

Building commitment through organisational culture

Organisational Culture

Today, talent management is the key imperative, making employee commitment more important than ever. Commitment takes many forms however and it is essential that organisational strategies retain the right people for the right reasons. This study examined the relationship between organisational culture and the various forms of commitment. The results showed that organisations with constructive cultures encouraged commitment where people stay because they want to, and those organisations with more defensive cultures encouraged people to stay because they functioned within a 'comfort zone'.

Inquiry

Is there a relationship between employee commitment and organisational culture? With today's realities of increasing employee mobility and the 'war for talent' does culture offer an avenue of exploration that might help an organisation increase employee commitment, reduce turnover and the costs associated with recruitment, induction and training? In short, is culture relevant in retaining high performing staff?

Research Opportunity

Sugarto Lahiry, through a research grant from the American Society for Training and Development, studied the relationship between culture and commitment within various business units within his employer - a large multi-unit organisation in India. These units are involved in manufacturing and marketing petroleum products, high technology engineering goods, and industrial explosives. His research was later published in the ASTD's publication 'Training & Development'.

Research Design

The study focused on eight business units within three divisions, surveying supervisors to general managers.

The Human Synergistics Organisational Culture Inventory was used to measure culture and organisational commitment was measured using a questionnaire developed by Allen and Meyer (1990). Statistical analysis examined the relationship between culture and commitment as defined below.

Defining Commitment

Meyer and Allen's (1990) model of organisational commitment defines three different types of commitment:

Affective commitment refers to the employees' emotional attachment to the organisation. In essence, with affective commitment, employees stay with the organisation because they want to.

Continuance commitment is based on the costs the employees associate with leaving the organisation. In other words people stay with the organisation because they need to and because it is simply more comfortable to do so.

Normative commitment refers to employees' feelings of obligation to remain with the organisation - people stay because they feel they ought to do so.

Linking human endeavour to organisational performance

Building commitment through organisational culture

Meyer and Allen's research found a relationship between affective commitment and higher levels of performance, with lower performance levels being associated with continuance commitment. Most importantly, these researchers found that people who stay because they feel they cannot afford to leave often do the minimum amount of work required to keep their jobs. Since many studies over the years have linked employee commitment (in the broader sense) with greater performance, identifying factors that distinguish specifically between affective commitment and continuance commitment would certainly shed greater light on where management should focus its efforts.

Given issues around the need to manage knowledge, retain talent and attract high performing individuals (the so called war for talent), then a study such as this has something very real to offer.

Results

- Affective commitment is related to constructive cultures, where members are encouraged to interact with others and approach their work in ways that reflect achievement, self-actualising, humanistic and affiliative behaviours, as measured by the Organisational Culture Inventory.
- Continuance commitment correlated highly with the passive/defensive culture patterns, where members are encouraged to interact with others and approach their work in ways that reflect approval, conventional, dependent and avoidance behaviours (OCI).
- Continuance commitment was also related to higher scores in the aggressive/defensive culture styles, where members are encouraged to interact with others and approach their work in ways that reflect oppositional, power, competitive and perfectionistic behaviours (OCI).
- Normative commitment did not correlate significantly with any of the culture patterns.

Implications

The implications of this study are particularly significant when considering organisational development interventions designed to increase employee commitment. Whether it is an effort to reduce turnover; attract talent or ensure high performing individuals are retained within the organisation, such interventions must target increasing constructive behaviours and minimising any passive or aggressive defensive behaviours.

Studies have shown that affective commitment is significantly more desirable than continuance commitment, and as commitment itself cannot be 'increased' interventions can only be directed at areas that will encourage, support and reinforce commitment. What is clearly shown by this study is that if affective commitment is to be increased, then culture change programmes are a relevant approach to achieve this. If defensive elements within an organisation's culture can be reduced and constructive factors encouraged, then commitment should improve.



Auckland

10 York Street
PO Box 37-483
Telephone 09 309 9010
Facsimile 09 379 2263

Wellington

1 Willeston Street
PO Box 27-327
Telephone 04 470 7700
Facsimile 04 470 7711

Sydney

8 Windmill Street
Millers Point NSW 2000
Telephone 02 9271 5900
Facsimile 02 9247 6310

Melbourne

470 Collins Street
Melbourne, VIC 3000
Telephone 03 9675 0100
Facsimile 03 9629 3095