

Employee Work Passion

What's important in creating a motivating work environment and whose job is it?

By Drea Zigarmi, Dobie Houson, David Witt, and Jim Diehl

There's a lot of buzz about the factors that lead to an engaging work environment and an equal number of prescriptions for what should be done to improve it. But what factors are most important, and who is actually responsible for creating a motivating work environment in today's organizations? Is it an immediate manager's responsibility? Is it senior leadership's responsibility? What role do individual employees have in the process?

These are just some of the questions asked in a recent survey conducted by *Training* magazine and The Ken Blanchard Companies® as a part of Blanchard's ongoing research into the factors that create employee work passion. More than 800 *Training* magazine readers participated in the survey sharing their thoughts on 4 key questions.

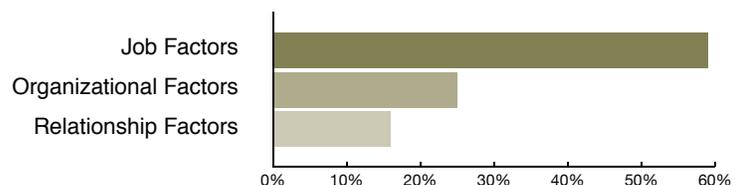
1. What factors are most important when it comes to employee retention?
2. Which of five Job factors do you feel is most important?
3. Which of five Organizational factors do you feel is most important?
4. Who has primary responsibility for seeing that needs get met in these areas?

What factors are most important to employees when it comes to remaining with an organization—Job, Organizational, or Relationship factors?

The first question in the survey focused on what type of factors respondents felt influenced employee retention the most. Respondents were asked to rank three different categories of factors.

- Job Factors—Autonomy, Meaningful Work, Feedback, Workload Balance, and Task Variety
- Organizational Factors—Collaboration, Performance Expectations, Growth, Procedural Justice (process fairness), and Distributive Justice (rewards, pay, and benefits)
- Relationship Factors—Connectedness with Colleagues and Connectedness with Leader

Chart 1: As you reflect on your work experience in your organization, which factor is most influential in regard to your intention to stay in your job?



Study Finding: Job factors are the most important influential considerations when employees are thinking of leaving an organization.

The 12 Employee Work Passion Factors

JOB FACTORS

Autonomy: The extent to which employees feel empowered to make decisions about their work and tasks, in control of their work, and in control of their ability to achieve their goals

Meaningful Work: The extent to which employees perceive their job actions are important inside and outside the organization and have lasting worth for themselves and others

Feedback: The extent to which employees perceive an environment where they receive timely, relevant, and specific information regarding their performance

Workload Balance: The extent to which employees perceive that their workload is reasonably proportioned for the time they have to accomplish it

Task Variety: The extent to which employees perceive that the work they do and actions taken to accomplish the work are different enough to meet their motivational needs

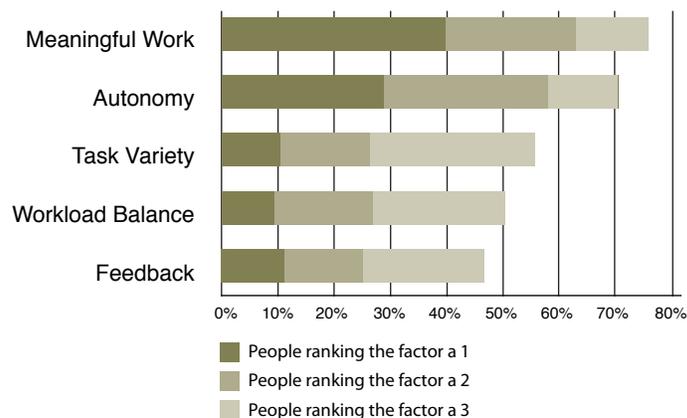
The survey found that people experience their environment first through their jobs and the role they are playing, before looking at the Organizational factors or relationship factors. In the minds of the *Training* magazine survey participants, the factors they found to have the most impact in terms of their intentions to stay with their organizations are the five Job factors. And while Organizational and Relationship factors are seen as a secondary aspect of the work environment, that doesn't mean they are unimportant.

Job, Organizational, and Relationship factors come and go in primary importance as employees' realities shift back and forth based on their work experiences. For example, Distributive Justice often becomes more important when people look at their checks and realize they are not making as much as they would like to, while Growth might be more important on another day when people feel hemmed in and are wondering if there might be another place where they could go for better opportunities. To help people become passionately involved in their work, leaders have to make sure people are getting their needs met in all three areas.

A Deeper Look at the Relative Importance of Each Factor

Next, respondents were asked to rank the five Job factors and the five Organizational factors in terms of relative importance. While all of the factors received high marks depending on the personal experience of the respondents, there were some factors that were ranked most often as first, second, or third most important in the forced ranking.

Chart 2: As you reflect on the Job factors mentioned below, please rank order them from 1 to 5, 1 being most important, 5 being less important. (Chart shows the percentage of people ranking the factor a 1, 2, or 3.)



The results depicted in Chart 2 show that organizations wanting to create an environment where people have job commitment need to ensure that their creative, talented people see their work as meaningful. Second, organizations will want to create an environment where people have Autonomy and feel able to make the decisions that influence the quality of their work instead of having leaders making most of the choices for them. Finally, and importantly, organizations will want to ensure that opportunities for Task Variety are present, meaning that an individual's work should not be so repetitive that it does not stimulate thought and require attentiveness.

ORGANIZATIONAL FACTORS

Collaboration: The extent to which employees perceive that cooperation is more important than competition among individuals within a work unit and/or across work units within the organization

Performance Expectations: The extent to which employees perceive that work outcomes are to be done to a certain level of quality and quantity

Growth: The extent to which employees perceive that the organization fosters opportunities for both career and job growth

Procedural Justice (Fairness): The extent to which employees perceive decisions as being fair and equitable with equal application of rules for everyone

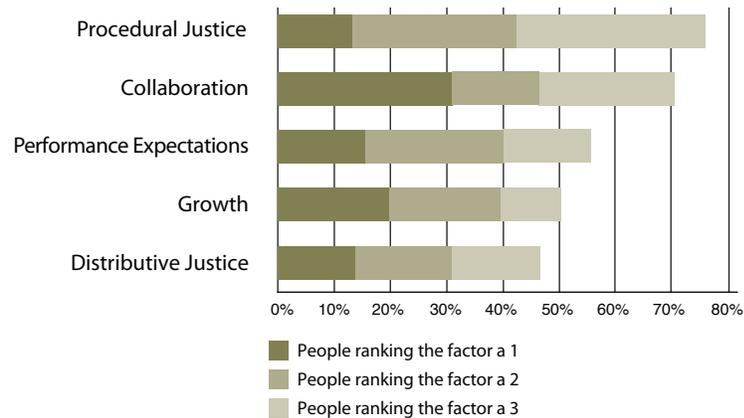
Distributive Justice (Rewards): The extent to which employees perceive an equal input to output ratio, in relation of effort to reward

RELATIONSHIP FACTORS

Connectedness with Colleagues: The extent to which an individual perceives he or she has rewarding interpersonal interactions with his or her coworkers

Connectedness with Leader: The extent to which an individual perceives he or she has a supportive and personal relationship with his or her leader

Chart 3: As you reflect on the Organizational factors mentioned below, please rank order them from 1 to 5, 1 being most important, 5 being less important. (Chart shows the percentage of people ranking the factor a 1, 2, or 3.)



When it comes to Organizational factors, people are most frequently concerned with Procedural Justice, which refers to the fairness of the decision-making process used by the organization's leaders. The more involved people are in their jobs, the more they feel that organizational decisions should be free from bias, consider all stakeholders, and be consistently applied to all. When people perceive that decisions are not being made in a fair manner, it drives talented people out.

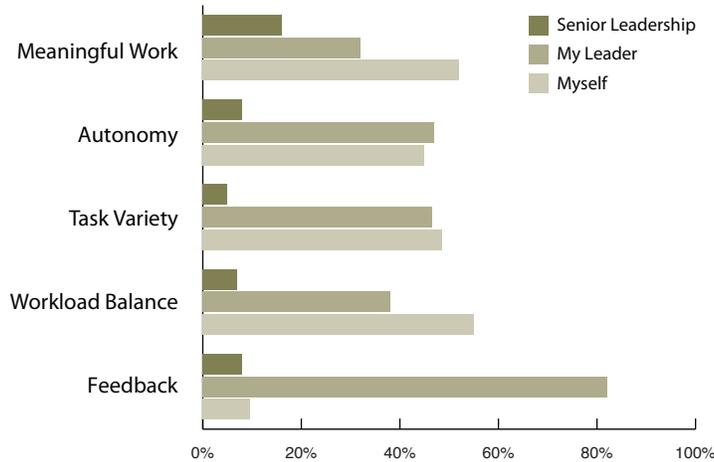
Collaboration is also important in that people want to have a sense that they work in an environment where people share information within and across departments and business units. People want to work in an environment where they can collaborate with others in a way that allows them to draw from the best minds in the organization to work on a common problem.

Finally, Performance Expectations rounds out the top three Organizational factors and expresses the importance people place on wanting to know what initiatives are most important to the organization and how their individual goals contribute to those initiatives.

Who Is Responsible for Making Things Better?

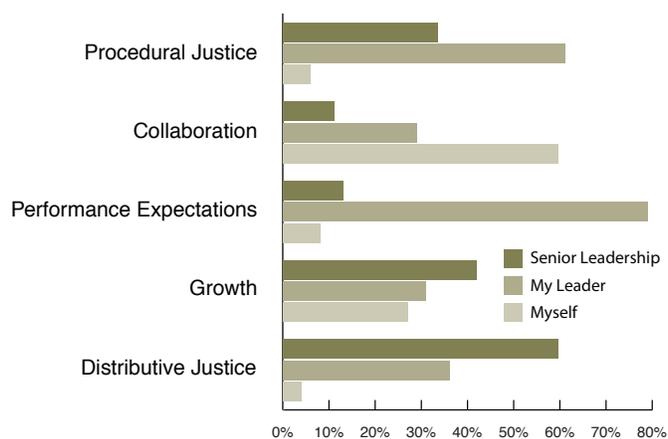
The final questions in the survey asked respondents who they felt had the primary responsibility for influencing and improving each of the 12 factors. Academic literature typically sees organizational factors as being strategically determined by the senior leadership of an organization and embedded in their policies and procedures. Job factors are generally thought to be at the discretion of the leader and follower. This question was an opportunity to see how the survey respondents saw these responsibilities.

Chart 4: Who, in your opinion, has primary responsibility for influencing and improving the following Job factors?



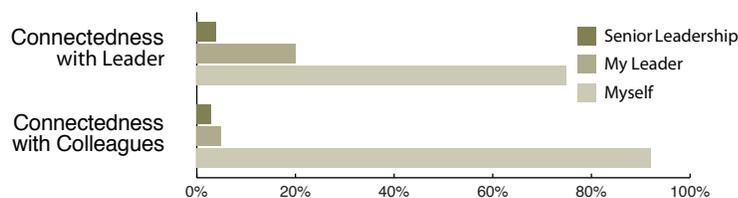
Respondents saw responsibility for Meaningful Work, Autonomy, Task Variety, and Workload Balance as a shared task between themselves and their immediate manager. Somewhat surprisingly, for the Job factors of Meaningful Work, Task Variety, and Workload Balance, employees actually saw themselves as having more responsibility than their manager. The one exception to the idea of shared responsibility was on the factor of Feedback where 82% of the respondents saw the responsibility for Feedback as primarily being in the hands of the supervisor.

Chart 5: Who, in your opinion, has primary responsibility for influencing and improving the following Organizational factors?



As the academic literature would suggest, senior leaders were seen as being more responsible for the Organizational factors, especially for the factors of Growth and Distributive Justice. However, for Procedural Justice and Performance Expectations, respondents saw senior leadership involved but their immediate manager as primarily responsible. And for Collaboration, respondents saw themselves as the primary driver by a substantial margin.

Chart 6: Who, in your opinion, has primary responsibility for influencing and improving the following Relationship factors?



Respondents saw the social dimensions of their organizational lives as their responsibility with 92% of the respondents seeing it as their responsibility to improve their Connectedness with their Colleagues and 75% of the respondents feeling it was their responsibility to improve relationships with their leader.

Implications for Leaders

In summary, survey respondents saw it as their primary responsibility to improve the factors of Meaningful Work, Autonomy, Workload Balance, Task Variety, Collaboration, Connectedness with Leader, and Connectedness with Colleagues. They saw their managers as primarily responsible for improving the factors of Feedback, Procedural Justice, and Performance Expectations. And they saw senior leadership and systems as responsible for Growth and Distributive Justice.

These results point out some important distinctions between what respondents feel that they can control personally and what they think the organization ought to be doing to help them. For example:

- Organizations need to train leaders at all levels of the organization—including self-leaders who see themselves as most responsible for 6 of the 12 factors but who may not have the requisite skills for collaborating, communicating, managing up, influencing without authority, or managing their time or workload effectively.
- Organizations need to train their managers to understand that they are the first bastion of Procedural Justice and Feedback and if they are not living up to the expectations of followers, the direct reports will see their managers as not serving them.
- When it comes to Distributive Justice (pay, benefits, etc.) and Growth, respondents saw improvement in these areas as a senior leadership/systems responsibility. When people feel that they do not have growth opportunities, or that resources are not being distributed fairly, they are going to hold senior management responsible.

Creating Resilience, Adaptability, and Passion

If an organization wants to retain their top talent and maintain their organization's expertise and knowledge, employees within the organization must view Job, Organization, and Relationship Factors as positive. Positive perceptions of the Job and Organizational factors increase the likelihood of an employee staying with the organization; 58% of the respondents said Job Factors were the number one consideration, while 25% said Organizational Factors were number one.

But retaining top talent is only half the battle. Other behaviors, such as the use of discretionary effort, altruism, and the positive endorsement of the organization and its leadership are also important.

Blanchard research reveals that employees are constantly making appraisals of their work experiences and these appraisals result in intentions to stay, to use discretionary effort, to perform at a higher than average level, and to endorse the organization and its leadership. These intentions stem from the sense of well-being created by the employee's organizational experience with all of the 12 Employee Work Passion Factors.

Organizations need people to be unselfish, altruistic, and good sports amid the craziness of organizational life. As an organization is buffeted by the needs of profitability, change, or regulation, it is essential to have employees who recognize that while it is not always perfect, the organization is a pretty good place in general. All organizations have warts and imperfections, and leaders need employees with a certain sense of tolerance for the imperfections that might be happening.

Leaders have always felt a responsibility to retain top talent who are resilient, adaptable, and passionate about their work and their organization. But a startling aspect of this research is the extent to which employees see themselves as being responsible for improving their work environments rather than solely as their manager's role. Leaders can use this survey data to see creating a motivating work environment as a partnership between themselves and their direct reports where everyone feels they can own and take responsibility for their experience within the organization.



Global Headquarters

125 State Place
Escondido, CA 92029 USA
From anywhere: +1 760 489-5005
Within the US: 800 728-6000
Fax: +1 760 489-8407

For a list of our offices worldwide, visit
www.kenblanchard.com

About the Researchers

Dr. Drea Zigarmi is coauthor of *Achieve Leadership Genius* (2007), and *The Leader Within* (2005), and codeveloper of a number of The Ken Blanchard Companies' products, including Situational Leadership® II and the widely used Leader Behavior Analysis II® instruments. In addition, he is a professor at the University of San Diego.

Dobie Houson is Director of Marketing Research for The Ken Blanchard Companies and is responsible for competitive, market, and customer intelligence.

David Witt is a Program Director and Researcher for the Office of the Future, The Ken Blanchard Companies' think tank and R&D division.

Jim Diehl is a Senior Project Manager for The Ken Blanchard Companies. In his role he works with numerous clients and serves as the Government Delivery Specialist for Blanchard.