

1. Evaluation of the Organisation's Approach to Engagement

Much of the current thinking regarding employee engagement makes reference to the importance of having a joined up approach to engagement and the need for employers to create a “total relationship” with their employees whilst fostering an environment that provides opportunities for growth (Deloitte, 2019).

Whilst the NAS has, historically, not adopted a holistic view of engagement and the factors that drive it, awareness amongst the Senior Management Group has increased over the last year under the guidance of a new HR Director and CEO. This is evidenced by an increase in the family friendly policies that have been devised and actively promoted (eg: Flexible working) as well as the work being undertaken in support of championing emotional wellbeing, which includes the introduction of a Stress at Work Policy & Procedure, WRAP clinics conducted on site and Mental Health Awareness training being made available to staff at all levels of the organisation.

This shift in thinking is evident in the 2019/20 HR strategy which advocates for the implementation of a total reward package which better serves to reflect the brand and seeks to facilitate an increase in retention and employee satisfaction whilst addressing the inherent inconsistencies that exist across the organisation in the areas of pay, reward and benefits. According to Purcell (2014), committing to creating and sustaining engagement by building this into the people management approach requires that potential barriers to engagement are scrutinised.

It has become apparent following feedback from the business (through the staff communication network) and management reporting data (exit interviews,

turnover reports) that the key drivers for people departing the organisation relate to the following:

- Lack of career progression / opportunities for growth – as no clear defined career pathways exist (an identified barrier to engagement according to Taylor & Woodhams (2016)).
- Poor rate of pay (minimum wage for entry level staff) is incongruous with how the organisation positions itself within the sector “Autism Specialists”
- Benefits that aren’t viewed as fit for purpose

These factors were echoed in the feedback received in the results of the UK staff survey per the below:

- In response to the question: *“My pay is comparative to other organisations”*, 17% agreed.
- In response to the question: *“Our charity offers a good benefits package”*, 20% agreed.
- Of the 38% of employees considering leaving the charity in 12 months’ time, 37% cited the limited opportunities for career progression as being the primary driver for that.

These results further strengthen the argument to revise the NAS’s current approach if the organisation is to realise enhanced engagement levels and an improvement to the attrition stats.

An additional hurdle is the perception that employees have of the Senior Management Group with only 36% of the workforce agreeing that SMG are in touch with the views and opinions of the staff and 43% responding that they believed that SMG would action the findings from the survey – a concerning

statistic when there is a leadership focus on embedding an inclusive culture and given that leadership teams deemed as “positive, honest and in touch” with the ability to communicate goals clearly is described by the IES (2009) as being optimal in enabling higher levels of engagement (IES, 2009).

Consequently, the actions being taken by the HR Director in conjunction with the Area HR Managers through focus groups and the allocation of dedicated work streams are as follows:

- Discontinue the Edenred discount voucher scheme (which only 15% of the workforce is utilising) in favour of a proposition that offers more choice without the need for any initial financial outlay (eg: Perkbox).
- Work with the L&D Team to devise competency frameworks that will enable line managers to track how their direct reports are performing against core aspects of their role, whilst benchmarking performance against their peers and facilitating a means to differentiate performance and align bespoke training interventions to development areas. This is in line with the findings of a 2018 LinkedIn Learning Report where 94% of employees stated that they would remain longer with an employer if they invested in their development (Ceridian, 2019).
- Continue to deliver the leadership & management training programme to frontline managers, however, revise the content to link to supporting managers link performance to the new competency frameworks and provide them with insights in terms of rewarding differential performance (eg: Secondment opportunities, diverse work experiences).

The above are examples of the activities being undertaken in the drive to creating an integrated framework wherein inclusion, wellness and leadership, performance management are amongst the principles that are necessary when

moving away from “point-in-time” engagement towards a longer term solution that sustains and maintains engagement levels (Deloitte, 2017).

Total = 776 words

References

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2. Review of Handbook / Internal Comms Content

The NAS has recently undergone a leadership change with both a new CEO and HR Director taking up roles in recent months. Both these appointments have seeing significant step change in terms of key focus areas for the organisation and communication in all its guises has been deemed of paramount importance. According to the CIPD (2018), organisations should adopt a multi-faceted approach to employee engagement, ensuring communications are aligned to support their workforce to understand their role in the organisation's purpose, goals and culture. Further, effective communication can reflect the organisation's integrity through structured messaging that embeds an ethos of "What we say, is what we do" (Macleod, 2009) whilst installing a sense of shared purpose (Pink, 2011).

Following feedback from on-boarders regarding the volume of information that they are required to retain from the week long induction session, the HR Managers devised a handbook to signpost new joiners to a variety of resources that included:

- Support for managing their health, wellbeing and counselling.
- An overview of the organisational benefits.
- A brief summary of key policies (annual leave, whistleblowing, equality & diversity).
- An introduction to the digitisation project (specifically, People Planner, which would ultimately have an impact on how they logged their shifts, checked future rotas).

The above was compiled by canvassing people who had joined the organisation within the last 6 months and asking them to contribute their ideas for inclusions based on information they thought would have eased their transition into

services (eg: business support function contact details, how to report absence, organisational values and the positive behavioural support approach that the NAS adopts in all interactions with the people we support). This focus on ensuring that the employee value proposition aligns to what has been conveyed to people during the recruitment process is key in creating the emotional bond between the employee and the employer (Gallup, 2019).

In terms of internal communications, there are a number of platforms being utilised to engage employees across a diverse array of topics, which is keeping with a view held by Bridger (2015) who as part of her research, found that engagement should be used at every touchpoint in the employer/employee relationship if transformational engagement is the objective. Again, utilising platforms like Sharepoint, Yammer and NASnet has been stepped up in keeping with the mandate from business leaders that employees are engaged through weekly news bulletins and blogs from members of the SMG.

Feedback from staff forum representatives is positive and the highlights include:

- An increasing number of staff joining Yammer groups and sharing knowledge and best practice through those forums
- Staff feeling more connected to SMG members as they feel more able to relate to them through the narratives and personal stories they are sharing on their blogs
- The staff with familial links to autism are especially keen to be kept abreast of developments impacting people and their families living with autism (eg: lobbying Welsh government for the introduction of the Autism Bill / uptake from retailers for Autism Hour etc).

Total = 508 words

References

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3. Summary of Discussion with HR Director (BM)

I am passionate about employee experience and have worked closely with BM in a number of the key areas reflected on the profession map, specifically: participating in the design of the onboarding programme, engaging in pro-active approaches to addressing wellbeing within the organisation, through the hosting of WRAP clinics and presenting at “Building Manager Capacity” workshops in Nottingham. BM is aware that I led on the recruitment, retention, reward and recognition work streams for the UK. I understand the barriers to engagement within the organisation and have worked alongside the BM in compiling submissions to SMG that outline proposals in terms of a way forward. A standing agenda item for discussion at our weekly catch-up sessions is monitoring uptake of the ongoing “leadership & management” training course that was piloted in Wales and has now been rolled out across the UK.

Our most recent meeting centred around how the culture of trust that we as an HR function are endeavouring to embed across the organisation (through training initiatives, reviews of salary and benefits, creating the frameworks to differentiate performance) is being negatively impacted by poor people management practices, combined with the budget constraints that have resulted in the proposed uplift to entry level salaries in advance of the legislated increase in April 2020 being put on hold.

One of the areas for development that BM identified from the 2013 CIPD Profession Map was in the area of “evaluating and improving management practices and behaviours to create a better worker experience”. Whilst she acknowledged that the classroom sessions had proved successful, she identified an issue with these learnings translating into practice. Our conversation then turned to considering what measures we put in place after the training has

concluded to ensure that line managers are leveraging the knowledge they acquired during training. We agreed that I (in conjunction with the L&D Manager) would devise a means to monitor progress (suggestions included requesting that line managers provide recorded conversation sheets of difficult conversations they had conducted and/or evidence of what their contribution had been to an absence management process).

Total = 354 words