

Don't Forget the Employee Experience!

Article By:

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While the pandemic may be behind us, many employees in manufacturing workplaces who worked on the front lines during the last few years, may be having difficulty remaining engaged at work and satisfied with their job. Whether it is called the “employee experience,” “employee satisfaction,” or “employee engagement” – this concept generally means the amount of their energy that employees are willing to invest in their work and workplace. Regardless of what you call it, it is far more than a personnel issue, it directly impacts retention, attrition, productivity, safety in the workplace, and ultimately the “bottom line.” So where should manufacturers start in taking the temperature of workers and their satisfaction?

First, manufacturers should consider gathering information about the current level of employee engagement. This can be done through formal channels such as employee engagement surveys and focus groups but also through informal conversations with stakeholders (e.g., town hall meetings, small group meetings, etc.). There are a number of vendors who offer surveys, many of which can be tailored, or such surveys can be conducted by internal personnel. For manufacturers who may not have the resources to conduct a formal survey or assessment, engaging in discussions around several standardized inquiries to diverse stakeholders at all levels of the organizations can also provide insight into the status of employee engagement. In addition, metrics for key data points may also be helpful in providing insight into the workplace including: turnover and attrition rates, employee use of various benefits, safety incidents, absences, use of vacation, and similar data. In this phase, the information solicited should help in answering the following kinds of questions:

- What makes our employees feel valued?
- Do employees feel their work is important?
- Do employees perceive salary and benefits as fair? What about competitive?
- Do our benefits actively reflect trends and needs of our employees? For example, if we know that employees value flexibility, are we providing that and if not, should we be?
- How do we recognize employees and how is it being received by them?
- Do employees believe they “fit in” at work and why?

- Are we providing the right support to employees including personnel, tools, equipment, and a safe work environment? Are there barriers to our employees feeling comfortable?
- Do we have a mechanism for inviting dialogue with employees and are they using it? If not, how can we improve that?
- According to the data gathered, how are we doing? Where do we need to improve?

Second, manufacturers should review the information received. If reliable data is obtained, employers will be able to understand the current status of engagement and the answers to questions such as those listed above. When surveys are conducted using a vendor and/or electronic platform, companies may be provided with a certain degree of analysis beyond aggregation of results, that may also provide helpful. Depending on how the data is gathered, it will need to be analyzed by the company to understand what the data is showing.

Third, key decisionmakers and stakeholders should determine the priorities and goals and then craft a plan to best attain those goals. Plans should be focused on tangible action items and the steps needed to perform each item. Ideally, one person or several people take ownership for implementation of the plan, the individuals are held accountable for working toward the goals in the plan, and the company is updated on its progress with regularity. Investing in this third step, at the highest level of the organization, is critical to the successful implementation of a plan to increase employee engagement.

While 2023 may be a year of rebuilding the workplace in various industries, for manufacturers, it may be an opportunity to gain valuable insight into the workplace and into employees, many of whom worked through a tumultuous and difficult several years.

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