Chapter 6

Looking Beyond the Academic Institution for Retention and Student Engagement Models: A Study of Employee Engagement in a Rapidly Growing Worldwide Marketing Company

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ABSTRACT

Student engagement, retention, and success are not issues limited to traditional academic settings. Corporations and non-traditional business entities allocate significant resources to identify and develop viable solutions that positively impact employee engagement, retention and success. While most corporate training and employee development programs are driven by corporate mandates to improve efficiency and cost containment, the most dynamic retention and student success elements within these programs deserve further study and exploration. Indeed, the possible transfer of these effective retention and student success elements from the corporate training and development space to other learning, training and student development settings, can yield significant benefits to any institution or organization that seeks to improve its initiatives focused on training and education.
INTRODUCTION

Student engagement, retention, and success are not issues limited to traditional academic settings. Corporations and non-traditional business entities also allocate significant resources to identify and develop viable solutions that positively impact employee engagement, retention and success. While most corporate training and employee development programs are driven by corporate mandates to improve efficiency and cost containment, the most dynamic retention and student success elements within these programs deserve further study and exploration. Indeed, the possible transfer of these effective retention, engagement and success elements from the corporate training and development space to other learning, training and student development settings can yield significant benefits to any institution or organization that seeks to improve its initiatives focused on training and education. Moreover, while the application of corporate training approaches and strategies might appear to be most applicable to workforce development, these strategies can serve as an excellent template to inform the full range of traditional institutional academic programs, including degree completion and college preparation bridge programs.

A comprehensive corporate training and retention study of an international multi-level marketing distributorship program took place in 2015 and 2016 as part of a dissertation study. This paper re-examines the findings from this study in terms of how the strategies apply to retention and student success in academic programs and institutions, with a special focus on institutions that serve non-traditional and underserved student communities. Looking at models and approaches to retention that exist outside of academia can help to identify best practices, innovative approaches and viable alternatives to existing approaches to retention and student success.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The significance of employee engagement strategies and training programs in corporations should not be overlooked when searching for best practices and innovative approaches to student engagement and retention challenges. As Gallup concluded in its 2013 engagement study, lack of employee engagement has far-reaching consequences in our current global business landscape. In 2013, Gallup, pursuant to its ongoing study of employee engagement, published “The State of the Global Workplace: Employee Engagement Insights for Business Leaders Worldwide,” which revealed that only 13% of workers worldwide are engaged. Gallup defines engagement as a worker who is “emotionally invested” and focused on creating daily value for the organization (Gallup, 2013). Since the 1990s, Gallup has administered its Q12 survey to over 25 million workers, in 195 countries, in 70 languages. In its Q12 survey, Gallup measures four stages of engagement, and asks workers to consider the following: (1) what do I get from this role; (2) how do I contribute; (3) do I belong; and (4) how can I make improvements, innovations, or contributions. In its latest study, Gallup administered the Q12 survey to an additional 230,000 workers in 142 countries. Gallup then grouped workers’ responses into three categories: (1) engaged; (2) not engaged; and (3) actively disengaged. After analyzing the results, Gallup made several key findings about engagement and the cost of disengagement, including (1) disengagement drains world economies, (2) engagement varies widely from region to region, (3) engagement leads to the perception of job growth, (4) poor management practices hinder organizational performance and engagement levels, (5) engagement leads to feelings of positivity and living better, and (6) education is often associated with higher engagement levels.