



# switching on your people

the importance of cultural alignment as a competitive advantage



**Enlightened organisations understand the need to really listen to their customers and not only provide what they want, but to exceed their expectations. They understand it's the customer's perception of how well, or badly, they feel they were treated which counts.**

How do organisations ensure front line staff deliver a "top notch" experience, outshining the competition and separating them from the "herd"?

This article sets out the tried and tested methodology for making this happen.

**Putting yourself in your customers' shoes**

How do you feel when you phone with a problem or need which you want dealt with and you are presented with a seemingly interminable list of options by a disembodied voice, or put on hold for minutes at a time with a background of irritating music?

Contrast this with your own most recent experience of excellent service when you really felt valued. How did this influence your view of the organisation you were dealing with? How rare are these experiences?

**How do you want your customers to feel?**

What is the experience which you would like your customers to have? Visualise what this would be like, picture the scene – what do you see, hear and feel?

There's a buzz about the place. Bright, switched on, confident and committed people are responding quickly and solving problems. Queries referred to others are dealt with immediately enabling the customer facing person to get back to the customer with the solution. Every customer rings off or walks away feeling really valued.....like you did in the second scenario above.

**What's the current reality?**

What is your reality today. Ask yourself – "how do my customers feel about the experience they have when they deal with my business? How do we treat them?"

"How well are our customer facing staff dealing with our customers?"

"How well do these staff feel they are being managed and supported by the rest of the organisation or your suppliers?"

**Is there any difference between these two scenarios?**

If not – congratulations! Keep up the good work and share with others what you are doing, so they can learn from your experience.

If yes – can I invite you to read on.

**There's good news!**

The good news is that there are some simple tried and trusted actions you can take which can "narrow the gap" between where you are now and where you want to be.

We all know organisations who do this well and who are role models to follow.

**So how is it done?**

How do these people remain fully committed to deliver good results continually on a day to day basis?

The people working in these organisations

are subject to the same daily pressures and are just like the rest of us, both in and outside of work

**Putting on a Performance**

What they are able to do is to put on a performance. This doesn't mean they are blindly positive about everything – "yes" people. You cannot fake good service.

What they do is to lift themselves to give of their best each day. They don't do this because they are told to or coerced – they do it because they want to – they identify totally with the purpose of their role and take pride in doing it to the best of their ability. They work together as part of a team delivering a collective service.

**So how is this achieved?**

Every single person must understand what the organisation is trying to achieve and what their role is in delivering that.

They need to understand clearly what is expected of them and receive feedback on a regular basis of how well they are doing.

They need to feel valued and involved.

How can you measure whether this is being achieved? The answer is;-

Quite simply:-

- Ask them
- Listen to what they tell you
- Understand what they are saying
- Identify the issues which are influencing their perceptions
- Agree actions to replicate or reinforce the positive results
- Agree actions to address the negative results
- Follow through on the actions, checking on progress
- Repeat the process down the track

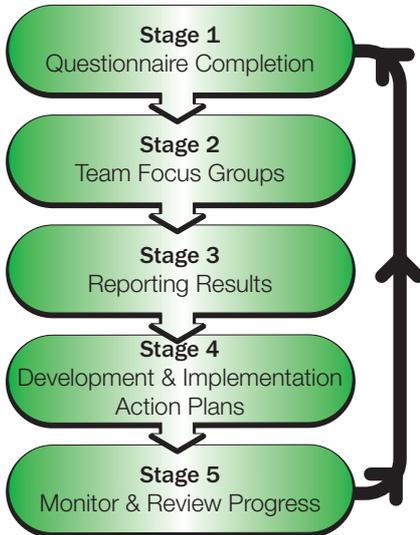




This is most effectively achieved using a system called:-

## EMPLOYEE VALUE MANAGEMENT (EVM)

### Summary of the EVM Process



### What's involved?

#### Stage One – Personal Questionnaire

Each person in the organisation completes a simple questionnaire which asks 36 questions and takes around 15 minutes to complete. This is done anonymously, only the name of the department or team is recorded. They are asked to enter a numerical score for each question.

The questions are based on 9 factors which influence motivation and commitment at work, drawn from accredited academic research.

The results are analysed and a collective average score is recorded for each team and the organisation as a whole.

#### Stage Two – Departmental Team Focus Groups

An externally facilitated focus group is held for each departmental team, where team members are shown the top 3 scoring factors and the bottom 3. They are then asked to share and discuss the

issues which caused them to score the way they did.

These issues are often manifested in perceptions, as opposed to facts, some of these perceptions can be quite powerful. The facilitators ask pertinent questions to distil down the real evidence driving the perceptions. Anything said in the focus group remains anonymous and non-attributable.

The senior management team, often the board of directors, is its own departmental team, as is the next tier of management down (middle management team). For consistency and richness of results it is also desirable to have a group for junior management/supervisory level.

#### Stage Three – Reporting of Results

The facilitators report the findings to the senior management team, without breaching the confidence of the groups. This feedback will include the perceptions and the “evidence” driving them. This feedback frequently takes the senior management by surprise and requires them to have the discipline to suspend judgement and not leap to conclusions, rationalise away the findings or “shoot the messenger”.

From this process it is easy to identify collective issues which exist across the whole organisation and those which are relevant to particular departmental teams. Often there are complimentary issues existing between teams which rely on each other on a day to day basis.

A further point of interest is looking at the issues which exist between the different levels of management.

#### Stage Four – Development of Action Plans

All this activity is under the guidance of the facilitators.

Starting at the top the senior management team discuss the issue arising from the feedback, both within their own team and the collective issues arising. They may pick up on positive feedback from particular departmental teams to identify actions which could be replicated more widely in the organisation to good effect. An action plan is agreed to replicate the good and address the more negative.

The top management team meet with the middle management team to follow the same process. This is likely to have to deal with some quite sensitive issues, but is extremely valuable in clearing the air and removing obstacles. It is quite typical for there to be some tension between the two teams, or elements within them, but it is vital to address this constructively, because any dissonance between senior and middle management is a significant barrier to achieving the successful result you desire!

This process is replicated between middle and junior management teams.

Each departmental team manager sits down with their team, with a facilitator to discuss the issues arising from the focus groups and to agree an action plan to replicate the good and address the more negative aspects.



#### Stage Five – Reviewing Progress

Review dates are built in for reviewing progress with these action plans. It is vital that the implementation of the action plan is one of the





personal objectives of each manager, by which their performance is measured.

**Stage Six - Repeat the process after 6-12 months**

By flagging up that you are committed to repeating the process you will generate momentum to ensure the action plans are delivered. It is folly to have an issue re-raised from the first exercise which has not been addressed. This demonstrates to everyone that you mean business and will enable you to move forward.

The timescales of your initial action plans will be a guide to how long you wait to repeat the process.

One tip is to avoid being complacent with your higher scoring teams, it is easy to take them and their goodwill for granted because you are naturally more likely to be focused on your areas for improvement. Make sure they continue to be involved in the ongoing dialogue.

**Benefits of Deploying the EVM System**

There are a whole range of significant benefits:-

- 1. The EVM system provides a quantitative way of "taking the temperature" of the motivation and commitment of everyone within the organisation.
- 2. The EVM system enables you to ensure that all the issues and perceptions which exist around the organisation are brought out into the open and dealt with. Some of these would remain hidden but for the EVM process. Paradoxically some negative issues arise from apparently positive scores.
- 3. The action plans comprise actions required from team members as well

as managers, they promote an acceptance of there being "rights and responsibilities".

- 4. Being seen to take action on the issues arising promotes trust, goodwill and commitment amongst the workforce. Staff feel more involved as a result of going through the process. They learn to trust the process and as a result feel more comfortable on a day to day basis to make suggestions, flag up issues and ask questions when they don't understand, thus completing a virtuous circle.
- 5. Managers benefit from the discipline of having to sit down with their teams to agree and then implement the action plan. With the help of the facilitator they develop their skills and confidence and become more effective managers.
- 6. An originally unforeseen benefit is that teams take great pride and ownership in their scores and therefore are more committed to work on the issues.
- 7. The EVM results can be presented in a format which matches the HSE criteria for workplace stress which means that your actions will automatically satisfy your legal obligation to address these factors.
- 8. There is a facility to benchmark your results against other organisations.

**All of the above result in:-**

- 9. Tangible business benefits ensue from the successful deployment of the EVM system such as:-
  - Reduced absenteeism and "presenteeism"
  - Lower staff turnover in key positions

- Much higher levels of staff performance
- Memorable levels of customer service, beating your competition all ends up
- INCREASED PROFITS



**Nigel Cook** is an experienced commercial professional HR practitioner with 30 years management experience in customer focused businesses. In his 18 years HR experience his strength has been to mould HR interventions which really add value to the business – largely through helping the organisation get more from its people through his advice, guidance and coaching.

In most organisations people on average feel they fulfil about 50% of their potential on a day by day basis. Yet most managers feel they have too much to do with the resources they have or put another way they need more resources to do the job.

Surely the logical answer is to get more from your existing people, who in many cases would be only too willing to give more – to realise more of their potential.

Nigel has recently established the **Employer's Cookbook** in a quest to help organisations do just that and break the cycle of so much being (not well) done in so little time!

Belonging to CIPD, IOD, BPS amongst other professional bodies, Nigel is also an advisor with TEN – The Excellent Network – which promotes Business Improvement.

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