

## Remote Working and Employee Engagement

There is no doubt that the challenges presented during the current health crisis have disproportionately impacted employees in the Community and Voluntary sector in terms of health, safety and wellbeing, demarcation of work and personal life as well as employee engagement. The promotion of employee engagement does not leave room for complacency and employers need to ensure they are actively engaging with employees in the approach of the year end and into 2021 in a managed and coordinated manner.

Employee engagement can be defined as the mental and emotional connection employees feel towards their places of work, all of which drive their motivation, productivity and ultimately efficiencies. 28% of Organisations surveyed in the Adare Human Resource Management Barometer Series 4, identified remote working practices as one of the top challenges in 2021, which is why it is of no surprise that of those surveyed, 68% of organisations see employee engagement as a top priority in 2021.

For Organisations to focus on employee engagement for the remainder of the year and into 2021 they must be more innovative in their approach to employee engagement and consider digitalised platforms. Prior to considering how this will be managed it is worth first considering the major drivers of employee engagement in order to unlock the potential of your workforce.

### ***Drivers of Employee Engagement***

In the main employee engagement is driven, under three key categories:

- Leadership & People Management
- Culture
- Employee Development

### ***Leadership & People Management***

Leadership and people management are integral to the promotion of employee engagement. In order to build employee engagement leaders must instil trust in their employees and provide clarity of purpose. Leaders should also be visible and in touch with their staff, not only fostering engagement of their employees, but demonstrating their own level of engagement in order to project the wider organisational vision into their employees' every-day working practices. A means of doing this is through succinct and frequent communications. The benefits of utilising a communication platform to further employee engagement, is its ability to build trust in the employment relationship. Open and transparent communication is a must in order to build and maintain trust with employees and will ensure that they feel their opinion is valued and consequently they are more likely to stay invested in the Organisations success.

By the same token people management will play a huge part in the promotion and maintenance of employee engagement, especially where there has been an influx of change to work practices,

policies and procedures and resourcing. Employees are being afforded much more flexibility in their working day due to the requirements of remote working and an understanding of this blended type of work-life balance, leads to favourable engagement from employees.

Leaders and people managers must be clear on setting employee expectations of their roles and provide clarity regarding the agreed workload and priorities. While key performance indicators may have to be adjusted following changes to the workforce, it is important to focus on the outputs or outcomes and measure accordingly, not only on the activity or time taken to do specific tasks.

Managers should be flexible and be there to offer support and encouragement, particularly for those who may be struggling. Design and revise policies so that they too can be dynamically flexible in the event of further change being necessitated and ensure that all employees have appropriate equipment to perform their roles and systems to endorse collaboration. Positive people management will act as a driver for employee engagement and when done correctly will also support employee wellbeing.

## **Culture**

Culture has always been a major driver of employee engagement, so it is essential that there is transparency about the purpose, mission and vision of an Organisation. By having a compelling purpose and direction and being clear on the how each employee is an integral part of that direction, will not only embed the core values of an Organisations culture, but it will manifest in other ways to strengthen employee engagement itself. A focus on behaviours throughout the organisation that are consistent with the stated values, will lead to employee trust and a sense of integrity.

How this is put into practice will depend on different factors but a good way to start is by looking at the performance management structure of your Organisation. The fact that there will be an on-going need for remote and flexible work practices in the future allows a focus on how performance management will be supported through digitalised means. This means that any performance management process can be realigned to the core values and altered to reflect changing work practices in the remote working space.

Performance management, when implemented correctly and efficiently can help improve the performance of employees as well as employee engagement, both of which contribute to the better operation of the Organisation as a whole.

An effective performance management process:

- is designed to develop and motivate employees while providing and giving honest and objective feedback regarding performance. Performance management is one of the key activities that, when successfully carried out, enables employees know that their contributions are recognised and acknowledged.
- is one which reflects ongoing communication between the employer and the employee that occurs throughout the year, in support of achieving the strategic objectives of the Organisation. The communication process includes clarifying expectations, identifying and setting objectives / goals, providing ongoing feedback and evaluating performance.

- positively influences employee engagement. An employee understanding how their work contributes to overall organisational performance, being provided with career growth opportunities, interesting and challenging work, contribute toward engaged employment levels and higher levels of employee discretionary effort in the workplace.
- Is an opportunity to recognise employee demonstration of values and reinforce if necessary.

With the evolution of employee engagement now having to be supported through technology Organisations must ensure any performance management process is more innovative in order to be supported through new platforms with a focus on the values and culture of an Organisation.

### ***Employee Development***

Investment in employee development will have a significant impact on employee engagement. The way an Organisation addresses the needs of employees as well as their development instils a commitment to employee engagement which can positively impact on productivity and efficiencies.

Organisations must encourage employees to build time into their working day or week to further their professional development and then provide them with the tools necessary to support that development and promote collaborative learning, which in turn impacts on effective team functioning.

Adapting to change is a skill in itself and with the future less certain, it is essential that employees are equipped to navigate future change. Provide learning experiences that support shifts in priorities, strategy or revised work processes. Embrace talent upskilling programmes that align with the shift in strategy and further develop the skillset and competencies of employees to further your engagement agenda.

Finally incorporate the values and culture of the Organisation into a training programme that will foster a sense of belonging, purpose and support employee retention and engagement. Having a sense of adaptability in learning and development, one which is built on the values of an Organisation will be the difference between just coping with change and embracing any changes that are to come.

### ***Benefits of Employee Engagement***

Employee engagement when practised correctly can improve:

- Retention rates
- Productivity
- Staff morale
- Client/ customer experience

The benefits of employee engagement will start to manifest when employees are clear on organisational purpose, expectations of their roles and the impact of their function to the overarching strategic objectives, are supported as a whole and communicated with regularly, all of which bind the employee with the values and culture of the organisation and promote employee engagement.

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**For further information or advice, please contact the designated HR & Employment Helpdesk at [thewheelhrhelpdesk@adarehrm.ie](mailto:thewheelhrhelpdesk@adarehrm.ie) or via telephone on (01) 5394661 Monday – Friday 9.00am- 5.00pm**