



The Practice Layer: EYE Culture by Design, Engagement by Practice™

Why leadership and engagement efforts stall, and what belongs
between them

Executive Summary

Organizations don't have a measurement problem. They have a practice problem.

Within the organizational support consulting and coaching world, two large industries sit on either side of the same gap.

1. Leadership development sells capability without accountability.
2. Engagement measurement sells accountability without capability.

Both are complete as products and incomplete as answers. The manager is left holding a number they are responsible for and a repertoire nobody gave them.

The missing piece is not a better survey or a better workshop. It is a *practice layer*: a small, named, teachable set of things a manager actually does, held to a standard that someone other than the manager can verify.

This paper sets out why that layer is missing, what it has to satisfy to work, and why we have organized our entire business around it, rather than treating it as one more program.

1. Two industries, one missing middle

Leadership development spends enormously and transfers little	The missing middle	Engagement measurement produces data and very little movement
The scale is not in dispute. Writing in <i>Harvard Business Review</i>, Michael Beer, Magnus Finnström and Derek Schrader put annual spending at "\$160 billion in the United States and close to \$356 billion globally in 2015 alone," and were blunt about the return: "Corporations are victims of the great training robbery." Their diagnosis is the one that matters. The learning does not lead to better organizational performance "because people soon revert to their old ways of doing things". The research literature has put a number on the reversion. In a 2025 review in the <i>European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology</i>, Kauffeld and Decius report that "only 10 to 15% of what is learned in training can be transferred to the work context by training participants," citing Ford et al.		The other side fails differently. Quantum Workplace's 2023 panel study of 1,068 employees found that two in three say their organization fails to act effectively on survey results, only one in three say they are involved in planning or taking action, and 76% believe responsibility for action sits with senior leaders. Their lead researcher, Shane McFeely, states the problem in one line: "An employee survey does not fix the employee experience". Writing in the <i>Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology's TIP</i>, the framing is sharper still: "The challenge is not a lack of data. It is a lack of credibility." When employees believe feedback disappears into a black hole, organizations "undermine trust, silence employee voice, and put retention at risk".

Read these as business facts rather than academic ones. Eighty-five to ninety cents of every training dollar buys an experience that does not change what happens on the unit, the floor, or the shift, or the organization.

These are the same failure seen from opposite ends

Development hands a manager capability with no structure that requires them to use it. Measurement hands them a requirement with no capability attached to it. Neither industry is responsible for the space in between, which is precisely why neither has built anything there.

That space is where the work actually happens. It is also, commercially, the most open ground in the field, not because there is no spending, but because there is no answer

2. Why ALS moved from leadership development to the practice space

Archetype Learning Solutions began as a leadership development practice. That was the natural place to start: founder and principal Danielle Lord, PhD has 34 years in the industry, it is where the credentials point, where the conference circuit lives, and where the buyer is comfortable.

Writing *Engaging Your Employees* changed the assessment. Not because engagement is the larger category, it is not; leadership development is many times its size, but because of a structural asymmetry that becomes obvious once you see it:

Engagement is the only thing every manager in every sector is already accountable for and has been given nothing to do about.

A physician executive, a nurse manager, a manufacturing supervisor and a first-time team lead have almost nothing in common in training, vocabulary or daily pressure. All four are handed an engagement score. None of them are handed a practice. Even the process of annual action planning is short lived, and the survey itself represents a small snapshot, a single moment in time based on how employees were feeling in the moment. The team dynamics change as soon as a team member leaves or a new one enters, and competing organizational priorities often dismantle the plan within weeks.

3. What the ALS practice layer has to offer, and satisfy

Four requirements, each of which rules out most of what is currently sold.

i. Small enough to be carried

Most engagement frameworks are factor structures presented as to-do lists. Nineteen drivers is a research finding, not a set of instructions. It is also a lot of information to sift through for busy managers.

The distinction matters more than it sounds. **A driver is a finding. A practice is a behavior.**

"Opportunities to learn and grow" a common engagement questions, is a legitimate empirical factor and an impossible instruction that no human being can perform it on a Tuesday afternoon. The ALS practices of "Rounding," "one-to-ones" and "a people centered meeting" are things a manager can do this week, be observed doing, and be better at next month.

When a manager is handed nineteen priorities, they are effectively handed none, and the score falls anyway. Our framework resolves this to **four elements and twelve strategies**: Leadership, Communication & Connections, Growth & Development, and Recognition & Appreciation, because that is the size of thing a working manager can actually hold.

ii. Assessed on practice, not on self-report or documentation

The credibility problem above is not only a problem for survey vendors. It is a problem for anyone claiming a manager has improved.

Self-rating is a mirror, and a useful one, but it is not evidence, and a credential built on it is worth nothing within eighteen months of issue. Equally, a program that verifies by reviewing binders measures documentation, not practice. This is an important note and one that I saw expressed as extreme frustration among many busy managers: "I hardly have the time for a bio-break, let alone all of the mandatory documentation that is now required in the "name of engagement."

The standard we hold to is narrow and deliberate: **assessed on practice, not on documentation.** Free tiers are self-claimed and say so plainly. Verified tiers are assessed by someone who is not the manager and not their employer.

iii. Able to survive the departure of the trainer

This is the requirement the industry most consistently ignores, and the evidence against the standard model is severe.

Nichol and colleagues, publishing in the *International Journal of Behavioral Medicine*, evaluated a train-the-trainer cascade across a regional health system. Of 705 people who completed trainer training, 4.4% ($n = 31$) had ever delivered any training at all. Of those who did cascade it, fewer than half ran more than one session.

Seven hundred and five people trained; only thirty-one who ever used it. That is the default outcome of the model most organizations buy. Its also an expensive one. Training organizations charge thousands of dollars for train-the-trainer sessions and the proprietary, and required, materials. I'm sure in one the hospitals I worked, there are still boxes of unused materials, stashed in a storage closet, a sunk-cost in a financially stretched industry. Sitting in most of the training sessions, at least one manager visibly perturbed about their required presence.

What works better is documented. Smith, Liebrecht, Bauer and Kilbourne, in *Health Services Research*, randomized 43 slower-implementing sites to external facilitation alone (21 sites) or external facilitation blended with a protected internal facilitator (22 sites). Blended facilitation produced an adjusted 4.37 additional patients reaching the intervention over twelve months relative to external alone (95% CI 1.87–6.87, $p = .001$), and 2.70 more patients receiving three or more sessions (95% CI 0.99–4.48, $p = .002$). Notably, only 14 of the 22 sites (64%) managed to identify a functioning internal facilitator at all.

Two conclusions follow, and we have built both into the design. External expertise alone underperforms. And the internal anchor is the hard part, a third of sites could not produce one, so it must be named, developed and held to a standard rather than assumed.

iv. Portable across audiences without being rewritten for each

A practice layer that has to be rebuilt for every population is not a layer. It is four programs wearing a shared logo.

This requirement is the one that reorganized our business, and it deserves its own section.

4. One method, four eco-systems

Archetype Learning Solutions delivers through four eco-systems, each segmented by **who** it serves:

- **Learning Academy:** leaders across sectors, stepping into learning labs and practicing new skills
- **HelixMD:** physician leadership recovery and development, built from qualitative research and lived experience in healthcare systems
- **TEND:** well-being and resilience for caregivers and helping professionals carrying the heaviest load
- **The FOG:** early-career and manufacturing leadership, workforce pipelines and mentoring

That is audience architecture, and it is the right way to earn trust. A physician will not accept material written for a manufacturing supervisor, and the reverse is equally true. But audience architecture has a well-known failure mode, and it is expensive. Each unit drifts toward inventing its own method, its own outcome claim, its own evidence base and its own renewal logic. Four audiences become four methods. Nothing compounds. Every new population is a new build, and the firm ends up owning four relationships and no property.

EYE Culture by Design is method architecture. It is the *how* that runs as part of our eco-system of four studios rather than a fifth one sitting beside them.

The logic is straight-forward once stated. The four audiences differ enormously in context and hardly at all in mechanism. A physician executive, a charge nurse, a plant supervisor and a first-time team lead face different pressures, different vocabularies and different politics, and the same four elements. What changes between eco-systems is the example, the facilitator, the case material, and the language. What does not change is the practice, the standard, or the credential. What makes the 12 strategies so portable, is that they are all by design, simple to use, free of cost, and all based on respect for the human in the workplace.

What this changes for an organization

- A manager who earns the credential in one eco-system keeps it when they move to another. Practice is portable; context is not.
- An organization running work in two eco-systems is not buying two frameworks, two vocabularies and two sets of measures.
- A site designation means the same thing in a hospital, a plant and a school district, because it is anchored to observed practice rather than to sector-specific documentation.
- The organization is never asked to pay per employee for a score. It pays for practice being taught, anchored internally, and independently verified.

5. What we do not claim

A method layer is only worth building if it is honest about its own limits, so these are stated rather than buried.

The free self-assessment is a mirror, not an instrument. It has not been psychometrically validated, it is not normed, and it is not a measure of anyone's effectiveness. It is deliberately anonymous, collects nothing, and transmits nothing, because a manager answering honestly is worth more than a manager being scored. Self-rating without consequence is the only condition under which self-rating is informative.

We do not claim that practice causes engagement scores to move. That claim is made constantly in this field and is rarely supportable. Ours is narrower and testable: the practices are observable, teachable and verifiable, and the evidence for the delivery model, internal anchoring rather than external-only or cascade, is considerably stronger than the evidence for any competing driver taxonomy.

The framework is our own. It comes from our own qualitative research and practice, with acknowledged inspiration from the broader motivation literature. It is not a licensed, relabeled or

lightly edited version of anyone else's model, and we do not borrow anyone else's validity to stand up our own.



Thresholds are set, not discovered. The levels of the credential ladder reflect a considered judgment about what distinguishes emerging from established practice. They are defensible, they are published, and they are subject to revision as evidence accumulates. They are not claimed to be empirically derived cut points.

6. The position, in one paragraph

Organizations do not have a measurement problem. They have measured for two decades. They have a practice problem, and the two industries best funded to solve it are structurally incapable of doing so, because one sells capability without accountability and the other sells accountability

without capability. Archetype Learning Solutions works in the space between them. We serve four distinct populations through four eco-systems, and we serve all of them with one method: **EYE Culture by Design — engagement by practice.** Four elements. Twelve strategies. A credential a manager earns by doing the work, verified by someone who is not their employer, and recognized wherever in the organization they go next. A variety of toolkits to support those doing the work, not binders full of documentation.

Try it for yourself! The app and first two Badge layers are completely free. No scoring, no emails, no monitoring. [Link here](#)

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