The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

# Enhancing Workforce Performance

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February 19, 2013






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A recent Manpower Survey identified a lack of confidence in leadership among employees. Today, people fail to gain motivation and engagement while facing new challenges such as increasing productivity to improve efficiency, compensating for workforce reductions and filling skill gaps created by a declining working-age population. Organizations that fail to hold managers accountable for engagement risk being less effective and successful than they could be.

Likewise, the role of managers is changing. They must redefine their mindsets and skill sets to accommodate changes in the way people work. The question arises: How can managers manage change better? What can they do to engage or re-engage their teams while leading them through change? We recommend that immediate managers concentrate on four areas of action:

## Communicate! Help your people understand change

Change is bewildering. People no longer know where they stand or where the organization's ship is heading. Initiating conversations that lead to greater understanding is essential to effective change management. Employees should be clear about:

• What is expected of them at work

• How they can contribute to meeting customers' needs

• What the organization's mission is

• What the organization's business strategy is

Don't assume that employees simply understand. Be proactive in discussing change and what it means for them.

## Provide learning and development opportunities

Employees feeling less secure in the wake of workforce reduction or simply disconcerted by major changes in the workplace want to know there is a meaningful future ahead. The same is true of employees asked to take on new responsibilities. Providing such employees with learning and career development opportunities is among the most important ways an organization can demonstrate its commitment to them.

Immediate managers have a key role to play. In fact, initiating career discussion has a greater influence on how employees rate their managers than just about any other action a manager can take. Talk to your employees about their careers, present them with development opportunities and position them to succeed by providing the necessary tools, resources and support. You will be rewarded with higher levels of engagement.

## Empower your people

Managing change often means learning to manage differently. As organizational structures become flatter, as increasingly diverse workforces demand increasingly diverse needs, and as people with specialized skill sets become harder to find and retain, traditional command and control modes of management are yielding poorer results. According to Manpower Surveys, engagement is positively impacted when employees are empowered to succeed. Ensure that everyone is treated with respect. Ensure that their opinions count. Encourage them to take ownership of their work. And provide them with the authority they need to do their job well.

## Organize work processes to minimize stress

One constant of organizational change is the almost unrelenting pressure organizations feel to improve productivity. As the leaders who interact most regularly with employees, immediate managers normally bear the brunt of inspiring and otherwise enabling employees to do more with less. In this role, a manager treads a fine line. Productivity is tied to engagement, and engagement, our research shows, is strongly impacted by the appropriateness of an employee's workload, by the pressure he or she experiences at work, and by his or her ability to balance work with family life and personal interests. Push team members too hard, put them under too much pressure, ask them to sacrifice too much and their engagement and productivity will actually decline. While external pressures may severely limit managers' room for action, they should at least be aware that emphasizing balance could actually lead to higher productivity. The answer may lie in optimizing work processes. Of the 10 group drivers identified by our study, work processes were revealed to have the greatest impact on engagement.

The recent past, current state and foreseeable future have all combined to create an intense focus on organization performance. That, in turn, has intensified the pressure on leaders and managers to effectively address what sometimes seems like an overwhelming array of issues and challenges. And this pressure is unlikely to abate even when the economy stabilizes and robust growth returns.

However, organizations should consider providing managers with formal support to help them develop the skills and behaviors needed in the changing world of work. Managers can and should play a significant role in engaging their employees. They must ensure that employees understand the organization's direction and their role in helping it achieve its goals; they must contribute to providing employees with career opportunities; they must lean towards a management style that empowers employees; and they must support productivity by helping employees achieve balance.

Original url: https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2013/02/19/enhancing-workforce-performance-a21671