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6 Key Trends That Increase Employee Productivity and Engagement

a fierce white paper

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SUMMARY

New survey results uncover up-to-date insights on how professionals at all levels of an organization view **communication** within their company and how it impacts work experience, engagement and productivity.

Over 1,400 corporate executives, educators and individual contributors across multiple industries responded to an online survey conducted in February 2011 by **Fierce, Inc.**, a frontrunner in global **leadership development and training**. Six key trends emerged. Outcomes expose training gaps and furnish learning leaders and decision makers with focus areas to consider when examining employee performance.

Communication approaches and interactions, whether they are effective or ineffective, impact all levels and functions within every sector.

SURVEY DETAILS

70%



managers, directors, vice-presidents, C-suite, presidents, owners or partners in their company

15%



individual contributors

15%



other (principals, teachers, consultants and coaches)

Results reveal limited **conversation skills** are not unique to any one industry and are not influenced greatly by the position held within an organization. Communication approaches and interactions, whether they are effective or ineffective, impact all levels and functions within every sector.

The following report discloses survey data and spotlights organizational tendencies that enhance or impede the success of the workforce.

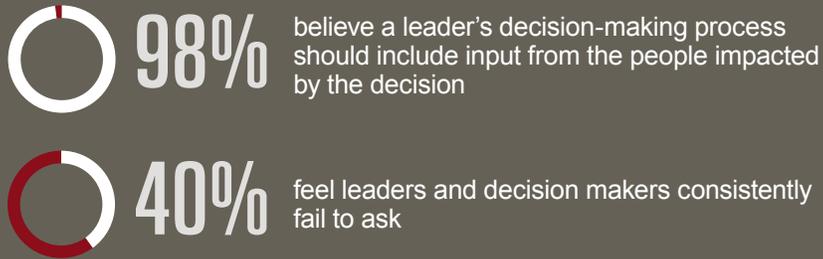


KEY TRENDS

- 1** Diverse points of view improve the decision-making process.
- 2** Cross-functional alignment is critical to program survival.
- 3** Relationships are integral to employee engagement and productivity.
- 4** People appreciate candor, but do not see enough of it.
- 5** Success requires productive confrontation.
- 6** The biggest challenge in leadership development and training is lack of reinforcement.

TREND 1 Diverse points of view improve the decision-making process.

The people most impacted by decisions provide critical insight. Yet they are frequently not invited to the conversation.



Even though there is a wide appreciation for the importance of including the perspectives of those affected by decisions, responses show the actual gathering of input is frequently overlooked in the fast-paced business world. Not only does the practice of collecting feedback create a culture of inclusion, it also brings significant depth of understanding to the decision-making process.



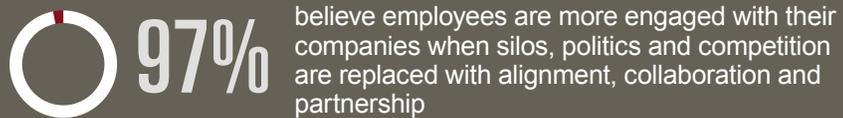
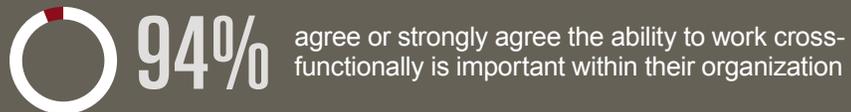
“Inviting others into the conversation, particularly those with differing opinions, and encouraging them to share their perspective creates a powerful internal think tank.”

Halley Bock, Fierce, Inc.

“Inviting others into the conversation, particularly those with differing opinions, and encouraging them to share their perspective creates a powerful internal think tank,” said Halley Bock, CEO of [Fierce](#). “The results may be better comprehension of the issues at hand, clearer identification of consequences, alternative solutions and strategies, or simply greater confidence and buy-in.”

TREND 2 Cross-functional alignment is critical to program survival.

The ability to work across different departments and successfully leverage various groups is a growing expectation in the modern workplace.



“If my leader isn’t committed to this, why should I invest my time? The implication is the training is another passing fad with no real connection to long-term objectives.”

Halley Bock, Fierce, Inc.

The majority of those surveyed believe the status quo is not acceptable if it means cross-functional alignment is put at risk. Connecting openly with other functions brings valuable expertise, teamwork and perspective. Synergy reduces duplication of efforts, builds [accountability](#) and enthusiasm and is shown to increase employee engagement.

TREND 3 Relationships are integral to employee engagement and productivity.

Numerous studies show companies with highly engaged employees benefit from increased employee productivity, lower turnover and greater returns to shareholders. They are also more likely to attract top talent. One of the key drivers of engagement is relationships with co-workers.

What may be surprising is how many people value these relationships and what the affinity brings to the workplace.

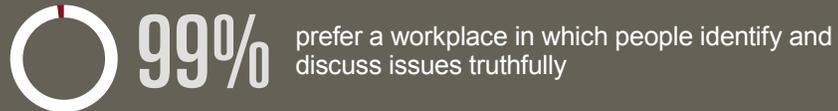


Results support the idea that relationships are an essential part of business. And relationships are built through the conversations happening day-to-day.

Taking responsibility and [personal accountability](#) for the impact decisions and actions have on others does not mean being fearful or weak. It means being open to feedback and speaking clearly and honestly so relationships are enriched.

TREND 4 People appreciate candor, yet do not see enough of it.

The largest gap between desired behaviors and the reality of the workplace is in the area of candor.

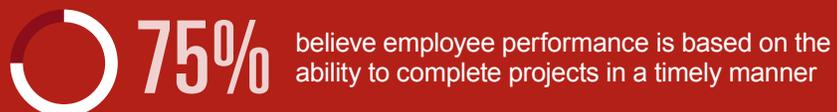


“If you haven’t agreed on what success looks like, you won’t know when you’ve achieved it. We work with clients to help them define success.”

Kim Bohr, Fierce, Inc.

Candor starts with sincere, open dialogue. A healthy corporate culture removes the façade of false professionalism and reveals an environment where healthy debate is valued and people are encouraged to take ownership of failure as well as success. In this way, employees are able to learn from mistakes and the organization as a whole builds credibility and relevance.

Responses also expose a connection between candor, time management and overall performance.



“A climate of candor is created when organizations choose to encourage and reward employees for being forthright and honest,” said Bock. “Problems are uncovered and change occurs when people are bold enough to shine light on pressing issues.”

TREND 5 Success requires productive confrontation.

 **93%** agree or strongly agree a successful company has a culture of effective confrontation

 **37%** feel their organization has an overall culture of “terminal niceness” and avoiding confrontation

“What gets talked about in an organization, how it gets talked about and who is invited to the conversation, determines what will happen.

Or won’t.”

Susan Scott, Fierce, Inc.

“Confrontation is frequently misunderstood,” said Kim Bohr, Senior Vice President of Client Development at Fierce. “It conjures up unpleasant images of tense arguments and discomfort, yet it stems from a lack of skillset. Confrontation is an opportunity to gain clarity and can be the catalyst for increased engagement.”

The steps to [productive confrontation](#) include preparing for the encounter, delivering the message in a timely manner without laying judgment or blame, staying focused on the issue at hand and genuinely listening to the other’s perspective. Professionals who deal with problems head on, in a respectful and direct manner, build trust and resolve problems.

TREND 6 The biggest challenge in leadership development and training is lack of reinforcement.

When it comes to improving [leadership skills](#) within an organization, most respondents feel the greatest opportunity for learning takes place after training ends.

Both of these responses show a tendency for organizations to consider training a one-time event rather than an impetus to change behavior. Transfer of learning is

 **48%** feel the largest hurdle to effective training is the program is not practiced after training occurs

 **25%** feel programs don’t change the way employees, managers or leaders communicate with one another or customers

how results are achieved, and the transfer occurs when conversations take place before and after training and when new routines are incorporated into the way business is conducted.

A recently published whitepaper, [The Three Pillars of Leadership Development and Training: How to Build a Foundation for Measurable Results](#), reveals transfer of learning as one of the three pillars critical to program success. The report emphasizes how on-the-job skills practice and regular check-ins with management reinforce new skills, build [personal accountability](#) and set up training programs for ongoing success.

Conclusion: What You Can Do

Learning leaders are expected to impact the bottom line. The six key trends provide insight into potential learning gaps within the workplace and illuminate what modern professionals seek in order to thrive.

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- 5 Success requires productive confrontation.**
- 6 The biggest challenge in leadership development and training is lack of reinforcement.**

What all six trends have in common is the solution. Success is achieved [one conversation at a time](#). Effective communication is a learned skill that needs to be practiced consistently. Daily interactions, whether they are team, coaching, delegation or confrontation conversations, determine personal and professional success. As Susan Scott, founder of [Fierce](#), stated in her national bestselling book, *Fierce Conversations—Achieving Success at Work and in Life, One Conversation at a Time*, “What gets talked about in an organization, how it gets talked about and who is invited to the conversation, determines what will happen. Or won’t.”

To ensure your company is developing the most relevant and applicable skills necessary to advance in today’s business world, visit www.fierceinc.com. Learn more about Fierce conversation models and how our award-winning global [training](#) can bring results to your organization.

About Fierce

Fierce, Inc. is a [leadership development and training](#) company that drives results for business and education by developing conversation as a skill. Traditional programs are impersonal, complicated and disconnected from concrete results. Fierce creates authentic, energizing and rewarding connections with colleagues and customers through skillful conversations that lead to successful outcomes and measurable ROI. Tailored to any organization, Fierce principles and methods translate across the globe, ensure individual and collective success and develop skills that are practical, easy-to-learn and can be applied immediately. Fierce, Inc. is certified as a Women-Owned Business by the Women's Business Enterprise National Council and the Astra Women's Business Alliance. Please find us in Seattle and online at www.fierceinc.com.