Union Activity, Employee Voice and the Regulatory Climate

June 2, 2022

The factors that enable employee voice in an organization are complex, and some observers question whether unions are the most effective tool for workers to use their voice. Union representation has declined since peaking in the 1970s, but recent factors have led to a resurgence in interest including the COVID pandemic, the increase in the "gig economy" and the "great resignation".

The panelists agreed that the current environment presents a problem and companies need to rethink how workers utilize their voice. As it pertains to collectively bargained union workforces, the panel also agreed that the current system is too adversarial.

The sources of the problem vary, depending on the perspective of the panelist. From a union perspective, an unfair U.S. regulatory environment has enabled a $50 Trillion transfer of wealth from the working majority to the owner minority. This perspective believes that the norm in the United States should be a shift towards workers being represented by unions as opposed to the current 6% or so of represented workers in the U.S. today.

Jennifer Berres
Senior Vice President and Chief Human Resources Officer
HCA Healthcare, Inc.

David Rolf
Founder and President Emeritus
SEIU Local 775

G. Roger King
Senior Labor and Employment Counsel
HR Policy Association

Daniel V. Yager, *moderator*
Senior Advisor, Workplace Policy
HR Policy Association

From an employer perspective, HR departments are looking to address employee concerns and require flexibility to do so. Workers should not have to pay union dues to have their concerns surrounding worker safety, pay and benefits be addressed by the companies they work for.

The question was raised as to whether union representation is needed to achieve worker goals - can companies actively hear and respond to the employee voice without the presence of unions? The advent of social media and other factors have led to companies evolving in how they address and hear employee concerns.

Although the solution is uncertain, this is clearly an evolving issue that will require attention of HR leaders.

Employee Expectations and Wellbeing

June 2, 2022

Employee expectations on wellbeing have shifted and employees are looking to employers to play a primary role in their mental, social, physical, emotional, and financial wellbeing. Today, social media allows employees to share what has become the norm, so transparency is more important than ever. But there's a disconnect between executives and employees on the perception of wellbeing benefits. While employers rate their wellbeing benefits at 7.6 out of 10, their employees rate them much lower - 4.4 out of 10. Employers will need to close this gap to improve their culture and the wellbeing of their workforce.

How are companies addressing this gap? Here is some advice for companies seeking to address employee expectations on wellbeing:

- Ground your approach to wellbeing in your purpose and values and stick to it.

- For many of us, safety has become a core value in recent years; but it's no longer just physical, it encompasses mental and emotional wellbeing. You may need to reframe the issue to gain acceptance – for example, what happens if someone is mentally unwell? If they are, they likely can't focus on physical safety.

- Remove the stigma of discussing mental health, reinforce that it's OK to not be OK and that it's safe to take advantage of wellbeing benefits.

- Make wellbeing personal. Flexibility and wellbeing are different for every person and leaders need to demonstrate it, be authentic and tell their story.

- Stay in learning mode. Employee voice is more critical than ever, and it's OK to get it wrong, get feedback and pivot. Candid conversations with employees are one of your best assets to know what really matters to them.

Monique R. Herena
Vice Chair, HR Policy Association
Chief Colleague Experience Officer
American Express Company

Timothy A. Massa
Director, HR Policy Association
Senior Vice President, Human Resources & Labor Relations
The Kroger Company

Susan Kelliher
Chief People Officer
The Chemours Company

Margaret Faso
Director of Health Care Research and Policy
American Health Policy Institute and HR Policy Association

D. Mark Wilson, *moderator*
President and CEO, American Health Policy Institute
VP, Health and Employment Policy and Chief Economist, HR Policy Association

- Transparency is key. Whether in hiring or retaining, educating your employees on the value of their total benefits increases accessibility.

- And finally, as costs are rising, failing to implement a holistic approach to wellbeing is no longer an option. Be on the agenda with your management committee and board, come with the internal and external data and be ready to engage in the dialogue about what is best for your employees.

There has been a big shift in employee expectations regarding wellbeing. Mental, emotional, physical, financial and career growth are all integrated. We must meet people where they are, in a holistic, personal, and meaningful way. Resources are only as good as employees using them and benefiting from them.

Employee Voice, Societal and Political Discourse and Employer Responses

June 2, 2022

In an environment of increasing polarization, bitter disagreements in our societal discourse have begun to spill into the workplace. In a recent survey, 90% of respondents reported spending 3.5 hours per week managing conflict at work. After years of asking employees to "bring their whole selves to work", companies are now faced with managing the expression of diverse views and opinions on social and political issues.

So, what suggestions do HR leaders have to help companies determine how to navigate increasing pressure by employees to take positions on divisive and polarizing issues?

Julia Minson
Associate Professor of Public Policy
Harvard Kennedy School of Government

Heidi B. Capozzi
Director, HR Policy Association
Executive Vice President and Global Chief People Officer
McDonald's Corporation

Dionne Wallace Oakley
Director, HR Policy Association
Senior Vice President, Chief Human Resources Officer and Chief Diversity Officer
Freddie Mac

Jennifer L. Weber
Senior Vice President, Chief Human Resources Officer
The Archer-Daniels-Midland Company

Michele A. Carlin, *moderator*
Executive Vice President, HR Policy Association and Center On Executive Compensation

- **Listen to your employees' voices** through employee resource groups and other employee listening methods.

- **Be transparent**. If you are still determining a position on a topic, say so. When you roll out your position, share the rationale and the basis upon which you made the decision.

- **Use your values and mission to frame your position**. Realize you don't need to weigh in on every single controversial topic; instead, focus on the topics that align with your values, mission, or brand.

- **Drive a culture of inclusion** (that includes remote and new employees) to deepen interpersonal relationships, which in turn, can dampen the impact of conflict.

- **When directly challenged, try to think about what positive you can take from it**. For example, when receiving a strong negative reaction to a position, recognize that the employee's willingness to speak out is shows a level of comfort and trust. And make them feel heard. Often your willingness to reach out directly via a phone or video call to the employee can significantly reduce the tension.

When considering interactions in the workplace, disagreement can be positive when it breeds innovation and ideas. But it can morph into conflict due to a phenomenon called "naïve realism." Naïve realism is the belief in the objectivity and accuracy of one's own views and opinions. As a result, when others disagree with our point of view, we try to persuade them of why they are wrong. If they continue to resist, we assume that they are either stupid or biased, and disagreement turns into conflict.

Based on research by Professor Julia Minson, there are multiple tools to reduce conflict, including:

- **Psychology levers** that create psychological safety, foster curiosity, and build engagement.

- **Organizational structures** that maximize the enhancement of information diversity, disrupt siloes, and flatten hierarchies.

- **Decision frameworks** that are most effective when they are designed to require contribution, mitigate bias, and center dissent.

- **Fostering open mindsets** through receptiveness to opposing views. Receptiveness is defined as the willingness to access, consider, and evaluate supporting and opposing views in a relatively impartial manner.

Dr. Minson and her team have developed a free tool designed to measure receptiveness to other points of view. Go to Receptiveness.net and click "Take the Quiz" to learn more. A copy of Dr. Minson's quick reference resource will also be shared on the Summit webpage.

Workplace Technology, HR Strategy, and the Talent Crunch

June 2, 2022

Over the last year, over 47.8 million American workers left current jobs resulting on average attrition of 4 million monthly. This statistic has provided a major challenge for organizations and even bigger challenge for CHROs when seeking new ways to improve the employee experience. Leveraging technology to understand employee sentiment has gained traction, especially considering the pandemic. Organizations have developed engagement surveys for their workforces, which have proven to be a key success factor. Many have leveraged various technologies, both in house developed and third-party tools to gain insights into the when, where, and how employees want to work.

Engagement technology is also being used to pulse organizations at specific points in time. While a few organizations still utilize the annual survey model, the shift to more of a real time approach has gained significant traction over the past two years. This cadence provides greater speed to insight which creates opportunities for HR to react faster to employee sentiments and drive real change.

Laurie Havanec
Executive Vice President and Chief People Officer
CVS Health Corporation

Daniel W. Chasen
Vice President of Workplace Policy
HR Policy Association

Christine M. Pambianchi, *moderator*
Director, HR Policy Association
Executive Vice President and Chief People Officer
Intel Corporation

Top concerns for organizations were around safety and well-being; training and development; and organizational trust. Through the power of technology and use of artificial intelligence, organizations provided immediate resources to their workforce. This was especially important for the healthcare sector given mental health and burnout challenges.

Through a partnership, one company was able to provide its employees access to resources to make sure they were physically, mentally, and financially well. This signaled to the workforce that the company cared about their wellbeing.

Trust in organizations continues to be a key concern with the workforce. With increased usage of AI during the hiring and screening processes, employees have greater concerns that organizations are invading their privacy. While the use of AI can create real insights and drive faster change, CHROs felt cautious about leveraging the various tools powered by AI. In a survey conducted during the sessions, approximately 43% stated implicit bias was a key concern when using AI, while 21% had concerns around increased legal scrutiny, and rounding out the top three at 16% was its potential negative impact on corporate culture.

Overall, technology is becoming more and more helpful within HR organization due to sheer volume, and usage can be valuable as long as it's not done in a "creepy" way. Technology is the future and HR needs to continue to find ways to think proactively and how you use it to differentiate the employee experience to make it more fulfilling and compelling.