



Employee engagement a building block for sustainable organisational performance

By Dr Rica Viljoen

It is widely acknowledged that human resources should be optimised and that investment in human capital should be leveraged for the benefit of all stakeholders.

Organisations internationally and locally invest astronomical amounts in attracting and placing talent.

Yet, in many an organisation talent is seldom or never allowed to contribute their unique tacit knowledge and diverse insights which would, if encouraged, assist in contributing effectively towards organisational decision making and problem solving.

Engagement may be described as "the act of committing, pledging or engaging oneself" (The Random House Unabridged Dictionary, 2006) or "a heightened emotional connection that an employee feels for his or her organisation,

that influences him or her to exert greater discretionary effort to his or her work" (The Conference Board of Canada, 2006).

Sadly, most readily available literature about employee engagement address the topic in a simplistic, mechanistic and linear manner and therefore underestimates the systemic causalities between the different variables and concepts contributing to engagement.

It is the task of leadership to ensure that the maximum number of employees engage the maximum amount of energy in terms of the strategy and the values of the organisation and

that, through involvement and participation, tacit knowledge and wisdom be unleashed and aligned. Viljoen (2008) described the level of engagement as the systemic result of the interplay between the individual potential, the group potential and the organisational potential within the context of a specific industry or a national culture. This level of engagement then correlates directly with business indicators such as productivity, production, safe behaviour, customer centricity and talent retention.

The Corporate Leadership Council, for example, found that internationally only 28% of identified talent engage. By implication 72% of the talented human resource potential in organisations is therefore not unleashed.

This facilitates the question that is arguably one of the most critical considerations that leadership is faced with, namely how to ensure that the most expensive, yet most valuable resource in the organisation people engage?

In order to create engagement, different outcomes must be achieved on different domains, namely:

Individual domain

Individuals must ensure that they have the ability to engage by:

- self-development,
- optimising leadership behaviour,
- formal development efforts,
- managing the self,
- self-mastery and personal purpose work.

Group domain

Engagement in groups must be enabled by:

- optimising group dynamics,
- clarifying roles and responsibilities,
- understanding group stages and unconscious patterns.

Organisational domain

Organisational culture (the way in which things are done in a specific organisation) should be conducive for:

- inclusivity,
- openness,
- valuing diversity,
- allowing voice.

It is the task of leaders on all levels in the organisation to optimise engagement on individual, group and organisational domain. As Jung said "As within, so without." Customers as external stakeholders will soon sense the transformation that engagement unleashes from within.

In the future, organisations that have the capacity to create engagement and inclusivity, will distinguish themselves as sustainable organisations.



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