



Driving growth through employee engagement

In recent years, employee engagement has become a hot topic for discourse in corporate circles, but beyond the popularity of this phrase, do we really understand its meaning and how it affects the life, continued existence and overall organizational vision of growth?

According to Derek Stockley, Employee Engagement is "The extent that an employee believes in the mission, purpose and values of an organization and demonstrates that commitment through his actions as an employee and his attitude towards the employer and customers."

AlphaMeasure also described engagement as the level of commitment and involvement an employee has towards his organization and its values.

This refers to the psychological commitment that employees bring to bear on their job. Where employees are "not engaged" or become "actively disengaged", the effect is always a drop in human energy that in turn affects the level of productivity, with an overbearing effect of dwindling profitability. This spiral of occurrences will greatly affect the growth vision of the organization.

Researches over the years have shown that employers are well aware that to achieve and constantly maintain growth in business, employee engagement is an essential factor. The next issue of concern will be how best to engage your workforce profitably so as to achieve the desired organizational growth.

Before attempting to analyse and propose recommendations, here are some background information. That an employee is satisfied at work does not imply that such a person is engaged, the satisfaction might be based on factors other than engagement. So also it is not always true that engaged employees are satisfied. Their dissatisfaction might be based on factors such as lack of good systems, managerial incompetence, bad leadership or other such factors. Therefore, to build a team of engaged employees, it is essential to identify what interests each employee, what engages them at work and what motivates peak performance.

Employee Engagement; the Best-Practices.

Employee Satisfaction Survey: The first step towards addressing employee engagement is by understanding what motivates their interest as an individual as well as work performance and identifying the current levels of engagement. To conduct this baseline, a comprehensive employee satisfaction survey form will come handy. Each organization is at liberty to draw up its form as deemed suitable; the important factor is to ensure that it is comprehensive enough to serve as an information gathering tool. A well administered survey will kick start the process of engaging your workforce towards optimized growth.

Feedback Management: The aim of an engagement survey is to gather relevant information as input for planning, hence, the feedback process should be well managed. When employees see the communication line address issues emanating from the survey exercise and their ideas well considered in decision making, this says to them that somebody is listening and cares about their



concerns. They feel more involved in the organizational development process and strive to contribute beyond their ordinary expected deliverables. The level of energy goes on the increase which ultimately is reflected on productivity and profitability.

"Actioning" Employee Engagement: Beyond feedback management, employees might become disengaged where the satisfaction survey process proves to be an All-Talk-No-Action (ATANA) exercise. It is so discouraging to seek employee's feedback, communicate listening and yet fail to take action on certain resultant issues. Such acts might breed disloyalty, lack of trust, low morale, declining productivity and disengaged employees. Any action taken on even the smallest of all concerns raised by the survey will drive engagement level massively.

It is important to note that evaluating, analyzing, defining and implementing action plan on employee engagement surveys are a going-concern concept and should not be treated as a one-off business process. Therefore, there is the need to constantly and continuously gauge engagement level and "action" the defaults promptly. Where employee engagement is at a low ebb, such an organization risks the spiralling adverse effects of three essential factors which include; Attrition, Productivity and Profitability.

Attrition is the rate of staff turnover. When employees are not well engaged or demotivated, they seek opportunities elsewhere. A disengaged workforce will constantly reduce enthusiasm and level of energy brought to performance of tasks. The adverse effect of this will be reflected on individual as well as organizational productivity. This spiral continues into dwindling profitability which is a major measure of growth in any organization. It is therefore critical to identify and address issues that affect engagement promptly.

Engagement is a process that begins from the first day in

an employee's relationship with the organization. The vision of the organization needs to be well communicated and shared; it is also essential that the employee be clear about his role and accountabilities within the overall goal. Clarity of role and accountabilities can be driven through a job-analysis-process in a concerted two way relationship - communication - between employer and employee on one hand, and manager and employee on the other.

The competitive work environment demands constant changes in order to remain relevant, therefore, it is essential to also communicate and engage employees in the change management process. This will assist them with settling in to the evolving structure and systems as well as drum support for the change process. The constant element in all of this is gearing towards "communication."

Time management analysis has revealed that a handful of employees cannot account for their work hours as a result of confusion. They approach each day not knowing what to do, which eats deep into the productive hours and affects total output.

To solve employee confusion, there needs to be clarity of relevant factors and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). The only way to achieve this is through a system that supports effective communication.

According to Watson Wyatt, in his major study, "Connecting Organizational Communication to Financial Performance"; a significant improvement in communication effectiveness is associated with a "29.5 per cent increase in market value" and that "companies with the highest levels of effective communication experienced a 26 per cent total return to shareholders, compared to a -15 per cent return experienced by firms that communicate least effectively." This infers the ultimate end-to-end measurement: from key driver of employee engagement (communication) to shareholder return on investment. It could therefore be concluded that,

"Effective Communication is a key determinant in creating Engaged Employees, who create Loyal Customers who in turn contribute to the growth of the organization."

Managers often give little attention to their engaged team members because they tend to have too much on their plate and they believe that engaged employees are always on top of the game, exceeding expectations and enthusiastically performing their tasks.

However, according to Curt Coffman, Global Practice Leader, Q12 Consulting and Co-author of 'First, Break All the Rules', "Some managers mistakenly think they should leave their best employees alone. Great managers do just the opposite. Great managers tell us again and again that they spend most of their time with their most productive and talented employees because they have the most potential. If a manager coaxes an average performance from a below-average employee, she still has an average performer. But if she coaches a good employee to greatness, she gains a great performer." This implies that great managers keep a constant cordial relationship with their engaged team members.

Conclusively, a well engaged team of employees will be mentally and physically attached to their work. They become brand ambassadors of their organization; breathe loyalty as against staff turnover, commit to the vision of the organization and constantly pursue the growth of the organization. Simple as this may seem in writing, it is a journey whose success is hinged on communication and clarity.

When employees are aware of the expectations and understand clearly their role in it, they take ownership of the process to drive expected results, thereby developing themselves as well as help the organizational growth in all areas. According to Ed Gudman "talent is wasted when it's not engaged", so also, employee engagement through effective communication and clarity of purpose will drive a massive growth across major spheres of an organization.

Global workforce engagement survey

A report of Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) found that 62 percent of global workers are moderately engaged in their jobs; 14 percent are highly engaged; and 24 percent are disengaged.

It collected data from 16 countries—including the United States—and found worker engagement rates to be consistent from country to country.

The countries and their rates are:

Belgium, highly engaged, 18 percent; moderately engaged, 67 percent; disengaged, 15 percent.

Brazil, highly engaged, 31 percent; moderately engaged, 62 percent; disengaged, 7 percent.

Canada, highly engaged, 17 percent; moderately engaged, 66 percent; disengaged, 17 percent.

China, highly engaged, 8 percent; moderately engaged, 67 percent; disengaged, 25 percent.

France, highly engaged, 9 percent; moderately engaged, 68 percent; disengaged, 23 percent.

Germany, highly engaged, 15 percent; moderately engaged, 70 percent; disengaged, 15 percent.

India, highly engaged, 7 percent; moderately engaged, 37 percent; disengaged, 56 percent.

Ireland, highly engaged, 15

percent; moderately engaged, 70 percent; disengaged, 15 percent.

Italy, highly engaged, 7 percent; moderately engaged, 64 percent; disengaged, 29 percent.

Japan, highly engaged, 2 percent; moderately engaged, 57 percent; disengaged, 41 percent.

Mexico, highly engaged, 40 percent; moderately engaged, 51 percent; disengaged, 9 percent.

Netherlands, highly engaged, 8 percent; moderately engaged, 73 percent; disengaged, 19 percent.

South Korea, highly engaged, 9 percent; moderately engaged, 71 percent; disengaged, 20 percent.

Spain, highly engaged, 11 percent; moderately engaged, 64 percent; disengaged, 25 percent.

United Kingdom, highly engaged, 12 percent; moderately engaged, 65 percent; disengaged, 23 percent.

United States, highly engaged, 21 percent; moderately engaged, 63 percent; disengaged, 16 percent.

Overall, few employees are consistently giving their all, the report says. And there is no single country where employers can expect half or more of their employees to regularly go the "extra mile" to help the company succeed.

Source: SHRM India

Peopleprime & SHL (UK) 4TH HR Roundtable Forum

For whom: Heads of HR function and Senior HR Executives

Theme: Objective Assessments in Talent Management and Restructuring/Redeployment

Date: Thurs. Nov. 5, 2009, 9-12noon

Enquiries: Contact Damilola on 01-2711578/579

Strategies to building highly engaged workforce

EMPLOYEE engagement is essential to every business success, especially in a turbulent time and challenging economy. As organisations continue to recalibrate their financial and human resources, employees are often requested to be more innovative and deliver beyond expectations. This task engenders greater challenges that might result in increased stress levels and decreasing engagement levels. Developing an effective strategy that keeps the workforce constantly engaged becomes imperative.

Each time one interacts with any business organization, identifying the engagement levels of the employees is predictable at a glance. You can tell who is bored, distracted, disengaged or unhappy; you can as well spot a focused, interested, enthusiastic and engaged employee. Most employers root for the latter, obviously because they tend to work harder, are more productive, provide better customer service relationships, and are often interesting as team members. They are also germane to the actualization of organizational goal attainment and a justifiable return on investment (ROI) to their employer. Nevertheless, determining how to engage employees is often a major challenge.

Various research exercises on Employee Engagement have revealed that people are naturally engaged when they have just joined an organization. The level of energy and commitment displayed at work and about the organization is on the ascendancy in the early years. They are usually enthusiastic about their new job and employer, and as a result, they advocate for their organization and its products and services. However, the more employees continue in the employment of a company, the less their likely levels of engagements. Such dwindles often come with diverse losses in profit and sales as well as lower customer satisfaction. A Gallup survey estimated that actively disengaged employees cost the American economy a whopping \$350 billion per year in lost productivity.

Quite alarming! With this challenge cutting across economies and businesses, employee engagement has become of greater essence beyond mere workplace phrasing. How then can employers/managers enhance employee engagement? What are the signs that employees are becoming disengaged? What can be done to reverse the slide?

Almost all employees are engaged when they come on-

board into an organization. However, their continuous engagement or otherwise will depend on how they were being managed from that point going forward by their employers and direct managers. Employees "demands" of an average employer/organization or work environment cut across four basic areas of needs which include the following:

- Employees want to feel the extent of their organization's concern about their individual needs – health and well being – beyond work concerns.

- They want to explore how much opportunities are available for individual development on the job and in their career.

- Opportunities to be involved in decision making and the planning of the organization's activities.

- They also want to know the value placed on "return on employees' voice" and also an assurance that managers listen to those views as well as value their contributions.

There is a saying that "People do not care how much you know but want to know how much you care." In essence, it is obvious that when the expectations of employees are met and they feel good with the workplace and workforce, engagement levels often exceed expectations. When these basic elements are not met, then employees begin to drift away to the "not engaged" and "actively disengaged" groups. Much as the "not engaged" group exists, they can be navigated back into the system through a system of effective communication and valuable relationship management between them and their managers. However, the "actively disengaged" group might be viral to the is such a powerful force that drives the best practices in an organization and as such a key factor that determines attitudes. A culture that is shaped in a way that addresses employees major concerns and allows them to feel valuable in the affairs of the organisation and its vision will

positively influence engagement levels. Where your culture is one that is highly engaging for employees, you are going to outperform groups that have similar resources with lower engagement. Therefore, investment in an all-inclusive organizational culture is inevitable towards employee engagement drive.

Since managers and supervisors relate directly with 'reportees', the responsibility to drive engagement across the entire workforce rests on them. Another sure way to enhance the culture of engagement is by ensuring that business leaders have good engagement-building skills as well as knowledge of engagement improvement. Where they are lacking in this regard, relevant training should be administered on them. The bottom line is that leaders and managers as drivers of employee engagement process should be empowered and equipped to perform the assignment.

Some benefits of such investments are as follows;

- Training supervisors/managers will enhance their ability to coach their employees.

- Engagement goals will be kept in focus when learning programs at all levels are being designed.

- Supervisors will be assisted to build their engagement and retention skills.

- Managers will be better acquainted with the skills workers need to perform well.

- Learning and performance management links will be clear.

- An emphasis on opportunities to invest in the ongoing process improvement in the organization means that better training and development strategies could make a large impact on overall organizational engagement.

A well equipped manager will explore employee talent positively and help them bridge identified gaps that might lead to disenchantment. They will

also help employees develop ownership of their goals, targets, and milestones, so employees can enhance their contributions to the company and increase their impact. The role of managers cannot be over-flogged on this issue.

Another essential means to build employee engagement is to establish a system of **recognition and reward management**. Recognition is personally fulfilling and establishing a system of performance management that allows managers to constantly identify good performances and reward same will be a motivator on employees and a stimulant for engagement. The process of rewarding performance sometimes might not fulfill desires; hence, it is also critical to identify the type of reward that motivates individual employees.

The last point we will pose here relates to **communication**. Technological advancement and tools are fast replacing the human angle of communication, yet they have not done enough to fill the place of relationship management. The point here relates to return on effective communication and not information. It is about a genuine two-way dialogue with both employees and the outside world.

Telling people what to do and how to do it is merely informing them. Communication goes beyond that. Human beings by nature are designed as communicators in various ways beyond words – body language etc. Organisational communication operates on a totally different model, using unnatural tools such as computers, telephones, e-mails etc.

To build an engaging communication strategy, it is important to establish a system that assists managers to identify that effective communication is germane to excellent performance and helps recognise the difference between natural and organisational communication as well as commits to developing the required skills.

A system where investment in the development and maintenance of appropriate channels of communication is supported helps drive the corporate image of the organization and positively engages employees and the wider community alike.

Employee engagement is unarguably essential to organizational existence. It can best be driven and to the peak also, by employing a well rounded system that provides for training and development, establishes a culture of engagement and gives business leaders the necessary support to perform the function.

A bespoke performance management and reward strategy as well as a communication system that returns positively on investments cannot also be ignored.



The Gallup 12 critical questions on employee engagement

1. I know what is expected of me at work.

2. I have the materials and equipment I need to do my work right.

3. At work, I have the opportunity to do what I do best every day.

4. In the last seven days, I have received recognition or praise for doing good work.

5. My supervisor, or someone at work, seems to

care about me as a person.

6. There is someone at work who encourages my development.

7. At work, my opinions seem to count.

8. The mission or purpose of my company makes me feel my job is important.

9. My associates or fellow employees are committed to doing quality work.

10. I have a best friend at work.

11. In the last six months, someone at work has talked to me about my progress.

12. This last year, I have had opportunities at work to learn and grow.

Gallup is an organization that studies the engagement level of the employees. The 12 questions above have

been carefully selected and tested across diverse business organisations over several years. Should you wish to objectively gauge your employees' engagement level, all you need do is to justifiably provide answers to the questions above.

Source: Gallup Survey

PEOPLE
PRIME

56B Isaac John Street, Ikeja GRA, Lagos, Nigeria.
Tel: 234-1-7911639, 2711578-9, 08033736471, 08023555261.
www.peopleprime.net
peoplesdigest@peopleprime.net

shl | partner