The Survey of Employee Engagement: The History and The Future

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The Survey of Employee Engagement: The History and The Future

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The history and nature of formal organizations are based in antiquity, with significant contributions from military organizations. The earliest cited example of small team groups was the organization of 8- to 10-person groups of shield- and sword-bearing soldiers in the Greek city-state of Sparta. The men trained and fought together as a team, in contrast to other military units of the time that would simply run or ride into battle in large, unorganized mobs. The classic battle of 300 Spartans fighting a large army from Persia is frequently cited in organizational history as an example of the advantage of disciplined, small groups.

Much of the basis of Western culture comes from the world of Greek city-states such as Sparta, Athens, Corinth, and, in time, over 1,000 city-states. Italy to the west of Greece on the Mediterranean Sea was influenced by organizational ideas coming from the Greeks including building military units from small teams, the concept of citizenship, governmental organization, and building wealth from trade. More than any other culture over 2,000 years ago, the Romans used these Greek concepts to create an empire of citizens and non-citizens that covered many of the areas around the Mediterranean Sea, north through the British Isles, and into the Germany of today.

Factory Production

Organizational thought many centuries later was expanded by concepts of factory production and assembly lines. Work sites that spun cotton into textiles near London in the 1800s are examples. Looms that would spin cotton and wool into fabrics that were powered by the moving water in streams and having workers tend to the machines were a template of factory organization that was extended to other areas of manufacture.

The most profound was the assembly line created by Henry Ford to produce the Model T, the iconic automobile of Ford and America. Ford did not invent the automobile. Craftsmen had created both gasoline and electric powered cars in the late 1800s, and Germany was the leading manufacturer in the first years of the 20th century. Ford's distinction was he invented an auto made on a factory assembly line without skilled craftsmen, but instead with "lowly" trained workers.

When he made the Model T in 1908 the price was $850, while other cars cost $1,000 and up. By 1924, using the assembly line and interchangeable parts, the cost had dropped to $265 per car. This model of manufacturing changed the world. Henry Ford sold millions of cars that were the first affordable option for middle class Americans which, with their standardized parts, could be kept running with easily available replacement parts.

Rather than building a unique item with skilled craftsmen, the factory simplified tasks and arranged them sequentially on the assembly line. Workers would have a place on the line and do, repeatedly, a discrete task. A foreman would watch several workers, often 5 to 10, and could stop the moving assembly line if problems occurred. This approach, not unlike the small-unit military pioneered by the Spartans and adapted by the Roman Legions, changed forever the manufacture of goods.

All manufacturing and most of agriculture, retailing, education, healthcare, and the military today reflect many of these concepts. Job descriptions, hierarchy, chain of command, and standardized products and processes are all components coming from the fundamentals of the factory assembly line.

While these concepts of factory production changed the world of work, there were problems. One was the lack of innovation. Assembly-line workers and foremen often knew only their immediate task but not the complete product or how users or consumers viewed the product. A top-down management style led to authoritarian conditions and conflicted with the sense of democracy in America. In response, workers formed unions to balance the power of management. From scientists that observed factories from the first decade of the 1900s through the mid-20th century, there were steps to lessen the emphasis on top-down control, increase participation of workers, and encourage more innovation.

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By the 1960s, more turbulence began to develop in American organizations. One response was for top management to ask for ideas, perceptions, and concerns of workers. Initially this took the form of suggestion boxes that were placed in the building hallways for employees to anonymously comment. In time more successful organizations were regularly polling employees about the product or service, their view of the working conditions, and examining how responses varied by areas of the organization and employee characteristics.

Tools to query and summarize perspectives and opinions of members of an organization and then secure related perspectives of those that use an organization are the two major efforts of the Survey of Organizational Excellence. Our research indicates that organizations that regularly acquire and then use these data build creative and innovative organizations that serve both the members of the organization and those that the organization serves.

The following is a brief history of how the Survey came into being in Texas and then some major issues that organizations particularly in Texas are facing now and, in many cases, will face for some time to come.

The Survey of Organizational Excellence began in 1970 at the Request of Governor William P. Clements

Governor Clements heard about the organizational assessment research of Michael Lauderdale. Professor Lauderdale had done community and organizational assessments in many communities, and while working as a faculty member at UT he did assessments for well -known Austin businesses including IBM, 3M, and the Austin Regional Clinic.

Governor Clements asked Professor Lauderdale in 1979 to do similar organizational assessments for Texas State Government's State Agencies. Governor Clements had created a large oil well drilling company and had served as Deputy Secretary of Defense in the Nixon and Ford Administrations. He told Professor Lauderdale that his experience in running large organizations included knowing the opinions and experiences of all members of the organization, not just the upper management.

Texas Economy in the 1980s

In 1979 the state population was 14 million with a strong but narrow economic base. The dominant features were agriculture, oil, and defense spending. East Texas agriculture was cotton, row crops, and lumber. West Texas was cattle, wheat, and cotton.

As the population of Texas grew, so did the complexity of the economy. The organizational surveys became important perspectives on detecting challenges and judging the efficacy of changes and innovations. Legislators were changing as the economy and population changed. Many noted the changing economy and worked to see that state government reflected these changes and promoted the needs of a changing citizenry.

An example is one encounter with State Representative Henry Cuellar in 1996. Representative Cuellar asked Professor Lauderdale if he had shopped at the new Walmart in Austin. Lauderdale replied he had not, and Cuellar urged him to do so and then to get back to him to talk. The key point Cuellar saw was the greeter at the door at Walmart and the effort to find out if Walmart had the items the shopper wanted. Cuellar said to Lauderdale that Texas State Agencies should be as open as this new retailer and said that he would write the legislation to citizen input. This became the Customer Satisfaction section of the Survey.

Survey staff worked closely over the decades with each Governor's Offices, Lieutenant Governor's Offices, and the Speakers of the House. Presentations were provided to House Appropriations and Senate Finance Committees. Beginning in the 1990s, a conference was held every two years that focused upon past accomplishments and awarded recognition of the best large, medium-sized, and small agencies and examined the challenges coming in the next two years.

Specific Considerations of Some Critical Agencies

Every state agency has general concerns and specific issues. Here are some examples.

<u>DOT-Texas Department of Transportation</u>

This agency charged with building and maintaining highways will continue to be pressured with population growth. Two more distant variables are more vehicles powered by electricity and thus the need for more resources to provide

charging. Another variable is the growth of autonomous and semi-autonomous vehicles. These trucks are already appearing on IH-10 and now into Dallas and Austin. Will such devices make the highways safer, will more electronic signals rather than visible signs be used, and will fewer stops along the roads occur are some of the questions.

DCJ-Texas Department of Criminal Justice

The Texas Department of Criminal Justice has the challenging responsibilities for the custody, care, and rehabilitation of 122,000 offenders. This agency's rapid growth was in the 1990s, and it has faced very difficult challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic. No part of Texas government, other than the juvenile custody facility, has more complex challenges. Where prisons are located, what services are provided, and what is the success rate of avoiding recidivism are some of the critical questions.

DPS-Texas Department of Public Safety

The Texas Department of Public Safety is the state police force with the responsibility of patrolling highways, protection of the Capitol, and growing responsibilities along the Rio Grande with the border of Mexico. It provides state identification services through driver's licenses for drivers and identification for non-drivers. No agency provides more direct contact with citizens than DPS.

2020 Forward

The last decade in the Texas economy has been remarkable from extremes of prosperity and poverty. Examining the major elements of the economy and social arrangements provides some perspective on the year 2020, one of the most difficult in Texas and much of the world, and some indicators of what lies ahead.

One challenge is the changing components in the Texas economy. The part of the economy most reflective of these extremes is oil. Peak oil production and prices occurred in July 2008 with a top price of $147 per barrel. A sharp decline in the American economy occurred, which was tied to excesses in housing and loan speculation, with a low for the economy and the price of oil occurring in February of 2009. Oil dropped to $33.55 a barrel. In January of that year General Motors filed for bankruptcy, the largest in history, and a bankrupt Chrysler Motors was acquired by Fiat. The Federal Reserve sharply expanded the money supply, and an economic recovery began. It continued until late in 2014 with oil remaining above $90 but dropping by the end of that year to $48. For 2015 through 2019 oil remained above $50 most of the time. The price of $50 is important for oil produced in the United States, as that is the level at which oil from fields that require "fracking" is profitable.

Three forces appeared in 2020 that have created a very different world.

One that is acquiring the most attention is a new virus that appeared in China in November of 2019 but spread throughout the world in 2020. Efforts to control the spread have decreased movement and contact in societies and contributed to sharp drops in economic activity and employment. From barbers in West Texas making as much as $180,000 a year in the spring of 2019 to a depression in the oil fields today has been a disturbing rollercoaster ride. More than 3 million cases of COVID-19 have been identified in Texas as of July 2021, including more than 53,000 deaths in Texas. This is more than 15 times the rate of influenza deaths in Texas in 2019.

In September 2019 the Texas unemployment rate was 3.4%, tied for the state's best-ever month of employment on record. In the two years since then, the state has faced the coronavirus pandemic, and, as a result, experienced some of the worst-ever months for the state's economy, including a 13.5% unemployment rate in April 2020. Since March 2020, more than 3.6 million Texans have applied for unemployment relief.

Workers in the state's signature industry, oil and gas, have lost work in massive waves. There were 22.6% fewer worker in the mining and logging industry, which includes the oil and gas sector, compared with September 2019, according to non-seasonally adjusted numbers.

That was reflected in the oil-rich Permian Basin. Odessa's unadjusted unemployment rate increased from 11.1% in August 2020 to 13.2% in 2020. Midland's unadjusted rate went from 8.1% to 9.6% in that one-month period.

Two is the challenge of globalization with moving work to low-cost labor countries. China and Mexico are the two most visible in this process, with industrial cities like Chicago, Cleveland, Detroit, and Pittsburg among the most afflicted with the loss of middle-class manufacturing jobs from 1980 to the 2020s. But global supply chains collapsed during the pandemic. Facial masks; rubber gloves; many antibiotics; and electronic devices such as chips used in

computers, autos, commercial and household electronics, and computers that generate the modern internet-based world have become unavailable or undependable in supply. As an example, one European auto manufacturer has replaced computer chips that provide data from the car's transmission to drive the speedometer with a speedometer cable. About 30 years ago auto manufacturers began to replace traditional components like speedometer cables with computer circuitry. Cables that run from the steering wheel, transmission, carburetor, radiator, brakes, and other components were replaced or modified by using computer chips.

Three is the continuing growth of new technologies that replace traditional businesses. Our most visible example in Austin is the new Tesla factory. Tesla says it intends to produce both cars and trucks and is partnering with a land development company near the factory to build homes that will all have Tesla solar panels and batteries. These may prove to be neighborhoods that create all of their own electrical power for lighting, heating, air conditioning, cooking, and internet access. If electric automobiles are used, they can be charged at home. The Biden Administration is pushing for electrification of automobiles to lessen the load of carbon released in the atmosphere. If this new Austin neighborhood is successful, then every home will contribute to the nation's supply of energy, thereby decreasing the use of oil, coal, natural gas, hydraulic, and wind power.

Four is continuing immigration to the United States with most people coming first into Texas. Immigration at the southern border since January 1, 2021, is at higher levels than any seen in 20 years and will be close to 2 million in the current calendar year. The level of immigration is a signal of failing communities and states in many parts of the globe.

Significant issues include the growing numbers from countries other than Mexico and Central America, the numbers of unaccompanied children, and the actions of Mexican cartels bringing immigrants to the border. Cartel violence is returning to the levels of a decade ago, with fentanyl replacing marijuana, cocaine, and heroin as the dominant smuggled drug. Chemicals for the manufacture of fentanyl are shipped from China to western Mexico where cartels operate labs to create the fentanyl and then smuggle it into the United States. The recent conviction of a member of the Sinaloa Cartel in North Carolina illustrates the flow and size of the drug trade from Mexico into all of the United States.

Moving illegal drugs into the United States from Mexico has a history that goes back to prohibition of alcohol in the 1920s. Illegal drugs and cartels are dominant themes in much of Mexico, particularly in Mexican border towns from Matamoros and Reynosa across from Brownsville to Nuevo Laredo to Juarez and on to Tijuana. The current Mexican President, Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador, has avoided confronting organized crime more than did his predecessors over the last 20 years. But trying to avoid the issue has made it worse and more dangerous for Mexican citizens and travelers from the United States to Mexico.

A visible example of this increased violence is the highway that continues south from where IH-35 ends at Nuevo Laredo. There, historically known as the Pan American Highway, it continues 140 miles to Mexico's most advanced industrial city, Monterrey, then on to Mexico City and then to the tip of South America. Monterrey, like the border cities of Nuevo Laredo, Juarez, Reynosa, and Tijuana, experienced rapid growth and prosperity from the movement of American, European, and Asian countries to manufacture products using Mexican labor that costs a tenth or less of American labor, with transportation near and efficient to American markets.

But the growth of these Mexican border cities, the high level of travel back and forth across the border, and the convenient access to highway routes to the United States and Canada provided opportunities for Mexican organized crime to move people and drugs into the United States. This has resulted in many of these areas being under the control of the cartels. The extent is revealed by the fact that citizens that live in Laredo and Nuevo Laredo call the highway to Monterrey the "road of death." By July of this 2021 at least 71 people have gone missing from cars and trucks they were driving either to or from Monterrey. The majority of those missing are men driving trucks north or south, but at least six are American citizens.

Since 2006, as the cartel wars accelerated in Mexico, about 88,000 persons have gone missing. The violence appeared to ebb about 2018 but is now accelerating. Part of the acceleration may be due to the deaths and costs of the pandemic, but the large cause is the deterioration of social order

in Mexico.

Five is the collapse of the social order in many countries such as Haiti, South Africa, Cuba, Afghanistan, and parts of Latin America, as well as the United States and even in Canada. The causes are complex and vary from country to country. Haiti's, for example, appears to be conflicts between opposing political parties. Afghanistan comes from the ending of the presence of American military and tribal groups asserting control over urban areas and the national government. Canada's comes from findings of graves of Native American children in schools run by churches until thirty years ago. Some persons, it appears, see church burnings as a means of addressing those acts of racial destruction against Native American groups. In Canada and the United States, children from Indian homes were taken and placed in boarding schools, some run by the government and more in Canada run by churches. The intent of the schools was to socialize Native American children in the culture of the United States or Canada, not letting the children mature in their Native culture.

Summary

In the future, the viral pandemic that began in China may be viewed as a catalyst that caused long standing and growing tensions to explode. Some tensions derive from brittle political structures that do not respond to the needs of the community. That appears to be the case in Haiti, Cuba, South Africa, and many other countries. A similar tension occurs between ethnic and racial groups and perceptions of justice. That is a recurring problem not only in the United States, but in Europe and Asia as well. The failure of governments to serve and secure societal support of is deeply apparent in Mexico, much of Latin America, China, India, and Europe.

Another tension as world-changing as the virus is the relationship between people and our environment. In 1972, scientists at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) made an early use of computers to extend patterns of population growth, energy usage, land and water use, and consumption of natural resources to write a book, Limits to Growth, that set 2040 as the year things would come to an end. The MIT book was paralleled by other thinkers like King Hubbard, a geophysicist who created the term "peak oil" to explain that there were growing limits to the availability of natural resources like oil, coal, and other minerals.

Where does all of this take us? We are ending a paradigm that appeared after World War II. For the United States and Europe, it was a paradigm of increased prosperity and relative peace. Families became smaller, and both adults in a marriage worked outside of the home. People moved from rural areas to cities. Highways and railroads linked the countryside to the city, and then telegraphs, telephones, and finally the internet promoted civic communication.

The New Paradigm

New paradigms seem to appear in the West every 70 to 100 years. They are caused by demographic shifts including disease, population migrations, scientific innovations, economic shifts, and even geological changes. Population migrations to North and South America thousands of years ago were possible with global cold waves that created vast ice deposits and lowered sea levels, permitting human passage from Asia to North America via a land bridge in Alaska. Thousands of years later, by the 1400s, innovations in sailing and navigation led to Portuguese and Spanish explorers coming to the Americas, followed by the fall of the Aztec Empire in Mexico and similar regimes in South America. Then immigrants from France, England, and Ireland came to North America, and like in Mexico, 90% of the native population died from disease, conflict, and starvation. Several cycles of civilization have occurred, from ranching and farming to urbanization and industrialization. The 20th century saw America become urbanized, leading the world in industrialization and then shipping much of its industry to lower-wage nations and seeking to secure its place in a globalized world. But the question that developed in the 1990s was what could the United States trade to the world for its imports of goods? Oil has loomed large, as has the dollar as the world currency. But both may be near decline.

Our question for this decade and the next is what is the coming paradigm? World trade and travel are declining as automation replaces cheap labor and the risk of disease from travel is high. Equal distribution of wealth is failing, as some of the highest concentrations of wealth are among

the upper 10% and even more for the upper 1%. Climate change appears to be increasing as the American West is facing record heat and water shortages. Rising sea levels threaten coastal areas from the Gulf to the Atlantic in the United States. Conditions are likely worse in Central America and much of Asia and Africa. This is deepening poverty, disrupting social stability, and causing growing efforts to emigrate.

In 2021 the features of the emerging paradigm suggest continuing decline of formal workplaces, with offices and factories shrinking. Shopping using the internet rather than traveling to stores and centers will continue. Traditional educational systems such as colleges will decline because of costs, and the subsequent earnings from a college degree will decline. Population growth will slow as the cost of children rises and there is a decline in the need for human labor. This decline has been in place for a generation in the West, Japan, South Korea, and now China. Population growth in the United States has continued not from births of citizens but from immigration.

Will the emerging paradigm include government? Yes, it will. But it must be government that is deployed with need, is highly innovative, and maintains, even more than in the past, fidelity with the people.