

Leadership can reduce employee cynicism, increase engagement, study finds

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(Phys.org)—Management efforts to reduce cynicism and enhance employee empowerment can have a large impact on employee engagement, according to a study from the University at Buffalo School of Management.

The study, recently published in [Organization Science](#), investigated officer attitudes and organizational climates at 14 state prisons and found that proactive leadership can reduce cynicism toward change for both individual employees and across an entire organization.

"In prisons, employees face an array of very real and challenging circumstances which can create commitment problems," explains study co-author Paul Tesluk, PhD, Donald S. Carmichael Professor of Organizational Behavior in the UB School of Management. "Past research has shown that there are extraordinarily high turnover rates of 50 percent in the first year of service and 38 percent overall."

Tesluk said the study's findings are useful to managers in a variety of organizational settings beyond prisons.

"Senior leaders should be aware of the potential development of a cynical culture in their organizations, which may amplify employees' [negative attitudes](#) toward change," says Tesluk. "By addressing the issue, management can foster employees who are more committed, leading to reduced turnover and disengagement."

Leaders can limit the development of these negative cultures by making sure that their words are backed by specific actions, such as regularly asking for and acting on employee feedback, or providing ways for employees to participate in organizational change efforts, according to the study.

"[Employees](#) who feel empowered in their jobs will feel confident in attempting new ways of performing their jobs, especially during change efforts, and thus be less likely to experience [cynicism](#) towards change in for-profit and public organizations alike," Tesluk says.

Provided by University at Buffalo

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