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Motivating an aging workforce - How to motivate and inspire people who are looking to retire.

Themes

- Motivation
- Personal Development
- Managing Tension

Context – The case study was based on two professional support teams within BU which contained a high percentage of members who were near retirement.

Issues – Structural changes to the teams led to risk of demotivation on the part of near retirement employees as change was perceived as a threat.

Actions - A series of team workshops were conducted with and without management intervention allowing these employees to take more ownership of the changes that were happening and feel that their past experience was important in helping the University move forward

Outcomes – Team was seen to be more motivated and energised in developing new processes to help the university move forward.

Motivation - There are a wide range of theories dealing with motivation. Maslow's Hierarchy of needs and Herzberg's Motivation and hygiene factors are probably the most often cited. However, it was found that Maslow's hierarchy was not especially useful in this context as its application seemed inflexible in a practical situation. Herzberg's ideas surrounding achievement and recognition as true motivators were seen more applicable to this context. Daniel Pink (2009) more recently suggested similar ideas, such as that, other than basic physiological and reward motivations, there is a third intrinsic motivation which focuses on individuals desire to be autonomous, have the satisfaction of being able to develop and to have a purpose.

Environment – Bal (2012) Talks about climates of accommodation and climates of development. According to this research a climate which accommodates the employee in moving towards retirement develops negative behaviours and demotivates. In contrast a developmental climate increases motivation and this approach was taken in this case study as the near retirement employees were engaged in contributing and leading new developments rather than being accommodated within them.

Team Dynamics - Team dynamics can be highly influential in motivating individuals and so the role and standing of the near retirement employees within the group is important. Older employees can feel threatened by younger employees and younger employees can see older ones as blocking their own career progression (Mullins 2013) again leading to negative behaviours. In this case the employees were engaged in group workshops set up by the manager to allow them to take ownership of new procedures and allow them to feel that their expertise was valued and essential part of the team's work.

Recognition and Reward – Recognition can be seen as a powerful motivator and based on what was identified regarding team dynamics, social recognition within the team, as well as recognition by the institution could be important in helping motivate older employees. In this case study recognition of the near retirement employee's expertise was seen through allowing them time to develop ideas without management intervention and access to full planning information.

The Role of the Leader

- Recognising withdrawal behaviours and managing anxiety in employees.
- Set up interventions to help employees have more input into the development of working processes and establish more individualised work arrangements
- Manage team dynamics to exploit the skills and knowledge of older employees and make sure that this is seen as an important part of the team dynamic.
- Use social recognition, individualisation of work arrangements and adjustment of responsibility as reward.

Conclusion

The use of workshops was seen as more time consuming than top-down management decisions but more effective in engaging the team. Motivation was seen to be raised as the employees in the teams actively sought to bring forward the second workshop to set up new procedures. New work patterns were rolled out on the basis of the workshops which were seen as important in recognising the input of the team, while leading to smarter working practices and more invigorated employees. The case study supported the theory of Daniel Pink (2009) in citing autonomy mastery and purpose as true motivators.

References

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