BEST PRACTICE GUIDE 9

Employee Engagement

Five Steps to Seeing the Consultant's Eye View

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The business guru John Harvey-Jones once said: "No-one goes to work wanting to do a bad job we just put so much red tape in their way that they give up trying."

When organizations review their processes and ways of working, business leaders consider the effect on customers. They also often focus on making life easier for managers, and for operational roles.

But sometimes the service professionals on the front line of delivering engagements receive less consideration, despite the fact that they are the backbone of the business and the people best placed to make a difference to how the business performs.

How does the organization look from where they stand? A Kimble survey called "dedicated but in the dark" found that while three quarters of employees say they care deeply about the health of their business, less than a quarter felt they had full insight into how it was performing.

In these kinds of companies, consultants or other service professionals, project managers and salespeople are expected to input information into the system, information which is vital for managers to draw on to run the business. But it is a one-way street - they can't draw information out. This makes it more difficult for them to see the bigger picture or to evaluate their own contribution.

The digital workplace, requires people to be autonomous, to self-manage and to take decisions which affect the future performance of the business. If they are to do this effectively, they need relevant information at their fingertips. Where people on the ground do feel in the loop and informed, they will work and contribute more effectively, and find their jobs more rewarding. This is a key driver of employee engagement.

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And when the business undergoes change, again employees need to understand what is happening and why. What is the reason for the change, what is the process, and how will it benefit the individual and the business?

This Best Practice Guide considers the people who are at the heart of any organization and looks at the employee experience. Best practices are not generally attainable using spreadsheets or home-grown systems. As with the other guides in the series, we will assume the reader has or is planning to buy a professional services automation solution. With that in mind, here are five steps to employee engagement.

1 COMMUNICATE THE VISION

Communicate goals clearly - express them in terms of customer success rather than financials - enable employees to understand their contribution and feel valued. Provide opportunities to listen to employee feedback.

There has to be some inspiration coming from the top of the business. An organization whose leaders don't have clarity on where they are heading, or a well-communicated plan, is not likely to be a challenging place to work. If there isn't a plan, the team will not be able to carry out or exceed the plan. The first step is for managers to understand and communicate the vision clearly to their teams.

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In BPG 'Measure what Matters' we explained the importance of establishing what success looks like and putting it into numerical format. But the strategy should not be entirely about numbers and targets. It is more engaging to express targets in terms of customer experience, satisfaction, churn rates and so on. Expressing targets in terms of customer success creates a stronger and more unifying vision.

All employees should find it easy to know where the company is headed, what the priorities are and how they fit in. Consultants, sales teams and project managers need to have clear insight into the part they play in the company's success. That will help them to realize and value the power of their contribution.

Equally, a company culture in which the people on the frontline are encouraged to give honest feedback, and to share their opinions, ideas and views will be best able to set out realistic goals.

2 CREATE A TRANSPARENT CULTURE

Ensure all relevant information is available to consultants, sales teams and project managers.. Consider extending the sharing real-time information about the progress of projects to customers.

Transparency is important on many levels. It helps individuals to succeed in their roles and to reinforce their sense of where the business is going. It also increases their engagement with the information-gathering process. If people understand where the information ends up and can see that it is used and valuable they are motivated to ensure that it is accurate and up to date.

For example, consultants want to see the tasks and projects they are assigned to now - and also the opportunities coming down the pipeline towards them. Salespeople should be able to see that the earlier in the sales cycle they log potential projects and associated demand the more likely these are to be converted to won business and to be well-resourced. And the more confident the resource manager is of the accuracy of the data from the sales person the more responsive they are likely to be - it's a virtuous circle.

Information on employee experience also helps highlight issues before they become a problem. For example, all of the hours which people work should be captured and this information should be used. Do people regularly have to put in 12 hours to do what someone else said would take eight? Can this information be harnessed to improve the accuracy of proposals? There may be commercial reasons for offering some time at a lower rate than normal, but accurately estimating the number of hours is better for everyone in the long term than habitually underestimating this.

Sharing information in real-time about the progress of projects with customers automatically - hours worked, issues, risks, milestones - will also reinforce the importance of keeping this data accurate and up to date. The information then becomes part of the relationship between the delivery team and the client organization. It helps to ensure that different teams across the organization work together in an outward-looking way.

3

ENCOURAGE EMPLOYEES TO SELF-MANAGE

Operate a "high-trust" network - concentrate on providing intellectually-stimulating work for high-performance teams.

Many businesses at the foundation stage operate in so-called "high-trust networks." They are made up of people who understand the company's culture and who share its goals. Rapid growth (perhaps onboarding many new staff) can have the effect of shifting the culture towards a more "low-trust network," where there is a lot more supervision. That can be difficult for existing staff who may dislike the change, become disaffected and leave, compounding the problem.

Utilizing technology such as augmented intelligence can help to sustain what is effectively a high-trust network, but one where the new staff work in a structured environment in which their decisions and actions are visible. Within this structure, employees can be encouraged to take responsibility for running their own areas of the business. Giving people control of things that can affect their success, such as budgets and goal-setting, allows them to make decisions and encourages collaboration at all levels across the organization.

A good use of data is harnessing it to provide insights to newer employees, supporting them to work at the level of more experienced people, guiding them towards expected actions.
This reduces the risk that people are going to miss important actions or to make wrong decisions because of the visibility into what's going on.
This allows the business to maintain the kind of culture that will attract and retain top quality talent as the business expands. It also allows the business to focus on offering the kind of challenging and intellectually-stimulating work which attracts highly-motivated individuals and sustains high-performing teams.

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4

USE ASSESSMENT CONSTRUCTIVELY

Make it easy for employees to see how they are being assessed and how they are performing against that. Take a constructive approach. Build talent aspirations into resource planning.

Is it clear to everyone how they are being assessed and why? Do they understand how they are performing against those metrics? Are the metrics fair and constructive? Are there opportunities for employees to deliver honest feedback? If not, employees will tend to resist the assessment process and may experience is as harassment.

For instance, telling everybody in the organization that they are falling behind on their targets and leaving it at that is not going to create a motivated team. The emphasis should be on understanding what issues caused the failure and giving constructive help to people to fix those issues. If assessment is part of an effort to understand better, to engage more, to contribute, then it is more likely to lift performance.

Is the utilization target realistic? Does it take annual vacation time into account and is there enough time for training? High-performers will want to continue to develop their skills and achieve personal goals. Are they being encouraged to do training courses, which are relevant and available as needed? This will help them to keep their skills up to date and remain motivated.

Set the expectation that employees should aim to add at least one new line of experience or skill on their résumé each year. This challenges both the individual and the organization and ensures that individual employees are encouraged to continue growing and developing.

5

CONSIDER EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCE WHEN MANAGING CHANGE

Dynamic businesses undergo constant change - consider how this affects people throughout the company and keep people informed.

Dynamic businesses undergo constant change. This affects employee experience and employee engagement. Taking the employee perspective into account during the change management process is vital.

Business leaders should communicate clearly the reasons for change and the benefits of it to different roles. It is also helpful to consider what the different responses of individuals might be. Sometimes managers direct most of their energy towards the people who are resistant to change. Instead, they should focus on the individuals who are enthusiastic and provide them with support and resources. In the right role, these people will be able to champion the change and enthuse others.

In some situations, it may be appropriate to offer a whole-company or a team-based incentive - if 95% of employees fill in their timesheets by a certain point each week this quarter, everyone gets a day off.

Change also looks different at different stages of the employee journey. As new people come on board, how easy is it for them to understand where the company is headed, what its vision is? New people who arrive midway through process change which is not yet embedded may be less invested in it. How does it work for them? Equally, if someone who was leading a change leaves, the succession will need to be managed in a way that doesn't mean the process slips back.

CONCLUSION

Constantly review how the business operates from the point of view of the people on the ground. Do the organization's processes help and support people to perform better, or are processes proliferating and becoming red tape?

Providing intellectually-stimulating work and letting people get on with it, and sharing information about how the business is performing in a transparent way are powerful and effective drivers of employee engagement.

Kimble Best Practice Example: Entero AG

German management consulting organization Entero AG uses Kimble to support a more autonomous and self-managing workforce. Engagement managers are responsible for maintaining the commercial outcomes of their projects. A review process ensures that the margins or rates they are presented with are sustainable and fit in with company policy.

Director Heiko Frank said: "Kimble helps us to keep track of everything. One person might be involved in ten projects - that would be almost impossible to organize if we didn't have professional services automation. It increases our productivity."

After introducing Kimble, chargeable work levels increased 3-4 percent as a result of behaviour changes across the company.

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