Career Perception of American Workers and Their Emotional States

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Employee engagement needs to be part and parcel
of the business DNA in any success story.

- Anosa, 2021

In 2021, the University of Phoenix Career Institute's Career Optimism index surveyed 5,000 nationally represented adults with oversamples of 300 adults in the top 20 metropolitan regions of the United States. Results indicate 43% of respondents "hate" or "don't think too much about" their job (Edelman, 2021). These actionable data are opportunities for educator/employer partnerships to reclaim this 43%, using workforce dynamics to catalyze career growth and employee engagement (Mani & Mishra, 2021).

Research correlates organizational productivity with employee engagement and validates training and development as intrinsic to the "business DNA" (Anosa, 2021, p. 50) of workplace culture, policy, procedure, and practice. In a competitive global marketplace, stagnant productivity augurs income disparity and organizational demise, while motivated, engaged employees ignite organizational innovation (Ivanov & Usheva, 2021). The call to action is clear: "employee engagement drives performance by improving retention, customer loyalty, productivity, safety, and ultimately, profitability. Engaged employees care about their organization and work to contribute towards its success" (Anosa, 2021, p. 49). This white paper covers the magnitude and ramifications and magnitude of employee engagement on local, national, and global economies and demonstrates how educator/employer partnerships can utilize workforce dynamics to inform self-efficacy and career growth.

Strengthening Employee Engagement

Productivity declines attributed to disengaged employees approximate $550 billion per year in the United States (Gallup, 2013). Corporate investments (Mani & Mishra, 2021) in employee engagement initiatives have produced lackluster results, with national cultural dimensions of engagement resisting minimalist "one size fits all" strategies (Li et al., 2021; Srinivas, 2021). With more than 70% of Millennials either not engaged or actively disengaged (Center for Creative Leadership, 2019), root cause analysis (Paulsen, 2021) is warranted to incent multi-generational workforces. Evidence-based contributors to U.S. employee engagement include age, income, and values (Edelman, 2021).

Age

Boomers, defined as ages 54-72, are more likely to love their job than Millenials, defined as ages 22-37, and Gen X, defined as ages 38-53 (Edelman, 2021):

Category	Age	Love My Job
Boomer	54-72	63%
Millennial	22-37	52%
Gen X	38-53	57%

Income

Higher income is associated with individuals' tendencies to love their job (Edelman, 2021):

Income	Love My Job
Over $150,000	67%
$100,000-$149,000	59%
$50,000-$99,000	57%
Under $50,000	50%

Values

Americans define themselves by their careers (Edelman Q7, 2021): "2 in 3 employed Americans say that their job/career is part of their identity" (Edelman, 2021).

Aligning individual and organizational values promotes employee engagement, with organizations deploying transparency, value congruence, and corporate social responsibility (CSR) as recruitment incentives and retention strategies (Clack, 2021; Low & Spong, 2021; Matenga, 2021; Srinivas, 2021; Yadav & Chaudhari, 2020). Contribution to institutional goals perceived as ethical, purposeful, meaningful, and worthwhile strengthen employee loyalty and organizational citizenship conduct (Carlini & Grace, 2021; Srinivas, 2021). Other potential motivators include teamwork, support, and family friendliness (Srinivas, 2021), social aspects, defined as open, friendly work atmosphere (Ivanov & Usheva1, 2021), and servant, ethical, and transactional leadership style (Li et al., 2021).

Micro-level CSR practices are defined as organizational initiatives focused on physical and psychological well-being of individual employees. The following micro-level CSR practices can strengthen employee engagement by 68.6% (Low & Spong, 2021):

Micro-level CSR Practices
Employment stability
Health and safety
Human rights
Training and development
Work diversity
Work-life balance

Educators' Role

"As educators, we have the opportunity to produce experiential-ready, practice ready, and career-ready practitioners. Student attitudes and values influence how learned knowledge and skills will be enacted, and therefore are key determinants of career-readiness" (Portillo & Gallimore, 2020, p. 251). Academicians, educators, and administrators of post-secondary educational institutions promote synthesis of content, competency, and professional growth conducive to self-efficacy and educational relevance.

What Employees Want

Data obtained from the University of Phoenix Career Institute's Career Optimism index reflect the following:

ELEMENTS NEEDED TO SUCCESSFULLY CHANGE CAREERS - Q23

The right skillset
Adaptability
Flexibility
Optimism
Additional training
Resiliency
Additional education
A strong professional network
Financial support

A strong socal support system
Support with childcare

ACTIONS TAKEN TO SUCCESSFULLY CHANGE CAREERS - Q 24

Seek out opportunities to build skills
Talk/connect with people in the field they want to be in
Learn new skills and expertise to be competitive in the digital age
Enroll in a training program
Talk/connect with people they personally know
Go back to school /enroll in an education program
Attend networking events
Use job apps and tools like LinkedIn and Indeed
Attend job fairs
Seek out assistance from a reputable career resource
Spend time job-shadowing
Reach out for informational interviews
Volunteer in a new field
Meet with human resources

STRUCTURAL BARRIERS IN MOVING FORWARD IN CAREERS - Q 17

Not having enough education
Lack of opportunities for upskilling/development
Lack of required skills
Lack of time/schedule flexibility
Financial problems
Lack of mentorship/advocacy

CAREER ACTIVITIES WHERE SUPPORT IS NEEDED - Q25

Connecting with others in my field/desired field
Finding a mentor/advocate
Seeking out training programs
Creating /updating resume
Seeking out education programs
Interviewing for job
Finding job postings
Creating/updating LinkedIn profile
Applying for a job

ACTIONS TAKEN FOR CAREER ADVANCEMENT - Q 19

Prioritizing my work-life balance
Managing my mental health/wellness
Becoming a specialist in an area of my industry
Connecting with others in my field/desired field

Seeking skill development opportunities/certifications
Researching resources to improve my employability
Talking with my manager/boss about what I need to do to succeed
Taking courses/classes to improve my employability
Advocating for financial rewards for myself
Seeking/engaging mentors/advocates

What Employers Want

Closing the gap between graduates' competencies and employers' requirements is a recurring mantra, with educators tasked to promote hard and soft skills related to actual "doing" (David et al., 2021; Mitchell et al., 2021). The National Association of Colleges and Employers delineates the following key attributes employers seek (NACE, 2021):

Ability to work in a team	81.0%
Problem-solving skills	79.0%
Analytical/quantitative skills	76.1%
Communication skills (verbal)	73.2%
Communication skills (written)	72.7%
Initiative	67.8%
Leadership	67.8%
Technical skills	67.8%
Flexibility/adaptability	65.9%
Strong work ethic	65.4%

Educator/Employer Partnerships

Collaboration between educators and employers builds upon existing momentum to align curricula and credentials, including degrees, diplomas, and industry certifications, with workplace competencies (Carter et al., 2020; Decker, 2021). Expanding experiential learning, including case studies, on-the-job internships, apprenticeships, job shadowing, and fellowships, enhances academic relevance and promotes "soft skill" development (Stewart et al., 2020).

Organizations seeking to reskill and upskill employees through education are partnering with external university, college, and technical schools (Volzer et al., 2021). Educator/employer partnerships can break-down barriers to career advancement, help American workers accelerate their careers, and reclaim the 43% who "hate" or "don't think too much about" their job (Edelman, 2021).

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