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Management Behaviour, Conflict and Employee Engagement

There has been substantial research over several years making the case for employee engagement. As if more evidence were needed, recent studies by the CIPD, has shown that the extent to which managers provide guidance, feedback and the appropriate level of autonomy for staff is key to whether employees go the extra mile for their organisation. This has been supported by the government commissioned review into employee engagement by David McLeod and Nita Clarke.

What is extraordinary is that despite the wealth of evidence the subject of employee engagement and how managers directly influence perceptions of engagement is still a powerful issue in organisations.

Another recent study by the CIPD found that scale of workplace conflict is remarkable and has increased in the recession. The number of days of management and HR time spent on managing both disciplinary and grievance cases has gone up since 1997, from 13 to 18 days (disciplinary) and from 9 to 14.4 days (grievance). There are significant differences between sectors – the number of days of management time spent on handling grievances in the public sector, (9 days), is two-thirds as high again as that in private services (5.5 days). The related cost to the organisation is just the tip of the iceberg.

Imagine how much this conflict is costing your business? This cost won't be just financially, it will manifest itself in time, staff turnover, low morale, health problems and stress, inefficiency and staff absenteeism. Typically we see a negative effect on creativity, innovation, customer service, growth, development and business opportunity.

The most frequently mentioned management competencies for supporting employee engagement in the CIPD report were:

- reviewing and guiding
- feedback, praise and recognition
- autonomy and empowerment
- the level of interest the manager shows in employees as individuals

What we have found in our own work is that managers and team leaders at any level still need practical frameworks to enable them to manage the relationships they have with the team and create an environment in which people feel committed to their organisation and its values.

Sadly, we find too often that despite management training support frameworks and mechanisms are either woefully lacking or completely missing, relying completely on the abilities of busy managers to handle the relationships and cope with any angst and disengagement.

We promote an approach that creates a climate of engagement that is sustainable, is developmental for leaders, builds ownership - and delivers results. This is based on 7 indicators which, though we don't assume are the **only** indicators for making your place of work a more engaged one or that the list is complete, but it is a pragmatic choice based on over 22 years working on people issues in companies.

The factors we focus on are based on discernable management behaviours. People who are well led:

- **Feel Valued.** They feel appreciated as an individual and appropriately rewarded – psychologically as well as financially. They are made to feel special and hence give more of themselves.
- **Are Open.** They are receptive to new ideas and engage in authentic two way communication; talking freely about a wide range of topics including those delicate and difficult issues.
- **Engage in Feedback.** They recognise the importance of regular high quality feedback to improving performance levels.
- **Are Motivated.** Because their abilities are recognised and utilised they have positive feelings about the job and their colleagues and have an intrinsic drive to achieve and support each other.
- **Manage Differences.** They create collaborative relationships with colleagues and ensure that differences are not allowed to get in the way becoming a potential source of conflict, but are seen as a source of strength.
- **Take Ownership.** They take ownership for getting their needs met rather than moan behind backs. They view leadership as a partnership and take joint responsibility with the leader for being led.
- **Are Conflict Free.** They engage proactively in authentic conversations and feedback and hence dysfunctional conflict is minimised and time is not wasted.

Fundamentally, a more engaged workplace with managers who are better equipped to deal with individual and team relationships, consequently experience greater levels of understanding and collaboration between people, and processes in the company are likely to be quicker, cheaper and better thought through. Change can be sustained and a measurable improvement in performance can be achieved through greater engagement.

Managing employee engagement at the team level leads to additional benefits for the team leader. By being able to manage team inter-personal relationships and creating a climate of commitment, trust is built and the team leaders own credibility is enhanced. On this basis the team can start to build a climate of high performance which turns them from a team of stars to a start team.

about the author

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