

The Power of Staff Engagement: Some Sharing Session

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What is staff engagement?

Before we proceed further, let us go through the following real scenario:-

Mr. X has ill feeling towards Ms. Z as he has been informed by Mr. B (the manager from other department) that his and some of his colleagues performance appraisal rating has been downgraded after the appraisal review session. According to Mr. B, Ms. Z did not try her best to defend her staffs appraisal rating during the review session with the Senior Management. Mr. X has informed other staff in his department about this incident too.

What is the consequence of this incident if there is no proper engagement session taking place? When we look at this incident from more holistic perspective, there is a possibility that Ms. Z may not be able to defend some of her staffs appraisal rating due to lack of proper documentation, the justification of the rating is not acceptable, the management is aware that some of her staff are not performing, certain individuals may not be fully rewarded due to disciplinary action taken against them before or there is some other more valid justifications implied. We have to ask ourselves why Mr. B made such move to inform Mr. X about this matter? Assuming that he is one of the panels in appraisal review committee, he is not supposed to disclose such information to any third party. What is the benefit that he will

get by doing such action? Don't you think that we can label Mr. B as the instigator too?

Employee Engagement and Internal Communications Specialists from OPC define employee engagement is the means or strategy by which organization seeks to build a partnership between the organization and its employees. The employees are expected to fully understand and committed to achieve organization's business objectives. Organization at the same time must respect the personal aspirations and ambitious of their employees.

Burkholder (2006) highlighted that employee engagement is the extent to which employees place discretionary effort into their work (i.e. in form of extra time, energy and brainpower). Based on the statistics highlighted in Burkholder article, general studies showed that 5 percent increment in employee engagement will contribute 2.5 percent increase in growth. Growth in public sector is measured by stock value.

However, the concept of employee engagement that the writer wants to share with the reader is about employees level of understanding towards Company future direction, what has been achieved by the Company so far, whether the employee (in general) have been treated fairly, areas that requires further improvement from the employees point of view, their

needs and expectation towards the Company and how their roles and responsibilities (regardless of their position) affecting the bottom line of the organization.

Most of the time, we may feel that such effort is not necessary because line managers and their supervisors are supposed to cascade down the information and then provides the feedback to top management or HR Department (depending on the nature of grievances). Some of us may perceive that staff engagement is time consuming and we may end-up leaning our ear to more complaints, grievances and unreasonable demands.

To our surprise, there are lots of employees who are unaware on many important issues around them, which may directly or indirectly impacting them. There are many reasons why certain information does not reach their target groups, the content has been modified to the benefit of messenger(s), the target groups do not understand the content of information and etc. Or you may come across some receivers have high ignorance towards any initiative taken by the organization.

As a HR practitioner who have actively involved in staff engagement, we do agree that time and efforts is required to address unhappy staffs. We need to know the reasons behind their action. Attendance of line managers or heads of department is required when such issue had been addressed to the staff concern, unless the staff requested otherwise. In some unpleasant situation, HR practitioners need to be a mediator too (with the consent from Senior Management). If this negative feeling is not taken seriously and promptly, it will have very destructive connotation towards the

organization. It is not easy to please everyone especially those who have been reprimanded for example.

Also, bear in mind that you are not required to spread all the information to all your staffs. You need to be diligent in disseminating the information based on the sensitivity and confidentiality of the content. There is some information that you can make known to everyone (example: performance appraisal criteria) and there are some information that you may need to restrict to certain individuals only (example: those who have been rated poorly in their performance only get minimum salary increment). Or you may want to inform your subordinate about the seriousness and impact of not performing by sharing with them that "the staffs who had been rated poorly in their yearly appraisal is entitled to minimum salary increment only. Lesson learned from this incident is we must strive to the best in our working performance". No name should be mentioned here. Remember to praise „openly. and to criticize „closely..

Before disseminating any information, it is important to consider the level of understanding of our target participants and choose the language that people understand the most. It is important to get the messages across to the relevant staffs timely, effectively and thoughtfully.

From some of my engagement with the staffs from different levels, they in fact want their immediate superior to consider their inputs, take care of their feeling, get to know them better, listen to them, assist them in career development and do make them feel proud if they are doing the right things. Talking from experiences, disengaged staff

will lead to high absenteeism, exercising excessive emergency leave, always come late to work, care less about the job quality, not willing to work overtime and many other unproductive cause.

Before the Company decides on any form of progressive disciplinary action, we need to identify the reason(s) why they have such disengaged feeling or behaviour. They may choose to disengage when they feel disappointed on certain issues. It is important to bring them back to the right track. If this employee choose not to improve, remain their negative impression towards the Management, not cooperative or even refuse to perform the assigned tasks/ jobs, terminating their employment should be seriously considered to avoid any further damage to other staffs morale. However, it should be done carefully with the right mind and procedures to avoid any industrial relation dispute.

One of the challenges of today's manager is to engage their employees promptly and transparently or else it will lead to more damaging effects. If we have good intention to resolve the issue amicably, there will be a way out for all the issues. Intention is crucial to determine the outcome of staff engagement or any form of communication. Bear in mind that it is important not to take advantage(s) towards your innocent staff (for some genuine case) for your own benefits.

Some of the benefits derived from consistent and continuous engagement are employees have clear understanding on the company directions, enhance better relationship with their immediate superior, subordinates, peers and other superiors (if relevant), willing to take additional job

responsibilities, avoid instigator to send wrong messages, more acceptance in receiving comments or criticisms for the purpose of improvement and increase self-belonging/ ownership.

There must be some form of mechanism to measure whether the information has been disseminated to the right persons and they understand the message clearly. We do not want to see some line managers sitting in "silo" comfortably and did not put much effort to send the right and "non-popular" messages or information to their subordinates, even though it is crucial for their operation. Each and every manager including those with subordinates must take proactive action to engage their staff.

References.

- (1) Burkholder, K (2006). The Power of Employee Engagement – Part 1. http://earthasylum.newsvine.com/_news/2006/10/19/406669.
- (2) How Do We Define Employee Engagement (www.opcuk.com).

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