

Bosses, look to hearts and minds

Recent research claims that UK managers are lazy and fail to motivate their staff. Can it be true?

A RECENT Gallup Survey suggested that less than a quarter of UK employees were engaged. Ratan Tata, chairman of Tata Industries Ltd, which owns Corus and Jaguar Land Rover, has also accused UK managers of being workshy and refusing to “go the extra mile”. Neither statistic shows the UK workforce in a good light. If we can’t offer companies a skilled and dedicated workforce, what is it that we can offer?

WHERE DID IT ALL GO WRONG?

Our experience is that some UK management still operates the outdated rational/logical management thinking of the American F.W. Taylor, the father of scientific management. This is demonstrated by the many decisions still taken merely to achieve short-term results.

Recent studies by Gallup and The Training Foundation point to the fact that “the primary issue for employees is the relationship with their immediate manager, accounting for 80 per cent of decisions to engage or disengage”. Management in UK companies seems increasingly distant, impersonal and uninspiring; few managers receive any training in how to engage hearts and minds and wrongly assume that employees are somehow contractually bound to be engaged in building the business.

A POSITIVE CULTURE

Bourton Group’s experience, gleaned from more than 40 years of achieving business improvement

for many large-scale organisations, is that employees respond better to leadership that is based on trust rather than enforcement. They also respond to emotion as well as logic, and an environment in which a positive business climate and culture exist. Human beings trust in and seek to achieve inspiring and ambitious goals if they see their leaders leading by example, supporting and driving an empowered, informed and energetic workforce.

Managers could use methodologies such as Lean, which is often regarded as merely a technical tool, when the real magic is the way in which Lean appeals to the “emotional brain”, to satisfy the “human givens” that research shows are fundamental to engaging employees. This more human approach has been closely linked with organisational performance.

The Lean strategy plays to the six drivers that are recognised as motivating employees. It gives them a sense of being valued – involving them at all levels, not just in doing their work but also in helping to improve it. Lean provides a sense of being treated honestly, of being trusted with, and sharing, performance information about the things that matter to the business and its customers. Lean produces a culture of openness; often employees see the end to end process only when they are opened up to the effect on others of how they do their work. Lean instills self-direction and autonomy so that employees are given permission to challenge, find out and



Employees more likely to achieve goals if managers lead by example

resolve issues that affect not only the workplace, but the overall work atmosphere and climate. Personal development and growth is encouraged so that employees learn the tools and techniques that enable analysis and improvement to happen. This teaches them to work with colleagues in new ways. Staff develop a sense of organisational worth and a greater understanding of what they are doing, which fuels a feeling of ethical pride. Lean allows managers to build greater two-way trust with employees. It creates emotional motivation and helps to focus on the team and workplace climate that research shows is so

important in employee engagement.

In general, UK workers are hardworking, skilled and willing but they will maintain their enthusiasm, innovation, thirst for knowledge and desire for continuous improvement only if managers build a climate of trust to encourage the right behaviour and reward “going the extra mile”. If not, we all risk being left on the sidelines.

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