

# Chapter 6

## Framing Your Future Through Employee Engagement

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### ABSTRACT

*There are many diverse demands and pressures on institutions of higher education. We are now at a time where innovation is required for many higher education institutions' survival and sustainability. However, university leaders should not look to old archaic change models to determine a way forward. Institutional leaders should look for methods to engage all generations of their workforce and decrease the level of resistance to the proposed change. This chapter looks at employee engagement and provides a model that higher education leaders can deploy to stimulate employee engagement and innovation. Framing Your Future is a model that can easily be deployed at a team, department, or even organizational level.*

### INTRODUCTION

If you are involved in higher education leadership, you are most likely aware of many of the current education industry's demands and pressures. Discussions about innovation in higher education are not new; however, what often gets lost in the debate is how sustainable innovation can occur in organizations that are rich with tradition and culture. Sadly, many universities are not structured in a way to support radical transformational change, nor are they developed to allow all members to be engaged in realignment and proactive futuring strategies.

As we take a look at higher education through the lens of human resource development (HRD), you will see that HRD looks for a means to unleash human expertise at the individual, team, and organizational levels. This view considers how each employee has an impact on a system, and that one system has an impact on the entire organization. The problem is that many universities are not set up to address future higher education needs, largely because they are not fully engaging their entire staff. Even though some universities teach the topic of employee engagement to their students, it is likely that their own opera-

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-7998-8275-6.ch006

## ***Framing Your Future Through Employee Engagement***

tional structure limits the full unleashing of their staff's expertise. While not their intended outcome, it is often that higher education organizations establish structures that create silos out of departments that prevent whole organization cohesion.

Sustainable innovation can only occur when all the organization's members are prepared, poised, and focused on a common vision. When organizations witness a higher level of employee engagement, they will also see a higher number of employees working towards the mission, vision, and key performance indicators (KPIs) of the organization, thus leading to higher employee levels of the three Ps: passion, productivity, and performance. This chapter looks at employee engagement and provides a model that higher education leaders can deploy to stimulate employee engagement and innovation.

## **EVOLUTION OF HIGHER EDUCATION**

### **Employee Engagement in Higher Education**

Take a few moments and visualize what your institution may have looked like when the doors were opened for the first group of students, and now compare your vision with the operational practices of today. Even though generations have come and gone, how employees and faculty are engaged at your institution is likely to be similar to the way it was in the 1800s. If higher education is to survive, it must also learn to evolve to meet the new demands of learners, but also the demands of its employees. Archaic traditions should be evaluated for their appropriateness for long-term sustainability. Across the United States, we are seeing universities close because they are more afraid of changing than they are with having to close the institution. Admittedly, some of closing are caused by denial that the higher education market is changing, and that "our" institution is shielded from these changes. Senge (2006) summarizes this very well when he mentions that what we think determines what we see; however, it is really what we see that determines our own reality.

So why is the talk about employee engagement so important in the discussion about the future needs of higher education? The importance of employee engagement is because of the direct connection between engagement and the level to which an employee is willing to invest in the success of their organization. Higher employee engagement levels will lead to more productivity (Gallup, 2013), economic growth, and profitability (Mehrzi & Singh, 2016; Sharma & Sharma, 2014), and that productivity will create additional innovation and a competitive advantage (Baily et al., 2005; Hill et al., 2014). All of this leads to the need for higher education institutions to better understand employee engagement and determine ways to engage their workforce in organizational planning.

### **Lens of Human Resource Development**

Successful leaders understand that engaging their employees is an important component to the success of their organization, but engagement can be very difficult (Quirke, 2008). To understand how employees can impact their institutions, it is important to view this discussion through HRD, which is defined as "the process of developing and unleashing human expertise through organizational development and training and development for the purpose of improving performance" (Swanson & Holton, 2009, p. 4). The core beliefs of HRD are (p. 10–11):

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