

Contact with Colleagues: A Key Engagement Lever in Times of Crisis

WHAT YOU WILL LEARN FROM THIS ARTICLE

1. The impact of positive work relationships
2. The role of peer-to-peer recognition
3. How a sense of belonging drives performance

INTRODUCTION

More than ever before, HR leaders and managers are looking for ways to keep their workforce connected during the COVID-19 pandemic. It's during these trying times that meaningful contact between colleagues becomes instrumental in ensuring engagement and sustaining performance. The challenge for leaders is facilitating these connections in an authentic and impactful way.

WHY PEER RELATIONSHIPS MATTER

You already know that your people matter to the business. But equally important is that they matter to each other. It's shown that good relationships among peers can help reduce the risk of burnout and increases motivation at work (Fernet et al, 2009).

And so, in times of crisis, leaders must prioritize strengthening positive work relationships as they have been shown to be an essential area for employee health promotion (Persson et al, 2018) and play a key role in promoting employee flourishing (Colbert et al, 2015).

HOW TO INCREASE HIGH QUALITY CONTACT WITH COLLEAGUES

ENCOURAGE 'WATER COOLER' CONVERSATIONS

Impromptu and informal conversations between colleagues form a critically important link to social connections, friendships and support networks. This type of contact between colleagues is vital to engagement, especially during a time of crisis.

"While it is easy to only focus on your ability to efficiently accomplish tasks, remember that informal water-cooler conversations, chats over coffee, and cubicle prairie-dogging serve multiple important purposes," says Mark Mortensen, an associate professor of Organizational Behavior at INSEAD. "They provide sources of informal information that are the oil critical to keeping the machinery of your organization going."

FACILITATE PEER-TO-PEER RECOGNITION

A study from Harvard Business School found that recognition from "internal beneficiaries"—contact in the form of recognition between colleagues—can dramatically increase motivation and performance. While peer recognition can cost your company nothing, it can have a significant and measurable impact on productivity and outcomes.

BUILD A SENSE OF BELONGING

The same study attributes the reason for increased motivation and performance to recognition because it facilitates a sense of belonging. When one colleague connects with another by thanking them or acknowledging a job well done, a sense of affinity and inclusivity is fostered.

In support of this, research from Gartner shows creating a sense of belonging is critical to inclusion, which corresponds to greater on-the-job effort and intent to stay, as well as high employee performance.

CONCLUSION

Contact between colleagues must not be limited to the usual day-to-day tasks. To drive engagement, particularly during times of crisis, contact between colleagues should be authentic and on a more personal level, with peer-to-peer recognition actively encouraged by leaders.

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