

CHANGE FOR THE BETTER

Employees are happier and more productive when companies support their career ambitions

If there is one thing that employees are weary of, it is change. One quarter of top performers think about leaving their job as soon as they hear about changes to their working environment.

When a company is trying to transform itself, retaining its star players becomes more important than ever to carry the organisation through the upheaval. But how do leaders persuade them not to jump ship when there are serious challenges looming?

Staying on board

The answer is engagement. Even when a company is not going through an upheaval, engaged employees are happier. Research from the Corporate Leadership Council suggests that the most engaged employees are 87% less likely to leave their organisation and 20% more productive.

Leaders have to overcome two obstacles to engagement. The first is that they have enough on their plate during an upheaval without worrying about such intangibles as whether their employees are feeling engaged.

However, the employees who have survived the job cuts — far from being grateful to still be in employment — are left to deal with the changes. Engaging these potentially disaffected employees who have been left behind will keep them on a leader's side and make the change process easier.

The second obstacle is the lack of engagement, even at the best of times. According to Corporate

Leadership Council research, only 11% of the workforce is highly engaged and three quarters are neither engaged nor disengaged. Employees can hardly be expected to give their all in times of uncertainty when they are not that bothered about their work in the first place.

The United Kingdom's Chartered Institute for Personnel & Development (CIPD) calls engagement "passion for work" and says that it involves feeling positive about your job and being prepared to go the extra mile.

It has a meaningful effect on productivity, so how do companies make engagement happen?

When Fujitsu Services in Britain carried out its annual employee engagement survey in 2006, it was keen to improve the perception of career support, where it had consistently scored below average.

"We weren't focused on supporting people moving round the organisation," says Jai Cozzi, head of Graduate and Professional Development. "We had what we considered to be an excellent career framework, but it just wasn't visible to employees."

Staff simply did not know where they could take their careers within the organisation.

Managing careers

The first step to improve this was to create an online career-mapping tool, which employees could use to help them visualise career paths. This, however, wasn't the resounding success that Fujitsu had hoped.



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Source: ST/ANN

Says Cozzi: "We went to focus groups with the tool and people said, 'It's good, but it doesn't help me. I don't know if I want to do that job.'"

The company had the strategy right, but not the basics, such as an awareness of what it means to manage your career. The company then built some self-analysis tools into the mapping system.

This time the focus groups liked what they saw. "They said the tools were helpful and allowed them to better plan their careers," says Cozzi,

who admits that there is a strong commercial case for encouraging employees to find new jobs within the company.

"Our resource plan is to try to promote the mobilisation of staff and grow them into bigger roles," he says. "The commercial reason is to save on recruitment costs."

In addition, by moving people up the promotion chain, the recruitment gaps are created only in the lower-skilled end, which is more cost-effective.

There is also a less hard-nosed philosophy behind engaging staff. Says Cozzi: "By supporting people in their ambitions and desire to move into positions of responsibility, you become an appealing employer to them. If people are being supported in realising their potential, they are more engaged with their employer."

— Source: ST/ANN

■ **ARTICLE** by Sattar Bawany, head of Transition Coaching Practice at DBM Asia Pacific.