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Embedding Psychological health and wellbeing at work

A brief guide to the Psychology of
Commitment and trust at work

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Case study

A university with 20,000 students was required to increase its commercial operations and expand its range of services to compete successfully for students and income from other sources, for example, research funding. This raised the question about the purpose of a university, and the need for clarity. Some staff held strongly to the view that a university is a research and learning institution, whilst others thought the university should be more vocationally focused. There was not a common view. Staff started to become disillusioned with the lack of direction and purpose, and the younger members were looking for employment elsewhere, placing the University strategy for expansion and development at risk. Costs for replacing staff were rising, diverting funds away from development in order to fulfil current obligations. Negativity was spreading and being felt by the students, in turn, having an impact on the reputation as a university of choice, threatening the future attraction of existing numbers, never mind future growth.

Brief guidance

- 1) Clarity of purpose of an organisation is an essential pre-requisite to achieve commitment from staff
 - 2) Commitment from staff has a direct impact on performance; lack of commitment contributes significantly to sickness, absence and staff turnover.
 - 3) Staff who commit to and trust 'the big idea' of an organisation will have lower sickness, absence and staff turnover, and will experience greater involvement and contribution to the overall performance of the organisation.
 - 4) Strong commitment and trust in the purpose of the organisation leads to a psychologically healthy workforce.
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Our role

- OrganisationHealth works with top management to define purpose. This necessitates a thorough understanding of all the issues that confront all the staff in each of the services offered by the organisation.
 - We use learning sets comprised of a broad range of staff to ensure that all the issues are identified, discussed, crystallised and contribute to the outcome.
 - We help to establish criteria for judging the 'success' of the university, and seek agreement amongst staff that they be used to determine purpose.
 - We introduce the defined purpose from competitive organisations to help in establishing a unique purpose that sets this organisation apart from others.
 - We help to introduce an effective communication network throughout the organisation to build the commitment of staff to its purpose.
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Wider application

Many organisations fail to establish a clear purpose with the consequences of 'luke warm' commitment by staff. Such organisations perform below their optimum and carry a heavy cost in replacing and supporting staff whose level of commitment results in under personal performance. Such situations place organisations at risk of failing to develop and compete effectively.

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