



QUARTERLY HR DEVELOPMENTS

Publications Committee: Chris Mathas, Elena Stavrinou, Olympia Fantis, Eugenia Papadopoulou, Maria Christooforou, Artemis Artemiou, Koulla Kyriakou, Elena Theophanous, Kiki Kalli, Miranta Archontidou, Dora Siekkeri, Maria Ioakim, Taleen Tchallikian

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Empowerment



Employee engagement defined: *The extent that an employee believes in the mission, purpose and values of an organization and demonstrates commitment through their actions as an employee and their attitude to their employer and customers. Employee engagement is high when the statements and conversations held reflect natural enthusiasm for the company, its employees and the products or services provided. Derek Stockley 2005*

Note from the editor, Chris Mathas

For this issue we have chosen a much talked about and often researched concept, that of empowerment. Although most organizations simply pay lip service to this concept there is no doubt that it has a very real and practical impact on the organization. A recent Gallup employee engagement index poll found that only a small percentage of workers in organizations are truly engaged, that is, they work with passion and feel profound connections with the company. The big question that needs to be answered is what leads to high levels of employee engagement? What makes this a difficult question is that the answer lies not in one action or solution but rather in the implementation of a wide variety of activities that create a workplace designed to advance productivity through the improved work experience of employees. In this issue of E-HR Trends we have set out some useful hints and have chosen two very different articles that address what we consider to be fundamental issues in employee engagement: **TRUST** and **INNER WORK LIFE**. Of course the pursuit of maximum employee engagement is futile unless the basics are in place: **good quality line management, two-way communication, effective internal cooperation, a development focus, commitment to employee well being and clear and accessible HR policies and practices, that enjoy full management commitment at all levels.** **So the question really is how engaged are managers and HR professionals in people engaged?**

Keep the Faith, by Steve Smethurst

What drives engagement?

If we accept that engagement is one step up from commitment it is clearly in the organization's interest to understand the drivers of engagement:

- **A sense of feeling valued and involved**
- **Involvement in decision making**
- **The extent to which employees feel able to voice their ideas and managers listen to these views and value employees' contributions**
- **The opportunities employees have to develop their jobs**
- **The extent to which the organization is concerned for employees health and well being**

Line management clearly have a very important role to play in fostering employees' sense of involvement and value.

"The article highlights the thoughts of a consortium of business leaders on the subject of trust, who came to several conclusions with the most important one being that trust is not something soft and fluffy, the absence of trust has a direct impact on the bottom-line in that it affects financials and business performance. This is because it creates three types of value for the organization: 1) the stock price is influenced by investor/analyst trust in the management team, 2) Customers trust the organization's brand and reputation and 3) employees are willing to offer discretionary effort if they trust that the organization will reciprocate. Trust allows for action to occur. It is an act of faith "If I do A, I will get B", this cause and effect is the inherent power by which all things are done or actions taken. Trust therefore requires equity (balance of what we get for what we receive). Trust is like a currency. Every time you meet your commitments, effectively manage expectations, keep people informed or give people an opportunity to have their say you make another deposit into the 'trust bank'. The ability of a leader to take decisions in the rapidly changing environment is crucial, but the lack of cooperation on the part of team workers is the deal breaker. The degree to which team members will follow tough decisions without question depends on the size of the trust bank you have. This is not a process that occurs quickly nor can it be faked. Trust does not require friendship between individuals but is founded in mutual respect. Every action, every attitude, every conversation, builds up or whittles away at trust. When there is trust, employees are motivated to perform. Trust is a precious commodity —maintain it and your employees will go the extra mile for you; lose it and your business performance will suffer."

Source: *People Management*, 22 February 2007

Questions or comments? Email us at: cyhrma@cablenet.com.cy

Empowerment *(continued)*

Inner Work Life —by *T.M. Amabile & S. J. Kramer*



This article constitutes the first comprehensive look at what employees are thinking and feeling as they go about their work, why it matters, and how managers can use this information to improve job performance. People experience a constant stream of emotions, perceptions and motivations as they react and make sense of the events of a work day. The article describes the way these thoughts perception etc impact on our work performance and is based on research that examined 238 professionals in 26 project teams using the methodology of journal entries. What

they found may stun you.

It is virtually impossible to really understand an individual's inner work life simply by watching them go about their daily work activities. This is because as events unfold individuals are also forming and adjusting perceptions about people they work with, the organizations they are a part of, the work they do, and even themselves. These perceptions and emotions that are felt throughout the day affect an individual's work motivation and as a result impact on their performance for that day. A person's inner work life is crucial to a person's experience of te work day but is for the most part imperceptible to others, it even goes largely unexamined by the individuals themselves.

When something happens at work - some workday event- it immediately triggers cognitive, emotional and motivational processes. People's minds start "sensemaking"; They try to figure out why the event happened and what it's implications are. These perceptions feed the emotions that are evoked by the event , and the emotions, in turn, feed the perceptions. Depending on what happens with these cognitive and emotional processes, motivation can shift, which in turn , affects how people perform their work. By way of example the article sets out the detailed diaries of individuals working with in a team on a very demanding high value project. From the comments that were made and emotions described it would seem that individual performance is positively influenced by a good working environment and can be directly influenced by management. In the specific example actions undertaken by managed that positively influenced performance, and employee engagement were among others, that upper management who rarely paid attention to that part of the business was now paying attention, they held back all other demands on the teams time therefore giving them the focus the needed to get the job done. Management provided encouragement and support in a number of ways and other groups within the organization pitched in to help. The team leader pitched in and did a great deal of the work herself and acted as a liaison between the team and upper management. It is clear from the case presented that it is management's active engagement and behaviour that make the difference.

The research put forward in the article shows that the most important managerial behaviours don't involve giving people daily pats on the back or attempting to inject light-hearted fun into the work place. Rather, they involve two fundamental things: **enabling people to move forward in their work** and **treating them decently as human beings**.

Inner work life...

is the dynamic interplay among personal perceptions, ranging from immediate impressions to more fully developed theories about what is happening and what it means; emotions, whether sharply defined reactions or more general feeling states, like good and bad moods; and motivation—your grasp of what needs to be done and your drive to do it at any given moment.

Enable progress. A sense of being able to make progress in their work. Achieving a goal, accomplishing a task, or solving a problem often evokes pleasure and sometimes elation. Successes are clearly important to staff motivation and engagement, even small mundane successes. Setbacks in the work, no matter how small, lead to frustration and negative emotions. Which managerial behaviors affect employee's ability to make progress on work? They include: providing direct help, providing adequate resources and time and reacting to successes and failures with a learning orientation. The most important managerial behavior was however setting clear objectives.

Managing with a human touch. Although the interpersonal managerial events work in tandem with progress events. Praise without real work progress or at least solid efforts to work progress, have little positive impact on a person's inner work life and might even cause cynicism. On the other hand good work progress without recognition could engender anger and sadness. The best boosts to inner work life were episodes in which people knew they had done good work and managers appropriately recognized that work.

Source : Harvard Business Review—May 2007

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