

# Engaging employees through Brainstorming

**When faced with a business problem but uncertain of the solution, Brainstorming can be the perfect approach.**

It is not a precise or scientific method of gaining information, but if you involve the right subject matter experts the opinions that come out when using the technique carefully can tell you more about your business than you could ever measure.

The HR department of a manufacturing company recently decided to get outside help to deal with the problem of staff turnover. With a steady number of around 300 employees, the company had seen almost 60% of their staff leave in the previous year. The cost and time required to recruit and train replacements, the loss of business knowledge, and increasing pressure on the staff who were left behind were all having a direct impact on the company's ability to perform its core functions, and there was a clear need to take urgent measures to slow the churn rate down.

The first step was to understand why it was happening, and that was a very sensitive subject. Exit interviews gave a mixed picture, so the HR Manager put together a cross functional team to work with an outside facilitator on the subject. The choice of a facilitator from outside the company was crucial – the group would have been less likely to open up if the questions were being asked by someone from the Management team in their own business.

The event started by brainstorming the reasons they believed people were leaving, which was done onto a fishbone diagram. The standard six fishbone categories – Materials, Methods, Measures, Manpower, Machines and Mother Nature don't always work for Brainstorming, but for this subject they were perfect.

A wide range of issues were raised, especially a combination of frustration with internal processes and the high number of local job opportunities with other companies. There were also some positives. A lot of loyalty to the company was demonstrated, people didn't want to leave but many felt they were being forced to by circumstances.

After the initial Brainstorming session, the issues were prioritised based on how frequently they happened and how big an impact they had on making people want to leave. The highest priority issues were then subject to more Brainstorming, this time for solutions.

As would be expected with such an emotive subject there was a lot of talking, but by the end of the one day event the team had created a concise list of solutions, and clear documentation of how they had been reached, which the Management team could then separately turn into an action plan for the business. The immediate impact of the session was that the people who attended, specially selected by HR for their positions of influence within the wider business, were pleased to see that the Management were taking the issue seriously, and that they were being seen as part of the solution.

The company has since been making many changes to its recruitment policies, its employment terms, its internal support processes and its management structure, all of which was supported by the information which came out of the Brainstorming sessions.

Based on the opportunities that were identified, a target was set to reduce staff turnover to 30% in the current financial year and 15% the following year, and the current trend shows the business on track to achieve it.



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Mike is a certified Lean Six Sigma Black Belt with nine years' experience of leading hard benefit generating projects across multiple functions of a large organisation.

He has delivered numerous Continuous Improvement training courses, and coached colleagues at all stages of the Lean Six Sigma training process.

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Bourton Group has supported many businesses from a wide range of industries to implement Lean improvement techniques via tailored engagement programs.

We work collaboratively to deliver on efficiency objectives and targets, with returns on investment of over 20:1 being reported, along with wider benefits of reducing waste, decreasing time to complete activities and improvements to quality – all of which have been directly attributed to Lean.

If you would like to find out more about how Bourton Group can help to fix your business. **And help it to stay fixed.** Please get in touch...

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