



Ways to Work: Episode 4 — Transforming employee experience beyond borders

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ANNOUNCER: Welcome to Ways to Work, a WTW podcast series exploring the modern workplace through the lenses of people and risk, with a focus on the Philippines and the broader Asian market. We provide access to current thinking on topics that matter most to employers and employees.

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LEE BRIONES: So hi, everyone. Welcome to our next installment of our employee experience series. This episode is special because we have invited one of our key clients who is leading in the area of transformative employee engagement. We have with us today the Head of HR Partnering from Energy Development Corporation, Ms. Tizza Zamora. Hello, Tizza. Thank you and great to have you with us in this episode.

TIZZA ZAMORA: Hi, Lee, excited to be part of this podcast with you.

LEE BRIONES: Thank you, Tizza. I'm going to get right to my question. EDC has been our client since 2014. And ever since then, you continue to post very positive sustainable engagement scores in every survey cycle that you've run, either with us or doing it individually. And I saw in 2021 that you even exceeded expectations and went higher than your previous pre-pandemic engagement scores. So what did EDC do differently that led to the company getting a higher mark than your previous 2019 score? Can you cite any specific actions?

TIZZA ZAMORA: So the engagement survey that we did was really a significant activity for us as we were in a transformation journey, as you mentioned. And so the leaders were really very keen on understanding the data that we provided them, and then working on the suggested actions from this particular data.



Now, the pandemic was really an opportunity for us to show that we really care about our employees. And so it was so easy for our leaders at that time coming from getting the results of the survey to really think of new ways of getting in touch and communicating with the employees. So there was an increase in the number of touchpoints that leaders had with our employees at the different levels.

So it wasn't even a siloed view of leadership for our employees, it was really top management creating different venues wherein employees can be heard and for them to be able also to connect with our employees. Also, the company showed its flexibility where it was needed during this pandemic, knowing that we're in operations in the different parts of the country.

We had people who were not in their actual home location, so we provided private transportation so that before-- as soon as it was allowable, we were able to bring employees back to where they originally came from, and that they could just continue working in that location moving forward with this work from home setup.

LEE BRIONES: Thank you, Tizza. Those are really great examples. And for our listeners, did you know that EDC actually has operations that spans all over the country? You not only produce power in a certain area, but you actually generate it through renewable means. They have hydroelectric, solar, geothermal energy.

And despite that, their employee engagement scores show that distance is not a barrier in creating positive employee experience. Could you share EDC's initiatives that led to creating a strong connection with its employees? You did mention several key points about leadership being driven, or fully committed to connecting with individuals. And what do you think made the difference in terms of you being able to make those stronger connections? And what makes leaders in EDC very successful at driving engagement organization wide?

TIZZA ZAMORA: So what has helped us in that even if we're dispersed on different islands in the Philippines is that one of the things that the survey told us as well was that the organization is something that we had to take a look at, and how we've organized work, how we've given responsibilities to people in different parts of the country.

And so what we did was really take a look at standardization of work. So that a person who's working in Leyte will be doing the same thing if he were in Bicol, or in Dumaguete, or in Kidapawan, so that it's easy for them to have discussions. There's a lot of meeting of the minds and that you're not alone. You're not like an island, that you're just doing your work on your own. You're not connected. So I think that has helped because there's a lot of collaboration that has happened with that because people can see the work and it's being done in different parts, and you get to also share your best practices, it can be applied. For example, we have a team in Leyte who was able to discover something that makes it easier for a plant operations to move faster, then that kind of an idea gets to be done as well in the other parts of the



company. And I think that has helped in terms of getting people to understand better how the company works.

The second one is the leaders are not just talking about the motivational part, but it's really putting it down on the working level so that there's that transfer of that engagement into actual performance. Because that's what you'd like. You have engaged people, but that they do that, they transfer that into the way that they do the work.

Now, on the other side, to maintain the motivation, we do fleet wide activities. So we don't just leave it to per plant or per location do your own thing. It's really more of-- from that engagement so that everybody knows that it's happening the same place. It's not just dependent on if the leaders in one location are more active or more into doing activities for employees.

Now, it's more of-- everybody gets the same attention coming from our senior leaders. There's no just one specific location, for example, Leyte is our biggest, that our attention would just be given to them and then the smaller ones will just be on-- as an opportunity presents itself, every engagement activity that we did after that was for everyone. So that there's an opportunity for the different sites as well to get to know each other. And they get to see that their counterparts in the other locations are actually as active as they are in terms of doing all these things that we have lined up for them.

So most of our engagement activities are connected with nature because we are regenerative. So we do have activities that, at one point, even the pandemic, we partnered with our CSR partners in-- for example, in areas where they were to plant trees. We were in Manila where there's not that much land that we provide. We partnered with La Mesa eco park in that sense. So just to provide people an area where they can be outdoors, but at the same time still feel connected with nature, which are also part of our purpose and advocacy as a company.

LEE BRIONES: That's correct. You shared a lot of learnings and what made EDC successful at maintaining engagement. And I really like the term that you used fleet wide. That's definitely something I'm hearing for the first time. And so it's a great example of how alignment goes a long way, how commitment of leaders in terms of driving engagement and what it does for the organization. It's not just for the purpose of lifting your engagement score so that you could appease your stakeholders, but it actually translate to positive business performance as well.

What lies at the core of statements that you've made so far would be around how successful EDC is particularly with engaging your leaders to take an active part in driving engagement. Does this also trickle down even to the front line managers? Do they share the same level of excitement that your leaders would have in engagement? And do they also take an active part in helping the company transform the organization?



TIZZA ZAMORA: So at the start, when we had the first survey, it's an area that we needed to work on as well-- to have the same enthusiasm that's shared at the front line leaders. So one of the things that we focused on was in that particular area and during the second survey that we did. That's also an area where we saw a bit of an improvement and we saw a higher number of leaders really at the front line being more engaged.

We do have a program internally wherein we've asked the other leaders to also do some coaching with the frontline leaders in the organization. So we call it Leaders Coaching Leaders. So I think it's also something that's being done in some other companies. And so in that space, I think that really helps send the message in terms of the enthusiasm of your top management the things that we're doing into the work that leaders would have.

We've also introduced as part of performance management the concept of regular check ins. We've also provided a tool where in the employees themselves could ask for feedback from their managers at any time or from anyone, whether it's a direct manager or other managers that they've worked with for example, in a project. So I think it's more of also to have that sharing of that enthusiasm down the line. It's just providing them the mechanism to be able to do it. So we had leaders coaching other leaders, we had employees as well providing that channel so that together you engage them in different ways, not just from the top down but also from bottom up.

LEE BRIONES: Those are really great examples, Tizza. I also would like to delve deeper into another statement that you've made two questions back. You said something about how much aligned currently the experience is within EDC, how you share best practices. So could you share something about that?

TIZZA ZAMORA: What I noticed was it was really more of wanting to understand. I mean, our leaders to have that mindset that you need to understand better the people, your people and what they are telling you, and how do you get a better pulsing of all of this. Let's validate all that information. And I really appreciate them for the extra steps they did. They just didn't look at the survey and said, "Yeah, that's it, that's the survey and it's reflective." But it's really having further conversations and understanding what works for them has helped in that area.

Across leaders, the idea is not to point out who was highest and then who was mostly reds in the survey, but really it was, for those who were green what were you doing differently? I mean, what was it that you're doing, and let's share that. Maybe some of those things can help the other groups or some of those things can be tweaked and the others would see it. But I think what's better is that it opened the minds of people to see that there are different kinds of employees that we have. So it's not like one size fits all. Even if we have fleet wide initiatives, you still have people who are not as engaged as the others as we've seen it in terms of the demographic cuts as well.



So it's about opening the minds of the leaders that it's really very diverse right now. There are-- you have a large group of tenured employees, but they also have a large group of very young employees. And so really the leader's challenge is to balance that kind of relationship building and that kind of communication that you have, it's not a one size fits all kind of scenario for you. And so I appreciate that the leaders took on the challenge, took on the hat that it's their responsibility and they're going to do something about it. And really for us in HR, the activity is just to provide them different channels, different tools with which they could work with and at the same time just supporting them and building up their confidence to have such conversations with employees and also just to give them access to information so that it's easy for them to answer queries from employees.

LEE BRIONES: Thank you, Tizza for citing those examples. I'm actually down to my last question, and I think it's at the top of everyone's mind. And I think a key component of most conversations I'm having is what the new normal would look like. If you were to select around three key learnings or realizations over the past 21 months where we've been in lockdown or in quarantine, what are those lessons or new practices that you will carry over into the new normal? That you think, well, it's something that's not just temporary but can stand the test of time.

TIZZA ZAMORA: First is data driven analysis is so much important because you have to have a basis for having certain conclusions right about the workplace, about performance, and about how people deliver. We have to be more of output based, and output provides us information, provides us data. The challenge really is just having people adapt to that tech world faster because as I said, our particular company is really a dichotomy of really tenured and a bit of the more experienced generation. And then you have your ones who are really tech savvy and who are fast to assimilate with the technology, whatever system that you get to launch for them.

So that's one, let's really be more data driven and data based in terms of your analysis. The second is that you have to be able to understand as they say in *Who Moved My Cheese*, right? Understand the writings on the wall and stay ahead of the change curve.

What I appreciate with how we've done this was that prior to having actually the lockdown and the quarantine, we got ourselves as early as Feb we were already planning for like the shifting of employees of, you know, Team A Team B within that set up before of course the total lockdown. So I think being able to see what was going to happen and to anticipate that. Like we understood it's going to take a toll on people's mental health. That's why we really also invested in-- even if we already have an existing like lifeline support that was external to us, we added one more.

I mean, just so that there's going to be a lot of venues for people to be able to reach out and not be sad. We also in HR took courses on psychological safety and psychological safety first aid. So that if you get



the call somehow, you'll be able to address the queries of the employees. And then if it's something deeper, then you can just let them talk to somebody who is really the professional in that area. And then lastly is really just continue the regular check ins with people and maximize the different channels of communication. I think we just need to provide them with the different channels, what works for them best.

LEE BRIONES: Thank you, Tizza. Those were certainly very good insights and great experiences that you've shared with us. We've reached the end of the session. I wish I could continue this conversation and my conversations with you truly are enlightening. And thank you for sharing your time with us. And our listeners will take away very important lessons from this episode. Thank you, Tizza.

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