



LOCATION: ONLINE

LLEOLIAD AR LEIN

LEVEL 7

LEFEL 7

EXAMINATION PERIOD
DECEMBER 2020

CYFNOD ARHOLIADAU
RHAGFYR 2020

MODULE TITLE: LEADING, MANAGING AND DEVELOPING PEOPLE

MODULE CODE: BMHR7008

TIME: 48 HOUR OPEN BOOK EXAMINATION

INSTRUCTIONS TO CANDIDATES:

A copy of the article (section 1) has been previously supplied.

Section 1 - Answer questions 1-3 and either A or B for question 4

Section 2 - Answer either A or B for each question

You should answer a total of 8 questions, 4 in section 1 and 4 in section 2. You cannot pass the exam if you do not answer 8 questions

Section 1 is worth 80 marks and section 2 is worth 40 marks, so you should plan your time accordingly.

Maximum word count: 4,500 words.

This is an open book examination and you may refer to any sources whilst completing your answers. Your answers (clearly labelled and in one document) should be uploaded to Turnitin by 12pm on Thursday 3rd December 2020.

Academic honesty is required. In the main body of your submission you must give credit to authors on whose research and ideas your work is based. Append to your submission a reference list that indicates the books, articles, etc. that you have used, cited or quoted in order to complete this assessment. You should complete this task on your own and without collaboration with others.

SECTION 1:

Article:

In their seminal work *Engage for Success: enhancing performance through employee engagement* MacLeod and Clarke (2009) set out four enablers of engagement in the workplace. Since then there has been ample debate centred around the concepts that are closely aligned to engagement; commitment, motivation, satisfaction, discretionary effort and so the list goes on. Some authors even go as far as to say 'engagement' as a term does not exist, take this extract from Briner's 'The Future of Engagement: Thought Piece Collection. What is employee engagement and does it matter?: An evidenced-based approach (2014).

Imagine this, I approach a senior HR manager of a large organisation and ask if we can arrange a meeting to discuss a wonderful new and proven idea about how they can motivate and retain their employees. They are very busy, but agree. I start the meeting with a more truthful account of this idea. I tell them that in reality it has no agreed upon definition and that there is no evidence about whether it can be measured in a valid or reliable way. I then tell them that the idea is actually quite similar to if not precisely the same as a lot of other ideas that have been around for about 50 years. Finally, I let them know that there is at the present time absolutely no good quality evidence that shows that if you implement this idea it will produce the desired results – though there are plenty of people and organisations with vested interests who will happily tell you their neat anecdotes and 'success stories'. Very soon that HR manager will get pretty annoyed with me for wasting their time on this not-so-new and pretty unhelpful idea and quite rightly show me the door. Wouldn't you do the same?

The idea of employee engagement¹ (henceforth just engagement) shares exactly the same characteristics as the idea described above. However, rather than showing engagement the door, many HR practitioners (and some HR academics) have invited it in, sat it down, given it a nice cup of tea, asked it to stay for as long as it wants and given it a prominent role. What's going on? Whatever your personal views about engagement my goals here are simple: To stimulate a more balanced, deeper, more critical and more evidence-based approach to how we think about and use engagement in organisations.

Problem 1: Defining engagement:

The one thing everyone knows about engagement is that nobody agrees what it is. For example, McLeod and Clarke (2009) stated: 'There is no one agreed definition of employee engagement – during the course of this review we have come across more than 50 definitions'. Not only are definitions numerous but, more importantly, they are very different (see Robertson-Smith and Marwick, 2009). Some definitions focus on employee behaviour (eg, discretionary effort), some on employee attitudes (eg, commitment), some on employee feelings (eg, enthusiasm), some on the conditions of work and what the organisation does (eg, provides support), some on various combinations of these, and yet others define engagement as a situation in which one of these things, such as attitudes, causes another, such as behaviour. In other words, when it comes to defining engagement it appears that almost anything goes.

From a practical (and academic) perspective the absence of agreement about what something means – and an absence of concern about that lack of agreement – is not funny or weird or cute or unfortunate or inconvenient. It's a confused, confusing and chaotic mess that is almost bound to lead to messy and undesired outcomes. It means that whenever we talk about or think about or try to measure 'engagement' we are almost certainly saying different things, understanding different things, measuring different things and doing different things but believing quite incorrectly they are all the same.

David Guest got it pretty much right when he said: '...the concept of employee engagement needs to be more clearly defined (...) or it needs to be abandoned' (McLeod and Clarke, 2009). Since that time, far from increased definitional clarity this definitional chaos has continued and perhaps even worsened...

More recently, the CIPD Profession Map now refers to 'employee experience' under specialist knowledge as opposed to 'employee engagement' and in HR Zone's HR predictions for 2020 Perry Timms wrote 'e is for energy not engagement' (Timms, 2020). Therefore, one can assume the debate under the very loose heading of 'employee engagement' is set to rage on a little longer. Given recent macro factors affecting the entire workforce not only across the UK but across the globe, one might argue the case that an engaged workforce is going to be a pivotal factor for any business or organisation to pull forward in the next twelve months. Drawing on recent literature, business examples and academic viewpoints answer the following questions.

ALL answers should be justified as far as possible using appropriate theory and evidence

Section 1

Read the above article. Answer all three of the following questions, taking care in each case to fully justify the arguments you make.

- 1.1 Critically examine the concept of 'engagement'. What exactly are organisations seeking from their workforce and how best can they achieve this?
- 1.2 How have the enforced changes to working arrangements due to the pandemic impacted on engagement?
- 1.3 Which strategies have organisations deployed to successfully navigate rapid change during this period and maintain engagement?

Section 1 (continued)

Answer either a or b

1.4

a. Critically examine the link between the culture of an organisation and engagement.

OR

b. Critically examine the role of the line manager in maintaining the engagement of the workforce.

Section 2

Answer either a or b in each section.

To communicate your answers more clearly, you may use whatever methods you wish, for example diagrams, flowcharts, bullet points; you need to provide an explanation of each.

2.1

a. In a world where the pace of change is accelerating, critically examine how the HR function should be organised to best support the business.

OR

b. Critically examine the capabilities that HR should possess to be successful given the rapidly changing external environment and pace of change in organisations.

2.2

a. Critically evaluate how HR can support the rapid adoption of technology in workplaces, including how it can further embrace its use in HR operations.

OR

b. *'It is clear an 'unfreeze' has happened. Many of the traditional norms and ways of working have been cast aside with extraordinary speed. So as we look forward, executives are beginning to imagine the 'refreeze' and what the new norm could be.'*

(Gratton, 2020)

Critically evaluate the need to build on developments and not 'snap back' following the increased use of technology and alternative ways of working throughout the pandemic.

2.3

a. *'The overwhelming effects of a crisis strip leadership back to its most fundamental element: making a positive difference in people's lives. By tuning inward to cultivate awareness, vulnerability, empathy, and compassion, and then turning outward to comfort and address the concerns of stakeholders, leaders can exhibit individual care, build resilience, and position their organisations to positively reimagine a postcrisis future'.*

(D'Auria, Nielsen and Zolley, 2020)

Discuss, with reference to academic and other literature, the increased need for compassionate leadership following recent global events.

OR

b. Maintaining employee wellbeing, particularly mental health, has become a priority for many organisations during the pandemic. Critically evaluate the need to continue with the strategy following the end of the current global crisis.

2.4

a. As the pandemic progresses, the employment landscape is changing from one of high employment to one where organisations are making difficult decisions regarding the composition of their workforce. Critically evaluate how HR can ensure balance and fairness in times of cost-cutting and change and why this is important.

OR

b. Given the current pandemic and other global issues such as climate change, critically evaluate the need for organisations to focus on corporate social responsibility as a lever to recruit and retain a productive workforce.

Reference List:

Briner, R. (2014). *The Future of Engagement: Thought Piece Collection. What is employee engagement and does it matter?: An evidenced-based approach*. Brighton: Institute for Employment Studies.

D'Auria, G., Nielson, N.C., and Zolley, S. (2020). Tuning in, turning outward: Cultivating compassionate leadership in a crisis. *McKinsey and Company*. [On-line]. Available at <https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/organization/our-insights/tuning-in-turning-outward-cultivating-compassionate-leadership-in-a-crisis#> (Accessed 24th November 2020).

Gratton, L. (2020). I'll tell you something. *People Management*. November 2020, p.18.

Timms, P. (2020). *HR Zone 2020 HR Trends Report*. pp.5-7. UK: Achievers.