

Factsheet - Employee Engagement

According to Harvard Business Review, employee engagement can be defined as “something to do with how involved people are in their work and how enthusiastic they are about it”. Not a precise definition, but still useful!

In 2019, ADP Research Institute surveyed thousands of employees from 19 different countries, in order to paint a global picture of engagement. (This work involved Marcus Buckingham, building on the work he had been doing on engagement whist with Gallup.) Harvard Business Review described the study as “the most extensive and methodologically consistent global study of engagement yet undertaken”.

The researchers classified people as “Engaged” or “Coming to Work” and found the following:

Engaged employees perform better. Those who self-rated themselves highly were far more likely to be seen by their managers as highly productive.

Engaged employees stay with you for longer. Engaged employees were far less likely to leave the organisation in the following six months.

ForHR can help you understand how engaged your employees are. We can also help you put in place the things that are known to lead to higher engagement, which include the following.

Manage Employees as Individuals

Your employees are all different, with different personalities, different strengths, different learning styles and different motivators. ForHR can help you and your managers and supervisors understand how to manage people as individuals, treating them as adults and trusting that they are there to do a good job.

Managing to Strengths

Your employees will be far more engaged if they spend most of their time at work doing things they like doing – which usually means things they are good at. Wherever possible, try to organise work so that people are doing the things they are good at. This will be better for you and better for your business.

Trusting your Employees

Most people go to work to do a good job and most people have responsibilities in their personal lives, so why don't you trust that they will be doing their best and that they can be responsible – i.e. they are adults? Obviously, if they are not adults, or if they have proved themselves untrustworthy, you might want to monitor or supervise them more closely, but in most cases, once they have been trained/shown, you should be able to tell them clearly what you want them to achieve and let them get on with it in their own way. Isn't that how you would want to be treated - just think about how you would feel if you had someone telling you how to do your job!

When employees feel trusted and feel that they have some autonomy, they feel far more engaged.

Flexible Working Wherever Possible

If you can allow your employees any flexibility in the hours they work, how and where they do the work, why not do it? Obviously there are jobs where you need people in at fixed times, or need to do things in set ways, but many jobs can be done more flexibly.

If you can define what someone needs to do in terms of the output you want, rather than the time they need to take, what methods they need to use, or where they need to be, this becomes a lot easier.

If you are worried about the need for people to work together or time for team meetings etc., why not fix some core hours, then let the rest be flexible?

It may be that most people continue to do nearly standard hours, but just the knowledge that they can vary them may lead to higher engagement.

If your employees have caring responsibilities, one of the most stressful things for them can be how to cope when someone is ill, or normal arrangements fall through. If they can move things around to enable them to cover everything, you will get more and better quality work from them and they will feel very positive about your organisation.

ForHR can help you consider options and decide what is best for your business.

Help Your Employees find Meaning in their Work

People will feel far more engaged if they feel their jobs are valuable, or have meaning. This is easy if you work for a charity, doing something to help people, or similarly if you are in the care sector.

If it isn't that clear, you can at least let them know where they fit and how they help your organisation achieve its overall goals – working towards a common goal can strengthen the bond between employer and employees. Ask their opinions and let them contribute to discussions on how to do things in your business. Never forget they will determine the success of the strategy and your business. Understanding the value and influence they have on the overall outcome is key – for both of you.

There are other things you could do, such as getting involved with a charity or a local community. Community projects or fundraising activities can be great for teamwork and providing 'safe' leadership opportunities, whilst also giving employees a reason to be proud of the organisation.

Communicating and Consulting

Keep your employees in the loop. No one responds well to being dictated to, so wherever possible, ask your employees for feedback or their opinion. When people feel that their opinions are valued, they're more likely to feel part of things and fulfilled at work. You may well find that the people 'at the coal face' will have great ideas for how to improve things.

You can gather opinions in various ways, so it depends on your culture. It could be as simple as asking them in your team meetings, but remember, not everyone is comfortable speaking out in front of others and it's important to give everyone a voice. Another way is to set up a suggestion box or on-line version of that, which can be anonymous if you think you will get more from that.

.Let them know when things have not gone well, as well as the good news. Word usually gets around anyway and you will not seem honest if you only give them the good news.

Reward and Recognition

Everyone feels better when their good work is recognised.

Everyone will feel demoralised when something they are proud of receives no recognition – especially if they have overcome barriers to complete it. If that happens again and again, the thought ‘I don’t know why I even bothered’ can soon become a guiding behaviour.

So for starters, never underestimate the power of a simple thank you.

Even small incentives and rewards, such as gift vouchers, can be a powerful motivator and this can be especially so if you have something in place to allow other employees to recognise and reward their colleagues for great work or going that extra mile. Allowing your people to vote for those they think deserve it also helps promote team spirit, respect and the feel of belonging.

If you have the budget, an annual event for employees who made outstanding contributions over the year can be a reward everyone can aspire to.

For HR can help you put reward and recognition scheme in place to suit your employees.

Providing Development Opportunities and Career Progression

Providing development opportunities should be easy in a large organisation, but may require a bit more creativity in a smaller one.

The main thing to remember is that employees should own their own development; they know where they want to get to or at least the direction they want to go in, so they should decide on how they want to develop – although a mentor or more senior person can help them understand the kind of opportunities that might be available.

Development doesn’t have to mean sending people on training courses, although those are useful sometimes – there are many other ways for someone to develop. Employees will benefit from such things as: shadowing a more senior person; attending senior meetings to observe; taking part in, or leading, community projects; taking on work that is outside their experience; attending, or even presenting at, conferences; secondments; job swaps or buddying with someone in a different job; and training other employees.

Most employees like to be progressing in their career, and usually they associate this with their pay increasing. If you have a flat, or a small, organisation it can be difficult to provide traditional progression up a hierarchy, but you could provide pay increases for developing professional competence, or multi-skilling, or in other ways that suit your organisation.

For HR can help you and your managers provide development opportunities and career progression in your organisation.

Diversity & Inclusion

When you see the word ‘Diversity’, it might make you think about providing equal opportunities for different ethnic groups, or making reasonable adjustments for people with disability - and those things do come into it - but here I am talking about diversity in the context that **diverse teams are far more effective** than those that are not diverse and everyone should feel part of the team.

Inclusion is all about **valuing the differences** between people and including everyone, whatever their: gender, sex and sexual orientation; social and geographic backgrounds; academic qualifications and experiences; work experiences; cultural and religious backgrounds; physical and mental health; neurocognitive style; learning style; physical capability; strengths and weaknesses etc. etc.

ForHR can help you review what you do, to make sure you are an inclusive organisation.