

Workplace Issues Often Trickle Down From the Top. Have You Tried These 3 Ways to Fix Your Biggest Challenges?

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We're at an inflection point in the workplace. According to an American Psychological Association study, nearly 3 in 5 employees report negative impacts of work-related stress, including lack of interest, motivation, energy and effort at work. Constant change, staffing issues and unclear expectations can all cause workplace stress and burnout.

These issues stem from a lack of employee autonomy and a lack of a sense of belonging – and they are all symptomatic of top-down management structures. That's why open-source change (or bottom-up change) is the answer to the biggest workplace challenges. Change must begin with empowering employees. Incorporating their feedback and hearing their needs has been found to increase company engagement and creativity. I recommend three ways leaders can restructure their workforce management to create open-source change to enhance productivity.

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1. Equipping your workplace to harness everyone's collective intelligence

In just three years, workplaces have rapidly shifted to include hybrid or fully remote work where previously it didn't exist. This fast and major shift requires the right workplace tools and technology to empower employees to work from anywhere. While many leaders fear that hybrid and remote work lead to less productivity and engagement, the reality is quite the opposite. Tools can promote meaningful collaboration for increased engagement and more productive meetings regardless of the setting.

Engagement can and should take many different forms. While some employees feel comfortable raising their hands in company-wide meetings, others are more reluctant to contribute their ideas in such an open forum. In fact, according to a 2022 survey for both in-person and virtual meetings, over 71% of participants want anonymous ways to engage.

Unique tools offering anonymous ways to engage through voting, polls and Q&As can give a voice to others and support a culture of inclusivity. Responding to the needs of your team, rather than dictating your idea of what an organization should be, is key to engaging and motivating your workforce. Making it easy to ask and be asked questions is an essential component of fostering inclusivity and amplifying every voice to promote change.

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2. Rethinking your approach to

meetings

It is no secret that most employees wish that there were fewer meetings and some workplaces have moved to strike them entirely. However, with about one-third of working hours spent in meetings, they are not going away. To hold meetings that reflect the modern way of working, leaders must employ tools to build culture, support inclusion and identify new business opportunities while bolstering productivity.

A 2021 study found that 86% of employees feel people at their company are not heard fairly or their needs are not being met. Meetings should be a platform to ensure this overarching issue is addressed and everyone's contribution is recognized. Leaders will experience better outcomes when all of the right stakeholders are included and a broad set of perspectives are engaged. Not only will employees benefit from stronger and more inclusive meetings, but the full richness of the expertise in the room – rather than just focusing on the loudest voices – holds much more value for leaders and their decisions.

And everyone ultimately wants to feel included. As is the same in any passing conversation, the simple gesture of asking an employee's opinion and listening actively goes a long way in building their confidence *and* willingness to participate. Technology tools designed for meetings also help people give input in more indirect ways through the use of emojis, surveys, polls and other features that may be well-suited for employees with more introverted working styles.

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3. Motivating your employees to

believe in – and perform – the mission

As a CEO, I understand that employees are the core of every organization, and learning what motivates them is the key to leading a successful business. Simply listening to employee needs isn't enough – effective leaders are able to motivate employees to take pride in their contributions and highlight their involvement in a larger mission. Motivation can be as simple as ensuring body language feels warm and inclusive, but can also be as complex as addressing equity gaps in participation rooted in gendered, racial or socioeconomic differences.

It can be incredibly useful to consider how your meetings and meeting tools do – or do not – support employees' self-determination. In a psychological sense, self-determination theory studies human motivation as an arm of individuality and personality. In a practical sense, this sort of psychological consideration can be the difference between your employees feeling well-supported, autonomous and driven to succeed.

In day-to-day logistics, leaders may grant their employees certain schedule management freedoms, provide the ability to choose tasks for themselves or set certain boundaries to avoid too much top-down controlling or order-giving. In my own company, everyone has the complete freedom to determine these things for themselves.

In meetings, healthy employee self-determination can come from positive integration and the development of trust. Proven-effective meeting tools help unify teams to forge more meaningful relationships, underpin more generative communication and avoid the pitfalls of siloed work. In turn, actively encouraging employees to be honest about their opinions and needs inspires everyone to be accountable for their own actions.

Part of my vision when I started Mentimeter was to enhance belonging and ensure a positive and safe company culture where people were free to express ideas and be themselves. By embracing best practices including actively promoting inclusivity, taking a new approach to meetings and being a listening leader, leaders can create a culture that promotes the growth and development of employees and empower them to make change no matter their position or seniority.

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