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## **Creating the Engaged Organization**

### ***The Engaged Employee as a Key Lever for Change***

#### ***(or How to Un-Boil a Frog)***

Hanley Brite

Agile organizations are winning organizations. They react quickly to changes in their markets and move nimbly from strategy to action. Agile organizations require agile teams and, most important, agile employees... and agile employees are engaged employees. If you want to bring about positive, meaningful change in your company, you need positive, motivated employees on board who are willing to take risks and able to move with ease and speed to make the change happen. If this is not the case, if the employees are disconnected from a deeper sense of the purpose of their work, and you truly want to be a high-performing, agile organization, then this is where you have to start.

### **The Case of the Boiled Frogs**

No one had a high opinion of the in-house technical support group in this particular Silicon Valley software company. Business units, key functional groups and employees throughout the company had the same story to tell: the support staff's service was spotty and their information was unreliable.

Contrary to popular belief throughout the company, the technical support folks were actually smart, hard-working people whose original intent was to provide excellent service. They could recall a time when they felt respected and supported by the organization, worked well together and had established excellent relationships with their internal customers. But times had changed. Slowly, in response to multiple factors including leadership changes, increases in technical and organizational demands, insufficient attention to the employees' basic needs and outsourcing of a number of the critical functions that they felt should have remained with the company, employees disengaged. They had lost touch with their customer—the internal client base of the company's employees themselves. And they had loosened their grasp of the meaning, purpose and even value of their work. In their gradually increasing struggle for basic

survival, submerged in the fast pace and heavy demand of their workplace culture, they had become Boiled Frogs.

The Boiled Frog syndrome is gruesome, but it certainly has a direct application in a company that is increasing the heat under its employees. The premise is this: you can't drop a frog into a pot of water that's already boiling. What you *can* do, though, is invite the frog into the pot before the heat is on and then slowly increase the temperature. The frog will continually adjust to the slowly rising heat. Eventually the water boils and the frog hardly notices. What might have been an intolerable situation for the frog (or self-respecting employee) has gradually become the norm.

People in organizations enter into work environments where they perceive that their basic needs are being met or exceeded, and where they feel they are making a difference. Sometimes it turns out that their initial positive perceptions were an illusion. Other times a good situation goes bad, often very slowly as the heat is turned up, and people in their natural resiliency just adjust and adapt. Employees experience such things as constantly changing leadership, relentless firefighting, unclear messaging and lack of effective performance management as threats to their well-being, survival, and ability to contribute in a meaningful way. The result is a disengaged workforce whose definition of success slowly narrows to simply getting through the day. The healthier, smarter, more "with-it" people quickly snap out of it and move on to healthier work environments, and you are left with a full pot of burned-out—or boiled—employees.

Every company—at least every one that is thriving—undergoes growth and change to the point where its leaders risk losing sight of the elements that once made it a great place to work. Employees of these companies are going to feel the heat of that change, but that doesn't mean they have to suffer. Employees can remain highly motivated and engaged when they have what they need to continue to make meaningful contributions toward increasing the level of individual, team and organizational performance.

This chapter will explore the factors that create disengagement in changing environments, and how you can analyze the problem and start to move employee energy in a positive direction. I'd like to start by asking you to imagine being the change agent for our example support group. Like the boiled frog, these employees are in hot water and they've all come to your presentation about change. There they are. Staring at you. Waiting to hear whether this meeting will be positive and fruitful, or just another hour of work—and their lives—that they'll never get back. The ultimate success of your presentation is not about you, your PowerPoint slides, or how well you communicate. It's about what happens for *them*, tomorrow, next week, next month, how the process will play out for them over time to build (or destroy) the engagement you have just asked for. Change starts with a promise, and whether people truly buy into the promise for the long haul is not a function of the imagination but one of experience.

### **Imagination versus Experience**

Employees become integrated with organizations because what they have been told and shown, coupled with their own hopes and aspirations, has created a sense of excitement, anticipation and identification with the company's purpose or future. They've formed a sense of what will be expected of them, what they expect to accomplish for themselves,

how to act, how others will act toward them and how they will feel about it all. Their imaginations are full of ideas about what this job will be like and what it will do to create a future of their dreams. If they imagine that they are joining highly engaged organizations where there will be ample opportunity for significant individual and team achievement, their expectations will follow. They will be prepared to engage with work, colleagues and the organization as a whole. And with that attitude, they're also prepared to do whatever it takes to help drive their company toward its goals.

The job begins, and employees go through their day-to-day routines and meetings constantly testing their imagined work environment against actual events. They observe what is happening to others around them, noticing who is doing well and who is struggling, who is being promoted and who is not, who is staying and who is leaving and who is powerful and who is not. All the social and business interactions, feedback and observations add up to an experience of the workplace, a combination of what employees see and how they feel about it. In evaluating the difference between the workplace they imagined and the one they actually experience, they are led to one of three conclusions: Things are as they imagined them to be (within some band of acceptable differences), things are considerably better, or, as in the case of the Silicon Valley company, things are considerably worse.

This kind of daily evaluation affects both their expectations and their level of engagement. If things match their expectations reasonably well and stay there, they'll keep the same level of enthusiasm they came in with. If things are (or get) considerably better than expected, the possibilities for increasing connection and achievement in the workplace grow, and employees become more engaged with their work and colleagues. A deeply engaged, high-performing team of employees are most likely to have a highly positive experience of the workplace compared with what was imagined, and more likely to contribute to a highly positive workplace.

This reinforcing loop of engagement can spiral either up or down. If things are (or get) considerably worse, people start to adjust to continually having their expectations blown. Among the many strategies people use to deal with this disappointment is to slowly lower their expectations over time so that they won't be disappointed again. Among those expectations will be their own standards of performance. The upshot is that what seemed intolerable yesterday becomes moderately acceptable today—by tomorrow it will be the norm. Employees begin to expect less from others, and from themselves. The work environment causes them to focus more on survival than on performance and so they disengage, tune out and become inured to the negative atmosphere that they are now reinforcing. They become boiled frogs. Boiled frogs making a lot of mistakes, not delivering on time, and certainly not volunteering extra effort or innovation.

## **The Engagement Experience**

Organizations can't grow and sustain positive change when they're staffed with boiled frogs. They need impassioned, aware, creative and healthy employees to help the organizations move toward their next generation of success. Awaken the positive forces for change within an organization, enabling engaged employees to be an integral

part of the change, requires an understanding of the core relationships that influence their level of engagement.

The employees' process of comparing experience to imagination involves taking a cold, hard look at five major aspects of work:

1. **The work itself:** This can vary from meaningful, creative work in which employees feel they are making a difference in the world to boring, repetitive and/or futile work that is draining and purposeless.
2. **The leadership:** This includes the employees' leadership chain from their immediate supervisors to the CEO and every level in between.
3. **The work group:** This includes peers, team members, and others in the employees' inner circles of day-to-day at-work tasks and social connections. This relationship can range from highly supportive, challenging and uplifting to isolating, threatening and downright depressing. Are team members collaborative and mutually enhancing? Or do they just pull each other down?
4. **The organization at large:** This includes all aspects of the company culture espoused to and experienced by employees. It also includes security, safety and other work-place dimensions that fulfill basic economic and psychological needs. These dimensions can vary from an atmosphere in which the employee is free to focus on the work challenges at hand to a set of distracting and worrisome situations that draw employees away from their work.
5. **The employees themselves:** Ultimately employees' engagement at work is enabled or limited by their willingness and ability to be engaged in the first place. This is governed by myriad factors that play out both within and outside of the workplace. Employees' engagement can vary from highly motivated, inspired and engaged to disinterested, hostile and, inevitably, disengaged.

Creating an engaged workforce requires an understanding of the dynamics of these five relationships, how they interplay with each other and how you discover the leverage points to create sustainable, positive, productive change.

What is really important for Change Agents to consider here is the level of harmony (or dissonance) felt by individuals, teams and the organization as a whole in relation to the five core relationships. As employees compare what is *imagined* with what is *experienced*, some key questions reveal what is important to know in each area, illustrated in the matrix below:

## Exhibit 1: Comparison Between the Imagined and the Experienced

	Imagined	Experienced
The Work	What did I assume the nature of the work would be based on my former experiences and what I was told?	Has the work turned out to be interesting, challenging and developmental?  Do I know my work is important and makes a difference?  Has my team been acknowledged for our contributions?
The Leadership	Based on early encounters and former experiences, what did I expect my relationship with my boss would be?	Has my boss given me the appropriate level of direction and feedback?  Has my boss expressed sincere interest in my work and let me know it is important to the company?
The Work Group	What were my expectations relative to interacting with others?	Have my work-mates and others I depend on met my expectations?  "Do I understand how my work group a contributes to the company's big picture goals.
The Organization	What was I told about what it is like to be part of this company?  What have I heard from others, read about, or seen in the media?  What were my expectations regarding my basic needs for a pleasant and safe workplace?	Have I found this to be a good (or great) place to work?  Have my basic needs for a supportive and safe workplace been met?
Themselves	What were my aspirations in taking this job or assignment in the first place?  How important is my work in the context of my life as a whole?  Is this a place where I can express myself, be heard and have influence over my own job and career?	Have my aspirations and hopes been reinforced or attenuated?  Do I feel I am capable of contributing more?  Has my confidence in taking on new challenges grown or shrunk?

People tend to process information from the inside out, starting with “What this means for me and my work” and progressing through “what this means for my team, the organization, etc.”

Employees have an opportunity to compare imagination against experience in each of these areas, and to assess how each of those comparisons contributes to the larger picture. They might decide that while there is an unacceptably wide gap between their imagination and their experience of their work, there is no dissonance at all between the imagined and experienced relationships with co-workers and the direct manager. In this case work dissatisfaction is mitigated by the personal relationships in the group.

## **People and Their Work**

A while back, I was part of a team that was working on a massive change effort involving thousands of employees working the employee benefits claims division of a large insurance company. As part of the change effort, there was a drive by senior leadership to get employees more involved in “teamwork.” This approach was based on the idea that in teams, employees would be more engaged with each other and therefore more engaged with their work, more productive. As one Tech Support leader put it: “If we just got people to feel better about each other and us, you know, do some teambuilding and talk sessions, things would improve.” Not a bad theory but one with a serious flaw: the employees didn’t have a problem with *each other*. They did, however, have a big problem with the fact that their work was highly compartmentalized, repetitive and fairly boring.

After much revealing discussion, leadership began to realize that the key to the results they were looking for might be *enhanced* by improved relationships, but that the group could not reach full potential, nor could the leadership create lasting change, without examining the work itself. Once they were persuaded to explore new ways of getting the work done, they acknowledged the need to have the employees deeply and directly involved in how the work was redesigned. In taking part in designing their own work, the employees could directly address the problems in their relationship to the work. At the same time, they would be challenged to relate to each other and their managers in significantly different ways.

It worked. An extensive business process redesign effort in which the employees were involved at all levels resulted in significant increases in productivity and quality. Equally important, employee engagement increased as performance rose. The measurements of this were turnover, tardiness and absence—lagging measures of engagement, but the best available at the time.

The moral of the story for all of us was the importance of keeping the work itself at the center of the change and involving the employees as subject matter experts in the redesign of their own work. Focusing on concrete aspects of the change actually creates more effective relationships because people see cooperation and communication as essential to getting the work done. As employees see their own plans come into being, these new relationships are cemented and overall engagement rises as a matter of course.

## **People and Their Leaders**

Every known survey that measures the important aspects of employee engagement have at least one assumption in common: A person’s direct supervisor is a critical factor in an employee’s engagement. Big surprise. What’s important in the context of change is to understand that engagement is contagious and it tends to spread top-down and then horizontally out. So leaders are *carriers* of engagement and are capable of spreading good engagement germs or bad ones.

The implications are obvious: If you want an engaged work force that will bring about important, meaningful changes, it must be led by engaged leaders. The lesson for now is

understanding the critical nature of involving, enrolling, and ensuring the support of leaders up and down the line.

### **People and Their Work Groups**

An engaged employee with a supportive leader is still working within a context that can affect engagement in radical ways, as the claims company discovered when it formed five pilot teams in the benefits claims division. The teams were formed according to skills needed for the team tasks and, when feasible, personal preferences based on input from supervisors and prospective team members. The teams were given extensive training in “team building” i.e., relationship building and maintenance. They were taught TQM-based process improvement techniques and tools. Of course performance varied across the five teams, but the differences were more polarized than anyone expected: three of the five teams were doing outstanding work while one was just getting by and one was struggling and beginning to fail.

Since this team approach was going to be migrated across the organization, it was important to understand why seemingly equally assembled teams would perform so differently in identical circumstances. We discovered a common thread that, in retrospect, provided significant insight into both performance and employee engagement. At the root of the differences was the essential issue of trust, specifically, the team members’ trust in each other, in the team leaders and in the system in general.

Trust is such a value-laden term and can mean so many things that it was necessary to unpack it a bit to understand the tangible meaning to this particular company. The four dimensions of trust described below evolved out of this experience and point to specific aspects of how and why people and groups trust each other, the relevance of trust to both performance and engagement and where to focus specific interventions.

#### Four Dimensions of Trust

1. **Character**—the foundation of trusting relationships is the assumption of shared values—an agreed-upon set of expectations as to what is good and bad, right and wrong, dependable and undependable. At the most basic level of trust in this dimension is whether or not people tell the truth and can be counted upon to “play by the rules.”
2. **Judgment**—this aspect of trust is built from insights and decision making. We learn to trust people who demonstrate a practical grasp of how things really are. They provide deeper perspective on issues and consistently make wise decisions.
3. **Reliability**—this level of trust comes from showing up when you say you will, making deadlines and generally delivering what you said you would deliver when you said you would deliver it. A subtler and more subjective aspect of reliability is quality of output.
4. **Competence**—this has to do with trust born of demonstrated know-how. People and groups who gain this kind of trust do so by providing accurate and

complete information, show an understanding of the complexity of things and have a proven track record of demonstrated expertise in their functional area.

Though somewhat mutually exclusive (i.e., a particular individual might demonstrate high competence and extraordinary business judgment and at the same time be undependable and not completely honest), these four dimensions do interplay with each other and have significant effect on both performance and engagement.

When applying the four dimensions to the five teams, we discovered no measurable difference on the level of character and, surprisingly, no difference in terms of competence. In fact, the poorest-performing team included a couple of well-respected experts. But beyond the areas where the members were well known, the poor-performing team was perceived as less competent—in some cases, incompetent.

The differences that effected performance so drastically first showed up in terms of judgment. The higher-performing team leaders consistently demonstrated the ability to make “good calls” in the eyes of team members, management and customers, while the judgment of the team leader of the poor performing team was in question.

More telling in terms of engagement were the differences in reliability. The informal data on reliability between team members correlated almost directly with the analytical data from customers: some members of the poorer-performing teams simply couldn't be counted on to deliver quality work on time. As a consequence, other team members disengaged from the team and from the work, resulting in poorer overall performance for the customer.

## **People and The Organization**

The employees and the employee teams were further affected by the work culture as a whole. A work culture exists as a specific container holding all the aspects of the workplace that an employee experiences as “my job.” This container can hold everything needed to support motivated, engaged employees. Or not. If not, the consequences are usually measured by unwanted attrition, erratic productivity and other measures of employee dissatisfaction. When the organization consistently meets or exceeds the employees' basic expectations, and provides the resources people need to operate effectively, the results are more likely to be engaged employees and great performance.

For an agent of change, the place to start when thinking about change at the organizational level is best stated through a slightly modified version of the Serenity Prayer:

Grant me the patience  
to accept the things I cannot change,  
the courage—and the resources—  
to change the things I can,  
and the wisdom to know the difference.

The claims division had made a lot of progress in changing the things they could. This included the work processes, the work space, and, through extensive off-site team

building sessions we dubbed “Team Camps,” the way employees related to each other and their management. They also took on the very tough challenge of altering the compensation system to support team behaviors. All these things led to a more engaged work force—productivity improved and, perhaps most important, people started to see new possibilities for the team and themselves. But a major organizational roadblock was looming ahead: there was no way that the company’s outmoded information system would be able to keep up with the changes.

Early on, it was understood by all that the information and technology support for this change effort was not where it needed to be. The system was a generation behind, and could not support the anticipated interactions between team members. As the project progressed two things happened: the employees became more aware of just how much the outdated tools were holding them back and management promised that a new system would be in place in the not-too-distant future.

As employees bought into this promise of change, their sense of engagement increased. They imagined how their work lives would improve with the new systems supporting the innovative changes they had all developed together. But the promised systems upgrade did not happen as planned, and because of the technological limitations, everyone hit a plateau and could go not further in implementing their change objectives. They were stalled at a critical phase of the change process.

Plateaus are risky. At early junctures in change processes, if things do not keep getting better, there is a significant chance they will get worse. Consistent accomplishment breeds success which breeds a desire for more accomplishment. The teams were being stopped in their tracks by that antiquated information system that was supposed to be replaced. This was frustrating enough in its own right, but fuelling the frustration (and leading to a feeling of disengagement) were the un-kept promises. The employees’ experience was completely the opposite of what they were led to expect (or, encouraged to imagine), resulting in a dissonance that led to disappointment. People began to disengage. In their eyes, the organization had set them up and then let them down.

### **People and Themselves**

Even given the influence of the work, direct leadership and the employee’s co-workers, employee engagement is ultimately a personal choice. Obviously, self esteem, direction, fit for the job and other factors affect the choices employees make. But to create change that *encourages* employee engagement, you must understand the choices people can make depending on the situations they find themselves in.

Other chapters in this set explore the motivations of employees in depth; here, I want to focus on some essential mindsets and their importance to engaging in sustainable change. A mindset is a fixed mental attitude or disposition that predetermines a person's responses to and interpretations of situations. It’s what makes people act the way they do. The three typical mindsets described below affect employees’ performance and engagement level in fairly predictable ways.

### **Exhibit 2: Mindsets Affecting Employee Performance and Engagement**

<b>Mindset</b>	<b>Desired Outcome</b>	<b>Primary Focus</b>	<b>Dynamics</b>
<b>Strategic Mindset</b>	<b>Fulfillment:</b> “Our future holds promise. There is a vision greater than today’s world that we can achieve.”	Tomorrow’s Opportunities	Divergent and Imaginative Idea Orientation
<b>Performance Mindset</b>	<b>Security:</b> “We have meaningful objectives to meet or exceed. Protecting what we have and proving our worth is the most important thing.”	Today’ Problems and Opportunities	Convergent and Purposeful Task Orientation
<b>Survival Mindset</b>	<b>Day-to-Day Existence:</b> “I do not know what is coming next but I must react to it. Every day I get to keep my job is a victory.”	Today’s Problems	Scattered /Fearful or Alert/Focused  (note: this difference reflects the flight – fight response)

So much of what people are capable of doing at any particular time is dependent on these predominant mindsets, which in turn are products of the harmony or dissonance between imagination and experience. If teams feel let down by their work experiences, they may come to perceive the organization as an unsafe place and take the necessary precautions (based on their individual beliefs) to protect themselves. This is the classic survival mindset, and when people are in this mode, it is very difficult to engage them in collaborative, innovative, future-oriented change processes. Teams operating predominantly in the performance mode can see change as a threat to their security and must be shown how the change will enhance their ability to perform. Teams in the strategic mode welcome change, but often must balance today’s needs with tomorrow’s aspirations.

When engaging employees as thinkers, drivers and implementers of change, you have to start where they are, not where you need them to be. It is critical for you to determine how much of their pre-dominant mindset has to do with their experiences with the organization, with their ability to trust the people around them, or with their opportunities to make meaningful contributions toward how they get the job done.

Once you understand the issues, you will have a better idea of how best to approach them. Teams and individuals operating from the survival mindset are best engaged around ideas and actions that will strengthen their position and ensure their future in some way. Teams and individuals in performance mode are best engaged in projects where there are immediate results that the organization will recognize as important.

Those in the strategic mindset are best focused on improvements that will lead to higher levels of achievement.

### **How the Message Becomes the Experience**

Coming back to our Silicon Valley tech support team, let's assume that you have assessed the overall mindset and determined its cause. You know where the problems are, and you have agreed on a plan of action with management. So now we are back at your change presentation, and you are about to describe your plan to the employees, to make your promise about change. It is important—for you and for management—to remember that the message you give will frame, and become an integral part of, their experience. Again, change starts with a promise, in the imagination, and the messages people receive about an impending change create the mindsets from which they will approach it.

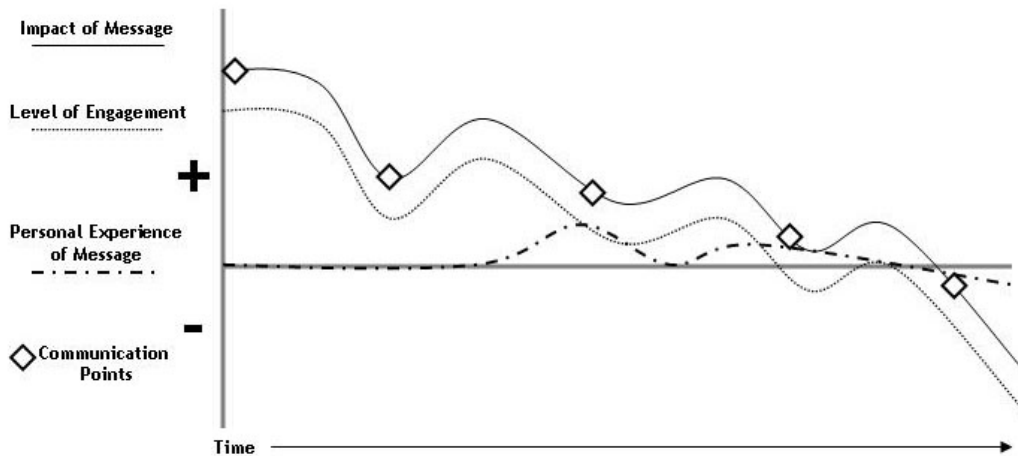
Management can be open about the change, telling people what it will be and what it means to them. If people know that change is coming, but management decides to keep quiet about how things will work, then the rumor mill reigns and people start imagining all kinds of scenarios, generally not very pleasant ones. In either case, before the change process even begins, employees start imagining the impact of the change on themselves, their teammates and their jobs.

Even when the communication is handled well, change efforts often fall short of expectations, especially when the change requires (as it does most of the time) engaged employees. This can occur because messaging is more complex than content alone, as our technical support group and its management discovered in the course of fixing the all-too-real issues they faced.

Upper management's response to the growing concerns about the group's competency was to assign a new manager to the group and grant him broad freedom to make the changes necessary to both meet the customers' needs and re-engage employees. The manager worked for some time to develop a plan that included some innovative organizational and work process changes. Probably, if it had been implemented by an engaged team, this plan would have led to significant improvement. Unfortunately, the manager's style was mostly one of keeping his own council and continually reinforcing a "things will get better" message to employees. To his mind, the start of the change process would come when he announced his plan, which would be solid enough to inspire the engagement it required to succeed.

Unfortunately, by the time the announcement was made, the engagement of the team was at an all-time low, some of the most effective members had lost faith and left and there was little heartfelt adoption of the changes. The manager's messaging pattern and its problems are illustrated in the following chart.

**Chart 1: Long Lead Time Between Messaging and Experienced Change**



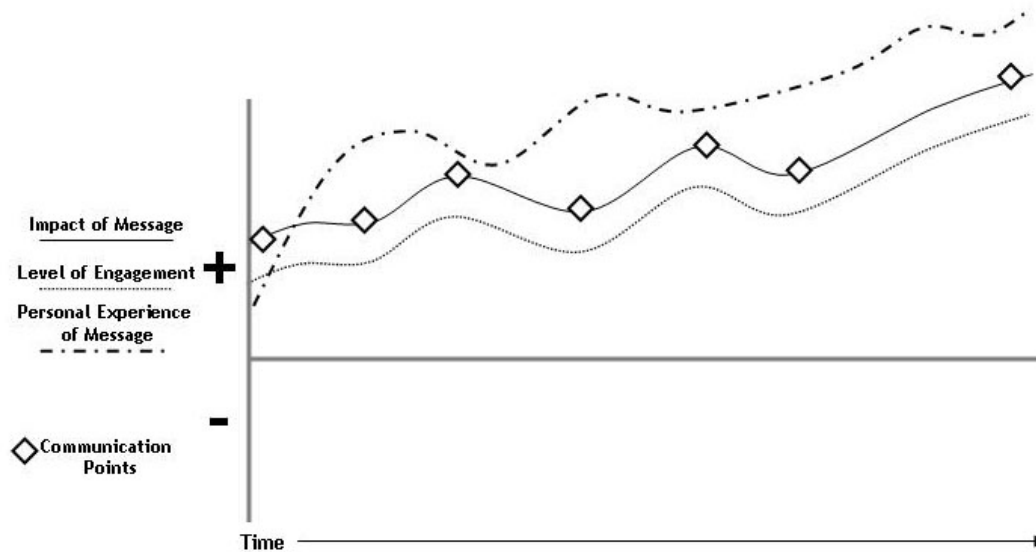
The chart shows four dimensions:

- **Communication Points:** Key communications about the nature and expected results from the change. Communication points set a vision in the imagination of the employee as to what they can expect and the possible impact of the change. These are the promises you make.
- **Impact of Message:** Effectiveness of message in engaging employees and mentally preparing them for the change.
- **Level of Engagement:** How engaged employees are in their work day-to-day as they prepare and implement the change.
- **Personal Experience of Message:** How noticeable and tangible the change is on a day-to-day basis.

In this chart, the change is announced and described fairly frequently. But the employees have very few actual experiences of change. Over time, the message loses its impact and eventually erodes the credibility of the change. Further, and more damaging, because they are not part of any concrete experiences of change, the employees come to understand that they are not participants, that they have no power to shape the change. Management has started to talk *at* them instead of *with* them. The longer this mode of communication continues as the project moves toward implementation, the less and less engaged the employees become. Chances for the high level of adoption and adaptation that most change efforts need grow slimmer and slimmer.

At this point, the manager's vice president decided to get directly involved. The Vice President realized that a very different approach was needed to get this group where it had to be:

**Chart 2: Interactive Integration of Message and Experience**



His approach was simple but elegant. The message was re-framed from a somewhat jargon-filled, corporate-speak abstract to a simpler message focused on how employees could get involved in solving their own problems. He shifted the bulk of the communication from large “all-hands” style meetings to smaller informal groups of managers and employees. A number of small teams with significant front line employee involvement formed to help define root causes and set course of “local” action. Employees were encouraged to “launch and learn” solutions, that is to implement needed changes on the fly and then learn from the results, and adjust as they moved forward.

The result was noticeable positive customer response in less time than expected. Employees started seeing some light at the end of their tunnels and negative attrition began to slow down. Over time processes were put in place that moved decision making closer to the customer and involved employees in continuous improvement efforts. Six months into the change, a pulse survey was conducted on the key drivers of employee engagement and the organization had realized an 18% gain over the previous employee survey.

The level of success, which has continued, was much greater than usually realized with this kind of effort. There were a number of reasons for this:

- Framing: The message was framed in the language of the employee and restructured into digestible pieces.
- Process: Employees were engaged in a variety of formal and informal forums with a focus on smaller informal groups.

- Reinforcement: What was put into the imagination of the employees (the “promise”) was quickly and consistently built on by their on-going experience.
- Empowerment: Employees were involved from the outset in what would happen to them. Through discussion and action they were engaged in solving their own problems.
- Feedback: Throughout the process, the voice of the employee and the customer was accessed, listened to and carefully considered. Establishing reliable feedback loops was essential to keeping the change on course.

First and foremost, though, was the perceptual shift created by the vice president. Going into the change process, the low engagement scores had been viewed as an indicator of “problem” employees. Ongoing conversations with leadership in the group made clear that their focus was on “fixing” the employees. The vice president was able to change this perception, both with the managers and with the employees themselves, by engaging employees in solving their own issues – waking them up to the possibilities of creating a better environment that would allow them to do work that better matched their expectations of fulfillment.

Employees began to see themselves as *essential* to the solution and not the cause of the problem. The shift in the energy of both teams and individuals was palpable. There of course continued to be detractors, but the power of their voice diminished over time.

The frogs were un-boiled.

## **Conclusion**

When the gap between employees’ imagination and experience becomes too wide, organizations slip into a sort of corporate-level funk. When management empowers employees to build solutions to their own problems, the experience of having their ideas listened to, taken seriously and adopted brings forward the energy employees need to make their own work more relevant and effective. If the measure of a change’s success is greater employee engagement, start by engaging the employees in the change itself—that is where the spiral of engagement begins moving up instead of down.

But temporary improvements in morale are far from the point; the point is to *keep* engagement moving upward. Simply getting involved in solving your work problems (overcoming the expectation that “my work-world sucks and will continue to do so”) is useless without dealing with the meta-expectation (“ and I am powerless to do anything about it”). To continue in its success, an organization must maintain its newfound state of agility so it can seize opportunities for positive change as they arise—it must keep its un-boiled frogs from re-boiling. To do that, management must continue to see its employees as valuable contributors to corporate success and to reinforce the support structures that allow them to contribute.

## **Hanley Brite**

Hanley Brite is the founder of Authentic Connections, Inc. a consulting firm focused on bringing a fresh approach to creating organizational vitality through transformational change. Hanley spent the first 18 years of his career inside large companies; at Dow Jones and Company and Digital Equipment Corporation taking on a series of line management, learning development and internal consultative roles. In 1986 Hanley left large company life to pursue his passion for Leadership Development and Transformational Change – he never looked back. Hanley has more than 35 years experience as a manager and executive, executive coach and advisor, educator, business leader and consultant. His mission is to help organizations achieve success through focused and principled leadership, strategic action, and mastering the process of change.

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