

## Managing the workforce and maintaining engagement in an economic downturn

During periods of economic downturn it is extremely important to engage staff. Employees with high engagement are more likely to be driven, enthusiastic and committed to their work. Engaged people contribute to customer satisfaction, productivity levels and profit margins. At the same time engaged employees have less accidents and lower turnover rates. The following strategies are designed by APS Organisational Psychologists to help you to build engagement in your workplace.

### Value alignment

Organisational and employee values can be aligned by screening during the recruitment process. This should be part of an overall engagement strategy to help ensure the new employee will be compatible from the very start. Ensure the vision of the organisation, and an emphasis on mutual respect, support and teamwork are reinforced during the induction process. Once the employee has been inducted, ongoing support and training to perform their roles should be provided.

### Provide adequate supervisory support

Provide regular feedback and the opportunity to talk about the issues employees are having with their work. This will assist to remove hurdles, ensure the employee is appropriately resourced and feels valued. Concentrate on building positive relationships amongst your team and cultivate openness and trust. Focus on individual and team strengths and ways to build on these attributes to improve areas in which the employee may not be so good.

### Provide clear goals and direction and the opportunity for decision making input

Employees become more emotionally and cognitively engaged when expectations are clear and they have the opportunity to be involved in decision making. One way to achieve this is to ensure that your employees have an opportunity to provide input into the organisation's strategic direction and develop an understanding of the reasoning behind it. All other operational plans and strategies should cascade down from this (including resulting individual performance goals). Make sure that these performance goals are specific and measurable and progress is discussed regularly.

### Take an interest in your employee's wellbeing

Take the time to interact individually on an informal level with all your direct staff and make sure each staff member can count on you for help when required. Remember that this approach is even more important in times of economic uncertainty. Approach difficult issues in a non-judgemental way and provide adequate support, back up and an environment where employees can learn from their mistakes without fear of recrimination.

### Ensure the work is challenging and employees have decision making authority

The requirements of the work and an employee's ability to meet these requirements is extremely important. Employees' skills should be effectively aligned with their positions, tasks and responsibilities. Ensure that individual skills and abilities are put to good use. Within the workplace timelines, an employee should be allowed to apply their discretion to choose aspects of how the work is done and set the parameters for completing these work activities. The work should also be complex and varied enough to keep the individual from being bored. These measures will assist staff to maintain interest and focus on the task at hand.

### Provide resources to get the job done

Another important consideration is that people have enough materials and equipment to get the job done. Perform regular checks, replace or repair faulty equipment immediately and if possible have back up resources available. Ensure that all necessary information required is easily available and up to date. It is also important that staffing levels are monitored to avoid burnout and regular workload reviews are conducted as the organisation changes.

Continued over page ►

### **Opportunity for career advancement**

Provide access to a variety of opportunities for learning and provide sufficient career development opportunities within the organisation for staff. This strategy should be linked to your succession plan. These opportunities give people something to aim for and another reason to remain loyal to the organisation.

### **Focus on teamwork**

Build teams with different skills and backgrounds to ensure positive outcomes. Work towards building a group culture so that everybody feels part of the team and change organisational structures that don't support teamwork. For example you can implement a team based reward and recognition strategy and define shared goals across business units. Train your teams to communicate better and give your teams the tools they need to foster creativity. Intervene if necessary when dysfunctional conflict is occurring to move the group forward.

### **Communication**

It is extremely important that employees are informed promptly when any changes are made that affect their work and that they receive any information before your customers or the media do. Regular updates on the health of the organisation should also be shared as soon as possible. This process helps to dispel any fears and lowers the risk of any rumours circulating around the organisation. Opportunities should also be given to discuss these issues and provide suggestions to improve the situation.

### **Periodical measurement**

Conducting a periodical employee engagement survey will give you a bench mark and an indication of how you are going with your efforts. An APS Organisational Psychologist will be able to assist you with this and implementing the strategies mentioned in this information sheet.

### **Seeking professional assistance**

An APS Organisational Psychologist has expert knowledge and skills in the science of people at work. Members of the APS College of Organisational Psychologists typically have six years of university education, as well as experience in helping individuals and organisations to increase their performance, resolve problems and increase their wellbeing at work.

If you are interested in improving wellbeing in your organisation, talk to an APS Organisational Psychologist today. Visit [www.findapsychologist.org.au](http://www.findapsychologist.org.au) and select the Advanced Search function to find an APS Organisational Psychologist near you.