

Employee Engagement: Role of Line Managers

Whilst workforce planning skills are increasingly becoming core competencies for HR professions the changing nature of organisational design and structure has put increasing pressure on line management to manage the resources entrusted to them wisely. This has resulted in line managers having increasing responsibility to manage human resource functions for their unit or team.

Sadly, it remains that the majority of people are promoted into supervisory or management positions based on their task competence – their ability to manage tasks. Regretfully, they are seldom equipped or trained to manage the people performing the tasks resulting in stress, waste and re-work. All items that have big impact on the bottom line!

Research conducted by the Corporate Leadership Council (CLC) suggests that “only 29% of an organisation’s current high performers have the potential to rise and succeed in more senior, crucial positions”.

CLC has found that “line managers directly influence the key drivers of positive or negative employee performance by as much as 40%”; with 36.4% positive influence and 27.8% negative impact.

As well as their roles as positive models and influencers, line managers have a key role in providing clear line of sight between the organisation’s goals and objectives and their staff’s tasks and activities. Putting these dots together can influence employee engagement levels and performance by up to 32.8%

However, the big engagement driver of employee performance that line managers have responsibility for is communication; both informal and formal. Informal feedback can have a 39% positive impact on performance.

In September 2007 The McKinsey Quarterly Newsletter reported the findings of a study by one of their teams of some 100,000 questionnaires to uncover the practices of 400 business units in 230 companies around the world.

The McKinsey team eventually arrived at one winning combination:

- clear roles for employees (accountability),
- a compelling vision of change (direction), and,
- an environment that encourages openness, trust, and challenge (culture).

The study suggested that “Nothing else came close in improving organizational performance”. These responsibilities fall squarely on the shoulders of line managers and leaders. If they don’t facilitate this “winning” combination for their staff, the opportunity is lost.

Effective communication underpins the implementation and maintenance of the winning combination. The importance of communication was highlighted in the Watson Wyatt Worldwide 2005/2006 Communication ROI Study. Included in its many findings on the impact of communications were:

- Communication effectiveness is a leading indicator of financial performance
- Effective internal communication can result in 4.5 times greater employee engagement, and
- Effective communicators are 20% more likely to report reduced staff turnover.

Despite this evidence, many managers and supervisors lack effective communication skills and organisations continue to incur the consequential opportunity costs.

Equipping managers and supervisors to manage the ‘human’ side of their staff can have great financial benefits to their organisations. Conversely, in the words of Daniel Goleman, a lack of soft skills can have hard consequences!

The College for Adult Learning provides a suite of Human Resource Management and Leadership courses as well as individual coaching models that can help Managers and Supervisors enhance their people management skills.

References

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He is known in the field as a speaker and writer on global HR trends and issues and more recently has developed a comprehensive set of HR metrics and measures designed for ease of use by busy HR practitioners. He is the author of over 50 articles and columns and has developed a large range of tools for HR professionals.

Michael is working in partnership with the College for Adult Learning to provide a range of consultancy services and specialised training development options for HRM Practitioners.