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2012 Annual Report

How to Maintain an Engaged Workforce

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Executive Summary

The purpose of the World Leadership Survey (WLS) is to provide a window into the internal world of professionals, managers, and executives within the organization. This view of the employee experience will help leaders of organizations understand what the employee is experiencing, and understand what the organization needs to do to improve organizational commitment and reduce turnover.

The good news for organizations in the U.S. and Canada (the sample for this report) is that respondents are mostly committed to their organizations, satisfied with their jobs and their pay, work more than the typical 40-hour work week, and do not currently intend to leave their jobs. The professionals, managers, and executives surveyed feel supported by their organization and by their direct supervisor, and think that their organizations are economically stable. Unfortunately they also feel overloaded, as if their work interferes with their life, and that there is a lot of political behavior within their organization, which results in reduced effectiveness. This report describes the current employee experience, and what organizations need to focus on to maintain and improve commitment.

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INTRODUCTION

Workplace attitudes and behaviors are impacted by a multitude of factors including individual differences, professional relationships, organizational practices, and the external environment. While the economy in North America has been showing some promising signs of growth, businesses across North America have remained fairly conservative in hiring and developing employees. This prolonged period of economic challenge and the resulting "tightening-of-the-belt" at many organizations could have a negative impact on employees' satisfaction, job performance, and consequent engagement in their work and commitment to their organizations. To better understand trends in how employees currently perceive the workplace, the Center for Creative Leadership (CCL®) maintains an ongoing survey of managerial attitudes, to which we invite people from around the world to participate and provide us with their perspectives on work and leadership. Awareness of these views can help organizations better develop their systems and structures for developing and retaining talent.

This report looks at how North American managers and other professionals are thinking about their work, and how they perceive their own organization's environment. It is important to understand attitudes of professionals, managers, and executives within an organization because those attitudes affect future organizational performance – and with the difficult economy, organizations need to take advantage of every opportunity to improve corporate performance. For example, studies show that higher organizational commitment, supervisor support, and job satisfaction are all related to lower absenteeism, lower turnover, and better job performance – all of which improve organizational performance. So an organization that understands how its talent feels can make targeted improvements which will benefit their bottom line.

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Data from 1,250 respondents tell us that North Americans continue to view the workplace positively. Our data provide evidence that the managerial and professional workforce continues to find meaning in work and is motivated to take part in organizational life – both positive signs for organizations striving for recovery and growth in the (hopefully) improving economy.

Though we are seeing that North American managers' and other professionals' work engagement is high, and they see their organizations providing positive and supportive environments, the data also suggest that there is considerable room for improvement. Respondents noted plenty of issues which reduce their effectiveness, including high workloads and disruptive political behavior within organizations.

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Report of Methodology and Sample

The World Leadership Survey has continued to collect data online in English since its inception in March 2008, and began collecting data in twelve additional languages in March 2009. Participants in the research come through partner organizations, interested individuals, and enrollment in CCL programs.

Participants fill out a survey online that is hosted by Clear Picture Corporation and takes them approximately 20 minutes. In thanks for their participation, participants receive a free CCL Guidebook to download immediately upon completion of the survey. Questions about the survey are sent to the World Leadership Survey e-mail account at WorldLeadershipSurvey@ccl.org. The sample for this report was collected from January through December 2011. This sample includes: 1,250 respondents from the United States and Canada. (Respondents from other regions will be included in separate reports).

- 77% of respondents had enrolled in a CCL program. Both public and private organizations from more than 30 industries. Respondents' companies ranged from very small (1 to 9 employees) to very large (10,000 or more employees) with the vast majority (81%) coming from companies with at least 100 employees.
- 52% male.
- 66% White; "Non-White" includes approximately 5% Black, 2% Asian, and 3% Other (Hispanic, Multiracial, Other).
- 4% of respondents were Millennials, 55.4% were Generation Xers, 29.8% Late Boomers, and 10.8% were Early Boomers.
- Most are managers or professionals: 25% of the sample indicate that they are at the top (C-level) or an executive, 26% upper-middle management, and 20% as middle-management or professional.

(See Appendix for a more complete description of demographics, including definitions of the generations included in this report.)

It is important to note that this is not a random sample of North American managers or employees, and therefore it is likely not fully representative of the working population. Our sample consists of people who are employed, are currently proactively working on their own development, and who were willing to take 20 minutes of their own time to participate. Though it is not a representative sample, it is a good sample of managers and professionals at higher levels in organizations who are currently employed and are engaged in improving their work skills. They offer insight into how people who are either in current leadership roles or have aspirations for leadership roles think about life in organizations.

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SECTION 1

How Managers and Professionals Feel About Work

Overall, respondents are mostly committed to their organizations, satisfied with their jobs and their pay, work many hours, and do not currently intend to leave their jobs.

Respondents report feeling committed to their organization. Three-quarters of respondents enjoy discussing their organization with others, and nearly as many (74%) say that the organization has a great deal of personal meaning to them (see Figure 1). Further, 61% indicate they would be happy to spend the rest of their careers with their current organization. Consistent with our previous annual reports, people at higher levels in the organization express significantly greater commitment to their organization than do people at lower levels. Interestingly, we also found that respondents with children indicated that they were more committed to their organization than individuals without children.

Figure 1

Work Hours. Respondents' commitment is clearly matched by their work hours; the vast majority of our sample (more than 93%) report working more than 40 hours a week. This is true of 98% of those at top and executive levels, 97% of those in upper middle management positions, and 92% of those in professional roles. Not surprisingly, individuals in management positions, and especially those higher in the organization report working more hours

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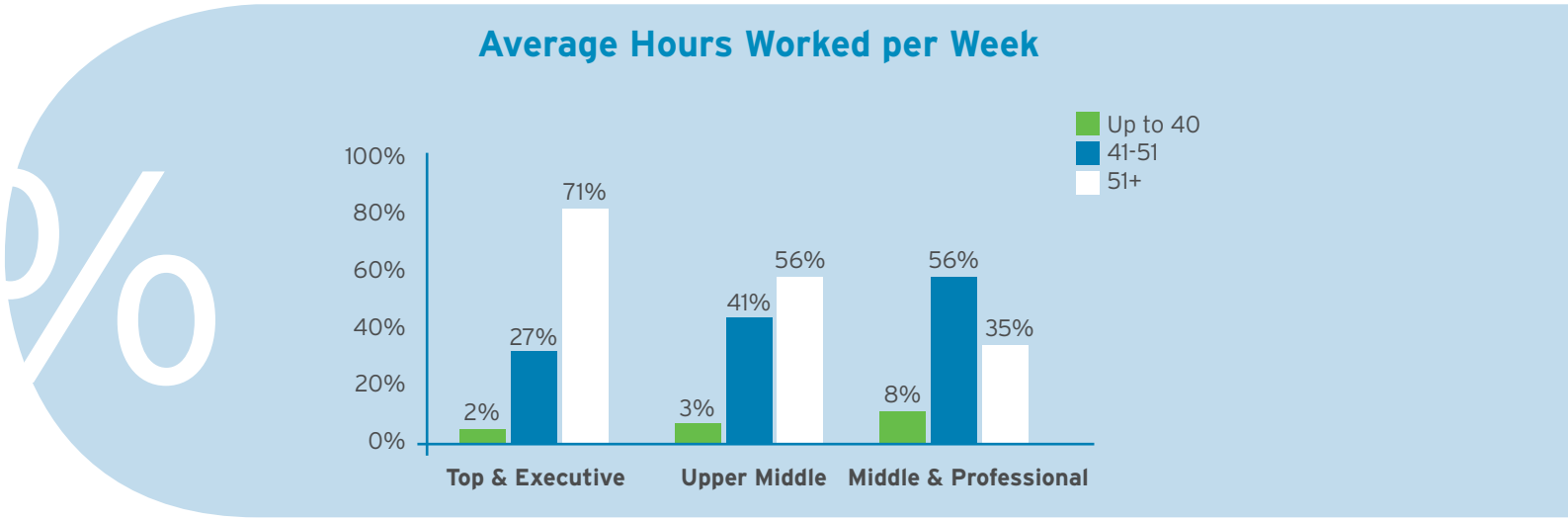
than do professionals in non-management roles. On average, individuals in top/executive levels report working 10.5 hours in a day, upper middle managers report working 10.1, and professionals report working 9.5. As can be seen by reviewing Figure 2, individuals in upper middle management and especially those individuals in top/executive positions are more likely to work 50 or more hours per week than are those in middle-management and professional roles.

Though nearly all respondents reported working more than 40 hours a week, men report working more hours than women regardless of level in the organization or generation (e.g., Baby Boomers, Generation X). However, the discrepancy between the hours worked by men and women may be decreasing. We reported in 2011 that more than half of men (58%) reported typically working more than 50 hour weeks, while 43% of women (15% fewer) reported doing so. The most recent data indicate that the gap has narrowed, and more than half of men (57%) reported typically working more than 50 hour weeks, as did 47% of women (a difference of only 10%).

When compared with level-peers, all generations report working about the same number of hours.

Figure 2



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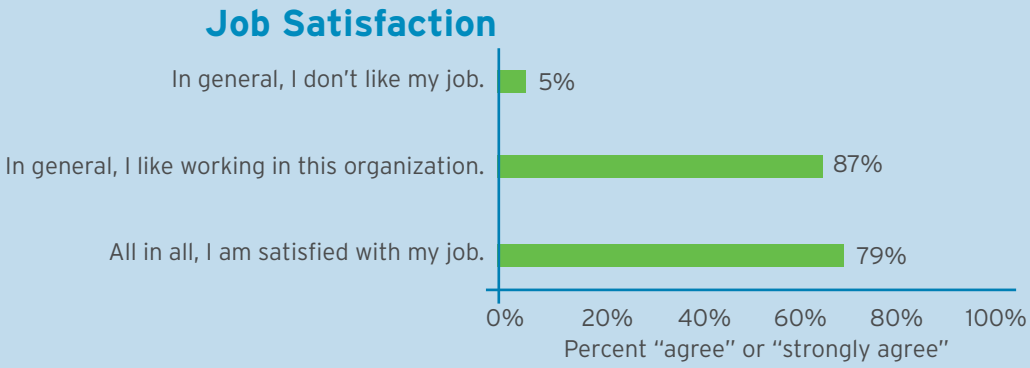
Job Satisfaction. In addition to being committed to their organization and working many hours, respondents also express satisfaction with their jobs and organizations: 79% report being satisfied with their jobs, and 87% like working for their organization (see Figure 3). A small percentage of people may like the organization that they are in, but not their current position, which could explain the slight discrepancy between the two items. Similar to previous reports, individuals at the top of the organization express greater job satisfaction than do middle managers and professionals.

Figure 3



Pay satisfaction. With regard to satisfaction with pay as part of job satisfaction, respondents were neutral to slightly positive about their pay (3.3 on a 5 point scale, with 5 being the highest possible rating.) Individuals at top/executive levels are more satisfied with their pay than are individuals at middle and professional levels. This is a shift from previous years where we found about equal satisfaction – and dissatisfaction - with pay.

Intention to Turnover. Conventional wisdom may suggest that as we slowly creep out of the economic decline, employees may start to consider other options. However, turnover intentions remained as low in 2011 as they were 2009 and 2010. Approximately three quarters of respondents say they are not thinking about quitting their jobs (73%) nor are they intending to quit their jobs (78%). Further, only 8% are actively looking for another job.

One factor that may be contributing to this stability is that although the economy has shown signs of improvement and growth, the overall unemployment rate is still relatively high, and house prices have not rebounded, which restricts movement for many. It is yet to be seen if improvements in the job market or the housing market will lead to increases in turnover.

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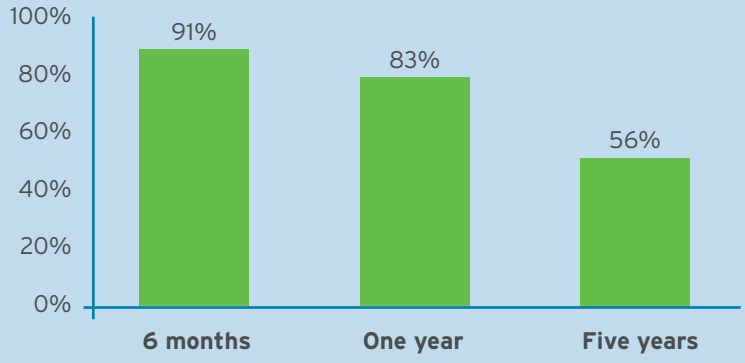
As in 2010, we still see the percentage of respondents saying they are likely to stay with their organization (see Figure 4) declining from 91% (6 months) to 83% (1 year) to 56% (5 years). In other words, nearly half of all respondents intend to leave their current organizations within 5 years. Organizational leaders should continue to find ways to support employees and help them navigate fulfilling career paths within the organization to decrease the likelihood of the organization's best and brightest making an exodus in a few years. In contrast with 2010 when we found that the people at the top of organizations are more likely to say they plan to remain with their organization, and professionals, women, and Gen Xers were more likely to say they are looking for other opportunities, this year we find that *all groups were equally likely to say they were going to stay with their current employer.*

Figure 4

Percentage Likelihood I Will Be with the Organization in:



So the overall picture for employers is positive: a committed workforce that is satisfied with their jobs and their pay, works hard, and doesn't intend to leave. **What can organizations do to keep the situation positive?**

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SECTION 2

What do you need to focus on to maintain high commitment and low turnover?

While professionals, managers, and executives currently say they are committed to their organization and don't intend to leave, leadership cannot presume that will continue without effort on the organization's part. To maintain or improve on the current environment, employers need to focus on organization and supervisor support, providing interesting work, reducing work-life conflict, and reducing organizational politics.

Continue Organization and Supervisor Support

Employees' commitment to their organization and intention to stay is partly a result of the opportunities they have at their current organization in comparison with other organizations, and partly a result of the professional relationships and organizational practices at their current organization.

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One factor organizations can control is the extent to which employees feel supported at work. Respondents report feeling generally supported by their organization and supervisor: 65% believe their organizations value their contributions, 80% believe that their organization cares about their satisfaction, 72% believe that their supervisors take pride in their accomplishments, and 73% believe that their supervisors care about their well-being. Very few respondents feel they are ignored (9%), their efforts are not noticed (9%), their managers are not concerned about them (10%), or their manager does not appreciate their extra effort (16%) (see Figure 5 for organizational support items).

Figure 5

Consistent with previous reports, we find that people at all levels feel equally supported by their supervisors, but people at all levels do not feel equally supported by the organization. Specifically, people lower in the organization feel less supported by the organization than do people higher in the organization. This finding serves as a reminder to organizational leaders to ensure that policies and practices are in place that will support people at all levels. To maintain high commitment and reduce turnover, organizations need to continue to make an effort to support their employees and to recognize each individual employee's contribution to the organization.

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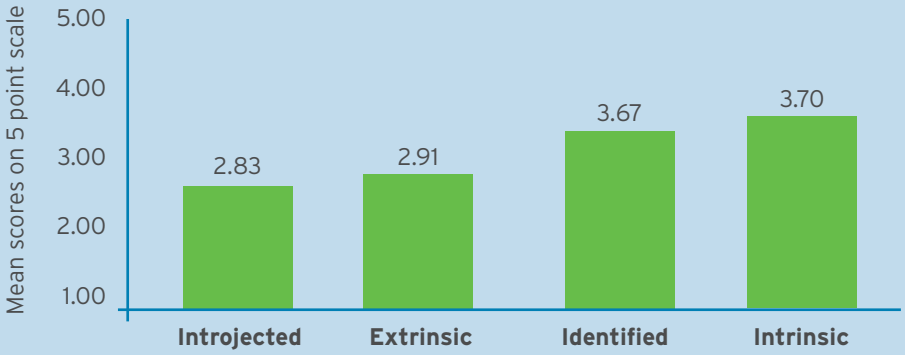
Another type of support has to do with being given work that the employee finds interesting. Respondents generally report that they enjoy their work, and that they have high levels of motivation – at least for the types of motivation that matter most (see Figure 6). Overall, respondents report higher levels of intrinsic motivation (finding joy in work) and identified motivation (feeling driven to achieve goals) than extrinsic motivation (driven by pay or prestige) and introjected motivation (felt obligation). This is another positive indicator about the workforce in North America, because intrinsic motivation (finding joy in your work) and identified motivation (feeling driven to achieve goals) are closely associated with productivity, engagement, and innovation.

Figure 6

Motivation



People at higher levels in the organization (top/executives and upper middle) continue to appear to like their work more (are more intrinsically motivated) than do people at lower levels in the organization, and older people (Baby Boomers) continue to report greater joy in their work than do Gen Xers. This remains true even when holding organizational level constant — so it can't just be explained by older generations having the highest positions. The most likely explanation is that older people tend to be happier than younger people in general.

People higher in the organization (especially C-level executives and other top executives) continue to express greater identified motivation (feeling driven to achieve goals) than people lower in the organization.

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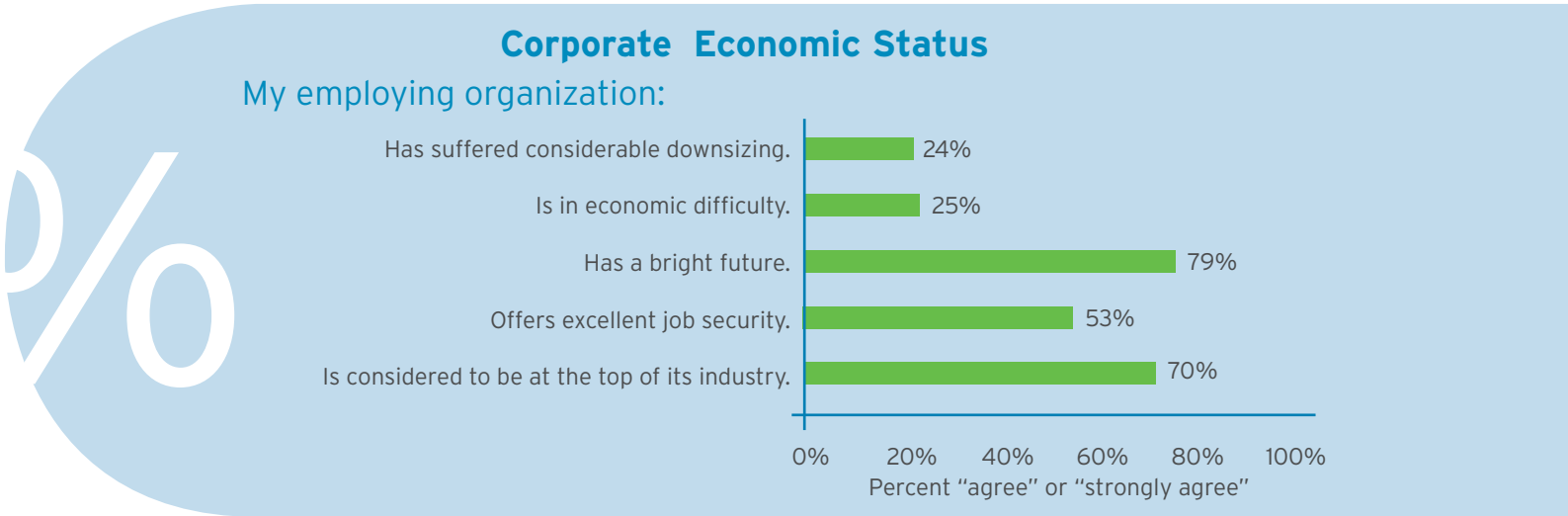
While it is positive that people at the top of the organization enjoy their work so much and are so driven to achieve goals, organizations would benefit more if people lower in the organizational hierarchy had equivalently high levels of motivation. Organizations need to continue to provide work to executives that they find motivating, while at the same time encouraging those executives to provide work that is equally motivating to employees lower in the organizational hierarchy. And while not all tasks that need to be completed will be interesting to employees, there are things a manager can do to make a dull task come to life. For instance, supervisors can allow the employee the latitude to decide how and when the task needs to be completed, and can help the employee see how the task fits into the bigger picture and thus understand that even seemingly menial tasks can have strategic significance for the organization.

Economic Stability

Respondents are generally positive about their organization's economic stability and health (see Figure 7). It is encouraging that respondents maintain optimistic views about the economic stability of their organization because employees who view their organization as economically stable have more reasons to continue to work hard and fewer reasons to look elsewhere for employment than those who believe their organization is performing poorly.

Figure 7



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Reduce Work-Family Conflict

Though our research shows that this sample is generally happy, we continue to see evidence that they are also overloaded. For instance, 75% of women agreed or strongly agreed they don't have enough time to get everything done in their job, as did 66% of men. Employees being consistently overloaded can be a problem because overload stimulates a stress response within the body which reduces effectiveness in the short term and resiliency in the longer term. Resiliency is essential to employee productivity because employees with low resilience have increased fatigue and cynicism and are more at risk for burnout which often results in turnover. Therefore overloading talent simultaneously decreases an organization's short term and long term effectiveness.

People of all levels, all generations, both sexes, and with and without children, all report that they experience work-family conflict. For all groups, ratings of work-family conflict averaged about a "3" on a 5-point scale (with 5 being the highest level), meaning that they experienced moderate work-family conflict. There is evidence to suggest that individuals at top/executive levels of management experience significantly more work-family conflict. Consistent with the 2010 report, of all of the items used to measure work-family conflict, respondents most strongly agreed with the statement "due to work-related duties, I have to make changes to plans for personal time or family activities." People at all levels are equally likely to agree that upper management is supportive of family and personal concerns, so the difference is not because people at higher levels feel less supported. Basically, organizations are asking too much of people at all levels in the organization, especially when it comes to taking them away from pre-planned family or personal time.

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Reduce Office Politics

Political behavior within organizations can be detrimental to fostering an environment of trust and justice at work. Organizations that are highly political frequently have employees who perceive the workplace as unfair, which often results in lower organizational commitment, less efficiency, increased turnover, and less trust in leadership.

The level of political behavior within organizations reported in 2011 is slightly lower than it was in 2008. Despite this shift, political behavior within organizations is still clearly prevalent in the minds of our respondents. For example, 42% of respondents believe that agreeing with powerful others is the best alternative in their organization (see Figure 8).

As in previous years, there are differences in perceived political behavior depending on organizational level – the higher you are, the less political behavior you perceive in your organization. Specifically, those at the top/executive levels of the organization (e.g., C-level and VP level) tend to perceive less political behavior than those at all other levels, and upper-middle management perceive less political behavior than those at the middle management and professional levels.

One way leaders can reduce the perception that their organization is particularly political is to be clear and consistent in their communications and policies. Leaders should say what they mean and mean what they say, and follow the rules that are written and communicated just as everyone else in the organization needs to. Politically savvy leaders understand themselves and others they work with, exercise influence to benefit all parties rather than just themselves, have large networks of colleagues, and are authentic. Leaders who are politically savvy in this way contribute to creating an organizational culture where organizational politics are not perceived as disruptive or negative. Rather than being perceived negatively, leaders who exhibit this type of political savvy improve the perception of the organization as being a place where everyone is playing under the same rules, and reduce the perception that those with power or influence get their way (in spite of the rules). One way individuals can cope in environments that are highly political is to be politically savvy. We have found that people who rate themselves as being more politically savvy perceive their organizations as less political than do people who are less politically savvy. Therefore organizations benefit when they develop their employees' political skill because employees then work both more effectively with the people around them and perceive the workplace as less political.

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Figure 8

Political Behavior

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DOs and DON'Ts for Sustaining a Positive Workforce

DOs	DON'Ts
Explain to employees how their task or role is contributing to larger goals. If you can't explain how the task is contributing, should the employee be doing it?	Assume employees understand why sitting in yet another update meeting is contributing to the success of the organization. (And if you can't explain how it is, cancel the meeting until you can!)
Tell employees directly that you appreciate the work they do for you and the organization.	Assume your employees know you appreciate their work without having to say it.
Create a safe environment for employees at all levels to speak their minds.	Punish people who challenge your views or the views of organizational leaders.
Communicate regularly about how the organization is doing, both the difficulties and the successes your organization is experiencing.	Constantly remind employees of your organization's financial hardships (OR) Deliver veiled "threats" about layoffs as a way to motivate employees to work hard. (OR) Pretend that there aren't difficulties. (OR) Ignore successes.
Match employees' assignments to their interests, whenever possible.	Keep the most interesting assignments for yourself while asking others to do the grunt work.
Act as a role model to employees by having the courage to raise challenging questions to other leaders.	Keep employees in the dark about how important decisions are made.
Recognize your employees' focus and quality of work will be better if they have enough time to rest and take care of personal needs outside of work.	Assume your employees will say "no" to you if they need to rest or take care of personal needs outside of work.
Routinely ask your employees if they are enjoying their jobs.	Assume employees will come and complain if they don't like something, and ignore complaints or concerns your employees express to you.

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Conclusions and Recommendations

Our data show that U.S. and Canadian respondents are highly motivated, enjoy their work, and feel satisfied with their jobs, supervisors and organizations. They also believe their organizations are economically stable, and most respondents intend to continue in their current organizations for years to come. Organizations should maintain or improve the amount of support employees feel, and to provide work (especially to those lower in the hierarchy) that employees find equally engaging and motivating.

While the current outlook is positive, the data point to a few opportunities for improvement within organizations. First, respondents continue to see a great deal of political behavior within their organization, with people at higher levels reporting less of it than people at lower levels. Leadership within organizations needs to work to reduce this disparity, which will result in improved organizational efficiencies, increased trust, and decreased turnover. Second, employees consistently feel that they do not have enough time to get their work completed (not to mention enough time to complete the work well). Organizations have been slow to hire even though the economy is improving. People are feeling overwhelmed, and feeling consistently overwhelmed over time will eventually lead to burnout. And before people burn out they reduce their contribution to the organization. Burnout has been linked to outcomes ranging from reduced production to absenteeism to health problems. While it's wise to be cautious about over-spending and over-hiring, leaders should not lose sight of the importance of taking care of their people.

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Appendix: Study Sample

In the calendar year of 2011, 1,757 people responded to the World Leadership Survey. Individuals from the Silent Generation were excluded from all analyses due to their small number. Of those who responded, the vast majority (75%) were from the Americas (North America, Central America, and South America). Of the respondents from the Americas, nearly all (95%) were from the United States and Canada whereas very few (5%) were from Central and South American countries. Only 25% of responses came from Asia, the Pacific Rim, India, Europe, Middle East, and Africa. This report includes data from the U.S. and Canada only. Thus, the sample for the current report is 1,250 individuals.

Gender

The distribution of men and women was split almost identically, with just over half (52%) of the respondents being men.

How Respondents Were Recruited

Over three quarters (77%) of the respondents who completed the WLS were enrolled in a CCL program. As part of the pre-work for their upcoming course, a link was provided to them to inform them of a voluntary opportunity to complete the survey. The remaining 23% of respondents were not enrolled in CCL programs. They may have found the link to the survey upon visiting the CCL Web site, or it may have been forwarded from a friend or colleague. There were no differences between these two sub-groups of our sample in terms of level, generation, or age. One demographic difference between the two subsamples is that more men came to participate in the survey through being in a CCL program, while more women came to complete the survey through other means.

There were a few small, but statistically significant, differences between those who attended a CCL program and those who did not. Those who did not attend a CCL program were higher in identified motivation than those who did not attend a CCL program, while those who attended a CCL program were higher in extrinsic motivation and reported higher confidence in the economic stability of their organization. These differences existed even after controlling for demographics such as gender, race, organizational level, and generation.

Race

The vast majority (66%) of respondents in this sample were White. Non-White races "included approximately 5% Black, 2% Asian, and 3% Other (Hispanic, Multiracial, Other)."

Generations

The average age of respondents was 45. Over half (55%) of respondents are Gen Xers (born 1964-1981), and the second most common age group in this sample is Late Boomers (30%, born 1955-1963). This means that 85% of the sample is between the ages of 30 and 56. Only 11% of the sample respondents are Early Boomers (1946-1954), and even fewer are Millennials (4%, born 1982-2000). There were so few Silents (born 1930-1945) that they were not included in this sample.

Organizational Level

Looking at organizational level, a quarter of respondents (25%) held top positions in their organizations (e.g., C-level or VP), 26% held positions in the Upper Middle level of the organization, 20% held positions at the Middle/Professional level, and 4% identified themselves as hourly employees or in the first level of their organization. Twenty-six percent of respondents chose not to respond to this question.

Size of Company

Respondents reported working for companies of all sizes ranging from 1 to 10,000+ employees. Over half (60%) of the respondents were employed by medium-large companies ranging from 100-4,999 employees, while a smaller number (14%) of employees came from very large (10,000+) companies.

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Jennifer Deal is a Senior Research Scientist at the Center for Creative Leadership (CCL®) in San Diego, CA. Her work focuses on global leadership and generational differences. She is the manager of CCL's World Leadership Survey and the Emerging Leaders research project. In 2002, Jennifer co-authored *Success for the New Global Manager*, and has published articles on generational issues, executive selection, cultural adaptability, global management and women in management. Her second book, *Retiring the Generation Gap*, was published in 2007. An internationally recognized expert on generational differences, Jennifer has spoken on the topic on six continents (North and South America, Europe, Asia, Africa, and Australia). She holds a B.A. from Haverford College and a Ph.D. in industrial/organizational psychology from The Ohio State University.

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