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TASKED WITH ENGAGEMENT IN A NEW WORLD OF WORK

CLARE KAVANAGH REPORTS ON THE FINDINGS OF A RECENT B&A STUDY WHICH EXPLORED EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT AND WORKING FROM HOME

Recent research undertaken by B&A suggests that Irish workers are becoming less committed to their employers over time. In May of this year we asked a sample of 630 employees if they could see themselves working for the same company/organisation in three years' time: 60 per cent of employees agreed, down from 68 per cent in May 2021. The 'Great Reshuffle' is far from over.

For companies hoping to improve their customer experience (CX), this spells trouble. The role of engaged and motivated employees in delivering differentiated, quality customer experiences promised by our brands' PR and advertising should not be over-estimated. CX is where the 'rubber hits the road'. Employees, especially customer-facing employees, are there to make it happen.

During the pandemic, contact centres have had a lot of churn in employees, prompting much disquiet among customers over poor experiences, often due to a dearth of experienced and trained staff. The challenge for employers is how to create conditions that retain and attract quality staff, while ensuring they are engaged in the work and can deliver the CX standard promised to customers.

A key conundrum is how to handle working from home. Employers need to get the balance right between large swathes of employees who wish to work from home and the challenge of managing employee engagement. Almost half of the employees that were interviewed by B&A claimed they either work from home all of the time (25 per cent) or in a hybrid set up (23 per cent).

The options are to tempt employees back to the office, demand employees return or learn to manage hybrid set-ups. We know that tempting employees back to the office is difficult as half empty company carparks across the country bear witness. This is despite employers using anything from ice cream trucks to free massages to attract employees to return to work in the office.

In terms of demanding a return to office, it appears that few employers follow the lead of Tesla boss, Elon Musk, in pressuring a return. In fact, the latest Labour Market Pulse, published by IDA Ireland in association with Microsoft and LinkedIn, showed that one in five Irish job postings published on LinkedIn in April 2022 offered candidates a choice of working from home.

Interestingly, LinkedIn data shows that Ireland had more remote working roles available than the United Kingdom, United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Germany. The data suggests that working from home is here to stay – in Ireland, at least. The challenge therefore is to put systems and processes in place to manage employees, regardless of where they decide or wish to work.

In this work it is worth noting that while employee happiness is an important factor, what we are really looking for here is employee engagement. All employers want their employees to be happy, contributing to staff morale and boosting productivity in the workplace. However, engaged employees are invested in the bigger picture, delivering on the purpose in the same way as employers.

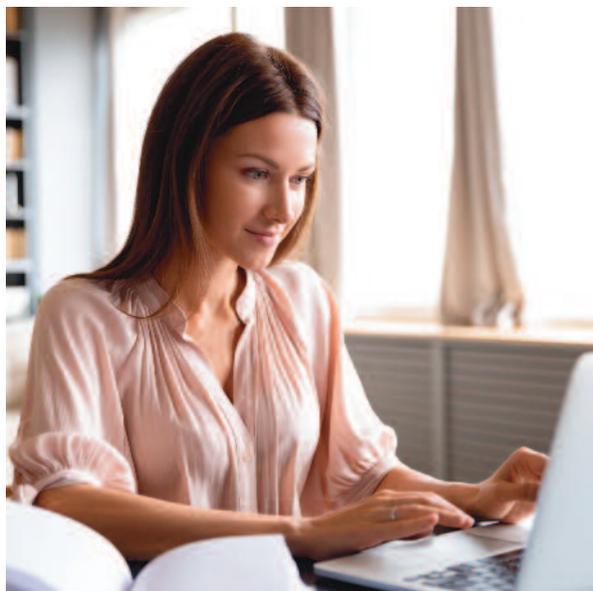
Engaged staff can be relied upon and set an example for others by prioritising customer concerns. They do better work, driving a cycle towards better business results. Encouraging employee engagement is obviously a challenge for all employers, irrespective of the workplace.

Feedback gathered over the pandemic cited that staff can feel socially and professionally isolated and find it hard to focus without the physical guidance of a supervisor or manager, which adds to the pressure. An employee poll to assess rates of engagement is a worthwhile investment. We recommend querying the extent to which employees are front line with your customers.

How aware are they of the brand promise and, crucially, how should they show up in the experience they deliver to customers? Do they feel they are resourced to deliver at home and in the office and have the correct training to deliver and, most importantly, what could be done to help them? Results from the B&A employees' poll highlights that employees believe CX needs attention.

Just 60 per cent agreed that the on-the-ground experience of customers reflects the promises made in advertising and PR. While as many as two thirds agreed that staff shortages often impact badly on good CX, 80 per cent agree they have the training and tools to deliver strong CX.

That a similar sentiment was expressed both by those working from home and those in the office points to employees' belief that they are equally well able to deliver at home and in the office. While the dust is yet to settle on the full implications of working from home, there are early indicators here of the challenge for employers that are anxious to build better customer experiences.



'WHETHER EMPLOYEE OPTIMISM ABOUT FEELING EQUALLY WELL RESOURCED TO DELIVER AT HOME AS IN THE OFFICE IS WELL FOUNDED OR NOT; ONLY TIME WILL TELL'
– CLARE KAVANAGH