

involvement

Employee consultation and involvement in decision-making

Employee involvement is linked to positive changes in employees' attitudes, overcoming resistance to change, increasing commitment, trust in management, and productivity. Despite its importance, employees consistently rate involvement as one of the aspects of work they are least satisfied with.

suggested actions

- **employee decision-making** Encourage employees to make suggestions and empower them to make changes to their daily work processes. Ensure the change process is continuous, allowing for ongoing input. Educate and train employees, as they may be new to offering ideas and making decisions of this nature. *Organisational surveys, suggestion schemes, continuous improvement systems, quality circles and self-directed work teams* are all ways of involving staff. A quick Google search will provide you with more information about these strategies.
- **clear organisation direction** Regularly communicate the vision and strategy of the organisation to employees. It gives employees the structure and information needed to make autonomous decisions and changes that are effective and in line with organisational goals.
- **communication** Facilitate information flow up and down the organisation. Set up meetings, at least once a month, so there are opportunities for two-way communication between management and staff. Have an open door policy at work and use open-ended questions to elicit feedback from employees. In times of organisational change, more communication is needed. Consult with staff particularly about decisions that will affect them.
- **management commitment** Involving staff can be challenging for some managers who are used to directing rather than listening. Management will need to take on a supportive role and give up a little authority. They need to proactively encourage, pay attention to, and act on employees' opinions. Consulting on decisions will almost always take more time than making them autonomously, and managers must be convinced that it is worth the effort. Education and training may be required to assist in changing management views and behaviour.
- **structures for evaluation** Develop and frequently review strategies to involve employees. Have an evaluation process in place to decide the value of each idea made by employees. Always respond to ideas, without making promises that cannot be kept. Provide feedback on decisions where ideas were not implemented.
- **feedback on action** Communicate actions taken and explicitly link them with the involvement process. Acknowledge employees for their part in any improvements. This will encourage continued involvement from staff.

case study

Following administration of the ResMed Global Voice Climate Survey, Andrew Cameron, Head of Manufacturing – Patient Interface Unit in ResMed Australia, presented their results to his 200 employees. Together they chose a few priority areas, one of which was involvement.

In response, Andrew asked each employee to come up with one idea for improving their job that could be implemented within a year. He empowered employees by acknowledging “you are here all day... you’re the ones that are best equipped to make a decision”. He was confident that the organisation direction was well known as it is communicated by him every 6 to 8 weeks, and by the COO quarterly.

Some ideas were simple – for example, moving paperwork from one side of the campus to the other by allocating a post bag. Every single idea was given attention. Ideas not able to be implemented were discussed with the employee who made the suggestion. All staff had put forward an idea within 2 weeks. “Within 3 months we had actually implemented the whole 200 ideas. It was mind-blowing. We won the COO Continuous Improvement Award of the month for not only recognising 200 ideas, but realising these 200 ideas”. The enthusiasm generated has resulted in improvement ideas being suggested daily. In 6 months their unit achieved savings worth \$500,000. “It wasn’t so much the money that was motivating, it was about making it an easier and more improved place to work with efficiencies behind that. If you talk to the employees, they love this program”.

Andrew also involved staff in communicating progress through a “visual feedback loop”. “A lot of the actions that we see happening on the floor, we could capture photographically and remind ourselves and our employees about the actions that we are taking”. Displayed on posters around the work area, this innovative and effective form of communication has generated much excitement, and featured in ResMed’s global magazine.

useful resources

- Cotton, J. L. (1993). **Employee involvement: Methods for improving performance and work attitudes**. New York: Sage.
- Department of Innovation Industry and Regional Development. (2008). **Workplace consultation: Employee participation in decision making**. The high performance toolkit: Your guide to managing a high performance organisation Retrieved 19 September, 2009, from http://www.business.vic.gov.au/busvicwr/assets/main/lib60037/08_hpt3-1employeeparticipationindecision.pdf
- Fair Work Ombudsman. (2009). **Best practice guide: Consultation & cooperation in the workplace**. Retrieved 19 September, 2009, from <http://www.fwo.gov.au/Best-Practice-Guides/Documents/02-Consultation-and-cooperation-in-the-workplace.pdf>
- Gollan, P. J. (2005). **High involvement management and human resource sustainability: The challenges and opportunities**. Asia Pacific Journal of Human Resources, 43(1), 18-33.
- Greig, A., & Australian Employee Ownership Association (AEOA). **Employee ownership and employee participation** Retrieved 19 September, 2009, from http://aeoa.org.au/0024/forum/topic.asp?TOPIC_ID=83
- Lawler, E. E., III (Ed.). (1991). **Executive behavior in high-involvement organizations**. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.