

From Symptoms to Systems: What's Driving High Turnover



High turnover and low morale often point to deeper systems misalignment. In this case, a talent system diagnosis revealed unclear roles, inconsistent performance management, and compensation disconnects. The solution wasn't another program — it was structural clarity.

High turnover and low morale rarely have a single, obvious cause. What makes them especially difficult is that the most visible symptoms often point leaders toward the *wrong* fix.

For one government-funded organization, the symptoms were familiar: employees were stretched thin, turnover was increasing, and service continuity was suffering. Long-tenured staff expressed frustration about pay, particularly when newer hires entered at higher rates with little connection to performance. Leadership knew something was wrong — but there was no clear agreement on what to fix first.

With limited resources, public accountability, and growing scrutiny, the risk wasn't inaction. The risk was acting too quickly on the wrong assumption.

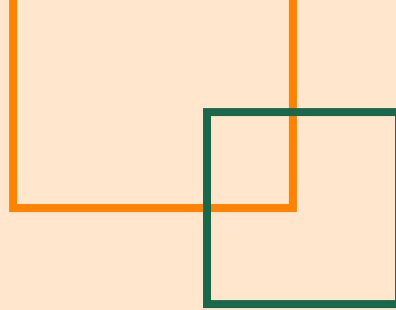
Resisting quick fixes

In situations like this, organizations often move straight to solutions: engagement initiatives, manager training, compensation adjustments, or wellness programs. Each option can be justified. Each also consumes time, budget, and political capital.



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This organization paused instead — despite pressure to “do something” quickly.

Rather than choosing a solution that felt visible or reassuring, leaders decided to step back and understand how their talent systems were actually functioning, and where misalignment was creating avoidable strain.

The goal wasn't to prove a point or validate a preferred approach; it was to reduce guesswork.

Diagnosing the system

The organization committed to a focused, three-month current-state assessment. The work combined employee focus groups, an organization-wide survey, and analysis of existing HR data — all designed to answer a single question: *Where is the system helping people succeed, and where is it getting in the way?*

The shift was immediate. The conversation moved from “*Which initiative should we launch?*” to “*What is our system actually asking people to do — and is that realistic?*”

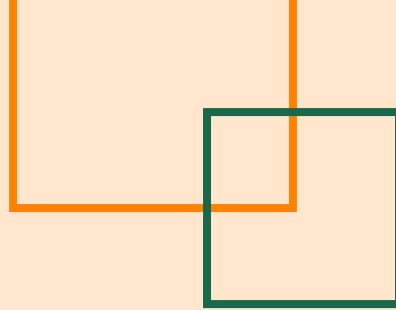
What emerged was not a morale issue in isolation, and not a compensation issue alone. It was a set of structural misalignments that had accumulated over time.

Roles had expanded without being re-evaluated, creating expectations that were difficult to prioritize.



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Employees were hired quickly into complex roles with limited clarity about what success looked like. Feedback and performance expectations existed, but they weren't consistently tied to a small number of clear outcomes.

Technology was available but underutilized, often increasing friction instead of reducing workload. Compensation decisions were driven more by tenure and hiring conditions than by role contribution or performance. Career paths were unclear, leaving high performers uncertain about growth and others without a realistic path forward.

Taken together, these patterns explained what leadership was seeing: burnout, frustration, turnover, and inconsistent service. The issue wasn't effort or engagement. *It was a system that made sustained performance difficult.*

Addressing root causes, not symptoms

With greater clarity, leaders were able to act more deliberately — even within real constraints.

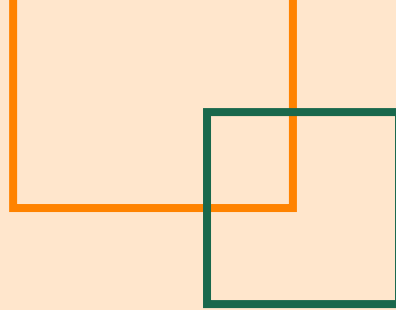
Rather than layering new programs on top of existing problems, they focused on realigning the system itself. Roles were clarified and narrowed to reflect realistic priorities. Performance expectations were simplified and tied to a small number of meaningful measures. Feedback points were reintroduced earlier, so employees could course-correct before becoming overwhelmed.

Career paths and succession options were made more explicit, giving high performers visibility into what advancement required.



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Compensation misalignments were addressed where possible, alongside clearer guidance about how individuals could progress over time.

Not every issue could be fixed at once. Some changes required negotiation, sequencing, or tradeoffs. But decisions were grounded in a shared understanding of what mattered most — and why. This work wasn't framed as a corrective exercise. It was positioned as a way to give employees and leaders clearer signals about expectations, priorities, and success.

The outcome

The most important outcome wasn't a single metric; it was confidence. HR leaders were no longer forced to defend isolated decisions or react to symptoms as they appeared. Instead, they could explain how changes fit into a broader system and why certain priorities came first.

Leaders gained a shared understanding of the problem they were solving. Employees experienced greater clarity about expectations and options. And while challenges remained, decisions were made with greater consistency and intention.

Why this matters for HR leaders

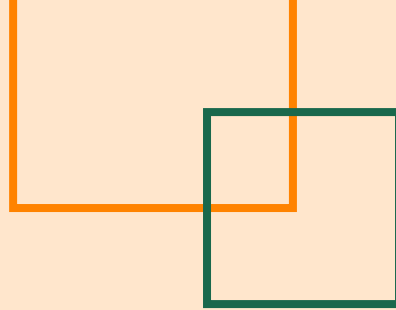
When turnover and morale decline, the pressure to act quickly is real — especially in environments with limited resources and high accountability. But speed without clarity often leads to fragmented solutions and repeated reinvestment in initiatives that don't address the root cause.

This case is a reminder that most organizations don't need more programs; they need a clearer diagnosis.



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Even a well-designed assessment can create that clarity when it's used to understand systems rather than justify predetermined solutions. The value lies not in the tool itself, but in how it informs priorities, sequencing, and tradeoffs.

Creating Space for Clarity

If this case study raises questions about what's really driving turnover or disengagement in your organization, you're not alone.

Many HR leaders reach out to us when they want a neutral, experienced perspective before committing time and resources to another initiative. Sometimes that starts with an [engagement survey or assessment](#); other times, it's simply a conversation to sense-check what they're seeing.

[Contact us](#) to schedule a diagnostic conversation – we're happy to serve as a sounding board before your next initiative is launched.

About Orange Grove Consulting



Learn More

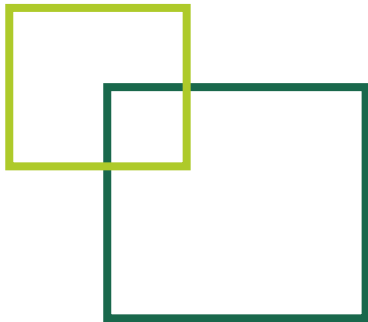
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Organizations today struggle with low engagement, uneven leadership skills, and unclear expectations — all of which make it harder for people to succeed.

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