

**UPS AND DOWNS:  
CREATING A CULTURE OF ENGAGEMENT AT A SMALL AIRLINE**

by

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## ABSTRACT

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An airline, whether large or small, relies on a vast array of talents and skills to operate successfully. With such a variety of goals and objectives, sometimes it is difficult for employees to see how their contribution affects the success of the company. As a result, employees may just “go about the motions” of their job without being actively engaged in the process. Fostering engagement in an airline presents some unique challenges, such as those derived from the conflicts between diverse work groups and the intensely competitive nature of the aviation industry. This paper explores several areas regarding employee engagement. First, it examines a variety of engagement definitions and the benefits of engagement. Next, it explores the concept of Relational Coordination. Finally, the paper examines the six drivers of workplace engagement and the six high performance work practices that support relational coordination.

A plan for creating a workplace environment, which supports employee engagement, is presented at the end of this document, as a result of combining the information learned about employee engagement and relational coordination with the author’s knowledge of a small airline.

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## INTRODUCTION

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The topic of employee engagement has become a promising focal point for both management theorists and practitioners. Yet, what does “employee engagement” actually mean? As a manager, there is less interest in theory and more interest in looking at the practical advice we can garner on how to motivate employees to meet our organizational objectives. Those in leadership roles have sought to motivate people since people formed into cohesive groups. However, organizations still have difficulty trying to encourage individuals to move in the right direction at the right time. Leaders have used a variety of techniques to motivate their people: ranging from threats and fear, to cajoling and bribery. Modern management theory continues to postulate and promulgate new theories and ideas about how to motivate but, ultimately, the answer comes down to one simple point.

Leadership is not about telling someone to do a task; leadership is about inspiring someone to choose to do what you want him or her to do. At the organizational level, the challenge for the leader is to find a means of persuading employees to choose to work cohesively together to achieve the desired organizational goals and objectives. It may be possible to tell an employee to do a task in the short term. However, in the long term, this approach to management may not achieve the organization’s desired results. Consequently, leaders and managers have sought new management practices that will achieve the desired organizational goals and objectives. The following quote from Sir Alan Jones, Chairman Emeritus of Toyota UK, touches on the role of the

manager within an organization: *"Wherever you work, your job as a manager is to make your people be the best they can be – and usually they don't know just how good they could be. It's individuals that make the difference."*

When referring to employee engagement, we, first, need to answer the question: Does engagement only mean that an employee shows up for work each day and does their job or, is there something more? From an employer's perspective, an engaged and effective employee is one who goes beyond just doing the job and actually becomes actively involved in the job. Recent research by Gallup Research suggests that companies with an engaged workforce improve their earnings at a rate 2.6 times faster than companies who don't have an engaged workforce. This research indicates that these results can be sustained even through poor economic conditions. The financial benefits of having an engaged workforce are apparent. Yet, Gallup has also determined that, in average organizations, the ratio is 1.5:1 of an engaged to actively disengaged employee. The cost to organizations of this active disengagement has been estimated to be \$300 billion in lost productivity in the United States, alone (Gallup, 2010).

As a small regional airline operating in a very competitive environment, Hawkaair must achieve the objectives of profitability while ensuring high levels of safety and customer service. There are two specific questions regarding employee engagement at Hawkaair that need to be examined. The first: is employee engagement a realistic option for improving profitability and

sustainability? The second question: if employee engagement is seen as giving Hawkair a potential competitive advantage, how would it be achieved?

The objective of any airline, stripped down to basics, is to transport passengers from point A to point B, in a safe and efficient manner. This operation is divided into a number of tasks. Each of these tasks is performed, everyday, by a diverse work group of employees who must work together in a coordinated and cooperative manner. The jobs range from the obvious ones like pilot, flight attendant, and customer service representative to those behind the scenes jobs such as mechanic, dispatcher, marketing, and administration staff.

When performing the day-to-day functions associated with operating a small airline, it is common for conflict to arise between work groups due to individuals focusing on their own task without considering their impact on co-workers. Complicating these internal conflicts are the realities of schedule integrity, and ongoing commercial pressures. Airlines face very narrow margins of profitability and since this is the case, they have developed a well earned reputation for financial instability. This volatility as evidenced by bankruptcies and failures of airlines over the last decade, like Air Canada, Canada 3000, Jetsgo and Zoom, which continues today. Financial instability affects most airlines, both large and small, to some extent. Although an airline environment may provide more pronounced challenges for motivating staff to work together in a coordinated fashion, leaders and managers in most businesses and organizations face similar trials.

The purpose of this paper is to thoroughly examine the concept of employee engagement by focusing on the question of whether engagement is an appropriate strategy to use in achievement of Hawkair's long term organizational objectives. This examination will concentrate on the unique challenges of both Hawkair and the aviation industry. Using the observations and company specific knowledge of the writer, this report will identify the obstacles and impediments to employee engagement. Acting on these observations, a plan for fostering the development of an enduring culture of engagement at Hawkair will be presented.

## **Employee Engagement**

Academics, management consultants and practitioners have developed a myriad of somewhat conflicting definitions for engagement. These differing definitions will be explored further in this section. Macey & Schneider (2008) suggest that employee engagement involves such traits as employee involvement, commitment, passion, enthusiasm, focused effort, and energy. Employees with these characteristics can have a positive benefit for the organization. Engaged employees have a high degree of energy and are effectively connected to their workplace, while maintaining an ability to deal with the demands of their job (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003).

## BENEFITS OF ENGAGEMENT

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It is apparent to most observers that the world is changing at a rapid rate. Technology has led to changes in how we work and how we compete in an increasingly globalized economy. Technological innovation combined with process improvement systems such as Six Sigma, and Kaizen, have been the focus of management since the 1980's. These strategies focus on improvements to the system itself, but what of the most important asset in any organization: what about human capital? In this ever more competitive world, it has become increasingly necessary to draw efficiently upon all our resources. The need for employees to be engaged in their workplace is a key component to companies being successful. A diverse cross section of experts in aviation, management and, even, in academics all recognize the benefits of employee engagement.

In a cutthroat business such as the airline industry, successful organizations have already identified employee engagement as a critical success factor. Southwest Airlines is an airline often put forward as a model of success within an industry filled with failures. They owe much of their success to a policy that supports employee engagement by fostering a relationship-based culture (Gittell, *The Southwest Airlines Way*, 2003). WestJet is a Canadian example of airline success that owes much of its success to an engaged culture of shared ownership. The recent "WestJet owners" marketing campaign speaks to the fact that WestJet employees are not only workers but also engaged owners.



Corporate management consulting firms, such as Gallup, have suggested that high levels of engagement can have an impact of the financial health of organizations. In their corporate pamphlet titled, "Employee Engagement – What's your engagement ratio?" Gallup presents statistics that promote engagement as an initiative that organizations should employ to improve financial and strategic outcomes. Some of the benefits of an engaged workforce suggested by Gallup include, 27% reduction in employee absenteeism, a 31% to 51% reduction in staff turnover, a 51% reduction in theft by staff, and a 62% reduction in accidents. Gallup has further suggested that these measurable improvements lead to increased overall organizational performance, which includes, productivity improvements of 18% and an average 12% increase in business profitability (Gallup Consulting, 2008).

Researchers in the Faculty of Business and Law from Kingston University, London, conducted a two-year long project into employee engagement. They looked at a diverse range of sectors, including the National Health Service, local governments, environment services and consultants. As part of their research report titled, Creating an Engaged Workforce, the authors present a number of outcomes from engagement. The report, based on 5,291 questionnaires and 180 interviews, identifies a number of positive attributes of engagement, these include:

- Engaged employees performed better than non-engaged employees

- Engaged employees are less likely to want to leave the organization
- Engaged employees are more innovative
- Higher levels of well being among engaged employees
- A perception that the workload is sustainable

(Alfes, Truss, Soane, Rees, & Gatenby, 2010).

It is interesting to note that academic researchers, such as Alfes *et al*, present many of the same positive attributes of employee engagement as management consultants. Dr. Wilmar Schaufeli and Dr. Arnold Bakker, professors of Work and Organizational Psychology, are the two founding members of the Center for Occupational Behaviour in the Netherlands. Together, in 2003, they developed the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) to measure the meaning of “work engagement” in an empirical manner. For example, Schaufeli and Bakker list a number of possible consequences of work engagement. These consequences revolve around positive attitudes towards the organization and their work, including increased levels of job satisfaction, commitment to the organization and a low intent to leave the organization (2003). Benefits attributed to employee engagement have ranged from reduced sick time to increased employee innovation. In our increasingly bottom-line focused corporate landscape, management requires proactive employees who can work collaboratively with others to achieve shared goals. Engagement can lead to the development of a workforce that is committed, energized, and absorbed in their jobs (Bakker & Schaufeli, 2008).

Defining engagement presents some challenges because there is no single, universal definition. Management consultants tend to use definitions that are tied to their own proprietary idea of how to improve engagement. Academics have suggested definitions as simple as “passion for work”, to the more complex three-dimensional psychological state that encompasses cognition, emotion and the physical being, as suggested by William Kahn (1990).

### **Engagement Definitions – Management Consultants**

The following definitions, from management consulting organizations, use the *outcome* of engagement as a key component of their definitions. These definitions point to engagement as being good for business: the benefits that the organization will see from engagement. These definitions act like a sales pitch for engagement, letting the manager know that engagement will assist in motivating employees through raising the level of enthusiasm for the job.

- *“The individual's involvement and satisfaction with as well as enthusiasm for work”* (Gallup, 2010).
- *“A result that is achieved by stimulating employees' enthusiasm for their work and directing it toward organizational success”* (Hay Group Holdings, Inc., 2010).
- *“The extent to which people value, enjoy and believe in what they do”* (Wellins, Bernthal, & Phelps, 2005, p. 5).

- *“The capability and willingness to help the company succeed, i.e., discretionary performance”* (Towers Perrin, 2006, p. 18).

## **Engagement Definitions – Theorists**

While these engagement definitions from management consulting firms tend to focus on the intended result of engagement from an organizational point of view, the more academic definitions presented by Kahn, Schaufeli and Bakker, and Alfes *et al* give more detail regarding the attributes of an engaged employee.

Kahn defines engagement as a three layered psychological state that encompasses cognition, emotion and physical being (1990). Schaufeli and Bakker, further refine Kahn’s definition of engagement. They also have three themes, but they label them: absorption, dedication and vigour (2003).

Engagement is a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigour, dedication and absorption.

Rather than a momentary and specific state, engagement refers to a more persistent and pervasive affective-cognitive state that is not focused on any particular object, event, individual, or behaviour.(p. 4)

The purpose of Schaufeli and Bakker’s Utrecht Work Engagement Scale is to empirically define and measure the attributes of an engaged worker. This is done through the use of three descriptors; vigour, dedication and absorption,

which are then linked to a series of survey questions which are designed to measure the intensity of each descriptor on an individual basis.

The first descriptor the UWES defines is vigour. From a popular management point of view, when describing an engaged employee, we think of an employee who has a high level of “get up and go.” They also can keep going “when the going gets tough”. Vigour speaks to an employee who has a combination of physical and mental strength and energy: intensity to get the job done and the ability to grow and thrive.

The second descriptor that is tested using the UWES manual is the aspect of dedication. This attribute is very closely tied to vigour in that it requires both vigour and dedication to “get the job done”. This level of commitment to the job can be tied to the strength of an employee’s identification with the organization. Dedication, also, speaks to a commitment or devotion to the organization held by the employee who often places a high value on the organization’s goals and objectives.

The final descriptor, absorption, focuses on the positive benefits of challenge within the workplace. An employee who is fully absorbed in his work will notice that “time flies.” Other aspects that come into play when discussing absorption revolve around how immersed the employee is and how fascinating they find their work. In other words, absorption means an employee who is preoccupied by his job.

The clarity needed to really determine how to foster engagement is not available when relying on the management consulting definitions alone. Alfes *et al*, in their 2010 report, Creating an Engaged Workforce, focuses on better understanding employee engagement from both an academic and a managerial perspective.

Alfes *et al* offer as their definition of engagement, **“Being positively present during the performance of work by willingly contributing intellectual effort, experiencing positive emotions and meaningful connections to others”** (p. 5).

This definition touches on the three themes first laid out by Kahn: of physical state (*being positively present during the performance of work*), cognition (*willingly contributing intellectual effort*) and emotion (*experiencing positive emotions and meaningful connections to others*). Alfes *et al*’s definition can be further distilled into three fundamental factors of engagement:

- **Intellectual engagement** - or thinking hard about the job and how to do it better
- **Affective engagement** - or feeling positively about doing a good job
- **Social engagement** - or actively (acting) taking opportunities to discuss work-related improvements with others at work (2010, p. 5).

These three fundamental factors are very similar in nature to the three aspects of physical state, cognition, and emotion originally put forward by Kahn

in 1990 and refined by Schaufeli and Bakker. The following chart shows an evolution and refinement of the terms used to describe engagement while still maintaining a very similar framework for engagement.

Kahn (1990)	Schaufeli and Bakker (2003)	Alfes, et al (2010)
Physical State	Vigor	<i>social engagement (acting)</i>
Cognition	Dedication	<i>intellectual engagement (thinking)</i>
Emotion	Absorption	<i>affective engagement (feeling)</i>

In reviewing the literature from management consultants, one sees a different approach to engagement than the approach taken by academics such as Kahn, Schaufeli and Bakker, and Alfes *et al*. Management consultants seem to view engagement as a strategy to achieve organizational goals implemented through the employees. The academic approach seems to point to a state where employees experience engagement due to an intrinsically generated sense of contribution to the organization's success. These two views of engagement ultimately agree that engagement is a beneficial organizational construct.

The description of an engagement put forward by Alfes *et al* is in alignment with the definitions of Kahn, and Schaufeli and Bakker. However, the plain language used by Alfes *et al* is easily explained to and understood by both

managers and employees. During the process of creating and fostering an engaged culture at Hawkair, the ability to clearly describe engagement in a manner that all managers and employees will understand is critical. A further benefit to this engagement definition is that its authors have also built a framework to describe the attributes of an engaged employee in a manner that most managers can easily understand. For these reasons, this report will be using the definition of engagement developed by Alfes, Truss, Soane, Rees, & Gatenby.

## **MEASURING ENGAGEMENT**

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Touching on the above definition of engagement as being something that an individual employee thinks and feels about his work, creates a scenario where the measurement of engagement within an organization involves measuring individuals' levels of engagement. Thus, measuring engagement within an organization is dependent upon building a construct for testing all individuals and determining an organizational engagement level. The usual means for determining an organization's level of engagement is with standardized questionnaires, which measure the levels of engagement on an individual basis. Then, this collected data is distilled into useful information, which permits the organization to identify areas of concern. The organization can then take the appropriate action.



## **The Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES)**

The Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) test manual is an example of a system designed to test employee engagement within the workplace. The test manual, developed by Schaufeli and Bakker in 2003 to measure levels of organizational engagement, has been used in a number of countries such as the Netherlands, Australia, Canada, Germany, France, Norway Spain, Russia, Portugal, and Greece. The survey has also included a number of diverse occupational groups, such as Salvation Army officers, blue-collar workers, hospital staff, paramedics, police officers, teachers, military officers, and farmers. The UWES uses a seventeen-question Work & Well-being Survey to determine the engagement level of the employee. The survey is based upon the three attributes of vigour, dedication, and absorption, which are the foundation of the engagement definition used within the UWES. The following excerpt from the UWES manual details the questions asked in the survey and how they relate to the three key attributes of engagement as defined in the scale.

Vigour is assessed by six questions that look at an employee's energy level and degree of resilience. These six questions are:

- 1. At my work, I feel bursting with energy*
- 2. At my job, I feel strong and vigorous*
- 3. When I get up in the morning, I feel like going to work*
- 4. I can continue working for very long periods at a time*
- 5. At my job, I am very resilient, mentally*

6. *At my work I always persevere, even when things do not go well*

Dedication is assessed by five questions that examine an employee's commitment to their job. These five questions are:

1. *I find the work that I do full of meaning and purpose*
2. *I am enthusiastic about my job*
3. *My job inspires me*
4. *I am proud of the work that I do*
5. *To me, my job is challenging*

The final attribute that the UWES can measure is absorption. There are six questions that look at whether an employee is totally and happily immersed in their work. These six questions are:

1. *Time flies when I'm working*
2. *When I am working, I forget everything else around me*
3. *I feel happy when I am working intensely*
4. *I am immersed in my work*
5. *I get carried away when I'm working*
6. *It is difficult to detach myself from my job* (pp. 5-6)

The UWES uses complex statistical analysis of the answers to these questions to come up with a rating in each category. Employees who are highly engaged score as high positive numbers in each category. Yet, employees who

are burned-out and disengaged will have a negative number in each category. At Hawkair, this could be a good system to measure the engagement of our employees. However, the full statistical analysis, as conducted in the UWES is too cumbersome for use within a small organizational setting. For this reason, a streamlined version touching on the three categories of engagement will be developed for use at Hawkair.

### **Gallup 12 Element Scale**

The UWES means of determining levels of organizational engagement was developed within the environs of Utrecht University. A different view of how to measure engagement is from the view of how management consultants / practitioners measure engagement. Gallup Incorporated is a business information and consulting organization which has developed a management consulting practice around the area of employee engagement. Gallup postulates that top performing organizations understand that employee engagement is a driving force for positive business outcomes, and that measurement of organizational engagement is a key part of their engagement program. A key component of Gallup's focus on engagement has been the development of their "*12 Elements of Engagement*". Gallup proposes that these 12 elements predict employee and workgroup performance. In order to create a benchmark index of an employee engagement within an organization, Gallup has developed the following list of statements. Gallup claims that, through the analysis of the employee responses to these statements, an accurate engagement measurement can be established. Gallup claims that these statements are

predictive statements which when taken together indicate if a culture conducive to engagement exists.

### ***The 12 Elements of Great Managing***

- 1. I know what is expected of me at work.*
- 2. I have the materials and equipment I need to do my work right.*
- 3. At work, I have the opportunity to do what I do best every day.*
- 4. In the last seven days, I have received recognition or praise for doing good work.*
- 5. My supervisor, or someone at work, seems to care about me as a person.*
- 6. There is someone at work who encourages my development.*
- 7. At work, my opinions seem to count.*
- 8. The mission or purpose of my organization makes me feel my job is important.*
- 9. My associates or fellow employees are committed to doing quality work.*
- 10. I have a best friend at work.*
- 11. In the last six months, someone at work has talked to me about my progress.*
- 12. This last year, I have had opportunities at work to learn and grow.*

(Gallup Consulting, 2008)

Gallup suggests that organizations should add their own questions developed to represent their organizations unique culture. Using research that it has conducted, Gallup then analyzes the answers from the surveys to build a plan for improving employee engagement levels within an organization.

However, Gallup's focus is mainly on extrinsic rewards for the employee. For example, number six in Gallup's list states, "someone at work encourages my development." This suggests that employees need people at work to be their cheerleaders rather than the employee themselves taking pride and ownership of their role in the organization. Granted, it is beneficial to encourage employees, but that should not be the only path to an engaged workforce. Although an interesting take on engagement, this will not be the route taken at Hawkair.

#### **CREATING AN ENGAGING ENVIRONMENT**

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In the article, "Accelerating Corporate Transformations by Rapidly Engaging All Employees", Robert H. Miles suggests that, in the era of corporate leaders, such as Jack Welch, Sam Walton, and Lee Iacocca, the means of meeting corporate objectives is through streamlining, and the shedding of non-core activities. These strategies focus on the mechanics of corporate process and procedures. Over time, process-based improvements have, for the most part, reached their zenith. He suggests that the future success of further process-based improvements, like Six Sigma, is dependent upon the organization's ability to successfully engage their employees. Miles concedes

that many employees have become sceptical and disengaged during the streamlining process. The new focus for management should be on the employee, not the process. Miles also suggests that, as technology increases and business cycles become more condensed, an engaged workforce that is able to rapidly respond will become essential for organizational survival (2001).

Management consultant Bill Piersol (2007), in his article "Employee Engagement and Power to the Edge," further expands upon the concept of engagement within the organization by focusing on the responsibility of management in fostering a culture of engagement within organizations. Piersol suggests that, while engagement is not entirely management's responsibility, they are the ones primarily responsible for establishing an environment of empowerment and shared ownership. He uses the analogy of a dance to symbolize the relationship between employee and employer. It is a relationship that neither can exist without the other: it is a process of give and take. Employee engagement should not be viewed as a series of engaged individuals. It needs to be seen as the engagement of the entire organization. Just as the old cliché states, "there is no 'I' in team", an organization is not only individuals but parts of a team working together. In order to assist in developing engagement within an organization, it is necessary to have a robust, open communication system, and that the employees have the tools that they need to do their jobs.

Reflecting on what Miles and Piersol have written, it is clear that engagement is an organizational state that needs to be fostered and cultivated by creating a work environment that supports engagement. Just as a manager

cannot order an employee to be happy; the manager cannot also order an employee to become engaged. In the UWES manual, Schaufeli and Bakker have suggested a number of possible causes of work engagement. Some of the characteristics positively associated with work engagement include social and job autonomy. Self-efficacy has also been tied closely to high levels of engagement (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003). Other reports have suggested that the main drivers of engagement include: how important an employee feels their contributions are to the organizations success, how supported in their job and in their career they feel, how well senior management communicates a vision for the organization, and the individual job / employee fit (Alfes, *et al*, 2010).

Looking back to our definition of engagement with the three aspects of social, intellectual, and affective engagement presented by Alfes *et al*, we see that engagement is not entirely an individual endeavour. Any strategy used to promote engagement must be carefully constructed to allow the organization, as a whole, to become more engaged. This adds to the complexity of any scheme to improve engagement because the organization's management / leadership need to approach engagement in a holistic manner. They need to touch the hearts, minds and souls of a diverse group of individuals.

### **Management's Role in Engagement**

As the previous section states, an environment of engagement within an organization does not just happen. Engagement is a state that must be cultivated and nurtured. It has also been pointed out that the creation of an environment that supports engagement cannot and will not be successful through



the unilateral work of management. Since engagement is a state that includes the physical, cognitive, and emotional states of the employee, any plan for increasing the level of engagement within an organization must involve the entire organization; addressing engagement at numerous levels simultaneously. A number of suggestions have been brought forward as consequential means to increase the engagement level of organizational members. However, each mechanism may only address one aspect of engagement be it a physical, cognitive, or an emotional component.

The ultimate goal, when building a culture that supports engagement within an organization, is to put in place strategies that will support organizational members to care about the organization, care about themselves, and care about those whom they work with. This means that procedures must be initiated that will allow the organizational member to feel that their contributions matter and that they are going in the right direction. Taking this into consideration, management needs to develop strategies that will engage the employee's mind, body, and soul. But strategies alone are not sufficient. In order for an engagement plan to be effective, the full support of top management is crucial. If senior leaders within the organization do not clearly demonstrate an unambiguous commitment to engagement through active involvement, engagement efforts are doomed to failure. Senior managers need to recognize that motivation and engagement are about more than just financial rewards; it is the intrinsic aspects of employee motivation that make the difference when developing a culture of engagement.



## Engagement Supporting Initiatives

One of the engagement-supporting initiatives suggested for building an engaging environment is to focus on strategies which will allow the employee to feel that the organization values them and their contributions. In order for the employee to feel valued, it is critical that the employee clearly knows what is expected of them and what their role is within the organization. The key to this alignment of employee and employer expectations is two-fold. The first is clear communication of the corporate goals, vision, and mission and what each employee's role is within the organization. Clearly defined roles and purpose helps create meaning for employees. The second critical aspect is comprehensive feedback from management about employee performance, both positive and in areas where improvement is needed.

Practitioners and theorists both agree that communication is a key aspect of any engagement strategy (Endres & Manchemo-Smoak, spring 2008) (Kular, Gatenby, Rees, Soane, & Truss, 2008). Communication strategies must focus on communication from top to bottom, bottom to top, and between different work groups within an organization. Plans should be implemented that give every member of the organization an opportunity to use their voice. Looking back at one of the questions under the heading of dedication, in Schaufeli and Bakker's UWES manual: *I find the work that I do full of meaning and purpose.*

Management can demonstrate that they value the work of their employees by asking for their input and keeping them informed of developments within the

organization. Employees reciprocate by feeling connected to the company because their opinions and input are seen as meaningful.

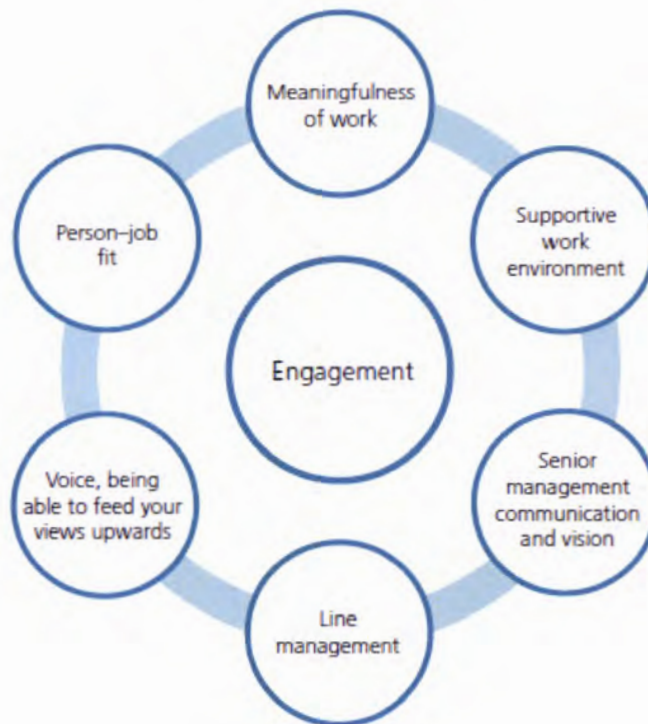
Giving and receiving clear and constructive feedback can be one of the most daunting challenges for many managers, supervisors, and employees. It can be often fraught with misperceptions and hyperbole. Yet, as managers or employees, we need feedback from our supervisors, reports and peers to improve how we do our job. Time and again we see situations where a manager bemoans the fact that one of their report's fails to do a job as expected. Often this scenario is a result of the employee not being clear about what is expected from them or exactly how they should carry out the task. Most employees and managers have a desire to do a good job; often the only missing ingredient is direct, clear and concise feedback about what is expected. Of course positive feedback is a critical part of the feedback continuum as well. Positive feedback for a job well done reinforces the spirit, leading to increased levels of engagement. When designing feedback systems, leaders must ensure that strategies and policies are introduced that will allow for feedback from the frontline employee to reach both line and senior management. A key component of any feedback / communication system is the development of protocols which will ensure that the contributor is acknowledged so they know that views / observations will be taken seriously.

In addition to good communication systems and clear feedback, Dent and Holton (2009) offer four more initiatives to support engagement in an organization. The first is to have a creative reward system. This system can be

both financial and non-financial in nature. Policies such as flexible working, offering sabbaticals, percentage contracts and work-life balance would be several ways to appeal to the various needs of employees. The second initiative is to create a culture of life-long learning by encouraging opportunities for mentoring, coaching, and taking courses, online or at a post-secondary institution. Learning and development, as coined by Dent and Holton, should be part of the day to day work environment of all employees, including managers, and not just brought up at employee performance reviews. The next initiative focuses on line managers. It is important to give these managers support from each other and to discuss best practices from across the organization. Coaching and mentoring support also needs to be available to managers who take on unmotivated employees or departments, in order to successfully re-engage these employees. The fourth initiative is one we have also discussed before: the need to measure employee motivation and engagement (Dent & Holton, 2009).

The following engagement model (Figure 1) put forward by Alfes *et al* speaks to the same four attributes of engagement as suggested by Dent and Holton. However, this model expands the motivators of engagement into the six distinct drivers.

Figure 1



(Alfes, Truss, Soane, Rees, & Gatenby, 2010, p. 56)

Alfes *et al* offer a number of recommendations associated with each of these key drivers of engagement, which, when combined, may assist management in creating an engaged workplace. Although each facet of engagement may be implemented independently, for the full organizational benefits to be felt, the goal should be the development of a plan which plays on each of these drivers.

The first driver is "Meaningfulness of Work." An employee who does not see how their efforts contribute to the organizational goals will have difficulty maintaining a high level of engagement. For this reason, it is essential that each

individual clearly knows how his work contributes to the organizations overall success. The link between ones work and the organization success needs to be reinforced both intellectually and emotionally using metrics, honest feedback and the odd pat on the back.

The second driver is "Voice, the Ability to Have Your Views Heard."

Knowing that your opinion is valued by the organization is a critical aspect of intellectual engagement. Why think about your job and ways to improve it, when you know that no one will listen? Front line employees are a valuable source of information for the organization. Listening to opinions and feedback from all employees will contribute to the organization's success. Implementing strategies, which will enhance the flow of information from employees, need to be a part of any engagement strategy.

The third driver is "Communication of Vision by Senior Management."

Directly linked to both intellectual and emotional engagement, having a vision of where the organization is going is important when trying to engage the minds and hearts of employees. The organization's members need to know that senior management knows where the organization is going. Management also needs to communicate that direction to their employees and let them know what their role is in that vision in order for the employees to know that their work is meaningful.

The next driver is "Supportive Working Environment." Knowing that the organization and co-workers are supportive will allow the employee to focus on the job. This support needs to include support for growth both personally and

within the organization through education or training. This personal and professional growth leads to longer-serving, more engaged employees.

The fifth driver is, "Job Fit." The old analogy of trying to fit a square peg into a round hole fits this aspect of an engagement model. Organizations who wish to support engagement should ensure that appropriate HR policies are in place to assist employees being placed in the right position within the organization. An employee in the wrong position can cause disharmony for those around them while trying to do a job for which they are not suitable.

The sixth and final driver, as indicated by Alfes *et al*, is "Front Line Management Style." Line managers act as a conduit of information between the organization and employees. Due to the importance of effective communication, it is essential that line managers do not become barriers to information either from the employee or from the organization. Line managers must be carefully selected and trained in effective communication in order to develop their potential as leaders that support and validate engagement strategies.

### **Relational Coordination**

To this point the paper has touched on engagement in a generic manner, yet this report attempts to focus on engagement specifically within a small airline. As previously mentioned, the airline industry can present some unique challenges to the creation of an effective engagement strategy. When developing management strategies, an often used means of building a plan is to closely examine successful industry peers with the hope of garnering ideas.

One such successful airline is Southwest Airlines. Southwest, headquartered in Dallas, Texas, has been put forward by many aviation industry pundits as the most successful airline in the United States. Southwest has successfully achieved 37 consecutive years of profitability in an industry fraught with bankruptcies (Southwest Airlines company, 2010). Jody Hoffer Gittel, a professor of Management at Brandeis University, has spent a considerable amount of time investigating organizational behaviour at airlines such as Southwest Airlines. She has developed theories for why and how Southwest Airlines has been successful for so long in an industry filled with business failures. Gittel presents the emerging theory of Relational Coordination: a theory for understanding the relational dynamics of coordinating work, as an explanation for Southwest's success. Relational coordination, "is a mutually reinforcing process of interaction between communication and relationships carried out for the purpose of task integration" (Gittel, 2009). Much like engagement, relational coordination is a multi-faceted construct which focuses on three aspects: shared knowledge, shared goals, and mutual respect.

One aspect of this theory is put forward by Gittel in her 2003 book, The Southwest Airlines Way – Using the Power of Relationships to Achieve High Performance. She suggests that, through the understanding the relational dynamics of an organization, management can facilitate and better develop communication strategies between groups. Better communication strategies allow an organization to disperse information to the employees about shared goals, shared knowledge, and mutual respect. Better communication results in

better organizational outcomes. Gittell, through her work with airlines in the area of relational coordination, suggests that organizations with high levels of organizational coordination benefit from positive outcomes. These positive outcomes include stronger long term financial strength and higher levels of employee engagement. Therefore, relational coordination is a theory that supports organizational engagement within the airline industry.

Relational coordination is a means to improve process and the flow of information between work groups. There are inherent stressors involved when different groups are trying to meet often-conflicting agendas. These inherent task conflicts can then lead to situations where conflict may occur. These conflicts then lead to ineffective communication and, thus, reduce overall organizational effectiveness and decrease levels of employee engagement. Relational coordination suggests that improvements in communication between interdependent groups can lead to better task completion.

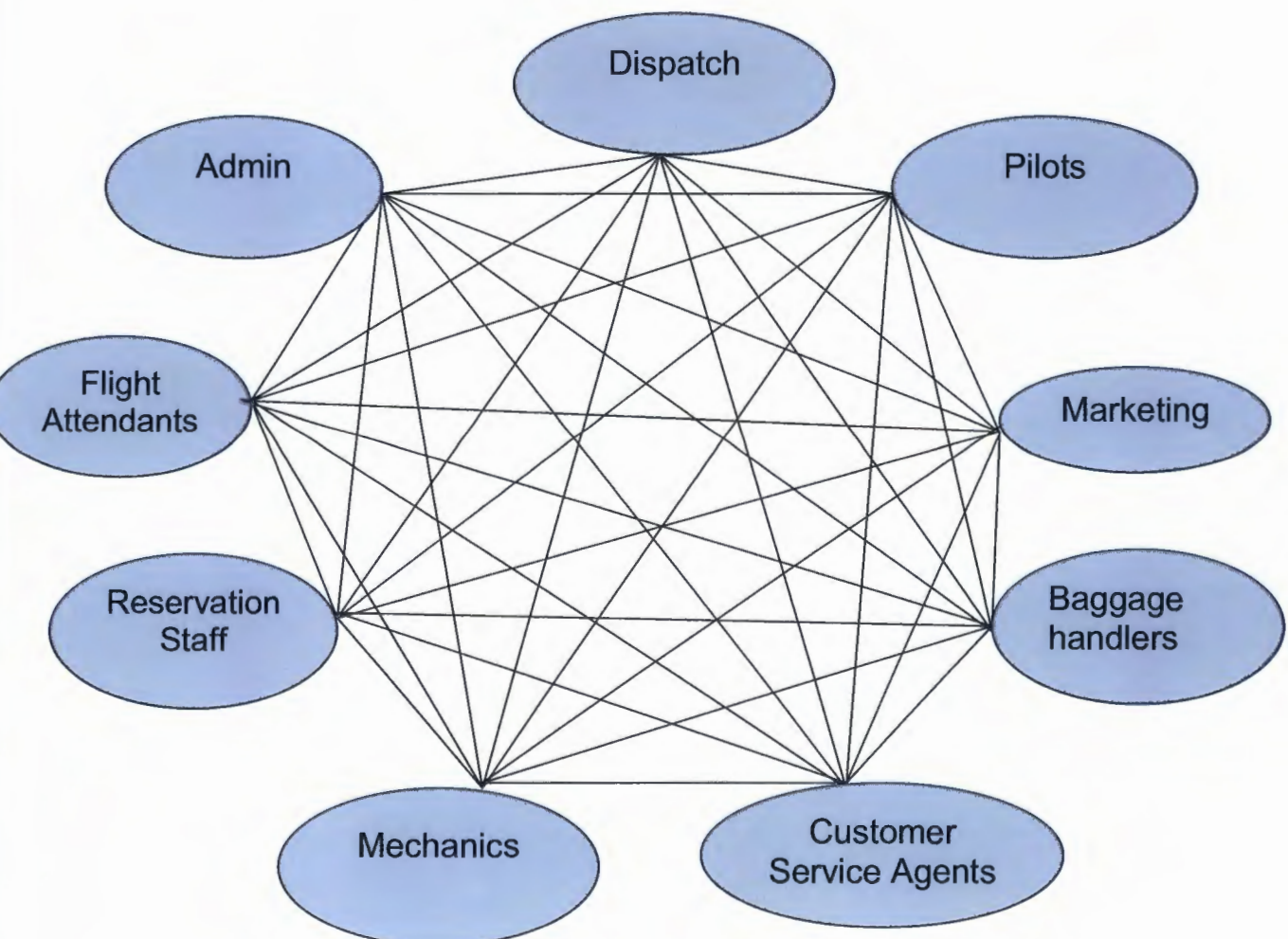
In a complex industry, such as the airline industry, where many different tasks need to be accomplished by a variety of very different work groups, the concept of task interdependence becomes critical when designing work routines. There are four types of task interdependence: pooled, sequential, reciprocal and team. Pooled interdependence describes a situation where two or more groups carry out tasks on a parallel basis, while using a common resource. In the case of an airline, each of the multiple bases performs the same tasks using the airline as the common resource. In this scenario, conflict is limited by geographic separation but the organization does require that each base works well, while



supporting the organization as a whole. Sequential interdependence describes a situation where Group A must successfully complete a task before Group B can begin their work. This form of dependence inherently has a higher probability for conflict than pooled interdependence due to the coordination required between groups. In an airline, sequential interdependence shows itself in a myriad of situations. During the check in process the sequence is as follows: the customer service agents must finish checking in the passengers before the flight attendants can board the airplane. The pilots, in turn, must wait for the flight attendants before they can start the engines for departure. Reciprocal interdependence involves tasks where one group is dependent upon the work of another group but there exists a feedback continuum between groups. An example of this type of interdependence is the reservations department and the customer service agents at the counter doing check-in. They communicate back and forth in order to make sure the correct passengers board the correct plane at the correct time. Team interdependence is the most common form of interdependence at Hawkair. Team interdependence refers to situations where multiple work groups must work together in a coordinated manner to accomplish a common task. For example, multiple groups (maintenance, Customer Service agents, flight attendants, dispatch, ground service and pilots) must work together during the process of an aircraft departure. This form of interdependence is not only common within an airline but is also the form of interdependence where the greatest probability for conflict exists (Bowdich, Buono, & Stewart, 2008). The following chart (Figure 2) shows the different work groups within Hawkair. Just

imagine the conflicts that could arise if one group does not perform as expected. Thus, a key part to any engagement implementation program would be an organizational education program geared towards educating the employees about how their job is critical to organizational success. Without such a program, different employee groups will often revert to forming into independent groups or silos, with the outcome being the formation of communication barriers between groups. As discussed earlier, good communications between all levels is a key aspect of any engagement strategy.

Figure 2 Airlines, – A Coordination Challenge  
Adapted from (Gittell, 2009)



## Relational Coordination and Communication

Previously, it was stated that communication is a key driver of engagement within organizations. In her 2009 report, Relational Coordination: Guidelines for Theory, Measurement and Analysis, Gittell expands on the concept of communication and engagement. Gittell proposes that there is a direct correlation between relationships and communications between groups. A company without an effective communication plan will often suffer from ineffective or low quality relationships between groups. The absence of an effective communication strategy will not result in *no* communication; it will result

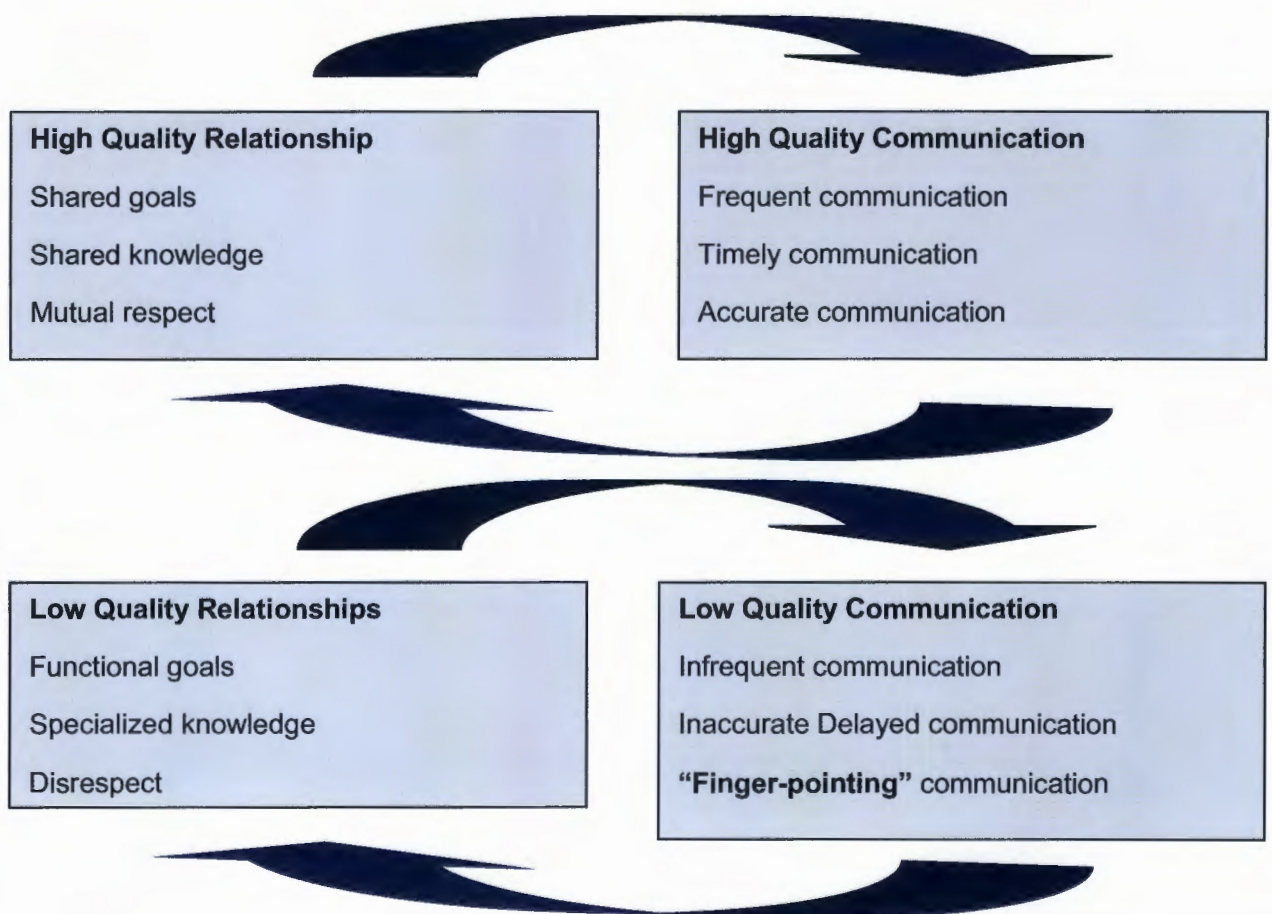


Figure 3: High quality relationships vs. Low quality relationships  
From Gittell, J. H, 2009, p. 20

in poor communication. Using the basic science fact, "*nature abhors a vacuum*," in the context of communication and the following will occur: "*any information void will be filled with something regardless of whether it is true or not.*" Figure 3 demonstrates the relationship between high quality communication and high quality relationships. (Gittell, 2009)

In order to implement a relational coordination model within an organization, Gittell proposes the *Relational Model of How High Performance Work Systems Work*, as illustrated in Figure 4. This model touches on supportive high performance work practices. These practices will help to instill relational coordination within an organization with the associated positive benefits. These positive benefits are similar to suggestions for engagement made by Alfes *et al* in Figure 1.

#### Selection for Cross-functional Teamwork

When managers hire employees, the focus is often on selecting the employee based on their individual performance without looking at the candidate's ability to work with others. In a work environment like a small airline, it is critical to select employees based on functional expertise. However, their ability to work with others to accomplish common goals must also be considered.

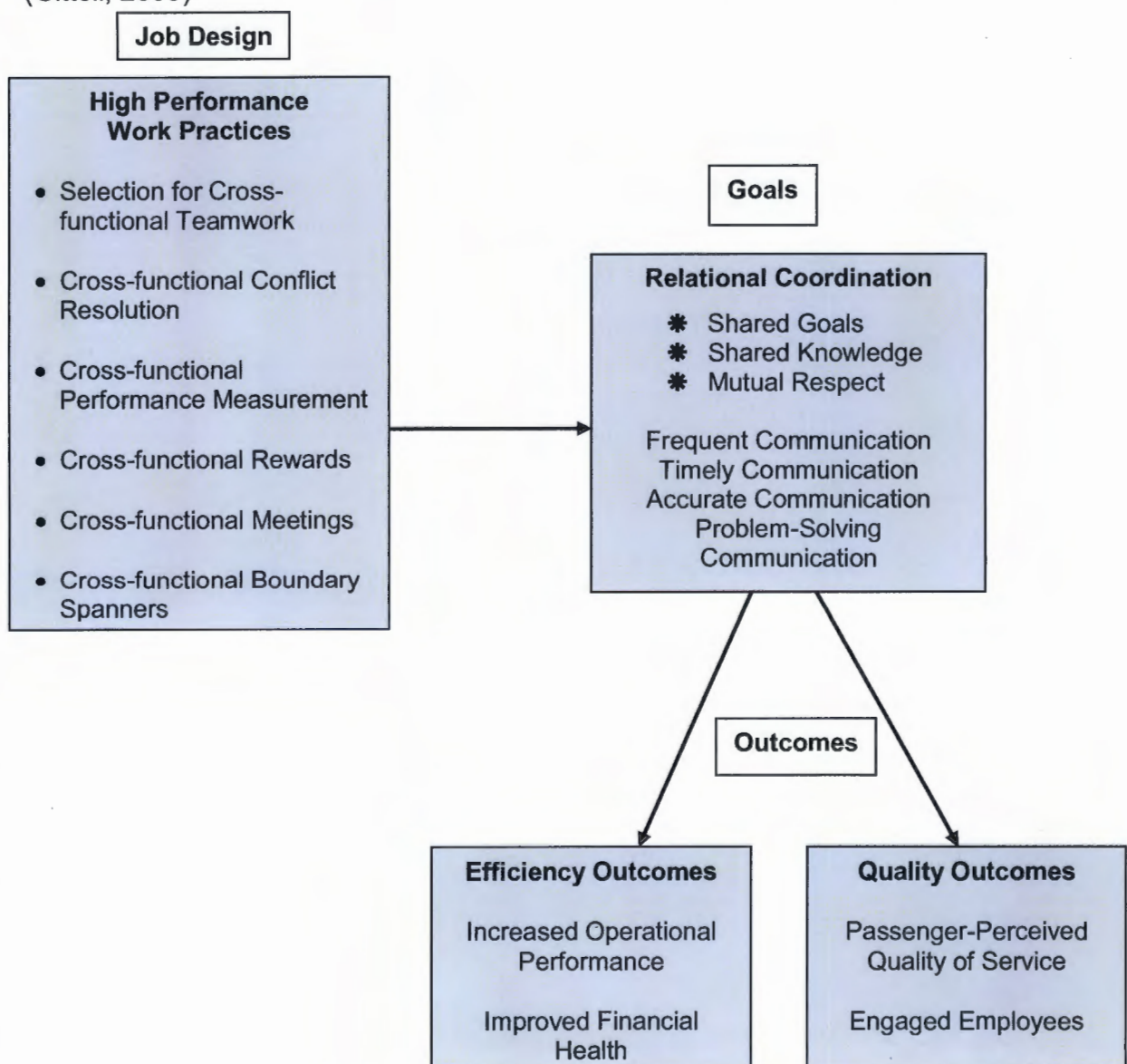
#### Cross-functional Conflict Resolution

The realities of time constraints and limited resources often lead to conflict between functions or tasks within an organization. In the relational coordination model, organizations embrace this conflict as an opportunity to break down barriers between work groups. Often conflict is swept under the carpet or



ignored. This failure to deal with a problem often leads to long running disputes between groups. Using cross-functional conflict resolution, the individuals or groups in conflict are brought together to discuss how their roles have an impact on each other and how their roles contribute to the organizations goals. The idea is, that through better understanding of the challenges faced by the other party, the level of conflict will be reduced.

Figure 4: A Relational Model of how High Performance Work Systems Work, (Gittell, 2009)



### Cross-functional Performance Measurement

When instituting performance metrics within an organization, managers will sometimes institute measurements which force one group to compete with another. For example, many airlines base flight delays on which employee group last left the aircraft. If the last person off the plane was a customer service representative, then that group would be responsible for the delay. This competition between groups often leads to a scenario where each group focuses on getting off the plane first, and then finger pointing at the group who was last off. The employee groups fight amongst themselves rather than create a situation where they work together to accomplish the common goal. This scenario reinforces the importance of instituting broad performance measures, which broach functional boundaries.

### Cross-functional Rewards

This work practice touches on the same issues as touched on with performance measurements. Managers need to ensure that rewards are based on organizational goals as opposed to goals geared towards individual groups. Although healthy competition may lead to spurts of performance improvements by individual groups, the reality is that these improvements in performance may come at the cost of performance from other groups.

### Cross-functional Meetings

This work practice is meant to improve relationships between groups. Improved relationships then lead to better quality communications as described in Figure 3.

### Cross-functional Boundary Spanners

A boundary spanner is a position within an organization that, in doing their job, communicates across numerous functional work groups. In this way, they act as a link between functions. Within an airline, the flight operations agent / dispatcher operate within this role. The departure of an aircraft requires the coordinated effort of pilots, flight attendants, customer service agents, fuelers, baggage handlers, and others. The role of the dispatcher is to act as a coordinator ensuring that all roles are accomplished. In this role, the dispatcher is often seen as just a conduit for information between groups. Yet, the effective dispatcher who acts in the boundary spanning role also reinforces relationships between groups by sharing information and challenges faced by others.

### Outcomes of High Performance Work Practices

The outcomes from the implementation of effective high performance work practices are shared goals, shared knowledge and mutual respect between work groups. These outcomes are very much in alignment with the drivers of engagement suggested by Alfes *et al.*

This report has defined engagement as a state where the employee is, **“being positively present during the performance of work by willingly contributing intellectual effort, experiencing positive emotions and meaningful connections to others”** (Alfes, Truss, Soane, Rees, & Gatenby, 2010, p. 5). This definition touches on the multi-faceted aspects of engagement, where the employee feels, thinks, and acts in an engaged manner. In reviewing the data from management consultants and academic sources, we see that employee engagement can be a positive state that will assist the employer in meeting organizational objectives. A review of the drivers of engagement shows that engagement levels are dependent upon a number of intrinsic and extrinsic organizational factors. These factors include: whether employees feel that their work is meaningful; the organization’s leadership has clearly communicated organizational goals and objectives; and whether the organization has policies and practices that are in alignment with a culture of engagement.

We, then, reviewed how the concept of relational coordination and the improved communications derived from good relationships between groups could assist the development of engagement. In reviewing the idea of relational coordination in the context of engagement at Hawkair, justification exists for integrating the relational coordination supporting high performance work practices into the plan for fostering a culture of engagement at Hawkair. The following chart graphically details the suggested link between the six drivers of engagement and the high performance work practices of relational coordination.



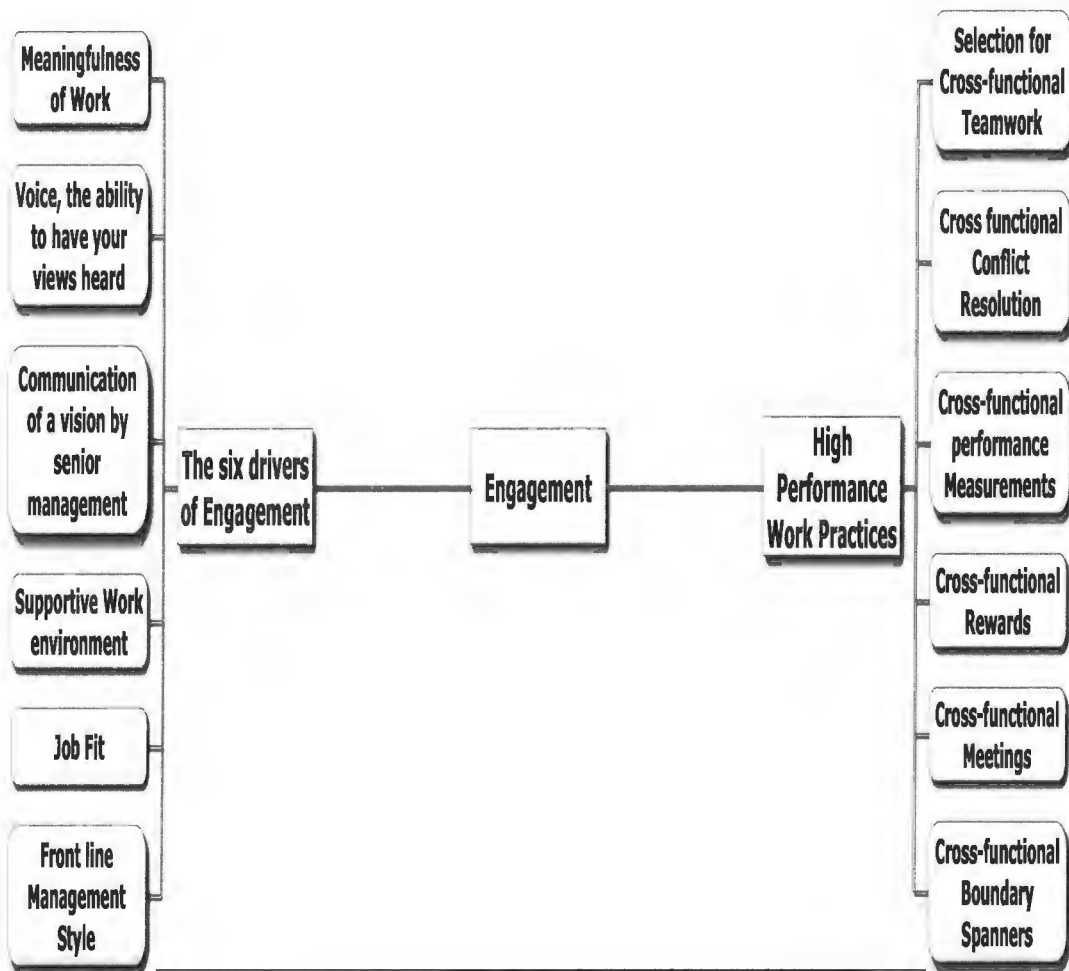


Figure 5  
Link Between Alfes *et al*'s Six Drivers of Engagement and Gittel's High Performance Work Practices

## Brief History of Hawkair

Hawkair, like many airlines, has experienced many ups and downs over their history. In order to know where we need to get to, we must first look at where we have been and how we got to where we are right now.

Hawkair began as a partnership between three aviation professionals in 1994 as a remote area cargo service, in order to service gold mine operations in

northern BC. In 2000, sensing an opportunity to enter the passenger airline industry, the company transformed itself into a scheduled passenger airline. Using a DeHavilland Dash-8 aircraft, Hawkair began a service between Terrace and Vancouver in September 2000. Over the next five years, Hawkair expanded to five aircraft connecting five northern communities with Vancouver, and employing as many as 130 employees.

The volatility in the airline industry is proven by the history of the company in the past ten years. From 2000 to 2010, Hawkair went from ten employees, up to 130, then back down to seventy-five. We currently stand at ninety. We went from one plane, to five, back to two and are now at three planes. Due to a heavy debt load, Hawkair spent two years in bankruptcy protection between 2005 and 2007. In 2007, Hawkair was purchased by a group of investors from Alberta. These investors brought new opportunities for Hawkair to expand into the charter business of flying crews to and from oil projects in Alberta. Once again, the situation was looking positive. The owners, believing they needed an expert in airline growth to help the company grow even further, hired a senior manager. Unfortunately, while this manager came highly recommended, once at Hawkair, he proceeded to sow discord through lack of communication, issuing dictates and dishonest interactions with the staff. As a result of his actions, specifically with regard to the pilots and restructuring their pay scale without consulting them first, the pilot group was so enraged that they began a union certification process. These events all occurred within a short period of time and by the fall of 2008, company morale was in decline. At the same time, the world was undergoing

what at the time was being described as being the worst economic downturn since the Great Depression. Revenue sources were reduced. The internal conflicts and discord were intensified by the financial uncertainty brought about by current world economic conditions.

### **Current Situation**

On March 15, 2010, Hawkair announced a change in ownership. The Alberta-based owners sold Hawkair to a northwest BC-based ownership group that also owns several other small airlines. This has, once again, changed the landscape for Hawkair and its employees. Although the recency of this event precludes a full analysis from being included into this report, an attempt will be made to summarize the impacts of this change of ownership upon the employees and culture of Hawkair. The ownership group that purchased Hawkair also controls and directly manages Central Mountain Airlines (CMA). Therefore, a very brief description of CMA is in order to understand some of the cultural similarities and differences that exist between these two airlines.

Central Mountain Air is a regional airline, which serves seventeen destinations within BC and Alberta, employing approximately thirteen 19-passenger Beech 1900 commuter airliners and two 30-passenger Dornier 328 aircraft. CMA employs 300 employees based out of Vancouver, Prince George, Calgary, and their head office located in Smithers, BC. Their main focus is on scheduled passenger operations, but CMA does carry out a limited amount of charter operations, mainly from its Calgary base.

From this brief description of CMA, it is apparent that Hawkair's new ownership group has more in common with Hawkair than Hawkair's previous Alberta-based owners. The new ownership group is located in Northwest BC and has extensive experience in running scheduled operations, as opposed to being Alberta-based and focused on charter operations. In light of this observation, it may be possible to assume that cultural challenges encountered during this ownership change may be somewhat less than previously encountered. Issues to be investigated when developing a plan for engagement within Hawkair will revolve around employee fears of what the impact of this acquisition will have on them as individuals.

#### What is the Current Engagement Level?

Although certainly not unique within the Canadian aviation industry, Hawkair has seen its fair share of uncertainty and change within the last ten years. This has often led to ambiguity about where Hawkair was heading as an organization, as well as, fear about employment security. Each ownership group had a different approach to management and a different vision for Hawkair. The last group had very little experience in running a scheduled airline and sought out a "professional" airline manager. Through a lack of attention to employee relations, this manager damaged employee relations to the point where one group sought union certification. The writer, who has maintained the role of General Manager at Hawkair through the ownership changes, has witnessed uncertainty and the resulting damage to employee morale. Each new owner had

a slightly different vision for Hawkair and as a result employees have been left with an impression that management lacks a vision for Hawkair.

In an effort to measure the level of employee satisfaction after a tumultuous period, the previous Board of Directors of Hawkair engaged an outside consultant to conduct an employee survey during the Fall of 2009. Although the purpose of this survey was not to measure engagement *per se*, it does act as a valid representation of employee views, and concerns. The survey reflects a snapshot view of the state of employee satisfaction when this survey was carried out in September 2009.

These survey questions focus on the following six categories: Company, Departmental Effectiveness, Supervisor Evaluation, Personal Satisfaction, Compensation & Opportunities, and Working Conditions. These quantitative surveys allow the employees from nine different departments to rate each of the six categories from one to five. Based on the quantitative results, most employees are generally satisfied working for Hawkair. The average scores, from all segments of the questionnaire, range from 3.0 to 3.7 out of 5 (five indicates the employee strongly agrees with the statements and that the company consistently exceeds expectations). The areas that rank the lowest are the Company (average of 2.9/5) and the Compensation & Opportunities (average of 2.7/5). The area that ranks the highest is the Departmental effectiveness (4/5). This score is a reflection that members of each department generally feel that their own departments are running smoothly and effectively, but, that effectiveness is not present on an inter-departmental basis.

Figure 6 Quantitative Survey Results

# of completed surveys	department	category 1 Company	category 2 Departmental effectiveness	category 3 Supervisor evaluation	category 4 Personal satisfaction	category 5 Compensation & opportunities	category 6 Working conditions	Total average score by department
7	Unassigned	2.89	4.04	3.42	3.62	2.64	3.61	<b>3.4</b>
3	In-flight services	2.25	3.50	3.37	3.30	2.13	3.33	<b>3.0</b>
5	Flight Crews	2.75	3.87	2.95	3.53	3.18	3.46	<b>3.3</b>
13	Customer Service	2.53	3.98	3.37	3.59	2.55	3.22	<b>3.2</b>
7	Base Operations	2.89	4.33	3.95	3.55	2.74	3.39	<b>3.5</b>
5	Reservations	3.50	4.10	3.90	3.93	3.12	3.74	<b>3.7</b>
5	Maintenance	3.37	3.83	3.95	4.15	2.98	3.54	<b>3.6</b>
4	HR / Accounting	2.79	4.10	3.88	3.52	2.83	3.50	<b>3.4</b>
1	Marketing	3.00	4.25	4.00	3.00	1.90	3.43	<b>3.3</b>
Total surveys completed: 50	<b>Total Average by Survey Category:</b>	<b>2.9</b>	<b>4.0</b>	<b>3.6</b>	<b>3.6</b>	<b>2.7</b>	<b>3.5</b>	

The following ranking was applied to the questions

- 1 – Strongly disagree – Consistently fails to meet expectations
- 2 – Disagree – Occasionally fails to meet expectations
- 3 – Neither agree nor disagree – Performs at a satisfactory level – neutral
- 4 – Agree – Often exceeds expectations
- 5 – Strongly agree – Consistently exceeds expectations

There were a total of 68 questions, a list of the questions sorted into categories can be found in Appendix 1.

### What Needs to Improve?

In reviewing the six drivers of engagement as suggested by Alfes *et al*, we note some areas of concern at Hawkair. In the following section of this report, we will conduct a gap analysis using the six drivers of engagement in relation to the current situation as described by the author. Following the examination of the drivers of engagement, a further study will be conducted to determine where Hawkair is situated in relation to the six high performance work practices as suggested by Gittell. Following each of the six drivers and six work practices, will be an analysis in which Hawkair's unique needs will be discussed, along with suggested actions that will be incorporated into the plan for improvement.

## **THE SIX DRIVERS OF ENGAGEMENT**

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### **1. Meaningfulness of Work**

In order for an employee to know that their contributions are meaningful, it is essential that all organizational members know how their efforts contribute to the organization's success. In the case of Hawkair, where corporate objectives have shifted with each ownership change, it is difficult for an employee to know whether their work actually has meaning. Other than knowing that they have received a pay cheque, there is little connection between individual work and organizational performance.



*Analysis: This is an area of concern that needs to be addressed through the introduction of metrics that show how each employee within the company contributes to the success of Hawkair.*

2. *Voice, the Ability to Have Your Views Heard*

Hawkair currently lacks an effective means for employees to voice their opinions. The uncertainty caused by repeated organizational changes increases the need for an effective means for employees to voice concerns and suggestions for improvements. Although senior management has an open-door policy, this is not an adequate means for most employees to have their views heard within the organization.

*Analysis: This is another area that needs to be addressed. Strategies for allowing the employees to feel free to voice their opinions need to be developed. Strategies may include the use of electronic bulletin boards or social media which would be open to both management and employees. Training for line managers in communications is also critical. Employees who feel that their suggestions stop at the manager will cease to make suggestions and thus, become disengaged.*

3. *Communication of Vision by Senior Management*

The importance of this driver of engagement has repeatedly been underestimated by a number of managers and owners of Hawkair.



The communication of vision by senior management is crucial to the development of meaningfulness of work by an employee.

*Analysis: The current change in ownership has increased anxiety among the workforce at Hawkair. This change increases the need for the communication of a clear vision that all employees can get behind.*

#### 4. Supportive Working Environment

Hawkair has, for the most part, made training available for employees. However, most of this training has usually involved training for technical positions. Hawkair has a history of promoting from within; giving an opportunity for advancement within the organization. But, beyond just support for the employee themselves; a truly supportive working environment is one where the organization supports the employee beyond their hours at work.

*Analysis: Although Hawkair has promoted from within and offered training, it has often promoted employees to supervisory positions without giving the appropriate training in management or supervision. The recent introduction of employee evaluations has focused on performance within the current position. Consideration should be made to incorporate some sort of personal development plan into this program. In addition, it is suggested that succession planning for key position be instituted within Hawkair. Extending beyond the job itself, Hawkair needs to employ initiatives that will support employees and their families. Such initiatives*

*could include flex time, employee assistance plans, and other such programs which would support a healthy work-life balance.*

5. Job Fit

From a technical aspect, the right people are in the right position at Hawkair at this time. However, do these people have the necessary leadership / supervisory training?

Analysis: *Although not an obvious source of concern at Hawkair at this point, it will be important to ensure that all future hiring decisions include not only job fit but cultural fit as a part of any selection process. Employee evaluations, which have started at Hawkair, should become standard in all departments. The institution of regular employee evaluations may be used to help identify any situations where job fit is not appropriate.*

6. Front Line Management Style

In order for engagement to really take root within Hawkair, it is essential that all management, including front line management, clearly understand their role. Front line management support is crucial for effective engagement. As representatives of the organization and as a conduit for the views of the employees, front line management style is critical to encouraging engagement.

At Hawkair, line managers have, for the most part, been recruited from the rank and file. They may have excellent technical skills but they may have

been placed into these critical positions without adequate managerial / supervisory training.

Analysis: Hawkair has a cadre of front line managers who have excellent technical skills but may lack training in areas of supervision and management. This lack of training may, unwittingly, act as a barrier to communication. An evaluation of all front line managers, focusing specifically on communication style, should be carried out. The purpose of this evaluation would be the identification of managers who lack a clear understanding of their role as communication facilitators within the relational coordination construct.

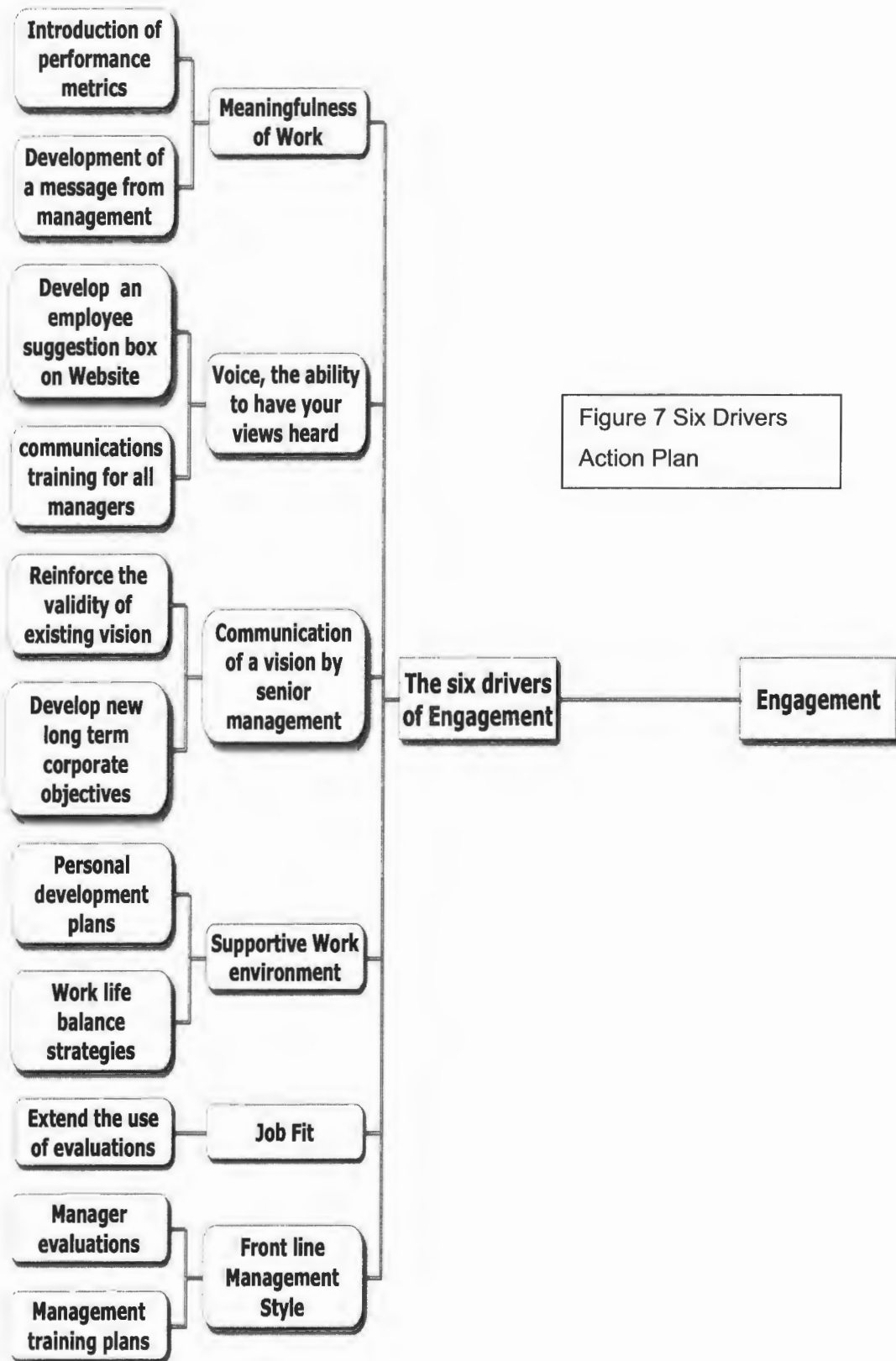


Figure 7 Six Drivers  
Action Plan

In the previous section an analysis of the six drivers of engagement within Hawkair was conducted, this section will focus on an analysis of where Hawkair is positioned in relation to the six high performance work practices.

### 1. Selection for Cross-functional Teamwork

Due to the relatively small number of internal candidates, a small labour market, and predominance to promote from within, there are often a very limited number of candidates available for consideration when filling positions at Hawkair. This has resulted in the case where a candidate may be selected that meets minimum technical requirements while not being an ideal candidate from a cross-functional teamwork perspective.

*Analysis: Although limited numbers of candidates may apply when openings are posted, it is critical that the ability to work with others not be underestimated when selecting employees. It may be necessary to extend the search process beyond internal or local candidates in order to find the candidate with the right teamwork attributes. Human Resources needs to clearly understand the importance of the soft skills associated with cross functional teamwork and develop means of measuring these skills during the interview process. Although department managers may be better judges of technical skills, it is essential that HR be included in all employee selection. Human Resources should have VETO power over department managers when a candidate fails to measure up from a cross-functional teamwork perspective.*

## 2. Cross-functional Conflict Resolution

The reality is that conflicts will occur between interrelated work groups during the accomplishment of daily flight operations. These conflicts are tied to the nature of a business that requires different work groups, with often incompatible tasks, to simultaneously work together on achieving the common goals of safety and on-time performance.

*Analysis: Conflict needs to be embraced as an opportunity to increase awareness of the challenges faced by different work groups. It is essential for management within Hawkair to institute a means for bringing conflicting groups or individuals together when conflict occurs. All managers need training in conflict resolution and the role of conflict in the establishment of high performance work systems. The practice of ignoring conflict needs to cease.*

## 3. Cross-functional Performance Measurement

Current performance measuring parameters within Hawkair include an On-Time Performance (OTP) report. This report is generated on a daily basis by the operations department. This report identifies all flight delays which occurred the previous day and applies a departmental code to each delay. The intent of the OTP is to identify areas where delays occur and identify the department responsible.

*Analysis: Although this system identifies delays, and which department is responsible, it may not reinforce teamwork between work groups. A better*

*method for determining and allocating responsibility for delays needs to be devised. Instead of blaming a work group, such as flight attendants or customer service for the delay, each departure needs to be viewed as a team task. This team made up of representatives from all necessary work groups, would then take responsibility for delays jointly.*

#### **4. Cross-functional Rewards**

At present, Hawkair has a number of rewards systems in place which reward employees for meeting departmental goals. For example, some of these initiatives include incentives for making sales, rewards for meeting on time performance, and rewards for going beyond in the area of customer service. For the most part, these rewards are based on the performance of individuals within their own department.

*Analysis: Although possibly more complicated to administer than rewards based purely on functional / departmental outcomes, incentives that reward cross-functional coordination need to be incorporated into an incentives program within Hawkair. Hawkair currently lacks an employee incentive program tied directly to financial performance. The link between employee output and long-term organizational financial viability needs to be implemented.*

## 5. Cross-functional Meetings

Hawkair has a number of cross functional meetings. Currently, these include bi-weekly manager meetings, twice weekly OTP meetings (delays are discussed by lead hands and supervisors) and semi-monthly safety meetings (employee and management representatives meet to discuss safety related concerns).

*Analysis: Although a number of cross-functional meetings are currently in place at Hawkair, these meetings generally focus on getting departmental managers or supervisors together to discuss operational or safety issues. Lack of communication between groups at Hawkair has been a long-standing concern. The purpose of regularly scheduled cross-functional meetings is to improve relationships and should lead to improvements in communication. Recently, cross functional meetings have been scheduled between the pilot group and the maintenance group. This initiative is designed to break down misconceptions and barriers between these groups. Similar programs should be encouraged between other work groups within Hawkair.*

## 6. Cross-functional Boundary Spanners

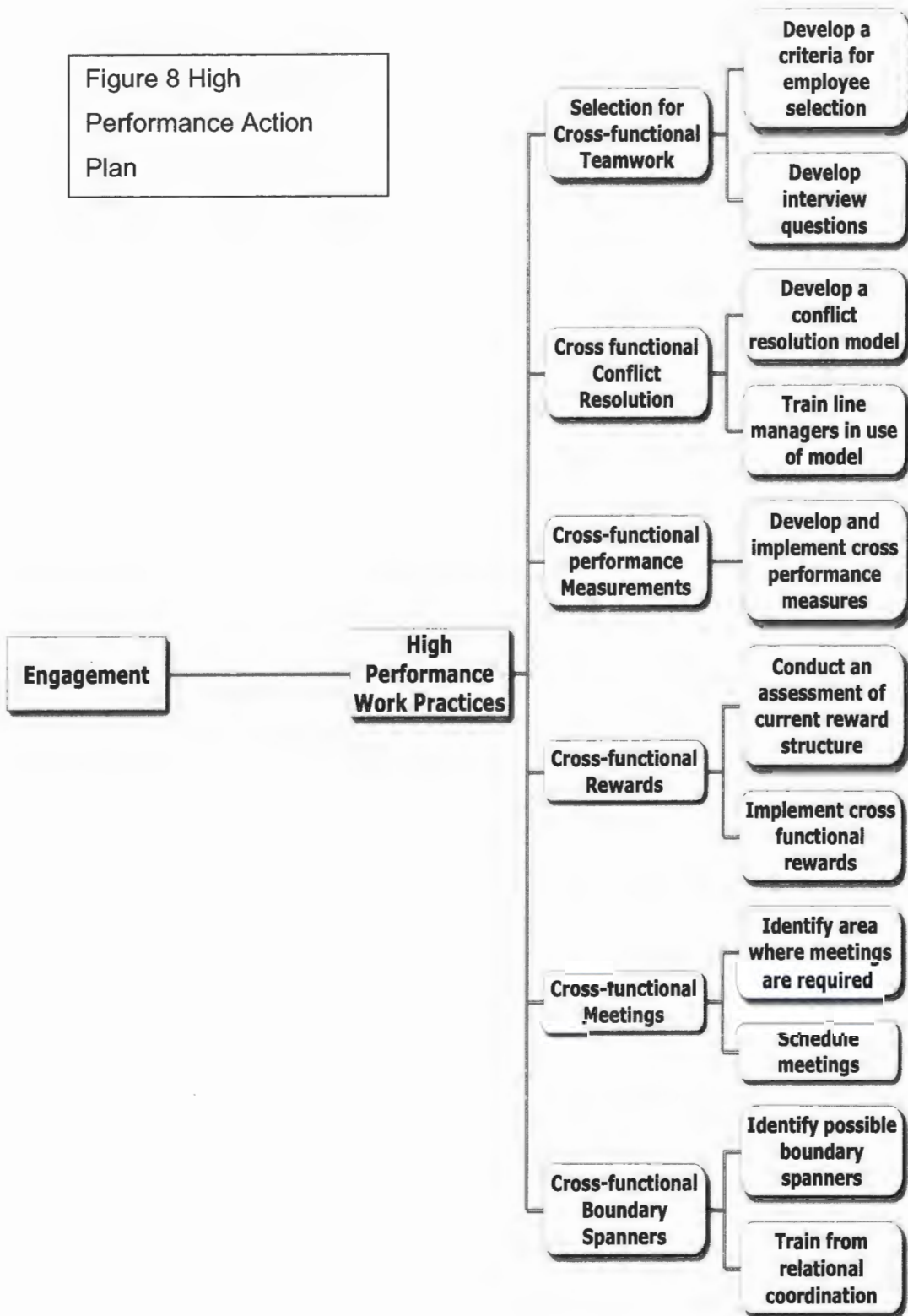
In larger airlines, with a considerable number of departures occurring throughout the day, the role of coordinating cross-functional work groups during the departure process falls upon the operations agents. At Hawkair, where the number of departures is much smaller, no such



position exists. The one position that most closely resembles the role of operations agent within Hawkair is the base manager or lead hand.

Analysis: *Although Hawkair lacks the title "operations agent." It is apparent that some sort of coordination must be occurring. A review of the current coordination efforts during departure should be analyzed with a view of understanding which employees currently fulfill this role. Upon identification of the appropriate party, training in how to facilitate better communication between groups will be initiated. This training program will involve instruction of team dynamics and the functional benefits of true teamwork.*

Figure 8 High  
Performance Action  
Plan



As described in the analysis of the six drivers of engagement and the six high performance work practices, there are many areas within Hawkair that will need to be addressed. One single person could not conceivably make the changes necessary to create an engagement -supporting environment. A list of areas that will need to be addressed and a list of actions to be taken are included and can be found in the draft implementation schedule (Figure 9). This section, however, will focus on how to engage the hearts and minds of the employees and managers which will be crucial to the success of any transformational efforts. Many theories, such as Kurt Lewin's (1951) three-step change framework, (unfreezing, moving, and refreezing), have been suggested for implementing organizational transformations. However, the method chosen for use at Hawkair is John P. Kotter's eight step model, described in the article "Leading Change Why Transformational Efforts Fail", (2007). Using Kotter's eight-step model, in conjunction with the author's observations and personal knowledge of Hawkair, the following is an analysis of how to approach the establishment of a culture of engagement at Hawkair.

1. *Establishing a Sense of Urgency* – The recent ownership change, combined with a history of insecurity, should be leveraged to act as the catalyst for establishing a sense of urgency among the employees and management of Hawkair.

2. Forming a Powerful Guiding Coalition- As in most organizations, Hawkair has both appointed and emergent leaders. Key employees, with the skills and power to guide other employees need to be identified. These key employees will form a guiding coalition. The author's intimate knowledge of Hawkair and its workforce will be employed in the selection of appropriate members of this coalition. This group will be made up of members of all work groups and will include managers and employees.
3. Creating the Vision – After enduring a period of insecurity, the goal of achieving stability will be a key part of the vision going forward. From our 2009 mission statement (Appendix 3), the goal of becoming a top employer by 2013 will be the target to be achieved during the creation of an engagement-supporting culture.
4. Communicating the Vision- The guiding coalition will be a key part of communicating the vision for the future. Time must be spent to instruct the guiding coalition in the finer points of relational coordination and the six drivers of engagement. Another means of communicating the vision will include meetings with staff about the benefits of engagement; training material will need to be developed for this purpose. Working with the marketing team, an internal marketing campaign will be developed and implemented.

5. Empowering Others to Act on the Vision- This part of the process will focus on the timely elimination of barriers to change. In the case of process, or system, triggered barriers, re-engineering of processes or systems will be undertaken. In the case of human barriers, careful retraining or extraction will take place if the person is unwilling or unable to change their views. The guiding coalition will be encouraged to act as role models of risk taking behaviour. These role models will, hopefully, encourage others to step outside their traditional work boundaries.
6. Planning for and Creating Short Term Wins - As change occurs, every small improvement needs to be celebrated. A system for rewarding employees, who make an effort to change, will be developed with the assistance of the guiding coalition.
7. Consolidating Improvements and Producing Still More Change – This stage will revisit the changes that have been made, ensuring that company policies and procedures are in alignment with the changes that have been completed. Hiring and promotions practices will be instituted that support the six drivers of engagement and the six effective work practices.

8. *Institutionalizing New Approaches* – A means of connecting the transformation to organizational success needs to be instituted through the establishment of metrics which measure corporate success. Continued leadership development will need to persist so that future leaders within the company understand the reasons for the transformational initiatives. This continued development of leadership will, hopefully, avoid the mistake of future leaders undoing process and procedures which were instituted to create an engaged workforce.

### **Implementation Plan**

As stated in this report, in order to foster engagement among the employees of Hawkair, an environment which supports engagement needs to be created. The task of creating this environment will require the cooperation of a number of groups such as managers, ownership, and the employees themselves. The framework for change within Hawkair comes from Kotter's Eight-step model for organizational change, in addition to the six drivers of engagement and the six high performance work practices. An implementation plan has been drafted and is awaiting execution (Figure 9).

This implementation plan contains a series of tasks which are directly related to the twelve engagement supporting themes as shown in Figure 5. The draft implementation schedule has been granted a timeline of 1.5 years, but this will probably shift as the execution of the plan takes place. Actual start dates of

the project and the individual tasks will be implemented at a later date. It is hoped that the process will start as early as May 2010. As suggested by Kotter, a guiding coalition will be formed. In order to empower these agents of change, it is essential that this team take on two vital roles. The first is to take part in the development of the implementation schedule that Hawkair will use. The second is to bring forth suggestions for alternate initiatives that can be implemented at Hawkair. The identification of employees to become members of the guiding coalition has already started. The goal is to select emergent leaders within Hawkair who have two important characteristics. Firstly, they must have the requisite respect of the employees of Hawkair; they are already identified as leaders by their peers. Secondly, they must demonstrate a passion and commitment for the company. This group will represent a diverse group of employees from all work groups within Hawkair.



Figure 9 Draft Implementation schedule

Number	Task	Resource	Start	End	Duration	% Complete
<b>1</b>	<b>The six drivers of Engagement</b>		<b>1/6/2010</b>	<b>30/12/2011</b>	<b>397</b>	
1.1	Meaningfulness of Work		1/6/2010	30/12/2011	397	
1.1.1	Introduction of performance metrics	HR/ managers	1/6/2010	30/12/2011	397	
1.1.2	Development of a message from management	General Manager	1/6/2010	30/12/2011	397	
1.2	Voice, the ability to have your views heard		1/6/2010	30/12/2011	397	
1.2.1	Develop an employee suggestion box on Website	IT/ HR	1/6/2010	30/12/2011	397	
1.2.2	communications training for all managers	HR/ GM/ outside trainers	1/6/2010	30/12/2011	397	
1.3	Communication of a vision by senior management		1/6/2010	30/12/2011	397	
1.3.1	Reinforce the validity of existing vision	Senior Management	1/6/2010	30/12/2011	397	
1.3.2	Develop new long term corporate objectives	Ownership/management	1/6/2010	30/12/2011	397	
1.4	Supportive Work environment		1/6/2010	30/12/2011	397	
1.4.1	Personal development plans	HR/ Managers	1/6/2010	30/12/2011	397	
1.4.2	Work life balance strategies	HR/ Managers/employees	1/6/2010	30/12/2011	397	
1.5	Job Fit		1/6/2010	30/12/2011	397	
1.5.1	Extend the use of evaluations	HR/ Managers	1/6/2010	30/12/2011	397	
1.6	Front line Management Style		1/6/2010	30/12/2011	397	
1.6.1	Manager evaluations	GM / HR	1/6/2010	30/12/2011	397	
1.6.2	Management training plans	Managers/ GM	1/6/2010	30/12/2011	397	
<b>2</b>	<b>High Performance Work Practices</b>		<b>1/6/2010</b>	<b>31/12/2011</b>	<b>397</b>	
2.1	Selection for Cross-functional Teamwork		1/6/2010	31/12/2011	397	
2.1.1	Develop a criteria for employee selection	HR/ Dept Managers	1/6/2010	31/12/2011	397	
2.1.2	Develop interview questions	HR / Dept Managers	1/6/2010	31/12/2011	397	
2.2	Cross functional Conflict Resolution		1/6/2010	31/12/2011	397	
2.2.1	Develop a conflict resolution model	HR / GM / Outside	1/6/2010	31/12/2011	397	
2.2.2	Train line managers in use of model	HR / Outside Resources	1/6/2010	31/12/2011	397	
2.3	Cross-functional performance Measurements		1/6/2010	31/12/2011	397	
2.3.1	Develop and implement cross performance measures	Dept managers / GM	1/6/2010	31/12/2011	397	
2.4	Cross-functional Rewards		1/6/2010	31/12/2011	397	
2.4.1	Conduct an assessment of current reward structure	Dept managers / GM	1/6/2010	31/12/2011	397	
2.4.2	Implement cross functional rewards	Dept Managers	1/6/2010	31/12/2011	397	
2.5	Cross-functional Meetings		1/6/2010	31/12/2011	397	
2.5.1	Identify area where meetings are required	Dept Managers / GM	1/6/2010	31/12/2011	397	
2.5.2	Schedule meetings	Dept Managers	1/6/2010	31/12/2011	397	
2.6	Cross-functional Boundary Spanners		1/6/2010	31/12/2011	397	
2.6.1	Identify possible boundary spanners	GM	1/6/2010	31/12/2011	397	
2.6.2	Train from relational coordination	HR / GM / Outside trainers	1/6/2010	31/12/2011	397	



## **How do we Measure the Effects of our Strategy?**

The above implementation schedule estimates that execution of all policies and strategies will take approximately 18 months from a tentative June 1<sup>st</sup>, 2010 launch date. It would be hoped that, as the plan is implemented, there will be a noticeable improvement in levels of engagement. In an ideal scenario, an employee survey would be done in June 2010 to measure initial employee engagement. However, due to the recency of the Fall 2009 survey, it is suggested that this survey be used as a proxy for the baseline measure. Although this survey did not measure engagement levels *per se*, it does present a measure of employee morale and satisfaction. In the longer term, the UWES survey (Appendix 2) will be used to measure engagement on an ongoing basis. At this stage, it is anticipated that the UWES survey will be carried out annually, although this schedule may be amended as experience is gained.

## CONCLUSION

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The aviation industry has a well-earned reputation for instability. Breaking this cycle requires a secure financial footing. Since the time of deregulation, airlines have sought this fiscal stability through cost cutting initiatives. These cost cutting measures often focus on reducing labour costs. Hawkair has seen its own share of volatility over the last decade. This insecurity can only be reduced through increased financial stability and consistent profitability. Southwest Airlines and WestJet are two airlines that have managed to remain financially secure through aviation industry downturns. They offer an enticing model for success and stability within the airline industry. In reviewing literature, such as the book, Up in the Air: How Airlines Can Improve Performance by Engaging Their Employees, by Greg J Bamber, Jody Hoffer Gittell, Thomas Kochan and Andrew von Nordenflycht, (2009), we can identify a model that Hawkair can use to increase stability.

By implementing a strategy that focuses on implementing the six drivers of engagement and the six high performance work practices, we can create an environment which supports engagement, at the same time; we can break down the barriers between functional work groups. The implementation of these strategies will not just happen by talking about the changes required. This transformational effort will require planning, approval and concrete actions by the employees and management alike.

Hawkair is a great group of people. Many employees are passionate about the company and wish for years of continued growth and prosperity. Harnessing these passions as well as incorporating the knowledge about engagement garnered through this report, will make it possible for all levels of the staff to cultivate an engagement-supporting culture. We anticipate the benefits of an engaged workforce to be the long term stability and success of Hawkair.

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## **APPENDICES**

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### **Appendix 1**

#### **Survey questions broken down by Category**

##### **Category 1 Company**

1. Management is interested in the welfare of its employees.
2. In my judgement, this organization is well managed.
3. I have trust and confidence in senior management.
4. I feel management generally understands the problems we face in our jobs.
5. I have a clear understanding of the organization's values and behavioural standards.
6. People with different ideas are valued in this organization.
7. Our senior management communicates well with the rest of the organization.
8. All department managers encourage each other and works well together as a team.
9. The company morale is good.
10. In my judgment, employment conditions have improved over the past 12 months.
11. I am proud to work for Hawkair.
12. I would recommend employment at Hawkair to my friends.
13. This survey is a good way to find problems that need to be solved.



## **Category 2 Departmental Effectiveness**

1. My department's overall performance and effectiveness is good.
2. My work department makes good decisions and solves problems well.
3. There is cooperation between my department and other departments we work with.
4. I have confidence and trust in my departmental coworkers.
5. My department produces the amount of work that is expected.
6. My department encourages each other and works together as a team.
7. The exchange of ideas and opinions is encouraged in our department.
8. My department is efficient in doing it's required work.
9. My department plans and co-ordinates work effectively.
10. People in my work area work well together.
11. The department morale is good.
12. The people I work with helps each other out when someone falls behind.

## **Category 3 Supervisor Evaluation**

1. My Supervisor is consistent in his/her dealings with all of us.
2. My supervisor listens to our suggestions and problems.
3. My supervisor gives me credit for work well done.
4. I feel free to express my honest opinions to my supervisor.
5. When dealing with my supervisor I am treated with respect and courtesy.
6. My supervisor encourages myself and my colleagues to give their best effort.

7. My supervisor provides me with adequate help, training and guidance so that I can improve my performance.
8. My supervisor ensures that his/her instructions are clear, understandable and complete; uses interactive skills.
9. My supervisor consistently displays a positive attitude about his/her job role and the organization.
10. I am satisfied with how my supervisor takes care of complaints.
11. My supervisor always addresses poor performance appropriately.
12. My supervisor expects too much from me.
13. My supervisor has enough authority to make changes for the better.
14. My supervisor is a good listener.
15. My supervisor consistently holds people accountable.

#### **Category 4 Working Conditions**

1. The hours I work are agreeable.
2. Working conditions around my job are good.
3. The workload is fairly distributed.
4. Work is well organised at Hawkair.
5. My workplace is physically comfortable.
6. Too much work is expected of employees in my area.
7. Working conditions here are safe.

### **Category 5 Personal Satisfaction**

1. I enjoy the day-to-day activities of performing my job.
2. I see myself at Hawkair long-term.
3. I am efficient in performing my job.
4. The work I produce is high quality.
5. I have to go through a lot of 'red tape' to get my job done.
6. My job gives me a strong sense of personal satisfaction.
7. I have a clear path towards job progression.
8. Our company does a good job of meeting my needs as an individual.
9. Overall, I am satisfied with this organization.
10. I have clear expectations and understanding of my job duties and what is required of me.
11. I receive proper praise and recognition when I perform my job beyond expectations.

### **Category 6 Compensation and Opportunities**

1. I am paid fairly for the work I do.
2. I understand how my pay is determined.
3. I am satisfied with how pay raises are determined.
4. I feel that the benefits package I receive at Hawkair is fair and competitive.
5. In comparison with other people in similar jobs at Hawkair, I feel my pay is equitable.

6. This organization's policies for promotion and advancement are always fair.
7. The individuals who do receive promotions usually deserve them.
8. I can be sure of a job with Hawkair as long as I do good work.
9. There is an opportunity for long-term career progression.
10. I have a chance to achieve my goals at work.

## Work &amp; Well-being Survey (UWES) ©

The following 17 statements are about how you feel at work. Please read each statement carefully and decide if you ever feel this way about your job. If you have never had this feeling, cross the '0' (zero) in the space after the statement. If you have had this feeling, indicate how often you feel it by crossing the number (from 1 to 6) that best describes how frequently you feel that way.

	Almost never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very often	Always
0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Never	A few times a year or less	Once a month or less	A few times a month	Once a week	A few times a week	Every day
1. _____	At my work, I feel bursting with energy* (VI1)					
2. _____	I find the work that I do full of meaning and purpose (DE1)					
3. _____	Time flies when I'm working (AB1)					
4. _____	At my job, I feel strong and vigorous (VI2)*					
5. _____	I am enthusiastic about my job (DE2)*					
6. _____	When I am working, I forget everything else around me (AB2)					
7. _____	My job inspires me (DE3)*					
8. _____	When I get up in the morning, I feel like going to work (VI3)*					
9. _____	I feel happy when I am working intensely (AB3)*					
10. _____	I am proud on the work that I do (DE4)*					
11. _____	I am immersed in my work (AB4)*					
12. _____	I can continue working for very long periods at a time (VI4)					
13. _____	To me, my job is challenging (DE5)					
14. _____	I get carried away when I'm working (AB5)*					
15. _____	At my job, I am very resilient, mentally (VI5)					
16. _____	It is difficult to detach myself from my job (AB6)					
17. _____	At my work I always persevere, even when things do not go well (VI6)					

\* Shortened version (UWES-9); VI = vigor, DE = dedication, AB = absorption



Tag Line: Flying with Passion!

Our Mission: To be the aviation company most admired for its people, partnerships and business performance, passionately providing unequalled value in safe and friendly air travel.

Our Vision: By 2013, Hawkair will be recognized in Western Canada as the preferred regional airline for passenger and charter services by connecting the west to the world. Hawkair will be recognized as one of BC's Top 50 Employers, providing aviation excellence in safety, service and price.

Our Values: Commitment to Safety  
Respect & appreciate ourselves, our workplace, our guests and our environment  
Strive for professionalism and excellence  
Focus our energy on making good things happen  
Take responsibility for our actions  
Communicate effectively  
Community Involvement  
Create a culture of fun, action and teamwork  
Invest in the best - our people, our business and our partnerships

July 23, 2009

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## RAISING THE BAR

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