Employee Engagement in Saskatchewan School Divisions: Literature Review, Conceptualization and Policy Analysis
Commissioned by the Saskatchewan School Boards Association

Paul Newton, PhD
Associate Professor
Department of Educational Administration

Saskatchewan Educational Leadership Unit
Department of Educational Administration
College of Education
University of Saskatchewan

March, 2015
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Table of Contents ........................................................................................................................................... i
List of Tables .................................................................................................................................................. iii
List of Figures .................................................................................................................................................. iii
Executive Summary ......................................................................................................................................... iv

Part One: Introduction ...................................................................................................................................... 1
  Review Objectives: ..................................................................................................................................... 2
  Limitations and Delimitations ...................................................................................................................... 3
  Review Process and Method ......................................................................................................................... 4
  Organization of the Report ............................................................................................................................. 6

Part Two: Review of the Literature on Employee Engagement .................................................................... 7
  Defining Employee Engagement ................................................................................................................. 7
    Internal “State” Definitions .......................................................................................................................... 8
  Generational Differences ............................................................................................................................... 9
  Disengagement ............................................................................................................................................ 10
  Who are Engaged Employees? ..................................................................................................................... 11
  Benefits of Engagement ............................................................................................................................... 12
  The Job Demands-Resources Model ............................................................................................................ 14
  A Model for Practices in Employee Engagement ....................................................................................... 15
  Psychosocial Safety Climate ........................................................................................................................ 18
  Antecedents of Employee Engagement ....................................................................................................... 18
  Flexibility ..................................................................................................................................................... 20
  Related Concepts ....................................................................................................................................... 21
    Climate and empowerment .......................................................................................................................... 22
    Teacher engagement ................................................................................................................................ 22
  Leadership and Employee Engagement ....................................................................................................... 23
  Synthesis ...................................................................................................................................................... 25
  Examples of Key Indicators/Best Practices for Teacher Engagement: A Conceptual Framework ............. 31
Part Three: An Analysis of Extant Policies and Divisional Documentation in Saskatchewan

Chinook School Division .......................................................... 35
Good Spirit School Division ..................................................... 35
Holy Family School Division .................................................. 37
Horizon School Division ......................................................... 38
Living Sky School Division ..................................................... 38
Northern Lights School Division .............................................. 40
Regina Roman Catholic Separate School Division ..................... 41
Saskatoon Public Schools ....................................................... 43
Sun West School Division ....................................................... 44

Overall Synthesis of Sample School Division Documents .............. 47
Messaging .......................................................... 47
Employee Voice and Agency ................................................. 48
Employee discretion and control ............................................ 49
Professional Life .......................................................... 49
Health and Well-Being ....................................................... 50
Clarity of Purpose .......................................................... 50
Leadership .......................................................... 51
References .......................................................... 52
Appendix A: Measures of Employee Engagement ......................... 57
Appendix B: Human Resource Strategy and Employee Engagement .... 60
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. The levers of employee engagement ................................................................. 31
Table 2. Model of best practices in employee engagement in educational settings ....... 33

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Model of employee engagement ................................................................. 15
Figure 2. A Conceptual Model of Workplace Commitment ........................................ 19
Employee engagement appears to have a relatively robust research community contributing to contemporary theorizing. It is based largely in the psychological sciences and particularly organization and industrial psychology. There is also a significant body of research that investigates employee engagement in schools and school systems, with an obvious sampling bias toward teacher groups.

The impetus for this attention to engagement is the emerging empirical evidence that engagement has significant benefits for organizations of all kinds. Harter, Schmidt, and Hayes (2002), for example, in a study of over 7000 business units in 36 companies found a significant positive relationship between employee satisfaction and engagement and organizational outcomes.

**Review Objectives**

A synthesis of research findings was completed, and a systematic analysis of publicly available documents of a sample of Saskatchewan school divisions was undertaken. The following specific objectives frame this report:

1. The concept of employee engagement across a broad spectrum of employee groups and organizational types were examined and synthesized.
2. The literature connecting school organizational outcomes and employee engagement received particular attention.
3. This report presents a synthesis of the research, conceptualization of employee engagement in educational contexts, and a framework/model of best practices in employee engagement.
4. Publicly available documentation, primarily from school division websites were examined and analyzed for the purpose of presenting the state of practice in Saskatchewan school divisions.

**Review Process and Methods**

This report examines the literature and research on employee engagement across a broad spectrum of sectors and organizational types. The focus of the synthesis, and
framework/model generation was on the organizational factors that are hypothesized to contribute to employee engagement.

The researcher selected a sample of Saskatchewan school divisions. The sample includes rural, urban, public, separate and Northern school divisions. In all, nine school divisions were reviewed. For each school division, the researcher examined the following types of documentary sources: board policies; administrative procedures; division communications; social media; director of education communications; newsletters; strategic plans; CIAF planning documents; principle, mission, vision, belief statements; board agendas and minutes; and annual reports.

**A Conceptual Frame of Employee Engagement**

The following antecedents are identified as significant for employee engagement in the education sector and are pertinent to the work of school boards and divisional senior leadership.

**Messaging**
- Appreciation, recognition, and celebration of accomplishments
- Surveying staff about their satisfaction levels
- Open, transparent, and frequent communication

**Employee Voice and Agency**
- Seeking input from staff on board decisions
- Employee participation in decisions
- Shared decision making
- Seeking open dialogue with employees on issues

**Employee Discretion and Control**
- Autonomy
- Job flexibility

**Professional Life**
- Supervisory coaching
• Peer to peer networks
• Cultures of collaboration
• Paying attention to staff development

**Health and Well-Being**

• Support for work-life balance/ Employee assistance
• Psychosocial safety climate
• Equity and fairness

**Clarity of Purpose**

• Clear goals and expectations
• Alignment of goals among stakeholders
• Focus on quality

**Leadership**

• Transformational leadership
• Engagement oriented leadership
• Stability in leadership

A brief snapshot of publicly available school division documents points to a number of positive and consistent policies and practices to promote employee engagement. There are, however, a few gaps that occur in most contexts and some variability among the divisions studied. Despite the limitations of the documentary sources accessed, this review should serve to highlight the kinds of explicit messaging that are present with respect to the phenomenon of employee engagement.
The concept of employee engagement is a relatively recent addition to the area of human resource theory and organizational behavior. Interest in the psychology of employees has been a feature of research, theorizing, and policy since the early twentieth century. Multiple theories of motivation have been developed as part of the human resource movement in organization science. Consequently, there are numerous theoretical perspectives on the psychosocial experiences of employees that have attempted to explain how some employees engage with work and are able to contribute to organizational goals in significant ways, the latest iteration of this line of theorizing in “employee engagement.” Employee engagement has several competitors in research circles – these will be highlighted later in this report. Employee engagement, however, appears to have a relatively robust research community contributing to contemporary theorizing. It is based largely in the psychological sciences and particularly organization and industrial psychology. There is also a significant body of research that investigates employee engagement in schools and school systems, with an obvious sampling bias toward teacher groups.

The research in employee engagement follows a general trend in organizational science to explore human resources and human capital as central to the effectiveness of organizations in meeting their goals.

Instead of traditional organizational structures that heavily rely on management control and economic principles of cost reduction, efficiency, and cash flow, the focus in modern organizations is on the management of human capital. Currently, organizations expect their employees to be proactive and show initiative, collaborate smoothly with others, take responsibility for their own professional development, and to be committed to high quality performance standards. Thus employees are needed who feel energetic and dedicated, and who are absorbed by their work. In other words, organizations need engaged workers. (Bakker & Schaufeli, 2008, p. 147)

Those working in the area of the work and motivation have suggested that
contemporary employees are seeking more from their working lives than they have in past eras. “It has been argued that the growing emphasis on the intrinsic aspect of work marks a shift from a materialistic to a post materialistic era and a rejection of individualistic cultural values, as people are seeking a greater sense of meaning and purpose in their extending working lives” (Cartwright & Holmes, 2006, p. 200). The notion of employee engagement, in this sense, is not only a process, but an outcome desired by organizations in terms of the impact on productivity and by employees who are seeking greater meaning in their working lives. Clearly, organizational interest is a key driver in the research into employee engagement. The impetus for this attention to engagement is the emerging empirical evidence that engagement has significant benefits for organizations of all kinds. Harter, Schmidt, and Hayes (2002), for example, in a study of over 7000 business units in 36 companies found a significant positive relationship between employee satisfaction and engagement and organizational outcomes.

As stated previously, there is considerable research on employee engagement in educational organizations; however, in the interest of comprehensiveness in coverage of the concept, a broad literature review was performed that explored engagement in multiple organizational contexts.

**REVIEW OBJECTIVES:**

This report explores the literature on employee engagement with a preference for recent literature reporting empirical studies of the concept. In addition, a synthesis of research findings was developed, and a systematic analysis of publicly available documents of a sample of Saskatchewan school divisions was undertaken. The following specific objectives framed this report:

1. The concept of employee engagement across a broad spectrum of employee groups and organizational types were examined and synthesized. The focus of this review is not merely to report on the nature of teacher engagement, but of employee engagement more generally.

2. Where possible, the literature connecting school organizational outcomes and employee engagement received particular attention. This includes any research in
which a focus on the engagement and motivation of employees is related to school improvement and student learning outcomes.

3. This report presents a synthesis of the research, conceptualization of employee engagement in educational contexts, and a framework/model of best practices in employee engagement.

4. Publicly available documentation, primarily from school division websites were examined and analyzed for the purpose of presenting the state of practice in Saskatchewan school divisions. In this section, I suggest possible congruence/incongruence with the framework/model developed through the literature review.

**LIMITATIONS AND DELIMITATIONS**

One of the primary restrictions on this work is the nature of the research available on employee engagement generally in educational contexts. In particular, two challenges arise: 1) the relatively robust research on employee engagement in educational contexts tends to privilege teacher employee groups. Often this “teacher engagement” research looks at pedagogical practice, student issues, and classroom level factors. The literature on teacher engagement is only partially helpful in this respect. The literature on “teacher engagement” is often identified as personal attributes of teachers that can contribute to overall teacher quality and improved student learning. Additionally, the aim of this review and analysis is broader than that of teacher engagement. The purpose of this report is to explore employee engagement generally as a concept, and how it might be practiced in Saskatchewan school divisions in relation to all employee groups.

Although much of the literature is American and much uses terminology that may not be preferred (e.g. union management partnerships), I believe there are some valuable insights in these sources for exploring a broader discussion of teacher engagement; broader than just a view of engagement as a property of individual teachers focused solely on classroom practices. Second, much of the research on employee engagement in schools has been conducted in Europe and Australia. As such, the organizational level of analysis is usually at the school level or sometimes at the state level. As school boards/divisions are largely a North American phenomenon, this does confound the
synthesis to a degree. While this is important, this report focuses on the literature and a conceptualization that also explores the organizational context for teachers’ work and the extent to which they demonstrate commitment for the various system levels – in particular, a commitment to and engagement with the school division as an independent organizational entity.

Another limitation of this study is the nature of the analysis at the school division level. One of the purposes of this report was to establish the state of practice in Saskatchewan school divisions. While employee engagement practices were found at the level of the school division, it is assumed that yet more practices and policies exist at the school level that may be significant in understanding employee engagement more fully in the Saskatchewan context. Individual school policy and practices were not explored, as this would have added to the complexity and variability of the data set.

An additional area of complexity pertains to the overlapping research among a number of similar and related concepts. This non-exhaustive list includes concepts such as: organizational trust; employee/teacher commitment; distributed leadership; teacher empowerment; district loyalty (identification); employee relations; collaboration; system investment; employee investment; and teacher leadership.

**REVIEW PROCESS AND METHOD**

I met several times with a representative of the Saskatchewan School Boards’ Association and the Associate Director of the Saskatchewan Educational Leadership Unit to establish the purpose and scope of this report. After preliminary consultation, it was determined that this report would examine the literature and research on employee engagement across a broad spectrum of sectors and organizational types. In reviewing the research, the researcher chose to review research from the temporal period of 2000 to the present. Principal criteria for literature selection were: 1) currency criterion (more recent research was given preference), 2) sector criterion (literature on educational workers’ employee engagement was given preference); 3) methodological criterion (report of empirical studies were given preference over argumentative manuscripts and studies with larger sample sizes were given preference); and 4) an objectivity criterion (studies
performed by independent researchers rather than corporate research in support of, for example, employee engagement consultancy services was given preference). The initial review produced over 200 articles reporting on research into employee engagement (or other related concepts). From this list, the researcher reduced the number of references based on duplication or similarity of findings, in particular where several academic papers presented findings from the same empirical study. As well, several meta-analyses of the state of the research into employee engagement were particularly useful.

Following the review of the research, the findings were synthesized looking for congruence across the research, as well as unique outlier findings that spoke to the specific phenomenon of employee engagement in educational organizations. The review of the research provided a variety of perspectives on employee engagement. The primary perspective represented in the research was on the psychological states of employees and the process whereby employees come to be “engaged.” While this is instructive in understanding the phenomenon of engagement, the focus of the synthesis, and framework/model generation was on the organizational factors that are hypothesized to contribute to employee engagement. That is, while it is important to first understand how employees come to be engaged, for this report, it is more significant that I identify how organizations might employ policies or practices that lead to employee engagement.

In the review of publicly available school division documents, the researcher selected a sample of Saskatchewan school divisions. The sample includes rural, urban, public, separate and Northern school divisions. In all, nine school divisions were reviewed. Of course, the relatively small sample size and the diverse contexts of the divisions means that generalization is not possible and conclusions about how context affects engagement policies and practices would not be reasonable. The sample does, however, provide some insight into the range of ways that school divisions in Saskatchewan have approached the issue of employee engagement. For each school division, the researcher examined the following types of documentary sources: board policies; administrative procedures; division communications; social media; director of education communications; newsletters; strategic plans; CIAF planning documents;
principle, mission, vision, belief statements; board agendas and minutes; and annual reports.

**ORGANIZATION OF THE REPORT**

Following this brief introduction to the report, a comprehensive (though not exhaustive) literature review is presented. At the end of this review, I present a synthesis of research findings with respect to employee engagement. Following this, I develop a framework/model for school board/division best practice in employee engagement focusing on those elements that pertain most directly to the levers for engagement at the system level. In part three of this report a summary of the findings for each of the nine divisions examined in the report is presented. I conclude with a broader analysis of the findings across the nine divisions paying particular attention to the areas in which the system practices reflect the best practice model and the area in which elements of best practice appear to be lacking.
DEFINING EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

Defining employee engagement is no easy task. There are multiple conceptions of engagement, and numerous similar concepts such as commitment, employee empowerment, organizational citizenship behavior, and motivation (Shuck, Ghosh, Zigarmi, & Nimon, 2013; Shuck, 2011; Shuck & Wollard, 2010; Zigarmi, et al., 2009). Although there may be subtle differences between the concepts of work engagement, job engagement, and employee engagement, for the purposes of this report these concepts will be mostly utilized as similar notions. Other related concepts, such as employee commitment or empowerment are also of use, and will be explored for their contribution in the next section of this report.

It is fairly recently that the term employee engagement has come into popular usage in the management consulting literature and the academic literature. In the extant academic literature, multiple definitions exist of employee engagement (Saks, 2006). However, “although the definition and meaning of engagement in the practitioner literature often overlaps with other constructs, in the academic literature it has been defined as a distinct and unique construct that consists of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral components that are associated with individual role performance” (p. 602).

Macey and Schneider (2008) disagreed that there is consensus in the understanding of employee engagement and argued “the meaning of employee engagement is ambiguous among both academic researchers and among practitioners who use it in conversations with clients” (p. 3). The reason for the ambiguity and confusion might draw from the multi-faceted nature of employee engagement as both an internal mental state (as in feelings of satisfaction) and a behavioural component. Gruman and Saks (2011) stated that “employee engagement has a state and behavioral dimension, 2) the state of engagement precedes and leads to engagement behaviors, and 3) engagement behaviors are directly related to performance outcomes” (p. 126). That is, employees may “feel” engaged, but it may not follow that they demonstrate engaged
behaviours. Even if it is the case that engaged mental states necessarily result in engaged behaviours, the empirical research needs to be read carefully to consider which form of engagement is being emphasized.

An example of a model that incorporates the mental state and the behavioural perspective is the Blessing White (2015) “X Model of Employee Engagement.” This is a matrix model in which employee contribution and employee satisfaction are the key measures. This model defines engaged employees as those employees who have high levels of employee contribution and individual satisfaction. Other employees are categorized into the following configurations along these two axes: low contribution/high satisfaction = ‘honeymooners or hamsters’; high contribution/low satisfaction = ‘crash & burners’; low contribution/low satisfaction = ‘the disengaged’. The problem for organizations in determining employee engagement from this model is the difficulty in establishing internal mental states of employees. That is, the “crash & burners” may appear as engaged employees if the organization does not have a reliable way of gauging the internal mental states of employees.

**INTERNAL “STATE” DEFINITIONS**

Bakker et al. (2007) defined engagement as “a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption” (p. 274).

Further,

*Vigor* refers to high levels of energy and mental resilience while working, the willingness to invest effort in one’s work, and persistence in the face of difficulties. *Dedication* refers to a sense of significance, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride, and challenge. The third dimension of work engagement is called *absorption*, which was found to be another element of engagement in 30 in-depth interviews (Schaufeli et al., 2001). Absorption is characterized by being fully concentrated and happily engrossed in one’s work, whereby time passes quickly and one has difficulties with detaching oneself from work. (p. 274)

May et al. (2004) suggested that the internal emotional and cognitive states act as “antecedents” for job involvement that may be equated with the behavioural component
of engagement described above.

Job involvement is thought to depend on both need saliency and the potential of a job to satisfy these needs. Thus, job involvement results from a cognitive judgment about the need satisfying abilities of the job. Jobs in this view are tied to one's self-image. Engagement differs from job involvement in that it is concerned more with how the individual employs his/her self during the performance of his/her job. Furthermore, engagement entails the active use of emotions and behaviours, in addition to cognitions. Finally, engagement may be thought of as an antecedent to job involvement in that individuals who experience deep engagement in their roles should come to identify with their jobs. (p. 12)

The importance of the internal state perspective lies in the issues organization can have in assessing employee engagement. If internal states are important antecedents of engagement, organizations will need to be able to assess not only the apparent engagement level as seen through productivity, but also the internal emotional and cognitive states of employees. An assessment of only the external manifestations of engagement will not give an organization the ability to determine, for example, the ranks of the “crash & burners” within the employee pool.

**GENERATIONAL DIFFERENCES**

In a 2008 study, Busch, Venkitachalam, and Richards found that work commitment differed depending on the generation of employee. They studied differences in employee responses among baby boomers, generation x, and generation y employees. In particular, they found younger employees “more enthusiastic on the whole (than their older colleagues) with regard to attaining formal recognition for example through workplace awards” (p. 53). Also, “Generation X and even more so Y felt enthusiastic about their opinions, the Boomers on the other hand appeared subdued in comparison with regard to the importance of their points of view” (p. 54). Further, Gilbert (2011) argued that the so-called “Millennials” differed significantly in terms of the way in which they respond to engagement drivers. In particular, he argued that “the millennial employee is interested in feedback on his or her performance. But traditional semi-annual reviews are too
infrequent for millennials. They want to know that they’ve done a good job, and they want to know now” (p. 1). He recommends an ongoing engagement strategy in which employee engagement is studied annually and goals and targets are established as part of multiple strategies for different generations of employees. Further, he suggested that managers be given broad discretion to implement diverse strategies based on specific needs of employees under their supervision. This suggests that employee engagement strategies need to take into consideration the characteristics of the workforce.

**DISENGAGEMENT**

On the other side of research and theorizing into employee engagement, there are numerous “disengagement studies.” May et al. (2004) define disengagement “as the decoupling of the self from the work role and involves people withdrawing and defending themselves during role performances” (p. 12).

Multiple factors for disengagement have been found, and they generally align with the research on factors leading to engagement – although they obviously focus on analysis of the negative cases of engagement factors. In a qualitative study of teachers with 4-10 years of experience, Kirkpatrick (2007) found that teachers identified a lack of guidance and support as a factor in disengagement.

Acknowledging that their schools did not intervene when teachers stopped investing in their work, participants recognized that they, too, could continue to teach even if their effort was severely diminished. Participants suggested that a better balance of guidance and autonomy in helping teachers make decisions about how to invest in their jobs would benefit them and their teaching. (pp. 10-11)

In her study of “second stage teachers” (meaning those teachers with 4-10 years of experience) Kirkpatrick (2007) argued “schools and administrators must guide and support second-stage teachers while allowing them to maintain some of the autonomy they feel they have earned and need at this stage in their career” (p. 28). This group of teachers may be overlooked in research, policy, and practice. Much research has been conducted focusing on the needs of neophyte teachers. This study would suggest that
these second stage teachers need similar guidance, but also need to be guided in moving toward more autonomous functioning. Similarly, Luthans and Peterson (2002) identified a lack of autonomy at work as a factor that has the potential to lead to disengagement. “Disengagement may be a result of employees who lack needed social interaction at work, who experience little autonomy in work roles, or who feel their jobs are unimportant” (p. 378). Another factor identified as leading to disengagement is the perceived lack “of fairness in the workplace” (Maslach & Leiter, 2008, p. 504)

The impact of disengagement can be a significant one for organizations. Research highlights effects ranging from low productivity to damaging and antisocial behaviours in the workplace. “Engagement is important for managers to cultivate given that disengagement, or alienation, is central to the problem of workers’ lack of commitment and motivation” (May, et al. p. 13). Additionally, disengaged employees can hamper organizational change and improvement efforts as those employees who are disengaged appear to be particularly inclined toward negative attitudes with respect to change (Vakola & Nikolaou, 2005).

As disengagement progresses, employees may develop cynicism in their jobs. Cartwright and Holmes (2006) discuss the notion of employee cynicism as follows:

Employee cynicism has been described as characterized by negative attitudes of frustration, disillusionment, and contempt toward and distrust of business organizations, executives, managers and other objects in the workplace (Andersson, 1996; Dean et al., 1998). In a review article, Dean, Brandes, and Dharwadkar (1998) define employee cynicism as “a negative attitude toward one's employing organization, comprising of three dimensions: a belief that the organization lacks integrity; negative affect towards the organization; and tendencies to exhibit disparaging and critical behaviors towards the organization that are consistent with these beliefs and affect.” (pp. 200-201)

WHO ARE ENGAGED EMPLOYEES?

In determining those who are engaged employees within an organization, it is recommended that organizations regularly survey employees about their levels of
engagement. These internal states may be difficult to assess without directly asking employees about their levels of satisfaction; however, the research suggests some traits that may help to identify the truly engaged from the productive, but burned out employees.

Engaged employees are no supermen – they do feel tired after a long day of hard work. However, they describe their tiredness as a rather pleasant state because it is associated with positive accomplishments. Finally, engaged employees are not addicted to their work. They enjoy other things outside work and, unlike workaholics, they do not work hard because of a strong and irresistible inner drive, but because for them working is fun. (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008, p. 210)

According to this, those employees that appear to maintain balance between their work lives and personal lives, have collegial and productive relationships, and also are highly productive employees, can likely be called engaged. “Employees who know what is expected of them, who form strong relationships with co-workers and managers, or who in other ways experience meaning in their work, are engaged” (Luthans & Peterson, 2002, p. 378). The implication for school leaders and for district leaders is to be cautious of the “supermen and women” who appear to be integral to all activities of the workplace. They may not be engaged regardless of the high productivity displayed. In these cases poor retention and burnout is a significant risk. As an extension, employers might consider policies and practices that promote work life balance for the promotion of engagement and long-term organizational success.

**BENEFITS OF ENGAGEMENT**

There is widespread consensus in the scholarly literature on the benefits to organizations of engaged employees. (e.g. Lockwood, 2007; Pitt-Catsouphes & Matz-Costa, 2008). “The well-being of employees is important in its own right and also has benefits for organizations in terms of lower absence rates and health insurance costs” (Meyer & Gagne, 2008, p. 61). First, engaged employees are personally fulfilled, and this deep satisfaction is worthy of consideration in its own right, but can also motivate employees more than extrinsic factors. “People rate purpose, fulfillment, autonomy, satisfaction,
close working relationships and learning as more important than money” (Cartwright & Holmes, 2006, p. 200). Additionally, engaged employees tend to expand their work beyond the minimal expectation articulated in job descriptions. “High workplace well-being and engagement are characterized by high levels of satisfaction, positive career aspirations, and extra or non-core role participation” (Parker & Martin, 2009, p. 68). This is particularly relevant in educational organizations, as these often depend on the extra role contributions of staff members, and especially teachers. “Engaged teachers are important to a school, because they are more willing to take on extra tasks that are not part of their job description, such as helping colleagues or volunteering to support extra-curricular activities, all of which enhance the performance of the school” (Runhaar, Konermann, & Sanders, 2013, p. 106). Similarly, Bakker and Demerouti (2008) argued that engaged employees have high capacity for creativity and innovation. “Engaged workers are more creative, more productive, and more willing to go the extra mile” (p. 209). As well, “engaged employees often experience positive emotions, including happiness, joy, and enthusiasm; experience better health; create their own job and personal resources; and transfer their engagement to others” (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008, p. 215).

Engaged employees are also crucial to high performing organizations. These employees are centrally important in times of rapid organizational change and are essential to reshaping organizational realities. “Engaged employees are not passive actors in work environments but instead actively change their work environment if needed” (Bakker, 2011, p. 268). As such, there has been much interest from managers, boards, and organizational leaders in developing employee engagement as a key driver for organizational effectiveness and organizational renewal. “Managerial interest in engagement is understandable given claims from consultancies that having engaged employees results in higher shareholder return, profitability, productivity, quality, and customer satisfaction as well as lower absenteeism and turnover” (Crawford, LePine, & Rich, 2010, p. 834).

Schaufeli, et al. (2009) indicated that efforts directed at employee engagement can amplify as the organization enters a cycle of increased engagement leading to increased
organizational effectiveness which, in turn, leads to more engagement. “The current study goes one step further by showing that well-being (engagement) leads to future resource gain, which suggests a gain cycle in which resources and engagement reinforce each other reciprocally” (p. 909).

THE JOB DEMANDS-RESOURCES MODEL

The most well cited model within the employee engagement research is the Job Demands-Resources Model (JD-R) (Hakanen, Bakker, & Schaufeli; Halbesleben & Wheeler, 2008; Van den Broeck, et al., 2008; Xanthopoulou, 2009). Crawford, LePine and Rich (2010) highlight the ubiquity of this model. They state:

over half of all the published empirical research on engagement and its antecedents has been explicitly grounded in this perspective. Essentially, the job demands–resources model suggests that job resources promote engagement through a motivational process and that job demands contribute to burnout—a syndrome of weariness with work characterized by exhaustion, cynicism, and inefficacy. (pp. 834-835).

Figure 1 illustrates this model. Job resources are those that are provided or facilitated by the employer while personal resources are individual characteristics of employees. These two sets of resources combine to promote engagement. Job demands are an intervening variable that can lead to employee burnout or disengagement. A balance of these factors results in the levels of employee engagement and, consequently, performance in the job.
A MODEL FOR PRACTICES IN EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

The most significant element of this model for employers to consider is the area of job resources because these are the elements over which employers have most control and leverage. “Examples of job resources are autonomy, supervisory coaching, and opportunities for development” (Bakker & Bal, 2010, p. 190). Job resources can play a part in the cognitive and emotional well-being of employees and can facilitate success in work roles. “Job resources either play an intrinsic motivational role because they foster employees’ growth, learning and development, or they play an extrinsic motivational role because they are instrumental in achieving work goals. In the former case, job resources fulfill basic human needs, such as the needs for autonomy, relatedness and competence” (Bakker & Bal, 2010, p. 191).

In a study of 806 teachers in Quebec, Fernet, Guay, Senecal, and Austin (2012) identified specific job demands and resources for teachers as follows:

Source: Based on Bakker & Demerouti (2007)

Figure 1. Model of employee engagement. From Bakker & Demerouti (2008)
At school, job demands include several aspects such as work overload, role problems, deficient equipment, school policies and climate, interpersonal conflicts, and students’ behavioral problems. Job resources include administrative leadership, flexible schedules, decision latitude, skill utilization, participation in decision-making, recognition, professional development, coaching, and support from colleagues, among others. (p. 514)

In a study of 805 Finnish teachers, Bakker et al. (2007) explored how engagement and job resources are related in situations where demands on employees were deemed as high. In their study, they argue that job resources are negatively related to job demands. In other words, job resources may act as buffers or mediating factors against the demands of the job and may lead to higher employee engagement. Job resources are defined as:

those physical, psychological, social, or organizational aspects of the job that (a) reduce job demands and the associated physiological and psychological costs, (b) are functional in achieving work goals, or (c) stimulate personal growth, learning, and development (Demerouti et al., 2001). Hence, not only are resources necessary to deal with job demands but they are also important in their own right (Hobfoll, 2002). Resources may be located at the following levels: the organization (e.g., salary, career opportunities), interpersonal and social relations (e.g., supervisor and coworker support), the organization of work (e.g., role clarity, participation in decision making), and the task (e.g., performance feedback, skill variety). (p. 275)

Importantly, Bakker et al. (2007) argued that job resources were established as related positively to employee engagement and that employee appreciation appeared to be particularly important in employee engagement. “All six job resources (job control, supervisor support, climate, innovativeness, information, and appreciation) were positively related to vigor, dedication, and absorption (Demerouti et al., 2001; Hobfoll, 2002). Of all job resources tested, appreciation appeared to be the strongest predictor of all work engagement dimensions” (Bakker et al., 2007, p. 279).
Citing conflicting research findings for this model, Crawford, LePine, and Rich (2010) posited a differentiated model of job demands. In this refined model, they suggest that job demands be categorized as either hindrances or challenges. Demands characterized as hindrances were found to be negatively related to employee engagement, while demands characterized as challenges were found to be positively related to employee engagement.

Challenges tend to be appraised as stressful demands that have the potential to promote mastery, personal growth, or future gains. Examples of challenges include demands such as a high workload, time pressure, and high levels of job responsibility. Employees tend to perceive these demands as opportunities to learn, achieve, and demonstrate the type of competence that tends to get rewarded. Hindrances tend to be appraised as stressful demands that have the potential to thwart personal growth, learning, and goal attainment. Examples of hindrances include demands such as role conflict, role ambiguity, organizational politics, red tape, and hassles. Employees tend to perceive these demands as constraints, barriers, or roadblocks that unnecessarily hinder their progress toward goal attainment and rewards that accrue as a result of being evaluated as an effective performer. (Crawford, LePine, & Rich, 2010, p. 836)

In a conflicting finding, in a study of teachers and engagement, Klusman et al. (2008) suggested that job demands (particularly those demands related to student issues) did not lead to engagement, but only to exhaustion.

None of the student characteristics were associated with teachers’ engagement. Teachers’ behavior appeared to be independent of student discipline, background, or ability level. These results are in line with the predictions of the job demands–resources model, which states that resources are more strongly related to employee engagement, whereas demands are more strongly related to employee exhaustion. (Klusmann, et al., p. 146).

In this case, it seems clear that job demands related to students are associated with hindrances. These equivocal findings unfortunately leave policy makers with a less than
satisfactory understanding of the concept of job demands. There is an interesting implication inherent in this finding – that engagement and exhaustion (or burnout) are not part of a continuum, but rather unique phenomena. This brings to mind the seminal work of Frederick Herzberg (1966) and his two factor theory of motivation that states that one set of factors (motivators) may lead to satisfaction, but the other set of factors (hygiene) can, at best, lead to a lack of dissatisfaction. “In line with previous research, our results indicate that research on occupational well-being should consider positive (engagement) and negative (exhaustion) aspects of psychological functioning separately” (Klusmann, et al., 2008, p. 147).

**PSYCHOSOCIAL SAFETY CLIMATE**

Dollard and Bakker (2010), in their study of teachers and administrators in Australia, argued that psychosocial safety climate (PSC) precedes both job demands and job resources. The define PSC as the “organizational policies, practices, and procedures about psychological health and safety” (p. 593).

There is a theoretical and empirical case for managers to develop a robust PSC in organizations, to potentially reduce demands, bolster resources, and build environments conducive to health and engagement (Bond, Flaxman, & Loivette, 2006). The key action is to build PSC through senior management involvement and commitment and the enactment of related policies, practices, and procedures. Arguably the safety climate movement tackling physical health problems and injuries and has gained considerable traction in organizations. However, the cost of psychological ill-health is significant (ASCC, 2006) and also requires attention. In addition to a conceptual gap, we see a social, moral, and legal imperative for the identification of PSC. (Dollard & Bakker, 2010, pp. 595-596)

**ANTECEDENTS OF EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT**

Other research into employee engagement has attempted to describe and catalogue the factors or conditions that foster employee engagement. These are often referred to as the antecedents of employee engagement. “Given the apparent desirability of having engaged employees, researchers have focused a great deal of their attention on identifying
antecedent conditions of engagement that could, in turn, inform managerial efforts to foster increased levels of engagement among employees” (Crawford, LePine, & Rich, 2010, p. 834). The antecedents of engagement are thought to facilitate employee engagement. Many of these antecedents fall into the category of working conditions (or at least employee perceptions of working conditions) and, it is argued that, “common across these perspectives is the focus on perceived working conditions as predictors of engagement” (Crawford, LePine, & Rich, 2010, p. 834).

In figure 2, Fornes, Rocco, and Wollard’s (2008) model of antecedents is presented. In this model antecedents are separated into those that lead to organizational commitment and those that lead to individual commitment. There is overlap in these antecedents, and for the purpose of this report, it is sufficient to say that the antecedents (congruency, interesting work, clarity of purpose, equity and fairness, feedback and recognition, empowerment, autonomy) in various configurations lead to both

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**Figure 2. A Conceptual Model of Workplace Commitment (from Fornes, Rocco, & Wollard, 2008, p. 9).**

In figure 2, Fornes, Rocco, and Wollard’s (2008) model of antecedents is presented. In this model antecedents are separated into those that lead to organizational commitment and those that lead to individual commitment. There is overlap in these antecedents, and for the purpose of this report, it is sufficient to say that the antecedents (congruency, interesting work, clarity of purpose, equity and fairness, feedback and recognition, empowerment, autonomy) in various configurations lead to both
organizational and individual commitment.

In a similar vein, May, et al. (2004) argued for organizations to take an active role in fostering conditions that lead to commitment and engagement. “Managers should attempt to foster meaningfulness through the effective design of jobs. Second, the findings of this study also suggest that selecting the proper employees for particular work roles will enhance meaningfulness. Care must be taken to learn more about the personal aspirations and desires of employees in order to fit them to roles that will allow them to better express themselves” (p. 33).

Other important antecedents identified in the literature on teacher engagement include:

1. Shared decision making
2. Focus on quality
3. Peer to peer networks
4. Cultures of collaboration
5. Stability in leadership
6. Board support for collaboration
7. Community support for collaboration
8. Frequent two-way communication
9. Clear goals and expectations
10. Alignment of goals among stakeholders
11. Ensured sustainability
12. Engendered trust, shared values, and norms

FLEXIBILITY

Flexibility on work arrangements is one area that has been given significant attention as an antecedent of engagement. “Although use of a formal flexible work arrangement such as flextime or telework has the largest influence on perceived flexibility and employee engagement, this study demonstrates that even occasional use of flexibility is associated with increased engagement and retention” (Richman, et al., 2008, p. 195).
Although flexibility in working conditions is seen as an important workplace condition leading to increased employee engagement, there is also a generational consideration with respect to workplace flexibility.

Employees who have the flexibility they need are significantly more engaged than those who do not have the flexibility they need across all age groups. However, among those who have the flexibility they need, those age 45 and older were more engaged than their counterparts younger than age 45. (Pitt-Catsoughes & Matz-Costa, 2008, p. 225)

As well, some research suggests that it is not the policies with respect to job flexibility that are key, but the actual experiences of flexibility that employees have. Eaton (2003) explored the relationship between employment flexibility and commitment to the organization and employee productivity. She characterized employee flexibility as formal and informal – formal relating to organizational policies and informal to actual practices afforded employees in the workplace environment. These formal and informal flexibility policies are considered family friendly and may include allowances for flexible work scheduling, employee autonomy over workspace, or the ability to move easily between full time and part time employment. She found that flexibility was positively related to both organizational commitment and productivity. Further, she found that the “perceived usability of flexible work-family policies is important to employees, more so than either the presence of formal or informal policies alone” (p. 163). In her study, she explored the concept of employee commitment rather than employee engagement. Although not fully defined, organizational commitment in her study was related to employee decisions to remain in the employment of the organization.

RELATED CONCEPTS

There are a number of related concepts that have been studies and share features with studies in employee engagement. One such concept is employee commitment (Benkoff, 1997). This has been identified earlier in this report and shares a number of features with the concept of engagement. Other related notions include climate, empowerment and
teacher engagement. These concepts are discussed briefly here, as they may provide some further insight into the concept of employee engagement.

**CLIMATE AND EMPOWERMENT**

Gemberling, Smith, and Villani (2000) encourage school boards to consider empowerment of staff as a key driver for system effectiveness. They argued that empowerment can best be accomplished by: a) allowing for decision making by those most closely affected by the decisions; b) modeling positive and respectful relationships between board members and the Superintendent (Director); c) seeking input from staff on board decisions; d) seeking open dialogue on issues; paying attention to staff development; and e) surveying staff about their satisfaction levels.

**TEACHER ENGAGEMENT**

In a preliminary search of the literature, it appears as though “teacher engagement” can be connected to student learning and to a sense of identity and belonging. Much of the research explores engagement and identity in terms of commitment to and identification with schools as the unit of analysis. I have found little that explores engagement and identification at the level of the school board or school division. This may pertain to the limitation of the extant literature as identified above with respect to the location of research in jurisdictions without school board or division-level organizational structures. Related more to the school division level is a growing body of literature dealing with teacher collaboration in governance. This includes some work done on “employee-management” partnerships. There are several dimensions to engagement/empowerment that might be worth exploring: teachers’ empowerment and autonomy as well as teachers’ collaborating in governance resulting in investment and “buy-in”. There are several purposes of “teacher engagement” apparent in the extant literature:

1. Teacher engagement can be seen as part of individual teaching practice – engaged teachers are fully motivated to work productively toward system goals and initiatives. This is also connected to some studies on teacher stress and well-being;
2. Teacher engagement and empowerment can been seen as vehicles to drive
system-level school improvement initiatives;
3. Teacher empowerment can be seen as a mechanism to develop organizational trust and a sense of identification with a school (or perhaps school division) and a commitment to organizational mission and vision; and
4. Teacher collaboration can be seen as a way to engage multiple partners in system-level improvement and to engender positive employee-employer relations.

LEADERSHIP AND EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

There is considerable literature supporting leadership and management practices to facilitate employee engagement. In the education sector, considerable research has been done on the role of the school principal in employee engagement. Once again, this is not surprising given that research conducted in Europe and Australia, for example, tends to focus on school level factors in engagement as there is no equivalent organizational or governance structure to school boards and school divisions in these jurisdictions. Again, unsurprisingly, leadership is identified as central to creating the conditions for employee engagement. For example, “when individual teacher factors were controlled, schools with a more supportive principal had more engaged teachers. This finding emphasises the principal’s responsibility and potential influence” (Klusman, Kunter, Trautwein, Lüdtke, & Baumert, 2008, pp. 145-146).

May et al. (2004) identify the types of activities that managers undertake to ensure employee engagement. These practices look much like the antecedents of engagement, and it is clear that leaders and managers are primarily responsible for creating antecedent conditions. “Specifically, it is important for managers to encourage employees to solve work-related problems, develop new skills, participate in decisions, treat employees fairly, be consistent in their actions, demonstrate integrity between their words and actions, use open communication and demonstrate genuine concern for employees” (p. 33).

Cartwright and Holmes (2006) argued that trust in leadership is essential for overcoming cynicism and promoting employee engagement. In particular they identify transparency in information sharing and high levels of emotional intelligence in leaders
as central in facilitating employee engagement. Additionally, they suggest that organizational change efforts “frequently fail due to mistrust because organizations do not provide employees with a meaningful framework to understand and justify the proposed change” (Cartwright & Holmes, 2006, p. 205). They claim that leaders can ameliorate sources of distrust through efforts to clearly communicate and educate employees on the meaning of organizational change.

Also, the role of principals or managers in encouraging or supporting autonomy appears to be important for the promotion of employee engagement.

Principals who adopt autonomy-supportive behaviors can make themselves available to provide information, clarify ambiguities related to their role or tasks, respond to questions, and offer assistance or guidance as needed. Furthermore, they can foster a positive perception of resources by creating an autonomy-conducive environment, sharing information, and acknowledging teachers’ contributions (Fernet, et al., 2012, p. 523)

Gurman and Saks (2011) proposed that managers and leaders require training in employee engagement. In particular, it is suggested that leaders need to know employee engagement when they see it. As stated before, the overworked, ultra committed employee may not be the best example of an engaged employee. Leaders without specific training in employee engagement run the risk of mistaking effort and productivity with engagement. This has the potential to lead to employee turnover and burnout.

A shift in the performance management process towards a focus on employee engagement will require that supervisors and managers receive training on employee engagement. Along these lines, they will need to learn what employee engagement feels like and looks like, how to develop and facilitate it, and how to assess it and include it in the performance appraisal and feedback process. (Gurman & Saks, 2011, p. 133)

Shuck and Herd (2012) argue for a specific leadership style or model for employee engagement to be realized. They argue that leaders who intend to support
employee engagement ought to be trained in and practice a transformational leadership model.

To progress beyond the foundational conditions for employee engagement, leaders must move beyond transactional leadership to transformational leadership. Training initiatives directed at developing leaders’ transformational leadership skills have been shown to be successful at increasing followers’ motivation, commitment, and performance levels (Barling, Weber, & Kelloway, 1996; Dvir, Eden, Avolio, & Shamir, 2002). Such transformational leadership training initiatives warrant further consideration in terms of their empirical impact on employee engagement. (p. 19)

Tims et al. (2011) concurred with the assertion that a transformational approach is called for and training will be required to achieve transformational leadership practices.

The transformational style of the supervisor seems to be highly important, because it boosts employees’ optimism and in turn enhances their work engagement. Thus, it might be worthwhile for organizations to invest in transformational leadership training for their leaders. There is research that shows that it is possible to train leaders in the transformational leadership style” (pp. 129-130).

School systems in Saskatchewan have been aware of and practiced transformational leadership since at least the 1980s. As instructional leadership gains momentum in the province’s educational systems, it is unclear how employee engagement will be affected. More research is required to explore the power of instructional leadership as a driver of employee engagement.

SYNTHESIS

Fernet, Austin, Trépanier, and Dussault (2013) suggested the following important, if somewhat obvious, recommendation for policy and practice. “From an organizational standpoint, interventions that aim to reduce job demands and increase job resources are
recommended” (p. 134). They go further to provide specific recommendations for organizations. It is worth quoting at length here.

Organizations concerned with alleviating job demands can assess employee workloads to ensure that they are appropriate for their skills and capacities. Managers could also attempt to clarify employee roles and responsibilities. When it is difficult to eliminate or reduce job demands, increasing job resources appears to be a promising approach. A workplace that offers employees more decision latitude and provides more support would reduce emotional exhaustion and depersonalization while contributing to a feeling of personal accomplishment. To complement this support, interventions could aim to more fully meet employees’ psychological needs. In addition to the workplace factors documented in this study, psychological resources could be reinforced through task enrichment (job design) and by management’s leadership behaviours.

With respect to task enrichment, the research suggests that workplaces that provide favourable job characteristics (e.g., task significance, autonomy, and feedback from the job) foster employees’ psychological resources (Gagne et al., 1997). Moreover, managers who adopt an autonomy-supportive style towards their employees (i.e., acknowledge their subordinates’ perspective, provide meaningful information, offer opportunities for choice, and encourage self-initiative) facilitate the satisfaction of employee needs (Baard et al., 2004). To obtain similar outcomes, managers could also use transformational leadership behaviours, as other studies (e.g., Bono & Judge, 2003) have linked transformational behaviours to autonomous motivation in employees, which entails the satisfaction of psychological needs. Such behaviours occur when managers provide employees with constructive feedback, encourage them to think creatively, and convince them to put extra effort into their job (Bass, 1985). (pp. 134-135)
Most important in their assessment of best practices for employee engagement are the provision for a level of employee autonomy, meaningful, timely and relevant feedback from supervisors, involvement in decision making, and role clarity.

Runhaar, Konerman, and Sanders (2013) described how teachers, for example might benefit from and access more autonomy in their roles. “By increasing teachers’ autonomy, schools can compensate for teachers’ relatively lower levels of work engagement. Increasing autonomy can for example be done by giving teachers more freedom with respect to their time schedule and the way they prioritize their tasks” (p. 107).

As mentioned previously, the concept of flexibility with respect to work schedules and work environment also seems significant in promoting engagement. Building level leaders and managers are central to the provision of flexibility and should be empowered to provide flexibility where feasible and where appropriate. “Providing employees with access to the flexibility they need provides managers with a tool to enhance the engagement of workers of all ages, but especially older workers” (Pitt-Catsoughes & Matz-Costa, 2008, pp. 225-226).

Professional growth opportunities and development are also identified as important support for the development of engagement. “Human Resources Management instruments like professional development opportunities, induction programs for newcomers or constructive feedback from the supervisor (Runhaar, Konermann, & Sanders, in press) positively influence teachers’ work engagement, because these instruments empower teachers to deal with the challenges they face in their jobs” (Runhaar, Konermann, & Sanders, 2013, p. 106). As stated here, supervisory practices, particularly feedback, have been identified as a significant driver of employee engagement. As well as supervisor feedback, it is also suggested in the literature on teacher engagement, that opportunities for collegial feedback be provided. “Schools are advised to invest in creating the necessary conditions within teacher teams that enable teachers to engage into (informal) learning activities like feedback asking, observing each other and exchange advises and ideas” (Runhaar, Konermann, & Sanders, 2013, p. 106).
As significant as the actual policies and provisions in place for employees, it is argued that employees’ perceptions of support are deemed important. Saks (2006) suggests that inquiry into engagement does two things: it provides valuable information on the state of employee engagement in the organization and it is communicated to employees that their well-being is important to the organization.

Organizations that wish to improve employee engagement should focus on employees’ perceptions of the support they receive from their organization. Organizational programs that address employees’ needs and concerns (e.g. surveys, focus groups, and suggestion programs) and demonstrate caring and support (e.g. flexible work arrangements) might cause employees to reciprocate with higher levels of engagement. (Saks, 2006, p. 614)

Shuck, et al. (2011) argued that organizations and leaders can provide the conditions for engagement by ensuring employees are well matched to their roles, ensuring the provision of a climate that supports psychological well-being, and focusing on the emotional experiences of employees within the organization.

Evidence… has suggested that creating opportunities for employees to work in roles in which their knowledge, skills, and abilities fit with their job responsibilities, creating and then supporting a positive psychological climate, and providing opportunities for employees to emotionally connect with their organization are conditions that support a relation with employee engagement. (Shuck, et al., 2011, p. 442)

And, as stated previously, they argue that training about the concept of employee engagement is required for leaders to have the capacity to lead for employee engagement. “Practitioners could also encourage the development of employee engagement by training leaders, managers, and supervisors about the conditions that have a relation with employee engagement” (Shuck, et al., 2011, p. 442).
Welch (2011) also highlighted the importance of a thoughtful and carefully considered communication approach when it comes to messaging about employee engagement.

Tone could be evaluated in relation to its possible impact on perceptions of safety, and its likelihood of encouraging dialogue. Since engagement levels differ within workforces, the model encourages communicators to consider the communication needs of employees with varying levels of engagement. For example, a highly emotionally engaged employee may have a greater need for information to validate an ongoing sense of belonging to the organisation. Likewise, employees with high cognitive engagement may value access to detailed material to facilitate their understanding of, and contributions to organisational goals. Consequently, the model encourages practitioners to evaluate employee communication needs from an engagement perspective. (Welch, 2011, p. 341)

In summary, the literature and research on employee engagement suggests that leaders and those responsible for designing the organization context and culture have a central role in establishing the conditions for employee engagement. The research suggests the following practices that may lead to increased job resources and reduced job demands:

- Ensure alignment of employee roles with employee skills and aptitudes
- Increase employee discretion, latitude, and autonomy where possible and where appropriate.
- Communicate the significance of each employee’s role within the organization.
- Demonstrate how each employee’s role aligns with the core mission and vision of the organization
- Focus on employee feedback and supervision which is relevant and timely
- Provide professional development and opportunities for growth
- Where possible provide for job flexibility
- Survey employees regularly about employee engagement
- Train leaders in the conditions that promote employee engagement and in transformational leadership approaches
• Consider open, transparent, and engagement oriented communication
# Examples of Key Indicators/Best Practices for Teacher Engagement: A Conceptual Framework

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lever</th>
<th>Type or Level of Responsibility</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Internal communication</td>
<td>Organizational culture and Organizational factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reputation of integrity</td>
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<tr>
<td>Innovation</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Flexibility</td>
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<tr>
<td>Clearly explains job importance</td>
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<tr>
<td>Customer focus</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Future orientation</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Demonstrates strong commitment to diversity</td>
<td>Manager Characteristics</td>
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<tr>
<td>Demonstrates honesty and integrity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adapts to changing circumstances</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Clearly articulates organizational goals</td>
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<tr>
<td>Possesses job skills</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sets realistic performance expectations</td>
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<tr>
<td>Puts people in the right roles at the right time</td>
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<tr>
<td>Helps find solutions to problems</td>
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<tr>
<td>Breaks down projects into manageable components</td>
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<tr>
<td>Accepts responsibility for successes and failures</td>
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<tr>
<td>Encourages and manages innovation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Accurately evaluates employee potential</td>
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<tr>
<td>Respects employees as individuals</td>
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<td>Demonstrates passion to succeed</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cares about employees</td>
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<tr>
<td>Has a good reputation within the organization</td>
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<tr>
<td>Is open to new ideas</td>
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<tr>
<td>Defends direct reports</td>
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<tr>
<td>Analytical thinking</td>
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<tr>
<td>Helps attain necessary information, resources, and technology</td>
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<tr>
<td>Makes sacrifices for direct reports</td>
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<tr>
<td>Quality of informal feedback</td>
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<tr>
<td>Encourages employee development</td>
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<tr>
<td>Persuades employees to move in a desired direction</td>
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<tr>
<td>Accurately evaluates employee performance</td>
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<tr>
<td>Identifies and articulates a long-term vision for the future</td>
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<tr>
<td>Inspires others</td>
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<tr>
<td>Places employees interests first</td>
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<tr>
<td>Provides job freedom</td>
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<tr>
<td>Is intelligent</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clearly communicates performance expectations</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Appropriately handles crisis</td>
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<tr>
<td>Creates clear work plans and timetables</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Trusts employees to do their job</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lets upper management know of employee effectiveness</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Listens carefully to views and options</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connection between work and organizational strategy</td>
<td>Day-to-day work characteristics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance of job to organizational success</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding of how to complete work projects</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance of projects to employees’ personal development</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to obtain necessary information</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is open to new ideas</td>
<td>Senior executive team qualities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 1. The levers of employee engagement**
Table 1 identifies the levers for employee engagement. According to the Corporate Leadership Council (2004), the preceding elements (levers) are the most significant in promoting employee engagement. These are categorized in four broad areas: (1) organizational culture and organizational factors; (2) manager characteristics; (3) day-today work characteristics; and (4) senior executive team qualities.

In this review of the literature, there are other job resources or antecedents of employee engagement that are particularly relevant to educational organizations. As has been discussed, to a considerable extent, the research into employee engagement has been related to engagement for educational personnel. The following antecedents seem most significant for employee engagement in the education sector and are pertinent to the work of school boards and divisional senior leadership. Many of these antecedents may be present at both the school level and at the divisional level. They are not distinguished here; however, all are posited to have relevance at the larger organizational level.

Table 2 identifies the antecedents for best practices in employee engagement in seven broad areas: (1) messaging; (2) employee voice and agency; (3) employee discretion and control; (4) professional life; (5) health and well-being; (6) clarity of purpose; and (7) leadership.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Messaging</th>
<th>Employee Voice and Agency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Appreciation, recognition, and celebration of accomplishment</td>
<td>• Seeking input from staff on board decisions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Surveying staff about their satisfaction levels</td>
<td>• Employee participation in decisions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Open, transparent, and frequent communication</td>
<td>• Shared decision making</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Surveying staff about their satisfaction levels</td>
<td>• Seeking open dialogue with employees on issues</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employee discretion and control</th>
<th>Professional Life</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Autonomy</td>
<td>• Supervisory coaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Job Flexibility</td>
<td>• Peer to peer networks</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Health and Well-Being</th>
<th>Clarity of Purpose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Support for work-life balance/Employee Assistance</td>
<td>• Clear goals and expectations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Psychosocial safety climate</td>
<td>• Alignment of goals among stakeholders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Equity and fairness</td>
<td>• Focus on quality</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Leadership                                                               |                                                                            |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|                                                                            |
| • Transformational leadership                                           |                                                                            |
| • Engagement oriented leadership                                         |                                                                            |
| • Stability in leadership                                               |                                                                            |

Table 2. Model of best practices in employee engagement in educational settings
PART THREE: AN ANALYSIS OF EXTANT POLICIES AND DIVISIONAL DOCUMENTATION IN SASKATCHEWAN

This analysis examines only publicly available documents in a sample of school divisions in the province. As such, the analysis represents a limited series of insights into the realities of employee engagement in each organization. As important as the explicit statements of policy are the actual practices employed in the school divisions. There are significant limitations in establishing the practices employed, although statements found in public documents may point to division practices that can be implicated in employee engagement. Additionally, no causal relation can be established between the documents identified and the actual practices. That is, a school division for which little reference for employee engagement can be found in public documentary sources cannot be assumed to have low levels of employee engagement.

It is recognized that these public sources may be seen as primarily a portal for communication to the general public, yet it is assumed that some insight into the internal policies and practices with respect to employee engagement and the employee experience can be determined from the public profile of the school division. As well, there may be some effect of school division size apparent in the type of information communicated through the public documents. That is, very large urban school divisions may show a preference for website use, for example, to be intended as a vehicle primarily for communicating with the public and media rather than for communicating with employees. This is merely a hypothesis, however, and not one that impacts the methodology of the data collection or analysis.

The following is a brief overview of the documents reviewed that highlight elements of employee engagement developed in the literature review. There is considerable variability in the amount of information available on public divisional websites; some school divisions have considerable materials that would support employee engagement.
CHINOOK SCHOOL DIVISION

In the division’s “Direction Newsletter” (February, 2015) employees are highlighted in an article on staff appreciation week. “It is important to acknowledge the impact that teachers and support staff have on the children in southwest Saskatchewan, and Chinook School Division is very proud of our employees. We are privileged to have so many talented and passionate people in our communities who truly care about the education and development of our children” (p. 4).

In the Chinook School Division Policy manual, there is a detailed policy in the human resources section on violence prevention as well as employee assistance. There are also provisions in policy for long service awards with the division.

The board’s 2013 strategic plan does not explicitly address issues of employee engagement or human resources as a key strategic priority. However, the 2013-2014 Annual Report states “Chinook School Division has used its vision of being a great place to go to school and go to work as a driving factor in day-to-day operations” (p. 3). This statement is also found in other documents such as the board vision statement, but specific planning for improving the work-life of employees is not obvious in the online documents surveyed. Also notable in the Annual Report is the inclusion of “promising practices” which highlight many practices related to human resources connected to employee engagement. Staff professional development aligned to division goals, the lead teacher concept, and coaching models all highlight some activity focused on strategic initiatives that have implications for employee work-life.

GOOD SPIRIT SCHOOL DIVISION

The Good Spirit School Division (GSSD) publishes a document entitled “Honour Roll”. This publication highlights the division’s belief in “People Engagement”. In this section of the publication, it is stated that the division sought out input from bus drivers in a focus group to explore transportation-related issues. In addition, equity processes are discussed that ensure “students, staff and school needs will be met in a fair and transparent manner.” This kind of publication appears an effective way to highlight engagement principles within the division. It highlights some key activities and describes
the involvement of staff. There is also repeated reference to the principles of “fairness” and “transparency”.

In the 2013-2014 annual report, the division articulates a long-term professional development strategy that aligns with division strategic planning.

We embarked on a robust professional development plan beginning in 2013-14 and extending for the next 5 years. This plan or continuum is as a direct result of the GSSD strategic plan and the feedback obtained from a number of educational stakeholders. The PD plan represents a cohesive "big picture" look at how all of the initiatives within GSSD connect, with the focus on teaching and learning. (Good Spirit School Division, Annual Report 2013-2014, p. 2)

On the GSSD website, it is indicated that this professional development plan “is a direct link with our strategic goals of… strengthening staff engagement and morale.”

In the Board Policy Handbook (2013), one of the responsibilities of the board is the “Recognition of students, staff and community” (p. 8). As well, in the aspirational statements of the board policy handbook (2013), the statement on people engagement is worth citing in its entirety.

We are all a community of learners. Collaborative partnerships with students, staff, families and community members will enhance educational opportunities. The collective efforts of highly motivated, passionate, dedicated staff will result in successful students and promote continual progress towards ensuring every student is provided with the ability to succeed both within the school environment and after graduation.

Internal and external communications focus on fostering and growing positive relations with students, staff, families and our communities to create a sense of confidence, optimism and pride in Good Spirit School Division. Innovative and
inspiring board members, students, staff, families and community members in all areas of education will be positive ambassadors of their school experience.

A thriving school community is built on a team effort within a healthy, culturally-responsive environment. As we continue to grow and change, our focus remains that of a safe, welcoming learning atmosphere that celebrates diversity, fairness, respect, responsibility and the deepening of knowledge. (p. 3)

Importantly, GSSD includes staff Recognition in its administrative procedures. As an example GSSD awarded 14 staff members with awards of distinction in 2014-2015. “Sea Stars are those employees which are “Sparkling Examples of Accomplished Skillful Talented and Radiant Staff” who portray dedication to student success in one of three recognition areas”

**HOLY FAMILY SCHOOL DIVISION**

In the 2013-2014 Annual Report, it is stated that the school division had implemented “staff appreciation events;” however, little information was provided about the nature of these events.

In the “Director’s Report” there are mentions of a “Human Resources focus,” but no details of what the nature of this focus might be is included. There is little information available in publicly available documents to get a clearer picture of what this might mean. No HR policy or further statements of this focus are available online. The “Message from the Director” (Sept. 2014) states “Holy Family appreciates its partnership with teachers in the leadership of Convention Day”. As well, the strategic plan includes the statement “HOPE is the belief that all Holy Family students can learn and that our school staff with support from our parents, parish, Central Office and Board, can and will turn that belief into positive reality.” In the division’s guiding principles, it is stated that “We value and celebrate the success of our students and staff”

At least in terms of the publicly available documents, Holy Family appears to refer to the importance of recognizing the contribution of staff and the importance of
human resources. There is not, however, a robust description of the extent to which the division practices align with these messages, and the public communication of these ideals are minimal.

**HORIZON SCHOOL DIVISION**

In the messages from the Director of Education, there are references to principles such as open and transparent communication processes and meetings with staff members to provide input on decisions in the school division. The “This Week in Horizon” publication written by the Director of Education is posted weekly on the school division website. The publication is substantial and represents an apparent emphasis on openness and transparency. The publication also includes multiple examples of recognition of staff (e.g. mention of the awarding of one of their principals as one of 40 distinguished principals in Canada for 2015).

The division’s statement of principles does not explicitly identify employee engagement, but the following principles might be seen to implicate engagement as an area of interest in the division:

- We value effective communication & productive partnerships
- We value optimism and the celebration of success. (2013-2014 Annual Report, p. 7)

In the division’s strategic plan, there is no explicit reference to strategies for employee engagement, although there is reference to recruitment and succession planning as human resource planning strategies.

**LIVING SKY SCHOOL DIVISION**

On the Living Sky School Division (LSSD) website, the following statement is made with respect to employees:

- We appreciate and thank our staff for everything they do to represent Living Sky School Division and produce strong citizens and prepare students to be educated, capable and open-minded.”
LSSD has a number of publications that serve as a communication means with school division employees and the public. The “Staying Connected Newsletter” appears to be published quarterly and highlights many of the activities of employees within the division. This newsletter begins with a message from the Director of Education. In the December 2014 issue, for example, the Director points to the work of employees in the division:

Let me conclude by thanking our staff members across Living Sky School Division for their commitment to our students. Through your support and regardless of your role, students are afforded the opportunities they deserve to learn, to excel, and to give.

Additionally, many submissions to this newsletter are made by employees. This newsletter serves to act as a communication portal and also is used to recognize the efforts of employees. Interestingly, the newsletter not only highlights the work of teachers, but also bus drivers, secretaries and other employees. This publication not only mentions employees as a group, it also singles out individual employees from several employee groups for recognition.

Also found in the newsletter was reference to opportunities for shared decision making between employees and division leadership. On October 21st, School Bus Driver Appreciation Day is specifically mentioned and bus drivers are commended for “the hard work and dedication… put into their jobs every day.” As in other jurisdictions, LSSD identified Education Week as an opportunity to formally recognize the efforts of employees in the division.

The LSSD vision statement includes the following statement: “Growth Without Limits, Learning For All: It is a statement that represents an environment where staff and students flourish.” In the statement of principles, transparency is identified as a guiding value and the following statement may reflect practices in the divisions: “Our organization strengthens through shared leadership.”

The Board’s current operational plan does not include any specific reference to elements of employee engagement.
The 2013-2014 Annual Report does not specifically highlight employee engagement strategies; however, there is an identified alignment between division goals and teacher professional development. “Professional learning sessions for teachers continued to offer a variety of choices and formats to meet a range of learning styles, needs, and division/school based goals” (p. 7).

LSSD has a comprehensive set of procedures for Human Resource management. This includes policies on staff supervision and growth, recruitment and placement, leaves for advanced study, as well as, supervision and evaluation of non-teaching employees. Although there is a procedure in place for recognizing long service in the division, there is no equivalent procedure for celebrating staff accomplishments.

**NORTHERN LIGHTS SCHOOL DIVISION**

Several of the belief statements articulated by the Northern Lights School Division are relevant to practices in employee engagement. In particular the following two statements clearly link the human resources practices in the division with the broader work and goals of the organization:

“the responsibility for effective education is a collaborative effort between students and all staff of the division, parents and other community members.”

“a representative workforce will result in positive role models which will encourage and motivate students to achieve”

The division also identifies the support it provides to staff on the home page of their site. “Northern Lights School Division wants to provide the support our teachers need to be their best for their students. We offer a large library of teacher resources to help you plan for a great year.”

In the teachers’ section of the website, many resources for teacher development and planning are highlighted.

Most significantly, In the Division Foundational Statements within the policy handbook, the flowing goal is articulated:
Goal #4: The NLSD #113 is the employer of choice

Strategies:

1. Implement the supervision and evaluation AP for all staff
2. Provide professional development support for all staff to grow professionally
3. Provide short and long term professional development, promotional and/or lateral career pathing, succession planning throughout the division
4. Have competitive salaries and benefits
5. Empower staff and improve morale
6. Promote quality of life in the North
7. Encourage and support innovative and creative ideas
8. Recognize achievement

In addition to long service recognition, this school division maintains a fund for “occasional recognition” as highlighted in the following statement.

1. Occasional Recognition

Employees are important team members who provide valuable services promoting core goals of the Division that warrant public recognition and support on occasion. (Northern Lights School Division, Administrative Procedure 417)

REGINA ROMAN CATHOLIC SEPARATE SCHOOL DIVISION

On the division’s website, the employees are described in the following way: “1,100 dedicated people work together as the staff of Regina Catholic, including teachers, education support professionals, and CUPE employees who manage our facilities.” Also, the role of employees (among others) in meeting the goals of the school division are articulated. “Our students, staff, and parents do work together to make a difference. Every month, we publish our Director’s Communique on the Division website. These publications are always filled with countless examples of students and staff members reaching out to others in our local, national, and international communities in an effort to put our Division’s Theme into action.”
The board meeting agendas include an item called “School Success Story”. In the meeting minutes, successful programs in schools are highlighted and specific employees are named and commended.

In the board policy (goals) document, there is no explicit mention of goals related to human resource management or employee engagement. In the policy “Treatment of Staff & Volunteers”, it is stated, “Based on Catholic principles, the Director shall take all reasonable steps to ensure working conditions for staff and volunteers are fair, respectful, safe, organized, and clearly stated.”

Regina Catholic is one of the few school divisions that includes an explicit statement pertaining to shared decision making. The following statement (Statement of Beliefs) falls short of establishing a shared decision making process, but does identify that they value employee input into major decisions. “Our community (students, parents, staff, trustees, clergy, and supporters) has a right to have input into major decisions that affect our education community.”

As in the other school divisions examined in this report, Regina Catholic Schools identifies teacher professional development aligned with divisional goals in their 2013-2014 Annual Report (e.g. Grade 3 reading initiative and corresponding teacher PD).

In the 2012-2013 CIAF report, the need for teacher professional development is identified corresponding with most of the specific elements of the plan. For example, in the portion of the plan pertaining to grade 4-8 reading, the division states “To accomplish the above, we would need to in-service Grade 4 teachers on how to benchmark using the Fountas and Pinnell Reading Benchmark Assessment System” (p. 7). This demonstrates how the division sees the role of teacher professional development in achieving division goals.

On the division’s human resource website, there appears to be information about a “distinguished employee” program, but this site is password protected and I was unable to access any specific information about this program. Similarly, the administrative procedures document is not obviously available in the website and may be housed in the password protected area of the division website.
In the Director of Education’s “Communique,” the director highlights the work of employees in the division. In the February 2015 edition, he highlights the work of “difference makers” in the division. One of these is a principal recognized as one of Canada’s Outstanding Principals. In the December, 2014 edition, the director indicates that “92% of our Division employees completed the Q12 Employment Engagement Survey. Thank you! We look forward to the rich discussions that will now take place reviewing the employee feedback.” This is one of the few divisions that have surveyed employee groups about engagement within the division. I was not, however able to find any document pertaining to the engagement survey that indicated findings or how the data were to be used by the board and division.

**SASKATOON PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

The Saskatoon Public Schools’ Board meetings for the past year include an item on most board agendas of “celebrating excellence.” These items, highlighting programs of the school division, are presented by school division employees at the regular board meetings. According to the Board Policy Manual (p. 19), this is a regular item on board meeting agendas. The website articulates the details of the celebrating excellence initiative:

> At every Board of Education meeting, there is an agenda item titled Celebrating Excellence. This report to the board highlights the accomplishments and achievements of our students, staff members and schools. It provides an update on our continuous work to strengthen our learning community and meet our organizational goals.

> In the school board goals, it is indicated: “Our people will be committed to a constructive educational culture that values people, excellence, and life-long learning.”

In the Board’s Policy Manual, the importance of employee recognition is identified. “The Board values its most important resource – its employees – and honours their dedication and exceptional service through the Employee Recognition Program” (p. 69). Although this policy recognizes employees with lengthy service, it does not identify other forms of recognition or celebration of accomplishments.
In the school division’s annual report, the accomplishments of staff are highlighted:

Saskatoon Public Schools has much to be proud of this year. Our students and staff have helped to create an environment in which “learning for life” is the central focus. Congratulations to everyone who contributed to our success in 2013-14. (p. 5)

Saskatoon Public is one of the few divisions for which I have found detailed employee safety procedures (AP 406). In this document, the conditions and supports for employee safety are described – including the mechanisms for employee input in safety committees.

The Annual Report identifies one of its strategic directions as “Our People”. However, I was unable to locate the strategic plan (the link provided in the Annual Report is not functional).

**SUN WEST SCHOOL DIVISION**

The Sun West School Division provides handbooks differentiated for numerous staff groups (e.g. Caretakers’ Handbook, Bus Driver Handbook, Teacher Professional Practice Handbook). These resources represent significant organizational supports to employees. Other school divisions may have similar resources, but Sun West is one of the few that has published such a detailed set of resources intended to provide support and specific direction to school division employees. Similarly, the division posts detailed job descriptions for a variety of employee positions on their human resources web page. As well, they have a detailed description of the employee benefits for all staff groups. This includes a section on the employee and family assistance program.

As in other school divisions, Sun West maintains a procedure for employee long service recognition. In addition, there are clear and extensive policies for educational leave, employee supervision, and professional development and growth.
One of the identified board goals is “to ensure the recruitment, retention, administration of agreements and mentoring of all staff follows best personnel practices” (Board Policy Handbook, p. 3)

In the 2012-2013 Annual Report (the 2013-2014 report was not provided on the website) it is stated that “Sun West School Division has a lot to be proud of this year. Our students and staff have helped to create an environment in which ‘Success for all’ is the central focus. Congratulations to everyone who contributed to our success in 2012-13” (p. 4).

The Sun West School Division has extensive employee professional development resources posted on their website. Particularly for teachers, there are many videos and links pertaining to teacher professional development.

There is also a link to a recent system review performed by the Johnson-Shoyama Graduate School of Public Policy. This review included an extensive study of human resource management in Sun West School Division. The major recommendations in the review relevant to this report center on the “CULTURE, HUMAN RESOURCES AND SATISFACTION REVIEW.” The recommendations are:

1. Employees, especially in Schools, need to experience more self-determination
2. More School-based and professional autonomy
3. Elevate the focus on human resources to become more strategic
4. Develop and maintain robust human resource metrics
5. Develop and regularly monitor succession plans for all key positions
6. Develop annual work plans for all staff
7. Delegate performance management and other duties to in-school administrators.
8. Ensure there is good flow of needed information through to school staff.
9. Align professional development with strategic plans and student needs.

10. Longer lunch breaks, review marking system, address bullying, value school events

(Sun West School Division – Comprehensive System Review, 2014, pp. 53-54).

It seems clear from the materials developed by the division that much clarity has been brought to several of these issues, particularly communication, role identification, expectations, and professional development and growth. It may be that the extensive nature of the employee engagement resources provided on the website are a result of the response to the system review performed recently.
OVERALL SYNTHESIS OF SAMPLE SCHOOL DIVISION DOCUMENTS

Most noticeably absent in many cases from the documents surveyed were strong policy statements concerning employee involvement in decision making or shared leadership. This is not surprising since shared decision making and shared leadership might be more appropriately focused at the school level rather than the school division level. However, it might be worth considering that both shared decision making and shared leadership with employees might be a value that can also be communicated and clarified at the division level.

There is also a potential role for social media and websites in employee engagement. All of the school divisions examined maintain a presence in media. Most have a twitter feed, many have Facebook accounts, and some have YouTube channels. There are multiple purposes for the communications occurring within these types of media. Clearly, one of the main goals is that of public relations with the broader community. It is also apparent that websites, Facebook, and twitter are being used extensively to communicate with parents and community members about such things as bus cancellations and specific school division events as is the use of these media to publicize activities of the schools and school divisions. The potential for using these media for employee engagement purposes, however, is under realized.

In the following section, some general observations about the “state of the art” in employee engagement, as well as noticeable gaps will be presented following the seven broad areas of the model for best practice in employee engagement developed through a review of the research.

MESSAGING

- Appreciation, recognition, and celebration of accomplishment
- Surveying staff about their satisfaction levels
- Open, transparent, and frequent communication
Most divisions in this report recognized employees for long service to the division. Less frequent was formal recognition of accomplishments by employees. A few of the divisions studied had a formal “distinguished employee award”, but this appeared to be the exception rather than the rule. It was noted, however, that frequent informal recognition of achievements and accomplishments was included in newsletters and communication from the Director of Education. Also, it was common for members of multiple employee groups to receive such recognitions; however, teachers were most often singled out in this way.

Most divisions have communicated with frequency with employees. Several school divisions employed the practice of weekly communication from the Director of Education. These communications were often focused on employee matters and were seen as in alignment with the literature with respect to the promotion of employee engagement. In other cases, school boards provided communication at regular intervals for employees. There is great variation in the quality and frequency of these communications from senior leaders and school boards.

Only one school division appeared to have recently surveyed employees with respect to their levels of satisfaction or engagement. It is recommended in the literature that employer surveys of employee engagement be performed regularly. Such surveys provide valuable information for the employer, and also communicate to employees that engagement is taken seriously in the organization. Several examples of survey items to measure employee engagement are included at the end of this report (Appendix A).

**EMPLOYEE VOICE AND AGENCY**

- Seeking input from staff on board decisions
- Employee participation in decisions
- Shared decision making
- Seeking open dialogue with employees on issues

Many school divisions indicated that employee input is sought when the board is faced with major or significant decisions. The role of employees in decision-making processes is less than obvious. As stated previously, this may be appropriate, in that, the form for
both shared decision making and shared leadership might be at the school level. Once again, this may not be as easily applied to staff groups of non-instructional groups who may find it difficult to participate in shared decision making or shared leadership at the school level.

**EMPLOYEE DISCRETION AND CONTROL**

- Autonomy
- Job flexibility

The notion of job flexibility is relatively well developed and identified in human resource policies and administrative procedures. Most school divisions in this report have extensive policies with respect to formal flexibility. It is difficult to assess the extent of informal flexibility from a review of documentary sources. Autonomy is also not apparent in the documents examined. Once again, this may not be a formalized phenomenon in school divisions and autonomy may be evident in school level practices. It is, however, clearly identified in the literature as a key driver of employee engagement and may benefit from formalization or enculturation. Many organizations in, for example, the technology sector use autonomy as a key value for organizing for innovative work.

**PROFESSIONAL LIFE**

- Supervisory coaching
- Peer to peer networks
- Cultures of collaboration
- Paying attention to staff development

The professional culture and professional development areas are well developed in all of the school divisions studied. There is more variability, however, in how staff development is highlighted for non-instructional staff groups. For example, the professional development of support staff was not mentioned in relation to division targets in strategic planning documents or annual reports for most, if not all, of the divisions. Again, concepts such as peer to peer networks or collaboration are rarely considered for non-instructional staff groups. One area that could be further emphasized
in divisional documents is the role or model of supervisory coaching. All school divisions have robust policy and procedures on the supervision and evaluation of staff, but these descriptions would not likely be characterized as coaching. The policies and procedures for supervision and evaluation communicate the division’s vision for the nature of the supervisory relationship. The documents reviewed here might be best characterized as portraying a traditional or clinical supervisory model.

**HEALTH AND WELL-BEING**

- Support for work-life balance/ Employee assistance
- Psychosocial safety climate
- Equity and fairness

There is some unevenness in the attention given to psychological and emotional well-being of staff. Several divisions highlight employee assistance programs on their website. The most significant gap in promoting employee engagement in this area concerns the promotion of work-life balance. This antecedent of employee engagement may need more thoughtful consideration and more attention paid to how the value of work-life balance is valued by the employer and promoted for employees. The Northern Lights School Division provides one example of messaging with respect to quality of life beyond the job as a key value.

**CLARITY OF PURPOSE**

- Clear goals and expectations
- Alignment of goals among stakeholders
- Focus on quality

Most school divisions do an excellent job of identifying the goals for the school division and align these priorities with expectations for employees. Sun West School division can be singled out as an exemplar in providing detailed, coherent, and comprehensive employee job descriptions and handbooks for each of the employee groups employed by the division.
LEADERSHIP

- Transformational leadership
- Engagement oriented leadership
- Stability in leadership

Leadership is clearly identified as a central element in meeting division goals. It is less clear in almost all cases how leadership is leveraged to promote employee engagement. It is expected that most principals in these divisions have participated in discussion and development about how they can best support and promote employee engagement. This is not, however, clear from the publicly available documentary sources. Finally, the leadership model recommended in the literature on employee engagement is transformational leadership. Since there is considerable momentum toward and emphasis on instructional leadership as a preferred model in Saskatchewan schools, the implications of this for employee engagement should be considered.

This brief snapshot of publicly available school division documents points to a number of positive and consistent policies and practices to promote employee engagement. There are, however, a few gaps that occur in most contexts and some variability among the divisions studied. The reader is cautioned about the limitations of the documentary sources accessed, but at the very least, this review should serve to highlight the kinds of explicit messaging that are present with respect to the phenomenon of employee engagement. If we can assume that the choices made about the kinds of messages to highlight reflect the priorities and values in school divisions, then perhaps reflection on what is presented in these venues might provide some insight into the practices employed in school divisions in the province.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A: MEASURES OF EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

Autonomy

- Able to decide myself how to execute my work
- A lot of freedom in the execution of my work
- The opportunity to decide myself the order of my work

Social support

- Colleagues had attention for my feelings and problems
- Colleagues helped me with a task
- A nice atmosphere at work

Exchange with supervisor: feedback

- Received enough information about the quality of my performances
- Received enough feedback of my supervisor indicating how well I do my job

Exchange with supervisor: supervisory coaching

- My supervisor used his/her influence to help me with problems at work
- My supervisor informed me whether he/she is satisfied with my work
- My supervisor was friendly and open

Opportunities for development

- My work offered me the opportunity to learn new things
- I had sufficient possibilities to develop myself at work
- I had the opportunity to develop my strengths

(from Bakker & Bal, 2010)
Table 3. Organizational Antecedents to Employee Engagement Index

Considering how your organization operates on a daily basis, reflect on and answer the following questions.

Is the mission and vision clear to our employees? Is the corporate culture authentic? In our organization, what do the words “authentic” and “culture” mean?

Is our organization socially responsible and can our employees participate? Can we name how?

Are managers clear about what they expect from employees; are employees clear about what they expect from their managers?

Is encouragement common? Do employees receive timely feedback?

Are pay, rewards, benefits, and working conditions considered reasonable? How can they be better?

How much control do people have over their jobs? Can we realistically empower them more? How?

How is our leadership viewed?

How challenged do people feel? How do we know this?

Are there opportunities for learning or are there barriers to learning processes in our organization? What can we do to provide equal access?

Is our workplace seen as safe physically, emotionally, intellectually, and socially? What tells us it is unsafe, or safe?

Is the workplace climate positive and what artifacts reflect this?

Is there a focus on talent management and using people’s strengths, or just using people?

Is the culture supportive? How and why?

Wollard & Shuck, 2011, p. 441
Table 2. Individual Antecedents to Employee Engagement Index

Considering your own level of engagement, reflect on and answer the following questions using your current work and workplace as a context.

On a scale of 1 to 10, how engaged are you?

Are you absorbed in your work? Do you find it meaningful? Why or why not?

Are you psychologically available to engage, or are there factors in your work or personal life that are inhibiting you? Can you name the factors?

Do your employee, work and/or family statuses support your engagement? How and why?

Do you have good work/life balance and what can be done to improve it?

Are you dedicated? Motivated? Curious? Optimistic? Vigorous? Do these words describe you?

Is there good “emotional fit” between you and the work you do? Does the work you do fit your coping and learning styles or are you often stressed, bored, or burned out? Why?

Do you feel you have choice and control over your work? Is there anything that could be done to improve your control?

Do you feel that your organization supports your success or impedes your progress? How?

Are you a good corporate citizen? Is your employer a good corporate citizen? How do you define citizen?

Is there a link between your goals and the organization’s goals?

Are you willing to invest your personal energies to reach your organization’s goals? Why or why not?

Please elaborate on your answers in the space below.

Wollard & Shuck, 2011, p. 440
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HR Responsibility</th>
<th>How it relates to employee engagement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Strategic HR Planning**            | People are the main resource that organizations have for delivering services  
Strategic HR planning links HR management directly to an organization's strategic plan and that means that staff will have meaningful roles tied to the strategic direction of the organization  
Strategically planning how your organization will meet its current and future HR needs and how people will be supported and nurtured within your organization is critical for success |
| **Operational HR Planning**          | At an operational level, organizations put in place HR management practices to support management and staff in achieving their day-to-day goals  
Whether it’s determining how many employees are needed to deliver services over the next year or how performance will be monitored, the HR management practices and activities need to be planned to answer the question: "Where is our organization going and how will it get there?"  
An operational plan ensures that employees are properly supported |
| **Compensation and Benefits**        | • Though usually not ranked the most important, compensation is an important factor in job satisfaction  
• An employee who feels adequately compensated monetarily is more likely to stay with your organization |
| **Developing HR Policies**           | • Policies and procedures both communicate the values of your organization and provide everyone with a consistent process to follow  
• Policies and procedures provide your employees with a process to follow and that knowledge can help them confidently approach situations, particularly difficult situations |
| **Employment Legislation and Standards** | • Provincial/territorial and federal governments outline the minimum requirements to ensure a safe and equitable work environment for employees |
Job Descriptions

- Job descriptions are basic HR management tools that can help to increase individual and organizational effectiveness.
- A well-written job description sets an employee up for success by outlining their responsibilities and the parameters of their position.
- Job descriptions also show how an employee's position contributes to the mission, goals and objectives of the organization.

Performance Management

- Performance management is an ongoing process where the manager/supervisor and employee work together to plan, monitor and review an employee's work objectives or goals and overall contribution to the organization.
- Motivates employees to do their best.
- Establishes clear communication between the manager and the employee about what s/he is expected to accomplish.
- Provides on-going, constructive feedback on performance.
- Establishes plans for improving performance, as necessary.
- Identifies the skills and abilities of each employee so that work assignments build on and reflect an employee's strengths.
- Identifies individual employees for more challenging work.
- Assists and supports staff in achieving their work and career goals by identifying training needs and development opportunities.
- Contributes to the succession management plan so that employee skills are developed and employers develop the skills they need to fill potential HR gaps in the future.

Learning, Training and Development

- Investing in training programs helps employees develop personally and professionally.

Workplace Diversity

- Creating an environment where people feel welcome and safe from harassment and discrimination motivates staff to perform.
### Work Teams and Group Dynamics
- Absenteeism and performance problems decrease while productivity, morale and employee retention increases.
- When you develop and support effective teams, you enhance the power and feeling of satisfaction of individuals working on the team.
- When a team works well, it means that staff trust one another and that leads to better sharing of knowledge and understanding.

### Conflict Resolution
- In a healthy workplace, there will be conflict.
- Having a conflict resolution policy and a process will mean that conflict is constructive and not destructive.

### Workplace Wellness Initiatives
- A healthy workplace means more than just warding off colds and the flu.
- It is more holistic and takes into consideration the physical, spiritual, environmental, intellectual, emotional, occupational and mental health of employees.
- Wellness promotion doesn't just benefit the employee — an organization filled with healthy, balanced and fulfilled employees is a productive workplace that retains its employees.

### Employee Recognition
- Giving employees a sense of shared values and purpose by creating a relationship with them is important.
- When you thank employees you value them and that, in turn, is motivating.
- Updating staff on organizational issues through internal communications like e-mail updates and newsletters builds the sense of team and their value to the team.

### Staff-volunteer relations
- Develop a sense of team with staff and volunteers contributing to the organization's mission.

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From: hrcouncil.ca ([http://hrcouncil.ca/hr-toolkit/keeping-people-employee-engagement.cfm](http://hrcouncil.ca/hr-toolkit/keeping-people-employee-engagement.cfm))