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Developing and Managing Individuals and Teams

Component 2 – Individual Report

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Introduction

Our HR departments in Unilever, have received more employee grievances in recent years due to the increase in new technologies, methods of working and increased competition. Additionally, as a result of falling behind the times or their competitors having outpaced them over these recent years, many businesses have also changed how they operate. The increase in employee grievances received by HR departments appears to be a direct result of these changes affecting employees' ability to work effectively. This report has been produced by an employee new to HR in Unilever for which the general manager has requested a detailed explanation of the difficulties faced by employees from the business transformation process, digital technology initiatives, and work-life balances, as well as a complete overview of effective HR practices and methods for implementing the application of those HR practices by departmental leaders.

This report will first outline the effects of each of the above-listed factors on the organisation, second will provide a detailed plan of the effective human resources practices that can be applied to alleviate each of the aforementioned difficulty areas, and finally will summarise how senior managers can ensure they implement those HR practices.

1. Explanation of Key Factors

1.1 Business Transformation

Recent changes that have occurred to Unilever such as changing their organisational structure, changing their processes and changing their business goals to remain competitive are referred to as Business Transformation. We have adopted technologies that allow businesses to operate differently than they did before COVID-19; examples include switching from 100% of their staff working within the same building to using a hybrid working model or implementing new technologies such as robotics to improve operational efficiency. Many changes have occurred rapidly and many workers are feeling anxious and stressed regarding their job security and future employment due to the rapid pace at which employers are putting these changes into effect and the increased burden of employee productivity expectations. Many workers may struggle to meet their new employer's expectations or may be anxious about the potential for job loss. It is for this reason that the HR department has been receiving a greater number of grievances.

1.2 Digital Technology Trends

With the UK's growing reliance on digital transformation within businesses comes a number of benefits—faster processes, better efficiencies, and the ability for organisations to communicate with their customers and use AI (artificial intelligence), data analytics, and cloud systems. However, with those benefits also comes a range of challenges that may be caused by the introduction of these technologies.

For example, older workers may feel that they don't have sufficient skills to deal with these technologies. Employees that are concerned about being replaced by technology. Employees are under pressure to quickly learn multiple tools when they are new to the company or organisation.

Also, the use of technology has also brought about challenges with respect to privacy and monitoring. Many organisations monitor employees for productivity, attendance, and activity on their computers/phones, and employees may feel that this is an invasion of their privacy. Technology has contributed to some team members developing a lack of trust in their organisations. Additionally, there can be communication issues due to excessive dependence on technology by the team, especially when there are team members who want or need to communicate face-to-face.

1.3 Flexible Working Arrangements

Flexible working has gained prevalence within many UK organisations due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Flexible working allows employees to either remote work on occasion, work in-office only few days a week, or allow for flexibility during work hours. Offers greater flexibility for working from home can provide employees greater enjoyment from working within a company and provide them increased connection to their employer but has potential to negatively affect employees' relationship with the company.

Employee experiences working from home vary across the board; for example, several employees have reported feeling disconnected from co-workers while several others have indicated that the combination of their work and home lives creates additional pressure to perform at a higher level. Managers may also experience difficulty assessing remote employee's performance levels or ensuring that their assigned tasks have been completed within the allocated timelines. Employees may perceive unfairness if an employee receives flexibility benefits while another does not.

Communication will often be a challenge. When several employee's schedules and work locations are significantly different, coordination of information often becomes a point of confusion, and an emphasis must be placed upon clear and concise planning; otherwise, the flexibility of the current working arrangements may lead to reduced productivity and possibly conflicts arising between employees.

2. Evaluation of Contemporary HR Practices

2.1 Practices to Support Business Transformation

HR should establish procedures that allow for clear communication and appropriate support to guide companies through the transformation process using best-practice techniques for managing change. To ensure that employees feel supported when moving into new processes and/or technologies, we recommend using a process called Change Champions. We assign a Change Champion to each department. The Change Champion's role is to help employees through the transition process and to provide the necessary training and education through HR to ensure a successful transition to their new job roles. The best time for training through HR is before the change occurs so that employees have access to the resources they require. Additionally, employees should be made aware of the reasons for the change and how their job description and role will be influenced by the change. To create certainty and a trusting relationship between the employee and HR, the organisation may create several communication avenues including: meetings, email, and regular feedback sessions. Performance management systems may also support the transformation movement. Employee performance has the potential to be maximised when there is a clear and articulated path to achieving corporate objectives and outlining employee expectations. Therefore, it is essential to keep human resource professionals updated regarding corporate objectives by having them conduct regular reviews of job descriptions so that they remain consistent with the current structure of the organisation.

2.2 Practices for Digital Technology Trends

By developing digital-skills training programs for employees, Human Resources will help workers gain confidence in using digital technology. Furthermore, the use of mentoring and buddy systems will assist employees who are having difficulty operating the tools provided by the new systems. In addition, HR must provide continuous training to employees through internet-based courses.

One other good way to encourage employee adoption of new technologies is to include them in the decision-making stages before rolling out new technological systems. Involving employees in the decision-making process will make them much more accepting of the changes when they occur. HR should also create and implement policies regarding monitoring of and privacy of employee data to help create trust in the employment relationship and help employees interpret appropriately.

HR needs to implement initiatives to improve employee welfare, which, in turn, will also help to decrease stress for employees related to digital responsibilities. Programs that support employee wellness may be screen breaks, mental health programs, and workshops to help employees create a balance between the digital demands of work and their personal lives.

2.3 Practices for Flexible Working

HR is in a position to help facilitate the development of policies regarding an employee's eligibility to work remotely. It can create examples of how it would define an employee's performance. Additionally, protocols will be put in place to communicate with remote workers. In order to avoid the perception by employees of discrimination based on their remote work status, the examples provided here will ensure consistency in the treatment of employees if there is no existing remote work eligibility policy in place. With an established remote work eligibility policy, employees would not have the ability to claim that they felt discriminated against due to not having access to remote work because there is no clear criteria as to who qualifies for remote work opportunities.

HR can train managers on how to safely manage remote employees. Many managers are used to managing their teams in an office environment and may struggle when they have to transition from a

face-to-face to a virtual environment. By training managers on the key components of effective remote management, managers will know how to monitor employee performance and effectively communicate with their teams while also increasing employee satisfaction and morale.

HR can have regular communications with employees to check in, hold virtual team-building activities, and outline the communication standards for digital communication to ensure employee connection while in a remote work environment. Additionally, HR can provide workload management software to help streamline the organisation of remote employee's workload and increase productivity.

3. Critical Evaluation of How Managers Can Ensure Practice Implementation

Managers must ensure compliance with human resource practices. Delaying decisions means creating additional dissatisfaction; therefore, managers must act promptly. To support business transformations, managers must provide employees with an open means to communicate and to answer employees' questions about these changes. Managers should demonstrate a positive attitude about the change so employees will feel less threatened.

In order to implement newly developed Digital Tools/Practices effectively within the organisations, Managers should be role models by showing confidence while using said tools/practices to motivate Employees to adopt their use likewise. Moreover, Managers need to allow sufficient Training Time before having Employee use New Digital Tools/Practices; thus, not rushing Employees into their use. Managers should also listen to and provide support for any Employee issues or concerns about New Digital Tools/Practices and then report these issues and/or concerns to Human Resources, creating a Continuous Improvement Ecosystem.

When implementing Flexible Work Arrangements, it is imperative to maintain Consistency within the Application of Flexible Work Arrangements Policy to prevent potential claims of favoritism. Furthermore, the Manager should have Regular Team Meetings and one-on-one check-ins with Employees so as to ensure all Employees are accomplishing their job duties within the expected timeframe. Additionally, when Managers assess the contributions of Employees, the Managers will focus on the Outcome rather than the Number of Hours each Employee has been present in the

Office; therefore, the Amount of Time each Manager spends with his/her Employees while in the Office is not indicative of the Productivity of that Manager or Employee. Finally, Managers will need to create a mechanism to measure their success with their Flexible Work Arrangement Program. Performance Metrics, Employee Feedback, and Team Discussions will allow Managers to establish a baseline of information regarding how well Human Resources has implemented the new program and whether Managers have successfully implemented it. Therefore, Managers should use the data collected and establish specific areas in which they wish to improve.

Recommendation

The organisation must improve communications between itself and employees regarding business changes so that employees are not left wondering what this means for them. Employees should be provided with ongoing opportunities to develop their digital skills so they may successfully adapt to any new technology while remaining productive. Lastly, whenever feasible, the organisation will need to have fair and reasonable flexible work arrangement (FWA) options in place, and managers will require training to assist employees during the transition from one form of employment to another. The organisation must also review its HR policies periodically and obtain employee input continuously, in order to increase the effectiveness of HR.

Conclusion

Organisations that implement current HR practices, including but not limited to training & development for their employees, utilizing an active two-way communication process with their employees, providing fairly and uniformly for all their employees, and supporting their management to be active and involved with their employees during this challenging time, can assist with addressing the numerous issues associated with changes in business, advancements in technology and changes to our working environment. Working collaboratively and developing a structured plan for working together will allow HR to provide management with the tools to adapt to today's evolving business environment and provide employees with the means to succeed.

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