

Re-engaging employees – the role of Employee Engagement in the Non-Profit sector

The majority of employees across the country begin the return to the workplace, albeit on a carefully phased basis, from Monday, 20th September. Having worked remotely for 18 months in most cases, consideration must be given to how employers will effectively re-engage these employees.

The importance of employee engagement cannot be underestimated in a post-Covid workplace, particularly for non-profit organisations. Not only will engaged employees support the recovery of the business, they will also re-energise the culture and re-focus on the efforts and ambitions of the organisation, particularly if the organisation is one that helps and supports others in the community.

But given many non-profits organisations will continue to have staff working remotely for some, or all of the week, how can they ensure these employees continue to feel their contribution is valued? The challenge for employers in the sector is to create an environment where employees feel connected to the overall mission and vision of the organisations, particularly if they have been on lay-off or short-time during the pandemic.

Being able to identify the drivers of Employee Engagement in your Organisation is key in supporting the improvement of performance. Some of the key elements of Employee Engagement include:

Leadership: strong leadership within Organisation provides clear direction of purpose and through their actions, empower employees to contribute to the Organisation's success.

This not only applies to those in senior management positions but also people managers. A good manager supports employees and provides them with the opportunities for development and recognises the contribution they make. This is particularly important with employees, or volunteers, who are working within communities where their work may not always be noticed immediately or their efforts to support others can go unrecognised.

Health & Wellbeing in the Workplace: promoting health and wellbeing is crucial to Employee Engagement in our view. Creating a safe working environment and associated policies and procedures is a basic responsibility. Employees are much more likely to have higher engagement levels if their workloads are appropriate and they have the supports required to carry out their jobs.

The Wheel's 'Consultation Report on the Support Needs of the Non-Profit Sector' from earlier this year, highlighted that recruitment and retention of employees is difficult, resulting in "staff and volunteers being spread too thinly across a number of roles. Mental health and burnout are repeatedly identified as challenges for both staff and volunteers."

Effective communication: Effective communication is important in terms of providing support and reassurance to employees at times of uncertainty. Employees who may be working remotely or returning to the workplace for the first time in over a year will already be under stresses that they wouldn't normally be used to such as lack of social interaction, structured working environment, financial worries and childcare issues and poor, or non-existent, communication will also contribute to stress, sometimes leading to conflicts and disputes.

Communication was also an issue raised in The Wheel's report, particularly internal communications. People want to work for Organisations that are successful in reaching their

objectives; this is true whether it be a multi-national or a small non-profit. Employees need to know that their views, opinions and input are appreciated and valued and want to understand how these align with the overall objectives of the Organisation.

Clear and meaningful two-way communication is a primary engagement tool and should not be under-valued. An employee's understanding and connection with their work and how it plays into the Organisation's mission will have a positive effect on their overall performance. Their attitude towards their job and the Organisation leads to improvements in job-relevant behaviours, which also increase job satisfaction. So effectively communicating all aspects of the Organisation's objectives and how the employee or volunteer helps achieve these objectives is vitally important.

Conclusion

As we went into the early stages of the global health crisis, there was a real sense of "we're all in this together", which no doubt helped stem a wider spread of Covid-19. But we need to instil this sense again within the non-profit sector and within our own Organisations. By pulling together, re-engaging with colleagues and re-focusing efforts, the sector can continue to build on previous successes and help carry out the much-needed work it does in various parts of our society.