

On the Job training

1) Meeting with the People Lead

I met with the People Lead (Head of HR) to discuss employee engagement. I did this as my role as vice-chair of the employees forum. This is a new position for me and in order to determine the role the forum has in supporting employee engagement, I arranged the meeting. We discussed previous employee engagement surveys that had been carried out and talked through plans for the future, especially in relation to the role of the employee forum.

To give some background; when employees are dissatisfied at work, they are less committed and will look for opportunities to quit. If these opportunities are unavailable, they may emotionally or mentally “withdraw” from the organisation, which clearly impacts on productivity and meeting the overall organisational goals (Lok and Crawford, 2004). The actions taken to remedy dissatisfaction are termed employee engagement. The CIPD (2019a) suggest that when engagement is high it results in a combination of commitment to the organisation, its values and a willingness to help colleagues.

The MacLeod Report (MacLeod and Clarke, 2009) identified four cultural elements that must be in place for engagement to occur, so I thought it useful to go through each of these points with the People Lead to identify what was done, and to what extent.

1. Strategic narrative

Chwarae Teg has produced a people strategy document which highlights several areas that are key to engaging with employees, including; the attraction and appointment of strong candidates to Chwarae Teg, the recognition and the reward and retention of key talent within the business. Whilst being in the third sector pay cannot match the private sector, Chwarae Teg offers all employees a unique environment in which to work. We operate an agile working environment with results based outcomes being measured and not time. All staff work flexibly and the majority can work from home whenever it suits them.

2. Engaging managers.

The People Lead also told me about the plan in place to improve management capability. Having engaging managers Chwarae Teg wants confident and highly capable managers, providing consistent support to all employees. This is annually reviewed with a specific management training programme being put in place. The people manager and I talked through this. The aim of the training is to instil more empathy and understand their professional development with honesty and integrity. The people manager was honest in her assessment and agreed that more work must be done to ensure leaders have a clearer understanding of their roles and by her team to ensure there is consistency across the organisation.

2. Employee voice

We discussed employee voice, especially in relation to the role of the employee forum. The manager was frank, and admitted that one of the biggest complaints among employees is that their feedback is not sought often enough or that when it is, it is paid lip-service to. I suggested that this was one reason why the employee forum wasn't as effective as it could be as the results of communications

are shared in an ad hoc way and can't be accessed online for staff. Another example of this was a staff development day held in January where everyone got involved in reviewing the values, but this still hasn't been fed back to all staff. For employees to feel engaged with their workplace and give their best there needs to be employee voice throughout the organisation, to involve employees in decision making (CIPD, 2019a).

3. Integrity

We talked through the core values that we have at Chwarae Teg. The ethos of 'one united team', togetherness and integrity are heavily promoted at the recruitment stage, on the careers page of the website and are measured as part of performance management via achieve. Employees more readily engage, and give more to their work, in an environment where they are sure that the values espoused by the organisation and its leaders are genuine, and that there is buy-in throughout (Macloed and Clarke, 2009).

The manager and I discussed the extent to which we have strong organisational culture and how we believed this has built high employee engages by ensuring we all display a consistency approach to attitudes, behaviours, treatment and support for one another.

More needs to be done. There is a role for the employee forum in this. So there is plenty of scope for improving what is an open and engaged workforce at Chwarae Teg.

2) Employee handbook

As a member of the employee forum one of my roles is to review policies before they go to final publication in the staff handbook. This was done very recently and I made notes which were fed back to the People Lead (HR manager). We had a number of policies to review, leave policies, an updated flexible working policy and reviewed these in line with the other policies already in the handbook. As the CIPD (2019b) state, policies play an important role in providing consistency and transparency for employees and managers, helping to enhance the psychological contract and create a positive organisational culture.

Gibbons (2006) defined employee engagement as 'a heightened emotional and intellectual connection that an employee has for his/her job, organization, manager, or co-workers that, in turn, influences him/her to apply additional discretionary effort to his/her work'. One area that strengthens the connection between employee and organisation is the extent to which a supportive work environment is provided and how the daily work experience is managed. Richman et al. (2008) suggest that the provision of HR policies and practices are crucial defining the relationship between employee and employer and the management of the work experiences and are therefore strong predictors of employee engagement.

Chwarae Teg goes above and beyond current legislative requirements in all of its policies and aims for best practice in all areas. Therefore in terms of the legal elements, the policies reflect positively on the organisation and demonstrate a willingness to provide a hugely positive work experience. On reviewing the policies however, whilst legally they were great, I was considering how the policies were themselves communicated. How for example, would someone with no HR knowledge, know that the policies were offering more than the legal requirement in terms of leave, flexible working etc? I believe that what needs to accompany the policy is a wider explanation of Chwarae Teg's values, an overview of why going above and beyond is important in terms of policy provision and a

clearly written introduction that spells out how important the policies are in creating a productive, happy and supportive work place environment. As Guest (2014) describes, employees should be made to feel that their companies' values are clear and unambiguous in order to generate higher engagement and engagement needs to be explicitly embedded within the HR policies, practices and provision.

All of the policies are important to employees; not all policies will be used by all staff, but whilst the language of the policy needs to be 'legal' there is no reason why an introduction to the handbook should not use more emotive and supportive language. So on reviewing bereavement leave policies, they come across as cold and unfeeling. I made notes to suggest that an introduction could be written highlighting that a managers door should always be open, HR should always be available and the language could be softened and explicitly state that Chwarae Teg recognises that employees using this policy will be going through emotionally difficult times and that the organisation is there to support them.

As Bowen and Ostroff (2004) identify, the coherent and consistent suite of policies, communicates to employees expectations of expected behaviours; not only of the employee but the attitudes, values and behaviours of the organisation.

3) My development needs

I held a meeting with my line manager and we discussed employee engagement using the CIPD profession map as a basis for our discussion.

Looking at the bands and the range of activities covered under employee engagement, we both felt I was strong in the areas of the employer brand; I frequently run workshops with clients on this very topic, and internally I have coached managers on how to communicate with and get feedback from employees around the employer brand proposition. My manager said I had good skills surrounding my knowledge of psychological contracts and, working at Chwarae Teg I have good technical and practical knowledge on diversity and how to talk to diverse groups about employer engagement.

However, I need to strengthen more in areas of actually developing employee engagement activities and then to work closer with managers to implement practices and tools that help build and facilitate engagement. I admitted that my skillsets are weakest in the use of data analysis tools, for example regression analysis and data reporting.

With my lack of direct experience working in the HR function I wanted to get more involvement in supporting the HR function with the research done into employee engagement and working with them to analyse the results of the previous engagement surveys done and to assist with the design, planning and measurement of the next survey due in the summer of 2020.

My manager and I worked together to plan my support in this area. Doing so, would give me the skills and knowledge to step up from level two to three within the CIPD bands.

References

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