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HOW TO IMPROVE OPERATIONAL EFFICIENCY AND GET MORE FROM YOUR WORKFORCE

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How to Improve Operational Efficiency and Get More from Your Workforce

The established adversarial relationship that historically typified labour/management relations has been in the process of transformation for some time; these changes have become even more evident over the past 30 years. Even in consideration of the current and prolonged economic downturn, business today emphasises customer service, cost analysis, operational agility and employee self-reliance. Traditional management hierarchies have become less rigid and flatter; workplace modifications need to be developed creatively if a firm is to operate more efficiently, with a better prepared and motivated workforce.

These changes are important for Human Resources Management (HRM), since the whole concept of labour – what it is and does – is undergoing its own consequential transformation and redefinition. Among the most meaningful recent, new or non-traditional buzzwords delineating the contemporary workplace are: cloud computing, contingency planning/development, cross-training employees, employee empowerment, flexitime, IT service desks, mobility, organisational development, outsourcing, re-engineering, restructuring, team-building, telecommuting, and virtual offices. Taken in aggregate, they encompass the revitalised relationship between labour and management, with the key difference of greater access to responsibility for employees.

The workplace has been compelled to respond to these conditions, which should continue to evolve through the near future. As management hierarchies have flattened, and enterprise operations become more mobile, workers are gaining enhanced control over much of what they do; self-direction has largely superseded the doctrine that workers only do what they're told.

AT TEN LIVE, WE HAVE THE HRM-BACKGROUND TO RESPOND TO THESE CIRCUMSTANCES, GENERATING BEST PRACTICE SOLUTIONS FOR COHESIVE ENTERPRISE PERFORMANCE NECESSARY TO MOTIVATE STAFF EFFICIENCY AND FLEXIBILITY.

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Changes in the workplace

What is the significance of workers' willingness to alter their attitudes in relation to change-processes affecting their job? Can they be motivated toward better performance and enhanced operational efficiency? These problems have been made topical by present economic conditions and the need for businesses to remain competitive. It is imperative to generate internal cost savings through improved efficiency and agility, while getting the most from employees. The future of HRM should offer many challenges and equally as many obstacles to satisfying workforce job expectations while promoting personnel policies that encourage and induce better staff performance through commitment to organisational objectives.

Since the economic downturn of 2008, much enterprise activity has slowed or taken new directions. New jobs have become scarce and management is frequently obliged to seek more work from fewer workers, just to remain competitive; in this case, efficient workforce performance leads to financial benefits for the conduct of business operations during a time when windfalls are few. Moreover, as Western dominance in global enterprise has declined, new methods of conducting business have become essential. The result has been something of a revolution in HRM, where flexible human resource strategies help free employees to engage in a greater variety and often more fulfilling mixture of varied work. Humanisation issues have become pervasive and critical in the workplace. Today's workers often have higher-order needs, largely negating the traditional HRM-perspective of balancing organisational conformity and individual resourcefulness.

Ten Live is positioned to help you generate opportunities for enhanced workforce performance combined with cost savings through greater operational flexibility.

HRM for improved operational efficiency/workforce performance

One of the primary problems confronting enterprise is improving operational efficiency and motivating enhanced workforce performance. While it is true that the optimisation of business processes combines with streamlining the firm's operational network and structure to improve efficiency and performance, reliance on strictly IT, or otherwise automated, processes generates incomplete solutions. That is, every organisation depends on the cooperation of its entire workforce for its work is to be effectively accomplished, meeting strategic priorities and expanding enterprise horizons. Instead of a reliance on specific individuals, teams or groups of employees need to work together, whether on a permanent or temporary basis, to reach organisational objectives. Managers often create teams to solve problems but must take care to define the nature of the difficulties involved and identify to the furthest extent possible how they relate to other problems. Measuring and improving performance requires an HRM-outlook as well as the implementation of best practice technologies.

Here are four useful criteria for beginning:

- Compare your present operational performance and efficiency with that of organisations considered most efficient in your industry, as well as factors apparent in related markets, both mature and emerging.

- Evaluate the competence of your enterprise work processes to distinguish those components that require upgrading.

- Assess employee attitudes toward their jobs and organisational quality of work life (QWL) to ascertain where improvements can be made in their motivation and in the work processes that are their responsibility.

- Develop solutions to raise performance in these areas.

Don't be surprised by the extent to which the human element figures in all the consequent analyses and computations.

Our recommendations for improving operational and workforce performance concern HRM administration.

Organisational development

Many improvements have been made for employee quality of work life, through development of HRM policy and influence in enterprise decision-making. Nevertheless, issues of workforce protection and empowerment may remain incompletely resolved within the organisational environment. Various processes can be enacted that enhance QWL, while improving operational efficiency. Although it may be somewhat costly to initiate these procedures within the enterprise paradigm, they result in improved workforce functioning and ultimately generate more money through better staff efficiency.

An organisation's people strategy attempts to positively transform workforce operations by focusing on employees' skills, attitudes, perceptions, and outlook in relation to the work expected of them. Methods for improving operational efficiency and workforce performance frequently involve change strategies based on employees' job-related behaviour and expectations; many of these can be categorised as a source of organisational development (OD) techniques. OD incorporates a planned behavioural-science strategy for understanding, changing, and developing organisations to improve performance. The primary focus of OD techniques is changing workforce behaviour for better performance. It is an overriding belief among OD practitioners that those affected by the change process should actively participate in developing methods to achieve the desired change. This provides them with an element of 'ownership' in the change process, which can enhance their motivation to improve workplace performance.

An organisational development programme is tailored to meet the specific needs of the organisation. Team-building is an OD technique whose overriding objective is to help workers operate more effectively by evaluating and improving their process configurations for leadership, communication, conflict resolution, and member satisfaction. OD offers great opportunities for effecting such transformation because it encompasses three major sets of values influencing organisational behaviour and performance:

Values toward people

People have a natural desire for growth and development. Permitted to grow and develop, workers have an enhanced potential for contributing meaningfully to the organisation. OD team-building aims to overcome obstacles to individual growth. It encourages treating people with dignity and respect, stresses genuine behaviour while depreciating game-playing, and strives for open communication.

Values toward groups

It is important for people to be accepted by their work group. Collaboration and involvement in group problems leads to expression of feelings and perceptions. If members in a work group hide those feelings or are not accepted as members of their group, the individual's willingness to solve problems constructively will diminish. Encouragement of openness can strengthen the work team by stimulating trust and problem-solving capacities, thus improving operational efficiency.

Values toward the organisation

The way that groups are linked has a strong influence on their effectiveness. Just as each member of a team must realise that he or she is a single component of a larger unit, each team in an organisation must understand that it is only one of many other units comprising the entire organisation; appropriate interactive behaviour among teams is as important as suitable inter-personal behaviour between team members.

Organisational development ideally focuses on solving intergroup problems for improved operational efficiency and enhanced workforce performance. Too much organisational effort is wasted through poor communications or trying to achieve worker consensus. Team-building sessions may last from a half-day to several days, but the process of team maintenance is ongoing, so long as the unit continues to function. Depending on the team's specific needs and the skill of the team leader, team-building sessions stress such issues as:

Climate building

The meeting purpose and objectives are discussed. People share information about themselves and state what they would like to accomplish.

Process and structure evaluation

The group evaluates the strengths and weaknesses of its group processes. The group may, for instance, evaluate:

(a) its policies and structure,
(b) how decisions are made,
(c) how communications take place,
(d) the norms of the team-culture, and
(e) how each person could be a more effective team member.

Problem solving

After identifying major strengths and weaknesses, the group develops alternative strategies for overcoming weaknesses. The focus is on developing solutions to problems.

Setting objectives and planning

Team objectives are agreed upon and plans are made for achieving them efficiently.

Training

Team-building sessions include some form of training that is helpful to the group, such as improving communication skills, learning how to run meetings effectively, or diagnosing obstacles to improved performance.

Closure

Closure involves summarising what has been accomplished by assigning follow-up responsibilities. These processes empower employees for better performance.

Employee empowerment

"LIMIT THE ADVERSARIAL CHARACTER OF LABOUR/MANAGEMENT RELATIONS."

Empowerment is a workforce maintenance technique that uses aspects of HRM in conjunction with OD to serve enterprise needs and those of employees. It limits the traditional adversarial character of labour/management relations by improving workers' quality of work life, the level to which workers can satisfy important personal needs through their workplace activities and experiences. QWL emphasises the human dimension in work and recognises the advisability of providing responsible employees an appropriate degree of workplace autonomy, even within the context of team-specific assignments and responsibilities. This is the degree to which the job provides substantial freedom, independence, and discretion to the individual in scheduling work and determining the procedures to be used implementing the assigned tasks.

Knowledgeable team leaders and HRM personnel therefore suggest to upper level management that empowerment procedures and processes be introduced into the workplace as a means of improving employees' QWL and, by extension, their motivation for better performance.

Such improvements might be implemented by:

- introducing methods of problem-solving based on worker contributions,
- modifying work schedules and responsibilities, and
- offering incentives/benefits that interest workers.

Employees are further empowered when they are given the opportunity to improve their work knowledge/skills and advance to higher stations in the organisation. Empowerment can effectively serve team development and maintenance by engendering a more participative work environment that stimulates enhanced performance. Empowerment further stimulates the primary skills of

effective work groups. These are:

(1) the ability to gather relevant information about a problem confronting the group;
(2) the ability to make sound decisions; and
(3) the ability to obtain member commitment to implementing the decisions.

Team-building efforts focus on building such skills for improved operational efficiency and reduced costs. Team-construction and development serves employee empowerment and is appropriate to enhanced organisational performance when one or more of the following conditions exist:

- Members have various bits of information that must be brought together to produce a solution, such as developing a new product; team-members are selected with respect to the data and skills they bring to the resolution process.

- Members also need to have the skills and knowledge to deal with unstructured and complex tasks, such as how to reduce labour costs during the coming year.

- Members have different ideas about the best means of dealing with a problem or task; their acceptance of the chosen solution is critical to effective implementation.

These workforce solutions engage employees through the development of their skills and challenging their workplace interests, encouraging stimulated performance of occupational tasks.

The role each team-member plays within the context of the team is empowering because it is a function of their respective and specific personalities, communication styles, levels of satisfaction (QWL, etc.), as well as the leadership style of the team's leader. Team leaders need to know how to recognise effective and ineffective teams, from the outset. In general, an effective team normally possesses all or most of the following characteristics:

(1) Members know why the group exists, so they are empowered to obtain specific objectives.
(2) Members have approved guidelines or procedures empowering them to make decisions.
(3) Members have achieved honest and open communications among themselves.

(4) Members are empowered to receive and provide help to one another, without specific managerial interaction.
(5) Members are empowered to accept and deal with conflict within the team.
(6) Members have learned to diagnose their processes and improve their own, and the team's, capacity to function effect lively.

The degree to which one or more of these characteristics are not present determines whether – and to what extent – the group is ineffective. At Ten Live, our professionals can help you generate organisational development/ empowerment solutions appropriate to your firm's needs.

Employee motivation

One of the more critical tasks of HR management is assessing individual and group behaviour. Successful HRM improves the match between individuals and the jobs they do, increasing worker output. This is equally true for workplace teams. The overall quality of this match ultimately influences job performance, operational efficiency, employee satisfaction and employee turnover. While individual performance is an important factor for organisational success, group performance is even more consequential, since most of the work an organisation does involves the contributions of many people before it is completed. Moreover, where personnel problems arise, individual workers can be replaced more easily than groups of workers, in most cases. Thus, it is essential that accurate assessment of individuals and groups be accomplished.

Motivation improves when workers:

(1) see the good results from their efforts,
(2) receive appreciative assessments from HRM, operational managers and peers,
(3) receive appropriate rewards in terms of compensation, benefits and recognition,
(4) are assured similar incentives will be provided for future good performance, and
(5) see workers who have shown a lack of enthusiasm for improved group-performance are appropriately informed of their workplace transgressions.

Therefore, for enhanced motivation, HR management must make appropriate decisions about the method or methods used for assessment of job-performance. Motivation also improves as workers see quality of work life and employee well-being is provided respectful assessment by HRM policies. HR practitioners recognise that consideration of QWL is necessary for appropriate reduction of employee dissatisfaction. Improved quality of work life generally leads to enhanced individual and/or group motivation and performance.

Employee retention

Employees are assets whose retention assures optimal benefits for workplace performance and operational efficiency. Workers who quit need to be replaced, a costly and time-consuming process. From the financial standpoint alone, estimates suggest that loss and replacement of entry-level workers equals 30-50% of their annual salary; that figure grows for mid-level employees (150%) and to as much as 450% for upper-level, specialised, expert workers. It can be particularly problematic if enterprise knowledge-workers seek other employment, since the slowly reviving economy requires workers who are capable partners, committed to your organisational strategies.

Retention is more likely where workers feel they have a stake in maintaining the firm's competitive position. Having access to organisational development and empowerment priorities provide some incentive to stay, as do competitive compensation packages. In today's increasingly outsourced economy, the enterprise environment is one where overt managerial control is less attractive than ever before. Higher quality employees seek to work with their employers, rather than for them.

Establishing a corporate culture of mutual support, where workers feel valued and add value in equitable return is more conducive to their enhanced productivity than measures management has used in the past.

Integrating temporary staff into the workforce

In an ideal work environment, temporary staff would seamlessly integrate with permanent workers for

enhanced output and efficiency. However, the realities of workplace dynamics ensure problems stemming from unplanned interactions between core long-term workers and peripheral temporary staff. Some consistency with institutionalised behavioural norms is an expectation of the workplace, a commitment to recognised and normative behavioural patterns that meet an organisation's mission. Temporary staff – more common in the flexitime, outsourced working world of today – may be unaware of behavioural expectations, causing some reduction in operational performance, even as work gets done.

Crucial factors influencing integration outcomes include:

(1) how temporary workers are added-into the work organisation,
(2) the skills they're required to perform,
(3) duration of orientation/training, and
(4) access to competence development.

Improving workforce performance and operational efficiency throughout the enterprise requires perpetual adaptation of corporate expectations to circumstances as they unfold, rather than reliance on the rigid directives of paper strategies, which necessarily change during practical execution. There is no way to stop the changes already underway in the workplace; however, in light of other consequences of workplace evolution – diminished job stability, longer working hours, potential decline in the number of good jobs, widening gap between unskilled and skilled workers – it will be important to strategically navigate an economic course that stimulates business and creates a supply of good jobs for the workers of tomorrow.

Recognise some of the issues mentioned above?

If you were unaware that you had any issues with staffing but some of the points mentioned above ring a bell, then why not get in touch with Ten Live?

Ten Live would like to hear from you and work in partnership with you, implementing the TEN LIVE : ENGAGE program to ensure you have the right people in the right job, helping you meet your business objectives.

About Ten Live

Ten Live is an international recruitment and resource management company with many years' experience. With our roots in Scotland, Ten Live operate across the United Kingdom, Middle East, Asia, Africa and Australia.

We offer a range of specialist recruitment and resource management services in Energy, Telecoms and Logistics markets – not only recruiting but ensuring staff are fully trained prior to joining your organisation. Ten Live go above and beyond simply placing a candidate; we work continually with them, providing training to ensure they are offering you the best they can.

Ten Live's unique TEN LIVE : ENGAGE program offers both employers and job seekers a high degree of certainty in sourcing the right person for the right role.

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