

# Do You Know The Top Three Issues Effecting Employee Engagement?

**Most companies spend time and effort getting to know their personnel, investing in their wellbeing and aiming to keep them effective and loyal to the business. Engaged employees are a valuable asset, they're more productive, take fewer days off sick and go that extra mile. Still, time and time again, there appears a disconnect between the organisation strategy and day-to-day work. Companies scratch their corporate heads, they thought they had good human resource measurements and communications in place - so what's not right?**

In our work with organisations and their employees we regularly come across the blockers to and enablers for engagement, if the right conditions are not in place an employee is less likely to be engaged. Situations that tend to block an individual's propensity to be engaged are related to Maslow's basic needs and include things like: poor IT systems, lack of resourcing (in particular people), and policies and procedures that restrict autonomy.

Employee research (such as employee engagement surveys, focus groups and workshops), no matter what type of business or where it is located, regularly pinpoint three main enablers where organisations are performing less well than other areas:

- Internal Communications
- Training and Career Development
- Recognition

The three areas are closely linked to engagement, and poor performance in these areas can detract from engagement.

Many companies are surprised at these outcomes, believing that they are ticking the right boxes for all the above. Yet one of the biggest bug bears is that people don't know if they are performing well and directors are not always sure that information on organisational strategy is shared across the whole organisation. Of course this can be even trickier to control when a company is based over numerous territories and employs people from a variety of backgrounds and cultures.

## Internal communications

With today's intelligent social media

platforms it is a complex matter talking to people within businesses, particularly those spread across different locations and countries, performing a myriad of jobs. Online newsletters or daily missives are great for those who love accessing information this way but may exclude those who do not always have connection to the software or are less technologically aware. It is worth considering how new technologies have changed patterns of work and establishing acceptable business etiquette within your company.

Email culture can also hamper employee engagement. People should be encouraged to get up from their desks and go and speak to their colleagues face-to-face, where possible. New social media tools have helped geographical disperse workforces collaborate better and more intelligently. However, employees who spend more time using email as their primary communication tool are losing the art of human interaction. Without that ability to bounce ideas off one another, creativity, ideas, solutions to problems are less spontaneous and generally less effective.

Schaeffler Group is a leading provider of rolling bearings; their Asia Pacific region undertook a review of its internal communication activity. The feedback from staff has resulted in many practical changes including the development of cross-functional conversations to counter exactly this kind of situation.

Schaeffler Asia Pacific have also introduced town hall style meetings for shop floor employees. This allowed top management to communicate the strategy directly to staff ensuring that all were engaged and working towards the same organisational goals.

Large organisations need to ensure that the 'say-do' gap between its leaders and people is as small as possible. When it comes to communicating the strategy, values and behaviours of an organisation – actions speak louder than words. Employees need to see that leaders within an organisation 'live' the values on a day-to-day basis and don't merely pay lip service to them. This is why it is critical that senior leaders instil this by

demonstrating it themselves.

Companies find that when they address issues they reap major rewards. The well-established international engineering company, Buro Happold works in all areas of the built environment. The company had been through five years of very rapid change, growing from 500 people to over 2,000. In their regular staff survey they found that one of the less positive areas was the consistency of its communications: a gap seemed to have emerged between the strategic messages from the top and the way these were perceived lower down, where the emphasis tended to be more project-focused. On the back of this, it produced an action plan, setting up a firm-wide employee forum to bolster two-way communication. The company made its team-briefing cascades more formal, and opened up a host of online channels including blogs and tweeting.

## Training and development

The second biggest area companies fall down upon is training and career development; it's hard to believe that companies do not see the importance of training, and that is because many of them do. However, personnel often cite a lack of proper training as the main reason that their performance may have slipped or that they are stressed in their jobs. Looking at training from the employee perspective it is easy to see how the lack of basic training that enables someone to do his or her job can create a disengaged employee. It makes good business sense to invest in new ways of doing things, in how to work with your team more effectively or in properly showing people how to use that new software instead of relying on them to instinctively know. Bringing in experts and mentors to assist people not only makes for more efficiency and company profitability, it also de-stresses people and makes them more happy and confident in their roles.

## Recognition

There may not be many promotion opportunities in this current economic climate but career development is still required by most individuals. This not

only benefits them but the organisation as a whole. Having an employee who has risen in the ranks and knows the business inside out is a valuable asset. This means that lots of businesses need to think laterally. By moving people around so that they develop new skills and get a broad view of how a company operates and is managed they can encourage staff to develop themselves and provide opportunities for career development, maintaining engagement levels.

An employee engagement survey undertaken by The Royal Society of Chemistry (RSC) identified two specific areas that needed to be more positive. These were career development and recognition for jobs well done. As a result, it instigated a new page in the staff newsletter to showcase staff career progression case studies, especially internal moves within the RSC, so that its staff could be inspired by others experience and feel confident in leading their own career development.

The RSC also implemented a new high level and very visible staff awards programme to encourage recognition.

Lack of recognition from line managers in particular can create an environment where an employee disengages from the organisation.

It may seem such a basic enabler of employee engagement but the fact remains that a simple, genuine 'thank you' from your line manager is one of the most powerful rewards. Not a platitude or a throw away remark, nor a champagne moment or all-staff awards. For a vast majority of people, the power of a thank you, from managers or peers is both motivating and engaging and it is incredibly cheap and easy to do – yet, many simply don't – merely forgetting.

Finally, if you haven't already, consider undertaking some investigative work to understand what is driving engagement or disengagement within your organisation. Be it an employee engagement survey, some focus groups or workshops or even one to ones. These can pinpoint issues, help with benchmarking, with reaching goals and continuously developing people and the business alike.

Here are some tips on how to combat everyday employee engagement problems:

- Don't underestimate the power of a thank you
- As a manager ask your team, what can I do to help you do your work better
- Do not let email culture hamper employee engagement
- Consider how new technologies have changed patterns of work
- Get teams to share their experiences/successes/ issues with other teams during informal get togethers
- Organise job sharing, internal mentoring and secondments between teams to help with communication and cooperation and personnel development
- Bring in experts and mentors to help develop key personnel
- Look at showcasing staff career progression
- Have an agile appraisal system in place
- Survey personnel regularly to identify issues.

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