

EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT IN SUCCESSFUL ORGANISATIONS...

Getting our people to go the extra mile

By Derek Dann

This article is presented with the compliments of Consultation Limited for the personal use of its clients and visitors to its web site. For this piece Derek Dann continues his exploration of issues around challenging our people to increase their performance and how we support them in doing so.

Our article '*I love a real challenge, but... (The Truth about Challenge and Support at Work)*' looked at a couple of models designed to assist managers in helping their people through tough challenges at work. In this follow-on article, we'll look at how we can better raise employee engagement within our organisations so that we motivate our people to higher performance.

We know that one of the major barriers to higher performance can be individuals' perceptions of how much they are being challenged alongside how much support they perceive they are receiving. The two Challenge and Support models indicated that managers need to offer appropriate levels of support so that:

- ▶ Staff are not over or under-supported;
- ▶ And they are not too highly or too little challenged.

It's worth reiterating here that one of the keys to high performance is to really know and understand what makes each individual tick. That's one reason why managers need to have a limited number of direct reports. Then we can tailor an individual's work to engage with their interests as well as their skills and experience.

What we are talking about here is real and effective *employee engagement* (where they bring 100+% of themselves to the workplace).

SO WHAT IS EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT?

In their 2004 report on *The Drivers of Employee Engagement*¹, The Institute for Employment Studies (IES) defined employee engagement as:

"A positive attitude held by the employee towards the organisation and its values. An engaged employee is aware of business context, and works with colleagues to improve performance within the job for the benefit of the organisation. The organisation must work to develop and nurture engagement, which requires a two-way relationship between employer and employee".

If you belong to a larger organisation then the chances are that it will have conducted employee attitude surveys and at least some people will know how the organisation is regarded by its staff. If you belong to a smaller organisation, probably where no survey has been conducted, then you should have enough of a 'feel' for how employees generally regard the organisation.

¹ *The Drivers of Employee Engagement*, Robinson D, Perryman S, Hayday S. Report 208, Institute for Employment Studies, 2004

If you don't, then just ask yourself:

Do our people regularly 'go the extra mile' without being asked to do so?

Is there generally a 'can do' attitude within the organisation?

Is the prevailing atmosphere within the organisation one of professionalism and pride in a job well done?

EMPLOYEE OUTLOOK

In their 2010 Employee Outlook Quarterly Survey Report, The Chartered Institute of Personnel & Development (CIPD) noted that job satisfaction across all sectors and organisation sizes had dipped from +48 in Summer 2009 to just +35; interestingly, men were less satisfied than women.

The same report noted that "employees continue to be generally positive in their attitudes towards their immediate line managers".

However, staff continued to be less positive in their attitudes towards their senior managers, most notably when it came to being consulted about important issues (-28).

This area has been declining for more than a year and "needs to be tackled to improve employee engagement, motivation and retention in the long term".

Other interesting results from the survey are:

Pressure at work: 41% feel under excessive pressure every day or once/twice a week.

2009 Recession: 19% think that it is likely they could lose their job.

Personal Standard of Living: A general drop in the reported standard of living. 29% say it has worsened and only 9% reckon it has improved.

While the results do not point to a disastrous gap in employee/management relationships, they do indicate that we can do better. And we must if UK plc is to be competitive in a global marketplace.

So what can we do to improve employee engagement?

ORGANISATIONAL CLIMATE

Our article entitled Leadership in a Changing World talks about David McClelland's² view of organisational climate and offers some advice on those elements that are the building blocks of successful organisations.

To recap briefly, McClelland suggested that there is no better way for a leader to pave the way for a culture of staff engagement, creativity and innovation than through a model of organisational climate based upon:

- ▶ **flexibility:** how free employees feel to innovate;
- ▶ **unencumbered** by red tape;
- ▶ their sense of **responsibility** to the organisation;
- ▶ the level of **standards** that people set;

² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_McClelland

- ▶ the sense of accuracy about performance feedback and aptness of **rewards**;
- ▶ the **clarity** people have about mission and values;
- ▶ and finally, the level of **commitment** to a common purpose.

I'm sure we can all recognise that, with these elements in place, the chances of our achieving sustained employee engagement rise exponentially. But let's go a little further to look at why employers should be interested in employee engagement and how they can work towards achieving it. A recently updated CIPD report on the subject³ gives us some clues.

WHY YOU SHOULD BE INTERESTED IN EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

By delivering on your commitments to your employees (fulfilling employees expectations), organisations establish trust and a sense of fairness, thereby generating a positive psychological contract⁴ between employer and employee.

High performance is at least in part driven by employee engagement. The role of line managers in creating the right conditions in which employees offer discretionary behaviour⁵ is critical.

³ <http://www.cipd.co.uk/subjects/empreltns/general/empengmt.htm>

⁴ <http://www.cipd.co.uk/subjects/empreltns/psycntrct/psycontr.htm>

⁵ Discretionary behaviour is defined as that which goes beyond the requirements of the job to give that extra performance which can boost the bottom line; 'going the extra mile'.

Engaged employees will be advocates of the organisation and its brand. This good reputation will spread naturally. The converse is also true and a poor reputation is likely to spread much faster than a good one.

HOW TO WORK TOWARDS ACHIEVING EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

The usual starting point is to conduct an employee attitude survey. This reveals those areas which need attention and enable you to prioritise what you will do to engender employee engagement.

Having identified your employee engagement strategy you then need to implement it. The keys factors for success will include:

- ▶ Having a coherent and robust people management process;
- ▶ Having a coherent and robust people development process;
- ▶ Having a reliable and comprehensive internal (as well as external) communications strategy;
- ▶ Having an effective feedback loop in which employees are able to express their views upwards;
- ▶ Keeping your employees informed of what's going on in the organisation;
- ▶ Having trusting, professional relationships between managers and employees;
- ▶ Maintaining a sense of fun in the workplace.

We can express all of this in a relatively simple model of leadership:

(the organisational segments are simply representative of a typical organisation).

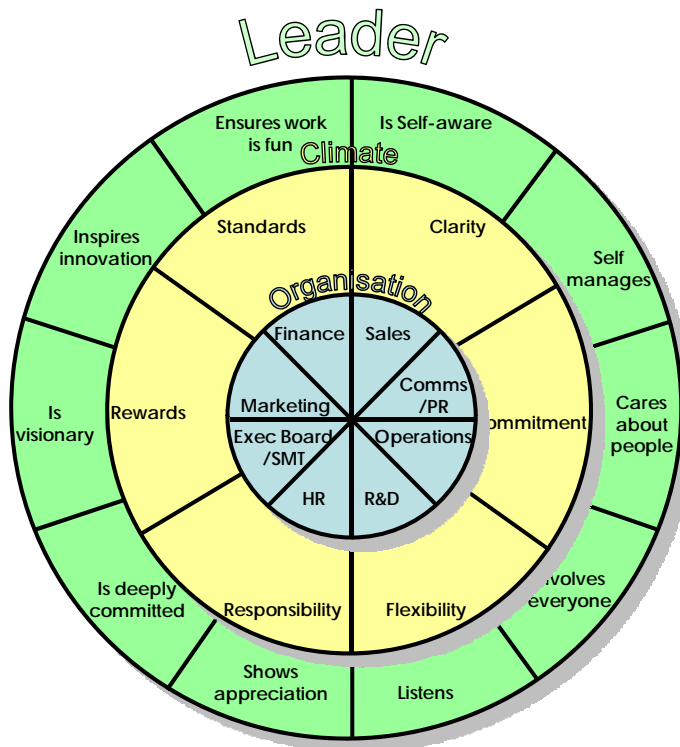
So, the message is clear: if we want to achieve high levels of performance, then we can start the process by raising the levels of employee engagement within our organisations.

This need not be expensive. Indeed, if you are able to develop your leaders

at all levels to display the attributes shown in the model, the management overhead is likely to be reduced. That means more effective and happier managers too. And the benefits circle just carries on and on and on...

Sounds too good to be true? Just try it and see.

A Model of Leadership



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