



Innovating work

Penny Tamkin

In this issue

- 2 Engage for Success – where next?**
- 3 From data to insight**
- 4 Are employers ready for changes to flexible working?**

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It is easy to think of innovation as being something 'out there', something that is focused on new products, new IT or new services, something directed at customers or consumers. In a project for Eurofound, IES has recently been looking at innovations being made in work organisation and how these can support the productive or innovative capacity of organisations.

Work organisation innovation can cover advances in people management practices, relationships within and external to the workplace, or the organisation of work including devolution of decision making to employees. They can be critical to the adoption of technological developments because they encompass the process changes which are required to change beliefs, attitudes and structures of organisations so they can better adapt to change and challenge. In essence, work organisation innovations are deliberate changes which affect how employees undertake their job and refer to any element of people management.

When looking at why organisations innovate around work and how work innovation helps organisations adapt to challenge we have identified a number of key trends:

- Changing work environments to foster innovation.
- Coping with ageing workforces.
- Innovating work to improve customer responsiveness.

Innovation appears to thrive in flexible spaces which break down old barriers and create fluidity in where, when and how work is done. Enabling employees to work at home or whilst on the move, creating



'neighbourhoods' where workers can mingle and exchange ideas and using space in more creative ways can help develop an innovative culture.

Ageing workforces are widespread across Europe and can result in rising absence levels, problems of transferring expertise between generations and losing much-needed people and know how over time. Redesigning work environments to improve ergonomics and increase flexibility can help, alongside attention given to cascading expertise and implementing well-being initiatives to promote healthy ageing. These have been shown to help both reduce turnover and increase productivity.

Customer responsiveness requires employees who can think and react quickly without constant reference to others. It also requires employees who are able to place the customers' needs at the forefront of their thinking. Devolving responsibility including clarity around what employees can action without reference to their bosses, and encouraging more freedom in where, when and how employees do their work can help create an appropriate culture.

Continued on page 2

Engage for Success – where next?

Dilys Robinson

Many of you will have heard of the 'Engage for Success' (EFS) movement, and may even be active participants. Born out of the 2008-09 MacLeod Review into Employee Engagement¹, EFS has grown into a massive pro bono movement incorporating 700 practitioners (HR professionals and managers) and 300 gurus (academics and consultants).

IES has been actively involved in EFS throughout. We are represented on the guru steering group and have supplied and reviewed evidence for the EFS website, www.engageforsuccess.org, which is a valuable source of material and discussion on the engagement theme.

In November 2012, EFS 'went live' via a CEO breakfast (a large gathering of the UK's most influential business leaders), a lead letter in *The Times*, the unveiling of the EFS website, and a major conference featuring such luminaries as Archie Norman and the Minister with responsibility for employee relations, Jo Swinson.

So where next for EFS? The movement looks set to expand and involve ever-greater numbers of practitioners and experts.



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At the EFS breakfast launch, CEOs from across the nation called on the UK to deliver £26bn GDP growth by better engaging employees.

Perhaps its biggest challenges are:

- Finding common ground between academics (who tend to focus on engagement with the job) and practitioners (who, not surprisingly, are more interested in engagement with the organisation).
- Bringing the sceptics on board (the 'Nailing the Evidence' report on the EFS website should help).
- Involving more people outside HR – notably senior leaders and SME owner/managers.
- Supplying the website content pipeline.

IES is helping with the last point by facilitating a special interest group (SIG) on the future of engagement (SIGs aim to provide challenge and thought-leadership via white papers for the website). If you have a view about the direction in which engagement is, or should be, heading, email dilys.robinson@employment-studies.co.uk or tweet us @employmtstudies

¹ MacLeod, D. and Clarke, N. (2009), *Engaging for Success: Enhancing Performance through Employee Engagement*. Department for Business, Innovation and Skills. London.

Continued from page 1

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These are just three ways in which work organisation innovation has been used, there are many others. The results include greater engagement and job satisfaction, reduced absence and staff turnover, better internal labour markets, increased customer satisfaction, increased productivity and profitability. In each case carefully rethinking how work is done has had positive impacts on the organisation and on the workforce and in each case people management has been central to successful outcomes.

Further reading

Penny Tamkin has also written a chapter on IES's work innovation research for the IES Perspectives on the HR Year Ahead 2013 report: <http://www.employment-studies.co.uk/pubs/report.php?id=499>

The full IES report for Eurofound, Work Organisation and innovation, can be found on the Eurofound website <http://www.eesc.europa.eu/?i=portal.en.events-and-activities-boosting-europe>

From data to insight

Peter Reilly

As organisations improve their HR IT systems, the capability to capture, analyse and report on data improves correspondingly. Our members' conference in October showed how companies like Vestas and SpecSavers demonstrate impressive outcomes from their own data analysis. They and companies like them can provide helpful insights based on various sources of 'HR data'. Employee engagement scores can be segmented by workforce groups; workforce supply can be viewed against length of service and wastage; references to contact centres can be reviewed by business unit; referrals to occupational health can be sorted by topic; and so on. Even more powerful is when HR data is combined with other sources of information held by colleagues elsewhere in the organisation. Thus you could look at employee engagement against customer satisfaction; measures of innovation (eg patents) by team structure; productivity by levels of employee autonomy; etc.

Besides having decent technological systems, prerequisites for success include having processes in place to ensure data are captured fully and accurately; that the data manager has an enquiring mind, and that this is devoted to solving business problems. Global organisations are addressing the first point through greater corporate mandation of data conformity and the threat of challenging data failures or deviations from standard.

Using data to improve business decision-making means sensitivity to which are the critical people management issues. For example:

- Line manager capability – identifying those with low employee engagement scores, poor attendance rates, high wastage, low productivity, etc.
- Present or future resource gaps – highlighting areas where business performance is hindered by vacancies, skill deficiencies, experience shortfalls.
- Poor adherence to HR policies and practices – concentrating on those that impact business performance (eg performance management) and assessing whether it is a design or execution fault.
- Uneven employee engagement – highlighting areas of employee dissatisfaction and identifying their causes and workforce characteristics.

- Poor brand identification – understanding why the employment brand may be less successful than competitors in attracting new recruits from university campuses.

IES has helped organisations to both gather the right sort of data and analyse it in ways that give insight into the nature of the problem and a possible solution. Examples include:

- conducting HR customer surveys such as for East Sussex County Council (which has seen the customer evaluation of its performance noticeably improve since our initial review)
- understanding the cost implications of potential reward changes
- examining the labour market challenges in office relocation
- offering in-depth (correlation) analysis of organisational employee surveys.

There are fewer excuses these days not to mobilise the evidence in order to drive the organisation forward. It just needs the right attitude of mind and the right data protocols in place.

To discuss how IES could help your organisation with data collection, analysis or thoughtful application of findings, contact Peter Reilly at peter.reilly@employment-studies.co.uk or on 020 7930 8748.

in brief

The NHS Institute for Innovation and Improvement has commissioned IES to review the experiences of organisations which have implemented the 15 Steps Challenge and emerged from the Productive Ward Programme.

Peter Reilly is chairing the 11th Annual HR Directors Business Summit 2013 in Birmingham.

Dilys Robinson and Linda Miller will be presenting the findings of the Family Nurse workforce study, carried out for the Family Nurse Practitioner National Unit, to 750 people at a national study day in February.

Dilys Robinson was an expert panel member at the ESRC/Engage for Success 'Engaging Workplaces for a Sustainable Future' conference on 17 December at the University of Kent Business School.

IES is currently advising Wellcome Sanger Trust on the review of its pay system.

In other projects, IES has been supporting NOMS with their HR strategy, as well as delivering coaching skills training at the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills.

IES is running masterclasses for HR representatives of four south east London boroughs on the role of HR and OD in managing change.

In February, Peter Reilly is conducting a webinar on talent management for Success Factors.

Our colleagues have also been working on various other projects of interest, including:

- Looking at gender pay gap for the European Parliament as part of its programme of work in this area
- Research for Acas into employers' use of social media in the recruitment process
- A study for Eurofound that explores the links between innovations in work organisation and the potential benefits for both employees and organisations.

JUST PUBLISHED

HR Year Ahead 2013: interesting times

Taking change as its overarching theme, this fresh collection of essays takes a look at the year ahead, exploring issues in HR and OD from a number of different angles.

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Are employers ready for changes to flexible working?

Mary Mercer



IES has recently started work, in conjunction with the research organisation IFF, on the Fourth Employer Work Life Balance Survey for the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills. We were also involved with the previous Work Life Balance Surveys, but it has been six years since the last survey took place and the flexible working landscape has changed noticeably in that time.

The 'right to request' has been extended to carers and to those with older children, and fathers have access to a larger share of parental leave. The Government announced in November that, from 2015, new parents will be able to share parental leave and the right to request flexible working will be open to all. So in this edition of the survey, as well as identifying trends in take up and employer approach, we will want to discover whether employers are ready for this legislative change and whether there is more of a recognition that flexible working is a business

tool and not just a nice benefit for working parents.

One of the main benefits of the widening of the right to request to all staff is that flexibility stops being the preserve of the working mother. Links to caring responsibilities put flexibility firmly into women's domain. People, including employers, then felt flexible workers had made a choice to be less committed to their work and their careers suffered as a consequence. It is not a coincidence that, despite anecdotal evidence that managers value the contribution of their flexible workers, those workers are less likely to get the best grades in performance management in many organisations. For this reason, employers will need to look at the culture that surrounds flexible working in their organisation if they really want staff to work in a flexible way that suits the business needs of the organisation.

About the institute

IES, a not-for-profit organisation, is the UK's leading independent centre of research and consultancy in employment policy and HR practice. We contribute to corporate strategy and performance, through research and evidence-based consultancy commissioned by individual employers. IES is also commissioned by government departments, agencies and other bodies to research and advise on the effectiveness and development of public employment policy. Our expertise is available to all organisations through research, consultancy, publications and the Internet.

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- Our HR Network HR Directors' Retreat will this year focus on HR as organisational leader. It will take place on 20 and 21st June at Wootton House in Surrey.
- The full programme of HR Network events in 2013 has now been published. The masterclasses and workshops this year will consider: diverse organisations, values, learning from lean, career development, organisation effectiveness, intergeneration and more.

To find out more go to:

www.employment-studies.co.uk/network/



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