

MAN UK: *Driving success through employee participation*

What does this case study demonstrate?

Man Truck and Bus UK Ltd values employee feedback, voice and team work, aiming to translate them into a powerful source of innovation and business efficiency. Man is on transformational journey, adopting workplaces practices that will locate employee participation and involvement as an indispensable part of its business success.

Workplace innovation elements: cross functional groups, job autonomy, employee recognition, employee initiative and involvement, learning and development, continuous improvement, representative participation.

Context: Man Truck UK Ltd is one of the biggest road transport service providers in the UK. It supplies a range of commercial vehicles, buses, coaches and industrial engines to operators and other companies, though no manufacturing is undertaken within the UK. The company is part of the MAN Group and is wholly owned by VW which plays an active role at corporate level.

Beyond the engagement survey

The annual staff engagement survey is followed up with team-based discussions and both enjoy high levels of participation. They are considered an effective tool for identifying weaknesses in organisational culture and practice as well as identifying opportunities to break down silos between management and staff. According to the Head of Organisational Development Trish Newman “. . . it's been a very useful tool for us to get to the grass-roots of issues and to hear what's really going on.”

Outcomes from the survey and group discussions identified areas of poor communication between management and staff, and instances of decisions being made without proper involvement. The immediate response included enhanced leadership training and a strong emphasis on communication: “we've encouraged managers to have proper discussions, take twenty or thirty minutes with your staff; talk about the core brief, also talk about things that are happening in your local area; involve the sales guy in the meeting so he can tell you what's up and coming with customers . . . the more involved our guys feel with what's going on, the more they will try and make it work” (Trish).

The company then began to implement a series of workplace innovations designed to enhance employee involvement, team-work, job autonomy and representative participation, all designed to strengthen its approach to continuous improvement.

Dialogue drives improvement

Man recognises the importance of engaging staff in discussion and knowledge sharing at every level of the business.

Employees are actively represented on the *Works Council* which meets in Germany. The volunteer representative “asks for issues before, he goes to the meeting, comes back and gives everybody a summary of what's happened.” The company is also seeking to strengthen employee voice through the creation of an *Employee Forum* based on a strong belief that when employees are involved in

decision making they are more likely to own the outcomes and to respond effectively to challenging circumstances.

At the workplace level *cross functional project teams* are a source of continuous improvement, bringing employees from different levels and disciplines together to share knowledge and ideas, stimulate innovation and inform decision-making.

Employee recognition programmes and monetary awards encourage employees to identify new ideas, celebrate success and make people feel valued for their contribution to business success. Recognition is not limited to individuals but extends to teams as a means of promoting collaborative working and innovation. One of the most popular schemes is “The Extra Mile” in which employees are recognised and rewarded for being innovative and going beyond the requirements of daily work tasks.

Cross training is a crucial contributor to employee skills development and effective team work. According to the employee representative “cross training is a big thing for us . . . we look at opportunities for job rotations and things like that to give people different (opportunities for) development.”

Teamwork is central to work organisation and culture. From regular team meetings to informal “Friday biscuit time” discussions employees have the chance to meet and share knowledge about business issues. Well-functioning teams also support the individual *job discretion* and *autonomy* that are of utmost importance in getting things done efficiently. In one case “we knew that (two) teams were struggling in terms of manpower, so we devoted some of our team’s time to some of their work . . . we have not had to ask permission to do that” (team member). According to one employee the use of discretion is expected to the extent that: “. . . if you don’t use your own initiative you don’t get things done”.

Who benefits?

Management recognises that employee involvement and participation have significantly contributed to Man’s business success by stimulating continuous improvement, innovation and better decision-making. An open management culture enhances quality of working life and employees value the opportunity to use their knowledge and ideas more effectively: “we have got an awful lot of long serving members of staff working here because the culture and the company itself is really, really good to work for” (employee). However the company readily acknowledges that further progress is required.

Prognosis

The company shows sustained commitment to developing and sustaining participative and empowering workplace practices as a driver for continuous improvement and business success as well as improving communication, knowledge sharing and customer focus. The planned Employee Forum will play a vital role not only in enhancing employee voice and representation but in taking the company’s performance forward.