

**UNIVERSITY OF BOLTON**  
**INSTITUTE OF MANAGEMENT**  
**BSC BUSINESS MANAGEMENT**  
**SEMESTER 2 EXAMINATION 2018/2019**  
**WORK AND THE EMPLOYMENT RELATIONSHIP**  
**MODULE NO: BAM6007**

Date: Wednesday 22 May 2019

Time: 10.00 – 1.00

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**INSTRUCTIONS TO CANDIDATES:**

There are **TWO** questions on this paper.

Answer **BOTH QUESTIONS.**

Each question carries equal marks.

Exam duration: **three hours**

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## **CASE STUDY**

### **Background**

The organisation is a growing high tech SME that currently have a workforce of just over one hundred directly employed staff. They also have a Recruitment and Training Manager to assist in the management of their personnel and to achieve their goals through its handling of recruitment, training, mentoring and motivating staff.

Operating in a highly competitive market in which there is intense competition for labour, sales staff are particularly transient. For the organisation workplace effectiveness is about:

“Having happy profitable people who are enjoying their jobs and stay with us. It’s about the relationship between management and staff at every level.”  
(Recruitment and Training Manager)

Reducing turnover has been a priority for improving workforce effectiveness:

“The dissatisfaction with employee retention was the driver. Everything else stemmed down from that”. (Recruitment and Training Manager)

### **Issues facing the business**

A high rate of staff turnover has been a persistent issue for the organisation. Identification of the problem dated back to 2013 when middle management held a day’s meeting to share their concerns. The high workforce churn was particularly prevalent amongst sales staff (who form over 30 per cent of the workforce) though it was also a feature of other roles. It was proving expensive to fund turnover, given that the cost of recruiting, training and equipping an employee was estimated by the company to be around £3,000. Poor retention was also proving a barrier to the company’s desire to grow.

“I think that we have always been dissatisfied with the level of retention... As we recruited more managers with wider experience of different industries they emphasised that we were right to be dissatisfied”. (Recruitment and Training Manager)

Following the 2013 meeting, senior managers engaged with members of staff on an anonymous basis. A team leader for one of the organisation’s departments took the lead and all members of staff were invited to send their anonymised written feedback to him

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### **Case study continued**

Subsequently senior managers undertook a 'fishbone analysis' of staff feedback, exploring all the potential causes of the high rate of turnover. This identified a number of issues that needed to be addressed in order to improve staff retention. These included better conflict management, greater manager-employee engagement and relationship building. Managers needed to develop their listening skills, approachability and responsiveness; and the ability to diffuse workplace tensions, tailoring their responses to varying circumstances. Staff felt that there needed to be greater fairness and respect in the workplace, as bullying and intimidating behaviours were prevalent. The tensions appeared to be inter-departmental rather than top down. For example, there was a concern about unreasonable line management pressure to hit targets. Staff perceived that managers needed to be able to recognise individual staff experiences and needs, rather than having a one size fits all approach to responding to issues.

Alongside the issue of targets there was a feeling that managers needed to display greater understanding of people's strengths, weaknesses and abilities when assigning them to sales jobs. More generally there needed to be greater line management support for coaching and developing staff across the organisation. As the organisation had grown, so had the number of managers; but what was lacking was formal leadership training. It was felt that too much was taken for granted vis-à-vis management background and experience. The organisation needed to look at what skills managers actually had. There was widespread management support for a development workshop that would give senior and middle managers the opportunity to gain a better understanding of core practical management skills relating to mediation of conflict and a collaborative approach to problem-solving.

"We are very proud of the way that the management team acknowledged this ... There was a desire to improve things". (Recruitment and Training Manager)

This positive attitude towards, and enthusiasm for, engaging with some difficult issues, reflected the organisation's adherence to a Hoshin Kanri strategic approach which was a feature of the company's lean management and continuous improvement tool-kit. Hoshin Kanri is a Japanese management term engaging with four key elements of business management, namely: vision, policy development, policy deployment and policy control.

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### **Case study continued**

It is directly linked to 'Total Quality Management' and is an approach that requires detailed planning, targeted benchmarking and the effective and systematic use of continuous improvement tools at all levels of the workforce.

The organisation benchmarked its business management practices against those of blue chip companies. In the spirit of continuous improvement, they then drew on the support of several training providers to deliver on the desired improvement in core skills, including Acas. The organisation approached Acas, due to its experience in advising on performance management and workplace relationships. In July 2013 an Acas adviser ran an initial line management training course on appraisals

"We sat down and realised that no one had ever had any formal appraisal training; in terms of paper work, response, help for people who were struggling".  
(Recruitment and Training Manager)

The same adviser then helped devise and facilitate a two day management skills workshop.

Representing a fairly small financial investment for the company, the workshop programme focussed on conflict management, avoiding confrontation, promoting respect, listening skills and achieving a 'win-win' outcome. The workshop involved four senior and three line managers who felt that the adviser was extremely responsive to the organisation's needs:

"She received accolade and praise from every single person at the meeting. [She] was brilliant, effective, succinct and precise. Would we use her again? Absolutely". (Recruitment and Training Manager)

### **Other initiatives**

As implied above, the organisation has been seeking to foster best practice activity in other ways, with the assistance of external bodies and consultants and by benchmarking its practices against those of blue chip companies. In keeping with Hoshin Kanri principles of engaging all levels of the workforce, the company wants to roll-out a core skills programme, including: effective meetings, decision-making, route-cause analysis, detailed planning, situational management and leadership and conflict management.

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### **Case study continued**

Complementing the introduction of personal development reviews, the company has introduced a mentoring scheme. Staff adaptability is seen as particularly important for workforce effectiveness and the recruitment process now incorporates an online assessment and trial day. The online assessment aims to gauge the character and behavioural traits of potential staff, feeding into work to identify the characteristics of staff who remain with the organisation, compared with those who leave. The new staff mentors are building strong relationships with staff and this is showing early signs of feeding into company understanding of staff retention:

(ACAS, 2019)

**End of case study**

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## **QUESTIONS**

**With reference to the case study:**

- 1a. Critically discuss the concept of employee engagement and its organisational value.  
**(50 marks)**
- 1b. Identify organisational strategies for improving and sustaining employee engagement.  
**(50 marks)**
2. In additions to the employees in the case study, critically discuss the other key stakeholders in the 'employment relationship'.  
**(50 marks)**

**End of exam questions**

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