IBM

Overview

This White Paper highlights factors that have a decisive influence on the design and effectiveness of employee engagement programs. The results revealed in this study help to ensure future engagement programs are implemented even more successfully. Through successful engagement programs, the HR department can better position itself as a strategic partner of company management and ensure HR has an influence.

Key figures from the study:

11

Expert Interviews

900-490.000

Enterprise Sizes

9

Industries

70%

IBM Kenexa Global Norm for Employee Engagement (EE)

Eight decisive success factors for an employee engagement program

An employee engagement program (i.e., employee survey and change processes) is a complex measurement and management tool often used to prioritize and govern the required change processes within the company. In that respect, it is crucial that an engagement program is successfully implemented and accepted by employees. Employees' opinions are often collected in the form of a survey, but all too often without deriving, implementing or communicating any effective measures or improvements as a result. Yet engagement programs form one of the most powerful tools to maximize employees' potential and to assess the effectiveness of the corporate strategy (1). To enable sustainable improvements via engagement programs, the following factors have shown to be effective in practice.

The results at a glance

The results presented here are based on the review of eleven companies' employee engagement programs and expert interviews. The companies included in the study had varying employee engagement (EE) scores from their most recent survey. The IBM Kenexa WorldNorms Database was used to determine the threshold for above-average EE scores (i.e. more than 70%). As it currently stands, the IBM Kenexa WorldNorms Database contains 720 million responses from 15 million respondees and 730 projects, making it one of the largest databases in the industry. Eight (8) common success factors emerged from the expert interviews conducted with the sub-group of companies with above-average EE scores. The following success factors were found to have a positive influence on engagement programs:
(see also Fig. 1)

- Corporate strategy drives survey content
- High degree of commitment from senior management
- Continual communication about the engagement program (above all between surveys cycles)
- Dialogue-based involvement of employees in the follow-up process
- Additional involvement of an internal data protection officer
- Conscious resource planning within the project team responsible for the engagement program
- Structured process to support less successful teams
- Communication specially tailored to internal stakeholders

Success factors in detail

1. Corporate strategy drives survey content

All companies with an above-average EE score have clearly derived their engagement program from their corporate strategy. To achieve this, successful companies focus on conversations with internal stakeholders at an early stage. This allows them to optimally derive all strategy-related components. The survey is treated as a core part of the company's processes and not as an isolated sub-project, conducted by the HR department.

2. High degree of commitment from senior management

The vast majority of companies with an above-average EE score are noted for their senior management's active support of the engagement program process. Management that demonstrates personal commitment and personal interest positively impacts the engagement program. A lack of personal involvement or active support from company management is frequently found to be the case in firms with a below-average EE score. Active support could be demonstrated, for example, through the regular inclusion of the Employee Engagement topic in communication from senior management (e.g. meetings, presentations and town hall gatherings).

3. Continual communication about the engagement program (above all between the survey cycles)

Comprehensive communication throughout the entire year or between the survey cycles is likely to increase participants' acceptance of the engagement program. Companies with an above-average EE score issue extensive updates about any implementation or actions on the back of the survey results. For example, it would be appropriate to communicate and publish success stories to demonstrate that results are actually used to instigate improvements/changes and to show that the survey results really do influence organizational processes.

4. Dialogue-based involvement of employees in the follow-up process

The majority of companies with an above-average EE score conduct the follow-up process in close consultation with employees, which is not typically the case in companies with a below-average EE score. The latter group show great potential for improvement in this regard. A close exchange with employees can be achieved, for example, by developing ideas together on how to approach and work with the results.

5. Involvement of an internal data protection officer

To stress the relevance of data protection and confidentiality of data handling in the engagement program, most companies with a high EE score also bring an internal data protection officer into the engagement program process and inform them accordingly. This underpins transparency and fosters employee trust.

6. Conscious resource planning within project team responsible for the engagement program

Companies with an above-average EE score are able to clearly verbalize the amount of human resources aligned to the project team (i.e. the FTE required and/or assigned). This makes it clear that the engagement program can be advanced much more successfully when a dedicated project team is responsible for the engagement program.

7. Structured process to support less successful teams

To increase the quality of the follow-up process, the expert interviews clearly revealed that practically all companies provide certain support measures for teams with very low results. Companies with an above-average EE score have a clearly-structured process for support. Companies with a below-average score often have no such concrete measures. Company-wide support measures could include:

- Central point of contact
- Local support teams
- Monthly best-practice calls

8. Communication specially tailored to internal stakeholders

All companies with an above-average EE score release targeted communication or materials specially tailored to certain groups within the company, in addition to general information about the engagement program. For example, before the survey, special communication is produced for different stakeholder segments in the company such as for employees with no direct access to a computer. In addition, after the survey, targeted information is provided to management, e.g. how to action on the results, through training and workshops. A comprehensive communication plan throughout the whole engagement program and implementation generally contributes towards the success of the engagement program.

Figure 1: The success factors for employee engagement programs

Conclusion

Based on the results of this study, it is proposed that these eight success factors are taken into account when designing future engagement programs in order to maximize their chances of success. However, one needs to be aware that the journey towards a successful engagement program will be influenced by the level of maturity of the company's employee engagement program. Progressively implementing these factors can help a company achieve a high standard for its own engagement program, whilst highlighting the strategic relevance of engagement for the company.

Sources:

(1) Shiemann/Morgan (2006) quoted in Wiley, J.-W. (2010): Strategic Employee Surveys - Evidence-Based Guidelines for Driving Organizational Success, First Edition, San Francisco, P.3.

For more information:

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