

**Bringing Morale Back to the Workplace: A Collaborative Change Project**

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**Abstract**

Organizations cannot function if morale is low. It is essential that organizations be aware of how their employees are feeling, and can take preventative action to ensure that morale does not get to the point where employees feel undervalued or underappreciated.

For this change project, I worked with my organization of five years to discover a previously unknown issue of low morale within the company using anonymous surveys, then coordinated and executed an employee appreciation lunch and raffle with the intention of boosting morale.

What follows is a detailed look at the project's preparation, implementation, results, and recommendations for the future.

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### **Executive Summary**

In my action change project, I worked with my current organization to analyze employee morale in the company and determine whether there are improvements that can be made. My overall goal for this project was to identify common areas where morale was lower using anonymous surveys, and then use that data to develop a morale-boosting event. For the survey portion, I developed the survey questions myself, but allowed all the stakeholders the opportunity to review the questions ahead of time, both to ensure that there are no objections as well as to see if they have any additional feedback or suggestions of questions I should be asking. After receiving the survey data back from the employees, I evaluated the information and compiled an analysis for my stakeholders to review.

Taking into consideration both the scope and timeframe of the project as well as budgetary restrictions, my stakeholders and I agreed upon executing a companywide pizza party and raffle. All employees were invited to attend, and an extra raffle ticket was awarded to all employees who agreed to participate in the anonymous exit survey that was issued following the event.

At the time of this rough draft, final survey results from the employees are still coming in, as well as the survey that was issued to my stakeholders to provide feedback on both the effectiveness of my event as well as my effectiveness in facilitating and executing the event. Having received some results already, I will extrapolate my findings from the data I have already received, and my full analysis of the results will be present in my final report next week. What follows is a detailed report my research findings on the issue of employee morale in the

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workplace, a detailed methodology and results of my project, and the conclusions I have drawn from the implementation and results of the project.

## **Chapter I: Introduction**

### **Identify the Issue**

I have worked at my current organization for over five years, and it has become clear to me that while the company has a lot of things they do well, maintaining employee morale is one area where they have constantly struggled. I have lost count of the number of employees I have seen come and go, and it has always baffled me that this high turnover rate is not more concerning to the organization. While morale is certainly not low amongst all employees, I have suspected for a long time that this is a real struggle that is felt amongst a significant number of employees. It is often apparent in the way that employees carry themselves when they walk through the halls or when they sit in the breakroom. Of course, everyone has their own lives so there could be some personal reasons why they are unhappy that are unrelated to work. That said, I see it happen frequently enough to indicate that work conditions and environment are a common denominator.

### **Importance of the Project**

Morale is a perspective which includes sentiments and feelings. Existing within every employee, it is regularly viewed as a slippery quality. It includes the state of mind and observation towards the employment, workplace, colleagues, chiefs and the association on an entirety. Positive employee morale is normally displayed by certainty, discipline and readiness to perform. There are no single variables that clarify high or low morale, but instead a mix of related elements. According to Ali (2016), low morale can be caused by many factors including “job security issues, uncertain business conditions, limited upward mobility, a perceived lack of fair compensation and excessive outsourcing practices.” High morale in the working environment is vital to achievement and is for the most part impacted starting from the top as

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opposed to from the base up. Managers that make low morale in employees do so from a top-down charge and control mode, which suggests that employees do the listening and supervisors are not required to. By denying open discourse on work environment issues, managers are precluded a firsthand view from claiming issues that exist. This can bring about a gap while tending to the genuine issues and can intensify them, prompting to employee doubt, disregard towards management, and further decrease morale and workforce inspiration.

An exorbitant marker of low morale is high turnover; when employees leave since they are not content with their occupations and have couple of outside motivations to remain. The negative effect of employee turnover is perturbing a direct result of its enormous effect both monetarily and on efficiency levels. Even more essentially, when employees leave, they take all the skills and knowledge they have learned from the organization, costing the company a great amount of time and money to train new employees from scratch. Nase (2009) proposes that the average cost of turnover extents from at least one year's compensation and benefits to a maximum of two years pay. High turnover also means that additional expenses to recruit and onboard new candidates will be incurred.

If the morale problem within my organization is not addressed, the company will continue to face the consequences of high turnover, increased absenteeism, and lower work performance. While these costs may be sustainable in the short-term, they will not be sustainable in the long-term as the company continues to lose more and more.

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### **Project Purpose or Goal**

The goal of this project is to put my organization on the right track for developing sustainable solutions for the morale issue. Given the scope and timeframe of this project, it is not a realistic expectation that morale will cease to be an issue at the conclusion of the project. That said, my first goal is to prove to my stakeholders that a morale problem exists through the analysis of anonymous survey results. Once this has been accomplished, my next goal will be to demonstrate through my company-wide event the enormous value that even simple gestures of gratitude can have on the employees. The exit survey issued after my event will ask employees to rate the value of the event, as well as if they feel that regular company events and functions will improve their opinion of the company and their overall work experience. I know that morale is a complex issue that can stem from many different factors (often having nothing to do with the organization), but I believe that there is always the responsibility of an organization to ensure that employees feel good about their working conditions and that they feel they have a valuable function within the organization.

## Chapter II: Literature Review

### Introduction

The importance of high employee morale in an organization cannot be overstated. If morale is low, organizations are prone to higher turnover rates, which in turn costs companies a far greater sum to replace works than it would to retain them. Replacement costs typically incorporate sourcing, meeting and enlisting costs connected with finding new staff. Training costs include the on-boarding procedure of another employee and the best possible acclimation to nature and new work systems and procedures (Nase, 2009).

Employee morale is a perspective which includes sentiments and feelings. Made inside every worker, it is regularly viewed as a subtle quality. It involves the state of mind and recognition towards the occupation, workplace, colleagues, administrators and the association on an entirety. Positive employee resolve is generally shown by certainty, control and ability to perform. There are no single elements that clarify high or low resolve, but instead a blend of related elements (Ali, 2016). Organizations with high morale encounter higher profitability and staff engagement, they indicate bring down employee turnover and truancy, and they have a more joyful workforce (MindTools, n.d.). Additionally, these organizations find it much easier to draw in and hold the best candidates. While raising morale may appear to be an indistinct objective, the results are quantifiable and can influence the organizations' bottom line.

For this literature review, I have referenced several articles that not only speak to the importance of employee morale contributing factors of morale, some important ethical leadership traits and skills, and how to combat toxic leadership.

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### **Importance of Morale in the Workplace**

In today's job market, there are various purposes behind a jobseeker to look for new open doors however there are just few to make him/her stay and they all come down to mentality and morale. It is basic that managers cultivate a domain of support if they look for the largest amounts of yield and employees who will go the additional mile for the organization. Laborers get a kick out of the chance to feel that they are a piece of something in which they have a basic part. Making every individual feel profitable will make for a work environment of people who can accept pride in their position and think about the result. With a specific end goal to enhance employee state of mind, managers must make a feeling of family when assembling their groups, or more all else stay positive.

In recent years, many businesses have fallen by the wayside and a huge number of Americans are without profitable employment (Walter, 2010). One would believe that simply having a job would be sufficient for the clear majority, that there is little to pick up from building up an attractive work environment, all things considered on the off chance that one individual leaves; there will be ten in line to take the opening, isn't that so? Off-base. Presently is the best time to venture back and assess what is working and make a firm unit that won't just climate the present tempest however will exceed expectations for what's to come.

Wherever you turn there is antagonism in the work environment which is reproduced by stagnation, envy and dread. One approach to mollify pessimism is to organization programs which remunerate inventiveness and a job well done. By doing this, managers will have the capacity to successfully make a climate where employees feel they play a part in the organization's prosperity. Very regularly, the inspiring element for employees to accomplish more than the base required is to keep away from retaliation or losing their job. This is the wrong

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inspiration. They ought to feel that they are working towards an objective that exclusive can be accomplished with their carefulness and special aptitude set. If they feel that they are an essential part of the group, they will be sufficiently inspired to do what is anticipated from them and the sky is the limit from there. A domain that prizes inventiveness won't just make the coveted impact, yet will likewise position the organization to be versatile to the always showing signs of change business environment (Hamel, n.d.).

On the off chance that antagonism exists in the work environment, it is basic to explore precisely from where the pessimism stems. The antagonism can be contrasted with disease in associations. If management can find the tumor in its most punctual stages, it can be cured, however if it is left unchecked then it could contaminate the whole organization and it might be past the point where it is possible to spare the association. The most ideal approach to ensure there is no malignancy that can spread all through the association is through standard screening (Walter, 2010). It is vital that managers realize what is happening in their areas of expertise and know whether there are any displeased or miserable employees. Open lines of correspondence are basic to the accomplishment of the screening procedure. Employees ought to feel that if they have something they are miserable about, they could converse with their directors without dread of reprisal. Frequently arrangements are instituted that won't be prevalent, however are fundamental. It will be a much less demanding pill to swallow if the employees feel their managers are forthright and fair with their clarifications.

The way we work is continually developing and over the previous decade, the workplace has seen various changes which have cultivated a culture inside the venture that enables employees. Web-based social networking and office intranets have made inner and outer interchanges substantially more dexterous, with employees having the capacity to take an interest

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in wikis, websites, social intranets and a large group of shared undertakings. Meister & Willyerd (2010) affirm that the workplace upheaval has been occurring for quite a while. Their book demonstrates a lot of understanding into how we will work in the future, with a lot of what the writers anticipated as of now being obvious at this point.

All that matters is that a manager's job is hard. It is an exercise in careful control where they need to ensure the organization's advantages while dealing with their benefits. Be that as it may, enabling people and making them feel like an essential part of the group will more than likely keep them on your group when different open doors get to be distinctly accessible.

### **Contributing Factors of Employee Morale**

Rutledge (2005) states that employees who are genuinely engaged are propelled by what they do. They are committed, love their job and think about what happens to the organization they work for. While in years passed by the power has been solidly in the hands of the business, this is no more extended the case and organizations need to work harder to pick up and hold beat ability.

This is not something that is identified with money either, per Rutledge, but rather it is down to how glad and tested an employee is and how solid the workplace culture is. Engagement to some degree needs to happen as well; there can be no requesting that employees engage by managers, no investigating their shoulder to check what workers are doing, this is profoundly counterproductive.

Per Baehr & Renck (1958), early research into employee morale was coordinated toward the cultivating of group affinity or solidarity and the internalization of management goals by employees. The desire was that the accomplishing of these points would have positive and advantageous impacts on truancy, poor work, efficiency, and so forth. However, it soon became

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clear that employee morale was something more than group compatibility. For high morale to be kept up in the working environment, some different conditions must be met. Among the most vital of these is some measure of accomplishment in the achievement of group goals as well as some sort of individual and individual fulfillment.

While more conventional managers tend to see low morale as impalpable, its significance and effect on benefits, efficiency and money related intensity are quantifiable and influence hierarchical targets. The Gallup Organization assessed that there are 22 million effectively withdrawn representatives costing the economy as much as \$350 billion dollars for every year in lost efficiency including non-appearance, ailment and other low morale issues. (Ali, 2016)

Achieving positive morale is refined through a broadened way to deal with relationship building, acknowledgment and remuneration. Administration that executes the developments and thoughts of workers fortifies their feeling of worth. Smaller than usual gatherings or morning groups will highlight the errands to be expert while perceiving earlier week's triumphs. This can also be found by expanding the recurrence of communication among colleagues, giving chances to examine bunch objectives, and by building up a solid feeling of rivalry against different groups.

A Forbes (2014) article suggests some methods for increasing employee morale including give them a reason to believe, show you care, recognize the good, promote from within, and organize fun activities. These methods correlate with the key points outlined in the MindTools (n.d.) article which include Reconnecting with your team, developing your team, improving the workplace, improving communication, setting measurable goals, rebuilding confidence, focusing on talent management, and motivating your people effectively.

Other sources like Hartzell (n.d.) attest that employees who feel empowered in their position will achieve higher levels of performance, and that it is therefore essential for

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organizations to empower their employees. I believe this will go a long way to improving morale as well, as employees who feel more motivated and empowered are more likely to feel increased job satisfaction as well. Mcknight, Ahmad, & Shroeder (2001) similarly indicate that empowering employees and giving them accountability is an important component in building morale. However, they do suggest that the accountability process ought to be interpreted as a positive and constructive experience, as overbearing negativity on the part of the manager could also hurt morale.

There are numerous factors that can cause employee morale to plummet. Some examples include cutbacks and rebuilding, poor administration, poor correspondence, absence of strengthening or independence, rigid working conditions, cancelation of benefits, losing a major contract or customer, difficult coworkers, overwhelming workloads or anxiety with no incentive or appreciation, and no feeling of social quality to the work being done. (MindTools, n.d.) While morale is still a prevalent issue that is being studied by many working professionals, the research on the topic dates back several decades.

While these sources present varying theories for causes of low morale and suggestions for improving morale, the commonalities are that they show the importance of strong employee morale in the workplace, and that companies who don't take measures to ensure their employees have strong morale are more likely to have a higher turnover, lower motivation, and increased cost incurred by organizations to replace employees. Another key component in improving morale within an organization is to improve relationships between colleagues.

One of the most important components of any professional environment is the ability to get along well with your colleagues. Even if you do not have many things in common with them

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at a personal level, it is very important to be able to work well with others. Great workplace relationships can help you carry out your job duties better. They can make going to work each day charming or, at any rate, bearable. Conversely, bad relationships can keep you from your obligations and can transform a mediocre job into a living terror. McKay (n.d.) suggests that some strategies to improve relationships with colleagues include respect, avoiding controversial topics, not gossiping, and practicing good office etiquette. Similarly, Smith (2012) recommends making teamwork a priority by setting the expectation early on. I consider myself lucky to have quite positive relationships with my colleagues, but there is always room for improvement. Olson (2012) emphasizes the importance of communication in the workplace, which is essential for improving relationships with coworkers. In addition to active listening and paying attention to body language, it is also very important to clarify what you are being told and to keep criticism constructive.

Another very important tool that can strengthen relationships with colleagues and avoid tension is the Ladder of Inference. The Ladder of Inference gives us a set of concrete steps to better determine how we will respond to situations. The Ladder gives us a level of awareness to ensure that we are always thinking about our options before acting. MindTools (n.d.) describe the necessary questions to ask yourself to ensure that you are not drawing unfounded conclusions about a situation. The analysis process is designed to keep yourself levelheaded so that you do not say or do something that is going to make a situation worse. Handling workplace situations in a diplomatic manner is essential to maintaining positive dynamics with colleagues and can also go a long way in improving workplace morale.

These articles demonstrate that good relationships with colleagues are an important factor in good employee morale. If employees feel like they have good relationships with their coworkers as well as management, they feel like they have more of a support system in place. This not only

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increases morale, but also makes employees more efficient at their jobs. Using tools like the Ladder of Inference help to reduce tension and misunderstanding, keeping relationships friendly and diplomatic.

### **Ethical Leadership Traits and Strategies**

Throughout the MEL program, we have explored several leadership traits and strategies. For example, the benefits of confrontation. Stinnett (2012) makes the argument that confrontation is an act of respect and that it should be encouraged by leaders. He argues that a good leader will recognize the value of this type of feedback. Furthermore, Martinuzzi (n.d.) outlines different tips for developing adaptability such as “consider what mental scripts are influencing your behavior” and making changes that you believe a hypothetical successor would make. Friedman (n.d.) outlines the pros and cons of Task-Oriented Management Style and People-Oriented Management Style. He argues that a task-oriented style can keep things proficient and timely, but can also “lead to a lack of employee autonomy and creativity, which can result in low morale in the office.” Conversely, he argues that People-Oriented Management can energize employees by making them feel appreciated, while simultaneously running the risk of employees feeling overwhelmed by their tasks.

Another excellent leadership trait is knowing when and when not to take advice. Robyn (2011) suggests that leaders “take some quiet time to reflect on the advice you’ve been given”. I think this is extremely important, as this will end up being the deciding factor of whether I will follow the advice. I think it is imperative to always take time to reflect instead of making a rushed decision.

Taking these articles into account along with theories like the Ladder of Inference and Appreciative Inquiry, leaders are much better equipped to be able to listen to the concerns of their

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employees without jumping to negative conclusions. Ethical leaders need to engage and listen to their employees, as it is critical for morale that employees feel valued to the organization.

### **Combating Toxic Leadership**

Toxic Leadership is pervasive in one form or another in nearly every organization. Even my current company is not immune to levels of toxicity, although fortunately it is not nearly as bad as other companies I have worked for in the past. Lavoie (2014) suggests diffusing a toxic workplace by recognizing accomplishments, being proactive rather than reactive to avoid potential problems, ensuring that management and employees have their expectations aligned, and avoiding cliques or favoritism. Gibbons & Bryant (2013) believe that leaders and followers should avoid falling into group think, as this can lead to toxicity in the workplace. Duggan (n.d.) makes the point that an inability to resolve conflict effectively can cause lots of strife and tension in the workplace. These authors are persistent in their belief that a toxic workplace is not the be-all and end-all. There are always steps that can be taken to reduce toxicity in the workplace, whether you are in a leadership position or not.

In Dr. Stan Ward's (2014) presentation, he asserts that even without positional authority within an organization, one can still act with leadership if they have both intention and influence. If an individual has a vision for how an organization should be, then they have fulfilled the intentional part of leadership. However, intention is not enough to enact change, and influence is also required. Ward goes on to explain that influence requires both allies and advocates. You need to have people on your side within the organization who believe in your vision and are willing to help you carry it out. If you can harness both intention and influence together, you have the tools in place to promote positive change.

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Another powerful tool to fight toxic leadership is Appreciative Inquiry (AI). Cooperrider & Whitney (n.d.) describe AI as recognizing the best qualities in people while also being open to seeing new possibilities. AI starts a discussion within an organization. Without making judgements or assumptions, it takes the positive approach of recognizing what is working well, investigating why it is functioning admirably and then doing more of that. The essential principle of AI is that an organization will develop in whichever course that individuals in the organization center their consideration.

### **Summary**

After my research, it is clear to me that employee morale is a crucial issue that organizations must take seriously. If left unchecked, it can lead to increased turnover, poor performance, general dissatisfaction in the workplace, and will take a financial drain on the organization. Leaders have a duty to be proactive rather than reactive with morale in the workplace. They need to listen to their employees, take suggestions when necessary, and make sure employees feel valued within the organization. One of my biggest takeaways from my research was that open communication is critical, not only with my stakeholders, but also with the employees that I surveyed. It was essential for me to communicate adequately what I was trying to accomplish, as well as ensure that I am opening productive dialogue to accept new advice when it is offered, but also know when to stand firm. During the implementation of my project, I employed many of the techniques outlined in this review including Appreciative Inquiry, Intentional Influence, and the Ladder of Inference. The suggestions for avoiding toxic leadership and for improving employee relations will also help me as I look for both ways to improve morale as well as do whatever I can to avoid common pitfalls. The methods of my project were greatly influenced by my research,

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particularly in my numerous interactions with my stakeholders. The following chapter outlines the execution of my project.

## Chapter III: Method

### Introduction to Implementation

To reiterate, my project involves working with high-level stakeholders within my organization to look for ways to improve morale within the organization. The methodology discussed in this chapter includes the following:

- A breakdown of the stakeholders I will be working with
- A needs analysis for why this project is necessary
- An evaluation plan of how I intend to carry out my project
- An analysis of the positives and negatives of my proposed solutions
- A plan to overcome obstacles and make my plan sustainable
- Artifacts used throughout the project
- Results of the implementation

### Stakeholders

The **Vice President of Operations** is in charge of executive decision making. He is open to suggestions, but approval for any decisions must run through him. His primary need is for the organization to continue growing in value and profitability. When I spoke with him about my proposed project, he seemed intrigued by the initiative I was taking, and acknowledged the validity of some of my concerns. He did not give me much in the way of ideas, but he asked me questions about what I would do. I told him about my proposal to turn employee surveys into tangible data to gauge morale, and organizing a morale-boosting event for the company. Overall, he liked the approach I was thinking about taking, and he encouraged me to speak with other stakeholders within the organization to gain their perspective. Due to his extensive responsibilities within the organization, the VP did not have a very hands-on approach with my project. His main role was giving the final budget approval for me to conduct my event.

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The next stakeholder I spoke with was the **Client Relations Manager**, who I report to directly. She oversees Client Relations department, and has a strong focus on customer service and client retention. Her need is for all employees to be highly knowledgeable, independent, hungry for growth, and dedicated to service. She typically has several meetings and calls every day so she does not have very much time to spare for this project, but she was willing to give me about 15 minutes to discuss. She seemed intrigued by the ideas I was proposing, and echoed many of the same thoughts. Her primary concern is that she does not know how this project will be practical, from a purely logistical perspective. I assured her that the project would not take away from my day-to-day responsibilities, and that I would only require infrequent meetings with her and the other stakeholders, and after that she seemed more open to the idea. This manager assisted me with reviewing and approving the survey questions, and participated in brainstorming meetings to develop my morale-boosting event.

The **Verifications Manager** was the next person I spoke with. She manages over 60 employees in the Verifications department, and she needs for her department to ensure they are following direction with a strong attention to detail, and needs for the Client Relations department to be mindful and considerate that human error is a part of the business. Out of the various aspects of the project I described, she seemed most intrigued by the employee morale aspect. She manages the largest department in our organization, and has probably seen the biggest turnover of any other department. Because of this, she finds herself questioning if there are things that can be done to increase morale among her team. She seemed very open to the idea of me conducting anonymous surveys, and even offered to help me come up with survey questions if the project got approved. In the end, she was an enormous help with getting my survey off the ground. Having had experience surveying employees in a previous job, she gave

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me some wonderful feedback on the questions I developed and helped me make many improvements to the wording of my survey.

My next interview was with the **Training & Development Manager**, who is essentially the Human Resources representative in our building. She handles employee interviews, puts together internal trainings, and works with Corporate to stay up-to-date on all company policies. Given her position, employee morale is of great concern to her, and she was very interested in my proposed project. This was a very positive interview, as she offered full support in both the issuing of anonymous surveys, as well as the organization of a morale-boosting event. She encouraged me to seek her out for any questions I might have so she could offer her support. Unfortunately, due to an unforeseen scheduling conflict, she was unable to review the survey prior to me sending it out. However, she did help me set up my event, and even stayed for part of the time to help hand out raffle prizes.

My final interview was with the **Administrations Manager**, who has experience with organizing events for the company. As I expected, she seemed very receptive to the ideas I was proposing, and offered her help in any way should could for helping me organize a successful event. Her one concern was how much she thinks the event might end up costing. This manager was ultimately responsible for my \$1,000 budget. While other managers were hesitant to give me a budget at all, this manager took a vote of confidence in me and convinced the other stakeholders that \$1,000 was a reasonable budget for my event.

### **Needs Analysis**

The articles I studied corroborated a lot with what I learned in my interviews. The tips I learned about ways to increase employee morale and the lessons I learned on how to manage

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client expectations will inform how I move forward. I feel like all my interviews went well, and I believe that I have gained the support I require for a successful project.

My biggest takeaways from my stakeholder interviews were that ideas I had were sound, and the main challenge would be finding time to conduct the project and meet with stakeholders so that it does not take away from day-to-day operations, which must remain the top priority. It was also clear to me that I needed to be very mindful of how I speak to my stakeholders to ensure that I do not upset anyone or make them feel defensive. These are all extremely busy individuals, and it is my responsibility to make sure that I am communicating with them in a way that does not feel overly invasive.

When I initially approached my stakeholders about partnering with me for this project, I don't think they believed there was an issue with morale in the organization. The consensus amongst the stakeholders was that they believed most employees in the organization were happy. I knew that trying to convince them otherwise without producing any evidence would only serve to agitate them and create tension, so I instead opted to let the results speak for themselves. I knew there was a morale issue in the organization, and I felt confident that if employees were assured that the survey results were 100% anonymous and would have no negative repercussions on them, they would be open and honest. I did have a few employees reach out to me just to make sure that the survey would be anonymous. They wanted to participate, but feared getting in trouble. I assured them all that their name would not be tied to their results in any way, shape or form. This helped to alleviate any concerns they had.

Given that we are a customer service organization, the main concern amongst my stakeholders was that the project would disrupt the workflow of the different departments. I

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ensured the managers that the surveys I was requesting the employees complete was voluntary, and if they did choose to complete it, it could be completed in 10-15 minutes, minimizing time away from their primary responsibilities. When the plan for the pizza party and raffle came together, the concerns about disruption to workflow once again came to the surface. The stakeholders wanted to ensure that there would still be ample phone and email coverage throughout the entire event, so I proposed that we split the employees into three separate lunch groups, thus ensuring that there would be plenty of people answering phones and emails during the event.

The Client Relations Manager whom I directly report to was also concerned about my day-to-day responsibilities being disrupted, as she knows that I manage several large accounts who depend on me to be available for assistance. I was able to put these concerns to rest by assuring her that the vast majority of the preparation I was doing for the project was taking place off the clock. Only the scheduled stakeholder meetings and the event itself were during work hours, and all other preparation I did on my own time.

After I presented my analysis of the survey results to my stakeholders, there were a lot of emotions in the room. Some felt shocked, some were determined to come up with solutions, and one manager seemed to take personal offense with the results. The surprising thing is that the manager who took offense was the Verifications Manager, who was so instrumental in helping me develop the survey questions. I gave her the opportunity to voice her concerns, and discovered that she was upset by the results because she considers herself to be such an advocate for her department, and she couldn't believe that so many employees had low morale. I took this opportunity to use some Appreciative Inquiry by offering positive reinforcement for the things

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that she was doing right, mainly the fact that she cared so deeply. I also reminded her that since the results were anonymous, we don't know which results came from which department. And I ended by trying to turn it into a positive situation, encouraging her to think of the results as an opportunity rather than a failure. Now that we know that an issue exists, we can start making progress towards rectifying it. I knew that my event would not solve the problem on its own, but I intended for it to be a step in the right direction that would hopefully lay the groundwork for the organization to implement more events and programs to boost morale.

### **Change Plan**

My overall goal for this project was to identify common areas where morale was lower using anonymous surveys, and then use that data to develop a morale-boosting event – either one time or ongoing. For the survey portion, I developed the survey questions myself, but all the stakeholders had the opportunity to review the questions ahead of time, both to ensure that there are no objections as well as to see if they have any additional feedback or suggestions of questions I should be asking. The survey went out to about 200 employees, and I received 39 responses back. It was a little less than I had hoped for, but I still feel that I got enough responses to draw conclusions from the data, so I was not discouraged. A few of the commonalities I drew was that employees do not feel that leadership takes their feedback seriously, they don't feel adequately compensated for the work they do, and they do not feel that there are many opportunities for advancement.

After providing my survey analysis to my stakeholders, and getting past their initial reactions, we could have a very productive conversation about where we could go from here. They understood the limited scope of the project, and agreed that the best plan for the short-term

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would be a one-time event to boost morale. There were a lot of ideas thrown around, but what we ultimately decided on was a company luncheon and raffle. Due to the limited budget, the event will be a giant pizza party, and raffle tickets will be given to all who attend. To create incentive and increase participation for my exit survey, an extra raffle ticket will be given to all employees who agree to participate in the survey. A big challenge was the discussion of a budget for the event. I had no idea how much catering costs for these type of functions, so I had a very difficult time getting the amount of money I had hoped for to allow for more catering possibilities. After much discussion and deliberation, I was given a budget of \$1,000 - \$500 for food and \$500 for raffle prizes. The budget negotiation was one of the most difficult and unpleasant aspect of this project to date. My organization does not part with money easily and even getting the amount that I ultimately got felt like pulling teeth. However, this was a great exercise in compromising. Most of my stakeholders did not want to spend any money at first, but I did everything I could to convince them that something as simple as buying lunch for the staff could go a long way in making them feel valued. I argued that offering prizes was added incentive, and would also help increase my final survey results. I was very relieved to have the Administrations Manager in my corner for the budget discussion, as she echoed all the same concerns that I had, and she was instrumental in helping me secure a budget. After continuous reminding that employee morale is not something that can be fixed overnight but that we must start somewhere, we reached consensus on a budget of \$1,000. It is not what I hoped for, but it is enough to work with.

I spent the week leading up to the event spreading awareness amongst the company. I sent out a company-wide newsletter explaining what I was doing, and have placed fliers around the builder so everyone is aware. I did not have much experience with event planning, so there were a lot of pieces to put together and it felt a bit overwhelming at times. However, I employed

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some mindfulness techniques to remind myself to just breathe, stay present, and take the project one step at a time. Using these techniques made a world of difference in relieving my stress and keeping me from getting overwhelmed. On a positive note, news of the company lunch was very well-received by the employees. Free food and prizes proved to be a powerful motivator in this project. Budgeting has proved to be a rather large challenge as well. My \$1,000 budget has forced me to be very frugal. Fortunately, my food costs still allowed to dedicate about 35% of my budget to survey prizes.

All challenges aside, the event went very well overall. The employees seemed very happy and engaged during the company lunch, and there was especially a lot of excitement during the raffle. Due to my limited budget, prizes were primarily gift cards of varying value, but there was still a lot of excitement during this portion of the event. Coordinating food for the 3 lunch groups was challenging. I had scheduled 3 separate pizza deliveries to ensure fresh pizza for every group, and transitioning the groups proved to be a bit of a challenge as well. If I had to do things over, I would have allowed for a bit more of a transition period between the 3 lunches to allow for clean-up and preparation in between. Even having 15-20 minutes in between would have made a big difference.

One hiccup I experienced was during one of the lunches when the pizza delivery was a little late. Even though it was only about 10 minutes late, this created a lot of stress, as I knew that the employees only had a limited amount of time to get food and eat. I called the pizza place to find out what was going on with the delivery, and they apologized and said the driver was a little behind scheduled but would be there as quickly as possible. I took a few minutes to myself just to breathe and center my thoughts, and accepted that this was outside of my control and that

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everything would be okay. I apologized to everyone who was waiting for their food, and did what I could to reassure them. To my relief, everyone was pretty understanding about the whole thing and it gave me the opportunity to engage employees in conversation and try to lighten the mood. I did feel immensely relieved once the pizza arrived, however.

A surprisingly high number of employees agreed to participate in my exit survey in exchange for an extra raffle ticket. All in all, I had 64 sign-ups, which was a lot more than I expected. Of course, I didn't have a way of enforcing that they will in fact complete the survey, but even if I can get half of them to complete the exit survey, I will be pleased with those numbers.

### **Evaluation Plan**

Employee morale is a complex issue that is not going to be fixed with one pizza party and raffle, but this project was always intended to be the stepping stone towards something greater. Up until a couple months ago, my organization did not realize that they had a problem with morale. Now that they are aware the problem exists, we can think about solutions. I could tell during my event that it was making a difference. I saw some employees' faces light up in a way that I haven't seen in the five years I have been working there. I felt the energy during the raffle, and the enthusiastic cheering for every winner. I had people coming up to thank me afterwards, telling me how much they appreciated the gesture and how much it meant to them. I was completely humbled by this reaction, and it solidified in my mind how something as seemingly small as a company-sponsored lunch and raffle can make a large difference.

The exit survey that went out to the employees asked them to rate how they were feeling before the event vs after the event, whether the event met, exceeded, or did not meet their

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expectations, and I proposed some ideas for potential future events or programs to gauge employee interest. Survey results are still coming in as of this rough draft, but most the results I have seen so far indicate that the employees came into the event with low to moderate expectations and were very pleasantly surprised. I will be reviewing and analyzing all the exit survey results with my stakeholders later this week, in preparation for my final write-up.

In addition to the surveys given to the employees, I have also given exit surveys to my stakeholders to gauge their feedback on the event itself, along with how they feel I did with implementing and executing the event. While I would like to be able to test some long-term morale improvement possibilities, the limited timeframe of the project unfortunately does not allow for that. That said, I have prepared some suggestions for my stakeholders to review for possible ongoing morale-boosting events or programs based on feedback I have gotten from employees so far. I want employees to feel valued and appreciated on a consistent basis, so some of my suggestions include company-sponsored lunches on a monthly or quarterly basis, monthly team-building events for each department, incentive programs for employees going above and beyond with prizes like gifts cards or a paid day off, recurring anonymous surveys to gauge how employees are feeling about the general work environment, and creating channels where employees can easily provide constructive feedback, like an online suggestion box. And there could perhaps be a monthly or quarterly incentive for employees to make suggestions, such as a gift card or some other monetary reward for suggesting gets picked and implemented by upper management. I believe that after the success of my one-time event and the enormously positive reception it received, my stakeholders will be much more open to implementing ongoing morale-boosting events or programs in the future. I may or may not be involved in morale-boosting activities moving forward, but if I am asked to play a bigger role in this, I will certainly do so.

**Artifact 1 – Employee Survey**

1. On a scale of 1 to 10, how happy are you at work?
2. Would you refer someone to work here?
3. Do you have a clear understanding of your career or promotion path?
4. On a scale of 1 to 10, how would you rate your work-life balance?
5. Hypothetically, if you were to quit tomorrow, what would your reason be?
6. Do you feel valued at work?
7. How frequently do you receive recognition from your manager?
8. The last time you accomplished a big project, did you receive any recognition?
9. Do you believe you'll be able to reach your full potential here?
10. If you were given the chance, would you reapply to your current job?
11. Do you foresee yourself working here one year from now?
12. Do you believe the leadership team takes your feedback seriously?
13. Do you feel like the management team here is transparent?
14. With eyes closed, can you recite our organization's values?
15. What three words would you use to describe our culture?
16. On a scale of 1 to 10, how comfortable do you feel giving feedback to your supervisor?
17. Do you feel like coworkers give each other respect here?
18. Do you believe we live authentically by our organizational values?
19. Does our executive team contribute to a positive work culture?

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20. Do you have fun at work?

### **Rationale 1 – Employee Survey**

The survey issued to the employees was divided into four sections:

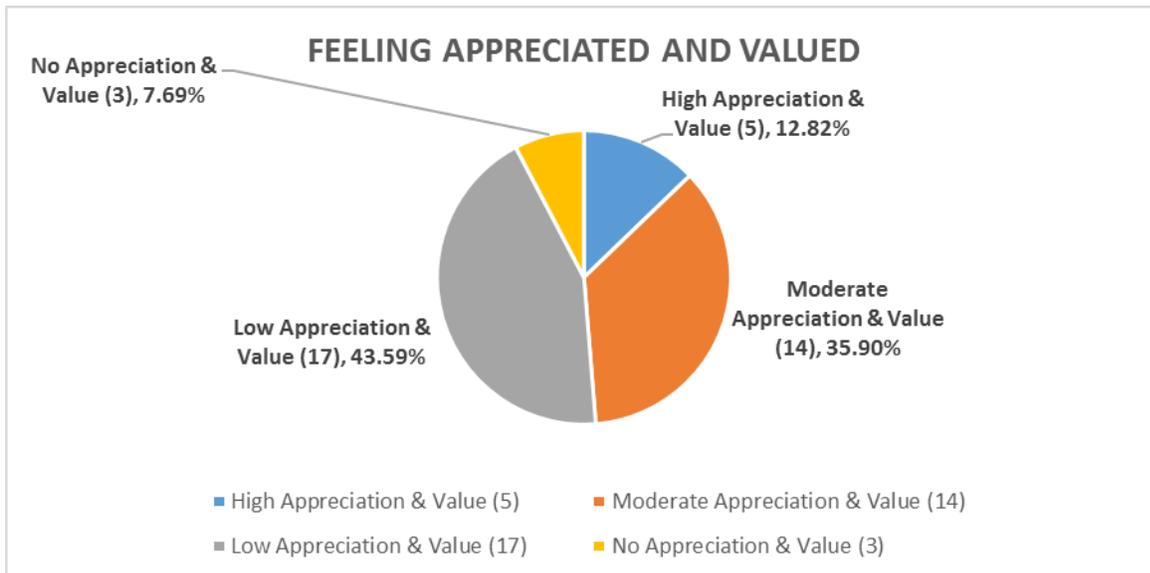
1. Workplace Satisfaction
2. Feeling Appreciated and Valued
3. Employee Retention
4. Organizational Culture

To analyze and present the results in an easily graspable way for my stakeholders, I quantified all the results into four distinct categories:

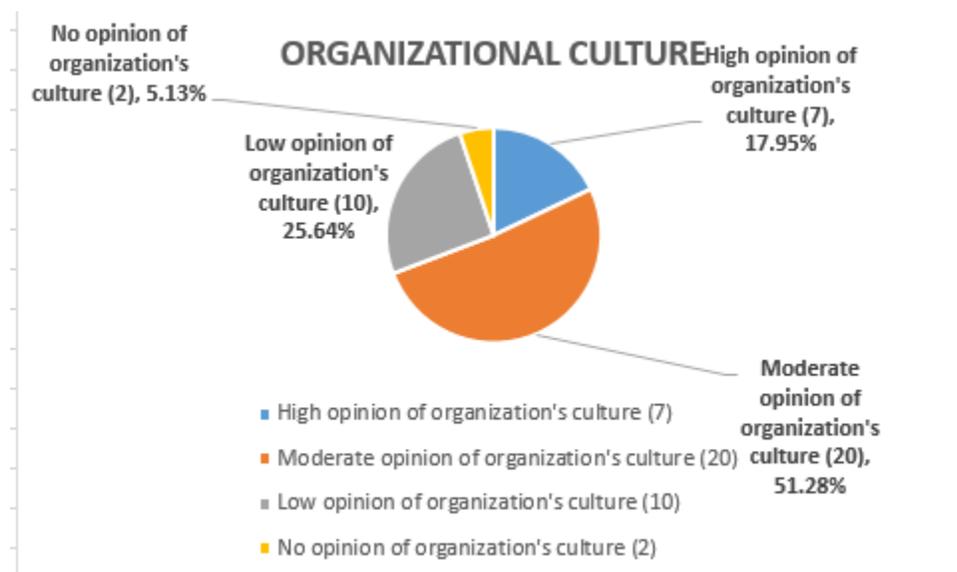
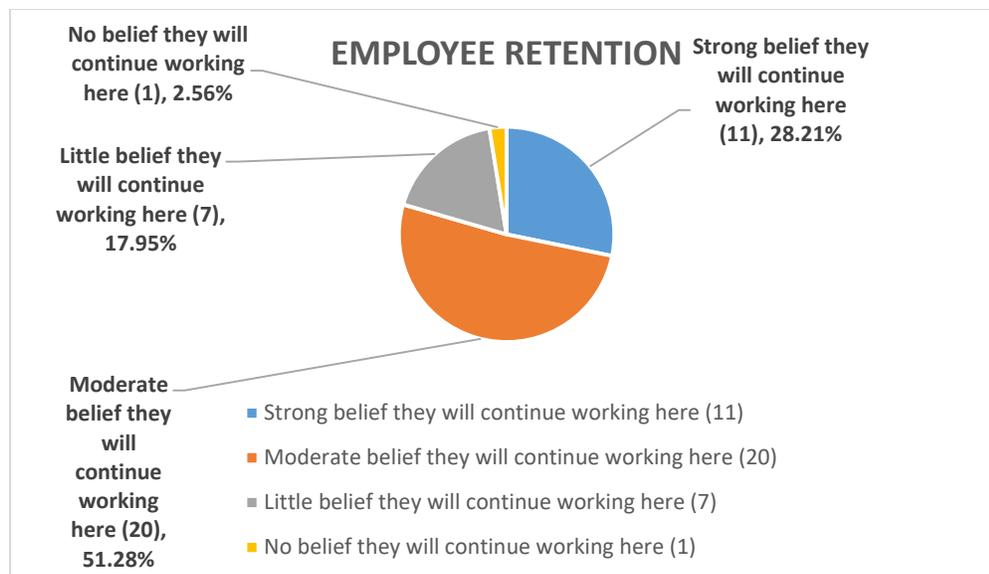
- High
- Moderate
- Low
- None

These categories then became the below analysis, which is the actual data that I presented to my stakeholders.

**Artifact 2 – Survey Analysis**



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**Rationale 2 –Survey Analysis**

Out of the 39 employees who participated in the initial survey, over 76% indicated that they felt either low or moderate satisfaction in the workplace. Over half of the employees indicated that they felt little to no appreciation or value from the organization. The employee retention section surprised me, however. Even though a large percentage of the employees had expressed dissatisfaction, nearly 80% believe that they will continue working there. I took this to

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mean that while they may be unhappy, complacency and a fear of change may keep them from seeking other opportunities. Of course, this is not an excuse for maintaining the status quo, as my research showed that even if employees with low morale do not leave the company, they are likely to exhibit poor work performance and a general feeling of apathy about their job. If employees are unhappy, it is hard to expect them to care about what they are doing.

Based on the survey results, it was clear that something had to be done to improve morale within the organization. Presenting these results to my stakeholders and giving them my analysis proved to be enough of a wake-up call to get them to sign off on my companywide event.

### **Policy Changes/Procedures/Programs**

At this time, no policy changes, procedures or programs have been implemented because of my project. However, I believe there is a very strong chance that there will be some morale programs and initiatives coming in the future. My stakeholders were very impressed with the results of my event, and have told me that they saw the positive impact that the event had. I am in discussions with my stakeholders about possible ongoing events or programs that the company may implement. While nothing has been decided yet, all parties involved are very enthusiastic, so I feel optimistic that if we can maintain this momentum, it is only a matter of time before a morale program or initiative is implemented within the organization.

### **Results**

To summarize, I started the project by issuing my survey to the employees. I turned the survey results into a concise analysis that I presented to my stakeholders. After some brainstorming together, we decided on a pizza lunch and raffle as a morale-boosting event. The event was an overall success based on feedback from the employees, as well as initial feedback

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from my stakeholders. Long-term and sustainable programs are in discussion amongst my stakeholders, but nothing has been decided now. Pending my final meeting with my stakeholders, I am tentatively calling this project a success.

## Chapter IV: Conclusion

### Conclusions

Based on the survey results I received, it is clear to both me and my stakeholders that my belief that a morale problem existed within the organization was accurate. Less than ¼ of the employees surveyed stated that they felt high satisfaction in the workplace, and over half of the employees stated that they felt little to no appreciation or value within the organization. These initial results were the supporting evidence I needed to get my morale-boosting event off the ground.

With the help and support of my stakeholders, I successfully orchestrated a companywide pizza party and raffle that was extremely well-received by all involved. Nearly all feedback from both employees and stakeholders was very positive, as have the exit survey results that were received. Out of the 200+ employees who attended the event, I received 46 responses to my exit survey, which was about 5% more responses than on the initial survey that was sent out. Most employees stated on the exit survey that the event did help to improve their mood as well as their overall opinion of the organization. Nearly 100% of employees stated that they would like more events like this on a recurring basis. I only received negative feedback on five of the survey responses. Three of them did not give a specific reason for not liking the event, and the other two expressed frustration due to the pizza arriving late to the event, as they felt rushed. Based on what I received, the negative responses were the exception rather than the norm.

Feedback from my stakeholders was very positive as well. They felt that I did an excellent job in both organizing the event as well as facilitating all of the stakeholder meetings. They acknowledged that their daily responsibilities did not make it easy for them to always have time for me, which caused most our meetings to turn into a scheduling nightmare. However, they

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admired my persistence and appreciated the flexibility I showed in accommodating their varying availabilities. The most notable feedback came from the Administrations Manager who stated that she saw a clear improvement in the way that I conducted our stakeholder meetings. She observed that I grew in confidence and came into the later meetings with a more clear-cut agenda than the initial meetings. This feedback meant a lot to me, because leading the stakeholder meetings put me well outside of my established comfort zone, which I now feel has been expanded.

### **Recommendations for further work**

My biggest recommendation is that the organization invest in their employees' happiness and well-being. While a \$1,000 pizza party is a good start, we can do better. Research has shown that employees are more productive and passionate about their jobs when they feel that their company appreciates and values them. Having recurring companywide events is a great way to show that they care about their employees and want to reward them for all their hard work. While lunches are great, we can also look at events outside of the workplace such as company picnics and other outings. The cost will be a lot more expensive than a pizza party, but if it means that employees are more productive and less likely to quit, then these company events will pay for themselves over time as the cost of constant recruiting, hiring, and training new employees goes down.

I also believe that it would be beneficial to have more of a voice from the employee base when determining methods to improve morale. Since the employees are the group that is primarily impacted, it is important to have an accurate assessment of what employees actually want to see, rather than making assumptions that turn out to be incorrect or incomplete. My

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survey results showed that almost all employees would like to recurring events that show the company's appreciation, and I see no reason why the employees could not be involved in the planning of these events. One of the suggestions I brought to my stakeholder's attention was that we form an official Events Committee and give employees the opportunity to participate.

Another way to improve morale is for employees to feel more ownership in what they are doing, and I believe that having them help with the planning and execution of events is a great way to make them feel like a more essential part of the organization.

### **Limitations and implications of proposed recommendations**

The biggest limitation and implication of my recommendation is cost. Sponsoring meals and outings for over 200 employees is expensive, no matter how you look at it. No matter how beneficial an idea may seem on paper, organizations are always looking at the bottom line. To help the organization come to terms with the added cost of maintaining morale, I have two potential solutions.

#### Solution 1:

My first proposed solution is to utilize the *8-Step Process for Leading Change* that was founded by John Kotter (n.d.). Out of the eight changes that Kotter describes, the two that I believe will be most helpful to me for making the change sustainable are Step 7 – “Build on the Change” and Step 8 – “Anchor the Changes in Corporate Culture.” Kotter suggestions some very practical steps for keeping the change moving such as “after every win, analyze what went right, and what needs improving,” “set goals to continue building on the momentum you've achieved,” “keep ideas fresh by bringing in new change agents and leaders for your change coalition,” “publicly recognize key members of your original change coalition, and make sure the rest of the

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staff – new and old – remembers their contributions,” and “create plans to replace key leaders of change as they move on. This will help ensure that their legacy is not lost or forgotten.”

(MindTools, n.d.) I believe that utilizing Kotter’s *8-Step Change Model* will go a long way in helping my organization create a sustainable morale program.

### Solution 2:

My second proposed solution is to use Appreciative Inquiry to convince my organization that adding a morale program into the budget is a worthwhile endeavor. By using this technique, I would reference the positive experience that the employees had at my small event, and would also ask them to think back to a previous job they might have had in which they did not feel valued, and what they wish that employer would have done. I believe that I could use AI to appeal to their empathetic side and help them see the real value of implementing such a program.

### **Final Thoughts**

This change project was an experience unlike anything I have done before. I have been a part of projects and events before, but this is the first time I have conceived a plan, drawn out all the steps, recruited collaborators, and executed the event from start to finish. This project is something that has felt so daunting since I enrolled at CLU. I always knew that the change project was on the horizon, but I put it out of my mind until the Capstone lab and Change course forced me to focus on it. And once I started working on the project actively, it was not as scary or daunting as I thought it would be. Sure, there were times when it was stressful, but now that it is over, I feel extremely proud of myself. This was the culmination of my time at CLU. If it wasn’t for everything I have learned in the MEL program and all the support from my classmates and instructors, I never would have had the skills to pull this off.

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All things considered, I believe that my change project was a success, but I know that is not the point. Everything CLU has taught me over these past 18 months has confirmed my belief that the most important thing you can do is try. It is not enough to be another passerby when you believe a circumstance can be better, you need to be an agent of change. I have done my best to put into action everything I have learned, and that makes me a success in my mind. But if my plan does not result in a sustainable program, I am not going to feel like I have failed. Because at the end of the day, this is another learning experience and I will be in a much better position for the next time I try to implement real change.

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Appendix A: Gantt Chart

