



bpost

Engagement and well-being: more than just window dressing

When it became clear, at the beginning of the 21st century, that the mail delivery market would be liberalised by 2011, bpost knew that it needed some drastic transformation if it wanted to survive in a competitive market. They had quality issues, they were not profitable, and overall suffered from a bad image.

Between 2002 and 2011 bpost has experienced a complete makeover; processes were scrutinised and improved wherever possible, productivity was increased considerably by introducing organisational changes and new technology (such as Georoute for the improvement of the mail delivery routes) etc. As a result the organisation became far more efficient, leaner and more profitable. Moreover the quality level increased significantly as well as customer and employee satisfaction.

bpeople



But as of 2011 other priorities surfaced. The mail delivery market suffered from accelerated volume decline and felt an urgent need to innovate for growth. The customer satisfaction and quality level experienced a slight decrease again. And in the surrounding countries the postal sector experienced a difficult social climate. It became clear to CEO Johnny Thijs that bpost would not be able to delight the customer and continue innovating at an even faster pace without the employees' commitment to walk the extra mile to achieve this.



Thus the project bpeople was initiated in order to find out how to reach the desired level of employee engagement. Frédéric Gilmard was appointed project director and he decided to organise a company-wide employee survey to gauge the employees' level of engagement and well-being instead of just satisfaction. This required the right external partner. "We needed a partner who excels in managing complex surveys, who is an expert in work psychology and who

has an extensive benchmark database to compare our results, and all this preferably at an affordable price”, says Frédéric Gilmard, “ISW Limits proved to be all that and more.”

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From ‘soft’ to ‘hard’ KPI’s

By May 2012, after four months of preparation, the survey was completed by a good half of bpost employees in just one month’s time. “This was an impressive achievement:

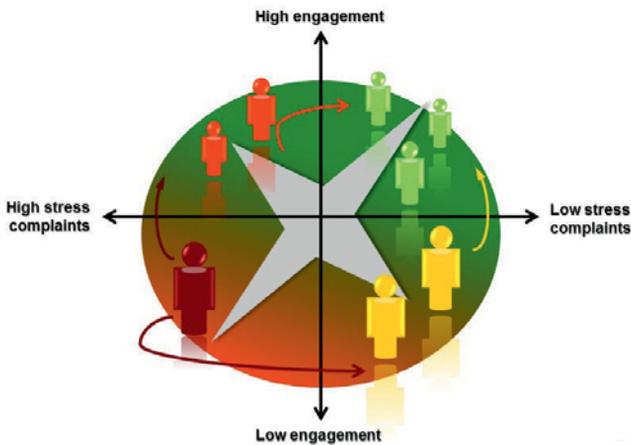
it used to take six weeks to survey all our employees” recalls Frédéric Gilmard. Equally impressive were the results of the survey; they proved very clearly that the level of stress experienced by the floor level employees (mailmen, post office employees etc.) was very high compared to other companies and to the bpost management. The results also indicated a need for more dialogue and a sense of meaning and purpose to the job.



Another very important result of the survey was the correlation between the ‘soft’ KPI’s such as well-being and stress on the one hand and ‘hard’ KPI’s such as sick leave. Gilmard: “We could thus calculate that decreasing the level of stress would result in a yearly cost saving of approximately 40 million euro. That was one of the buy-in tools that convinced the management that investing in stress-reducing initiatives is a worthwhile investment, that will surely provide a high ROI.”

When Frédéric Gilmard talks about ‘we’ he always includes ISW

Limits. Throughout the entire project the internal bpost team and the ISW Limits team collaborated together as colleagues, working towards the same goal with the same enthusiasm, confirms HR Director at bpost Trees Paelinck, who has taken over the role of project director from Frédéric Gilmar: “The survey was a co-creation of ISW Limits and ourselves and so was the follow-up: analysing the results, defining a strategy to improve the level of engagement and convincing the management of the necessity of these actions.” ISW Limits was at times very valuable as the external voice in the entire project and as an official member of bpost’s sounding board, bringing in their expertise from many other projects and their academic background. This helped bpost a great deal in moving to the next phase.



Following the survey bpost and ISW Limits have jointly drawn up five recommendations - management of stress, authentic dialogue, management of change, leadership with a human face and social responsibility. These have resulted in five priority projects all aligned under the master project, bpeople. And the senior management has fully understood that these projects are needed

to enable the transformation of bpost towards a culture of engaged and innovative employees.

“And we are already seeing local initiatives that result from these projects” tells Trees Paelinck: “in some regional offices the managers have acknowledged the fact that customer-facing employees may from time to time need some time and space to themselves in order to blow off some steam after an intense discussion with a customer. These employees can now ask for a ‘time out’ and be alone for a couple of minutes. Such initiatives are good examples of how the priority projects can be turned into direct action to increase the employees’ well-being.”

The road ahead

“The road ahead is still long but the most important steps - the awareness that change is necessary and the willingness to contribute to this change - have already been taken”, says Trees Paelinck. “This further journey towards employee and customer engagement and towards a more innovative company will be long but together with ISW Limits we are convinced that we can get there in the end.” bpost is already looking forward to the second company-wide survey that ISW Limits will organise in May 2014 and they are confident that the results in that survey will turn out to be significantly better already.

THE CHALLENGE: bpost wanted to transform from an efficient and optimised organisation to an innovative company that can engage the employees and the customers.

THE SOLUTION: after a company-wide survey (about 30,000 employees in 4 weeks) bpost and ISW Limits have identified the major obstacles and drawn up a project-based approach to tackling these problems.



THE RESULT: The entire company, from the CEO to the various level of management, has acknowledged the need to tackle stress on the work floor and other employee issues, and various initiatives are taken to improve the working conditions while still improving the organisation's efficiency and profitability.