

Engaging people in a change programme

Engagement: do you really need it?

The term engagement has developed a recent prominence amongst organisations interested in improving performance. Why is this? Is it that leaders are recognising that to become wholly effective they need to combine excellent systems with excellent people? Regardless of the reasons for the rise in interest, engagement, it clearly has merit in supporting organisation success.

What do we mean by engagement?

Engagement, put simply, is about how we include our people by sharing power and decision - making with them, in such a way that they not only become accountable, but want to become accountable. John Smythe, in his book, 'The Chief Engagement Officer' describes engagement as 'a well-designed process by which people become personally implicated in the success of a strategy, change, transformation or everyday improvement'.

Key factors

- There is a process involved
- It involves personal implication
- It relates to achievement.

Understanding these three key aspects puts us in a position to develop an approach to engagement within our own organisations.

Why is it important?

Best practice research clearly demonstrates the value of engagement. Work carried out in private and public sector environments has shown a clear linkage between not only achievement of business objectives be those of profit motive or otherwise, but also linkages between levels of engagement and customer satisfaction.

The sorts of benefits you would expect to achieve therefore would be:

- Attainment of organisational objectives
- High levels of customer satisfaction
- Process become less wasteful because decision-making is speeded up
- Staff become more creative, more productive and more motivated, resulting in less down-time and unnecessary turnover

- Staff promote the organisation externally resulting in a better 'brand' image
- Staff 'own' change, making it easier to cope with ever-present demands to improve.

Isn't it just about communication, alignment and good leadership?

Yes, and no! Good leaders who manage communication, and who align their people, are likely to gain numerous benefits, and are also likely to be the sort of leaders who will readily share power, and may therefore achieve engagement by default. It may not turn out that way however, and if you specifically seek engagement, you will need to plan and implement specific actions.

Alignment and communication whilst essentially excellent things to do, do not necessarily broaden ownership or share power in the way that engagement does. Communication can certainly improve understanding of the context, and influence the climate of the organisation positively, but this then relies on individuals wanting to part of that context simply by seeing the same view, rather than giving them the opportunity to really own & share in it, and add value.

Building foundations

The first step in developing engagement is to have a leadership who actually believe in the benefits, and who can live with sharing their power. Whilst the desire for improvement and success may be tempting, the reality of 'letting go' is, for many, actually not possible. Taking the path of engagement is not one to enter lightly, it will challenge the current approach to leadership, how you manage change, how you make decisions and how you communicate. Getting leaders to agree to proceed is the first step, and there are a number of ways to do this, and to assess readiness. The assessment techniques are based upon identify where on a continuum an organisation's leaders are, from instruction and compliance, through to full empowerment and trust in individuals.

Once signed up, leaders must then design and own the process of engagement.

What engages people?

The factors attracting people to organisations, and those engaging them have some similarities, but are not identical. This is important to understand, in how you recruit, and importantly how you retain staff. Research shows that the top ten drivers for engaging staff are:

- Senior management interest in employees
- Ability to improve skills
- Senior management demonstrates values
- Challenging work
- Decision making authority
- Company reputation as good employer
- Ability to influence company decisions
- Company focus on customer satisfaction
- Fair and consistent pay
- Overall work environment

Actions to engage staff will therefore need to take these factors into account.

The road to engagement

The route you take depends upon where you are starting from, and the pace will be dictated by the level of commitment, the strength of desire and the resource available to you.

Having gained top team commitment, you will need to make sure you are clear about the following:

1. What do we mean by engagement
2. What are the goals of engagement
3. What outcomes do we want
4. What will we use as key drivers
5. How will we measure success?
6. What will we actually do and do differently to make this happen?

Clearly developing this route map is complex and it is impossible to detail here, as every organisation is different. There are clearly risks, which must be mitigated from the outset, including the biggest risk of raising and then not fulfilling expectations.

How we can help

At Ad Esse, we have many years experience in helping organisations create success and implement sustainable business improvement. We specialise in supporting real performance improvement, part of which we believe, is contingent on engaging your people. If therefore you are currently working on or are about to embark upon an improvement programme to raise your performance then we will be able to help. If you would like to know more please email us at hello@ad-esse.com.

Say hello

Get in touch by emailing hello@ad-esse.com or call **01164 788 258**