

Engaging People for Performance

The focus of attention in organisations now is **“How to deliver the full contribution of all employees through employee engagement”**.

This has always been important, however, in the economic downturn the performance leverage that can be gained has become more critical to survival.

Many things have been tried in the past, like Empowerment and Performance Related Pay. And managers have tried to find new ways to “Motivate the Team”. So what made them fail? They have all missed the fundamental point. The problem is not just about **individuals**, it is about **the way we work together**.

Growing high performance teams is an elusive aspiration for many organisations, and there is increasing pressure to deliver it in these tough times when people are generally not feeling very hopeful. Also, to add to the challenge, teams are becoming dispersed, globalised, outsourced, insourced, merged and matrixed, and are being tasked with working at high pace on multiple projects.

The recurring realisation that **“People are the organisation’s most important asset and hold the key to competitive advantage”** has led us to evaluate what makes the difference. John Harvey-Jones (remember him!) once said, **“You cannot manage your business today using yesterdays tools and still expect to remain in front tomorrow”**. My belief is that we are using a number of yesterday’s tools because we hold a number of yesterday’s beliefs about people resulting in yesterday’s workplace behaviours.

The yesterday’s beliefs I refer to are described by McGregor as part of Theory X leadership, predicated on the view that work is distasteful to most people, and they will avoid work whenever possible; people are not ambitious, have little desire for responsibility, and prefer to be directed; they have little aptitude for creativity in solving organizational problems and motivation occurs only at the physiological and security levels of [Maslow's Needs Hierarchy](#). Also, most people are self-centred, and must be closely controlled and coerced to achieve organizational objectives. And most people resist change and are gullible and unintelligent.

In contrast, Theory Y leadership is based on the beliefs that work is as natural as play if conditions are favorable; people will be self-directed and creative to meet work and organizational objectives when committed to them; people will commit to quality and productivity

objectives if rewards address higher needs like self-fulfillment; capacity for creativity spreads throughout organizations; most people can handle responsibility because creativity and ingenuity are common in the population; under these conditions, people will seek responsibility.

So, what do we need to do to use a Theory Y approach to engaging people with things that need to be improved, changed, speeded up, economised etc.? My research has yielded a simple model around which managers can engage their teams to deliver improvements in workplace performance. The 'engagement culture' will bring improvements in the ways in which teams manage everything that matters -information, communication, production processes, supplies, orders, deliveries, invoices, payments, improvement ideas, knowledge, learning, and (not least!) cash-flow and profit. The principles we apply have been discovered from researching High Performing Teams and have been fully developed and tested in numerous organisational settings. The resulting model, Flows[®], describes the principles at the heart of our approach.

FOCUS: ensuring that teams have a clear understanding of business goals and direction, why they are important, and how the team's work contributes to their achievement.

LEARNING: ensuring that teams and individuals take opportunities to grow and develop through training and self-development and take responsibility for sharing work based learning with others.

OPPORTUNITY: ensuring that teams are able to utilise the full expertise and capability of every team member, and have the autonomy to do so.

WORTH: ensuring that teams are widely recognised for their capability and achievement, praised and thanked for their efforts and results, and appropriately rewarded for their contribution.

SUPPORT: ensuring that every team feels it has the resources, information and management support and commitment it needs to be able to perform at the highest level.

So the big question is:- "What can we do to improve Team Performance now? Well, the answer is to apply the Flows[®] model to engage people with new ways of working as teams. That can be done informally by using the Flows[®] model to help teams assess where they stand in relation to the 5 principles. They can make

decisions about what is working well and what needs to improve. Things that cause frustration can be discussed and potential solutions found using the Flows principles and Theory Y frameworks. Key to success is that managers adopt Theory Y behaviour and 'walk the talk' of the Flows[®] principles. You can download some free Flows[®] Hints and Tips from www.valueflows.com

A formal approach would be to use Flowsurvey[®] questionnaires to enable Team Members and Managers to provide specific views on the way they work as a team. The results are analysed and fed back in a report which is used as a basis for discussion of current strengths and areas for improvement. Actions for improvement are specified and plans agreed for change by using the content of the Flowsurvey[®] report in a team workshop. Defining 'What it is like to work in this team' is a good way of starting because it begins to apply the Flows[®] principles and realises the following benefits.

- ◆ The team can **focus** on its strengths and what improvements are needed
- ◆ Individuals **learn** by developing a shared view of the situation from each others' perspectives
- ◆ Everyone has the **opportunity** to contribute to the process and the picture being clarified
- ◆ Involvement develops a feeling of '**worth**' and being valued in everyone, and they see 'worth' in the plans being made
- ◆ This process enables management **support** and encouragement to be delivered in a natural way

In short, the manager and the team apply Theory Y and Flows[®] principles to their ways of working. What's the bottom line? Improvements in motivation, productivity, customer satisfaction, and many other indicators like retention, absence, and...**the bottom line!**

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