

maximus insights

Exactly how engaged are
your people?



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People leave managers not organisations... or so the saying goes.

But what does the evidence suggest?

The past few years have been dominated by organisational efforts to engage employees. According to the Institute for Employment Studies (2004) employee engagement is “a positive attitude held by the employee towards the organisation and its values” which “affects the extent to which employees put discretionary effort into their work”.

Is there a link between engagement and performance? Absolutely. Recent studies by James K Harter at Gallup (2009) have found compelling evidence that engagement is crucial for driving sustained organisational performance. In one US study, organisations at the 75th percentile on employee engagement experienced 16% greater profitability than those organisations at the 25th percentile. Worldwide research by Towers Perrin (2006) backs up this fundamental relationship: organisations with more highly engaged employees outperformed those with lower engagement on key financial measures.

Don't rely on organisational initiatives to deliver ROI

Is your organisation embarking on a new initiative aimed at driving up levels of employee engagement? How convinced are you that it will lead to real benefits and results for you, your team and the business?

Although broad based measures of engagement are useful, it is still crucial to identify the alignment between individual factors and the environment at work. More specifically, new insights into motivation in the modern-day workplace reveal how leaders can identify and align individual drivers with the workplace, and get measurable results.

Cutting edge research by Gignac and Palmer of Genos International (2010) demonstrates a compelling causal relationship between workplace motivation and a number of productivity measures. Conducted in the UK and Australia across three organisations in the insurance, utilities and industrial sectors, this research focused on measuring four critical aspects of motivation:

1. Role motivation: Characteristics related to day-to-day tasks and activities including use of technology or working with customers
2. Management motivation: Characteristics related to the style of the manager including directive or coaching styles of management
3. Team motivation: Characteristics related to team preferences, styles and behaviours including camaraderie, quality focus or support
4. Organisation motivation: Characteristics related to overall organisational factors including remuneration and work/life balance

Avoid a 'one size fits all approach'

This approach to motivation differs from the well publicised work of Dan Pink (The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us (2010)) in an important way. Although Pink's work identifies common motivational factors like mastery and so called 'universal factors', it does not account for the fact that people are not all motivated by the same things. One person may be highly motivated by intellectual stimulation (dealing with complex and intellectually challenging tasks) in their job, where as another may be unmotivated by this factor. While working in a competitive environment may be stimulating for one person, it could be stifling for the person sitting next to them. As a leader, the organisation, the team or indeed your own management style could be actively disengaging your best people.

The Genos research makes a startling conclusion that all leaders must pay attention "across all metrics and samples" and that it was management (not organisation or role or even team) that was associated with "the most substantial predictive validity".

Get to the heart of what matters

Clearly there is much more to engaging and motivating employees than first meets the eye. For leaders, the good news is that the most crucial drivers of engagement and performance are things within your direct control. The fact is that above all else, it is your management style that has the biggest impact on individual employee motivation, and therefore productivity. If you want to get the best out of your people, you need to be clear about the impact you have on each and every one of them, and have high quality conversations that get to the heart of what drives them. Leaders simply can't rely on a one-size-fits-all approach.

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Andy is an accomplished Organisational Development practitioner with in-depth experience across the employee lifecycle. Andy is a member of the UK Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) and has a BA (Hons) Business Studies and Post Graduate Diploma in Personnel Management. He holds a number of psychometric qualifications including OPQ, FIRO B, MBTI Step I & II, HBDI and Hogan MVPI, using these tools in individual and team development.

Andy is an experienced performance and personal development coach specialising in cognitive behavioural coaching approaches, and has a Certificate in Coaching Practice accredited through Middlesex University and the Centre for Coaching.

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