Your Voice Resource 3:

TIPS, RESOURCES & CASE STUDIES

Tips and resources provided by Voice Project, the suppliers of Your Voice Staff Survey
www.voiceproject.com.au

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Mission and Values

Staff belief in the purpose, work and values of their organisation

Research conducted by Voice Project has shown that employees' belief in the mission and values of their organisation, the strongest driver of employee engagement. This connection between purpose and passion is strong across sectors, industries and all types of staff – both front line delivery and back-office employees. Practices that support organisational purpose and values meet basic human needs of meaning, stability, esteem and belonging.

Suggested actions

- Communicate Employees need a well-formulated purpose (not a mission statement that is little more than public relations ploy) that offers something for people to
commit to, with leaders providing clear, consistent, frequent and inspiring messages about direction and values. Keep mission and values part of everyday conversation in the organisation, and on meetings agendas. Invite employees to discuss what the values mean in action to help ensure alignment. Put them in documents, posters, websites and other media to help staff remember them.

- **Select** Attract and select people who are already predisposed to sharing the organisation’s values. People are attracted by the values of an organisation that are consistent with their own, so communicate these values in your recruitment brand. Build on this information in initial interviews so that candidates are more likely to self-select appropriately. Include assessment against organisational values in structured interviews.

- **Orient** Design a compulsory, formal orientation that includes the organisation’s history, philosophy, and how the values are ‘lived’ in the organisation. Ensure new recruits have the opportunity to meet senior executives, observe role models, receive positive support from and spend social time with organisational ‘insiders’. Assess best practices and problems of socialisation processes from the perspective of newcomers.

- **Celebrate & reward** Tell stories about actions that reflect the mission and values, especially difficult choices, to reinforce and celebrate what your organisation stands for. Articulate, evaluate and reward behaviours that support the values.

- **Create meaning** Help people to understand the link between their work and the end users of your products or services, and why their role is important. For example, build purpose and impact statements into job descriptions and role orientation, or put up posters for staff on an assembly floor showing where their part fits in the whole, and customers using the product.

- **Align** Talking up values and purpose is a double-edged sword. Employees who are personally aligned with your mission and values will also be more conscious of, and frustrated by, structures that are out of alignment. Constantly evaluate decisions, strategy, systems, policies, practices and people against your values and purpose. Refer to values when communicating the reason for changes and choices.

**Useful resources**

- [http://www.valuescentre.com](http://www.valuescentre.com) and [http://www.valuesatwork.org](http://www.valuesatwork.org)

**Ethics**

Ethical, social and environmental responsibility of the organisation

There is increasing recognition that an organisation’s ethics affect employee outcomes, including behaviours directed towards external stakeholders. Employees often feel better about themselves when associated with an ethical organisation, and may also feel that such an organisation is likely to treat them better.
Suggested actions

- **Management support** Obtain support from management as soon as possible. Management plays an important role in setting standards for ethical behaviour. It is important to lead from the top.

- **Clear expectations** Consider developing an ethical code of conduct, providing your employees with guidelines around what is considered acceptable ethical behaviour. Also outline the manner in which the organisation deals with external stakeholders. For example, describe how suppliers should be treated, how the organisation interacts with local government and community organisations and how decisions affecting the community should be made (e.g. waste management). Ensure this code of conduct is implemented and followed.

- **Intuitive and coherent actions** It is important that socially, environmentally and ethically responsible actions align with strategic goals. These actions need to be relevant to the specific nature of the organisation, industry and region in which you operate. For example, organisations in the finance industry might consider running community education programs on the topic of money management. Organisations with operations in a number of sectors or regions may implement different actions across these areas, rather than taking a ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach.

- **Consultation** Employees differ in their responses to ethical actions and different issues are important to them. When you are implementing ethically based actions it is important to consult your employees. Find out what actions employees expect, what they think the impact will be, and how they are likely to respond to ethical actions.

- **Meet the minimums** Employees are more likely to pay attention to the areas in which ethical performance is poor, than the areas in which ethical performance is high. It is critical that you present or address unethical actions, rather than simply add on socially or environmentally responsible ‘programs’. Ethical actions should not be perceived as attempts to compensate for poor performance in other areas. For example, employees should not believe that you are donating money to local sporting clubs to divert people’s attention away from negative media coverage.

- **Measure success** Think about what you want to achieve from implementing ethically based practices and define clear objectives. Choose ethical, socially responsible or environmentally responsible actions that can help you achieve these objectives. Use clear guidelines to determine if you are meeting these objectives.

**Case Study**

Blackmores is an Australian organisation delivering natural healthcare solutions. It is committed to measuring internal organisational climate, and uses Voice surveys to prioritise action areas. One priority area for Blackmores, and a core value, is social responsibility. “It is important to practice what you preach” notes Philip Daffy, Sustainability Manager, “if you are in the natural health industry, you have to be naturally healthy”.

Blackmores advocates seven steps to sustainability: (1) Establish your sustainability priorities, (2) Walk the talk, (3) Minimise your footprint across all aspects and locations, (4) Establish trust with your consumer, (5) Recognise employee rights, (6) Take control of and responsibility for your supply chain and (7) Report and promote honestly. Staff are encouraged to nominate colleagues who demonstrate behaviour consistent with social responsibility, or other Blackmores’ values, for quarterly awards.

One way in which Blackmores has demonstrated their commitment to social responsibility is their impressive new workplace campus, designed to be both environmentally sustainable and to create a healthy work environment for staff. The Blackmores campus
incorporates a number of environmentally sustainable elements, such as light/motion sensitive lighting, as well as being designed with employee health in mind (e.g. low Volatile Organic Compounds (VOC) emitting furnishings, internal gardens).

Blackmores has faced a number of challenges in their commitment to social responsibility. For example, the new campus condensed a number of existing sites into one, resulting in the need to find a suitable sized site, which still allowed Blackmores to meet their commitments to the environment and employee health. Another challenge is that while Blackmores sees benefits from socially responsible actions (e.g. staff retention, staff health); many corporate practices can contribute to these benefits, meaning stakeholders do not always recognise the return from socially responsible actions.

So, where to now for Blackmores? Philip believes the next big challenge for Blackmores, and indeed a challenge for any business, is gaining complete knowledge and control of the supply and distribution chain, in order to ensure that products are ethical and sustainable form the ‘cradle to the grave’.

Useful resources

- http://www.ethics.org.au St James Ethics Centre

Trust in leadership

Role-modelling, competence and communication skills of senior management

Trust in leadership, particularly trust in senior leadership, consistently proves to be one of the strongest predictors or employee engagement. Trust helps to create and facilitate cooperation and relationships, and provides a very strong foundation for influencing others. Trust in leadership also increases employees’ willingness to go above and beyond what is needed to get the job done. However, trust can deteriorate more quickly than it can be built. Once trust has been abused, people are particularly slow to trust again and substantial effort is required to rebuild.

Suggested actions

- **Trust in employees** Trust begets trust. Demonstrate trust in employees by consulting and involving them in decision-making, and allowing their views to impact decision outcomes. Share the organisation vision and strategy, and rationale for decision. Express confidence in the capabilities of employees, recognise effort and achievements and invest in staff development.
• **Common identity** Similar attitudes between leaders and employees about what is ethical, right, and important are related to trust in leadership. When leaders clearly communicate shared values and goals, and evaluate decisions using these organisational values and goals, employees feel more confident that they understand leaders and what they want.

• **Visibility and accessibility** Help employees get to know leaders through communication and visible action. Develop leaders’ verbal communication skills. Increase frequency, quality, depth and variety of communication and interaction. Suggestion schemes, attitude surveys, mentoring, town hall meetings, regular newsletters, and senior management visiting front-line staff will promote two-way open communication. As organisations grow, webcasts or videos can be a practical way of supplementing (but not replacing!) face to face contact. Role-modelling behaviour so that words and actions are consistent will demonstrate integrity.

• **Supportive environment** Create and maintain a workplace where employees feel supported. This may entail making some short-term sacrifices in order to support others and build trust, such as leaders sacrificing some of their time to mentor staff. Listen, show empathy, and express understanding. Encourage staff to collaborate, rather than playing off competition between employees which can lead to questions about motives. Show sensitivity to differences between people, individual needs and desires. Consider the feelings of employees before acting.

• **Fairness** The importance of integrity grows with leadership seniority. Leaders must keep their promises and treat employees with respect and dignity. Give adequate feedback on tasks and decision-making processes. Explain to employees the criteria for performance related benefits, such as rewards, raises and promotions. When procedures such as performance appraisals are consistent and transparent they are more likely to be perceived as fair.

**Case study**

Each year Roche Pharmaceuticals conducts Voice Engagement Surveys to determine the key drivers of high engagement for their employees. In recent years they have invested a lot of time into Leadership as it is one of the two top drives of engagement at Roche. Despite significant organisational change, Roche continued to achieve high levels of trust in leaders with 90% of staff rating Roche as a well-managed company. These great leadership results are "due to four leadership practices", says Director of Prescription Medicines, Kirsten O’Doherty.

Firstly, Roche leaders involved employees in organisational change decision-making. They ran focus groups and surveyed all employees asking them what changes they would make to the organisation. Employee recommendations were made available on their website, including the outcomes. O’Doherty says, at Roche the “transparency and involvement in decision making is not lip service, it’s real”. Secondly, clarity of direction is important. Regular town hall meetings enable the business plan to be understood by their employees. This allows employees to effectively be involved in the change process.

Thirdly, Roche recognise and reward high performance. Roche “value everybody that contributes but particularly value high performance”. Recently, they have created detailed descriptions of high performance to clarify Roche’s expectations and promote fairness when allocating rewards.

Lastly, Roche invest in their leaders by providing ongoing leadership skills training for managers in local and global programs. Organisational change and leading that change is important at Roche. Skills developed include, for example, how to be a leader in the change process, and the guidance of career development as a manager.
O’Doherty highlights the importance of leading by ‘doing’ rather than by ‘telling’. “People rate you on what they see, not what they hear!”

Useful resources


Cross-unit cooperation

Horizontal collaboration, knowledge and information sharing between sections of an organisation.

Collaborative efforts between organisational units facilitates the pooling of assets, personnel, and equipment to improve problem-solving capacity, cross-fertilisation of ideas, organisational learning and new knowledge creation through information sharing. Leveraging the expertise and knowledge held in different parts of an organisation has become critical for organisations to maintain a competitive advantage through innovation, to deliver superior customer service and to improve employee engagement.

Suggested actions

- **Identification of needs and barriers** Understand the needs of different areas and diagnose the factors contributing to low horizontal cooperation, information sharing and communication, through mechanisms such as a survey, focus groups or interviews. Specific data will help the definition of a targeted approach. Ongoing review of collaborative processes allows future changes to be made.
- **Leadership support** Observable leadership support of inter-team cooperation is critical for encouraging positive collaborative employee behaviours. Leaders should clearly communicate the value of cross-unit cooperation to achieving team and organisational goals as well as model the behaviours expected. Leaders can also eliminate identified barriers, such as redefining competing work goals, reducing competition for resources and clarifying cross-unit role responsibilities.
- **Building organisational commitment** Building a strong organisational brand and identity that is consistently reinforced helps to encourage affiliation with the organisation over team loyalty alone. Leveraging high involvement HR practices can facilitate the alignment of employee interests and their willingness to engage in
activities that support the wider organisation. For example, training and development opportunities signal the organisation’s interest in employees’ long-term growth and increase employees’ belief in their ability to engage in expected behaviours and contribute to the organisation.

- **Goal alignment** Creating similar levels of interdependence between organisational units to achieve work objectives can help overcome perceptions that one function is more important than another. Setting clear goals and accountabilities while minimising competing goals will ensure that individual team objectives do not impede employees from collaborating with other organisational areas.

- **Reward and recognition systems** Expected behaviours need to be outlined and evaluated directly as part of the performance appraisal process, signalling to employees the importance of these activities as part of their role. Consider structuring incentive and/or recognition schemes that recognise collaboration and cooperation with other departments/units within the organisation.

- **Cross-unit contact** Creating opportunities for horizontal face-to-face communication can foster trust and respect between areas, reduce in-group biases and improve intergroup perceptions, which can increase employees’ willingness to coordinate with others outside of their immediate team. More structured opportunities for employees to engage with those outside of their immediate team can be created through cross-unit project teams, training to facilitate organisational learning, networking events and job rotations.

**Case study**

When researching initiatives to improve cross-unit cooperation in organisations, we came across a comprehensive partnering program that Sydney Water had embarked on to improve the way Operations and Maintenance (O&M) worked together to deliver services to its customers. Despite strong O&M performance, engagement and ownership was low, lines of accountability were unclear, and collaborative relationships were lacking. Sydney Water’s goal was to attain long term process and business improvements, and achieve O&M excellence through trust-based collaboration. Sydney Water have been generous in sharing the key initiatives they implemented to achieve this goal.

As part of a broader change management program, a multi-faceted partnering strategy was implemented by the organisation to engage leaders and staff at all levels in O&M and improve relationships. The first stage was the creation of an Operations and Maintenance Division with clear accountabilities to work collaboratively as equal partners towards the common goal of O&M excellence. Governance was, and still is, key in driving and maintaining change momentum. In the four months prior to launching the new divisions, and for several months afterwards, a Program Leadership Team (including General Managers (GM), O&M Business Improvement Managers, Partnering Program Manager, HR) met weekly, now fortnightly to oversee the O&M change management program. Next followed a series of engagement workshops with the leadership teams, after which employees at all levels participated in partnering workshops to cascade the importance of collaboration through the organisation. Employees were accredited as facilitators of the sessions which helped to foster involvement and strengthen employees’ sense of ownership.

The workshops focused on: exploring the highlights, lowlights and ‘rub points’ of the O&M partnership; assessing the health of the relationship through a survey; identifying the desired target state for the O&M relationships; and action planning for making improvements. Leaders were responsible for refining action plans following the workshops and completed plans were posted to the intranet to improve transparency and accountability. Monthly follow-ups were implemented to maintain traction. Six to nine
months following the initial workshop, a review workshop was conducted to acknowledge progress and address remaining ‘rub points’. An annual relationship survey was also implemented to measure progress, and each employee had partnering KPIs incorporated into their performance development plan.

Additional communication channels continue to be leveraged to maintain focus on partnership objectives. Examples include an online community of practice; toolbox talks, regular O&M update emails to staff, a staff Maintenance Improvement Suggestion Scheme and regular GM road shows where leaders across both divisions in the depots and plants present back to the GM on what they are doing to achieve agreed objectives.

A number of follow-up measures indicate significant improvements since implementing the organisational restructure and the partnership strategy including: a consistent increase in the quality of working relationships between operations and maintenance since the 2009 baseline, a decrease in customer complaints with Sydney Water’s product from 3,542 in 2009 to 1,872 in June 2011, and an increase in the reliability of assets and processes with July 2011 showing the best performance to date. Performance metrics that have remained static are the focus of ongoing strategies.

Useful resources


Involvement

Employee consultation and involvement in decision-making

Employee involvement is linked to positive changes in employees’ attitudes, overcoming resistance to change, increasing commitment, trust in management, and productivity. Despite its importance, employees consistently rate involvement as one of the aspects of work they are least satisfied with.

Suggested actions

- **Employee decision-making** Encourage employees to make suggestions and empower them to make changes to their daily work processes. Ensure the change process is continuous, allowing for ongoing input. Educate and train employees, as they may be new to offering ideas and making decisions of this nature. Organisational surveys, suggestion schemes, continuous improvement systems, quality circles and self-directed work teams are all
ways of involving staff. A quick Google search will provide you with more information about these strategies.

- **Clear organisation direction** Regularly communicate the vision and strategy of the organisation to employees. It gives employees the structure and information needed to make autonomous decisions and changes that are effective and in line with organisational goals.

- **Communication** Facilitate information flow up and down the organisation. Set up meetings, at least once a month, so there are opportunities for two-way communication between management and staff. Have an open door policy at work and use open-ended questions to elicit feedback from employees. In times of organisational change, more communication is needed. Consult with staff particularly about decisions that will affect them.

- **Management commitment** Involving staff can be challenging for some managers who are used to directing rather than listening. Management will need to take on a supportive role and give up a little authority. They need to proactively encourage, pay attention to, and act on employees’ opinions. Consulting on decisions will almost always take more time than making them autonomously, and managers must be convinced that it is worth the effort. Education and training may be required to assist in changing management views and behaviour.

- **Structures for evaluation** Develop and frequently review strategies to involve employees. Have an evaluation process in place to decide the value of each idea made by employees. Always respond to ideas, without making promises that cannot be kept. Provide feedback on decisions where ideas were not implemented.

- **Feedback on action** Communicate actions taken and explicitly link them with the involvement process. Acknowledge employees for their part in any improvements. This will encourage continued involvement from staff.

**Case Study**

The most recent ResMed Global Voice Climate Survey was conducted in 2008. Andrew Cameron, Head of Manufacturing – Patient Interface Unit in ResMed Australia, presented their results to his 200 employees. Together they chose a few priority areas, one of which was involvement.

In response, Andrew asked each employee to come up with one idea for improving their job that could be implemented within a year. He empowered employees by acknowledging “you are here all day ..... you’re the ones that are best equipped to make a decision”. He was confident that the organisation direction was well known as it is communicated by him every 6 to 8 weeks, and by the COO quarterly.

Some ideas were simple – for example, moving paperwork from one side of the campus to the other by allocating a post bag. Every single idea was given attention. Ideas not able to be implemented were discussed with the employee who made the suggestion. All staff had put forward an idea within 2 weeks. “Within 3 months we actually implemented the whole 200 ideas. It was mind-blowing. We won the COO Continuous Improvement Award of the month for not only recognising 200 ideas, but realising these 200 ideas”. The enthusiasm generated has resulted in improvement ideas being suggested daily. In 6 months their unit achieved savings worth $50,000. “It wasn’t so much the money that was motivating, it was about making it an easier and more improved place to work with efficiencies behind that. If you talk to the employees, they love this program”.


Andrew also involved staff in communicating progress through a “visual feedback loop”. “A lot of the actions that we see happening on the floor, we could capture photographically and remind ourselves and our employees about the actions that we are taking”. Displayed on posters around the work area, this innovative and effective form of communication has generated much excitement, and featured in ResMed’s global magazine.

Useful resources


Recognition

Recognising achievements and contributions of employees, in addition to financial remuneration

Recognition programs are designed to attract, motivate and retain talent. They communicate what is important to the organisation, and encourage high performance amongst employees through reinforcement of desired behaviours. Recognition promotes a strong sense of leadership and support, and significantly impacts employee productivity, satisfaction and engagement. It also plays a role in reducing turnover and absenteeism in the workplace, and is often more cost-effective and flexible than cash awards. Although some organisations are improving in this area, feedback from employees indicates a need for greater recognition in the workplace.

Suggested actions

- **Align with organisational goals and values** Recognition programs designed to reinforce an organisation’s mission, strategy and values encourage employees to act in line with what is important to the organisation. When recognition programs do not align with the organisation’s goals and values, employees may receive mixed messages and be rewarded for acting in a way that does not facilitate organisational objectives. Create recognition criteria based on organisational values, and present awards to employees who best exemplify these values to emphasise their importance and demonstrate appreciation for those who display them.

- **Tailor to individuals** Recognition should be meaningful to and valued by all individuals who receive it. This suggests that recognition should be tailored to each employee (or groups of employees) based on their personal preferences and circumstances. Some employees are interested in praise and feedback, some want greater support, involvement, or learning and development opportunities, while
others prefer flexible working hours or greater autonomy. This means that the more choice employees have around the recognition options available, the better. And the best way to ensure that the recognition is valued by employees is to simply ask them.

- **Apply equally and consistently** There is a risk of losing the power and value of recognition if it is viewed as unfair or inconsistent. For recognition to be perceived as fair in its process and outcomes, all employees must have equal opportunity to earn recognition, with equivalent recognition to all employees who meet the criteria. Make the recognition process transparent by clearly communicating to all employees the criteria for receiving recognition and showing that it is consistent across teams and departments. Consider also involving employees in developing these criteria.

- **Gain key stakeholder support and commitment** Every recognition program requires support and commitment from key stakeholders in order to be successful and sustainable. It is important to obtain buy-in from management so that resources can be provided to develop and implement the recognition program, and to build a culture of recognition. You may need to educate management on the importance and impact recognition. For example, research shows that a simple “thanks” will lead to greater pro-social behaviour among employees and willingness to put in extra effort for the organisation. Involve employees in the planning stages, and allow a degree of ownership over the way recognition is delivered.

**Case study**

Qantas Staff Credit Union (QSCU), one of Australia’s largest credit unions with 84,000 members, recently achieved over 20% improvement in staff satisfaction with rewards and recognition practices over two years. Wendy Tomlins and Wendy Hadenham, from Human Resources at QSCU, attributed these improvements to an overhaul of their rewards and recognition program in the context of a broad change to their performance review framework for individuals and teams. “Once we asked people to be accountable for their own performance and started measuring it, it meant that we could reward people for good performance”.

While achievements such as length of service milestones continue to be celebrated in newsletters, there has been more targeted recognition of employees who demonstrate QSCU’s values and core competencies to support the strategic direction of the organisation.

Wendy Hadenham gave an example of employees who are nominated by their peers to receive an award for displaying each of QSCU’s four values, and an overall annual winner who is given the opportunity to receive learning and development of their choice. “If we hadn’t aligned behaviours to what we want and what we need, then I don’t believe we would have been as successful”.

Integrating the recognition program into the performance review system has allowed employees to “discuss what it is they really want” with their manager on a monthly basis. Wendy Tomlins acknowledges that while people like to be rewarded through remuneration, survey feedback indicated many wanted non-cash awards. “We had people who were nearing retirement that wanted access to financial planning.....we had Gen Y who were more interested in training and development. We had to make our rewards and recognition tailored to the individual”.

One key factor of QSCU’s success was gaining support from senior management. Wendy Tomlins stresses that “you really need to understand how a business ticks” to lead change and establish credibility with stakeholders. QSCU’s CEO, Scott King, has been a key figure in communicating reward and recognition changes to staff. “He comes to every
onboarding day. They’ve been a great tool for communication so we set up (recognition
and performance criteria) right from the start”.

Wendy Tomlins says the recognition initiatives have helped to raise awareness of the
outstanding efforts and performance of employees and to “drive a high-performing
culture”. While employee engagement (including intention to stay) has increased by more
than 10%, making performance and recognition more visible has also led to process
improvements and greater productivity for the business. “Something you clearly see is
that our profit has increased, and our headcount hasn’t, which is fantastic.”

Useful resources

- Corporate Executive Board. 2006. Creating an effective reward and recognition
  program. Retrieved from
  n/docs/CLC-Rewards&Recognition.pdf
  http://147.126.1.230/hr/pdfs/eregSHRM.pdf
  Workforce Management (October) 41-44
- Nelson, B. 2005. 1001 ways to reward your employees (Vol 2). New York:
  Workman Publishing Company

Performance Appraisal

Frequency, fairness, and clarity of performance evaluation

Performance appraisals have the potential to significantly improve both individual and
organisational performance. Yet the ways in which performance appraisals are conducted
strongly impact employee engagement, perceptions of organisational fairness, and can
even negatively impact performance.

Suggested actions

- **Prioritise** Although it may be difficult or confronting for managers, providing
  feedback to employees on how well they are doing is necessary for reinforcement or
  improvement of performance. Keep managers accountable for conducting
  performance appraisals to provide each employee with formal feedback every 6
  months. Have a template to document the process and results, and a plan for
  tracking development. Encourage managers to provide informal feedback on
  performance between formal appraisals, as more frequent feedback is perceived as
  fairer and allows staff to improve their performance prior to the performance
  appraisal.
- **Clear Purpose** Ensure that employees understand who will see their appraisal
  results and how they will be used, e.g. for professional development, training, career
  or succession planning. Research suggests that greater positive gains in
  performance can be achieved when the performance appraisal is used solely for
  developmental purposes rather than to determine pay and promotion.
- **Employee voice** One of the strongest predictors of positive outcomes from
  performance appraisals is the extent to which employees participate in the
  discussion. Managers must not do all the talking. To support participation, provide
employees with the appraisal template/form in advance of the meeting. Encourage them to rate their own performance and note reasons and examples to support their self-ratings. Promote two-way communication during the performance review, jointly decide how to rectify any problems and establish mutual goals for future performance. Provide a formal appeal procedure for employees to challenge inaccurate or unfair evaluations.

- **Evaluation Criteria** Base the performance evaluation criteria on a job analysis or competency dimensions, align with organisation values and goals, and communicate to employees well in advance. The most effective feedback is candid, specific and focussed on task behaviours and performance only, not on the person or any part of the person’s self-concept such as motives and traits. Give reasons and examples for the ratings assigned to the employee, as well as examples of desired behaviours for higher ratings.

- **Appraiser** The appraiser should be familiar with the employee’s typical performance (i.e. their efforts) as well as outcomes, and trained how to conduct the review and evaluate performance. Perceived supervisor support and fairness is critical for employee’s engagement in the process and subsequent improvement initiatives.

**Case Study**

Sylvanvale Foundation, a growing not-for-profit disability organisation with 60 years’ service, recently developed and implemented a new performance appraisal system across the organisation of 530 staff. The percentage of staff rating performance appraisal practices favourably improved by 27% from 2008 to 2010, and positioned them as the highest rated disability services organisation (out of 30 organisations) on performance appraisal.

Wendy Greenhalgh, HR Manager, said the former performance appraisal system “wasn’t being implemented consistently across the organisation; there was no way to measure its utilisation, it was very haphazard”. All their records were paper-based so a lot of the focus was around who had completed their reviews and when they were due to be completed. The performance appraisal templates are now electronic, and they have a HR Information System which will enable HR to run timely reports and give managers advance notice of performance appraisal meetings.

One challenge was managing staff expectations and fears. Some long-term staff had never been through the process so “for some people it was frightening; they didn’t know what to expect”. Employees were reassured by communicating the aims of the performance appraisal system (i.e. professional development, learning, career and succession planning) and encouraging their input to the process. The performance appraisal template is given to the employee in advance. This way staff know what will be discussed at the performance appraisal interview so “there are no surprises”, and staff are able to prepare examples to support their ratings.

HR explained the process to all front-line managers. In small groups, managers were given the template, the policy, and “did a role-play around how we expected it to be delivered.” Managers were educated to explain why an employee was rated in a particular way, and encourage two-way dialogue to allow employees to voice their thoughts. Greenhalgh says managers ask questions such as ‘tell me how you think you’ve gone in that area’ to elicit employees to talk first. The manager is then able to agree and provide their own examples, or they have the chance to say, for example, “In this circumstance I felt you didn’t manage that particularly well” and then clarify why.
Useful resources

- http://www.cipd.co.uk (The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development)

Career Opportunities

Investment in career planning, skill development and opportunities for career progression

Regardless of generational cohort or tenure, career opportunity within an organisation has a significant impact on employee engagement and bottom line results. One of the primary reasons why people leave companies is lack of personal growth, job challenges and opportunity for career progression.

Suggested actions

- **Competency framework** Provide a clear competency profile that allows all employees to identify their position within the organisation, identify current development opportunities and potential pathways for career progression (both upwards and outwards). Competencies should include the required skills, knowledge and behaviours for each level, role and job family.
- **Developmental assessment** Give your staff the opportunity to participate in developmental assessments to determine current competencies and enable the identification of gaps between current and future planned positions. A self-assessment skills audit tool may be created and made readily available to allow staff to regularly monitor progress in closing competency gaps. Development assessments can also be used as a tool for identifying and fast-tracking a pool of high potential employees.
- **Career Planning** Talk with staff about their career goals. Career coaching can be integrated into the performance appraisal process, with managers assisting in the development of personal career interests, goals and the formulation of realistic career pathways in line with employees’ abilities and the long-range plans of the organisation.
- **Tailored learning & development** Offer support and guidance for the development of an action plan in which development needs are formally identified and prioritised and relevant developmental and training options are tailored to learning style and career objectives.
- **Strategic Career development options** Get creative about developing future oriented options that are focused on the development of competencies to meet career objectives. Options can include job enlargement or rotation, lateral movement, cross-organisation task forces or even secondments in partner organisations to develop a breadth of organisational exposure, an understanding of different functional areas, peer learning, new skills acquisition and a new network of contacts. More specific development of professional skills can be facilitated through formal mentoring, development centres or formal education and training.
Case Study

Over a number of years, Cancer Council Queensland has improved its career planning and development capability with measurable results. In 2005, Voice Climate survey results revealed some staff believed that there was a lack of career opportunities and effort spent on career development. Management and HR took a number of steps in response.

Firstly, career planning was incorporated into the performance review cycle. Employees were given the option of discussing their career aspirations with their manager. The intention was to have an open and honest conversation about their real career intentions without impacting their perceived HR record. As such, managers were also trained and equipped to have these conversations. There was a positive response to this initiative with a 75% uptake of the career discussion option.

Secondly, processes were put into place to ensure that all jobs were advertised internally first before looking for external applicants. Staff can now easily access current job vacancies.

Finally, the organisation was restructured into a smaller number of divisions to improve the cross-department cooperation and manage the growth of the organisation. This action enhanced the awareness of job opportunities across the organisation.

By 2008 the percentage of employees rating career opportunities favourably had improved 20% demonstrating a significant transformation in perceptions of career development. Cherie Everett, the Executive Manager HR, believes that this combined with other HR and management initiatives has contributed to measurable improvement in performance and a reduction in staff turnover from 25% to 6%.

Useful resources


Flexibility

The extent to which staff believe they can control when, where and how long they work.
Workplace flexibility is more than just flexible work policies. It is a sense of trust and respect between employer and employee, a supportive workplace culture, and a sense of control over one’s job and working conditions. Organisations with workplace flexibility are more successful at attracting and retaining employees, even if the employees don’t use the policies. A sense of control over work is a strong mechanism for managing stress, and is linked to less sick leave, less work-related impairment and high job commitment.

Suggested actions

- **Manager attitudes** Encourage and educate supervisors to be accepting and supportive of workers’ lives outside work. Changing individual attitudes towards flexibility can be a challenge, but educating supervisors as to the benefits and illustrating their key role may help. Managers and supervisors have a strong influence over whether or not formal workplace flexibility policies are available for use and to whom they are available. The usability of flexibility policies is positively linked to organisational commitment, whereas the mere presence of flexibility policies is not. Informal flexibility, attitude towards flexibility and the acceptance of its use are key to successfully utilising the benefits of workplace flexibility.

- **Myth busting** More hours equals higher productivity is not always true. Long hours can have a negative effect on productivity by straining employee engagement and increasing stress levels. Similarly, the mistaken belief in some organisations that part-time employees are less committed and of less value than full-time employees can deter people from requesting part-time hours. Research shows that part-time employees are equally as engaged, but are often less stressed than their full-time colleagues.

- **Consistency** Managers might worry about ‘everyone’ wanting flexibility. However, the benefits of workplace flexibility outweigh the costs, as commitment and staff retention can be increased amongst staff generally, but not everyone will require flexibility. Flexibility policies should be applied consistently, particularly within work groups, and promoted to all employees.

- **Every employee is different** Individual needs, preferences, and circumstances will reflect the type of flexibility people need. ‘Flexibility fit’ is a powerful positive predictor of employee engagement. Provide a range of flexibility options, such as schedule flexibility – part-time work, flexible work hours, alternative leave arrangement or part year employment; location flexibility – working from home or remotely; flexible job design – phased retirement, job sharing.

- **Promotion of flexible work options** Just knowing that flexible work options are available has potential positive outcomes for all employees such as lower depression, less work/life conflict and lower turnover intention, even if they don’t use it. Increasing employee understanding of policies and available resources can positively impact job commitment in the organisation.

Case Study.

Regents Garden is an aged care facility that operates three residences in Western Australia. Their facilities accommodate for independent living through to full high-care. In a recent Voice Survey staff rated Flexibility as a strength of Regents Garden, scoring in the top quartile across all industries – a rare feat for an organisation in an industry that often struggles with inflexible shift work.

Executive Director, Ann McAdam, says the culture at Regents Garden is the key to their flexible workplace success. There is no formal flexible workplace policy, but their culture has grown organically as a response to individual and business needs. “We’re not very formal people. When it comes to things like OH&S we have to be formal, but with
flexibility we probably don’t do anything that is greatly different to others as far as procedural things go”. Ann explained that Regents Garden’s aim of encouraging residents to be comfortable, happy and live life to the full can only be facilitated by a workplace culture that encourages employees to do the same.

Regents Garden tries to leverage its strengths to meet employee need where possible. They have 24 hour care, and therefore, options for people to work outside of traditional business hours. The majority of staff are hired on a permanent part-time basis and rosters are modified regularly. It is common for supervisors to make an effort to accommodate people’s requests for changes to their work hours, if possible, even though some types of workplace flexibility, such as work from home are not an option. They also take advantage of their work environment to accommodate parents who have conflicts between child care and work rosters. Employees occasionally bring their children to work where they talk to residents, watch TV, or even teach residents how to use a computer.

Regents Garden recognises and accepts that each employee is a whole person with their own circumstances and responsibilities. They need employees who are loyal and genuinely care for residents in order to achieve success. “Our management values fairness. We try to be approachable from the CEO down. If the situation arises, we can be tough, but above all we are fair”.

Useful resources


**Wellness**

Supporting psychological health and employee wellbeing

Healthy workplaces provide employees with the ‘right’ amount of challenge and support to successfully perform and enjoy their work. Employee wellbeing has significant implications for workforce sustainability, WHS incidents and costs, as well as performance.
Suggested actions

- **Involvement and influence** One of the primary drivers of wellbeing is how much control an individual feels they have over their work. People are able to cope better with higher demands if they are given flexibility in where and when they work, autonomy in how they complete tasks, and input into decisions that affect their work. It is particularly important to consult with staff about change. Provide high quality information about how, when and why changes will occur to reduce employee uncertainty and provide a sense of agency and control.

- **Workload management** Assess hazardous psychological demands including stressors, breaks, resource deficiencies, incentive systems, repetitive tasks and shift work. Consistently working long hours significantly increases the risk of major mental health problems. A workplace culture encouraging a healthy work-life balance and recovery time away from work can be role-modelled and supported by leadership. Workload also affects perceptions of fairness, as employees balance up their efforts versus their rewards. Perceived inequity in this exchange can lead to burnout, depression, anxiety and stress. Pay attention to due process and recognise employees for their contributions.

- **Training** Employees who believe they are adequately resourced in terms of knowledge and skills feel more supported by their employer and better equipped for challenging tasks. Give employees specific and relevant on-the-job training, and opportunities to identify, develop and leverage their strengths.

- **Social support** Quality work relationships characterised by empathy and approachability improve employees’ resilience and coping mechanisms. Equip supervisors with skills to conduct coaching conversations and to proactively check in with staff about both personal and work-related issues. Create opportunities for staff to interact and connect socially. Have processes in place to intervene if an employee looks distressed at work.

- **Positive workplace** While it is important to reduce negative cognitive and emotional impacts of stress, it is also important to increase the balance of positive thoughts, behaviours and emotions for healthy functioning. Positivity increases the ability of employees to cope with stress and build resilience. At work, these positive emotions are contagious – being passed on from team members and supervisors to affect the whole group. Focus on learning from successes and what’s working. Celebrate achievements, affirm your organisation’s strengths and practice gratitude. Identify and acknowledge employees’ character strengths, and find new ways for staff to apply their strengths.

Case Study

Knox Grammar School is an independent K-12 boys’ school, with over 2,300 students and 360 staff. Like most in the education sector, Knox Grammar School has highly passionate staff, yet in 2006 it found itself not performing academically, and in 2009 dealing with negative media coverage. Staff morale was generally low, with a culture of separation between departments. Head of Positive Education at Knox, Dr Steve Zolezzi acknowledges that it was a hard moment. “People were saying we can’t go on working like this at Knox ... it was probably a most powerful trigger for change”.

After a wide search, the executive identified positive psychology as an evidence-based body of research to develop a school-wide positive education program. This involved a strategic 3 year plan, informed by student exit surveys and staff interviews to not only change the structure and content of individual and group mentoring sessions, but educate and enable all staff to make changes in teaching methods and interactions. “Things were going to be done differently and we were going to talk differently at the school”. A top
down staggered approach was used to role-model, engage and empower senior leaders, followed by staff, and finally students. They invested heavily in an intensive 3-day course on positive psychology, mental health, wellbeing, and how to conduct coaching conversations. All executive and staff, including cleaning, administration, computer and sports staff participated in the training, ‘because we wanted everyone to be conversant with positive psychology and the language to be totally transforming of the old culture’.

Although the changes added to staff workloads, Voice Survey results showed staff wellness actually improved during the process. Firstly, social support was bolstered through buddy systems and structured mentor group meetings to ‘share tips and continue to get support from psychologists and share what is going on’. Secondly, the management style of senior leaders became more consultative and empathic. Staff were invited to contribute ideas on age-appropriate programs, given choices about age groups to work with and formats for mentoring sessions, and encouraged to pursue special interests aligned with the program. Finally, extensive training and coaching were provided both in positive education and in core curriculum. Staff were also rewarded and acknowledged for their involvement.

The impact of the program has been transformational. Staff ‘like telling stories now’ about how positive psychology has reinvigorated tired teaching methods, given them greater confidence, a sense of value and a focus on strengths. For Zolezzi “the most gratifying thing is if you walk into the staff room you will see that people are having nurturing conversations”, and he’s observed more acts of kindness and generosity. “If you’ve got happy teachers that translates into a happy school”. Feedback from students and parents has been positive, and there is now optimism about the future for the school with staff feeling like “we’re going to go somewhere, we’re on a mission”.

Useful resources:

- http://workplacestrategiesformentalhealth.com
- http://www.guardingmindsatwork.ca/info/gmaw_resources/actions_tools
- http://unhealthywork.org/workplace-stressors

Respect

Creating a workplace where individual differences are respected and bullying is prevented.

Workplaces that foster a culture of mutual respect and diversity enjoy higher employee engagement and productivity. This type of environment also discourages workplace bullying – behaviour that threatens, intimidates, humiliates, or isolates people at work, or undermines their reputation or job performance.

Suggested actions

- **Training** Proactively provide appropriate coaching, training and on-the-job learning to promote positive and constructive interactions. Educate staff on how to display
respectful behaviour, communicate more effectively, develop group decision-making techniques, and recognise bullying and harassment. Managers can be coached on how to work through threatening issues and learn to replace interpersonal aggression with emotional awareness and control. Emphasise the importance of early intervention when inappropriate workplace behaviour occurs. Anti-bullying training should promote awareness of the problem, its psychological and economic costs, appropriate courses of action and consequences of non-compliance.

- **Leaders' model respectful behaviour** Successful and sustainable anti-bullying programs require support and commitment from organisational leaders to add credibility, and to build a culture of respect. Research has shown that leaders' behaviour sets the tone for what is acceptable in the workplace, is imitated by others, and therefore perpetuates the culture.

- **Implement a policy** Having a strict and clear anti-bullying policy in place allows transparency and support for those seeking relief from bullying. It should include a definition of what bullying is, what it is not, and the procedures to take if bullying occurs. It is also useful to involve staff in the policy development to increase awareness and encourage ownership of the policy. Most importantly, it should be applied consistently. Behaviour which reflects a lack of respect or intimidates others needs to be immediately and actively discouraged and where appropriate, be subject to disciplinary action with reference to the policy.

- **Clearly define roles** Research has found that when employees are unclear about their roles or are faced with conflicting demands, bullying and perceptions of bullying are more likely. Ensuring employees know what is expected of them and others promotes a workplace that is more stable and encouraging of optimal performance and cooperation.

- **Encourage feedback** Regular surveys to measure staff perceptions of their environment and their level of satisfaction with team members will give an idea of how people are getting along. Dissatisfaction and frustration are not always obvious, but tend to enable bullying. Anonymous feedback can also uncover issues such as fraud or other unethical behaviour, which perpetrators often mask with controlling and bullying behaviour.

- **Reward** Respectful behaviour should be recognised and rewarded. This is often codified in organisational value statements. Rewarding value alignment encourages positive behaviours in line with team values and signifies the importance of the way things are done, not just performance outcomes.

**Case Study**

Voice Project works with an Association which provides services to a number of member organisations. They employ approximately thirty staff across five departments, each with a senior manager. When a new CEO was recently appointed, she observed numerous dysfunctional relationships and poor team dynamics. In order to gauge the extent of the issue, baseline data was gathered via Voice Project’s Engagement and Culture Survey. Results revealed less than half of staff felt that bullying and abusive behaviours were being prevented or discouraged. Investigations revealed a culture of intimidation and fear with no formal feedback system in place, aggressive interactions, personal attacks, blaming, isolation and withholding information and support. Some of these behaviours had been displayed by the previous CEO and tolerated in other managers and staff.

The new CEO immediately addressed the issues by updating and developing the organisation’s policies. She explained “So that the staff knew that I was taking it seriously, the first policy they got was the ‘Bullying and Harassment’ one ... they know the policy is there, it will be implemented, and there are consequences”. This policy outlines what bullying is, what it is not, how to detect it, and steps to be followed in cases of
inappropriate workplace behaviour. Courses of action include contacting a third party organisation which is available to hear grievances and to escalate issues which employees believe have not been handled appropriately by the CEO.

A strong stance was taken against aggressive exchanges, and 360 degree feedback enabled managers to reflect on exactly how their behaviour was impacting their co-workers. The CEO commented that one manager, who had previously been described as a bully, has stopped being aggressive. “I gave him some fairly honest feedback about his behaviours and how it was being seen, and he's worked really hard on it ... now people actually respect him and go to him for advice”. Another manager faced with a similar ‘tough conversation’ chose to leave the organisation.

Additional activities to build a more positive and respectful culture included a number of team-building exercises, and increased formal and informal opportunities to interact. ‘I knew I (needed to) start dealing with the people and getting them to trust and respect each other, which was about getting to know each other..". The CEO has been coaching her managers in analysing others’ reactions and behaviours, taking others’ perspectives, and having ‘crucial conversations’. She plans to roll out a similar program for all staff.

Twelve months on, there has been a dramatic decline in perceptions of bullying and significant increases in satisfaction with the workplace. This has been demonstrated by improvements in approximately 85% of the items in the culture survey. Teams are working together, and the workplace – although extremely busy – has become more harmonious than ever. “It’s good now .... there is certainly no yelling, and there is laughter”.

Useful resources