5.2 Workforce Engagement

Purpose

This item asks about your systems for managing workforce performance and developing your workforce members to enable and encourage all of them to contribute effectively and to the best of their ability. These systems are intended to foster high performance, to address your core competencies, and to help accomplish your action plans and ensure your organization's success now and in the future.

Commentary

High performance. The focus of this item is on a workforce capable of achieving high performance. Understanding the characteristics of high-performance work environments, in which people do their utmost for their customers' benefit and the organization's success, is key to understanding and building an engaged workforce. High performance is

characterized by flexibility, innovation, empowerment and personal accountability, knowledge and skill sharing, good communication and information flow, alignment with organizational objectives, customer focus, and rapid response to changing business needs and marketplace requirements.

Workforce engagement and performance. Many studies have shown that high levels of workforce engagement have a significant, positive impact on organizational performance. Research has indicated that engagement is characterized by performing meaningful work; having clear organizational direction and accountability for performance; and having a safe, trusting, effective, and cooperative work environment. In many organizations, employees and volunteers are drawn to and derive meaning from their work because it is aligned with their personal values.

Drivers of workforce engagement. Although satisfaction with pay and pay increases are important, these two factors generally are not sufficient to ensure workforce engagement and high performance. Some examples of other factors to consider are effective problem and grievance resolution; development and career opportunities; the work environment and management support; workplace safety and security; the workload; effective communication, cooperation, and teamwork; the degree of empowerment; job security; appreciation of the differing needs of diverse workforce groups; and organizational support for serving customers.

Factors inhibiting engagement. It is equally important to understand and address factors inhibiting engagement. You could develop an understanding of these factors through workforce surveys, focus groups, blogs, or exit interviews with departing workforce members.

Compensation and recognition. Compensation and recognition systems should be matched to your work systems. Recognition can include monetary and nonmonetary, formal and informal, and individual and group mechanisms. To be effective, compensation and recognition might include promotions and bonuses tied to performance, demonstrated skills, skills acquired, adaptation to new work systems and culture, and other factors. Approaches might also include profit sharing; mechanisms for expressing simple "thank yous"; rewards for exemplary team or unit performance; and linkage to customer engagement measures, achievement of organizational strategic objectives, or other key organizational objectives.

Other indicators of workforce engagement. In addition to direct measures of workforce engagement through formal or informal surveys, other indicators include absenteeism, turnover, grievances, and strikes.

Performance development. Organizations today need employees who are versatile and who can continually upgrade their work skills. High-performing organizations address this need by meeting employees' rising expectations for career-relevant learning and development. In performance development, employees pursue personal growth and growth in the organization through both internal and external learning. This learning involves engaging work assignments, opportunities, and personal learning to reach the next level of organizational and personal performance.

Performance development needs. Depending on the nature of your organization's work, workforce responsibilities, and stage of organizational and personal development, performance development needs might vary greatly. These needs might include gaining skills for knowledge sharing, communication, teamwork, and problem solving; interpreting and using data; exceeding customer requirements; analyzing and simplifying processes; reducing waste and cycle time; working with and motivating volunteers; and setting priorities based on strategic alignment or cost-benefit analysis.

Education needs might also include advanced skills in new technologies or basic skills, such as reading, writing, language, arithmetic, and computer skills.

Learning and development locations and formats. Learning and development opportunities might occur inside or outside your organization and could involve on-the-job, classroom, e-learning, or distance learning, as well as developmental assignments, coaching, or mentoring.

Individual learning and development needs. To help people realize their full potential, many organizations prepare an individual development plan with each person that addresses his or her career and learning objectives and desires.

Customer contact training. Although this item does not specifically ask you about training for customer contact employees, such training is important and common. It frequently includes gaining critical skills and knowledge about your products and customers, how to listen to customers, how to recover from problems or failures, and how to effectively manage and exceed customer expectations.

Learning and development effectiveness. Measures to evaluate the effectiveness and efficiency of your workforce and leader development and learning systems might address the impact on individual, unit, and organizational performance; the impact on customer-related performance; and costs versus benefits.