



CUTTINGS

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Involving Staff in Difficult Decisions

Let your people take you higher! – this was the title of an article in *People Management* magazine that caught my eye – and the eyes of a lot of other people, to judge from my inbox!

The core theme was that involving staff in difficult decisions can help weather the current financial storm. Not only that, but from my own – and others' – experience, the solutions developed by involving staff are often much more cost effective, faster to implement, and generate higher levels of commitment than those developed through traditional processes.

At this time, organisations are faced with competing priorities. In the long term, they need to have good people in the right jobs, and develop and keep them. Yet in the short term, they need to cut costs. So an important task is to help everyone keep both a short- and long-term perspective.

Another important task is to maintain a positive organisational climate. Research has shown that open and transparent management; processes that give employees influence; allow them to contribute ideas; and giving opportunities to learn and grow, attract new talent and encourage existing people to be productive.

Employees want – and deserve – to be treated as adults. They want to know the difficulties, they want to understand the challenges, and they want to be able to offer their ideas and contribute to the solution. And, we know from research that over 60% of the good ideas for change come from employees, while only 6% come from the bosses' office – so it is worth engaging!

The article suggests the use of “large group methods”, practical processes created over the past 20 years, as having special promise in these difficult times because they can involve employees and management in working together on issues that affect the organisation.

Large group methods involve working with the whole system – getting stakeholders together in one place to deal with issues of importance. The methods invite people to express their views and join in developing solutions and planning implementation. Managers and leaders are still responsible for charting the way forward and drawing the boundaries. But the meetings engage the whole system in addressing the critical issues. Which means ideas are developed and implemented far more quickly than through the usual cascade process.

One famous method, known as “work-out” was developed by GE to rapidly solve problems of quality, production and service delivery by inviting employees to share their observations and knowledge directly with decision makers.

Other methods have improved work design by involve employees and other stakeholders in analysing the whole production or service delivery process to identify where critical errors occur and redesign the process to remove them.

“Future search” is a method that helps stakeholder groups, often in conflict with each other, to find common ground and develop a viable future strategic vision that engages and inspires them all. IKEA redesigned its supply chain to increase quality, reduce costs and increase sales at the same time

using this method (in just 18 working hours for the Ektorp sofa!)

“Open space” allows tens, even hundreds, of people to work simultaneously on a self-created agenda on a subject of mutual interest – whether it is generating ideas for the strategic focus of the company as the Rockport does every year, or just on how to do things better now.

Wanting to get people to focus on what works and promote high levels of employee engagement? Then “appreciative inquiry” might be the answer.

By focusing dialogue on what works and what energises, organisations can quickly develop a framework that everyone signs up to, and is known to work as it is based on reality. One department in a local authority in Scotland developed a leadership model in 3 hours. In another company an analysis of the total system was completed in less than two weeks

And strengths based approaches which involve staff build engagement, which leads directly to increased productivity and talent motivation and retention, as we have seen in a number of the articles in recent *Cuttings*.

These are just some of the many large group methods for engaging stakeholders and large numbers (up to 5,000 at a time in some cases!) They replace slow, cascade systems with real time action – planning and implementing simultaneously.

These methods are not panaceas, but they give us a rapid, cost effective and positive response to the current depressing agendas in many organisations.

“Let your people take you higher”
Billie Alban and Barbara Benedict
Bunker, *People Management* Feb. 2009

Snippets

A collection of thought provokers and quotations...

- ✂ “Everything that irritates us about others can lead us to an understanding of ourselves.” *Carl Jung*
- ✂ “Ability will never catch up with the demand for it.” *Malcolm Forbes*
- ✂ “Ignorance, the root and the stem of every evil.” *Plato*
- ✂ “How you choose to respond each moment to the movie of life determines how you see the next frame, and the next, and eventually how you feel when the movie ends.” *Doc Childre*
- ✂ “Out beyond ideas of rightdoing and wrongdoing, there is a field. I will meet you there.” *Rumi*
- ✂ “The optimist sees the rose and not its thorns; the pessimist stares at the thorns, oblivious to the rose.” *Kahlil Gibran*
- ✂ “When we feel love and kindness toward others, it not only makes others feel loved and cared for, but it helps us also to develop inner happiness and peace.” *HH the Dalai Lama*
- ✂ “A problem is a chance for you to do your best.” *Duke Ellington*
- ✂ “You cannot control what happens to you, but you can control your attitude toward it, and in that, you will be mastering change rather than allowing it to master you.” *Brian Tracy*
- ✂ “Don't ask what the world needs. Ask what makes you come alive, and go do it. Because what the world needs is people who have come alive.” *Howard Thurman*
- ✂ “Forgiveness does not change the past, but it does enlarge the future.” *Paul Boese*
- ✂ “There is hope in dreams, imagination, and in the courage of those who wish to make those dreams a reality.” *Jonas Salk*
- ✂ “Self-confidence is the first requisite to great undertakings.” *Samuel Johnson*
- ✂ “Treating people with respect will gain one wide acceptance and improve business.” *Tao Zhu Gong (500 BC)*

7 Jobs for the Generation Yers

1: THE SAFE HARBOUR JOB

Sometimes they just want to collect a pay check. There are no upsides for the employer.

2: THE WEIGH STATION JOB

Sometimes Gen Yers take a job while they are still taking stock and trying to figure out what they really want to do next. The key here is to get them to decide what they really want next is to build a great career working for you. Or at least convince them to work hard for you so they can trade up to that job they really wants.

3: THE PEER GROUP JOB

This is when they take a job in order to spend time with friends. At least they may look forward to coming to work. The downside is that social relations will be their primary focus.

4: THE PASSION JOB

This is when Gen Yers find work that aligns with their deep interests and priorities. The upside for the employers is that they will bring energy and enthusiasm to the work. The potential downside arises when the work part of work makes the passion seem more like a grind.

5: THE BIG GAMBLE JOB

This is when Gen Yers see a job as an opportunity to work like crazy for a time when there is the chance of a giant payoff. They will often work like crazy for some time. until and unless they lose confidence in payoff.

6: THE NEEDLE IN A HAYSTACK JOB

Sometimes Gen Yers take a job to meet some idiosyncratic, personal and hard to fulfil desire – maybe it's working the night-shift or working with books or working on a boat. As long as you can provide what they really want, you can be pretty sure they won't leave.

7: THE SELF-BUILDING JOB

The best case is when Gen Yers are looking at the job as a chance to make an impact at work while building themselves up with your resources. This is most likely to bring out their best for a sustained period.

From the new book: “Not Everyone Gets A Trophy: How To Manage Generation Y” by Bruce Tulgan

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Our 2009 Public Course programme:

Focus on Influence:

8-11 June (Dutch, Geetbets Belgium)

7-10 September (English, location tbd)

13-16 October (Dutch, Geetbets Belgium)

Getting Results without Authority:

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3-4 June (Brussels)

6-7 July (London)

1-2 September (London)

Managing Technical Professionals

12-13 May (London)

Internal Consulting Skills

14-15 May (London)

More on

Large Group Methods

The lead article in this edition is about the use of large group methods. New Directions consultants are experienced in using these approaches with a range of organisations in the public and private sectors. If you are interested in knowing more about how they can engage your whole organisation in change, call for a free consultation or send for a free 12 page guide to info@newdirections.uk.com.

MORE INFORMATION

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