

FRONT LINE MANAGEMENT SKILLS- WHAT THEY NEED & THE IMPACT

Research for the CIPD by a team at Bath University¹ and based on interviews with over 1000 employees, proved categorically that front line manager* (FLM) behaviour is a critical factor in developing organisational commitment. The higher the employees rated their FLM in terms of the way they managed people, the more satisfied and committed they were. This in turn resulted in higher performance.

The study focused on 12 organisations including Jaguar Cars, Nationwide Building Society, Selfridges and Tesco.

All companies showed a significant correlation between "relationship with FLM" and employee attitude - including commitment, motivation and job satisfaction.

The report's recommendations were that: FLMs need:

- a good working relationship with their own managers. This was by far the most important factor influencing their own levels of commitment to the organisation and includes being treated with respect and a sense of job security.
- time to carry out their people management roles as there is a tendency for these "soft" parts of the role to be driven out in favour of other duties such as controlling, budgeting and monitoring.
- to be carefully selected with more attention paid to behaviour competencies such as communication and emotional intelligence..
- the support of strong organisational values which give emphasis to the fundamentals of people management and show clearly those leadership behaviours expected. and those not permitted.
- proper skills training in activities such

as communications and handling discipline and grievances.

- a sense of career opportunity - any feeling of being stuck in a dead end job will see a huge drop in commitment.

Many of the qualities and skills which are associated with higher quality front line management are around the behaviours of front line managers.

It is not enough to educate front line managers in the behaviours required; organisations must also ensure they are developing the environment and culture in which front line managers are actively encouraged and permitted to exhibit the behaviours above. The Bath research found that organisations which had a strong shared culture with guiding principles for behaviour which were embedded into practice over time were more successful.

To be good ambassadors of people management, line managers need, above all, self-confidence and a strong sense of their own security in the organisation. This, in turn, requires strong support and the appropriate training and development for those newly appointed in a line management role.

The CIPD says that "Organisations need to encourage line managers' buy-in and commitment to people management activities by clarifying their responsibilities through job descriptions, performance appraisal and communicating the importance and value of development-related activities."

References

1. HUTCHINSON, S. and PURCELL, J. (2003) *Bringing policies to life: the vital role of front line managers in people management*. Executive briefing. London: Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development.