

The importance of employee engagement essay



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Change is a constant in today's modern business activity. As Harvard Business School Professor John Kotter wrote in Fujitsu's 'Fit for Change?' report, "the current rate of change within businesses is faster than the rate at which organisations are improving...many organisations just can't keep up with the speed of change." (www.theinformationdaily.com, 2012). This more and more complex and competitive environment inflicts a greater pressure on the employees; given that the employees are the heart of organisations not approaching them appropriately is one of the main reasons of corporate failure (Argenti, 2009).

Although there is not a lot of research done in this field as it is a relatively new concept (Saks, 2006), understanding the importance of employee engagement and implementing a well-developed internal communications plan is crucial for success, especially during change (Dolphin, 1999). The organisation should be guided by experts through all this complexity if it wants to overcome all the tension that originates from the dynamics of change and survive.

THE IMPORTANCE OF EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

Many authors claim that an organisation's accomplishments, financial performance and employee outcomes may be predicted by the levels of employee engagement. However, it is surprising that even if it is a logical assumption, it appears that employee engagement is waning and that disengagement among the majority of today's workforce is costing huge amounts of money to organisations in productivity loss (Saks, 2006). At present, workers are well educated, have greater expectations than those of past generations, and aspire to have a better understanding of the company they work for (Argenti, 2009).

According to Argenti (2009), most companies' senior managers exclude lower-level employees from taking part in most decision-making. According to Dolphin (1999), employee communication is too often conducted by inexperienced and junior personnel. Therefore, it could be said that organisations do acknowledge the importance of employee engagement to some degree but are not following an appropriate and effective two-way communication strategy that will engage their staff. ORDER AND CHANGE

Every organisation has a culture and identity of its own and these should be consistent, coherent, and clear. When an organisation suffers a big change, it might have the need to acquire a new identity and/or alter or even create a whole new corporate culture (Dolphin, 1999); to be able to direct this change effectively, there must be a well-defined vision. Most of the definitions of vision in this context make reference to an ideal or a future to which the organisational change should lead to (Palmer, Dunford ; Akin, 2006).

Without a firm vision and effective internal communications, the " changes introduced by managers may seem arbitrary and unneeded... vision helps to motivate staff in working towards the change and engaging in what may appear to be daunting or risky actions" (For Kanter et al. , as cited in Palmer et al. , 2006, p. 245). Sutton and Khan (1986 as cited in Jimmieson et al. , 2004, p. 12) argue that when a deep change is about to happen, workers " go through a process of sense-making in which they need information to help them establish a sense of prediction and understanding of the situation".

Palmer, Dunford and Akin (2006) insist in the importance of having their employees well informed about the situation and about what is expected from them, To the extent that the strategic intent is not complemented by clarity as to expected actions, the chances increase employees will fail to convert a change initiative into supporting action at their level of organisation. The Key point here is that the lack of supporting action is not due to overt resistance or even apathy; it is due to the lack of clear understanding of what such supportive action would “ look like. (Palmer et al. , 2006, p. 149) Organisations must therefore aim to achieve a balance between order and change. For instance, they can only operate efficiently if members execute their roles consistently, perform everyday operations, and uphold ordered structures, but they also need to stay open and agile enough to react to and anticipate the fluctuating stresses of today? s changing commercial environment. (Jacobs, 2004, p. 382). Carl Weick (1979, as cited in Jacobs, 2004, p. 82) highlights in his relational perspective the role of communication when dealing with the tension that arouses between these two elements and suggests that organisations are in essence the outcome of communication collaborations. Lewin? s Three Stage Model of Change (Carnall, 2007, p. 70) can be used to help the organisation better understand this process. It consists of three stages: 1. Unfreezing. It is related to cultural change.

Identifying both present behaviours and required behaviours necessary to achieve the organisation? s mission and common goals and analysing the differences, with the participation of the company? s members, is the first step of “ unfreezing” actual change. 2. Changing/Moving. Identifying the

procedures and changes in the structure that will enable the execution of the new behaviours and the implementation and examination of accomplishments. 3. Refreezing. Instilling the new behaviours, attitudes, and values in the group.

This is usually done by rewarding new behaviours, carrying out policies, implementing an effective communication, and educating members in order to support the new culture and behavioural principles; commitment to change is attained in this stage. However, as organisations and their environments are ever more uncertain and dynamic, many changes may occur at once and when one area is refreezing another might be unfreezing or moving. This has led Clark and Clegg to believe that 'successful management in the future must be based on intelligence and creativity and the capacity to question and learn?' executives must learn how to combine continual change with the ability to sustain 'business as usual?' (1998, as cited in Carnall, 2007, p. 78-79). An organisation is dynamic, it is persistently reinventing itself, and therefore must be monitored constantly. THE RISKS OF CHANGE AND THE IMPORTANCE OF ORGANISATIONAL SUPPORT A possible reason for failure could be that organisations simply do not dedicate enough time or attention to understand the psychology of change. Employees' experience is a critical factor that should be considered; it is how people adapt and react to change that makes a difference. Firstly, changes in an organisation are not linear by nature and thus uncertainty is the most common psychological condition that emerges as a result (Callan et al. , 2004); 'much of what we refer to as resistance to change? is really 'resistance to uncertainty' meaning that the resistance originates from the

process of dealing and handling change, not from the change itself (Carnall, 2007, p. 3). Secondly, Palmer, Dunford and Akin (2006) argue that people's perceptions of how they believe that change will affect their personal interests will influence their readiness for it. People have a tendency to support changes that do not seem threatening to their interests and resist those that appear to be harmful. (Palmer et al. , 2006, p. 149). Managers should understand the potential risks of letting employees face changes on their own without a consistent support on behalf of the organisation. Doubt and uncertainty should be dissipated and substituted by safety, and mutual interests should be addressed to avoid feelings of threat.

According to Argenti (2009) effective internal communications not only requires facilitating employees with relevant and sincere information but it should also reinforce their belief that they are significant assets to the company and that subsequently their matters are too. Listening to them and allowing their participation in conversations regarding organisational change will keep them " excited about their work, connected to the company's vision, and in a position to further goals of the organisation" (Argenti, 2009, p. 84). An example that describes poor attention to how stakeholders react to change (whether they are predisposed to welcome it or reject it from the beginning) is Kodak's announcement of its reduction in workforce to its staff, and of its dividend cut to its investors. They ignored the importance of setting an adequate strategy to promote a positive response prior to change and this basically resulted in resistance to change from both groups which led the merger with Compaq Computers a failure (Palmer et al. , 2006, p. 1)

REASSURING EFFECTIVENESS IN COMMUNICATION Before any action is

taken, the organisation must have a sense of the present effectiveness of its internal communications. Argenti (2009) reveals that an excellent way to measure the effectiveness of its actions is by executing communication audits and systematic temperature checks to discover the employees' attitudes towards the organisation itself, their opinion about the quality of the communications they are getting, and whether the messages are being understood.

Once this is done, an internal communication framework can be implemented to work on solutions to any communication deficiencies and satisfy those requests. The Strategic Employee Communication Model and Best-practice Definitions (Appendix A) can be used in a change programme as "benchmarks against which to measure a company's employee communication strengths and weaknesses as well as a model of effective change". According to Barrett (2004), both the model and its different elements were inspired by research done in numerous Fortune 500 companies on what actually works in employee communication.

The best companies integrated many of these definitions in their practice scheme. This model links all principal factors involved in employee communication between them and to the company's manoeuvres and strategy; it analytically breaks down communication into distinguishable and manageable portions and illustrates how interconnected and inter-reliant each portion is when employee communication is placed strategically within the organisation, a must in order to make change feasible. What moves this model from a tactical level to a strategic one is the direct connection to the firm's "strategic objectives and business planning process plus the overlay of

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supportive management with on-going assessment of individual and company communication. " (Barrett, 2004, p. 22). An example of a good communication in practice is what CEO Gordon Bethune did in Continental airlines. Every month, he held an open-house in his own office where employees were welcome to go and talk to him about any issues, suggestions, or complaints, and in numerous occasions he would go himself to meet the employees at their workplace.

This platform for open, informal, and sincere discussion was his trait of leadership. He has been recognised for having significantly improved employee spirit and productivity as well as enhancing the global culture of the firm. This is illustrative of what should be done to have the organisation prepared in the eventuality of change. THE LEARNING ORGANISATION. FROM INDIVIDUALS TO A TEAM In order for the organisation to move as a whole it should behave and act as one.

Organisations should provide the ground for individuals to move out of their sense of self, be flexible, and connect with and contribute to the group consciousness. Many authors emphasise the need of creating learning cultures within organisations in order to achieve success during change. " Teams, not single individuals, are the key to successful organizations of the future and... individuals have to learn in the context of the team" (Appendix B). Hurst (1995, as cited in Carnall, 2007, p. 65) for instance exposes that a performance organisation should evolve into a learning organisation when it faces complexity; " tightly defined tasks, control systems and rigid structures" should be replaced by " recognition, networks and teams". His ecocycle model of eight stages points toward renewal through which the <https://assignbuster.com/the-importance-of-employee-engagement-essay/>

company reinvents itself, more explicitly, “ in which people rethink what they seek to achieve, with whom and how, and thereby recreate the organisation... it is certainly a learning process”. The complexity theory can throw some light on this perspective.

As Darwin, Johnson and McAuley (2002, cited in Carnall, 2007, p. 84) note, the basic idea that lies beneath the relevance of the complexity theory within the literature regarding organisational behaviour is that of a multifaceted adaptive organism described as a coherent network of agents interacting in parallel with no ? command and control framework? and who are ? adaptively intelligent? (Appendix C). This view links to the idea of ? self-organisation? (Carnall, 2007, p. 84). Emery (2004, as cited in Carnall, 2007, p. 85) also presents “ an analysis of open-systems theory-based action research as an enabler of learning and change”.

She starts off by stating that learning is fundamental for viable change and then argues that practitioners must deal with all individuals at every level of the corporation and all practical areas must be implicated in some kind of practise that will enable them to take part in this learning process. However, she highlights that there are certain obstacles that might get in the way such as certain attitudes of the elite members, fail to use a common language throughout the organisation, and diverse framework and priority schemes.

Another issue to tackle is the fact that individuals have different learning rates and they learn in different ways (Carnall, 2007). That is where the role of internal communications plays a significant role. Professional practitioners should be able to identify where communications fail and target unlike

audiences with different techniques to be able to engage them appropriately. We therefore can determine that the objective of education in the long-run would be to create a “ strong sense of listening and of responsiveness [that will] permeate(s) the organisation” (Macleod, p. 9) by: -Forming engaging managers that will know how to communicate cultures and values and treat their personnel with respect. As MacLeod ((Macleod, p. 79)) states in his report, managers who engage “ facilitate and empower rather than control or restrict their staff; they treat their staff with appreciation and respect and show commitment to developing, increasing and rewarding the capabilities of those they manage. ”. -Giving employees a voice and tools to address management with their concerns.

They must feel “ they are listened to and see that their opinions count and make a difference... [And that they are able to] speak out and challenge when appropriate” (Macleod, p. 79) CONCLUSION Employee engagement levels can predict an organisation? s accomplishments and performance as it is claimed by many authors. However, due to today? s complex environment it is more than necessary to build up a strong internal communications strategy. Employees should not be isolated from the organisation as a whole and should be informed and involved in it. The corporate culture should be coherent and the vision should be clear.

If organisations fail to communicate all this properly and engage its employees into believing that change is not synonym of threat, resistance will appear. Resistance may lead to a break in the internal homeostasis and the consequences will show up as a failure when trying to move the organisation forward. REFERENCES Argenti, P. (2009) Corporate

Communication. 5th ed. Singapore: Mc Graw Hill. Carnall, C. (2007) Managing Change in Organisations. 5th ed. Essex: Prentice-Hall. Dolphin, R. (1999) The Fundamentals of Corporate Communications. Butterworth-Heinemann. Jimmieson, N. et al. (2004) A Longitudinal Study of Employee Adaptation to Organizational Change: The Role of Change-Related Information and Change-Related Self-Efficacy. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, 9 (1), p. 11-27. MacLeod, D. and Clarke, N. (2009) Engaging for Success: enhancing performance through employee engagement. [report] Department for Business Palmer, I. et al. (2006) Managing Organizational Change: A Multiple Perspectives Approach. s. l. : Mc Graw-Hill Saks, A. (2006) Antecedents and Consequences of Employee Engagement. *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, 21 (7), p. 600-619. www.theinformationdaily.com (2012) Making your organisation fit to change. [online] Available at: <http://www.theinformationdaily.com/2012/12/21/making-your-organisation-fit-to-change> [Accessed: 4 Mar 2013]. Jacobs, G. (2004) Corporate creative thinking. In: Oliver, S. M. ed. *Handbook of corporate communications and public relations*. London: Routledge, pp. 382-384. Barrett, D. J. (2004) A best-practice approach to change communication. In: Oliver, S. M. ed. *Handbook of corporate communications and public relations*. London: Routledge, pp. 22-24. . APPENDICES Appendix A. Figure 2. 1 Strategic employee communication model (Barrett, 2004, p. 23) *Appendix B. Senge's five disciplines: 1. Systems thinking: everyone must learn how to view things as a whole and that one set of events has impact on others 2. Personal mastery: ? the discipline of continually clarifying and deepening... personal vision, of focusing... energies, of developing patience, and of seeing reality

objectively.? 3. Mental models: ? learning to unearth... internal pictures of the world, to bring them to surface and hold them rigorously to scrutiny? 4.

Build a share vision: leadership is the key to creating and communicating the vision... the leader creates vision but is prepared to have it reshaped by others 5. Team learning: teams, not single individuals, are the key to successful organizations of the future and individuals have to learn in the context of the team (Senge, 1990, as cited in Carnall, p. 164) *Appendix C. Darwin, Johnson and McAuley (2002, Carnall, p. 84) describe a multifaceted adaptive organism: 1. It is a network of ? agents? acting in parallel, often interconnected, ways but without any ? command and control? framework 2. These agents are ? adaptively intelligent? ; constantly seeking and making sense of patterns, testing ideas, evolving and learning. 3. Change is achieved through learning, evolution and adaptation. 4. Control of the system is dispersed throughout the system. 5. Coherence within the system arises out of competition and cooperation among the agents as they see advantage in alliances and other arrangements for mutual support. This view links to the idea of ? self-organisation?. (Darwin et al, 2002, as cited in Carnall, p. 84)