



Engagement cruise

Royal Caribbean International provides a text book example of how a company can survey its employees to measure engagement levels. And how it can then use this information to transform its HR policies.

When Susan Hooper was appointed to run cruise company Royal Caribbean International European headquarters, she reasoned that the company was not yet getting the best value from its workforce.

In 2005, one year after its HQ (in England) and its smaller offices throughout Europe were established, it went about surveying its staff to find out just what made them tick.

To do this it commissioned business psychologists Get Feedback as to what staff thought of the company, the way it was run and to rate the package that was offered to them.

Hooper explains the logic of this exercise. "I strongly believe that the management team does not hold all the answers. Ideas, momentum and motivation do not just come from a director saying 'do this and do this and this', but from the people who are at the coal face and in touch

programme" to clarify communications and rectify the feedback it had from employees. On benefits, it increased holidays to 25 days a year and on the issue of performance it introduced annual bonuses for managerial staff, where previously it had only been for the most senior staff.

The survey also awakened other thoughts on benefits. It decided that its benefits should match the ethos of the company too, which led them to switch healthcare providers to Bupa.

Hooper says: "We asked what is the best thing for an organisation where we require innovation, where we require immense dedication in terms of time?"

For the future Hooper has also decided that the package should offer a more flexible choice of benefits to meet the different requirements of all employees.

FOCUS GROUPS

Not all the research was carried out through Get Feedback. Royal Caribbean also used some old fashioned focus groups to help look at the internal design of the new offices they are moving into at the end of this year. This led to a more egalitarian and open plan approach.

A common room was also created offering internet access, newspapers and somewhere for lunch. Employees were also given more say over seating plans and colour co-ordination within the office.

The new deal for employees has also brought with it responsibilities for staff. Hooper explains that in creating a superior work environment for staff, it wanted them to take greater responsibility in achieving the firm's aims too.

Aims that she admits include an aggressive growth strategy.

RESULTS

A year on from the first survey, a second was carried out and the results were impressive.

Overall engagement was up by 10pc, the ratings on intention to leave or stay was up by 11pc and there was a 20pc point rise in appreciation of leadership.

Verbally too employees said they were proud of the firm's leadership and proud of the direction the firm was taking. Hooper is understandably positive about the whole process.

"It is not a cheap proposition, but we do it in a very cost efficient way online. It is done in four languages so it covers the whole region.

"When you have these plans in place and you see that what you do makes a difference to what people feel – and we have over achieved our targets this year – it is priceless. It also provides reassurance that the few resources we have are being put against the right things."

David Rowley

with the customers.

"What we try to do is say 'we have not got everything right yet, you tell us how you think it should be and we will try and make it right'."

While the initial exercise serves as a problem solving exercise, Hooper admits that some of the inevitable negative feedback was depressing.

Employees generally said they wanted more information. Particularly about company strategy and how they could contribute to that. They also felt under-performance was tolerated too much.

In terms of benefits they felt that as a company that offered desirable holidays, that they were short changed with only 20 days leave a year.

RESPONSE

First Royal Caribbean set in place what Susan Hooper refers to as a "massive

The science of staff surveys

Psychological employee survey Get Feedback explains its methods

If managing human resources could be as precise as finance it would be far more effective. This is the tempting cherry that business psychological surveying firm Get Feedback dangles for those who are looking to get more from their employees. The firm counts Xerox, 3 – the mobile phone company and npower as clients, all of whom use it to carry out employee surveys to provide them with statistics that provide greater precision in people management.

While many firms carry out internal surveys of staff themselves, Get Feedback's proposition is that they do these all year long and have built up not only expertise, but a wealth of comparative data from its clients. From its experience so far it has found three common strands of feedback. That employees want greater leadership and direction from their company, greater confidence in the future direction of their employer and clearer career development within their job.

Get Feedback has trained psychologists who frame questions and devise suitable responses to answers. Get Feedback business psychologist James Finn believes that half of the trick is in asking questions that help identify what engages your employees.

He says: "What is going to provide an environment for them to go the extra mile and leverage the people aspect of your competitive advantage?"

Once you have that data, he says, an employer is going to

have more confidence in what rewards it places before its employees, and is happier to validate this spend to the board.

The quality of this information is higher, he argues, if it is carried out by a third party. "Often employees are not comfortable giving their innermost thoughts – so having a third party and a very clearly anonymous process actually gives them the confidence to come forward, especially when it comes to verbatim comments where they can really write out what they feel.

"It can take a while to build up that confidence between employers and employees."

The need for this service arose in the mid-1990s says Finn, when the Sears employee case study made probably the most renowned link between engagement and productivity.

He adds: "One of the actions most businesses understand now is the equation that performance = motivation x ability."

The service, he explains, allows a consultative process for change away from the more adversarial approach of 20-30 years ago when the board and HR – and to an extent the unions – decided most of what went on in an organisation. Despite this not everyone is able to put it to good use.

Finn says: "80pc of employers recognise a value in assessing employee data. But just one in five are getting round to develop their business policy on it. HR is keen to do, but it still has to convince the board."

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