative inquiry through two focus groups and a world café to stimulate dialogue and gather data. The data was transcribed and then analyzed with the assistance of a qualitative software program. The next chapter provides the findings and conclusions.

CHAPTER FOUR: ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

This chapter provides the study findings from the focus groups and world café. This research project sought to answer the question: What services, programs, or activities could be developed and implemented by the Manitoba Quality Network to encourage and enhance employee engagement within member organizations? Through the data analysis several sub-themes emerged which illuminated four primary themes. Each of these themes is discussed separately. This chapter also provides an overall summary of the focus group findings and their influence on the world café. Along with the study findings this chapter provides the study conclusions based on the findings and the limitations to the research.

Study Findings

This research study included two focus groups, represented by four organizations and 10 employees. This study also included a world café with representation from 15 organizations that included 25 participants. The sub-questions assisted in the organization and analysis of the data. Two of the sub-questions linked closely to three identified themes: (a) what are the indicators of employee engagement, and (b) what are the key factors identified by employees that could improve their engagement. The three themes that emerged were: positive relationship, challenge through change, and opportunities to contribute. The third sub-question, what leadership factors encourage employee engagement, assisted in identifying authentic leadership as a fourth theme. The fourth sub-question, what organizational programs or processes can make it easier for employees and leaders to improve employee engagement, guided and assisted in the data analysis from the world café.

The data from the two focus groups was analyzed as two separate, yet primary, documents in one hermeneutic unit. As I coded participant comments, the software tracked how often a comment was made. The data from each focus group was coded separately, but because they were located in the same hermeneutic unit, the coding was cumulative. A theme was identified when it appeared in both focus groups repeatedly. It became clear as I coded these two primary documents that significant themes were emerging.

There were four unique questions asked at the world café (see Appendix I). Although each question was directly related to the primary research question the world café questions were unique and based on the four themes that emerged from the focus groups. The focus group findings were instrumental in the development of questions for the world café. The process used at the world café provided an opportunity for all 25 participants to respond to the four unique questions. As a result, the data gathered for each question was kept separate and loaded as a primary document into the qualitative software program as individual hermeneutic units. The data from each question was analyzed and coded separately.

Research Participants

A total of 10 employees representing the financial, public, and manufacturing sectors participated in the two focus groups. All participants self-identified and volunteered to participate in this study. A total of 25 individuals, comprising of employees, managers, and QNET board members, attended the world café. The manufacturing, financial, communications, independent consulting, and public sector were represented (see Table 1).

Table 1. *Focus Group and World Café Participants*

Research Phase	Sector Respondents	Participant Type	Number of Respondents
Focus Group I	Financial	Employee	3
	Public	Employee	2
	Manufacturing	Employee	1
Focus Group II	Financial	Employee	4
World Café	Financial	Employee	4
	Government	Employee	4
	Government	Management	3
	Manufacturing	Employee	1
	Manufacturing	Management	1
	Communications	Employee	3
	Communications	Management	1
	Consulting	Independent	3
	Association	Employee	3
Association	Board Member	3	

Note. Total number of participants for Focus Group I was 6, for Focus Group II was 4, and for the World Café was 25. In all cases, the word employee indicates non-managerial staff.

Each participant was given a unique identifier. The unique identifier was used when citing a direct quote during the focus groups. However, I did not identify, using the unique identifier number, which participant attended which focus group, as there was a possibility of jeopardizing anonymity. The world café was a larger conversation where the individual rounds were not audio-taped, but participants did make notes on the paper provided at each table. The generic term participant is used for this circumstance.

Focus Group Findings

This section describes in detail the findings and observations made during the two focus groups. The data analysis of the focus groups resulted in four significant themes:

positive relationships, challenge through change, authentic leadership, and opportunities to contribute. Sub-themes were identified in each of the primary themes (see Table 2).

Positive Relationships

The largest theme that emerged from the research was positive relationships. This theme included terms such as transparency, people focus or humanistic approach, mutual respect and trust, and optimism. Each one of these elements was strongly represented in both focus groups. Positive relationships were mentioned 112 times within the two focus groups (see Table 2).

Table 2. *Focus Group Themes and Sub-Themes*

Primary Theme	Total Times Theme Emerged	Sub-Theme	Total Times Sub-Theme Emerged
Positive relationships	112	Transparency	35
		People focus or humanistic approach.	33
		Mutual respect and trust	27
		Optimism	17
Challenge through change	54	Growth and development opportunities.	26
		Greater change through teamwork	18
		Meeting deadlines and goals	10
Authentic leadership	33	Authentic relationship and the flat organization	20
		Authentic feedback and connection with senior leaders	13
Opportunities to contribute	31	Contribution to team	16
		Contribution through unique talents	8
		Contribution that impacts the company	7

Transparency

Transparency was identified as a key element in building positive relationships.

The willingness of an organization to share important information with front-line workers

would assist in engaging employees. Participant 1-02 stated when there is transparency, employees have no reason to believe management is hiding anything: “Employees can engage in a company with full knowledge of where the company is coming from and that’s something that really resonates with me.”

The willingness of an organization to increase information flow and create transparency appeared to increase employee engagement. Another participant from the focus group confirmed this by stating, “You knew what was going on. You didn’t spend time guessing at rumours. They let you know what was going on. You felt like you were part of things; you were part of the success of the company” (Participant 1-07).

Transparency and information flow was mentioned 35 times during the focus groups (see Table 2). There was a common belief that when participants were in the dark and information did not flow their engagement decreased; conversely, when participants worked in transparent environments where information was abundant their engagement increased and their relationships were more positive. During one of the focus groups, the discussion on transparency and information flow moved to discussing trust and respect. The conversation naturally flowed as a linkage between transparency and increased trust and respect.

People Focus or Humanistic Approach

People focus or humanistic approach was mentioned 33 times in the focus groups (see Table 2). Participants described work environments and situations where a people focus, or humanistic approach, enhanced their engagement. There were comparisons made between how a customer might be treated versus an employee and how a vice president might be treated versus a front-line employee. Participant 4-01 made an interesting point, he stated, “Management or the company will take a possible customer

out for dinner or golfing to gain his money or support his investment, but he won't spend the time to invest in his employees for doing the same thing." This statement moved the conversation towards how employee engagement is impacted by how people are treated.

What I'm hearing is that people are people, and we all have to be treated the same way. We can't treat one person because they have a title different than we treat another person because we are all the same. (Participant 1-07)

Participants discussed the importance of having a focus on the people that was fair and equitable. This discussion included looking at relationships and people within all levels of the organization. This included senior executives being seen and treated like all other employees. "A family picnic or at a volleyball game, not only are you seeing the managers playing volleyball in shorts sweating, but laughing; they have a sense of humour. They are a person" (Participant 4-01). This comment resulted in further discussion on the importance of having outside activities that can create comfortable and trusting relationships.

Mutual Respect and Trust

Trust and mutual respect was a significant part of the focus group discussions. When trust and mutual respect were present between coworkers, and in particular between workers and supervisors, positive relationships resulted. Participant 1-07 stated clearly and simply, "If my employer respects me and I respect my employer then I'm going to be engaged." Participant 1-06 stated, "Trust is really important if you trust the person, you trust him or her, and then you can get on with things you need to get done." This statement ignited additional comments on respect and trust and how they connect to positive environments and positive relationships. Within the context of respect, Participant 1-04 believed that trust is empowering on its own and that when there is trust you are focused on the common goal and you can work positively and create a positive

environment. Trust and respect as attributes of positive relationships came up in discussion 27 times (see Table 2).

Optimism

Optimism represents a positive approach to business, projects, and key initiatives. When participants were asked, what were the factors surrounding their engagement, optimism and a positive approach to business was clearly identified. Optimism and a positive approach to business included excitement and moving forward in a positive direction. Participant 4-01 described it as, “I think it’s real important for anyone to feel excited about where they work, they feel valuable, they feel needed, they feel like a part of the future. They feel like they’re moving forward.” Optimism and positive approaches to work, culture, and people was mentioned 17 times during the focus groups (see Table 2).

Positive relationships emerged as a theme due to significant discussion by both focus groups. Optimism and a positive approach to business, transparency including increased information flow, mutual respect and trust, and a people-focused approach were all part of having positive relationships. The existence of positive relationship that included these components impacted the level of employee engagement.

Challenge through Change

The second theme that emerged was providing challenge or stretch opportunities through change initiatives. The concept of providing challenge and encouraging growth and development for employees was directly linked to change initiatives, and was mentioned 54 times in the focus group discussions (see Table 2). In every case where challenge and growth was discussed the participant was working on a team to implement a significant change initiative. As a result, I found it difficult to separate the concept of

challenge and change initiatives. After reading the transcripts numerous times and the coding process was complete, it became apparent that the theme was challenge through change. This theme included the concept of challenge with growth and development opportunities while working on a major project with a specific goal that resulted in significant change. I have not separated these concepts as they were naturally linked with each example given by participants. The three sub-themes that support the primary theme of challenge through change are: growth and development opportunities, greater change through teamwork, and meeting deadlines and goals.

Growth and Development Opportunities

When participants of the focus groups described situations where they were committed and engaged with their work it was most often when they were given new opportunities that challenged them. Participants shared example after example of working on a specific major project, designed to affect change, and where they were continuously challenged. Participant 3-01 described a specific time when she was engaged, “It was just tons of challenges. I learned a lot along the way because there was a lot of stuff I’d never done before.” The opportunity for employees to try something new became very obvious in both focus groups. “When we started working on an underwriting project it was exciting because it was something new, it was a chance to do something new and different” (Participant 1-04). Providing employees the opportunity to work on new and different projects that help to develop an individual’s skill was identified as important to engagement. Participant 1-01 described it as, “The ability to continually develop your own skills and to be stretched to work on projects.” Growth and development opportunities were mentioned a total of 26 times throughout the two focus group discussions (see Table 2).

Greater Change through Teamwork

Several participants commented and contributed to the conversation on the importance of being challenged while working on change initiative projects. This concept was also linked to working in teams. Many of the employee engagement stories involved personal growth and development through working on special change initiative projects as part of a team. Participant 1-02 reacted to stories shared by others:

For me it's as much about team and as much about change as they were talking about. Because a team is bringing about a greater change than I individually could so it's really about being part of a group that brings about greater change.

There are clear linkages between the opportunities an employer provides to employees and their engagement. These opportunities need to include challenge while working on change initiative and projects that include a team approach. The appetite for change that includes opportunities for employees to have new and different work that challenges them increased employee engagement.

There was significant discussion around change initiatives or having an appetite for change. It was discussed that organizations that have an appetite for change are more likely to have change initiative projects where individuals could participate and be challenged. Participant 1-02 simply stated, "I think the appetite for change in an organization is something that really sets the tone for how engaged I feel I can be." The ability for an organization to provide opportunities for employees to collaborate on change initiatives was important. During this discussion participant 3-02 stated, "If you're somebody who likes change and your employer doesn't have the appetite for it where is the desire to go to work." Greater change through teamwork was mentioned a total of 18 times in the focus group discussions (see Table 2).

Meeting Deadlines and Goals

One of the components of challenge was meeting deadlines and goals. The focus group participants mentioned 10 times that working towards a common goal including meeting deadlines was exciting and engaging (see Table 2). “I enjoy also the excitement of making the crunch having a team get together and meeting a deadline,” said (Participant 4-01). Participant 3-01 also confirmed that working on a significant project that included goals and timelines was motivating, “Madly trying to meet a deadline that can take weeks and weeks of work. Just having that kind of a project is definitely motivating and keeps you going.” Motivation and engagement appeared when individuals had team goals and timelines that resulted in change.

Authentic Leadership

Authentic leadership, mentioned a total of 33 times, was a significant theme that emerged from the focus groups (see Table 2). Authentic leadership included, developing relationships naturally through flat organizations, providing opportunities to connect with senior management, which includes authentic feedback, and open, honest communication. The two sub-themes are: authentic leadership and the flat organization, and authentic feedback and connection with senior leaders.

Authentic Leadership and the Flat Organization

Authentic leadership and the flat organization was mentioned a total of 20 times during the focus groups (see Table 2). One participant connected authenticity and leadership to a flat structure. After a lengthy conversation regarding leadership characteristics Participant 1-02 stated, “My priority for an organization is to keep it as flat as possible ... people will naturally develop relationships with one another; naturally develop a caring network without organizational policy.” This particular discussion

included concerns about leaders connecting with employees in a way that was strategic and intentional due to policy and procedure. Once Participant 1-02 stated this view, other participants confirmed and reinforced the need for authenticity not policy and procedure. “There is no policy in regards to that it’s something that has developed by the managers and the vice president. To me this interprets as the organization is becoming more flat” (Participant 3-02). This participant discussed how the vice president, within her organization, would often come onto the floor and speak with employees several levels below him.

One of my observations was that those participants that appeared to be younger were more concerned about authenticity than those that appeared to be older. Some companies use policy, procedure, and incentives for managers to connect with employees.

Participants wanted their relationships with the organization and the leadership to be flat in nature. Regardless of whether the organization was hierarchical or not, a flat approach was believed to enhance engagement. If leaders act as if the organization is flat then they are more likely to be seen as authentic leaders and a more natural relationship can develop. The concept of leaders behaving as if the organization was flat seemed very significant to me.

Authentic Feedback and Connection with Senior Leaders

Participants spoke about spontaneous authentic feedback from senior executives as an important part of leadership and a driver of employee engagement; this topic was mentioned a total of 13 times in the focus group discussions (see Table 2). “It comes out of the blue ... you don’t expect to get it ... you think he didn’t notice. It goes above and beyond in motivating the staff in the department” (Participant 3-01). Participant 3-01

continued to discuss how the motives of this executive did not come from policy or procedure but from a personal leadership style that invoked employee engagement.

There was significant discussion around leadership characteristics during times of high engagement. One of the important components of authentic leadership was an open, honest, and direct approach. I spent considerable time thinking and reflecting on the differences between transparency and authenticity. Participants used these repeatedly and interchangeably. I concluded that the linkage is, if transparency is present then authenticity can emerge and be seen.

Opportunities to Contribute

The opportunity to contribute to an organization became a significant theme during the focus groups. This theme was mentioned 31 times by focus group participants (see Table 2). Participants shared stories of how they were most engaged when they were given an opportunity to contribute. The sub-themes that emerged were contribution to team, contribution through unique talents, and contribution that impacts the company. Each one of these sub-themes was important to participants, and although different clearly linked to the theme opportunities to contribution. Each one of these sub-themes is explored for its significance, linkages, and importance to the research.

Contribution to Team

Most of the examples provided by participants were in the context of working on teams. Which led to discussions focused on contributing through team collaboration. This discussion of contributing through team collaboration included some discussion on the impacts their contributions had on others. Participants described being engaged when they knew their contribution impacted others and the team overall. In one particular case,

a participant described how his contribution engaged other team members in a dialogue, which then moved the project in a new direction. Participant 1-02 said:

When it's a period of feedback and collaborative work after dealing with what I put into the project, and then seeing how other people's ideas fit together, that's when I really see myself getting more engaged, because I can bounce ideas off people and the project can go in new directions from what I originally envisioned it.

The concept of contribution and collaboration that impacts team was apparent in both focus groups. Contribution through teamwork that impacts others came up 16 times during the two focus groups (see Table 2).

Contribution through Unique Talents

Contribution through unique talents was mentioned 8 times in the focus group discussions (see Table 2). During both focus groups, participants provided examples and stories about how they were able to use their talents and unique skills to contribute. In one case, a participant described working on a project with others where the leader wanted people in roles where they could use their talents and skills. Participant 1-03 stated, "I got to do the administrative stuff for most of the units and I really like doing that, it was fun for me ... whereas other people were doing different things that they were good at." Participant 1-03 discussed the importance of being able to use your unique skills to contribute to the organization.

The opportunity for employees to use their experience, skills, and knowledge is linked to their level of engagement. When asked to describe a time when they loved their work and believed they were engaged Participant 1-04 described being on a project where her expertise was called upon, "We were allowed to choose what we thought was the best using our experience rather than just being told what we were going to use. Being allowed to use our expertise was exciting."

As the conversation surrounding contribution evolved, another person described it as playing to your strengths. Participant 1-03 described another team she worked on where team members worked with their strengths. The team members utilized all of the skills and abilities they had, “essentially playing to their strengths and working with the strengths that we had at the time” (Participant 1-03).

Participant 3-01 agreed with the statement made by 1-03. Participant 3-01 described working on a project where she was highly engaged, because her role matched her skills and experience well. She recognized that not everyone would enjoy the accounting work, but due to her skill working with numbers, it was a great fit. “I was working with numbers, and it is not exciting to most people, but I know I’ve chosen the right course for myself, and it was an accounting project” (Participant 3-01).

Contribution that Impacts the Company

The other significant factor relating to contribution was the impact and value they had on the overall company. “What really excited me I was getting an opportunity to really show what I could do for the company as opposed to just some of my skills” (Participant 1-06). Participants agreed that having the opportunity to contribute in a way that impacts the organization was important to their level of engagement. Positive contribution to the organization was mentioned 7 times (see Table 2). Participant 1-02 spoke about the willingness of organizations to seek the ideas and contributions of others for the overall benefit of the company.

Responsible for figuring out how to make the company a better place to work or how to make the company more efficient and to know those ideas are welcome, and in fact they are sought out and implemented routinely, is something that is very engaging for me. (Participant 1-02)

There was consensus that contributing to the organization overall was important to their engagement in their work and workplace. Participant 1-01 built upon this statement by adding, “When you’re able to make a difference in the company ... I think that’s very rewarding for myself.”

Opportunity for employee contribution that could directly impact the organization was seen as a critical connection to employee engagement. Participants believed that great ideas are sometimes missed due to the hierarchical nature of some businesses. In one case, a participant described how employees would make a suggestion or have a great idea. The idea would be shared with the supervisor, but would never go any further. Shop floor workers could have multiple innovative ideas that had to be funnelled through one supervisor. If that supervisor were unwilling or uninterested in moving the ideas forward, engagement would drop. When Participant 4-01 suggested a meeting be held between front-line employees and senior management without supervisors present the results were significant. Participant 4-01 talked about the first meeting held between front-line employees and senior management: “The questions and ideas were just left and right, left and right. They couldn’t believe it, and now management is coming and talking to the guys, listening to their suggestions.”

When employees are given the opportunity to contribute in a meaningful way employee engagement can increase. The subject of contribution was discussed by both focus groups, in particular in the context of contributions that impacts coworkers and team members as well as contribution that positively impacts the organization overall. As the discussion on contribution evolved, it was apparent that contributing to a team effort that included identifying and utilizing individual skills and abilities had the most positive

impact on employee engagement. When these situations also included a positive impact on the organization, employees were highly engaged.

Summary of Focus Group Findings

The data analysis from the focus groups resulted in four significant themes emerging: positive relationships, challenge through change, authentic leadership, and opportunities to contribute. The most significant theme was positive relationships within the organization. Positive relationships included transparency, a people focus, mutual respect and trust, and optimism. The second theme was challenge through change. In almost every case where employees shared stories of stretch and growth opportunities, it was within the context of change initiatives. The sub-themes included growth and development, greater change through team and meeting deadlines and goals. The third theme that emerged was that of authentic leadership. Authentic leadership included the sub-themes of authentic leadership and flat organizations and authentic feedback and connection to senior leaders. Finally, employees believed they were engaged when they had an opportunity to contribute in a meaningful way. The opportunity to contribute included the sub-themes of contribution to team, contribution through unique talents and contribution that impacts the company.

The results of the focus group had a significant influence on the development of questions for the world café (see Appendix I). Each of the four world café questions were based on one of the themes identified from the data analysis of the focus groups. Each question presented at the world café contained a theme from the focus group, while addressing services, programs, or activities that could be offered by QNET to its member organizations.

World Café Findings

The fourth research sub-question is: What organizational programs or processes could make it easier for employees and leaders to improve employee engagement, assisted in the world café data analysis? Data analysis was done both separately and comparatively. However, each question posed at the world café was uniquely different and, therefore, the data was primarily analyzed independent of each other. Each of the four questions was based on an identified theme that emerged from the focus groups (see Appendix I). For example, one question asked: “If you could provide any programs, training or activities that would improve opportunities for employees to contribute what would they be?” The analysis of the data from the world café uncovered themes and sub-themes for each of the questions.

Due to the process used at the world café it was not possible to get individual participant codes for each quotation or theme. In some cases I was able to get the individual participant identifier because that participant spoke independently during the summary of the world café and, therefore, it was audio-taped. Where the information was summarized during the final round of the world café I was unable to get the specific participant identifier or code, as the information may have only been on a flipchart and then verbally shared with the group. In these circumstances, I use the generic term participant when providing theme details.

Positive Relationships

All 25 of the world café participants had an opportunity to respond to the question regarding programs activities and services that would create positive relationships in the workplace (see Appendix I). The themes that emerged were: (a) Programs—Providing

programs that would enhance relationships, (b) Benefits—Ensuring benefit packages were available, and (c) Leadership—Defining and creating leadership programs that focused on relationships.

Table 3. *Positive Relationships: Themes and Sub-Themes*

Primary Theme	Sub-Theme
Programs	Get to know the employee Nominate a peer Ask the Chief Executive Officer Outside activities and celebration
Benefits	Employee Assistance Program
Leadership	Walk in someone else's shoes Define and teach leadership

Programs

Four sub-themes emerged from the discussions at the world café that related to programs. The sub-themes are: get to know the employee, nominate a peer, ask the chief executive officer, and outside activities and celebration. Each of these sub-themes is discussed under its own heading.

Get to know the employees

There were varying themes regarding the importance of getting to know other employees within the organization. One participant described a “what does everyone do in the company” program. This program consists of a database where employees could track and record the types of work and activities they do. Other employees have access to this information, allowing them to better understand the role of others. Another participant discussed a more personal database on their organizations intranet site. The program included opportunities for employees to post pictures, family events, and

anything of interest. This intranet site provides coworkers with an opportunity to get to know each other from a more personal perspective. Of course these programs were voluntary, but were believed to be effective in getting to know others.

Nominate a peer

Nominating a coworker for a job well done was also discussed in significant length. Several participants described nomination programs where one employee can identify another employee for a job well done. Employees could also nominate a coworker for a kind deed; the nomination did not have to be for work related tasks. Participants believed that these programs assisted in building positive relationships amongst employees. The discussion was around a peer-to-peer, employee-to-employee program and not necessarily a manager-to-employee initiative.

Ask the chief executive officer

Participants discussed a unique program called, ask the chief executive officer (CEO). This program was also located on an internal intranet site. Employees could access the CEO by logging on to the intranet site and asking questions directly to the CEO. The program provides an opportunity for employees to bring forward suggestions, challenges, and opportunities directly to the senior leadership. Participants believed that many of the challenges and innovative ideas that employees have could be lost if there is no access to top management. Participants also believed that relationships could be built between front-line employees and senior executive through such programs. If the CEO is committed to reading, reflecting, and responding to the entries, relationships could be built throughout the organization.

Outside activities and celebration

Participants discussed the importance for organizations to provide opportunities for employees to meet away from work. Opportunities for employees to meet away from work could include a variety of outside activities where all levels of the organization have an opportunity to participate. One participant described a volleyball game where a vice president plays in his shorts, working up a sweat, while employees either challenge him in the game or watch in the stands. The discussion included the value in seeing senior leadership as real human beings and not necessarily someone special. Another important contribution was that of providing opportunities to celebrate. Celebration could be formal and organized or informal and spontaneous. Participants believed that the opportunity to have fun and to celebrate was an important part of building positive relationships.

Another suggestion regarding outside activities was the opportunity to give back to the community as an organization. For example, volunteering for a charity or participating in a community improvement event: “In terms of creating positive relationships was giving back together. The company and its members would be involved in community development. Some of our suggestions were cleaning green space or participating in Habitat for Humanity,” said a participant at the table during the summary portion of the event.

Benefits

The theme of benefits emerged from the discussions at the table on building positive relationships. The sub-theme of benefits was providing an employee assistance program. The employee assistance programs sub-theme is discussed under its own heading.

Employee assistance programs

Organizations should provide some form of employee assistance program. In an effort to keep the workplace positive participants believe that employees need external services that can assist them during difficult times. The employee assistance program is an opportunity for employees to seek outside external professional services quickly and confidentially. Other benefits identified were providing employees with flextime and a compressed workweek. The flextime gives the ability to move a persons schedule as needed to accommodate personal situations. A compressed workweek includes allowing employees to work longer days for the purpose of having an additional day off.

Leadership

During discussions at the table on developing positive relationships leadership emerged as a primary theme. The sub-themes that developed were: walk in someone else's shoes and define and teach leadership. Both of these sub-themes are further discussed under separate headings.

Walk in someone else's shoes

Participants discussed the importance of managers and senior leaders to understand and appreciate the work that others do in the organization. One of the ways that leaders can do this is by performing the duties of those who report to them. A program where leaders do someone else's job for a day or a week was discussed. A couple of participants provided examples where not only leaders, but also employees switched roles for a short period of time in an effort to better understand their work and responsibilities. Participants believe that these types of programs assist in building a better understanding and improved relationships.

Define and teach leadership

There were lengthy discussions regarding leadership at this specific table. The question invoked conversation around the importance of defining leadership for the specific organization. The consensus was that leadership would be different in different organizations and that it was important to define it. During the summary of the world café, participants also identified that leadership needs to be taught. The development of leadership programs that reflect the values and culture of the organization and that include the necessary skills to build positive relationships was identified as critical. This discussion included the importance of communication and development of people skills. The summary also included the importance of leadership accessibility. Participants believed that employees need access to leaders throughout the organization.

Summary of Positive Relationships

Participants identified specific programs that would assist in creating positive relationships within organizations. Those programs included, get to know the employee, nominate a peer, ask the CEO, and activities outside the organization. Participants also discussed the importance of having benefit programs such as employee assistance program and flextime. The theme of leadership emerged through this discussion, which included providing opportunities for leaders to walk in someone else's shoes. The leadership theme also included defining and teaching leadership on an ongoing basis.

Challenge through Change

All 25 participants had an opportunity to contribute at the world café regarding what they believed would assist organizations in developing challenging opportunities

that included change initiatives. The data analysis resulted in three themes: create an environment open to change, change agents, and recognition.

Table 4. *Challenge through Change: Themes and Sub-Themes*

Primary Theme	Sub-Theme
Create an environment open to change	Participate in best practice Leaders comfortable with change
Change agents	Identified those who love change Build transformational teams Identify individual strengths
Recognition and continuous improvement rewards	Continuous improvement rewards

Create an Environment Open to Change

The primary theme of creating an environment open to change emerged at the world café during discussions on providing challenge through change. The sub-themes are: participate in best practice and leaders comfortable with change. Both of these sub-themes are discussed under separate headings.

Participate in best practice

Participants discussed the importance of going outside their own organization to share ideas and to look for opportunities for change. One of the examples given was specific professions meeting with other professionals in their field who work for different organizations. As part of the group summary at this table it was stated:

When a person has a job in one organization be in touch with two or three other organizations within the same job and exchange ideas and best practices within each organization and bring them back to their own organization so it puts the onus on the employee to find change opportunities.

These meetings would be specifically designed to provide an opportunity for individuals who work for different companies to share ideas and explore different ways of doing things. The purpose of these meetings would ignite change opportunities that would improve the organization.

Leaders comfortable with change

The participants determined that leaders need to be comfortable with change; they also need to be provided training and time for change initiatives. Participants discussed that not all leaders are comfortable with change, and not all organizations provide leaders with time to explore change initiatives. If an organization is to provide an environment that is open to change leaders must be comfortable with change opportunities and, therefore, should be given training to assist in improving their openness to change. The organization also needs to provide leaders with time to explore new ways of doing things.

Change Agents

The primary theme of change agents emerged during discussions at the world café on providing challenge through change. The sub-themes that emerged were: identify those who love change, build transformational teams, and identify individual strengths. Each of the sub-themes is discussed under separate headings.

Identify those who love change

Participants agreed that not all employees like change. There was significant discussion regarding the need to identify employees who embrace and enjoy change. The group discussed the importance of asking employees whether they enjoy change initiatives or not. Participant 10-01 believed that you could tell those employees who like change, “They are always looking for opportunities to participate in new initiatives, and

they get excited while other employees get pulled along.” The identification of change agents led to discussions regarding building transformational teams.

Build transformational teams

Participants agreed that the identified change agents could form transformational teams responsible for identifying change opportunities including planning and implementation. There appeared to be consensus amongst world café participants that those who enjoy change should also be willing to initiate and take responsibility. During the summary portion of the world café, one participant stated, “Staff driven transformational teams, where the process is broken down and worked through by staff, where they become the champions of change for that particular initiative.” Organizations could create transformational teams that include those identified change agents. Participants believed that you could provide these individuals an opportunity to identify areas within their own job that could be changed for improved efficiency and productivity.

Identify individual strengths

The discussions regarding providing employees challenge through change initiatives also included identifying individual strengths. The group identified the importance of determining change agents individual strengths. Those employees who enjoy change and love the challenge that comes from change initiatives also need to determine where their strengths are so their skills can be utilized appropriately. There was discussion regarding the strength deployment inventory—a tool used to determine individual strengths. Several participants had used the strength deployment inventory tool before. This tool could be used to assist change agents in determining how to manage the

work associated with change and which team members should do what work. Participants believed it was important that team members have the right skills for the right job.

Recognition

Recognition was a primary theme that emerged from the discussions on providing challenge through change initiatives. The sub-theme was the need to provide continuous improvement rewards. This sub-theme is discussed under separate heading.

Recognition and Continuous Improvement Rewards

Participants concluded that it was critical organizations reward initiatives based on continuous improvement. Participants discussed the importance of providing opportunities for employees to participate in change initiatives, but believed that rewarding successful improvement, as a result, of these initiatives was essential. Participants believed that by developing a formalized incentive and recognition program, organizations would reward employees for seeking continuous improvement. Recognizing and rewarding those individuals who seek opportunities for change, take responsibility for the change, and whose initiative improves the overall performance of the company is crucial.

Challenge through Change Summary

When participants described programs and activities that would provide challenging opportunities through change initiatives for employees they spoke about the need to create an environment that is open to change. Participants also discussed the importance of identifying change agents within the organization; those who love change and can drive change initiatives. They also identified the importance of having continuous improvement rewards and recognition programs. These programs would provide employees with incentives and recognition for implementing change initiatives.

Authentic Leadership

All 25 participants at the world café had an opportunity to contribute to the question regarding programs and activities that would create authentic leadership. The themes that emerged from this discussion were ensuring a commitment to leadership and strategic recruitment and termination. Sub-themes also emerged from both of these topics.

Table 5. *Authentic Leadership Themes and Sub-Themes*

Primary Theme	Sub-Theme
Commitment to leadership	Appraise my boss Simplify communication Leadership training
Strategic recruitment and termination	Change recruiting competencies Visible termination programs

Commitment to Leadership

The primary theme of commitment to leadership emerged during the discussions on authentic leadership at the world café. Three sub-themes emerged, they are: appraise my boss, simplify communication, and leadership training. Each of the sub-themes is discussed under a separate heading.

Appraise my boss

Participants discussed the importance for employees to have input on their leaders skills and abilities. There was a significant discussion around 360° evaluations.

Participants believe that 360° evaluations are a valuable tool in providing leaders insight into their impact on employees. The discussion began with the importance of including employees in the evaluation of leadership then moved to identifying those individuals

who have a strong desire to lead. As that discussion expanded, one participant suggested that those individuals considering leadership choose one of the following three statements:

1) I commit to my role as leader, 2) I will recommit to my role as leader, 3) I do not want to be a leader. I will put my employees out of their misery and step back from leadership.

There was consensus that a strong desire and commitment to leadership that included the willingness to be evaluated by employees was critical.

Simplify communication

The groups discussed the importance of communication and in particular the ability to communicate throughout the organization. As stated and agreed to by several participants, and mentioned in the summary session, “If we agree that leadership is relational at its root the core task of a leader is to communicate.” Participants believe that communication needs to be simplified if it is going to allow a more fluid approach. The ability for employees and leaders to communicate with anyone throughout the organization was identified as being a positive course of action. In particular, participants believed that simplified communication would assist in creating a more authentic environment.

Leadership training

The majority of the discussion and summary focused on leadership training. Participants believe that defining leadership at each level of the organization was important when considering creating a formal leadership-training program. They discussed the importance of allowing leadership programs to provide opportunities for supervisors and managers to practice leadership skills. One participant stated, “Allow leaders to step in and out of leadership roles as needed.” Organizations should provide

opportunities for individuals to lead, which should include evaluation and reflection. The leadership program should also include skills on how to create authentic personal connection with employees and how to adapt to generational needs. The training also needs to be ongoing and dynamic. Finally, the leadership-training program needs to include the opportunity for people to go back and step out of leadership roles without losing face. The dialogue then moved towards the next sub-theme regarding strategic recruitment and termination practices.

Strategic Recruitment and Termination

The primary theme of strategic recruitment and termination included two sub-themes. The sub-themes were: change recruiting competencies and have visible termination programs. Both of these sub-themes are discussed under separate headings.

Change recruiting competencies

Participants discussed the importance of having recruiting practices that reflect the unique organization. If leadership is defined at each level of the organization, and the leadership training program reflects this definition, then the recruiting practices need to also reflect appropriately. One participant stated, "Recruit on the character of the person." Participants also identified the importance of having the right people in the right positions. Several participants quoted the work of Jim Collins (2001) in *Good to Great* where he wrote about the importance of having the right people on the bus sitting in the right seats. Participants believe that the selection process is a critical function in getting the right leaders in the right roles.

Visible termination programs

There was discussion involving the importance of allowing leaders to step down from leadership roles without losing face. Participants believed that if the culture reflects

this philosophy, leaders would be more likely to remove themselves when appropriate. This discussion led to more discussion regarding the importance of terminating managers and supervisors who do not reflect the leadership culture. One participant stated, “They should be prepared to fire the highest producing manager if he’s a jerk.” There was consensus that even those high-performing managers need to leave if they are unable or unwilling to lead within the defined leadership culture.

Summary of Authentic Leadership

The themes that emerged through the discussion on authentic leadership were, having a commitment to leadership and having a recruitment and termination strategy. The commitment to leadership included the opportunity for employees to appraise their boss, simplifying communication and provide ongoing leadership training. The sub-themes of strategic recruitment and termination were, the importance of changing recruiting competencies and to establish visible termination programs when leaders are unwilling or unable to meet the leadership requirements.

Opportunity to Contribute

All participants at the world café had an opportunity to contribute to the question on developing programs activities or services that would provide opportunities for employees to contribute. The themes that emerged from this question were programs, leadership, and recognition.

Table 6. *Opportunity to Contribute Primary Themes and Sub-Themes*

Primary Theme	Sub-Theme
Programs	Identify baseline Think and thanks Beyond the company to community
Leadership	No fear of ridicule Change language Mentorship and coaching
Recognition	Acknowledge quickly

Programs

The primary theme of programs emerged during discussions on opportunities to contribute. This theme includes three sub-themes: (a) identify baseline, (b) think and thanks, and (c) beyond the company to the community. Each of the sub-themes is discussed below under separate headings.

Identify baseline

There was consensus from the participants that organizations need to determine a baseline. This baseline would inform the employer what employees perceive about the opportunities available to them. “We need to start with understanding where the company is as it relates to opportunities for employees. One size will not fit all,” stated one participant. The participants agreed that it would be important to identify where the company was before creating new programs. A participant suggested that interviews, focus groups, or a small survey could be conducted with employees to determine whether the company is providing appropriate opportunities for employees to contribute. The participants agreed that you needed to understand where the company was prior to

determining what programs or activities could be implemented. This of course would be unique to each company.

Thinks and thanks

A Thinks and Thanks program was described as a formal program that encourages employees to provide ideas and suggestions for improvement. One participant suggested the program could be managed through an internal intranet site where all employees have access to sharing their ideas and suggestions related to improving the company. The company could respond back to the employees, and when suggestions are implemented employees could be thanked formally. The participants at the world café agreed this was an excellent opportunity for employees to contribute. However, they added that the company should thank employees for their ideas and suggestions regardless of whether they are implemented or not. Recognition of employee contribution was considered important.

Beyond the company to community

The world café participants discussed the importance of opportunities to contribute that move beyond the organization. There were numerous examples given where organizations provide employees opportunities to contribute to their favourite charities in a hands-on way. One example was employees are allowed three days each year to volunteer for a charity of their choice. The organization encouraged this participation, recognized the value for employees and the community, paid their salaries while the employees volunteered, and recognized the employees in company newsletters and other formalized communication. The participants agreed that this type of contribution and the opportunity to give to the larger community was important.

Leadership

The primary theme of leadership emerged during discussions relating to authentic leadership. The sub-themes that corresponded to this primary theme were: (a) no fear of ridicule, (b) change language, (c) mentorship and coaching, and (d) recognition. Each of the sub-themes is discussed separately.

No fear of ridicule

During the summary portion of the world café it was apparent that participants believed it was critical employees could contribute knowing there would be no ridicule. If employees perceived they might be laughed at for ideas that were not considered practical or usable they would stop sharing and contributing those ideas. The idea that the work environment needs to be free from ridicule came up at each round of the world café and was also noted during the summary portion.

Change language

Participants discussed the importance of changing the language used by managers and supervisors. During the summary portion of the world café a participant said, “Instead of saying, you did a good job,’ managers could say, that was a valuable contribution or your contribution was significant”. It was discussed that language can change the way people view things and that acknowledging individual’s contribution by using this language was far more effective.

Mentorship and coaching

Participants discussed the importance of creating mentorship and coaching programs for leaders. The mentorship and coaching programs could focus on assisting leaders in creating opportunities for employees. If leaders could learn about the

importance of providing these opportunities and they could create a safe environment for employees to contribute then contributions would increase.

Recognition

The final sub-theme that emerged from the world café regarding opportunities to contribute was that of recognition. The participants believed that when employees are recognized for their contribution they are more willing to contribute openly. Having tools in place to monitor employee contribution and having formalized recognition programs was seen as important. However, there was some debate regarding whether recognition for contributions should be public or private. Some participants discussed that private recognition was appropriate depending on the individual being recognized. The general consensus was that recognition programs needed to be flexible. Participants agreed that recognition must be timely and must reflect the specific contribution.

Summary from Opportunity to Contribute

The data analysis uncovered three primary themes: programs, leadership, and recognition. Programs included identifying a baseline where the organization can begin community-based contribution and developing a think and thanks program that provides opportunities for employees to share innovative ideas. The theme of leadership included a mentorship and coaching that assist leaders in identifying and providing opportunities for employees to contribute. The leadership theme also included the need to change manager's language when providing feedback to employees, and finally, the importance for employees not to fear ridiculed if their ideas are not acted upon. The third theme of recognition includes the ability for an organization to acknowledge contribution quickly and effectively.

Study Conclusions

The study findings provide significant information in answering the primary research question: What services, programs, or activities could be developed and provided by the Manitoba Quality Network to enhance employee engagement within member organizations? The participants provided answers to this question based on the factors of employee engagement that emerged from the focus groups. The four factors identified that enhance employee engagement are: positive relationships, challenge through change, authentic leadership, and opportunities to contribute.

The first two research sub-questions were:

1. What are the indicators of employee engagement?
2. What are the key factors identified by employees that could improve their engagement?

These two research sub-questions were instrumental in identifying the themes of positive relationship, challenge through change, and opportunities to contribute. The third research sub-question was: What leadership factors encourage employee engagement? This sub-question assisted in determining that authentic leadership is a key factor influencing employee engagement. When these themes were addressed at the world café participants were able to identify specific programs and services that QNET could implement that would assist their members in enhancing employee engagement.

Positive Relationships

The most significant factor of employee engagement is having positive relationships within the work environment. Participants identified that positive relationships would include transparency, people focus or humanistic approach, mutual

respect and trust, and finally optimism. These factors were considered critical in creating positive relationships.

The concept of positive relationships can be linked back to Fredrickson and Losada's (as cited in Bakker & Schaufeli, 2008) research, which empirically validated that positive communication and supporting team members resulted in flourishing teams and was linked to attitudes, behaviours, and engagement. Participants identified that positive relationships requires a people-focus or humanistic approach, this links clearly to the work of Margaret Wheatley (2006, 2007), Senge (2006), and Senge et al. (2004). Senge referred to this as a positive values-based approach to employees, while Wheatley spoke directly about the need to lean towards people, to bring people together. "I like to ask another question as well: In what I am about to do, am I turning toward others or turning away? Am I moving closer or am I retreating" (Wheatley, 2006, p. 129). Wheatley routinely asks this question to remind her and others to keep a humanistic or people focus.

It is important to also consider the work of Cameron and Quinn (2006) when we consider a humanistic or people focus at work. Cameron and Quinn's work on cultures, and in particular the identification of the clan culture, linked to the more humanistic approach at work. The primary focus of this culture is positive relationships and teamwork, which is closely aligned with the research findings.

Participants at the world café identified specific activities that they believed would enhance employee engagement. These activities involve specific programs, benefits, and leadership initiatives.

Programs

World café participants concluded that positive relationships can be enhanced through specific programs. Participants identified four specific programs that they believe would result in positive relationships. Those programs are: get to know the employee, nominate a peer, ask the CEO and, outside activities and celebrations. The getting to know employees program links back nicely to taking a humanistic or people focus, while the ask the CEO program links to transparency and trust. Providing opportunities for employees to participate in activities away from work creates an environment that is people focus. The nominate a peer program connects to providing positive feedback and optimism to coworkers. Each of the identified programs can be linked back to the sub-themes identified by participants as factors of employee engagement.

Benefits

Participants identified that Employee Assistance Programs are important in keeping positive relationship especially when employees are dealing with difficult situations. The Employee Assistance Program can assist in keeping employees positive and the environment overall more positive. Flextime and compressed workweeks provide flexibility for employees, which could be linked to creating a more humanistic approach to work. These programs are less rigid and structured and consider the individuals needs. When employees have scheduling options they may be more positive when at work.

Leadership

Participants identified the importance for each organization, to define leadership uniquely for them, at each level of the organization. A participant stated, “One size does not fit all.” Once leadership is defined, then a formal leadership program can be created that reflects the unique cultures and values of the organization. Participants agreed that

the leadership program should include how to develop and sustain positive relationships within the organization. Leaders need to be committed to leadership and be willing to be evaluated by the employees.

Challenge through Change

The primary theme of challenge through change emerged as a clear factor of employee engagement. The sub-factors relating to this theme are growth and development opportunities, greater change through teamwork, and the opportunity to meet deadlines and goals. The significant evidence that participants believed having challenging opportunities that involve change initiatives enhanced their engagement may be linked to having meaningful work. In each example, participants discussed being given challenging opportunities that were directly affecting change. A change initiative that positively affects a company may be more meaningful than other types of work. The literature indicates there is a connection between engagement and meaningful work. Wheatley (2006) discussed the importance of allowing employees to co-create their work: "It's the fact that people need to be creatively involved in how their work gets done" (p. 87). Working on change projects suggests a changing or dynamic approach to work where participants could have influence on the process and results. Bolman and Deal (2003) also confirmed the importance of employees having opportunities to influence their work and to have autonomy.

Cameron and Quinn's (2006) work on organizational cultures also links to the research findings. Organizations that create an environment open to change could be linked to the adhocracy culture. Characteristics of the adhocracy culture are: they take more risks than other cultures and thoroughly enjoy challenge and new opportunity. A

core value is to be on the leading edge of products and services and comfortable with ambiguity. This connects clearly to creating an environment open to change, identifying change agents, and recognizing change initiatives.

Create an Environment Open to Change

Participants at the world café clearly identified the need for organizations to create an environment open to change. This requires organizations to build programs that initiate or look for change opportunities. Creating an environment open to change could include having employees participate and collaborate with other employees or professional in their field that work for another organization. The exchange of ideas can facilitate the initiation of new and creative opportunities for one or more companies. The participants recommended an exchange of best practice to assist in creating an environment welcoming of change. Participants also believed to create an environment open to change leaders need to become comfortable with change.

Change Agents

World café participants suggested identifying those people within the organization that love change. Participants referred to these individuals as change agents. Not everyone likes or is comfortable engaging in change and, therefore, tapping into that interest was identified as very important. Participants also believed that teams could be developed that would be responsible for initiating and implementing change. Providing an opportunity for employees to be responsible for, and to be involved in, decision-making relating to change projects, links directly to autonomy and influence as described by Bolman and Deal (2003).

Recognition

Creating continuous improvement rewards that include recognition and incentive is important in an environment that is open to change. Rewarding employees who are willing to work hard on change initiatives that result in continuous improvement for the organization is an important factor in encouraging and creating challenging opportunities through change initiatives.

Authentic Leadership

Authentic leadership emerged as a primary theme during the focus groups. This theme included the sub-theme of authentic relationships, which included leaders behaving as if the organization is flat even when it is not. The theme of authentic leadership also included connecting to leaders in a real and sincere way, not through policy and procedure. Authentic leadership could be linked to servant leadership as identified by Secretan (2004). Servant leaders make an intentional choice to connect with employees and to serve them in a way that is genuine and caring. Servant leadership includes the ability for the leader to assist in an employee's personal growth and to increase their autonomy and empowerment. Participants described it as having a connection with the leader where there is clear and sincere feedback.

The work of Cameron and Quinn (2006) included the identification of the clan culture, which is described as a culture that includes "shared values and goals, cohesion, participativeness, individuality, and a sense of we-ness" (p. 41). This speaks to the organization behaving flat even when it is not. Everyone participates and there is a sense of togetherness versus the hierarchy of us and them.

The participants at the world café identified two strategies that would improve authentic leadership in an effort to enhance employee engagement. These strategies are:

developing a commitment to leadership and having a strategic recruitment, and termination process.

Commitment to Leadership

Employees want an opportunity to appraise their leaders. Providing feedback to leaders regarding their leadership skills is important. Participants suggested that administering a 360° feedback tool would be effective in this evaluation. Simplified communication that is direct to employees and that includes the ability to communicate with all levels of the organization was seen as important. The commitment to leadership also included integrated leadership training that is ongoing and comprehensive. However, participants suggested that the leadership program would need to reflect the principals of authentic leadership, that of providing an opportunity to connect with senior management and create an organization that acts flat even when it is not. World café participants recommended that leaders practice their leadership skills by moving in and out of leadership roles. This could be compared to the concept of roving leadership as described by Max De Pree (1987). Roving leadership is when people can move in and out of leadership as needed. It is not a hierarchical process, but one of need at the time.

Strategic Recruitment and Termination

The sub-theme of strategic recruitment and termination focused on the need for an organization to redefine their hiring competencies to reflect and align with the leadership philosophy. Participants recommended that managers or supervisors that are unwilling or unable to meet the leadership competencies should have their leadership role terminated. Participants suggested that these policies needed to be open and transparent.

Opportunities to Contribute

The fourth significant theme that emerged through the focus groups, as a factor of employee engagement, was the opportunity for employees to contribute. The opportunity for employees to contribute through team collaboration and contributions that impact the company overall were identified as important. As an employee's relationship with their employer matures, the employee begins to feel a sense of belongingness and a need to achieve results that reflect the company mission and purpose (Buckingham & Coffman, 1999). The Gallup organizations studies, as documented by Buckingham and Coffman, indicated that employees want to achieve and be called upon to contribute. This aligns with the findings of this research study.

This research finding can also be linked to the recent *Global Workforce Study* by Towers Perrin (as cited in Klie, 2007); Towers Perrin stated that learning and development opportunities where employees can contribute are key influencers on employee engagement. The participants of the world café identified three primary activities, programs, leadership, and recognition, which they believe will provide opportunities for employees to contribute in an effort to enhance employee engagement.

Programs

World café participants identified three specific programs to improve opportunities for employees to contribute. The first program is to develop surveys or interview questions to identify a baseline of where the organization is relative to providing opportunities for employees to contribute in a meaningful way. Participants believed that not all organizations would have the same level of need and, therefore, conducting a gap analysis would be appropriate. One participant suggested, while others agreed, that a think and thanks program, where employees have an opportunity to share

innovative ideas, would be a good way to encourage contribution. The final program discussed and recommended by participants was to provide opportunities for employees to contribute in the larger community. This could include volunteer work with a favourite charity. The world café participants identified that contribution is different for different organizations and different people and that providing a variety of ways for people to get involved was important.

Leadership

Participants believed that when employees make a suggestion or provide an idea leaders need to ensure that employees would not be ridiculed for making suggestions that were seen as impractical or inappropriate. Participants believed that employees would not make suggestions if there were a possibility of ridicule. Participant also suggested that leadership should engage in a mentorship or coaching program that focuses on finding and encouraging opportunities for employees to contribute. Changing leader's language was also recommended. Leaders could acknowledge individual contribution by using the word contribution in their feedback. Instead of telling an employee that they have done a good job, leaders could advise the employee that they have made a contribution. Participants considered this an important change in language by their leaders.

Recognition

The final sub-theme that emerged relating to opportunities to contribute was the importance of recognition when contribution is evident. Acknowledgment and recognition were considered important factors when employees contribute to team effort or overall organizational effectiveness.

Scope and Limitations of the Research

When designing and implementing this research study careful consideration was given; however, there are some limitations to the research and to the scope with which it was implemented. This study included 15 QNET member organizations from the possible 200 members. This represents 13% of their member organization. The results of this study can only be generalized in the context of this representation.

One organization in Brandon Manitoba wanted to participate in the focus group, however, QNET and I were unable to attract any other organizations in the Brandon area. The organization that was interested had only one employee wishing to participate. This representative from the Brandon organization was unable to travel to Winnipeg to participate in one of the two focus groups and, therefore, did not have the opportunity to participate. Due to time limitations, it was not practical to expand the research to rural Manitoba and, therefore, of this group was not represented in either the focus groups or the world café.

The focus groups did not include managers, supervisors, or executives. The results of the focus group are limited to front-line employees and, therefore, the results cannot be generalized to any other group.

I relied on the organizations to broadcast the opportunity to participate to employees. I am unable to confirm that all participating organizations made this opportunity available to all employees. It is important to note that it is possible and likely that those who volunteered to participate were individuals who were interested in employee engagement and possibly already engaged. This means that the research

findings may not represent the views of those people who are unengaged in their workplace.

The research study findings include four primary themes that emerged from the focus groups. The research also identified programs activities and services that QNET could develop and implement to enhance employee engagement based on the findings from the focus groups. The research findings identified in this chapter inform the study recommendations presented in chapter five.

CHAPTER FIVE RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

Introduction

This chapter includes recommendations and the implications to QNET arising from the research project findings. I will discuss the recommendations, implications, implementation strategies, and possible further research based on the results. This research study sought to answer the question: What services, programs, or activities could be developed and provided by QNET to enhance employee engagement within member organizations? The research participants provided significant information regarding the factors of employee engagement along with activities, programs and services that QNET could implement in an effort to enhance employee engagement.

The recommendations and implementation strategies are presented under the following headings: positive relationships, challenge through change, authentic leadership, and opportunity to contribute.

Study Recommendations

Positive Relationships

The most significant recommendation of this study is for QNET to inform and assist its members in developing positive relationships within their organizations. These positive relationships need to occur throughout the organization at all levels. The recommendations include programs, benefits and leadership. The first recommendation to create positive relationship is to develop specific programs.

Programs

The recommendations include four distinct programs. These programs are: get to know the employee, nominate a peer, ask the CEO, and outside activities and

celebrations. Three of these programs could be accomplished through an internal intranet site established by member organizations.

The first study conclusion is that positive relationships within the workplace are a key factor to enhancing employee engagement. When employees know each other both from a professional and personal perspective positive relationships can be developed. The development of an intranet site that provides employees with a place to share information and stories could assist in creating positive relationships. It could be a central place for people to explain the type of work they do for the organization. This could be particularly effective for larger member organizations that have more difficulty connecting employees. An intranet site could meet the needs of both providing professional information such as the type of work a person does to the more personal information such as, children's names and family vacations. This type of program would need to be voluntary, but could help bring people closer together in a positive way.

As part of the intranet site, member organizations could create a, nominate a peer program. Employees could go onto the site and nominate a co-worker for a job well done or a favour provided. They could include into the system why they want to nominate a co-worker. This program is an internal employee recognition program that highlights special moments between employees. Along with sharing information about employees and nominating co-workers for a job well done, the intranet site could include an ask the CEO section, which would allow employees to type in questions and get responses from the CEO, thus dramatically increasing the flow of information to employees. By increasing the communication between all levels of the organization positive relationships can grow. Margaret Wheatley (2006) stated:

At all levels and for all activities in organizations, we need to challenge ourselves to create greater access to information and to reduce those control functions that restrict its flow. We cannot continue to use information technology and management systems as gatekeepers, excluding and predefining who needs to know what. (p. 107)

This increase in information flow allows employees to grow stronger relationships with each other and with the organization. When the CEO shares information about the organization transparency is increased and trust can increase amongst team members. Transparency and trust were key factors in positive relationships as identified by participants.

The final program recommendation to create positive relationships is for member organizations to develop outside activities and celebrations that bring employees together. It is recommended that member organizations provide opportunities for employees to work together on non-organizational events such as charities. When employees of an organization take a day off from the usual work activities to participate in an event that gives back to the larger community bonds can be built and positive relationships can develop. This recommendation ties to optimism and the ability for organizations to have a humanistic or people focus. Both of these characteristics were identified as key factors to employee engagement.

Implementation strategies

In order to accomplish the development of these programs, QNET should begin by communicating clearly to their members the research study conclusions and recommendations. It is through this communication that member organizations will benefit and begin the process of identifying when and how they wish to implement.

Some member organizations may already have an intranet site that has some or all of the programs identified. Organizations that already have an intranet site would be able

to implement the recommendations faster. Those that do not would be required to develop the site first.

Due to the nature of this recommendation I do not believe that QNET could implement a generic site that would bring value to its members as the overall objective is to create positive relationships within individual member organizations. However, QNET could provide the information on how to develop, what to include and the importance of developing this new communication tool for employees in an effort to increase transparency, trust, optimism, and a more humanistic people focus resulting in positive relationships.

Benefits

It is recommended that QNET inform its member organizations of the importance to provide employees benefits that are flexible and adaptable. Through QNET could develop and implement a benefits workshop that includes how to create flextime and compressed workweeks and still meet production or performance requirements. Many of their smaller member organizations may not have information regarding these important initiatives. QNET could also provide a workshop on employee assistance programs, how to purchase and implement these important employee benefits. As one of their mandates is to provide education and training within the wellness stream, QNET could incorporate a workshop that focuses on the wellness of employees through flexible benefits.

Leadership

QNET can begin by informing their member organizations about the results of this research study. The information should include the importance of leadership development and internal leadership education that is unique to the organization. The research identified that leadership development will be unique to each organization and at

each level of the organization. However, the leadership development must have components that focus on building positive relationships within the workplace. Leaders must have an opportunity to develop a people focus approach to their interactions that includes open transparent communication and builds trust. It is recommended that member organizations create a unique leadership development strategy and QNET could be instrumental in assisting them to do this

Implementation strategy

QNET could develop a workshop that assists organizations in developing a strategy to identify their unique leadership philosophy. This could be done in a group setting or facilitated individually with each interested member organization. QNET could develop a training program that assists organizations in actually developing their own internal leaders. Elements or modules could be developed whereby members could pick and choose which elements they want to include in their program. Under QNET's Leadership and Management stream, QNET could develop a series of leadership program development workshops that include a variety of leadership concepts.

Challenge through Change

The second significant recommendation and strong theme in the research findings is for organizations to provide challenge to employees through change initiatives. This research finding aligns with the results of a study on what activities produce the highest intrinsic motivation, conducted by Dr. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and cited by Kouzes and Posner (1995), "The challenges that ranked highest among respondents were designing and discovering something new, exploring a new place, and solving a problem" (p. 42).

This recommendation is presented under three distinct headings: create an environment open to change, change agents, and recognition. I provide recommendations for each of these important opportunities.

Create an Environment Open to Change

QNET should share the results of the research findings relating to challenge through change with its member organizations. A clear description of what this finding means, its importance, and how it can enhance employee engagement should be provided. Participants described the importance of being involved in change initiatives and how these initiatives provided significant challenge to them. It was this combination of the change initiative and the challenge that greatly enhanced their engagement in the workplace.

Member organizations could participate in best practice initiatives such as having employees from their organization share information with employees of another organization. People in similar positions at different organizations meet to discuss best practice and share ideas. The objective would be to have employees return from participating in these groups with new ideas and strategies for change. When talking about the importance of change Wheatley (2006) stated, “For a system to remain alive, for the universe to keep growing, information must be continually generated. If there is nothing new, or if the information merely confirms what already is, then the result will be death” (p. 96). Wheatley discussed the importance of cross-pollination of information and the need for organizations to be looking for opportunities for change. “We need to have information coursing through our systems, disturbing the peace, imbuing everything it touches with the possibility of new life” (p. 96). To facilitate this process, leaders would have to become comfortable with change. A strategy to assist leaders in becoming more

comfortable with change should be implemented. The primary objective is to create organizations that are open to change.

Implementation strategies

QNET could provide a venue for its members to participate in best practice initiatives. QNET's role could be to bring member organizations together for the explicit purpose of sharing ideas. Those organizations that are interested in the program could self-identify to QNET. QNET could connect companies that wish to share ideas and brainstorm on best practice and could facilitate the process where necessary. Under QNET's Leadership and Management stream they could provide this service to their members several times per year. It would also be important for QNET to develop and implement workshops on the subject of organizational change. This workshop could be offered to member organizations wishing to assist managers in becoming more comfortable with change.

Change Agents

A key component in providing challenge through change is to first identify those people in the organization that love change, those people who are natural change agents. Member organizations need to determine who within their organization the natural change agents are. Once this is done transformational teams need to be developed for the purpose of identifying opportunity for improvement and to assist in the change initiative and implementation. Once teams are formed, members of the team should participate in the identification of individual strengths. This will allow members to utilize their strengths during the change initiative. Team members usually have unique strengths that if identified could assist in appropriate allocation of work.

Implementation strategies

QNET can provide member organizations with the research findings relating to challenge through change. This information is the first stage in assisting members in understanding the importance of providing change opportunities. To assist members in determining who their internal change agents are QNET could develop an on-line survey that members organizations could access. This survey should be designed to identify who within the organization are the change agents. Member organizations could work independently when forming the transformational teams or QNET could provide a venue to bring the change agents together from multiple organizations to discuss transformational teams, their role and importance within the organization.

There are several tools that can be used to assist individuals in determining their unique strengths. QNET could provide a workshop for the identified change agents, on the Strengths Deployment Inventory or another preference based tool. This training could be provided under their Leadership and Management stream. This would provide an opportunity for the member organizations change agents to meet and receive specific training that would enhance their contribution.

Recognition

It is critical that change agents be recognized for their unique contribution. The research conclusions clearly indicate the importance of recognizing and rewarding change agents for their role in change initiatives. “The outcomes of our present actions play a major role in determining our future actions. People repeat behaviour that’s rewarded, avoid behaviour that’s punished, and drop or forget behaviour that produces neither result” (Kouzes & Posner, 1995, p. 275). The recognition of the contributions made by change agents in the organization is critical to ensuring that change agents will

continue to look for new opportunities to evolve and grow the organization. The nexus between challenging opportunities through change initiatives and employee engagement is clear and the recognition of these unique contributions will assist in the behaviour being repeated.

Implementation strategies

QNET may not directly be able to recognize and reward change agents within member organizations but they can share the importance of this information. QNET has influence within the Manitoba business community and through their Leadership and Management stream they can inform member organizations of the importance of building in recognition program. This important information could be included in the leadership workshops. One of QNET's mandates is to recognize organizational excellence. QNET should recognize member organizations for their ability to build transformational teams and provide employees with challenge through change initiatives.

Authentic Leadership

The third significant recommendation is for QNET to assist member organizations in creating authentic leadership within their organizations. This section is presented under two distinct headings: commitment to leadership, and strategic recruitment and termination.

Commitment to Leadership

QNET member organizations will benefit if QNET provides an evaluation tool that is easily accessible to its members for the purpose of evaluating leaders within their organizations. Under its Leadership and Management stream QNET could provide a 360° evaluation tool that members could access. Many of the smaller organizations may not have access to these tools however, QNET could be a central distributor and provider of

training assisting leaders of member organizations to evaluate their skills and build self-development plans.

QNET member organizations will benefit if QNET provides leadership training that reflects authentic leadership; assisting leaders in recognizing the importance of connecting in a sincere and authentic way to employees. Authentic leadership includes the notion that organizations and leaders can act as if the organization is flat even when it is not, connecting with employees in a real way. Authentic leadership also includes simplified communication, encouraging communication throughout the organization, and at all levels removing the hierarchical barriers that can sometimes restrict communication. The past role of management to contain information flow, to ensure control and to procreate a need to know only approach, does not align with the results of this research nor with the work of Margaret Wheatley (2006), she stated, “If information is to function as a source of organizational vitality, we must abandon our dark cloaks of control and trust in its need for free movement, even in our own organizations” (p. 97). It is recommended that a leadership program be developed that includes the components of authentic leadership as identified by this research.

Strategic Recruitment and Termination

QNET can benefit by assisting its member organizations to build strategic recruitment programs that align with their identified leadership characteristics. QNET should share the research results and in particular the importance of aligning recruitment and termination strategies with the leadership philosophy. The leadership training could include a module on aligning organizational policy to leadership philosophy. This research study provides insight into the need to align corporate strategies such as recruitment and termination to leadership philosophy. It is a mistake to develop a

leadership philosophy and not align programs and policy to it. If this happens employees could see unauthentic leadership versus authentic leadership that aligns strategy to philosophy.

It raises questions of alignment congruence, and leadership such as, what is the cause ... to inspire people over the long term, we need to ensure that the cause is rooted in something higher than self-interest, something beyond personal or corporate gain. (Secretan, 2004, p. 121)

For an organization to be committed to authentic leadership, it must align its recruitment practices to ensure that they are hiring people whose cause and approach aligns with the organizations. Organizations must also be prepared to terminate those that do not align.

Implementation strategies

QNET can implement these research recommendations through the following steps: (a) research and evaluate 360° evaluation tools and determine an appropriate tool for their vast membership requirements, and make this tool available to their membership; (b) develop a workshop that includes a debrief of the evaluation tool in a trusting and safe environment; (c) provide one on one coaching for managers that request additional assistance; (d) develop a second workshop that builds on the first and includes the creation of a personal self development plan for participants; (e) create a third workshop for member organizations that focuses on communication and tools to reduce communication barriers and to increase communication flow throughout the organization; and (f) create an information session on the importance of aligning the organizational leadership philosophy to the policies and procedures such as recruitment and termination.

Opportunities to Contribute

The final recommendation includes providing employees of member organizations opportunities to contribute. Recommendations are presented under the three

sub-themes from the research findings. The sub-themes are: programs, leadership, and recognition.

Programs

QNET member organizations will benefit by providing opportunities for employees to contribute to community initiatives. This includes volunteering with charitable organizations. Research findings identified opportunities to contribute include being able to move outside the employing organization and contribute to the larger community.

Through an intranet site member organizations could create a place for employees to provide ideas and to be creative. This program was identified by participants as a think and thank program. It is recommended that member organizations provide this opportunity to employees as a way of obtaining their contribution and engagement. It is important, however, that contribution be recognized so this program requires two phases, the opportunity to provide the ideas and contribution and the ability for the organization to recognize the contribution.

QNET would benefit by creating and providing to its members a survey that assists member organizations in identify how well they provide opportunities for employees to contribute. The research findings include the importance of creating a baseline. Each member organization will provide these opportunities to a different extend. Having a clear understanding of where the member organization is by developing a baseline will assist in determining to what level they need to increase these opportunities.

Implementation strategies

QNET can implement this recommendation by engaging in the following steps:

(a) communicate clearly with members through information sessions the importance of providing employees opportunities to contribute beyond the company and into the community to enhance employee engagement; (b) inform member organizations through the same information sessions of the importance of providing a place on their intranet site for employees to contribute their ideas and suggestions for improvement; and (c) create an on-line survey to assist member organizations in developing a baseline. QNET could house the survey on their website allowing multiple member organizations access.

Leadership

QNET and its member organizations could benefit by incorporating into their leadership programs training that includes the importance to ensure a safe place for employees to contribute. An environment that is safe from ridicule. The research findings included the importance for organizations to create a safe environment where employees would have not fear of ridicule if their ideas or suggestions were not acted upon.

QNET should assist its member organizations and their leaders in changing their internal language to include the word contribution. The research findings indicate that employees find more meaning and significance when their leaders provide feedback relating specifically to that employee's contributions, as opposed to simply stating they have done a good job. The simple task of changing language will benefit QNET members and assist in enhancing employee engagement.

QNET can also benefit by including a mentorship and coaching program within their Leadership and Management stream. The research findings included the importance of organizations having a coaching and mentorship program that includes teaching

leaders the value of creating and encouraging opportunities for employees to contribute in a meaningful way. Self-efficacy and personal satisfaction are key components of meaningful work (Bolman & Deal, 2003). The coaching programs primary goal is to improve leadership skills that focus on employees and opportunities for employees to contribute.

Implementation strategies

QNET can implement the research recommendations by providing a leadership development program that assist member organizations in providing a safe environment for employees to contribute. The leadership program should also include information on how to communicate positive contribution. Encouraging leaders and organizations to change their language to include the word contribution would benefit member organizations. The leadership development program should also include the development of mentorship and coaching programs. Through its Leadership and Management stream QNET could be instrumental in the development of a leadership program that contains both mentorship and coaching components.

Organizational Implications

The recommendations outlined in the study recommendations section will have organizational implications. The research findings recommend that QNET assist organizations in creating positive relationships within the workplace, provide challenge through change initiatives, create authentic leadership, and provide opportunities for employees to contribute in a meaningful way.

QNET is a not-for-profit organization that provides Manitoba businesses with opportunities for networking, building business awareness, education, and recognition. Its

focus is on business quality and assisting Manitoba businesses to be competitive within their specific market. QNET strives to assist organizations and individuals in being effective, efficient, and adaptive to changing business needs. With this as part of QNET's vision and purpose the recommendations align nicely with their mandate.

The research recommends four primary initiatives, dissemination of information, technology improvements both internally and externally, training programs and facilitation of cross-pollination. Each initiative will be discussed and the implications of the initiative identified.

QNET can inform its member organizations of the research findings. With one of their primary roles being to provide information relevant to organizational excellence, providing an information session would be valuable to QNET and its members. This information should include all of the research findings and recommendations. QNET often provides information session in the form of breakfast meeting or lunch and learn session and therefore the implications of this initiative are minimal.

QNET can create two specific surveys on its website. The first survey would be developed to assist member organizations in identifying their internal change agents. Member organizations would have access to the survey through the QNET website. The second survey, also available through the QNET website could be to assist member organizations in determining a baseline of how well they provide opportunities for employee to contribute to the organization. The creation of these surveys would be a new service offering by QNET.

The resources necessary to develop a valid survey and to create the necessary technology could be cost prohibitive. Part two of the technology improvements includes

an initiative by member organizations. QNET should provide their members information on the research findings regarding the importance of developing an intranet site. This information could be provided in a workshop setting where representatives of member organizations could receive information on how to set up the programs. The intranet programs should include opportunities for employees to: (a) get to know other employees both professionally and personally; (b) nominate a peer for a job well done or favour extended; (c) ask the CEO questions and receive answers; (d) provide public recognition for improvement through change initiatives; and (e) participate in a thinks and thanks programs, where employees can submit ideas for improvements, contribute to the organization, and be thanked for their contribution. The implications to QNET for providing this information to their members are minimal, however, the implications to members could be lack of resources both professionally and financially as well as concerns regarding possible inappropriate use of an intranet site and privacy implications.

QNET can develop a leadership program to assist member organizations in developing their internal leaders. QNET could develop through their Leadership and Management stream a leadership program that focuses on the research recommendations. Authentic leadership was a primary theme that emerged from the research findings as well as leadership was a significant sub-theme of each of the other primary research themes. As a result leadership development must be considered an important component of enhancing employee engagement. By developing a modular leadership program members could participant in the components that best align with their defined leadership philosophy. Modules should be developed that reflect the research findings such as, building positive relationships that include a humanistic approach, assisting leaders in

becoming comfortable with change and creating an environment open to change, providing preference based tools that help determine strengths of team members, 360° leadership evaluation, communication, mentorship, and coaching.

A modular approach to leadership development allows for flexibility and adaptability of programs. QNET could also create a service that assists member organizations create their own internal leadership development program. The implication to QNET is that they already have a leadership development program that member organizations utilize. However, the program does not reflect all of the specific findings in this study and therefore would require significant changes. The cost for QNET to implement these change could be prohibitive depending on the extent to which changes are required.

QNET can be a resource for members to cross-pollinate ideas in an effort to stimulate change initiatives relating to best practice. QNET could connect interested parties through their central organization. The implications of this recommendation are minimal as QNET already connects its members through a monthly newsletter; however, there could be some additional requirements by staff to contact and connect those interested parties. There are limited staffing resources so this will require consideration.

Implications if Changes are not Undertaken

If the recommendations are not undertaken there are possible implications that could impact both QNET and its member organizations. The recent needs assessment, in which 700 QNET companies participated, identified employee engagement as a concern for Manitoba companies (Cadence Human Systems, 2007). The needs assessment respondents were asked to identify the top five challenges facing Manitoba businesses.

One of the top five challenges identified was low employee morale and motivation. The needs assessment report also outlined the desire by members, for QNET to expand learning opportunities for its members relating to employee engagement through leadership. Manitoba employers are also facing a labour shortage, which was identified in the assessment and which aligns with recent trends in Canada (Bouchard, 2007).

If the recommendations, or part thereof, are not implemented QNET could be seen as unresponsive to the *2007 Needs Assessment* (Cadence Human Systems, 2007), but more importantly, QNET would not be providing its members with important information regarding the factors of employee engagement. It is possible that QNET's member organizations could continue to have low morale and motivation amongst its employees. It could also lead to poor retention and attraction rates. The need to increase employee engagement cannot be underestimated as a factor for increasing retention, productivity, and sustainability. Employees who are not engaged in their workplace are more likely to leave and seek employment elsewhere. The current labour shortage has significant implications for Manitoba employers and, therefore, any initiatives that improve attraction and retention rates are important. QNET plays an important role in bringing programs and services to the Manitoba business community, that assist in developing excellence; therefore, these recommendations are a vital part of QNET's vision and purpose.

Implications for Further Research

An area for further research would be to conduct similar research focused specifically on the newer, younger employee. One of my observations made during the conduct of the research was it appeared younger employees were more vocal about

authentic relationships and change opportunities. Younger employees who participated in the research seemed more passionate about the need for change and challenge through change. The younger employees also seemed more attached to the need for positive, authentic relationships within the workplace as a factor of employee engagement.

The research project identified the need to develop a survey to determine who the change agents are within an organization. This could require a study to determine the characteristics of change agents. It could be difficult to create a valid survey that identifies change agents without defining what a change agent is.

Another area of possible further research is that of determining an appropriate evaluation tool for QNET to use in its leadership development program. It is important that the tools used and develop meet the needs of both QNET and its members. This may require further evaluation and consideration.

Conclusion

The process of organizing involves developing relationships from a shared sense of purpose, exchanging and creating information, learning constantly, paying attention to the results of our efforts, coadapting, coevolving, developing wisdom as we learn, staying clear about our purpose, being alert to changes from all directions. (Wheatley, 2007, p. 27)

Within the context of this research we find the factors of employee engagement to include employees want and need to work where there are positive relationships throughout the organizations. Optimism and a people or humanistic approach is critical while transparent communication that flows freely throughout the organizations can co-exist. The need for change and the sheer appetite for change were clear. Employees are engaged when there is an appetite for change and where change agents are allowed to flourish. Authentic leadership where employees can have candid conversations with leaders and where leaders behave as if the organization is flat even when it is not, makes

employees want to engage. Finally the opportunity for employees to contribute to the team and the organization while engaging their unique talents was important.

QNET is a leader in the Manitoba business community providing its members with unique programs and services that address excellence and opportunity. QNET's goal is to improve economic development, capacity, and sustainability for Manitoba companies through four distinct areas: awareness, networking, education, and recognition. Through this research study employees of QNET member organizations have provided QNET with specific information about programs, services, and activities that will enhance employee engagement.

CHAPTER SIX: LESSONS LEARNED

This project has provided me with significant learning professionally, academically, and personally. I have stretched myself in many ways through this important and monumental opportunity. I am able to articulate clearly my learning opportunities from a professional and an academic perspective, but I suspect the personal learning will continue for several months as I reflect on the uniqueness of my journey. The following suggestions and reflections are provided in an effort to assist others in their learning opportunity.

Keep an Open Mind

The objective of the research project is to seek answers to the research question. It is with this in mind that I suggest keeping an open mind when considering the research questions. In fact, an open mind is required throughout the process. We bring to our research our personal lens and biases. It is critical to remove the personal perspective and look beyond and through it. In my case, I had a clear idea of what I wanted to inquire about. During the early months of proposal development, I discovered that I had significant biases and that my mind was more closed than open. Through the persistence and guidance of a faculty member, I began to see the pure joy and value of inquiry without the lens of bias. When we let go of our preconceived thoughts and ideas around our topic we can begin to be open to new information. The exploration and messiness of action research in itself is a fascinating process.

This was a significant learning opportunity for me both academically and professionally. The process provided the opportunity for me to truly identify my personal biases and to become more objective and open to anything. This has already impacted

how I conduct research for my clients professionally. My increased self-awareness of personal perspectives has thoroughly enhanced my objectivity. Keep an open mind and you will learn significantly more than you ever imagined.

Organization of Data

I made the decision early on to purchase a student copy of a qualitative research software package. What a fabulous opportunity to learn a new application and to organize my raw data. I am not a technical person, so I hoped that the software would be reasonably intuitive. It was. With only two passes on the tutorial I was able to begin loading primary documents. This was one area of my project that I was very pleased with. It is sometimes hard to imagine how much data you will gather in the course of an action research project. The capability of the software to allow me to store data, capture quotations, and code meaningful units made the analysis thoroughly enjoyable. The function of creating families or groupings with the meaningful units and then the ability to view those families in a visual format similar to a mind-map made the data come alive. I would highly recommend using a qualitative research software tool, as there was no frustration, only pure enjoyment.

Choose Wisely

One of the most important things the learner must do is choose their academic supervisor. Aside from the actual project and, the need to love your research topic, choosing your supervisor is the most critical decision you will make. Do not rely solely on the list provided by the University. This relationship is very important, one that can enhance or hinder your journey. Finding the right supervisor is critical. Choose two or three names. Treat it like a mutual interview. Create questions in advance and be ready to

write down the answers given. Be prepared to answer questions as well. Make sure to get references and once the interview is over, call the references and speak directly to the learner. If you can speak to past students, as well as students who are still in the process, that is even better. Ask specific questions like: (a) did the supervisor use track changes, (b) did the supervisor provide positive feedback along with constructive feedback, (c) did the supervisor show an interest in the subject matter, (d) did the supervisor provide feedback on your questions and sub-questions, and (e) was your supervisor willing to share information and teach you along the way? This decision is probably the most important decision you will make, so choose wisely.

Expect the Unexpected

Things will occur that you never imagined. It is important to be comfortable with change and to expect roadblocks. As a successful entrepreneur and reasonably successful student, I was shocked to find myself significantly doubting my ability to complete my project. My most important learning was to trust myself and to reach out early and often. As I began to doubt my ability, I began to question whether I would finish at all. If you find yourself like me, doubting your ability, ask a friend, ask a colleague, speak with your sponsor, inquire until you find a way to move past it. As I moved passed my personal roadblocks and slowly approached the finish line my mother passed away leaving me breathless. Life continues around us whether we expect it to or not.

Take a Break, You Deserve It

One of my learning objectives all through first and second residency was to learn to slow down, find balance in life, and appreciate the journey. Quiet intentional reflection was a key area of opportunity for me. I have not figured out how it happened, but through

this journey I actually learnt this valuable lesson. In all of the craziness and all of the workload I found time to be with my family, to take a much needed Christmas vacation and to reflect along the way. This was the most important lesson of all, truly seeing the importance of balance, reflection, visualization, connection, and the incredible abundance the world provides.

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APPENDIX A: LETTER OF UNDERSTANDING—RESEARCH TEAM

This letter identifies the roles of research team members. The role of research team members is to participate in focus groups as observers or in the World Café as table hosts. Research analysis is the responsibility of the primary researcher only. Research team members are not direct participants in the research they are outside objective observers.

The role of a research team member at the World Café is to act as table host listening to the participants contribute, encouraging them to write down their comments, debriefing new groups arriving to the table as to contributions already made and finally summarizing what the last group on a flipchart. Research team members are not direct contributors to the data.

Every participant will have signed a consent form indicating their informed consent to participate in this research project. Confidentiality, including participants' identity and contributions, must be kept strictly confidential.

As a research team member, I agree to hold all information in the strictest of confidence and to discuss it only with other research team members and the researcher in the context of this research during the research process only.

By signing below, I indicate my commitment to confidentiality of participants and the content they provide during focus groups and the World Café.

Print Name

Signature

Date

APPENDIX B: EMAIL TO INTERESTED MEMBER ORGANIZATIONS

Dear Potential Research Participating Organizations:

I am thrilled to advise that I have received approval from Royal Roads University Ethics Committee to proceed with my research project. I have schedule two Focus Groups and One World Café.

First Focus Group: October 2nd 9:15am to 11:00 am XXXXX Hotel XXXXXX (open to employee only)

Second Focus Group: October 6th 9:15am to 11:00 am XXXXXX Hotel XXXXXX (for front-line employees only)

World Café November 4rd location TBA 9am to 11:30am (open to employees, managers and senior executive)

I have attached the necessary Consent Forms which is part of the process for research that includes people. The first form is an Invitation/ Consent form for the Organization. This forms outlines the process and confidentiality. All companies will be held in confidence. I realize the form is lengthy and hope that it does not deter your interest. I am very happy to answer any questions via phone or email.

The second document is an employee Consent Form. It provides some information for individual employees regarding the process and confidentiality. Each participant will be given a number tag instead of a name tag and their identity will be held in strict confidence. The goal is to ensure that employees are comfortable sharing their knowledge knowing that their specific comments will not be identified in any way. This form needs to be signed by the employee.

The Organizational Invitation/CONSENT form needs to signed and faxed to my **fax line at XXX-XXX-XXXX**

The Employee CONSENT to participate in the Focus Group also needs to be signed by the actual employee participating and faxed to **XXX-XXX-XXXX**.

I encourage any employee who has questions to call me at XXX-XXX-XXXX.

I could not conduct my research without the participation of companies and their employees. I greatly appreciate your consideration. Please feel free to contact me at any time with questions.

Yvonne Thompson, CHRP, CHSC

Principal Consultant

Change Innovators Inc.

www.changeinnovators.com

XXX-XXX-XXXX

This communication, including its attachments, if any, is confidential and intended only for the person(s) to whom it is addressed, and may contain

proprietary and/or privileged material. Any unauthorized review, disclosure, copying, other distribution of this communication or taking of any action in reliance on its contents is strictly prohibited. If you have received this message in error, please notify us immediately so that we may amend our records. Then, please delete this message (and its attachments, if any) without reading, copying or forwarding it to anyone.

APPENDIX C: LETTER OF INVITATION AND ORGANIZATIONAL CONSENT

September 11, 2008

Dear Member Organization:

I would like to invite you and your employees to be part of a research project I am conducting. The objective of this research project is to understand the elements that contribute to employee engagement and to determine what services, activities, or programs could be developed and implemented to enhance employee engagement in QNET member organizations.

The Manitoba Quality Network has agreed to sponsor this research project and is offering this opportunity to member organizations. Each participating organization will receive a copy of the results and will be invited to any subsequent activities or programs provided as a result of the research.

This project is part of the requirement for a Master's Degree in Leadership from the Faculty of Social and Applied Sciences at Royal Roads University. My name is Yvonne Thompson and my credentials with Royal Roads University can be established by calling the Dean, XXX XXXXX, at XXX-XXX-XXXX.

I will be using an appreciative inquiry approach to invoke positive responses. An appreciative inquiry approach is a positive approach to seeking information. It allows participants to share past experiences that were positive and to explore possibilities for the future. For this research, the approach will be used to encourage participants to share positive experiences when they felt engaged with their work and work environment.

I will be using two research methods: focus groups and a World Café. The first research method to be used is focus groups. There will be two focus groups consisting of 10 front-line employees in each. Each focus group is expected to be 1.5 hours in length and will be held on October 2nd and October 6th. Both focus groups will be held in the morning between 9:00am and 11:00am. The anticipated questions will be: Please share a time when you felt excited about your job and couldn't wait to go to work. What do you think were the core attributes or circumstances that created or enhanced employee engagement?

The second research method will be a World Café held November 4, 2008. A World Café is a larger group setting that includes representatives from all stakeholders. For this research the World Café will include front-line employees, senior leadership, and employees of QNET; we also hope to involve QNET board members. The questions asked at the World Café will be directly related to information and themes identified in the focus groups. The questions will be constructed from focus group information to further understand employee engagement as experienced by those participating. This event will consist of six tables, with five participants at each table. Each table will have a unique question and participants will have an opportunity to participate in discussions at each table. Each table will summarize their discussions and a whole group discussion will

follow to integrate information from each table. The World Café will seek information from all levels of participating organizations and will further provide data on enhancing employee engagement.

It is important that all information gathered is properly documented. Information will be recorded in handwritten format, as well as audio-taped to ensure verbatim capture. All participating organizations and employees will be given pseudonyms, so that I can ensure their anonymity. A copy of the final report will be housed at Royal Roads University and available online through UMI/Proquest and the Theses Canada portal. Access and distribution will be unrestricted.

Your organization's support and participation would be greatly appreciated. Your organization and employees are free to withdraw at any time without prejudice, prior to the commencement of the actual focus group or World Café. However, once an employee has participated in either a focus group or the World Café, the information that person provided must be retained for the integrity of the research. Their anonymity will be retained at all times.

I thank you for your consideration of this research project. If you have any further questions please contact me at:

Name: Yvonne Thompson, CHRP, CHSC

Email: ythompson@XXXX.XXXXX

Telephone: XXX-XXX-XXX

Sincerely,

Yvonne Thompson

If you would like employees of your organization to have the opportunity to participate please sign below giving permission to provide an invitation to them.

By signing this letter, you give free and informed consent to allow your employees to participate in this research project. **PLEASE FAX TO XXX-XXX-XXX**

Name (Please Print): _____

Authorized Signature: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX D: FOCUS GROUP CONSENT FORM

This project is part of the requirement for a Master's Degree in Leadership from the Faculty of Social and Applied Sciences at Royal Roads University. My name is Yvonne Thompson and my credentials with Royal Roads University can be established by calling the dean, XXX XXXX, at XXX-XXX-XXXX.

This document constitutes your agreement to participate in this research project. The objective of the research sponsored by the Manitoba Quality Network is to better understand what factors contribute to being engaged at work. This will help determine what services, activities, or programs could be developed and implemented to enhance employee engagement in Manitoba organizations.

I will be using two research methods: focus groups and a World Café. This consent form is specific to the focus groups. There will be two focus groups consisting of eight different front-line employees in each. Each focus group is expected to be 1.5 hours in length. The anticipated questions will be: Please share a time when you felt excited about your job and couldn't wait to go to work. What do you think were the core attributes or circumstances that created or enhanced your engagement?

The second research method will be a World Café held in November. A World Café is a larger group setting that includes representatives from all stakeholders. For this research the World Café will include front-line employees, senior leadership, employees of QNET; we also hope to involve QNET board members. The questions asked at the World Café will be directly related to information and themes identified in the focus groups. The questions will be constructed from focus group information to further understand employee engagement as experienced by those participating.

Information will be recorded in hand-written format and will be audio-taped. At no time will any specific comments be attributed to any individual. Pseudonyms will be used to ensure anonymity of all participants. The audiotapes will be transcribed and a copy provided to participants for review and validation within one week following the focus group. All documentation will be kept strictly confidential.

A copy of the final report will be housed at Royal Roads University and available online through UMI/Proquest and the Theses Canada portal; it will be publicly accessible. Access and distribution will be unrestricted. In addition to submitting my final report to Royal Roads University in partial fulfillment for a Masters in Leadership, I will also be sharing my research findings with the sponsoring organization QNET and with participating member organizations and their employees. This will be done in information sessions and an electronic communication.

Your organization's support has been granted and, therefore, we would appreciate your participation and support. You are free to withdraw at any time prior to the commencement of the actual focus group. However, once you have participated in a focus group, the information you provided must be retained for the integrity of the research. Your anonymity will be retained at all times.

By signing this letter, you give free and informed consent to participate in this research project.

Name (Please Print): _____

Signed: _____

Date: _____

PLEASE FAX TO XXX-XXX-XXXX

APPENDIX E: ORGANIZATIONAL CONSENT
Organizational Consent

Organizational consent has been received by the following companies.

Company Name	Company #1	Participant Name Participant Name Participant Name Participant Name Participant Name Participant Name Participant Name	1-01 1-02 1-03 1-04 1-05 Oct 6th 1-06 Oct 6th 1-07 Oct 2nd
Company Name	Company #2	Participant Name	
Company Name	Company # 3	Participant Name Participant Name	3-01 3-02
Company Name	Company # 4	Participant Name Participant Name	4-01 4-02
Company Name	Company # 5	Participant Name	
Company Name	Company #6	Participant Name	

Figure E1. Organizational consent spreadsheet, created to keep track of participant consent forms for focus groups and world café.

APPENDIX F: WORLD CAFÉ CONSENT FORM

This project is part of the requirement for a Master's Degree in Leadership from the Faculty of Social and Applied Sciences at Royal Roads University. My name is Yvonne Thompson and my credentials with Royal Roads University can be established by calling the dean, XXX XXXXX, prior to the event

This document constitutes your agreement to participate in this research project. The objective of the research sponsored by the Manitoba Quality Network is to better understand what factors contribute to being engaged at work. This will help determine what services, activities, or programs could be developed and implemented to enhance employee engagement in QNET member organizations.

I will be using two research methods: focus groups and a World Café. This consent form is specific to the World Café. There will be two focus groups consisting of 8 different front-line employees in each. Each focus group is expected to be 1.5 hours in length. The anticipated questions will be: Please share a time when you felt excited about your job and couldn't wait to go to work. What do you think were the core attributes or circumstances that created or enhanced your employee engagement?

The second research method will be a World Café held November 4th at the Norwood hotel from 9:15 a.m. to 11:15 a.m. A World Café is a larger group setting that includes representatives from all stakeholders. For this research the World Café will include front-line employees, senior leadership, employees of QNET; we also hope to involve QNET board members. The questions asked at the World Café will be directly related to information and themes identified in the focus groups. The questions will be constructed from focus group information to further understand employee engagement as experienced by those participating.

Information will be recorded in hand-written format (flip chart) and will be audio-taped. At no time will any specific comments be attributed to any individual. Pseudonyms will be used to ensure anonymity of all participants. The audiotapes will be transcribed and a copy provided to participants for review and validation within two weeks following the World Café. All documentation will be kept strictly confidential.

A copy of the final report will be housed at Royal Roads University and available online through UMI/Proquest and the Theses Canada portal; it will be publicly accessible. Access and distribution will be unrestricted. In addition to submitting my final report to Royal Roads University in partial fulfillment for a Masters in Leadership, I will also be sharing my research findings with the sponsoring organization QNET and with participating member organizations and their employees. This will be done in an information session and an electronic communication.

Your organization's support has been granted and, therefore, we would appreciate your participation and support. You are free to withdraw at any time prior to the commencement of the actual World Café. However, once you have participated in the

World Café, the information you provided must be retained for the integrity of the research. Your anonymity will be retained at all times.

By signing this letter, you give free and informed consent to participate in this research project.

Name (Please Print): _____

Signed: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX G: CONSENT FORM PILOT QUESTIONS

This project is part of the requirement for a Master's Degree in Leadership from the Faculty of Social and Applied Sciences at Royal Roads University. My name is Yvonne Thompson and my credentials with Royal Roads University can be established by calling the dean, XXX XXXXX.

This document constitutes your agreement to participate in the role of piloting the Focus Group questions. The objective of the research sponsored by the Manitoba Quality Network is to better understand what factors contribute to being engaged at work. This will help determine what services, activities, or programs could be developed and implemented to enhance employee engagement in QNET member organizations.

If you choose to participate your role will be to review the questions that will be posed at the Focus Group and provide feedback and comments to the researcher on their value or relevance to understanding employee engagement. Particular attention to the sequencing of the questions would be appreciated. I will require only 30 minutes of your time and will be looking for your candid feedback on the questions and their ordering relevant to encouraging dialogue on employee engagement. Your anonymity will be retained at all times.

A copy of the final report will be housed at Royal Roads University and available online through UMI/Proquest and the Theses Canada portal; it will be publicly accessible. Access and distribution will be unrestricted. In addition to submitting my final report to Royal Roads University in partial fulfillment for a Masters in Leadership, I will also be sharing my research findings with the sponsoring organization QNET and with participating member organizations and their employees. This will be done in an information session and an electronic communication.

Your organization's support has been granted and, therefore, we would appreciate your participation and support

By signing this letter, you give free and informed consent to participate as a pilot group only for the purpose of reviewing the proposed questions.

Name (Please Print): _____

Signed: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX H: FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL AND QUESTIONS

All participants will be identified in advance. Informed consent will already be in place prior to the commencement of the focus groups.

All focus groups will take approximately 1.5 hours and will be audio-taped. I will facilitate both focus groups. In addition, there will be a member of the research team to assist.

The focus groups will follow an appreciative inquiry approach. The focus group is the discovery stage of appreciative inquiry. The focus group will have two stages. The first stage will be inquiry, focused on sharing examples and invoking conversation. The second stage will be an opportunity for participants to debrief and summarize the discussions. The first stage will ask the questions:

1. Please describe a time when you were excited by your job and could not wait to come to work.
2. What were the factors and conditions present at work that contributed to being excited about your job?
3. Please describe what the leadership was like when you felt like this.

The three questions will be asked in the order presented. Once these three questions have been explored by the participants and they have nothing further to add, there will be an opportunity for them to summarize and capture key ideas and thoughts as a group. This is the second stage of the focus group.

Any member of the focus group can withdraw at any time, but they can not remove their comments and contributions after the focus group starts as to provide integrity of the research. The focus group audio tapes will be transcribed within one week of the focus group. The transcription will be forwarded via email or by confidential mail depending on the request of the participant. Participants will be encouraged to review and confirm accuracy.

Upon completion of the research project and subsequent report, an information session will be held and participants will be invited. I will also produce an electronic brief on the results for those unable to attend.

APPENDIX I: WORLD CAFÉ QUESTIONS

1. Preliminary research indicates that having an opportunity to truly contribute in a real way to an organization is a key factor in enhancing employee engagement

Your café question is: if you could create, design and implement programs, training and/or any activities within a workplace in an effort to create opportunities for employees to contribute what would they be?

2. Preliminary research indicates that providing challenge through change initiatives contributes to enhancing employee engagement

Your café question is: if you could create, design and implement programs, training and/or any activities within a workplace in an effort to provide challenge through change what would they be?

3. Preliminary research indicates that positive relationships within organizations are a key factor in enhancing employee engagement.

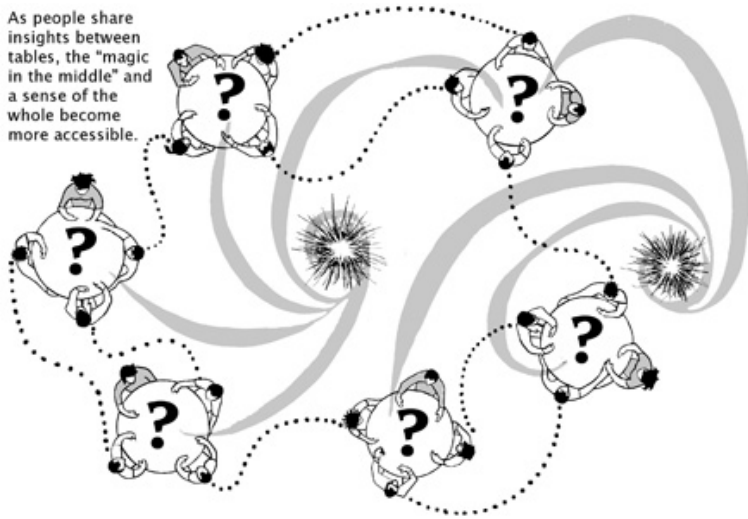
Your café question is: if you could create, design and implement programs, training and/or any activity within a workplace in an effort to create positive relationships what would they be?

4. Preliminary research indicates that providing authentic leadership contributes to enhancing employee engagement

Your café question is: if you could create, design and implement programs, training and/or any activities within a workplace in an effort to create authentic leadership what would they be?

APPENDIX K: WORLD CAFÉ MENU

As people share insights between tables, the "magic in the middle" and a sense of the whole become more accessible.



The World Café is an "innovative yet simple methodology for hosting conversations about questions that matter.

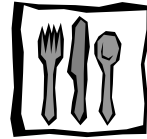
These conversations link and build on each other as people move between groups, cross-pollinate ideas, and discover new insights into the questions or issues that are most important in their life, work, or community.

As a process, the World Café can evoke and make visible the collective intelligence of any group, thus increasing people's capacity for effective action in pursuit of common aims."

Brown and Isaacs (2005)



Menu



Antipasto (10 min)
Overview of the meal

Table Host introduces themselves (stays at table through the different rounds; summarizes conversation at the table at start of next round.) The table host will also summarize the conversations at the end of all the rounds and during Cafe they will debrief and record on the flip chart a summary with help of the group.

Soupe (25 min)

Choose a table to sit at. You may want to sit with people you do not know. The table host will introduce the table question and encourage input and dialogue. Draw, create graphs, and jot down your thoughts. When the bell rings move to another table. Remember you are encouraged not to move as a group but move to any table you wish to. Join a new group at a new table.

Salada (20 min)

Table host recaps key ideas/ concepts / tools discussed in *Soupe*, and then new group can discuss and elaborate or build on first group's ideas or can create / provide new ideas surrounding the question.

Entre (20 min)

Table host recaps key ideas/ concepts / tools discussed in *the previous two rounds*, then new group can discuss and elaborate or build on others ideas or can create / provide new ideas surrounding the question.

(10 min) **coffee & bio break** – (Integrate coffee into rounds as needed!)

(Menu continued)

Dessert (20 min)

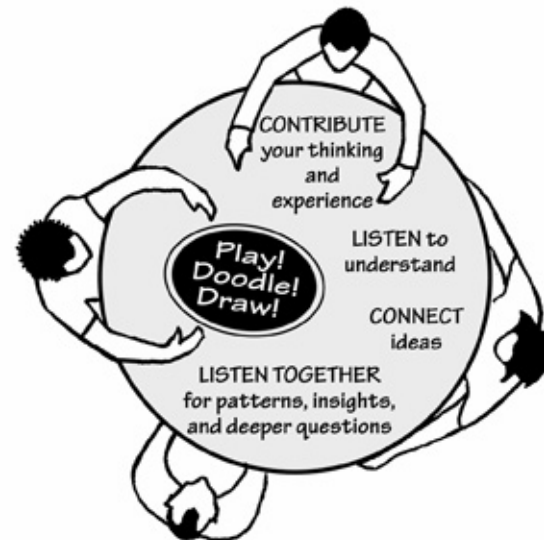
Table host recaps key ideas/ concepts / tools discussed in previous rounds, then new group can discuss and elaborate or build on others ideas or can create / provide new ideas surrounding the question.
Don't forget to doodle!

Cafe (20 min)

(Plenary:) Groups present a summary of their conversations (3-5 minutes each)

CAFÉ ETIQUETTE

FOCUS
on what matters!



APPENDIX L: FOCUS GROUP AND WORLD CAFÉ RESEARCH TEAM

EVALUATION FORM

I greatly appreciate your participation in this research project. Your feedback on my ability to conduct myself within the parameters of confidentiality, inclusion and integrity is very important. I appreciate you taking the time to answer this brief evaluation.

1. Did you sign and provide agreement to research team role and confidentiality?

yes no

2. Did the researcher demonstrate respect for individual

differences and opinions?

yes no

3. Did the researcher promote and demonstrate the

importance of inclusion for all?

yes no

4. Was the researcher organized and prepared for the event?

yes no

As a table host and research team member your feedback is very important. Any comments you can provide to the researcher would be greatly appreciated.
