

## Social Responsibility of Learning, Training and Staff Development within Global Organizations Highly Relational Engagement of Stakeholders (HRE): Long-Term Value Creation through Connectivity

Human capacity is your single most valuable resource.<sup>1</sup> The best strategic plans and/or state-of-the-art technologies are only as good as the people who actually execute them. When we nourish people's desire to learn and grow they feel engaged and give more of themselves.

And people yearn most powerfully for deep connections as conveyed by some of the greatest philosophers<sup>2</sup> and now affirmed by substantive scientific findings.<sup>3</sup> So, while we have a responsibility to provide all types of practical education and training, when we help our teams learn how to deeply connect with a broad stakeholder spectrum – internal and external – we give them tools to reach their greatest potential.

Neuroscience research supports that deep relationships with stakeholders are vital to success.<sup>4</sup> Studies show that combined deep levels of engagement of your employees and the beneficiaries to whom you provide services have an outsized effect on your performance.<sup>5</sup>

A broad spectrum of internal and external stakeholders has a direct impact on your core activities. So, in an increasingly connected world, organizations that foster the *deepest* level of engagement – HRE – are more successful in shaping that impact to greatest advantage.

Creating/sustaining HRE – multi-directional, emotionally deep, profoundly trusting relationships that unleash people's greatest potential – is no longer an option but now an imperative. Do you have a clear strategy on engagement? How can you improve/strengthen its execution? That's what we'll focus on today.

In four decades helping enterprises globally better engage stakeholders<sup>6</sup>, I have found that when strategically planned and executed HRE led to increased efficiency, stronger performance and greater fulfilment of employees, often simultaneously delivering societal benefits (CSR linked directly to ROI rather than a side-bar activity).

But organizations often don't know how to effectively create and sustain HRE. To provide a structured framework to learn critical HRE mechanisms we'll review an inter-related matrix organized by four themes: (I) How to *create value* through HRE; (II) How to *overcome obstacles* to HRE; (III) How to *make HRE last* over time; and (IV) Role of *bridging leaders* in HRE at all stages with all types of stakeholders.

We'll delve into three sub-components of each, engaging in dialogue about them. So, let's begin with creating value through HRE. To start you and your teams must know: (1) what *capabilities* they need to have; (2) what *conditions* they must create; and (3) what *processes* will move them forward. From your experiences what are these conditions, capabilities and processes? [INTERACT WITH PARTICIPANTS' RESPONSES.]

I've mapped what I believe are critical elements: you'll find much similarity with what you've shared. You can use these maps as points of departure for creating your own road map as you develop a strategic action plan for helping your teams develop highly relational engagement to solidify long-term success of your operations.

Some of the capabilities I've found to be most important include being able to: remain open, listen and learn; keep a willingness to find common ground regardless of how challenging; help others stay on track when they forget the reasons for engaging; unearth key desired outcomes and articulate them to others; maintain a firm belief in the ultimate goal of the engagement.

Some of the conditions I've observed as vital include having: unambiguous co-created ground rules about the process to reach consensus, with clarity on inviolable values versus areas where compromise is possible; a safe

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<sup>1</sup> See <http://bit.ly/3HCyiY> Human Capital - your most valuable asset, FP Blog, Bhardwaj, Oct 2009

<sup>2</sup> See <http://bit.ly/y9AK> Dr Martin Luther King Jr 1963 Letter from a Birmingham Jail, "We are caught in an *inescapable network of mutuality*, tied in a single garment of destiny." See <http://buber.de/en/work> Martin Buber I and Thou, about how human existence is defined by "*engaging each with our innermost and whole being*." See <http://bit.ly/dSwWQr> Nelson Mandela talking about African concept of Ubuntu that "*you affirm your humanity by recognizing the humanity of others*." See <http://bit.ly/gvGcMv> Erich Fromm defining our very being as a mode of "*authentic relatedness*."

<sup>3</sup> See <http://bit.ly/cxic4C> video on empathetic civilization by Jeremy Rifkin. See <http://empathiccivilization.com> for more on Rifkin and this thesis.

<sup>4</sup> See <http://bit.ly/fX0pg8> Neuroscience and Leadership: the Promise of Insights, Ivey Business Journal, Bovatzis, Jan/Feb 2011

<sup>5</sup> See <http://bit.ly/dRmQCd> Manage your Human Sigma, Harvard Business Review, Fleming, Coffman, Hartner, Jul 2005

<sup>6</sup> See <http://bit.ly/dvOuxs> "IMD welcomes master bridge builder Nadine B Hack as Executive in Residence," Oct 2010

environment where candid, respectful dialogue can take place; tacit agreement of exactly who will do what in which timeframe within what budget; a process to evaluate if everyone is fulfilling their obligations.

Some of the processes that I've seen be effective are: continually reaffirming the shared goal and how respective various stakeholder goals align, including explicitly articulating shared and individual benefits and responsibilities; finding those from each stakeholder constituency who "see the light early" and are willing to bond across stakeholder groups with like-minded visionaries; acknowledging strengths and weaknesses with transparency, celebrating victories and developing mechanisms to cope with the disappointment of failures.

Once you've created value through HRE to remain effective, you and your teams must: (1) define your *obstacles* to HRE; (2) identify the *drivers* that can overcome them; and (3) *mobilize* those drivers. What do you believe are and continue to be key obstacles, drivers and mobilizing techniques for engagement? When have they worked? When have they failed? [INTERACT WITH PARTICIPANTS' RESPONSES.]

Again, I've created maps that include much of what you shared that you can use when you pro-actively prepare to face and overcome obstacles to HRE within your organizations. Rather than listing out what I believe are the most important you can review my maps later to see which points are relevant for you. But I will share one thing.

I often use the analogy of being like a UN translator: even if everyone is speaking the same actual language, words mean different things to different people, especially if they are from different stakeholders constituencies. One of my favourite stories is when I co-produced the first ever UN InterAgency Global Teleconference: A World Free of Violence Against Women in November 1998.<sup>7</sup> We not only brought together virtually every UN specialized agency and various departments of the UN Secretariat but also external service providers of what was then cutting-edge technology. This included external vendors for live multi-directional video, satellite and internet broadcasting, which would connect the General Assembly to myriad sites globally.

As most of you know, just to plug a chord into an electrical socket in the GA requires sign-off from multiple UN departments including conference services, safety, security, etc. So, the complexity of this was enormously challenging. At an early meeting during the summer of 1998 we'd assembled in one of the NY Headquarters basement conference rooms specialists from many UN departments as well as their external counterparts.

I was presiding and the discussion – which was largely about the many reasons why the global teleconference could *not* be done – went something like my fictionalized version of highly technical language. First person - I need a Doppler7X four gig transmitter; second - we don't have that; third – even if you did, we'd have to have a 24double helix 6-cylinder GT33X to connect; fourth – yeah, and we could never hook up my G65 2amph 8-treble PD4; and so on. I didn't understand a single technical term.

Yet, I listened really carefully and then announced to the group, "you're brilliant, you just figured out how you are going to do this: he's going to bring in from the outside and use his 24double helix 6-cylinder GT33X to connect to the Doppler7X four gig transmitter that you have in-house and we're going to use their G65 2amph 8-treble PD4. Wow, you guys (and they were all guys) are going to make the impossible happen!" They left the room feeling like geniuses completely committed to collaborate to do what they initially couldn't envision was doable.

We've seen how to create value through HRE and what might be obstacles to achieve it: let's now focus on how you can make it last. To keep HRE going, you and your teams must: (1) learn how to *sustain* it; (2) know it will *breakdown*; and (3) *mend* those breaches quickly. What are your observations about what works to sustain engagement, what causes the breakdowns in it and how mend those? Is damage to engagement ever irreparable? If not, what types of skills are required? [INTERACT WITH PARTICIPANTS' RESPONSES.]

As before, I've created maps that include much of what you shared, which can help you remember what you must do in order to make your engagement strategies sustainable. I'll leave it to you to decide which elements are vital.

At the center of creating value through HRE, overcoming obstacles to it and sustaining HRE, I've placed what I call *bridging leaders*. As bridge-builders among stakeholders, they recognize individual catalytic drivers, create catalytic teams, and empower them to form chains of trust with a broad spectrum of internal and external stakeholders. They reward cross-boundary behavior. What are some other *bridging leader* skills you've used? Or seen others effectively employ? [INTERACT WITH PARTICIPANTS' RESPONSES.]

Now that we've analyzed some general points about bridging leaders, let's look at specific roles they play. They create HRE with: (1) *internal* stakeholders (board, management, employees, etc); (2) *external willing* stakeholders

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<sup>7</sup>See <http://freeofviolence.org/natcamp.htm> for history of initiative. See also <http://blog.because.net/?p=947> for Oct 2009 follow up reporting.

(suppliers, service beneficiaries, partners, etc); and (3) *external adversarial* stakeholders (interest groups opposing your presence and intentions, etc). From your experience, what are ways that such leaders work effectively internally and externally whether with willing or adversarial stakeholders?

Are you a bridging leader who has the skill and tenacity to bring together and hold together your key stakeholders so they're deeply engaged and feel ownership for what they're tasked to do? Can you visualize what you'd need to do to become better at this? And how would you train others on your team to do this more successfully?  
[INTERACT WITH PARTICIPANTS' RESPONSES.]

While I have mapped out – again much of what you've shared – points in each of the categories, I draw your attention to a few that I believe underscore everything else we've been discussing. Bridging leaders act as über-catalysts to empower other catalytic drivers. They see the humanity in themselves and others and work to elevate that above external differences. They enable a co-creation process that is much stronger than asking people to support something that's been created without their input. They proactively stay in touch.

I'll leave you with what I think are key lessons about highly relational engagement you and your teams can employ but it's really up to you to determine exactly which insights make the most sense for your situation.

- I. **CREATE VALUE:** Organizations that realize HRE will benefit them – and that they might be lacking in it – will begin to build up *capabilities, conditions* and *processes*.

Create a trusting environment where people truly listen, hear and try to put themselves in the other's shoes. Stakeholders must develop clear grasp of shared goals and determine how their respective goals will align.

- II. **OVERCOME OBSTACLES:** They will learn it's in their advantage to recognize the *obstacles* to HRE as soon as possible, identify key *drivers* and *mobilize* them quickly.

It is vital to prevail despite the typical general unwillingness to find common ground. Cultivate those who can forge bonds among the initially unwilling and have skills to move among stakeholder constituencies.

- III. **MAKE IT LAST:** They'll explore how to *sustain* HRE systematically, admit early when there is an HRE *breakdown* and move aggressively to *mend* those breaches.

It is essential that organizations foster systems that strengthen ongoing connections among different cohorts, encourage dialogue about fissures and their causes and promote transparency to regain interconnections.

- IV. **CULTIVATE LEADERSHIP:** *Bridging leaders* empower catalytic drivers in each stakeholder constituency who see the light early about the value of HRE: all organizations, especially global ones, need them.

They identify and/or train individual catalytic drivers, create catalytic teams, and empower them to form chains of trust with a broad spectrum of internal and external stakeholders.

Achieving HRE among your internal and external stakeholders – those you have by decision *or* default – has a critical impact on your organization's effectiveness. HRE takes place over time with many vital steps along the rocky path but nothing beats it for long-term value creation and competitiveness. As we end today, please take some time to think about: What key elements do you need to strengthen for your engagement strategy to be effective? How might you act on those to improve your organization's performance now and for the future?

Thank you and good luck engaging!