

FOSTERING EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

The Role of Leaders/Managers

In March 2022, the University of Windsor conducted its first **Employee Engagement Survey**. The survey was an opportunity to identify the **strengths of the University as an employer** and the **opportunities to improve the employee experience and workplace culture**.

Leaders/managers play a key role in fostering engagement within their department/unit/team. They **shape organizational culture**, create the conditions in the work environment for faculty and staff to feel **inspired, motivated, safe, and proud, and foster a sense of belonging**. This document highlights key practices of leaders/managers that can support engagement.

What is employee engagement?

The Conference Board of Canada (2018) defines employee engagement as “**the level of an employee’s psychological investment in their organization.**”

It is the extent to which employees:

- **Feel connected and committed** to the organization’s vision, purpose, and goals;
- Are **passionate** about their work, **invested** in their roles, and **experience the freedom and safety** to engage in their work;
- Are **motivated to contribute** to not only do their best but to ensure the organization’s success.

Why is employee engagement important?

Employee engagement is critical to the University’s success. Research suggests that employee engagement **positively impacts an employee’s physical and psychological wellbeing, increases productivity and performance, improves customer service, increases levels of innovation, and decreases turnover and absenteeism** (Conference Board of Canada, 2006).

How can leaders/managers foster employee engagement?

The table on page 2 outlines some **evidence-based practices** of leaders/managers that can **promote employee engagement**. These have been clustered into six (6) factors (also known as drivers) of employee engagement.

Engagement Factor	Examples of Practices
<p>Impact & Connection with Senior Leadership</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicate the University's Vision, Mission, and Strategic Priorities as outlined in the Aspire Strategic Plan to your team/department/unit and engage in regular discussions about how their individual and collective work contributes to the University's success. • Where possible, engage your team/department/unit in the development of operational plans and establishment of departmental/unit goals and priorities and highlight how these are aligned with and/or advance the Aspire Strategic Plan. • Look for opportunities to invite the University President and Vice-Presidents to visit your department/unit to connect with employees informally or formally. • Highlight and reinforce University-wide communications within your team/department/unit, particularly any upcoming changes, key institutional achievements, etc. • Discuss with your department/unit/team the Executive Leadership Team newsletter "UWindsor's Top Ten Campus Community Updates," designed to enhance understanding of institutional matters.
<p>Connection with Manager/ Supervisor</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be visible, nurture relationships, and invest time and energy in getting to know your colleagues/team members. • Communicate the goals and priorities of the department/unit/team and upcoming changes that may affect individuals and/or the department/unit. • Where possible, engage colleagues/team members in planning and decision-making, particularly around changes impacting them. Ask, listen, act on feedback, and follow up on discussions. • Follow through on commitments and take the time to share reasons why agreed-upon commitments may no longer be feasible. • Schedule regular one-on-one meetings with your direct reports to connect with employees, provide constructive feedback, identify strengths, set annual goals, share ideas, solicit feedback, discuss work-related issues, etc. • Schedule regular departmental/unit/team meetings as an opportunity to enhance connections, work collaboratively on issues/projects, share information, learn about individual work priorities, and enhance communication.
<p>Meaningful & Challenging Work</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When discussing tasks and projects with colleagues/team members, take the time to provide context so that individuals can enhance their understanding of how their work fits within the bigger picture for the University/department/unit. • Engage in discussions with colleagues/team members to clarify their responsibilities, the outcomes/results they are expected to achieve, and ensure that they have the tools/resources needed to be successful. • Set parameters of what is acceptable, and empower colleagues/team members to make decisions and solve problems within those parameters. • Encourage colleagues/team members to take initiative/risks in exploring innovative and creative ways to carry-out their roles/work.

Engagement Factor	Examples of Practice
Meaningful & Challenging Work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide colleagues/team members with autonomy around how they perform their work/role and avoid micromanaging. • Where possible, delegate projects and vary work assignments/opportunities to tap into individuals' strengths and interests. • When introducing changes, take the time to communicate the reasons associated with the change(s) and provide colleagues/team members with the information and supports needed to navigate the transition.
Growth & Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage colleagues/team members to participate in professional and personal development opportunities, and provide them with the supports to participate. • Where possible, encourage and support colleagues/team members to take on new work challenges and other career growth assignments. • Discuss professional development and career aspirations annually with direct reports and establish clear goals to support their growth and learning. • Address performance issues as they arise using a capacity-building rather than a deficit approach. • Schedule opportunities for colleagues/team members to come together to collectively enhance skills and knowledge.
Recognition & Appreciation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Look for opportunities to offer recognition and appreciation for a job well done in real time. A simple "thank you" is a powerful tool. • Consider nominating individuals and/or your team/department/unit for awards sponsored by various areas on campus. • Take the time to regularly recognize and celebrate the accomplishments of the team/department/unit (i.e., lunch, team social, verbal thank you, e-mail, etc.).
Positive & Supportive Workplace Culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prioritize health and wellbeing. Encourage colleagues/team members to maintain personal wellness (take breaks, vacations, stay home if psychologically/physically not well, etc.) • Encourage workplace socialization. Schedule time throughout the year for colleagues/team members to come together and connect. (i.e., professional development days, team planning meetings, social get-togethers, lunch, volunteering as a group, etc.) • Communicate your commitment and everyone's role in fostering a physically and psychologically healthy and safe work environment, encourage colleagues/team members to report any concerns, and promptly act on concerns brought forward. • Address conflicts, disrespectful behaviours, psychological health and safety matters, and/or allegations of harassment in a timely manner as per University policies and collective agreements. Reach out to Human Resources (staff) and the Provost's Office (faculty) for guidance. • Ensure that all colleagues/team members feel welcomed, supported, valued, and included.

Self-reflection - Taking Action

Reflect on the examples of practices outlined in this document and identify what you may want to **start, stop and/or continue** doing to enhance engagement within your portfolio/team.

Start	Stop	Continue
Practices that you would like to start to enhance engagement within your portfolio/team.	Current practices that you would like to stop as they may be negatively impacting engagement within your portfolio/team.	Current practices that you would like to continue as they are consistent with the practices outlined in this document.

Resources Consulted

Conference Board of Canada. *Employee Engagement: A Review of Current Research and Its Implications*, 2006.

Conference Board of Canada. *Employee Engagement: Driving Engagement from the Middle*, 2018.

Cornell University. *Employee Engagement Toolkits*. Retrieved from: <https://hr.cornell.edu>

Stanford University. *Enhancing the Level of Employee Engagement*. Retrieved from <https://cardinalatwork.stanford.edu/>

Western University. *Fostering Engagement: Tips for Leaders*. Retrieved from <https://www.uwo.ca>.