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Upfront

Embedding Employees: Relationships keep workers from walking out. By Jennifer Daw Holloway

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Stanford Social Innovation Review
518 Memorial Way, Stanford, CA 94305-5015
Ph: 650-725-5399. Fax: 650-723-0516
Email: info@ssireview.com, www.ssireview.com

Embedding Employees

Relationships keep workers from walking out

The American Pharmacists Association (APhA) in Washington, D.C., has little turnover. Many of its staffers have been with the organization for more than 20 years. And no one on its seven-member senior management team has served for less than a decade.

James Appleby, APhA's senior vice president, says that a major reason why he has stayed with the organization for 15 years is his relationships with his co-workers. "It's sort

of like how people in the military stand their ground and fight because they can't imagine letting down their buddy," he laughs.

A recent study in the *Academy of Management Journal* (vol. 48, no. 4) confirms that the ties that bind people to each other also bind them to their workplaces. Surveying 176 employees at a large public medical center, the study's authors find that employees "who had a lot of friendships and were often asked for advice

tended not to leave," says Kevin W. Mossholder, the study's lead author and a professor of management at Louisiana State University. The article's other authors include Randall P. Settoon of Southeastern Louisiana University and Stephanie C. Henagan of Northern Illinois University.

"The study takes us beyond what we knew about the predictors of turnover," observes Jason Shaw, a professor of management at the University of Kentucky. "Most prior models focused on negative job attitudes, but [this study] shows that the social context is important. People understand that their network of relationships is valuable and may be



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reluctant to give it up, despite the fact that they may be dissatisfied with certain aspects of their job," he says.

What can organizations do to embed their employees in relationship networks? "One approach," recommends Appleby, "is to get a lot of work done through cross-divisional teams. [These] build relationships not only inside existing work units, but also among units that might not otherwise work together. It makes people realize that they can be friends with others in the organization, not just those in their work group," he adds.

Another way APhA intertwines its employees is through its staff

The ties that bind people to each other also bind them to their workplaces. And because organizations are much flatter than in the past, linking employees is now more important than ever.

partner program. "Every time a new employee joins the organization, we identify a staff partner for him from a different division, so that it creates a new network connection to another part of the organization," says Appleby.

Mossholder adds that linking employees is more important than

ever: "Organizations are much flatter than in the past. Now you have people who must connect laterally to do their jobs." And so organizations must take extra care to embed their employees in the right networks, he says.

—Jennifer Daw Holloway



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