

IDENTIFYING THE ROLE OF MIDDLE MANAGEMENT IN IMPROVING EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT.



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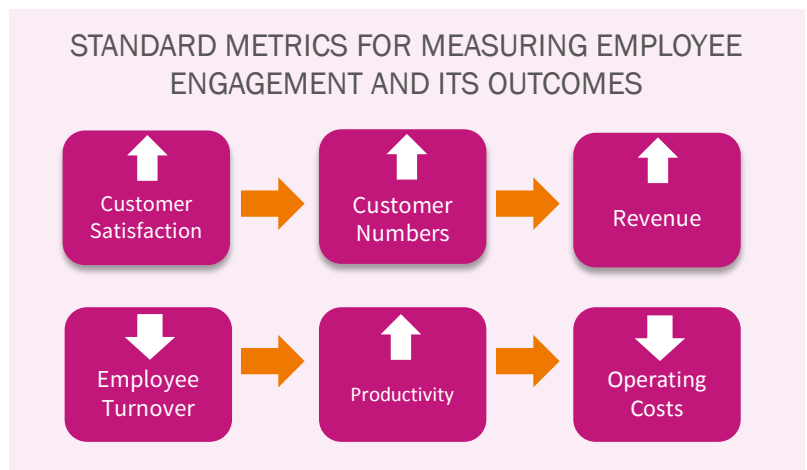


ENGAGING MIDDLE MANAGEMENT IN EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT.

Delivering a clear employee engagement strategy has the ability to boost the performance of any business. A key element to creating a successful strategy lies in the communication and tools used to help deliver it. Engagement is not something that we do to people, it is an outcome of creating a business culture and employee value proposition that is employee and consumer centric. Much work will have gone into defining the business values, and creating an expected way of working. For these values to be fully embraced, there must be clarity in how the message is communicated and consistently applied throughout the layers of the business.

The measure of the success of this work inevitably is seen at the front line. Success of a business will be reflected in standard business metrics.

As many of these sample metrics tend to only be measured at the front line, there is often the risk that middle management will not engage fully with a cultural change as they are one step removed from the ultimate measure.



To be successful in delivering cultural change it will be necessary to ensure that the values are being lived and demonstrated throughout the hierarchy. To implement cultural change and to deliver an increase in employee engagement it will require managers to learn new leadership skills and to follow through on actions from the engagement strategy. However, our human nature is such that what does not get measured will not get done. To assist with the development of leadership skills, new tools may need to be delivered to support managers with their learning and creating new habits. These tools need to be measurable as these will become the ‘leading indicator’ for the overall business performance.

“Middle management are the key to delivering consistent employee engagement.”

Managers will be in contact with the front line every day and will be able to use these tools to consistently reinforce and demonstrate the values and culture that the business is looking to build, and consequently, improve employee engagement.

The approach to creating the tools is straight forward and reliant on developing core leadership traits in the management team. The tools need to be tailored to the culture and operating model of each unique business. Delivering a standard set of tools across the business will ensure consistency, and gain the optimum input from employees as they will want a consistent format to be able to plan ahead with their input and feedback. These tools provide the opportunity to measure the progress of each manager and create the lead indicators for employee engagement.

SAMPLE MANAGEMENT TOOLS TO INCREASE EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

Objective - Create an employee centric environment.

Celebrate success

Recognition that the job is important and worthwhile to encourage the repetition of positive behaviour and actions.

Seek feedback in a constructive way & follow through

Recognition that everyone has a voice and can make a difference, identify operational issues early and promote innovation.

Open communication for employees

Provide a connection for the employees to the company, its values and its progress.

Alignment of goals

Fail to plan and plan to fail! Provide clear targets cascaded to managers and direct reports and actions required to achieve corporate goals.

Outcome - an environment of additional discretionary effort, innovation, autonomy and self development.

When developing the tools, it will also be necessary to consider how and where managers are going to use them. This is not just a case of ticking the box to achieve the leading indicator targets. It needs to be carried out in an authentic way to demonstrate the integrity of the work and cultural change that is underway. For instance, 'thank you' is often used as closure at the end of a conversation or event. A standard 'thank you' at the end of a day from a manager will not be sufficient to create a need to repeat the positive actions and behaviours of the previous day by the employee. There often needs to be clarity as how a thank you can be used more as a sign of genuine appreciation to make this happen.

A move from command and control to an employee centric management style can initially cause suspicion, and communication of the changes is vital. This change needs to be approached as a long term journey, not a one off event that gets overlooked when challenges come along. To heighten expectations and then fail to follow through or deliver has the potential to disengage employees further.

92%
of a manager's
time is spent
managing 8% of
their employees
(Studer)

As the business continues its engagement journey, there are additional elements to consider and probably the most important being the focus on managing performance. Whilst management time is spent dealing with low performers, your high performers are ignored, potentially lose interest and move on. Meanwhile your middle performers may become disengaged without leadership and in their minds move to a 'quit and stay' position which impacts productivity and overall team engagement.

Managers often feel they have to treat all employees equal. It is necessary to provide them with the guidance and tools to help understand simple steps that they can take to manage the performance outside the formal HR process, and to see their teams continue to engage and further develop.

SUMMARY

Managers within a business have the ability to shape and influence the success of an engagement strategy. They can add the consistency of execution, timely feedback and innovation. To leave this group unclear of their role in delivering an engagement program will reduce the potential return on investment not only in the change process, but in the potential ROI of a companies overall labour cost.



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