

Engaging, communicating and energising employees



The business case for engaging employees is well established. There is a huge body of evidence confirming that engagement drives many important areas such as income growth, productivity, innovation, employee retention and wellbeing.

This paper is taken from a workshop first presented on 15th May 2014 by Michael Sippitt of Clarkslegal LLP, Samantha Gee of Innecto Reward Consulting and James Poole and Scott Addison of Spada. It focuses on the barriers and solutions to effective engagement, as well as forms of collective voice, reward and communication.

Collective voice and employee engagement **Michael Sippitt, Clarkslegal LLP**

“Allowing people the opportunity to feed their views and opinions upwards is the single most important driver of engagement” – CIPD, 2006

It is vital for organisations that employ a hundred or more employees to give them access to a collective voice, as well as an individual one, to ensure they feel that their views are heard and responded to. There are various forms of collective voice, from recognised trade unions to established forums, focus groups, protests and employee representatives.

Although employers' experiences of trade unions vary enormously, there is an increasing trend for the approach of unions to be more sophisticated and international, focusing on campaigns that target reputation and apply stakeholder pressure using social media and PR rather than strikes.

Employee forums, whether they are ICE compliant or tailored to the organisation, and whether they are local, national or international in scope, may exist alongside or instead of recognised unions, and all forms of employee representation can face various challenges and barriers.

These include cultural and geographical differences, senior management perception and attitudes, forums becoming stale through lack of feedback and involvement, nervousness to change, cynicism of employees and managers, short-termism driven by shareholder demands, credibility of HR and costs being cut.

Genuine buy-in and the commitment of time and energy from senior management are essential in nurturing and preserving a relationship of trust and confidence between the representatives, employees and organisation. With the growth in technology and changing expectations of employees, organisations need to embrace more innovative approaches to collective voice rather than the usual staff surveys.

Engagement – what's reward got to do with it? **Samantha Gee, Innecto**

“Pay is one of the top drivers of engagement. Usually described as a ‘hygiene’ factor of little consequence to employee engagement, pay moved up in engagement driver ranking from #6 in 2011 to #3 in 2012” - Aon Hewitt, 2013

Reward is essential for engaging employees. Those who do not feel that their pay is fair in relation to their duties, colleagues and the market can be demotivated and disengaged and this message can quickly spread through the abundance of social media. As well as ensuring that employees feel they are paid fairly, it is important to have and be aware of your organisation's differentiators that lead to employees feeling that they actually get something more – be it working for a great brand, having more involvement in decision making, the ability to give back to the community, sabbaticals or access to flexible benefits.

In the face of the growing proportion of “Generation Y” who are increasingly diverse, comfortable with new technology, independent and concerned with ethical issues, coupled with an apparent reduction in the “job for life” mentality, employers need to carefully consider how to motivate, reward and engage their workforce. Treating people as individuals is key, as is offering flexibility and empowering employees to contribute their ideas.

Harnessing communication to drive engagement **James Poole and Scott Addison, Spada**

Organisations can learn from big brands when it comes to communicating with their staff. World changing brands communicate to their customers by creating desire, participating in dialogue, following their brand identity and creating a culture that embraces change.

Common barriers to effectively communicating with employees include commercial sensitivities and legal issues, scepticism, cultural diversity, staff and manager buy-in and lack of response to initiatives. There is a fine line between not communicating enough with staff and information overload. Timing is also key; the speed and variety of social media mean that the risk of employees being the last to know about changes that impact on them is higher than ever.

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In the face of these challenges, employers need to consider all aspects of their communication – from formal internal announcements, notices and policies to social communication, press and day-to-day leadership. Effective communication should be clear, consistent, coordinated and above all credible – organisations that don't deliver what they promise will struggle to positively engage with their employees.

Employers also need to allow sufficient time in order to consider what needs to be communicated, ideally considering the rationale and vision for the change, the employee's role and contribution, what's in it for the employee, the support employees will have (such as forums, workshops, 121s), as well as what, how and when.

Consideration should also be given to the employees with whom you are trying to communicate, modern workplaces can require having realistic expectations and "asks", better preparation (particularly for managing negativity), adopting an "individualism" approach and keeping messages short and sweet. Identifying key influencers to carry the message and taking stock of how it is working can also lead to more effective communication and, ultimately, engagement.

If you have any questions on the above topics or would like copies of the slides please get in touch using our contact details below.

Contact details



Michael Sippitt
Chairman
Clarkslegal LLP
Tel: 020 7539 8000
Email: msippitt@clarkslegal.com



Samantha Gee
Senior Consultant
Innecto Reward Consulting
Tel: 020 3478 4810
Email: Samantha@innectogroup.co.uk



James Poole
Director
Spada
Tel: 020 7269 1435
Email: jamespoole@spada.co.uk



Scott Addison
Director
Spada
Tel: 020 7269 1430
Email: scottaddison@spada.co.uk

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