



ADAPTIVE ACTION

Leveraging Uncertainty in your Organization

EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT WORKSHEET:

This worksheet goes with the [Employee Engagement Live Virtual Workshop](#)

1. Recall a time when you were aware of really great employee engagement or really weak employee engagement.

Make a sentence to describe that follows this format:

WHO(Subject)

DOES WHAT(Verb)

TO WHOM (OBJECT)

2. How might you change the sentence (what could you add/change in the WHO, the DOES WHAT and the TO WHOM)?

List your ideas:

Applying At Enterprise Level:

When you scale to an enterprise level, you have added constraints. The WHO and the TO WHOM are givens (i.e. Manager > Employee, Client > Service Provider, etc.). The opportunity for action lies in the VERB (DOES WHAT). In Adaptive Action, these are called "Exchanges" – and that is where you focus if you want to make a difference at scale.

The Three Levels of Connections Made Through Exchanges:

A TIGHT COUPLING

All players act in concert.

Like Synchronized Swimming or Ballet.

WHAT ONES DOES, ALL DO IN THE SAME WAY

BENEFIT

- when safety is an issue
- Quality Control is important

• Newly forming systems (allows for clarity, belonging, identity).

RISK **Micro-Management**

- people feeling over-constrained is a source of disengagement.

Exhaustive

- makes escape a desire over time.

B LOOSE COUPLING

The players influence each other but they don't have tight control. i.e. A WALTZ

BENEFIT • Nice balance of freedom and constraint

- **More Creative** – people can explore a larger possibility space than when tightly coupled
- **Preserve Resources** (much less costly than tight coupling)

RISK

- **Lack of due control**
 - For example:

Ethical issues that arise due to lack of control in a financial system

Programs focus almost exclusively on setting up loose couples. Not bad, but it's hard to hit the blend just right, and sometimes you need tight coupling. There isn't a one-size-fits-all solution.

C UN-COUPLING

It looks like a DISCO DANCE

Each player is totally disconnected from others.

BENEFIT

- Want individual contributors to be separate from the whole.
- Need for autonomy is deep drive in the system
- Example: when child goes to college):
Academics take sabbaticals

RISK

- Lose track and connection altogether

Bottom line: No one-size-fits-all approach. Best question is, "What is fit to purpose?" A true, rich engagement is able to adjust, and has the capacity for all kinds of coupling and the wisdom to choose the right one at the right time. Your relationship must be resilient enough, with protocols so that it's easy to move between the types of engagement.

3. Referring to how you answered #1 above, what is the type of coupling? And is it fit to purpose or not?

The Four Parameters That Influence Tightness or Looseness of an Exchange:

How do you go about building couples? How do you set conditions for tight coupling, loose coupling or uncoupling?

- A. Length** – how long does it take for a connection to happen (point a to b and back again). The longer the connection (in either time or space), the weaker it's going to be (looser). If it's very short/close, it will be tighter.
- B. Width** – bandwidth, feedback loop – how many different types of signals are going through the path at the same time? Too wide and it's tough to absorb. You might zero in on one signal, rather than trying to absorb all of them.

- C. **Dynamic** – whether you are amplifying or damping. Amplify = do more of whatever you were doing. Damping = no, don't do that. Stop that.
- D. **Direction** – Is the connection a one-way connection (broadcast) or a two-way connection, with give and take?

	TIGHTLY COUPLED	LOOSELY COUPLED	UN-COUPLED
LENGTH	SHORT	VARIABLE	LONG
WIDTH	WIDE	VARIABLE	NARROW
DYNAMIC	DAMPING	AMPING	IGNORING
DIRECTION	ONE-WAY	TWO-WAYS	NO-WAYS

Bottom line: When thinking about employee engagement in the length and width parameters, if you think about the engagements where there are long and narrow connections that's not going to be a very resilient system, unless there are also opportunities for short/wide connections that satisfies the need for relationship, control, clarity and understanding. When employees constantly hear "no don't do that", people become very risk-averse. This results in a tightly coupled exchange. You're going to be very careful and watching for that message all the time. A lot of tension is present in the system. When you have encouragement and acknowledgement, it gives freedom of movement.

The Gallup study supports "amp" over "damp": "Gallup has found that managers who focus on their employees' strengths can practically eliminate active disengagement and double the average of U.S. workers who are engaged nationwide."

Each variable by itself can help shape what might happen in a coupling relationship. Whichever couple you want, you will get both the benefits and the risks. Sometimes it's in the uncoupling that employee engagement occurs.

4. What were the conditions/parameters of the exchanges, that gave the pattern of coupling you identified in #3 above?

SUMMARY:

These considerations are especially important for organizations that are considering new ways of working. When we have groups that are from multiple teams, working virtually, co-working, and lots of different network structures, each requires a different kind of coupling. In order to be able to design those on the fly, you must be much more conscious of what are the conditions that influence them. The more variable our ways of working, the more variable the kinds of coupling we need, the more variable the conditions are, the more conscious we must be with our application of Adaptive Action.

To get the background behind this worksheet, we encourage you to listen to the complete webinar, and see the comments and chat that occurred during the webinar, which will enhance your understanding of how to improve employee engagement in your organization.

[YOU CAN LISTEN TO THE FULL WEBINAR HERE](#)